

SNOW
MAN

MALCOLM WALDRON

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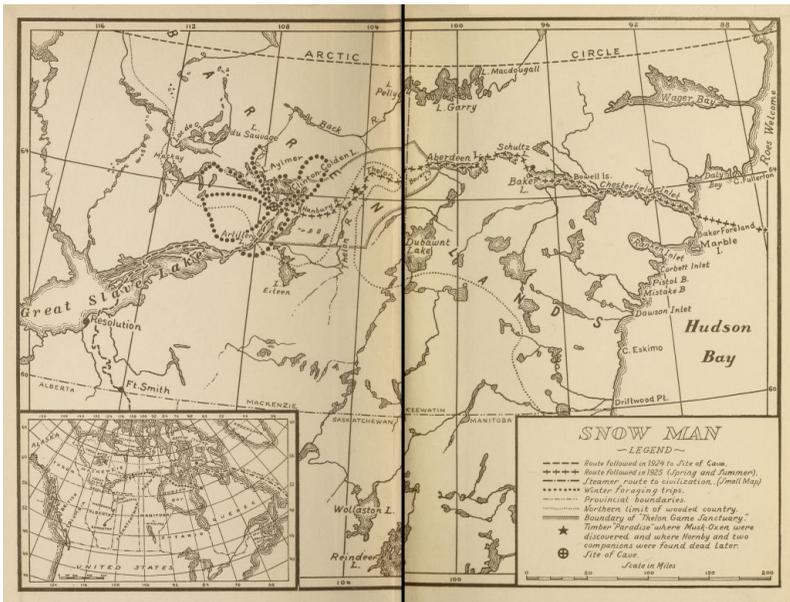
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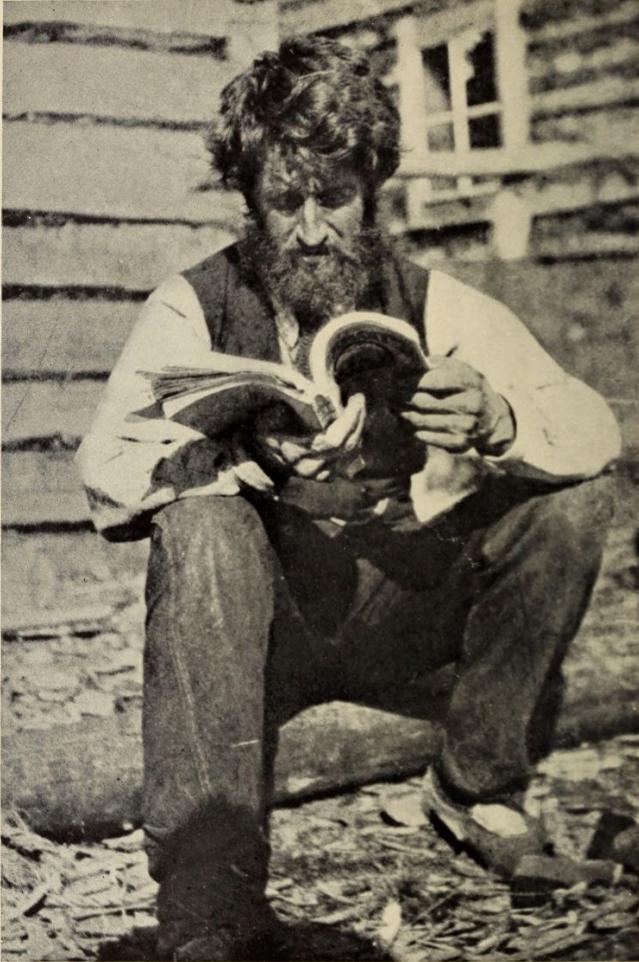
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SNOW MAN



JOHN HORNBY
A CHARACTER STUDY

SNOW MAN

JOHN HORNBY IN THE BARREN LANDS

BY MALCOLM WALDRON

with illustrations



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TO MY MOTHER

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book has been rewritten rather than written. I found it in its original form in the amazingly extensive diaries and records of Captain James C. Critchell-Bullock, full of the minutiae of dialogue and deed. The only liberties I have taken have been chronological, and for the purpose of telling a connected story. To Captain Bullock I am indebted as well for the pictures which accompany the text.

MALCOLM WALDRON

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SNOW MAN

CHAPTER ONE

EDMONTON, CANADA'S northernmost city, is a place of contrasts. It has its gentle side, its women and its children. But it is the men who color the picture. In the winter, tailored overcoat and rough mackinaw walk side by side, and in the summer, stiff collar and flannel shirt hobnob in the public squares. For Edmonton is on the edge of civilization. It is the jumping-off place for innumerable expeditions into the forests to the North, or into the great lone lands which lie beyond the forests. In and out of the city flows a tide of adventurers, trappers, prospectors, and hunters, just back from the wilds, or just returning to them. They are a hearty, blandly blasphemous lot, keeping largely to themselves and silent in the presence of strangers. The rabble among them scatter to the multitude of cheap hotels which line certain of the city's streets. The more prosperous frequent, among other places, the King Edward Hotel, an old establishment on First Street.

In the lobby of the King Edward, one morning in 1923, sat a man of about twenty-five. Since breakfast he had been surveying the passers-by. He sat with his arms folded and his left foot crossed over his right knee. Casual watchers could have noted his length of limb and the almost moulded set of his shoulders and his blond head. He wore a blond moustache handsomely. His skin was fair. Beneath his slenderness one could sense springy muscles. His face was stern, almost hard, with cold eyes and a sharply cut jaw. It lacked only the quality of softness. Most men have something of woman in their expressions, some trace of sympathy, some shadow of tenderness. He had none of this.

He was not in Edmonton by accident. No one is. He had arrived from England several weeks before. The hotel register bore, in a bold but illegible scrawl, the name, Captain James C. Critchell-Bullock. In the title lay, partly at least, the explanation of his presence. The son of an English family of means and position, he had been commissioned in the Indian Cavalry at

eighteen. He had fought in France, and when General Allenby opened his cavalry offensive in the Palestine campaign, Bullock joined his Desert Mounted Corps with the rank of Captain. His six feet and two inches balanced superbly astride a horse. He became known as a magnificent if hard rider. All man-made obstacles he scorned. One thing, however, he could not fight—malaria. His father had been a figure in Africa in other days, but the tropics weakened him. The tendency had been passed on to the son. Blazing days in the Jordan Valley, when the mercury bubbled as high as 130 degrees, flattened even so stubborn a physique as Bullock's. In August, 1923, he retired from the army as medically unfit. It was a bitter anticlimax. His competence, in the form of a trust income, had been left him by a grandfather whose military complex colored even his dying testament. The income was Bullock's only so long as he remained a soldier. With a few thousand pounds left out of what otherwise would have been a life trust, Bullock turned to Canada for forgetfulness.

Bullock's demeanor, in the not too comfortable lobby chair, bespoke patience. That was because he sat almost motionless. A close observer could have seen the restlessness in his eyes. He was not sure why he had come to Edmonton. He had not even a vague idea of what he should do now he was there. Perhaps he would 'go North.' It seemed to be a standard remedy for troubles such as his. Philosophical troubles, that is, for in temperate zones his physical ailments vanished. It was possible he would settle in Edmonton. He even played with the idea of joining the Mounted Police, though for the present he preferred self-discipline to that by others.

When one o'clock had passed, he went into the café, sitting alone at a table by the wall. As the meal progressed, he glanced curiously at a man who had taken a seat at the table next to his. The newcomer's back was toward him. A mass of shaggy, black hair atop a large head moved Bullock to meditate on the features which might go with it. The man's clothes were untidy and ill-pressed, yet there was something in his bearing which belied the implication of the attire.

When the waitress came to take the stranger's order, she lingered in conversation. Bullock sensed that she had served him often. Bits of sentences floated back; impersonal, chaffing words. He had supposed the fellow to be one of the horde of adventurers who drift in and out of the King Edward. But his speech was not that of a vagabond; it was the speech of a scholar, chosen and deliberate and softly voiced. At the disappearance of the waitress, Bullock left his chair and went to the other table. With a bluntness almost belligerent because he knew it to be rude, he said:

‘You speak remarkably fine English for this country.’

He was conscious of a pair of very blue eyes glinting amusedly. The mouth beneath them said:

‘I went to Harrow.’

Bullock permitted himself no show of surprise, though Harrow is one of England’s most aristocratic schools. He replied:

‘And I to Sherborne.’

‘Yes, yes?’

The blue eyes glowed.

‘Have the waitress move your things to this table and we’ll talk.’

Thus did John Hornby and Critchell-Bullock meet.

The name of Hornby will not be readily familiar to readers in the United States, but along the whole fringe of Canadian civilization it brings to mind a thousand anecdotes of the snows; tales of a man who loved hardship as other men love comfort, who wandered alone into the most desolate corners of the North for the pure joy of solitude and adventure, who had enlarged a wolf den for his home when the fancy struck him, who bore a reputation as the most reckless nomad in a land which bred hardihood as its stock in trade. In England, as well, one can conjure with the name. John Hornby’s father, the late Albert Neilson Hornby, was, perhaps, the most famous gentleman in the history of English cricket. He poured his wealth and energy into the game to establish it as a national sport. He had captained the Lancashire Cricket Club, to-day led by another son, A. H. Hornby. John, himself a fine athlete in youth, had been destined for a career in the British diplomatic service, but a visit to the Black Forest in Germany in his early twenties brought an infatuation for snow. The crispness of the air, the white mantle which stretched from a slender film in the lowlands to a deep blanket in the hills, robbed England of a diplomat. John Hornby forgot home, tradition, career, and sailed for Canada. For a quarter of a century, save for two years in France as a Captain in charge of Canadian snipers, he had roamed the Arctic and the sub-Arctic.

All of this Bullock did not learn at once. Though an egoist, as are all non-conformists, Hornby did not talk readily about himself. And the young Englishman was not given to questioning. Much of the detail Bullock picked up later around the lobby of the King Edward, where every other man claimed acquaintance with Hornby.

The luncheon began a friendship which was to endure a lifetime. There followed other luncheons, and meetings in Bullock's room, and long walks. When, after several weeks, Hornby suggested an exploration jaunt into the mountains near the border of Alberta and British Columbia, Bullock agreed delightedly.

The wind which whined down the upper slopes of Mount Coleman caught at the flaps of the tent and strained at the ropes. Outside gaunt and blackened tree-trunks, remains of a recent forest fire, swayed dangerously above the canvas shelter. Night and fatigue had forced Hornby and Bullock to camp in this desolation. Without game, they had made their supper on tea and biscuits. The flames in the tent stove danced. A stubby candle flickered between the two men, reclining on their blankets.

Bullock studied his companion, and remembered the long day just past. They had carried packs of one hundred and twenty pounds each, hour after hour, over steep grades and through ravines. Hornby, though forty-eight years of age, had set a pace that numbed the muscles and strained the wind of the younger man. Yet he weighed but one hundred and forty pounds as against Bullock's one hundred and ninety, and his five feet, five inches fell below the other's shoulder.

The fitful light of the candle served to sharpen Hornby's features. His hair was black, long, and intensely matted. He combed it only under compulsion. His face was swarthy, almost black, from the constant glare of sun and snow. It was a condition of which he was peculiarly proud. His nose was strong and beaked, but with an underlying sensitiveness. Beneath it was a mustache, black and irregular. Elsewhere on the face was the beginning of a beard, which, on long sojourns away from civilization, flowered into a massive growth. The focus of the face, however, was in the eyes. They were of an amazing blue. They seemed to glow with an unearthly light. None who knew him ever forgot his eyes.

Bullock felt a fondness for the little man beside him, and as one will do when he is alone with another, he talked. He told of the war and of the deserts.

' . . . and on the road to Jerusalem we had in our regiment a wrestler who had only one eye, his left one. His horse, a bloody great animal, had only one eye as well, the left one. Sympathized with each other, I guess. At one spot, where an embankment rose on one side and a precipice dropped off sharply on the other, we met some camels. Wrestler and horse kept their one

eye apiece on the camels. Both went over the precipice, since they could not see it, and both broke two ribs. Funny, wasn't it? . . .'

He talked on, idly, reminiscently. He told of tiger-hunting in India, and of 'pig-sticking,' virile sport of cavalrymen. He spoke feelingly of frightful marches under desert suns.

Hornby at last interrupted:

'You don't really know what traveling is. All you have told me is tripping, not traveling.'

Bullock bridled.

'As much as this is, it's traveling. It's as hard to stagger through heat as it is to pull up mountains and through snow.'

'As hard maybe, yes, yes!'

Hornby beamed.

'As hard, but not as real, Bullock. In the desert you were traveling with a blasted army at your heels. There were Indian servants to wait on you, and big wagons to cart your grub. I know what war is. I was a Captain myself in France. But war isn't hardship. Nothing is hardship when others help you bear it.'

He paused to watch the younger man's face. He saw two eyes fixed on him in the half-glow of the candlelight, and a pipe bowl red with fire.

'The hardship of this country is different, boy. You do everything by yourself, and for yourself. You eat only when you're man enough to wrest food from the country. Look at us now. We had tea and biscuits to-night. Maybe a forest fire did get here before us and burn out all the game. But we have to eat, anyway. That's what my life has been, eating when there's nothing to eat, finding game where there isn't any. You're not afraid of starving, are you?'

Bullock grinned. He had heard, in Edmonton, of this scholarly hermit's delight in adversity.

'No,' he said, 'I'm not at all worried. Frankly, I probably care less than you do whether we eat again or not. Tropical diseases from those damned deserts ended my cavalry career. And my personal affairs are not pressing.'

It was Hornby who grinned now. There was something of the boy in his voice.

‘Bullock, I knew I made no mistake in you. Not many men know how to starve properly, but I think you can be taught. The greatest temptation is to go to sleep. It’s the easiest thing in the world to lie down and die if you have been without food for a long time. Of course to-night’—he waved an expressive hand—‘we can sleep as much as we please. But there may be nights when we shall have to keep awake. Remember that.’

Bullock offered no comment and they lay silent for a moment. The wind shook the canvas and blew down the pipe to make the fire smoke. Beyond the wind’s whistle was silence such as is only heard where no life is. It would have maddened most men. It soothed Hornby and left Bullock unmoved. Through it Hornby’s voice, pitched high for a man so much a man, exploded suddenly:

‘You’re not married?’

‘No.’

‘I should have asked before. It’s most important.’

Bullock wondered at the importance of it. He said:

‘I’m pretty much of a roamer. I’ve known women. I’ve liked most of them. Probably I haven’t liked any of them well enough to settle down.’

He spoke the last sentence slowly, but Hornby did not notice it. He was too intent upon his own thoughts.

‘I tell you, Bullock, I’m glad to hear that. I’ve learned lots of things up here that escape people down in the cities. A woman only marries for a home. There is no such thing as love beyond books and the drivel of young pups. It’s all passion. Yes, yes, passion. I have never spoken a word of love to any woman. I’ve never had anything to do with native women. There isn’t an Indian or an Eskimo in Canada who wouldn’t trust me with his wife. What other white man in the North would they trust likewise?’

Bullock would have liked to dispute him, not because he was in love, but because he was young. But he only said:

‘Let’s have some tea.’

‘Fine.’

Hornby stirred from his blankets and put fresh twigs in the stove. Into an open kettle, already filled with water, he threw a handful of tea. He put the kettle on the center of the stove, where the flames crept highest. He squatted in silence until the black liquid bubbled. Bullock watched him dip two tin

cups in the pot. He saw him heap in sugar from a dirty bag. One cup Hornby passed to Bullock and one he kept. The tea was like lye. Hornby sucked from his cup, noisily, and with grimaces, as the hot liquid burned his lips. After some minutes he said:

‘Bullock, did you ever hear of the Barren Lands?’

‘Yes, I’ve heard of them. I don’t think I know much about them.’

‘Would you like to go there?’

It was asked as one might ask, ‘Do you care to step down to the corner with me?’

‘Why?’ said Bullock.

‘Because it’s the only place that isn’t overrun.’

The younger man smiled.

‘Is this place overrun? We haven’t seen a human being in a week.’

‘That isn’t what I mean——’

Hornby had come suddenly alive. He flung the tea grounds behind the stove and squatted, balanced, on his toes.

‘That isn’t what I mean. This country we’re in now has been well explored. There aren’t many here. Probably there’s no one within fifty miles or more. But the Barren Lands, Bullock! They’re virgin. I can name on the fingers the men who have really penetrated beyond the timber. Most of the country is unexplored. Most of it no man has seen. I suppose I know it better than any man alive, and yet I’ve only seen threads of it. Do you follow?’

Bullock had laid aside pipe and cup.

‘Go on,’ he said.

‘You go north, far beyond Edmonton, until you come to Great Slave Lake. You go still farther north into Artillery Lake. There you will be beyond civilization. There will be no cabins, no trading-posts. At a certain spot along the shores of Artillery the timber ends. It doesn’t straggle off. It ends. Beyond stretch plains, almost without a tree or a hill, for as many miles as the eye can see, and for hundreds of miles beyond that. Those plains are the Barren Lands, broken only by rivers and lakes, many of them unknown and unmapped. Those lakes! Sometimes they are like mirrors, blue mirrors. Sometimes they are like rapids when the wind churns them. Mostly, though, they are under ice. The summers are short. For a few weeks there

are flowers everywhere. But the winters are long. And they are cold. There is no ocean near to temper the air, as in the Arctic proper. I have known it to fall to eighty below zero. There are no human inhabitants. And the caribou _____,

Hornby smiled. It was as if, then, he were looking at a herd of them. His glance was directly at Bullock, but it was focussed far away.

‘There are millions of them there, Bullock. At migration time the whole horizon will be a trembling black mass of them. I have seen tens of thousands at one time gallop by, their hoofs beating like the hoofs of your own precious cavalry horses, and their funny grunts filling the air. There is no sight like it. And the white wolves. Yes, yes. Great fur there. And white foxes, and wolverines. As for fish——’

Bullock listened, enchanted. He struggled to solve the riddle before his eyes. He had heard much in Edmonton of Hornby. He knew the story of his youth and of his self-exile. He had heard murmurs of eccentricity. But here was more than an eccentric. Here was a man. Here was a traveler who asked no quarter, and even spurned it if he got it. Here was, also, a story-teller. Bullock glowed with thoughts from the image Hornby had painted. One shadow fell across his dreams.

‘Why, with the whole Northland to pick from, do you ask me to join you?’

‘Because you are a gentleman.’

Hornby said it quickly and simply.

‘When I consider a trail companion, I look for a gentleman because he’s got backbone. You’ve told me of your family in England. You have had the advantages of care and good feeding as a boy, and that is half the battle. Not only that, but your parents, and their parents before them, had that same care.’

Bullock looked sharply to see if the words might not be in jest. Hornby sensed the thought.

‘I mean every word of it. A gentleman does not know when to stop. Another usually has set ideas about the sufficiency of his labor. It’s the same with grub. A man who has not been accustomed to the best will more likely demand it than a man who has had it all of his life. You can usually tell what sort a man is when the flour sack goes empty. I think we’ll make good partners. Tell me, you have some money?’

‘Several thousand pounds.’

‘Fine. We’ll divide costs and equip a first-class expedition.’

‘But I’m not sure——’

‘Of course you’re sure. Why, I’ve roamed from one end of this continent to the other, and you’re the second man I’ve considered as a partner. The other is dead. Melville. C. D. Melville. He was with me twenty years ago.’

‘What can we do up there?’

Hornby’s eyes burned until Bullock could imagine himself physically raked by the gaze.

‘Do?’

It was spoken in a lowered tone more impressive than any shout.

‘Do? My God, Bullock. There’s no place a man can do more. It’s a forgotten land, I tell you. We can be the first white men ever to winter in the Barrens for one thing. Every one else has gone in the summer, and in winter has retreated to the woods or the shores of Hudson Bay and the Arctic Ocean.’

‘I’ve done a bit of photography,’ Bullock suggested. ‘Could I do anything along that line?’

‘Anything? Everything!’

In his excitement Hornby kept twisting his fingers.

‘You can take wonderful pictures. And there are few good pictures of the Barrens in existence, I know. We might even find the black-faced musk-oxen. Do you know what they are? Like small buffalo, Bullock. And no one’s seen any on this continent for I don’t know how many years. They used to be plentiful, but the Indians killed too many off. Maybe they’re extinct and maybe not. Anyway, we can hunt for them, and I know the most likely places to look. Then there are the skeletons of Franklin’s men. If we found those our names would go around the world.’

‘Skeletons?’

‘Yes, yes. Sir John Franklin, you know. The great English explorer. Eighty years or so ago. He brought over two shiploads of men to explore the Arctic coast-line. Ships and men vanished. There were a few upturned boats on the beach to prove the men landed. A few bones were found near the boats. But most of the men—a hundred and twenty-nine in all—must have

plunged inland. They were never heard from. It's one of Canada's greatest mysteries. I have my own ideas as to which way the men went.'

Though the little man paused and waited, Bullock kept silent. He was thinking furiously. By nature a vagabond, his blood had been stirred to its ultimate drop by Hornby's words. Yet there were considerations that had not been put into words, vague ties of the past to bind him. There was his father in England and his brother in India. How much did he owe them in caution? There was the Army, a life which had claimed him as a boy, but which had betrayed him with the soldier's most despised foe, disease—malaria, dysentery, and other tropical ills.

All of this came to him in a flash of doubt. What of the Barren Lands? To pour his remaining substance into the unknown or to husband it against a change of heart? To cast odds with this colorful wanderer or to succumb to a virtue he secretly scorned—discretion?

Hornby, watching, sensed the struggle. He said softly:

'Life is hard up there. Harder than anything you've ever known before. Maybe you'd better think it over.'

Bullock laughed. There was no mirth in it, only metal.

'So that's it. You think I'm soft. You think I'm just another one of those damned remittance men. When do we start?'

'Next summer. But first I must go to Ottawa and get official recognition for us. Maybe we can even get a stake and carry out a government survey.'

Hornby gave no hint of triumph, but his voice was extraordinarily cheerful.

'How long shall we be gone?'

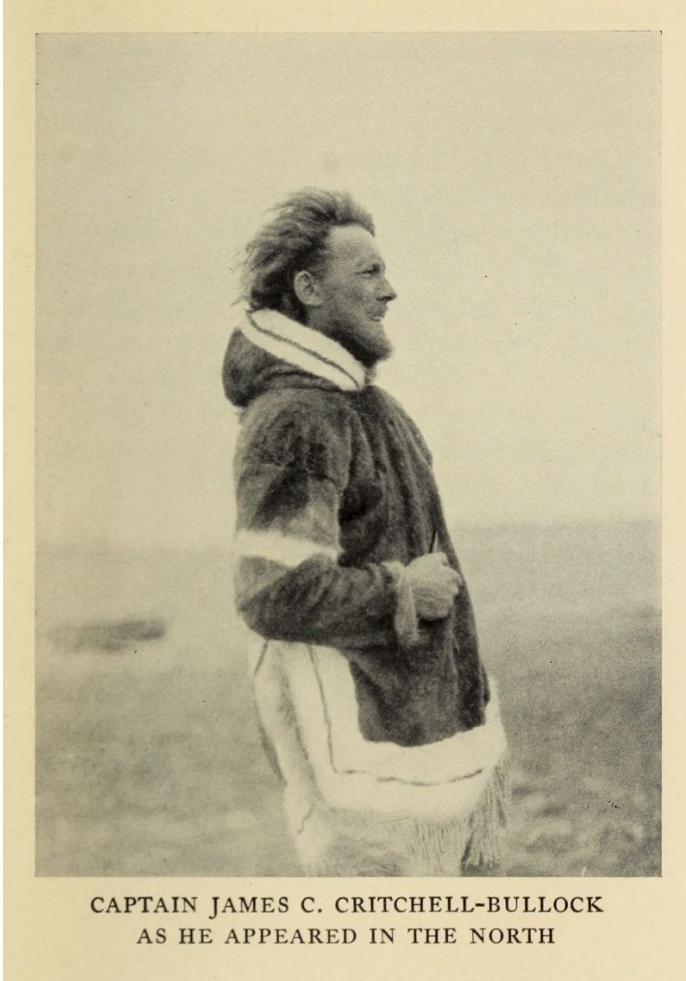
'Maybe two years. Maybe more.'

The pair sat in silence and regarded each other. There seemed little else to say. Bullock could think of no comment but what would sound fatuous. After a few moments he noticed that he felt cold. The fire in the stove had died down, and even the candle stub was little more than a wick in a pool of wax. They had been forgotten, neglected.

'Shall we turn in?' he suggested.

Hornby grunted a good-natured acquiescence. The light was gone from his eyes, the spark from his voice. He was once more the veteran putting the tent in order for the night. Flaps were inspected for security. Blankets were

carefully arranged, for morning might find the inside of the tent coated with frost, ready to rain down upon the occupants at the least movement within.



When the candle was put out, a darkness and a silence which city dwellers never know fell upon the place. Hornby was asleep almost instantly. But Bullock lay awake for an hour or more. The Barren Lands! He tried to picture them, but his fatigued imagination was not equal to it. He merely got a vision of another desert, with snow instead of sand and cold instead of heat. Try as he would, he could not keep imaginary camels and horses from galloping across the snow.

In the morning, after a breakfast of tea, Bullock sought some scrap with which to light his pipe. By the stove were pieces of a letter Hornby had

written and torn up early the previous evening. Bullock played among them with a stick. On one piece he could read:

‘. . . *with me a young fellow who'll have to show me what he's made of*
. . .’

Bullock grinned, and Hornby, watching, grinned back.

Both knew why.

CHAPTER TWO

HORNBY and Bullock shared an apartment on McDougall Street, Edmonton. On a morning in the early months of 1924, Hornby was nervous. He had arisen early, his invariable custom, and now, with breakfast over, he sat on his heels in an upholstered chair pretending unconcern. In a few moments, he knew, Bullock would call a cab and together they would go to the Canadian Pacific station. Hornby was ready to entrain on his pilgrimage to Ottawa. There he would ask Government recognition and aid for the Barren Lands expedition.

‘They know me at Ottawa,’ he told Bullock, ‘and they’ll be glad to hear I’m going to head a serious expedition. Those Dominion men have always wondered why I jumped about so.’

Bullock was busy repacking a nondescript handbag.

‘Where’s your underwear?’ he asked.

‘There,’ said Hornby, pointing to a roll of garments on the floor.

‘Underwear? Those are pajamas!’

‘Well, they’ll do. You’re too fussy.’

The packing continued. Hornby’s habit of rolling everything had destroyed the crispness of the shirts and collars. Bullock laid the linens out as flat as possible, but in his heart he knew that after the first night on the train shirts, collars, pajamas, and handkerchiefs would be moulded into rolls again. The departing delegate was, after a fashion, precise.

When the clasps were finally snapped on the bag, Bullock stood up and surveyed his companion. He saw the eyes, gleaming as ever; the face still swarthy after a fresh shave which had spared only the mustache; a gray suit newly pressed, but not looking it; a light flannel shirt held at the neck by a

tie which must, by its wrinkles, have known other uses; black shoes with heavy toes and black socks *sans* garters. Hornby was dressed up.

‘I have a comb in my pocket if you want to use it,’ Bullock suggested.

The other grinned.

‘Life’s pretty short to worry about such things.’

‘Let me try, then.’

The younger man tried to comb Hornby’s wiry shock, but somewhat in vain. He managed to produce the semblance of a parting, but the hair was so matted and so heavy that it would not lie down. It came to him that in an association of some months he had never seen Hornby’s hair combed.

‘And now, before I call a cab, where’s your hat?’

‘I haven’t any. You know perfectly well I never wear one.’

‘I know—but going to Ottawa—to meet the highest officials of the Government?’

Hornby rubbed his chin. Then grinned.

‘Perhaps. But have we time to buy one?’

‘No need. I have just the thing.’

The younger man went to a closet and returned with a tropical headpiece, a double affair consisting of two light felt hats telescoping one within the other, with the air space between designed as protection from the brilliant suns. It was more the size and shape of the American ten-gallon hat than of the standard street felt. Bullock took the inner hat and handed it to Hornby.

‘Too small,’ he said, trying to pull it on.

‘Good Lord! It’s a seven and a quarter. Try the outside one, then.’

That was a fair fit. Bullock went to the telephone to summon transportation.

Thus casually did Hornby start on a mission which was to include a bit of tragedy, a bit of comedy, and more than a bit of other things.

To the onlooker, able to see all things and have access to their histories, Hornby’s visit in Ottawa would have seemed pathetic. To the Dominion moguls, all of whom knew him in person and by reputation, it must have

been embarrassing. To Hornby himself, as he later confided to Bullock, it was incidental.

Hornby was a vagabond. Ottawa's official sons were precise and scientific. Hornby loved travel for travel's sake; he gloried in the trail no matter where it led. The frontiersmen of the Government were students of the compass and the theodolite who endured travel as a necessary prelude to observation. To one play, to the others labor. Play begets zest, labor facts. Ottawa had a passion for facts.

Years before Hornby had run afoul of the material side of the Government. The position of Chief Ranger at the Fort Smith Buffalo Sanctuary had been open. Hornby, not averse to title and authority if they beckoned from the wilderness, applied for the place. Ottawa's investigation of the application revealed the little man's uncanny knowledge of the buffalo, and, indeed, of all Northern game. He knew the animals, not as man knew them, but as they knew each other. Friendship with the animals was a fine thing the Dominion men agreed, but there were certain small matters to be taken up as well. Had Mr. Hornby records and diaries to chronicle his years in the Barrens? Two brief and mothly notebooks were all. But surely, out of all his travels, Mr. Hornby had preserved some maps or sketches? There were no maps. Then a few photographs, perhaps? There were no photographs. The Government chieftains shook their heads. A decade in the North and scarcely a line to mark it! A few days later, Hornby was offered a place as common ranger. It was the glove on the cheek, the supreme insult. For months the man became livid if the subject was mentioned.

None of this could Hornby understand. He sometimes suspected that he was a peg with no hole in which to fit. It never occurred to him to reshape the peg. The information, the color, the wisdom of the wilderness which was packed beneath his heavy shock of hair could have brought him riches and fame. His was the mind to mould it into beautiful English, his the humor to flavor it and the touch to dramatize it. The desire was there. He dreamed that his name would go down in the history of the Northland. He had every element save the patience to weave the crazy quilt threads of his life and his philosophy into an intelligent pattern. He was forever talking of the book he would write. It would be called 'The Land of Feast and Famine.' A hundred times he had written the title at the head of a virgin sheet of paper. A hundred times the pencil had been dropped for something else. Sometimes it was a caribou going by. Sometimes it was because he couldn't decide on the opening sentence.

His early and enthusiastic efforts to bring out of the North some worthwhile trophies and specimens did not prove encouraging. One time he packed, canoed, sledded, and portaged for a thousand miles a magnificent set of caribou antlers, the finest he had ever seen. With a feeling of parting from a treasure, he presented them to Maxwell Graham, the game commissioner at Ottawa. Years later, they were still on the floor, in a corner of Graham's office, unmounted.

There was, too, the rather rare set of Eskimo copper implements and primitive arms which he gave to the Alberta Provincial Museum. These items filled two large glass cases, and Hornby never returned to Edmonton without visiting the museum and personally cleaning and rehangng the collection. He was inordinately proud of this gift, but tortured by doubts that the trophies were appreciated. 'Do you think they really understand the hardship and starvation I went through to get them?' He would ask this plaintively, so that no answer but 'Of course' was possible. But such answers never reassured him.

He wrote Bullock frequently from Ottawa—short, ill-scrawled notes, but couched in the best of English, telling of vague contacts and conferences with officials. They were invariably concluded with a 'Yrs. V. Sinc.' Never in the course of their friendship did Bullock receive a letter terminated otherwise. It was as steadfast as the signature itself.

After several weeks word came that Hornby had been appointed 'Part-Time Research Engineer,' with a yearly allowance of two hundred dollars and a grub stake. Bullock was bitterly disappointed. He remembered the vivid prophecies his partner had made; how he would ask for and get 'complete outfits'; how he would arrange to have the expedition commissioned to make an official natural history survey of the Barrens. Disappointment became astonishment when Hornby wrote expressing delight at the turn affairs had taken.

'We won't be tied down now,' his letter said, 'and we won't have the bother of submitting a lot of written reports.'

A few days later, Hornby wired that he was sailing for England to see his family and to approach British interests on behalf of the expedition. Bullock, with stolid philosophy, decided that recognition was one of the minor considerations. He busied himself with the purchase of equipment.

His dreams centered largely about black-faced musk-oxen. He had heard, since that night on Mount Coleman, many stories of these creatures. An old Indian told him how the musk-oxen meet their enemies by forming a

circle, heads out and rump to rump in the center, and how, as fast as one is killed, the others close in to form a smaller circle, until finally only two may be left.

If there were any black-faced musk-oxen left at all on the North American continent, they were numbered by tens where once they could have been counted by the thousands. Bullock wanted to immortalize them on film, by stills and by motion pictures. He wanted to be the first to bring out of the Barrens a pictorial record of one of its winters, with musk-oxen glowering before the camera and caribou dotting the otherwise unbroken snow. He was a photographer of parts. He had been official cameraman at General Allenby's triumphal entry into Aleppo.

Dreaming thus, Bullock began his purchases. His eye was not for economy. He bought as though some other purse were to pay. Even life in the Army had given him little idea of the value of money. He had soldiered with sons of the rich who furnished and maintained their own horses and equipment. He had never done a moment's gainful labor. Hornby, whose usual equipment, even for a journey of months, seldom cost more than two hundred dollars, would have writhed to see Bullock's 'list of necessities.' There were thousands of feet of motion-picture film; a standard motion-picture camera; a portable motion-picture camera; a graflex camera; a folding Kodak; three hundred reels of graflex film; a complete developing outfit; a portable dark-room; a botanical outfit with presses to prepare specimens; an entomological outfit with preserving fluid for small mammals and insects; a series of thermometers; theodolite and three watches for surveying; surgical outfit with anæsthetics, scalpels for simple amputations, sutures, dressings, etc.; a small library on the natural history of the Barren Lands. The photographic equipment alone ran into thousands of dollars. And all these items were only the frills of the equipment. There were also boats to buy, and canoes, and sleds, and dogs, and a hundred other staple articles which were costly and bulky.

While Bullock was contemplating his scientific material, and learning the intricacies of his cameras, there came a curt cable:

Necessary I remain in England. Cancel expedition.

HORNBY

Bullock was too stunned to reply immediately. He didn't ponder long on Hornby's motive. He assumed it must be sufficient, and turned to the more important matter of his own future. Wisdom seemed to dictate the sale of

equipment already bought, and as graceful a withdrawal as possible from the public eye. Some embarrassment would be inevitable. The Edmonton press had not neglected the plans of Hornby and Bullock.

The young man toyed with the idea of business. There was a British wholesaler in Scotch whiskies who had hinted he would like to appoint him agent for the Province of Alberta. The prospect was enticing. Only vanity, a stronger voice than most realize, spoke against it. Bullock was, fundamentally, a fighter. All of his instincts, including the traditional English tenacity, had been heightened by his life as a soldier. He could not see himself a quitter. That word alone probably decided him. No sooner did 'quitter' enter his mind than he was on his way to a cable office.

His message was brief. He asked permission to use an old cabin of Hornby's at the edge of the Barrens. He would go, anyway. Once set upon it, nothing could move him. He was quite unprepared for the almost immediate answer to his request. It read:

Returning by next steamer. Wait for me.

HORNBY

The message puzzled Bullock. He did not yet know his partner well enough to sense the subtle thing which had so suddenly turned him about, a strange blending of jealousy and responsibility. Hornby, he later discovered, was madly jealous of the Barrens. So freely had he roamed them and so wholly had they been shunned by most others, he regarded them almost as his Kingdom. He had thought that Bullock, after the first cable, would drop all preparations. Word that his friend meant to persist in the trip aroused him. He knew that Bullock had funds to carry on. He pictured an expedition invading the lands he loved, and without him. In the picture he was conscious of a responsibility. His had been the voice which fired Bullock to enthusiasm for the trip. If anything befell the younger man, the finger of conscience, if not of public opinion, would point at Hornby. With such thoughts to torment him, the errant partner cabled his intention to return. Canada's call was stronger than England's ties.

While Hornby was on the high seas, Bullock went ahead, buying canoes, sleds, and supplies. He even engaged an assistant, one Jack Glenn, a former provincial police officer with an imposing physique and a knowledge of it.

Hornby's home-coming was unemotional. But already Bullock and he were shaping their sentences to each other's ears. When Bullock took him to a warehouse to view the assembled equipment, Hornby said:

‘By Jeebas, we’re not going to take an army.’

‘A lot of it is my scientific stuff,’ said Bullock.

‘Yes, yes,’ said Hornby, turning to inspect the canoes and sleds.

Bullock thought it a good time to mention Glenn.

‘I’ve engaged a man,’ he said.

Hornby straightened up from his examination of some blankets. Bullock felt in his glance the same assurance of authority he had always sensed in the eyes of his Colonel in India.

‘Who is he?’

‘Jack Glenn. Used to be a member of the provincial police. He’s a strong chap of a fine type. Said he’d love the North.’

Hornby might have been standing at attention.

‘What right has he to say he’d love the North? What color are his eyes?’

‘Color?’ Bullock was more than a bit piqued. ‘What in hell has the color of his eyes got to do with it?’

‘Everything!’ Hornby snapped. ‘I won’t go into the Barrens with any but blue-eyed men. I’ll wager his are brown.’

Bullock ended the conversation by saying nothing. It occurred to him, though, that his own eyes were blue.

The next day Hornby and Glenn met. Glenn, though not a large man, stood almost a head taller. He tried to be bluff and hearty, but Hornby’s stiffness froze him. Bullock watched uncomfortably. Later Hornby said:

‘Did you notice his eyes?’

Bullock nodded. ‘I know they’re brown. But, damn it, man, that’s a funny thing to condemn him for.’

‘He isn’t the kind, Bullock. I know it, I tell you, I know it. The North isn’t for everybody.’

Bullock knew the rub. Only men of Hornby’s choosing must go into the Barrens. After two days of strained atmosphere in the McDougall Street apartment, the younger man suggested a compromise.

‘Let Glenn take his wife with him, and we’ll leave them at the east end of Great Slave Lake. That will be our most southerly back camp. They can

guard what things we cache there, and do some trapping for themselves on the side.’

Hornby beamed. His smile came back and his eyes seemed liquid again.

‘Yes, yes. Excellent.’

To himself Bullock permitted a smile, too. The Barrens are some miles beyond the east end of Great Slave Lake.

June 24, 1924, dawned an ordinary day in Edmonton. The sun shone lazily and warmly. Business was not brisk. It never was on a cloudless June day. The usually energetic Canadians seemed content to be lazy. Only at the Dunvegan Yards were there signs of liveliness. There Hornby, hatless and with hair flying, was talking excitedly to Bullock. The latter’s usual mask of calm was gone. His face was red and his pulse up. In a moment or two the expedition would be under way. Off to one side stood Mr. and Mrs. Glenn. In the baggage car of the train near by was most of the equipment.

Hornby was talking:

‘. . . and by taking the next steamer I’ll probably be at Fitzgerald before you are. You are going by canoe and that will take you longer . . .’

Then Bullock:

‘. . . think I have ’most everything. If not, we can buy some stuff at Fort Smith . . .’

‘Yes, yes . . .’

Bullock was on his way. As Edmonton slipped past and the car windows showed small farms and winding rut roads, he was happy. Despite everything the trip was a reality. One night on the train, and on the morrow Waterways, where the canoes would be launched, the supplies stowed aboard, a boat bought or hired to carry the heavier stuff, and the trip down the Athabasca and Slave Rivers begun. Beyond Waterways the river-banks would grow more lonely and wild with each mile. That night on the train Bullock slept well.

In the Athabasca the two canoes were christened. They were named ‘Yvonne’ and ‘Matonabee,’ the first after the Honorable Yvonne Gage, the second in memory of the Indian Chief. A scow which was found for possible use as a transport was given the fragrant name of ‘Sandbar Queen.’ Bullock had been enchanted by stories of the original Sandbar Queen, a madame of the old school, whose girls had solaced trappers and millionaires without discrimination. She had survived, among other things, the snapping of a

shotgun over her head. When Bullock first viewed the scow, with its evidences of use and its ample proportions, he chuckled. After that nothing but Sandbar Queen would do.

The trip down the river to Fort Smith occupied several days and was without incident save on the first night. Part of the canoe load consisted of dogs destined to pull sleds in the Barrens. They were large Huskies, bred for the snows. After camp had been made, Bullock gave some small order to the dogs. One of them failed to respond. He used the lash. At the first howl the other dogs fell upon the unruly one and completed the disciplining in true fashion. Bullock, who had expected at least snarls of disapproval from the rest of the team, was astonished. It was his first introduction to the curious mentality of Northern sled dogs.

From Fort Smith, Bullock went back the river a few miles to Fort Fitzgerald, the steamer landing, to meet Hornby. The boat arrived without him. Inquiries among the officers were fruitless. Bullock returned to Fort Smith. He wasn't particularly disturbed at first. Steamers made the run with fair frequency in the summer, and punctuality was never a virtue with Hornby, anyway. But when days ran into weeks, he became worried, then angry. With Glenn and Mrs. Glenn on his hands and with thousands of pounds of supplies and equipment waiting at the waterside, the suspense was maddening. He began to wonder if after all he might not have to venture into the Barrens alone. Faithfully he met every steamer and diligently he questioned every newcomer. He reaped only rumors which disturbed him.

Meanwhile, Hornby, naïvely unaware that Bullock wouldn't understand his delay, was paddling north on the Peace River in company with four trappers. During the day, when the canoes leapt through the water, the five were not unlike any of the thousands of trappers and prospectors who have at one time or another used the waters of the Peace for a highway. But at night, when tents were erected and the grub eaten, conversation emphasized the contradiction of types.

First, of course, was Hornby himself, the smallest man present, but the most dominant. He said the least and listened the most. But when he spoke there was silence. His diction and soft tones were set off by the colloquialisms of the others.

Two of his companions were the brothers Stewart, Malcolm and Alan, friends of long standing. They were farmers when farming paid, and trappers when it didn't. Otherwise they were quite dissimilar. Malcolm was about thirty-eight, a large man with reddish-brown hair and a florid

complexion. He was inclined to stoutness. Alan was shorter and more slender. He was also older. While Malcolm's features were almost cherubic, Alan's were aquiline. Malcolm was a wit, and to believe him, something of a Lothario. There was the time he liked to tell about, for instance, when he escaped with his pants in his hands instead of on his legs. Alan was quiet. He had a softer voice than his brother, seldom indulged in ribaldry, and almost never talked of women. Malcolm chewed tobacco. Alan was an abstainer. Two other qualities the brothers shared; both were powerful, and both had a bit of the gentleman about them. That was why they were old friends of Hornby's.

Then there was Al Greathouse, an old man, nearing his seventies, or perhaps in them. He was typical, a good man on the trail or with a paddle, but, since the years had come upon him, a dreadful bore. He would lean across the tent and speak in whispers of phenomenally large wolf packs or of 'caroobee' of a stature no one else had ever seen. To these tales Hornby would listen patiently, and punctuate them with a 'Yes, yes,' spoken as much with his eyes as with his lips. Greathouse would then go solemnly on, delighted that the Master was enthralled. Hornby knew the ways of trappers, particularly of trappers who had grown old. Only in respect to Greathouse's dog Pat did Hornby permit himself to show annoyance. Pat's owner fed him 'white man's grub,' an act which was both blasphemy and effeminacy to Hornby.

The fifth member of the group was a youth named Buckley. He was called 'Buck,' for no one knew, or at any rate remembered, his first name. First names are of more use in civilization than in the wilds. Buck was a good-looking lad with a charming smile and a strong body. He rather fancied broad wit.

With these men as his *entourage* Hornby arrived at Fort Smith six weeks late. He greeted Bullock gayly, and without any but meager explanations. Bullock was so glad to see him that explanations would have been superfluous. One thing Bullock wanted to mention, but didn't; when he was introduced to the quartet, he noticed that Greathouse's eyes were gray and Buckley's brown!

Hornby, in an extravagant flush of enthusiasm, bought a huge old hull for transporting supplies and equipment down the Slave River to Great Slave Lake, and two hundred miles across the lake to its northeastern tip. The hull had no motor, but no matter. Several days of frantic search revealed that there was no motor within many miles of Fort Smith big enough to move the ship. So the Empress—it bore so fancy a name—was left to rot.

The next purchase was more carefully made, three small flat-bottomed boats, two of them powered. On these the load was distributed, and late in August the entire party got under way. The goal was the site of Fort Reliance, gateway to the Barrens.

What might have been the most pleasant part of the expedition, with August days for paddling and August nights for sleeping, and food for everybody, was marred by spite. Bullock had not been wholly forgiven for bringing Glenn. The result was a divided party, with Bullock, Glenn, and Mrs. Glenn sailing and camping by themselves. The King was gently disciplining his Prince.

It was the last day in August when Reliance was reached. In the midst of the small timber stood a stone chimney, all that remained from the stronghold which once sheltered Sir George Back and lent to the spot the title of Fort. To Hornby the sight of that chimney was like first glimpsing home after a long journey. He had seen it often, sometimes with its stones hot from the sun, sometimes half-buried in the drifting snow. Now, seeing it again, he felt suddenly at peace. To Bullock the shaft meant the beginning of his dream. It meant, too, the end of embarrassment. For there Glenn and his wife were to remain. If Reliance held any special significance for the others, they did not speak of it. To them it was the spot where a cache must be built.

Already ice was forming on the small ponds and the nights were taking on bitterness. The building of the cache was rushed, for the best of the summer weather had gone. A cache is like a small log cabin on stilts. First the uprights were erected, six of them, fresh hewn from the forest. Some twelve feet above the ground a log platform was laid across the uprights. The height was necessary as a protection from raiding animals. On the platform was piled all that was to be stored. Then interlocking log walls were built around the treasure. A roof of sorts topped off the job. To get into the cache after it is finished, one must virtually tear it apart again.

At Hornby's suggestion that 'the stuff can be brought up more easily after we are settled,' Bullock allowed most of his costly scientific apparatus to repose in the cache. He kept out only his cameras.

Just as the cache was finished, several canoes appeared seemingly from nowhere on the waters of the lake. From the first one to touch the beach stepped a little man of the size and build of Hornby. He was Guy Blanchet, Government explorer, back from his summer trip. He greeted Hornby familiarly, and for some time they talked over portages, caribou, white

wolves, and kindred subjects. When they parted, Hornby had bought four canoes.

Northeast from Reliance runs the Lockhart River, and at its source is Artillery Lake. The river is short, but broken by a myriad of rapids and falls. Such travelers as go beyond Reliance must take Pike's Portage, a route of alternating ponds, streams, rocks, hills, and muskeg. It is a man's route. Over it early in September started Hornby, Bullock, Malcolm, and Alan Stewart, Greathouse, Buckley, and two teams of dogs. They had with them five canoes, four of those bought from Blanchet, and Yvonne. Matonabee stayed behind. It was not suited for exploration work, Hornby said. Bullock suspected that his jealousy extended even to canoes. Also the party had four tons of equipment. All of it had to travel on the backs of the men over the portages.

'Packing,' Hornby had said, 'is a matter of guts.' It is also a matter of back and shoulders and legs. It is a process peculiar to the far places. Civilization has no counterpart for it. The bulky chap who helps to juggle pianos in a city would be likely to find his legs turning to custard and his back giving up the first hour on the trail. Muskeg has a devilish habit of sucking down one foot and throwing a man off balance. Ropes and straps grow to feel like newly sharpened band-saws on the longer treks. Even the ability to stagger along with a hundred and a half pounds is only half of it. Getting the pack on your back comes first.

As he had outlined it to Bullock in the mountains:

'You lie on your side with your back against the pack. The pack may be the size and shape of a five-foot baked potato, or it may be compact. At any rate, it has straps or ropes tied around it. You grasp those ropes and bring them over your shoulder, or over both shoulders if there are two ropes. Then you curl your legs up as far as they'll go, and, with the aid of your arms, your back, your stomach, and most of the rest of the muscles of your body, roll over on your knees. After that it's merely a matter of getting to your feet.'

The second day on the portages was torture. A steady drizzle soaked the muskeg to a mud-like consistency and made the rocks slimy. A swarm of black flies completed the misery. The black fly of the North draws blood with its bite. As insects go, it is vicious. Hornby alone seemed immune. But then, he seemed immune to everything, even pain and fatigue.

The second night the party camped beside some Indians. Two or three of the braves came over to powwow with Hornby in the tent he shared with

Bullock. Most of the conversation was in grunts and guttural which, although supposed to be English, were beyond Bullock's understanding. Once Bullock closed his eyes on the scene and was startled to discover that in the undertones Hornby's voice so blended with the others he could not distinguish it. The Indians spat freely on anything within range, but their white host was in no wise bothered. Before they left for their own camp, Hornby had given them several pairs of moccasins, more than half the food immediately at hand in the tent, and a blanket. Bullock considered that the gifts were needed at home. He said so. Hornby was shocked.

'We don't need them as much as they do,' he said. 'Those Indians can't get along as well as we can.'

On one of the short portages the next day a small, sturdy Indian came over to greet Hornby. They stood toe to toe, the Indian and the white man, pumping each other's hands in welcome. It was young Susie Benjamin, whose father Hornby had befriended with food and clothing during the cruel winter of 1920. The son was one of Hornby's greatest admirers. He was about twenty-two, and gave the impression of enormous strength, though he stood no taller than his idol. The others, who had stopped to watch the tableau, saw the Indian and the white man talking in whispers. Soon Hornby turned and said:

'Susie and I are going to show you boys how to pack.'

The supplies and equipment had been moved, but the five canoes still lay at the south end of the portage. Toward these Susie and Hornby went. They juggled the first canoe to their shoulders and started off across the rocky surface at a sprint. They had no pads, but, instead of carrying the canoes inverted, rested the steel keel on their shoulders with only their heavy shirts to soften the weight. The second canoe followed the first, with a youth in front and a middle-aged man behind. At the third canoe there was a bit of agony in Hornby's expression, but no slackening of pace. All five canoes were run across without a halt. It was a superb feat of endurance. At the end Susie was breathing more heavily than Hornby, but Bullock noticed that the latter's shirt was stained red where the canoe keels had rested.

'Hurt you?' he asked.

Hornby tried to look scornful.

'No! Nothing can hurt you if you don't think about it.'

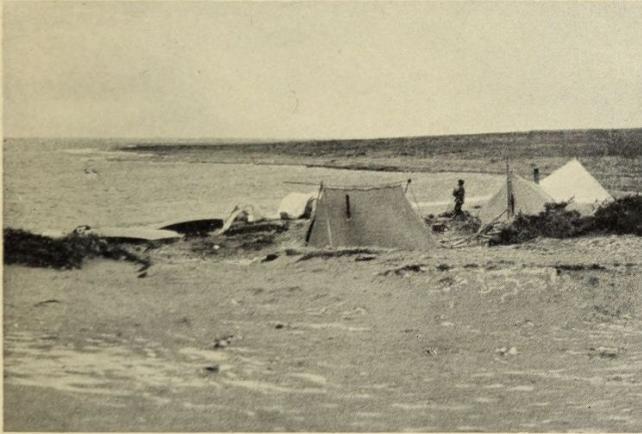
The rest of the day he took care to use his raw shoulder the most. And he took equal care that the younger man should be aware of it.

When Bullock had learned the grind of packing, he felt an itch to assemble his motion-picture camera. He visioned close-ups of strained faces beneath heavy loads, and long-distance shots of men trudging behind each other, through deep muskeg, up wet rocks, fording streams, staggering from water to water with bent backs. Once, when he and Hornby had finished their packing before the rest, he set up his tripod and approached Buck and Malcolm. The pair were coming over the trail, well laden.

‘Do you mind waiting a minute,’ he said, ‘until Alan and Greathouse fetch up so I can get some pictures of you all together?’



GETTING READY TO CAMP ON ARTILLERY LAKE
HORNBY ERECT; MALCOLM STEWART BENDING OVER; BUCKLEY SEATED



FIRST CAMP IN THE BARREN LANDS

The two men stopped for an instant. Malcolm shifted his pack and looked at Buckley. The latter looked back. Then, without speaking, they went on. Bullock felt his face flush as though some one had struck him. They regarded him as an oddity who puttered with cameras and diaries in a land meant for sterner things. Even when he out-packed them and out-paddled them, they held to their opinion. Only Hornby seemed to understand. He posed for several shots when he saw the tripod erected.

To stem his depression, Bullock wandered off alone that night after grub. A blue butterfly effect on one of the little lakes affected him deeply. The sight of it was like food. In its beauty he even forgot his physical troubles, surmounted by a liverish throat which was scalded by every swallow of hot food or drink. He endured the cold for the sake of the solitude after the sun went down. His pipe bowl glowed until late. Before turning into his sleeping-bag, he wrote in his diary: 'How sweet to be alone!' He smiled grimly at the thought of the sneers if the others should read it.

There came a night when the packs were set down on the shore of Artillery Lake. Portaging was over for a while. The next morning when camp was broken and the canoes launched, a heavy mist clung to the water. Hornby was more animated than he had been for months. He was nearing home. The start from shore was almost a rite. One by one the men climbed into the canoes and began to paddle. The only sound was the drip-drip of water from the blades. A hundred feet off shore the mist swallowed up the beach they had just left. There was something symbolic about it to Bullock.

It was as though the gray-white film which enveloped them betokened the great spaces which were to awe them and surround them farther on.

After several hours the mist, which had been gradually thinning under the mounting sun, vanished altogether. On the western shore, Bullock saw small timber for as far as the eye could see. Hornby was looking at the eastern shore. It was bare of trees, and presented a strange spectacle of emptiness. The timber line cuts Artillery Lake diagonally, from northwest to southeast. Where Hornby's eyes were focussed, the Barren Lands began.

CHAPTER THREE

ONE day in October, after the snow had come and the lake ice was forming near the shore, Hornby sat on a sand prominence watching the caribou. He was often to sit thus during the winter, always in silence, always alone. He watched as another might watch the tide of humans in a city street, with tolerance and amusement, seeking familiar faces and tableaux. Sometimes a half-mile distant, sometimes only a few yards away, the animals drifted in little bands. They were idling toward the edge of the timber, drawn by the instincts which each year guide and time their migrations. In a few days mating would begin. Already there was a restlessness in the bulls and a friskiness in the cows. Hornby, motionless, saw the graceful, thin-flanked creatures grub beneath the snow for moss. He could tell of other years when he had walked into closely packed herds and aroused no more than passing glances from the deer. The proudly poised bulls and sleek cows had opened respectful path for him. Beyond that not one had moved.

To the ears of the man on the sand-bank came now and then the crack of a rifle shot, sharpened and amplified by Northern air. He knew that Bullock, or Malcolm, or Alan, or Greathouse, or Buckley had fired, and that probably some fat bull lay dead or dying in the snow. It was the finger of necessity, not sport, at the trigger. Caribou must be hunted while they are fat. In a few weeks, when true winter became animate and the rutting season was on, the flanks and backs of the deer would grow leaner. Also caribou must be hunted when they are in evidence. For there might be days and weeks when not one would be seen. So on this day, with animals dotting the horizon, rifles spat. To-morrow the flat sweep of the Barrens might be lifeless again.

For the moment Hornby was content to leave hunting to the others. His thoughts were his own. Probably they were vague, as vague as the outlines of the farthest knoll to the west, or the well-nigh invisible shore-line across

Artillery Lake to the east. Surely they were the thoughts of a dreamer, for who else would so endure the cold and the monotony? There was even something regal in it all, as when he said to Bullock in their tent late in the afternoon:

‘It’s a wonderful, wonderful country, don’t you think, Bullock? I’ve been watching the caribou grazing. The cows and the calves were skipping like sheep and lambs. A shame to kill them, but man comes first, and men must eat. People don’t understand what brings me to this country—what holds me here—but you do, don’t you?’

Bullock, understanding a little, smiled. He was blood-spattered and dirty from a day of butchering.

‘Yes, I think I do. I can wake up in the morning here and know that I have no troubles beyond keeping alive.’

‘Yes, yes! That’s it!’ Hornby’s eyes were afire again. ‘If I could only stay in the Barrens I should be content. I wish the Government would give me Artillery Lake. They ought to, after all I’ve done. Then I’d build a house on a hill by the shore. From its windows I could see for miles in every direction. When the caribou were in migration, I’d sit and watch. The windows would be open so that I could hear the grunts and hoofbeats. I’d feel as though they were galloping for me, passing in review. Then I’d be really happy . . .’

Such moods Hornby reserved for Bullock. With the others he was always the doer, never the dreamer.

Sometimes in the evenings of early October, the little man and his young companion journeyed to the log cabin which Alan Stewart and Buckley, with help from the others, had erected in an isolated spruce clump a few miles beyond the timber-line. This cabin was the largest of the chain of back camps. It was designed to shelter the whole party in an emergency. Southward, within the timber, was a cabin built by Greathouse. Miles to the north, also in the haven of stray lakeside timber, a semi-dugout was nearing completion. It would house Malcolm Stewart. Somewhere beyond that, in the true Barrens, Hornby and Bullock would eventually settle.

The gatherings at Alan’s cabin were merry. Loneliness and labor proved droll parents. Of them were born masculine quips and arguments never heard in civilized parlors. Laughter was loud, louder than the howl of the wind or the crackle of spruce logs in the stove. Sometimes Malcolm, whose

laugh was heartiest and words broadest, would climax a muscular story by asking:

‘That’s the way of it, eh, Jack?’

And Hornby would say:

‘I guess so, Malcolm. But you know more about such things than I do.’

When conversation dragged, Al Greathouse talked. He hinted of secret fox bait which would snare the most wary descendant of Reynard. Or of equally secret hair tonic which had been ‘brewed by an Indian Chief.’ Mention of the tonic was always punctuated by inclinations of his bald head so the rest might see the new fuzz struggling to be visible. Some one asked to see the tonic. The old trapper grinned. It was, it seems, one of those things which were not for infidel eyes. When Hornby suggested that a diet rich in meat was excellent fuzz nutriment, Greathouse was indignant. Almost as indignant as on an earlier night when Pat was missing.

It was while the party was encamped on the shores of Artillery. The dog had not been seen for more than a day and its master was worried. After darkness had fallen, and a group had gathered in one of the tents, there came a howl from some distance outside, Greathouse rushed out, calling, ‘Pat! Pat! Pat!’ Hornby followed, and returned a moment later grinning like a boy.

‘What’s the old fellow doing?’ some one asked.

‘Calling a wolf “Pat,” ’ Hornby chuckled.

One of the events of an evening at Alan’s was the card game. They played Five Hundred, these trappers and frontiersmen, with an enthusiasm never equaled at society Bridge tables. No stakes were needed to pyramid the thrills. The games were conducted with childlike simplicity. To win was good, but to lose was much better than not to play at all. The cards were gummy from handling by fingers which an hour before, perhaps, had been messing with some freshly killed carcass. The men were bearded and untidy. The table was a makeshift. But the game, the everlasting sport of it, was genuine. All were participants at one time or another: Hornby, beaming or frowning with his luck; Bullock impassive; Malcolm calculating; Buckley jocular; Alan serene; Greathouse voluble.

From the shadows near the stove a grotesque figure watched the players, a squat, shaggy shape without head or legs. In the half gloom it had the appearance of an idol hideously carved. Closely examined, it became a matter of caribou hides. Malcolm had contrived it with needle and gut to supplement the light cloth parka he had brought from civilization. Two large

hides did service for the body of the garment, and a third one, halved and roughly sewn, was made into sleeves. The tanning and curing had been hasty, so hasty that the skins retained the character of stiff brown paper. When worn, they crackled with each movement of Malcolm's limbs. Left standing on the floor, as now, the monstrosity kept upright, yet not without a certain state of collapse which lent to it a malignancy. The arms drooped as if weary; the body sagged like the cheeks of a man near death. One night, while Hornby was looking from his cards to return the headless thing's scrutiny and to see if in the candlelight it didn't sway as though alive, Malcolm winked broadly at the rest. He was dealing new hands, and before the deal was complete, he became tense.

'What's that?' he whispered. Then a moment later—'I hear a wolf outside.'

At 'wolf' Hornby dropped his cards for a rifle. The larder could do with more fat. When he vanished through the door, Malcolm picked up the cards he had already dealt and turned the whole deck face up on the table. He chose an assortment of aces and face cards, counted out the proper number, and placed them before the little man's seat. Then he dealt new hands around from the remainder of the deck.

Hornby was back in five minutes.

'No sign of him,' he said. 'I couldn't even find his tracks in the snow.'

'Too bad,' Malcolm sympathized. 'Maybe I heard wrong.'

Hornby had no poker face. The social graces were his when he chose to exercise them, but not the masks which were worn in conjunction. When he was pleased, or when he wasn't, he showed it. Just then his eyes shone like cat's gleams as he waited for play to begin. He got the bid. He took every trick. The others, Malcolm and Buckley in particular, wailed.

'Damn it, Jack,' the latter complained, 'what did you do—stack these cards?'

The winner was concerned.

'Why, no,' he said earnestly, 'Malcolm dealt them, not me. The trouble is you don't get the psychology of the thing. I'm lucky because I have faith in luck.'

Back in their tent, Hornby brewed tea for himself and Bullock. It was too late to bother with the kettle, and, besides, the new fire wasn't burning

well. Two aluminum cups, each with its portion of leaves and water, were set on the stove. Hornby squatted in bare feet. He had removed his moccasins and socks, as always when he lounged inside. His right hand fingered one of his toes while his left stirred the fire. Sometimes he stared intently at his feet as though expecting to find a toe had come off in his hand.

‘Bare feet are hard and healthy, Bullock.’

‘I fancy so.’

‘If I should hear a wolf or caribou now, I wouldn’t bother with moccasins. That’s the beauty of it here. There are no nails or glass on the ground. And cold won’t hurt your feet if you’re on the run.’

‘What of the rocks?’

‘Oh, I wouldn’t step on the sharp ones.’

Tea in the Barrens was hardly tea at all. The black liquid in the dented cups was hot. That was its virtue. But it didn’t taste like tea. And the cups were greasy from insufficient washing. When water wasn’t handy, Hornby rubbed cups and plates with sand. It *did* shear off the thicker grease. Bullock remembered Quetta, where one sat on a wide veranda in some officers’ compound and sipped tea of an Indian afternoon. Wild peach trees bloomed in the garden, and the eye commanded a picture of rolling brown plains cut by nullahs. It had been as hot there as it was cold in the Barrens. One wore shorts, a sun helmet, and a khaki shirt with a ‘spine pad’ to keep the blistering rays off your back. In the daytime you couldn’t even sit in a tent with your helmet off. Now he sat on his bunk with parka on. Beneath it was a heavy flannel shirt, and under all thick underwear. Over his legs was stretched a pair of coarse overalls. Moccasins covered his feet. The whole outfit was blood-spattered. Packing fresh meat on your back is not for the fastidious. Was it always the same—too hot yesterday, too cold to-day, too something else to-morrow? Thinking thus, Bullock managed to put into words that which had been in his heart for some days. He tried to be pleasantly casual.

‘I say—when is my scientific stuff going to be moved up from Reliance?’

Hornby set his cup on the stove and grasped his toes with both hands.

‘Sometime soon, Bullock, sometime soon.’

‘But aren’t we wasting time—leaving it down there?’

‘Why, no. No, of course not. We’re getting the Stewarts settled, and Greathouse and Buckley, so they can trap successfully. I’ve been showing them where to set out trap lines, and the best kind of bait to use.’

Something in Bullock’s glance, some tensivity in his silence, made Hornby look intently at the younger man. After a moment he said:

‘Look here, I know what you’re thinking. I want to tell you a story. It’s about two trappers who were alone together in a remote part of the woods. They had a disagreement over something and determined to separate, dividing equipment and supplies. They set about putting one sack of flour on one side and a second sack on the other. An axe went to the left, another to the right, and so on through staples, through traps, through fish nets, through ammunition, and even fur. After the division was accomplished, one thing remained—a kettle. The men eyed the thing, each knowing it held the power to stampede them to murder. To leave it was unthinkable. Either might return and steal it. What was to be done? At that moment, when one spoken word might have been fatal, the elder of the men picked up an axe and split the kettle down the center. It was of no further use to either.’

Hornby hesitated, but not long enough to allow the other to comment. Then he said:

‘Let’s turn in.’

Two hours later, Bullock was still awake. An almost continuous rustling disturbed the darkness. It was Hornby, sleeping Indian fashion, twisting and turning in slumber to keep the circulation from sluggishness. Bullock envied him the knack of it.

The moods of Nature are as vagrant as those of her children. What had been snow was now rain, and the two in the tent were miserable. It was four in the afternoon, but already dark. Hornby sat on his haunches trying to heat water and tea leaves in a cup held over a candle. Bullock supposed that Hornby would manage tea on a raft in mid-ocean. Hail hit the canvas like bullets. A few yards away, two heavy canoes, turned bottoms up to shelter a half ton of dunnage, echoed the steady drumming of the ice. Occasionally a growl or half-whine would come from one of the dogs tethered outside. Mostly, though, they were philosophical and made no sound. Or perhaps it wasn’t so much philosophy as it was Whitey. This old leader, who stood as high as a wolf, was a veteran of the trails. His massive shoulders and wolf-like head set him apart from the younger dogs, with whom he enforced

discipline by gutturals as commanding as a sergeant major's 'Halt!' Whitey's hide was weather-proof. Hail was merely an incident, even if cold and driving like this. So, wisely, did Skinny and Porky and Bhaie accept it as such. The names were descriptive. The first was slimly built; the second had been shot full of porcupine quills at Reliance; the third, to whom Bullock took a fancy, became Bhaie because it signified 'Brother' in Hindustani. Whitey, of course, was named for his color, which was that of the snows in which he had been bred.

In the tent Hornby juggled the metal cup. The candle flame made it uncomfortably hot.

'We were lucky to have found this island. We might have been swamped.'

'I'm as wet as if I had been swamped.'

'We'll go on pretty soon. Maybe the storm will let up. Anyway, there's no sense in spending the night here. We need a fire to help dry us out, and there's no fuel on this miserable sandbar. I'd like to get into the Casba tonight.'

They drank candled tea, a half-cup apiece. The cup was hot, but the liquid only warm. Still, it helped. Bullock felt a loneliness he had not known before. The others were definitely behind them now. They had set out in the afternoon—he and Hornby—to make their way into the northern beyond and establish winter quarters. Their route lay up Artillery Lake to where the Casba River wound its way through the Barrens with Ptarmigan Lake at the other end. Somewhere near the western banks of the river they would land and reconnoiter for a building site. Once there the severance would be complete. The Stewarts and Buckley and Greathouse would undoubtedly visit them, but only at the expense of grueling trips with the dogs. Travel by water was not for long. A fair collar of ice encircled the island they were on, and already the freeze had set in along the main shores. He and Hornby had discussed—vaguely, as unknown things are always discussed—the nature of their winter home, the shape it was to take. 'At worst,' Hornby had said, 'we can enlarge a wolf den and live in that. I've done it before.' Well, that would be better than a tent with the inside so frost-coated that a touch on the canvas brought down a snowstorm upon occupants, blankets, and food. Several mornings lately that had happened, when one or the other of them had moved too swiftly upon awakening.

By eight o'clock the hail had stopped. Reloading was difficult in the darkness. Packs, boxes, bedding, tents, all were soaked. And the dogs shook

spray on everything for good measure. Once away from the island, the gloom was so acute that Bullock followed Hornby's canoe only by the sound of its paddle swishing through the water, and by occasional exchange of shouts. It was like canoeing with your eyes shut. By the time the Casba yawned before them, the clouds opened a little. The canoes looked like dark shadows upon darker water. Half a mile up the river foam churned ahead of them, and a dull roar filled the air. Hornby, who was leading, shouted:

'Forked rapids with a little island between. I'll take the right channel. You go left.'

The words seemed to touch Bullock's ears and be whisked away before he could properly hear them. But he understood. He saw the shadow that was Hornby's canoe disappear to the east of the island. He drove his own craft into the swirling waters to the left. It was upstream work, and he had to guess at which among the foam patches were eddies and which rocks. The heavily laden craft was perverse. It swung as if phantom hands pulled upon it. The full play of Bullock's broad shoulders and long arms was needed to make headway and keep course. Chunks of ice, swept down from the more northerly waters of Ptarmigan, jarred the canoe and tore raw spots on his knuckles. Beneath his parka Bullock felt the sweat trickle. His muscles ached from the strain of fighting a boiling current which never got tired. When it seemed that he could paddle no farther, that his strength had all been poured out uselessly, the end of the island came, and with it quiet water. He beached the canoe and looked for Hornby. He saw nothing but the black outline of the opposite bank against a less black sky. He shouted—once—twice—three times! The rumble of the rapids, that indescribable sound of writhing water, drowned his voice. The night suddenly frightened him and he was unaccustomed to fright. He hated the river for its darkness and its depth. He hated the Barrens for their endlessness and bleakness. He hated himself for being afraid.

Suddenly he heard Hornby's call, high-pitched and desperate. Or was it just another night sound? Or even imagination? It came as from a long distance. Bullock ran back along the shore, shouting until his throat hurt. There was no answer. He heard only the roar of the water and the labor of his own breath. He felt puny, weak, impotent. He could do nothing but rage. If he tried to cross the river to the other rapids, the current would lift his craft broadside upon the rocks. He lived hours of doubt within the space of seconds.

Then Hornby's cry came again. Desperate with anxiety, Bullock climbed on hands and knees to a ledge whence he could see over the little island. His

torn knuckles stung and he spat on them. While he stared unseeingly into the darkness, the moon broke through the clouds. It wasn't much of a moon—only a white glow through the still thick mists—but to Bullock it was as a shining sun. For there in the other rapids he could discern Hornby, in water up to his waist, trying to round his canoe off a rock against which the current threatened to crush it. Those white patches which rushed at the figure in the water were not all foam. Some were cakes of ice, jagged and cold. Bullock felt his knuckles throbbing. He cupped his hands and roared: 'Hornby! Oh, Hornby! Are you all right?' The little man heard him for the first time above the terrible hissing of the water in his ears, and, assured of his partner's safety, redoubled his efforts.

An hour later, after he had waded the canoe upstream into quiet water, Hornby lay panting on the bank while Bullock made camp and nursed a miserable fire of wet twigs.

'My God! man, I thought you were done for. What happened, anyway?'

The little man sat up. Water ran from his tangled hair and dripped from his beard. His clothes squished when he moved. Though the water had been but waist-deep, he had been wholly immersed.

'Done for?' His tone was meant to be scornful. 'Nonsense. I was worried about you. The canoe fetched up against a rock, and when it started to go over, I went over instead—to keep the supplies dry. I knew I could wade it out.'

He squeezed his parka and rivulets ran down the wrinkles.

'See here—that wretched fire of yours will never dry out these clothes. And if I sit here they may freeze on me. It's cold enough. I'd better run a bit.'

'But you're all played out . . .'

'Yes, yes?'

Hornby grinned, stood up, and was gone. He melted into the darkness at a trot. Bullock poked dispiritedly at the fire and was oppressed by his thoughts. What manner of man his partner? Smaller than most, he could perform amazing feats of strength and agility. More primitive than most, he was a scholar under it all. Hardships he welcomed as most welcome comfort. Knowing these things, Bullock had come to look upon the man as something beyond the human pale. Yet those cries in the darkness—they were born of common terror. They might have come from the throat of any man so menaced—menaced, too, by fears for his partner. As he had listened

to them, and felt them stab him, Bullock's soul had been full of sympathy—not a usual emotion for him. But now he was hard-pressed to recall his softer feelings. Of what use, for one who flaunts exhaustion to jog off into a freezing night in wet clothing?

Hornby was gone more than an hour. He came into the tent with eyes and cheeks glowing. He looked fresh as morning. His clothes were still wet. He didn't bother with them, but blew out the candle and wriggled, fully clothed, between the blankets of his sleeping-bag. He was asleep almost at once.

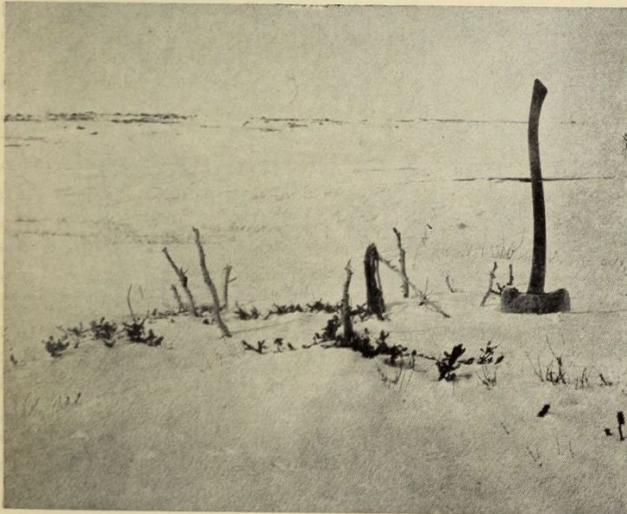
When the great ice-cap retreated from the North American continent, it left its signature upon the Barren Lands—not the graceful tracing of hills and valleys, but a severe pattern of straight lines engraved upon a most awesome flatness. It wrote from south to north with fissures for pens and melting ice for ink. And where it wrote there grew eskers, lone, rounded ridges of sand and gravel stretching as far as the eye can see, and far again beyond that. The eskers average, perhaps, a height of from thirty to eighty feet. They might have been raised by the passage of some giant mole. They are the mountains of the Barrens, the only relief from the monotony of endless plains, and lakes which seem to lie flat like new coins upon the earth.

Under snow late in October the eskers gave to the country an unearthly complexion, an emptiness not unlike that which meets the eye as it peers through a telescope at the surface of the moon. When the day was clear and the sky blue, the snow was blisteringly white. But when the sky was overcast, the tops of the ridges melted into the horizon and all the world seemed one piece of gray.

The tent which was Hornby's and Bullock's rested on top of an esker which commanded the country to the north and west of the Casba River. From it could be seen snow, with here and there a willow or a spruce twig sticking through, occasional caribou, less occasional white wolves and white foxes—nothing else. Bullock found it numbing, that view. It had the flavor of the desert about it, the desert reversed, with snow for sand and cold for heat. But it lacked the desert colors—the rose and the purple and the violet. It had only white and gray. Bullock was glad that there was work to do. One doesn't think so much when one is forever busy.



HORNBY AND THE DOGS WITH A TON
ON THE SLED



THE FUEL SUPPLY OF THE BARRENS

The two men were always up before the sun—which was coming at an alarmingly later hour each morning—and at work until darkness—which was closing in with an even greater rapidity. Winter shelter had become a

problem as paramount as life itself. Living beneath canvas was daily more insufferable. After sunup came winds which tore at the guy ropes and opened weak seams. Night found the wind gone, but the mercury dropping. Twice the thermometer had registered lower than -15, and it was not yet November.

Precious days had been wasted deciding the form their dwelling should take. A log cabin was not feasible. The timber was fifty miles behind, too far to permit bringing up beams by dog sled; the river flowed the wrong way for floating them up. An igloo, such as the Eskimos contrive, was also out of the question. Snow on the Barrens is dry and powdery. It falls so, and gales keep it milled. It never packs to a consistency from which blocks can be cut. Sod, particularly frozen sod, is good for building. But where they were was no sod; nothing but sand and gravel and useless moss. A stone hut, cemented with mud in the crevices, might have been possible. But the rocks either were too small for use or too large to wrest from their icy settings.

In such a dilemma Bullock said, half-seriously:

‘We’d better be after a wolf den, hadn’t we?’

‘I guess not. But we *can* dig a cave in this esker.’

And a cave it was becoming. One of their spades broke, and both of their backs nearly did. The ground was already frozen solid for more than a foot down. But somehow a cut was made—ten feet long, seven feet broad, and six and one half feet deep. They planned to lay a ridgepole lengthwise across the top, and a network of smaller sticks from the ridgepole to the sides. There was enough canvas to do for a roof. A layer of sand over it all and no one would know the earth had been disturbed!

They worked together, the little man and the big man, the veteran and the neophyte, digging the twelve-foot trench that was to serve as both entrance and storehouse. Half-way along its length they dug a door leading on the hillside. The dead end of the trench would be for supplies.

The walls of the cave itself had to be revetted, lest sand fall from them constantly. Spruce and willow tips, such as might be found within the limits of search, were laced and interlaced against the upright surfaces. Stout fishline, threaded through the sand to stakes outside, held the revetments in place. It was slow, painstaking work, ill-fitted for hands numb with cold.

Hornby worked in furious spurts, Bullock methodically. When a trip to the timber was needed in order to cut the ridgepole and supporting sticks—Hornby made it. When more twigs were required for the revetment—

Hornby went after them. These runs with the dogs and sled gave him that variety of employment his nature demanded. He would come back half-exhausted, yet eager to be at a new task. His spirits rose as the problems multiplied. Often Malcolm would come up from the south and help for a few hours. Sometimes Buckley, and less frequently Alan, would make the long trek from their cabin with fresh meat and supplies of sticks and fuel.

There came at last a day when the cave was inhabitable. Early in the morning the tent had ceased to be a tent. It had become instead a canvas roof, spread like flesh over a network of ribs fastened to the ridgepole backbone. Over the canvas was sprinkled enough sand to hide it. At noon a light snowfall completed the illusion. The trench likewise had been covered with old hides, strips of tarpaulin, and what-not, so that the yawning hole of a door and a foot or so of black stovepipe sticking impertinently through the snow alone marked the cavern beneath.

Inside the occupants were busy with the furnishings. Bullock was vastly concerned with the sleeping arrangements. He had stretched two caribou hides upon the sand, fur up, at the far end from the tunnel door—one on either side of the cave and about three feet apart (like twin beds, he thought). On the pelts were placed sleeping-bags. Between them was his small iron trunk. Already a candle winked upon it, dripping its wax into the elegance of a tin-can top. In the trunk were his treasures—some of his photographic equipment, toilet necessities (which Hornby regarded as unmanly in the North), and two large red-bound notebooks, each with its thousand pages of India paper, which were to be diary and letter box. Beyond the foot of the beds, and to the right, was Hornby's play-thing—the stove. It was a sheet-iron affair, box-shaped, with a single opening meant to do duty as damper, fuel-receiver, and ash-remover. He crouched there now, sliding back and forth with a stick the thin metal plate fixed with one rivet over the stove's lone aperture. The new fire was balky—and it was to have been a ceremonial blaze, too, the first of the 'season.' But the fuel was damp and green and inadequate.

'The wind's playing hob with the draft. Fancy we'll have to stand the smoke, though. We need the fire.'

'Yes,' said Bullock.

But he was thinking less of the smoke than of their handiwork, the fruit of their long toil. It looked murky now in the light of the lone candle. The dark backgrounds of twigs and sand were poor reflectors. While it was in the

process of being dug, and while daylight illumined its corners, it had seemed adventurous, this prospect of a winter in the cave, but now . . .

‘Couldn’t we hang our canoe sails along these walls to help the lighting a bit?’

Hornby looked up. His eyes were watering from the smoke and his lip was wrinkled up under his nose, for green willow root is not incense.

‘Yes, yes. Of course. It is rather dark, isn’t it? But we mustn’t mind things like that, Bullock. We’re lucky to have a place like this to live in.’

The younger man didn’t comment. If he had he would have said: ‘We’re a couple of damn fools. What are we fighting cold and privation for when we could be down in Edmonton before an open fire, with plenty to eat and drink and good friends to talk to?’ There were two reasons why he didn’t say it. Hornby would think him jesting. And he wasn’t really sure he felt that way himself. In fact, he wasn’t really sure of anything just then—except that the cave seemed to afford enormous satisfaction to Hornby. The little man had made himself extraordinarily busy all day, puttering about the cave as a bride might putter about a new bungalow. Perhaps he regarded the esker dwelling as affectionately. Certainly pride had something to do with it when he said:

‘We have them all whipped—Greathouse and Alan and Buckley in their log cabins, and Malcolm in that affair of his. They have only the thickness of wood between them and winter. We have a whole hill. When I was a boy I used to imagine great underground castles. Too bad we didn’t dig a couple more rooms. Then this place would be a regular castle.’

There was a dedicatory dinner in the evening. Probably the Barrens had never seen its like before, have not since, and never will. The dogs had been fed early and tied securely behind their windbreak above. Bullock was toastmaster, Hornby guest of honor. The night was notable for the extravagance of two candles alight at once. The *pièce de résistance* was caribou steak garnished with bacon. The second course was bannock, thick and steaming. The third course tea, reënforced, flavored, and enriched by rum. The rum came from the medical stores, and was the only item in the cave’s pharmacopœia of which Hornby approved.

At one point during the dinner Bullock rose and held his cup of rum and tea aloft. That the guest of honor was busy cooking bannock deterred him not at all. He began in his best military voice:

‘In the name of all adventurous men who have looked upon this esker, and all others who have known the Barren Lands in its changing moods of snow and sun, storm and quiet, stranger and friend, and particularly in the names of John Hornby and James C. Critchell-Bullock, I dedicate this cave.’

So saying he threw some tea upon the nearest wall. Hornby grinned.

‘You’ll need that tea some day.’

‘Damn!’ said Bullock.

CHAPTER FOUR

FOR GOD'S sake, don't do that!

Bullock was singing as he helped to skin a caribou, filling his lungs with bitterly crisp air and expelling it to the mellow notes of 'Drake is Going West, Lad.' If he sacrificed tune and key to volume, it was because it delighted him to stretch his voice to the utmost, just as it sometimes delighted him to loose the full power of his muscles. In the deserts of the Jordan Valley, when patrol duties carried him far from camp, the sands had echoed to 'Here Comes Tootsie' and 'Thora,' rendered with all of the bellow his parched throat could muster. And now, while he guided a knife down the inside foreleg of the caribou, he sang to the snows.

Hornby, slitting the skin on a hind quarter, waved his blade in protest.

'For God's sake, Bullock, don't do that!'

'Don't you like music?'

'I don't admit that's music, but even if it is, all music is a screech to me.'

The younger man cut neatly around the hoof and peeled the hide down to the shoulder.

'Even opera? Or musical comedy?'

'All of it. And the theater too. Music's unnatural and the stage is artificial.'

Having finished with the hind quarters and stripped the hide down, Hornby began to slice up the belly.

'You don't understand, do you? Did you ever hear of music in Nature? A brook ripples and the sound is soothing. A wolf howls and the sound is

chilling. A loon laughs and the sound is ridiculous. But do animals gather to listen to a brook, a wolf, or a loon?’

His incision met that of Bullock’s and together they began the messy task of divesting the caribou of its coat. While his companion eased the hide away from the ribs, Hornby held the carcass steady.

‘And that isn’t all, Bullock. Animals need no music because they require no stimulants. Humans use it as an emotional drug. You laugh at that, don’t you? Yes, yes? Well, look here. Erotic music excites passion, marches energy, ballads dreaminess. Noisy arias arouse a man, soft ones calm him. I can go to a chemist and get pills that will produce the same results. Your scientist and your scholar would work with a talking machine at their elbows if music inspired thought and reason and logic. But it doesn’t. It inspires feelings that distort clear thinking. Play music at a zoo and watch the beasts. They howl and grow fidgety. It’s like giving them a shot of dope.’

Bullock looked for a sign of jest. The eyes that regarded him were shining, but there was no twinkle in them. With great care he ran his knife under the hide to loosen it from a layer of fat. He decided that hereafter Drake must go West in silence.

Those early days in the cave taught Bullock more than the anomalies of music. They taught him as well the anomalies of that trite, overwritten, overdiscussed intangible reality men call—without at all thinking about it—Life. It had seemed complex to him in England as a student, when the *nuances* of boy popularity, the intricacies of mathematics and languages, and the urgings of adolescence had plagued him. It had seemed confused in India and Palestine, when natural aversion to death and bloodshed had collided with Army pride and patriotism. But at home and on the battlefield he had not thought much about it. Vaguely he had realized that the one amongst the many must suffer entanglements, whether it be threads or men. Here in the North—in the cave—with the world well behind, he expected simplicity. In fact, during the days when the expedition was only a plan, he had wondered if stagnation might not be the price—if one day might not so pattern itself after the last as to make even existence unattractive. He had not come into the Barrens with illusions. Sternness, and hardship, and privation, and work—heart-breaking, lung-straining work—these were the things he looked for. But the other thing, complexity? In this snow wilderness? When he found it, he was like a man who has told himself that the shadow by the church is a tree stump—and then has seen it move.

It was Hornby, of course. The wanderer was a hundred personalities in one. In Edmonton, and even on the trip up from civilization, he had been just an individual, a human being with astonishing command of his physique, an explorer with a flair for hardship, a boy who never outgrew his wanderlust. Now Bullock scarcely knew words to place him. In the diary, which he kept faithfully each day, he wrote ‘puzzling,’ ‘disgusting,’ ‘irresponsible’ side by side with ‘tireless,’ ‘super-human,’ ‘profound.’ But as he wrote them he knew that they were only syllables.

There were the teeth, for instance. Hornby had a lone upper incisor. For the rest he had plates. In civilization he wore the plates for pride’s sake. But in the cave he deposited them in a tin can which held freshly killed mouse specimens. It happened to be the handiest receptacle. Thereafter he ate without teeth, tearing his meat with the incisor, giving it a perfunctory prod or two with his gums, and swallowing it at a gulp. Moreover, he thrived mightily as an anti-Fletcherist.

Or there was his pet spoon, a twisted, dented bit of aluminum that he stuck in the sand by his bed. Other utensils might get an occasional washing. Never the spoon. Each time its use was called for, Hornby picked it up and scooped out the grease and sand with his thumb.

Or there was, again, his habit of bringing into the cave a wolf carcass ready for skinning. With the candor of a child taking a toy apart, Hornby would squat on his sleeping-bag and disembowel the wolf. The mess he thus created was frightful. The carcass seemed to fill the cave. At such times Bullock watched in silence, fascinated at the other’s complete indifference to blood and entrails, and unable to bring a protest to his lips. The first time it had happened he said:

‘Your bed’s going to be damp to-night.’

‘Yes, yes,’ was the reply, ‘but I’ve slept on lots damper ones.’

After that the young man shut his nose to the stench, his eyes to the sight, and his mind to the thoughts the first two engendered.

It was this in the man that defeated Bullock’s estimates of him. In another it would have been animalism. With Hornby the word was out of place. His thoughts, for instance, were uncommonly clean for a man. In matters of sex, where laxity often follows a letdown in personal fastidiousness, he was—like Cæsar’s wife—above reproach. He had richly chided Bullock when he found him penciling the figure of a woman on a diary page. He tolerated no smut; told no questionable stories; discussed

women, if he discussed them at all, only in terms of high respect. He never cursed, save at his dogs, and then it was more caress than blasphemy. The feelings of a wolf were of great moment to him. If one fled wounded from his bullets, he would follow it for miles to grant a quick death rather than the agony of perishing from loss of blood.

Clean or unclean, civilized or savage, were terms which could not be twisted to fit the man. His body was never dirty. Bullock's flesh would turn dark, until he would be forced to bathe at tremendous discomfort with a little pan. Hornby never bathed. He never seemed to need to. His skin seemed to change like a snake's, only more frequently. He had one of those rare systems that always keeps sweet.

All of this bred in Bullock an emotion uncomfortably like inferiority. His own efforts at fastidiousness appeared futile—yes, and even a bit ridiculous. The soap and the toothpaste of which he had been so proud now took on the color of weaknesses, admissions that their user could not breast the North without recourse to the delicacies of the city.

It was at night when his thoughts tormented him the most. The days were woefully short, and never one of them but what darkness raced with work, and won. There were traps to visit, foxes to skin, furs to treat, meat to butcher, fish to catch, fuel to gather, clothing to sew with gut from the back sinews of a caribou, sleds to mend, meals to cook. The Hornby of the daytime was a prodigious worker, and if Bullock was a good pupil, the other was an even better teacher. He learned to make his mittens more warm by stuffing them with caribou hair—to develop a taste for caribou head, the choicest delicacy of the Barrens—to beat the laws of expansion and contraction by leaving the rifles stuck in the snow at night—to kill a fox in a trap by stunning it with a knife-handle tap on the nose and then kneeling on the ribs over the heart until its beats had ceased. 'It's quick, humane, and keeps bullet holes out of the fur,' Hornby explained.

Yes, daytimes Bullock felt deep affection for his partner. The little man seemed to know everything, to anticipate everything, whether it required experience, as in caching meat beyond the jaws of wolves, or ingenuity, as when he improvised sun-glasses out of penny match-box covers. Bullock believed him when he boasted he could be dropped naked into the heart of the Barrens and survive. And he felt a strange smarting in his eyes the noon Hornby said, quite slowly:

'My day is nearly over—I'm going to die soon.'

As he said it he was kneeling beside Whitey stroking the long, thick hair on the dog's back. Before the younger man could protest, he went on:

‘Yes, yes. There’s no getting away from it. I’m not the man I used to be. I’m almost fifty now. That’s old age for me. When I was thirty, or even forty, no man could best me in strength, in packing, in running, in enduring. I won’t admit that any can now—but there’s Young Susie Benjamin, Bullock. I don’t *think* he could have sprinted a sixth canoe back on the portage, but I *know* I couldn’t. You’re young yet, and you’re a gentleman. This winter I’ll teach you all I know about the Barrens. It isn’t a boast when I say I know them better than any one else. Others have made trips here—I have lived here. It’s almost as though it were *my* country.’

The other, whose eyes had been on Whitey, looked up.

‘Bullock, when I go you’ll be my successor.’

The silence which followed these words was scarcely broken by Bullock’s feeble ‘Why, you’re good for twenty years yet.’ He meant it when he said it, but the thing had an inadequate sound. Twenty years! Why express limits! The man was ageless, he told himself; his blue eyes and shaggy hair were as much a part of the Barrens as the esker in which they dwelt. Fifty years old! In London, in Edmonton a man of fifty liked slippers and the fire, and made excuses for his digestion, and gave up handball and tennis and cricket for golf. Whereas Hornby—the comparison seemed ludicrous—took hardships to bosom in the crudest corner of the world, and cured indigestion (if ever he had such a thing) by ten-mile runs, and packed fat bull caribou into camp for recreation.

Hornby must have read all of this in the other’s eyes.

‘I don’t feel old, if that’s what you mean,’ he said. ‘It’s just that I know what time does to a man up here. Look at Whitey . . .’

He wound his fingers affectionately in the luxurious hair on the dog’s neck.

‘Look at Whitey. He’s an old-timer too. I hate to think how old he is—as dogs go. But he’s better than any of the young ones at that. The point is, he won’t always be that way. You know, Bullock, I’d like to take him back to civilization with me. To London, for instance. Can you imagine the stir he’d create on one of London’s busy streets? A great white beast, half as big as a horse! I’d love that. People would stare at us and wonder. But we wouldn’t pay any attention. We’d just be two old fellows out for a stroll together . . .’

November nights in the cave were sixteen hours long—sixteen hours of darkness to be whiled away in a frozen sand-hole ten feet, by seven feet, by six feet and a half. Sleep, mercifully, accounted for most of the night. The exhausting work of the day and the low temperatures acted as soporifics. But there were always four or five hours of candlelight. Hundreds of miles to the south were theaters of an evening, and cronies to join at little side-street coffee-houses, and radios to blare forth the latest songs (though the latter would have lain forever unused by Hornby). In the bowels of the esker, on the other hand, was precisely nothing of diversion save a few books. These were read and re-read endlessly. There was ‘Hodson of Hodsons Horse,’ and a ‘History of Exploration,’ a biology textbook, two volumes on bird life in the sub-Arctic, and two more on the Mammalia. Also there were several crumpled sections of Edmonton newspapers—July issues—that had served as wrappings. Their contents were well memorized. Both Bullock and Hornby knew full well that ‘on Thursday evening Mrs. William Jessup entertained friends at cards’; and that ‘Henley Graves, aged caretaker,’ was seriously ill with pneumonia.

‘I say, Hornby, do you suppose that caretaker is dead yet?’

‘Probably his wife has spent all the assurance money by this time.’

‘But it says he was unmarried.’

‘Does it? Well, I’d forgotten. I haven’t read that item for nearly a week.’

Hornby, reading, assumed a position as invariable as that which was his while squatting beside the stove. He lay, always, on his back, with his head propped against a roll of bedding and his knees elevated. His right hand held the book or paper, while his left curled, snake-like, behind his head until he could finger his right ear. Thus he reclined through many an evening, stirring only to poke the fire or put on more fuel.

Bullock found solace in his bulky red notebooks. In one he wrote letters—long, intimate letters to women he had known in England and Canada, equally long but less intimate ones to Government officials, soul-weary notes to a few friends scattered around the globe. None of these could be mailed. In fact, he neither wished it nor would he have allowed it. Under the surface they were not letters at all, though they began with ‘My dear Y——’ and ‘Dear L——’ and concluded, mostly, with a scrawled ‘Charles.’ They were outpourings, releases. The salutations and signatures seemed to render them less naked.

Once he wrote:

‘I am afraid Hornby has conceived the idea that I am mad for not being dramatically enthusiastic over this negative form of existence.’

And once again:

‘I should perish without him. As it is, I think I could endure here forever merely in the reflection of his own astounding energy.’

The other red notebook contained his diary. In it he wrote faithfully the record of each day, tempering it with his thoughts and moods. For obvious reasons he never showed it to Hornby. And the latter never asked to see it. But whether this was dictated by lack of interest, or by an inward sensing of what was written there, Bullock never knew. Sometimes Hornby would grab a sheet of paper and scribble furiously for a few moments. The contents of these sheets were also a mystery. Gentlemen respect the privacy of each other’s thoughts.

Conversation was spasmodic. Usually Bullock would start it, for his companion seemed so often rapt by his own meditations. It was probably inevitable that he should occasionally dwell upon women—and their absence. Once, when he spoke of some incident to which memory lent a romantic flavor, Hornby mocked him.

‘I think you’re very foolish.’

‘Perhaps, and then perhaps not. You don’t speak from experience.’

‘Ah! I never had the opportunities you did. I never knew any woman who would marry me.’

‘How do you know no woman would ever marry you? You’ve never asked one.’

At this Hornby waggled a triumphant finger.

‘Have you?’

Bullock thought a moment.

‘No,’ he said.

‘Quite right. But you will sometime. You have more gall than I have. I’d never go that far to find out.’

With every evening there came a time when caution, if not weariness, demanded a retreat to the sleeping-bags. Fuel was too scarce to permit a late fire, and candles to allow more than brief intervals of light. The cave had run short of candles once already, and the gloom that time had been defeated

only by Hornby's ingenuity. He devised a 'bitch' from a tin-can top and fox fat, with a piece of shoelace for a wick.

Retiring was accompanied by certain rites. There was the stove to receive final ministrations, the kettle to be filled with snow and placed over the hottest part of the flame in the usually vain hope that it would hold water in the morning, the Hudson's Bay blanket to be adjusted over the tunnel entrance, and the roof supports to be inspected.

This latter task was becoming increasingly important. The ridgepole and its ribs proving weak, three supporting poles had been introduced. One was reasonably straight, but the other two had been trunks of stunted spruce, grotesquely twisted and maimed by the gales of the Barrens. The three together—brought by dog sled from a wooded area near Malcolm's dugout—made of the interior of the cave something of a labyrinth through which the occupants must thread their steps. An elbow or a foot brought accidentally against one of the supports called down a rain of sand.

When the candle or bitch was at length extinguished and darkness closed in, Hornby slumbered quickly. Not so quickly Bullock. What was home to the former was like a haunted place to the younger man. Sometimes, under the stress of a mighty fire, the stove glowed for a bit. More often the darkness was absolute. It wasn't the silence of it; it was the sounds. Worst of all was the cracking of the earth. It was like successive blasts of a cannon. The alternating temperatures of daylight and night, and the different degrees of expansion and contraction which characterized the frozen rocks and gravel of the esker, brought thunderous upheavals. A low, angry rumble would be followed by a sharp report which left the ears ringing. It would have been disturbing enough on the surface, but in the cave it was terrifying. The shock of it always left Bullock quivering. Never in all of the months to come was he to accustom himself to it, nor to the sand which fell trembling from the walls and roof upon his face. Once Hornby awoke with sand in his mouth and beard.

'Run for it, Bullock!' he sputtered. 'Run for it!'

Later, he insisted he had been dreaming. Nevertheless, he thereafter slept with an axe by his bed and a knife in his belt.

Another night sound which tugged at the spine was the howl of the wolves. The notes were mournful and penetrating. On occasion Whitey would respond, the throb of his voice coming from almost directly overhead. Whitey had wild blood in his veins. Once or twice Bullock heard ponderous

steps on the roof. Each morning afterwards there were depressions in the canvas where some great cream-colored beast had put its paw.

But the keenest ears must rest, and before midnight, while urbanites in the same time belt to the far south amused themselves, Hornby and Bullock slept. Their sleep was heavy, as befitted the labor of the day. Sometimes they would awaken in the morning refreshed, and sometimes numb from the cold, which, in the darkness, seeped like a gas through roof and wall and door.

Hornby was a master trapper. Since his earliest years in Canada he had snared the fox and the wolf. With fur as currency he had paid his way, eking out what little income still remained to him through family connections. But if he excelled at the mechanics of trapping, he rebelled at its brutalities. He was seldom too busy, never too lazy to visit his trap-lines every day to save the fettered creatures from prolonged suffering.

Hornby and Bullock often made the circuit together. Leaving the cave of a morning, they would set out behind the dogs, trotting by the sled for the most part, but hopping on for occasional moments to catch their breath. Sometimes the sun was up. Then the snow would be dazzling and travel an exhilaration. Sometimes the sky was a colorless gray and the wind spun spirals of snow that cut like whips. Hornby was driver. He talked to the dogs as he would have talked to humans. If it was exceptionally cold, he told them so. If he was looking for caribou, he mentioned as much. For guidance usually a quiet ‘Gee, Whitey! Gee!’ would turn the team smoothly to the right. Once, when an Arctic hare bounced into vision at the wrong moment, the dogs forgot their traces and started in wild pursuit. Hornby, his short legs working like pistons and his arms tugging at the racing sled, shouted:

‘Haw, Whitey! Haw, you bitch! Haw! Porky! Bhaie! Haw, damn you!’

Whitey led the chase for over a mile before he broke stride, forcing the others to do likewise. There was humor in the moment which even the old leader seemed to appreciate as he came to a full stop and looked back mournfully over his shoulder as though to say, ‘Cursing again.’ Hornby returned the look with a glance which explained, ‘You rascal, you know I didn’t mean it.’ After that there was a wait while Bullock came up, and then the course was reset for the trap-lines.



HORNBY WITH WHITEY, A HUGE HUSKY
AND THE EVEN LARGER FROZEN CARCASS
OF A WHITE WOLF



BARREN-GROUND CARIBOU

One caribou carcass was used as bait. On this day Hornby was to set traps around two carcasses left out on the Barrens the night before. From a distance they presented to the two men only a shapeless mound of white, but on approach the stumps whence the meaty quarters had been hacked for caching were seen to have stained the snow red before freezing.

Hornby pointed to innumerable tracks criss-crossing about the bait.

‘Yes, yes. I knew it. The wolves were here last night, Bullock. I tore up a red silk handkerchief and put a piece on that stick there to scare them, but they came, anyhow. They must have been hungry. Fluttering cloth usually does for them. There weren’t many, I guess, or we’d have only bones left.’

The little man took three single-spring traps from the sled and tested the play of them with his hands. They were fox traps. Wolf traps had double springs and were larger and stronger. From each trap dangled a stout chain, some three feet long, at the end of which was a steel ring the circumference of a man’s forearm. Through this ring Hornby stuck a toggle, a prepared stick three feet in length, which, when buried beneath the snow, would resist the most frantic struggles of a fox. Had any water been available, he would have contrived to freeze the toggle in place. Lacking it, he merely cut a little trench in the hard crust, put the stick with ring attached in it, and stamped three inches of snow on top.

While he likewise buried the chain and arranged a depression to receive the trap, Bullock was foraging for a ‘pancake.’ This last was a circular crust, large enough to cover the pan and open jaws of the trap, weak enough to break at the lightest footstep of a fox, strong enough to hold its consistency through handling, through storms, through quick changes in temperature. It is cut slightly larger than the hole in which the trap lies, and the edge of the ‘pancake’ rests upon the surrounding snow. Bullock found suitable snow a few yards from the bait. He cut three disks, one for each of the traps. Hornby chuckled as he worked.

‘The red handkerchief I tore up, Bullock—I’ve got a story to tell you about it. When I picked it out in a Hudson’s Bay Company store, I said to the girl, “I’ll take a dozen like this if you have some other colors as well.” She looked at my hair, and at my clothes—I don’t remember what I had on—and said, “Oh, but they’re three and a half dollars apiece!” Isn’t that dandy? What do you suppose made her say that? If she could only see them now—torn in strips to be wolf scarecrows!’

Hornby scattered the dust of frozen blood over the nicely adjusted ‘pancakes.’ The white apron about the caribou carcasses was, when he finished, a study in innocence. The three little bulges in the snow which so shapelessly and so artlessly hid the traps might have been raised by the wind. Only a fox’s foot would learn differently.

Hornby went to Reliance in November for provisions and additional traps, and, in deference to Bullock's constant entreaties, for the cached weather instruments. It was a hundred-mile trip, requiring three weeks for the circuit. It was on the down stretch, somewhere on the lonely spaces of Artillery Lake—now thickly iced over and an admirable highway for sled and dogs—that he conceived a ghastly jest. *He would whisper at Reliance that his life was in danger—that Bullock was crumbling under the awesomeness of the Barrens and had hinted, in a mad moment, at murder!*

It was superb! The whisper would be passed from Reliance to Resolution and to Fort Smith. News travels faster than man in the North. Sometimes it seems to fly with the wind. Soon every outpost in Canada would buzz with the word that Jack Hornby might never come back. Trappers, miners, and loggers would discuss the thing by evening fires. Some echo of the whispers might creep into the press. Ottawa officials might read it in a stiffly worded Mounted Police report. Each repetition of that most fascinating of all words—*murder*, each elaboration and exaggeration handed from man to man like an ever brighter torch, would arouse in the expedition an interest beside which the cause of science and exploration must pale.

All of this raced through Hornby's consciousness to the soft beat of his dogs' paws on the ice. Despite his assurances of satisfaction to Bullock, the wanderer had been disappointed, wounded afresh, at Ottawa's attitude. They didn't understand! They saw things shallowly! But this time it would be different. Yes, yes! When the Hornby-Bullock expedition at last pushed its way through to Hudson Bay and out to civilization, there would be no lack of waiting crowds. There would be questions, many of them, but easy to parry. The whole affair of the whispers could then be laughed off for the nonsense that it was. And while the curious listened for explanations, they would hear, instead, of the fury of the Barrens and the glory of its conquerors. Almost perfect! Only one caution was indicated. Bullock must not be told until later—much later. He might be sensitive about it. And, besides, he *had* been rather taciturn lately—and he *had* been obstinate about his weather instruments. . . .

On the return trek to the cave, Hornby, inevitably, met some Indians, and the Indians, inevitably, proclaimed themselves starving. Thus much of the sled's stock of flour, bacon, and sugar changed hands. The provisions were a gift. Hornby disliked bargaining. Then, too, the Indians had nothing he wanted.

When the sled came to a stop atop the esker one bitter afternoon in middle December, it was lightly laden. There was not very much food and a few traps. There was no meteorological equipment. Bullock helped to unhitch the dogs and said nothing. There was, if you take matters broadly, nothing to say.

In the cave, squatted comfortably on his bed, Hornby told of the trip. Bullock listened from a more civilized seat on the upturned box by the stove.

‘Yes, yes. Glenn and his wife are all right. They are doing pretty well with their trapping. Storms? Not many. A little blizzard on Lower Artillery made it unpleasant for a bit. And oh, yes, Bullock! I knew I had some news for you. What do you think? There’s internal trouble brewing in England. Unemployment and all that sort of thing. Even talk of serious riots. I heard about it at Reliance.’

Bullock played with his beard, his military senses alert.

‘Were any troops called out?’

‘I don’t know about that. But if they are, and it spreads over here, I will fight for Canada. A man ought to be loyal to the country he lives in.’

‘Which means, I suppose,’ said the younger man heavily, ‘that if I were living in India and India revolted against England again, I ought to fight for the Indians?’

‘Take it as you like, Bullock.’

‘You’re a fool.’

‘Not at all. I’m an Imperialist.’

Bullock snorted.

‘One moment you are talking against the Crown and one moment you are an Imperialist.’

‘Well, anyway, there’ll never be another King.’

Bullock stared at the blue eyes looking into his own. He thought, ‘How odd for an ex-officer to talk so! He would be court-martialed in the Army for it.’ He said aloud: ‘Do you mean to suggest that there’s going to be a revolution?’

‘Yes, and if there is, I’d like to lead it.’

‘If I ever hear an inkling of anything like that,’ said Bullock in great disgust, ‘I’ll head for England so damned fast you can’t see my smoke.’

Hornby chuckled.

‘Why? That eager to enlist?’

‘No, to shoot you as you landed on British soil.’

For a fleeting instant the blue eyes wavered. Then the mouth under them said defiantly:

‘You couldn’t hit me.’

‘Rot!’

‘No one can hit me. They couldn’t hit me in France.’

‘But they did, and damned quick.’ It was Bullock’s turn to grin. ‘You came home for your wounds, didn’t you?’

‘That was only because I wanted to be hit. I was tired of war. I told my men I would be hit shortly before it happened.’

Bullock gave up.

Two days before Christmas, Hornby left with the dogs on an all-day fuel hunt. A temperature which was dropping to -45 at night and a wind which was icing the air in the daytime made fire more hungered after than food.

When Hornby left in the morning, the sky was overcast. By noon snow was falling into the rush of the wind. Near nightfall, while Bullock was staggering along a quarter of a mile from the cave with a freshly killed bull on his back, a blizzard descended. In a twinkling it was dark, for the failing light could not penetrate such spinning snow.

Shut off from sight of anything save his own feet and the whitened air the hunter chose discretion. The bull he dumped into the snow for later finding. Then, beset by that feeling which is man’s when he finds himself blinded, he started to run toward where he had last seen the chimney and guide sticks of the cave. He was aware of reaching the esker, because the ground suddenly sloped up. At the crest he had to pick his way for at least another quarter of a mile before locating the entrance to the cave. He had run far to the right on approaching the esker.

There were no dogs behind the windbreaks outside, and inside the tunnel and little chamber were black and bitter. Hornby was still out in the blizzard.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE blizzard is a bully. It is impotent against strong men, but it is a monster to the weak. It tries the hearts of its victims by blinding them. It robs them of their senses, and sets the nerves singing in tune with its whine. There are no blizzards south of 53. Below that are only snowstorms. A Northern blizzard has an identity. It lasts either three or seven days in the Barrens. It varies from this no more than a few hours. The falling snow and the dry powdered drifts are whipped by the wind into impenetrable, whirling curtains. The flakes are like flying chips of glass, glazed and sharp. The wind is a duet, the shrill piping of the upper gusts and the organ drone of the earth currents. The air is like ink during the long nights, and in the few hours of half-daylight, it is like a fog gone mad.

When Bullock found that Hornby had not returned, his first sensation was one of annoyance. He little relished the idea of being awakened, perhaps in the middle of the night, while Hornby stamped in, warmed himself, and brewed some tea against the cold. There would follow, he knew, the inevitable chatter of the trap-line, the sighting of a caribou or the scarcity of wood. The thought grew upon Bullock that he had often been annoyed with Hornby of late. There was a monotony to the man that weighed upon him. He was learning that motion is adventure, inertia hardship.

Even while Bullock ate his solitary meal of tea and caribou steak, he had no thought but for the return of Hornby during the night. He knew that the blizzard was growing with the hours, but his faith in Hornby's prowess knew no blizzards. It was not until he had blown out the bitch and lay rolled in his blankets that doubt whispered. The fire was almost out. He had fed it no fresh twigs, for the wood corner was nearly empty. Darkness became a horn to amplify all sounds. With the bitch flame dead, the wind seemed more menacing. A drift had apparently blocked the tunnel entrance, for no

draft entered. But the moan of the night filtered through rock and sand. Doubt rode on sounds, a stealthy visitor. One moment Bullock was free of it, and the next it was hissing in his ear. His thoughts centered upon fuel. If Hornby did not return until the next day, would there be wood enough to keep the cave warm? The irony of the full larder assailed him. In the dead end of the tunnel was caribou meat to last a month. But in its natural refrigerator, it was rigidly frozen. It would take much wood to thaw it and cook it. And there was flour, and oatmeal, and tea. He could feast if he had fire.

Bloody fool! If Hornby had only got wood in time. But Hornby never got anything in time. He delighted in close sailing. Bullock felt impotent anger flush him. He knew he could not venture alone into the blizzard for fuel without dogs. And Hornby had them. He was a prisoner, as much a one as though the tunnel entrance were barred with steel. As for Hornby, he could reach the cave. Had he not boasted that the North held no storm which was his master? Bullock clung to a picture of the little man staggering through the snow at the side of his dog sled, with his eyes boring blue holes in the night. He fell asleep.

Sometime later he awoke with a start. A cry still echoed in the cave. In the darkness Bullock strained eyes and ears. The cold was bitter, but beyond it he sensed an unphysical chill. He felt for his matches, but they eluded him. He wanted to rouse himself and stumble through the cave in search of a presence. The cold forbade it. He could feel his nose throb. Conscious of his nose, he sensed a foreign odor. It brought to mind a hospital in Egypt where he had lain beside a gangrenous patient. As he filled his nostrils, the odor was overpoweringly putrid. He knew.

‘Bhaie!’ he called. ‘Bhaie!’

A piteous howl answered him. He remembered now. Bhaie had been left in the cave that morning with a frozen foot. Hornby had taken the other dogs. Bullock had thrown him caribou meat for his supper, but with the light out, he forgot him. It was the first time a dog had spent a night in the cave. Bhaie’s foot hurt. It also stunk.

When Bullock awoke again, he looked at the luminous dial on his wrist watch. Head and hands were both beneath the blankets, after the fashion of the turtle, as Hornby had taught him to sleep. The dial’s glow was feeble from lack of sun to nourish it in the daytime. It seemed to point to two-thirty o’clock. That could not be. In Arctic air sleep is a ponderous operation, to be indulged in heavily. Extreme cold is a soporific. One does not lightly

awaken in the middle of the night. Of course, it might have been two-thirty in the afternoon. The gloom of the cave was no criterion. But that would have meant over eighteen hours of sleep. Bullock looked more closely. Indisputably it was two-thirty. But something seemed amiss. He held the watch to his ear. It was dead. He waggled his wrist. A few weak clicks from the balance wheel and silence again. Mechanically he wound the watch, but he made no effort to set it. What use? He could only guess at the time. Probably it was mid-morning. He usually slept twelve or thirteen hours when Hornby did not decide to arise early and make obeisance to the stove. On ordinary days the hour could have been charted by the sun's position. Now the wind roared to defeat him. Bullock could hear it still filling the heavens. And its high whine betokened the snow in it. It was the second day of the blizzard.

Bullock threw back the blanket from his face. He wanted to fill his lungs. A deep breath expands more than the air pockets. It inflates the spirits, too. The flow in his nostrils was so sharp that it made him giddy for an instant. He tried to penetrate the darkness. Perhaps Hornby had come in during the night, and, exhausted, gone quietly to his bunk. Bullock stretched out a hand across the little space between the two caribou hides. He felt only cold fur. He looked toward the tunnel. On other days he had seen a gleam of daylight through the cracks where the Hudson's Bay blanket was ill-fitted to the inner entrance. Now he saw only darkness. Even the form of the stove, and of Bhaie stretched out in the corner, were obliterated by the murk. Bullock wondered if Bhaie were still alive. The stench of the decaying paw assailed him as soon as he sniffed for it.

'Bhaie,' he called, and then more sharply, 'Bhaie!'

The dog whined.

'Bloody rotten, I know, but we'll manage some kind of a fire after a bit.'

He said no more. He fancied that his words lingered in the cave, and rang from the walls long after they had left his lips. It was as if he had spoken into a vast corridor, rather than into a frozen sand hovel. A fire? Yes, perhaps there would be some kind of a fire. There were twigs enough to start one—that was all. For the present Bullock decided to keep to his bunk and conserve his body heat. He was hungry. One was always hungry up there. Yet the lure of his blankets was greater than that of the tea-pot. There came back to him Hornby's words that night they planned the Barren Lands trip together. '*Not many men know how to starve properly, but I think you can be taught,*' Hornby had said. '*The greatest temptation is to go to sleep.*'

Yes, Hornby knew how to starve. But Bullock was not sure he wished to learn. Hornby knew a joy in it, too, which Bullock couldn't even understand. And Hornby saw life in the wretched cave as existence in its sweetest form. Bullock could have laughed. The memory of Hornby's upper lip, for instance, curled in pleasurable disdain as he disemboweled a white wolf on his own bunk, or sucked at nauseous tea, was tickling. Bullock could have laughed. He didn't because he remembered that in a few hours—how many he had no way of telling—it would be Christmas Eve. The thought shocked him. Not that he was sentimental, but for the contrasts. A year ago he had been in Edmonton. There had been ale and whiskey and wine. There had been vistas through windows revealing trees alight with that fairy sparkle which lives but once a year. There had been feasts of turkey and duckling and goose, and fat puddings with flaming brandy hair. And there had been women. The face of no particular one came into focus just then. In fact, he was not conscious of remembering faces. He only remembered skirts, graceful skirts, whirling skirts, pleated skirts, skirts of silk and of calico, skirts which fluffed out like the mouth of bells, and skirts which clung intimately, skirts which caressed slim legs and skirts which rubbed fat ones. He wondered if Hornby ever thought of women. It was likely not, or he would have mentioned it. Hornby usually mentioned everything at one time or another.

Bullock felt suddenly weak. It was not so much the cold or the hunger. He knew how to fight them. It was the futility. He could not forget his costly equipment cached back in the timber. He had abandoned hope of retrieving it. Hornby's flealike methods of travel voided the cause of science. The truth was—and Bullock was fast digesting it—that Hornby's sole interest lay in existence from day to day. The keeping of records and the gathering of specimens required too much system for his nature to stomach. The irony of the wolf heads Hornby kept in a bag, and the mouse carcasses in the tin can with the false teeth, was not lost on Bullock. Some one, perhaps in jest, had told Hornby that wolf heads and mice deserved study. Hence the carcasses which would be unrecognizable and the heads which would be unapproachable when spring came.

To stem his depression, Bullock roused himself. He had slept, as ever, fully dressed, but the blood is sluggish upon leaving a bed, and he felt chilled. He worked his arms to speed his circulation. Then, finding a match, he lit the bitch. Bhaie lay still, probably exhausted with the pain of his foot. The water pail held solid ice. The naked wood corner loomed evilly. Standing in the center of the room, Bullock fancied that the roof had sagged during the night. It seemed to hover nearer to his head. He could imagine the

snow drifted deep across it, weighing it down. Perhaps it would fall. The thought failed to stir him. It was too familiar.

With numb fingers he sorted the twigs. There were just twelve, and none more than an inch in diameter. A leaf from his diary would do to kindle them. He arranged the sticks in the stove as carefully as though he were executing a design. Before lighting a match, he let his eyes follow the walls of the cave. There must be something else to burn. He thought of the support poles. They were wrist-thick logs dragged up from the timber. He regarded them greedily, but did not touch them. One less prop and the roof would surely entomb him. The walls, though, might yield some of their sticks. Worked into the firm revetment was a multitude of small spruce tips, many with the needles still clinging. It was not a great task to slip some of these out, exercising care against disturbing the main bracings. Bullock managed to gather four or five handfuls before dribbles of sand began to fall. He threw them all in on top of the twigs. It would take a strong flame to heat the stove to cooking temperature.

It seemed like self-torture when he still delayed applying the flame, and busied himself with the tea-pot and frying-pan, but with so quick and brief a fire all had to be ready beforehand. From the tunnel he brought several slabs of caribou meat and some snow for tea. The entrance was sealed with packed snow. He would cut a hole and stick his head out to survey the storm after breakfast.

The meat was like red rock. The tea leaves of the night before were cold-soldered to the bottom of the pot. Bullock put snow in the tea-pot over the frozen grounds. He put a slab of meat in the frying-pan together with a little grease. He set the iced pail on the back of the stove. Across the top of the tea-pot he balanced another meat slab. Bhaie would get it when it lost its rigidity. Then he lit a match.

It wasn't the food. Such fare as the cave offered was always eaten as it was digested, mechanically, methodically, because the body demanded it. It was the fire. Whatever pleasure was Bullock's at that moment had birth in the flames. The meat he ate and the tea he drank with no thought for their taste. He was conscious that the tea was hot, that was all. But from the fire he drew a wild delight. The warmth of it was secondary. The fatality, the finality it expressed, was what enchanted. It was like scaling your last dollar across the waves' tops, as a small boy scales thin, flat pebbles. It was like watching your feet sink into quicksand. It was even like watching your blood bubble out of a severed artery. Surely at such an hour fuel was life-blood. Bullock had been called cruel. In the deserts he had been known as a

hard horse-master. In the snow he had exacted from the dogs more discipline than he had given sympathy. Now he was being cruel to himself.

He sat on the end of his caribou hide nearest the stove. The cave had become quite warm, for the twigs and spruce tips burned like tinder, with a fierce flame. Already they were sinking into thin red coals. In a few minutes their life would be spent, with scarcely a spark to gleam through the ashes. But for now it was still a fire. Bullock sat motionless. His thoughts seemed removed from his body. It was as if he hovered above, looking down on this anti-drama of inertia. He could see his own face, lean and bearded and blond. It was defiant. He could have died gladly at that moment if some foe, some great belligerent Indian or giant trapper, had appeared. He would have gone to the battle grimly, coolly, indifferent to the outcome. He would have cast ethics to the blizzard outside, and become as an animal. He would have used no knife. He would have torn out his opponent's throat with bare fingers or have had his own thus torn. He would have broken the other's fingers as if they were so many matches, or as joyously suffered his own to be snapped. He would have mutilated, disfigured, maimed, slain. Or he would have welcomed all this himself. It little mattered which. The thing that mattered would have been the combat, some one to struggle against, some one to spit his venom on, and, as heartily, some one to vent the same upon him. It was only snow and cold and wretched, miserable twigs which did not respond to blows. He could not hit the blizzard. It would laugh in his face, and freeze his fist. He could not hit the walls of the cave. They would crumple on him. He was a weakling. His muscles, hard enough to vie with anything human, were mere strips of flesh which demanded nourishment. His hands, great, marvels of strength, were fit only for clenching empty air. His mind was but a chamber full of odd thoughts and longings which rebuked themselves. This, then, the Barrens? How true, the name, its ring. And Hornby loved them; Hornby worshiped them; Hornby preferred them to any spot on earth. Poor, foolish Hornby. A little boy in beard and parka, a tiny chap who had not outgrown playing with fearsome things. Bullock pitied him; he hated him; he reviled him; he loved him, all in a moment. And all the while he sat motionless, staring at the stove.

After a while the fire went out. It was like a quiet death in slumber. One minute there were tiny flames and glowing coals, the next only warm ashes and a wisp of smoke. Bullock could have stirred the ashes to produce the live sparks underneath, but he didn't. It would have been akin to shaking a corpse to awaken it. The cave did not get cold immediately. It remained warm for a long time, and when the chill did come, it crept in so stealthily it was scarce noticed at first. The sand and snow had a thermic power.

The thought of monotony clings to such moments. It is an error. There is no monotony when the mind is seething. Minutes dragged, perhaps. The eyes wearied of the perpetual sand walls and the ears of the wind. But it can't be monotony when thoughts, words, visions pass in such review.

Bullock took up his diary and wrote:

‘Discomforts! Such discomforts! So that I sincerely believe that a man of the civilized world could not possibly possess the imaginative power to comprehend the intensity of it even in a small manner . . .’

Ordinarily he wrote tersely and to the point.

‘Can a man without the empirical knowledge of happiness possibly grasp the full meaning of all this means to me and teaches. . .?’

He didn't mean ‘empirical,’ but who was going to read it?

‘Man's reward is indeed the penalty thereof . . .’

All afternoon—or was it afternoon?—Bullock smoked his pipe. With the water, before it froze again, he bathed Bhaie's foot. Twice he went through the tunnel to the entrance and cut a window in the snow impaction. The opacity of the blizzard depressed him. His beard on both occasions was plastered white with clinging flakes. In the cave his breath and the warmth of his flesh melted the snow. Later, this moisture was to freeze his hair into an ice cake.

When there seemed nothing more to do, he blew out the bitch, opened the blankets of his sleeping-bag, and crawled inside.

He felt exhausted. It was as though he had returned from a long day on the Barrens. All of the phantoms of the night before oppressed him, the darkness and the silence. He had grown so accustomed to the moan of the wind that he was no longer conscious of it save when it rose to a too human shriek. Something seemed lacking, however. Perhaps it was Hornby's chatter. Surely his whimsicalities and enthusiasms were not without their salt.

After a long while, the mephitic of his own breath aiding beneath the blankets, he fell into a deep sleep.

It would embellish the story to recount that the night was one of prophetic dreams. It would add flavor to the tale if it were written that the agonies of the darkness gnawed at Bullock's mind and nibbled at his spirit. The truth is less of drama and more of despair, though a subdued despair which hid its bitterness, not the raging despair of fiction. Bullock slept the

night through, and on, hours into the morning. How close the sleep was to death, how slight the membrane between the slumber of a soul-sick, exhausted man and the slumber of the ancients, none knows. Those who awaken cannot tell, and those who do not have not told.

Bullock, at least, was at transient peace. He slept almost without motion. On top of his sleeping-bag was piled the bedding which was Hornby's. So thick a mass of covering served to contain his body heat, even though the temperature of the cave fell to glacial depths. There was an awfulness to the cold silence of the cave which even the untiring whine of the gale could not shatter. Only Bhaie was awake to sense it. He lay in the utter blackness, dumb with the agony of his foot. Bhaie, who romped so joyously in harness; Bhaie, who was the youngest and most irrepressible of the dogs; Bhaie, whose eyes were like pools of agate and whose ears were more eloquent than most men's tongues—he was awake.

Perhaps the dog knew the doom which hung heavy in the air. Perhaps, with that intuition which is God's gift alone to some women and to all dogs, he caught the blacker than black shapes which fancy weaves at such hours. Then, if ever, Death was riding on the wind. But it was not the Grim Reaper with scythe, bowed back, and grinning skull. It was a monster with an icy breath, a vampire who sucked the heat from men's bodies, a wretched wanton whose kiss froze men's lips to hers, then filled their mouths with ice spittle. There are those who have spread the myth that death by freezing is a pleasant death. So is death by gas if you submit to it and breathe it. But what of the man in an airtight chamber, fast filling with a deadly vapor, who holds his lungs against it and struggles for escape? What pleasure there?

Yes, perhaps even Bhaie recognized the sharp sweet air as poison. Surely he understood the pain in his paw. And strangely, though his torture must have been as great as on the previous night, he kept silent. It was as though he withheld his howl in deference to the man's sleep.

When Bullock awoke, it was Christmas. An impudent thought leapt up. A *white* Christmas, with plenty of snow for the reindeer. Reindeer—mere tamed caribou! Silly thing, Christmas? A bloody fuss over things nobody wants, and a lot of tissue paper and ribbon to pick up the next day. A girl under the mistletoe or a glass of steaming punch. Of such stuff was the soul of Christmas spun. The rest was tinsel. Perhaps, too, there was merit in a long table laden with sweetmeats and a roaring fire in the . . .

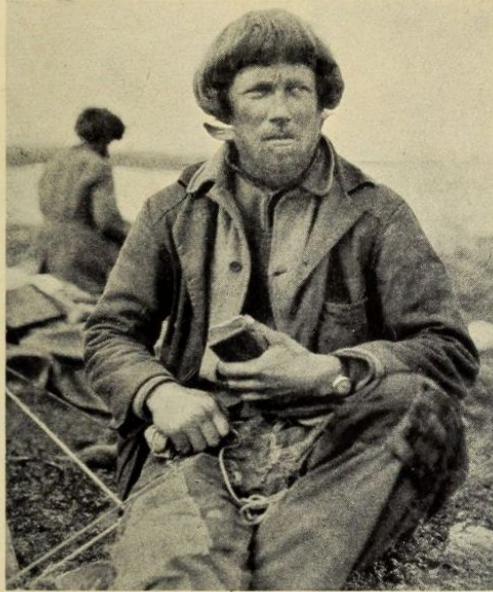
The thought hurt him. Christmas faded. The darkness of his sleeping-bag assailed him. He felt weak and cold. The blankets weighed upon him. He

became slowly conscious that the wool covering just above his head was frozen to his beard. The beard itself was rigid with ice. When he tried to shift his position, the pain of pulled hairs made him cry out. With infinite care, as one removes adhesive plaster, he separated his beard from the blanket. When he finished, his hands were without feeling.

For the first time fear shook him. There came to him a Christmas in the Holy Land, when the sanctity of the countryside had penetrated even the vanity of cavalry officers. He recalled a day when his squadron, weary after a night's march on the desert, had been revived by the beautiful tenor of a muezzin floating over the sands from a distant minaret. Not since he was a boy had so soft a moment come to him. He half-formed a prayer.

For an hour he lay awake, thinking, planning, scheming. As clearly as though it were written in fire before him he knew this—to tarry in the cave was to die. The last bit of fuel was gone. There was nothing to burn but clothes, a fool's fuel, though Hornby had employed it on occasions. Yet how could he, weakened by cold, venture into the blizzard? The wind's whistle was as shrill as before. That meant that the storm was a seven-day one. It must have been even then reaching the peak of its fury. It was the third day.

After a time, Bullock left his blankets and groped for a match. The bitch would hardly light. The cold was indescribable. Bullock could no longer remember what it felt like to be warm. The air had become as an anæsthetic which was stealthily numbing him. He went to the tunnel and brought back some caribou meat. It was as though he carried ice. He had to use an axe to cut it, chopping off small splinters as from a log. He threw some to Bhaie. The dog didn't even sniff at them. He put a piece in his own mouth. It was a minute before it thawed sufficiently to be chewed. Then the chill and gristle of it gagged him. He spat it out, ill and shivering. He tried a mouthful of raw oatmeal. The saliva would not run. So much sawdust would have served as well.



SELF-PORTRAIT OF BULLOCK
TAKEN IN THE BARRENS



THE CAVE IN WHICH BULLOCK SPENT HIS
MAD CHRISTMAS
SMOKE-PIPE AT LEFT AND ENTRANCE AT RIGHT

If a man could weep at such a moment, pouring his melancholy out in tears, he would be better for it. Bullock could only sink to his caribou hide and stare at the sand floor, with his eyes at that angle eyes assume in despondency. At length he stirred himself to get a pencil and a scrap of moderately clean, heavy paper. What another might have labored over he wrote rapidly.

IN THE EVENT OF MY DEATH

John Hornby as my partner to assume full control of my affairs in Canada. He will dispose of anything of my equipment of this expedition as he deems fit. He will enquire into the condition of my account with the Bank of Montreal, Edmonton. He will inform Tayler-Bullock, Esq., of 10 Southwood Avenue, Bournemouth, Eng., of the condition of my affairs and remit to him any monies belonging to me. John Hornby need not contribute in any way to the expenses of this expedition in this event, but ask the Canadian Government to name the sand ridge, on which I spent my time in the Barren Lands, after me. My diaries, being the large red notebook in my haversack, to be unread even by him (as it contains much personal matter), but to be dispatched to Dr. R. M. Anderson, of Ottawa, for him to worry through if he wishes, and then destroyed.

JAMES C. CRITCHELL-BULLOCK

26th December, 1924

As he finished, he sat for a moment studying the paper. His eyes were wrinkled in thought. He had reached a decision. He would take Bhaie and head for Malcolm's dugout, fourteen miles away. It was so simple. Anxiety seemed to leave him. Only the cold persisted, and Bhaie's frozen paw. They were still realities. Bullock was conscious of a nervous elation. He had experienced a similar feeling upon preparing to leave Palestine for the last time. He carefully folded his testament and put it in his pocket. Then he stood up. His legs were weak, but his mind denied it.

'Bhaie.'

There was gentleness in the word.

Two weary eyes rolled toward him.

'We're going. Can you make it?'

The dog didn't seem to understand. Bullock found a bit of half-clean cloth and tied up the bad paw. Then he put a thong of caribou hide through the dog's collar. Bhaie knew what the leash meant. His eyes lightened and he started to get to his feet. Two attempts were necessary. He stood there trying to appear eager, but Bullock was paying no attention. He was adjusting his parka and folding a blanket about his head. The depth of the hood over a man's face is often his margin of life in a blizzard.

When his covering satisfied him, Bullock picked up the leash and walked into the tunnel, Bhaie followed on three feet. Behind them the bitch still burned. Its flame would fight off the gloom until the fox fat gave out. Then the cave would die. At the entrance, Bullock picked up an axe and hacked at the snow. It was several minutes' work to clear a low door through the impacted drifts. The wind came in furiously, bringing with it hard, white flakes swarming like insects. Man and dog stepped into the storm.

Falling, rising, slipping, whirling, stumbling, they went. The world was a mass of spinning whiteness. There were moments when Bullock lost sight of Bhaie, and could detect him only by tautness in the leash. The snow would come on them like a mad thing, envelop them for a moment, then partly withdraw to watch them struggle. One fear gripped Bullock beyond all others. He had no true sense of the time, and with the short days of winter, darkness might smother them before they had fully gauged their course.

Thought became difficult. Concentration on the next step was the limit of mental energy. Bullock did not realize it, but Bhaie had assumed command. Progress was slow, for the dog was weak from hunger and enduring great agony. Yet, however halting the steps of the three legs ahead of him, Bullock was content to let them set the pace. He followed the dog, and when he could not see him, he followed the leash.

Malcolm Stewart's camp lay slightly out in the Barrens, nestled in the shelter of an isolated clump of spruce. There were no landmarks on the way. The Barrens are lacking in all prominences. One may mark with the eye a rock for a guide, and find four more like it in four different directions. Only once did Bullock glimpse anything familiar. As he staggered across a patch of ice swept bare for the moment by the gale, he saw a little mound of brown. The sight of it went to his head like wine. He pulled Bhaie up short on the leash long enough to verify his vision. The mound was frozen tobacco spittle, deposited maybe months before by Malcolm, the only member of the party addicted to chewing.

One cannot write much of hours of sameness. Bullock was conscious of no particular emotion. There was neither hope nor despair, anticipation nor indifference. All had become merely one step after another, zigzag across the snow, fighting weakness, battling dizziness, struggling to keep head on to the lashing, freezing blast.

When Bhaie finally stopped and flattened himself out on the snow, Bullock stopped, too. While he wondered whether the panting creature in front of him would be able to move again, the snow lifted enough to let him see the sawed ends of several logs. Then his snow-blinded eyes caught a wisp of smoke being whipped by the wind away from a tiny chimney. He knew it was Malcolm's place. Strangely he felt no elation. He began to paw away the drifts where he judged the door to be. His hands and arms would scarcely respond. He heard sounds above the wind, the scrape of a boot and a shouted word. The door swung inward. Malcolm stood inside. His face was the color of the snow.

'Good God, Bullock. . . !'

He stepped forward and grabbed the younger man around the waist to help him inside. Bullock, swaying a bit and feeling an awful weakness, tried to laugh.

Inside a little man with blue eyes stood watching.

'You were lucky to get through,' he said. 'Better have a spot of grub, but not too much at first.' His voice was unsteady.

Hornby went to the door while Bullock stretched out on the floor by the stove. In a few moments he came back. Very methodically he knelt beside Bullock, pulled his feet in under him, and sank onto his heels. There was an indefinable softness in his face.

'Bhaie's paw won't ever heal,' he said. 'You know what that means.'

When Bullock didn't answer, Hornby went to the stove and fixed some tea and bannock. Bullock took the tea.

'Give the dog something,' he said.

CHAPTER SIX

WINTER went on sullen feet. By January, ten crooked poles held up the roof of the cave, and in February two more were added. Hornby and Bullock felt their ways about like worms entering and emerging from a hole. There were changes outside too. Where once the chimney and the tunnel door alone gave token of habitation, now a hundred signs were scattered about. Six frozen caribou heads, with gracefully arching horns, had been stuck upright in the snow by Hornby. ‘Statuary on our estate,’ he said.

Other heads, with horns less well proportioned, were distributed haphazardly on the esker top. Some of them seemed, grotesquely, to be looking at each other. The lower slopes of the esker were strewn with the naked carcasses of two hundred foxes and wolves. There was an obscenity about their hideless leanness. Even the snow about the tunnel door was matted with caribou hair and stained with blood. A dozen blizzards had obliterated the mess, and a dozen times it had been made afresh.

Bullock’s rebellion against this untidiness grew inwardly, seeming to occupy less and less his thoughts. In reality it was coiling like a snake, concentrating its power for the moment of release. But it died within him of its own poison on the morning he found, in a corner of his iron chest, a tiny, tin-backed souvenir mirror he had forgotten was there.

Idly he looked into the little oval of glass, and it gave back to him such an unfamiliar face, such a mass of dirty, tangled blond beard and hair, such an odd expression, half-brutal, half-tender, that he said aloud, without meaning to:

‘Bullock!’

Hornby, who was resting on his bed while the after-breakfast fire burned itself out, chuckled.

‘Bad sign, my boy, talking to yourself. Some call it insanity, but I’m liberal. I wouldn’t go that far.’

The Captain glowered.

‘Insane? Who’s insane?’

‘No one.’

‘But you said . . .’

‘You were talking to yourself, weren’t you?’

‘Was I? What did I say?’

‘You said, “Bullock!”’

The younger man stared at his companion for a moment, then thrust the mirror in front of the restless, blue eyes.

‘What do you see?’ he asked.

Hornby peered into the glass and cocked his head from side to side. He grinned and his image grinned back.

‘A black face. Yes, yes?’

Bullock leaned across the space between the beds until he could see into the glass. Hornby’s eyes twinkled back at him. His own were reflected solemnly at one side.

‘Be serious. Don’t you see anything else there?’

‘Yes. Two black faces. Only yours isn’t so black.’

In February, the absence of shadows in the Barrens is oppressive. The vague half-light which prevailed during that period when the Northern sun was just below the horizon traced no outlines on the snow. There is an eeriness which marks any deviation from the natural. Solitude intensifies it. There came a day when Bullock, returning on foot, empty-handed from the trap-lines, found himself trying to create a shadow. He stopped and waved his foot idly above the crust, watching for some faint, moving darkness beneath it. He leaned over and held his hand a few inches above the snow, studying the crystals in hope of sensing even the ghost of a silhouette. The silvery whiteness mocked him with unchanged brilliance. The moonlike light seemed to be coming from everywhere and nowhere. He could not intercept it. He felt overwhelmingly alone.

Somewhere was Hornby, chopping under the snow for the twigs that meant warmth, chattering to the dogs, enjoying the solitude and the labor and the sense of living as no other human being would permit himself to live. None other, that is, but Bullock.

The snap was gone from the younger man's walk. He wandered toward the cave as though he were idling along Piccadilly. His thoughts possessed him. Malcolm and Alan and Buckley and Greathouse. They thought him soft. So much for them. Perhaps he was soft, soft enough to long for so trivial a thing as a shadow. But he had left them behind and dared the Barrens with the toughest of all travelers. He had packed pound for pound with Hornby. He had shivered with him, and starved with him, and labored with him. Perhaps he was soft, soft enough to regret the futility which had crept in. Hornby asked no more than wood for one fire, and meat for one meal. Bullock had dreamed of achievement, of painstaking observations, of unlocking the secrets of the Barrens. And the most scientific gesture of the expedition to date had been precision in setting traps and skill in disemboweling a carcass.

Bullock looked out over the snow which stretched lifelessly to a thousand horizons. Not a caribou was stirring, nor a wolf, nor a fox, nor even an Arctic mouse. Only himself. And why himself? The question, oddly, did not disturb him. The dispassionate man often analyzes life more closely than the emotional one. He had the cosmopolite's outlook on suicide. It was something to be avoided if possible; something very regrettable, but neither heroic nor cowardly; something to be accomplished, if at all, in a moment of calmness rather than of passion. He had thought of it before in Palestine, when tropical fevers had rendered him weak and trembling, and duties had ordered him fit and strong.

There was that day in Jerusalem when his squadron was camped on a hill outside of the city prior to a march into the dreaded Jordan Valley. He remembered it now, remembered every little detail just as though it had been yesterday—the valley in the distance into which the clouds seemed to have fallen, clouds which resolved themselves into a blue-green haze to mask the sites of fallen Sodom and Gomorrah.

Captain Fitzgerald had come over to pay his respects to Captain Bullock. He was attached to a yeomanry regiment which had been in the valley. He was about thirty-eight, immensely tall and immensely swarthy. He had a beak nose and one eye of steel gray. An empty socket hugged a black monocle. He ordered a bottle of gin before sitting at the table in Bullock's tent. This he consumed, neat, during an hour's visit.

‘Well, young fellow,’ he said, ‘I hear you’re going to the Dead Sea. It’s a tough place. I’ve seen infantry coming back with the men’s faces blistered from the sun until they ran with matter. If a man was badly wounded, the doctors gave him a big shot of morphine to end him. It was too hard to evacuate ’em back to Jerusalem.’

Bullock had listened. He remembered feeling like a Crusader in a campaign against the Infidels. He had loved the Army passionately then. But already Egypt had sown malaria in his system. He said to Fitzgerald:

‘I don’t know what the valley will do with me. The fevers may get me. But I care too much for the Army to be one of its invalids. I’ll use my service revolver first.’

All Fitzgerald said was:

‘You’re young. Drink some of this gin.’

The next day Bullock rode out past the rich red stone of the old part of Jerusalem and into the hell of white-baked clay beyond. He fell from malaria and dysentery, but never by his own hand. Somehow things were never quite bad enough.

But here, in the Barrens, wasn’t it different? There was no Army to be proud for, no uniform, no rank. His money was gone, sunk in the litter of instruments still cached at Reliance and in equipment scattered among the camps from Glenn’s cabin to the cave. Even his dreams were dead things. The diary that was to have been a journal of triumphs was daily filled with prayers for relief. From what? Well, he could answer that. From the monotonies of the improvidence and apathy—from the terrible uselessness of the expedition—from the endless days that held nothing more of importance than the trapping of a fox, and nothing more of enlightenment than comments on it.

He tried to imagine what it would be like afterwards. Would there be snow and ice? Would one explore and pioneer and soldier? Would there even, in time, be Hornby’s spirit beside him to taunt him for his weakness? Bullock’s mind was too disciplined to stray far into metaphysics. The very fantasies of his thoughts assumed a Frankenstein touch, destroying themselves with their own abstractness. He turned sullen, with his mood directed at nothing very definite, and so arrived at the cave to find the dogs quartered for the night, and Hornby inside, mending his moccasins. The fire in the stove was almost out.

‘Get any wood?’

Hornby pointed behind the stove.

‘Enough for to-night and to-morrow. Mostly willow root.’

Bullock, who felt the urge for a bright, hot blaze, opened the stove. A few embers glowed on top of a mass of ashes. He took up a shovel with the handle broken short, a relic from the days of cave-digging, and scooped it full of ashes. The slop-bucket stood handy. He emptied the shovel into it. Still hot, the ashes set the slops hissing, and a cloud of dust spurted up, coating Bullock’s face and filling the cave.

Hornby rubbed his eyes and went on sewing. Bullock didn’t even bother to rub his eyes. He spat some ashes out of his mouth and sat on his haunches for a few minutes. Then he rebuilt the fire.

Hornby cooked the inevitable steaks for the evening meal. He cut them with his skinning knife while Bullock looked on glumly. That same knife that had scraped the entrails of foxes and pared corns. But the steaks tasted good, and Hornby seemed to gather good humor with each mouthful.

‘What would you do,’ he asked, helping down a great chunk of meat with a wash of tea, ‘if you had a million pounds?’

‘Build a barbed-wire fence around the Barrens to keep out damned fools like us.’

‘Can’t you ever be serious, Bullock? Think of what a million pounds could do. I don’t care a thing for money, but I like to imagine myself spending it.’

Bullock, resting on his bed, stared through the gloom without answering. A coating of ash still covered everything, even his spirits. Hornby didn’t notice the silence. His eyes gleamed from within.

‘A million pounds! Yes, yes! I could spend it easily. Domesticating caribou, for instance. A big, fenced-in ranch with half a million head. They would breed rapidly and there would be an enormous supply of fine meat, better in many ways than beef. The caribou of the Barrens could feed millions of people, Bullock. There’s only one flaw in my scheme. I wouldn’t be spending my money. I’d only be investing it, and in the end I’d have more than when I started. That wouldn’t do. But I could use it for equipping expeditions to explore every inch of this land. Then I’d have the privilege of naming the new lakes and rivers. I’d name some of them after you. Bullock Lake! No, that doesn’t sound well. Lake Bullock! That’s better. And

Critchell River! There's an aristocratic ring to that. In fact, it's too good a name to waste on a river. I'd use it for some area of the Barrens, say in the extreme northeast, and call it Critchell Land. Aren't you flattered?'

'I'm disgusted.'

Hornby grinned.

'With me?' he asked.



A WHITE WOLF CAUGHT IN A TRAP



HORNBY CLEANING A WOLVERINE SKIN
NOTE THE CHARACTERISTIC SQUATTING POSTURE. A WHITE WOLF
AWAITS SKINNING

‘With everything.’

‘Your liver’s bad. You ought to go out and take a run . . .’

He would have said more, but a pitiful howl pierced the cave. In what appeared to be one motion, Hornby was on his feet and out through the tunnel. He came back in a few moments and sat again on his bed.

‘It was Rowdy, poor devil. His tongue froze to the chain and he left part of it there when he pulled it away. Nothing serious, though.’

The older man peered at the watch on Bullock’s wrist.

‘Yes, yes?’ he said incredulously. ‘Ten o’clock already. I must be turning in.’

Bullock watched in silence while Hornby poked at the fire, arranged his sleeping-bag, and crept inside.

‘Aren’t you turning in, too? You have to start for Reliance in the morning and you need the rest.’

Bullock held out his wrist.

‘It’s really only seven-forty-five,’ he said. ‘You were reading the hands the wrong way.’

Hornby started to get angry and then thought better of it.

‘Why didn’t you tell me? Well, it doesn’t matter. But I wish you’d take a look at my toe before I go to sleep.’

‘Your toe! Why don’t you let it alone?’

‘Because it’s been sore ever since I cut that corn off.’

‘That corn will be my finish yet. I dreamt I found it in my tea last night.’

‘Well, that’s better than fox-droppings, anyway.’

Bullock went over to the bed and Hornby drew out his left foot from the sleeping-bag. He had previously removed the sock.

‘It looks bad,’ Bullock said. ‘You’d better let me bandage it.’

‘Nonsense, fresh air is good for it.’

‘Fresh air, yes. But it’s full of sand now.’

‘I’ll fix that.’

Hornby crawled out of the bag and hopped over to the stove, almost knocking down some of the support poles on the way. He picked up the kettle of still warm tea and poured the black liquid on the toe, rubbing the sand away with his fingers.

‘There,’ he said triumphantly, ‘it feels better already.’

Bullock’s trip to Reliance was born of two necessities—the first of replenishing the supplies of the cave, the second of settling accounts with Glenn and releasing him for his return to civilization. Hornby’s farewell, as the dogs swept his companion and the sled southward from the cave, was reserved. Bullock wondered at it, without knowing the torment which prompted it.

His partner’s last words struck him as odd.

‘Don’t talk too much to Glenn. I don’t trust him.’

But then, Hornby had disliked the man from the beginning. Beyond the first few minutes of the trip, Bullock thought little of it. Besides, Glenn was to be a factor in the expedition no longer. He was to return to Edmonton, or to Peace River, or to wherever his fancy should take him. So, too, were to go

Malcolm and Alan and Greathouse and Buckley. The back-camps would soon be deserted and only two in a cave far in the Barrens would be left. There would be some relief in that. Bullock realized, as the monotonous miles were swept underfoot, that he had never been at ease with these men. They had treated him neither as a superior nor an inferior, nor yet as an equal, but rather as one who filled no niche in their world. Between him and them existed a barrier he had never pierced. This was apparent even when the Stewarts joined him as he reached their camp. The three continued the journey together, but they were not really three, but two and one.

There came a morning when, after a night in camp at the foot of Pike's Portage, Bullock took the dogs and went alone to the Glenn shack. The snow was deep and soft, unlike the dry drifts of the Barrens. Glenn must have seen the approach, for the door was thrown open while Bullock was yet some yards away. The face of the former was a study. He recognized the dogs, but not the heavily bearded, filthy driver, ponderous in his fur clothing. Bullock waved a hand and shouted.

'Hello!'

Rather vaguely the greeting was returned.

It was not until Bullock reached the door and was shaking hands with him that Glenn knew who it was.

'You?' he said, and stared.

'Yes, me. Do I look like a ghost?'

Glenn continued to stare, his mind drawn to another visit when murder had been hinted, though of this Bullock knew nothing.

'Where's Hornby?'

'Back at the cave.'

'Is he all right?'

'Of course he's all right. Why wouldn't he be all right?'

Before Glenn could answer, his wife came to the door. Bullock felt a queer sense of emptiness inside of him as he shook her hand. He noticed that she was shocked by his appearance.

The three went inside.

'We were to split even on the fur, weren't we, Bullock?'

The other nodded.

‘Well,’ Glenn said, ‘that makes it rather hard, for I managed to get only twenty hides.’

‘Only twenty? I heard you had more than that.’

‘Yes, but fifty of them my wife got.’

Bullock looked intently at Mrs. Glenn. She flushed.

‘Oh,’ he said. And then, after a moment, ‘But it doesn’t matter, for I’m going to let you keep all of it, anyway. I don’t want any split.’

He waved aside their thanks and sat thoughtfully in the warmth of the stove, taking note of the luxuries the cabin afforded, luxuries, that is, beside the crudities of the cave. He listened soberly to the Glenns’ tales of hardship.

Once he mimicked Hornby’s idiosyncrasy, and said: ‘Yes, yes? Sometimes we experienced little inconveniences, too. As a matter of fact, I have not had a bath since you last saw me. See?’

He pulled up his trouser leg and revealed a calf caked with filth. The soot of camp-fires, the dust of rotting cloth fabric had been solidified by sweat on the trip down from the cave. He ran his thumb-nail down the skin and the dirt curled off. Glenn stared. Mrs. Glenn looked sick. For a reason he could not fathom, Bullock was pleased.

A load of several hundred pounds was prepared on the sled for the return journey. Sugar and flour, tea and candles, bits of photographic and meteorological equipment retrieved from the cache, all were lashed together to withstand the endless pitching and swaying of an Arctic dog sled in motion. When all was ready, the Glenns came to pay farewells.

Never was contrast between husband and wife more marked. Though both must have been thinking of Hornby’s warning, their attitudes demonstrated the differences of character. Mrs. Glenn, moved by the sight of a man, terrifying in his bearded filthiness, who had been named as a potential murderer, was unable to speak. Her husband was in no wise thus afflicted. He affected a bluntness to hide his uneasiness, and pounded him on the back and pumped his hand.

Bullock smiled unpleasantly and said nothing. Mrs. Glenn smiled timidly and said nothing. Glenn played his rôle to the end, even to waving vigorously as dogs and sled went off at a trot.

In February Pike’s Portage, over which the party had toiled on foot months before, should have presented good sledding across its lakes and

intervening strips of tundra. Perhaps Bullock might have found it so if the winds had quieted and if Rowdy, the leanest and meanest of the three dogs which made up his team, had not developed a complex. The wind was a problem, because it swept down from the north, obscuring vision by whipping the dry snow into a mist. Rowdy's complex was even worse. When Bullock saw how frightfully the three dogs were straining under the load, he ran ahead to grab a line and help. Rowdy sat down and howled. Nothing could persuade him to regain his feet or silence his howl save the driver's return to the sled. Three times Bullock tried to get in front of the dogs, and as many times Rowdy sat down in the snow. Bullock was a disciplinarian and would have liked to wield the lash, but he realized that dog power was too scarce to risk alienation or injury. He relieved himself of a few oaths, and made a pack of a hundred pounds or so of the supplies, which he slung on his back and with which he followed the team over the rest of the portages.

At the lower end of Artillery Lake, which he reached the third day, the traveler decided that progress was too slow with a pack on his back. So thereafter he pulled a line in the heavy snow at the side of the trail. So long as he did not advance beyond the front of the runners, Rowdy behaved. It was exhausting work. There were knolls to be surmounted where the twenty-foot rise seemed like a mile of hard grade. There were stretches where the runners cut through to gravel. There were times when of the three dogs only Whitey seemed to be pulling. But then, he always pulled, just as the night always came, just as Hornby's eyes always shone.

Part-way up Artillery Lake, where ice afforded good going for a few miles, Bullock turned the team toward the western bank for a short cut overland which Greathouse had described with many words and gestures. For some hours the man traveled mechanically, now helping with the load over grades and bare spots, now running beside the sled. A spot in his back burned as though touched by hot iron. It was the echo of a Palestine injury, revived by the strain of dragging at the sled rope. Navigation was a matter of dead reckoning, so many hours at so many miles per hour. The eye was of small assistance. Each esker looked like the last, and each clump of stunted spruce or each rock. Darkness set in shortly after noon. It was not the darkness of night, but rather of a long-extended twilight. The sun not far below the horizon and the extreme whiteness of everything lent fair visibility, but so blurred the outlines of distant knolls as to render them more alike than ever.

The thought that he was lost fell upon Bullock with the suddenness of a marauder. One moment he was jogging along with eyes on the swaying sled, the next he was scanning the horizon in search of something familiar. His back was torturing him, but he dared not stop. The fact that his dogs might lead him to safety found no place in his consciousness. He thought only of his own weariness, of the cruelty of the Barrens winter to a stranded traveler. As the sled plunged over the top of each new rise, his hopes were drowned in the immensity of the empty, unfamiliar space ahead. Finally he began to rave and swear with the abandon of a man in agony. His nerves, set singing hours before by the fire in his back, gave way. But he kept on. He knew nothing else to do. Once Whitey turned in his stride and looked back wonderingly, as though sensing the mood of the driver.

When the sled swept down a slope into a little patch of stunted timber and the dogs came to a halt, Bullock cursed them. He did not want to camp yet. He wanted to go on. Exertion is a relief sometimes. Only when Whitey sprawled in the snow and appeared bored by the commands directed at him did the driver glance around. Scarcely fifty feet to his right the top of a door showed through the snow. He stared at it vacantly until the memory of a blizzard and of following the now dead Bhaie to that door welled up. It was the dugout. With shaking hands Bullock untied the dogs and prepared to camp.

The sight of the familiar esker in the gloom of the next evening was like a tonic to him. Across several hundred yards of snow he had detected the little black speck which marked the chimney, silhouetted against black-gray sky. Such as it was, the cave was home, and home is balm to the most eager traveler when he is weary. Forgotten were the discomforts, the sagging walls and roof, the quaintnesses of Hornby. Bullock remembered only that within the cave was a stove, which meant warmth, and a bed, which meant rest. And he hungered for both.

When Whitey, without command, had brought the team to a stop on top of the esker, Bullock pushed aside the blanket which hung over the tunnel entrance, and shouted for Hornby. There was no answer. Venturing into the cave proper, he found it dark and cold. There had been no fire in the stove for some time. Water in the kettle was partly frozen.

Bullock was puzzled, but not alarmed. Hornby was evidently out on the trap-lines, but without dogs he couldn't be away for long. Yet it was idle to speculate on the movements of one so erratic. He threw a few sticks in the stove, and nursed them into flame with some fox fat. Then he went out to unhitch the dogs and make them ready for the night.

It was nearly dark. Not a star could be seen, not a light. In the few steps to the sled, Bullock passed something stuck upright in the snow. He stopped as though grabbed from behind. It was Hornby's rifle, and Hornby never left the cave without it. For an instant he stood there, swept by the same emotions which had been his the night he had stood on the river-bank and visioned his partner as drowned. Only then he knew that Hornby couldn't be far away, while to-night, with the Barrens reaching so endlessly in all directions, there was no premise, even, for imagination.

The dogs, whom fatigue should have quieted, seemed unduly restless as he chained them for the night, and reshaped the snow windbreaks behind which they slept. Bedding the dogs was always Hornby's task. This was the first time that Bullock had performed this service at the cave. Even after the chains were secure, Whitey, whose dignity usually forbade demonstration, strained in the direction of the carcass dump along the esker top, and howled softly. Bullock, worn by exhaustion and incipient anxiety, cursed him.

'Shut up, damn you! I'll feed you in a minute. You don't have to howl after those filthy wolf husks.'

But Whitey did not even turn his head at the words. He continued to stare into the darkness. The chain which held him was so taut it quivered. Impatiently, Bullock followed the dog's glance. He could see nothing but the black shapes which marked discarded caribou heads or wolf carcasses. Yet so tense was Whitey's attitude that the driver's curiosity overcame him. He walked slowly along the esker, alert to catch the cause of the dog's uneasiness. Perhaps a wolf or a fox was prowling among the bones. But no motion met his eye. The dead stillness of the Barrens night was unbroken. Familiar shapes loomed blackly against the snow, here an ash dump, there the long shadows of the overturned canoes. But almost at his feet Bullock came upon a shadow not so familiar. He leaned to examine it and almost cried aloud. A hand stuck out grotesquely from a darker background.

On his knees, and pawing at the snow, he uncovered Hornby, face down, half-buried in the drift. The little man was no great burden. Bullock lifted him into his arms and talked to him frantically.

'Hornby! Jack! Look at me. Are you all right? Can't you speak? Look at me, damn you!'

The limp form gave no reply. For a horrible minute, during which the chill of the Barrens seemed to penetrate to every sinew of his body, Bullock thought he cradled a dead man in his arms. But holding Hornby's face close to his own, he felt the faint warmth of breath.

Once inside the cave, he laid his partner on the ground, and turned to liven the fire and light a candle. By the glow of the latter he knelt beside the still figure. For a moment he did nothing. His thoughts congealed. He was regarding a scene which he found unbelievable. As yet he did not know what had happened, but whatever it was, it had felled the man of all men who seemed invincible to physical woe, who had lived as an immortal—felled him, indeed, in his own element, the Northland. Vaguely he realized that Hornby must be bitterly cold; that his hands, feet, and face might already be frozen beyond aid. Yet for the first few minutes he could raise no hand to relieve him. He merely stared numbly at the black, bearded face on the bed, overcome by the presence of unconsciousness in one lately so vital and so vigorously alive. Finally, his reason triumphed, and he went to the sled, returning with a can of lard. He began with Hornby's feet, massaging them until a glow underlay the skin. Once Hornby groaned, and Bullock's fingers rubbed more eagerly. After a while Hornby opened his eyes and blinked them, as he might have done awaking from a nap. He tried to sit up, but the younger man held him down.

‘What are you doing to me? What’s wrong with my feet?’

‘I’ve been rubbing them. I found you outside in the snow.’

Hornby's eyes took on some of their old fire.

‘Found *me* outside? What’s the matter with me? I’m all right.’

‘Yes, you’re all right, but you’ve got to take it easy for a day or two. If I hadn’t come back when I did, you’d have frozen to death.’

‘Nonsense! Let me up! I’m hungry. I probably fell asleep, that’s all.’

Hornby squirmed in an attempt to rise, and Bullock, holding him by the shoulders, was shocked to find how slight a pressure was needed to keep him on the bed.

‘I’ll fix some tea,’ Bullock said, ‘and try to make soup out of some of that bloody caribou.’

Hornby's will and Hornby's body did not agree that night, for when Bullock busied himself at the stove, the little man, from sheer weakness, relaxed at full length on the blankets. Over the tea-kettle and the pot of steaming caribou stock Bullock argued with his heavy heart. He dared not think beyond the night at hand. What had stricken Hornby he was not physician enough to say. But he knew that the man on the bed was shorn of his strength, and without that strength, how could life in the cave go on? Without that strength . . . ! The thought of it made Bullock feel weak. And

he felt lonely. Now that the others had gone, the nearest human beings, so far as he knew, were three hundred miles away. He contemplated having to freight Hornby's frozen body back to Fort Resolution on the sled. What a fiasco the whole business seemed likely to be!

The tea, and the hot caribou broth, warmed Hornby and satisfied him. He lay on the bed looking at Bullock, his eyes bright with fever.

'I guess it was my heart, Bullock. Yes, yes. It was my heart. It happened once before in Edmonton.'

Having said that, he seemed disposed to sleep, and Bullock helped him into his sleeping-bag. There was no necessity to remove his clothes, as they had not been wet. When Hornby appeared to be comfortable, Bullock took stock. He noticed, gratefully, that there was enough wood for several days. The supplies he had brought from Reliance were still on the sled. He started after them and remembered that the dogs had not been fed. Some scraps would have to do them for the night.

When the cave was in order, Bullock went to his own bed. It was warmer there, and one could conserve candles and firewood. But he did not sleep for a long time. The wind had come up, and was howling across the snow. The earth walls still cracked as they did before the trip to Reliance. All was the same save the man who slept heavily an arm's length away.

The recesses of the imagination disgorge mad things under stress. Bullock pictured Hornby dead in a dozen situations, dead on his bed by morning, dropping into the snow beside the sled, falling lifeless onto the stove. He tortured himself with visions of ultimate disaster. If Hornby lived, could he get him back to civilization with three worn dogs in the harness? And if he died, should he bury him in the snow wastes, or fight his way South with the body? What of the goal that had shone so brightly on the Edmonton horizon?

The horrors of Christmas Eve were being repeated; only then it was his own life he feared for, while now it was Hornby's. He found himself loving the man with a fierceness he did not know he possessed. The irritations, the absurdities of the past few months, melted before the fires of affection. Hornby, *Hornby*, the White Indian, who laughed at pain and who did not understand the meaning of fatigue, was lying stricken beside him! Even as he fell into troubled sleep, there was that in Bullock's mind which could not believe what his eyes had shown him. And, too, even as he fell into sleep, there were rumors in Edmonton that Hornby would not come out of the Barrens alive, that there was trouble. . . .

Hornby lay half dead for three days, but one morning Bullock awoke to find him squatting beside the glowing stove. The rich, greasy odor of cooking caribou steak filled the cave. Before he could remonstrate, Hornby spoke up:

‘It’s all right, Bullock. I feel fine this morning. I’ve been out for a run and I’m hungry.’

Bullock, who lay propped on his elbows, tried to reconcile his eyes and his memory.

‘But your heart . . .’ he began.

‘Bother my heart!’

Hornby gave the frying-pan a militant flip, and two steaks slithered over on their other sides.

‘I tell you softness isn’t for the likes of us. A run in the early morning is worth a dozen doctor’s prescriptions. My heart’s beating the way it ought to now. When a watch stops ticking, you don’t start it again by carefully laying it in cotton, do you? You give it a good shake. And if it doesn’t start then, you keep on shaking until it does.’

The steaks got a final flip. Bullock relaxed and stretched out in his sleeping-bag for an extra wink. He smiled as he did so. It was Hornby again.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT was a day when spring was in the air. Hornby cocked his head to one side like a dog.

‘Did you hear that?’

Bullock, on his bed mending moccasins, looked up.

‘No. What?’

‘It’s shooting.’ Then, disgustedly: ‘Maybe it’s those damned Indians. When the winter’s almost over, they get brave about the Barrens.’

He grabbed up his parka, dodged around the support poles of the cave, and disappeared out through the tunnel. By the time Bullock reached the entrance, Hornby was on his way, paddling over the snow at that tireless pace he could endure for hours. Two miles to the southeast a group of black specks seemed to crawl slowly, like insects over white sand.

Bullock knew that Hornby was disturbed. The little man, mighty in his unbroken solitude, was jealous of other feet on the cold tundra, of other eyes viewing the eternal nothingness of empty horizons. Different emotions swept the younger man. He was tremendously excited at the prospect of new faces to see, new voices to hear.

As he watched, he saw the black speck that was Hornby merge with the others, and the whole group continue its advance. When the caravan was a mile away, words began to drift in through the crystal air. The newcomers were neither Indians nor Eskimos, for the half sentences Bullock caught were in perfect English. A figure broke away from the others and came on at a trot. It was Hornby. He ran up, breathing as easily as though he had been strolling.

‘The police,’ he said. ‘Malcolm brought them up. They met him somewhere below and brought him along as a guide. We must get them some grub.’

He was all smiles and his eyes twinkled as he vanished into the tunnel. Bullock stood waiting for the visitors with mingled feelings. The police! What business had the Royal Canadian Mounted in the Barrens? He shrugged. It didn’t matter. They would be diversion. And the gleam in Hornby’s eye had been unmistakable. The little man was relishing his rôle as host.

They came up, four men and three dog sleds. Malcolm Stewart presided at the introductions to Corporal Hawkins and Constable Baker, both of the R.C.M.P., and to an old Indian interpreter whose name was unintelligible to Bullock. The officers did not look their parts. In place of the traditional uniform with its touch of red, they wore parkas and moccasins, and their faces, bearded and black from the glare of sun and snow, might have belonged to any of the tribe of Northern trappers. Bullock noticed the Corporal regarding him more intently than the occasion deserved. For the moment he thought nothing of it. He was to remember that scrutiny many times later.

As they stood there indulging in the amenities of first acquaintance, Hornby appeared to bid them inside. The little procession, with Hornby leading, crept into the tunnel and emerged into the gloom of the cave. What had become commonplace to its residents must have shocked the police. One candle flickered uncertainly on the chest between the beds, revealing, by indirection, the filth of the walls and of the canoe sails hung there. For the canvas gave back no reflection. Accumulated soot had rendered it wholly black.

At Hornby’s bidding the strangers, together with Malcolm and Bullock, arranged themselves on the floor. The latter would have helped, but Hornby would not hear of it. The royal gesture! The little man might have been presiding at some sacred rite, so deliberately did he go about his duties at the stove. First the kettle for the tea. Then the frying-pans for the steaks. A steady cloud of smoke escaped from the joints of the stove, and through this Hornby was outlined in shadowy relief. The air was heavy with the combined odor of smoke and slops.

It was evident that the visitors were not at their ease. Conversation was at low ebb. Once Corporal Hawkins turned to Bullock and handed him a packet he had pulled from the bosom of his parka.

‘Some letters for you. About fifty there, I think.’

‘Thanks, Corporal.’

Bullock would have said more, would have expressed more pleasure and surprise, but he, too, was infected with uneasiness. The figures about the cave were like shadows. Their dark faces did not catch the feeble candle rays, and only their eyes and flashes of their teeth showed clearly. Hornby seemed unaware of the tension. Serenely smiling, he sent a hawklike glance toward the Corporal.

‘Well, what do you think of our country here?’

And before the officer could grasp the inanity of the question, Hornby answered it himself.

‘Yes, I like it. We like it. Yes, yes. Every one likes it who learns to know it.’

The Corporal changed his squatting position, nodded vaguely, and muttered something no one understood. Bullock, from his position in the corner, sensed the beginning of a game. He knew Hornby’s regard for the police was tempered by belief that they were spoiled with hero-worship.

Hornby, who had emerged from a billow of smoke after adding fuel to the fire, broke in again.

‘Where are you going after this, Corporal?’

‘Back, I guess, Mr. Hornby. Back to Resolution.’

‘Yes, yes. What a pity! What a pity! You haven’t begun to see the country yet. Wouldn’t you like to go out by a different route? Say up through to Coronation Gulf on the Arctic Ocean?’

In the semi-darkness Corporal and Constable looked at each other wonderingly. What answer could one give to a madman who suggested such trips with the air of a tourist agent?

‘That would be fine, Mr. Hornby,’ the Corporal finally managed, ‘but you know we have to be back at Resolution.’

At one side sat the Indian, smiling, listening attentively, recognizing in the strange host one of his own kidney.

The tea-kettle was bubbling. On the surface of the liquid floated a scum of caribou hair. In getting snow for the water, Hornby had not bothered to go farther than the tunnel entrance. With a stick, produced from somewhere in

the sand, he scooped off the more obvious islands of scum. Then he took an array of battered cups from behind the stove and dipped them in the black liquid. With the air of a fastidious host he passed them around. Afterwards he filled his own battered aluminum cup.

Squatting by the stove, Hornby drank noisily. The tea burned his lips. Bullock and Malcolm, who were accustomed to the brew, and the Indian, whose racial tradition was not to question food or drink, made headway with the liquid, which was violently strong. But Hawkins and Baker sipped sparingly. They, too, were not unused to the exigencies of Arctic meals, but the atmosphere of the cave and the slightly fleshy aroma of the tea was nauseating.

Hawkins moved to ease his position, and his knee caught one of the support poles. A dribble of sand fell upon him. Hornby laughed with an almost childlike glee.

‘Careful, Hawkins,’ he cautioned, ‘or you’ll have to play Atlas and hold up the world for us.’

The Corporal looked anxiously at the roof, scarcely visible through the smoke.

‘That thing’s liable to fall in on you,’ he said.

‘Yes, yes. That’s why I sleep with an axe handy at night. But the worst of the winter’s over now, I guess. We’ve been mighty comfortable here, Hawkins. A man’s lucky these days to have grub to eat and a roof over his head.’

Bullock squirmed without comment. That chant again. He had heard it when there had been no food but raw oatmeal, and when the ‘roof over his head’ had augured a quick burial. But now, with other ears to hear it, the thing amused him.

When the steaks had been served and chewed—you could hardly say eaten—Hornby stood up and rubbed his hands in a satisfied gesture.

‘I have,’ he began laboriously, ‘a special treat to offer. Have you, Hawkins, or you, Baker, ever eaten pink ice cream?’

Only the crackling of the fire answered him.

‘I thought not. Well, wait a moment.’

He turned and disappeared into the tunnel. When he returned, he had in his arms an assortment of caribou thigh bones. Solemnly he passed them

around. They were like ice.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘you crack it like this.’

With the handle of a knife he splintered the bone and pulled from it a broken finger of frozen marrow. It was stained pink with blood. As a child would eat a stick of candy, Hornby nibbled at his portion. The others, some of whom knew of the trick, but not of the name ‘pink ice cream,’ followed his lead. Aside from a certain greasiness, the taste was not unpleasant.

But the party was drooping. Only Hornby was enjoying himself, and he at the expense of the rest. The Corporal and the Constable exchanged whispers more frequently as the moments passed, and it was inevitable that Hawkins shortly should have said:

‘Well, Mr. Hornby, this has been very nice. But I’m afraid we must be on our way again.’

‘So soon! So soon! Why, you’ve not been with us two hours yet. Come, man, you’re in the Barrens now. Bullock and I’ll show you some of the country. It’s a chance you may never get again.’

Before the embarrassed officer could reply, Malcolm Stewart, fearing that Hornby’s suggestions were being taken too seriously, changed the subject.

‘You said you had some fox skins, Jack,’ he drawled. ‘Hadn’t we better get them baled before it’s too dark?’

The little man’s eyes blazed for an instant at the interruption, but the spell was broken. Corporal Hawkins grasped eagerly at the excuse to be moving.

‘Yes, Mr. Hornby. If we’re going to take those skins out, we’d best be working on them.’

So the dinner ended. Bullock stayed behind to straighten up the cave while the others, chattering in the atmosphere of relaxed tension, went outside.

The sound of shooting brought Bullock to the entrance in time to see Hornby drop a wolf with a phenomenally lucky shot at five hundred yards. He was explaining to the police: ‘It’s all in the light up here. You have to get used to it or you undershoot every time.’



CORPORAL HAWKINS (LEFT) AND CONSTABLE BAKER OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE AS THEY LOOKED UPON THEIR VISIT TO THE CAVE



HORNBY WITH THE DOGS AT THE FOOT OF THE CAVE ESKER

Hornby was sending out twenty-five fox skins, and these were quickly baled. Still reluctant to let his guests escape, the little man urged them to

spend the night in the cave and postpone departure until morning.

‘I’ll sleep in the snow outside, so there’ll be room enough,’ he said.

But Malcolm came to the rescue a second time.

‘No, Jack. There’s more room at my cabin. And we can reach there without much trouble.’

‘Then I’ll go down with you.’

And so it was settled.

When the moment of departure arrived, Hawkins and Baker became jocular. They patted Bullock on the back and made rough jokes about the cave and its furnishings. It was the mask men sometimes wear to cloak the finality of a parting. The old Indian was the last to shake Bullock’s hand.

‘You go after musk-ox?’ he asked

‘Yes, when the snow goes.’

‘Uh huh. No good here. I know.’ He pointed to the tunnel entrance.

He put a hand on Bullock’s shoulder and looked at him intently.

‘Musk-ox many days’ travel. But you are a strong man!’

And with that they were gone. Four sleds flying over the snow. Hornby had taken his own sled and dogs to facilitate his return on the morrow. The Indian, last over the brow of a distant esker, turned and waved.

Back in the cave Bullock surveyed with no enthusiasm the litter of greasy cups and frying-pans to be cleaned. Yet the solitude which the evening promised was not without compensation. There was mail, more letters than he had received at any one delivery in his life before. It would be delightful to stretch out in bed, with a candle placed just so on the iron chest, and commune again with the outside world.

Thinking thus, he scoured the cooking-ware with sand and put the cave in a condition as near to order as was possible, not forgetting, even, to straighten the upright which Corporal Hawkins had knocked askew. As he worked, he mused over the events just past. Surely the police didn’t travel the three hundred miles from Resolution just to deliver mail. Nor did the Service indulge in haphazard patrols into the Barrens. Odd that Hawkins and Baker had been so brief with their explanations. In fact, Bullock could remember no explanations at all. During the feast he had been several times

on the point of asking a direct question, but the general embarrassment had kept him silent. Anyway, Hornby would probably find out and would tell him to-morrow.

He let the fire die out, and did not bother to rebuild it. Days recently had been increasingly mild, and only midnights were unpleasantly cold. In the heat of the midday sun the snow, he remembered, had shown touches of going rotten. It was a relief to crawl into the sleeping-bag without fear that by morning blankets and beard would be glued with ice.

Bullock found his mail cosmopolitan. Letters from his younger brother, Philip, a cavalry officer in India; from his friends of the Tel el Kebir days; from a girl in Edmonton, and another in England; Government letters from Ottawa; even circulars and advertising matter, all welcome in a spot where each available printed word had been read dozens of times.

He lingered over the more personal letters. He read the words for their meaning, and then read them again for their visual effect, noting each graceful or angular sweep which went into the forming of the script. Inevitably, not because he was sentimental, but because he had imagination, the letters brought back to him vivid moments from the past, moments in violent contrast to the reality of the present. He remembered his childhood in Sussex; a day at Sherborne when he had dislocated his knee four times in one game of football. Philip, standing by, asked him why he laughed at the pain. It wasn't laughter, but a grimace. Ah, much water under many bridges! And the night on the troop ship in the Red Sea when he had awakened to find himself covered with ants and painfully bitten. A search for the doctor had revealed that medical worthy reclining on a mattress on the floor of his cabin entirely surrounded by ant powder. He fell asleep with some of the letters still unread. The candle burned down and went out, leaving a blob of wax to be removed from the top of the chest the next day.

Hornby returned in the afternoon. It was thawing, and the cave, which had withstood the assaults of snow and gale, proved unequal to this milder expression of the elements. The roof leaked in a dozen places, and Bullock spent a futile hour in trying to stop the trickles with odd pieces of clothing. Major among the victims of the dampness was the dwindling woodpile. While Bullock labored to water-proof that part of the roof above the beds, enough moisture had dribbled onto the fuel to render it useless for at least a day. Hornby arrived to find a cold stove, while around the cave water

dripped with mournful sound into strategically placed pots and pans. He grinned and patted his own wet garments.

‘Do us good. We need a bath, anyway. But it’ll be all right in a few hours. As soon as it gets dark, it will freeze again, and we’ll sleep dry.’

Bullock nodded.

‘I know, but look at the wood.’

‘Wet, is it? Well, there are still a few things to burn. We’ve got to get out of this hole, anyway, if the thaw has set in, and we can stand getting rid of some of our junk.’

He threw his cap on the bed, and looked around for the most likely fuel. Such a search for Hornby was routine. He had, during his lifetime in the North, burned everything combustible, from sides of bacon to a shirt off his back. Other men might go cold and hungry for lack of wood, but Hornby, when the urge for tea did not coincide with the availability of fuel, could see warmth in everything.

This time he saw it in an old pair of trousers he had discarded as too caked with filth, and in several of the books and newspapers that had been guarded so zealously in the iron chest. A little fox fat helped them into flame. The burning of the books amused Bullock. He would never have thought of it himself, but he realized the impracticality of preserving them. He said to Hornby:

‘If you ever feel the need of intellectual entertainment, I’ll recite one of those books. I’ve read them all so often I’ve begun to think I wrote them.’

They had some tea, all that the makeshift fire was capable of cooking. With it they ate ship’s biscuits and lard. Hornby chatted amiably about his trip to Malcolm’s shack and back. The police, he said, were better travelers than he had suspected. It had not started to rain until he was part-way on the return. The snow had grown very soggy, and going was difficult. Bullock listened quietly for some minutes, and then asked:

‘Why did they come up here, anyway?’

Hornby nibbled thoughtfully at a biscuit before replying.

‘Didn’t they tell you?’

‘Tell me? No, they didn’t open their mouths about it. And, besides, you heard everything that I did. I wasn’t alone with them at all.’

‘Oh, well, it doesn’t matter. They were probably a bit puzzled, and didn’t want to say too much.’ He laughed softly. ‘Yes, yes. They were puzzled all right. But I put them straight.’

Bullock was becoming impatient.

‘I know, but what did they come for?’

Hornby looked across the several feet which separated him from Bullock. His eyes were half-anxious, half-amused.

‘They came to take you out as a lunatic with designs on my life.’

Bullock stared unbelievably at his companion. He looked for the marks of jest and saw none. Hornby’s eyes were twinkling, but with excitement, not humor. The Captain grew annoyed.

‘What the bloody hell are you talking about?’

‘I told you, they came to take you out as a lunatic. They thought you were planning to murder me.’

Bullock started to reply, but Hornby cut him short.

‘It’s mostly your fault. If you hadn’t kicked up your heels at Fort Smith, nothing would have happened.’

Bullock, now less angry than bewildered, tried to grasp the significance of the other’s words.

‘But what did I do at Fort Smith?’

Hornby sighed. He took off a moccasin and sock and fingered his great toe.

‘Well, you listen carefully and I’ll tell you the whole story. But don’t interrupt. When I went down to Reliance a while ago, I knew you were feeling bad about the expedition. You had a lot of dreams in your head that couldn’t come true. And I thought that if I could do something to attract attention to us, get people talking a little, it would help us when we finally made our appearance on Hudson Bay. So I passed the word that things weren’t going as smoothly as they might, and that I was afraid you meant to do away with me. I said nothing specific or definite, and if matters had stopped there, all would have been well. The word would have drifted along that something dramatic was happening in the Hornby-Bullock expedition, and our return would have been awaited with added interest. When we showed up at Hudson Bay, safe and triumphant, we would, of course, deny

all rumors of friction. I would say I had been badly mistaken. And we should get lots of publicity.’

He paused a moment to note the effect of his words. Bullock was impassive.

‘When I did all this,’ he went on, ‘I didn’t know about you at Fort Smith. You must have got very tired of waiting for me there, for at least two men heard you say that you’d “kill him” when he did come. When my words got back to Fort Smith, the other memories were revived, and the police thought it time to do something.’

Here Hornby chuckled.

‘But when Hawkins and Baker arrived, they found everything so serene that they didn’t mention their errand in your presence. In fact, their chief worry seemed to be the conditions under which we are living here. But then, they haven’t been in the Barrens enough to know better. They mistake comfort for hardship.’

The last sentence, which ordinarily would have provoked Bullock, passed unnoticed. He sat on his bed with his chin resting on hunched-up knees, struggling to remember his conversations at Fort Smith. It was not unlikely that he *had* said ‘I’ll kill him,’ but what fools his listeners were to take the words seriously. And the police had intended to take him out as a lunatic? The thought brought a thin smile to his lips. They might have taken his *body* out.

Hornby, trying to pierce these thoughts, was uneasy.

‘Say it! Say it!’

Bullock looked steadily into the blue eyes opposite. In his mind was censure, but in his heart an explicable affection. After some seconds he said:

‘You’re an ass.’

For two days it thawed. On the third day the cave was abandoned. Hornby and Bullock retrieved from beneath one of the canoes the tent that was to be their home for many months to come. The canvas was wet from the thaw, but otherwise undamaged. Of all of their equipment it seemed best to have survived the winter. This tent was pitched on top of the esker some three hundred yards from the cave. There the snow had already receded, leaving bare a few square rods of sand.

To this camp was moved as much of the cave's contents as was worthy of salvage. Out came the stove, and the iron chest, and the blackened canoe sails, and the supplies of staples and meat, the matter of the latter's preservation having become a problem with the temperature often mounting above the freezing point. Out, too, came Bullock's cameras, which had been of little use in months past, and with the cameras a mass of film and developing paraphernalia. Out came the assortment of battered and greasy culinary ware, the pots and pans and skillets and cups. And, biggest item of all, many white fox and wolf hides, from which no little revenue was expected upon return to civilization. In all there were two thousand pounds of equipment, exclusive of the two canoes,—a staggering weight to consider transporting over the uncharted miles ahead of them. Yet they were loath to discard a pound of it. In all of the moving Hornby worked like an automaton, deliberately choosing for his own shoulders the heaviest loads, and urging Bullock to take the lighter tasks. In the idle moments of mid-winter the little man might indulge in oddities, but when necessity demanded labor, he more than bore out his almost legendary reputation.

To Bullock, from the more open vantage of the tent, the Barrens seemed to have assumed a new personality. No less empty than in the dead of winter, they appeared less desolate. The monotony of whiteness was now relieved by patches which the thaw had bared. The sight of sand, and of rivulets on the esker side, softened the sense of isolation. A sharp change had occurred, too, in the animal life. Wolves and foxes were now seldom to be seen. It was as though they had deserted the country. Only an occasional caribou topped the horizon, moving always to the north. One band of five passed close to the tent, all of them bulls, and Bullock noticed that the new horns were but two or three inches long, in striking contrast to the noble antlers they had borne in the fall. But the greatest change was the appearance of birds. Willow ptarmigan and an occasional hawk began to invade the territory dominated by the esker.

The problems of the daily thaw multiplied rapidly. In the tent the gradual seepage from the sand made an artificial floor necessary. Hornby solved the difficulty with moss taken from the walls of the cave. Outside the midday sun softened the frozen fox and wolf hides, and released a variety of odors. In the dim light of the cave these skins had been improperly cleaned. Hornby got firewood in his typical fashion by wrecking the roof and walls of the abandoned residence.

Plans were laid for the spring trip.

With such maps as he had, Hornby marked out a tentative route.

‘If we start soon,’ he explained, ‘we can save a lot of portaging by heading directly overland to the junction of the Hanbury and Thelon Rivers. This daytime thaw has come to stay, I guess, but there’ll be a freeze every night for a while, and we can travel with the dogs after dark. May is a good month in this country.’

Bullock listened eagerly. The prospect of motion after the months in the cave filled him with a new enthusiasm. For an entire afternoon he kept the shutters of his cameras clicking, posing Hornby at various tasks, simulating winter scenes on the esker top amid such snow as remained.

That night in the tent Hornby said:

‘I wish we hadn’t left so many carcasses and caribou heads around. They’ll rot and stink like the devil. And somebody might come up this way in a few months and sniff their nose and say, “So *this* is where the Hornby-Bullock outfit camped.”’

Bullock grinned, for he knew that a particularly evil wolf hide had that morning wounded even Hornby’s sense of smell.

‘Why don’t you,’ the Captain suggested, ‘pile the bloody things into the cave? The walls will collapse soon enough now that we’ve taken the revetment out. Then the stuff will be buried.’

Hornby beamed.

‘We’ll do even better than that. We’ll put them in the cave and pile on top of them all the stuff we are going to throw away. Then we’ll set it afire. There’s enough stray fat in some of those carcasses to burn nicely, and the twigs still left in the walls will help. It’ll be a good farewell gesture.’

The following morning the esker top was policed. Most of the unapproachable items were moved by means of the poles which had served so faithfully as roof ribs all winter and were dumped into the sand hole that had been the cave. Bullock found it hard to realize, as he stood on the edge of the pit, that a few days previously he had lived in it. But he felt no sense of regret at its destruction. When Hornby had finally coaxed the pyre into flame, Bullock went for his camera. The lens captured the last of as weird a dwelling-place, probably, as civilized man has known. Smoke curled upward for two hours, and then the fire died. The cave was no more.

Even Hornby, for all of his familiarity with the North, was excited at the new stage into which the expedition had entered. With the cave in ruins the period of hibernation was at an end. From now on it would be travel, over frozen snow crusts as long as they lasted, through tortuous canyons and

seething rapids with the canoes, on foot over portages of sand and muskeg and slippery rock.

At supper the night of the day the cave was fired, Hornby asked, for the first time since civilization had been left behind:

‘Bullock, are you sorry you came?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘No reason. No reason. But things have gone a bit queerly sometimes this winter, and I wondered . . .’

‘If I wanted to turn back, perhaps?’

The interruption was caustic. Hornby smiled, and his words came slowly.

‘I’ve wondered that. Yes, yes. But I’ve always known better. It isn’t that. I just want to be sure that you still have some of your enthusiasm left.’

Bullock thought back, back to the days in Edmonton when he had dreamed great things for the expedition, back to the trip up from Fort Smith when he had neither understood nor been understood by the other members of the party, back to the monotony of the cave. Not an heroic picture, surely. And yet in the background of each memory was an amazingly likable figure, a man of infinite resource and native skill, of prodigious strength and endurance, a man, in fact, who exacted from those about him a strange blend of loyalty, of awe, of affection. From all of these impressions Bullock framed his answer.

‘Enthusiasm? Yes, lots of it, Hornby. Not bubbling, perhaps, but dogged, and that kind gets farther. I’ll admit I’m glad winter is over, but there isn’t enough money in the world to buy me out of the Barrens the way I came in. I’ll go out by Hudson Bay, or I won’t go out at all.’

Hornby’s grin expressed delight.

‘Dandy, Bullock! Dandy!’

It was Hornby’s most ecstatic adjective, a dash of slang flavored to his taste.

‘We really *are* just beginning now, anyway. The winter in the Barrens was necessary to get an early start. There are wonderful things ahead for you to see. We’ll be in the musk-ox country in a week. No one has laid eyes on a musk-ox up here for a long time. If we find them, we’ll have something then to make them sit up at Ottawa. Perhaps we’ll even find those bones of

Franklin's men. It's quite possible they might have strayed the way we are headed. That would be a find that would make us famous. It would be in papers all over the world, with pictures of John Hornby and Captain James Charles Critchell-Bullock. The hunt for those lost men was one of the greatest ever carried on in the North, you know. We'll find plenty to record if we keep our eyes open, and . . .'

Bullock listened, and dreamed, and was aware of the same sensations that were his when Hornby talked thus one day in Edmonton many, many months before. Maybe there was adventure ahead, after all.

On the following night the two men arose at midnight. During the preceding day the entire mass of supplies and equipment, with the exception of the tent and the sleeping-bags, had been trussed and packed for moving. All of it, including the two canoes, was lashed onto the sled. Only the runners were visible. All of the superstructure was hidden behind bulging and overflowing packs. At least a ton of dead weight awaited the efforts of three dogs in the harness and two men at the ropes. It was planned to take advantage of the hard crust on the snow and the ice, both of which were to be expected after sundown, to cross the Casba River and proceed generally northeast until the heat of the day should make going too soft. On a glazed surface the load, once in motion, could be pulled without great difficulty. But in snow even slightly soft the sled would be rooted.

It was the work of but a few minutes to attach the tent and sleeping-bags on top of the load. Breakfast was forgone. They would eat when it became necessary to stop, for then the stove could be unloaded and a hot meal prepared.

The start was singularly lacking in drama. Neither Hornby nor Bullock felt inclined to words, and without so much as a backward glance, they, pulling with the dogs, slowly overcame the inertia and set the sled in motion. With the impetus from the dash down the esker slope, on which the sled nearly got out of control, going was comparatively easy. The runners slipped over the glaze as gently as a wheel revolves on bearings. Once every few hundred yards a runner might break through under pressure from the great weight above. But the interruptions were trivial.

By two-forty-five the sun peeped up, forerunner of the long days to come in the Arctic summer.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SNOW began falling on the second night of the march. With the Casba River behind them and their goal at the junction of the Thelon and the Hanbury only a hundred miles away, the travelers expected to complete the journey in four or five nights. But that was before the snow fell. It came down gently, silently, and, in comparison to the vicious blizzards of the winter, seemed a mild and pleasant interlude. The two men and the three dogs straining to keep the sled in motion learned otherwise in a matter of minutes. Half an hour after the fall began, they surrendered and came to a halt. The new snow was like sand under the overloaded runners. The sled that had glided over the ice-like crust became as glued to the soft, unpacked surface.

Some men, facing such an impasse, would have camped and awaited better conditions. Hornby was too dynamic and Bullock too dogged to be balked that night. All winter they had waited, and now waiting was intolerable. Exchanging little more than monosyllables, they unloaded the sled until there remained on it but a third of its original weight. Then, calling the dogs to their feet and themselves picking up the ropes again, they made a new start.

Even with the lightened load it was fearful work. Beneath their parkas Hornby and Bullock ran wet with sweat before a likely camping-place was found four miles farther on. Back with the dogs they went to pick up a second load. And after that, back once more for the third, this last trying them to their final ounce of strength because the sun had risen and crept high, turning the new snow to slush and spoiling the crust beneath. In all, twenty miles had been traveled to advance four.

In the ensuing days it was as though an evil and malicious spirit contrived to pit the Barrens' contrariness against the efforts of the men. The

start had been delayed a week or two too long, and while each daylight brought a new thaw and with it a diminution of the snow, the nights failed to freeze the surface to a point where it would support the sled.

Haul day, haul night, haul their very hearts out, Hornby and Bullock could not advance the load more than a few miles in any twenty-four hours. And this, though they drove the dogs and themselves for eighteen hours at a stretch, leaving, when camp chores had been completed, but four hours for sleep. Then there were days when they could not move at all. Such crust as did form was cruel footing for the dogs, whose paws quickly became raw and bleeding. That meant shoes, and the men sat, impatient, in their tent cutting up and sewing strips of caribou hide to serve as protection for the dogs' feet.

Part of the route lay along the shores of small lakes, and Hornby had counted on guiding the sled along the smooth surface of the ice edges as often as conditions permitted. Once more the weather defeated his plans. Water from the thawing snow on the uplands ran down and swamped the ice near the shore. Ice in winter rises gradually toward the center of a lake, owing to expansion. Thus the outer edges collected the draining water. The weight of this water depressed the ice, until near the shore there often would be a channel to the depth of three or four feet above the frozen level.

Finding such conditions, the men would unload the sled and transfer the entire outfit to the canoes, which would then be poled or paddled for several miles along the shore. It was a perilous business. Huge chunks of submerged ice, loosened by the pole or the motion of the canoe, came lumbering to the surface. Usually the canoes were past before these little bergs reared themselves out of the water, as if curious to see what had disturbed them. But sometimes they came up under the boats. Then it was only skill and luck—and probably more of the latter—that kept men, dogs, and equipment from a quick bath.

It is idle to detail the hardships and the disappointments of that struggle to move a ton of unwieldy matter across the thawing plains. Sufficient to say that after a month of toiling, the sled was but sixty miles from the site of the cave, whence it started.

Even though at a turtle's speed, they might have kept on had the snow lasted. But one night Hornby and Bullock looked out on a mottled landscape which was streaked with patches of bare sand and rock. The white mantle was receding like the edges of a puddle drying in the sun. It was a time for quick decision. To pursue the present course might mean disaster, with the

whole outfit stranded sans snow for the sled or water for the canoes. And, on the other hand, to retreat to the nearest waterway would mean a loss of a month or more in time, as well as surrender to all of the portages which were to have been eliminated by the overland dash. There were anxious moments as the two men surveyed their chances. Yet there was but one possible answer—retreat.

It was not necessary to return to the Casba River. Such maps as had been made of the region indicated that a northerly course would lead to the chain of small lakes which run one into the other in the upper reaches of the Hanbury. The toiling over insufficient and softened snow began again, this time with a new destination in view, and in early June camp was made on the shores of what later proved to be Campbell Lake.

Hornby and Bullock, weary, thin, and hungry, for the meat supply was exhausted and no caribou had been sighted for days, stood on the beach and gauged the temper of the weather. Although freezing temperatures were over until autumn, ice still persisted. It was broken and cracked by the rapidly rising water, but dangerous for travel. It would be a week, perhaps, before the canoes could be safely launched. The men met the new delay with the only weapon left, philosophy. But even that didn't survive.

From the iron chest Bullock took a sheet of heavy lead foil, one of a score brought for the purpose, and with a pin began carefully to prick out the letters of a record. Meanwhile, Hornby gathered stones for a cairn in which the foil was to be guarded from time and storm.

Bullock wrote:

*John Hornby
and
J. C. Critchell-Bullock
camped here
June 10, 1925.
Weather fair
Ice disintegrating.*

Before putting it in the cairn, he showed it to Hornby. The latter sniffed.

‘What do you want to use a word like that for? Disintegrating? It’s pedantic.’

Bullock, his own feelings rubbed raw by the disappointments of recent weeks, could not see the humor of arguing the point in the midst of the

Barrens.

‘What’s the matter with it? It’s a good word. Perhaps you know a better one.’

‘Why couldn’t you have made it “breaking up”?’

‘Because it isn’t breaking up. It’s disintegrating.’

Hornby’s own sense of humor had been left somewhere back along the miles of thawing plains.

‘Damn it, Bullock! Some of the men who might read this thing wouldn’t know what your word meant. I’ll have nothing to do with a report that’s bookish. You can tear my name off the top of that foil.’

‘I’ll do better. I’ll tear the whole thing up.’

Bits of the silvery sheet fell at his feet. As they slipped through his fingers, he writhed inwardly, and to ease his rage he placed his foot against the cairn and demolished it. Then he turned away without smile or speech. Hornby made no effort to stop him. It took six tiny wolf pups to reconcile them.

Bullock found the pups in the afternoon of the same day. He was climbing a sandy rise near camp when his foot went through the roof of what he knew instinctively to be a wolf den. Expecting teeth to fasten on his leg any second, he sacrificed dignity for speed in extricating himself. But when no movement followed and no sound, he investigated.

In a space four feet long and half as wide, which had been covered with a sandy roof four inches thick, nestled six fat puppies of a slate-brown color. The old ones were absent, probably foraging for food. The tiny pups were apparently about six days old. Their eyes were still closed, and they huddled together, blindly seeking warmth. Following a whim, Bullock took off his parka and, bundling the puppies into it, carried them back to the tent.

Hornby might have been their mother, so enthusiastically did he greet the new arrivals.

‘Bullock, ever since I have been coming to the Barrens, I’ve been wanting to get hold of some healthy wolf pups. Think what fun it’ll be to raise a couple of them and bring them out with us! We could make a present of them to the Prince of Wales.’

‘But what’ll we feed them with? We haven’t any milk, and they can’t eat anything else yet.’

‘Oh, I can manage that somehow.’

So Bullock left the destiny of the sextet in Hornby’s hands. The little man rummaged until he found a sack. Then he dumped the pups inside. That was to be their home. For the next two days he neglected camp tasks and turned dietitian. Meat was extremely scarce in the larder just then, but he managed to cut and pound some raw caribou into a pulpy mass. Holding the pups on his lap, he tried to coax them to eat. They paid no attention to the meat, but seemed to enjoy sucking Hornby’s blackened and gnarled fingers, probably because they were warm.

That night the mother howled dismally at the stars. It was unlike any wolf cry that Bullock had heard before. Even the most savage of beasts can be torn with grief, though the grief be instinctive rather than sentimental. Fat was badly needed, and more wolf hides would have been welcome, but no shot was fired at the gaunt shadow which haunted the pillaged den after dark. Hornby and Bullock exchanged no words on this subject. Each seemed to know how the other felt.

By morning one of the pups had died, both cold and hunger probably contributing. Hornby was more solicitous than ever of the remaining five. He brewed caribou tea and punctured the finger of an old glove to serve as a nipple. But it was no use. The pups needed milk and the warmth of their mother’s belly. By the third day the little balls of fur were barely able to move. Stoically, and for mercy’s sake, Hornby killed them. He was morose for some hours afterwards.

Many incidents broke the monotony of the days of waiting. For the first time Hornby seriously joined Bullock in research work. Together they explored the surrounding country for natural history specimens. Mostly they confined themselves to birds, because they were plentiful now, not hard to bring down, and small enough to add no great burden of weight to the outfit. Sparrows were collected and skinned, as were hawks and plover and larks and falcons, some of them of species not known to nest in more temperate regions. Insects were added to the collection, and preserved in fluids Bullock had brought along for the purpose.

The search for food, always difficult, became at some moments amusing, though perhaps the humor was not apparent at the time. No caribou had been sighted for days, and meat not being available, the men turned to fish and birds and eggs. Ptarmigan were welcome as food, and once or twice consumed raw when fuel was lacking. The eggs were usually addled, but half-starved men cannot be particular. The procedure was to crack the shells

and pour off the fluid into a frying-pan, leaving the usually present embryo inside.

Gulls' eggs were especially sought. The large, strong loons' eggs were used if nothing better could be found, but the flavor was vile. When the mess was cooked in the pan, instead of turning the conventional white, it became a foul brown. Once a group of eggs yielded young birds almost fully fledged. Even Hornby, who could turn almost anything into food if necessity arose, balked at sprouting feathers. On that occasion there was no meal.

Shortly before one midnight, the barking of the dogs took Hornby to the flap of the tent. Barefooted and in ragged underwear, he stood peering out into the night, which at that time of year was as light as the twilight of the temperate zones. Bullock, stretched out in his sleeping-bag, saw the other turn.

‘Caribou!’

Hornby stopped just long enough to deliver himself of the word and to grab his rifle. Then he was gone. Bullock, vastly excited, and in an equally scant state of dress, followed. He stopped long enough, however, to don moccasins. Hornby was some distance away, blazing at four fleeing shadows as he ran. Bullock could see the white soles of his feet as they flashed over rock and muskeg and bramble. When the shooting stopped, two caribou were dead and the other two had disappeared. Hornby was examining the kill when his companion arrived.

‘Look, Bullock! Come here.’

Hornby kicked at the carcass before him.

‘This scurvy beast was rotting on his feet. He’s been eating himself to get at the warble maggots under his hide. We’re cheated out of our meat.’

Bullock leaned over to examine the hide in the half-light. He straightened up.

‘It does smell strong.’

The other caribou was in better condition, but not fat. Bullock stood guard to ward off a possible stray wolf while Hornby returned to the tent for knives. Butchering was a job that couldn’t wait until morning. The little man came back without having added to his attire. Thus the two of them labored, in their under-clothes, while the temperature flirted with the freezing point and a frost set in. Hunger will do that to men. Once Bullock stopped work to ask his partner about his feet.

‘Oh, they’re all right,’ was the answer; ‘only I stepped on an egg that we might have had for to-morrow’s dinner.’

Later, the two men packed the edible parts of the animal back to camp. Their under-clothes were red with caribou blood, but neither cared, least of all Bullock.

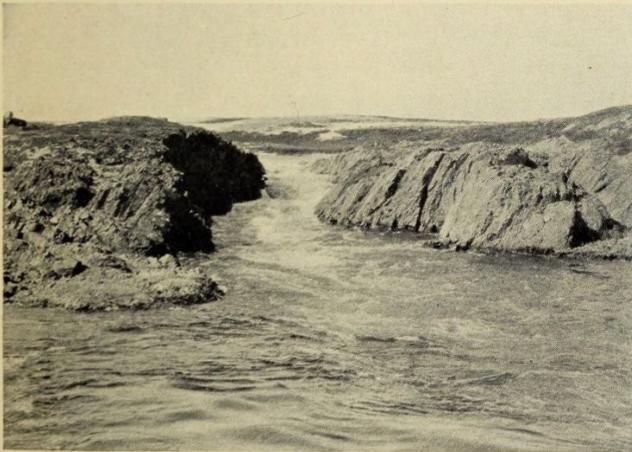
At last there came an evening when Bullock wrote in his diary: ‘The ice is separating up rapidly.’ He started to write ‘disintegrate’ and changed his mind. It was a tribute to Hornby’s feelings, though the little man was never to read it.

The morning after he wrote thus, camp was broken and the canoes loaded. One of the canoes, an old twenty-foot craft, had suffered from the snows. Its bottom was a mass of rotted sheathing into which Hornby had kneaded much lard that could better have been devoted to culinary purposes.

Before a start was made, Hornby went to the water’s edge with some bannock crumbs. They had been discovered the night before in the bottom of one of the sacks, and a conference followed as to their palatability. It was finally decided that too much sand was mixed with them. So they were to serve a higher purpose. Hornby threw a few into the water through a hole in the ice and watched them drift off slowly in the direction of the current. They would do. Thereafter when the flow of the current was to be tested on some unfamiliar and apparently motionless lake, bannock crumbs would be used. They would point the way to the outlet.



HORNBY LAUNCHING A CANOE AFTER THE
ICE STARTED TO BREAK



DICKSON CANYON ON THE HANBURY RIVER
TYPICAL OF THE DANGEROUS RAPIDS ENCOUNTERED

The Hanbury River is hardly a river at all, but rather a series of small lakes, rapids, and falls. It is navigable only with many portages, some of them up or down the sides of steep cliffs, and one of them two and one half miles long. There is water enough and more than enough in the thawing season, but it boils through so many canyons and over so many rocks that

travel is only for the hardy. Hornby and Bullock worked as they had never worked before. Eight loads to the man were needed to carry the canoes and equipment overland. That meant that for every mile of portage, the men traveled fifteen. This, with the constant loading and unloading of the canoes, made progress painfully slow.

Through the last weeks of June and the early part of July they toiled. Campbell Lake was behind, and Smart Lake and Sifton Lake and Lac du Bois. Mosquitoes were gathering, and at night slumber was possible only under netting. Food was more scarce than ever. Whitefish were caught, and trout, but it takes many pounds of straight fish a day to appease one man, and here were two men and three dogs. There was no time for conversation. The days of the cave, with their long hours for speculation and idle comment, were gone. Now it was up at three A.M. and slave without ceasing until well into the evening. Bullock had barely time and energy to make entries in his diary.

But there were interludes.

Two of the dogs escaped one night as the canoes were beached, and dashed off after a lone caribou silhouetted on a knoll several miles away. Calls to the dogs went unheeded. Hornby leveled his rifle and put several shots in the sand a few feet in front of the racing pair, but he might have saved his ammunition. The dogs never came back. Somewhere in the Barrens they must have starved to death, for dogs are unfitted to live off that land. Only Whitey remained, and he never attempted to escape, even when left untied.

On long portages he carried a pack on his back, carried it proudly and willingly, following the men with his legs spread well apart to counter the sway of the load.

One morning, when a haze overhung the river, and the final portage of the night was being completed, they came upon an odd monument. They saw it from a distance, a wooden upright protruding from a pile of stones. It proved to be a pillar, finely carved with the inscription:

*Lake Hanbury, named 13th August, 1911.
H. V. Radford. T. G. Street.*

Hornby was deeply moved.

‘Those men were murdered by Eskimos,’ he said. ‘They never reached civilization. I remember a police inquiry into the affair. Bullock, probably

we're the first humans to see this since it was erected.'

The younger man was fascinated. The thought that other white men actually had penetrated this loneliness affected him as much as the idea of murder.

Somehow from this rude marker came the inspiration to cache part of the load. Such a move had been discussed before and promptly rejected. But when, beside the monument, Bullock suggested it anew, Hornby acquiesced quickly. On a little island in the center of a near-by rapids, the sled was stood on end, with rocks around its base to keep it upright. Then twelve thousand feet of motion-picture film in cans was tied to the top of the sled, and an assortment of winter equipment, including extra blankets, heavy parkas, and the like, was stored at the base. This lightened the main load by a couple of hundred pounds.

A piece of foil was tacked to the sled. On the foil was pricked:

Cache No. 2.
The property of Captain Critchell-Bullock
and John Hornby.
7th July. 1925.

If there can be a monotony to life in an untraveled, virgin country, there was that monotony for the next two weeks. Paddle a few miles and pack, paddle a few miles and pack—such was the daily schedule. Men less concerned with realities would have found charm in the unfolding of the Barren Lands summer. The low, rolling hills, which in the colder months had so forbidding an aspect, took on color. Wild flowers bloomed everywhere, in places forming a veritable carpet of blue and yellow and green. There was a melancholy beauty about it that occasionally stirred Bullock, and less occasionally Hornby, into comment. Dickson Canyon, a two-mile rocky gash across the face of the Barrens, would have moved less weary men to ecstasy.

But the coming of warm weather brought its penalties as well. The mosquitoes increased until at evening they swarmed in clouds about the edges of river and lake. And the black flies, too, were abroad in the land. The Barren Lands black fly is a cruel parasite. It gorges on the blood of living things. Such caribou as were sighted were invariably in full flight, seeking in motion relief from the flies that persecuted them. Humans were no less the prey of these insects.

It was during these days that Hornby's humanity became magnificently apparent. Bullock's back, which had been weakened on the return trip from Reliance, rebelled at the constant packing. At times the pain was almost unbearable, but, under the lash of necessity, portaging went on. Hornby knew this by little things, by fleeting grimaces on Bullock's face and by faltering steps, rather than by words. For Bullock kept his troubles grimly to himself. Quietly Hornby came to the rescue.

He surreptitiously put the heaviest articles in his own pack, leaving the lighter ones for his partner. He made excuses to carry most of the loads, sending Bullock ahead to make camp and cook, and wording his suggestions so that, though both knew their import, the younger man could keep face and not openly admit his weakness. It was the act of a man. Bullock, in his diary, gratefully wrote: 'For all of these things I consider Hornby a Trojan.'

Hornby's own strength did not hold up as it might have under a proper diet. Scarcely a night but what the men went to sleep with gnawing bellies. This weakness sometimes provoked dangerous makeshifts. Thus it was that, when Helen's Falls was reached, a crisis developed that but for split-second action and the luck of the despairing more than half of the outfit would have gone to the bottom of the river.

The drop at Helen's Falls is about fifty feet, and below is a deep ravine a mile long, through which the waters boil angrily. The situation called for portaging of the entire load overland to a point beyond the ravine. But weariness made the men desperate, and at Hornby's suggestion, they decided to risk 'lining' the canoes down the rapids with ropes.

First the canoes and equipment in a dozen packs were lowered by ropes to a rock ledge beside the foot of the falls. The work was difficult, but proceeded without mishap. There the first canoe was loaded for its trip down the ravine. Unwisely it was packed with the entire photographic outfit, the rifles and ammunition, Bullock's diaries, and other items which would have been beyond replacement if lost.

The technique of 'lining' a canoe is simple enough to tell. It consists in keeping the stern close to the bank by means of a rope, and the bow pointing slightly outstream by means of a long pole. The danger lies in letting the current get on the inside of the canoe. For then, if the stern is swept out from the bank, the craft becomes uncontrollable, and, save by the exercise of a giant's strength on the stern line, is at the mercy of the rocks and water. Three men can afford a safety margin, with the third walking a slack line attached to the bow. Then, if the current sweeps in too powerfully against

the stern, the rear line is freed; the canoe pivots; and the bow line comes into control.

The sides of the ravine were so steep and irregular that most of the time Hornby and Bullock had to walk on ledges some ten feet above the water. At one point the ledge overhung the water, and Bullock found himself holding a blind rope. The canoe was out of sight beneath him. He gave an experimental tug on the line to keep the craft from running afoul the bank, and succeeded too well. A strong eddy caught the stern and swept it toward midstream so rapidly that all slack was gone from the rope before he was aware of what had happened.

The pull on the line made his shoulders ache as he strove against it. Though he strained until his back seemed ready to crack, he could not gain on the current. For a few seconds he forgot the Barren Lands, forgot Hornby; all he knew was that everything in life he valued was in that canoe, and that its fate was being slowly torn from between his hands. He knew that if the rope parted, or if his grip on it failed, the canoe and its contents were doomed. Even if it survived the rapids, there was another fall at the lower end of the ravine which would mangle everything on its rocks.

All of this was but a matter of seconds, and suddenly Bullock saw that his weight on the rope was causing the canoe to tip. A wave splashed in, then another. The stern sank lower in the water. A fit of desperation possessed Bullock. He decided that if the canoe must go, he would go in after it. He would struggle to reach it and with his hands keep it on an even keel. If he failed, or if the thing were wrenched from his grasp, he would drown. It would be a pleasant way to go out.

All this time Hornby had been shouting instructions. But Bullock was deaf with excitement and anxiety. One desperate 'Bullock!' finally brought him to his senses. Hornby was standing on a lower ledge, maneuvering his pole so as to catch it in the bow of the canoe. He shrieked at the younger man:

'For God's sake, let go the rope. You're swamping the thing! Let go! *Let go!* I'll let it pivot on my pole!'

As if waking from a dream, Bullock dropped the rope and plunged forward as Hornby, white from the strain, held the pole in the bow crevice. He jumped into the water, landing heavily on a shallow bottom, but keeping his feet and struggling toward the canoe. The pole held it long enough for him to grasp the sides. Then Hornby followed him into the water, and between them they brought it to the bank.

After that everything was packed.

At midnight they were still packing. The route lay over a rocky plateau above the ravine and ended in a low, swampy stretch just below the second falls. They had been working hours, but in the monotony of weariness found new strength. Like automatons they walked, silently, slowly, ponderously.

On one of the last trips, as they approached the lower falls, Hornby, who was leading, dropped suddenly to his knees, motioning Bullock to do likewise. Perhaps, the latter thought, there were caribou about. But little good it would do them without their rifles. He noticed Hornby quietly slip off his pack and creep back toward him on all fours. Bullock wanted to shout, but something stayed his voice. He waited until Hornby was almost beside him, and then whispered:

‘What is it?’

He could see, in the gloaming which was the conventional July midnight in that region, Hornby’s eyes dancing. They seemed bigger than he had ever seen them before. The words of Hornby’s reply stumbled over his lips.

‘Musk-oxen, Bullock! Musk-oxen!’

He might have been some fabled creature uttering a magic *sesame*.

Bullock stared into the dusk without speaking. Musk-oxen! The catchword which Hornby had used so long ago in Edmonton to stir a fever for adventure. Black-faced musk-oxen! That denizen of the North which had become almost legendary; which, indeed, many believed to be extinct in the sub-Arctic. His eyes burned with the effort of scanning the horizon for some sign of motion.

‘Where, Hornby? I don’t see anything.’

The little man pointed to a spot on the south bank, some two hundred yards distant, where low and slender willows rose for an area of several acres from a patch of swamp grass.

‘Take your pack off,’ he whispered, ‘and we’ll crawl closer.’

He helped Bullock off with his load, and together, like children in some fantastic game, they crept forward on hands and knees. When they had gone perhaps fifty yards, Hornby reached back and squeezed Bullock’s shoulder. His words were as soft as breathing:

‘Over there. Just coming out of the willows.’

Bullock looked, and saw a great mass of moving shadows. At least it seemed like a great mass at first, but later he was able to count just eleven animals. His eyes blurred with the intensity of his gaze, and not until he relaxed a bit did he catch the contours of the shadows. He could feel Hornby, tense, beside him.

The musk-oxen were smaller than he had pictured them, something like the size of a small pony. Their heads were magnificent, seeming to take up half of their bodies, and even in the gloom their great coats of hair hung long enough to be seen waving with the motion of their gait. Half-buffalo and half-goat, they moved slowly, aimlessly, about the edge of the willows, stopping now and again to rub against the shrubs to brush off the insects which filled the night.

To the two men, watching, it was a scene to inspire awe. The hour of the night, the roar of the near-by falls, the mist which rose lightly to curtain the dusk, all conspired to make speech impossible. Bullock felt as he had felt in his youth in the interior of one of the massive English cathedrals. He knew that Hornby's silence and statue-like pose bespoke a similar mood. It had been years, maybe as much even as a quarter of a century, since white men had looked upon these creatures in their native habitat. Maybe these few animals were the sole survivors of what had once been a mighty horde. Maybe man would never again see them. There was a law against the killing of musk-oxen. But it was not law that kept Hornby and Bullock from creeping back to the new camp for rifles; it was a sense of reverence, entirely foreign, at least to Bullock's nature.

It seemed hours that they watched, but in reality it was no more than thirty minutes. Yet in that thirty minutes the shapes which loomed so blackly and so mysteriously a stone's throw distant gave rise to new hopes and old thoughts. Bullock was concerned about pictures. Would they find them again after sunrise? The midnight glow that was strong enough for half-vision was useless for photography. And yet, at that moment, if the light had been right, it is doubtful if the man would have moved to get his cameras. His eyes had not yet feasted enough on what he had come so far and suffered so much to see.

The almost religious atmosphere of the scene brought to mind an irrelevant memory of a day in Palestine. It was a day when the thermometer said 120 degrees in the shade; when no breath of air stirred to ease dry lips and burning bodies. Dead tired, hour after hour, Bullock had ridden behind his squadron, almost hidden in the cloud of dust and sand raised by the

hoofs of thousands of horses. In mid-afternoon a brother officer, churchly minded, had ridden up to point at a baked hill the squadron was passing.

‘Do you know what hill that is?’ he asked. ‘That’s where Christ fed the five thousand.’

Bullock, his face thick with dust, looked blankly at the speaker.

‘Christ?’ he said, with a rising inflection.

‘Yes,’ eagerly assented the other.

‘Christ!’ Bullock concluded.

It had been a good story once. He had told it often. Now it was a thing of contrasts. It seemed obscene as he recalled it. Here, staring at these strange creatures by the willow thicket, he felt remorseful at the memory. A moment later, it was as though he had been punished for remembering. One of the larger musk-oxen suddenly raised his head and grunted. The heads of the others became erect, and, as though by preconceived order, the eleven shadows fled, their hoofs splashing noisily among the swamp grass. Some vagrant current of air had carried the scent of the two men.

As though in a trance Hornby and Bullock went back to their discarded packs and picked them up.

CHAPTER NINE

WHERE the Hanbury River flows into the Thelon, there is the heart of the Barrens. And a heart it is by virtue of more than geography. In a land desolate and largely unproductive, this river confluence marks a veritable Garden of Eden; a spot where timber rises from otherwise bald plains, where lush grasses line the shores, where the air is as soft as that which caresses the South African veldt or the high plains of the Argentine. Until the turn of the century the existence of this sub-Arctic oasis was a matter of controversy. The Indian legends mentioned it, but Indian legends, though picturesque, have not always been accurate. It was left to the English explorer, David T. Hanbury, to penetrate its mysteries in the name of the white man. That was in the late nineties. In the third of a century which has elapsed since, travel in this region has been confined to necessity. Peaceful and inviting though it appears in summer, with its green grasses and multi-hued flowers overhung by a sky of blue too brilliant almost to look upon, it is no haven for humans.

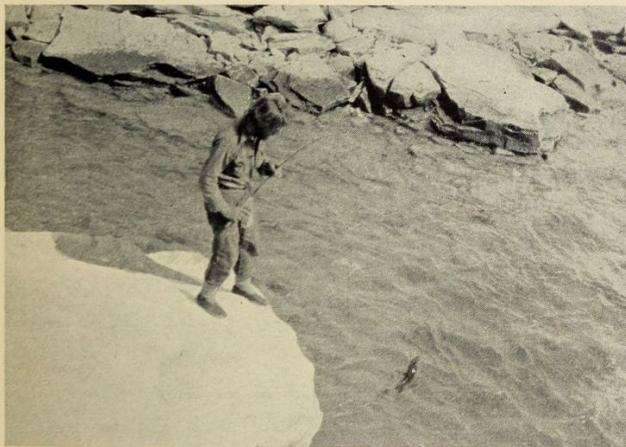
The canoes of Hornby and Bullock slipped into the waters of the Thelon at one o'clock on the morning of July 22d. What, in the subdued light, should have been a majestic scene, was largely lost on the paddlers. Shockingly weak from lack of food and tortured by insects, their eyes sought only a suitable camping-site. They found one on the north bank a few miles below the mouth of the Hanbury. It was grassy land, with sufficient timber for many camp-fires. They fell asleep to the unfamiliar sound of tree-trunks creaking.

A morning such as they next awoke to can rouse the spirits even above hunger. Hornby was at the water's edge arranging nets when Bullock opened his eyes and sensed a delicious odor of laziness in the air. It was partly his own weakness and partly the softness of the morning. He liked the warmth of the sun as it beat down on him through the mosquito-netting shelter. They

were not erecting a tent these nights because of the heat, but slept instead under separate nets. Reluctantly as any city clerk on a Sunday morning, Bullock arose and dressed. He had been sleeping in his underwear—quite different from the heavy parka and sleeping-bag which had with difficulty kept him warm in the cave.



THE STRANGEST SPOT IN THE BARRENS
NEAR THE CONFLUENCE OF THE HANBURY AND THELON RIVERS
WHERE FOREST GROWS IN DEFIANCE OF THE TIMBERLINE



BULLOCK FISHING; HIS WEAKNESS SHOWING
IN EVERY ANGLE OF LIMBS AND BODY

He found Hornby squatting easily on the shore, watching the net floats for sign of a catch.

‘Any breakfast?’ he asked.

‘Not a minnow.’

Bullock stretched out on the beach. It was the first moment in months that he had felt the existence of such a thing as leisure. There had been other intervals of idleness, of course, but always enforced idleness. Just now he was relaxing for the pure enjoyment of it. As he watched Hornby, he was shocked at the change that had come over the man. Strange he had not noticed it before. His hands were thin and hawklike, and the sag of his cheeks was discernible even beneath the tangled mass of beard. He remembered, suddenly, that he had sensed a similar change in Whitey, who now lay close to where the canoes were pulled up, moving only to rout the more persistent flies. The great dog had fallen away, too. His back, which during the winter had seemed as broad as a pony’s, did not give its old sense of power. It seemed to have shrunk. Frowning, Bullock held his own hands out for inspection. He tried to deny that he saw, but the evidence was beyond denial. The fingers were lean, and the flesh had receded between the cords on the back of the hands. Once more came back the vision of Hornby in the tent on Mount Coleman, saying: ‘Not many men know how to starve properly, but I think you can be taught.’

So that he could better see the other’s face, Bullock sat up. After a moment he said:

‘Let’s take a vacation.’

‘What?’

‘A vacation. A rest. Stay here for two or three days instead of rushing on. We both need it.’

Hornby, by instinct, started to deny the last statement.

‘Need it? Nonsense. But, then, Bullock, you don’t look like a man who’s fed very well lately. Maybe it’s a good idea.’

Such easy acquiescence was unexpected. Perhaps Hornby felt even weaker than he looked.

‘We can camp here,’ he went on, ‘keep our nets in the water, shoot anything edible that comes in sight, and otherwise do a little intelligent loafing. A few days one way or the other won’t mean anything. We’re weeks behind as it is and . . .’

He was cut short by a sudden chortle from Hornby. The floats had bobbed violently, and the little man paddled out to the net. In it, flopping vigorously, was a ten-pound trout. Speech was forgotten while a fire was built, a kettle filled with water, and the catch boiled, head, tail, and all. Fish boiled thus is less tasty and fattening than fish fried, but there was no fat for frying. Whitey's share had to be taken to him. He was too intent on sleeping to know that food was about. The fish was a glorious adventure, but ten pounds between two men and a dog isn't a feast when a straight fish diet requires twelve pounds a day per man.

The next two days were, if you discount the ever-present flies and mosquitoes, the most pleasant of the entire expedition. Both men avoided work as much as possible. Hornby kept a fire going constantly, though in the heat of the day it was ridiculous. The presence of so great a quantity of timber intoxicated him, and there was for him the keenest delight in playing the prodigal.

'Bullock,' he'd say, his eyes dancing with amusement, 'we'll have to burn the canoes if we want a fire to-night. This is the last of the fuel.'

And Bullock, eyeing the generous pile of cut lengths Hornby sat on as he talked, would agree with a dubious nod of his head, apeing the little man's 'Yes, yes.'

They did childish things in the pure joy of being free of duties.

In the evening, when such fish as had strayed into the net were cooked and eaten, they talked long hours before going to sleep, sitting in a constant smoke smudge because of the insects. The soot blackened everything it touched, but instead of resenting this, the men strove with each other for the privilege of sitting in the densest smoke. And the man who emerged the blackest was the most proud.

Then, as an experiment against mosquitoes, they painted each other's hands and face with iodine, which gave a brown tinge to the already black background. As for the efficacy of the treatment, it worked as long as the iodine remained moist. Or, to be exact, a matter of seconds. But the Barren Lands mosquito had no aversion to biting through a dried coating. After the first application, Hornby thoughtfully pulled at his beard.

'Maybe this isn't such a good idea after all,' he ventured.

'Well, it was yours.'

'I know. I know. But we look too much like Indians now. If we should meet any Eskimos along farther, we might be in for it. There's a deadly feud

on between the two.'

So no more iodine was used.

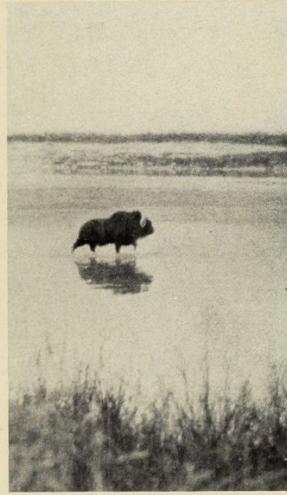
Bullock's laundry furnished a moment of amusement. At noon he had placed a suit of underwear, tied with a piece of rope, in a spot where the water boiled around an isolated group of rocks. Toward evening he went to reclaim it. Only a few rags remained in the rope loop. Perspiration had so rotted the fabric that it fell apart under the flow of the water. Ruefully he regarded the other suit he had been wearing for relief. He had meant to throw it away when the first was washed and dried. It was more holes than cloth.

They camped for three days, with numerous excursions on either side of the river in search of game. Only a couple of sea-gulls rewarded their marksmanship. But what was more important, musk-ox tracks were found. Bullock got his cameras, a bulky Graflex for still pictures and a French-made portable camera for his motion-picture film. Hornby carried a rifle. Thus armed, they ventured several miles inland. Whitey trotted at their heels.

The tracks doubled back to a spot on the north bank some distance downstream from the camp. They came upon the animals suddenly in a clearing. Before they realized it, they were in full sight of about a half-dozen musk-oxen. The footing was soggy and men walked noisily, but the shaggy creatures only looked up in mild curiosity.

No fear was exhibited by the herd. Hornby and Bullock stood motionless, fearing even to retreat out of sight lest the musk-oxen flee. Whitey, taking his cue from Hornby, also became like a statue, but he quivered so with excitement that little ripples grew from around his paws in the puddle where he stood. The Captain experienced a return of the feeling of awe that had been his the night he had seen his first musk-ox.

There was one bull, with a head that seemed as big as the rest of his body and a coat of long hair that swung like kilts when he moved. He was nearest to the men. Behind him were three cows and two calves. All but the bull nosed idly among the swamp grass some fifty yards distant. The bull stared intently at the intruders, showing neither agitation nor defiance, but merely pardonable interest in the presence of something strange and unfamiliar. His attitude indicated that the scent of the men had not reached him, for it was a foreign scent at which the animals had fled that night on the Hanbury.



MUSK-OXEN

While Bullock strove by cautious moves to get his portable motion-picture camera in a position which would allow focussing, Whitey, excited beyond all restraint, gave one low growl and dashed for the bull. That growl had enough of the wolf in it to strike panic to the heart of any musk-ox. With aggrieved grunts the cows and calves vanished, making surprising speed for their size. The bull stood his ground for a moment, then wheeled and followed the others.

All need for caution gone, Bullock ground his film on the tableau, shouting for Hornby to take the still camera and use it.

At the edge of the clearing the bull pirouetted as neatly as any polo pony and dashed straight for the pursuing Whitey. As a tactical maneuver it was superb. The dog, thinking the situation well in hand, had been running more for the exhilaration of the chase than for any sanguinary purpose. Hence the sight of a monstrous head charging at him upset his poise. He turned and streaked for his masters. The bull followed part-way, then veered off and disappeared into the timber.

Bullock had been too intent upon the success of his pictures to appreciate the humor in the thing. But Hornby was vastly amused. Yet when Whitey came up, panting and soaked, he pretended to be stern.

‘Damned old fool,’ he said, ‘letting a musk-ox scare you. I’ve a good mind to whip you.’

Even if Whitey could have understood the words, he wouldn’t have taken them seriously. Hornby never laid hand on his dogs. All Whitey understood was the tone, but he must have seen, too, the twinkle in Hornby’s eyes. He grinned, as though to say, ‘Good joke on me, wasn’t it?’ and then seemed to move deliberately close to shake himself. Hornby, grinning, leapt back to avoid the shower.

The third night in camp they played chess. Bullock had an old, begrimed checker-board in his canoe, and Hornby made some men out of boxwood, writing on each piece its designated rank. There had been some regular men once, clumsy, big wooden affairs, which had found their way into the cave stove during the winter. The board would have gone, too, had not Bullock hidden it.

Hornby was an impatient player. He disliked to study his moves, preferring to make them rapidly and with a flourish. Once, when Bullock felt the need of concentrating at length on the position, he said, ‘What’s that? I thought I heard a wolf.’ Hornby sped to his rifle and prowled the darkness for some minutes. Whereupon Bullock, by the light of the fire, carefully studied out his move.

There came a moment, however, when he thought that Hornby was changing his tactics. The little man peered intently at the board and wrinkled his brows. Although his course was reasonably obvious, he delayed taking it. He rolled his upper lip up toward his nose, a characteristic gesture of

disapproval. Then he let it relapse to its normal position. Still he stayed his hand from the board. Finally Bullock could keep silent no longer.

‘I hate to break in on your reverie, but I thought you told me you liked to move rapidly.’

Hornby’s head jerked up.

‘Do what rapidly?’ Then, in a disgusted tone: ‘Oh, chess. I’d forgotten we were playing chess. I was thinking of something else. I was thinking, Bullock, it’d be a good plan to have one of us go out to civilization and the other stay here. I could stay here for all of next winter, for instance, and in the spring you could organize a rescue party and come . . .’

‘I’d be in prison by that time as your murderer.’

Bullock’s interruption was almost savage. Hornby put up his hands protestingly.

‘Yes, yes. You’re right. Well, then, I could go out and you stay. I’d help you build a cabin before I went, and you could stock up lots of meat. The caribou migration is overdue now.’

‘But why can’t we go out together as we planned?’

‘Publicity, Bullock, publicity! If I went out, I’d say that we got separated and I couldn’t find you. Then in spring I’d organize a rescue party. I’d know where you were, of course, but no one else would know that. The search would be talked of everywhere. In fact, *I* might even be suspected of doing away with *you*. When the rescue party finally got here, there would be all sorts of talk. It would help us win any amount of funds and support for another expedition later.’

Bullock looked at his companion. What was it he had once thought him? Oh, yes—a little boy in a parka. Well, he wore no parka now. But he was still the little boy. He asked:

‘Why would my getting lost in the Barrens be any inducement for any one to finance another trip? They’d feel I might get lost again.’

‘Oh, Bullock . . .’

Hornby tried to show more irritation than he felt.

‘You don’t understand. The fact that you had survived two winters up here would give you a reputation better even than mine. And the fact that I was able to lead a party to you would prove me the good traveler I am. I’d see to it that I found you personally. I’d have the party come in by way of

Hudson Bay, and we'd make camp several miles below here. Then I'd wander off. I'd say I was hunting for game, or musk-oxen, or anything. Don't you see? I'd come to the cabin, and, if you weren't there, I'd stay until you returned. Then, when members of my party started looking for me, they'd find us together. Meanwhile, I'd have had a chance to warn you of any developments and tell you what to say.'

As Bullock listened, he was conscious of the return of an emotion he had experienced many times in Hornby's presence. There was something of pity in it, something of awe, and not a little apprehension. Perhaps the police had felt the same way on that day in the cave when Hornby toyed with them. But he was not playing now. He was distressingly in earnest. Common sense told Bullock that the proposal was fantastic madness, but he didn't voice this aloud. There was always enough of merit and shrewdness in Hornby's fantasies to confute most criticism.

'There's one thing, Hornby,' he finally said, 'if anything happened to you on the way out, I could never go back to civilization. I'd have to be a hermit here. No sooner would I set foot in any Canadian city than I'd be popped in a cell.'

The little man looked thoughtfully toward the river. A half-moon added its silver to the deep blue of the twilight. The sound of lapping water was in keeping with the peace of the scene. Not until the hideous and demented laugh of a loon echoed over the Thelon did Hornby start from his reverie. Then he slapped at a mosquito on his neck and turned to Bullock.

'Come to think of it,' he mused, 'we haven't enough ammunition to last a man through the winter. We'll be lucky if it lasts the two of us until we get to Chesterfield Inlet.'

He looked down at the board and idly fingered the makeshift chess pieces.

'It was my move, wasn't it?'

'Yes,' said Bullock solemnly.

Sometime after two o'clock in the morning Bullock awoke to the sound of rain. Almost immediately he became conscious of something dark above his head, something on which the drops pattered noisily. When he had gone to sleep there had been only mosquito netting there, supported by four stakes.

Examination by means of an arm through the netting proved the covering to be one of the canoe sails. The Captain peered through the rain

and the gloom to where Hornby's shelter stood ten yards away. He thought he could detect a dark covering over the other's shelter. Hornby must have awakened at the first few drops of rain, and gone to the canoes for the sails.

In the morning, as they hunted about to find dry fuel for a fire, the younger man was several times on the point of mentioning his gratitude. But he stifled the impulse. An expression of thanks made Hornby irritable and uncomfortable. Bullock learned that during the winter. Once he had undertaken to voice his appreciation for the repair of some moccasins. Hornby had glared back.

'I don't do things for people unless I enjoy doing them. So why make it obvious by mentioning it?'

So Bullock showed gratitude, thereafter, by actions. Hornby approved of such expression.

When they broke camp and took to the canoes, it was still raining. Only a realization that winter might trap them, if they delayed longer, kept them at the paddles. They were still hundreds of miles from the nearest trading-post, and in less than a month, in that latitude, would appear the forerunners of winter, the snow flurries and autumn storms. For the present there would be heat, sometimes almost intolerable, but it would not last. And for the sake of easy travel, they had left behind most of their heavy clothing.

There was little conversation that day. The canoes slipped through the water a few yards apart. A short stop was made at noon and nets were thrown in for an hour. But the fish seemed to have left the river.

Starving is a luxury reserved to a few. An incompetent, languishing in civilization for lack of food or money to buy it, is really not starving at all. He is merely dying for want of nourishment. Starving is an active, not passive, process. To Bullock and Hornby the absence of fish and game brought an increase in effort and labor. In addition to the rigors of paddling and camping, they spent hours each day tramping the banks for something to shoot or fish to catch.

When a few fish would be caught—not a daily occurrence by any means—the heat and flies and maggots made immediate boiling necessary. For sake of preservation the fish were cut in small pieces, and the cooking developed a sort of stew which could be carried in the canoes in kettles.

Hornby and Bullock thus devised an eat-as-you-go system, and while the stew lasted, they would paddle all day, sampling the mess with a spoon whenever stretches of calm water and easy current permitted.

Though the fish might have been freshly caught of a morning, and cooked at once, by noon the sun would have begun its work, and next day the whole mass would be in the initial stages of decay. But none was ever thrown away. In another day it would take on the odor of all putrid things—but it would be eaten. There is nourishment, even in rotting food, as many a wanderer has learned. But there are also poisons.

Bullock was the first to fall ill. At the end of a day's paddling, when camp was being made, he was attacked by cramps so severe as to render him helpless for many minutes. The intestines had rebelled at the diet of decay, and a siege of dysentery set in. Hornby, impractical in many things, was equal to any emergency. He rummaged among the supplies until he found a bit of flour in an old sack. The flour had gone unused because of mildew and the taint of gasoline, but somehow the little man had never been able to throw it away. He made a paste of sorts from the less mildewed parts of the flour, and persuaded Bullock to swallow it.

'No doctor would prescribe this,' he said, 'but it'll do you good. It's saved me from the same thing once or twice.'

Probably the flour was a help, but Bullock continued ill. That night he could not sleep for fever. He could feel an aura of heat about every part of his body, and the touch of his flesh made his bedding hot. By morning, when the fever had abated only a little, he went to his canoe and opened the iron chest. From a little case, cotton-lined, he took a clinical thermometer. It was the first time the thermometer had left the case since Bullock purchased it in Edmonton.

Back in his mosquito-netting shelter he sat with it under his tongue. Hornby, who had watched with suspicion Bullock's trip to the canoe, came up with his upper lip curled in disgust.

'What are you using that thing for?' he asked. 'Suppose you *have* got a fever. That stick of glass isn't going to bring it down any. It would tell you that your temperature was—was—what in the devil *is* a sick temperature, anyway? Well, it would give you a nicely graduated reading, and after you had it, how much better off would you be? Up here you either have a fever high enough to keep you in camp or one that'll let you travel. And you don't need any fancy apparatus to tell you which you have. It just sets you to thinking about yourself.'

Later, when the fever subsided, Bullock concluded that for the Barrens, at least, Hornby's psychology was right.

It was a morning in August. From their camp-site on the south bank, Bullock and Hornby could see the Thelon stretching lazily ahead for as many miles as the eye can compass in level country. The timber lay mostly behind them. Occasionally there would be a dozen or so trees clustered together near the river edge, but the character of the land had changed. Low, grassy, sandy shores prevailed. It was a peaceful scene, bathed in sunshine, and free at that early hour from most of the insect swarms which would fog the air later in the day.

Camp was being broken. Hornby had climbed to the crest of a near-by sand-bank in his daily and usually futile survey of the country for stray game. Bullock was at the water's edge loading the canoes. Whitey lay stretched out on the warm sand. If the men looked gaunt, there is no adjective properly to describe the appearance of the dog. He was chiefly bones, that had so short a time before been a massive creature of flesh and muscle. Such food as had been obtained had been fairly divided between Hornby, Bullock, and Whitey, but the latter's suffering was the worst. His old skin trouble recurred and tortured him, and the luxuriance of his white hair was a great burden in the heat. Lately, whenever the canoes were beached, Whitey had taken to the habit of inertia. Once or twice Hornby had been on the point of suggesting the kindness of a bullet, but the sentence each time was left half-spoken.

Bullock was just completing the load in one canoe when he heard Hornby's voice, high-pitched and excited:

'Bullock! Bullock! The glasses! Quick!'

He saw his companion on the sand-knoll gesturing madly, and pointing to something downstream. The binoculars were not yet packed, and he grabbed them and moved to Hornby's side. The latter was too wrought up to bother with focussing the glasses now that he had them. His eyes were fixed on the northeast horizon. Bullock looked, and doubted his own vision.

He saw what appeared to be an army of cavalry on the march. To his ears came dimly the roar as of a waterfall or of tremendous rapids, a rumbling thunder as though a division of artillery were crossing a mile-long pontoon bridge. For a moment Bullock thought that both he and Hornby had gone mad. Such a sight could not be! And yet it was there. The horizon trembled with motion.

Bullock was the first to recover himself enough to pick up the glasses and adjust them. The rumbling had by this time grown more distinct. He

held the glasses in position and twirled the knob for a focus. Before he had time to get a sharp picture, Hornby's eyes had detected something familiar.

'It's the caribou!'

He was up in an instant and streaking for the canoes. Bullock followed, his heart thumping horribly. La Foule! The Throng! One of the greatest spectacles left to man. And more than that, more than excitement, more than thrills—meat, red, fresh, dripping meat, with fat on it! Millions of pounds of it!

The caribou were advancing rapidly on a diagonal toward the north bank. The men had to cross the river for a vantage-point. They piled into the unloaded canoe, rifle in hand and pockets stuffed with ammunition. Paddling technique was forgotten. They flayed the water in an attempt for speed. And to their ears came the ever-louder roar of oncoming hoofs beating a tattoo on the ground of the Barrens.

The canoe was beached beneath a low sand-bank, and the men settled themselves on the slope of this bank with only their heads visible above the top. The front ranks of the herd were still a half-mile away, too far for shooting, but near enough to send across the plains a steady chorus of grunts. It is doubtful if anywhere on earth there exists a more awesome sight than caribou in migration. The beasts seemed to fill every cranny of the horizon to the north and the east. They were beyond numbering. Tens of thousands is only a phrase. They came down wind, using their speed to keep away from the flies which torment them and add insult to injury by laying eggs in the living hides.

Bullock, waiting, was conscious of the fact that he had never been so nervous before. Yet it was not fear, for he knew the caribou, even in great numbers, to be timid, non-fighting creatures. He glanced once at Hornby, and saw him as alert as a dog on the scent, his eyes not moving from the herd, his hunger-lean cheeks drawn tight.

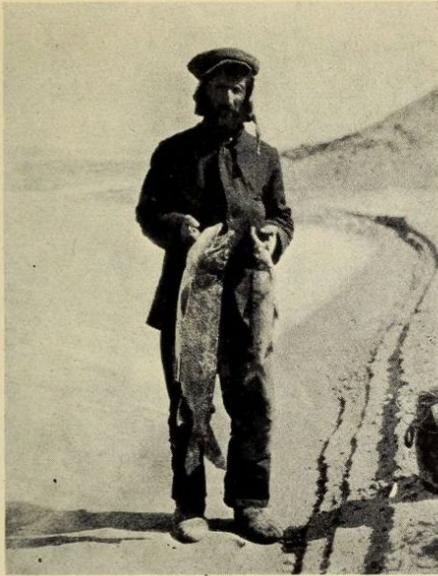
They had chosen their spot well. The north wing-tip of the herd would reach the river directly where they waited. When one of the leaders, a large bull, came within range, Hornby fired. The bull staggered and dropped. The herd kept on, splitting a bit to pass the body. Bullock commenced firing.

The next few moments were gruesome. Roused to the utmost of excitement by the sheer magnitude of the spectacle and by the prospect of feasting after weeks of lean living, Hornby and Bullock slew methodically. Nearly a score of caribou lay in the sand before they stopped. Strangely

enough, the animals, too, must have been intoxicated by their own sweep, for the herd scarcely faltered at the slaughter or the sound of the rifles. On they swept into the river, swimming rapidly and easily until they gained the other bank, whence they hurried on as before. Once or twice the men thought the mass would trample them, but each time a well-directed bullet split the herd by dropping a carcass where the others would have to swerve to pass it.

How long the men crouched on the sand-bank they never knew. Later, they tried to estimate it, but the remainder of the day was spent in such a frenzy of activity that no time mark was remembered. Certain it is they were there several hours, for the herd took that long to pass. And during the period of waiting, the Thelon was full of swimming animals as far east as the eye could go. Afterwards the water was coffee-colored from the churned mud.

When all but a few stragglers had disappeared to the southwest, the butchering began. It began joyously, with Hornby and Bullock shouting levities at each other, and forgetting for the time their weakness and fatigue. But it ended toward sundown in a more somber mood. The wretched caribou, pursued by flies, kept on the move day and night, proved fatless and lean. The meat was edible, but little more could be said for it. One bull, the first killed, was in better condition than the rest, and his carcass was carefully stripped of every ounce of fat and flesh.



HORNBY WITH FISH FROM THE THELON



BULLOCK, LOOKING LIKE SOME CHARACTER
OF BIBLICAL DAYS, POSING BESIDE A
CARIBOU HE HAS SHOT

There was no time for rest, even after the butchering. The meat had to be dried immediately or it would spoil in the heat and become fly-blown. On an

improvised rack of willow boughs the strips of caribou were hung over a smoky fire. Then came the feast.

Some of the best meat from the bull was fried in its own fat, the first fried food, the first fat food, in many nights. Even Whitey was stirred from his lethargy by the smell of sizzling steak. Whether he had been stirred as well by the caribou migration the men never knew. When they returned from butchering, he was dozing in the same spot where they had left him in the morning.

That night, when the false vigor of the day had passed and they were eager for sleep, Bullock remarked:

‘I think I ate too much. I’ve got a stomach ache.’

Hornby grinned broadly.

‘Yes, yes? Well, don’t boast. So have I.’

CHAPTER TEN

WHEN the canoes were beached at noon for an hour of rest, Hornby was incommunicative. While Bullock sat down gratefully in the shadow of a rock and Whitey stretched out in the warm sand, the little man fidgeted about the canoes. He arranged and rearranged the boxes and packs. He examined bits of equipment as though he had never seen them before. A psychologist might have compared him to a man about to tell a lie.

When he could no longer justify, even to himself, a further tidying, he walked slowly to where Whitey lay and squatted before him.

‘Whitey, you damned old rounder, you’re tired, aren’t you?’

The white tail flapped twice and the agate eyes lighted. But the dog’s body did not move. Inertia was too pleasant. Hornby said no more, but seemed content to regard the dog, and say with his glance what he was loath to bring to his lips.

Bullock was shocked anew by the tableau. A day-by-day, hour-by-hour association blunts the perceptions. Only when some incident stirs the senses do matters come into focus. So it was now. There they were, Hornby and Whitey, mockeries, caricatures, burlesques of what they had been when he first met them. The dog looked like something half-finished in the taxidermist’s. Hornby looked like—well, Bullock remembered beggars in India across whose ribs he had once wanted to rattle a stick.

After a time Hornby went back to the canoes. He rummaged in the meat-sack until he found an edible piece. He balanced it on his palm and went to where Bullock sat. He spoke softly, as though afraid Whitey might overhear.

‘There’s mighty little of the meat that isn’t full of maggots, but I’ve found one good piece. We’ll let Whitey have it. We won’t eat this noon.’

Bullock nodded. He knew. He knew that more than rotten caribou was staying the little man's appetite. They had talked it all over the night before. Hard days were upon them. The blow-flies and the heat and the maggots from the wolf-hides had despoiled the meat-sack. The fish seemed to have left the river. Also the decaying hull of Hornby's canoe made weight a vital thing. And the great dog was suffering, or perhaps was beyond the point of actual suffering. He had no words to tell it, either way. All he could do was lie motionless, and grow weaker and thinner.

There had been other days. Hornby had bought the dog from an impoverished trapper on the way to Fort Smith to join Bullock.

Whitey was in poor condition at the time. His teeth were bad and he was cursed with a skin affliction that caused violent itching. In the early days of winter the tap-tap of his teeth as he nibbled at his hide was a part of the night sounds outside the cave.

As a packer he had been a savior on more than one portage. Hornby's eyes had designingly appraised Whitey's broad back as early as the first days at Reliance in the fall. He saw the muscles weave beneath the white hair. He saw the sturdy play of the legs. One morning in camp he flipped back the tent-flap and called to the dog. In his hand he held a flour sack, rudely sewn into a pack harness. Whitey entered with a rush. But he had seen such things before. His ears went back, and his lips left his teeth in a sickly grin that seemed to say, 'Well, damn me, so it's come to this!' With a sudden touch of sagacity his knees gave out. He hobbled toward Hornby as though smitten with semi-paralysis. When the fitting started, he kept moving just enough to make the task difficult. He tried to give the impression that his itch was tormenting him.

Once Hornby bawled:

'Whitey! Whitey! You bloody beast! Stand still!'

The dog turned his head and grinned until Hornby grinned in return. Then he shook himself again. Two old hands having their joke.

The first load Whitey carried was about thirty pounds. Gradually this was increased. Days came when he staggered along with as much as fifty pounds slung on his back. Bullock fancied that Hornby and the dog buoyed one another. When Whitey was off color, Hornby would plug along with occasional affectionate glances at the dog. And when Hornby was low, Whitey would wobble ahead, with his old legs nearly bending under him, steadying himself now and then when the pack swayed dangerously.

All of this swept through Bullock's mind as he saw Hornby approach and lay the steak before the dog. Whitey sniffed at the meat. For a moment it seemed as though he wouldn't touch it. But hunger and the aroma brought him to a crouching position. Indolently he held the meat between his forepaws and tore it apart with lazy shakes of his head. Animal telepathy, if such a thing is, failed him. Had he troubled to turn his head, he could have seen Hornby standing awkwardly in back, with a fearful expression on his face. The little man's eyes were like the eyes of a small boy, and his mouth was the mouth of a woman.

Bullock felt the same tightness in his breast that had been his when first he looked upon death on the battlefield. In a moment Hornby would signal. Then the other would go, casually, to his canoe and get his rifle. He would stroll off as if in search of game and circle behind the unsuspecting dog. Hornby had so decreed it.

'You'll have to do it,' he said. 'I'll wander off somewhere. I don't want even to watch.'

The younger man waited impatiently. His heart was not for his task, and he feared Whitey would finish the steak and look up. He knew, though all three starved there on the spot, he could not shoot a dog who was looking at him.

Suddenly he was aware that Hornby had moved. The little man was tiptoeing off, with a finger raised to his lips in answer to Bullock's questioning look. He strolled to his canoe and took from it his rifle. He came back, eyes on the ground, carrying the rifle carelessly under his arm. As he passed Whitey, the old dog raised his head and his tail flapped once in greeting. Hornby might have been on his way to the gallows. But the dog didn't notice.

Bullock was sitting about twenty feet behind Whitey. He rose to take the gun as Hornby approached. The sound of a shot stiffened him. Hornby had gone no more than two paces past the dog when he whirled and fired. The echo of the report seemed to linger for minutes. While it still rang in his ears, Bullock realized that it had been the only way. Hornby would never have forgiven another for killing Whitey.

There were no words spoken. Together they dug a grave in the sand, beyond the high-water mark. Later, in the canoes, they paddled recklessly until exhaustion bade them camp.

Short of death itself, there are no limits to what man may endure. It is best to dwell but lightly on the immediate days that followed. Each was alike. The excessive humidity of the valley through which the lower Thelon ran, the frequent rains of almost tropical fury, the flies and maggots turned the remaining meat into a putrid paste. Uncooked it could be squeezed like so much dough. It fell apart in the fingers when handled. Its foulness permeated canoes and clothing. Yet it was eaten, 'cut' with the only thing left from civilization's larder—tea. And this was brewed as black as ink.

There was one day of luck, however.

Hornby awakened in the morning to find a great wolf sniffing around the canoes. Naked, as he had come from his blankets, he took his rifle and crept outside the netting. The wolf looked up just too late. A bullet caught him in the heart. He spun once, and fell. The sound of the shot aroused Bullock, and together, one innocent of any clothing, the other in drawers, they went to examine the kill. Hornby, wild-looking as any savage of the jungles, carried his knife.

They turned the wolf over on his back. He was a splendid creature, unlike the skinny, ill-conditioned animals they had occasionally glimpsed during the summer.

'Bullock, I think he's fat!'

Hornby laughed delightedly, and, taking the knife, made an incision in the wolf's belly. He plunged in his hand with the assurance of a surgeon, and dragged out the intestines. They were coated with fat. Then he probed for the kidneys. With them came, pure, and creamy, the life-giving stuff that had been denied them since spring.

Hornby was more excited than Bullock had ever seen him.

'A piece of canvas and the meat-kettle. Quick!'

There was no travel that day. Nets were thrown in and by noon the Thelon had smiled on them to the extent of nine pounds or so of whitefish. They fried it in generous pools of fat, and such of the latter as was not absorbed by the fish was eaten straight from the skillet.

When the feast was finished, Bullock felt as strong as Samson.

The nets were kept in the river all afternoon in hope of a catch that would last several days. A few more fish were caught.

Bullock found a depression in a rock ledge and decided to treat himself to a bath. First he filled the natural sink with water carried laboriously from

the river in kettles. Then he built a hot fire, around which he piled as many large stones as he could gather. When these stones were too hot to touch, he rolled them, by means of sticks, into the water. They went in to the accompaniment of much hissing and clouds of steam.

Hornby left the nets to watch. He found Bullock, half-submerged, squatting uncomfortably on the stones. They were still hotter than the water, and the man was forced to keep his feet more or less in motion.

‘You make a good water-dancer,’ Hornby remarked.

Bullock, crouching, rubbed his chest vigorously.

‘Damn little water-dancing you do,’ he said.

‘I don’t have to. My skin’s so smooth dirt won’t stick to it.’

Bullock grunted.

‘Wait till you stand up to get dry,’ Hornby chided. ‘The mosquitoes will have a feast day. This is the time of afternoon they start swarming.’

Bullock had already thought of this.

‘I say, Hornby, throw a little grass on that fire, will you? I want some smudge to stand in when I get out.’

‘I wouldn’t advise it.’

‘Oh, hell! Put some on, like a good chap.’

Hornby, with feigned reluctance, went a short distance off and returned with his arms full of long, tough river grass. He sprinkled a generous amount over the coals. A thick smoke rose, and was blown parallel to the ground by the stiffish breeze off the river. Bullock hopped from the pool into the smudge. His head stuck out above the smoke-clouds. The warmth from the fire enveloped him and gave him a feeling of extreme well-being. He could see Hornby grinning. He grinned in return. But Hornby had the most reason for it.

When Bullock felt dry and warm, he stepped out of the smudge toward his clothes. Hornby was giggling like a schoolgirl. The Captain was about to inquire the reason for mirth when he caught a glimpse of his arm. It was a grayish black. He looked down at the rest of his body. It was the same color. He was covered with soot, dirtier than when he had first entered the pool. In high disgust he brushed as much of it off as possible and put on his clothes.

‘Bullock, if you could go into the restaurant of your choosing, anywhere on earth, and order just what you wanted, what would it be?’

They were camped on the shores of one of the lakes that mark the lower Thelon. The tent was over them, for the weather had turned sharply colder nights. Two sea-gulls had been their dinner.

‘What meal do you mean? Luncheon, dinner?’

‘Begin with breakfast and we’ll go through a day.’

Bullock grew thoughtful. What restaurant? In London, or Cairo, or Paris, or Bombay? It didn’t matter. Food was all that mattered. In imagination he could see before him a *carte de jour*.

‘Well—say strawberries and cream, a bacon omelette lightly browned on the outside, baked salmon patties, hot scones and rolls, and coffee with cream. How’s that? God! but it makes me hungry to say the words.’

Hornby squirmed under a gastronomic orgasm of his own.

‘Not bad, Bullock. Not bad. But you left out two things that should go with any breakfast. Marmalade and grilled fresh mackerel.’

He wrinkled his nose as though sensing the aroma.

‘Now for lunch . . .’

‘Luncheon,’ corrected Bullock. ‘Lunch is something that’s ordered and eaten carelessly.’

‘Yes, yes. You’re right. Luncheon. What’s it going to be?’

Bullock remembered like pastimes as a child. Only then the make-believe had been easier. Now the stink of decay was in his clothes and on his hands, and in his hair even. But Hornby seemed so eager. He frowned and tried to recall a luncheon at *Ciro’s*. What *was* it he had eaten? Ah, yes, now the memory was emerging.

‘How would Bass’s No. 1 do for a starter?’

‘Dandy, Bullock. Bass’s or Burton’s, it doesn’t matter. Well cooled, of course. What next?’

Hornby’s eyes were gleaming with the excitement of an imaginary draught. His lips smacked unconsciously. To Bullock it seemed as though the man were like a rake wallowing in a mental debauch. Well, if so he’d help him.

‘Listen to this,’ he went on, rolling the words off his tongue voluptuously. ‘One fried eel in sauce, just to arouse the appetite a little; then roast fresh pork, stuffed, gravied and sauced; some chip potatoes fried in butter; steamed suet pudding with golden syrup; Stilton cheese and Egyptian coffee.’

He finished with a sigh. Hornby’s mouth was partly open and he was breathing rapidly.

‘I’d make one change,’ he said, almost in a whisper—‘roast beef, just a little rare and dripping with its own juice, and Yorkshire pudding.’

The little man paused, then put a pleading hand on Bullock’s arm.

‘Let me order the dinner?’

Without waiting for a reply, and with his glance far away, he continued:

‘The wines first, Bullock. We should have a magnum of the best champagne—Mumm’s or Heidsieck. And a bottle of Old Brown Sherry. Now for the dinner. I’ll order carefully. Norwegian anchovies in pure olive oil, chopped up and spread on thin toast. And soup? I think clear green turtle will do. Then sweetbread patties or a small lobster *thermidor*. Gad, can’t you taste that lobster? There’s no choice for the next, of course. It must be roast dressed pheasant, royally stuffed, served with slightly salted shoestring potatoes. A little salad of crisp watercress with Roquefort dressing. Then for dessert a choice. Mince pies, assorted crystallized fruits, sponge fingers, brick ice cream, Stilton and Camembert with crackers, assorted nuts, and Turkish coffee.’

His voice had risen to a tense whisper during the recital. When he stopped, he was as a man shaken with passion. Bullock, who had been thinking more of Hornby’s attitude than of what he had been saying, was disturbed. He moved toward the fire, where he seemed to fuss with the glowing embers and rattle the pans. But he managed to throw a handful of tea into the kettle which always held water for just such emergencies. Hornby didn’t wake from his reverie until the acrid odor of the brew came to him. Then he started as one awakening from a dream.

‘Are you making tea?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

Bullock fancied he saw him shudder.

‘Bloodsome stuff,’ Hornby said.

Hornby was master of all pains but one. When he awoke to find his lone tooth aching, he was miserable. No patient in a dentist's waiting-room ever looked more downcast or held hand to jaw more tenderly.

'It aches,' he told Bullock for the fourth time since arising.

'Well, let me pull it, then.'

'No, no. You haven't got a delicate touch. No, I'll manage it myself.'

Bullock shrugged his shoulders and went about the task of loading the canoes. Hornby didn't offer to help. He took a length of fine silk fishline and his rifle and disappeared. Once or twice Bullock had a glimpse of him prowling about a stray clump of spruce some distance away. He wondered at the rifle. There had been no sign of game, and, besides, Hornby had seemed too concerned about his tooth to indulge in hunting.

Bullock had one canoe ready when he heard a rifle shot. For an instant he didn't look up. It occurred to him, rather horribly, that Hornby, driven mad by the pain, had shot himself. But on the echo of the report came a succession of well-spoken oaths, ringing with sincerity, such as had never passed the little man's lips before in his companion's hearing.

Relieved and itching with curiosity, Bullock ran to the timber patch. Hornby stood defiantly, rifle in hand, and a piece of loose fishline hanging from his tooth.

'Shot the damned line in two,' he was saying; 'that's how good a marksman I am.'

As he spoke, the fishline wiggled ridiculously.

'I won't aim so well next time. I had tied one end of this line around my tooth, and the other end around that thick stick you see over there.'

He pointed to a spot a few yards away where a wrist-thick bit of branch lay splintered down the middle.

'I put the stick in the crotch of a tree and stepped back to shoot.'

Bullock struggled to understand.

'You were trying to shoot your tooth out?' he finally asked.

'Of course. The bullet would hit the stick. The stick would jump. And out would come the tooth. Only I aimed so well I hit the string where it was tied to the stick. It jerked the tooth enough to make it ache more, and that's all.'

The other bellowed heartily.

‘Why don’t you hold the butt against your tooth and let the recoil knock it out?’

Hornby glared.

‘Because I might have swallowed it.’

He reached in and dislodged the line from his tooth.

‘I’ll do it at night when you’re asleep. Then I won’t have a blithering idiot grinning at me.’

But that night it stopped aching.

Late in August, Bullock, leading in his canoe, espied three white dots on a hillside where the river turned several miles ahead. He called to Hornby, who put the glasses on them.

‘Gad, they’re Eskimos! Three tents.’

Bullock let Hornby’s canoe drift alongside his.

‘Are you sure? Let me look.’

He took the glasses. He could see no figures about, but beside one tent was an object that resembled a caribou carcass. And at the shore were drawn up a kayak and two canoes.

‘Do you suppose,’ he asked, ‘they have any food?’

‘Probably not. There’s no game around here now. I can’t imagine why they’re this far from Hudson Bay.’

Bullock found himself becoming excited. These would be the first humans they had seen in months. But his excitement was tempered by a flash of caste consciousness. He looked at Hornby’s matted hair and beard and at his blood-stained clothes. He knew his own were no better.

‘Seriously,’ he told Hornby, ‘we’ve got to go ashore and tidy up. We’re white men and supposed to be scientists. It won’t do for them to see us this way.’

The little man looked at the speaker. Evidently what he saw checked any remonstrance.

‘We’re not so sweet, are we? All right, let’s head in to that beach over there.’

The process of cleaning up bred self-consciousness. It was the first time that appearance had mattered. Hornby was rather amused, but Bullock made great ceremony over the clipping of hair and beards and the soapless scrubbing.

There was little to be done with regard to clothing. Shirts and trousers were beyond cleaning and there were no fresh ones at hand. But Bullock was satisfied with the washing and hair-trimming. Hornby, meanwhile, had been thinking along more practical lines.

‘What food have we got?’ he asked.

‘If you call it food, two gulls and a small kettle of rotten fish.’

‘Well, Eskimos are always hungry. We’d better eat half the fish and hide the rest.’

When the canoes were again in the water, the gulls lay under canvas in Hornby’s craft, while Bullock guarded the remainder of the fish, well hidden behind boxes in the bow.

The Eskimos sighted the canoes when they were a half-mile away, and ran to the shore in welcome. There were four women, two men, and several children. The men did not wait for the canoes to touch land, but leapt into the water and pulled them up on the beach. The babble of voices dismayed Bullock, but Hornby joined in it, and by repeating his gutturals several times, each time in a higher key than before, managed to be understood.

‘Come on,’ Hornby beckoned. ‘They want to show us their tents.’

On the way up from the beach, Bullock studied his hosts. They were a ragged lot, not at all like the Eskimos of his imagination. They had the sallow complexion, but not the round, moonlike faces he had seen in pictures. They were lean and pinched-looking, and their skin clothing was in need of repair.

Bullock lingered behind, with the uncomfortable feeling which always attacks those who can neither understand nor be understood. Hornby walked between the two men, supplementing his Eskimo vocabulary with violent gestures.

The tents were sorry affairs. In one of them Hornby and Bullock sat with the four wives, while the men built a big smudge outside to recall the absent husbands from a hunting trip. Filth and privation, the former not a usual condition in Eskimo dwellings, stared at the visitors from every cranny of the tent.



WHITEY, DOG OF DOGS, WHOSE KILLING FOR
HUMANITY'S SAKE WAS THE SADDEST
EVENT OF THE EXPEDITION



THE ESKIMOS WHO PLAYED HOSTS TO THE
TRAVELERS

In turn each of the women chattered at Hornby, who sat with his head to one side, like an alert bird, trying to catch what they were saying. Once one of the women stretched a hand behind a pile of skins. Grinning broadly and nodding her head in pleasure, she produced the sorriest-looking caribou

tongue Bullock had ever seen. It was of very uncertain age. Hornby regarded Bullock sadly.

They want to trade this for some tobacco. They think the tongue is a great gift. I guess you'd better get a plug out of my canoe. And you'd better get your iodine, too. One of the children has something the matter with its arm. When you paint it, be very impressive. The men out hunting might bring home some good meat, you know.'

Bullock was glad of the opportunity to be in the fresh air again. He walked quickly toward the river lest they decide to follow and discover the fish and gulls. From a canvas bag in Hornby's canoe he took a musty plug of tobacco. There were several there. During the winter Bullock had frequently smoked a pipe, but while traveling had tired of it. Hornby did not smoke. Hence the ample supply remaining. When he took up the iodine bottle, with its brush-fitted stopper he noticed it was almost empty. Painting faces had done that.

Hornby was waiting outside the tent, the four women grouped around him. He took the tobacco from Bullock and presented it with a flourish. In turn he accepted the caribou tongue, which he promptly put in his trouser pocket. The women uttered little squeals of delight and each had to handle and examine the tobacco.

After a bit Hornby began a conversation with the largest of the women. Once he nodded in the direction of Bullock. The women seemed impressed. She uttered a shrill cry, which brought running from behind one of the tents a thin, shy boy of about ten. At a word from his mother, he uncovered his left forearm, upon which glowed angrily a big carbuncle. Bullock examined it gravely.

He turned to Hornby.

'Tell them I'll be right back.'

Once more at the canoes he unpacked his first-aid kit, remembering with a smile Hornby's gentle ridicule at medical supplies. He took out the scalpel and some bandage.

When the rude surgery was over and the boy's arm bandaged, the women overwhelmed him with gratitude. Through Hornby they demanded that the white men be their guests, promised fine kills of caribou, offered the exclusive use of one of the tents. But Hornby, feeling the lone caribou tongue in his pocket, and remembering the half-kettle of fish and the two gulls, parried the invitations. By talking rapidly and incessantly for several

minutes, he appeared to convince them that departure was necessary. Not unlike civilized hostesses, they insisted on accompanying the strangers to their canoes. They were still standing on the bank, jabbering farewells, when the paddlers floated out of sight around a bend in the river.

Half an hour later, Hornby happened to look back. Less than a half a mile away were two canoes, with paddles flashing swiftly. He called to Bullock.

‘Look what’s coming! Those women smelled the fish in your canoe and the men are going to wheedle some. Why does fish have to smell anyway?’

Bullock dropped his paddle and uncovered the kettle.

‘I’ll skoff half of this and give you the rest. If we hurry, we can finish before they get here.’

With a big spoon he gulped the mess down like soup. It was in the latter stages of fermentation, but it was food. The excitement of the moment seemingly made it more palatable. After several minutes of noisy swallowing, he maneuvered his canoe close enough to Hornby’s to pass over the kettle. The little man ate even faster. He was finished when the canoes were yet several hundred yards off.

Hornby greeted the Eskimos with a disarming smile, which faded to a rather weak grin as he listened to their talk.

‘They’ve come to show us a good fishing place, Bullock.’

The fishing place was several miles beyond. The tent was erected close to the shore, and a fire threw its glow on the bobbing net floats. Feeling very guilty, Hornby produced the two sea-gulls, much the worse for age and concealment under heavy objects. He and Bullock took the smaller one, and the Eskimos shared the other. But before morning, all feasted on about twenty-five two-pound whitefish which the nets snared.

The Eskimos played hosts, taking each fish as fast as it was caught and packing it in clay. Thus wrapped, the fish was roasted in the embers. When it was cooked, the skin and scales came away with the clay, leaving the meat exposed.

Until well toward dawn the party gorged themselves. Only when the floats began to bob with less frequency was sleep suggested. The white men went into the tent and the Eskimos prepared their beds outside. Bullock, who was up early, found the latter slumbering soundly in their blankets. Four

bare Eskimo feet stuck out in the cold. Bullock had to go back in the tent to keep from tickling them.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BAKER LAKE trading-posts of the Hudson's Bay Company and Revillon Frères stand side by side on a gentle slope not far from where the Thelon empties its waters. Thither come Eskimos and trappers from the shores of Hudson Bay and the more distant regions of the true Arctic to barter the pelt of the fox for petty luxuries and food. Together these trading-posts form an oasis as welcome in Northern Canada as was ever any palm-fringed water-hole in the Sahara. For the space of a few acres there is civilization—little conventional wooden houses, all painted white, in which men eat three meals a day, and sit of an evening before a stove reading not too ancient newspapers, and finally seek rest in real beds between real sheets.

Beyond these few acres there is desolation, but it is kept at a distance. The community is remarkably self-sufficient. Every so often a ship glides up Chesterfield Inlet with supplies and an assorted cargo of everything from pins to furniture. But between ships if anything is needed, it is contrived on the spot. A life of isolation breeds artisans to order.

It was about mid-afternoon on September 26, 1925, that a shout went up from one of the carpenters. He pointed to the west, where, three hundred yards or so off-shore, two canoes were heading for the post jetty. The hammers stopped as if on signal and the men scrambled from their positions.

No canoes had gone up the Thelon at any time during the summer. How, then, could two be coming down?

A score of watchers, headed by the Factor of the post, a six-foot, two-inch giant with ginger hair, were waiting on the jetty when the canoes came up. In the first to touch the landing was a little man who appeared vastly amused. The occupant of the second canoe bore himself seriously. As though by prearrangement they spoke not a word, but proceeded to tie up the

canoes. The Factor contained himself as long as possible, and then, hands on hips, demanded:

‘Well, where the hell have you two come from?’

Hornby inspected for a second time the knot he had tied in his bow line, and said, without looking up:

‘From Edmonton.’

The Factor’s ginger hair moved as he arched his brow.

‘From *where*?’

Hornby stood up. His eyes were afire with mischief.

‘Yes, yes. Edmonton. We had a fine trip. Splendid. Couldn’t be better.’

‘Well, I’ll be damned.’

With that the Factor became silent. Even when Hornby introduced himself and Bullock, he merely grunted in acknowledgment. He stared at the strangers’ attire and at their canoes. He was probably thinking he had never seen white men more blackened or more ragged. He would have been still further astonished had he known they considered themselves at a high level of neatness and cleanliness.

Hornby wandered off to make friends with the Eskimos in the group. The Factor turned to Bullock.

‘Come on up to my house. We can talk up there.’

Bullock assented at once. But before leaving his canoe, he procured a goose he had shot that morning and presented it to the Factor. As geese go it was a sorry specimen, but privation had dimmed Bullock’s talents as a connoisseur. The Factor took the bird and mumbled appreciation. On the way up from the jetty he carried it behind him. When they reached the house, the other noticed the goose was gone.

Once inside the Factor said very quietly:

‘Now, just where *did* you two come from, anyway?’

‘From Edmonton.’

The Factor waved his hands vaguely.

‘Well, you look as though you might have come from anywhere. But Edmonton’s a long way off.’

Bullock laughed, softly at first, then loudly and unrestrained as the Factor's face expressed complete bewilderment. Hornby had stage-managed the arrival well.

'No, really . . .' the Captain finally said.

Then he told of the trip. He left out much that was personal, but otherwise described the days in the cave and the journey by canoe on the Hanbury and Thelon.

'We were several miles away when we first sighted the post,' he said. 'To us it looked like a great city, the first buildings we have seen for what seemed like a lifetime. Hornby was afraid it was a mirage. He insisted that we paddle closer and examine the post with the glasses. Not until we could see figures moving about did we dare throw overboard some rotten meat we'd been saving. Then we turned in to shore and cleaned up a bit. It was Hornby's idea that we paddle up without a word, just as though we were back from an afternoon's outing.'

'A damned good idea,' the Factor said, 'but when you first landed, I thought you were both crazy. Are you hungry?'

Bullock tried to compose a calm answer, but the Factor didn't wait.

'You can have dinner to-night at Revillon Frères. Their cook's better than ours just now. But meanwhile you can nibble on these.'

He went into another room and came back with a seven-pound tin of sweet oaten cookies. While he was opening it, Hornby came in.

'Want some afternoon-tea biscuits?' the Captain asked.

Hornby looked at the cookies.

'I'm not particularly hungry,' he said.

'Oh, here,' broke in the Factor, 'take this handful.'

The little man hesitated for a moment, then excused himself.

'I'll be right back.'

When he returned, a mouthful of teeth showed through his grin. He had retrieved his plates from among the mouse carcasses.

The Factor left, and Hornby and Bullock sat silent for many minutes chewing intently on the oaten wafers. So great were their appetites that, though they chewed themselves sick, they were still hungry.

Finally Hornby broke the silence.

‘Did the Factor say anything to you?’

‘About what?’

‘About you and me.’

‘He said he thought at first we were both crazy.’

Hornby lowered his voice.

‘No; I mean about the police.’

‘No. Nothing.’

Hornby seemed disappointed.

‘Maybe he doesn’t know.’

‘Do you think we should tell him?’ the Captain asked grimly.

‘Oh, no. I wouldn’t go that far.’ Hornby regarded his partner rather wistfully. ‘But when Hawkins came to the cave last winter, it spoiled everything. Here we arrive like nobodies. I thought for a while this afternoon we were going to be welcomed, after all. That big motor boat near the jetty looked very official from a distance. I had hopes it was the police.’

Bullock recalled his own worries on the subject and grunted in disgust.

‘Suppose there had been officers here. They would have asked a lot of questions and decided in the end that we were a couple of damned fools.’

‘I know. But that would be better than things as they are. No one here at the post seems to realize that we have been on a serious scientific expedition. Instead of expecting us, the Factor asks where we come from and then won’t believe . . .’

He was interrupted by the appearance in the doorway of a large, ruddy-cheeked man who bore himself as one with some authority.

‘Sorry to intrude,’ he said, looking good-humoredly at each in turn, ‘but I thought you might like to meet some of our Eskimo women. They’re scared of your beards, but I’ll do my best for you.’

Hornby snorted.

‘Tell them the hair on my chest is longer than on my head. That’ll scare them some more.’

The man in the doorway bowed sarcastically and turned inquiringly to Bullock. The Captain felt himself breaking out in a cold sweat. The very thought of women seemed to terrify him. He managed to say:

‘Not to-night, thanks.’

Dinner was a feast. Heller, assistant factor at Revillon Frères, cooked and presided. Hornby sat to one side and removed a shoe so he might play with his toe. He seemed ill at ease, but Bullock knew better. He knew the little man was suffering from regrets that the trip was over. Hadn’t Hornby said on the way over to dinner?—‘A week of this, Bullock, and we’ll wish we were back in the Barrens. They live by routine at these posts.’

But Bullock reveled in the routine, at least that part of it touching upon dinner. He watched Heller’s every move, and abandoned himself to the ecstasy of kitchen odors, of steaming broth, of hot biscuits. How easily the cave and the Thelon were forgotten! It was as though he had been at the post always, that Heller had been his friend for months. Only Hornby, sitting rather sadly by, his ‘store teeth’ all too obviously in place, belied Bullock’s new found sense of contentment.

Heller proved an agreeable companion. He was a young Frenchman, short of thirty, and something of a mystery to the others. In conversation he was impersonal, though he confided that he was happiest when alone. He was a gentleman and so provided Bullock with his first sympathetic contact with the outside world. The Englishman did not think of it that way, but months later, his memory of Heller’s character and conversation was to be as vivid as a vision.

With dinner over and their stomachs comfortably overloaded, Hornby and Bullock were escorted to a big tent, with a wooden floor, furnished with two beds—*real* beds if only of cheap enamelled iron—and spread with *real* sheets. Heller bade them a *bonne nuit*, and added:

‘Sleep as long as you like. I’ll fix you a breakfast any time you’re ready for it.’

He left.

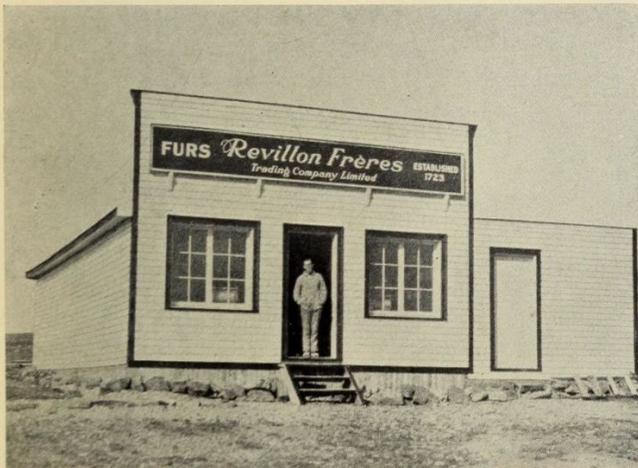
Hornby sat on one of the beds.

‘I suppose I’m an ingrate,’ he said, ‘but I don’t appreciate this sort of thing the way I ought to. I like being on the move so well that all of this is an anticlimax. What about you?’

Bullock, who had remained standing by the door of the tent, looking with a measure of awe at the bare electric light globe which hung by its own wire from the apex, nodded.



HELLER, HOST AND COOK AT BAKER LAKE



THE POST OF REVILLON FRERES AT BAKER LAKE
WHERE THE ADVENTURERS ATE THEIR FIRST 'WHITE MAN'S' DINNER

‘I know. We all hate to come to the end of a thing. But that’s no reason why we shouldn’t make damned good use of these beds to-night. For my part, I’m tired.’

‘Yes, yes. So am I tired.’

A moccasin dropped on the wooden floor; a second followed the first. Bullock started to speak, then thought better of it, and began himself to undress. In silence they crawled into their beds after Bullock had turned out the light. A stranger, watching, would have assumed a quarrel between the pair. In truth, their attitudes were born of the dejection of one and the embarrassment of the other.

In the darkness Bullock felt very much alone. Freed of the worries of the moment, of the torment of uncertain food and shelter, his thoughts winged into the future. There would be a vessel in a week or so to take them across Hudson Bay and down to Newfoundland. That much he had learned from Heller. But after Newfoundland, what? He had left to his credit, perhaps, a couple of hundred pounds. That was all. There was some fur, of course, but the maggots had played havoc with it. There were pictures and natural history specimens. There were the diary records, as complete as he had been able to make them, but woefully short of what he had hoped for. Yet it might have been worse. Under his blankets he felt cold at the remembrance of how close disaster had come; how, when near the entrance to Baker Lake, just a few miles from the trading-posts, he had been standing up in his canoe every few minutes to observe the rough water in time. It was their practice to beach the canoes and study each rapid for its perils. If the water was too swift or rocks too plentiful, a portage was made. If, on the other hand, the rapid was to be run, Bullock always insisted Hornby go through first. For the little man could not swim, and Bullock, in the second canoe, would have a chance of aiding him in the event of trouble. More particularly had he decreed this arrangement because of the innuendoes of the police visit.

On this occasion the morning sun gilded the water and interfered with vision. Bullock did not see the rapid until within a hundred yards of it. At the time the canoe was twice that distance from either bank. The water, speeded by a shallowing bottom, swept him on. Before he could make Hornby understand the danger, the rapid was fifty yards nearer.

There was nothing to do but run it. Safety depended on paddling like mad to keep sufficient headway above the speed of the water to permit steering. Bullock cursed his eyesight and swung his paddle. A quick glance backward showed Hornby already standing up in his canoe. He always

picked his course that way, claiming better vision of the rocks and shoals. But the sight of the little man, teetering in his canoe from the pure excitement of the thing, had scared Bullock more than once. Always before Hornby had been in front of him. Now it was different.

Bullock had the double responsibility of watching the rocks ahead and Hornby behind. Above the rush of the water he could hear the other's shouts. 'All right, Bullock! I'm all right.' Once a shout was strangled in the middle, and he turned in time to see Hornby on one knee. A side current had almost thrown him. For a mile and a half the water and the canoes fought with each other. And when the rapid was past, both men headed for the shore, exhausted. It was many minutes before they had wind enough to go on.

Yes, it might have been worse. Bullock smiled to himself. Time enough to-morrow for more worrying. To-night there was a bed to enjoy. He stretched his legs to their utmost. They slid between cool stretches of sheet and touched the foot of the bedstead. He drew them up again until his knees were almost beneath his chin. In that position his weight, concentrated, made a generous dent in the mattress. He decided he would go to sleep curled up. Next his arms had to be arranged. Strange that on the trip he had never bothered about the angle of his arms. First he tried them under the covers, but with his legs drawn up, there was no proper room for them. He was on his right side, and the right arm seemed to slip naturally under the edge of the pillow. The left then lay inert, palm and wrist beyond the edge of the sheet. Musing on the bliss of body comfort, he fell asleep.

He learned later that it was three o'clock when he awakened. He awakened in that peaceful manner which allows the mind to rouse into consciousness without the necessity of opening the eyes. For a moment he was angry at himself. His promised night of rest had been broken. But soon he became aware of a low, monotonous sound close by. Still too comfortable to open his eyes, he tried to place the sound. A breeze? No, there was a rhythm to it. It was like breathing. He looked up to find Hornby sitting on the edge of the bed.

When the little man saw Bullock stir, he said:

'I wanted to talk to you, but I didn't want to wake you. I've been sitting here a half-hour.'

'What do you want? Is something the matter?'

'No. But I've been lying awake thinking.'

‘Thinking?’ The little man’s subdued manner alarmed Bullock. ‘Thinking about what?’

‘About you.’

Hornby moved to ease a cramped leg. The Captain noticed that he had dressed again.

‘Things haven’t gone just the way we wanted them to, have they?’

‘No,’ Bullock admitted, ‘but this is no time to worry about that. We did our best.’

Hornby smoothed imaginary wrinkles on the blanket.

‘Yes, yes. We did our best. But suppose we did better next time.’

Bullock felt his hair move as though he had seen an apparition. He said slowly:

‘Next time? Next time what?’

‘We can go back into the Barrens again next year. We can profit by the mistakes we made this time.’

Hornby said it quickly, eagerly, as though to forestall objections. Bullock knew the tone. He thought to himself that out of all the earth the Barrens was one spot he cared never to see again. Yet, having thought it, he was overwhelmed with a nostalgia for certain moments of the trip, and for certain spots where they had rested. He said, feebly enough:

‘But, Jack, there is no money left.’ It was one of the few times he had ever called Hornby by his first name.

‘No money!’ Even in the darkness Bullock could almost see the eyes light up. ‘What do we care for money? I have a little. And I can always get some dogs and a sled and a canoe and some grub. We don’t need anything more. The caribou and the white wolves and foxes and the fish are free. Free, that is, to men who know how to get them. Men like you and me, Bullock. You’re going back to civilization soon. Back to where every man is your enemy because every man is in competition with you. Back where the man with the cleanest shirt is the most respected. And what’ll you do? You’ve built a fine body for yourself up here. You will weigh close to two hundred pounds in a couple of weeks, and all of it solid bone and muscle. Try to sell that in a city. It may get you a day laborer’s job or a third assistant’s berth in some gymnasium. That’s not for you, is it? Money! It isn’t in the Barrens that you need money, but in the cities.’

He stopped, flushed with enthusiasm and the exertion of talking from the depths of himself. Bullock could hear the lapping of water at the shore's edge, and Hornby's breath coming jerkily. All else was silent. Probably, throughout both posts, only the two of them were awake. There was just light enough coming through the screen door of the tent to outline the tensivity of Hornby's position on the bed.

'Next year,' the voice above Bullock was saying, 'we can go over the old route, or take a new one.'

Even as the words were being spoken, Bullock knew that it could not be—knew it as one sometimes knows, when planning for pleasure, that the end and the beginning are wrapped in the mantle of a single dream. It was not only money. It was something beyond the immediate power of words to convey, something complicated by pride and sentiment. Later, perhaps. But not next year.

And here was Hornby waiting for an answer. Hornby, who had not been asleep for thinking about it all. Bullock smothered his first impulse to temporize.

'Not next year, Jack,' he said. 'I have to recoup my fortunes a little, and we both need a spell of good living to make up for the past eighteen months.'

He would have said more, would have made the refusal less final, but Hornby stood up.

'I belong up there, Charles. Maybe I'll find some one else.'

He started for the door. Bullock sat up in bed.

'Where're you going?'

'Out to take a run. That dinner was a bit heavy.'

Bullock heard him patter off in the darkness, and then lay long wondering if his choice had been the right one.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AND now I must break the thread of my story. Nay, more than break it; I must weave the threads of a new one. For the tale just told is ended. And yet I cannot leave it. I cannot leave it because, as I have mentioned in a little prefatory note, this book is not mine although of my writing. Therefore I must tell you of a very recent day in Ottawa.

It was a day in October of 1929. Into the office of the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police came Inspector Trundle with a bulky report. In the precise language of officialdom this report told of the burial of three skeletons in the heart of the timber stand on the Upper Thelon. Over one of the graves had been set a crude marker bearing the name John Hornby. The others were similarly marked with the names of Harold E. C. Adlard and Edgar V. Christian.

In the heart of the timber stand on the Upper Thelon! In the land of the musk-oxen! Not too far from where Whitey sleeps! A fitting hermitage.

And how did it happen? It is not a long story.

At the end of 1925, when Hornby and Bullock reached civilization, the little man sailed for England to visit his aged mother. At that time he was without definite plans for the future. But under date of February 8, 1926, he wrote Bullock from Nantwich, Cheshire:

At the present time I am in a very awkward position, as my mother is alone and thinks I ought to stay with her. She curiously thinks that money and an easy life are all one can wish for. Money, I admit, is all right, but the latter does not appeal to me.

A month later he wrote again. The wanderlust was torturing him.

Would that you and I were again on our way North! You can fully realize how miserable I feel in civilization. This senseless life is detestable. How can people feel justified in leading an aimless existence? I have never felt so lonesome as in cities. Hardships are preferable to ease.

April found him back in Canada, ripe for any suggestion, any plan that should take him back into the Barrens. Once more he approached Bullock to beg him to join an expedition. The other's refusal must have cut, for the little man never communicated with him again. But the dream of the Barrens persisted. A party of three was formed. There were Hornby and Christian, his nephew, a lad barely out of his teens; and Adlard, who had seen service as a second lieutenant in the Royal Air Force.

These three, traveling in one canoe, were sighted on Great Slave Lake in June. Trappers reported that rifles, fish-nets, pemmican, and tea made up the equipment of the trio. They apparently hoped to restock with provisions from a cache at Reliance. In July, they were again seen east of Great Slave Lake. After that the Barrens swallowed them.

Months passed without word of the travelers. Then, in the summer of 1927, a trapper came upon an abandoned camp near the Casba River. In a cairn he found a note, dated 1926, and signed by Hornby. It read:

Traveling slowly. Flies bad. Shot a fat buck caribou. Hope to see you down the Hanbury this winter.

When the second winter of silence came, the Mounted Police showed anxiety. Well though they knew Hornby's prowess in the North, they knew also that his party was not equipped to spend two winters in that region. Corporal R. A. Williams was sent out on a patrol from Reliance, but had to turn back when his Indian guides rebelled. Meanwhile, the inevitable rumors drifted back. An Eskimo reported three bodies afloat on an ice pack. Hornby was 'seen' farming on Lulu Island near Vancouver. Patiently the police disproved all of these.

Then in July of 1928 the truth became known. A party of mining prospectors in charge of one Harry S. Wilson were proceeding down the Thelon. About sixty miles from the confluence of the Hanbury, a tiny log cabin was sighted on the north bank. They stopped to investigate.

Their calls went unanswered as they beached their canoes. Wilson led the way to the cabin, which was about one hundred yards from the shore and

set in a thin clump of trees. Two bodies, later proved to be those of Hornby and Adlard, lay outside the cabin. Christian's body lay on a narrow bunk inside. The men had been dead about fourteen months.

The meager interior of the little house told its own story. Lack of caribou hides meant lack of caribou. The migration had failed Hornby at last. Three rifles, each filled with ammunition, revealed the tragedy of nothing to shoot at. The only food in the cabin was a half-pound of tea.

Diaries and letters were found, notably a diary written by Christian. From this diary the police were later to fix the dates of death as follows: Hornby first on April 16, 1927; Adlard next on May 4, 1927; and Christian soon after June 1 of the same year.

The diary, or so much of it as police and relatives have been willing to release, shows that what might have been expected occurred. Improperly equipped and provisioned, without dogs and the means of transporting caribou carcasses to camp, they became so reduced by starvation that hunting became impossible. If the caribou migration had passed their way they had been unable to accept the opportunity it provided for restocking their empty cache.

Hornby made long trips in search of game, but the same difficulties that had dogged him and Bullock dogged him again now. Also instead of two mouths to feed, there were three.

Soon it became apparent to him that all three could not hope to survive, and he proceeded to make the supreme sacrifice—by surreptitiously starving himself that his wards might live. And while he starved he directed their efforts, showing a generalship that he had never before displayed, and too late.

It is hard to believe that under the rigors of starvation, to which he was well accustomed, he should succumb weeks before two inexperienced youngsters, but the diary makes it only too plain that he considered his life of less value than that of his companions.

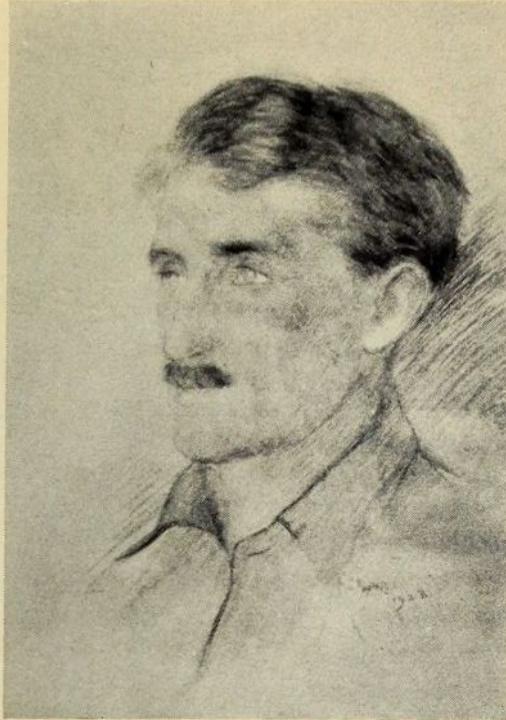
And to make the sacrifice more ghastly, old war wounds opened to torture him with unbearable agony.

On the last evening he made his will, writing still in a firm unshaking hand, and bequeathing all that he possessed (no negligible fortune) to Christian, his nephew—a Hornby after his own heart.

Wilson missed this will and the diary which contained it. They were discovered later by the police hidden in the ashes of the stove, where

Christian had deposited them, before he took to his blankets for his last sleep.

Perhaps the details of the thing will always remain one of the mysteries of the North. At any rate, it was a noble tragedy, with one of the Barrens' own sons dying where he wanted to die, and two brave lads going to their graves beside him.



STUDY OF JOHN HORNBY
IN CIVILIZATION



HORNBY IN A TIME OF STARVATION CRACKING
OLD CARIBOU BONES FOR THEIR MARROW

Canada will not soon, and perhaps never will, know the like of John Hornby again. For the airplane is conquering the wildernesses of the North-West Territories, where countless lakes and wide rivers offer landing for amphibian craft.

In not too many years the caribou will go the way of other wild things, either to slaughter or domestication. Their flesh is too good eating and their numbers too tempting for civilization long to let them alone.

Hornby and the Barrens were inseparable. Without the Barrens there could have been no Hornby. The lone lands were his life and his love. Had they not existed, or had he lived a hundred years hence, he would likely have been an ordinary misfit in some ordinary community, seeking always that which he could not find. As it is, he went to his grave as few are able to—full of the substance of his dreams. For Hornby's dream was simple. To be alone, with Nature at her bleakest; to roam with the wind, and be as free; to seek hardship as other men seek comfort, and for the same reason; to outdo all others in the Barrens.

There is a beauty in all this, for Hornby was sincere. His distaste for cities was not a pose; he felt uncomfortable away from the North. Just why a youngster, reared in luxury and educated in the same conventional manner as all other English boys of good family, should so swerve his own destiny I

do not know. In all of the letters I have exchanged with those who knew Hornby, in all of the documents and diaries I have examined, in all of the conversations he ever had with Bullock, no reason greater than an exaggerated whim appears to explain his flight to Canada as a youth.

There are those, who, in reading this book, will feel outraged at the way Hornby lived. They will see nothing but madness in his carelessness of attire and attitude, in his improvidence, in his haphazard and futile wandering. Perhaps. Perhaps. And yet there will be some, I think, who will sense the unconquerable and boundless spirit of the man, that spark that lived behind his eyes, and drove him on to feats that have become legends. *That* was his glory.

There is a story of his early days in Canada. He was in Edmonton and wished to visit friends in Onoway, some forty miles distant. He inquired about trains and was told there would not be one until the next day.

‘No good for me,’ he said.

And as he was, moccasin-shod, without overcoat, he started off on the trail. It was many degrees below zero. That night he dined with his friends, and the next day returned, still on foot, along the same route. Later, he was astonished to find that his jaunt had been cause for comment.

The only two consecutive diaries Hornby ever wrote he presented to Captain Bullock before they parted at the end of their expedition. Entries in these, scrawled most illegibly in pencil, show how close to death he had been on other occasions. In the terrible winter of 1920, when many Indians perished in their native haunts, Hornby was in a little cabin not far from the site of Fort Reliance. Under date of March 6 of that year he wrote:

It has been aptly said that a man who lives alone in this country for three years either goes crazy or marries an Indian woman. I have found that a man’s mind up here becomes somewhat vacant, for there is nothing to sharpen the intellect.

At times I feel so weak that, after eating stale fish bait in order to have strength to crawl over the ice to my nets, I feel dangerously inclined to expend the energy in putting straight my house and staggering to the box I have built outside for a grave. So far I have resisted that mad inclination. I wrap a blanket about my head and crawl on hands and knees to my nets in the ice almost a mile away. Often I find that the Indians have been there before me. The blood on the ice, clumsily covered with a little snow, tells me

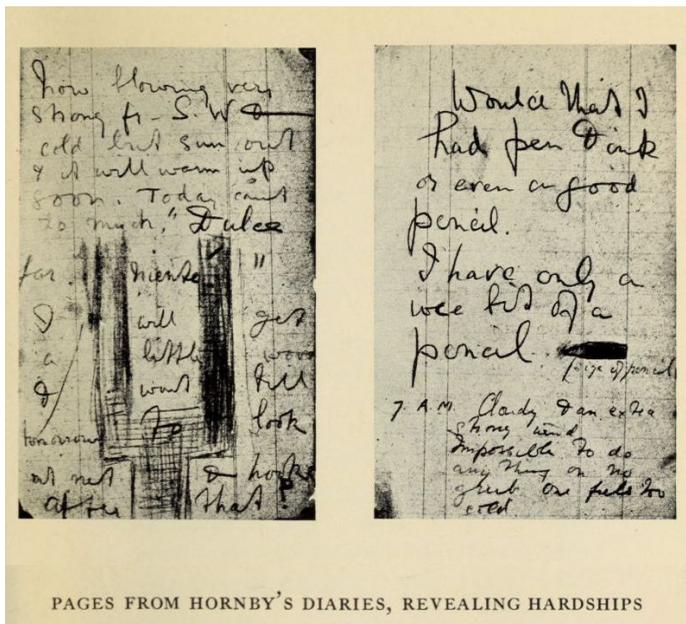
again that I have been robbed. It is hard to conceive that they would treat me thus after what I have done for them. But I bear them no ill-will. They know no better. Hope on, hope ever!

And again in that diary, two days later, Hornby wrote:

I could never eat a dog. When I am starving, my dogs are starving also. As I look now at them, I neither wish to eat them, nor can I. I am too weak to digest anything but the mildest food and their wretched flesh would be poison. They are like so many nightmares as they crouch like statues, or slink past with their mournful eyes piteously watching me—like me—living skeletons. How I wish the days would lengthen! Why don't the caribou come?

Why don't the caribou come? Such a question as must have passed his thoughts, if not his lips, many times in that last winter by the Thelon.

Jack Hornby is dead. It is hard to write that sentence after fashioning a book out of his astounding energy and virility. But he is dead, in the very heart of the Barren Lands. Over his head in winter, then, blow the snows he loved. In summer a million wild flowers blanket him. The endless caribou cavalcade thunders by, just as he used to watch it, a squatting statue on a sand ridge. Somewhere near him browse the almost legendary musk-oxen. White wolves howl to the moon at night, and white foxes prowl silently past. It is a fitting burial-ground, as lonely as the life he led, and as weird.



PAGES FROM HORNBY'S DIARIES, REVEALING HARDSHIPS

He had lived his life. Death came only when he was fifty, which for a man of intense activity is the time of the setting sun. He had many virtues and many faults, and the latter were as lovable as the former. And he was a gentleman. Only men who are not would presume to doubt it. If he lived as an animal lives, primitively and without comforts, it was the body's choice. His mind was on a higher plane than most. He was supremely courteous and supremely thoughtless. That is no paradox to one who knew him. He was an egoist, yet his ego was soothing, as of a sunset that has a right to know it is beautiful.

I have called this book, for many reasons, 'Snow Man.' Obviously, of course, because Hornby was of the snows. Obviously, too, because both Hornby and the traditional snow man were products of whims. There was another reason for the title. Have you ever thought how futile is a snow man? He is majestic, perhaps, a figure for all to admire—but what is his destiny, what his purpose?

There are those of Hornby's friends in the North who cannot reconcile themselves to his going. If they should return to the Barrens to-morrow, they would keep looking for him over the top of the next esker. Thus strongly did he live, and impress his life on others.

Vale, Snow Man!

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Book author has been added to the original book cover. The resulting cover is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Snow Man--John Hornby in the Barren Lands* by Malcolm Thomas Waldron]