

Fox ISLAND



**KATHRENE
PINKERTON**

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Title: Fox Island

Date of first publication: 1942

Author: Kathrene Pinkerton (1887-1967)

Illustrator: Isaac Brewster Hazelton (1870-1943)

Date first posted: December 13, 2024

Date last updated: December 13, 2024

Faded Page eBook #20241210

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FOX ISLAND

by KATHRENE PINKERTON

ILLUSTRATED BY I. B. HAZELTON

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NEW YORK

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Fox Island

1



It was cold, but not too cold. The dogs, chilled by their stay at the Indian camp, ran at full gallop. Their claws dug into the crusted snow while Ann Jackman balanced on the swiftly drawn toboggan. Her blue eyes were dark with excitement. Particles of ice-like snow streamed back and stung her face but she scarcely felt them. The cold, the speed of the dog team, the jingle of harness bells and the snow-filled air were part of the thrill of winter travel in the Canadian north.

The thrill was the greater because Ann was making her first long journey alone. It was ten miles from the Jackman cabin at the head of Far Lake to the

camp of Pe-tah-bo, their only neighbor. Winter visits were not made often, and always Ann's brother, Philip, had gone with her to help break trail. But today Ann had carried a message from her father to Pe-tah-bo. Both men were trappers, and the white man and the Ojibwa shared a vast trapping district. Except for these two friends and their families, no one lived nearer than the Hudson's Bay post, a long day's travel away.

Ann had been glad for the errand. The winter north was lovely. The lake stretched ahead in dazzling whiteness encompassed by green forested shores. Overhead was the incredible blue of a bright winter sky. The snow on the lake, packed and sculptured by an Arctic wind, was so hard that neither toboggan nor dogs left a trace of their flight. This was one of the rare times in the northland when dogs and driver were freed of the tyranny of trails. A veteran traveler would have found the journey exciting, but to Ann, not quite fifteen and in her first winter in the north, it was thrilling.

She felt as competent and romantic as she looked. Her caribou moccasins were beaded in bright colors. Her trousers of blue wool were tucked inside heavy woolen socks and she wore a capote of white strouds, a woolen cloth so firmly woven it was windproof. The capote, cut like a man's frock coat with wide flaring skirts, was bound in red woolen braid and held snugly at the waist with a wide l'assomption belt. The multicolored yarn of the belt ended in long, gay tassels which Ann wore dangling at her side in the dashing fashion of the early voyageurs. And from under the red piping of the hood of the capote her blonde hair escaped to frame her face.

After running a mile the dogs had spent their first energy and settled down to a steady lope. Ann's weight was as nothing on the smooth hard surface, and supper lay at the end of the journey. Ogema, the lead dog, looked back over his shoulder. His long red tongue, lolling from his mouth, made him appear to be grinning at her, and Ann laughed back to acknowledge the shared adventure.

"*Bim-e-tow!*" she cried, because she knew Ogema liked to be given the command to speed.

Ann looked ahead. The long arm of the lake was narrowing. A half mile beyond, the steep shores seemed almost to meet and in that narrow passage the swift current undercut the ice even in coldest weather. Her father had warned her against treacherous thin spots and Wah-be-goan, Pe-tah-bo's wife, had reminded her that she must go ashore and walk among the boulders under the straight cliff. Ann's glance searched for a place to leave the lake.

“Gee!” she commanded, and Ogema swerved obediently toward the western shore.

At the edge of the ice she halted the team and walked forward. She stroked Tony as she passed him, rubbed Dick’s tasseled ears, but when she reached Ogema’s head she stopped to cuddle it against her body.

Ogema was more than just one of a team of dogs for he had chosen to become a member of the Jackman family. He had “belonged” ever since the previous summer, soon after their arrival at Far Lake, when they were making their first journey to the Hudson’s Bay post and Ann and Philip had found him keeping vigil beside a rapids where his Ojibwa master had been drowned. The Indians had gone off to leave the dog to his grief, thinking that he must die of the trouble the natives called “the sickness of long, long thinking.”

When Ogema had chosen to depart with Ann and Philip, that decision had settled forever the question of ownership. Michel, the Indian clerk at the Hudson’s Bay post, had accepted the dog’s choice of new masters, as had the other Indians. And now it would have been difficult to say whether Ogema belonged to Ann and Philip or they to him. It had been a three-way sharing.

Ogema, whose name meant “chief,” had been made leader. It was he who had welded the new dogs into a team, had given it spirit. And now he followed Ann down the shore, picking the way carefully among great boulders.

The gorge narrowed. Huge masses of rock had slipped from the face of the cliff. Ann turned a sharp corner, halted. An involuntary cry escaped her.

Not ten feet away stood a man. He was as startled as was Ann, for after a swift glance he looked quickly toward the cliff as if seeking escape. Ogema lunged to Ann’s side. His long shoulder hairs lifted, he bared his fangs, and a deep growl rumbled in his throat.

“Where’d you come from?” the man demanded.

Ann didn’t answer. She couldn’t. She was too frightened. A white stranger in that empty land was startling enough, but there was something sinister about this man. His expression was not stern yet kindly, like that of Mr. Gillespie, manager of the Hudson’s Bay post. Nor was it the eagle look of Pe-tah-bo, which, Ann knew, hid a love of laughter. This man’s face was shrewd and shifty and his eyes were cruel. Ann thought of the bloodthirsty eyes of a weasel which had once stared at her from a windfall.

Ogema's growl deepened and he started forward. The man lifted a rifle.

"Keep your dog off," he said. "Or I'll—"

Ann found her voice.

"Don't you dare!" she cried as she tightened her hold on Ogema's collar. "My dogs aren't making any trouble."

The rifle barrel lowered a few inches. The man's eyes were still afraid, but suddenly more cruel.

"I'm warning you," he said.

Ann stared at his eyes and the menacing rifle, and then she glanced toward the ice in the narrows. No matter how thin, it was safer than this man. For the first time in her life she feared another human being.

She loosened her grasp on Ogema's collar. "*Marchon!*" she cried. "*Marchon!*"

At the command to go, her leader looked up startled, but he hesitated only for a second. He dashed to the left, the others followed, and Ann flung herself on the toboggan as it swept past.

The team sped across the ice, ice that might break beneath them at any moment, but Ann did not even think of that danger. She expected to hear a rifle or feel a bullet, and she clung desperately to the swaying toboggan as the team, galvanized by the terror in her voice, raced on.

It was a long time before she dared let the team's speed slacken or look back over her shoulder. She was still trembling when she did so, but she did not see the man with the rifle and the cruel face. The black cliffs rose above the white snow and the place was as empty and as desolate as Ann had always known it.

But Ann knew she would never forget the threat in those eyes. Even out on the open lake fear still gripped her and every jutting headland held terror. She looked at the wooded shores with apprehension. Anywhere might lurk an enemy and she and the dogs, out on that great expanse of dazzling white, seemed so exposed and so defenseless.

It was a relief to round the point which hid Home Bay and to see the Jackman cabin standing on the crest of the hill. Smoke rose in a straight high column from the chimney and the sight of the familiar trails about the clearing brought a sudden sense of security.

The team swung into the main trail, firm and beaten as a pavement. All the goings and the comings of the Jackman family began and ended on that trail—trips to the waterhole in the ice, visits to the traps across the bay, journeys to the Hudson’s Bay post, and even the daily dog team drives.

Philip, who had been watching, started down the slope to meet Ann. He was three years younger, but as tall, for he took after the “tall, dark side” of the Jackman family. That three years’ difference had seemed a wide gulf when they lived in the small town of Bradford. Then Philip had been only a younger brother, three school grades below Ann and a noisy member of a gang of boys.

But at Far Lake they’d drawn close. In those months when, together, they’d fished, hunted, paddled, explored the country, driven dogs, and shared morning study hours under Mrs. Jackman’s coaching, they’d really discovered each other. And in those months when Philip had broadened and lengthened and shown an instinctive woodsmanship, Ann had developed a real respect for his opinion.

Now she didn’t want him to guess how frightened she had been and as Philip approached she threw back her shoulders and tried to look competent and self-reliant. Had it not been that Philip had failed to finish his week’s lessons, he would have gone with her to Pe-tah-bo’s camp. Philip had looked downcast when she started off that morning, but now he was his usual cheerful self.

“See Wen-dah-ban?” he asked.

The son of Pe-tah-bo had been almost a daily visitor at the Jackmans’ the previous summer. He was Ann’s age and had been one of a close trio.

“He and Pe-tah-bo were away on their trap lines,” Ann said. “But his mother told me Wen-dah-ban has caught over a hundred dollars’ worth of mink already.”

Philip looked impressed. “If I didn’t have to finish school, I could have a mink line too,” he said. “You’re lucky to be through algebra. Those darn problems took me all morning.”

They walked up the slope together, the dogs at their heels.

“Have to break any trail?” Philip asked.

“Didn’t put on my snowshoes, not even when I went ashore at the narrows and—”

She stopped, but Philip didn't notice the abrupt silence. He was thinking only of what he'd missed.

"First packed snow this winter and I had to do algebra!" he said.

They unharnessed the dogs and before they turned them into the corral Philip examined Ogema's feet. His warm fingers helped the dog to melt the snowballs which had formed between the pads. Ogema didn't have good trail feet, for they were not hairless as were the others'. Ann and Philip never spoke of this defect, but Ogema recognized his lack and he licked Philip's hand in a quick "thank-you" which was more of an admission of inadequacy than either of his masters could have been induced to make.

The sun had slipped behind the ridge and with the last fading of the pale gold of the sky came a sudden chill. As Ann and Philip carried the dog harnesses to the cabin, the snow of the hard packed trail squeaked beneath their moccasins. In the canvas enclosed entry porch Philip hung the harnesses on pegs and Ann took off her capote and shook off the dry snow before entering the warm cabin.

The large log room glowed softly under the yellow light of a big lamp which hung from a center beam. It was always a pleasant room to come home to, but tonight it was a haven to Ann. In their months at Far Lake this room had taken on the impress of their living, for the room served every purpose except that of sleeping and the partitions were only mental. In one end were the home-made couch, easy chairs, Mrs. Jackman's heaped sewing basket and shelves of books, and Ann found the sight of them reassuring. Here all four had gathered every evening, and would do so again tonight, safe from the threat of the man with the cruel eyes.

The long table in the center of the room was set for supper and from the stove in the kitchen corner came delicious odors. Mrs. Jackman stirred a large pan of browning wild rice. She looked up and smiled.

"Supper is ready, dear," she said. "Your father will be home any minute."

"I'll feed the dogs tonight," Philip offered. "Bet they're starved."

He heaped three tin pans, and over a baked mixture of cereals, fats, and meat he ladled soup from the kettle bubbling for the Jackmans' own supper. Ann laughed.

"Why the double rations?" she asked. "They didn't work that hard to pull me."

"Got to do something to square their day without me," Philip said.

“Poor Philip!” his mother said as she watched him go out the door. “He’s had a dull Saturday, but something had to be done about his algebra.”

As Mrs. Jackman moved pots and pans and basted the sizzling moose roast in the oven, she asked questions about their Ojibwa neighbors.

Ann was glad to have questions to answer. She didn’t want to tell about her encounter with the white man until she’d decided how much to reveal of her own panic. Her father must be told of the stranger’s presence, but she wondered if she would have to tell of her own terrified flight across the thin ice of the narrows. That might be considered even more hazardous than the threat in the stranger’s eyes.

Ann wondered about that even while she tried to chat gaily about Wah-be-goan. The Indian woman had been enchanted with the cookies, Mrs. Jackman’s gift, and had greedily crammed them into her mouth while “*nish-i-shins*” and “*me-quetchs*” meaning “good” and “thank-you,” had flowed out in an Ojibwa torrent.

“But when she wanted to give me boiled rabbit, I wished Philip was along,” Ann said. “He doesn’t mind the rabbit hair in Wah-be-goan’s kettle.”

Mrs. Jackman laughed, but as always her laughter was mellowed by tenderness and understanding and Ann knew there was no need to defend Wah-be-goan’s primitive housekeeping. The friendship between the two women, one red, one white, was deep down and unmistakable. They met rarely, and when they did neither could say a half dozen words to the other, but they had not needed a common language to discover that although one lived in a log cabin and the other in a birchbark wigwam, they were engaged in the same struggle. They were two women arrayed against the wilderness in a determination to make a home.

But at Ann’s mention of Philip, Mrs. Jackman suddenly sobered.

“You know, Ann, I didn’t like your going off alone this morning,” she said. “By this time I should know that you and Philip can take care of yourselves and, as your father says, there’s no one in this empty land to harm you. But I can’t tell you how relieved I was to see you safe home.”

Ann looked up, suddenly as serious. She remembered their first weeks at Far Lake and how valiantly her mother had struggled to conquer maternal fear. At first it had not been easy, but it had been many months since her mother had even admitted a misgiving. Now Ann dreaded her mother’s discovery that her misgiving had been justified. And yet sooner or later she

must tell of the stranger and of her own panic-stricken flight across the treacherous ice of the narrows.



The dogs in the corral set up a joyous chorus of welcome and Ann heard her father call to them as he came down the trail. Soon the crisp crunch of snowshoes passed the window and then Philip's and his father's voices could be heard in the entry porch.

The door opened and Mr. Jackman came in. He tweaked Ann's ear and kissed his wife.

"Have good luck today, Dave?" Mrs. Jackman asked.

"Your mother will never admit there's anything but luck in trapping," her father said to Ann. "Even when I have to spend all evening skinning and stretching fur."

“If I were a good trapper’s wife, like Wah-be-goona, I’d do that for you,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“That’s one Ojibwa custom the Jackmans will never follow,” her husband said. “Trapping is a man’s business as I’ve just been explaining to Philip. He wants to start a mink line.”

“That’s because I told him Wen-dah-ban has caught over a hundred dollars’ worth of mink,” Ann said.

Mr. Jackman looked impressed. “He’s had good luck.”

“Is trapping luck with Wen-dah-ban?” Ann asked.

Mr. Jackman laughed. He liked to have Ann tease him.

“The lad will make as good a hunter as Pe-tah-bo,” he said. “But that doesn’t mean Philip has to run a trap line. Once we get our fur farm started there’ll be plenty to keep Philip busy.”

Any talk of fur in the Jackman household usually led to some reference to the farm on which they would raise fur-bearing animals as farmers raise sheep and cattle. The domestication of wild mink and fox had fascinated Mr. Jackman since he’d first heard of the early experiments. He’d brought his family to the wilderness to start a fur farm, but since such a project required capital, they’d known they must earn it the slow way, by building as they went along.

“It’s really a job of pioneering,” Mr. Jackman had said when they’d decided to go north.

Ann knew her father and her mother had not made the decision lightly, least of all her mother. It had meant leaving home and friends and schools and coming to an empty country to build anew. But somehow, after less than a year in this country, it no longer seemed to be an empty land. It had been filled with fun and with adventure. And already the land seemed theirs.

Down the lake was the island where they’d planned some day to build their fur farm and a real log home. Just outside the clearing at Home Bay were the mink pens Ann’s father had built. Ann had hoped that even this winter they might be full of bright-eyed tenants, but now in late January the pens were still discouragingly empty.

A fur farm would be far more exciting than all the trap lines in the north. Ann’s eyes were eager as she turned to her father.

“When we have pens and pens of live mink, Wen-dah-ban’s trap line won’t sound so grand to Philip,” she said.

“Hatch your chickens first,” her father said.

They had almost finished supper when Ann realized she could no longer put off telling of the stranger. She dreaded having to distress her mother but her father must be told about him.

“I met a man in the narrows,” she said. “A white man and—”

“You met a what?” her father said.

“A white man. He looked—well, dangerous and—”

“He must have been an Indian, a friend of Pe-tah-bo’s,” Mr. Jackman said.

“But this man was white!” Ann cried. “And he pointed a gun. Said he’d shoot the dogs.”

She jumped into her story then, and when she had finished her mother’s face was pale.

“Dave!” she cried. “Ann and the dogs driving through the narrows! If—”

Mr. Jackman put his hand on her shoulder.

“She got through, Mary.”

“And I had to do it,” Ann said.

Mr. Jackman nodded. “What did he look like?”

Ann described him. His dark face, shifty eyes, evil voice, and dirty mackinaw had been indelibly impressed upon her.

“He’s probably the man,” Mr. Jackman said.

“What man?” his wife demanded.

“I didn’t want you worried, Mary, but last week Pe-tah-bo cut across country to my trap line. His traps had been robbed. So had mine. Pe-tah-bo was sure the thief was a white man. No Indian steals fur.”

“Then this man *was* the trap thief,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“Maybe,” her husband said. “I’d thought he had left the country. Pe-tah-bo and I had agreed that if no more of my fur was stolen, I’d send a message that I was having fine luck with weasel.”

“I thought it was funny that silly message had to go today,” Philip said.

No one noticed Philip's comment. Mr. Jackman arose from the table. Ann knew he was worried.

"At least we've something to work on," he said. "Tomorrow morning I'll go over to the narrows and have a look."

"Can I go with you?" Philip asked.

"I'd better take care of this myself," his father said.

"But two of us would be safer and we'd take the dogs. Gosh, Dad! I'm no baby to be left at home with—"

"None of you are babies," Mr. Jackman said as he smiled at them. He hesitated a moment, and then he added, "All right, son. Maybe this is a two-man job."

Later, when the supper dishes had been washed and the kitchen darkened, the family gathered in the living room end as they had done so many evenings. But Ann missed a reassuring sense of security and peace. She felt a strange foreboding.

Outwardly this evening was like all the others. Her mother sat beside the mending basket, her swift fingers darning holes in Philip's socks. Her father worked mink pelts onto the long stretching boards, taking his usual care to strip the hides clean of fat and flesh. Ann and Philip each held a book. Even the two black cats, Josephine and Napoleon, whose duty it was to rid the clearing of mice, had come in from their hunting and sat with their front paws tucked neatly under their white chests as they drowsed before the big heater.

But Ann noticed that her mother had taken care to pull the curtains completely across the windows, and she often looked up to listen. Ann, too, had a feeling that the blackness held a menace. A threat had come to the northland.

As they started to bed Philip loitered in the doorway of the bedroom.

"What do they do to trap thieves in this country?" he asked.

"They've never had them," his father said. "Traps and caches have been sacred. It's up to us to keep them so."

"You mean drive the man out of the country?" Philip asked eagerly.

"Dave!" Mrs. Jackman said. "No amount of fur is worth danger to you and—"

“There won’t be any danger, Mary. All we’ll find will be his tracks. When he threatened to shoot Ogema, he must have been as badly scared as Ann.”

The next morning Ann recalled her father’s speech as she watched him and Philip set off down the lake. It reassured her, but not enough to prevent her making frequent trips to the point to watch for their return. And when at last she saw, far down the great white stretch, the two tiny black dots and a dash, which meant two men and a dog team, she rushed the news to her mother.

Mrs. Jackman was as relieved as Ann. The two set off to meet their men and stopped on the trail for questions and answers. News couldn’t wait until they reached the cabin. Mr. Jackman reported they’d not found the man, or discovered where he came from, where he went, or even what he was doing in the narrows.

“Didn’t you even see his tracks?” Ann cried.

“A few faint ones where you two met beside the boulder. He was smart. Traveled on a hard crust. Might as well have tried to track him over cement pavement.”

“Found out one thing,” Philip said. “He chews tobacco.”

“And doesn’t spit often,” his father added. “We saw only two brown stains.”

Conjectures flowed freely during their late noon dinner. Mr. Jackman guessed hopefully that the white man had been traveling through the country, had stopped to rob traps, and now was on his way out. He’d probably been the first scum of the riff-raff which the railroad would bring to the north.

“I’m glad steel won’t touch this end of Far Lake,” he added.

Ann stared at her father in astonishment. She’d thought of the coming of the railroad as only beneficent. It would free them from the tyranny of portages, which had ruled their existence. Until now, everything from the outside had been transported by canoe and borne on her father’s back across ten long portages. These land trails connecting the lakes of the great waterways had necessitated home-made furniture and concentrated foods and had decided just how few must be the possessions brought from their stored things at Bradford.

They had accepted the limitation of the portages until now, for their present cabin had only to serve until they had a real home on the island. But their future plans, the big house, the fur farm, even their future years at Far Lake, all depended on steel rails ultimately stretching across that vast wilderness of forest, lake, and muskeg.

“But, Dad!” Ann cried. “We couldn’t build the big house next fall unless the railroad comes.”

“You’ve even set the time for building!” her father laughed. “But it’s not a bad trait to set your heart on things. Sometimes it helps to get ’em.”

They were alike, these two, in so many ways. Ann knew her father had never learned to give up easily. It was that shared, stubborn quality which had brought them so often side by side in any battle.

But it was Philip who felt aligned with his father in the battle against the fur thief. He was unusually silent and thoughtful all afternoon. When Ann and Philip returned from feeding the dogs their supper, they stopped where Mr. Jackman was sawing firewood.

“Look, Dad,” Philip said. “If we cut a big circle around this end of the lake, we’d find out whether that man left the country.”

“That’s what I figured,” his father said. “I was planning to get Pe-tah-bo to make a two-day trip with me.”

“But tomorrow, Dad, I could take you to Pe-tah-bo’s with the team and —”

“Not tomorrow,” his father said. “Ann told us that yesterday Pe-tah-bo had just started on his three-day trip. It will be day after tomorrow before he’s back at his main camp.”

“But the man might get away!”

“Can’t help that, son,” his father said. “Hope he does leave the country. But if Pe-tah-bo and I cut a two-day circle we can make sure he has.”

Neither Ann nor Philip understood how their father could take an interest in his ordinary occupations when there was a fur thief in their district, but Mr. Jackman set off on his own trap line before the first faint show of daylight next morning.

In late afternoon as Ann and Philip did the evening chores, they began to watch for his return. Dusk came, and then night. Supper was ready and had

been waiting when finally they heard their father. They rushed to the door and none of the three even pretended to hide their anxiety.

“What happened, Dave?” his wife demanded.

“How’d you guess something had happened?” her husband chuckled.

He slipped a packsack from his shoulders, unstrapped the flap, and brought out a grain sack. He handled it carefully and Ann caught a quick movement in the folds.

“Philip, get me that transfer box,” he said.

Philip carried in an oblong box. It had sliding doors at each end to facilitate the transfer of small animals.

“Was afraid I wouldn’t have a chance to use the box this winter,” his father said.

Mr. Jackman knelt on the floor, lifted one sliding door, and held the sack in the opening of the box. He shook the cloth folds. Ann heard a rustling. Then her father slammed the end door quickly and set the transfer box on the table.

“Come and have a look,” he said.

They gathered around. Ann peered through a crack. She saw a long, dark, slender shape, and then two bright eyes.

“Is it a mink?” she cried.

“A yearling,” her father said. “Caught it by a foot in the farthest trap. That’s what made me late.”

Philip stared through the crack for a long time, and then his mother demanded another look. Mr. Jackman stood beside them beaming.

“Gee! He’s a beauty!” Philip exclaimed. “I knew we’d get our fur farm.”

“If one wild mink makes a fur farm, we’ve got one,” his father answered.

“But all the early fur farms were started with wild mink,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“Will he eat?” Ann asked.

“Not now,” her father said. “He’s too frightened.”

“We can get fish and meat and the stuff he’s used to,” Philip said.

“Getting him to eat it will be the real job.”

Ann caught the seriousness in her father’s tone.

“Won’t he eat when he gets really hungry?” she asked. She had visioned pens full of happy, bright-eyed mink. “Won’t he be tame once he gets to know us?”

“Never very tame,” her father said. “We’ll be lucky if we keep him alive.”

Ann looked at the small creature in the box.

“But we’ve got to make him trust us!” she cried. “We can’t let our first mink die.”



The Jackmans were not the only uncertain fur farmers. There were few fur farms, even in Canada, and pioneers in the infant industry were still groping in the dark, learning by their failures. The raising of wild mink had been largely a matter of trial and error. Almost nothing had been written on fur farming and the government was only beginning to give advice to the fur farmer as to the men who raised cattle, sheep, and chickens.

Mr. Jackman's greatest source of information had been letters from an old friend, Steven Barclay, an early fur farmer, and the mink houses and pens at Home Bay had been constructed according to his directions.

Ann and Philip had waited impatiently for these houses to have tenants but now the custody of one terrified yearling made them all realize how little they knew about the raising of wild mink.

During supper they talked of nothing else. “Would he live?” “Would he eat?” “Could they catch a mate?” “If they did, could they raise young mink that spring?” “What if he is one of those extremely nervous mink which pine away, or even die of fright, as mink have been known to do?”

At the bare possibility of such a disaster, they went about on tiptoe. Mrs. Jackman knelt for a reassuring look into the transfer box and then covered it with a rug to shut out light, as she might have draped a canary cage.

After supper Mr. Jackman reread all of Steven Barclay’s letters.

“Steve doesn’t say much except to give ’em a natural life,” he said. “The nest box must be warm, dark, and lined with something soft like meadow grass. We can’t get grass this winter.”

“We can get caribou moss in the swamp,” Philip said.

“It’d make good packing between the double walls,” his father said. “And while you’re up the creek, scrape through the snow and get soft moss for lining. Wish we knew what mink use for bedding in this country.”

The next morning Ann and Philip went to the swamp and by noon the mink’s new home was ready. A mink house with a hinged cover had been set inside a pen of netting. Mr. Jackman lifted the cover of the mink house and put in the newly built nest box. It was warm and lined and had, as an entrance, a covered passageway to make the mink feel he was entering a burrow.

Ann thought the whole arrangement looked very cozy. Their mink would have a warm, dark bedroom and inside living quarters. And when he wished to go to the outside pen he reached it through another covered chute which gave him protection while he reconnoitered. She hoped the mink would like it.

Mr. Jackman carried the mink in the transfer box to his new quarters. No one wished to miss the auspicious occasion when their first mink took possession of his home. Even Napoleon and Josephine, their tails crooked stiffly in excitement, prepared to follow. But the cats were not allowed to leave the clearing and even the family had to watch from a distance.

Mr. Jackman entered the outside pen. He held the transfer box against the entrance to the house, lifted a sliding end, shook the box, and their first

mink was in his home.

Mr. Jackman moved quickly as he left the pen and closed the outer door.

“Steve claims they can jump four feet without even trying,” he said.

They left the mink to become accustomed to his new quarters. More visits, even to take food, would only add to his terror. The animals’ nervousness was one of the greatest hazards in mink farming and Steve had warned that they fared better if tended always by the same person.

“That will be your job, Ann,” her father said. “Think you can make him eat?”

Ann nodded solemnly. The future of their fur farm seemed to depend on her efforts. But the headiness of responsibility faded into plain panic a few hours later when, in mid-afternoon, Mr. Jackman set off on snowshoes for Pe-tah-bo’s camp. He warned them he would be gone for at least three days while he and the Indian cut a big circle to pick up the trail of the thieving stranger.

Ann’s heart sank. Three days alone with a terrified mink! Anxiety over her charge drove her to spend hours at the pen. She tempted the mink with bits of meat. She tried fish. She even tried pleading, although the mink remained hidden in his house.

“You’ve got to eat if you’re going to live!” she exhorted. “Please come out and try this fish.”

Even this brought no response. Philip had crouched over the waterhole in the lake for hours to catch a lake trout, but as far as the mink was concerned, it had been wasted effort.

Ann became exasperated with the obstinacy of the creature. She hardly knew what he looked like, had only glimpsed him through a crack in the transfer box.

The second day, Mrs. Jackman became as worried as Ann and asked if he were still alive.

“I see his tracks in the snow,” Ann said.

“Then he does come out at night.”

“But he doesn’t eat.”

“Does he drink?” her mother asked.

“He can’t because the pan of water is frozen.”

Mrs. Jackman said that thirst would be even more compelling than hunger.

“If I gave him milk, and he drank it, he’d get some food, wouldn’t he?” Ann cried.

“Try it,” Mrs. Jackman urged. “I do so want your father to find that mink alive.”

The next morning Ann carried a shallow pan of milk to the pen. Later she removed it, a white solid mass, still untouched. In the afternoon she carried more milk. She was desperate. Her father would come home that evening to hear only of her failure.

Ann set the milk inside the netting and crouched outside. “Come, mink!” she coaxed, wishing the creature had a name. “Minkie” sounded even less authoritative.

His name should suggest his importance, for he could be the beginning of so much. “Beginning,” she repeated, and thought the word even worse than “Minkie.” And then she had it!

“Genesis!” she cried. “That’s it!”

Having a name with which to call him made her tone firmer. She told Genesis that she was leaving some nice warm milk and advised him to drink it before it froze. Then she walked away noisily, and stopped to hide behind a tree. She was cold and discouraged when at last a small dark head appeared for a moment in the entrance to the mink house. Ann grew tense with excitement. The head reappeared, and a long slender body followed. The mink crept forward stealthily. Lightning-like in its quick movement, the mink looked in all directions. Ann held her breath lest he discover her. The dark serpentine body arched and flattened as the mink advanced, halted, took a few steps, raised to look and listen and then went on. At last he reached the pan of milk, sniffed suspiciously, dipped his head, considered the unfamiliar taste, and then drank deeply. Thirst had won the battle.

Ann walked home on air. The triumph even carried through the growing anxiety of late afternoon as they watched for Mr. Jackman. Her mother stopped often to look at the empty bay. At dusk, Philip returned from the point to report no one in sight.

“But Dad and Pe-tah-bo wouldn’t let that fur thief get ’em,” he added with a quick glance toward his mother.

She said nothing but plunged into supper preparations with a sudden air of briskness as though to shut out thoughts.

It was long past dark when Mr. Jackman arrived, weary, hungry, and disheartened. He and Pe-tah-bo had cut a wide circle through forests and swamps and had not found a trace of the stranger.

“He might have been on his way out of the country when you saw him, Ann. Did he carry a pack?”

“No,” Ann said. “But the mink drank milk today.”

“Good!” her father said, and even he forgot the fur thief. “Milk may keep him alive. Is he still frightened?”

“I think he knows my voice. I talk to him for hours.”

“Ann has a way with animals,” her mother said.

Ann hoped her mother was right. Strange dogs did trust her and she was the favorite of Josephine and Napoleon, the cats. The previous summer she had nursed a starving black bear cub back to health and mischief. But her confidence drained from her as a day passed, then another, and the food in the mink’s pen remained untouched. She wondered how long a mink could live without food. He might even die while the family was trusting her to save the first fur of their farm.

Ann dreaded the evenings which her father spent building box traps, for now he planned to catch all mink alive so that he could select dark yearlings for farm stock. There was no sense, Ann thought, in bringing more animals from the forest to starve in pens.

And that seemed exactly what Genesis was doing. She was convinced of this at noon on the fourth day of his milk diet. When she met Philip on the trail, the discouraged droop of her shoulders told the news.

“What do you suppose that mink ate in the woods?” Philip said.

“They’re bloodthirsty enough when free,” Ann said. “They’re always killing—rabbits, birds, fish, anything they can catch.”

“I bet he’d eat a live minnow.”

“Sure,” Ann said, “but there’s no chance to catch one for him.”

Ann had watched mink fishing in the creek and remembered the greedy bright eyes fixed on the water and the lightning dive at the first flash of a tiny perch.

“If it were only summer we could—” she began.

“Maybe we could get one in winter!” Philip cried. “Say! We’ve seen mink tracks around those rapids in the creek below the falls. I bet the current keeps the ice open.”

“And it’s close enough to the lake so small fish might work up there,” Ann said. “Let’s try it.”

Armed with a can and dipnet, they reached the creek ten minutes later. “Falls” was their courtesy title for the creek’s final leap down a cedar strewn hillside. Now the drowsy murmur of rushing water was stilled under an icy mantle, but they heard a faint trickle.

They shoveled away the snow, examined the rapids, and found a crack which Philip enlarged with his ax. He knelt down and reported he could see moving water. He thrust in the dipnet, slanting it against the current. Ann and Philip lay on their stomachs, shading their eyes and staring into the darkness below. A few bits of black moss and fragments of decayed leaves floated past, but nowhere did they see the dart of tiny fish.

“Even the minnows have gone into deep water,” Ann said forlornly. “We’re just wasting—”

Philip made a convulsive movement, jerked up the dipnet. A three-inch perch flapped in it. They slid the fish into a can of water and started for the mink pen.

The fish was placed in a shallow pan of water in Genesis’ pen. It was still flapping when Ann and Philip crouched in the lookout station under a fir tree. But they feared it wouldn’t be flapping long.

“If he doesn’t come out soon, the water’ll freeze,” Ann said.

“Gosh!” Philip whispered. “Wouldn’t you think he’d hear that fish?”

“Sh-sh-sh! Look! He’s coming!”

A small dark head peered from the covered entrance to the mink house. The fish made a last despairing leap and Genesis raised up alertly. His eyes glowed with the fierce light of hunting. Ann and Philip nudged each other in excitement as the long slender body tensed, then leaped forward. There was a splash of water and Genesis darted back into his house.

Ann and Philip raced home to tell the news.

“You ought to have seen him grab that fish!” Philip said.

“And we can get him more every day until he’s used to eating,” Ann added.

That was a happy evening in the cabin. They talked fast and hard, and even Mrs. Jackman’s usually busy fingers let her mending lie unheeded in her lap as she listened to the others’ brave plans for the future. She laughed a bit, but there was tenderness in her laughter.

“One mink eating a fish doesn’t make a fur farm,” she said.

“We’ve made a good start,” her husband said. “That live fish trick was good thinking. Have to write Steve about it.”

“And you’ll catch some more mink for us?” Philip asked.

“It’s up to me now,” his father said.

In a few days Genesis ate any kind of fish, dead or alive, and had begun to nibble meat. Within a week Mr. Jackman’s box traps had brought in more boarders for the pens and he planned to catch females after the spring mating season.

“Then we’d have a mink nursery here in June,” he said.

Ann knew she’d like that. Baby mink must be cunning and they’d have mothers to supply their food. The growing mink farm filled Ann’s days. She carried milk to the most recent arrivals, fish and meat to others, and persuaded Genesis to eat cereal with his ground meat. She hoped soon to teach him to eat vegetables. Already they had set aside carrots for the mink from their own precious store in the root cellar, but so far Genesis had not cared for carrots.

Genesis was discovering many things. He knew Ann’s coming meant food or fresh water and she was hardly hidden in her observation post before he investigated the place near the netting where she set his meals. Ann thought he watched a neighbor in a nearby pen with interest. She hoped his attitude was friendly, but her father doubted it.

“They’d be at each other’s throats in a split second,” he said. “The only company he wants is a mate. We’ve got to find a Mrs. Genesis.”

Ann hoped that would be soon. Mr. and Mrs. Genesis should become the forbears of a great fur farm. Success depended on an increase and Ann believed that Genesis was becoming less nervous, and adapting himself to captivity. Already he was not so nocturnal in his habits. Philip insisted he’d begun to investigate the possibilities of escape. Philip’s practicability always brought Ann down to earth.

“I know he’d be off in a flash,” she admitted crossly. “But it’s fun to pretend he wouldn’t.”

Mr. Jackman’s box traps had now brought in ten mink. Among them was a small dark female that Ann chose to be Mrs. Genesis. But she was the wildest of all. As Ann watched her tearing savagely at the netting she trusted that Mrs. Genesis didn’t have a violent disposition, lest her young might fare badly.

In her absorption in mink farming, Ann had forgotten there were other excitements in the north until one evening her father turned to her at the supper table.

“Can you trust the mink to Philip for a few days?” he asked. “I’m going to Fort Caribou.”

“You mean you’ll take me!” she cried.

“If you’re ready to start early tomorrow morning.”

Ann flew to pack her duffle bag and Mrs. Jackman wrapped belated Christmas gifts for Mr. Gillespie and Louise, the Indian housekeeper. She’d not expected those presents to be delivered before the late spring trip to sell fur, for Mr. Jackman had not intended to take three days from his trap line.

“But I ought to tell Gillespie about the fur thief,” he said. “And I’d like to talk to him about our mink.”

“Dave! You know he doesn’t believe in fur farming!”

“Naturally, as a servant of the Great Company, he can’t believe in raising fur,” her husband said. “But as our friend, he believes in this family.”

“I think he only growls so we won’t guess how warm his heart is,” Mrs. Jackman said.

The next morning when Ann and her father set off on their twenty-five mile journey the air was still and cold and the lake was so bright in moonlight their figures cast shadows. Every frozen snowflake was a gleaming jewel. It was a magic world, for there was the unreality of fairyland about it. The beauty caught Ann’s throat. She wanted to run on snowshoes behind the dogs so she might look ahead at the miles and miles of sparkling white.

“Better ride while you can,” her father said. “Plenty of trail to break ahead and we’ll have a load on our way home.”

Ann snuggled down among the blankets on the toboggan. Mr. Jackman picked up the tail rope while the dogs waited, tense and eager, for the command to start. He shouted, "*Marchon.*" Ogema leaped forward. Tony, the huge wheel-dog, sprang sideways to break the frozen toboggan from the trail, and the dogs were off on a run. Their ears were up and pointed. Their plumed tails curved high above their backs. Ogema's excited yelps put spirit in the team, and sleigh bells jingled in the frosty air.

Ann had traveled the summer canoe route to the Hudson's Bay post, but the winter trail was new. It struck through a chain of smaller lakes and was shorter. The beginning was well broken because Mr. Jackman used it often on his trapping rounds and the pace could be swift. Mr. Jackman's tireless legs raced behind the toboggan. Ann looked back at him. Team, toboggan, her father clinging to the tail rope, all seemed strangely one. She smiled at him ecstatically.

The moon set as the first streaks of dawn appeared. When the sun rose there was a stirring of air. It was day settling in. Mr. Jackman called the dogs to halt and walked forward.

"I thought so," he said as he looked at Ann. "You've got a white patch on your forehead and another on your chin. Doesn't take long to freeze the skin in this sunrise breeze."

Ann slipped off a mitten and melted the frosted spots with a warm hand. She could never believe that skin could freeze so painlessly or that a tiny zephyr of stirring air could work such damage. Her father watched her, so interested in Ann's face he didn't realize what was happening to his own until she laughed and pointed. Two white patches on his cheekbones looked as though they had been painted.

Full daylight had come when they reached the end of a long arm of Far Lake. Ann looked ahead at the portage trail, a white aisle through the forest. Ogema halted at the shore.

"Here's where you earn your passage, Ann," her father said.

Ann put on her snowshoes and fell in behind him to help break trail for the toboggan. His webs left impressions like alternate leaves on a stem and she was careful to set her own webs down between. "Breaking joints," they called it in the north. Two pairs of snowshoes made a smooth trail, but even then the dogs occasionally broke through. Ogema wallowed resolutely on. He knew he'd have better going soon, and that this tedious and labored pace

across the portages was the price they paid for the easier runs across lake ice. And the portages were short while the lakes were long.

When noon called a halt for lunch, they were past the halfway point of their journey and Mr. Jackman said they'd reach the post long before dark.

They chose the shelter of trees to make noon camp. The dogs lay on the ground, stretched out in a line. Ann knocked the snow off a windfall with her snowshoes and sat down to rest while her father built a fire and hung a kettle of snow to melt for tea water. Ann loved to watch her father. Like Philip, he moved quickly, with never a wasted motion.

With three strokes of his ax he shaped a handle for the frying pan. Then he opened a bag of frozen baked beans and dropped a few handfuls of the hard pellets into the pan.

"Nothing sticks to the ribs like baked beans," Mr. Jackman said.

The frozen pellets began to sizzle in the heat and blend together and to give off an appetizing odor. Ann left her windfall to stir the beans so they wouldn't burn. Her father brought the tea to a boil and they carried their lunch to the big windfall. Sociably, and to save dishes, they shared the frying pan.

Mr. Jackman drew a mark across the center.

"If Philip were here, I'd have to give him at least three quarters," he said. "Like winter travel?"

Ann nodded. It was quiet and warm and cozy among the trees. Overhead two moose birds sat in a spruce, their eyes searching for crumbs. The birds' arrival had been soundless, for the soft gray feathers of their wings muffled the whirr of flying.

"Like ghost birds," Ann said.

"That's a new name for them," her father chuckled. "And I thought I'd heard them all. In logging camps they call 'em camp-robbers or whisky-jacks, which is as near as the white man can come to the Indian's name for them, *wiskatjan*. I suppose there are more stories about those birds than anything that flies. I've even heard they keep a lookout for the first sign of campfire smoke. Anyway, I've never known it to fail that at least one of those fellows didn't arrive by the time the fire's going. You never hear them come, don't even know they're there, unless you just happen to look up and see 'em."

Ann thought such vigilance should be rewarded. She tossed out two pieces of her biscuit. There was a ghostly flutter as the birds retrieved the pieces and went back to resume their waiting.

When Ann and her father had packed the lunch dishes, called the dogs, and started for the lake, she looked back. The two moose birds were searching the campsite for crumbs. The dying fire sputtered in a deep hole in the snow. She could see the cleared place on the windfall where they had sat to eat and beside it were the four small holes in the snowbank where they had stuck their snowshoes upright.

It looked like so many other winter camps where they had stopped to boil tea, and yet there had been something unforgettable in the warmth and coziness of that noon hour. Indians named places in honor of memorable occasions. Ann wanted a name for this one. She smiled at her father.

“Perhaps sometime we’ll come back again to Moose Bird Camp,” she said.



It was nearly sunset when Fort Caribou loomed ahead. Ann had seen the Hudson's Bay post only in summer. She remembered the green lawn, the wigwams of the natives spaced along the point and the line of birchbark canoes on the shore. Now the two-storied dwelling house stood bleakly on a snow-covered flat and the adjacent trade shop and the servants' cabins looked small and desolate in the winter setting.

Mr. Gillespie came down to the ice to meet them.

"What luck!" he said. "I was ready to talk to myself just to hear a bit of English. How's the family? No bad news brings you, I hope."

He waited only long enough for reassurance, then clapped Mr. Jackman on the back, shook hands with Ann, called one Indian to carry the packsacks to the house and another to lead off the dogs.

“Staying over at least a day, I hope,” he said. “Louise will be delighted.”

Mr. Jackman said he’d help unharness and feed the dogs.

Mr. Gillespie gave an order in Ojibwa and turned to Mr. Jackman. “Telling him to put your team in an empty cabin. Don’t want to have a dog fight.”

The fort manager tucked Ann’s arm in his.

“And now, young lady, I’ll take you to the house.”

Louise was at the door to greet them, her broad face wreathed in smiles. She seemed even more pleased than had been the manager, and his delight had been unmistakable. His usual brusque heartiness had relapsed into actual volubility.

Ann followed Louise upstairs to a bedroom which was delightfully warm and cozy. The big round drum in the stovepipe of the living room heater was like a second stove. Louise brought a pitcher of hot water.

Ann changed from trail clothes to a scarlet woolen dress. She knew it was becoming. Her cheeks were pink, her eyes were bright with excitement, and her blonde hair fell in natural waves about her face. She was glad she had taken time to change, for when she entered the living room Mr. Gillespie arose and led her to the low tea table.

“Seems good to have a woman pour tea again,” he said.

Ann blushed with pleasure because he had said “woman.” On their previous visits her mother had poured tea and now Ann hoped to do it with the same gracious charm.

It was pleasant to be in that living room again, with the easy chairs, the cases filled with books, and the old piano which had been brought in by York boat and carried across fifteen portages. Her mother had played old Scotch ballads for Mr. Gillespie and Ann hoped he wouldn’t ask her to play. She had never gone beyond “Invitation to the Waltz,” and that wouldn’t make Mr. Gillespie wipe his eyes and blow his nose and think of his homeland.

Her father came and the two men fell into talk of fur. Michel, who worked in the trade shop and was partly white, was away as a tripper, taking

supplies to Indian hunters and bringing in their furs. Mr. Gillespie had been alone for several weeks. A few hunters had been in, one whole family to tell of their luck in having caught a silver fox. Mr. Gillespie asked about Pe-tah-bo's family and Ann told of her last visit to his wigwam and of Wen-dah-ban's catch of mink.

Mr. Gillespie nodded in approval. "The lad's like his father. He'll be as good a hunter, and a leader, too."

"Pe-tah-bo is awfully proud of him," Ann said.

"He has every right to be," the manager said. "Pe-tah-bo told me last fall he hoped Wen-dah-ban would marry one of Sho-shun's girls. I hope so too. It would unite two fine Indian families."

"Marry!" Ann cried. "He's too young! He's only my age."

"Indian lads grow up fast, once they've begun to hunt. At that, Wen-dah-ban probably doesn't know anything about his father's plans. The two families will go off blueberrying some summer, and the next thing we'll hear is that the young 'uns have set up a wigwam. Lord! How time flies! I can remember when Wen-dah-ban got his first canoe. And I'll probably be here to give him a present as the head of a new family." He turned to Mr. Jackman. "Seen Pe-tah-bo lately?"

Mr. Jackman told of their two-day search for the fur thief. Mr. Gillespie's face grew grim as he listened. It was at such times, Ann realized, that the grizzled Scotchman was indeed the ruler of a vast district where justice must be swift and stern. He remained silent for a moment and only the quick, sharp puffs at his pipe told how disturbed he was.

"That's what white man's civilization brings us!" he burst forth at last. "Never before in this district have any hunter's traps been robbed. Once I would have turned out every Indian at the post to hunt the thief. But now—" and he shrugged his shoulders—"with the railroad, such white scum can be here today and gone tomorrow. That's one reason why I'd like to see fur land stay as it's always been."

"You can't stop progress even in fur land," Mr. Jackman said.

"Progress!" the manager exploded. "That's what you call it!"

He leaped to his feet.

"Remember our argument last summer? You were talking of the coming of the railroad. Even of a time when flying machines would whisk you and your family in and out of the bush. And you were looking forward to white

trappers, fur farms, and changes in the old fur trade. I'd hate to live to see that. The forest can raise our fur and our Indian hunters can run trap lines, just as they always have."

Ann was sorry the talk had turned to fur farms so soon, but she knew her father would not dodge the issue. She slipped from behind the tea table and sat on the arm of his chair, wanting him to feel she was beside him. But when he spoke, Mr. Jackman's tone was quiet.

"The change is coming whether you and I want it or not," he said. "And I'm still a believer in fur farms. We've started ours. Have live mink in pens."

"Does Pe-tah-bo know that?" Mr. Gillespie asked.

Ann had dreaded that question, although she recognized the manager's right to ask it. He knew of the former feud with Pe-tah-bo when the Jackmans had unwittingly built their cabin in Pe-tah-bo's inherited trapping territory, which had belonged to his father and according to fur land laws would in turn descend to Wen-dah-ban.

Pe-tah-bo had ordered the Jackmans to leave Home Bay and they appealed to the Hudson's Bay manager. The Scotchman had been sympathetic but had insisted he could not interfere with the ancient rights of his hunters. For a time the previous summer Mr. Jackman had feared he could not earn a living for his family. The future had looked very black when they had gathered at the Hudson's Bay post for the treaty day celebration and not even Mr. Gillespie held out hope that Pe-tah-bo would weaken.

And then suddenly the matter had been settled. On the day of native canoe races, Ann had saved Wen-dah-ban from drowning, and in gratitude Pe-tah-bo had given Mr. Jackman a two-year hunting privilege in the territory which would some day belong to Wen-dah-ban. Since then friendship and understanding had grown up between the two neighbors.

Mr. Gillespie had been present when Pe-tah-bo had so unexpectedly capitulated, and he knew the terms. Now he frowned.

"The native reasoning may seem peculiar," he said, "but nothing was said about a fur farm."

Mr. Jackman admitted he'd not told Pe-tah-bo about the mink pens. "But I will," he added.

"I wish you would."

“He shouldn’t object,” Mr. Jackman said. “There’s no difference whether I trap for pelts, as he does, or select stock for breeding. The increase is my earned right.”

“But you won’t get an increase!” the Hudson’s Bay man said.

“Mink farms have existed for over thirty years and—”

“A few crack-brained experiments!” the Scotchman retorted. “They proved nothing. Let the Indian hunters get the fur as they’ve been doing for generations.”

“If we’d followed that policy with the silver fox, how many pelts would have been sold in this year’s market?” Mr. Jackman asked.

He didn’t wait for his answer.

“Until fox farms were started, there were never more than twenty-five silver fox pelts sold in any year,” he said. “And what happened after the Prince Edward Island farms proved that the fox could be domesticated? One farm alone sent twenty-five prime pelts to the London market. And after the First Ten Companies were organized they sent 703 silver foxes to London. This year there’s no guessing how many pelts will be offered. And all that has happened within five years because a few crack-brained experiments, as you call them, proved that the silver fox need not be just a matter of accident.”

Mr. Jackman leaned forward in his chair.

“The change isn’t coming, Gillespie. It *has* come. You told us that an Indian family came in to trade because they’d had the luck to catch a silver fox. It was probably the only one in a litter of reds. But the Prince Edward Island companies have proved that a strain can be bred which will produce only silvers. The world’s demand for the peer of all furs can be met. The industry of the Golden Pelt has started. The skin of the silver fox will no longer have to depend on the luck of an Indian hunter in finding it, and the additional gamble that he caught it when the fur was prime.”

Ann always thrilled when her father caught fire like this and even Mr. Gillespie looked impressed. Suddenly Ann felt a little sorry for the manager for he was of the past, and her father was looking toward the future.

Louise came in then to say that supper was ready. She was wearing a lace collar Mrs. Jackman had crocheted for a Christmas present and she giggled self-consciously as the manager admired it.

“And now, if you’ll excuse me for a moment,” Mr. Gillespie said to Ann, “I’m going to put on the tie your mother knit for me. What a woman she is! To find time in her busy days to make an old bear of a Scotchman happy.”

Louise carried in another present while they were at the supper table. She held out a jar and asked, “What you do with him?”

Mr. Gillespie sniffed. “Mincemeat!” he cried. “Tarts and pies! Louise, you know pie crust?”

Louise shook her head.

“Ann does,” Mr. Jackman said. “Tomorrow she’ll show you how. We’ve lived high since Mary discovered moose could be used in mincemeat.”

After supper Ann looked forward to a late evening of talk in the living room. Every minute of her visit was precious. She tried to listen, and to join, but the long day in the cold, the exercise, and now the warmth and food, made her drowsy. Her eyelids dropped despite her efforts, and then she saw her father too was having difficulty.

Mr. Jackman gave in first. “Let’s admit the truth, Ann,” he said. “Mr. Gillespie knows the bush well enough to understand that neither of us can keep awake.”

The manager jumped to his feet. “Lord! How I’ve suffered after a long day on the trail when I’ve had to stay awake and listen to some visiting dignitary.”

He lighted candles and watched his guests up the staircase.

“Don’t have to wish you a good night’s sleep,” he called. “You couldn’t have anything else.”

The next morning Ann opened her eyes to find Louise standing at her bedside with a cup of tea. On former visits only Mrs. Jackman had received this attention. Ann didn’t want the tea, rarely drank it, and certainly never before breakfast. But neither had she ever been waited upon before. She felt years older as she lay back against the pillows and sipped her tea while the Indian woman closed her windows.

“Thank you, Louise,” she said when the housekeeper was ready to leave. “I’ll be down soon.”

The men had already gone to the trade shop when Ann arrived for a solitary breakfast. But Louise was eagerly awaiting instruction in the mysteries of pie crust. Ann felt diffident when she entered the big kitchen of

the post. Until now she had always been the one to receive culinary direction. Nor had she counted on an audience, but word had gone forth to the employees' cabins and three dark calico-clad women, shawls drawn tightly around their shoulders, sat in a row to watch Louise learn about pie crust.

Louise was serious and deferential as she watched Ann's every motion and then did her own best to imitate it. The audience became more and more absorbed as the pies took shape, and scarcely moved during the baking. At last two browned, bubbling pies were taken from the oven. They smelled delicious.

“*Nish-i-shins!*” passed up and down the row of watchers.

Louise pointed at Ann. “Good woman cook,” she said.

It was the first time that Louise had dropped the diminutive, “little woman.” Ann colored with pleasure and although she laughed inwardly at herself, she knew her bearing did take on something of “the lady of the manor” air.

She left the kitchen in a hail of “thank-yous.” Mr. Gillespie was even more grateful at the noon meal and Ann began to enjoy the headiness of triumph. As they left the dinner table her father whispered to her that the pie really was good.

“That pie just *had* to be good,” she said.

In the afternoon Mr. Jackman sold his fur, did his trading, and loaded the toboggan for an early departure next morning. Ann visited the trade shop. It no longer seemed the scantily stocked store it had appeared on her first visit, for she understood now how precious were the pails and kettles which hung from ceiling beams, the axes, old-fashioned muzzle-loading trade guns, powder horns, steel traps, blankets, bolts of duffle, strouds, and dark colored calico which filled the shelves on one side. On the other were the foods of a primitive people, sacks of flour, large lead-lined boxes of tea, and sides of salt pork.

All these necessities of the Indian hunters had been brought through long waterways in the big York boats and had been carried over many portages on packers' backs, and Ann began to understand more clearly why Mr. Gillespie dreaded the coming of the railroad. There was a solidity about this trade shop with its blackened counter and work-a-day stock of simple things. It seemed to belong in this country. There was even romance in this place, filled with the tools of the old fur trade.

But trade shops would be different when they stood beside steel rails and the hardships of transportation were of the past. Then any desire of a child-like people, eager for the white man's culture, could be gratified.

"I hate to think of it, my dear," the manager said. "Gimcracks and gadgets! They'll freeze and go hungry to own 'em. But let's not talk of that. It's time for tea."

Mr. Gillespie had evidently been looking forward to that hour and Ann knew he was excited. But when he entered the living room with several large packages, he was beaming.

"Merry Christmas!" he said.

There was a package for each of the Jackmans. He laid Ann's in her lap. She opened it and cried out with pleasure as she unfolded the soft caribou skin parka. Ann quickly slipped it on. The hood was faced with cross fox and the long silky fur framed her face. Beadwork and fringed leather adorned the garment. Louise came in from the kitchen to admire and finger the fine sewing, and say it was "*nish-i-shin*."

"Should be," the manager said. "Finest skin worker in the district made it."

Ann smoothed the soft folds of the garment. It clung to her. Never had she felt more glamorous. Once she had been very proud of her capote of strouds, which the Indians wore. But skin clothing was worn by the official white man in fur land, and hers was lighter, finer, and more becoming than anything she had ever hoped to own.

"Why—it's beautiful!" she stammered. "I don't know how to thank you."

"You have, my dear," Mr. Gillespie said. "You've let me see you in it."



There was only one flaw in the homecoming. It was after dark when they reached Home Bay and Ann's new skin parka could not be seen from afar. As they trudged up the slope to the cabin, Mr. Jackman gave a loud and prolonged, "Hallo!"

The cabin door burst open and Ann stepped into the beam of light. She wore her hood pulled forward and her laughing face looked out from a rim of fur.

"Ann!" Philip gasped. "You look— How'd you get a skin parka like Mr. Gillespie's?"

In the cabin Philip's whole attention was fixed on the new skin garment and there was envy in his eyes as he fingered the soft tanning. Ann smiled at her father. They knew Philip's Christmas package contained one like it, and

they had plotted to keep the news secret. But Ann couldn't bear to watch Philip's envy any longer. She handed him his gift.

"Stop looking at mine, and look at yours," she said.

Philip wore his new parka when he fed the dogs. With difficulty his mother persuaded him to take it off even to eat supper, but he kept the garment on the bench beside him. Mrs. Jackman was almost as ecstatic with her own gift, a box of books.

"What I wanted most of all," she said. "How'd he guess it?"

"Didn't have to do much guessing after his years of long bush evenings," her husband said.

"But, Dave! There's one present I hope you got. Did you find someone to help with the wood and chores?"

"The Indians, of course, are hunting," her husband said. "And there's no chance of getting a white man. But Gillespie promised to keep a lookout."

"Anyone who could use an ax would help," Mrs. Jackman said. "Our woodpile is melting away."

"I'll have to figure a way to fell trees after dark. Can't afford to give up trapping hours."

When they'd planned the wilderness venture they'd talked bravely of a country in which food, shelter, and fuel were free. But already Ann had discovered nothing was really free. Effort had to earn what they did not buy, and there weren't hours enough in the day for the earning. Each season was crowded with preparations for the next. Their winter larder had been stocked by days of hunting, fishing, fruit picking and preserving all through summer and fall. Mr. Jackman had spent weeks freighting in those things which must come from "outside."

Even today the few supplies brought from the Hudson's Bay post had given the dogs a heavy load and Ann had snowshoed the greater part of the homeward journey. But she felt repaid as her mother exclaimed over those precious groceries.

"I never expected to be so glad to see a can of cinnamon," she said. "It doesn't look like much, but what a difference it makes in planning meals."

The winter trip to the post had enabled Mrs. Jackman to fill several blanks on her cupboard shelves. Mr. Gillespie had stripped his own kitchen in her behalf and he had even remembered Pe-tah-bo with extra midwinter

shot and powder for his trade gun, and a message that the tripper would soon be at his camp.

“Philip and Ann can deliver them,” Mr. Jackman said.

“Sure,” Philip said. “We’ll wear our new skin parkas. Bet Wen-dah-ban will be surprised.”

At noon next day Ann and Philip turned into the forest trail which led to Pe-tah-bo’s wigwam. Ann was riding. Philip ran ahead to drive off Wen-dah-ban’s dogs, and there was the usual great commotion of a winter arrival. Wen-dah-ban’s dogs, which maintained a state of belligerent neutrality with their neighbors, rushed out to threaten the visitors. Wah-be-goan, who had caught the jingle of harness bells almost as soon as the dogs, pushed back the blanket flap and stood in the doorway hurling firewood at her son’s dogs and shouting torrents of Ojibwa.

All through her terrifying tirade, her face was wreathed in smiles. The young Jackmans were favorites of Wah-be-goan’s. At last the Jackmans’ team was chained fore and aft between two trees, Wen-dah-ban’s dogs were tied to others, and Wah-be-goan had begun to cluck with excitement over the new parkas. Even before she led Ann and Philip into the wigwam she had to examine the sewing of the skins.

“*Nish-i-shin! Nish-i-shin!*” she exclaimed and demanded the name of the seamstress.

The inevitable stew simmered on the fire in the center of the wigwam and around the walls was the usual indiscriminate heap of rabbit skin blankets and bits of duffle. Wah-be-goan’s housekeeping was sketchy according to white standards, but she never appeared to notice the clutter. She had prepared for winter cold by putting on two dresses over the two she usually wore in summer. All were long, with full gathered skirts, and she moved ponderously under layers of calico and wool as she pushed a fresh stick against the one which was smoldering in the fire, rearranged the cooking kettle, and sat down to work. She was stretching a mink pelt, skin side out, on a board. As she scraped off bits of flesh with her fleshing knife, she chatted.

Two hunters gave her much fur to do. She liked that. Wen-dah-ban and Pe-tah-bo would be home by and by. Ann knew that might mean anything, an hour or after dark.

“But I want to see Wen-dah-ban,” Philip said.

“You mean you want Wen-dah-ban to see you,” Ann corrected.

This joke had to be explained to Wah-be-goan, and her fat sides shook with laughter. They never knew how much of their Ojibwa the Indian woman understood, but she always politely pretended that she had missed nothing. Philip made the tea while Ann toasted bacon for sandwiches. Wah-be-goan, who had never tasted crisp bacon, liked it so well that not a crumb was left. Lunch was over when Wen-dah-ban pulled back the flap of the wigwam.

“*B'jou! B'jou!*” he cried, and then he added the more formal English greeting, “Good day!”

He was delighted to see them, but as Ann looked at him she knew Mr. Gillespie had been right when he'd said Indian lads grow older quickly. He had a new air of assurance. Ann remembered him as the boy with whom she'd paddled and gone hunting with bow and arrows. He'd often eaten at the Jackmans' table, and with a sort of shamefaced boyishness had tried to use a knife and fork, as they did. For a time even Mrs. Jackman had thought they were teaching him white man's ways.

Now he was just as friendly and merry, but underneath there was a new seriousness. Ann felt it, even while it baffled her. It was as though man's interests now absorbed him.

Wen-dah-ban reached into the stew kettle, picked out a quarter of a rabbit, sat with his back against a roll of blankets and listened while Ann told him of her visit to the Hudson's Bay post.

Philip inquired about his trap line, and Wen-dah-ban told a story of a fisher which made their eyes shine with excitement.

For a month a fisher had eluded Wen-dah-ban. He had cunningly set bait, roofed the cubbies, and filled every crack and crevice so that the fisher could reach the piece of rabbit only by stepping on the hidden trap. And each day the fisher had defeated him.

The fisher had torn cubbies apart. He had worked out schemes to defeat Wen-dah-ban. Day after day the hunter had found trap sprung, bait gone, and cubbies either empty or destroyed. It had been a duel. And as Wen-dah-ban described the long struggle, the fisher began to take on the qualities of an outlaw and marauder who stole the bait of honest men. As an adversary he had wit, cunning, and phenomenal strength.

Wah-be-goan's fleshing knife remained poised in the air as she leaned forward to listen. Her eyes were proud. Ann held her breath. She couldn't bear to think of Wen-dah-ban facing defeat day after day. They sat absorbed

under the spell of his swift-flowing simple sentences. Ann remembered that his father, Pe-tah-bo, was an orator and a leader, and she knew that some day Wen-dah-ban would also be one of the chief men of his people.

This wasn't the boy with whom they had played. This was a hunter.

"Wait!" said Wen-dah-ban, and he walked out of the wigwam.

He returned, holding aloft the body of the fisher.

After that, the new parkas seemed very unimportant. Wen-dah-ban fingered and appraised the softness of the tanning. He spoke swiftly to his mother. She laughed.

"Wen-dah-ban says now you dress like the men of the Great Company," she said. "It is good for a white man."

A little later, as they stood in the doorway of the wigwam saying good-by, the dogs barked. In a moment Pe-tah-bo came down the trail. He walked erectly, his great barrel chest thrown back, and his eyes lighted when he saw the Jackmans. Ann was glad Pe-tah-bo had arrived before they left. It was months since she had seen him.

"But you should have been here earlier," she said. "Wen-dah-ban told a grand story of a fisher."

Wen-dah-ban was still holding his trophy, and his father's dark eyes flashed a proud look at his son. Wah-be-goona gave her husband the message about the tripper and showed him the shot and powder.

"*Me-quetch*," Pe-tah-bo said, and, as always, he imparted a gracious dignity to the simple Ojibwa word of "thank-you." Mrs. Jackman had once startled her family by saying that Pe-tah-bo was courtly.

When he heard they were leaving he looked swiftly at the sky and his quick "*Kah-win*" had more than even the usual vehemence of the Ojibwa "no." Snow would be falling soon, he said. They would lose their way. It would be much better for them to sleep that night in the warm wigwam.

Ann couldn't imagine sharing the crowded wigwam, and protested that their father and mother would be worried if they didn't get home by dark.

Philip listened to the wind sighing in the pine branches.

"We can make it," he said.

As he unchained Ogema, Pe-tah-bo made another effort to detain them. Wah-be-goona added a warning, and even Wen-dah-ban said it was not good

to travel in a snowstorm.

“But this team can run,” Philip said, “and part of the way we can both ride.”

“We *have* to get home,” Ann added.

Pe-tah-bo accompanied them a few steps down the trail. He pointed overhead at the first fine snowflakes.

“It is not good,” he said.

Philip looked uncertainly at Ann, and she feared that he was weakening.

“Philip, we *can't* stay,” she said. “Dad and Mother would be worried to death.”

As they left the forest and turned out on the lake, the snow was thicker. The flakes were small, but fell obliquely. Philip looked at the sky, gray and threatening, with windtorn clouds scudding low.

“Even if we do get snow, it's better that we started,” he said.

He crouched back of the toboggan hood, Ann clinging behind him. Philip's command, “*Marchon!*” held urgency, and Ogema looked back as though to say he too recognized the need of haste. Ordinarily, Philip would have discussed Wen-dah-ban in his new role of hunter and talked about his winter's catch, but now neither Ann nor Philip spoke more than monosyllables. They sat tense, as though the force of their will could hasten the speeding dogs.

When they reached the narrows the wind was blowing harder, driving the snow slantwise before it. Philip looked overhead, and turned to Ann.

“Once we're on the open lake, we can make it to Home Bay,” he said.

There was a question in his statement. Ann nodded. They hurried along the shore of the narrows. When they started out on the open lake, the snow was thicker. The wind had increased and carried a sense of force behind it.

A few hundred yards from shore, Philip glanced back.

“Look!” he said. “We can see the point clear as anything. It's not too thick to travel.”

“And Ogema can keep the trail,” Ann added.

They were proud of Ogema's ability to find the hard trail even under a fresh fall of snow. He had accepted that important leader's job and his

chagrin was pitiful if ever, for a moment, he led his team into soft going.

The force of the wind strengthened. Snow filled the air as the icy particles were picked up from the surface of the lake and whirled away. It stung their faces and coated the chests of the dogs. Philip looked back.

“You can’t see the point,” he said.

Ann turned. The point was lost in a moving whiteness. And then, as though a curtain had been drawn, the entire shoreline of the lake disappeared. Philip called on the dogs for speed, grasped the tail rope of the toboggan and let Ann ride.

Ogema whimpered, and began to range from side to side. He had missed firm footing and was endeavoring to find the trail again without losing time in the forward journey. He crossed it at last and settled down to a steady gallop.

“Good boy!” Ann said, even though she knew he couldn’t hear her.

And then with a shriek, the blizzard was upon them. Snow drove straight before the blasts. They were in a small white world of turmoil and confusion.

Ogema lost the trail again. He tried repeatedly but couldn’t find it. Philip ordered the dogs to halt while he went searching. Ann watched the quick dimming of his retreating figure.

“Philip! Philip!” she called. “Don’t go out of sight. We mustn’t lose each other.”

Philip returned, not because he had heard her, but because he too had recognized the danger.

“Maybe we’d better hunt for the trail together,” he said.

They went in one direction, then another. The dogs crowded close to Philip’s heels and Ann clung to the tail rope of the toboggan. Nowhere did their feet touch firm footing.

“Snow has covered the trail already,” Philip said.

To Ann it seemed that snow had been falling for hours. They stood alone, huddled in an unfamiliar universe of driving white. Ann tried to keep her voice steady.

“Let’s stop hunting the trail and just try to get home,” she said.

They started on. Ann plodded behind Philip. There was comfort in their nearness to each other. Ogema followed Ann. He crowded close but carefully avoided treading on the long tails of her snowshoes, even though to do so he had to cross one foot over the other like a dancer. Sometimes he thrust his head forward to nuzzle her swinging hand.

After a long time Philip halted.

“It will be dark soon,” he said.

Ann had known that. They should have reached Home Bay long before. They’d kept their direction by facing the wind, but there was no guessing how far they might have wandered when they’d been searching for the trail. They might have even reached the outer lake, and then they would have missed Home Bay entirely.

“Maybe we got turned around somehow,” Philip said.

Ann knew what that meant. They might circle aimlessly until exhaustion stopped them. And when they couldn’t walk any farther, there would be the freezing cold and the blizzard.

“We can’t stay out here,” Philip said. “Our only chance is to find shore.”



Ann and Philip stood close together, backs to the driving, cutting snow. Beside them the dogs, snow sifting into their fur, waited in a disconsolate file. Their heads drooped and their tails were tucked between their legs as though they tried to present as small a surface as possible to the blizzard tearing at them.

Ann shivered in the cold, and the sudden blasts and crescendos of the gale held real terror. Often in the past year, when she and Philip had played at outdoor games, they'd pretended to hold grave councils of war. Now they must hold a real one.

"How are we going to find the shore?" she asked.

“The wind was in our faces when we left the narrows,” Philip said. “If we keep it on our right we’ll get to the north shore.”

“But we don’t know how far out on the lake we are.”

“We got to make up our minds to keep on going, no matter how long it takes. We’ll get to land somewhere.”

Philip led. Ann followed. The dogs, recognizing that now their masters had a plan and the aimless wanderings were over, lifted their heads. Ann and Philip leaned against the wind, which bore down on their right shoulders. That wind had been their enemy. Now it must be their ally.

They fought on. Ann was becoming tired. She wondered what would happen when she could no longer put one snowshoe ahead of the other. She kept her eyes fixed on Philip for the determined set to his shoulders was a command to keep on plodding.

She began to fear this plan to reach land was hopeless. But she struggled on until suddenly Philip shouted.

“Shore!”

Ann stumbled up a rough incline after him. She touched a tree.

“Philip! It *is* shore!” she cried.

“But what do we do next?” he asked.

They moved deeper into the forest for protection from the wind. Ann was surprised to see that the snowfall seemed much less. A great part of that white turmoil on the lake had been surface snow driven before the blasts.

“We can keep on traveling here,” she said. “Try to find Home Bay.”

“We can’t travel in the dark,” Philip said.

Night was almost upon them. Ann listened to the wind as the trees bent before it. She could hear it shrieking on the lake. She thought of the cold, the loneliness and terror of not knowing where they were. And she thought of their father and their mother in Home Bay, watching for them.

“If we don’t get there, what are Dad and Mother going to think?”

“You know what Dad said,” Philip answered. “In the bush nothing very bad can happen to a fellow who’s made a camp.”

“Then we’d better make one while we can still see,” she said.

Ann's tone was firm. She was trying to stiffen her own courage. They'd never made a winter camp before, never been out overnight without a tent. But she'd heard her father describe the winter camps of the Hudson's Bay men.

"Dad said you got to hunt good shelter." Philip answered the thought in Ann's mind. "You stay with the dogs while I take a look."

He returned to report that he'd found a big jackpot, a jumble of windfalls which would give them shelter and fuel within reach. He led Ann to it and while she unfastened the traces, he took an ax from under the toboggan lashings.

"We used to think Dad was fussy because he'd never let us start off without an ax," Philip said. "Now he knows we've got one. That ought to help."

Ann didn't like to think of their father and mother waiting for them, but there wasn't time to do much thinking. It had started to get dark.

"First thing is a fire," Philip said.

While he gathered windfalls for fuel, Ann unharnessed the dogs. She unlashed the tarp from the toboggan for it must serve as a blanket. She leaned the toboggan against a tree and then began to clear space for a campsite. She used a snowshoe as a shovel. Philip came back to camp, dragging a huge windfall.

"If I clear down to the frozen ground, we won't have any melted snow to get us wet," Ann said.

"And if you throw it against the wind, it'll make a windbreak," Philip said.

Compared to the wide, open lake, the forest was quiet, but even among the trees the wind eddied and sucked, and tops bent before the blizzard. Out on the lake she could hear the gale blasting and shrieking, but the sound was less menacing when Philip built a fire and she watched the first bright flames creep up the face of the logs.

Philip carried in tops of balsam saplings and with her jackknife Ann cut off the branches for bedding. They'd need a lot to keep them warm on that frozen ground. Philip returned carrying a great thick balsam top over his shoulder. He looked proud as he set it down. He chopped off the heavier boughs to sit on and for the foundation springs for the bed.

They made the bed by laying the big branches bowed side up, and then thatching with the smaller branches. The bed was more than a foot high when it was finished and they laid the tarp over it to keep off the falling snow.

Dark had come. But the camp looked more cheerful walled in by the blackness outside. A great heap of windfalls, fuel for the night, lay just inside the outskirts of firelight. The dogs settled before the fire and Ann and Philip stayed within its warmth. Besides, the leaping flames, a mere pin point in the dark forest, gave comfort and reassurance. Philip looked around.

“Wish Dad and Mother knew how safe we were,” he said. “We’d be fine if we had something to eat.”

Ann was hungry, and the dogs looked at them expectantly. A supperless evening was beyond their comprehension.

“We ate a meal this noon, but those fellows haven’t had a thing since last night,” Philip said.

“If it wasn’t so dark we might get a rabbit.”

“Snare ’em, you mean,” Philip said.

He took a small roll of copper wire from a pocket, measured it, looked embarrassed.

“Dad gave me a big roll last fall and told me always to carry it,” he said. “But I’ve been using off it for one thing or other. Now it wouldn’t make any more than two rabbit snares. And we don’t know if there are any rabbit runways around here.”

“And we couldn’t set snares until daylight,” Ann added. “Maybe the storm’ll be over then.”

“It’s blowing hard enough to blow itself out.”

Ann couldn’t resist smiling as she thought how many of her father’s phrases Philip had used since they’d made camp. Ogema whined as though asking if they’d overlooked supper.

“Wish we’d saved some of that bacon we gave Wah-be-goan,” Philip said.

Ann thought of their empty tea pail. She filled it with snow and Philip hung it over the fire. The warm water tasted of pine needles and was not comforting. Ann wondered how long one could live on hot water.

Philip carried the kettle of water to Ogema, who took a few quick laps at this token supper by way of gratitude. Tony and Dick only sniffed and backed away. If they were thirsty they could lap snow with their long red tongues.

Ann and Philip sat on the balsam branches laid before the fire. The dogs cuddled close and fixed their feet. Philip helped Ogema melt a snowball from between his pads. Then all five stared into the darkness. Out on the lake the wind shrieked, died away, shrieked again. In the circle of firelight snow sifted down to disappear in the flame. On the edges of the burning logs the snowflakes made a low hissing.

“What’s the longest blizzard you ever heard of?” Philip asked.

Ann tried to remember. “I heard Dad talk of a three-day storm,” she said. “But that’s awfully long. Why?”

“Oh, nothing,” Philip said, and he jumped to his feet. “I suppose we might as well go to bed.”

They lifted the tarp and lay on the balsam branches. Ogema snuggled in between them. He was damp but very warm. Philip threw his arm around him. Tony and Dick stared at Ogema for one amazed moment and then decided to follow his example.

“Three dogs will help to keep us warm,” Ann said.

Tony and Dick found places on the outside and the five nestled close. It was like being banked by three stoves. Philip sat up for a last look at the fire.

“When it dies down the cold will wake us,” he said. “And I’ll put on more wood.”

“We’ll take turns tending the fire,” Ann said.

Philip didn’t argue that as he tucked the tarp around them to hold in the animal heat. He was silent for a long time and then said, “Wonder if Dad will be sore because we got lost.”

“But the way you thought of keeping the wind on our right was wonderful!” Ann protested.

“Dad says that in the bush a man begins to think when he gets really scared.”

“Were you scared?” Ann asked. “I was too.”

She wondered if she wasn't still a bit scared as she lay there listening to the storm's attack upon the forest. She thought Philip was asleep until he spoke.

"Say, Ann," he asked drowsily, "do you suppose there's anything that Dad would have done about this camp that we've forgotten?"

"Even he couldn't have made a better camp," she said almost fiercely.

"Think so?" Philip sounded pleased, and then as his voice trailed off sleepily, he added, "You know, this was a sort of test, like that fisher of Wendah-ban's."

Ann thought of Philip's speech before she too drifted off to sleep. Mr. Gillespie had said Indian lads grew up quickly, once they'd begun the man's job of hunting. The bush helped anyone grow up. She and Philip were different people than they'd been that night when they were lost in the spruce swamp a month after their arrival in the north. Then they'd run from a bull moose, feared bears, and cowered under the swift shadow of a flying owl. They'd been victims of nameless terrors. Now they'd found their way out of a blizzard. They were snug and warm. But she wished her father and mother knew.

Ann wakened to find daylight, but she knew the blizzard still held the north when she heard the wind in the trees. Philip stirred and looked at the dead fire. He was mortified.

"I put on wood once," he said. "But the cold didn't waken me."

"It wasn't cold," Ann said. "The dogs kept us warm."

Philip got up and built a fire. The dogs, reluctant to leave such unaccustomed luxury, only poked their noses from the tarp to watch. When the fire was blazing, Philip hung a pail of snow to melt. Ann sat up and shook the tarp free of snow.

"We'd only get lost again if we start out in this," Philip said.

Snow was still falling. The blizzard hadn't blown itself out. If anything it had gained force and Ann thought that it seemed colder. Ogema walked to the fire. When Philip offered him melted snow water, he only backed away. He whimpered. Philip patted his head.

"Hungry, old fellow?" he said. "I am too."

"We've got to get some rabbits," Ann said.

“It’ll take a lot of ’em to feed the five of us,” Philip said. “Wish I hadn’t used that roll of wire.”

“How about our moccasin lashings?”

They untied the long thongs which bound the white cloth tops and found one half the length would serve. As they cut off pieces for snares, Ann suggested they could hold the limp loop open with twigs. Philip experimented and agreed.

“But we got to find rabbit runways first,” he said.

They chained the dogs, who had watched the preparations with intense interest.

“You fellows would drive out every rabbit and get nothing for the pot,” Philip said.

Ogema’s whine protested this base slander, but Ann and Philip hardened their hearts and started, dogless, into the storm. The trees moaned and whined above them. Philip turned to skirt the shore.

“We got to find an alder swamp,” he said. “That’s where rabbits always stay.”

As they had hoped, a small creek came off the ridge behind them and flowed through a flat densely covered by alder bushes. They stopped just inside the swamp. Rabbits must be plentiful, for everywhere they saw runways. In places the trails were drifted over, but under the heavier growth the runways were still wide and deep and pounded hard by the long hind feet of the snowshoe rabbit of the north. A few tracks showed in the fresh snow, for rabbits, creatures of habit, always followed the same trails. One apparently had been traveling when Ann and Philip entered the swamp. Ann saw him sitting immobile only a few feet away. He was trusting to his protective coloring, and she would have missed him had it not been for his round black eye so plainly visible against the snow. She stared, almost unbelieving, until she saw his nose twitch. That rabbit felt so safe, but she marked him for the pot.

They set four rabbit snares along the edge of the swamp. With his knife Philip cut limbs from a live alder, attached the loop at the top, and then bent the pole across the runway and held it there by slipping it under a notch in another bush. They arranged the loops to dangle directly in the rabbits’ path, barely above the ground.

When the four snares had been set on four main runways, Ann and Philip walked into the swamp, knowing the rabbits would run in the opposite direction. Occasionally they heard a frozen twig snap. Philip grinned at Ann.

“Bet every snare has got a rabbit,” he said.

They went back and every snare did have a rabbit. They reset the snares and carried their meat back to camp. Three dogs greeted them with joy. Philip gave each dog a half a rabbit while Ann started a kettle of meat to boil. Mouths watered while the first kettle stewed. A second kettle was not so hard to wait for. And the third kettle was divided with the dogs. Even Philip was no longer hungry.

It was now past noon. Getting breakfast for the five had taken the whole morning. The storm showed no signs of lessening. They began on preparations for a second night. They gathered a huge pile of fuel, remade their bed, shoveled snow out of the campsite, and made three more visits to the rabbit snares. The first inspection produced four rabbits for supper, the other two assured them of seven rabbits for the next day’s food.

“We ought to keep meat on hand,” Philip said. “No telling what this storm might do.”

It didn’t seem possible for it to become worse. Ann had grown so accustomed to the incessant sounds of violence and fury that she thought she couldn’t remember when the world had been still and peaceful. The wind blasts on the lake grew louder and they fought their way to the shore to find that the blizzard had attained new might. They stared out at a white maelstrom, unable to tell where the ice left off and the air began.

“Anyway,” Philip said, “Dad can’t start out to look for us in this.”

“But not being able to do anything only makes waiting all the harder.”

Philip scowled. “Maybe,” he said. “But Dad knows we can take care of ourselves. It’s mothers who always worry.”

After their visit to the lakeshore they stopped speculating when the blizzard would be over. Neither spoke of the morrow when they and the dogs nestled under the tarp at dark. Both Ann and Philip were tired. They had spent every hour since waking keeping warm and fed. They’d burned up all the windfalls which could be dragged free from the nearby jackpot. Fuel for the night had been more difficult to gather, and fuel for the next day would mean even more effort.

Silence wakened Ann. It was not yet light. But their crashing, moaning, turbulent world was strangely still.

“Philip! Philip!” she cried. “The storm is over!”

Philip sat up. For a moment he, too, found it difficult to believe the unfamiliar stillness. Then he leaped to his feet and the dogs, sensing the excitement, tumbled after him. Philip built a fire, and by its light Ann shook and folded the tarp and began to lash the toboggan. She picked up the tea kettle.

“Pack the rabbits,” Philip said. “We’re taking those home too.”

They harnessed the dogs in the first faint show of daylight. Dawn was breaking as they hurried to the shore. Snow had ceased falling. The air was clear. Ann thought the contour of the hills was strangely familiar. Philip stared incredulously and turned to Ann.

“We went past Home Bay! Look! There’s our own point back there!”

It was true. They had camped within two miles of home.

“If we hurry we might get there before Dad starts out to search,” Ann said.

The surface of the lake was hard and crusted. It had been windswept and scoured. As they left the shore they watched the entrance to the bay. At any moment their father would be leaving. Philip saw him first. He pointed at a figure down the shore. Mr. Jackman had already departed. They began to shout.

Mr. Jackman halted, turned, waved both arms, and started back on a run.

Philip stopped.

“You ride in, Ann! We’ll beat him home. Come on, puppies! Get into it! Yippee!”

His yell galvanized the team. They broke into a gallop. Dogs barking, Philip yelling, and Ann riding triumphantly on the toboggan, they swept into their own bay. It was a magnificent homecoming.

Mr. Jackman came in a close second. They met on the trail below the cabin. He was panting. He tried to keep his voice gruff, but it broke a bit.

“You young ’uns!” he said. “I knew you’d make it!” And then he added, “What happened to you?”

They were telling him about getting lost in the blizzard and the camp when Mrs. Jackman ran down the slope. She kissed Ann, put her arms around Philip, hugged the heads of the dogs, and patted her husband all at once. She didn't want any of them to get out of handtouch while she heard the barest details of those two nights and a day.

"Was it awfully hard, Mother?" Ann asked.

"Just waiting was the hardest," she said. "We kept telling ourselves you'd stayed at Pe-tah-bo's."

"And why didn't you?" Mr. Jackman demanded. Now that danger was past, he could be cross. "We knew Pe-tah-bo would try to keep you. An Indian can smell a blizzard coming. Your mother's been worried to death for fear you wouldn't mind him."

"Gosh, Dad!" Philip said. "You knew Ann and I could make a winter camp!"

"I do now, son"; and then he added, "I guess I sounded grouchy because I was finding it hard not to tell you how proud I am."

They walked up the trail to the cabin. Mr. Jackman unhooked the traces of the dogs and then the team joined their family, as they licked any hand which was near and with gleaming eyes tried to tell their part in the story of those heroic days.

"Here we're standing talking, and you all must be starved!" Mrs. Jackman cried. "Feed the dogs, Dave, and—"

Philip threw back the tarp of the toboggan and gathered up the seven rabbits. Mr. Jackman gave a shout.

"Mary! They fed themselves and brought food home to us!"



Winter still gripped the north, but the March days were longer and a new warmth in the sun held a promise of spring. The deep cold had lessened. Despite heavy snowstorms, the clean white world of winter was turning gray. Snowdrifts no longer looked like great puffs of cotton batting. They had shrunk under the onslaughts of the warmer sun and were surfaced by an icy sheet which collapsed with a tinkling sound under the tread of snowshoes.

Low bushes, logs, and familiar landmarks emerged from their white shrouding. When Ann walked in the forest she heard the muffled whoosh of falling snow as crystal trimmings slipped from trees. And as, day by day, the forest and the clearing at Home Bay altered, Ann mourned the changes. The

intoxicating beauty of spring in the north was still far away and the sparkling fairyland of the deep winter months was so swiftly passing.

Philip dreaded the time when dog driving would end.

“Winter is more fun than summer,” he said.

“And harder on woodpiles,” his father said. “Ours won’t see us through the next two months of cold weather.”

The long tiers had melted and it was now a question whether wood or fur held first claim on daylight hours. Mr. Jackman had to stay home from the trap line to cut fuel, and often he worked outdoors by lantern light.

Any hope that Mr. Gillespie would find a man to help them had been given up so long before that no one even thought of this explanation when Philip rushed in one noon.

“There’s a man in our bay!” he said.

Everyone crowded to the window. A man on snowshoes was on the lake trail. He looked up at the cabin and turned toward it. They stared at their first visitor of the winter, the only one they’d ever had except Ojibwa neighbors.

“He’s a white man!” Ann cried.

A white stranger was even more incredible than a visitor. Ann tingled with excitement.

“It is a white man, and he’s come to see us,” Mr. Jackman said. “He was looking for the cabin.”

They went out to meet him. He was older than Mr. Jackman but his large spare frame was carried with easy power. When Ann saw the network of wrinkles around his deep-set eyes she thought he’d been weathered, but when he spoke she knew some of those tiny criss-crosses were smile crinkles.

“Good day,” he said. “I’m Hugh Mathews. Gillespie sent me. Suppose you’re Mr. Jackman.”

“Dave Jackman,” Ann’s father said, thrusting out a hand.

“Gillespie said you needed a man, but I told him I wasn’t staying in this country.”

“Can’t you stay long enough for dinner?” Mrs. Jackman asked.

Hugh Mathews laughed and set his packsack against the cabin.

“Gillespie was bound I’d stop,” he said. “Wanted you folks to know he’d tried to get you a man.”

The Jackmans liked Hugh Mathews. They felt the warmth of his kindness despite his effort to hide behind an air of gruffness. He didn’t talk much but he managed to tell a great deal in a few words. Before the meal was over, Ann felt she’d known him always.

Hugh was a trapper. He’d found the country far to the south too settled and had left when a logging camp was started within thirty miles of his cabin.

“Far away as I was, the trees got to shivering, thinking of all those axes and saws,” he said.

He intended to go farther north to find new trapping grounds, for on Far Lake the new railroad would be crowding him soon.

“Even you’ve got neighbors,” he said. “Saw snowshoe tracks this morning.”

“Must have been Pe-tah-bo,” Mr. Jackman said.

“Using factory snowshoes?”

That meant a white man. Mr. Jackman frowned.

“There are only Indians here,” he said. “At least, we haven’t seen—”

“This fellow was white and he was headin’ this way,” Hugh said. “Since the last snow. Queer thing is, he ain’t real bushwise. Didn’t even know how to make a good noon stop.”

Ann looked at her father. It was weeks since she’d spoken of the fur thief, but she’d not forgotten her fear of the man in the narrows.

“Did he—did he chew tobacco?” she asked.

Hugh looked at her with quick approval.

“And spits about every quarter mile,” he said.

“He’s the fur thief!” Philip cried. “The one who threw his rifle down on Ann.”

That startled their visitor. He didn’t believe anyone in the wilderness would threaten a girl. Mr. Jackman told him the story.

“Maybe same fellow headin’ back,” Hugh said. “Maybe railroads got to come, but they bring trash.”

“Dad!” Ann cried. “That man’s still in our country!”

The north had seemed safe and clean until this dark shadow had again trailed across it.

“He may be,” her father said. “I must send word to Pe-tah-bo.”

“And we’ll watch the mink pens,” Philip added.

Mr. Jackman turned to Hugh. “See how we can use another man around here?”

“I’d like to help you folks out,” Hugh said. “But this country is sort o’ too settled. Besides—I don’t hold with fur farms.”

“But Philip and I take care of the mink,” Ann said.

In her desire to have Hugh stay, she wished her father was more urgent. Mrs. Jackman didn’t even try to conceal her disappointment.

“We hoped you’d like us well enough to stay,” she said.

“You’re mighty kind,” Hugh said. “And I ain’t had a meal like this in more years than I’d care to remember. But I got to be going along.”

They walked out the door with him. Ann dreaded to see him go, but Hugh made no move toward his packsack. Instead he continued to talk to Mr. Jackman. The two men spoke of trails, weather, and places both knew. Mr. Jackman showed Hugh the box traps and Hugh suggested a better trip for the door. Mr. Jackman liked the idea and the two men worked over the trap together.

It grew later. Still Hugh tarried, and Mr. Jackman showed no impatience to be getting back to work. There was a nice holidayish air about the irregularity of spending the afternoon in friendly chat. Even the dinner dishes had been forgotten. At last Hugh took an ax from his packsack.

“No reason why I shouldn’t cut you folks a little jag o’ wood before I git along,” he said.

“But we don’t like to hear you even talk of leaving!” Mrs. Jackman said.

“I just wanted you folks to know I ain’t permanent,” Hugh said. “But I aim to stay long enough to get your woodpile shipshape.”

Ann thought he meant working until dark, perhaps this kindly stranger's way of paying for his supper. But Hugh worked until dark and was at it early the next morning. He stayed another day, and another, and still made no move to leave.

Hugh's "little jag o' wood" grew to astonishing proportions. He started to fell trees at daylight and only dark drove him to the cabin. When Ann and Philip wanted to find him they had only to listen for the steady clop-clop of an ax or the whine of a crosscut saw.

"You put in as long hours as Dave!" Mrs. Jackman protested.

"How you going to have a fire without wood?" he asked, but there was a kindly gleam in his eyes as he added, "Quite an outfit you folks got started here."

That was his only admission of approval or even of interest in the fur farm. But despite his lack of faith in the venture, it absorbed him. He helped Mr. Jackman set box traps. He enlarged the mink quarters and, although he stubbornly maintained that wild mink could never be domesticated like farm stock, he was an authority on their natural habits. He filled an icehouse for the refrigeration of the mink's summer rations, showed Philip how to set a net under ice to save hours of fishing through the waterhole, and he sympathized with Ann when all efforts to find a wife for Mr. Genesis were unsuccessful.

"You folks started too late this year," he said. "Those mink are too wild to settle down and raise a family."

"You mean we can't have any baby mink this summer?" Ann asked.

"You might," Hugh said. "Just forget about Mr. Genesis and pick yourself one of them females we brought in this month. Chances are they might have litters in early May."

Ann couldn't have told even Hugh how confidently she had planned that Genesis would be the name of the first family on their fur farm. She didn't want a substitute.

"But I wish you would make a pet of one of those females," Mr. Jackman said. "The tamer a mother is, the more apt she is to raise her young."

"Can I have a mink too?" Philip asked.

"Sure."

“And if we raise a litter, can we sell the fur?”

“Of course,” his father said. “Only don’t start counting pelts. It’s a tricky job to raise the first litters of wild mink.”

Ann thought only of how cunning baby mink would be. Philip chose his mink first and was sure he’d picked the better mother. She had recovered from her first terror and seemed to enjoy an effortless existence. The day her bright eyes peered out at him from the entrance to her house, he insisted she wanted to get acquainted.

“She knows me already,” he said. “Bet I can teach her to come when she’s called.”

He named her Rose. Ann laughed at naming a mink for a flower but Philip stuck to his christening and called her by name whenever he left food. He maintained his scheme was working and that she came promptly for her meals.

Ann’s mink was nameless while she searched for something as apt as Genesis. This mink was so different. She was shy and timid, darting out of sight at the merest sound and never eating until Ann had hidden in the lookout. If the creature had any personality, it couldn’t be discovered in brief glimpses. She had only one definite characteristic. If Philip’s mink was a showy rose, then hers was a timid violet.

Her mother’s eyes twinkled when she heard the names. “Rose and Violet,” she said. “Is this a flower garden or a mink farm? But there will be no mistaking that those mink have different natures.”

In the weeks since Hugh’s arrival there had been no more evidence of the presence of the fur thief. Mr. Jackman had warned Pe-tah-bo and the two neighbors had gone to the small lake where Hugh had seen the snowshoe tracks. They were still there, dim but definitely the impressions of factory snowshoes. They had followed them through two lakes and then stopped when the tracks struck south. Hugh had listened to Mr. Jackman’s report.

“Hittin’ for the railroad,” the old woodsman said. “Guess this time he did leave the country. If he was holin’ up anywhere around here you’d have struck his trail.”

In late March the weather became less severe. A sudden thaw softened the thick snow blanket on the lake. When Ann and Philip saw the wet slush lying on the ice, they thought dog driving days were over.

“Only make easier traveling later on,” Hugh said.

He was right, as usual. Three days later the cold tightened its grip and they awoke one morning to find the lake a hard surface. It was rough and white, frozen slush, but could be traveled on without trails.

Now the winter north lay open to them. Ann and Philip explored the entire shoreline of Far Lake. Even when both rode, the dogs could maintain a gallop. Hugh said they'd wear out the toboggan.

"Ought to have a high sled for spring travel," he said.

"I've got two birch runners drying on the island," Mr. Jackman said. "Roughed 'em out last fall when I was wind-bound."

Hugh, Ann, and Philip went to get them. Ann knew that the old woodsman, who would never have made that four mile trip without a definite objective, was secretly glad for an excuse to look at the island. He walked through the stand of Norway.

"More building timber than you folks need for a cabin," he said.

"But we're going to have a big house!" Ann said.

"So?" Hugh asked. "Dave got it planned already?"

"It's not quite decided," Ann admitted. She didn't wish to reveal how little the others had been consulted in her plans for the house, but she added, "It's *got* to be a big house. It's our future home."

That last phrase had a satisfying sound and it interested Hugh.

"We will have a big room," Ann went on. "Much larger than our whole cabin. And bedrooms and a kitchen. And maybe a big veranda."

"Sounds like quite a place," Hugh said. "While we're here we'd better cruise the timber to see if you've got enough."

Timber cruising was so fascinating they were late for supper.

"But that's a fine stand of Norway, Dave," Hugh said.

"One reason I took that island," Mr. Jackman said. "Maybe some day we'll have a house."

In the month in which Hugh had been with the Jackmans he'd begun many tasks by saying he might as well take care of a little job before he went along. But when the sled was finished they feared he'd carry out his threat to leave. Mr. Jackman admitted there wasn't anything more that needed doing. The woodpile was as high as the cabin. Every mink need had been met.

“I can’t imagine this place without Hugh,” Mrs. Jackman said. “He’s one of us.”

“It would scare him to death to be told that,” her husband laughed. “Wish we had another little job.”

“Perhaps he’ll find one.”

“If he wants to stay, he will. Those old fellows are funny. Have to hire themselves to the job. But if he intends to go, we can’t change his mind.”

Hugh dragged the new sled after him as he came in from work that evening. He leaned it against the cabin and went in for supper. During the meal he broached no new plans for the morrow. In the evening he brought his ax into the cabin. Ann feared he might put it in his packsack, and that would be the final symbol of departure. Hugh got out his whetstone and began to sharpen the blade, stopping often to test the edge with his thumb. He was taking more than his usual care.

“Figure to shave with it?” Mr. Jackman asked.

“Maybe I could at that,” Hugh said.

They waited while Hugh went on with his careful whetting. At last he put the ax away.

“Timber for that big log house ought to be cut while the sap’s down,” he said. “I might as well fall it before I git along.”

A smile flashed between Mr. and Mrs. Jackman.

“You mean we’ll start our house this year!” Ann cried.

“We’ll get the timber at any rate,” her father said. “If you ross those logs, Hugh, they’ll stay sound until we can build.”

“What I was figuring,” Hugh said.

He’d made his plans. He intended to camp on the island to save the long trip back and forth each day. Mrs. Jackman said it was too cold for camping but Hugh insisted he couldn’t take time off from work for traveling.

“But I’ll miss your cooking,” he said.

When she learned Hugh intended to leave the next morning, Mrs. Jackman started a baking of bread. Hugh packed his clothes, and as Ann watched him bring out his packsack, she thought it no longer held a threat of departure. And the big house on the island, which had existed only in brave thoughts of the future, had become a matter of the next day’s concerns.

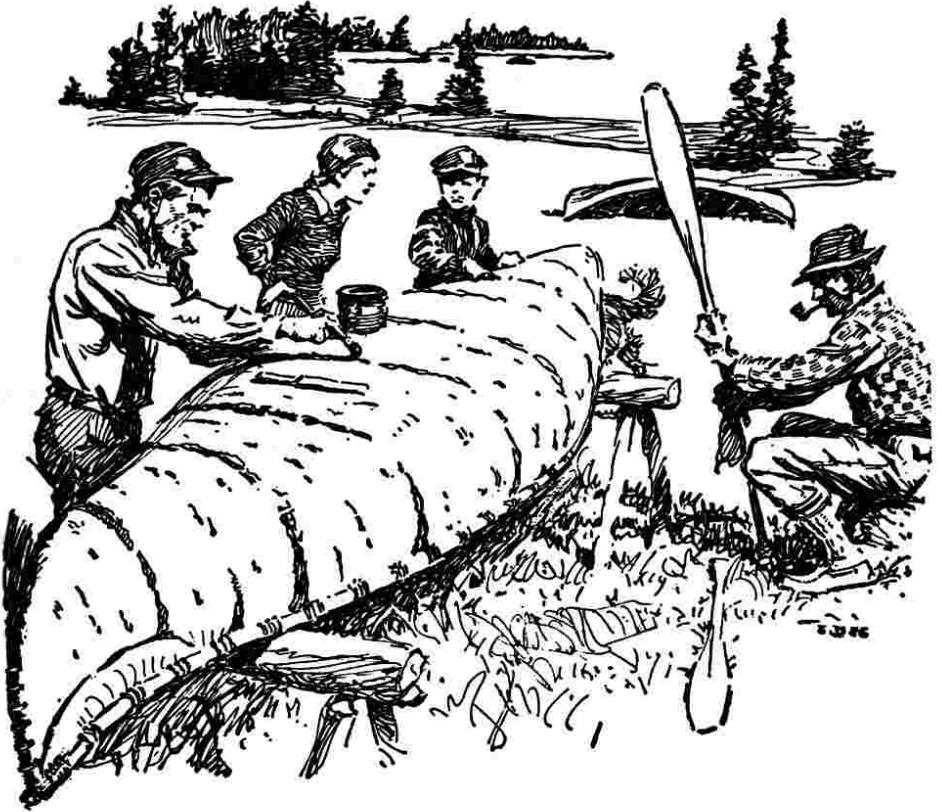
Even now Hugh and her father were discussing logs for that home. Ann got paper and pencil, and as she began to sketch she thought she might even show the plans to the others. After all, it was to be their family home. Philip came to the table.

“What you drawing, sis?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Ann said, and hid the paper.

The house that had formed under her swift pencil strokes was too glamorous to be defeated by objections. She could imagine it, down to the last detail, could almost see the enormous, high ceilinged living room with bookcases, easy chairs, fireplace, and a piano like Mr. Gillespie’s. But their island home would be far more romantic than the dwelling house of the Hudson’s Bay post.

Her sketch had been breath-taking in its daring. Flanking a huge fireplace, a broad stairway led to an overhanging balcony which ran the full length of that great-beamed main room. Off the balcony were the bedrooms, her parents’, Philip’s, hers, and a guest room. She had sketched the railing of the balcony, and then added the enormous bear skins which would hang from it for log lodges always had trophies of the hunt. But even as she drew them she wondered who would trap those skins.



Early the next morning Hugh and Philip set off for the island, leaving Ann to follow later with a toboggan load of camping outfit and supplies. She was to be official freighter and dog team driver. Philip had been permitted to leave school work and go camping with Hugh. Ann watched Hugh and Philip out of sight and then sought her mother, who was in the kitchen, making bread.

“Why should Philip have a vacation?” Ann demanded. “Hugh doesn’t need him to cut down trees.”

Mrs. Jackman patted a loaf into shape and smiled across the kitchen table.

“Hugh doesn’t need Philip,” she said. “But your father and I wanted Philip to have these weeks with Hugh. A boy and a man in the woods together,” and Mrs. Jackman’s tone was dreamy. “Your father still remembers an old woodsman friend of his boyhood.” She cut a piece from the white bubbly mass and as she kneaded it she became suddenly more vigorous. “Philip will get something far more important than school lessons.”

Later when Ann hauled the camping outfit to the island she began to realize what her mother had meant. Already a camaraderie existed. Hugh and Philip had prepared a campsite and now, as the two erected the tent, carried in supplies and consulted, there was a new equality between them. Philip’s ax leaned ostentatiously beside Hugh’s against a windfall, and there was a tinge of male superiority in Philip’s manner.

When Ann departed, Philip led the dogs to the ice. One would have imagined that the responsibility of the logging camp was on his shoulders as he cautioned Ann to look each morning for their signal smoke at the end of the island.

“We’ll light it when we need something,” he said. “If we get down logs, Hugh and I can’t take time to run back and forth.”

On the way home Ann brooded about Philip’s loftiness. She was still irked by it when she described the island camp at supper.

“To hear Philip talk, you’d think Hugh couldn’t get on without him,” she said.

“Your turn to help with the house will come later,” her mother said.

“Philip’s got the makings of a good axman,” Mr. Jackman added. “Started early enough to get the hang of it. In the bush nothing stands a man in better stead than an ax. Between it and a gun, I’d take the ax every time.”

Axmanship wasn’t the only thing that Philip was learning in days and evenings with Hugh, Ann discovered. She fell into the habit of a daily call at the snug winter camp on the island, and she usually carried home a wilderness story which Hugh told or Philip retold while Ann reheated a midday meal, brought from the cabin.

The evening she recounted Philip’s felling of his first Norway, both her father and mother were excited. Mrs. Jackman wanted to know if Philip had been nervous, but her father asked if the kerf had been clean cut, if the tree had fallen where Philip planned to fall it, and if Hugh had helped him.

“Hugh and I watched,” she said. “Maybe Hugh helped a little, but the tree fell exactly where Philip said it would. You should have heard it! First it was only a murmur. Philip clipped with the ax, and then there was a roar. Hugh said it was a grand Norway—long and straight and clean.”

Her father looked pleased and said the boy was learning.

Ann never tired of admiring the new logs which she found on each visit to the island.

“I wish there was something I could do,” she said.

“Keeping us fed has saved our time in cooking,” Hugh said. “It’d be a good idea to haul timber before snow goes. How about you and the team giving us a hand with some of that smaller stuff we’ve cut out in the bush?”

Ogema enjoyed the task even more than Ann. After the first trip from the forest to the building site, he needed no commands. He waited until traces were hooked onto a log, then turned and started for the pile, taking care to halt the team so that the log could be rolled upon the others.

Philip in the forest, Hugh at the pile with a canthook, and Ann driving the team between the two, it was amazing how fast the piles grew. Ann was always glad when there were logs to haul and even Hugh broke down and admitted pride when he sent a message by Ann.

“Tell Dave we’re getting enough clean straight Norway to build a mansion,” he said. “Philip and I might be nearly through by break-up.”

That time wasn’t far away. Ice couldn’t last much longer. Each day the afternoon sun dug deeper. Long before, Ann had given up moccasins for the rubber shoepacs of the north, because the ice was covered by water. But now the ice had raised and drained. It was white, honeycombed by the sun, and occasionally so needled that the dogs walked slowly lest they cut their feet.

It was warm and strangely pleasant on the lake now. One afternoon Ann threw back the hood of her parka and let the sun beat on her head. Even the dogs were listless, but she was glad to loiter. She knew she was enjoying one of her last dog team trips that winter. Spring was just around the corner.

In spring break-up no one would be able to travel. The ice in the lakes would lie, a dead, gray mass, floating free from shore. Waterways would be closed, for the ice could not be reached, and all wilderness dwellers would be imprisoned until a wind had driven the ice barrier ashore.

Mr. Jackman looked at the sky one morning. A warm wind blew. He returned from the point to report a signal fire on the island.

“Better harness the team, Ann,” he said. “Hugh knows it’s time to be getting home.”

When Ann reached the island she found a dismantled camp. Hugh and Philip piled tent, tools, and outfit on the sled. Philip regretted they’d not finished their job. Hugh looked back at the piles of logs.

“We got a good jag down, at that,” he said. “Two men can do a lot when they fly at it.”

“And you’ll be home for my birthday,” Ann said.

“Spring shut-in came just right,” Hugh said. “You don’t get to be fifteen every day. But Philip’s nose will be out of joint.”

Philip’s birthday was in March and for weeks he’d made much of the fact that now there was only two years’ difference in their ages.

The trip from the island was their last that winter. The next morning a dozen feet of blue water lay between ice and shore, and on Ann’s birthday the ice of the bay lay out in the center.

It was the strangest Mayday birthday celebration Ann had ever known. In Bradford her cake had always been banked by early spring flowers. At Home Bay, Ann and Philip paddled to the great mass of ice, riding free, and chopped off enough to make ice cream. Ann’s mother baked a cake and mourned the lack of candles. Hugh went to his tent in the clearing, where he’d slept since his return from the island. When Ann saw the smoke of his campfire she thought he was only scrubbing for her party. He appeared at the cabin with fifteen small tapers. They were still soft and a bit rough. But they were candles.

“I think they’re wonderful, Hugh!” Ann exclaimed. “How’d you ever make them?”

“In the bush you can usually figure out how to make anything you got to have,” he said. “I melted a candle and poured the wax down strings. At that,” and he stopped to admire his handiwork, “they’ll make the cake sort o’ pretty.”

The cake was pretty, and Ann felt infinitely older when she cut it. Oddly enough, fifteen seemed years older than fourteen. She tried out a new elder sister manner and hoped Philip would notice its maturity. But he only jeered to compensate for his humiliation that Ann had again established the irking three years’ difference.

In the days which followed, the Jackmans lived in a strange transition season. Out on Far Lake the rotting ice, riding free, was the last sign of winter, while on land spring had come overnight. Snowdrifts were only shrunken remains. Everywhere the earth showed in black patches. Trails were soft beneath the feet and on every hillside could be heard the soft gurgle of snow water on its way to join the lake.

Dog harnesses were oiled and hung from wires out of reach of mice. The toboggan was stored beneath the eaves. The seams of the birchbark canoe were freshly pitched and the other canoe examined for weak spots. Paddles were scraped and oiled. Hugh began to build a combination toolhouse and cook camp for the mink.

“Getting so many boarders we got to make a business of their rations,” he explained to Mrs. Jackman.

He still clung to his air of disapproval of a fur farm, although he was unrelenting in his efforts in its behalf. Sometimes Ann wondered if he didn’t argue merely to bother her father, for now the friendship between the two men had become so deep each went to pains to conceal it.

Ann and Philip were caught squarely between the pessimism of Hugh and the optimism of their father, and their hopes soared and fell as the two men argued about Rose and Violet and their prospective families. Mr. Jackman quoted from Steve’s letters, telling of litters ranging from two to ten born on fur farms to wild mink mothers. Hugh maintained that any mink captured so recently would never bear young and certainly never raise them.

“You’ll get no increase this year,” Hugh prophesied. “That little mink of Ann’s is so wild she won’t even eat if anybody’s watching.”

“But Rose is tamer,” Philip said.

“Makes no difference,” Hugh retorted. “She won’t be tame when the young ’uns come along.”

Hugh believed even less in silver fox farms than he did in the successful domestication of wild mink. Whenever Mr. Jackman talked of the spectacular rise of the silver fox industry on Prince Edward Island, Hugh jeered.

“You’re as stubborn as Gillespie!” Mr. Jackman exclaimed one evening. “The Prince Edward Island companies are cleaning up a fortune.”

“Sure!” Hugh said. “Because a lot of weak-minded folks are buying breeding stock. Even mortgaged their homes to do it. Prices are crazy. A few

years back I heard they was paying ten thousand dollars for a pair of foxes. Any man who's got ten thousand dollars don't need a fur farm."

Mr. Jackman laughed and admitted that ten thousand dollars was a lot of money. But he insisted that a pair of foxes guaranteed to bear silver cubs was worth the even more fantastic sixteen thousand which was the market price that winter. It had taken years of careful breeding to get a pure strain.

"Everybody's gone crazy," Hugh said. "Look at all those trappers wasting bear trapping time while they try to dig out a den of live foxes. Might have a lot better stuck to their trapping."

"Not if they capture a pair," Mr. Jackman said. "Even red or cross or patch foxes may have a silver cub."

"I know you can have all colors in the same litter, Dave. But the chances of a silver are mighty slim."

"That's why the Prince Edward Island stock is worth sixteen thousand dollars a pair," Mr. Jackman said triumphantly. "They've established the silver strain. Foxes are no different from dogs or farm stock. It took years of breeding to make sure the silver characteristic would be transmitted to the young. Why, Hugh! They've proved it can be done! Everyone in the world except you and that stubborn mule, Gillespie, accepts those facts!"

"Dave!" Mrs. Jackman said. "Don't get so excited. We'll never be able to buy silver foxes. And I'd be frightened even to have such valuable animals on the place."

"Don't worry, Mary. There's no chance for us to have any."

"But how did the Prince Edward Island fox farmers get their foxes in the first place?" Ann asked.

Mr. Jackman turned to her, and his manner became more quiet as he told her how Charles Dalton had bought a pair of foxes from an Indian who'd dug them from a den, and then had spent fifteen years experimenting in secret. Afterwards Dalton was one of the organizers of the association known as the First Ten Companies.

"And now they're reaping the profits of pioneering," he said. "They have what is practically a gold mine!"

He jumped to his feet and began to pace the cabin.

"Your mother tells me not to get excited," he said. "But it is exciting to think that within a few years the silver fox, once one of the rarest of furs, is

now reaching the market by hundreds. A new industry has started because a few men used their brains and were willing to work to prove a theory.” He stopped for a moment, and then he added, “Don’t you think that is exciting, Ann?”

She nodded. Ann loved to hear her father when he caught fire. She wished that he might have had Charles Dalton’s opportunity.

“You’d have worked as long and hard to prove something,” she said. “And perhaps some day you’ll have a silver fox farm.”

“Not much chance of that, Ann. But I like to talk about it.”

Ann wanted to say that if Charles Dalton could start with a pair of wild foxes, others could do likewise.

“Perhaps—” she began, then stopped.

They were waiting for her to finish.

“Perhaps what?” her mother asked.

Ann flushed.

“Nothing,” she said.

She could imagine Philip’s and Hugh’s laughter if she told them that she intended to try to find a silver fox. As well say she was going to find a gold mine. But people found gold mines by hunting for them. And she could hunt for a silver fox.

As she dropped off to sleep that night she was still fiercely resolved that if there were a silver fox within miles and miles, she would find him for their farm.



Rose, Philip's mink, refused to leave her nest box. Her favorite food didn't tempt her.

"Maybe she's sick," Philip said. "Or even dead."

"Probably busy with a family," Hugh said. "I thought those young 'uns ought to be along soon."

"You think the mink are born!" Philip cried. "I'm going to look and see."

"Better not. If you scare her, she'd kill the whole litter."

"Steve says to stay away until the young mink's eyes are open," Mr. Jackman said.

For the first time Hugh and Mr. Jackman were in complete agreement on fur farm matters.

“But, Dad!” Philip protested. “How am I to know I’ve got young mink unless I look at ’em?”

“You can’t know,” his father said.

Ann rushed to Violet’s pen and returned with the report that Violet was in her house and that the morning’s food remained untouched. The bare possibility of young mink sent Ann and Philip into wild excitement.

But all plans for a mink nursery regime were promptly vetoed. Mr. Jackman quoted Steve’s warning that even the scent of man left on a mink’s house had driven nervous mothers to kill their young. Hugh’s advice was more than usually pessimistic. He distrusted even necessary visits to leave food but said that they’d have to chance that danger for the nursing mothers needed good meals, although probably they would be so nervous they wouldn’t come out to eat. He ended with the gloomy forecast that they’d never be lucky enough to raise the young anyway.

“Fur farming goes agin natural habits,” he said.

“But we ought to make sure Rose and Violet are alive!” Philip said. “We can’t just wait around and let them die.”

“Nothing else to do,” his father said. “It’s worth some worry, if you raise your first litters of wild mink.”

“You won’t catch sight of hide nor hair of those young ’uns until their mother brings them out,” Hugh said. “Then they look awful cute. I’ve watched a litter of six being taken on a hunt.”

“What a fraud you are!” Mrs. Jackman said. “You pretend you’re no help on a fur farm, and I’ve never met anyone who knew so much about wild animals.”

“I’ve kept my eyes open while I traveled through the bush,” Hugh said. “But that don’t say I know how to tame the critters.”

In the days which followed Hugh could not be shaken from his gloom, even when Ann and Philip reported that Rose and Violet ate their food. Philip had listened and was sure he’d heard a feeble mewing.

“Sounded just like young kittens,” he said.

Ann and Philip read Steve’s letters until the pages were worn to tatters. Steve said young mink opened their eyes in about a month.

“Suppose we can stand waiting that long?” Philip asked.

“We’ll have to,” Ann said. “We’d feel awful if we did anything to frighten those mothers.”

“Gosh, yes!” Philip said.

After mewing in both mink houses had established the fact that two sets of young existed, the probable size of the litters aroused the wildest hopes and conjectures. Rose and Violet might be mothering one or ten. Even Mr. Jackman, an incurable optimist, began to worry over the possibility of a small increase as day by day went on and Rose and Violet remained in retirement.

Hugh and Mr. Jackman searched stream banks in the hope of finding a mink burrow from which they could dig a wild mink family. They gave it up at last and put away the box traps.

“This year it’s up to Rose and Violet,” Mr. Jackman said. “Hope they believe in large families.”

Rose and Violet became important personages, dwelling in mysterious seclusion. That their household affairs were proceeding nicely could be judged only by the brief glimpses Philip caught of an apparently cheerful Rose, and the fact that the mewing was becoming louder in both houses.

Meanwhile the earth had awakened and was stirring after the long winter. The last snow had disappeared. Birch and poplar trees were budding. The Jackmans began their garden, which must be large this year, with vegetables to be grown for mink as well as humans.

The water of the bay was blue and sparkling, but out in the main lake the ice still lay across the traverse. Each morning Ann and Philip paddled to the point to see if that great barrier showed signs of weakening.

“Hope break-up comes in daylight,” their father said. “It’s quite a sight to watch.”

Yet day after day that great gray mass of ice withstood the onslaught of the hot May sun. Ann and Philip marveled at its thickness. And then one morning as they were working in the garden, their father straightened suddenly. He listened to the first low murmur of wind stirring pine branches.

“Call your mother!” he shouted. “Hurry, if you want to see the ice go out.”

They reached the point just as the first great crack split the surface. They watched the crack travel from shore to shore, watched it widen. Other cracks ran out in all directions until the whole lake was riddled. Then the fingers of the wind reached into widening cracks and ice piled on ice.

The whole mass began to move as the wind increased. It drove the ice before it until the windward shore was piled high with great white ramparts. At the point where the Jackmans stood, enormous pieces worked up the bank like sluggish prehistoric creatures crawling onto the land. Only a few white fragments bobbed in the water and the watchers heard the silvery tinkle of ice slivers striking against each other. Far Lake lay blue and open.

Ann drew in her breath, suddenly feeling very tired.

“Watched break-up for twenty years,” Hugh said. “But it always gets me. Seems to make a fellow feel free all of a sudden.”

“That’s what it did to me!” Mrs. Jackman cried. “I want to go somewhere! I want to get in a canoe and paddle! Let’s have a picnic on the island.”

In less than an hour they were off. The Jackmans had visited the island many times, but this visit was different. Now timbers for their home lay in great piles of long symmetrical Norway logs. Mr. Jackman cautioned his family they must not hope to build in the coming summer, and immediately forgot his warning as they discussed the site of the dwelling house.

The island was shaped like a dumbbell. On one end would be the fur farm and on the other, connected by a narrow neck of land, would stand the dwelling house.

They ate lunch on the big flat where the house would stand and Ann imagined the view from her bedroom window.

“There’s a lot of work ahead,” Hugh said. “Fur pens, garden, workshop, house. And didn’t I hear something about a fireplace?”

“We must have that!” Mrs. Jackman said. “To sit by in the winter evenings.”

Hugh began to pace off ground.

“Got any plans drawn for this place, Dave?” he asked.

Mr. Jackman smiled at Ann. “I shouldn’t wonder,” he said.

“Well, if we had the bedrooms upstairs off a gallery,” Ann began, “then ___”

“Gallery!” Hugh said. “What’s that?”

“It’s something she saw in a book!” Philip said.

“It would be like an overhanging balcony,” Ann said. “It’s this way. Look!”

With a stick she began to trace lines on the ground. Mr. Jackman looked frankly dubious. Mrs. Jackman appeared sympathetic but unconvinced. Hugh listened intently.

“I see,” he said. “You mean a sort of platform running high along one side of the main room.” He turned to Mr. Jackman. “The girl’s right, Dave. You’d never have cold bedrooms. Heat goes up.”

“We’d build a big stairway beside the fireplace,” Ann said. “And hang bear skins from the railing of the balcony.”

Hugh’s eyes twinkled. “Guess you and me will have to set out bear traps. We’ll save the big black ones to trim the house.”

Mr. Jackman studied the plans.

“That could be quite a place,” he said. “The sort of home you young ’uns would always want to come back to.”

He started away, then stopped.

“Perhaps we can build it sometime,” he said. “But don’t let it get too real now.”

“No harm in talking about a thing,” Hugh said as he picked up his ax. “I was working on a big Norway just before break-up. Might as well get at it.”

“But this is supposed to be a picnic party,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“No reason why I shouldn’t do a little chopping,” Hugh said. “I was just figuring that I could get up all the building timber before I git along.”

They smiled as his spare frame disappeared in the direction of the forest. But Mrs. Jackman’s smile was tender.

“Dear old Hugh!” she said. “Don’t you hope the day never comes when he must stop figuring on the time when he will ‘git’ along?”

A week after Far Lake was open Ann and Philip discovered smoke in the bay where Pe-tah-bo made his summer camp. They paddled around the point for a visit. It seemed like old times to hallo as they came in sight of Pe-tah-bo’s wigwam and their neighbors rushed to the beach to await their coming.

Wen-dah-ban was now a head taller than Ann or Philip, but the greatest change was in his manner.

There was a new maturity about him, and even his mother knew it. She smiled at Ann and called her by the old name, Wah-bo-sence, meaning little rabbit, and she patted Philip's shoulder. To her they were still children, but she gravely consulted Wen-dah-ban on family matters. She boasted about his hunting.

"Many mink," she said. "Ermine, fisher, and a red fox. More than four hundred dollars' worth of trade goods. Soon we will go to the post to trade."

Pe-tah-bo nodded proudly as he listened. Wen-dah-ban planned to buy a Stetson hat and a new trade gun. He needed the gun, but the hat would mark him as a successful hunter.

For many summers Pe-tah-bo had worn his Stetson when he went visiting among his people. Wah-be-goan showed it proudly, and now Wen-dah-ban tried it on amid a great deal of happy laughter about such wealth as two Stetson hats in one family.

The Jackmans urged Wen-dah-ban to visit Home Bay and he arrived the next morning. He inspected the mink pens, stared curiously at Mr. Genesis, walked the full length of the wire enclosures, asked how many mink they had, and listened to their cautions not to disturb Rose and Violet.

"Why you go to all this trouble?" he asked. "In the forest the mink take care of themselves."

"But if we raise them we know we've got the fur," Philip said.

Wen-dah-ban shrugged. "Every year my father hunt and my father's father hunt before him. Always they get fur."

That ended the matter for Wen-dah-ban. Philip was disposed to argue, but Ann knew the uselessness of talking about the future to a race which had never recognized such a thing. Even in Pe-tah-bo's wigwam they did not gather fuel for the next day and before they could eat breakfast they must lift the fish net or visit the rabbit snares.

Ann suggested an all-day expedition. They'd had so many good times last summer when they'd gone hunting in the forest with bows and arrows. Philip proposed that they paddle down the shore and explore a river they'd never visited. Wen-dah-ban said he hadn't brought his bow and arrows, but a trade gun of his father's. He admitted it to be an old one which didn't shoot well. But he got it from his birchbark canoe and carried it to the cabin.

Mrs. Jackman helped pack a lunch and opened the big cooky can.

“I remember you liked my cookies, Wen-dah-ban,” she said.

He looked pleased, took a handful, and said, “*Me-quetch.*”

As the three munched cookies, Ann felt that the old companionship had somehow been restored. Despite his trade gun, Wen-dah-ban didn't look nearly so grown-up with his mouth crammed with cookies.

It was like old times in the birchbark canoe. Wen-dah-ban knelt in the bow, Philip amidships, and Ann in the stern. They turned down the lake, three paddles swinging.

Far Lake was lovely. Little catspaws stirred the water and the tiny wavelets caught the sunlight and sparkled as though diamond crusted. The air held magic and the sun was warm on their bodies. By common impulse, their paddles slackened and they loitered along the shore.

Ann showed Wen-dah-ban where Hugh had set bear traps. They stopped to inspect the first and Wen-dah-ban pronounced it good. He approved of this new white man who had come to live at Home Bay, and when Ann said Hugh had promised her the bear skins, the Indian boy looked impressed. But she didn't tell him she intended to use the skins for decorations. There were some things that Wen-dah-ban could never understand.

They paddled slowly, caught by the enchantment of spring in the north. Birch and poplar were leafed in fresh young green. Sunlight filtered through the forest. Tender grasses showed among the rocks. The perfume of growing things reached their nostrils. As they skirted shallow bays, ducks and geese rose ahead of them with a great whirr of wings and noisy clatter.

They turned a point to find a red deer, dappled in sunlight and shadow. He was a yearling and his small spike horns were in velvet. Ann caught her breath with delight. Wen-dah-ban raised his gun.

“No! No!” she cried. “Don't shoot!”

In a flash the deer was gone. Only the sharp crash of brush told of his swift leaps and bounds as he went up the hillside.

“Lot of good your gun does when Ann won't let you use it!” Philip said.

Wen-dah-ban said he didn't shoot because he didn't want to waste shot and powder. But Ann knew she had stopped him. Wen-dah-ban might not admit it, but she was still a leader in the trio.

They reached the river at noon and paddled between rocky banks which turned and twisted. The forest closed in about them. Birds flew overhead. The scolding chatter of squirrels announced their presence. They turned a bend to see a moose cow hurriedly cross the river a few yards ahead. Swift as a flash, Wen-dah-ban swung the canoe ashore and leaped out.

“Moosonce!” he said. *“Quick!”*

Ann hoped to find the baby moose asleep. But they reached the deep underbrush only in time to see the mother rousing her youngster from his bed. Not understanding the cause of all the maternal excitement, he stopped for a round-eyed stare at the intruders, swaying unsteadily on his knobby-kneed legs. But his mother sternly urged him forward with her long black nose. He was the largest and most awkward young thing Ann had ever seen.

“Isn’t he sweet!” she cried.

“Maybe only day old,” Wen-dah-ban said, and he didn’t raise his trade gun. *“Maybe tomorrow he run.”*

Wen-dah-ban had enjoyed the spectacle of that ungainly baby as much as had the Jackmans, and Ann thought Wen-dah-ban was not so much of a man and a hunter as he pretended.

They ate their sandwiches beside the river, lying back against the warm clean rocks and debating whether they would follow the stream further or turn toward home. Philip, always greedy about new country, won.

They pushed on. Sometimes they waded through shallows, dragging the canoe. At others they dug in with their paddles to make way against a strong current. At last they came to a short rapids.

“Let’s carry over and see what the river does next,” Philip said.

They had stepped ashore when Wen-dah-ban made a quick exclamation and pointed at the ground. Beside a cedar tree was the faintest indication of a trail. Ann and Philip would have missed it.

Wen-dah-ban bent over and studied the slight depression.

“Shag-e-nash!” he said.

Ann didn’t see how he knew the trail had been made by a white man. She asked him, but he didn’t answer. Instead he moved quietly into the forest. The others followed. They had gone only a hundred yards when he halted. Under a jackpine was a small log hut, rudely built and chinked with moss and clay.

Most apparently the place was deserted. They walked toward it, but Wen-dah-ban carried his trade gun ready to be used at a moment's notice.

Ann thought Wen-dah-ban had guessed right. Only a white man would build such a cabin. And then she thought of the man at the narrows and the prickles started up her spine.



They looked into the cabin. Except for a rough pole bunk built against a wall and a rusting camp stove on the earthen floor, the place was empty. Marsh grass had served as a mattress. Wen-dah-ban examined the grass.

“Cut last fall,” he said.

His black eyes searched the cabin, outside and in.

“He go before big wind,” he said and pointed at the stovepipe, which leaned at a drunken angle over the shed roof.

“That was in March!” Ann said. “A few days after Hugh came.”

“And Hugh saw his tracks!” Philip said.

“He’d already left when Dad and Pe-tah-bo went looking for him,” Ann said.

Philip frowned. “But maybe this is where he was hiding when they cut that big circle in January,” he said.

“You think he was the same man I saw in the narrows?” Ann asked. “I do.”

She stared at the small cabin, and it seemed to hold a menace.

“And he robbed the traps,” Philip added.

“But we’re just guessing,” Ann said.

“What other white man would hole up here through the winter?” Philip asked.

It did fit together—the stolen fur, the man at the narrows, the tobacco stains, the snowshoe tracks in March, and now the empty cabin. Ann could only rejoice that the north was free of him at last and she wanted to rush home and tell this to Hugh and her father and mother. But Philip and Wen-dah-ban were examining the cabin to discover everything they could about its owner.

It wasn’t much. Philip pointed to the roof of moss, poles, and strips of birchbark. The man had built before winter because he’d been able to obtain clay and birchbark. Wen-dah-ban said he’d not used the stove since the big wind in March or he’d have fixed the pipe. And the grass which sprouted so fast in May had grown around pieces of stove wood. Philip examined the sticks and said the man was a poor axman.

“Remember Hugh said he wasn’t bushwise,” he said.

Ann found a mitten in the grass. It was almost new.

“He didn’t throw it away,” she said. “He lost it in a snowdrift that hadn’t melted when he left.”

Wen-dah-ban looked at Ann with respect.

“Let’s get home and tell about this,” Philip said.

They paddled swiftly and spoke seldom. At Home Bay, Wen-dah-ban stopped at the beach only long enough to let Ann and Philip leap ashore for he too was anxious to get home and tell his story.

Ann and Philip rushed up the slope to the cabin, where Hugh and Mr. and Mrs. Jackman were ready for supper.

“We found where the fur thief lived all winter!” Philip cried, as he opened the door.

When they had finished their story, Mr. Jackman turned to Hugh.

“What bothers me the most is that a man could live here all winter and we not know it,” he said.

“It’s a big stretch of bush,” Hugh said. “But it sounds like he’d left. Shall you and me go take a look-see to make sure?”

“If Pe-tah-bo doesn’t,” Mr. Jackman said.

“But, Dave!” Mrs. Jackman said. “If this could happen before the railroad even touches Far Lake, what will this country be like later?”

“Any new country has to clean itself up, Mary.”

“That’s why I don’t hold with railroads,” Hugh said. “Anything can happen when that sort of trash can drop off box cars.”

“You mean—” Mrs. Jackman began.

“But, Mary, the man’s gone now.”

Pe-tah-bo arrived two days later. He had visited the cabin, knew no new facts, but was sure the man had left.

“You looked all through the bush?” Mr. Jackman asked. “Sure he took his stuff?”

Pe-tah-bo had made sure. He added that it was very bad when a man robbed traps. No Indian would do such a shameful thing. When he went to the post he would tell the Great Company what had happened in the district. Maybe they could stop it. Next winter he would be very watchful.

“You both better be,” Hugh said.

The three men visited the mink pens. Mr. Jackman explained mink farming methods. Pe-tah-bo listened and said nothing. Soon he got into his canoe and paddled away.

“That nitchie don’t like the idea of your trapping live mink,” Hugh said. “Did he give you hunting rights for two years?”

“And his word is good,” Mr. Jackman said.

Hugh snorted. “White or red, a man can usually think up a water-tight reason for doing something he intends to do anyhow. Those live mink, for instance,” and he turned to Ann. “How’d the lad feel about them?”

“He said that every year his father hunted, and his father’s father before him. And always they got fur.”

“Sure,” Hugh said, “old family territory stuff. The way he sees it, those live mink really belong to Wen-dah-ban.”

“But it makes no difference whether I sell the fur or trap mink alive,” Mr. Jackman said.

“It does to him,” Hugh said. “You’d better get your fur farm started so you don’t have to trap next winter.”

“Got to trap to keep the fur farm going,” Mr. Jackman said.

Even now the farm was supported as far as possible by the country. Green vegetables had been planted to provide summer food for the mink. Another great patch of garden held carrots and root vegetables for winter. The Jackmans spent the evenings carrying water from the lake, so that the fast-growing days of early summer could do their utmost to mature the garden before the inevitable August frost.

Already Ann and Philip had discovered that weeds grew as luxuriantly as plants in that short forcing season of the north. As they hoed endless rows of young vegetables and looked ahead to weeks of more hoeing, Ann wondered if there hadn’t been some wisdom in Wen-dah-ban’s remark that in the forest mink cared for themselves.

The long fish net had to be raised each morning. Dogs, mink, and humans depended on fish for food. Hugh’s rifle brought in meat. Fish, game, and vegetables came from the country. Only cereals must be purchased.

“We’ve got to make sure we can feed our stock next winter,” Mr. Jackman said. “That’s a farmer’s job.”

It was a farm, Ann thought. Earth’s bounty, a harvest from the lake and forest and young things growing up. Even Josephine would soon produce a family. Ann and Philip had been so engrossed in mink progeny they’d not even thought of the kittens. Mrs. Jackman was the only one who pampered Josephine.

“For a week now that cat has been restless,” she said.

“No wonder,” Hugh replied. “She knows what mink would do to kittens. Don’t you, old girl?”

Josephine looked up and chirruped, grateful for any attention in these days when Rose and Violet so completely absorbed the general interest.

Those mothers were still in retirement. Philip was sure that Rose was supplementing a milk diet because she carried chunks of meat into the nest box. Ann feared Violet wasn't so efficient a mother.

"Maybe Violet's only got one baby mink," Philip said. "I bet Rose has a lot."

At times Philip could be annoyingly superior.

But that afternoon when she returned from an inspection of Hugh's bear traps, Ann knew she brought news which would startle even Philip. He was in the garden with the others. Ann ran toward them. There was urgency in her manner, even though just as she reached them she suffered a slight misgiving. She wished she had more proof to offer. But no doubt showed in her voice as she exploded her bombshell.

"I saw a silver fox," she said.

Her father dropped his hoe. "You saw a *what*?" he said.

His tone instilled further doubt in Ann.

"Anyway I thought it was a silver fox," she amended. "It was small, and sort of dark and had a bushy tail and—"

"Where was this?"

"On that beach just before Hugh's last bear trap."

"Did it have a white-tipped tail?" Hugh asked.

"No," she said. "At least I wasn't close enough to see."

"How close were you?" her father asked.

"Not very," she admitted. "But I was close enough to be sure—well, almost sure, that it was a fox."

Ann's cheeks were scarlet. For years her father had laughed at what he called "Ann's tall tales." Now she knew he thought she was telling another. And she wasn't quite sure that she wasn't telling one. The running animal might not have been a fox at all.

Her father, however, was taking her news seriously. He turned to Hugh.

"We'd better go have a look," he said.

The two men returned within an hour. Ann watched them come up the trail. Their manner wasn't that of men who'd found a silver fox.

“It was a fox, all right,” her father said to Ann. “He was traveling, too. But what made you think it was a silver?”

Ann knew that hope and a deep desire might have stimulated her imagination. Now she wasn't sure just what she had seen and her excitement had completely drained away. She felt flat and a bit silly.

“Were you near enough to see the difference between black and red?” her father asked.

“Dave!” Mrs. Jackman said. “Stop tormenting Ann about that fox. No wonder she thought it was a silver. You've talked enough about those creatures so that any one of us might think we saw one.”

“And now Ann won't see any but silvers,” Philip said.

Ann wished they'd drop the whole unhappy subject. She was close to tears.

“I don't know what I saw—” she began, and then her voice broke.

Her father put his arm around her.

“Never mind,” he said. “You wanted to find a silver. And that helps a lot.”



June burst upon the north. The land was rich with thrusting life. Overnight, grasses grew ankle high. Luscious wild strawberries hid in the rank growth. Birch and poplar were fully leaved. The dark green branches of spruce and pine were tipped with delicate ends which looked like tiny candles. The songs of birds poured from thick green foliage. Even the Canadian whitethroat had changed his liquid notes from a lament to a joyous celebration.

As Ann thinned the dense rows of vegetables which crowded toward the sun, she felt that she could almost hear them growing.

Overhead the sky was a deep blue. The waters of the bay danced and sparkled. Even the air seemed cleaner, fresher. It was a day for glad tidings.

Ann knew that something marvelous lay just around the corner. She knew it even before Philip rushed into the clearing.

“Rose has got six baby mink!” he shouted.

The cabin door flew open and Mrs. Jackman rushed out the doorway. Hugh and Mr. Jackman dropped their tools. Ann ran from the garden.

“Rose has got ’em out in the sunshine,” Philip said. “Cutest things you ever saw!”

They followed Philip to the mink pens and watched Rose from a distance. Six little replicas squirmed and snuggled about their mother. The Jackmans caught glimpses of tiny pointed ears, bright eyes, and long tails which were almost ridiculous miniatures of their mother’s. As they staggered about, the babies even arched their long bodies as she did.

Rose looked content and happy, as though this day repaid for the long seclusion.

“Look like good dark mink,” Hugh said.

The baby mink were more cunning than Ann had imagined.

“I wish Violet would bring hers out!” she cried.

“She may,” her father said. “Put some fresh milk in her pen and watch.”

The others went back to the cabin and Ann waited a long time behind a screen of brush before she saw a pair of bright eyes peer out. A moment later Violet glided to the pan of milk. When she had drunk, she nibbled at ground meat, and then appeared to be studying the weather. Apparently she concluded it was a good day to air babies. She darted into the house and reappeared half carrying, half dragging a baby by the nape of the neck. She deposited the youngster and brought another, making eight journeys to the nest box.

Ann counted ecstatically. She’d beaten Philip’s litter by two.

Ann stood up and took a step. A twig snapped and Violet’s long slender body tensed in alarm. She stared distrustfully about and then reached for a baby. As she grasped it by the neck she stopped, apparently debating whether to risk the exposed seven while she carried back the one.

“Don’t take them in!” Ann pleaded. “I’ll go away!”

Ann’s report to her family was jubilant and completely loyal. Violet, she explained, would be an unusually cautious mother.

“But she’s got the biggest family,” she said. “Eight babies would make any mink nervous.”

“Fourteen young!” Mr. Jackman said. “This *is* getting to be a fur farm.”

The observation posts which commanded a view of the mink nurseries were occupied by at least one member of the Jackman family a great part of the days. The most popular hours were morning and evening, when the mothers brought their kittens into the sunshine or returned them to the nest box. Ann and Philip tried never to miss watching that nape-of-the-neck transportation. Hugh was fascinated by the baby mink and even he admitted that the young were growing bigger, stronger, and more active each day. Already they were playful.

Ann and Philip instituted nursery housekeeping. The pens were carpeted with fresh cedar boughs. Philip thrust brush in the netting to give shade. Ann contributed two hollow logs, which pleased both mothers. Violet kept her brood near her log retreat and saw to it that they disappeared within it promptly at the first alarm.

“If you want to tame those litters, you’ll have to take ’em from the mothers by weaning time,” Hugh said. “Soon as the mothers start to teach ’em to hunt, they’ll teach ’em fear of humans.”

The Jackmans had been so absorbed by the mink nursery that they’d not thought of the cats until one night Mrs. Jackman said she hadn’t seen Josephine all day. Napoleon had come in from his day’s hunting and was his usual sleepy self.

“Go find Josephine,” Mrs. Jackman chided the big black cat.

But Napoleon only opened one eye and yawned, as though to say domestic matters were not within his province.

“He knows she’s gone off to the bush to have her family,” Hugh said. “She don’t trust kittens so near to mink.”

The next morning Ann and Philip searched the ridge and called.

“She’ll bring the whole caboodle home when she gets ready,” Hugh said.

“But I’d like to see that she has plenty of canned milk,” Ann said.

Ann felt conscience stricken. Josephine had been self-supporting, but she had also been a hard-working member of the household and done her share to keep the cabin free of the fall invasion of forest mice. Now she deserved her favorite food.

But Josephine had vanished.

Three days later Ann saw Josephine coming down the trail. A kitten dangled from her mouth. Ann rushed out to greet the wanderer and installed the kitten in a warm box beside the stove. Josephine approved of the arrangements, and then, her tail crooked with excitement, departed.

Ann and Philip followed to help bring in the family. Josephine's bush home had been surprisingly close. Neither Ann nor Philip had thought to search the edge of the alder swamp where Josephine could make sure of a diet of young rabbits. Now she led the way to a stump and disappeared through an opening.

"What a wonderful home for kittens!" Ann cried.

It was then she heard Josephine's anguished cry, as the black cat sprang out, a creature of desolated fury.

They peered in. Ann took one sick look and gathered Josephine into her arms.

"Looks like the work of a weasel," Philip said. "He got 'em while she was carrying that kitten to the cabin."

The destruction had been swift and ruthless.

They carried Josephine home.

"Poor Josephine!" Mrs. Jackman said. "You tried so hard to keep your babies safe."

Tragedy had struck where it was least expected. Josephine had seemed so competent and fearless. Now she surveyed her one kitten as though she couldn't comprehend the disaster and after each short absence she rushed apprehensively to her box. The devotion intended for seven was now lavished on the one.

Josephine's grief had an effect upon them all. Even Napoleon remained at the cabin, and none of the Jackmans passed Josephine's box that evening without stopping to admire.

A feeling of depression carried over and was deepened the next morning when they awakened to find the ground white with an early June snow. Flakes drifted lazily from a leaden sky. Hugh prowled the clearing. Although he'd pretended a disdain of gardening, now he was frankly anxious as he examined the young plants under a thin snow blanket.

“If the wind switches and it clears, we’ll have a killing frost. No chance to grow potatoes before August. Be lucky to get carrots for the mink.”

Hugh could do nothing to halt the weather but he was unwilling to leave the garden to its fate. For the first time since his arrival he failed to plunge into a morning task. Instead he wandered aimlessly about the clearing. Ann offered to inspect his bear traps.

“Wish you would,” he said. “I don’t like to leave. Maybe Dave and I could do somethin’—spread blankets or even cedar branches.”

Ann paddled along the shore. The dark green forest was lovely in its white powdering and she could have given herself up to complete enjoyment of its beauty had she not realized what that snow might mean. In former years at Bradford, weather had been only pleasant, disagreeable, or inconvenient if it halted outing plans. Here weather touched the basic things of their existence—food for the coming winter and, more important, food for the mink.

Everything depended on what the wind did. Ann looked often at the scudding clouds, even held up a wet finger as she’d seen Hugh do. At last she was convinced that the wind was not shifting. There was no sign of clearing to change the snow blanket on the garden into an icy one. The vegetables were safe.

Her spirits lifted. Now she could enjoy the white and green forest. When she reached the last bear trap, she decided to go farther, at least around the next point, for the bay beyond had always been a favorite. Philip, Wen-dah-ban, and she had visited it often and had christened it the Bay of Caves, although the recesses in the granite cliff were really only small fissures in the jumbled rocks.

She paddled swiftly and had half-encircled the bay when she suddenly stopped paddling. She held her blade poised as she stared at the tracks which ran from the water’s edge. They were not large enough to be a wolf’s, and too large for anything but a fox.

She beached her craft and followed the impressions. They led toward the cliff, and were not the circling, aimless tracks of a forest traveler which had stopped to investigate smells and sounds. This animal knew where he was going. The trail showed no evidence of haste or of hesitation.

Ann debated. If she returned to the cabin with another story of a silver fox, they would laugh at her. If she followed the fox, she might frighten her

quarry. And this *must* be the silver fox. Her silver fox. The one she had glimpsed on the nearby beach.

She decided to risk the laughter. But when she burst upon her family with her story, they listened with amazing calm.

“You’re just trying to find proof of that story of seeing a silver fox,” her mother said.

“No difference between the tracks of a silver and a red,” Philip added.

“You don’t *have* to believe it!” Ann stormed. “But you’d be sorry if there was a silver fox living right under your noses and you never tried to hunt it.”

“I’d hunt even a red one if the fur was prime,” her father said. “And if he has a den the chances are we’ll get some good red pelts next winter.”

“But how do you *know* he’s a red fox?” Ann demanded.

“It’s a million to one chance against a silver.”

Hugh got up to leave the cabin and motioned Ann to follow.

“Listen, girl,” he said. “Tell me exactly what you did see this time.”

Ann told him.

“I know that bay,” he said as he squatted to trace lines on the ground with a stubby forefinger. “A cliff runs in this direction and across a little swale there’s a hogsback hill. Sat on it often while I was waiting for a deer. But the bay’s a good quarter of a mile from the beach where you saw that fox.”

“But it *could* be the same fox.”

“Could be,” he granted. “Let’s go take a look.”

As they put the canoe in water, Philip ran down the trail.

“Want to come?” Hugh asked.

“Sure,” Philip said. “I don’t think it’s a silver fox, but I like to go hunting.”

When they had sat on the hogsback for a long time, never moving, scarcely speaking except in guarded whispers, Ann began to wonder if the fox had really been going to the cliff. They’d not seen a stir of leaves or bushes. The light snowfall had changed into a faint drizzle. Ann was chilled

and stiff. She'd begun to feel silly. After this long vigil she'd never live down the disgrace of this second false alarm.

"Let's go home," she whispered.

Neither Hugh nor Philip moved or answered.

Then she added a forlorn admission. "I never was sure I saw a silver fox. I don't even know these tracks went to the cliff."

Philip gave Ann a quick, impatient glance. "Keep still!" he whispered. "We ought to stay at least half an hour more."

Hugh smiled. "All right, lad," he said. "You say when you got enough. Hunting is more of waiting than it is of shooting."

Never before had the old woodsman rebuked Ann. She looked at the man and boy beside her. These two were much alike. Now they sat tensely, eyes fixed on the caves ahead. Neither relaxed vigilance for an instant. Ann wished she had their stick-to-it attitude, but despite good intentions her own glance wandered.

She was recalled by a swift nudge.

"Look!" Philip said.

His finger trembled as he pointed toward the cliff. Ann saw a moving object and then as she caught the outline of a bushy tail and pointed head, she knew it to be a fox. His color seemed dark, but against the snow she could not tell whether he was red or black.

The fox was carrying a rabbit. He held his head up and to one side, as a dog does, to keep from stepping on the long trailing body. The fox stopped often, sometimes to drag his burden over rough ground, and sometimes only to look cautiously about. At last he halted before a huge rock. He looked around, then backed into a hole beneath the rock and drew the rabbit after him.

Hugh exhaled a deep breath.

"First silver I ever saw alive!" he said. "And he's feeding young."

"Are you sure he's a silver?" Philip asked.

"Never surer of anything in my life." Then commands flowed. "Ann, paddle home and get your father. Bring your mother. We'll need everybody."

Ann was already on her feet.

“Philip and I’ll stay here. Look, lad! See that hole on the other side of the rock? Don’t take your eyes off it for a second. It’s the other entrance to their den.”

Philip settled into immobility. Hugh didn’t turn his head as orders followed Ann.

“Tell Dave to bring grain sacks, blankets, and the heavy gloves we use with mink. And ax and shovels. A bit of rope. And anything else Dave can think of. Yes, and enough netting to put around those two holes.”

Ann had already started to leave the hogsback, but the old man’s hoarse whisper reached her.

“Hurry!” he commanded. “And come quiet when you get here. Tell Dave to paddle like he had a thousand dollars pinned on this tree.”

As Ann ran up the trail to the cabin, her father met her. He heard only her first words, then shouted for his wife.

“Mary! Mary! They’ve got a silver in a den! Get the mink gloves, and a tarp and blankets.” He turned to Ann. “Help your mother. Tell me the rest on the way.”

Ann and her mother snatched up gloves, blankets, and tarp and ran from the cabin. Mr. Jackman was loading tools in the canoe. As they ran down the slope, her mother dropped her burden, rushed back to the cabin, and came out with the first aid box.

“We might need it,” she panted as she caught up with Ann.

Three blades churned the water. Ann had never paddled harder, and her father’s face was set in grim lines. When Ann tried to finish her story, he stopped her.

“Save your breath for paddling,” he said. “Hugh’ll tell me.”

Ann led the way to the hogsback. Hugh and Philip were sitting where she’d left them. Hugh waited while the three set down their loads.

“He’s still in there,” the old man whispered. “If he’s carrying food to the vixen, the pups must be pretty young.”

“If we frighten her she’ll kill them,” Mr. Jackman said.

Hugh nodded. “Got to go at this careful.”

The two men held a whispered conference. First they would cover each entrance with netting.

“They’ll hear us, but they’ll keep on hiding,” Mr. Jackman said. “When we drive them out, they’ll come separately.”

“Fox comes first, then the vixen,” Hugh said. “A pair work together in a fox chase. They figure to take the hunter on by turns, then double back. But this time we’ll fool ’em with the netting.”

Philip, Ann and her mother carried logs and rocks to lay on the edge of the netting, which was finally adjusted to the men’s satisfaction. Hugh stood at one entrance, Mr. Jackman at the second. The others waited with blankets, tarp, and sacks. Hugh picked up a long pole and shoved it into the den.

A bundle of dark fur exploded from the hole. Ann caught the flash of a white-tipped tail before Philip and Hugh fell upon the netting with a blanket. The old woodsman struggled with a heaving, fighting bit of energy beneath the woolen folds. He worked swiftly, carefully.

“Give me a sack,” he called to Philip.

“Here’s the vixen!” Mr. Jackman shouted.

Everyone except Hugh ran to the other entrance. Ann saw the netting lift at a corner.

“Look out!” she screamed.

Philip hurled himself forward. His hands grasped at the netting and at a swift flash of dark fur. Mr. Jackman leaped with a blanket. Philip stood up. Blood dripped from a hand.

“Philip! You’re bitten!” Mrs. Jackman cried.

She held his arm as he struggled to get back into the fray.

“We got to get her in a sack!” he gasped.

“I won’t have you poisoned! Not for a thousand foxes! Ann! The first aid box! Help me!”

Ann and her mother disinfected the wound and adjusted a bandage while Hugh went to aid Mr. Jackman. Philip was still struggling to get free when his father tied the second grain sack.

“We’ve got ’em both,” he said.

Hugh replaced the netting around each entrance.

“Don’t think the cubs are old enough to run,” he said. “But there’s no need to take chances.”

They listened but could hear no whimpering in the den.

“Suppose the vixen killed them?” Mr. Jackman asked.

“No way of telling.”

The men began to dig. As the hole widened, Philip got down on hands and knees and peered in.

“It’s big enough for me to crawl in,” he said.

“Put on the mink gloves,” his father said.

“Dave! I don’t want Philip to—” Mrs. Jackman began.

“Gosh, Mother. I’m no baby! We got to get those cubs!”

“Go ahead, Philip,” Mr. Jackman said.

Philip crawled in and squirmed forward on his stomach until only his legs showed. Ann knelt behind him. In a moment they would know whether they owned a litter of foxes.

“I can hear ’em whimper,” Philip’s muffled voice came to them, and then he called, “Here’s the first!”

Everyone crowded close. Philip wiggled back and thrust out an arm. In his hand was a cub.

“It’s a silver!” Hugh yelled and clapped Mr. Jackman on the shoulder.

The cub was slightly larger than a new born kitten. Its eyes were closed. The fur was scanty, but it was dark and had a white-tipped tail. Mr. Jackman took it from Philip’s hand and laid it on a sack.

The tension in the waiting circle grew as Philip backed out again. The second was the same color as the first. A third cub followed, then a fourth. Dark! Every one! Ann’s heart was pounding! Not in her wildest dreams had she hoped for this! Mrs. Jackman didn’t speak. She couldn’t. Mr. Jackman was breathing hard.

Hugh kept up a low mutter. “Shot with luck! Shot with luck!” He repeated the phrase as though he didn’t yet believe it. “Just shot with luck!”

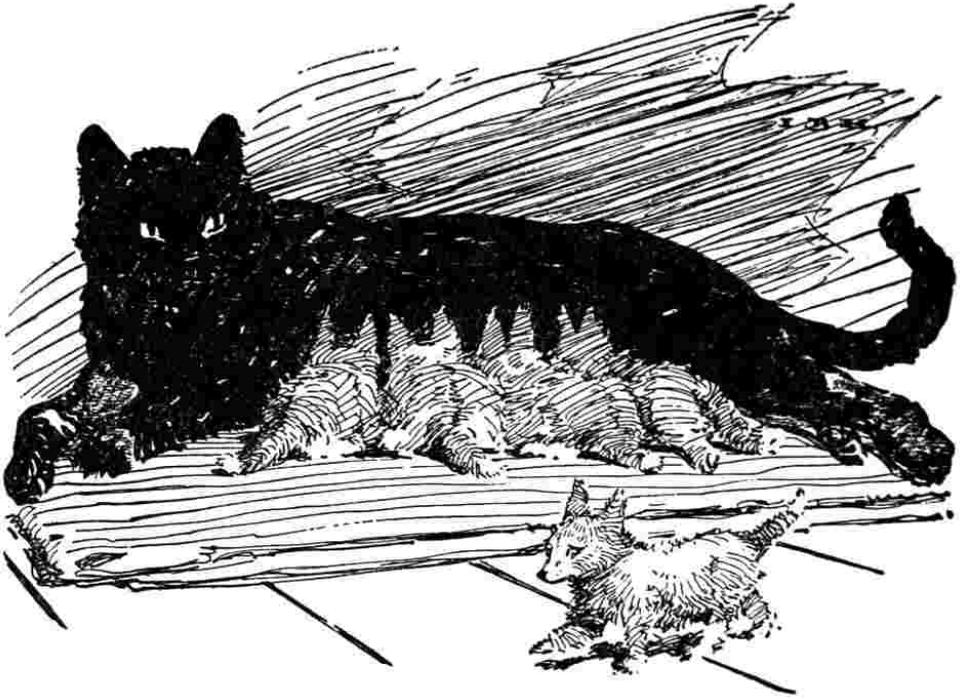
“Here’s the last one,” Philip called.

They leaned forward. Hugh snorted in disgust.

“Hell! He’s red! And not straight red at that! Look at the black underparts and at that white-tipped tail.”

Ann bent closer. The cub's funny little face was puckered. She wanted to cuddle the small body. She put out her hands to take it.

"I don't care if he is red!" she cried. "He's the cutest one of all."



The Jackmans, a weary but jubilant family, sat down to a late midday meal. So much had happened since breakfast, when they'd faced the threat of a frost-killed garden, that Ann couldn't believe all the events had been crowded into one morning. Philip too looked dazed.

"Wonder how a man feels when he's just found a gold mine," he said suddenly.

"About the way you feel now, son," his mother said. "The way we all feel."

"Next time Ann cries 'silver fox' we'll believe her," Mr. Jackman said.

"But it was Philip who found these foxes," Ann said. "He was the one who said to wait for another half hour."

"Luckiest half hour the lad'll ever spend," Hugh said. "I was ready to quit with Ann."

“You old fraud!” Mrs. Jackman said. “You wouldn’t have quit any more than Philip. Don’t tell me you don’t believe in fox farms!”

“Catching foxes and raising foxes are two different things,” Hugh said as he arose. “Well, folks, we got a big job ahead of us this afternoon.”

“Sure have,” Mr. Jackman said. “Got to settle a new family.”

The cubs were in a warm box beside the stove. The parent foxes were still in grain sacks. Their pen must be built securely, for foxes could burrow as well as climb. Mr. Jackman said they’d have to use an underground carpet of wire netting as well as a wide overhang around the top of the fencing. Hugh picked up his ax.

“It’ll take good strong twelve-foot posts to carry all that weight of netting,” he said. “Might as well build right in the first place. Anybody got any ideas about where we’ll put the pen?”

Everyone had ideas. They walked from one site to another, arguing merits. Preparation for visiting royalty couldn’t have seemed more important, and, Ann thought, the pair were royalty. Silver foxes were the aristocracy of fur land.

At last they chose a spot which had shade, sunlight, brush for hiding cover, turfy ground well drained. When the decision was finally made, Mr. Jackman went to the toolhouse to build transfer boxes for the captive pair. The boxes would also have to serve as homes until the pen was finished.

Hugh took charge of the permanent quarters. He set Mrs. Jackman to work making cedar shavings for nest material, Ann to gathering spruce and pine needles for a surface carpet, and sent Philip to find a flat stump.

“We’ll set it up in the pen,” Hugh said. “Foxes like to sit on ’em so they can take a look around.”

Before they had carried out Hugh’s orders, Mr. Jackman arrived with the foxes in the transfer boxes. He had used netting for one side so that they could look at their prizes. He was jubilant.

“These aren’t any brownish salt-and-pepper foxes,” he said. “They’re a real black, and the silver’s banded. The vixen is as well marked as the dog. The cubs ought to grow into beauties.”

Even Hugh stopped work for a look. Ann said they should be christened. The registered stock of Prince Edward Island had impressive names. Usually they carried the word Champion, although one of her favorites had been Black Hector.

“We’ll call ours Pride of the North,” Philip said.

Ann chose Silver Princess for the vixen, and then she added, “I’ll call my cub Eric the Red.”

No one questioned her ownership of the little red cub, for that had been settled at first meeting.

“Those babies haven’t had anything to eat since morning,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“You’d better try to feed them.”

“Are you sure the mother wouldn’t nurse ’em?” Philip asked. “They’re awful young.”

“She’d kill them,” his father said. “A frightened vixen can’t be trusted.”

“Fox farmin’ goes agin nature,” Hugh said. “I bet no mothers kill their litters in dens.”

Mr. Jackman said that no one knew about den life. But in the history of fox farms, vixens not kept secluded had destroyed their young.

Ann returned to the cabin with her mother to help feed the cubs. They didn’t have a nursing bottle but Mrs. Jackman contrived one with rubber fastened to the top of a bottle. The babies only moved their heads away. A medicine dropper was no more successful. Mrs. Jackman wrapped bread in a cloth, dipped it in milk, and tried to persuade the cubs to suckle, but this method too was a failure.

All five cubs were whimpering. They were miserable and hungry, and they missed their mother. Mr. Jackman came in.

“I’ve tried everything!” his wife said. “We can’t let them starve. I’m almost ready to take a chance on their mother.”

“We’d lose the litter,” Mr. Jackman said.

He knelt beside his wife and tried to help her. She dipped a finger in milk and rubbed it across the little noses. But the cubs only squirmed and whimpered and continued their blind search for the familiar warmth of their mother.

“Perhaps when they’re hungrier they’ll eat,” Mr. Jackman said.

“Hungrier! They’re starving now! We’ve got to do something!”

“Josephine!” Ann cried. “She wants more kittens.”

“That’s genius!” Mr. Jackman said. “We’ll risk one cub.”

Ann knew Eric would be chosen to explore feline maternity, and her heart cried out for him. It was silly, but he seemed the most precious of the lot.

“Does it have to be Eric?” Ann asked her father.

He drew back the hand, already reaching for the red cub.

“No,” he said. “You make the choice.”

Ann hovered over the box. She knew the value of the other four. They might be raised to be magnificent silver foxes. They were the peers of fur land. But Eric, like the man whose name he bore, must have a gallant heart.

“I want it to be Eric,” she said.

The cat lay mothering her lone kitten. Ann soothed her. Josephine lifted her head and eyed distrustfully the little red cub Ann laid beside her.

“Please, Josephine!” Ann pleaded. “You’ve missed your family.”

Eric nestled close to the big cat’s side. Josephine was warm and furry. She didn’t smell like his mother, but he caught the odor of food. A moment later he was suckling blissfully. Josephine looked around, then laid a black foreleg over the red cub. The adoption was complete.

Mr. Jackman carried the other cubs to the box. “Go to it, young fellows!” he said. “You can all have dinner.”

If Josephine noticed any difference in her offspring, she didn’t indicate it. She purred contentedly as her family, miraculously restored, nestled close. But she did realize that somehow she had stepped into a heroine’s role. She chirruped as the Jackmans applauded and admired, and that evening she fairly swaggered as she walked to her box and settled among her young.

“Those cubs will be gentle as kittens,” Hugh said. “You were lucky to find a litter that whelped so late. They’ll tame easy.”

Ann thought of Eric as he would be someday, running about the clearing. He enjoyed an advantage. He was a commoner, and could be allowed to romp while his aristocratic kin must be closely guarded.

Ann had heard of the precautions taken on Prince Edward Island, where pens were closely guarded day and night. Some farms had even installed

burglar alarms, like banks, and there were always double fences to keep dogs and humans from the kennels. Eric would never require such measures.

Ann felt weary, blissful, and somehow complete. She noticed that the others were spending an unusually idle evening. Neither Hugh nor her father worked on odd jobs as they usually did each evening. Mrs. Jackman had not picked up her mending. Good fortune could be as tiring as disaster.

“How much do you figure that pair of foxes is worth, Dave?” Hugh asked.

“Thousands, even for their pelts,” Mr. Jackman said. “As breeders—more than I’d dare say. We know the color of the litter.”

“And the cubs?” Hugh asked. “Three vixens and a fox. Course you’ll never raise ’em, but if you did they’d run into quite a bit of money.”

Mr. Jackman grinned. “Not used to counting money by thousands. But why do you ask?”

“I was thinking it would be a good idea to move over to the island.”

Hugh made no mention of the fur thief or the deserted cabin, but Ann thought of that threat, and from the faces of the others she knew they were thinking of it too.

“It’d be a lot safer to keep that much money in foxes on an island,” Hugh said.

“It would,” Mr. Jackman said. “But when I build on the island, I want to do it right.”

“Building right is the only way. Starting now, we could finish this summer. Might even get a couple of bear skins to hang over the railing of that gallery,” and he smiled at Ann. “Besides, the railroad will reach Far Lake this summer in plenty of time to bring all the building material you’d need.”

Mr. Jackman looked thoughtful, started to speak, then stopped.

“If it’s my wages that’s bothering you,” Hugh said, “forget ’em. Hold ’em long’s you need. Right now I got no use for money.”

“Thanks, old timer,” Mr. Jackman said. “Anyway, you’ve got a lot of money coming. By rights, a part of those silver foxes belongs to you.”

“You won’t give me no foxes!” Hugh flared. “When I get money I want the kind that don’t get distemper or mange or dies for no reason at all. No!

You and the missus and the kids can keep those foxes. But that's got nothing to do with me starting to work on the island."

"It isn't your wages, Hugh," Mr. Jackman said. "It's what the house would run to. We'd need a couple of men to help, Indians for freighting, roofing, screen, netting, cement, extra stoves, and all sorts of odds and ends. It counts up! And lumber costs money, whether you whipsaw the boards or buy them."

"By figuring we might—"

"No, Hugh. We started a fur farm on a shoestring. Building the house and pens this summer would take more money than I have."

"Unless—" Mrs. Jackman began.

"No, Mary! Once and for all, we decided that question long ago."

Ann wondered what they had decided. She hoped her mother would tell them. But she didn't, and her father changed the subject. Later, when Hugh had left for his tent and Ann and Philip had gone to bed, she heard her parents talking in the big main room. Ordinarily everyone went to bed at the same hour. Philip, on the other side of the birchbark screen, was already breathing deeply. Ann lay awake and listened to her parents' low voices.

Until now, all four had decided questions about the northern venture, all five since Hugh had joined them. That had been one of the thrilling things about this new life in the wilderness. Her father had said so often that in the bush all had to do the job together.

Ann slipped out of bed and found her robe and slippers. She opened the door to the large main room and stood in the doorway.

"Mother, what did you mean when you said 'unless'?" she asked.

"I'm glad you came, Ann," Mrs. Jackman said. "This concerns you."

Ann curled up on the couch. Her mother told of an inheritance she had set aside for Ann's and Philip's school. When the Jackmans had come north they'd decided that the fund must be kept intact, safe for its original purpose.

"We said no matter what happened we would never touch that money," her mother said. "Your father feels it really belongs to you and Philip. You'll be the first to go away to school. Next year, we hope."

Ann sat up, her face flushed with excitement. This was a real family conference, and she knew how she felt.

“Why shouldn’t Philip and I do our share toward the fur farm?” she demanded. “An education!” and she remembered Hugh’s words that evening. “Forget it! We’ve learned a lot this year. Besides, when we have a silver fox farm we’ll never even have to worry about money.”

“That’s the way I feel!” and Mrs. Jackman turned to her husband. “I knew they’d think the same way.”

“Just because we’re all excited now we’ve no right to let Ann decide—”

“Dave! The children will go off to school and when we have a fox farm we can give them so much more. This fox farm will belong to all of us. Let’s call it the Big Four Company.”

“Big Five, you mean,” her husband said. His smile was twisted as he gathered his wife and Ann into his arms. “Five people who can’t be beat!”

His wife laughed happily.

“But we won’t upset Hugh by telling him he owns silver foxes. The big First Ten Companies of Prince Edward Island don’t know it, but they have a rival.”

Ann wondered how she would ever go to sleep after so exciting a decision. Mrs. Jackman was as much elated.

“Let’s have a midnight feast to celebrate!” she cried. “Call Philip! And get Hugh! Tonight we’ll break down and say out loud how wonderful we think we all are. Every family should do that sometime.”

Mrs. Jackman brought out a cake. There was laughter and tenderness in her eyes.

“Tonight I’m going to tell Ann and Philip that although we may be reckless parents we managed to bring up some fine children. And I might even tell Hugh he’s one of us. He’ll have to know it sometime.”

She didn’t tell Hugh this at the midnight celebration but he must have sensed it. He grinned as he came into the cabin to find Mrs. Jackman stirring a great kettle of hot chocolate while Ann cut cake.

“I knew you had good news when I heard you yell,” he said.

Hugh drank three cups of chocolate while they talked house, fur pens, and all the preparations for building on the island. For the first time in his life, Philip ignored cake in his excitement.

“Gosh, Ann!” he said. “Wouldn’t that have been awful if you hadn’t heard ’em talking and gone out?”

When they went to bed at last, Ann was drowsy. She’d never known a more exciting day, not even when they had decided to go north. She was dropping off to sleep when Philip spoke.

“Wake, Ann?”

“Sure,” she said, although her eyelids were closing.

“Did you ever suppose when we came up here that you and I would be part owners of a silver fox farm?”

“I always sort of hoped.”

“We’ve got a lot of work ahead of us, but I bet the First Ten Companies won’t be any bigger’n ours before we’re done.”



Ann wakened with a start. The sun confirmed her quick guess that it was midmorning. The others must have been awake for hours. But Ann allowed herself a few moments to lie quietly and enjoy the sense of well-being which came as she thought of the marvelous events of the day before and the still more wonderful things to come.

But as she listened to the voices of Philip and her father and mother in the main room, they sounded purposeful. Even now she might be missing something. She dressed hurriedly and burst in on a scene of activity. Her father was stowing a camping outfit into a packsack.

“Just in time to see me off, Ann,” he said.

A great deal had been decided while Ann slept. Hugh had gone to the island. Mr. Jackman was about to leave for the railroad to get men. Mrs. Jackman was making a long list of supplies for the island camp where the two workmen would live with Hugh. Mr. Jackman hoped to accomplish several errands in one trip. If he encountered the fur brigade from the post he could send a message to Mr. Gillespie about hiring native freighters. And he hoped to arrange with the superintendent of construction to bring supplies as far as the rails had been laid.

“That would cut out portages this summer,” he said.

He swung the packsack to his shoulders and put his wife’s list in his pocket.

“Don’t know how long all this will take me,” he said. “I’d be willing to wait over a day or so to get Charlie Dean. Best man with a broadax I ever knew. We’ll need good men. Got a job ahead of us.”

As they watched Mr. Jackman set the canoe in water, Ann thought life had speeded up. There was urgency in the thrust of his paddle as he swung the craft from shore. His blade flashed in the sunlight as he set off with vigorous strokes.

As the canoe disappeared around the point, the three watchers looked a trifle sober.

“Our job is to take care of the silver foxes,” Mrs. Jackman said as they walked up the slope, and then she added, “The biggest job we ever had.”

Ann caught the note of panic in her mother’s voice and was relieved to know that another shared her apprehensions. Ann had been thinking that if anything happened to the foxes, the house on the island would hold no meaning.

“We took care of the mink,” Philip said. “We can manage foxes.”

“We’ll *have* to manage,” Mrs. Jackman said.

Josephine was not disturbed by the gravity of her new responsibility and she went calmly about maternal duties. She knew kittens needed only to be warmed, fed and mothered and she chirruped proudly to report that all was well. But later when the frequent inspections of her brood began to annoy and mystify her, Mrs. Jackman covered the box to shut out the light.

“We’ll let Josephine manage the cubs by herself,” she said. “Our job is the parent foxes.”

The dog and vixen had ceased climbing up the netting and were hiding in their house. Ann and Philip made sure they'd drunk water. The carcass of a rabbit lay unnoticed in their pen for hours, but in late afternoon it had disappeared.

"See the marks where they dragged it into the house," Philip said.

Even Hugh was cheerful when this was reported to him that evening.

"Having a pair will help a lot," he said. "The dog will take care of the vixen. Don't you folks worry too much about those foxes. And I'll stay here nights while Dave's away."

After an absence of four days, Mr. Jackman arrived early one evening with two men and a canoeload of supplies. While Ann and Mrs. Jackman prepared a late supper, he described the trip.

"Couldn't have had better luck," he said. "Sent a message to Gillespie by Pe-tah-bo, who was running the fur brigade. While I was waiting for Charlie Dean, I hunted up the construction superintendent. He's a fine chap."

"You mean the railroad will bring our freight?" Mrs. Jackman asked.

"Right to the head of steel. By August they'll hit Far Lake. Offered to do it before I asked."

"What *did* you do to bring all this about?" Mrs. Jackman demanded.

Mr. Jackman grinned.

"Told him about the fur farm and what we're trying to do here. He'd been driving steel through hundreds of miles of spruce and muskeg and seeing nothing but an Indian camp occasionally, and he'd been wondering if anyone would ever use this country. Now he wants to come and see us. Says we're the first white settlers in this stretch of bush."

"If he waits until we have the house built, we'll have something to show him," Ann said.

"That's exactly what I told him."

Mrs. Jackman lifted the browned flaky whitefish to a platter and Mr. Jackman went to summon Charlie and his companion, Joe. The two men took their seats at the table. Charlie was burly and deep-chested, and looked like a man unafraid of anything, but as Mrs. Jackman served him his voice trailed off in an embarrassed squeak. Joe was thin and wiry and didn't speak at all. Ann wondered if he could, until later when she saw him talking as the

two men sat outside and smoked after-supper pipes. Mr. Jackman reported the result of the conference.

“The boys decided to go to camp tonight,” he said. “Want to get an early start on work tomorrow.”

“They might feel more comfortable with Hugh,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“Hugh will be, when he sees them coming,” Mr. Jackman said. “He can’t wait to get them at those logs.”

As Ann watched Charlie and Joe depart, she felt sorry for them. Hugh was a driver. But later she began to pity Hugh, in the days when reports from the island began to trickle back through Philip and her father.

“They don’t even stop to talk to each other!” Philip said.

“Three good men all trying to out-do each other!” Mr. Jackman said. “I’ll give ’em a little while by themselves to shake down. Plenty of jobs to keep me busy.”

There were more than enough—trips to the railroad, to the Hudson’s Bay post, water to carry to the big garden, thirsty after hot days of latter June. And most important of all, there were the separate pens for the young mink and foxes. It would soon be time to separate the litters from the mothers, both real and foster.

Josephine had already recognized that the time for parting had come. She’d begun her mothering with no misgiving, but there had been nothing in her previous maternal experience to prepare her for the custody of five greedy little foxes which slept, squirmed, ate, and thrived so lustily.

From the first, Eric had been her favorite. She may have found his red coat enchanting because it was so great a contrast to the familiar blackness of Napoleon, the kitten, the other cubs, and Josephine herself. Eric became the wonder child in a midnight brood. She spent more time on his grooming than she did on her lone kitten, although she left the bathing of the silver cubs entirely to Ann. And Eric made the most of his position of favorite and would lie quietly while Josephine’s rough tongue smoothed his coat and polished his sharp little face. And he took by right the warmest place to sleep, whimpered the loudest when his mother left him, and received the first greeting on her return.

But now that the cubs’ eyes were open and they could tumble from the box and stagger about on explorations, Josephine regarded the long-legged, big-eared youngsters with an amazement which was as ludicrous as their

antics. Also their sharp teeth annoyed her and she frequently cuffed a greedy cub. Ann, fearing that Josephine's maternal interest might die completely, began to feed the fox cubs bread and milk and thin soups in a dish.

Josephine approved supplementary feeding. When her foster children were swollen with food, she permitted them to sleep off their orgy snuggled in her warm fur, but only Eric continued to have full child rights. When the cubs' pen was finished at last, Mr. Jackman didn't suggest taking Eric. He laid the little red cub back in the box.

"You're adopted, young fellow," he said. "Josephine's earned the right to keep you."

The fox cubs were much more fun to watch in their pen where they could romp and have playthings. Philip whittled out a big ball of light dry cedar for them to roll. Mr. Jackman set up a piece of dead tree, flat on top, and with long dead branches to which they climbed. But Ann devised the most successful toy of all. Remembering the antics of puppies, she gave the cubs an old grain sack to pull, tug at, and fight over.

It wasn't necessary to find playthings for Eric. He devised his own. He dragged the kitten about in wrestling matches, chased any moving object, and explored the cabin. His little pointed nose was in everything and no one knew where or when they'd see his bright face peering out.

Mrs. Jackman complained that she didn't dare step without looking. But Ann found Eric more enchanting each day.

When the fox cubs were settled in their quarters, it was time to separate the mink. Both Rose and Violet had been good providers and had taught their young to tear fish in shreds and worry meat. But now the youngsters had grown so playful and mischievous their pranks were intolerable. They leaped and jumped and dragged Rose and Violet around until both mothers decided weaning time had arrived.

The two broods were transferred to an exercise pen in which Philip had built a swimming pool surrounded by clean sand. He wanted to fill the pool with water.

"Better not," his father said. "Let 'em romp and get a little older. They haven't mothers to teach them how to swim."

"In a couple of weeks you won't be able to keep 'em out of water," Hugh said.

He wouldn't admit that his opinion about the domestication of wild mink had changed, but he never made a visit to Home Bay without visiting the mink pen to laugh at the youngsters' antics.

"Taking 'em away from their mothers before they could teach 'em fear was a good idea," he said. "It's hard to believe that such a bloodthirsty critter as a mink could be so playful."

"They play like squirrels," Philip said.

"Sort of," Hugh admitted. "Or more like bear cubs."

"Do you suppose they'd like an exercise wheel like squirrels run on?" Philip asked.

Once Hugh would have laughed at the suggestion, but now he said it wouldn't hurt to try. The wheel was begun before Hugh departed for camp. Philip spent hours shaping pliable willow withes and smoothing the hub to a satin finish. A small runway led to the revolving cylinder. Philip finished the wheel one evening.

"That's quite a rig," his father said. "Don't put it in the pen till Hugh comes. I want to see his face as he watches mink getting acquainted with a squirrel wheel."

The next afternoon Hugh forgot the urgency of his errand when he saw the wheel. He sat with the others watching fourteen young mink survey this plaything from a safe distance. Hugh's face registered disbelief and even Ann began to fear Philip's hours of carpentry had been wasted.

"Give 'em time," Mr. Jackman said. "Look! That young male is getting interested."

One mink, braver or more curious than the others, investigated. A moment later he found entry into the cylinder. It began to revolve. His look of terror and amazement sent the spectators into peals of laughter. Hugh rolled on the ground and held his sides. The little mink spun faster. Apparently he liked it, for no sooner was he on the ground than he re-entered the engaging plaything.

"That's something I never expected to see," Hugh said as they walked back to the cabin. "Maybe you don't learn everything just by keeping your eyes open in the bush."

Ann thought Hugh's opinions were becoming tempered. Already he had capitulated about Joe and Charlie and now he boasted about how fast the work was going.

“Never thought I’d admit another man was better with an ax,” he said. “But Charlie’s got me beat. How soon can we count on roofing and lumber and a jag of netting, Dave?”

“Any time. Gillespie sent word I could have a York boat and some packers by the middle of July.”

Ann was glad to hear talk of a roof. She hadn’t admitted how disappointing had been her first visits to the island when the blank log walls had risen from a jumble of raw white chips and cut brush. She couldn’t visualize that ugly structure as the house she had planned. Hugh had known how she felt.

“Ann’s getting anxious to see a gallery and a railing,” he said. “Too bad we didn’t get any bear skins. But there’s always another spring.”

“We’ll never have a busier one,” Mrs. Jackman said. “None of us has spent an idle moment since we got the silver foxes.”

The past weeks had been crowded with swift comings and goings, early departures and late returns. Garden, fish net, food for mink and foxes, had been the job of the stay-at-homers. But it hadn’t really seemed like work and even the routine of the nurseries had been fun. Philip preferred the long-legged foxes but Ann loved to sit and watch the mink as they swam in the pool and scrubbed themselves in warm clean sand. It was amazing what the young had taught themselves.

Mr. Jackman departed for the Hudson’s Bay post to get the native packers and the big York boat which could carry lumber, roofing, windows, rolls of netting, and sacks of cement and lime to the island. Philip looked envious when his father talked of a week of freighting.

“Let Philip go,” Ann said. “Mother and I can water the garden.”

Her father shook his head.

“You girls can’t carry those heavy buckets from the lake. And besides,” he added, “it’s better to have three people stay at Home Bay.”

The first evening of his absence they had finished watering the garden just at dark when Hugh came up the trail.

“Thought I’d sleep here nights,” he said.

“But I won’t let you make that trip back and forth each day!” Mrs. Jackman said.

“Dave does. Don’t seem to hurt him none.”

“But it isn’t necessary! Unless—”

She stopped. Ann knew she was thinking of the fur thief.

“Is there anything we ought to be afraid of?” Mrs. Jackman asked.

“No,” Hugh said. “I ain’t seen any sign of a stranger on this lake. Just thought I could give you a hand with the foxes.”

The foxes didn’t worry anyone. Pride and Princess were well and, if not happy, were at least resigned to pen life. The cubs were getting bigger and more active every day. And as for Eric, his energy poured out in mischief. He spent his days tormenting the black kitten, charging staid Napoleon, and chewing up the Jackmans’ clothing. Already Mrs. Jackman had threatened to put him in the pen, but each time Ann had begged a reprieve because he was so cunning.

The foxes were in fine condition. Hugh admitted this the next morning—one of his shoepacs bore the marks of Eric’s teeth. He shook his fist at the little red cub.

“If you didn’t have silver markings, I’d take a paddle to you,” he said. “But I got to bear with you because you might grow up to be the daddy of a silver gray.”

When Hugh departed for camp Mrs. Jackman told him not to spend his energy coming home every night. The old woodsman studied her face to see if she meant it.

“Dave said you’d get along all right.” He dipped his blade and then feathered it to hold the canoe stationary while he thought. “Well, maybe I’d best spend my evenings rushing fur pens,” he said. “Once we’re on the island, none of us’ll have to worry.”

Mrs. Jackman went back into the cabin. Philip turned to Ann.

“Hugh thinks that fur thief is still in the country,” he said.

“If he really thought so, he wouldn’t leave us,” Ann said. “But I think both he and Dad are sort of worried.”

Before they left the lake shore Ann and Philip put their own canoe in water and lifted the fish net. This was a daily job, but this haul, biggest of a week, produced many more fish than they could use that day. Philip looked at the silvery bodies on the floor of the canoe.

“Wish we could make ’em come as we need ’em,” he said. “Hugh told me that in August all the whitefish would be in deep water and we’d have to

feed the mink on rabbit.”

“We could smoke some of these,” Ann said.

“Sure. Like the Indians do in the fall. Get ’em started right away and we could have ’em done by night.”

Philip made a rack of poles while Ann slit the fish into two halves as she’d seen Wah-be-goon do. Their outdoor smokehouse looked like those they’d seen beside every wigwam. Ann tended the fire while Philip brought armfuls of alder boughs. She was watching the smoke curl upward about the fish when Philip shouted and pointed down the shore. A birchbark canoe was approaching.

“Here comes Wen-dah-ban!” Philip called.

They’d not seen him since the day they’d found the deserted cabin, and for weeks there had been no smoke rising from Pe-tah-bo’s summer camp.

The Indian lad beached his canoe and walked toward them. He asked no questions but his black eyes studied every detail.

“Willow much better,” he said.

Philip flushed. It always bothered him to have his woodcraft fall short of Wen-dah-ban’s.

“Of course it is!” Ann cried. “That’s what your mother always uses.”

The mistake in fuel rectified, the three sat down to tend the fire and talk. Now it was Wen-dah-ban who brought news from the outside. He had camped at the Hudson’s Bay post and knew all the gossip of the district. And he had been a boatman in the fur brigade. That was important tidings as he explained how for many years Pe-tah-bo had always been in charge of the summer freighting. Wen-dah-ban had planned that someday he too would take out the brigade, but now that could never be. The coming of the railroad had ended fur brigades. So it was good that he had gone on this one. He spoke as a traveler who had returned from foreign lands.

“You were lucky that Pe-tah-bo got you a place on this one,” Philip said.

“Every man should go once on a fur brigade,” Wen-dah-ban said.

Philip broke in with the story of the silver foxes. Wen-dah-ban nodded.

Yes. He had heard. All the Indians at the post were talking about the white man’s luck in trapping.

“But it wasn’t just luck!” Philip said. “Ann and I helped to catch them.”

Wen-dah-ban looked politely incredulous.

“If you want a job, I bet Dad would give you one freighting with the York boat,” Philip said. “Want me to ask him?”

“Hunters don’t work in summer,” Wen-dah-ban said.

“You mean you aren’t going to do any work at *all*?” Philip demanded.

Ann felt sorry for Philip. He was trying so hard to understand these new airs of Wen-dah-ban’s. She began to talk about the fur farm and the new house on the island. Her tone grew somewhat boastful as she tried to impress upon their neighbor that she and Philip too were doing important things.

“Wish we could leave this fish long enough to paddle to the island,” Philip said.

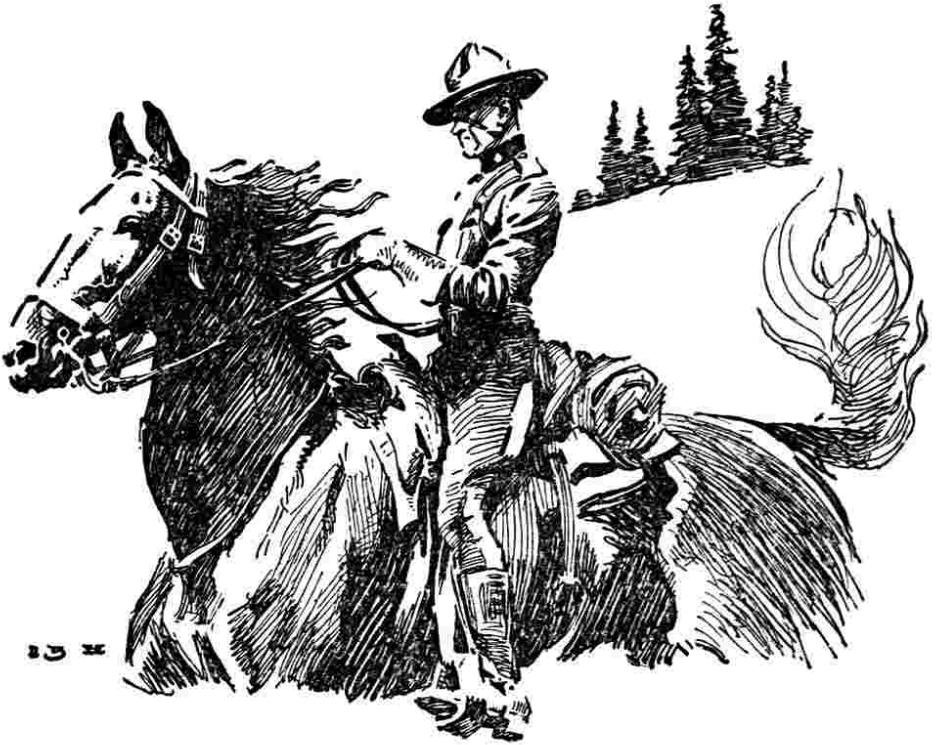
Wen-dah-ban shook his head. He stood up to go.

“How about tomorrow?” Philip said.

Wen-dah-ban ignored that suggestion as he went on to talk about his summer. Soon they must go to the Hudson’s Bay post. This year he had canoeman’s wages. He could buy much shot and powder. And then blueberries would be ripe and there would be much feasting and much dancing. And then it would be time to go to the post and get treaty money.

“But you did all that last summer,” Ann said.

“This year different,” Wen-dah-ban said. “Everyone knows I am a hunter.”



Moving day came at last, and the north put on its gayest dress to celebrate. Hillside were ablaze with late September color. Overnight frost had turned the birch and poplar, and the trees flamed like huge yellow and orange chrysanthemums against the dark green pine. Here and there a low bush maple made a crimson splash.

Mrs. Jackman carried a roll of blankets to the door and stood for a moment to look at the gorgeous forest.

“It’s a gala day,” she said.

The months of preparation were past. In mid-August the two axmen had departed and Hugh and Mr. Jackman had plunged into the final work. Boxes, barrels, and crates, stored so long in Bradford, had been brought

from the railroad to the island. Now the big house was settled and waiting for them. Ann knew every detail of its arrangement, but somehow that island home wouldn't seem truly theirs until they took possession.

Since dawn Hugh, Philip, and Mr. Jackman had ferried back and forth between Home Bay and the island. In mid-afternoon Mr. Jackman shouldered the final load. He looked around the cabin.

"We'll never have a happier home," he said. "I'll be glad to sleep here sometimes when I'm trapping."

Ann knew what he meant. As she and her mother swept the big room and put it in order, she too had a feeling they owed this final service, even if her father had not intended to use the cabin. To leave it tended, looking as though someone cared for it, softened somewhat their desertion. Ann forgot their eager plans for the housewarming dinner in the island home and took time to trim the wick of the big lamp. She saw her mother watching.

"We don't want it to smoke when Dad stays here," Ann said.

Her mother smiled. "You aren't all Jackman," she said. "There's a lot of me in you."

They closed the door. Ann picked up the kitten and called Josephine and Napoleon. Baffled by the strange behavior of their family, the cats had not let Ann out of sight all day. Now they ran ahead on the trail to the lake, stopping to chirrup as though asking what would happen next. They'd never cared for canoe travel, and Ann put them in. They leaped out. Ann gave them to her mother to hold while she pushed out from shore. She wondered if cats really liked houses better than they liked people.

But her paddle stroke was eager, and so was her mother's. As their craft rounded the island they saw a York boat drawn up at the landing. Mrs. Jackman stared.

"I thought the freighting was finished long ago," she said.

For weeks supplies had been poured into the storerooms—food for the Jackmans, for the fur farm and dogs—all the needs for the winter months ahead.

But as Mrs. Jackman spoke, a dozen Indians climbed into the York boat and pushed it from shore. They seemed in a hurry. As they turned toward Fort Caribou, Mrs. Jackman waved and called. They did not answer, only rowed faster.

"They act as though they were trying to escape," Mrs. Jackman said.

Ann was puzzled. The strangeness of Ojibwas being in a hurry hastened her steps as she went up the trail. She crossed the broad veranda, threw open the front door, and dashed into the room.

Logs blazed in the great fireplace. Hugh, Philip, and her father stood before it.

“Welcome home!” her father said.

“You’ve got a present!” Philip exclaimed.

Ann looked around. Her glance traveled over the easy chairs, the tables, the shelves of books. All were as she had last seen them. She looked at the big walnut chest against the side wall. The pewter tea set and her grandmother’s large blue plates were as she had arranged them.

“Getting warm,” her father said, and his eyes were twinkling.

Ann spun around. The Hudson’s Bay post piano stood between two windows.

“Dad promised Mr. Gillespie he’d make it a surprise,” Philip said. “We knew you’d look behind you last of all.”

Ann touched the yellowed ivory keys. She had never confided to anyone how badly she wanted to see a piano in that big log room. It had seemed a silly wish. Originally it had been only a childish desire for an object alien to the north, and then her desire had grown deeper as she remembered her pleasure in the living room of the post’s dwelling house on her first visit.

But now suddenly she knew that it was this particular piano that she had wanted. It had come through hazardous waterways, had been carried over many portages, so that a man who loved music might fill his lonely hours. This piano belonged in fur land.

Tears were in Ann’s eyes.

“Mother!” she cried. “How did Mr. Gillespie ever guess I wanted it so badly?”

“He’s a guessing person,” Mrs. Jackman said. “But this is a ceremony. Let’s make a tour.”

“The bedrooms first,” Ann said.

Hugh pointed out the solidity of the hewed planks which formed the treads of the broad staircase and apologized again because there were no bear skins to hang from the balustrade of the gallery. But Ann knew she’d

never fail to find that overhanging balcony glamorous. She thought the view of the lake from her bedroom windows the best, and Philip said he was glad for a room of his own with plenty of lockers to keep his things in. Mrs. Jackman said she'd never realized how lovely the old walnut furniture would look against log walls.

Downstairs they stopped to admire the big table Hugh had made and the chairs Ann had stained and upholstered with moose hide. Mrs. Jackman spoke of how well her mother's pewter and old china looked in the big log room.

"Second time those things have gone pioneering," Mr. Jackman said.

"As though this elegance was pioneering!" Mrs. Jackman said.

She would have liked them to admire the convenience of the kitchen, but Hugh was anxious to show his own home. He didn't call it that.

"Just an extra shack that might come in handy," he said. "And I can use it until I go along."

It was as neat and compact as Hugh's home would be. Ann thought it a bit bare. When she offered to make curtains, Hugh said he'd never had them in his trapping shack to the south, and this was a duplicate of the cabin he had owned.

"Even the same kind of chairs," he said.

The seats, made of two crossed planks, didn't look comfortable but Hugh insisted that no one had ever found anything to beat them for a tired back.

They stopped at the dog corral to admire the team's new quarters. They looked in the smokehouse where rows of split whitefish hung from long poles. They admired the toolhouse where Hugh and Mr. Jackman each had a work bench. They peeked in the root cellar with its shelves lined with jams and jellies and canned berries and filled to overflowing with produce from the garden.

Then they crossed the narrow neck of land which led to the fur farm. This end of the island was enclosed with an outer fence of netting. Hugh unlatched the outside gate.

"Double fences and an island," he said. "We ought to feel safe here."

"And we're going to teach Ogema to patrol twice a day," Philip said.

“Good idea,” Hugh said. “The dog corral is too far from this end of the island.”

They walked past the long mink houses. Now that each mink had its separate inner and outer pen, the mink kennel was an imposing structure. Ann had been sorry to see the litters separated, but as the young mink grew to almost adult size, family quarrels had become serious.

Hugh was most proud of the fox quarters. Here the royalty of the fur farm was properly housed. Hugh had even sandpapered the interior of the houses lest the precious pelts be rubbed. Ann was glad to see that Eric’s house had been as carefully smoothed as the others. Hugh was never one to dwell upon comparisons. Ann stopped to scratch Eric’s nose when he thrust it through the netting and she promised him a romp the next day.

Pride and Princess lived in a double house and pen because, as Hugh said, members of any family had to get away from each other occasionally. These two were Hugh’s favorites.

“Look how smooth and glossy they’re getting,” Hugh said. “Ain’t a finer pair o’ silvers in Canady.”

A tired, jubilant, and very happy family sat at the housewarming dinner table. It was a deep down happiness which brought an inner glow, and later when they lingered before the big fireplace they did not talk much. But when Ann went to bed she felt they had said a great deal to each other.

She couldn’t go to sleep. Somehow, things had changed on Far Lake. Only a year ago Pe-tah-bo’s refusal to give her father a share in his big hunting district had been the biggest thing in the Jackman family’s life. Now that was in the past. Already Pe-tah-bo and his family, friends now, had departed for the winter’s hunt. Before the Jackmans had left Home Bay, Wen-dah-ban had come to say good-by and to inspect the mink and foxes and, most important of all, the new but uncompleted house.

The Indian boy had been much nicer, Ann thought, now that his status as a hunter had been definitely established with the other natives at the summer encampment. She had said so to her mother.

“Perhaps you and Philip were a bit trying this summer too,” Mrs. Jackman had said. “Remember that a house and a fur farm don’t mean much to Wen-dah-ban.”

Ann knew the summer had drawn a line between the white and the red races, and as she looked back over it she knew Wen-dah-ban’s desire to be accepted as a great hunter like his father had been only the natural business

of growing up. It was just as she and Philip had been growing up when they had plunged so fervently into the affairs of the fur farm and the building of their island home.

Growing up didn't seem to be a steady change, as one might expect. It seemed to be a matter of sudden strides. You didn't know you'd made one until you looked back.

This homecoming day seemed to mark such a milestone. Ann knew she and Philip were suddenly older. Six months before they would have been exuberant. Now their joy was as intense, but it carried the graver sense of sharing. The year and a half at Far Lake took on a new meaning. It was as though the pieces of a puzzle had suddenly clicked together.

The next morning Ann came down to breakfast in her best flannel shirt and gayest scarf.

"Going somewhere?" Philip asked.

"She's dressed up to stay at home," Mrs. Jackman said.

Ann smiled at her mother. There were times when only she understood.

The dogs set up a warning bark and Mr. Jackman looked out the window.

"Pe-tah-bo and Wen-dah-ban are coming up the trail," he said.

They went out to the veranda to await their visitors. Neither Indian was smiling. Evidently this was no casual call. Pe-tah-bo plunged into his errand and asked if they knew a white man had killed a caribou on Echo Lake. Hugh and Mr. Jackman shook their heads. Then Pe-tah-bo's mixture of English and Ojibwa fairly spluttered.

What was this strange white man doing in the country? Where was his camp? Perhaps this *shag-e-nash* meant evil. Would the traps be robbed again this winter? Someone must go at once to Fort Caribou and tell the big company.

"But we've told Gillespie about the fur thief," Mr. Jackman said.

"Suppose he's the same fellow who lived in that shack last winter, Dave?" Hugh asked.

Pe-tah-bo didn't wait for the answer. The *shag-e-nash* was evil. Traps would be robbed again this winter. Hunters would be plundered. It was not right that he and Wen-dah-ban should lose fur.

"But we've got silver foxes to worry over," Hugh said.

Pe-tah-bo's face darkened. Ann was sorry Hugh had spoken of their fur farm. For months Hugh had insisted that Pe-tah-bo resented the silver foxes and that the enmity of so close a neighbor was dangerous. Her father had intended to talk to Pe-tah-bo but Ann, remembering the Indian's rages before the trapping rights had been settled, felt that this was not the time to speak of silver foxes or a fur farm.

Pe-tah-bo muttered something in Ojibwa to Wen-dah-ban and shrugged his shoulders. Ann knew he had deliberately slurred his words so they could not understand. Wen-dah-ban looked unhappily at his father.

"Is it true that you don't like mink and foxes in pens, Pe-tah-bo?" Mr. Jackman asked.

Pe-tah-bo thought a long time before he answered, and then his words came slowly.

Taking live fur from the forest was evil. The forest belonged to the Indian hunter. The big company believed this. But the white man's ways were different. Some day this forest would belong to Wen-dah-ban, and after Wen-dah-ban his children would hunt as Pe-tah-bo's father had hunted before he did. But Wah-bo-sence had saved Wen-dah-ban's life and Pe-tah-bo had paid his debt. He had said before the big company that the white man could hunt for two more winters. The big company said that word could not be broken. But Pe-tah-bo's heart was troubled. Taking live fur from Wen-dah-ban's forest was evil.

"Just about what I said, Dave," Hugh muttered.

Ann walked over to stand beside her father. She knew what she hoped he'd say. He stared across the lake a long time before he answered. He'd never been an orator but when he spoke at last his words were as measured as had been Pe-tah-bo's. And they were as simple.

Pe-tah-bo's words were good. Now the white man's words must be good likewise. The white man's ways were different and he believed the white man's ways were right. The Indian allowed his fur to run in the forest but the white man put his fur in pens. But it had not made any difference in the number of animals which still ran in the forest because a white man had not skinned his fur and sold that fur to the big company. Every hunter took the fur which came to his traps. That was all that he had done. He had worked hard last winter, but the forest had been good to him. In one year he had made much money as a hunter. Now Wen-dah-ban's debt was paid. So he gave the forest back to Wen-dah-ban. He would not hunt again in Wen-dah-

ban's district. It belonged now to Wen-dah-ban and to Wen-dah-ban's children.

Pe-tah-bo nodded. "Those are good words," he said.

The two men shook hands. Then Mr. Jackman shook hands with Wen-dah-ban. Ann and Philip and Mrs. Jackman shook hands with their neighbors. Hugh shook hands with Pe-tah-bo. Everyone shook hands. Ann found herself shaking hands with Philip.

Hugh was as relieved as were the others.

"You had the right idea, Dave," he said. "We'll find some place around here to trap live mink."

"And now we'd better find out about this white man," Mr. Jackman said.

The diplomatic conference became a council of war. Pe-tah-bo was now as eager as the others. Ann thought how good it was for all to be united. Hugh and Pe-tah-bo were sure the man was the same fur thief, returned to the country. Hugh suggested they look first at the deserted shack on the river. Pe-tah-bo nodded and started toward the lake.

"Get the canoe in water, Dave," Hugh said, "while I fetch a couple of rifles."

Before the Indians had launched their canoe, Mr. Jackman was waiting in the stern of his Peterborough. Hugh ran down the trail, laid the rifles against a thwart, knelt in the bow, and dipped his paddle.

"We'll meet you at the mouth of the river," he called to Pe-tah-bo.

"It wouldn't do any good to ask Dad to take us," Philip said to Ann. "But Wen-dah-ban's going."

Mrs. Jackman put a hand on Philip's shoulder.

"Certainly you can't go," she said.

Ann went nearer the water. The Peterborough had started. The slower birchbark would be left far behind. Ann picked up a paddle. Just as Wen-dah-ban shoved off, she stepped into the birchbark and knelt amidships. At Philip's yelp of rage, her mother looked around.

"Ann!" she cried. "Come back here!"

"It'll take three paddles to keep up with Hugh and Dad," Ann said.

Pe-tah-bo looked back at Ann, nodded, and dug in his blade.

Ann knew her action would have to be accounted for later. She wondered with whom it would be the hardest to square this, her mother, father, or Philip. She suspected it would be Philip.

But her father would be first, and she knew he would say something when the birchbark canoe came alongside the Peterborough at the river mouth. He did.

“All right, you’re here,” he said. “I don’t like it, but I’ve got to. When we leave the canoes, you walk well behind us. Wen-dah-ban, do you know the trail?”

The Indian lad nodded and paddled on upriver. When they reached the rapids he swerved the birchbark toward the cedar tree and they went ashore. Wen-dah-ban pointed at the ground. Ann couldn’t discern even the faint trail they’d found in June, but Pe-tah-bo looked and nodded.

“He not here now,” he said.

“Better make sure,” Hugh said. “Go quiet.”

They went single file, walking carefully lest a snapped twig betray their coming. Wen-dah-ban led the way to the cabin. It looked even more deserted than it had on their previous visit, but Wen-dah-ban stopped with an exclamation. Ann remembered having heard that same odd hiss when he’d missed a shot with bow and arrow.

Hugh looked at the stovepipe, which leaned at an even more drunken angle.

“He ain’t been here since spring,” he said. “Let’s have a look.”

They stepped inside. Except that more mice had nested and the camp stove was more rusted, the cabin was unchanged. Hugh poked through the hay in the bunk and looked at the ashes in the stove.

“I do that,” Pe-tah-bo said.

“Pe-tah-bo didn’t miss anything last June,” Mr. Jackman said.

Hugh ran his hand along the eaves. “Good place to hide things,” he said. “Done it often myself.”

His hand stopped, and then he drew forth a small paper-covered book.

“Leastways, we know now he could read,” Hugh said.

Mr. Jackman took the volume. On the cover was a picture. The colors were faded but the Stetson hat, red tunic, and the dashing breeches of the

uniform of the Royal North-West Mounted Police could still be seen.

“That’s funny,” Mr. Jackman said. “He certainly wasn’t a Mountie.”

He turned the pages.

“What’s the book about?” Hugh asked.

“It’s a history of the organization. Look! The fellow’s underlined words. And he’s put a question mark after this sentence, ‘They always get their man.’”

“I never believed that either,” Hugh said.

“But you never bothered to write question marks,” Mr. Jackman said. “Maybe we’ve got something here.”

“Paper tell who man is?” Pe-tah-bo asked.

“No,” Mr. Jackman said. “But I’m going to show it to Mr. Gillespie. Maybe big company can help us find out about him.”



Through the last half of October the smaller lakes and streams and even shallow bays of Far Lake were frozen over. In early November ice spread across the big stretches of Far Lake itself. But for the island dwellers, freeze-up was a short shut-in period. Ann enjoyed the days of isolation when their home, provisioned for man and beast, seemed a citadel, a stronghold against the north.

Only Hugh complained when the big lake froze solidly. He said he'd like to spend a winter cut off from the outside, but Ann knew he only meant he liked lonely lands and was no longer troubled by the fur thief. Weeks had passed with no further evidence of the stranger and even Hugh admitted the man had left.

“Now we’re living so near a railroad, we can’t get worked up every time a fellow shoots a bit of game,” he said.

“But what was he doing at Echo Lake?” Mr. Jackman asked. “And why didn’t he stop at Fort Caribou?”

In early October Hugh and Philip had made a quick canoe trip to the post. Mr. Gillespie had not seen a stranger, and neither had he considered the book on the Royal North-West Mounted Police an important clue. Many men in the bush read about the Mounties.

“Done it myself when I was pushed to fill an empty evening,” Hugh had said when he reported this on his return.

Dog driving began when ice on the big lake was safe. After a summer of idleness, the dogs were eager, and there were many errands to the mainland. Ogema was probably the most ecstatic of all the Jackmans. His life had changed. In addition to being the leader of the team, he was patrol dog, and his first task in the morning and last at night was to make a circuit of the outer fence around the fur farm.

Philip had taught Ogema to do this, though no one had believed it was possible. But Philip had kept at it, walking around and around with the dog at the stated times, until after a month Philip had only to wave an arm and Ogema would be off on his patrol. After another week Philip remained inside one evening, watching from a window. When the time came, Ogema was ready, waiting for Philip and the signal. But when no one appeared, the dog dashed off alone.

“I told you he’s smart,” Philip said.

Because of this new task Ogema was not kept in the corral with the other dogs. He even had a house of his own and he spent the evening before the fire with the family. Once more he was an intimate of the household, as when he had been the only dog.

Hugh said they needed a second team and often it seemed that they did. There was always some task for the dogs. Hugh hauled fuel from the mainland. Ann and Philip visited rabbit snares set in alder swamps, and Mr. Jackman maintained a camp on the eastern shore of Far Lake, trapping for fur farm stock. He didn’t catch as many mink as he had in Wen-dah-ban’s district.

“But I’m glad I gave back those hunting rights,” he said.

“Sure,” Hugh agreed. “No sense in stirring up trouble in a country where you’re going to live. And at that, old Pe-tah-bo was mighty decent about those silver foxes. Some nitchies would ’a’ brooded and been ready to take to the war path.”

Whenever the foxes were mentioned, Hugh burst into a eulogy on Pride and Princess.

“Noticed what cold weather is doing for their coats?” he asked. “Prettiest pair of foxes you’d want to see. And how that dog looks after the vixen! Won’t even eat until she’s finished.”

“Eric has nice manners too,” Ann said. “And besides, he’s cunning. You ought to see him snuggle while I scratch his head.”

“He is a cute little devil,” Hugh admitted. “First time I ever seen a red fox with a silvered face and white-tipped tail. I kind o’ like it.”

Ann was sure she did. The others in the litter were fulfilling their promise to be as handsome as their parents, but Eric would always be her favorite.

Thanksgiving was a reminder that Christmas was just around the corner, and preparations began in earnest. The men learned never to ask what Ann and her mother were knitting, and the women never appeared in the toolhouse without warning. All spent hours alone with a mail order catalogue and even Hugh sharpened a stubby pencil and remained all one evening in his cabin. Trips were made to the railroad. Packages were brought home and hurried off to rooms. There was a pleasant air of conspiracy in whispered conferences.

Mr. Gillespie had accepted an invitation for Christmas Day, would arrive for a late afternoon dinner and spend the night. The guest room was made ready. Ann practiced Scotch ballads and almost conquered “Loch Lomond.” She planned to sing loudly in the passage where her fingering was faulty.

Ann, Philip, and Hugh brought in Christmas greens and a tree. It was a spruce, tall and symmetrical, so lovely that it seemed the very essence of the forest. On Christmas Eve they strung popcorn and hung the decorations which had been used for as many years as Ann could remember. She twined balsam branches around the balustrade of the balcony and their aromatic odor perfumed the room.

Philip looked at the heaped-up presents at the base of the tree and said he didn’t think he could wait another day.

“You’ll wait,” his mother said. “It’s many years since Mr. Gillespie could join a family for Christmas.”

By afternoon on Christmas Day delicious smells seeped from the kitchen. After the chores were finished, everyone dressed, and even Hugh wore a tie. When he came from his cabin the first lazy snowflakes floated down, as though someone had made a slit in a feather pillow. Mrs. Jackman looked out a window.

“A snowy Christmas!” she said. “That makes it perfect.”

They heard a faint jingle of sleigh bells and rushed to the veranda as a five-dog team and two drivers came up the trail. Mr. Gillespie leaned back luxuriously in a skin cariole. The dogs halted before the house. The manager threw back his lynx paw robe and stepped out.

“Merry Christmas!” he cried.

“Merry Christmas!” they chorused.

Befitting the prestige of the Great Company, the Scotchman had made an impressive arrival. The lead dog wore a red pompom on his collar, and five sets of sleigh bells jingled. The cariole was heavily ornamented in gay beadwork and Mr. Gillespie wore his finest parka, decorated with more beadwork and fringed leather. The native trippers were grinning, proud of the ceremonial regalia which did honor to the Hudson’s Bay.

The cariole was heaped with Christmas presents. Mr. Gillespie gathered them up and, arms laden, a fine powdering of snow on his skin parka, he looked like a jovial Santa Claus. Hugh led drivers and team to a small cabin, built originally for the two workmen and now reserved for Ojibwa guests.

On the veranda the Scotch manager dusted off the snow, threw back his fur-trimmed hood, and followed Ann and her mother through the front door.

“I say!” he exclaimed. “I never guessed you’d built a house like this!”

His tone even more than his words paid a tribute. When they gathered around the Christmas eggnog for a ceremonial drink, he lifted his cup high.

“First of all, I want to toast a great family. God bless ’em!”

Mr. Jackman gave the second toast.

“To a real neighbor, and a man!”

Then the Jackmans drank while Mr. Gillespie blew his nose and cleared his throat.

During dinner there was little talk of fur land, and the manager made only one reference to the fur thief when he told Mr. Jackman that he'd sent the book to the headquarters of the Royal North-West Mounted Police.

"Never heard from them," he said. "So it's no clue."

Philip finished his plum pudding first and began to eye the presents heaped around the tree. Ann and Philip drew lots for the role of Santa Claus. Philip won. Hugh said he ought to run down and see how the trippers were getting along and Mrs. Jackman thought they shouldn't be left out of the party.

"Christmas doesn't mean a thing to them," Mr. Gillespie said. "They celebrate New Year's Day."

Nevertheless, Hugh went to the cabin laden with Mrs. Jackman's gifts of food and candy. They heard him stamping his feet on his return.

"It's settled down to snow," he said.

They looked out a window and watched the white flakes fall against the curtain of darkness, one flake following another so closely they often merged. Ann had never seen it snow harder.

But inside the big log room were happiness and laughter as wrappings were torn off gifts. All the socks and sweaters fitted, even Mr. Gillespie's, which had been a matter of guess. Mr. Jackman exclaimed with delight when he saw the caribou skin moccasins from the manager. He put them on at once. Hugh opened his tobacco. Mrs. Jackman admired the sewing box Hugh had made for her and Ann was ecstatic with a set for her dressing table. It was the big present from her parents and the beginning, she knew, of going-away-to-school things. Ogema rushed about, so excited by the party that it was with difficulty Philip adjusted his new collar.

Hugh was the most pleased with the success of a surprise when Ann unrolled a great black bear skin.

"Kept me busy all summer, hiding that," he said.

He had tanned the skin and it was soft and thick. Ann hung it from the balustrade and rushed downstairs to admire it from below.

"Never saw a finer," Mr. Gillespie said. He looked at Ann and Philip. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "I forgot the young 'uns!"

In the flurry of unwrapping and admiring, Ann had not noticed there was no present from the post manager for Philip or herself. Mr. Gillespie went to

the front door.

“Might have dropped them on the way in,” he said. “I’ll take a look.”

He returned a moment later, dragging a caribou skin cariole. His face was beaming over the success of his plot, and only Mr. Gillespie would have taken so much trouble to arrange a surprise. He had left the cariole hidden at the shore, to be brought up by the trippers after dark.

“Gee!” was all Philip could manage.

Everyone fingered the soft tanning and admired the elaborate decorations. Ann got into the cariole to enjoy the comfort of a mattress, so much softer than a blanket folded on a toboggan, and as she leaned against the back her ecstatic face just topped the high sides. This was luxury! Even Ogema took an interest, as though he recognized that now no one in fur land would travel in greater style.

It was late when they gathered around the piano. Ann began with “Loch Lomond,” which went more smoothly than even she had hoped. Her mother followed with old ballads, and they ended with Christmas carols. Mr. Gillespie asked for “Good King Wenceslaus” and sang it as a solo. Everyone joined in “God Rest You, Merry Gentlemen,” and when the last strains of “Silent Night, Holy Night” died away they knew the Christmas party was over.

“A Christmas I’ll never forget,” Mr. Gillespie assured them as he said his good-bys.

He planned to be off long before the others were awake. But Mrs. Jackman set an alarm so she would waken to cook breakfast.

Philip led Ogema toward the door.

“Let him sleep by the fire tonight,” Ann begged. “It’s Christmas!”

“He’s never done such a thing in his life,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“That’s why it would be a treat,” Philip said.

Ogema listened to the argument and when Philip patted his head he accepted that as permission. He settled down before the fire, and no one had the heart to send him into the snowstorm. Mr. Jackman put out the lamps and Ann leaned over the balustrade to call a last good night to Mr. Gillespie. The room glowed softly in the firelight and Ann thought it had never looked so lovely.

When Ann and Philip went down for breakfast next morning, Mr. Gillespie was gone. The snow had ceased and in the first faint daylight they looked out on a white-draped forest.

The island had been transformed.

“Plenty of trails to break this morning,” Hugh said as he started for the woodpile.

“Ann and I’ll do the trail to the fur pens,” Philip said.

Ann put on her snowshoes. She loved the feel of soft snow settling beneath the webs. Ogema lunged off on his belated patrol trip, making his own trail.

“Better take a kettle of hot water for the drinking dishes,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“After we’ve broken a trail,” Ann answered.

Two errands provided an excuse to be out longer in an exhilarating fairyland. Even the mink were rejoicing in the freshness and Ann and Philip stopped to laugh at them playing in the new snow.

As they approached the fox pens, Ann called to Eric. He always answered with a joyous half-whimper, half-bark. This morning there was only silence. She hurried to his pen.

“Eric!” she called, and when he didn’t appear in his doorway she called louder.

“Eric must be sick!” she cried.

Philip didn’t speak. He’d left one pen to run to another.

“There isn’t a cub in sight!” he said, and his voice sounded strangled.

Fear clutched at Ann. She rushed to Philip. Together they stared at the double pen of Pride and Princess. It too was empty. Then they realized the truth. The fur thief had struck.



A half hour later five stunned people stared at the empty pens and struggled to comprehend the catastrophe that had befallen them. The evidence was all in. Ogema's furious barking had called attention to the cut fence at the farthest end of the island. They had seen the open door to the storeroom near the pens. Mr. Jackman had discovered the loss of seven transfer boxes and Hugh had missed the heavy gloves and handling tongs. Evidently the thief had been unhurried, and sufficiently clever to recognize the value of live foxes rather than pelts.

Now each of the five, according to his fashion, was absorbing the disaster.

“Cleaned us out! Cleaned us out!” Hugh muttered as he paced from one empty pen to another. “We might ’a’ known he was only waiting for a snowstorm.”

Mr. Jackman’s face was bleak. “We’ve got a better chance to find him if he keeps those foxes alive.”

Ann found herself thinking most of Eric.

Mrs. Jackman said nothing, but Ann saw her mother’s eyes and knew she was remembering the night they had decided to use the school money to build the new house on the island. Ann squeezed her mother’s hand.

“We’d do it just that way again,” she said.

Her mother drew Ann close, as though she found comfort in her nearness.

“But I wish I hadn’t begged Ogema off from sleeping outside last night,” Ann said.

“This had already happened by then,” Hugh said. “A lot of snow has got to fall to cover a man’s trail.”

It was good of Hugh to say this, but it didn’t wipe away Ann’s vain regrets.

“Anyway, we know he’s got a big head start,” Mr. Jackman said. “We’re wasting time.”

He started toward the house, and when the others entered he was already cramming a blanket into a packsack.

“Where are you going, Dave?” his wife asked.

“To the railroad.”

“Want me to harness the dogs?” Philip asked.

“No. They’d only be a nuisance if I have to take a train. There’s no telling what I may have to do.”

“Nobody’s going to get on a train with seven live foxes,” Hugh began, and then his eyes blazed. “And if that dirty crook has pelted that pair of—”

“Don’t!” Mrs. Jackman cried. “Don’t even think of such a thing.”

But Ann knew they would all think about it.

“Want me to go along, Dave?” Hugh asked.

Mr. Jackman said that one man was enough to cover the railroad. He would report the theft to the provincial police, watch the stations to the eastward, and ask officials to keep their eyes open for suspicious characters and baggage.

“Then that leaves the bush to me,” Hugh said.

The men’s faces were grim as they made plans. Hugh was to go at once to the Hudson’s Bay post. Mr. Gillespie would be of help. And there was a chance that some hunter, on his way to the New Year’s celebration, might have crossed the thief’s trail.

“He might even have a nitchie working with him,” Hugh said. “How else could he have holed up since September with no one knowing he was here?”

“It’s up to me to see that the thief doesn’t slip out of the country,” Mr. Jackman said.

He shouldered his packsack and picked up his rifle. They followed him outside and waited while he put on his snowshoes. Mrs. Jackman had been silent, but as he turned to go she put out her hand.

“Dave! I wish you wouldn’t go alone,” she said.

“Now, Mary, you mustn’t worry.”

“Take Hugh,” she urged. “Two men are so much safer.”

“Hugh’s got to get to the post before—”

“But no silver foxes are worth—”

“They’re everything we’ve got,” her husband broke in harshly.

“No, Dave! We’ve got each other.”

Mr. Jackman looked down at the slight figure of his wife and Ann realized that, in this moment, these two were aware only of each other.

“You wouldn’t ask me not to try to get back those foxes?” he asked slowly.

“No, Dave,” she admitted, and then she smiled. “Only come back safely.”

He went then. Ann watched him swing out on the lake and turn to wave. She dashed tears from her eyes angrily and tried to look as composed as did her mother. Hugh made an awkward attempt at comfort.

“Dave Jackman can lick his weight in wildcats any time,” he said.

But it wasn't wildcats he was hunting. It was a man with cruel eyes, and as Ann remembered the evil face she'd seen at the narrows, all the old horror and fear returned.

Hugh departed for the post soon afterward. His leave-taking was so occupied with injunctions for the safety of the Jackmans, they had little opportunity to bid him to be careful.

"I'll be gone two days," he said. "You folks stay on the island. Leave Ogema outside the house to watch. He's as good as a man."

They nodded, but Hugh became more explicit.

"And don't you young 'uns go looking for any fur thief," he called back. "Your job is to take care of the place and your mother."

No one could eat dinner that day, although Mrs. Jackman tried to set a good example. When the silent meal was over, she started a batch of cookies and said she needed fuel for a quick fire. Philip stared in disbelief.

"Mother!" Ann cried. "How *can* you go on baking as—as though nothing had happened?"

"Your father and Hugh will have to eat when they get back," Mrs. Jackman said. "And have the mink been fed today? They have to be looked after, no matter what has happened."

Ann and Philip filled the woodbox and then went back to the fur farm, built a fire in the cook camp, heated mink food, and carried it and hot water to the pens. Both avoided looking at the fox kennel. Ann tried not to speak of Eric, but she wondered if a fur thief would bother to keep a little red fox alive.

And she wished she had not suggested that Ogema sleep indoors. That bitter refrain of "if" had been racing through her thoughts all morning.

"If Ogema had found that cut fence last night, we might have done something!" she burst forth.

Philip frowned.

"There's a lot we can do around here yet," he said.

"Not after all this snow," she said.

"But if he left the lake we might come across some tracks in the deep brush," Philip said. "We ought to take the dogs and go along the shore and look."

Ann brightened at the thought of doing anything to help. While Philip harnessed the team, Ann went in the house to tell their mother of the plan. Ann had prepared arguments against refusal, but she had no chance to use them.

“Certainly you and Philip can’t leave this island,” her mother said. She abandoned the cookies, wiped her hands, and started for the door. “I’ll tell Philip that myself.”

As she walked briskly up the trail she did not seem to hear Ann’s arguments. They found Philip hooking the team’s traces to the cariole. His jaw set obstinately as he listened to his mother.

“But we can’t waste two days doing nothing,” he said. “Everybody’s got to help.”

“It isn’t going to help for you and Ann to get into danger.”

“But we won’t!” Ann cried. “There’s no chance that the fur thief is hanging around here. We will only look for tracks.”

Ann and Philip pooled their arguments as they pointed out that they’d stay together, carry a gun, and have the dogs. They couldn’t risk waiting until the men returned. Another snowfall would cover any tracks. And if they even knew in what direction the thief went, it would help to trace him. Mrs. Jackman had begun to weaken.

“Can I trust you to stay near shore?” she asked.

“Sure,” Philip said. “We’ll do the west side of the lake this afternoon, and then tomorrow we’ll do the east.”

“I don’t know what your father and Hugh would say to this.”

“They’d be glad if we found a track where the man had left the lake,” Ann said.

“Yes. But be home by dark.”

Ann intended to keep that promise. And hours later, when the sun slipped behind a ridge and the first chill of a cold December night struck through her parka, she looked at the island, three miles away.

“We ought to start home,” she said.

Their search through the brush and rocks along the shore had revealed no tracks. It had been a difficult and discouraging task, with failure as the only reward.

“At least we know he didn’t leave the lake on this side,” Philip said.

He looked at a long wooded point ahead.

“If he was going west, he’d cut across there,” he said. “We ought to make sure.”

“But it would take an hour to break trail through that thick timber,” Ann said.

“We wouldn’t have to if you took the dogs around the shore while I cut through on snowshoes.”

Ann looked at the great white stretch of empty lake. The sinister shadow of the fur thief had seemed to darken the whole northland. And then the thought of Eric stiffened her courage. Fear gave way to a fierce anger.

“We can’t go back before we’ve searched that point,” she said.

They arranged that Philip was to carry the gun and fire it if he were lost or got into trouble. Ann would search the shoreline and they would meet at a big Norway halfway down the other side of the point.

Philip struck off toward the timber. Ogema looked after him, whined, and moved closer to the heels of Ann’s snowshoes. The dog knew tragedy had struck at his family and he didn’t approve of separations.

“It’s all right, Ogema,” Ann said. “He’ll be at the Norway before we are.”

She spoke aloud to keep up her own courage. And Philip should reach the Norway before they had skirted the longer shoreline. But as Ann approached the meeting place her glance searched for a solitary figure. She saw no one.

She waited with the team beside the Norway. Daylight began to fade into the first faint dusk. Night would follow fast. They couldn’t keep their promise to be home by dark. Ann considered calling Philip, and then as she looked into the shadows of the forest she dreaded to make a sound. But she knew that if Philip did not come soon, she must look for him.

The dogs stood disconsolately, their heads and their tails lowered. Ann was chilled. And gradually the threat of the empty lake and the silent forest struck at her spirit. Anything seemed better than the inactivity of waiting and fighting off vague apprehensions.

She called to Ogema and started into the forest. She had climbed a low ridge when she heard a branch crack. She believed it was Philip coming and

stared toward the sound.

Then a man stepped into an opening between the trees. He wore a parka and his head was lowered.

Ann's heart pounded. The man had not seen her and she looked wildly about for a place to hide. The low outspreading branches of a spruce were near and she crowded into them. She grasped Ogema's collar and pulled the dog down.

But Ogema had heard the branch snap, and now another crackle brought him to a stiff alert. A low growl sounded in his throat.

“Be quiet!” Ann whispered.

Her only hope was that Ogema would obey and allow the stranger to pass.



A rumbling growl burst from Ogema's quivering throat. It ended in a bark of defiance.

The man halted and looked toward the spot where Ann was hiding. Ogema strained forward, Ann clinging to his collar. Then she looked up and saw the man was a stranger. But he was not the stranger with the cruel eyes she had seen at the narrows.

"Who's there?" the man called and his hand reached under his parka.

As the long garment was lifted, Ann saw a broad yellow stripe running down the side of his breeches and knew it was the uniform of the Royal North-West Mounted Police. But she didn't see a red coat. The parka covered it, or he did not wear one.

The man came toward her. He stopped when he saw Ann.

"I'm Ann Jackman," she said.

"Has your dog any special grudge against the North-West Mounted?" he asked.

"Then you *are* a Mountie!" Ann cried. "Oh, I'm glad! We need one so badly. I didn't answer because I couldn't see a red coat and I thought the Mounted always wore them. That was why I was so frightened. Ogema will be all right when he understands you are friendly."

The man's face broke into a smile.

"Take it easy! Take it easy! And tell me all about it. I was looking for the Jackmans. Expected to get directions at the post."

Ann had not finished her story when they heard Philip's call. A moment later he emerged from the thick timber. It was the first time Ann had ever seen Philip completely the victim of amazement. She felt a thrill of triumph as they waited for Philip.

"This is Sergeant Holmes of the North-West Mounted," she said.

"And you're the lad who's been searching for tracks," the sergeant said, as he thrust out his hand.

The sergeant knew a great deal about the Jackmans. And he knew about the deserted cabin. The book which had been found there was the clue which had brought him to investigate.

"But it's too bad I didn't get here a week ago," the sergeant said. "Do you live near? It's getting dark."

"And Mother will be awfully worried," Ann said.

"I should think she might be," the policeman said. "Or doesn't she know you two are out trailing down a criminal?"

Ann rode home. In the cariole before her was the sergeant's pack. He laughed when he set it down.

"Don't let anything happen to this," he said. "I'll need my scarlet coat this evening to prove I'm a Mountie."

Mrs. Jackman heard them coming and was at the door. She looked almost as astonished as had Philip.

“Mother!” Ann cried. “We’ve brought the North-West Mounted. He was hunting for the fur thief.”

The coming of the law lifted the spirits of the Jackmans. The fox pens were still empty, the thief was still free, and Mr. Jackman and Hugh were still away on lonely trails. Nothing could be done that night to lessen their danger. But at least they now had an ally.

It wasn’t only that Sergeant Holmes wore a dashing scarlet coat and was supported by the color and the romance of the Royal North-West Mounted Police. There was a quiet air of competence about him as he asked questions during supper. He made no effort to reassure them and he did not try to conceal the seriousness of the situation.

“If it’s the man we think, he has a bad record,” he said. “We’ve been on his trail for four years. He was wanted originally for murder. We’ve caught up with him three times, and always he’s got wind of our coming and escaped. We’d lost all trace, but when that book arrived with a description of the shack, we thought it looked like we’d caught up with Hole-up Sam again.”

“Is that his name?” Philip asked.

“The one he goes by. He has a way of holing up. Done it three times. His real name is Sam Parkes.”

Four years before at Boiling River Sam had killed his partner. He had escaped to the mountains. Each time he had evaded his pursuers he had gone into some out-of-the-way place and remained hidden there. He wasn’t a good woodsman but he always managed to live on the country.

“With a rifle, some game, and any kind of a shack, he can stick it out for months,” the sergeant said. “And he always gets a grubstake before he runs again.”

“You mean he’s committed other crimes?” Mrs. Jackman asked.

“He robbed a trading post just before he left the mountains. And before he came here he took the payroll of a mine. Now apparently he’s gone in for fur.”

Ann thought of her father’s lonely trip to the railroad and of Hugh with a daylong journey to the post. Sergeant Holmes looked at the suddenly grave faces around the supper table.

“I’m not telling you this to frighten you,” he said. “I only want to show you that I must act fast. The man is clever. I don’t want him to suspect we’re

on his trail again.”

“Do you think he’ll pelt the foxes?” Mrs. Jackman asked.

Ann knew the courage required for her mother to ask that direct question and she waited for his answer with a beating heart.

Sergeant Holmes considered.

“There’s two chances that he won’t,” he said. “He’s greedy, and the foxes are worth many times more alive than dead. He’s boastful because he’s given us the slip three times. Boastful men grow careless and overreach themselves. He wouldn’t have bothered with the transfer boxes if he hadn’t a scheme to get those foxes out alive.”

“But if he suspected he was hunted?” Mrs. Jackman persisted.

“Then he’d probably take the pelts and try to make a getaway.”

Sergeant Holmes helped wash the supper dishes. When Mrs. Jackman protested he only laughed.

“You don’t know what it means to me to be here,” he said. “I’d expected to make a bush camp.”

“And you can’t realize what it means to us to have you,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“I’m going to give Ogema a special bone,” the sergeant said. “If he hadn’t growled, I might have missed you.”

“Oh, no, you wouldn’t!” Ann said. “Not after I saw your face.”

“Even without the red coat?” he asked.

“But I saw the yellow stripes on your breeches.”

He was serious again when they sat down before the fire. He brought out a map.

“Now show me every place where he’s cropped up,” he said.

They pointed out the narrows, the traps which had been robbed, the deserted cabin, the spot where Hugh had seen the snowshoe tracks, and Echo Lake. The sergeant made penciled crosses. He studied them.

“They’re scattered,” he said. “And yet he’s been able to keep track of this island. Any Indian around here who would give him information?”

“Not Pe-tah-bo,” Mrs. Jackman said quickly.

“Sam has made a habit of getting in with natives.”

“Any Indian in this district would have reported a white stranger to Mr. Gillespie,” Mrs. Jackman said.

“For the present we’ll count that out,” the sergeant said.

Ann’s heart sank. They had seemed to be making progress, but it led nowhere.

“Is there a likely place where he might hole up?” the sergeant asked.

Ann considered that. If Eric were to be saved, it must be soon.

“Nah-sho-tah’s hunting district!” she said. “The *Win-di-go* country!”

Sergeant Holmes looked up alertly as they explained about Nah-sho-tah’s hunting territory. No Indian had entered it since Nah-sho-tah’s death because they believed he had become an evil spirit, the most dreaded of all, a cannibalistic *Win-di-go*.

“How well is that story known?” he asked. “How’d you hear about it?”

“Mr. Gillespie told us,” Mrs. Jackman said. “He suggested that my husband might trap there if he couldn’t get hunting privileges from Pe-tah-bo. The district is eight miles from here and has little fur. We didn’t think Dave could make a living in that territory, even when he built a cabin.”

“He built a cabin!” Sergeant Holmes became excited. “Show me where it is.”

They studied the map.

“We can’t show you on this,” Ann said. “It doesn’t give the lake or creek or swamp.”

“But we could take you to the cabin,” Philip said.

Sergeant Holmes looked disappointed.

“I’ll have to wait until your father gets back,” he said. “Or Hugh. You’re too young to mix in this.”

“But that might be three days!” Ann cried. “And the foxes might be killed!”

“Couldn’t you draw a map and show me where the cabin is?”

“It’s just a mess of ridges and swamps,” Ann said. “You’d never find the trail.”

“But we could go down there in the morning and take you to the creek,” Philip said. “Then you could find the cabin by yourself. That’s safe enough.”

Sergeant Holmes turned to Mrs. Jackman. “What do you think?”

“Time means so much,” she said. “If they showed you the creek, then—”

“I’ll see that they start home,” the sergeant finished for her. “You’re a courageous woman, Mrs. Jackman.”

“I have to be,” she smiled. “There’s a lot of courage in my family.”

“I knew that hours ago,” the sergeant said.

Ann wondered if he meant Philip. She knew she hadn’t looked very courageous as she huddled under the branches of a spruce.

Next morning they breakfasted by lamplight and long before dawn Ann and Philip went out to harness the team. Philip lashed a large square of canvas on the toboggan.

“We’ll need it if we bring home seven transfer boxes,” he said. “But Sergeant Holmes still thinks we’re going to leave him at the creek.”

“We won’t talk about it till we get there,” Ann said.

But Ann wondered how adamant Sergeant Holmes would be. It did seem a mean trick to play upon him, and she felt a bit sorry for him when he said good-by to Mrs. Jackman.

“I’ll see that these young firebrands start home,” he said, and he looked as though he meant it.

It was mid-forenoon when they reached the *Win-di-go* country. Sergeant Holmes looked at the desolate hills and said it was the sort of country the natives always chose for the home of the great evil spirit.

“Are there many of them?” Philip asked.

“It’s a common legend,” the sergeant said.

Ann wondered that he could even talk of Indian legends at such a time. But there was a business-like quality about the man that suggested he was only going about his daily work. They turned into a shallow bay and climbed a ridge. From a rocky granite point they looked over a jackpine forest.

“Can’t you point out the creek from here?” the sergeant asked.

“No,” Philip said. “It’s over the next ridge.”

They started on. It had been a year and a half since Ann had visited the *Win-di-go* country. Philip missed the trail occasionally and had to stop and search for dim blazes. The sergeant admitted he was grateful for a guide. They climbed the second ridge. Philip halted halfway up. The sergeant looked relieved.

“The swamp is on the other side,” Philip said. “The creek flows through it. Follow the creek until you get to a lake. Take the left shore and you’ll find the cabin at the east end.”

“Thanks,” the sergeant said. “You two have helped a lot. I’m all right from here. How far is the cabin?”

“About a mile.”

“Good! Now you two start home. I’ll see you later.”

Philip looked at Ann. The crisis was upon them.

“We’re going to wait here,” she said.

“No,” the sergeant said. “You’re going back to your mother as I promised.”

“But we never intended to leave without the foxes,” Ann said. “That’s why we brought the toboggan.”

“Look here, you two!” and the sergeant’s tone was almost pleading. “I can’t let you do this.”

Ann sat down on the toboggan.

“And you can’t stop us,” she said. “We won’t go home without the foxes. We’ve got a responsibility just as much as you.”

“We knew all along we were going to wait here,” Philip said. “You get your man. We’ll get the foxes.”

Sergeant Holmes looked at Ann and Philip. There was the barest crinkle of a smile at the corners of his mouth. “I can put handcuffs on you,” he said. “Drag you home and come back alone.”

“We could have pretended to go and then come back,” Ann said.

“That’s true,” he said.

Ann watched his face. They had him, a Mountie, in a corner. She almost felt sorry for him.

“I’ll make a bargain with you,” the sergeant said. “You’ve got to promise not to go any nearer the cabin. If I’m not back by noon, you leave. And if you hear shooting you start home at once—and fast.”

“But you might be doing the shooting,” Philip said.

“Shooting always means trouble,” the sergeant said. “That’s the way it stands. And I want your promise.”

Ann turned to Philip. “We ought to give him our word and keep it,” she said.

“Sure,” Philip agreed. “We don’t want him worrying about us.”

The sergeant laughed.

“No,” he said. “I won’t give a thought to you two waiting here. But you’ll have to square this with your mother.”

They nodded. The sergeant drew a line in the snow.

“When the shadow of that tree is on this line, you two get out,” he said.

They watched him climb the ridge. At the crest he turned and waved. He was smiling.

“I don’t think he’s mad,” Philip said.

“Anyhow, we stayed,” Ann answered.

It was cold. They could not build a fire lest the smoke betray them. Neither could they make a noise. Ann walked back and forth to keep warm while Philip kept the dogs quiet and then he took his turn to get his blood circulating. It was two hours until noon, but those two hours seemed like five. Occasionally they spoke in low tones, but always they listened, straining to hear the faintest crackle of a twig.

“He might have seen the sergeant coming and made a getaway,” Philip said.

They watched the shadow of the tree as it moved toward the line. No shot sounded beyond the ridge.

“He ought to have gotten to the cabin long ago,” Philip said. “Maybe I ought to climb the ridge and have a look.”

“We promised not to leave here,” Ann said.

She watched while the shadow of the tree reached the line, darkened it, moved past.

“But it’s barely crossed.”

“Maybe it took him a little longer,” Philip said. “I don’t think we ought to go just yet.”



They waited. It was a fine point in conduct. Everyone should keep a promise, but no one should desert a comrade in a crisis. Ann was weighing one precept against the other, when they heard a shout.

Two men came down the slope, walking single file. Sergeant Holmes was in the rear, and ahead, a prisoner, was the man Ann had seen at the narrows.

He didn't look nearly so fearsome now. Ann stared boldly and wondered why that craven face had haunted her for months.

"Is this the man you saw?" the sergeant asked.

Ann nodded.

“Look him over. He’ll never frighten you again.”

There was only contempt in the sergeant’s tone.

“Did you find the foxes?” Ann and Philip demanded in one breath.

“All seven. Alive, and in the transfer boxes.”

Ann’s heart leaped. Eric was safe. She looked more kindly at the prisoner. Philip got the team to its feet and straightened out the traces.

“You’ll find them behind the cabin,” the sergeant said. “I only took a look. They’ve been disturbed enough without being handled by a stranger. We’ll wait here while you get them. Good thing you brought that toboggan.”

He grinned and Ann knew they were forgiven.

Ann and Philip raced along the trail. Philip pointed to the tracks of the sergeant’s snowshoes when he had turned aside to make his approach to the cabin. But man hunting wasn’t half as important now as silver grays.

“He’ll tell us all about it tonight,” Philip said.

The transfer boxes were in a row behind the cabin. The foxes peered out, frightened but apparently not harmed by their day and a half imprisonment.

“I bet he didn’t even feed ’em!” Philip stormed.

But there was evidence that Hole-up Sam had provided food and water. Ann went straight to Eric. He whimpered when he heard a familiar voice.

“Eric! Eric!” she cried. “Didn’t you know I was coming for you?”

It was a slow return to the ridge, for now a laden toboggan had to be taken over a rough trail. Ann went ahead and Philip took the tail rope. They topped the rise and started toward the Mountie and his prisoner. The sergeant had built a fire.

“I suppose all you’re thinking about is to get those foxes back to their pens,” he said.

Ann’s eyes were shining. She’d never been so happy.

“And I want to watch Mother’s face when she sees what we’ve brought,” she said.

“She won’t even think about our waiting here,” Philip said.

Two hours later an imposing cavalcade approached the island. The sergeant drove his prisoner before him. Ann, Philip, the team and toboggan

followed. Mrs. Jackman ran down to the lake to meet them. There was no need to tell her the load they brought. She read that in their faces.

“Every fox is safe!” Philip shouted.

No one thought of Hole-up Sam, until Sergeant Holmes asked where he could house him.

“Got an extra cabin?” he asked.

They led him to Hugh’s cabin and then the three Jackmans took the foxes to their pens. Eric’s delight was unmistakable, and even the others seemed happy to be home again. When they’d been fed and watered and the excitement of their homecoming was over, Ann and Philip argued as to what the fur thief’s scheme had been.

“I don’t care what it was,” Mrs. Jackman said. “All I think of is the news we have for your father.”

“Maybe he’ll be home tonight,” Ann said.

He was home much sooner than that. As they walked back to the house, Mr. Jackman came up the trail.

“What’s going on here?” he said. “I saw a whole procession crossing to the island. Didn’t you see me coming up the lake?”

No one had looked back at the small black speck of a man afoot.

“And two more are coming from the east with a dog team,” he said. “That’ll be Hugh and Gillespie.”

Mr. Jackman ran back to look at the restored foxes before he listened to their story. It would have to be told again when Hugh came, but it was a story which could bear retelling. Sergeant Holmes left his prisoner handcuffed in Hugh’s cabin and helped in the recital. He minimized the actual capture and said it had taken longer than he had expected as he’d had to wait for a chance to get the drop on Hole-up Sam.

“I told those young ’uns of yours to leave at noon,” he said. “But they stuck.”

Even the debatable matter of disobeying orders was now on the credit side of the ledger.

“It wouldn’t have been square to go off and leave the sergeant before he got his man,” Philip said. “Jackmans don’t quit, do they, Dad?”

Mr. Jackman smiled.

“I was in a quitting frame of mind when I came back from the railroad,” he said. “Hadn’t found a trace.”

“But, Dave!” Mrs. Jackman cried. “That’s all behind us now!”

He put his arm around her.

“Life looks a lot different than it did yesterday morning,” he said. “Some surprise we’ve got for Hugh. Here he is now.”

They rushed out to shout the news to Hugh and Mr. Gillespie as they came up the trail. The post manager was as delighted as Hugh. When they were settled in the living room before the fire, the story had to be told again. Mr. Gillespie’s eyes twinkled.

“What a rescue party we made, Hugh,” he said. “And I’m through trying to help the Jackmans. Every time I start, one of them beats me to it.”

Mr. Jackman chuckled. Laughter came easily now that threat and danger were past.

“You mean the young Jackmans,” he said.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

[The end of *Fox Island* by Kathrene Pinkerton]