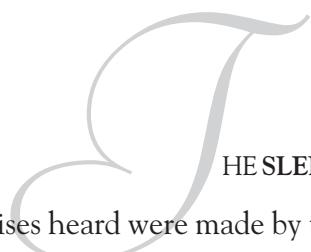




# The Wanderer of the North



HE SLEDS TRAVELED ACROSS THE SNOW.

The only noises heard were made by the **harnesses** and the bells of the leader dogs. The men and dogs were tired and made no sound. The trail was heavy with new-fallen snow, and they had come far. Darkness was approaching, but there was no camp to make that night. The snow fell gently through the quiet air in tiny shapes of delicate design. It was warmer than usual, and the men were comfortable. Meyers and Bettles had raised their ear coverings, and Malemute Kid had removed his **mittens**.

The dogs had been tired early in the afternoon, but they now began to show new life. Among the more lively ones there was some restlessness. These were not patient with their more tired brothers and urged them on by biting their legs. Finally, the leader of the first sled

barked quickly and threw himself against the harness. The others followed. The sleds leaped forward and the men held tightly to their guide poles. They had forgotten how tired they were and now shouted with delight at the new effort of the dogs. The dogs replied with joyful barks. Now they were speeding through the gathering darkness.

“Go! Go!” the men cried, each in turn, as their sleds suddenly left the main path.

Then came a short race to the lighted window, which told its own story of the home cabin, the roaring stove, and the steaming pots of tea. But the home cabin had already been entered. The whole team of sled-dogs resting in the yard barked in anger at the approach of the newcomer. The cabin door was thrown open and a man appeared, dressed in the red uniform of the Northwest Police. He stepped outside, knee-deep among the angry beasts, and calmed them with light blows from his dog whip. After that, the men shook hands. And in this way was Malemute Kid welcomed to his own cabin by a stranger.

Stanley Prince, who should have welcomed him, and who was responsible for the warmth of the stove, was busy with his guests. There were nearly a dozen of them. They served the British Queen in this faraway land in the enforcement of her law and the delivery of her mail. They were from many races and tribes, but their common life had made them all a special type—a lean type, with travel-hardened muscles, and sun-brown faces, and untroubled souls. They had seen life, and done deeds, and experienced adventure; but they did not know it.

And they were enjoying the comforts. Two of them were lying on Malemute Kid’s bed, singing songs which their French ancestors sang in the days when they first entered the Northwest land and married its Indian women. Bettles’ bed had also been occupied by three or four of them who were listening to the story of a companion. In a corner two men of mixed blood repaired harnesses and talked of the old days in the Northwest.

Jokes were told and the great difficulties of **trail** and river were spoken of lightly and with lack of concern. Prince was delighted with these uncrowned heroes who thought of great and exciting happenings

as the ordinary manner of life. He passed his precious tobacco freely among them. They, in turn, recalled story after story for his special interest.

When the talk ended and the travelers unrolled their packs of furs for sleeping, Prince questioned his companion for further information. Malemute Kid told of the probable origin of each of the guests. Prince was satisfied. Then he added, "And that fellow near the stove? I am sure he can't talk English. He has not opened his mouth all night."

"You are wrong. He knows English well. Did you look at his eyes when he listened? I did. But he's a different type from the others. When they talked their own languages you could see that he did not understand. I have been wondering myself what he is. We will test him!"

"Throw a couple of sticks into the stove!" Malemute Kid commanded, speaking loudly and looking directly at the man in question.

He obeyed immediately.

"He learned to obey somewhere," Prince said in a low tone.

Malemute Kid nodded in agreement. He removed his socks and hung them on the stove to dry.

"When do you expect to get to Dawson?" he asked the stranger.

The man looked at him a moment before replying. "They say it is almost one hundred miles. Maybe two days."

His manner of speech was somewhat strange, but he had no difficulty in finding the right words.

"Have you been in the country before?"

"No."

"Northwest Territory?"

"Yes."

"Were you born there?"

"No."

"Well, where were you born then? You are none of these." Malemute Kid swept his hand over the dog drivers and the two policemen who were sleeping in Prince's bed. "Where did you come from? I have seen faces like yours before, although I can't remember exactly where."

"I know you," he replied, not answering Malemute Kid's questions.

"Where? Ever see me?"

"No. I knew your friend. It was at Pastilik, a long time ago. He gave me food. He asked me if I had seen you, Malemute Kid. Did you hear him mention me?"

"Oh, you are the fellow who exchanged the animal skins for the dogs?"

The man nodded in agreement. He emptied the tobacco from his pipe and indicated that he did not want to continue talking by rolling himself in his furs.

Malemute Kid darkened the room and moved under the blankets with Prince.

"Well, what is he?"

"I don't know. He avoided my questions. But he is a fellow who makes you curious. Everyone was discussing him eight years ago. He came down from the North, in the middle of winter, many thousand miles from here. He was traveling as though the devil were following him. No one ever learned where he came from, but he must have come far. He was badly travel-worn when he got food from the Swedish **missionary** on Golovin Bay and asked the way south. We heard of this afterward. Then he left the shore line. He met with bad weather, snow-storms and strong winds, but he succeeded where a thousand other men would have died. He landed at Pastilik. He had lost all of his dogs except two and was nearly starved.

"He was so anxious to travel further that your friend Pastilik gave him the food he needed. However, he could not let him have any dogs because he was waiting to start a journey himself. This stranger from the North was too wise to travel without animals and he waited in Pastilik several days. On his sled he had some animal skins, the skins of sea **otters**, which were worth their weight in gold. There was also at Pastilik a Russian trader who had plenty of dogs. Well, they did not talk very long, but when the stranger started south again, he had a dog team. The trader had the otter skins. I saw them, and they were mag-

nificent. Those dogs cost the stranger plenty. And he knew the value of sea otter. He was an Indian of some sort, and the little he talked showed he had been among white men.

"After the ice left the sea, word came from Nunivak Island that he had gone there for food. Then he dropped from sight, and this is the first heard of him in eight years. Now where did he come from? And what was he doing there? And why did he come from there? He is Indian and where he has been nobody knows. There is another mystery of the North for you, Prince."

"Thanks, but I have too many now," he replied.

Malemute Kid was already asleep. But the younger man gazed straight up through the thick darkness. And when he did sleep, his brain continued to work. Throughout that night he, too, wandered through the white unknown, struggled with the dogs on endless trails, and saw men live, and work, and die like men.

The next morning, hours before daylight, the dog drivers and policemen started for Dawson. But they reappeared a week later, burdened with letters. However, their dogs had been replaced by fresh ones; but they were dogs.

The men had expected some sort of a pause in which to rest. But, nevertheless, they dried their socks and smoked their evening pipes with as much good spirit as on their former visit. As might be expected, one or two of them talked about deserting the Queen's service. They talked about the possibility of crossing the untraveled Rocky Mountains to the east, thus returning to their homes.

He of the Otter Skins seemed very restless and showed little interest in the discussion. Finally, he drew Malemute Kid aside and talked for some time in low tones. Prince watched them curiously and the mystery deepened when he saw them put on caps and mittens and go outside. When they returned, Malemute Kid placed his gold scales on the table, weighed 60 ounces of gold, and put them in the Indian's bag. Then the chief of the dog drivers joined them and further business was completed with him. The next day the entire group went up the river,

but he of the Otter Skins took some food and turned his steps back toward Dawson.

"I didn't know what to think of it," said Malemute Kid in answer to Prince's questions. "The poor fellow wanted to get out of the service for some reason or other. It seemed a most important one to him, although he would not tell me what it was. You understand, it is like the army: He signed for two years, and the only way to be free was to buy himself out. He could not desert and then stay here, and he was determined to remain in the country. He had decided when he arrived in Dawson, he said; but no one knew him and he had no money. I was the only person he had spoken two words with. He discussed his problem with an official and arranged for his release from service if he could get the money from me as a loan. He said he would repay me within the year, and, if I wanted, he would tell me something that would make me rich.

"And could he talk! When he got me outside he was ready to weep. He got down on his knees in the snow and begged until I pulled him up. He says he has worked to accomplish something special for years and years and could not endure having his hopes destroyed now. I asked him what he had been working for, but he would not say. I never saw a man act like that in my life. And when I said I would let him have the money, I had to pull him up out of the snow again. I told him to consider it as a **grubstake**. But no, he did not want that. He said he would give me all he found when he finished what he wanted to do. Now, a man who puts his life and time against a grubstake ordinarily finds it difficult enough to share half of what he finds. There is something more to this, Prince. We will hear of him if he stays in the country."

"And if he does not?"

"Then my judgment gets a shock and I have lost 60 ounces of gold."

The cold weather had come with its long nights before anything was heard of Malemute Kid's grubstake. And then, one cold morning in early January, a heavily loaded dog train pulled into the yard of his

cabin. He of the Otter Skins was there and with him walked a man such as the gods have almost forgotten how to create. It was Axel Gunderson. Men never talked of luck without mentioning his name. Tales of strength and daring were never told around the campfire without recalling him. And when talk seemed finished, it was begun anew with mention of the woman who shared his fortunes.

As has been noted, in the making of Axel Gunderson the gods had remembered their old-time skill. They created him from the pattern of men who were born when the world was young. He towered all of seven feet tall. His neck and arms were those of a giant. To carry his three hundred pounds of bone and muscle, his **snowshoes** were almost twice as big as those of other men. His large face and sharp eyes of palest blue had the look of a man who lived by the law of strength. His snow-covered yellow hair fell far down his coat made from the skin of a **bear**. As he walked down the narrow trail, in advance of the dogs, there seemed to be something of the seaman in his manner; and he brought the end of his dog whip against Malemute Kid's door as one who knew how to command.

Prince was making bread. As he did so, he cast many a glance at the three guests—three guests of a sort which might never come under the roof of a man in a lifetime. The Indian, whom Malemute Kid now called **Ulysses**, still interested him. But his attention was mainly divided between Axel Gunderson and Axel Gunderson's wife. The day of traveling had tired her, because she had lived in comfortable cabins during the many days since her husband had mastered the wealth of the frozen North. She rested against his great breast like a delicate flower against a wall. She replied occasionally to Malemute Kid's friendly talk and she stirred Prince's blood strangely with her deep, dark eyes. For Prince was a man, and healthy, and had seen few women in many months. And she was older than he, and an Indian besides. But she was different from all native wives he had met. She had traveled and she knew most of the things the women of his own race knew. And she knew much more than most women of the business of men. She could make a meal of sun-dried fish, or make a bed in the snow. She also spoke

in detail of dinners where many different foods were served. She knew the habits of the **moose**, the bear, and the fish of the Northern seas. She was skilled in the manner of living among the forests and the streams. Prince saw her laughing eyes as she read the Rules of the Camp. These rules had been listed by Bettles and were remarkable for their simple, direct humor. Prince always turned them toward the wall before the arrival of ladies. However, it was too late now.

This, then, was the wife of Axel Gunderson, a woman whose name and fame had traveled with her husband's, hand in hand, through all the Northland. At table, she was their equal in talking with the men. Her husband, slower in wit, did not join the discussion. He sat looking at her. He was very proud of her. His every look and action revealed the important place she occupied in his life. He of the Otter Skins ate silently, forgotten in all the gay talk. Long before the others had finished eating he pushed his chair away from the table and went outside among the dogs. Soon, his traveling companions drew on their mittens and fur clothing and followed him.

There had been no snow for many days, and the sleds slipped along the hard-packed **Yukon** trail as easily as if it had been ice. Ulysses led the first sled. With the second came Prince and Axel Gunderson's wife. Malemute Kid and the yellow-haired giant rode in the third.

"It is only a guess, Kid," said Axel Gunderson. "But I think we may find something on this trip. That Indian has never been there, but he tells a good story. He shows a map I heard of years ago. I would like to have you go with us; but he is a strange one and said no one else was to be brought in. But when I come back you will hear about it first, and I will **stake your claim** beside mine. And I will give you a half-share in the town which will be built, besides."

"No! No!" he cried, as Malemute Kid tried to interrupt. "I am the leader here and before I have finished I will need someone else to help me. This is a big thing, man. It will be the same as the building of the town of Cripple **Creek**. I have heard of this place before and so have you. We will build a town. There will be good waterways, steamship lines, a big trade, and perhaps a railroad. Listen, now! You keep

quiet about this until I return!"

The sleds stopped where the trail crossed the mouth of Stuart River. An unbroken sea of snow stretched away into the unknown east. The snowshoes were taken from the sleds. Axel Gunderson shook hands and stepped to the front, his great shoes sinking deep into the surface of the snow. His wife joined the line behind the last sled, showing long practice in the art of handling snowshoes. The stillness was broken with cheerful good-byes. The dogs barked. He of the Otter Skins brought a difficult dog under control with his whip.

An hour later the sleds had assumed the appearance of a black pencil moving in a long, straight light line across a great sheet of paper.

## C h a p t e r 2

ONE NIGHT, MANY WEEKS LATER, MALEMUTE KID AND PRINCE WERE working on some puzzles from the torn page of an ancient magazine. The Kid had returned from a visit to his properties and was resting before starting on a long moose hunt. Prince, too, had been traveling nearly all winter and was eager for a week of cabin life.

Somebody knocked at the door twice before Malemute Kid could say, "Come in." The door opened slowly. Something fell into the room. Prince looked once and jumped to his feet. The look of terror in his eyes caused Malemute Kid to turn quickly. He, too, was shocked, although he had seen bad things before. The thing moved blindly toward them. Prince edged away until he came to the nail from which hung his gun.

"My God! What is it?" he whispered to Malemute Kid.

"I don't know. It seems to be a case of freezing and starvation," replied the Kid, moving away.

"Be careful! It may be mad," he warned, after closing the door.

The thing advanced to the table. The flame of the lamp caught the attention of its eyes. It was delighted and began to laugh. Then, suddenly, he—for it was a man—leaned back and began to sing a song such as men of the sea sing. "Ship come down the river. Pull, my boys, pull..."

He stopped as quickly as he had begun. Then with a wolfish sound, he started toward the shelf where meat was stored and before they could stop him he was tearing with his teeth at some uncooked pieces hung to dry. The struggle was fierce between him and Malemute Kid. But his mad strength left him as suddenly as it had come, and he weakly dropped the meat. They seated him on a small chair, where he lay with half his body across the table. A little drink of liquor strength-

ened him so that he could take a spoonful of sugar from the bowl that Malemute Kid placed before him. After he appeared somewhat satisfied, Prince gave him a cup of weak tea.

The creature had eyes that were bright with a strange light. There was very little skin on the face. The face had little likeness to the human form. **Frost** after frost had bitten deeply into the skin. Its surface was of a bloody-black color, with lines where the red flesh showed through. Its clothes of animal skins were dirty and torn, and the fur on one side was burned away, showing where he had fallen upon his fire.

Malemute Kid pointed to where the animal skins had been cut away, strip by strip—a sure sign of **famine**, because life could be maintained for many days by boiling and eating the skins when all other food was gone. “Who—are—you?” said Malemute Kid, slowly and clearly.

The man did not appear to hear.

“Where do you come from?”

“Ship come down the river,” he sang in answer.

“No doubt he did come down the river,” the Kid said, shaking him in an attempt to start a flow of talk.

But the man screamed when touched, pressing a hand to his side in pain. He rose slowly to his feet, half leaning on the table.

“She—laughed at me—with the hate in her eye; and she—would—not—come.”

His voice weakened, and he was falling when Malemute Kid grasped him by the arm and shouted, “Who? Who would not come?”

“She, Unga. She laughed, and struck me once, and then again. And then—”

“Yes?”

“And then—”

“And then what?”

“And then she lay very quietly in the snow for a long time. She is still in—the—snow.”

The two men looked at each other helplessly.

“Who is in the snow?”

"She, Unga. She looked at me with the hate in her eye, and then—"

"Yes. Yes."

"And then she took the knife, thus; and once, twice—she was weak. I traveled very slowly. And there is much gold in that place, very much gold."

"Where is Unga?" Malemute Kid feared that she might be dying not far from the cabin. He shook the man fiercely, repeating again and again, "Where is Unga? Who is Unga?"

"She—is—in—the snow."

"Tell us more!" The Kid was pressing his arm cruelly.

"I—too—would—be—in—the—snow—but—I—had—a debt—to—pay. It—was—heavy. I—had—a debt—to pay. A—debt—to pay, I—had." The words ceased as he reached into his pocket and drew out a small bag. "A—debt—to—pay—of gold—grub—stake—Malemute Kid. I—" The tired head dropped upon the table; and Malemute Kid could not wake it again.

"It is Ulysses," he said quietly, throwing the bag of gold dust on the table. "Come, we must get him between the blankets. He is Indian; he will recover and will live to tell his story besides."

## Chapter 3

"I WILL TELL YOU MY STORY. I WILL BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING, AND TELL of myself and the woman, and, after that, of the man."

He of the Otter Skins drew near to the stove as do men who have been without fire and are afraid it may disappear again at any moment. Malemute Kid raised the lamp so its light might fall upon the face of the storyteller. Prince climbed out of his bed and joined them.

"I am Naass, a chief, and the son of a chief, born between a lowering of the sun and its rising again, on the dark sea, in my father's boat. All night the men fought with the storm and the women cast out the waves which were coming in upon us. The salt sea became ice on my mother's breast until the breath of her life passed with the passing of the tide. But I raised my voice with the wind and the storm, and lived.

"Our home was in Akatan—"

"Where?" asked Malemute Kid.

"Akatan, which is in the Aleutian Islands, above the tip of Alaska. As I say, we lived in Akatan, which lies in the middle of the sea on the edge of the world. We fished in the salt seas for the fish and the otter. Our homes lay side by side on the rocky strip between the edge of the forest and the yellow beach where our boats lay. We were not many, and the world was very small. There were strange lands to the east—islands like Akatan. We thought all the world was islands like ours and did not wonder what lay beyond.

"I was different from my people and I will tell you why. In the sands of the beach were the boards from a boat of a sort my people never built. Two men came from out of the sea in the boat which lay in pieces on the beach. And they were white like you, and weak as little children. I know of these things from the old men and the old

women, who heard them from their fathers and mothers before them. These strange white men did not understand our ways at first, but they grew strong eating the fish and the oil. And each built his own house and chose from among our women, and in time, children came. Thus was born he who was to become the father of my father's father.

"As I said, I was different from my people, because I carried the strong, strange blood of this white man who came out of the sea. It is said that we had our own laws in the days before these men; but the white men were fierce and quick to quarrel. They fought with our men until there were no more who dared to fight. Then they made themselves chiefs, and took away our old laws and gave us new ones. They said that the man was the son of his father, and not his mother, as our law had been. They also ruled that the firstborn son should have all things which were his father's before him and that the other brothers and sisters should make their own lives. And they gave us other laws, too. They also showed us new ways of catching and killing bear. They taught us to put aside bigger supplies of food for the time of famine. And these things were good.

"But when they had become chiefs, and there were no more of our men to face their anger, they fought, each with the other. And the one whose blood I carry drove his **spear** the length of an arm through another man's body. Their children continued the fight and their children's children. There was a great hate between them which existed until my time. And it happened that in each family only one lived to pass down the blood of those who went before. Of my blood I was alone; of the other man's family there was only a girl. Her name was Unga and she lived with her mother. Her father and my father did not return from fishing one night; but afterward their bodies were carried onto the beach by the big tides and they were holding each other very close.

"The people wondered—because of the hate between the houses. The old men shook their heads and said the fight would continue when children were born to her and children to me. They told me this as a boy, until I thought of Unga as an enemy. I believed that she would be the mother of children which were to fight with mine. I

thought of these things day by day, and when I grew a little older, I asked why this should be so. And they answered, ‘We do not know, but this was the manner of your fathers.’ I was surprised that those who were to come must fight the battles of those who were gone. In this I could see no right. But the people said it must be, and I was only a young lad.

“And they said I must marry soon so that my children might be the older and grow strong before hers. This was an easy thing for me to do, because I was the chief. The people respected me because of the deeds and the laws of my fathers, and the wealth which was mine. Any girl would marry me, but I found none that pleased me. And the old men and the mothers of young girls told me to hurry, because already the hunters were asking to marry Unga. If her children grew strong before mine, mine would surely die.

“Nor did I find a girl who stirred my emotions until one night when I was returning back from fishing. The sunlight was lying low and full in my eyes and the wind was free. The boats were racing with the white seas. Suddenly, the boat of Unga came rushing past me, and she looked at me with her black hair lying like a cloud of night. As I said, the sunlight was full in my eyes, and I was very young. But somehow it was all clear. I knew it to be the call of kind to kind. As she sailed ahead she looked back—as only the woman Unga could look—and again I knew there was understanding between us. The people shouted as we sailed past and left them far behind. She was skilled in sailing her boat and I did not lessen the distance she had gained. The wind grew stronger, the sea whitened, and we flew down the golden pathway of the sun.”

Naass half-stood out of his chair, in the manner of one handling a boat, as he lived the race anew. Somewhere across the stove he could behold the speeding boat and the flying hair of Unga. The voice of the wind was in his ears, and the taste of the salt sea was in his mouth.

“She came to the shore and ran across the sand, laughing, to the house of her mother. And a great thought came to me that night—a thought worthy of him that was chief of all the people of Akatan. When

the moon rose, I went to the house of her mother and looked at the goods of Yash-Noosh which were piled beside the door. Yash-Noosh was a strong hunter who had the desire to be the father of the children of Unga. Other young men had piled their goods here and taken them away again; and each young man had made a pile greater than the one before.

“And I laughed to the moon and the stars, and went to my own house where my wealth was stored. And many trips I made, until my pile was greater by the fingers of one hand than the pile of Yash-Noosh. There were fish, dried in the sun and smoked; and forty skins of one sort of seal, half as many of another; and ten sorts of bear which I killed in the woods in the spring. And there were blankets and clothes which I got from trading with the people who lived to the east, who had traded with the people who lived farther beyond in the east. And I looked upon the pile of Yash-Noosh and laughed, because I was the chief in Akatan. My wealth was greater than the wealth of all my young men, and my fathers had done deeds and given laws, and put their names for all time into the mouths of the people.

“When the morning dawned, I went down to the beach, looking out of the corner of my eye at the house of the mother of Unga. My offer stood untouched. And the women smiled, and whispered things one to the other. I wondered, because never had such a price been offered. And that night I added more to the pile, and put beside it a newly-made boat. But in the morning the pile was again there, open to the laughter of all men. The mother of Unga was clever, and I grew angry at the shame in which I stood before my people. So that night I added until it became a great pile, and I brought up my big boat, which had the value of twenty smaller ones. And in the morning there was no pile.

“Then I prepared for the wedding, and the people that lived far to the east came to eat the food of the feast. Unga was older than I by the age of four suns, according to our manner of counting the years. I was only a young lad; but then, I was a chief, and the son of a chief, and it was not important.

"As we prepared for the feast, a ship with large sails came into sight. It appeared that she was having trouble, because the men were working with all their strength to keep the water from flooding her. On the deck stood a mighty man, watching the water deepen and giving commands with a voice like thunder. His eyes were as blue as the waters and his hair was yellow like the grain of a southern harvest.

"In these years we had seen ships from afar, but this was the first to come to the beach of Akatan. The feast was broken, and the women and children hid in the houses. We men waited with spears in hand. But when the ship touched the beach the strange men did not notice us, because they were busy with their own work. With the falling of the tide they were able to repair the great hole in the ship's bottom. The women returned and the feast continued.

"When the tide rose, the strangers pushed the ship into deep water and then joined us. They brought gifts and were friendly. I welcomed them; and gave them small gifts, as I gave to all the guests, because it was my wedding day. And he with the yellow hair was there, so tall and strong that one expected to see the earth shake with the fall of his feet. He looked much at Unga and stayed until the sun went away and the stars came out. Then he returned to his ship. After that I took Unga by the hand and led her to my own house. And there was singing and much laughing. Then the people left us alone and went home.

"The last noise had not died when the chief of the sea wanderers came in the door. And he had with him black bottles, from which we drank and became merry. You see, I was only a young lad, and had lived all my days on the edge of the world. My blood became as fire, and my heart as light as a cloud. Unga sat silent among the furs piled in the corner. Her eyes were widely opened, and she seemed afraid. And he with the yellow hair looked upon her straight and long. Then his men came in carrying boxes and he piled before me more wealth than there was in all Akatan. There were guns, both large and small, and bright axes, and tools of steel, and strange things which I had never seen. When he showed me by signs that it was all mine, I thought him a great man to be so generous. But he showed me also that Unga was to go away with

him in his ship. Do you understand?—that Unga was to go away with him in his ship. The blood of my fathers flamed hot in me and I tried to attack him with my knife. But the spirit in the bottles had stolen the life from my arm. He took me by the neck, and knocked my head against the wall of the house. And I became as weak as a newborn child, and my legs would not stand under me. Unga screamed. She grasped the heavy furniture in the house with her hands, until it fell to the floor as he dragged her to the door. Then he took her in his great arms, and when she tore at his yellow hair, he laughed.

“Somehow I found my way to the beach and called to my people to help me but they were afraid. Only Yash-Noosh was man enough to act. But they struck him on the head until he lay with his face in the sand and did not move. And they raised the sails to the sound of their songs, and the ship sailed away on the wind.

“The people said it was good, because there would be no more war between the two bloods in Akatan. But I did not say a word, waiting until the time of the full moon. Then I put fish and oil in my boat and went away to the east. I saw many islands and many people, and I, who had lived on its edge, saw that the world was very large. I talked to people by signs, but no one had seen a large ship nor a man with yellow hair. They pointed always to the east. And I slept in queer places, and ate unfamiliar things, and met strange faces. Many laughed, because they thought me crazy. But sometimes old men turned my face to the light and blessed me. And the eyes of the young women grew soft as they asked me of the strange ship, and Unga, and the men of the sea.

“I had thought it would be an easy task to find the man as soon as I was among his own people. One day when we entered a port, I expected to find no more large ships than there were fingers on my hands. Instead, I saw large ships lying side by side for miles. And when I went among them to ask for a man with yellow hair, everyone laughed, and answered me in strange languages.

“Then, I went into the city to look upon the face of every man there. But there were many men. They were like fish when they run thick in the river, and I could not count them. And the noise was so

great that I could not hear, and my head was spinning with so much movement. I went on and on, through the lands which lay in the warm sunshine where the harvests were rich. And I went into great cities where men lived like women, with false words in their mouths and their hearts black with the desire for gold. And all the time, my people of Akatan hunted and fished, and were happy in the thought that the world was small.

"But the look in the eyes of Unga when she came home from fishing was with me always, and I knew I would find her when the time was right. There was a promise in her eyes such as only the woman Unga could give.

"I wandered through a thousand towns. Some people were gentle and gave me food. Others laughed at me, and some others cursed. But I kept silent and went to strange places and saw strange sights. Sometimes I, who was a chief and the son of a chief, worked for other men. However, no word did I hear of him until I came back to the sea. But this was at another port, in another country which lay to the north. And there I heard stories of the yellow-haired sea wanderer, and I learned that he was a hunter of seals and that at that time he was far out on the sea.

"I found work on a large ship and followed his trackless trail to the north. And we were gone many months and heard much of the wild actions of him whom I searched for. But not once did we see him. We went further north and killed the seals in great numbers on the beach, and brought their warm bodies to our ship. The oil and blood flowed over the decks until no man could stand there. Then we were chased by a ship which shot at us with great guns. But we added more sails until we moved with such speed that the sea washed our decks clean, and we left our enemy far behind.

"It is said that at the time we were running away with fear the yellow-haired sea wanderer stole skins from another company. It is said that he sailed directly to the factory and, while some of his men held off the servants of the company, the others loaded ten thousand skins from the houses where they were stored. I say, it is said. But I believe

it to be true. During the voyages I made in the Northern Seas I heard many stories of his wildness and daring. Three nations which hold lands there were seeking him with their ships. And I heard, too, of Unga, because the sea captains sang loud in her praise, and she was always with him. She had learned the customs of his people, they said, and was happy. But I knew better. I knew that her heart longed for her own people by the yellow beach of Akatan.

“After a long time, I went back to the port which opens like a gate-way to the sea. There I learned that he had gone to hunt for the seal to the east of the warm land which runs south from the Russian Seas. And I, who had become a seaman, joined a ship with men of his own race and followed him in the hunt of the seal. There were few ships off the coast of that new land. But we stayed near the seals and chased them north during the spring of the year. And when the females were ready to bear their young and crossed the Russian line, our men were afraid. The weather was bad and every day men were lost in the boats. The men would not work, and consequently, the captain turned the ship back toward the place it had come from. But I knew the yellow-haired sea wanderer was not afraid and would sail even to the Russian Isles. So I took a boat, in the black of night, and went alone to the warm, long land. And I journeyed south to meet the men by Yedo Bay, who are wild and unafraid. And the Yoshiwara girls were small and bright like steel and good to look upon. But I could not stop, because I knew that Unga was still beyond me to the north.

“The men by Yedo Bay had come from the ends of the earth and had neither gods nor homes. And I went with them to the rich beaches of Copper Island where our piles became high with skins. And in that silent sea we saw no man until we were ready to come away. Then one day, a large boat approached us. Close behind her was a Russian warship. We sailed away on the wind with the large ship pushing ahead of us. And upon her deck was the yellow-haired sea wanderer, laughing in his strength of life. And Unga was there—I knew her at once. But he sent her below the decks when the guns began to fire across the sea. His ship moved ahead of us, while I was holding our wheel and

cursing, with my back to the Russian shots. We knew that he intended to run before us, taking the wind from our sails so he might escape while we were caught. And the guns knocked our sails down until we dragged into the wind like a wounded bird. But he went on over the edge of the sky line—he and Unga—leaving us to the Russians.

“What could we say? The fresh hides spoke for themselves. So they took us to Russian port and after that to a lonely country. There they made us work in deep holes, digging salt. And some died, and—and some did not die.”

Naass swept the blanket from his shoulders, revealing the unmistakable marks of the whip on his flesh. Prince covered him quickly, for it was not nice to look upon.

“We were there a long time and sometimes men escaped to the south, but they always came back. So, when we who had come from Yeddo Bay rose in the night and took the guns from the guards, we went to the north. And the land was very large, with plains covered with water and great forests. And the cold came, with much snow on the ground, and no man knew the way. For months we journeyed through the endless forest. There was little food and often we lay down to die. But finally we came to the cold sea, and only three of us were alive to look upon it. One had sailed a ship from Yeddo as its captain. He knew in his head the map of the great lands and of the place where one may cross from one land to the other on the ice. And he led us until we were only two. When we came to the crossing place we found five of the strange people who live in that country. They had dogs and skins, and we were very poor. We fought in the snow until they died, and the captain died and the dogs and skins were mine. Then I crossed on the ice which was broken. And after that I came to Golovin Bay, and your friend at Pastilik. The south, south, to the warm sunlands I returned.

“But the sea was no longer profitable and men no longer went to hunt the seal. The ships had scattered, and the captains and the men had no word of those I searched for. I turned away from the ocean and went among the lands. I journeyed far, and I learned many things, even how to read and write from books. It was well I should do this. I real-

ized that Unga would know these things, and that someday, when the time had come...

“I moved from place to place. My eyes and my ears were open always, and I went among men who traveled much. I knew that they had only to see those I was seeking to remember them. I finally met a man who had come recently from the mountains. He carried pieces of rock in which the gold could be seen. And he had heard, he had met, and he knew them. They were rich, he said, and lived in the place where they drew the gold from the ground.

“It was a wild country, and very far away. But after much traveling I came to the camp, hidden between the mountains. There men worked, searching for gold night and day, out of the sight of the sun. However, the time I was waiting for had not come. I heard what people were saying. He had gone away—and Unga with him—to England. It was said they were looking for men with much money to form companies. I saw the house they had lived in. It was like a palace, such as one sees in the old countries. In the night I entered the place through a window to see in what manner he treated her. I went from room to room. I thought that kings and queens must live as they did; it was all so very good. And they all said he treated her like a queen. Many wondered what sort of woman she was because she was different from the women of Akatan. No one knew her past life. Yes, she was a queen; but I was a chief, and the son of a chief, and I had paid for her an unusual price.

“But why so many words? I was a seaman, and I knew how to find my way on the seas. I followed them to England, and from there to other countries. Sometimes I heard of them from talk and sometimes I read of them in the newspapers. Yet never could I meet them, because they had much money and traveled fast, while I was a poor man. Then their good luck changed. And one day their wealth disappeared like a curl of smoke. The newspapers printed much of the story at the time. But after that, nothing was said. However, I knew they had returned to where more gold could be taken from the ground.

“The world was no longer interested in them, now that they were poor. So I wandered from camp to camp until I heard of them. They

had come and gone. Some said they had gone to one place; others said another. Still others said that they had gone to the country of the Yukon. And I went to each place they had mentioned, until it seemed I would tire of the world which was so large. But then I traveled a long and hard trail with one of the men of the Northwest who died when a time of famine came. He had been to the Yukon by an unknown way over the mountains. When he knew his time to die had come, he gave me a map and told me the secret of a place where he promised there was much gold.

"After that all the world began to go north. I was a poor man; I sold myself to be a driver of dogs. I met him and her in Dawson. She did not know me, because I was only a lad when last she had seen me and her life had been full. She had no time to remember the one who had paid for her an unusual price.

"So? You bought me from my term of service. I went back to let things happen in my own way, because I had waited long. Now that I had my hand upon him I was in no hurry. As I say, I intended to do it my own way, because I remembered my life—through all I had seen and suffered. As you know, I led him into the east—him and Unga. We went into the east where many have gone and few returned. I led them to the spot where the bones and the curses of men lie with the gold which they cannot have.

"The way was long and the snow on the trail not firm. Our dogs were many and ate much; nor could our sleds carry all we needed until winter passed. We had to return before the ice melted and the river ran free. We stored food along the way so that our sleds might be lightened and there would be no danger of famine when we returned. At the McQuestion there were three men, and near them we built a **cache**. We did this at the Mayo River also, where there was a hunting camp. After that, as we went on into the east; we saw no men. All we saw was the frozen river, the unmoving forest, and the white and silent North. As I say, the way was long and the trail not firm. Sometimes, in one day, we traveled no more than eight miles, and at night we slept like dead men. And not once did they dream that I was Naass, chief of Akatan.

"We now set aside smaller piles of food. During the night it was not difficult for me to retrace our trail and change the piles so that one might think they had been taken by a wolf. Again, there are places where the river drops suddenly, and the ice that covers them is thin. In such a spot the sled I drove broke through and the dogs with it. To him and Unga it was bad luck, but no more. And there was much food on that sled, and the dogs were the strongest. But he laughed, for he was full of life. He gave the remaining dogs very little food until we cut them from the harnesses one by one and fed them to their brothers. We would go home with no burden, he said, traveling and eating from one cache to another, with neither dogs nor sleds. This was true, because our food supply was low and the last dog died the night we came to the place of the gold and the bones and the curses of men.

"To arrive at that place—and the map was correct—we cut steps in the ice against the wall in the great mountains. One looked for a valley beyond, but there was no valley. The snow spread away, level as the great harvest plains, and here and there about us mighty mountains pushed their white heads among the stars. And in the middle of that strange plain which should have been a valley, the earth and the snow fell away, straight down toward the heart of the world. Had we not been seamen, familiar with the deep places between the waves, our heads would have been turned at the sight. But we stood on the edge so we might see a way to get down. And on one side, and one side only, the wall had fallen away to offer a route to the bottom. I do not know why this thing should be so, but it was so. 'It is the mouth of hell,' he said, 'let us go down.' And we went down.

"And on the bottom there was a cabin, built by some man. He had thrown down the logs from above. It was a very old cabin, because men had died there alone at different times. On pieces of bark from a tree we read their last words and their curses. One had died of disease; the companion of another had taken his last food and stolen away. A third had been attacked by a bear; a fourth had hunted for food and starved. And so it went. They had not wanted to leave the gold and had died by its side. And the worthless gold they had gathered yel-

lowed the floor of the cabin like in a dream.

“But the man I had led here had a clear head. ‘We have nothing to eat,’ he said, ‘and we will only look upon this gold and see how much there is of it. Then we will go away quickly, before it gets into our eyes and steals away our judgment. In this way we will return later with more food, and possess it all.’ We looked at the wall of the mountain which was cut by a great band of gold. We measured it and traced it from above and below. We drove the poles to mark our property and cut the bark of the trees to show that this place belonged to us. Then, our knees shaking from lack of food and a sickness in our stomachs, we climbed the mighty wall for the last time and turned our faces to the return journey.

“Toward the end we pulled Unga between us, and we fell often. But finally we reached the place where we had stored the food. And behold, there was no food. It was well done, because he thought a wolf had stolen it. He cursed the wolf and his gods in one breath. But Unga was brave, and smiled, and put her hand in his, until I turned away so I might control myself. ‘We will rest by the fire,’ she said, ‘until morning, and we will gather strength from our moccasins.’ We cut the tops of our moccasins in strips and boiled them during half of the night, so that we could eat them. And in the morning we talked about our future. The next cache was five days distant; we could not wait that long. We must find something to eat.

“‘We will go forth and hunt,’ he said.

“And he commanded that Unga stay by the fire and save her strength. And we went forth. He went to find a moose and I went to the cache of food I had changed to another place. But I ate little, so they might not see new strength in me. And in the night he fell many times as he came into camp. And I, too, acted as if I were very weak, falling over my snowshoes as though each step might be my last. And again we ate pieces of our moccasins.

“He was a great man. His soul supported his body to the last, nor did he cry aloud. On the second day I followed him, so I might not miss the end. And he lay down to rest often. That night he was almost gone,

but in the morning he went forth again. I looked many times for him to yield, but his was the strength of the strong, and his soul the soul of a giant. And he shot two small birds, but would not eat them. His thought was for Unga, and he turned toward camp. He no longer walked, but moved forward on his hands and knees through the snow. I came to him, and saw death in his eyes. Even then it was not too late to eat the birds. He threw away his gun and carried the birds in his mouth like a dog. I walked by his side. And he looked at me during the moments he rested, and wondered that I was so strong. I could see it, although he no longer spoke. As I say, he was a great man, and my heart was moved to pity. But I thought back on my life, and remembered the cold and the hunger of the endless forest by the Russian Seas. Besides, Unga was mine, and I had paid for her a very high price in skins and boats.

“And in this manner we came through the white forest with the stillness heavy upon us like wet sea air. And the past was all about us. I saw the yellow beach of Akatan, and the boats racing home from fishing, and the houses on the edge of the forest. And the men who had made themselves chiefs were there, the lawgivers whose blood I bore and whose blood I had married in Unga. And I knew the time had come, and I saw in the eyes of Unga the promise.

“As I say, we came thus through the forest, until we could smell the camp smoke. And I bent above him, and tore the birds from his teeth. He turned on his side and rested, the wonder growing in his eyes. His hand moved toward his knife at his side. But I took it from him, smiling close to his face. Even then he did not understand. So I acted as if I were drinking from black bottles, and lived again the things which happened on the night I was married. I spoke no word, but he understood. Yet he was unafraid. There was an ugly smile on his lips and cold anger on his face. He gathered new strength from what he now knew. It was not far, but the snow was deep and he pulled himself along very slowly. Once he lay so long I turned him over and looked into his eyes. And sometimes he looked forth, and sometimes it was death that I saw in his eyes. And when I set him free he struggled on

again. In this way we came to the fire. Unga was at his side in an instant. His lips moved without sound. Then he pointed at me, so Unga might understand. And after that he lay in the snow, very still, for a long while. Even now is he there in the snow.

"I said nothing until I had cooked the birds. Then I spoke to her, in her own language, which she had not heard in many years. She straightened herself and looked at me in wonder. She asked who I was and where I had learned that speech.

"'I am Naass,' I said.

"'You?' she said. 'You?' And she came closer so she might look upon me.

"'Yes,' I answered. 'I am Naass, chief of Akatan, the last of the blood, as you are the last of the blood.'

"And she laughed. Among all the things I have seen and done, may I never hear such a laugh again. It made my soul freeze, sitting there in the white stillness, alone with death and this woman who laughed.

"'Come!' I said, because I thought her mind had wandered. 'Eat of the food and let us be gone. It is a long way to Akatan.'

"But she buried her face in his yellow hair and laughed until it seemed the heavens would fall. I had thought she would be full of joy at the sight of me, but this seemed a strange manner in which to show it.

"'Come!' I cried, taking her strongly by the hand. 'The way is long and dark. Let us hurry!'

"'Where?' she asked, sitting up, and ceasing her strange laughing.

"'To Akatan,' I answered, waiting to see the light grow on her face at the thought. But it became like his, with an ugly smile on the lips and cold anger.

"'Yes,' she said, 'we will go, hand in hand, to Akatan, you and I. And we will live in the dirty houses, and eat fish and oil. And we will bring forth a child—a child to be proud of all the days of our life. We will forget the world and be happy, very happy. It is good, most good. Come! Let us hurry. Let us return to Akatan.'

"And she stroked his yellow hair gently, and smiled in a manner which was not good. And there was no promise in her eyes.

“I sat silent, and wondered at the strangeness of woman. I thought again of the night when he pulled her from me and she screamed and tore at his hair—at his hair which now she played with and would not leave. Then I remembered the price and the long years of waiting. And I held her close and pulled her away as he had done. And she held back, even as on that night, and fought like a she-cat for its young. And when the fire was between us and the man, I let her loose. She sat and listened. And I told her of all that lay between, of all that had happened to me on strange seas and of all that I had done in strange lands. Yes, I told all, even to what had passed that day between the man and me. And as I spoke I saw the promise grow in her eyes. And I read pity there, and the tenderness of woman and the love, the heart and the soul of Unga. And I was a lad again, because the look was the look of Unga as she ran along the beach, laughing, to the home of her mother. The unrest was gone, the hunger, and the long waiting. The time had come. I felt the call of her breast, and it seemed there I must pillow my head and forget. She opened her arms to me, and I came against her. Then suddenly, the hate flamed in her eyes. Her hand was at my side. And once, twice, she struck with the knife.

“‘Dog!’ she cried, as she threw me into the snow. ‘Pig!’ And then she laughed until the stillness broke, and then returned to her dead.

“As I say, she struck with the knife twice. But she was weak with hunger, and it was not meant that I should die. Yet I wanted to stay in that place, and to shut my eyes in the last long sleep with those whose lives had crossed with mine. But there lay a debt upon me which would not let me rest.

“And the way was long and the cold bitter. There was little food. What I had hidden in my caches had been stolen. I do not remember much until I came here, and found food and fire—much fire.”

As he finished, he moved even closer to the stove. For a long while we watched the lamp shadows play upon the wall.

“But Unga!” cried Prince.

“Unga? She would not eat the birds. She lay with her arms about his neck, her face deep in his yellow hair. I drew the fire close, that she

might not feel the frost. But she moved to the other side. And I built a fire there. Yet it was of little good, because she would not eat. And in this manner they still lie up there in the snow."

"And you?" asked Malemute Kid.

"I do not know. Akatan is small, and I have little wish to return and live on the edge of the world. However, there is small use in living. I can go to the chief of police and he will put me in prison. Then one day they will tie a piece of rope around my neck and I will sleep. Yet—no; I do not know."

"But, Kid," protested Prince, "this is murder!"

"Quiet!" commanded Malemute Kid. "There are things greater than our wisdom and beyond our justice. The right and wrong of this we cannot say, and it is not for us to judge."

Naass drew even closer to the fire. There was a great stillness, and in the eyes of each man many pictures came and went.