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THE WALRUS HUNTERS: A ROMANCE OF THE REALMS OF ICE

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
A Romance of the Ice-World. A Surprise, a Combat, and a Feed

There is a river in America which flows to the north-westward of Great Bear Lake, and helps to drain that part of the great wilderness into the Arctic Sea.

It is an insignificant stream compared with such well-known waterways as the Mackenzie and the Coppermine; nevertheless it is large enough to entice the white-whale and the seal into its waters every spring, and it becomes a resting-place for myriads of wild-fowl while on their passage to and from the breeding-grounds of the Far North.

Greygoose River was the name given to it by the Dogrib Indians who dwelt in its neighbourhood, and who were wont, every spring and autumn, to descend its waters nearly to the sea in quest of game. The Eskimos, who, coming from the mysterious north, were in the habit of ascending it a short way during open

water in pursuit of their peculiar prey, named it Whale River.

The Indians and Eskimos did not often meet while on these trips. They did not like meeting, because the result was apt to be disastrous. Besides, the land was wide and the game plentiful enough for both, so that they were not much tempted to risk a meeting. Occasionally, however, meetings and encounters did take place, and sometimes bitter feuds arose, but the possession of fire-arms by the Indians—who were supplied by the fur-traders—rendered the Eskimos wary. Their headstrong courage, however, induced the red men to keep as much as possible out of their way. In short, there was a good deal of the spirit of "let-be for let-be" between the two at the time of which we write.

One morning in the spring-time of the year, soon after the floods caused by the melting snows had swept the ice clean out of Greygoose or Whale River, a sturdy young Eskimo urged his sharp kayak, or skin-covered canoe, up the stream in pursuit of a small white-whale. But the creature gave him the slip, so that, after an energetic chase, he turned his light vessel towards the left bank of the stream, intending to land.

Cheenbuk, for such was his name, was one of those sedate beings whose energies run calm and deep, like a mighty river. This feelings, whatever they might be, did not usually cause much agitation on the surface. Disappointment did not visibly depress, nor did success unduly elate him. The loss of the whale failed to disturb the placid look of grave contentment which sat on his good-looking countenance.

For it must be noted here that Cheenbuk was a handsome savage—if, indeed, we are entitled to style him a savage at all. His features were good, and strongly marked. His young beard and moustache were black, though not bushy. His dark eyes were large and full of tenderness, which expression, by an almost imperceptible raising of eyelid and contraction of brow, was easily transmuted into a gaze of ferocity or indignation. His bulky frame was clothed in the seal-skin garb peculiar to his people; his hair was straight, voluminous, and unkempt, and his motions gave indication of great strength combined with agility.

And no wonder, for a large part of our young Eskimo's life had been spent in battling with the forces of Nature, and the hardships of life as displayed in the Arctic regions—to say nothing of frequent conflicts with the seal, the walrus and the polar bear.

Running his kayak among the rushes of a small inlet, Cheenbuk stepped out of the hole in its centre into the stream. The water was ankle-deep, but the youth suffered no discomfort, for he wore what may be styled home-made waterproof boots reaching to above the knees. These had been invented by his forefathers, no doubt, in the remote ages of antiquity—at all events, long before india-rubber had been discovered or Macintosh was born.

Drawing his little craft out of the water, the young man took some food from its interior, and was about to begin his truly simple meal by eating it raw, when a distant sound arrested his

hand on the way to his mouth. He turned his head slightly on one side and remained for some moments like a singularly attentive statue.

Presently the voice of a wild-goose was faintly heard in the far distance. Evidently the young Eskimo desired a change of fare, for he laid down the slice of raw seal, on which he had been about to regale himself, and disengaged a long slender spear from the bow of his kayak.

It is well-known that wild-geese will, with proverbial stupidity, answer to an imitation of their cry, particularly in spring. Indeed, they will answer to a very bad imitation of it, insomuch that the poorest counterfeit will turn them out of their course and attract them towards the crier.

Availing himself of this weakness, our Eskimo hid himself behind a bush, and was opening his mouth to give vent to a stentorian goose-call when he was checked, and apparently petrified, by a loud report, which echoed among the neighbouring cliffs.

The youth knew the sound well. He had heard it only once before, but, once heard, it could never be forgotten. It was the gun, or, as his people called it, the fire-spouter, of an Indian. Plunging quietly into the underwood, he hastened towards the spot where a little wreath of smoke betrayed the position of what may be almost styled his hereditary foe.

Cautiously, carefully, and with a catlike motion that could hardly have been excelled by an Indian brave, Cheenbuk

advanced until he reached the edge of a partially clear space, in which he beheld an Indian leisurely engaged in pushing the head of a large grey goose under his belt. At his side, leaning against a tree, was the long-barrelled fowling-piece, which he had just reloaded. It was one of those common, cheap, flint-lock affairs which were supplied by the fur-traders in those days.

The Indian was a tall, powerfully built middle-aged man, and, from his look and manner, was evidently unsuspicious of the presence of a foe. He seemed to be quite alone.

The Eskimo poised his light spear, but hesitated to launch it. He shrank from killing a defenceless foe. The hesitation betrayed him, for at the moment the sharp ear of the red man heard, and his eye discovered him.

The gun flew to the Indian's shoulder, and the Eskimo launched his spear, but by good fortune both weapons failed. The well-directed spear was cleverly dodged, and the gun missed fire.

To re-cock the weapon, take a more deadly aim, and pull the trigger, was the work of three seconds; but again the flint proved faithless. Cheenbuk, however, divined the meaning of the attempt, and sprang upon his foe to prevent a repetition of the action, though he was now practically unarmed,—for the little stone knife which he carried in his bosom was but ill suited for deadly combat.

The Indian clubbed his gun to meet the onset, but the Eskimo, evading the first blow, caught hold of the weapon with both hands, and now began a fierce and prolonged struggle for

possession of the "fire-spouter."

Both hands of each combatant being engaged, neither could venture to draw his knife, and, as the men were pretty equally matched, both as to size and strength, they swayed to and fro with desperate energy for a considerable time, each endeavouring to throw the other, while the sweat poured down their faces and their breathing came in fitful gasps.

At length there was a pause in the conflict. It seemed as if they had stopped by mutual consent to recover breath for a final effort.

As they glared into each other's faces, each felt surprised to see little or nothing of the evidence of that deadly hatred which usually characterises implacable foes. Suddenly Cheenbuk relaxed his grip of the gun and stepped back a pace. In so doing he put himself, to some extent at least, at the mercy of his adversary. With quick perception the Indian recognised the fact. He drew himself up and dropped the gun on the ground.

"Why should we fight? The hunting-grounds are wide enough!" he said, in the grave sententious tones peculiar to his race.

"That is just what came to my thought when I let go," answered the more matter-of-fact Eskimo.

"Let us part, then, as friends," returned the red man, "and let us do it in the manner of the pale-faced traders."

He extended his right hand as he spoke. Cheenbuk, who had heard a rumour of the white man's customs—probably from men

of his race who had met with the crews of whalers—advanced, grasped the extended hand, and shook it in a way that might have done credit to any Englishman! He smiled at the same time with a slightly humorous expression, but the other maintained his solemnity. Fun is not a prominent characteristic of the red man.

"But there is no need that we should part before feeding," said the Eskimo.

"Waugh!" replied the Indian, by which it is to be presumed he signified assent.

The reconciled foes being both adepts in the art of cookery, and—one of them at least—in woodcraft, it was not long before a large fire was blazing under a convenient fir-tree, and the grey goose soon hissed pleasantly in front of it. They were a quiet and self-contained couple, however, and went about their work in profound silence. Not that they lacked ideas or language—for each, being naturally a good linguist, had somehow acquired a smattering of the other's tongue,—but they resembled each other in their disinclination to talk without having something particular to say, and in their inclination to quietness and sobriety of demeanour.

Here, however, the resemblance ceased, for while the Eskimo was free and easy, ready to learn and to sympathise, and quick to see and appreciate a joke, the Indian was sternly conservative, much impressed with his own rectitude of intention, as well as his capacity for action, and absolutely devoid of the slightest tinge of humour. Thus the Eskimo's expression varied somewhat with

the nature of the subjects which chased each other through his mind, while that of the red man never changed from the calm of dignified immobility—except, of course, when, as during the recent struggle, his life was in danger.

While the goose was roasting, the erstwhile foes sat down to watch the process. They had not to watch long, for the fire was strong and neither of them was particular. Indeed, the Eskimo would gladly have eaten his portion raw, but waited patiently, out of deference to what he deemed his companion's prejudices.

"You are alone?" said the Eskimo interrogatively.

"Yes—alone," returned the Indian.

To such men, this was mental food for at least a quarter of an hour. By the end of that time one side of the bird was sufficiently done. The Indian turned the stick on which it was impaled, drew his scalping-knife, and commenced on the side that was ready while the other side was being done. Cheenbuk drew his stone knife, cut a large slice of the breast, and also fell to work. They ate vigorously, yet the process was not soon over, for the goose was large and their appetites were strong. Of course they had no time or inclination for conversation during the meal. When it was finished, the grey goose was reduced to a miserable skeleton. Then both men sighed the sigh of contentment, wiped their knives on the grass, and looked gravely at each other.

Cheenbuk seemed as if about to speak, but was arrested in his intention by the strange and unaccountable proceedings of his companion, who now drew forth a gaily decorated bag which

hung at his belt behind him. From this he extracted a whitish implement with a little bowl at one end, and having leisurely filled it with a brown substance, also drawn from the bag, he put the other or small end of the instrument between his teeth. Then he took up a burning stick and applied it to the bowl.

The Eskimo had been gazing at him with ever-widening eyes, but at this his mouth also began to open, and he gave vent to a gentle "ho!" of unutterable surprise, for immediately there burst from the Indian's lips a puff of smoke as if he had suddenly become a gun, or fire-spouter and gone off unexpectedly.

There was profound interest as well as astonishment in the gaze of our Eskimo, for he now became aware that he was about to witness a remarkable custom of the red men, of which he had often heard, but which he had never clearly understood.

"Does it not burn?" he asked in breathless curiosity.

"No," replied his friend.

"Do you like it? Hi—i!"

The exclamation was induced by the Indian, who at the moment sent a stream of smoke from each nostril, shut his eyes as he did so, opened his mouth, and otherwise exhibited symptoms of extreme felicity.

"Would you like to try it?" he asked after one or two more whiffs.

Cheenbuk accepted the offer and the pipe, drew a voluminous whiff down into his lungs and exploded in a violent fit of coughing, while the tears overflowed his eyes.

"Try again," said the Indian gravely.

For some minutes the Eskimo found it difficult to speak; then he returned the pipe, saying, "No. My inside is not yet tough like yours. I will look—and wonder!"

After being admired—with wonder—for a considerable time, the Indian looked at his companion earnestly, again offered him the pipe, and said, "Try again."

The obliging Eskimo tried again, but with the caution of a child who, having been burnt, dreads the fire. He drew in a little smoke by means of the power of inhalation and choked again slightly, but, being now on his mettle, he resolved not to be beaten. The Indian regarded him meanwhile with grave approval. Then it occurred to Cheenbuk to apply the power of suction instead of inhalation. It was successful. He filled his mouth instead of his lungs, and, in his childlike delight at the triumph, he opened his mouth to its full extent, and sent forth a cloud with a gasp which was the combined expression of a puff and a "ho!" Again he tried it, and was again successful. Overjoyed at this, like a child with a new toy, he went in for quite a broadside of puffs, looking round at his friendly foe with a "ho!" between each, and surrounding his head with an atmosphere of smoke.

Suddenly he stopped, laid down the pipe, rose up, and, looking as if he had forgotten something, retired into the bush.

The Indian took up the discarded pipe, and for the first time displayed a few wrinkles about the corners of his eyes as he put it between his lips.

Presently Cheenbuk returned, somewhat paler than before, and sat down in silence with a look, as if of regret, at the skeleton-goose.

Without any reference to what had passed, the Indian turned to his companion and said, "Why should the men of the ice fight with the men of the woods?"

"Why?" asked Cheenbuk, after a few moments' profound meditation, "why should the men of the woods attack the men of the ice with their fire-spouters?"

This question seemed to puzzle the Indian so much that he proceeded to fill another pipe before answering it. Meanwhile the Eskimo, being more active-minded, continued—

"Is it fair for the men of the woods to come to fight us with fire-spouters when we have only spears? Meet us with the same weapons, and then we shall see which are the best men."

The Indian looked at his companion solemnly and shook his head.

"The strongest warriors and the best fighters," he said, "are not always the best men. He who hunts well, keeps his wives supplied with plenty of food and deerskin robes, and is kind to his children, is the best man."

Cheenbuk looked suddenly in the face of his sententious companion with earnest surprise in every feature, for the sentiments which had just been expressed were in exact accordance with his own. Moreover, they were not what he expected to hear from the lips of a Dogrib.

"I never liked fighting," he said in a low voice, "though I have always been able to fight. It does nobody any good, and it always does everybody much harm, for it loses much blood, and it leaves many women and children without food-providers—which is uncomfortable for the men who have enough of women and children of their own to hunt for. But," continued the youth with emphasis, "I always thought that the men of the woods loved fighting."

"Some of them do, but I hate it!" said the Indian with a sudden look of such ferocity that the Eskimo might have been justified in doubting the truth of the statement.

The flash, however, quickly disappeared, and a double wreath of smoke issued from his nose as he remarked quietly, "Fighting lost me my father, my two brothers, and my only son."

"Why, then, do you still come against us with fire-spouters?" asked Cheenbuk.

"Because my people will have it so," returned the red man. "I do what I can to stop them, but I am only one, and there are many against me."

"I too have tried to stop my people when they would fight among themselves," returned the Eskimo in a tone of sympathy; "but it is easier to kill a walrus single-handed than to turn an angry man from his purpose."

The Indian nodded assent, as though a chord had been struck which vibrated in both bosoms.

"My son," he said, in a patronising tone, "do not cease to try.

Grey hairs are beginning to show upon my head; I have seen and learned much, and I have come to know that only he who tries, and tries, and tries again to do what he knows is right will succeed. To him the Great Manitou will give his blessing."

"My father," replied the other, falling in readily with the fictitious relationship, "I will try."

Having thus come to a satisfactory agreement, this Arctic Peace Society prepared to adjourn. Each wiped his knife on the grass and sheathed it as he rose up. Then they shook hands again after the fashion of the pale-faces, and departed on their respective ways. The red man returned to the wigwams of his people, while the young Eskimo, descending the river in his kayak, continued to hunt the white-whale and pursue the feathered tribes which swarmed in the creeks, rivulets, and marshes that bordered the ice-encumbered waters of the polar seas.

Chapter Two.
Waruskeek

Alas for the hopes and efforts of good men! At the very time that Cheenbuk and the Indian were expressing their detestation of war, elsewhere a young Eskimo was doing his best to bring about that unhappy and ruinous condition of things.

He was an unusually strong young Arctic swashbuckler, with considerably more muscle than brains, a restless spirit, and what may be styled a homicidal tendency. He was also tyrannical, like many men of that stamp, and belonged to the same tribe as Cheenbuk.

Walrus Creek was the summer residence of the tribe of Eskimos to which Cheenbuk belonged. It was a narrow inlet which ran up into a small island lying some distance off the northern shores of America, to discover and coast along which has been for so many years the aim and ambition of Arctic explorers. How it came by its name is not difficult to guess. Probably in ages past some adventurous voyagers, whose names and deeds have not been recorded in history, observing the numbers of walruses which scrambled out of the sea to sun themselves on the cliffs of the said creek, had named it after that animal, and the natives had adopted the name. Like other aborigines they had garbled it, however, and handed it down to

posterity as Waruskeek, while the walruses, perhaps in order to justify the name, had kept up the custom of their forefathers, and continued to sun themselves there as in days of yore. Seals also abounded in the inlet, and multitudes of aquatic birds swarmed around its cliffs.

The Eskimo village which had been built there, unlike the snow-hut villages of winter, was composed chiefly of huts made of slabs of stone, intermingled with moss and clay. It was exceeding dirty, owing to remnants of blubber, shreds of skins, and bones innumerable, which were left lying about. There might have been about forty of these huts, at the doors of which—or the openings which served for doors—only women and children were congregated at the time we introduce them to the reader. All the men, with the exception of a few ancients, were away hunting.

In the centre of the village there stood a hut which was larger and a little cleaner than the others around it. An oldish man with a grey beard was seated on a stone bench beside the door. If tobacco had been known to the tribe, he would probably have been smoking. In default of that he was thrown back upon meditation. Apparently his meditations were not satisfactory, for he frowned portentously once or twice, and shook his head.

"You are not pleased to-day, Mangivik," said a middle-aged woman who issued from the hut at the moment and sat down beside the man.

"No, woman, I am not," he answered shortly.

Mangivik meant no disrespect by addressing his wife thus. "Woman" was the endearing term used by him on all occasions when in communication with her.

"What troubles you? Are you hungry?"

"No. I have just picked a walrus rib clean. It is not that."

He pointed, as he spoke, to a huge bone of the animal referred to.

"No, it is not that," he repeated.

"What then? Is it something you may not tell me?" asked the woman in a wheedling tone, as she crossed her legs and toyed with the flap of her tail.

Lest the civilised reader should be puzzled, we may here remark that the costume of the husband and wife whom we have introduced—as, indeed, of most if not all Eskimo men and women—is very similar in detail as well as material. Mangivik wore a coat or shirt of seal-skin with a hood to it, and his legs were encased in boots of the same material, which were long enough to cover nearly the whole of each leg and meet the skirt of the coat. The feet of the boots were of tough walrus-hide, and there was a short peak to the coat behind. The only difference in the costume of the woman was that the hood of her coat was larger, to admit of infants and other things being carried in it, and the peak behind was prolonged into a tail with a broad flap at the end. This tail varied a little in length according to the taste of the wearer—like our ladies' skirts; but in all cases it was long enough to trail on the ground—perhaps we should say the ice

—and, from the varied manner in which different individuals caused it to sweep behind them, it was evident that the tail, not less than the civilised skirt, served the purpose of enabling the wearers to display more or less of graceful motion.

"There is nothing that I have to hide from my woman," said the amiable Eskimo, in reply to her question. "Only I am troubled about that jump-about man Gartok."

"Has he been here again?" asked the wife, with something of a frown on her fat face. "He is just as you say, a jump-about like the little birds that come to us in the hot times, which don't seem to know what they want."

"He is too big to look like them," returned the husband. "He's more like a mad walrus. I met him on one of the old floes when I was after a seal, and he frightened it away. But it is not that that troubles me. There are two things he is after: he wants to stir up our young men to go and fight with the Fire-spouters, and he wants our Nootka for a wife."

"The dirty walrus!" exclaimed Mrs Mangivik, with as much vigour as if she had been civilised, "he shall *never* have Nootka. As for fighting with the Fire-spouters, I only hope that if he does go to do so, he will get killed and never come back."

"H'm!" grunted Mangivik, "if he does get killed he's not likely to come back."

"Who is not likely to come back?" asked a young girl, with an affectionate expression in her pretty brown eyes, issuing from the hut at that moment and seating herself close to the old

man. The girl's face, on the whole, was unusually pretty for that of an Eskimo, and would have been still more so but for the grease with which it was besmeared—for the damsel had just been having a little refreshment of white-whale blubber. Her figure was comparatively slim and graceful, and would have been obviously so but for the ill-fitting coat and clumsy boots with which it was covered.

"Your mother and I were talking of a bad man, Nootka," said Mangivik.

"Ay, a very very bad man," exclaimed Mrs Mangivik, with a decided nod of her head.

"If he is so very bad," returned Nootka, "it would be good that he should never come back. Who is it?"

"Gartok," answered her mother, with the air of one who has mentioned the most hateful thing in creation.

Nootka laughed.

"Surely you are not fond of him!" exclaimed Mangivik, regarding his daughter with a look of anxiety.

"You know that I'm not," answered the girl, playfully hitting her sire on the back with the flap of her tail.

"Of course not—of course not; you could not be fond of an ugly walrus like him," said the father, replying to her pleasantry by fondly patting her knee.

Just then a young man was seen advancing from the beach, where he had left his kayak.

"It is Oolalik," said Mrs Mangivik, shading her eyes with her

hand from the sun, which, in all the strength of its meridian splendour, was shining full on her fat face. “He must have made a good hunt, or he would not have come home before the others.”

As she spoke Nootka arose hastily and re-entered the hut, from out of which there issued almost immediately the sounds and the savoury odours of roasting flesh.

Meanwhile Oolalik came up and gave vent to a polite grunt, or some such sound, which was the Eskimo method of expressing a friendly salutation.

Mangivik and his wife grumped in reply.

“You are soon back,” said the former.

“I have left a walrus and two seals on the rocks over there,” answered the youth, sitting down beside the old man.

“Good,” returned the latter. “Come in and feed.”

He rose and entered the hut. The young man who followed him was not so much a handsome as a strapping fellow, with a quiet, sedate expression, and a manly look that rendered him attractive to most of his friends. Conversation, however, was not one of his strong points. He volunteered no remarks after seating himself opposite to Nootka, who handed him a walrus rib which she had just cooked over the oil lamp. Had Nootka been a civilised girl she might have been suspected of conveying a suggestion to the youth, for she was very fond of him, but, being an Eskimo of the Far North, she knew nothing about ribs or of Mother Eve. The young man however required no delicate suggestion, for he was equally fond of Nootka, and he

endeavoured to show his feelings by a prolonged stare after he had accepted the food.

One is irresistibly impressed with the homogeneity of the human race when one observes the curious similarities of taste and habit which obtain alike in savage and civilised man. For a few moments this youth's feelings were too much for him. He stared in admiration at the girl, apparently oblivious of the rib, and sighed profoundly. Then he suddenly recovered himself, appeared to forget the girl, and applied himself tooth and nail to the rib. Could anything be more natural—even in a European prince?

Nootka did not speak—young women seldom do among savages, at least in the company of men,—but she looked many and very unutterable things, which it is impossible, and would not be fair, to translate.

"Will the others be back soon?" asked Mangivik.

Oolalik looked over the rib and nodded. (In this last, also, there was indication of homogeneity.)

"Have they got much meat?"

Again the young man nodded.

"Good. There is nothing like meat, and plenty of it."

The old man proceeded to illustrate his belief in the sentiment by devoting himself to a steak of satisfying dimensions. His better-half meanwhile took up the conversation.

"Is Gartok with them?" she asked.

"Yes, he is with them," said the youth, who, having finished

the rib, threw away the bone and looked across the lamp at Nootka, as if asking for another. The girl had one ready, and handed it to him.

Again Oolalik was overcome. He forgot the food and stared, so that Nootka dropped her eyes, presumably in some confusion; but once more the force of hunger brought the youth round and he resumed his meal.

"Has Gartok killed much?" continued the inquisitive Mrs Mangivik.

"I know nothing about Gartok," replied the young man, a stern look taking the place of his usually kind expression; "I don't trouble my head about him when I am hunting."

He fastened his teeth somewhat savagely in the second rib at this point.

"Do you know," said Mangivik, pausing in his occupation, "that Gartok has been trying to get the young men to go to the Whale River, where you know there are plenty of birds and much wood? He wants to fight with the Fire-spouters."

"Yes, I know it. Gartok is always for fighting and quarrelling. He likes it."

"Don't you think," said the old man suggestively, "that you could give him a chance of getting what he likes without going so far from home?"

"No, I don't choose to fight for the sake of pleasing every fool who delights to brag and look fierce."

Mrs Mangivik laughed at this, and her daughter giggled, but

the old man shook his head as if he had hoped better things of the young one. He said no more, however, and before the conversation was resumed the voice of a boy was heard outside.

"Anteek," murmured Nootka, with a smile of pleasure.

"The other hunters must have arrived," said Oolalik, polishing off his last bone, "for Anteek was with them."

"He always comes first to see me when he has anything to tell," remarked Mrs Mangivik, with a laugh, "and from the noise he makes I think he has something to tell to-day."

If noise was the true index of Anteek's news he evidently was brimful, for he advanced shouting at the top of his voice. With that unaccountable ingenuity which characterises some boys, all the world over, he produced every sort of sound except that which was natural to him, and caused the surrounding cliffs to echo with the mooing of the walrus, the roaring of the polar bear, the shriek of the plover, the bellow of the musk-ox, and, in short, the varied cries of the whole Arctic menagerie. But he stopped short at the door of the hut and looked at Oolalik in evident surprise.

"You are back before me?" he said.

"That is not strange: I am stronger."

"Yes, but I started off long before you."

"So you thought, but you were mistaken. I saw you creeping away round the point. When you were out of sight I carried my kayak over the neck of land, and so got here before you."

"Have you told?" asked the boy anxiously.

"Never said a word," replied Oolalik.

"Here," said Nootka, holding out a piece of half-cooked blubber to the boy, "sit down and tell us all about it. What is the news?"

"Ha!" exclaimed Anteek, accepting the food as if he appreciated it. "Well, I've killed my first walrus—all alone too!"

"Clever boy! how was it?" said Mrs Mangivik.

"This was the way. I was out by myself—all alone, mind—among the cliffs, looking for eggs; but I had my spear with me, the big one that Cheenbuk made for me just before he went off to the Whale River. Well, just as I was going to turn round one of the cliffs, I caught sight of a walrus—a big one—monstrous; like that," he said, drawing an imaginary circle with both arms, "fat, brown, huge tusks, and wide awake! I knew that, because his back was to me, and he was turning his head about, looking at something in the other direction. I was astonished, for though they climb up on the cliffs a good height to sun themselves on the warm rocks, I had never seen one climb so high as that.

"Well, I drew back very quick, and began to creep round so as to come at him when he didn't expect me. I soon got close enough, and ran at him. He tried to flop away at first, but when I was close he turned and looked fierce—terrible fierce! My heart jumped, but it did not sink. I aimed for his heart, but just as I was close at him my foot struck a stone and I fell. He gave a frightful roar, and I rolled out of his way, and something twisted the spear out of my hand. When I jumped up, what do you think?

I found the spear had gone into one of his eyes, and that made the other one water, I suppose, for he was twisting his head about, but couldn't see me. So I caught hold of the spear, pulled it out, and plunged it into his side; but I had not reached the heart, for he turned and made for the sea.

"There was a steep place just there, and he tumbled and rolled down. I lost my foothold and rolled down too—almost into his flippers, but I caught hold of a rock. He got hold at the same time with his tusks and held on. Then I jumped up and gave him the spear again. This time I hit the life, and soon had him killed. There!"

On concluding his narrative the excited lad applied himself to his yet untasted piece of blubber, and Nootka plied him with questions, while Oolalik rose and went off to assist his comrades, whose voices could now be heard as they shouted to the women and children of the colony to come and help them to carry up the meat.

Chapter Three.
Peace or War—Which?

Soon afterwards the Mangivik family received another visitor. This was the bellicose Gartok himself, whose heart had been touched by the fair Nootka.

Like his rival, he sat down opposite the maiden, and stared at her impressively across the cooking-lamp. This would seem to be the usual mode of courtship among those children of the ice; but the girl's mode of receiving the attentions of the second lover varied considerably. She did not drop her eyes shyly under his gaze, but stared him full in the face by way of a slight rebuff. Neither did she prepare for him a savoury rib, so that he was obliged to help himself—which he did with much coolness, for the laws of hospitality in Eskimo-land admit of such conduct.

After some desultory conversation between Gartok and his host, the latter asked if it was true that there was a talk of the tribe paying a visit to Whale River.

"Yes, it is true," answered the young man. "I came to see you about that very thing, and to tell you that there is to be a meeting outside the big hut to-day. We shall want your advice."

"Why do the young men wish to go there?" asked Mangivik.

"To get food, and wood for our spear-handles and sledges, and berries, and to have a good time. Perhaps also to fight a little with

the Fire-spouters."

The youth glanced furtively at Mangivik as he concluded.

"To get food, and wood, and berries is good," observed the old man; "but why fight with the Fire-spouters? We cannot conquer them."

"You can ask that at the meeting. It is useless to ask it of me."

"Good, I will do so. For my part, I am too old to go on long expeditions, either to hunt or fight—but I can give advice. Is Cheenbuk to be at the meeting?"

"Did you not know? Cheenbuk has already gone to the Whale River. We only propose to follow him. He may not like our business, but he'll have to join us when we are there."

Having picked his rib clean, and receiving no encouragement from Nootka to remain, Gartok rose and departed.

That afternoon there was a large meeting of the heads of families in front of what was known as the big hut. There was no formality about the meeting. Unlike the war councils of the Indians, it was a sort of free-and-easy, in which blubber and other choice kinds of food did duty for the red man's pipe. The women, too, were allowed to sit around and listen—but not to speak—while the hunters discussed their plans.

Gartok, being the biggest, most forward, and presumptuous among them all, was allowed to speak first—though this was contrary to the wishes, and even the custom, of the tribe. He did not make a set speech. Indeed, no one thought of delivering an oration. It was merely a palaver on a large scale.

"We want spear-handles," said Gartok, "and wood for our kayak-frames, and deer for food, as well as birds and rabbit-skins for our underclothing."

"That is true," remarked one of the elderly men; "we want all these things, and a great many more things, but we don't want fighting. There is no use in that."

"Ho! ho!" exclaimed several voices in approval.

"But we do want fighting," retorted Gartok firmly; "we want the pretty coloured things that the Fire-spouters sew on their clothes and shoes; also the iron things they have for cutting wood; and we want the spouters, which will make us more than a match for them in war; and we can't get all these things without fighting."

"Do without them, then," observed Mangivik sharply; "why should we want things that we never had, and don't need? Listen to me, young men—for I see by your looks that some of you would like a little fighting,—even if we had the spouting things, we could not make them spout."

"That is a lie!" exclaimed Gartok, with the simple straightforwardness peculiar to the uncivilised. "Once I met one of the Fire-spouters when I was out hunting at the Whale River. He was alone, and friendly. I asked him to show me his spouter. He did so, but told me to be very careful, for sometimes it spouted of its own accord. He showed me the way to make it spout—by touching a little thing under it. There was a little bird on a bush close by. 'Point at that,' he said. I pointed. 'Now,' said he, 'look

along the spouter with one eye.' I put one end of it against my cheek and tried to look, but by accident I touched the little thing, and it spouted too soon! I never saw the little bird again; but I saw many stars, though it was broad daylight at the time."

"Ho! hoo!" exclaimed several of the younger men, who listened to this narration with intense eagerness.

"Yes," continued Gartok, who had the gift of what is called "the gab," and was fond of exercising it,—"yes; it knocked me flat on my back—"

"Was it alive, then?" asked Anteek, who mingled that day with the men as an equal, in consequence of his having slain a walrus single-handed.

"No, it was not quite, but it was very nearly alive.—Well, when I fell the man laughed. You know his people are not used to laugh. They are very grave, but this one laughed till I became angry, and I would have fought with him, but—"

"Ay," interrupted Anteek, "but you were afraid, for he had the spouter."

Before Gartok could reply Mangivik broke in.

"Boo!" he exclaimed contemptuously, "it is of no use your talking so much. I too have been to the Whale River, and have seen the fire-spouters, and I know they are *not* nearly alive. They are dead—quite dead. Moreover, they will not spout at all, and are quite useless, unless they are filled with a kind of black sand which is supplied by the white men who sell the spouters. Go to the Whale River if you will, but don't fight with any one—that

is my advice, and my hair is grey."

"It is white, old man, if you only saw it," murmured Anteek, with native disrespect. He was too good-natured, however, to let his thoughts be heard.

"Come, Oolalik," said Mangivik, "you are a stout and a wise young man, let us hear what you have got to say."

"I say," cried Oolalik, looking round with the air of a man who had much in his head, and meant to let it out, "I say that the man who fights if he can avoid it is a fool! Look back and think of the time gone away. Not many cold times have passed since our young men became puffed up—indeed, some of our old men were little better—and made a raid on the Fire-spouters of the Whale River. They met; there was a bloody fight; six of our best youths were killed, and numbers were wounded by the little things that come out of the spouters. Then they came home, and what did they bring? what had they gained? I was a boy at the time and did not understand it all; but I understood some of it. I saw the fighters returning. Some were looking very big and bold, as if they had just come from fighting and conquering a whole tribe of bears and walruses. Others came back limping. They went out young and strong men; they came back too soon old, helped along by their companions. Two were carried—they could not walk at all. Look at them now!"

Oolalik paused and directed attention to what may be called an object-lesson—two men seated on his right hand. Both, although in the prime of life, looked feeble and prematurely old

from wounds received in the fight referred to. One had been shot in the leg; the bone was broken, and that rendered him a cripple for life. The other had received a bullet in the lungs; and a constitution which was naturally magnificent had become permanently shattered.

"What do you think?" continued Oolalik. "Would not these men give much to get back their old strength and health?"

He paused again, and the men referred to nodded emphatically, as if they thought the question a very appropriate one, while some of the peacefully disposed in the assembly exclaimed "ho!" and "hoo!" in tones of approval.

"Then," continued the speaker, "I passed by some of our huts and heard sounds of bitter weeping. I went in and found it was the wives and sisters of the men whose bodies lie on the banks of the Whale River. There would be reason in fighting, if we had to defend our huts against the Fire-spouters. Self-defence is right; and every one has a good word for the brave men who defend their homes, their women, and their children. But the Fire-spouters did not want to fight, and the men who lost their lives at the fight I am speaking of, threw them away for nothing. They will never more come home to provide their families with food and clothes, or to comfort them, or to play with the children and tell them of fights with the walrus and the bear when the nights are black and long. Most of those poor women had sons or man-relations to care for them, but there was one who had no relation to hunt for her after her husband was killed—only a little

daughter to take care of her. I speak of old Uleeta, who is—"

"That is a lie!" cried Gartok, springing up and looking fierce. "Old Uleeta is, as you all know, my mother. She had *me* to hunt for her when father was killed, and she has me still."

"You!" exclaimed Oolalik, with a look of scorn, "what are you? A hunter? No, only a fool who wants to be thought very brave, and would leave his mother and sister to the care of old men and boys while he goes away to fight with the Fire-spouters! No," he continued, turning away from the angry young man with cool contempt, "old Uleeta has no son."

Gartok was so taken aback with this behaviour of Oolalik, who was recognised as one of the gentlest and most peacefully disposed of the tribe, that he stood gaping for a moment in surprise. Then, observing the half-amused, half-contemptuous looks of the men around him, he suddenly caught up the unfinished handle of a spear that leaned against the wall of the hut beside him, and made a desperate blow with it at the head of Oolalik.

But that youth had expected some such demonstration, and was prepared for it. Being very agile, he made a step swiftly to one side, and the handle came down on the skull of a walrus which hung on the wall, with a violence that would have surprised its original owner had it been within.

Before the blow could be repeated Oolalik sprang towards his assailant.

Eskimos know nothing of a blow "straight from the shoulder,"

but they know how to cuff. Oolalik brought his open hand down on Gartok's cheek with a pistol-shot crack that tumbled that fire-eater head over heels on the ground.

The man was too strong, however, to be knocked insensible in that way. He recovered himself, sitting-wise, with his mouth agape and his eyes astonied, while the whole assembly burst into a hearty fit of laughter. High above the rest was heard the juvenile voice of the delighted Anteek.

What the fire-eater thought we cannot tell, but he had the wisdom to accept his punishment in silence, and listened with apparent interest while Oolalik concluded his remarks.

The effect of this belligerent episode was to advance the cause of the peace-party considerably—at least for a time—and when the meeting broke up, most of the people returned to their various homes with a firm determination to leave the poor Fire-spouters alone.

But Gartok, who was still smarting under the disgrace to which he had been subjected at the hands of Oolalik, managed to rekindle and blow up the war-spirit, so that, two days later, a strong party of the more pugnacious among the young men of the tribe set off in their kayaks for the Whale River, taking with them a few of the women in one of their open boats or oomiaks —chiefly for the purpose of keeping their garments in repair.

Chapter Four.
War Prevails

It would seem, at times, as if there were really some sort of spiritual communication between people whose physical frames are widely sundered.

For at the very time that the Eskimos, in their remote home on the ice-encumbered sea, were informally debating the propriety of making an unprovoked attack on the Dogrib Indians—whom they facetiously styled Fire-spouters—the red men were also holding a very formal and solemn council of war as to the advisability of making an assault on those presumptuous Eskimos, or eaters-of-raw-flesh, who ventured to pay an uncalled-for visit to the Greygoose River—their ancestral property—every spring.

One of their chiefs, named Nazinred, had just returned from a visit to the river, and reported having met and fought with one of the Eskimos.

Immediately on hearing this, the old or head chief summoned the council of war. The braves assembled in the council-tent in solemn dignity, each classically enveloped in his blanket or leathern robe, and inflated, more or less, with his own importance. They sat down silently round the council fire with as much gravity as if the fate of nations depended on their

deliberations,—and so, on a small scale, it did.

After passing round the pipe—by way of brightening up their intellects—the old chief held forth his hand and began in a low voice and deliberate manner.

"My braves," said he, "those filthy eaters-of-raw-flesh have, as you know, been in the habit of coming to Greygoose River every spring and trespassing on the borders of our hunting-grounds."

He paused and looked round.

"Waugh!" exclaimed his audience, in order to satisfy him.

With a dark frown the old chief went on.

"This is wrong. It is not right. It is altogether unbearable, and more than the Dogribs can stand. They *won't* stand it!"

"Waugh!" again said the audience, for the old man had delivered the last sentence with considerable vehemence, and meant that it should tell.

Being apparently destitute of a flow of ideas at that time, the speaker had recourse to a not uncommon device among civilised orators: he cleared his throat, looked preternaturally wise, and changed the subject.

"When the sun of spring rises over the ice-hills of the great salt lake," he continued, pointing towards the Pole, "when it melts the snow, opens the lakes and rivers, and brings the summer birds to our land, the braves of the great Dogrib nation take their guns, and bows, and canoes, and women, and travel nearly as far as the icy sea, that they may hunt and feed—and—sleep, and—and—

enjoy the land. Nobody dares to stop us. Nobody dares to hinder us. Nobody dares even to look at us!"

He paused again, and this flight of oratory was received with a very decided "ho!" of assent, as it well might be, for during nearly all the year there was nobody in that uninhabited land to attempt any of those violent proceedings. Dilating his eyes and nostrils with a look of superlative wisdom, he continued:

"But at last the Eskimos dared to come and look at our hunting-grounds. We were peacefully disposed. We warned them not to come again. They came again, notwithstanding. We took our guns and swept them away like leaves that are swept by the winter winds. Are not their scalps drying in our lodges? What we did then we will do again. Has not one of our chiefs—Nazinred—been attacked by one of them? No doubt more will follow that one. My counsel is to send out a band of our braves on the war-path. But first we would like to know something. As the Eskimo did not take the scalp of Nazinred, how is it that Nazinred did not bring home the scalp of the Eskimo?"

The old chief ceased, amid many "ho's!" and "hoo's!" with the air of one who has propounded an unanswerable riddle, and all eyes were at once turned upon Nazinred. Accepting the challenge at once he stretched forth his hand:

"My father has spoken," he said, "but his words are not the words of wisdom. Why should we fight the Eskimos again, and lose some of our best young men, as we lost them in the last great fight? The Eskimos have come near our lands, but they

have not of late hunted on them. They have only looked and gone away. And even if they did hunt, what then? The land is wide. We cannot use it all. We cannot kill all the birds and deer, and even if we could we cannot eat them all. Would it not be wise to live at peace with the Eskimos? They have many great teeth of the walrus and skins of the seal. Might not the white traders, who take our furs and give us guns and powder, be willing to take these things too? Thus we could buy from the one and sell to the other, and fill our lodges with tobacco, and guns, and beads, and cloth, and powder and ball, and other good things."

The Indian stopped at this point to ascertain the effect of his remarks, but only a few faint "ho's!" greeted him. The councillors did not feel quite sure of their own minds. His remarks about peace and war were not palatable, and his suggestions about trade were a novelty. Evidently Nazinred was born much in advance of his time.

"It is true," he continued, "that I had a struggle with a young Eskimo; but he was very strong, and so was I. Before I could kill him he caught hold of my gun, but he could not force it from me, and I could not force it from him. As we strove we looked into each other's eyes and we each saw peace and good-will there! So we ceased to fight. We kindled a fire and sat down and fed together. As the light slowly increases while the sun rises, so light came into my mind. The Dogribs have always talked of the Eskimos as if they were fools. I found that this young man was not a fool—that he was wise—wiser than some of our own

braves. His mind was deep and wide. He did not talk only of food and sleep and hunting. He spoke of things past and present and future, and of the Great Spirit, and the world to come. Also of peace and war; and we both agreed that peace was good and war hateful. More than that, we found that it was foolish. Then we parted. He went, I suppose, to his people on the sea of ice, and I came home.

"He told me that none of his people were with him—that he was alone. There is therefore no occasion for the young men to look fierce or go on the war-path."

Having thus tried to throw oil on the troubled waters Nazinred came to an abrupt pause.

Instantly one of the younger councillors, named Magadar, sprang to his feet. He was unusually excitable for an Indian. Indeed, he differed a good deal from his companions in other respects, being passionate, impulsive, hasty, and matter-of-fact; in his speech-making too he scorned the use of symbol and metaphor, but went straight to the point at once in the simplest and most forcible language at his command.

"Braves," he said, looking at the previous speaker with a dark frown, "the Dogribs know nothing of those strange and stupid notions that have just come out of the lips of Nazinred. He says that this dirty Eskimo is a deep thinker and a man who loves peace. How does he know that one of that sort may not think so deeply as to deceive him? How does he know that the young man is not a liar—that many of his warriors may not be in our hunting-

grounds even at this moment, though he says there are none? As for his talk about the Great Spirit and the future, what does he know about either the one or the other? Is he wiser than the Dogribs? Does his attack on Nazinred look like a lover of peace? His leaving off when he found that Nazinred was his match seems to me more like sly wisdom than the hatred of war. My advice is not to trust these dirty men of the ice, but to take our guns at once and drive them from the land."

It was quite evident from the way in which this speech was received that the war-party was in the ascendant, and there is no doubt that Magadar's advice would have prevailed, and a war-party been organised forthwith, but for the arrival of a band of successful hunters, who had been out for some time in quest of food.

For a considerable part of that winter those Indians had been in a condition of semi-starvation. They had managed with difficulty to sustain themselves and families on rabbits, which were scarce that year. With the return of spring and the wild-fowl, however, things had begun to improve, and the hunting party above referred to was the first of the season that had returned to camp heavily laden with geese, ducks, plover, and other supplies of food, so that the half-famished people gave themselves up to feasting, and had no time to think further of war.

Thus many days were passed without any reference being made to a fight with the Eskimos, and Nazinred, believing that

the fancy to go on the war-path had passed away, set off on what was to be a long hunting expedition with three of his comrades who were like-minded with himself. Among other plans, this party intended to visit the establishment of the fur-traders on Great Bear Lake.

Thus when the belligerent party of Eskimos arrived at the mouth of Greygoose, or Whale, River, they found the place, as they had been accustomed to find it, a complete solitude.

At first they expected to overtake their comrade Cheenbuk there, but he was not found, having gone a considerable way inland in pursuit of game. Being aware of his peaceful proclivities, however, the Eskimos were not sorry to miss him, and they set about making an encampment on the shore at the mouth of the river, intending to leave the women there while they should be engaged in hunting and in searching for the Fire-spouters.

Meanwhile these Fire-spouters, having eaten and slept, and eaten and slept again, to the extent of their capacities, began to experience a revival of the war-spirit.

In front of one of the lodges or leather tents, one morning early, there sat two squaws engaged in ornamenting moccasins and discussing the news of their little world.

It was one of those bright genial mornings in spring peculiar to Arctic lands, in which Warmth comes out with a burst victorious, and Cold shrinks away discomfited. Everything looked as if a great revival of Nature were at hand—as in truth it was, for

the long Arctic winter is always driven away with a rush by the vigour, if not the violence, of the brief Arctic spring.

One of the women was young and pretty—yes, we might almost say beautiful. It is quite a mistake to suppose that all savages are coarse, rough, and ugly. Many of them, no doubt—perhaps most of them—are plain enough, but not a few of the Indian squaws are fairly good-looking, and this one, as we have said at the risk of being doubted, was beautiful; at all events she had a fine oval face, a smooth warm-coloured skin, a neat little nose, a well-formed mouth, and jet-black hair, with large lustrous eyes, to say nothing of her teeth, which, like the teeth of most Indians, were regular and brilliantly white. Her name was Adolay—that being the Indian name for Summer.

The other squaw was her mother. She was usually styled Isquay—which means woman—by her husband when he was at home, but, being a great hunter, he was not often at home. Poor Isquay might have been good-looking in her youth, but, alas! hard work, occasional starvation, and a rough life, had prematurely dissipated her beauty, whatever it might have been; yet these conditions could not put to flight the lines and dimples of kindliness which played about her weatherworn eyes and cheeks. You see, she had a gentle, indulgent husband, and that made her happy and kept her so.

"Magadar is stirring up the young men again to go on the war-path," said the younger woman, without looking up from the embroidered moccasin with which she was engaged.

"Yes, I know it. I heard him as he passed our tent talking to Alizay. I don't like Alizay; he is like gunpowder: the least thing sets him off, and he flashes up horribly."

"But many of our other braves have no desire to quarrel with the Eskimos," said Adolay; "indeed, some are even fond of them. And some of the men of the ice are very handsome. Don't you remember that one, mother, that we met when we went last spring with some of our men to shoot at the Greygoose River? He was a fine man—big and strong, and active and kind—almost good enough to be a Dogrib."

"I remember him well," returned Isquay, "for he saved my life. Have you forgotten that already?"

"No, I have not forgotten it," answered the girl, with a slight smile. "Did I not stand on the riverbank with my heart choking me when I saw the ice rushing down with the flood and closing on your canoe—for I could do nothing to help you, and none of our men were near! And did I not see the brave man of the ice, when he heard my cry, come running like the deer and jump into the river and swim like the otter till he got to you, and then he scrambled on a big bit of ice and lifted you and the canoe out of the water as if he had the strength of a moose-deer, after which he guided the ice-lump to the bank with one of your paddles! Forget it! no. I only wish the brave Eskimo was an Indian."

"I think you would be offering to be his squaw if he was," said the mother with a short laugh.

"Perhaps I would. But he's only an eater-of-raw-flesh!"

Adolay sighed as gently as if she had been a civilised girl! "But he has gone away to the great ice lake, so I suppose we shall never see him again."

"Unless," said Isquay, "he comes back this spring with his people, and our braves have a fight with them—then you would be likely to see his scalp again, if not himself."

Adolay made no reply to this; neither did she seem shocked at the suggestion. Indeed, Indian women are too much accustomed to real shocking to be much troubled with shocks of the imagination. Holding out her moccasin at arm's-length, the better to note the effect of her work, she expressed regret that her father had gone off with the hunters, for she felt sure he would have been able to allay the war-fever among the young braves if he had remained at home.

"Ay, he would easily have put down Alizay and Magadar; but the old chief can do nothing, he is growing too old. The young men don't mind him now. Besides, he is warlike as well as they."

While they were conversing thus, the young men referred to had finally decided to go on the war-path—to search for the Eskimo who had fought with their chief Nazinred, find him and kill him, and then continue the search for his companions; for they had set him down as a liar, believing that no Eskimo had the courage to visit their hunting-grounds by himself.

To resolve and to act were almost simultaneous proceedings with those energetic savages. In a very short time between twenty and thirty of them left the village in single file, armed with the

deadly gun, besides tomahawks and scalping-knives, and took their way to a neighbouring creek on the banks of which their canoes were lying.

Chapter Five.
A Rencontre and Flight

Thus it naturally came to pass that the two bands of men who had gone to the same place to meet each other met in the course of time.

There was a good deal of wandering about, however, before the actual meeting took place, for the Eskimos had to provide a quantity of food on landing on the Arctic shore, not only for themselves, but to supply the four women who had accompanied them, and were to be left on the coast to fish and mend their spare garments and boots, and await their return.

"We shall not be long of coming back," said Gartok as he was about to leave his mother, old Uleeta, who was in the crew of one of the oomiaks.

"I wish I saw you safe back, my son," returned the woman, with a shake of her head, "but I fear the Fire-spouters."

"*I* don't fear them," returned the young man boastfully, "and it does not matter much what you fear."

"He will never come back," said one of the other women when he was gone. "I know that because I feel it. There is something inside of me that always tells me when there is going to be misfortune."

The woman who thus expressed her forebodings was a mild

young creature, so gentle and inoffensive and yielding that she was known throughout her tribe by the name of Rinka, a name which was meant to imply weakness. Her weakness, however, consisted chiefly in a tendency to prefer others before herself—in which matter Christians do not need to be told that she was perhaps the strongest of all her kin.

As the weather was comparatively warm, the women contented themselves with a tent or bower of boughs for their protection. They were not long in erecting it, being well accustomed to look after themselves. In less than an hour after their men had left them they were busy with seal-steaks over the cooking-lamp, and the place was rendered somewhat home-like by several fur garments being spread on the rocks to dry.

"Yes, Gartok will get himself killed at last," said old Uleeta, drawing her finger across the frizzling steak and licking it, for her appetite was sharp-set and she was impatient, "He was always a stubborn boy."

"But he is strong, and a good fighter," remarked Rinka, as she spread a seal-skin boot over her knee with the intention of patching it.

"I wish all the other men were as strong as he is, and ready to fight," said one of the other women, giving the steak a turn.

It must not be supposed that, although the Eskimos are known to their Indian friends—or foes—as eaters-of-raw-flesh, they always prefer their food in the raw condition. They are only indifferent on the point, when the procuring of fire is difficult,

or the coldness of the weather renders it advisable to eat the flesh raw, as being more sustaining.

"I only wish that they would not fight at all," said Rinka with a sigh, as she arranged the top-knot of her hair. "It makes the men too few and the women too many, and that is not good."

The fourth woman did not express an opinion at all. She was one of those curiously, if not happily, constituted creatures, who seem to have no particular opinion on any subject, who listen to everything with a smile of placid content, who agree with everybody and object to nothing. They are a sort of comfort and relief in a world of warfare—especially to the obstinate and the positive. Her name was Cowlik.

"There is no reason why we should continue to roast our seal-meat over a lamp now," observed old Uleeta. "There is plenty of wood here. Come, we will gather sticks and make a fire."

The others agreeing to this, three of them rose and went into the bush, leaving Cowlik to watch the steaks.

Meanwhile the young men who had followed the lead of Gartok—fifteen in number—were cautiously ascending the Greygoose River, each in his kayak, armed with a throwing-spear, lance, and bow. One of their number was sent out in advance as a scout. Raventik was his name. He was chosen for the duty because of his bold, reckless nature, sharpness of vision, general intelligence, and his well-known love for excitement and danger.

"You will always keep well out of sight in advance of us,"

said Gartok to this scout, "and the first sight you get of the Fire-spouters, shove in to some quiet place, land, haul up your kayak, and creep near them through the bushes as quietly and cleverly as if you were creeping up to a bear or a walrus. Then come back and tell us what you have seen. So we will land and attack them and throw them all into the river."

"I will do my best," answered Raventik gravely.

"It is not likely," added Gartok, "that you will find them to-day, for they seldom come down as far as here, and they don't know we are coming."

The scout made no reply. Having received his orders he stepped into his kayak and paddled off into the stream, against which he made but slow progress, however, for the river happened to be considerably swollen at the time. He was also impeded at first by his comparative ignorance of river navigation. Being accustomed to the currentless waters of the ocean, he was not prepared by experience to cope with the difficulty of rushing currents. He went too far out into the stream at first, and was nearly upset. Natural intelligence, however, and the remembrance of talks to which he had listened between men of his tribe who had already visited the place, taught him to keep close in to the banks, and make as much use of eddies and backwater as possible. The double-bladed paddle hampered him somewhat, as its great length, which was no disadvantage in the open sea, prevented him from keeping as close to the banks as he desired. Despite these drawbacks, however, Raventik soon

acquired sufficient skill, and in a short time a curve in the river hid him from the flotilla which followed him.

Now it so happened that the Indians who were supposed to be a considerable distance inland were in reality not many miles from the spot where the Eskimos had held their final conference, which ended in Raventik being sent off in advance. It was natural that, accustomed as they were to all the arts of woodcraft, they should discover the presence of the scout long before he discovered them; and so in truth it turned out.

The Indians had ten birch-bark canoes, with three warriors in most of them—all armed, as we have said, with the dreaded fire-spouters and tomahawks, etcetera—for, as they were out on the war-path for the express purpose of driving the dirty Eskimos off their lands, Magadar had resolved to make sure by starting with a strong and well-equipped force.

Of course Magadar's canoe led the van; the others followed in single file, and, owing to the nature of their paddles, which were single-bladed, and could be dipped close to the sides of the canoes, they were able to creep along much nearer to the bank than was possible to the kayaks.

At a bend in the river, where a bush-covered point jutted out into a large pool, Magadar thrust his canoe in among some reeds and landed to reconnoitre. Scarcely had he raised his head above the shrubs when he caught sight of Raventik in his kayak.

To stoop and retire was the work of a few seconds. The men in the other canoes, who were watching him intently, at once

disembarked, and, at a signal from their chief, carried their light barks into the bushes and hid them there, so that the Eskimo scout would certainly have passed the place in half an hour without perceiving any sign of his foes, but for an incident which enlightened him.

Accidents will happen even in the best regulated families, whether these be composed of red men or white. Just as the last canoe was disappearing behind its leafy screen, one of the young braves, who was guilty of the unpardonable offence of carrying his gun on full-cock, chanced to touch the trigger, and the piece exploded with, in the circumstances, an appalling report, which, not satisfied with sounding in the ears of his exasperated comrades like a small cannon, went on echoing from cliff to cliff, as if in hilarious disregard of secrecy, and to the horror of innumerable rabbits and wild-fowl, which respectively dived trembling into holes or took to the wings of terror.

"Fool!" exclaimed Magadar, scarce able to refrain from tomahawking the brave in his wrath—"launch the canoes and give chase."

The order was obeyed at once, and the flotilla dashed out into the stream.

But Raventik was not to be caught so easily as they had expected. He had turned on hearing the report, and swept out into the middle of the river, so as to get the full benefit of the current. His kayak, too, with its sharp form, was of better build and material for making headway than the light Indian canoes

—propelled as it was with the long double-bladed paddle in the strong hands of one of the stoutest of the Eskimos. He shot down the stream at a rate which soon began to leave the Indians behind.

Seeing this, Magadar laid aside his paddle for a moment, raised his gun to his shoulder, and fired.

Again were the echoes and the denizens of the woods disturbed, and two other Indians fired, thus rendering confusion worse confounded. Their aims were not good, however, and Raventik was interested and surprised—though not alarmed—by the whizzing sounds that seemed close to his ears, and the little splashes in the water just ahead of him. Fortunately a bend in the river here concealed him for some time from the Indians, and when they once more came in sight of him he was almost out of range.

In the meantime his comrades, amazed by the strange sounds that burst on their ears, put hastily on shore, carried their kayaks into the bushes, and climbed to the summit of a rising ground, with the double purpose of observing the surrounding country and of making it a place of defence if need be.

"Raventik must have found our enemies," said Gartok to Ondikik, his lieutenant, as he led his men up the slope.

"That is certain," returned Ondikik, "and from the noise they are making, I think the Fire-spouters are many. But this is a good place to fight them."

"Yes, we will wait here," said Gartok.

As he spoke Raventik was seen sweeping into view from

behind a point in the middle of the most rapid part of the river, and plying his long paddle with the intense energy of one whose life depends on his exertions. The Eskimos on the knoll gazed in breathless anxiety. A few minutes later the canoe of Magadar swept into view.

"The Fire-spouters!" exclaimed Ondikik.

"Three men in it!" cried Gartok. Then, as one after another of the canoes came into view, "Four! six! ten of them, and three men in each!"

"And all with fire-spouters!" gasped the lieutenant.

"Come," exclaimed Gartok, "it is time for us to go!"

The Eskimos were by no means cowardly, but when they saw that the approaching foe was double their number, and reflected that there might be more behind them, all armed with guns, it was no wonder that they bethought themselves of retreat. To do them full credit, they did not move until their leader gave the word—then they sprang down the hillock, and in three minutes more were out in their kayaks making for the mouth of the river at their utmost speed.

On seeing this the Indians uttered a wild war-whoop and fired a volley. But the distance between them was too great. Only a few of the balls reached the fugitives, and went skipping over the water, each wide of its mark.

"Point high," said Magadar to Alizay, who had just re-charged his gun.

The Indian obeyed, fired, and watched for the result, but no

visible result followed.

"That is strange," muttered the chief; "my brother must have pointed too high—so high that it has gone into the sun, for I never yet saw a bullet fired over water without coming down and making a splash."

"It may have hit a canoe," said Alizay. "I will try again."

The second shot was, to all appearance, not more effective than the first.

"Perhaps my brother forgot to put in the balls."

"Is Alizay a squaw?" asked the insulted brave angrily.

Magadar thought it wise to make no answer to this question, and in a few seconds more the kayaks doubled round a point that jutted into the stream and were hid from view.

But the two bullets had not missed their billets. One—the first fired—had dropped into Gartok's canoe and buried itself in his left thigh. With the stoicism of a bold hunter, however, he uttered no cry, but continued to wield his paddle as well as he could. The other ball had pierced the back of his lieutenant Ondikik. He also, with the courage of a savage warrior, gave no sign at first that he was wounded.

At this point, where the Eskimos were for a time sheltered by the formation of the land, the Greygoose River had a double or horse-shoe bend; and the Indians, who knew the lie of the land well, thought it better to put ashore and run quickly over a neck of land in the hope of heading the kayaks before they reached the sea. Acting on this belief they thrust their canoes in among

the reeds, and, leaping on shore, darted into the bushes.

The Eskimos, meanwhile, knowing that they could beat the Indians at paddling, and that the next bend in the stream would reveal to them a view of the open sea, kept driving ahead with all the force of their stout arms. They also knew that the firing would have alarmed their women and induced them to embark in their oomiak, push off to sea, and await them.

And this would have turned out as they had expected, but for an unforeseen event which delayed the women in their operations until too late—at least for one of the party.

Chapter Six.
A Surprise, a Struggle, and a Capture

When the Eskimo women, as before related, made up their minds to discard the cooking-lamp and indulge in the luxury of a wood fire, they sent one of their number into the bush to gather sticks. The one selected for this duty was Rinka, she being active and willing, besides being intelligent, which last was a matter of importance in one totally unaccustomed to traversing the pathless woods.

The girl obeyed orders at once, and soon had collected a large armful of dried branches, with which she prepared to return to the encampment. But when she looked up at the small trees by which she was surrounded, she felt considerably puzzled as to the direction in which she ought to walk. Of course, remembering that her back had been toward the sea when she set out, nothing seemed simpler than to turn round with her face towards it and proceed. But she had not done this for many minutes, when it occurred to her that she must have turned about more or less, several times, during her outward journey. This brought her to an abrupt halt. She looked up and around several times, and then, feeling quite sure that the shore must lie in a certain direction pointed out by Hope, set off in that direction at a good round pace. As the wood seemed to get thicker, however, she

concluded that she was wrong, and changed direction again. Still the undergrowth became more dense, and then, suddenly coming to the conclusion that she was lost, she stood stock-still and dropped her bundle of sticks in dismay.

For a few moments she was stunned, as if her position were unbelievable. Then she became horrified and shouted to her companions, but her feeble, unassertive voice was unable to travel far, and drew forth no response. Indeed, she had wandered so far into the forest that, even if possessed of a man's voice, she might have failed to attract the attention of the women. Then the sound of distant firing began to salute her ears, and in an agony of anxiety she ran hither and thither almost blindly.

But there were other ears besides those of Rinka which were startled by the guns.

Sitting under a tree—all ignorant of the presence of his brethren or of the warlike Indians—Cheenbuk was regaling himself on the carcass of a fat willow-grouse which he had speared a little before the firing began.

Our Eskimo was making for the coast where he had left his kayak, and had halted for a feed. The sport in the woods, after its novelty wore off, had lost interest for one whose natural game, so to speak, was bears and walruses, and he was on his way back when this rattle of musketry arrested him.

The sudden eruption of it was not more puzzling to him than its abrupt cessation. Could it be that some of his tribe had followed him to the river and fallen in with the men of the woods?

He thought it not unlikely, and that, if so, his assistance, either as fighter or peacemaker, might be required.

Bolting the remainder of the willow-grouse precipitately, he jumped up, grasped his weapons, and made for the coast, as near as he could guess, in the direction of the firing.

It happened, at the same time, that one of the young Indians, who was on his first war-path, and thirsted for scalps as well as distinction, chanced to keep a more easterly direction than his fellows, when they took to the bush, as already related. This man, coming to an open glade whence he could see the shore, beheld the Eskimo women launching their oomiak in a state of frantic alarm. They were also signalling or beckoning eagerly as if to some one in the woods. Casting a hurried glance to his right, he observed poor Rinka, who had just got clear of the forest, and was running towards her companions as fast as her short legs could carry her.

Without a moment's hesitation, he took aim at her and fired. The poor girl uttered a loud shriek, threw up her arms, and fell to the ground. It chanced that Cheenbuk was within a hundred yards of the spot at the moment, but the bushes prevented his seeing what had occurred. The report, however, followed by the woman's shriek, was a sufficient spur to him. Darting forward at full speed, he quickly cleared the underwood and came suddenly in view of a sight that caused every nerve in his body to tingle—Rinka prostrate on the ground with blood covering her face and hands, and the young Indian standing over her about to operate

with the scalping-knife.

The howl of concentrated rage and horror uttered by Cheenbuk instantly checked the savage, and made him turn in self-defence. He had run to finish his horrible work, and secure the usual trophy of war without taking time to re-load his gun, and was thus almost unarmed. Grasping his powder-horn he attempted to rectify this error—which would never have been committed by an experienced warrior,—but before he could accomplish half the operation, the well-aimed spear of Cheenbuk went whistling through the air, and entering his chest came out at his back. He fell dead almost without a groan.

Cheenbuk did not stop to finish the work by stabbing or scalping, but he kneeled beside the wounded girl and gently raised her.

"Rinka," he said, softly, while he undid her jacket and sought for the wound, "is it bad? Has he killed you?"

"I feel that I am dying. There is something here." She laid her hand upon her side, from a small wound in which blood was issuing freely.

The heart of the man was at once torn by tender pity and bitter indignation, when he thought of the gentle nature of the poor creature who had been thus laid low, and of the savage cruelty of the Indian who had done it—feelings which were not a little complicated by the reflection that the war-spirit—that is, the desire to kill for mere self-glorification—among some of his own people had probably been the cause of it all.

"It is useless. I am dying," gasped the girl, drawing her bloody hand across her forehead. "But don't leave me to fall into the hands of these men. Take me home and let me die beside my mother."

She was yet speaking when old Uleeta and her companions came forward. Seeing that no other Indian appeared, and that the one who had shot Rinka was dead, they had quelled their alarm and come to see what had occurred. Cheenbuk, after stanching the flow of blood, availed himself of their aid to carry the wounded girl to the oomiak more comfortably than could have been possible if he had been obliged to carry her in his own strong arms.

With much care they placed her in the bottom of the boat, then the women got in, and Cheenbuk was about to follow, when the report of a gun was heard, and a bullet whizzed close past old Uleeta's head—so close, indeed, that it cut off some of her grey hair. But the old creature was by no means frightened.

"Quick, jump in!" she cried, beginning to push off with her paddle.

Cheenbuk was on the point of accepting the invitation, but a thought intervened—and thought is swifter than the lightning-flash. He knew from slight, but sufficient, experience that the spouters could send only one messenger of death at a time, and that before another could be spouted, some sort of manipulation which took time was needful. If the Indian should get the manipulation over before the oomiak was out of range, any of

the women, as well as himself, might be killed.

"No," he cried, giving the boat a mighty shove that sent it out to sea like an arrow, "be off!—paddle!—for life! I will stop him!"

Old Uleeta did not hesitate. She was accustomed to obedience—even when there were no fire-spouters astern. She bent to her paddle with Arctic skill and vigour. So did her mates, and the oomiak darted from the shore while the Indian who had fired the shot was still agonising with his ramrod—for, happily, breech-loaders were as yet unknown.

Cheenbuk was quite alive to his danger. He rushed up the beach towards his foe with a roar and an expression of countenance that did not facilitate loading. Having left his spear in the body of the first Indian, he was unarmed, but that did not matter much to one who felt in his chest and arms the strength of Hercules and Samson rolled into one. So close was he to the Indian when the operation of priming was reached, that the man of the woods merely gave the stock of his gun a slap in the desperate hope that it would prime itself.

This hope, in the artillery used there at that time, was not often a vain hope. Indeed, after prolonged use, the "trade gun" of the "Nor'-west" got into the habit of priming itself—owing to the enlarged nature of the touch-hole—also of expending not a little of its force sidewise. The consequence was that the charge ignited when the trigger was pulled, and the echoes of the cliffs were once more awakened; but happily the Eskimo had closed in time.

Grasping the barrel he turned the muzzle aside, and the ball that was meant for his heart went skipping out to sea, to the no small surprise of the women in the oomiak.

And now, for the second time since he had landed on those shores, was Cheenbuk engaged in the hated work of a hand-to-hand conflict with a foe!

But the conditions were very different, for Alizay was no match for the powerful Eskimo—in physique at least, though doubtless he was not much, if at all, behind him in courage.

Cheenbuk felt this the moment they joined issue, and on the instant an irresistible sensation of mercy overwhelmed him. Holding the gun with his right hand, and keeping its muzzle well to one side, for he did not feel quite certain as to its spouting capacities, he grasped the Indian's throat with his left. Quick as lightning Alizay, with his free hand, drew his scalping-knife and struck at the Eskimo's shoulder, but not less quick was Cheenbuk in releasing the throat and catching the Indian's wrist with a grip that rendered it powerless.

For a minute the Eskimo remained motionless, considering how best to render his adversary insensible without killing him.

That minute cost him dear. Five of Alizay's comrades, led by Magadar, came upon the scene, and, as it happened, Cheenbuk's back chanced to be towards them. They did not dare to fire, for fear of hitting their comrade, but they rushed unitedly forward with tomahawk and scalping-knife ready.

"Take him alive," said Magadar.

Cheenbuk heard the voice. He disposed of poor Alizay by hurling him away as if he had been a child, and was in the act of facing round when Magadar threw his arms round his body and held him. To be seized thus from behind is to most men a serious difficulty, but our Eskimo made short work of his assailant. He bent forward with his head to the ground so violently that the Indian was flung completely over him, and fell flat on his back, in which position he remained motionless. But it was impossible for Cheenbuk to cope with the other four Indians, who flung themselves on him simultaneously, and seized him by arms, legs, and throat.

Of course they could have brained or stabbed him easily, but, remembering their chief's order to take the man alive, they sought to quell him by sheer force. Stout and sinewy though the four braves were, they had their hands full during a good many minutes, for the Eskimo's muscles were tougher and harder than india-rubber; his sinews resembled whip-cord, and his bones bars of iron. So completely was he overwhelmed by the men who held him down, that little or nothing of him could be seen, yet ever and anon, as he struggled, the four men seemed to be heaved upward by a small earthquake.

Alizay, who had risen, stood looking calmly on, but rendered no assistance, first, because there was no room for him to act, and second, because his left wrist had been almost broken by the violence of the throw that he had received. As for Magadar, he was only beginning to recover consciousness, and to wonder

where he was!

Suddenly Cheenbuk ceased to strive. He was a crafty Eskimo, and a thought had occurred to him. He would sham exhaustion, and, when his foes relaxed their grip, would burst away from them. He knew it was a forlorn hope, for he was well aware that, even if he should succeed in getting away, the spouters would send messengers to arrest him before he had run far. But Cheenbuk was just the man for a forlorn hope. He rose to difficulties and dangers as trouts to flies on a warm day. The Indians, however, were much too experienced warriors to be caught in that way. They eased off their grip with great caution. Moreover Magadar, having risen, and seeing how things were going, took off his belt and made a running noose of it. He passed the loop deftly round Cheenbuk's legs and drew it tight, while the others were still trying vainly to compress his bull-neck.

The moment that Cheenbuk felt the noose tighten on his legs he knew that it was all over with him. To run or fight with his legs tied would be impossible, so, like a true philosopher, he submitted to the inevitable and gave in. His captors, however, did not deem it wise or safe to relax their hold until they had swathed his body with deerskin thongs; then they removed the belt from his legs and assisted him to rise.

It is not the custom of Indians to indulge in much conversation with vanquished foes. They usually confine their attentions to scowling, torturing, and ultimately to killing and scalping them. The Dogribs who had captured Cheenbuk could not speak the

Eskimo tongue, and being unaware of his linguistic powers, did not think it possible to speak to him, but one of their number stood by him on guard while the others dug a grave and buried the Indian whom he had slain.

We have already made reference to our young Eskimo's unusually advanced views in regard to several matters that do not often—as far as we know—exercise the aboriginal mind. While he stood there watching the Indians, as they silently toiled at the grave, his thoughts ran somewhat in the following groove:—

"Poor man! Sorry I killed him, but if I had not he would have killed me—and then, perhaps, some of the women, for they had not got far away, and I don't know how far the spouter can send its little arrows. I wonder if they *are* little. They must be surely, for I've never seen one. Hoi! hoi! what fools men are to kill one another! How much better to let each other alone! I have killed *him*, poor man! and they will kill me. What then? The ice and snow will come and go all the same. No one will be the better for it when we are gone. Some will surely be the worse. Some wife or mother may have to rub her eyes for him. No one will care much for *me*. But the walrus and the seal-hunt will not be so big when I am gone. I wonder if the Maker of all cares for these things! He must—else he would not have made us and put us here! Did he make us to fight each other? Surely not. Even I would not shape my spear to destroy my kayak—and he must be wiser than me. Yet he never speaks or shows himself. If I had a little child, would I treat it so? No—I must be wrong, and

he must be right. Speech is not always with the tongue. Now it comes to my mind that we speak with the eyes when we look fierce or pleased. Perhaps he whispers to me inside, sometimes, and I have not yet learned to understand him."

Cheenbuk had now dropped into one of his frequent reveries, or trains of thought, in which he was apt to forget all that was going on around him, and he did not waken from it until, the burial being concluded, one of the Indians touched him on the shoulder and pointed to Magadar, who had shouldered his gun and was entering the bushes.

Understanding this to be a command to follow, he stepped out at once. The others fell into line behind him, and thus, bound and a captive, our Eskimo turned his back finally—as he believed—on what we may style his native home—the great, mysterious northern sea.

Chapter Seven.
Flight and Misfortune

While the scene we have described was being enacted, the other Indians, who had crossed the neck of land for the purpose of cutting off the men in the kayaks, failed in the attempt, partly owing to the distance being greater than their memories had assigned to it, and partly to the great speed of the kayaks when propelled by strong men fleeing for their lives.

All the kayaks were well out of gunshot range when the shore was reached, except one which lagged behind. At this one the Indians discharged several volleys, but without effect, and soon after, it also was beyond range.

The little vessel which thus lagged behind belonged to the unfortunate Gartok, whose leg, it will be remembered, was wounded by one of the balls discharged by Alizay. Despite his energy, and desperate though the situation was, Gartok could not overcome the depressing influence of pain and haemorrhage. He fell gradually behind the others, each of whom was too anxious about his own safety to think much of his comrades.

When the firing ceased and the flotilla was well out of range, Gartok laid down his paddle and bound up his wounded limb with some scraps of seal-skin; at the same time, hailing the kayak nearest to him. As soon as it was discovered that their chief was

wounded, all the Eskimos came clustering round him. Among them was his lieutenant Ondikik.

"You also are wounded," said Gartok, observing the pallor of his face.

"Yes; I can find no arrow, but there is blood."

"Is it bad?" asked the chief, with an angry exclamation at their misfortune.

"I cannot tell," replied Ondikik, "but—"

He finished the sentence in the most expressive manner by fainting dead away, and falling over to one side so heavily that he would have infallibly upset the little craft if his comrades had not been close at hand to prevent that catastrophe.

"Hail the oomiak!" cried Gartok, in a voice that, for him, felt singularly feeble. "Put him into it, and let two of the women change with two of the men."

In a few minutes the women's large open boat was alongside, and poor Ondikik was, with some difficulty, transferred to it. Two men then gave up their kayaks to two of the women, and took their places in the oomiak. While this was being done some of the people gave a shout of alarm, for it was observed that Gartok himself had quietly fallen back in a state of insensibility.

The men, therefore, lifted him also out of his kayak and laid him beside his lieutenant.

This accomplished, the little fleet paddled out to sea, and they soon lost sight of the Arctic shore. They did not again pause until they reached a group of small islets, on one of which they

encamped for the night.

Fortunately the weather at this time was calm and warm, so that those hardy inhabitants of the icy north required no better lodging or bed than the cold ground, with the star-spangled sky for curtains. With lamps flaring, seal-steaks and wild-fowl simmering, and hot oil flowing, they quickly made themselves comfortable—with the exception, of course, of the warlike Gartok and the hot-headed Ondikik. These two, being fellow-sufferers, were laid beside each other, in order, perhaps, to facilitate mutual condolence. To do them justice, they did not grumble much at their fate, but entertained each other with a running commentary on the events of the day.

"And that is strange news that my old mother tells me," resumed Gartok, after a short pause in the conversation. "Cheenbuk must have given the Fire-spouters sore heads from the way he gripped them."

"I wish I had been there," growled Ondikik.

"I'm glad I was *not* there," returned Gartok. "I could not have saved him from so many, and it would not have been pleasant to go into slavery—if not to torture and death. Poor Cheenbuk! he was ever against war—yet war has been forced on him. I fear we shall never see him again. Hoi! my leg is bad. I can't understand how the Fire-spouters could hit it without the little thing going through my back first."

"I wish all the Fire-spouters were deep in the inside of a whale's belly," growled Ondikik, whose wound was beginning to

render him feverish and rusty. “Arrows and spears can be pulled out, but when the little spouter things go in we don’t know where they go to. They disappear and leave an ugly hole behind them.”

At this point Raventik, on whom the command had devolved, came forward with a choice piece of juicy walrus blubber on a flat stone for a plate.

“Our chiefs will eat,” he said, “it will do them good—make their hearts strong and ease the wounds.”

“No,” said Gartok decisively, “none for me.”

“Take it away!” cried the other sharply.

“No?” exclaimed Raventik in surprise. You see, he had never in his life been wounded or ill, and could not understand the possibility of refusing food, except when too full of it. Being a sympathetic soul, however, he pressed it on the invalids, but received replies so very discouraging that he was induced to forbear.

Old Uleeta turned out to be a more intelligent, it not more kindly, nurse. After she had eaten her supper and succeeded in bolting the last bite that had refused to go down when she could eat no more, she came forward with a bladder full of water, and some rabbit-skins, for the purpose of dressing the wounds.

“Gently, mother,” said Gartok with a suppressed groan, “you lay hold of me as if I were a seal.”

“You are quite as self-willed, my son,” replied the old woman. “If you had not gone out to fight you would not have come back with a hole in your leg.”

"If I had not come into the world I should not have been here to trouble you, mother."

"There's truth in that, my son," returned the woman, as if the idea were new to her.

At this Ondikik groaned—whether at the contemptibly obvious character of the idea, or at ideas in general, or in consequence of pain, we cannot tell.

"You said, mother, that Cheenbuk gave them a good deal of trouble?"

"Ay, he gave them sore hearts and sore bodies."

"They deserved it! what right had they to come with their fire-spouters to attack us?"

"What right had you to go without your fire-spouters to attack *them*?" demanded old Uleeta, somewhat maliciously.

Gartok, who was destitute neither of intelligence nor of humour, laughed, but the laugh slid into a most emphatic "hoi!" as his mother gave the leg a wrench.

"Softly, mother, softly! Treat me as you did when I was so big," he exclaimed, indicating about one foot six between his hands.

The old woman chuckled, or rather "hee! hee'd!" a little and continued:

"Yes, Cheenbuk fought like a bear. We could not see him, for they were all on top of him at once, but hi! how he made them heave! I wonder they did not use their knives."

"They felt sure they had him," said her son, "they wanted

to drive him to their huts and kill him slowly to amuse their women."

This was such a horrible idea that the old woman became unusually grave.

"These Fire-spouters are worse than white bears," she said, "for these never torture other beasts, though they often kill them."

"True, mother. Now I wish you would go away and leave my leg alone. Ondikik there needs your help. Go to him and hurt him as much as you please. I won't grumble."

"You were always a thankless boy—ever since you could speak," replied the dame, reproachfully.

"Did you ever hear of any one being thankless before he could speak?—hoi! mother, you've tied it too tight. Slack it a little."

After complying with her son's request, old Uleeta went to Ondikik, to whom, however, she could render but little service, owing to the nature of his wound. Then she paid a visit to Rinka, whose injuries, however, proved to be more alarming than severe; after which she joined the rest of the tribe at supper.

While the Eskimos were thus proceeding to their home among the islands of the Arctic sea, the captors of Cheenbuk were paddling up-stream to the lands of the Dogrib Indians.

At first the stout Eskimo meditated an attempt to escape. Indeed he made one vigorous effort when they were leading him through the bush with his hands tied behind him. Just as they came to the place where the canoes were lying, the thought of

home, and of his probable fate as a prisoner, pressed so heavily on him that he suddenly became furious, tripped up the man beside him with his foot, kicked over the one behind him with his heel, ran his head like a battering-ram into the back of the man in front of him, and then strove to burst his bonds with a succession of mighty wriggles, but, not being quite equal to Samson, he failed, and on seeing that two savages stood over him with drawn scalping-knives, while Magadar put the muzzle of a gun to his head, he deemed it wise to give in and uttered the exclamation "hoi!" with the air of one who feels that his game is played out. He marched forward after that in submissive silence.

On reaching the canoes, however, a fresh burst of indignation assailed him, and for a moment he meditated sending his foot through the bottom of the frail craft which was to carry him into exile, but on second thoughts he decided to delay the performance of that violent measure till they were well out in the middle of the current, when there would be the chance of drowning some of his foes as well as himself. By the time the desired position was reached, however, his spirit had calmed down a little and his philosophic mind—to say nothing of his heart—had begun to suggest the uselessness of gratifying his feelings by a revenge which he probably could not enjoy much while in the process of drowning, and, doubtless, could not enjoy at all after he was drowned.

Thus it came to pass that our hero restrained his passions, and, in process of time, found himself a prisoner in one of the lodges

of the Dogrib Indians.

Chapter Eight.
In the Hour of Need

On reaching the Indian village Cheenbuk was firmly bound to a tree a little way outside the camp, and left there to his meditations, while his captors went to the old chief's tent to hold a council.

Meanwhile the women and children went to look at the captive. Among them were Adolay and her mother. The moment the former set eyes on Cheenbuk she recognised him as the youth who had rescued her mother from drowning the previous year.

"Mother," she whispered, drawing her parent aside, "that is him! Don't you remember him?"

"I think it is," returned Isquay, gazing steadily at the Eskimo, who looked at the crowd which surrounded him with a gaze of supreme contempt, though he did not by any means feel contemptuous.

"Come, mother," said Adolay, with sudden earnestness, "he has not recognised us in the crowd. I must go and find out what the braves are palavering."

As she spoke she drew her mother towards their own lodge, and there left her while she hurried on to the council-tent. In the shelter of some bushes she crept as near to it as possible.

There was no difficulty in making out what was said, for the

warriors made no secret of their intentions, and spoke in loud tones.

"He shall die," was the remark of Alizay just as the girl came within hearing, "he has killed one of our braves."

"Ay, and he shall die by torture," said Magadar, who was a relation of the man that had been slain.

"Ho! ho!" exclaimed most of the warriors in tones of approval, but there were a few among them who were silent. They leaned to mercy's side.

"Better to spare his life and make a slave of him," said one of these, "we can keep him always tied like a bad dog till we need him; then we can loose his legs and make him drag our sledges."

"The brave who has spoken is young," said the old chief. "He does not know much about men. Will not the Eskimo watch for his chance, get free from his bonds, kill some of us when we are off our guard, and, perhaps, escape?"

"That is so. He must be killed," remarked Magadar, with a glance of scorn at the merciful youth, "and the sooner the better."

"Let us do it at once," said one of the blood-thirsty.

On hearing this the heart of Adolay beat anxiously, and for a few moments she was undecided whether to run to the tree to which the Eskimo was bound and set him free by cutting his bonds, or enter the council-tent, tell the story of his having saved her mother's life, and plead that the youth's might be spared. Both courses, she knew, were about equally desperate. If she were to follow the first, all the children would see her do it, and

give the alarm, in which case the Eskimo would be pursued and certainly recaptured, for a fugitive in a strange country would have no chance with men well acquainted with every nook and corner of their native land. Besides which, she knew not what terrible punishment might be inflicted on herself for making such an attempt. On the other hand, for a woman to violate the sanctity of a council-tent was so unprecedented that she felt sure it would be sternly resented, and, therefore, useless.

Fortunately she was saved the necessity of acting on either alternative by the arguments of the next speaker, who was one of the blood-thirsty braves.

"Let us not be in haste like women and children," he said; "if we leave him bound to the tree all night he will have time to think of the fate that is coming, and we shall have good sunlight in the morning, which will enable even the oldest squaw to see well."

After some palaver it was agreed that the execution of Cheenbuk should be postponed to the following day, and that a sentinel should be posted beside him during the night to make sure that he did not manage to undo his fastenings and escape.

On hearing this decision arrived at, Adolay crept back into the bush and hastened to her mother's tent.

"They have fixed to kill him, mother," she exclaimed, anxiously, on entering.

"I expected that, and I'm sorry," returned Isquay, "but we cannot help it. What can women do? The men will not mind what I say. If only Nazinred was here they would listen to *him*, but—"

"Yes, they always listen to father," interrupted the girl, with an anxious frown on her pretty brows, "but as father is not here you must do what you can for the man."

"You are very fond of him!" said the squaw with a keen look at her daughter.

"Yes, I am very fond of him," replied Adolay with an air of unblushing candour, "and I think, mother, that you should be fond of him too."

"So I am, girl, so I am, but what can I do?"

"You can go and tell the story to the old chief. He is not hard, like some of the young men. Perhaps he may help us."

Isquay shook her head, but nevertheless agreed to try her influence with the old man, and went out for that purpose.

Meanwhile Adolay, who had not herself much faith in her mother's advocacy of the poor Eskimo's cause, resolved upon a separate course of action. Throwing a blanket over her head and shoulders, she started for the place where Cheenbuk stood, scornfully regarding the little boys who surrounded and insulted him by flourishing knives and hatchets close to his defenceless nose. They did not, however, dare to touch him, as the time had not yet arrived for actual torture.

Running forward, Adolay, who was a favourite with the young people, drove them back.

"Keep clear of him," she cried with a fierce glare in her eyes —which was wonderfully realistic, considering that it was a mere piece of acting—"I want to speak to him—to terrify him—to fill

him with horror!"

This was quite to the taste of the wretched little creatures, who fell back in a semi-circle and waited for more.

"Can you understand my speech?" she demanded as she turned on Cheenbuk with flashing eyes.

The Eskimo thought he had never seen such magnificent eyes before, and wished much that they would look on him more kindly.

"Yes," he replied, "I understand a little."

"Listen, then," cried Adolay in a loud tone, and with looks more furious than before. "You are to die to-morrow."

"I expected it would be to-night," replied Cheenbuk calmly.

"And you are to be tortured to death!" At this the boys set up a howl of delight. At the same time the girl advanced a step nearer the captive, and said in a low voice hurriedly:

"I will save you. Be ready to act—to-night." The softened look and altered tone opened the eyes of the captive. Although the blanket partially concealed Adolay's face, Cheenbuk at once recognised the girl whose mother he had saved the previous spring.

"I am awake!" he said quietly, but with a glance of bright intelligence.

"Yes, you are doomed to die," continued Adolay, when the boys' howling had subsided, "and if you are to be tortured, we will all come to see how brave you are."

As she said this she went close up to the captive, as if to make

her words more emphatic, and shook her little fist in his face. Then—in a low voice—"You see the cliff behind me, with the dead tree below it?"

"Yes."

"Run for that tree when you are free—and *wait*."

Turning round, as though her rage was satisfied for the time being, Adolay left the spot with a dark frown on her face.

"Leave him now, boys," she said in passing. "Give him time to think about to-morrow."

Whether it was the effect of this advice, or the fact that the shades of evening were falling, and a feeding-time was at hand, we cannot say, but in a short time Cheenbuk was left to his meditations. He was, however, quite within sight of several of the lodges. As the daylight gradually faded a young brave left his tent, and, shouldering his gun, went to the place where the captive was bound. Examining the bonds to make sure that they were secure, the youth carefully renewed the priming of his weapon, shouldered it, and began to pace to and fro. His mode of proceeding was to walk up to the captive, take a look at him, turn round, and walk about thirty or forty yards away from him, and so on to and fro without halt or variation for upwards of two hours. During all that time he uttered no word to the Eskimo.

Cheenbuk, on his part, took no notice whatever of his guard, but stood perfectly still and looked with calm, lofty indifference over his head—which he was well able to do, being a considerably taller man.

As the night advanced the darkness deepened, and the poor captive began to entertain serious misgivings as to his prospects. Would the girl try to carry out the plan, whatever it was? Yes, he had not the slightest doubt on that head, because, somehow, she had inspired him with a confidence that he had never felt in woman before. But would she be able to carry out her plan? That was quite another question. Then, the darkness had become so intense that he could barely see the outline of the cliff towards which he was to run, and could not see the dead tree at all. Moreover, it occurred to him that it would be impossible even to walk, much less to run, over unknown and perhaps rough ground in darkness so great that he could hardly see the trees around him; and could only make out the whites of the sentinel's eyes when he came close up.

It was therefore with a feeling of relief that he at length observed a faint glow of light in the sky, which indicated the rising of the moon.

Soon afterwards a dark figure was seen approaching. It was Alizay, the blood-thirsty brave, who had come to relieve guard.

Chapter Nine.
Trying Moments and Perplexing Doubts

The first thing that the new sentinel did was carefully to examine the cords that bound the captive to the tree, and tie one or two additional knots to make him more secure. Then he turned to the other Indian, and asked sharply:—

"Has he been quiet?"

"Quiet as the tree to which he is bound."

"Has he uttered speech?"

"No."

"Good. You may go. I will watch him till morning: after that he will need no more watching."

Alizay looked sharply at the Eskimo while he uttered these words, perhaps to ascertain whether he understood their drift, but Cheenbuk's visage was immovable, and his eyes were fixed, as if in meditation, on the moon, which just then was beginning to rise over the cliffs and shed a softened light over the Indian village.

The new sentinel shouldered his gun and began his vigil, while the other left them.

But other ears had listened to the concluding words of Alizay.

The tree to which the Eskimo was bound stood close to the

edge of the bush, or underwood. In front of it was an open space, up and down which the sentinel marched. Had the Indian dreamed of a traitor in the camp he would not have deemed the captive's position as secure as it should be, but the idea of any one in the village favouring a contemptible eater-of-raw-flesh never once entered his imagination.

Nevertheless, Adolay was in the bush behind the tree, and not only heard his words, but saw his movements. Watching her opportunity when the sentinel had just turned and was marching away from the tree, she cut, with a scalping-knife, the cord that bound Cheenbuk's right arm and placed the knife in his hand. Almost at the same moment she slipped back into the bush.

Cheenbuk made no attempt, however, to free himself. The sentinel's beat was too short to permit of his doing so without being observed. He therefore remained perfectly motionless in his former attitude.

It was a trying moment when the Indian approached to within a couple of feet and looked him straight in the face, as was his wont at each turn. But Cheenbuk was gifted with nerves of steel. His contemplation of the moon was so absorbing, that a civilised observer might have mistaken him for an astronomer or a lunatic. Alizay suspected nothing. He turned round, and the Eskimo allowed him to take about five paces before he moved. Then, with the speed of lightning, he ran the sharp blade down his side, severing all his bonds at one sweep.

Next moment he was free, but he instantly resumed his former

position and attitude until his guard was within a yard of him. Then he sprang upon him, dropped the knife and seized him by the throat with both hands, so tightly that he was quite incapable of uttering a cry.

Alizay made a vigorous struggle for life, but he had no chance with the burly Eskimo, who quickly decided the fight by giving his adversary a blow with his fist that laid him insensible on the ground.

Springing over his prostrate form he ran straight for the cliff that Adolay had pointed out to him, leaping over fallen trees, and across what looked like young chasms, in a state of reckless uncertainty as to whether he would plunge into ponds or land at the bottom of precipices. With a feeling of absolute confidence that the girl with the lustrous eyes would not have told him to run where the feat was impossible, he held on until he reached the bottom of the cliff and stood beside the dead tree unhurt, though considerably winded.

There he resolved to wait according to orders. To most ordinary men, waiting, when they are filled with anxiety, is much more trying than energetic action. But Cheenbuk was not an ordinary man, therefore he waited like a hero.

Meanwhile Adolay, having seen the Eskimo fairly in grips with the sentinel, ran swiftly back towards the village, intending, before going to Cheenbuk at the cliff, to let her mother know what she had done, and what she still purposed to do—namely to embark with the Eskimo in a birch-bark canoe, guide him across

the small lake that lay near the village, and show him the rivulet that would lead him into the Greygoose River. But she had not gone far, when, on turning a bush, she almost ran into the arms of a young Indian girl named Idazoo, an event which upset all her plans and perplexed her not a little—all the more that this girl was jealous of her, believing that she was trying to steal from her the affections of Alizay, whom she regarded as her own young man!

"Why run you so fast?" asked the girl, as Adolay stood panting before her. "Have you seen a bad spirit?"

"Yes, I have seen a bad spirit," answered Adolay, (thinking of Alizay), "I have seen two bad spirits," she added, (thinking of Idazoo). "But I cannot stop to tell you. I have to—to—go to see —something very strange to-night."

Now it must be told that Idazoo was gifted with a very large bump of curiosity, and a still larger one, perhaps, of suspicion. The brave Alizay, she knew, was to mount guard over the Eskimo captive that night, and she had a suspicion that Adolay had taken advantage of that fact to pay the captive—not the Indian, oh dear no!—a visit. Unable to rest quietly in her tent under the powerful influence of this idea, she resolved to take a walk herself—a sort of moonlight ramble as it were—in that direction. As we have seen, she met her friend, not unexpectedly, on the way.

"I will go with you," she said, "to see this strange thing, whatever it be. There may be danger; two are better than one, and, you know, I am not easily frightened."

Poor Adolay was dismayed by this proposition, and hurried forward, but Idazoo kept pace with her. Suddenly she made up her mind, and, changing her direction, made for the cliff at a rapid run, closely followed by her jealous friend, who was resolved to see the mystery out.

She purposely led her companion round in such a way that they came suddenly upon the waiting Eskimo, whose speaking visage betrayed his surprise at seeing two girls instead of one.

On beholding Cheenbuk standing there unbound, Idazoo stopped short, drew back, and gazed at him in alarm as well as surprise.

"You have now seen the strange sight I spoke of, but you must not tell it in the lodges," said Adolay.

Without answering her, Idazoo turned to fly, but Adolay grasped her by the wrist and held her tight—at the same time motioning with her hand to Cheenbuk.

The Eskimo was prompt as well as intelligent. He did not wait for explanations or allow surprise to delay him. With a bound he was beside the girls, had grasped Idazoo, and looked to Adolay for further instructions.

"Hold her till I tie up her hands," she said, drawing a stout line of deerskin from a pocket in the breast of her dress.

With this she proceeded to bind her inquisitive friend's wrists. Perceiving that she was to be made a captive, the girl opened her mouth and began a shriek, which, had it been allowed full play, would no doubt have reached her friends in the village,

but Cheenbuk had observed the intention, and before the first note had struggled into being, he clapped his hand on her mouth and quenched it. Idazoo wore round her neck a brightly coloured cotton kerchief, such as the fur-traders of those days furnished for barter with the Indians. Cheenbuk quietly plucked this off her neck and tied it firmly round her face and mouth so as to effectually gag her. This done they fastened her to the stem of the dead tree.

The whole operation was performed without unnecessary rudeness, and with great celerity.

"Now, Idazoo," said Adolay, when they had finished, "you have done me great injury this night. I am sorry to treat you in this way, but I cannot help it. You *would* come with me, you know. If I could trust you even now, I would take the cloth off your mouth, but I dare not, you might yell, and everybody knows you were never good at keeping your promises. But it does not matter much. The handkerchief is not too tight to prevent the air getting up your nose—and it will give your tongue a rest, which it needs. Besides, the night is not cold, and as our braves pass here every morning when starting off to hunt, you will soon be set free."

The Eskimo showed all his brilliant teeth from ear to ear while this little speech was being made. Then he accompanied Adolay through the bush until they reached the shores of a small lake, beside which a birch-bark canoe was lying, partly in the water. At an earlier part of that evening the girl had placed the canoe there, and put into it weapons and provisions suitable for a considerable

voyage.

"You have got this ready for me?" said Cheenbuk.

"Yes. You saved my mother's life once, and I will save yours," replied the girl, pointing to the bow of the canoe as if ordering him to embark.

"Are you going with me?" asked the youth, with a look of hopeful surprise and a very slight flutter of the heart.

"You do not know the lake. I will guide you to the place where the little river runs out of it, and then, by following that, you will get into Greygoose River, which I think you know."

The Eskimo's heart ceased to flutter, and the hope died out of his expressive eyes as he said, still hesitating, "But—but—I am very heavy and you are very light. A canoe does not go well with its head deep in the water. Don't you think that I should sit behind and steer?"

"And where would you steer to?" asked Adolay, with a somewhat pert smile. "Besides, look there," she added, pointing to the stern of the little craft, "do Eskimos not use their eyes?"

Cheenbuk used his eyes as directed, and saw that a heavy stone had been placed in the stern so as to counteract the difference of weight. With an air of humility, therefore, he stepped into his allotted place, took up a paddle and sat down. Adolay pushed the craft into deeper water, stepped lightly in, and, giving a vigorous shove, sent it skimming out on the lake. Then the two dipped their paddles with a will, and shot over the water like an arrow.

Profound silence was maintained until the other end of the

lake was reached, when the moon came out from a bank of clouds and enabled the girl to find the reedy source of the little river without difficulty.

"We will land here and lift the canoe past the reeds," she said, steering the little craft to the side of a grassy bank.

Walking along this bank, and guiding the canoe with their hands, they soon came to an open space in the forest, whence they could see the rivulet winding like a thread of silver through the land in front of them.

"This is the place where we must part," said Adolay with a sudden determination of manner which surprised and puzzled the Eskimo. "You have now no further need for me. You have only to go straight on with the running of the water. There are only two falls on the way, but you will hear the noise before you come to them, and you have only to lift the canoe a short way through the bush to the still water below the falls. Our braves often do that; you will find it quite easy."

"I know something of that," returned Cheenbuk; "we have no falls in our great salt lake, but we have plenty big lumps of ice, and when these are like to crush together we have to jump out of our kayaks and lift them out of the water—ho! and we do it quick too, sometimes, or we get squeezed flat. But if I go on with the canoe how will you get home? You cannot swim back."

"I can walk round the lake. Are the Eskimo girls not able to walk, that you ask such a question?" said the girl, raising her dark eyes with something of an amused look to the face of her

companion, who was looking anxiously down at her.

"Oh yes, they can walk well. Ay, and run too when needful. But—but—I'm sorry that we must part. Must!—why must?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.