SHORT STORY AMERICA

FINIS

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It was the last of Morganson's bacon. In all his life he had never pampered his stomach. In fact, his stomach had been a sort of negligible quantity that bothered him little, and about which he thought less. But now, in the long absence of wonted delights, the keen yearning of his stomach was tickled hugely by the sharp, salty bacon.

His face had a wistful, hungry expression. The cheeks were hollow, and the skin seemed stretched a trifle tightly across the cheek-bones. His pale blue eyes were troubled. There was that in them that showed the haunting imminence of something terrible. Doubt was in them, and anxiety and foreboding. The thin lips were thinner than they were made to be, and they seemed to hunger towards the polished frying-pan.

He sat back and drew forth a pipe. He looked into it with sharp scrutiny, and tapped it emptily on his open palm. He turned the hair-seal tobacco pouch inside out and dusted the lining, treasuring carefully each flake and mite of tobacco that his efforts gleaned. The result was scarce a thimbleful. He searched in his pockets, and brought forward, between thumb and forefinger, tiny pinches of rubbish. Here and there in this rubbish were crumbs of tobacco. These he segregated with microscopic care, though he occasionally permitted

small particles of foreign substance to accompany the crumbs to the hoard in his palm. He even deliberately added small, semi-hard woolly fluffs, that had come originally from the coat lining, and that had lain for long months in the bottoms of the pockets.

At the end of fifteen minutes he had the pipe part filled. He lighted it from the camp fire, and sat forward on the blankets, toasting his moccasined feet and smoking parsimoniously. When the pipe was finished he sat on, brooding into the dying flame of the fire. Slowly the worry went out of his eyes and resolve came in. Out of the chaos of his fortunes he had finally achieved a way. But it was not a pretty way. His face had become stern and wolfish, and the thin lips were drawn very tightly.

With resolve came action. He pulled himself stiffly to his feet and proceeded to break camp. He packed the rolled blankets, the frying-pan, rifle, and axe on the sled, and passed a lashing around the load. Then he warmed his hands at the fire and pulled on his mittens. He was foot-sore, and limped noticeably as he took his place at the head of the sled. When he put the looped haul-rope over his shoulder, and leant his weight against it to start the sled, he winced. His flesh was galled by many days of contact with the haul-rope.

The trail led along the frozen breast of the Yukon. At the end of four hours he came around a bend and entered the town of Minto. It was perched on top of a high earth bank in the midst of a clearing, and consisted of a road house, a saloon, and several cabins. He left his sled at the door and entered the saloon.

"Enough for a drink?" he asked, laying an apparently empty gold sack upon the bar.

The barkeeper looked sharply at it and him, then set out a bottle and a glass.

"Never mind the dust," he said.

"Go on and take it," Morganson insisted.

The barkeeper held the sack mouth downward over the scales and shook it, and a few flakes of gold dust fell out. Morganson took the sack from him, turned it inside out, and dusted it carefully.

"I thought there was half-a-dollar in it," he said.

"Not quite," answered the other, "but near enough. I'll get it back with the down weight on the next comer."

Morganson shyly poured the whisky into the glass, partly filling it.

"Go on, make it a man's drink," the barkeeper encouraged.

Morganson tilted the bottle and filled the glass to the brim. He drank the liquor slowly, pleasuring in the fire of it that bit his tongue, sank hotly down his throat, and with warm, gentle caresses permeated his stomach.

"Scurvy, eh?" the barkeeper asked.

"A touch of it," he answered. "But I haven't begun to swell yet. Maybe I can get to Dyea and fresh vegetables, and beat it out."

"Kind of all in, I'd say," the other laughed sympathetically. "No dogs, no money, and the scurvy. I'd try spruce tea if I was you."

At the end of half-an-hour, Morganson said good-bye and left the saloon. He put his galled shoulder to the haul-rope and took the river-trail south. An hour later he halted. An inviting swale left the river and led off to the right at an acute angle. He left his sled and

limped up the swale for half a mile. Between him and the river was three hundred yards of flat ground covered with cottonwoods. He crossed the cottonwoods to the bank of the Yukon. The trail went by just beneath, but he did not descend to it. South toward Selkirk he could see the trail widen its sunken length through the snow for over a mile. But to the north, in the direction of Minto, a tree-covered out-jut in the bank a quarter of a mile away screened the trail from him.

He seemed satisfied with the view and returned to the sled the way he had come. He put the haul-rope over his shoulder and dragged the sled up the swale. The snow was unpacked and soft, and it was hard work. The runners clogged and stuck, and he was panting severely ere he had covered the half-mile. Night had come on by the time he had pitched his small tent, set up the sheet-iron stove, and chopped a supply of firewood. He had no candles, and contented himself with a pot of tea before crawling into his blankets.

In the morning, as soon as he got up, he drew on his mittens, pulled the flaps of his cap down over his ears, and crossed through the cottonwoods to the Yukon. He took his rifle with him. As before, he did not descend the bank. He watched the empty trail for an hour, beating his hands and stamping his feet to keep up the circulation, then returned to the tent for breakfast. There was little tea left in the canister—half a dozen drawings at most; but so meagre a pinch did he put in the teapot that he bade fair to extend the lifetime of the tea indefinitely. His entire food supply consisted of half-a-sack of flour and a part-full can of baking powder. He made biscuits, and ate them slowly, chewing each mouthful with infinite relish. When he had had three he called a halt. He debated a while, reached for another biscuit, then hesitated. He turned to the part sack of flour, lifted it, and judged its weight.

"I'm good for a couple of weeks," he spoke aloud.

"Maybe three," he added, as he put the biscuits away.

Again he drew on his mittens, pulled down his ear-flaps, took the rifle, and went out to his station on the river bank. He crouched in the snow, himself unseen, and watched. After a few minutes of inaction, the frost began to bite in, and he rested the rifle across his knees and beat his hands back and forth. Then the sting in his feet became intolerable, and he stepped back from the bank and tramped heavily up and down among the trees. But he did not tramp long at a time. Every several minutes he came to the edge of the bank and peered up and down the trail, as though by sheer will he could materialise the form of a man upon it. The short morning passed, though it had seemed century-long to him, and the trail remained empty.

It was easier in the afternoon, watching by the bank. The temperature rose, and soon the snow began to fall—dry and fine and crystalline. There was no wind, and it fell straight down, in quiet monotony. He crouched with eyes closed, his head upon his knees, keeping his watch upon the trail with his ears. But no whining of dogs, churning of sleds, nor cries of drivers broke the silence. With twilight he returned to the tent, cut a supply of firewood, ate two biscuits, and crawled into his blankets. He slept restlessly, tossing about and groaning; and at midnight he got up and ate another biscuit.

Each day grew colder. Four biscuits could not keep up the heat of his body, despite the quantities of hot spruce tea he drank, and he increased his allowance, morning and evening, to three biscuits. In the middle of the day he ate nothing, contenting himself with several cups of excessively weak real tea. This programme became routine. In the morning three biscuits, at noon real tea, and at night three biscuits. In between he drank spruce tea for his scurvy. He caught himself making larger biscuits, and after a severe struggle with himself went back to the old size.

On the fifth day the trail returned to life. To the south a dark object appeared, and grew larger. Morganson became alert. He worked his rifle, ejecting a loaded cartridge from the chamber, by the same action replacing it with another, and returning the ejected cartridge into the magazine. He lowered the trigger to half-cock, and drew on his mitten to keep the trigger-hand warm. As the dark object came nearer he made it out to be a man, without dogs or sled, travelling light. He grew nervous, cocked the trigger, then put it back to half-cock again. The man developed into an Indian, and Morganson, with a sigh of disappointment, dropped the rifle across his knees. The Indian went on past and disappeared towards Minto behind the out-jutting clump of trees.

But Morganson conceived an idea. He changed his crouching spot to a place where cottonwood limbs projected on either side of him. Into these with his axe he chopped two broad notches. Then in one of the notches he rested the barrel of his rifle and glanced along the sights. He covered the trail thoroughly in that direction. He turned about, rested the rifle in the other notch, and, looking along the sights, swept the trail to the clump of trees behind which it disappeared.

He never descended to the trail. A man travelling the trail could have no knowledge of his lurking presence on the bank above. The snow surface was unbroken. There was no place where his tracks left the main trail.

As the nights grew longer, his periods of daylight watching of the trail grew shorter. Once a sled went by with jingling bells in the darkness, and with sullen resentment he chewed his biscuits and listened to the sounds. Chance conspired against him. Faithfully he had watched the trail for ten days, suffering from the cold all the prolonged torment of the damned, and nothing had happened. Only an Indian, travelling light, had passed in. Now, in the night, when it was impossible for him to watch, men and dogs and a sled loaded

with life, passed out, bound south to the sea and the sun and civilisation.

So it was that he conceived of the sled for which he waited. It was loaded with life, his life. His life was fading, fainting, gasping away in the tent in the snow. He was weak from lack of food, and could not travel of himself. But on the sled for which he waited were dogs that would drag him, food that would fan up the flame of his life, money that would furnish sea and sun and civilisation. Sea and sun and civilisation became terms interchangeable with life, his life, and they were loaded there on the sled for which he waited. The idea became an obsession, and he grew to think of himself as the rightful and deprived owner of the sled-load of life.

His flour was running short, and he went back to two biscuits in the morning and two biscuits at night. Because, of this his weakness increased and the cold bit in more savagely, and day by day he watched by the dead trail that would not live for him. At last the scurvy entered upon its next stage. The skin was unable longer to cast off the impurity of the blood, and the result was that the body began to swell. His ankles grew puffy, and the ache in them kept him awake long hours at night. Next, the swelling jumped to his knees, and the sum of his pain was more than doubled.

Then there came a cold snap. The temperature went down and down—forty, fifty, sixty degrees below zero. He had no thermometer, but this he knew by the signs and natural phenomena understood by all men in that country—the crackling of water thrown on the snow, the swift sharpness of the bite of the frost, and the rapidity with which his breath froze and coated the canvas walls and roof of the tent. Vainly he fought the cold and strove to maintain his watch on the bank. In his weak condition he was an easy prey, and the frost sank its teeth deep into him before he fled away to the tent and crouched by the fire. His nose and cheeks were frozen and turned black, and his left thumb had frozen

inside the mitten. He concluded that he would escape with the loss of the first joint.

Then it was, beaten into the tent by the frost, that the trail, with monstrous irony, suddenly teemed with life. Three sleds went by the first day, and two the second. Once, during each day, he fought his way out to the bank only to succumb and retreat, and each of the two times, within half-an-hour after he retreated, a sled went by.

The cold snap broke, and he was able to remain by the bank once more, and the trail died again. For a week he crouched and watched, and never life stirred along it, not a soul passed in or out. He had cut down to one biscuit night and morning, and somehow he did not seem to notice it. Sometimes he marvelled at the way life remained in him. He never would have thought it possible to endure so much.

When the trail fluttered anew with life it was life with which he could not cope. A detachment of the North-West police went by, a score of them, with many sleds and dogs; and he cowered down on the bank above, and they were unaware of the menace of death that lurked in the form of a dying man beside the trail.

His frozen thumb gave him a great deal of trouble. While watching by the bank he got into the habit of taking his mitten off and thrusting the hand inside his shirt so as to rest the thumb in the warmth of his arm-pit. A mail carrier came over the trail, and Morganson let him pass. A mail carrier was an important person, and was sure to be missed immediately.

On the first day after his last flour had gone it snowed. It was always warm when the snow fell, and he sat out the whole eight hours of daylight on the bank, without movement, terribly hungry and terribly patient, for all the world like a monstrous spider waiting for its prey. But the prey did not come, and he hobbled back to the tent through the darkness, drank quarts of spruce tea and hot water, and went to bed.

The next morning circumstance eased its grip on him. As he started to come out of the tent he saw a huge bull-moose crossing the swale some four hundred yards away. Morganson felt a surge and bound of the blood in him, and then went unaccountably weak. A nausea overpowered him, and he was compelled to sit down a moment to recover. Then he reached for his rifle and took careful aim. The first shot was a hit: he knew it; but the moose turned and broke for the wooded hillside that came down to the swale. Morganson pumped bullets wildly among the trees and brush at the fleeing animal, until it dawned upon him that he was exhausting the ammunition he needed for the sled-load of life for which he waited.

He stopped shooting, and watched. He noted the direction of the animal's flight, and, high up on the hillside in an opening among the trees, saw the trunk of a fallen pine. Continuing the moose's flight in his mind he saw that it must pass the trunk. He resolved on one more shot, and in the empty air above the trunk he aimed and steadied his wavering rifle. The animal sprang into his field of vision, with lifted fore-legs as it took the leap. He pulled the trigger. With the explosion the moose seemed to somersault in the air. It crashed down to earth in the snow beyond and flurried the snow into dust.

Morganson dashed up the hillside—at least he started to dash up. The next he knew he was coming out of a faint and dragging himself to his feet. He went up more slowly, pausing from time to time to breathe and to steady his reeling senses. At last he crawled over the trunk. The moose lay before him. He sat down heavily upon the carcase and laughed. He buried his face in his mittened hands and laughed some more.

He shook the hysteria from him. He drew his hunting knife and worked as rapidly as his injured thumb and weakness would permit him. He did not stop to skin the moose, but quartered it with its hide on. It was a Klondike of meat.

When he had finished he selected a piece of meat weighing a hundred pounds, and started to drag it down to the tent. But the snow was soft, and it was too much for him. He exchanged it for a twenty-pound piece, and, with many pauses to rest, succeeded in getting it to the tent. He fried some of the meat, but ate sparingly. Then, and automatically, he went out to his crouching place on the bank. There were sled-tracks in the fresh snow on the trail. The sled-load of life had passed by while he had been cutting up the moose.

But he did not mind. He was glad that the sled had not passed before the coming of the moose. The moose had changed his plans. Its meat was worth fifty cents a pound, and he was but little more than three miles from Minto. He need no longer wait for the sled-load of life. The moose was the sled-load of life. He would sell it. He would buy a couple of dogs at Minto, some food and some tobacco, and the dogs would haul him south along the trail to the sea, the sun, and civilisation.

He felt hungry. The dull, monotonous ache of hunger had now become a sharp and insistent pang. He hobbled back to the tent and fried a slice of meat. After that he smoked two whole pipefuls of dried tea leaves. Then he fried another slice of moose. He was aware of an unwonted glow of strength, and went out and chopped some firewood. He followed that up with a slice of meat. Teased on by the food, his hunger grew into an inflammation. It became imperative every little while to fry a slice of meat. He tried smaller slices and found himself frying oftener.

In the middle of the day he thought of the wild animals that might eat his meat, and he climbed the hill, carrying along his axe, the haul rope, and a sled lashing. In his weak state the making of the cache and storing of the meat was an all-afternoon task. He cut young saplings, trimmed them, and tied them together into a tall scaffold. It was not so strong a cache as he would have desired to make, but he had done his best. To hoist the meat to the top was heart-breaking. The larger pieces defied him until he passed the rope over a limb

above, and, with one end fast to a piece of meat, put all his weight on the other end.

Once in the tent, he proceeded to indulge in a prolonged and solitary orgy. He did not need friends. His stomach and he were company. Slice after slice and many slices of meat he fried and ate. He ate pounds of the meat. He brewed real tea, and brewed it strong. He brewed the last he had. It did not matter. On the morrow he would be buying tea in Minto. When it seemed he could eat no more, he smoked. He smoked all his stock of dried tea leaves. What of it? On the morrow he would be smoking tobacco. He knocked out his pipe, fried a final slice, and went to bed. He had eaten so much he seemed bursting, yet he got out of his blankets and had just one more mouthful of meat.

In the morning he awoke as from the sleep of death. In his ears were strange sounds. He did not know where he was, and looked about him stupidly until he caught sight of the frying-pan with the last piece of meat in it, partly eaten. Then he remembered all, and with a quick start turned his attention to the strange sounds. He sprang from the blankets with an oath. His scurvy-ravaged legs gave under him and he winced with the pain. He proceeded more slowly to put on his moccasins and leave the tent.

From the cache up the hillside arose a confused noise of snapping and snarling, punctuated by occasional short, sharp yelps. He increased his speed at much expense of pain, and cried loudly and threateningly. He saw the wolves hurrying away through the snow and underbrush, many of them, and he saw the scaffold down on the ground. The animals were heavy with the meat they had eaten, and they were content to slink away and leave the wreckage.

The way of the disaster was clear to him. The wolves had scented his cache. One of them had leapt from the trunk of the fallen tree to the top of the cache. He could see marks of the brute's paws in the snow that covered the trunk. He had not dreamt a wolf could leap

so far. A second had followed the first, and a third and fourth, until the flimsy scaffold had gone down under their weight and movement.

His eyes were hard and savage for a moment as he contemplated the extent of the calamity; then the old look of patience returned into them, and he began to gather together the bones well picked and gnawed. There was marrow in them, he knew; and also, here and there, as he sifted the snow, he found scraps of meat that had escaped the maws of the brutes made careless by plenty.

He spent the rest of the morning dragging the wreckage of the moose down the hillside. In addition, he had at least ten pounds left of the chunk of meat he had dragged down the previous day.

"I'm good for weeks yet," was his comment as he surveyed the heap.

He had learnt how to starve and live. He cleaned his rifle and counted the cartridges that remained to him. There were seven. He loaded the weapon and hobbled out to his crouching-place on the bank. All day he watched the dead trail. He watched all the week, but no life passed over it.

Thanks to the meat he felt stronger, though his scurvy was worse and more painful. He now lived upon soup, drinking endless gallons of the thin product of the boiling of the moose bones. The soup grew thinner and thinner as he cracked the bones and boiled them over and over; but the hot water with the essence of the meat in it was good for him, and he was more vigorous than he had been previous to the shooting of the moose.

It was in the next week that a new factor entered into Morganson's life. He wanted to know the date. It became an obsession. He pondered and calculated, but his conclusions were rarely twice the same. The first thing in the morning and the last thing at night, and

all day as well, watching by the trail, he worried about it. He awoke at night and lay awake for hours over the problem. To have known the date would have been of no value to him; but his curiosity grew until it equalled his hunger and his desire to live. Finally it mastered him, and he resolved to go to Minto and find out.

It was dark when he arrived at Minto, but this served him. No one saw him arrive. Besides, he knew he would have moonlight by which to return. He climbed the bank and pushed open the saloon door. The light dazzled him. The source of it was several candles, but he had been living for long in an unlighted tent. As his eyes adjusted themselves, he saw three men sitting around the stove. They were trail-travellers—he knew it at once; and since they had not passed in, they were evidently bound out. They would go by his tent next morning.

The barkeeper emitted a long and marvelling whistle.

"I thought you was dead," he said.

"Why?" Morganson asked in a faltering voice.

He had become unused to talking, and he was not acquainted with the sound of his own voice. It seemed hoarse and strange.

"You've been dead for more'n two months, now," the barkeeper explained. "You left here going south, and you never arrived at Selkirk. Where have you been?"

"Chopping wood for the steamboat company," Morganson lied unsteadily.

He was still trying to become acquainted with his own voice. He hobbled across the floor and leant against the bar. He knew he must lie consistently; and while he maintained an appearance of careless indifference, his heart was beating and pounding furiously and

irregularly, and he could not help looking hungrily at the three men by the stove. They were the possessors of life—his life.

"But where in hell you been keeping yourself all this time?" the barkeeper demanded.

"I located across the river," he answered. "I've got a mighty big stack of wood chopped."

The barkeeper nodded. His face beamed with understanding.

"I heard sounds of chopping several times," he said. "So that was you, eh? Have a drink?"

Morganson clutched the bar tightly. A drink! He could have thrown his arms around the man's legs and kissed his feet. He tried vainly to utter his acceptance; but the barkeeper had not waited and was already passing out the bottle.

"But what did you do for grub?" the latter asked. "You don't look as if you could chop wood to keep yourself warm. You look terribly bad, friend."

Morganson yearned towards the delayed bottle and gulped dryly.

"I did the chopping before the scurvy got bad," he said. "Then I got a moose right at the start. I've been living high all right. It's the scurvy that's run me down."

He filled the glass, and added, "But the spruce tea's knocking it, I think."

"Have another," the barkeeper said.

The action of the two glasses of whisky on Morganson's empty stomach and weak condition was rapid. The next he knew he was sitting by the stove on a box, and it seemed as though ages had passed. A tall, broad-shouldered, black-whiskered man was paying for drinks. Morganson's swimming eyes saw him drawing a greenback from a fat roll, and

Morganson's swimming eyes cleared on the instant. They were hundred-dollar bills. It was life! His life! He felt an almost irresistible impulse to snatch the money and dash madly out into the night.

The black-whiskered man and one of his companions arose.

"Come on, Oleson," the former said to the third one of the party, a fair-haired, ruddy-faced giant.

Oleson came to his feet, yawning and stretching.

"What are you going to bed so soon for?" the barkeeper asked plaintively. "It's early yet."

"Got to make Selkirk to-morrow," said he of the black whiskers.

"On Christmas Day!" the barkeeper cried.

"The better the day the better the deed," the other laughed.

As the three men passed out of the door it came dimly to Morganson that it was Christmas Eve. That was the date. That was what he had come to Minto for. But it was overshadowed now by the three men themselves, and the fat roll of hundred-dollar bills.

The door slammed.

"That's Jack Thompson," the barkeeper said. "Made two millions on Bonanza and Sulphur, and got more coming. I'm going to bed. Have another drink first."

Morganson hesitated.

"A Christmas drink," the other urged. "It's all right. I'll get it back when you sell your

wood."

Morganson mastered his drunkenness long enough to swallow the whisky, say good night, and get out on the trail. It was moonlight, and he hobbled along through the bright, silvery quiet, with a vision of life before him that took the form of a roll of hundred-dollar bills.

He awoke. It was dark, and he was in his blankets. He had gone to bed in his moccasins and mittens, with the flaps of his cap pulled down over his ears. He got up as quickly as his crippled condition would permit, and built the fire and boiled some water. As he put the spruce-twigs into the teapot he noted the first glimmer of the pale morning light. He caught up his rifle and hobbled in a panic out to the bank. As he crouched and waited, it came to him that he had forgotten to drink his spruce tea. The only other thought in his mind was the possibility of John Thompson changing his mind and not travelling Christmas Day.

Dawn broke and merged into day. It was cold and clear. Sixty below zero was Morganson's estimate of the frost. Not a breath stirred the chill Arctic quiet. He sat up suddenly, his muscular tensity increasing the hurt of the scurvy. He had heard the far sound of a man's voice and the faint whining of dogs. He began beating his hands back and forth against his sides. It was a serious matter to bare the trigger hand to sixty degrees below zero, and against that time he needed to develop all the warmth of which his flesh was capable.

They came into view around the outjutting clump of trees. To the fore was the third man whose name he had not learnt. Then came eight dogs drawing the sled. At the front of the sled, guiding it by the gee-pole, walked John Thompson. The rear was brought up by Oleson, the Swede. He was certainly a fine man, Morganson thought, as he looked at the bulk of him in his squirrel-skin *parka*. The men and dogs were silhouetted sharply against

the white of the landscape. They had the seeming of two dimension, cardboard figures that worked mechanically.

Morganson rested his cocked rifle in the notch in the tree. He became abruptly aware that his fingers were cold, and discovered that his right hand was bare. He did not know that he had taken off the mitten. He slipped it on again hastily. The men and dogs drew closer, and he could see their breaths spouting into visibility in the cold air. When the first man was fifty yards away, Morganson slipped the mitten from his right hand. He placed the first finger on the trigger and aimed low. When he fired the first man whirled half around and went down on the trail.

In the instant of surprise, Morganson pulled the trigger on John Thompson—too low, for the latter staggered and sat down suddenly on the sled. Morganson raised his aim and fired again. John Thompson sank down backward along the top of the loaded sled.

Morganson turned his attention to Oleson. At the same time that he noted the latter running away towards Minto he noted that the dogs, coming to where the first man's body blocked the trail, had halted. Morganson fired at the fleeing man and missed, and Oleson swerved. He continued to swerve back and forth, while Morganson fired twice in rapid succession and missed both shots. Morganson stopped himself just as he was pulling the trigger again. He had fired six shots. Only one more cartridge remained, and it was in the chamber. It was imperative that he should not miss his last shot.

He held his fire and desperately studied Oleson's flight. The giant was grotesquely curving and twisting and running at top speed along the trail, the tail of his *parka* flapping smartly behind. Morganson trained his rifle on the man and with a swaying action followed his erratic flight. Morganson's finger was getting numb. He could scarcely feel the trigger. "God help me," he breathed a prayer aloud, and pulled the trigger. The running man

pitched forward on his face, rebounded from the hard trail, and slid along, rolling over and over. He threshed for a moment with his arms and then lay quiet.

Morganson dropped his rifle (worthless now that the last cartridge was gone) and slid down the bank through the soft snow. Now that he had sprung the trap, concealment of his lurking-place was no longer necessary. He hobbled along the trail to the sled, his fingers making involuntary gripping and clutching movements inside the mittens.

The snarling of the dogs halted him. The leader, a heavy dog, half Newfoundland and half Hudson Bay, stood over the body of the man that lay on the trail, and menaced Morganson with bristling hair and bared fangs. The other seven dogs of the team were likewise bristling and snarling. Morganson approached tentatively, and the team surged towards him. He stopped again and talked to the animals, threatening and cajoling by turns. He noticed the face of the man under the leader's feet, and was surprised at how quickly it had turned white with the ebb of life and the entrance of the frost. John Thompson lay back along the top of the loaded sled, his head sunk in a space between two sacks and his chin tilted upwards, so that all Morganson could see was the black beard pointing skyward.

Finding it impossible to face the dogs Morganson stepped off the trail into the deep snow and floundered in a wide circle to the rear of the sled. Under the initiative of the leader, the team swung around in its tangled harness. Because of his crippled condition, Morganson could move only slowly. He saw the animals circling around on him and tried to retreat. He almost made it, but the big leader, with a savage lunge, sank its teeth into the calf of his leg. The flesh was slashed and torn, but Morganson managed to drag himself clear.

He cursed the brutes fiercely, but could not cow them. They replied with neck-bristling and snarling, and with quick lunges against their breastbands. He remembered Oleson, and turned his back upon them and went along the trail. He scarcely took notice of his

lacerated leg. It was bleeding freely; the main artery had been torn, but he did not know it.

Especially remarkable to Morganson was the extreme pallor of the Swede, who the preceding night had been so ruddy-faced. Now his face was like white marble. What with his fair hair and lashes he looked like a carved statue rather than something that had been a man a few minutes before. Morganson pulled off his mittens and searched the body. There was no money-belt around the waist next to the skin, nor did he find a gold-sack. In a breast pocket he lit on a small wallet. With fingers that swiftly went numb with the frost, he hurried through the contents of the wallet. There were letters with foreign stamps and postmarks on them, and several receipts and memorandum accounts, and a letter of credit for eight hundred dollars. That was all. There was no money.

He made a movement to start back toward the sled, but found his foot rooted to the trail. He glanced down and saw that he stood in a fresh deposit of frozen red. There was red ice on his torn pants leg and on the moccasin beneath. With a quick effort he broke the frozen clutch of his blood and hobbled along the trail to the sled. The big leader that had bitten him began snarling and lunging, and was followed in this conduct by the whole team.

Morganson wept weakly for a space, and weakly swayed from one side to the other. Then he brushed away the frozen tears that gemmed his lashes. It was a joke. Malicious chance was having its laugh at him. Even John Thompson, with his heaven-aspiring whiskers, was laughing at him.

He prowled around the sled demented, at times weeping and pleading with the brutes for his life there on the sled, at other times raging impotently against them. Then calmness came upon him. He had been making a fool of himself. All he had to do was to go to the tent, get the axe, and return and brain the dogs. He'd show them.

In order to get to the tent he had to go wide of the sled and the savage animals. He stepped off the trail into the soft snow. Then he felt suddenly giddy and stood still. He was afraid to go on for fear he would fall down. He stood still for a long time, balancing himself on his crippled legs that were trembling violently from weakness. He looked down and saw the snow reddening at his feet. The blood flowed freely as ever. He had not thought the bite was so severe. He controlled his giddiness and stooped to examine the wound. The snow seemed rushing up to meet him, and he recoiled from it as from a blow. He had a panic fear that he might fall down, and after a struggle he managed to stand upright again. He was afraid of that snow that had rushed up to him.

Then the white glimmer turned black, and the next he knew he was awakening in the snow where he had fallen. He was no longer giddy. The cobwebs were gone. But he could not get up. There was no strength in his limbs. His body seemed lifeless. By a desperate effort he managed to roll over on his side. In this position he caught a glimpse of the sled and of John Thompson's black beard pointing skyward. Also he saw the lead dog licking the face of the man who lay on the trail. Morganson watched curiously. The dog was nervous and eager. Sometimes it uttered short, sharp yelps, as though to arouse the man, and surveyed him with ears cocked forward and wagging tail. At last it sat down, pointed its nose upward, and began to howl. Soon all the team was howling.

Now that he was down, Morganson was no longer afraid. He had a vision of himself being found dead in the snow, and for a while he wept in self-pity. But he was not afraid. The struggle had gone out of him. When he tried to open his eyes he found that the wet tears had frozen them shut. He did not try to brush the ice away. It did not matter. He had not dreamed death was so easy. He was even angry that he had struggled and suffered through so many weary weeks. He had been bullied and cheated by the fear of death. Death did not hurt. Every torment he had endured had been a torment of life. Life had defamed death. It

was a cruel thing.

But his anger passed. The lies and frauds of life were of no consequence now that he was coming to his own. He became aware of drowsiness, and felt a sweet sleep stealing upon him, balmy with promises of easement and rest. He heard faintly the howling of the dogs, and had a fleeting thought that in the mastering of his flesh the frost no longer bit. Then the light and the thought ceased to pulse beneath the tear-gemmed eyelids, and with a tired sigh of comfort he sank into sleep.