so—away down the nearly regular inward curve birds were flying to and fro, apparently going in and out of some tall pine woods. Those birds were following an arm of the marsh. How foolish he had been not to think of this before! He had run into a trap. He had been trailed across the burned ground and marked down as hiding somewhere between swamp and lake. At that moment he hazarded no guess in the swift conclusion that he and Zintkala-Zi were hemmed in by Tall Gun's Ojibwa trailers.

CHAPTER VI

AS THE RABBITS HIDE

Even as the boy stood, considering how he might best cover his tracks in the sand, two men appeared, not five bow-shots distant, walking down to the water's edge. Nothing but instant flight and a cunningly blinded trail could save the little voyagers.

Etapa sped back to camp and, as he burst into the opening, Zintkala read the evil tidings in his excitement. She had already buried the embers of a smokeless fire of charred wood, had packed their blankets and other articles in two small, tight rolls, and she looked at her brother with a scared, inquiring face. He put up a warning hand until he had come very near.

"The Raratonwan!" he said. "They are coming—we must go quickly."

As by a lightning stroke the sister's mind reverted to the mysterious visit of the wolf. "Brother!" she said, as Etapa seized his pack, "sung-manitu said thus—go in this direction!"

"It is so," said Etapa, struck by the thought, "we should have gone more quickly." He looked at the ducks in his hand. It would not do to leave so much as a feather upon the trail they must make and he flung his birds into the

brook. "Come," he said. They did not run; they slipped into the bushes at a light and hurried walk. The sister followed the brother and their feet almost unconsciously sought the bare, hard spots, their bodies weaved from side to side to avoid a telltale contact with the evergreen bush.

A swift change had come over the buoyant, hopeful children of the morning. All the helpful spirits, the birds and animals, had seemed to be aiding in their escape from the Ojibwa. Suddenly the enemy had come upon them and they were flung upon their own resources in this desperate case. The flushed and confident faces of so late a moment were drawn and pinched, and a pair of bloodless, breathless waifs, like ephemeral shadows, flitted from bush to bush.

In this swift, silent walk they progressed in a general direction toward the tamarack swamp; yet Etapa was continually taking sharp, zigzag courses, now and then going back upon his trail as the fox-chased rabbit does. He had no possible doubt that the upper reaches of this neck of bush land were guarded closely by watching, listening Indians, or that the men below would, within a brief time, discover their night camp and their line of flight. Therefore he and Zintkala must keep going, if need be until night fall, unceasingly dodging and warily listening for hostile sounds.

Suddenly a gun boomed in the rear. To their scared ears the sound was as if a shot had been fired at them from the bush near at hand. But far away to northward another gun answered, and they knew the first shot had announced the discovery of their tracks or their camp, and the second had been fired in answer to a preconcerted signal. Then a still more distant gun report told them that at least three parties of the enemy hemmed them in upon the neck.

Instinctively, Etapa changed his course, going — as ear and eye decided — in a straight line in the direction of the second gun shot. On this track they advanced swiftly until the boy's instinct told him it was time to stop and listen. Then they squatted under the bushes and, with ears close to ground, remained silent for some minutes.

Suddenly there was a rustling of the young pines and a snapping of twigs which told of the rapid approach of some creature. A brief moment of listening decided the matter. A man was coming! How the young ears were strained and the little hearts ceased to beat that the direction of those footfalls should be accurately judged! And what faint, long sighs of relief were breathed when it became evident that only one man was within hearing and that he was going by upon one side, paralleling their course.

Etapa then considered. If there had been

several men and they had all passed, making no discovery, he would have gone straight forward, at least for a considerable distance. But that way lay danger even greater perhaps than in the rear, and so again he turned their course toward the tamarack swamp and again resumed the tactics of zigzagging and doubling. And no hunter, merely crossing the trail thus made, could have discovered it except by accident or a prolonged and infinitely patient search. But the best tracker of Tall Gun's band would doubtless shortly be put upon their trail at the other end.

After making their way in laborious fashion for some distance toward the marsh the fugitives came upon a slight stony ridge the far slope of which extended to the open swamp. Etapa turned to his sister with a sudden light of animation in his eyes. Zintkala's pale, drawn face responded with an eager flush of comprehension, and again their hearts beat hopefully.

Here, where the bush was not so thick, they made their way more rapidly, stepping from stone to stone, very certain that no human enemy could trail them upon such ground. This tract of rocky soil continued, lying along the marsh, for a considerable distance.

Etapa led the way to within a short distance of the marsh's edge, then followed where the stones were thickest, taking a course parallel to its irregular curves. Thus they actually traveled

for a considerable distance back toward their night camp. This course they followed so long as the stones lay thick upon the ground. They had to stoop low at times to keep their bodies under cover.

When they were at the end of the stony tract they had reached a point well down toward where the bog marsh connected with the lake and had made nearly a half-circuit of their camp. Beyond the two gun shots, and the man running among the bushes, they had heard nothing of their enemies.

Etapa now cast his eyes about for an inconspicuous place of hiding. He finally selected a thin strip of shrub pine, upon the verge of the bog land, where the bush was barely sufficient to cover the prostrate body from prying eyes.

Within this thin fringe of bush—the last covert that a civilized person would have chosen—the Sioux children took to cover after the manner of the rabbits. They chose, with the instinct of wild things, each a spot sheltered by slightly raised boulders and a thin veil of pine foliage. Each spread a blanket in double folds and lay at full length upon it. And here they rested silently, with watchful eyes and wary ears, well knowing that a number of Ojibwa hunters were at the other end of their morning's trail and following with more than the persistence of a wolf pack. The children were now wholly dependent

for safety upon their success in having made a blind trail. As to immediate danger, they were not much worried, yet, as the sun rose high and beat warmly upon their covert, each fought a mental battle with drowsiness. They lay thus wearily until the afternoon was waning, seeing or hearing nothing to alarm.

Then their still alert ears caught slight sounds as of some creature walking in the shallow water of the bog marsh. Soon a softly-measured tread, marked by the light plash and drip of water as a foot was lifted or immersed, told the intent ears that a man was approaching, wading along shore. With bated breath, with animation suspended save as nature concentrated it upon the sense of hearing, the fugitive waifs lay inert as the stones beside them.

Both, as it happened, and chiefly for interest in passing flights of water-fowl, had their faces turned toward the open swamp. As their eyes thus rested upon a space veiled lightly by the pencil growth of pine, a man came within their range of vision and so close at hand that a hiding deer would scarcely have held its covert in their places.

Yet these two did not stir so much as an eyelid while an Ojibwa, who could almost have touched the bush fringes with his gun, waded softly by, stepping in shallow water between the

first bogs of the wet ground. The man was young and a stranger to the voyagers—thus they knew that Bimidji's young men, of another pine-woods village, had joined with Tall Gun's in the chase. In the same instant their torture of fear was lightened by noting that the hunter's eyes were intent upon the tufts of grass which clothed the bogs and drooped into the water. Evidently their trail had been lost when their enemies reached the stony ground!

This man supposed they might have crossed the marsh somewhere about this point where the reach of open bog and water was narrowest, and he was keenly scanning the feathered float of grass for sign of any fresh displacement. In fact, he was looking into the shallow water for their tracks! The man was very cunning—such was the thought of his breathless watchers, and it was with intense relief that they heard the last drip of water from his moccasined heels.

The trail hunter passed so close that had he turned his head to peer intently for an instant into the feather-like fringe of pines he must certainly have discovered the hiders. But, such was the wisdom of these prairie children, it is almost equally certain the hunter would have been astonished at their choice of covert.

Again, had the hunter's faculties been less intently engaged and those of the fugitives less utterly repressed, he might, by his wilderness

instinct, have felt their near presence and so have turned his eyes upon them.

Such was the ordeal through which the Sioux children had consciously yet instinctively passed. The rebound of joyful emotion when the danger had gone by was almost more than either could endure in silence. The little girl even found humor in the situation, and she almost laughed outright as she recalled how the man's toes had curled each time as he lifted them from the water. Evidently there was ice at the bottom.

Etapa's elation ran very high, for he felt very certain this man's report would keep any whom he should meet from going over the same ground. But there was also a sobering second thought in the knowledge that other Ojibwas had joined Tall Gun's young men in the pursuit. This might very well mean that 'Lizbet was dead and her people (relatives) bent upon revenge.

So wearily he lay, as did his sister, breathing with soft regularity, relaxing no whit of vigilance. It was a matter not only of life or liberty, but of honor now, to foil these hated Ojibwas. Again, however, their faces were turned to the swamp where flocks of ducks hurtled by in almost continuous flight. Blue wings, green wings, black and white with flashes of red and gold—swiftly the procession passed, whistling upon the wind like swift flights of missiles.

Now and then a flock of white-faced geese

skirted the edge of the marsh, flying low—so low that their dove-colored breasts and great spread of wing seemed, for an instant, to hover protectingly over the hidden voyagers. Yet the wary watchers well knew that in these close flights there was an element of danger to themselves. Should any suspicious stir or glint of color catch the cocked eye of the wary leader of one of these flocks his whole herd would go hurtling and squalling skyward, as plain a signal to the watchful Ojibwa as the red light of a campfire. So, hungry and bone-weary, the little voyagers lay close in covert until night gathered its curtain close about them and they were free to move with little danger of being seen.

CHAPTER VII

INTO THE TAMARACK SWAMP

Wicarpi-kin, the stars, were glimmering here and there out of a hazy sky, but all the bush land lay mottled in thick darkness, and the open stretch of bog and water showed only as a faintly seen and uncertain space, hemmed with a black wall which marked the line of the tamarack swamp.

This swamp, if it were passable for the feet, offered a line of retreat from the surrounding bush land, where certainly no trail could be followed beyond the extreme edge, and not there if the steps were taken with proper care.

Etapa was not certain of the depth out where the bog had showed only tufts of grass above the water's surface, but the wader had taught him as well as Zintkala that at the bottom of the bog was solid footing of ice and frozen ground. The marsh ice had been covered early with an overflow of melted snows, and it so lay thawing by degrees.

The boy spoke to his sister in low tones, the general confusion of night sounds in this season of bird migration making it safe to do so.

"Older sister," he said, "we shall go hither far

among those thick trees and there hide for another sun."

They rolled their blankets and effects in close bundles and tied them to their backs about the waist, Zintkala saying nothing.

Etapa led the way and they stepped from some close-lying boulders into the water, where there were few bogs and little grass. They walked very carefully, lifting their feet high and putting them straight down to displace as little as possible of the dead vegetation. They had not waded long until they were sure that no one would follow them far into the swamp. The water was much colder than that of the lakes, and the ice at bottom soon benumbed their feet.

The water was nowhere more than knee-deep, but even so its chill became well nigh unendurable. No man could here have waded for a great length of time. But there was capture or death behind the little voyagers and they pushed ahead with cramping feet and chilling bones. When they reached the tamarack trees they were compelled to seek low-lying limbs, of the larger growth, and to stand upon them, beating their moccasined feet until the blood returned to them.

Then, hungry and still shivering, they began to thread their way into the depths of a swamp where the growth of small tree trunks was so dense as sometimes to compel them to turn

their bodies edgewise, pulling their bundle rolls after them, in order to advance. The water was everywhere half knee-deep and the gloom intense. Now and then, through the skeleton web overhead, one particularly bright star glimmered and its fitful twinkle was all the guide they had. For the most part they made their way by feeling. Etapa trailed his unstrung bow and bundle in one hand and with the other searched the spaces in his front, and Zintkala followed, treading as closely as possible upon his heels, never daring to drop beyond arms' reach. Thus, slowly and with infinite patience, they advanced into the heart of a perilous swamp. Wherever they could find a limb of considerable size thrust across their path they endeavored to climb upon it in order to beat warmth into their feet. Sometimes this was possible and sometimes, because of the thick growth overhead, they were compelled to creep beneath or to pass around. In spite of these occasional respites from the biting cold of ice-water their feet in time became so numb and their legs so cramped that they groped their way stumblingly, nerved only by the necessity of foiling their enemies. Doubtless the unspoken thought of each was that they might easily perish in this unknown swamp—but it was better to die here than again to fall into the hands of the Ojibwa.

How many dreadful hours were passed in

threading the mazes of the tamarack swamp cannot be known. The voyagers' feet and legs at length became so numb and useless that they were barely able to drag them over the rough under surface, pulling themselves forward by grasping the limbs or small trunks of trees. They could no longer pound life into their legs, even upon a fallen log which they attempted to stand upon.

"Brother," said Zintkala, after a weary time, "brother, I perish. I cannot walk." Her teeth were chattering so that she could hardly speak the words.

"Come, Tanké, let us go on yet a little longer," urged Etapa. "We shall find some large fallen tree and lie upon it to rest."

They did not find the tree but, after painfully dragging their limbs some little distance further, they came suddenly upon a small open plat of marsh grass—such as is often found, a little oasis in the tamarack woods—where the ground lay quite above the water's level. Half-frozen, faint with hunger and dizzy with fatigue, they stumbled upon this dry grass as those who are drowning clutch the plank of safety.

Zintkala fell in a heap, her limbs cramping, her teeth chattering, too exhausted for a warming exercise. She had clung to her blanket roll mechanically. Etapa, though he shook as with a fever chill, was yet able to keep his feet. He

stamped about clumsily but manfully, crying out to his sister that she should do as he did. In thus tramping and attempting to jump he stumbled backward over a dead tree which had fallen across the opening. As he crashed among the branches some animal of the cat tribe sprang from its warm nest spitting and growling angrily. This creature scrambled into a near tree-top and continued to menace the intruders with angry snarls.

Somewhat frightened by the threats of the cat, Etapa decided to build a fire. As there was no wind blowing he knew that the smoke must go upward and could hardly carry a telltale scent to the enemy.

Following the dead tree to its broken tops, he soon secured an armful of fagots and, with a wisp of dry grass for kindling, speedily had a snapping fire going. As the blaze crept out upon the grass he stamped it out with his wet moccasins and so prevented the disaster of a tale-telling light upon the sky. The tamarack sticks burned briskly, and Zintkala crawled on her hands and knees into the grateful warmth.

Seeing her condition, Etapa piled on more sticks and both sat with their benumbed feet thrust almost into the flames. Ah, how good was the heat! It was truly waśte-ste. But they were no sooner warm than hunger pinched them anew.

While they sat warming their feet they heard the wildcat scramble away among the trees, but soon a saucy owl, perched near at hand, shrieked at them mockingly, "Hu-hoo! hu! who-whoo!" and had they understood English they might have answered after the manner of the lost son of Erin—"None, sor, that yer honor should be envyin'."

After a long time, when they were thoroughly dry and warm, they wrapped themselves tightly in their blankets and, in spite of a gnawing hunger, slept.

It was not yet daylight when the chill air awoke Zintkala, who sat up to draw her blanket more closely around her and instantly was stricken with fright. The sky was obscured and the darkness intense. None who do not know by experience the oppressive blackness of a tamarack swamp upon a rayless night can imagine its effect upon the mind of this Indian girl. It was a weird, dank darkness which carried a positive conviction of the reign of under-world spirits. She was smitten with the fear of the water-god of the Dakotas, the fabled monster of the wakan-wicaśa or medicine men.

"Hoye, younger brother," she called, in a sharp, low voice, "awake quickly! I am afraid of Unk-té-hï." She thrust out a hand and shook him, repeating her appeal.

"He-hee, why do you thus wake me?" he

grumbled. "Shh-te!" she warned. "Unk-té-hï will hear you and the under-water people will surely devour us."

At this the boy sat up, shivering. He, too, was stricken with the fear of Unk-té-hï and his under-water beasts.

"Let us keep very still," he murmured, "and pray to the thunder spirits. Perhaps they will keep the evil ones from finding us. Do you not think, older sister, that they have made it very dark against the under-water beasts?"

"It is very dark," she muttered, "but do not speak further, younger brother."

An unwonted and, as it seemed to these children, a dreadful silence had fallen upon the earth. They did not know it, but a fog had risen and hung densely in the woods and upon the waters. The migrating birds and woodfolk, seeing nothing, had fallen to rest. A dead stillness reigned save that now and then an intermittent, rasping shriek seemed to pierce all the black depths of the woods and once a hollow, terrible laugh fell out of the sky. The children were too much frightened to recognize the cries of the swamp owl and of that unerring swimmer, diver and flier, the loon. They heard only the voices of Unk-té-hï and his evil ones, who they doubted not were seeking to devour the invaders of their dismal swamp.

They snuggled, trembling, close together and

could only whisper the hope that Wakinyan, the spirit of thunders, enemy of Unk-té-hï, had cast a black robe over the woods to blind the evil one. Fervently, but with scarcely audible voices, they prayed to the spirits of the upper air to protect them.

With the coming of light they felt that their prayers had been answered and their fears passed to give place to the gnaw of hunger. Because of the fog there was in the swamp no living thing to be seen or heard.

"Come, older sister, let us go from here," said the brother, and with a hopeless face the little girl packed her bundle. There was no mark of land or sky to guide them, but they felt that they must go while they yet had strength to withstand the cold wading.

Etapa found traces in the dry grass of their tracks in coming in upon the opening and they left, going in the opposite direction. Again the dismal wading with water from ankle to knee deep and the same wedging and winding amid rough, close standing tree trunks and with the barest flicker of befogged skylight overhead.

There was a single element of cheeriness amid the gloom, for again they heard the whistle of wings overhead, the booming call and the far-off murmur, of innumerable water-fowl.

In order to keep a single course, Etapa would fasten his eye upon the farthest tree trunk to be