



## L o v e o f L i f e

THE TWO MEN MOVED PAINFULLY DOWN the bank and fell among the rocks that were scattered everywhere. They were tired and weak. Their faces showed the patient appearance that results from difficulty long endured. They were heavily burdened with blanket packs which were tied to their shoulders. Each man carried a gun. They walked in a leaning position, the shoulders forward, the head farther forward, the eyes fixed upon the ground.

“I wish we had a couple of those **cartridges** that are lying in our cache,” said the second man.

His voice was completely without expression. And the first man, walking into the milky stream that flowed over the rocks, made no reply.

The other man followed at his heels. They did not remove their shoes, although the water was icy cold. It was so cold that their feet

soon were without feeling. In places, the water dashed against their knees, and both men found it difficult to remain standing.

The man who followed slipped on a smooth rock and nearly fell. He recovered his footing with a great effort, at the same time uttering a sharp cry of pain. He seemed faint and stretched one hand forward, seeking support against the air. When he had steadied himself, he stepped forward. But he slipped again and nearly fell. Then he stood still and looked at the other man, who had never turned his head.

The man stood still for fully a minute, as if he were deciding something. Then he called:

“I say, Bill, I hurt my foot.”

Bill struggled ahead through the milky water. He did not look around. The man watched him go, and although his face lacked expression, as before, his eyes had the look of a wounded animal.

The other man climbed the farther bank of the stream and continued straight ahead without looking back. The man in the stream watched him. His lips trembled a little.

“Bill!” he cried.

It was the despairing cry of a strong man in trouble, but Bill’s head did not turn. The man watched him go, struggling forward up the hill toward the skyline. He watched him go until he passed over the hilltop and disappeared. Then he turned his gaze and slowly examined the circle of the world that remained to him now that Bill was gone.

The sun was low in the sky, almost hidden by a cover of clouds. The man looked at his watch, while supporting his weight on one leg. It was four o’clock in the afternoon. The season was near the end of July or the first of August. He did not know the exact date within a week or two, but that was enough to know that the sun marked the northwest.

He looked to the south and decided that somewhere beyond those hills lay the Great Bear Lake. Also, he knew that behind the same hills the Arctic Circle cut its way across the plains of northern Canada, called the Barrens. This stream in which he stood flowed into the Coppermine River, which in turn flowed north and emptied into the

Arctic Ocean. He had never been there, but he had seen it once on a map.

Again his gaze completed the circle of the world about him. It was not a cheerful sight. Everywhere was soft skyline. The hills were all low-lying. There were no trees, no grasses. There was nothing but a vast emptiness that brought fear into his eyes.

“Bill!” he whispered, once, and twice, “Bill!”

He stood trembling in the milky water, feeling the vastness pressing in upon him with great force. He began to shake as with a disease, until the gun falling from his hand into the stream brought him back to reality. He fought with his fear and regaining his self-control, he recovered the gun from the water. He pushed his pack more toward his left shoulder. This helped to take a portion of its weight off the foot he had hurt. Then he proceeded, slowly and carefully, in great pain, to the bank of the stream.

He did not stop. With a worry that was madness, unmindful of the pain, he hurried up the hill to the top, over which his companion had disappeared. But at the top he saw a valley, empty of life. He fought with his fear again and won. Then once more he moved the pack farther toward his left shoulder and struggled down the hill.

The bottom of the valley was very wet. Thick plant life held the moisture close to the surface and the water flowed from under his feet at every step. He picked his way carefully across the valley and followed the other man's footsteps along the rocks which made small islands in a sea of wet plant life.

Although alone, he was not lost. Farther on, he knew, he would come to where dead pine trees bordered the shore of a little lake. In the language of that country it was called the “land of little sticks.” Into that lake flowed a small stream, the water of which was not milky. There was grass along that stream, but no trees. He would follow the stream until it divided. He would cross this place of dividing to another stream, flowing to the west. This he would follow until it emptied into the river Dease. Here he would find a cache under an upturned boat and covered with many rocks. In this cache there would be cartridges for

his empty gun, and fishhooks and lines. Everything he needed for catching food would be there. Also he would find flour, a little meat, and some beans.

Bill would be waiting for him there, and they would find a boat and row south down the Dease to the Great Bear Lake. And south across the lake they would go, ever south, until they came to the Mackenzie River. And south, always south they would go, while the winter raced after them and the ice formed in the streams, and the days grew cold. South they would go, to some warm place where the trees grew tall and full and there was food without end.

These were the thoughts of the man as he struggled forward. But as strongly as he struggled with his body, he struggled equally with his mind. He tried to believe that Bill had not deserted him. Surely Bill would wait for him at the cache. He was forced to think this thought. Otherwise, there would not be any reason to continue, and he would lie down and die.

As the ball of the sun sank slowly into the northwest, he recalled every inch of his and Bill's flight south ahead of the oncoming winter. And he thought again and again of the food in the cache. It had been two days since he had anything to eat. It was a far longer time since he had had enough to eat. Often he picked muskeg berries, put them into his mouth, and ate them. A muskeg berry is a small seed in a drop of water. In the mouth, the water melts away and the seed tastes bitter. The man knew there was no real food value in the berries; but he ate them patiently with a hope greater than his experience.

At nine o'clock that night he hit his toe on a rocky surface, and from weakness and tiredness he fell to the ground. He lay for some time, without movement, on his side. He took his pack from his back and dragged himself into a sitting position. It was not yet dark. While some light remained he felt among the rocks for pieces of dried plants. When he had gathered a pile, he built a fire and put a tin pot of water on it to boil.

He unwrapped his pack. The first thing he did was to count his matches. There were 67. He counted them three times to be sure. He

divided them into several portions, wrapping them in paper. He put one portion in his empty tobacco pack, another in the inside band of his hat, and a third under his shirt against his flesh. This accomplished, he began to worry whether he had counted correctly. He unwrapped them all and counted them again. Yes, there were 67.

He dried his wet shoes and socks by the fire. The moccasins were badly torn. His socks were worn through in places, and his feet were bleeding. The area between his foot and leg, the ankle, was very painful. He examined it. It had swelled until it was as large as his knee. He cut a long strip from one of his two blankets and bound the ankle tightly. He cut other strips and bound them about his feet to serve both for moccasins and socks. Then he drank the pot of hot water, wound his watch, and pulled his blankets around him.

He slept like a dead man. The brief darkness at midnight came and went. Then the sun rose in the northeast. It can better be said that day dawned in that quarter of the sky, because the sun was hidden by gray clouds.

At six o'clock in the morning he waked, quietly lying on his back. He gazed straight up into the gray sky and knew that he was hungry. As he lifted himself on his elbow, he was frightened by a loud noise. There was a caribou looking at him curiously. The animal was not more than 50 feet away, and instantly, into the man's mind came the picture of caribou meat cooking over a fire. From habit, he reached for the empty gun and aimed it. The caribou leaped away and disappeared across the rocks.

The man cursed and threw the empty gun on the ground. He uttered a cry of pain as he started to drag himself to his feet. It was a slow task. When he finally stood on his feet, he needed another minute or two to straighten himself, so that he could stand as a man should stand.

He climbed a small hill and looked about. There were no trees, no bushes. There was nothing but grassy gray plants and some gray rocks and gray streams. The sky was gray. There was no sun or promise of sun. He had no idea of where north was, and he had forgotten how he had

come to this spot the night before. But he was not lost. He knew that. Soon he would come to the land of the little sticks. He felt that it lay to the left somewhere, not far. Possibly it was over the next low hill.

He returned to prepare his pack for traveling. He assured himself of the existence of his three separate portions of matches, although he did not stop to count them. But he did pause, trying to decide what to do about a bag made from moose skin. It was not large. It could be covered by his two hands. But he knew that it weighed 15 pounds—as much as all the rest of the pack. This worried him. He finally set it to one side and proceeded to roll the pack. He paused again to gaze at the moose-skin bag. He picked it up quickly with a quick glance around him. It was as if he thought the cruel wasteland was trying to steal it. When he rose to his feet, the bag was included in the pack on his back.

He started walking to the left, stopping now and again to eat muskeg berries. His ankle had stiffened, but the pain of it was nothing compared with the pain of his stomach. His hunger was so great he could not keep his mind steady on the course he had to follow to arrive at the land of the little sticks.

The berries did not help his hunger. Their bitter taste only made his tongue and mouth sore.

He came to a valley where some birds rose from the rocky places. “Ker-ker-ker” was the sound of their cry. He threw stones at them but could not hit them. He placed his pack on the ground and followed them as a cat advances on a bird. The sharp rocks cut through his trousers until his knees left a trail of blood. But the hurt was lost in the pain of his hunger. He moved his body through the wet plants, becoming wet and cold in the process. But he did not notice this, so great was his desire for food.

Always the birds rose before him. Their cry of “Ker-ker-ker” sounded as if they were laughing at him. He cursed them and cried aloud at them with their own cry.

Once he came upon one that must have been asleep. He did not see it until it flew up in his face from behind some rocks. He grasped the air as suddenly as the rise of the bird, and there remained in his

hand three tail feathers. As he watched its flight he hated it. He felt that it had done him some great wrong. Then he returned to where he had left his pack and lifted it again to his back.

As the day continued, he came into valleys where game was more plentiful. Twenty or more caribou passed by, within easy shooting distance of a gun. He felt a wild desire to run after them, certain that he could catch them. A small black animal came toward him, carrying a bird in its mouth. The man shouted. It was a fearful cry, but the animal, leaping away in fright, did not drop the bird.

Late in the afternoon he followed a stream which flowed through some thick grass. He grasped these grasses firmly near the root and pulled up what looked like a vegetable. It was round and white. Eagerly he sank his teeth into it. It was tender on the outside and gave the promise of food. But its inside was hard and stringy, and, like the berries, it had no food value. Nevertheless, he threw off his pack and went among the grasses on his hands and knees, eating the grass like a cow.

He was very tired and often wished to rest—to lie down and sleep. But he was led on, not so much by his desire to find the land of the little sticks as by his hunger.

He looked into every pool of water, searching without success for things to eat. Then, as the night darkened, he discovered a single small fish in one of these pools. He plunged his whole arm in, but the fish escaped his grasp. He reached for it with both hands and stirred the mud at the bottom of the pool. During his excitement he fell in, getting wet as high as his shoulders. Then the water was too cloudy with mud to allow him to see the fish. He was forced to wait until the mud had again settled to the bottom.

Then he tried again, until the water was again filled with mud. But he could not wait. He took a tin container from his pack and began to empty the water from the pool. He threw it out wildly at first, and so short a distance that it flowed into the pool again. He worked more carefully, trying to be calm, but his heart was pounding and his hands were trembling. At the end of half an hour the pool was nearly dry. Not a cupful of water remained. And there was no fish.

Then he discovered a narrow opening among the stones through which it had escaped into a larger pool—a pool which he could not empty in a night and a day. If he had known of the opening, he could have closed it with a rock before he began and the fish would have been his.

Thus he thought, and he sank down upon the wet earth. At first he cried softly to himself. Then he cried loudly to the uncaring wasteland around him.

He built a fire and warmed himself by drinking hot water. Then he built a camp on the rocks as he had done the night before. The last things he did were to be certain that his matches were dry and to wind his watch. The blankets were wet. His ankle pained him. But he knew only that he was hungry. Through his restless sleep he dreamed of feasts and of food served in all imaginable manners.

When he awakened he was cold and sick. There was no sun. The gray of earth and sky had become deeper. A cold wind was blowing and snow was whitening the hilltops. The air about him grew white with snow while he made a fire and boiled more water. It was wet snow, half rain. At first it melted as soon as it hit the earth. But it continued falling, covering the ground and destroying his fire.

This was a signal for him to put his pack on his back and struggle forward, he knew not where. He was not concerned with the land of little sticks, nor with Bill and the cache under the upturned boat by the river Dease. He was mad because of hunger. He did not notice the course he followed, except that it led him through the bottoms of the valleys. He felt his way through the wet snow to the watery muskeg berries, and was guided by touch as he pulled up the grass by the roots. But it had no taste and did not satisfy his hunger.

He had no fire that night, nor hot water. He pulled his blanket around him to sleep the broken sleep of hunger. The snow became a cold rain. He awakened many times to feel it falling on his upturned face.

Day came. It was a gray day with no sun. It had ceased raining. The sharpness of his hunger had departed. There was a dull pain in his stomach, but it did not trouble him so much. He was more in control



of himself. And once again he was interested in the land of little sticks and the cache by the river Dease.

He cut the remains of one of his blankets into strips and bound his bleeding feet. He used one of the strips on his swelled ankle and prepared himself for a day of travel. When he was ready to pick up his pack, he paused long before deciding to keep the moose-skin bag, but when he departed, it went with him.

The snow had melted under the rain, and only the hilltops showed white. The sun appeared and he succeeded in locating the way he had been traveling. But now he knew that he was lost. Perhaps he had wandered too far to the left. He now turned to the right to return to his true course.

Although the hunger pains were not as great as they had been, he realized that he was weak. He was forced to pause for frequent rests. At those times he ate the muskeg berries and grasses. His tongue felt dry and large and it tasted bitter in his mouth. His heart troubled him very much. When he had traveled a few minutes, it would begin pounding. Then it would leap in a series of beats that made him feel faint.

In the middle of the day he found two small fish in a large pool. It was impossible to empty it. But he was calmer now and he managed to catch them. They were no bigger than his little finger, but now he was not particularly hungry. The dull pain in his stomach had been growing duller. It almost seemed that his stomach was asleep. He ate the fish with great care. The eating was an act of pure reason. Although he had no desire to eat, he knew that he must eat to live.

In the evening he caught three more small fish, eating two and saving the third for breakfast. The sun had dried the wet plants and he was able to build a fire. He had not traveled more than ten miles that day. The next day, traveling whenever his heart permitted, he went no more than five miles. But his stomach did not give him any pain. It seemed to be sleeping. He was now in a strange country, too, and the caribou were becoming more plentiful. There were wolves also. Their howls could be heard across the land, and once he saw three of them crossing his path.

Another night passed. And in the morning, being more reasonable, he untied the leather string that held the moose-skin bag. From its open mouth poured a yellow stream of gold dust. He divided the gold into two equal parts. One half, wrapped in a piece of a blanket, he hid among a large formation of rocks. The other half he returned to the bag. He also began to use strips of the one remaining blanket for his feet. He still kept his gun, because there were cartridges in that cache by the river Dease.

This was a cloudy day, and this day hunger waked in him again. He was very weak. It was no uncommon thing now for him to fall. Once he fell into a bird's nest. There were four tiny birds, a day or so old, no more than a mouthful. He ate them greedily, putting them alive into his mouth and crushing them like eggshells between his teeth. The mother bird flew about him with cries of anger. He used his gun as a club with which to hit her, but she flew beyond his reach. He threw stones at her and by chance, one broke a wing. Then she ran away, dragging the broken wing, with him following her.

The little birds had not satisfied his hunger. He jumped along on his painful ankle, throwing stones and screaming loudly at times. At other times, he struggled along silently, picking himself up patiently when he fell, or rubbing his eyes with his hand when faintness threatened to overpower him.

The bird led him across some wet ground in the bottom of the valley. He discovered footprints in the wet grasses. They were not his own. He could see that. They must be Bill's. But he could not stop, because the mother bird was running ahead. He would catch her first. Then he would return and examine the footprints.

He tired the mother bird; but he tired himself also. She lay on her side breathing heavily. He lay on his side, a dozen feet away, unable to move toward her. And as he recovered, she recovered. She flew beyond reach as his hungry hand stretched out to catch her. The hunt started again. Night darkened and she escaped. He fell because of weakness, cutting his face. He did not move for a long time; then he rolled on his side. He wound his watch and lay there until morning.

It was another gray day. Half of his last blanket had been used for foot-wrappings. He failed to find Bill's trail again. It was not important. His hunger drove him on. He wondered if Bill, too, were lost. By the middle of the day, the weight of his pack became too great. Again he divided the gold, this time merely pouring half of it on the ground. In the afternoon he threw away the rest of it. There remained now only the half of the blanket, the tin container, and the gun.

A **hallucination** began to trouble him. He felt certain that one cartridge remained. It was in his gun and he had not seen it. However, he knew all the time that the gun was empty. But the hallucination continued. He fought it for hours. Then, he opened his gun eagerly, only to find nothing inside.

He struggled ahead for half an hour, when the hallucination arose again. Again he fought it, and still it continued. To give himself relief, he again opened the gun and found it empty.

At times his mind wandered even further. But these moments away from reality were brief, because always the pains of hunger forced him to return. Once, as his mind was wandering, he was returned to reality by a sight that almost caused him to faint. Before him stood a horse. A horse! He could not believe his eyes. A thick cloud was in his eyes, flashing with points of light. He rubbed his eyes fiercely to clear his sight. Then he saw before him not a horse, but a great brown bear. The animal was studying him with curiosity.

The man had brought his gun half the distance to his shoulder before he realized what he was doing. He lowered it and drew his hunting knife from its cover. Before him was meat and life. He ran his finger along the edge of his knife. It was sharp. The point was sharp. He would throw himself upon the bear and kill it. But his heart began its pounding. Then came its wild leap and he began to feel faint.

His wild courage was replaced by a great fear. In his weakness, what if the animal attacked him? He drew himself up tall, grasping the knife and staring hard at the bear. The bear advanced a couple of steps and stood up. If the man ran, the bear would run after him; but the man did not run. He was alive now with the courage of fear.

The bear moved away to one side with a threatening noise. He, himself, was fearful of this strange creature that appeared unafraid. But the man did not move. He stood still until the danger was past. Then he yielded to a fit of trembling and sank to his knees on the wet grass.

He regained control of himself and then started to move forward, afraid now in a new manner. It was not the fear that he would die from lack of food. He was afraid that he would be destroyed by forces other than starving. There were the wolves. Across the wasteland their howls could be heard, making the air itself a threat most real to him.

Now and again the wolves, in groups of two and three, crossed his path. But they stayed away from him. They were not in sufficient numbers to attack, and besides, they were hunting caribou. Caribou did not battle, while this strange creature that walked on two legs might bite.

In the late afternoon he came upon scattered bones where the wolves had made a kill. What remained had been a young caribou an hour before. He studied the bones, cleaned of any flesh. They were still pink with the life in them which had not yet died. Might he look like that before the day was done? Was this life? A fleeting thing without meaning? It was only life that pained. There was no hurt in death. To die was to sleep. It meant rest. Then why was he not content to die?

But he did not think about these things for very long. He was soon seated in the grass, a bone in his mouth, biting at the bit of life that made it yet pink. The sweet meaty taste drove him mad. He closed his teeth firmly on the bones. Sometimes it was the bone that broke, sometimes his teeth. Then he crushed the bones between the rocks. He pounded them into tiny pieces, and ate them. He was in such a hurry that he pounded his fingers, too. He felt surprised at the fact that his fingers did not hurt much when they were caught under the rock.

Then came frightful days of snow and rain. He did not know when he made camp and when he broke camp. He traveled in the night as much as in the day. He rested whenever he fell, moving ahead whenever the dying life in him started up again. He, as a man, no longer struggled. It was the life in him, unwilling to die, that drove him on.

He did not suffer, nor feel pain. But his mind was filled with hallucinations and wild dreams.

But he still ate the crushed bones of the young caribou, which he had gathered and carried with him. He crossed no more hills, but followed a large stream which flowed through a wide valley. He did not see this stream nor this valley. He saw nothing except hallucinations.

One morning he awakened with his mind clear, lying on his back on a rocky surface. The sun was shining bright and warm. Far away, he heard the noises made by young caribou. He remembered rain and wind and snow, but whether he had been beaten by the storm for two days or two weeks he did not know.

For some time he lay without movement. The friendly sun poured down upon him and filled his body with its warmth. A fine day, he thought. Perhaps he could succeed in locating himself. By a painful effort he rolled on his side.

Below him flowed a wide river. Its unfamiliarity puzzled him. Slowly he followed it with his eyes, as it curved among the bare hills. They were more bare and lower than any hills he had yet seen. Slowly, without excitement, he followed the course of the strange stream toward the skyline and saw that it emptied into a bright and shining sea. He was still unexcited. Most unusual, he thought. It was probably a trick of his mind. He was certain of this when he also saw a ship floating in the shining sea. He closed his eyes for a while, then opened them. It was strange how the sight continued. Yet it was not strange. He knew there were no seas nor ships in the middle of this land, as he had known there was no cartridge in the empty gun.

He heard a noise behind him. It seemed like the dry sound that comes from the throat when air is forced out in a **cough**. Very slowly, because of his weakness and stiffness, he rolled to his other side. He could see nothing near, but he waited patiently. Again came the cough, and there, between two rocks, he saw the gray head of a wolf. The sharp ears did not stand up as straight as he had seen them on other wolves. The eyes were dull and the head seemed to hang. The animal opened and shut its eyes frequently in the sunshine. It seemed sick. As he

looked, it coughed again.

This was real, he thought. He turned on the other side to see the reality of the world which had been hidden from him before by his hallucination. But the sea still shone and the ship was still there. Was it reality? He closed his eyes for a long while and thought, and then he remembered.

He had been traveling north by east, away from the Dease Divide and into the Coppermine Valley. This wide river was the Coppermine. That shining sea was the Arctic Ocean. That ship was a fishing boat which had wandered east from the mouth of the Mackenzie River. Now it was lying in Coronation Gulf. He remembered the map he had seen long ago, and it was all clear and reasonable to him.

He sat up and turned his attention to immediate affairs. He had worn holes through the blanket wrappings, and his feet were like shapeless pieces of meat. His last blanket was gone. His gun and knife were both lost. He had also lost his hat somewhere, with the matches in the band. The matches against his chest were safe and dry inside the paper. He looked at his watch. It marked eleven o'clock and was still going. This proved that he had kept it wound.

He was calm. Although very weak, he had no feeling of pain. He was not hungry. The thought of food was not even pleasant to him. Whatever he did was done entirely by reasoning. He tore off the legs of his trousers to the knees and bound them about his feet. Somehow he had succeeded in keeping the tin container. He would have some hot water before he began what he knew was to be an awful journey to the ship.

His movements were slow. He shook as if with a disease. When he started to gather dried grasses he found he could not rise to his feet. He tried again and again. Then he contented himself with moving about on his hands and knees. Once he went near the sick wolf. The animal dragged itself out of the way, licking its face with a tongue which seemed hardly to have the strength to curl. The man noticed that the tongue was not the customary healthy red, but was a yellowish brown and covered with a half-dried coating.

After he drank some hot water, the man found he was able to stand. He could even walk as well as a dying man might be supposed to walk. But every minute or two he was forced to rest. His steps were unsteady, as were the steps of the wolf behind him. That night, when the shining sea was hidden in the blackness, he knew he was nearer to it by no more than four miles.

Through the night he heard the cough of the sick wolf and now and then, the noises of the young caribou. There was life all around him. But it was strong life, very much alive and well. He knew the sick wolf was following the sick man's steps in the hope that the man would die first. In the morning, when he opened his eyes, he saw it looking at him with a hungry stare. It stood with its tail between its legs like an unhappy dog.

The sun rose brightly, and all morning the man headed toward the ship on the shining sea. The weather was perfect. It was the brief return of summer which was usual in that country. It might continue for a week. Or, tomorrow or the next day it might be gone.

In the afternoon the man came to a track. It was that of another man, who did not walk, but who dragged himself on his hands and knees. The man thought it might be Bill, but he thought about it without any interest. He had no curiosity. Feeling and emotion had left him. He was no longer able to feel pain. Yet the life that was in him drove him ahead. He was very tired, but it refused to die. It was because it refused to die that he still ate muskeg berries and small fish, drank his hot water, and kept a careful eye on the sick wolf.

He followed the track of the other man who dragged himself along. Soon he came to the end of it. There were a few freshly cleaned bones where the grass was marked by the footprints of many wolves. He saw a moose-skin bag, exactly like his own. It had been torn by sharp teeth. He picked it up, although its weight was almost too much for his weak fingers. Bill had carried it to the end. Now he would have the last laugh. He would live and carry it to the ship in the shining sea. He laughed aloud, making an inhuman sound, and the sick wolf howled with him. The man ceased suddenly. How could he laugh at Bill, if that

were Bill; if those bones, so pinky-white and clean, were Bill?

He turned away. Bill had deserted him. But he would not take the gold, nor would he eat Bill's bones. Bill would have done so, however, had their situations been exchanged.

He came to a pool of water. Bending over it in search of fish, he threw his head back as if he had been struck. He had caught sight of his face in the water. So awful was it that his feelings were stirred long enough to be shocked. There were three fish in the pool, which was too large to empty. After several attempts to catch them in his tin container, he stopped. He was afraid, because of his great weakness, that he might fall and sink into the water. It was for this reason, too, that he did not trust himself to ride down the river atop one of the many logs to be found along its banks.

That day he lessened the distance between him and the ship by three miles. The next day he traveled only two miles, because he was now dragging himself on his hands and knees as Bill had done. At the end of the fifth day the ship was still seven miles away. He was unable to travel as much as a mile a day. However, the summer weather continued, and he continued to move toward the ship. And always the sick wolf coughed at his heels.

His knees had become red meat like his feet. Although he bound them with the shirt from his back, it was a red track he left behind him on the grass and stones. Once, glancing back, he saw the wolf licking his bloody track hungrily. He saw clearly what his own end might be—unless he could kill the wolf. Then began as awful an event as has ever been told: two sick creatures dragging their dying bodies across a wasteland and hunting each other's lives.

Had it been a well wolf, it would not have mattered so much to the man. But the thought of feeding the mouth of that nearly dead thing was hateful. His mind had begun to wander again and he was troubled by hallucinations. His reasonable moments grew shorter.

He was awakened once from a faint sleep by a cough close to his ear. The wolf leaped back, losing its footing and falling in its weakness. It was a funny sight, but he could not laugh. Nor was he afraid. He was



too far gone for that. But his mind was for the moment clear, and he lay and considered.

The ship was no more than four miles away. He could see it quite well when he rubbed his eyes. He could also see the white sail of a small boat cutting the water of the shining sea. But he could never drag himself those four miles. He knew that, and was very calm about the fact. He knew that he could not travel another half a mile. And yet he wanted to live. It was unreasonable that he should die after all he had been through. Fate asked too much of him. And, dying, he could not accept death. It was madness, perhaps, but in the very grasp of death he refused to die.

He closed his eyes and tried to keep himself calm. He struggled against the awful desire for sleep that threatened him. It was much like a sea, this deadly sleepiness. It rose and rose, mastering his entire self, bit by bit. Sometimes he was almost lost, swimming through its waters with a weakening effort. Then, by some strange power of the soul, his will would strike out more strongly against it.

Without movement he lay on his back. He could hear, slowly drawing nearer and nearer, the sound of the sick wolf's breathing. It came closer, always closer, and he did not move. It was beside his ear. The dry tongue moved across his face. His hands struck out. Actually, he had willed them to strike out. The fingers were curved, but they closed on empty air. Quickness requires strength, and the man had not his strength.

The quiet waiting of the wolf was awful. The man's waiting was no less awful. For half a day he lay without motion, fighting off sleep. He waited for the thing that was to feed upon him and upon which he wished to feed. Sometimes the sea of sleep rose over him and he dreamed long dreams. But always, through it all, waking and dreaming, he waited for the noisy breath and the feel of the tongue.

This time he did not hear the breath. He slipped slowly from some dream to feel the tongue along his hand. He waited. The teeth pressed softly, then more firmly. The wolf was using its last strength in an effort to sink its teeth into the food for which it had waited so long. But the

man, too, had waited long. The hand closed on the wolf's mouth. Slowly, while the wolf struggled weakly, the other hand moved across the wolf's body. Five minutes later the whole weight of the man's body was on top of the wolf. The hands had not sufficient strength to grasp the wolf about the throat until it died. But the face of the man was pressed close to the throat of the wolf and the mouth of the man was full of hair. At the end of half an hour the man felt some warm drops of blood in his throat. It was not pleasant. It was like hot, melted metal being forced into his stomach, and it was forced by his will alone. Later the man rolled on his back and slept.

There were some **scientists** traveling on the fishing ship *Bedford*. From where they stood on the ship, they could see a strange object on the shore. It was moving down the beach toward the water. They were unable to decide what it was. Being men of science, they climbed into a smaller boat and went ashore to examine it. And they saw something that was alive but which could hardly be called a man. It was blind and did not know what it was doing. Its movements produced little effect. But still it continued to drag itself across the ground at the rate of about twenty feet an hour.

Three weeks later the man lay in a bed on the fishing boat. With tears streaming down his face, he told who he was and what he had experienced. He also talked without meaning about his mother, and a home in California among the flowers.

The days were not many after that when he sat at table with the scientists and the ship's officers. He delighted in the sight of so much food and watched it carefully as it went into the mouths of others. With the disappearance of each mouthful an expression of sorrow came into his eyes. He was not mad. However, he hated those men at mealtimes. He was afraid that there would not be enough food. He inquired of the cook, the cabin boy, the captain, concerning the food supply. They reassured him numerous times. But he would not believe them and went into the kitchen to see with his own eyes.

It was noticed that the man was getting fat. He grew bigger with

each day. The scientists shook their heads and gave their opinions on the problem. They limited the amount of food given to the man at his meals, but still his weight increased.

The seamen smiled. They knew. And when the scientists decided to observe the man, they learned the reason. They saw him walk about the ship after breakfast. Like a man begging with an outstretched hand, he approached a seaman. The seaman smiled and gave him a piece of bread. He grasped it, and looked at it as a greedy man looks at gold. Then he put it inside his shirt. He received similar gifts from other smiling seamen.

The scientists were careful. They allowed him to continue. But they secretly examined his bed. It was lined with bread; every inch of space was filled with bread. Yet he was not mad. He was preparing for another possible famine—that was all. He would recover from it, the scientists said. And he did, even before the *Bedford* sailed into San Francisco Bay.