



*The
Incredible
Journey*

by

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THIS JOURNEY took place in a part of Canada which lies in the northwestern part of the great sprawling province of Ontario. It is a vast area of deeply wooded wilderness — of endless chains of lonely lakes and rushing rivers. Thousands of miles of country roads, rough timber lanes, overgrown tracks leading to abandoned mines, and unmapped trails snake across its length and breadth. It is a country of far-flung, lonely farms and a few widely scattered small towns and villages, of lonely trappers' shacks and logging camps. Most of its industry comes from the great pulp and paper companies who work their timber concessions deep in the very heart of the forests; and from the mines, for it is rich in minerals. Prospectors work through it; there are trappers and Indians; and sometimes hunters who fly into the virgin lakes in small amphibious aircraft; there are pioneers with visions beyond their own life span; and there are those who have left the bustle

of civilization forever, to sink their identity in an unquestioning acceptance of the wilderness. But all these human beings together are as a handful of sand upon the ocean shores, and for the most part there is silence and solitude and an uninterrupted way of life for the wild animals that abound there: moose and deer, brown and black bears; lynx and fox; beaver, muskrat and otter; fishers, mink and marten. The wild duck rests there and the Canada goose, for this is a fringe of the central migratory flyway. The clear tree-fringed lakes and rivers are filled with speckled trout and steelheads, pike and pickerel and whitefish.

Almost half the year the country is blanketed with snow; and for weeks at a time the temperature may stay many degrees below zero; there is no slow growth of spring, but a sudden short burst of summer when everything grows with wild abandon; and as suddenly it is the fall again. To many who live there, fall is the burnished crown of the year, with the crisp sunny days and exhilarating air of the Northland; with clear blue skies, and drifting leaves, and, as far as the eye can see, the endless panorama of glorious rich flaming color in the turning trees.

This is the country over which the three travelers passed, and it was in the fall that they traveled, in the days of Indian summer.

John Longridge lived several miles from one of the small towns in an old stone house that had been in his family for several generations. He was a tall, austerely pleasant man of about forty, a bachelor,

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and a writer by profession, being the author of several historical biographies. He spent much of his time traveling and gathering material for his books, but always returned to the comfortable old stone house for the actual writing. He liked the house to himself during these creative periods, and for many years had enjoyed an ideal arrangement whereby his domestic wants were cared for by a middle-aged couple, Mrs. Oakes and her husband Bert, who lived in a small cottage about half a mile away. Mrs. Oakes came in every day to look after the house and cook the main meals. Bert was in charge of the furnace, the garden and all the odd jobs. They came and went about their business without disturbing Longridge, and there was complete accord among them all.

On the eve of the incredible journey, towards the end of September, Longridge sat by a crackling log fire in his comfortable library. The curtains were drawn and the firelight flickered and played on the bookshelves and danced on the ceiling. The only other light in the room came from a small shaded lamp on a table by the deep armchair. It was a very peaceful room and the only sound was the occasional crackling from the logs or the rustling of a newspaper, the pages of which Longridge turned with some difficulty, for a slender wheat-colored Siamese cat was curled on his knee, chocolate-colored front paws curved in towards one another, sapphire eyes blinking occasionally as he stared into the fire.

On the floor, his scarred, bony head resting on

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Instinct told them that the way home lay to the west. And so the doughty young Labrador retriever, the roguish bull terrier and the indomitable Siamese cat set out through the Canadian wilderness. Separately they would soon have died. But together the three house pets face starvation, exposure and wild forest animals to make their way home to the family they love.