

❧ CHAPTER 18 ❧

OVER AND OVER, THOUGH HE KNEW THE NUMBER only too well, Matt counted his notched sticks. He kept hoping he had made a mistake. Always they were the same. Ten sticks. That meant that August had long since gone by. He couldn't remember exactly how many days belonged to each month, but any way he reckoned it the month of September must be almost over. He only needed to look about him. The maple trees circling the clearing flamed scarlet. The birches and aspens glowed yellow, holding a sunlight of their own even on misty days. The woods had become quieter. Jays still screamed at him, and chickadees twittered softly in the trees, but the songbirds had disappeared. Twice he had heard a faraway trumpeting and had seen long straggles of wild geese like trailing smoke high in the air, moving south. In the morning, when he stepped out of the cabin, the frosty air nipped his nose. The noonday was warm as midsummer, but when he came inside at dusk he hurried to stir up the fire. There was a chilliness inside him as well that neither the sun nor the fire ever quite reached. It seemed to him that day by day the shadow of the forest moved closer to the cabin.

Why was his family so late in coming?

He was troubled too because the autumn weather seemed to have brought about a restlessness in Attean. There were days when the Indian boy did not come. He never offered a word of explanation. After a day or two he would simply walk into the cabin and sit down at the table. He rarely suggested that they hunt or fish together. Day after day Matt tramped the woods alone, trying to shake the doubts that walked beside him like his own shadow.

As he walked, Matt was careful to cut blazes in the bark of trees. They gave him courage to walk farther into the forest than he had ever dared before, since he was sure of finding his way back to the cabin. He also watched for Indian signs, and sometimes he was sure he had detected one. One day, looking up, he saw on a nearby tree the sign of the turtle. Time to turn back, he told himself. He felt secure now in the territory of the beaver, but he wasn't so certain that a strange people would welcome a white trespasser.

As he started to retrace his steps, he heard, some distance away, the sharp, high-pitched yelp of a dog. It didn't sound threatening, but neither did it sound like the happy, excited bark of a hound that had scented a rabbit. It sounded almost like the scream of a child. When it came again, it died away into a low whining, and he remembered the trapped fox.

Attean had warned him to have nothing to do with a turtle trap. But he hesitated, and the sound came again. No matter what Attean had told him, he could not bring himself to walk away from that sound. Warily, he made his way through the brush.

It was a dog, a scrawny Indian dog, dirt-caked and bloody. As Matt moved closer he saw, through the blood, the white streak down the side of its face, then the chewed ear and the stubby porcupine quills. Only one dog in the world looked like that. It was caught by its foreleg, just as the fox had been, and it was frantic with pain and fear. Its eyes were glazed, and white foam dripped from its open jaws. Matt felt his own muscles tense with anger. His mind was made up in an instant. It had been bad enough to leave a fox to suffer. Turtle tribe or no, he was not going to walk away from Attean's dog. Somehow he had to get that dog out of the trap.

But how? As he bent down, the dog snapped at him so ferociously that he jumped back. Even if it recognized him, Attean's dog had never learned to trust him. Now it was too crazed to understand that Matt meant to help. Matt set his teeth and stooped again. This time he got his hands on the steel bands of the trap and gave a tug. With a deep growl, the dog snapped at him again. Matt started, scraping his hand against the steel teeth. He leaped to his feet and stared at the red gash that ran from his knuckles to his wrist. It was no use, he realized. There was no way he could get that trap open with the dog in this maddened state. Somehow he would have to find Attean.

He began to run through the forest, back over the way he had come, back along the trails he knew, searching his memory for the signs he remembered that led to the Indian village. Luck was with him. There was the sign of the beaver cut into a tree, and here were the

fallen logs. He was never absolutely sure, but he knew he walked in the right direction, and after nearly an hour, to his great relief, he came out on the shore of the river. There was no canoe waiting, as there had been when Attean had led him there. But the river was narrow, and placid. Thank goodness he had grown up near the ocean, and his father had taken him swimming from the time he could walk. He left his moccasins hidden under a bush and plunged in. In a few moments he came out, dripping, within sight of the stockade.

He was greeted by a frenzied barking of dogs. They burst through the stockade and rushed toward him, halting only a few feet away, menacing him so furiously that he dared not take another step. Behind them came a group of girls who quieted the dogs with shrill cries and blows.

"I have come for Attean," Matt said, when he could make himself heard.

The girls stared at him. Tired, wet, and ashamed of showing his fear of the dogs, Matt could not summon up any politeness or dignity. "Attean," he repeated impatiently.

One girl, bolder than the others, answered him, flaunting her knowledge of the white man's language. "Attean not here," she told him.

"Then Saknis."

"Saknis not here. All gone hunt."

Desperately Matt seized his only remaining chance. "Attean's grandmother," he demanded. "I must see her."

The girls looked at each other uneasily. Matt pulled

back his shoulders and tried to put into his voice the stern authority that belonged to Saknis. "It is important," he said. "Please show me where to find her."

Amazingly, his blustering had an effect. After some whispering, the girls moved back out of his way.

"Come," the leading girl ordered, and he followed her through the gate.

He was not surprised that she led him straight to the most substantial cabin in the clearing. He had recognized on the night of the feast that Saknis was a chief. Now facing him in the doorway was a figure even more impressive than the old man. She was an aging woman, gaunt and wrinkled, but still handsome. Her blackbraids were edged with white. She stood erect, her lips set in a forbidding line, her eyes brilliant, with no hint of welcome. Could he make her understand? Matt wondered in confusion.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he began. "I know you don't want me to come here. I need help. Attean's dog is caught in a trap, a steel trap. I tried to open it, but the dog won't let me near it."

The woman stared at him. He could not tell whether she had understood a word. He started to speak again, when the deerskin curtain was pushed aside and a second figure stood in the doorway. It was a girl, with long black braids hanging over her shoulders. She was dressed in blue, with broad bands of red and white beading. Strange, Matt thought, how much alike they looked, the old woman and the girl, standing side by side so straight and proud.

"Me Marie, sister of Attean," the girl said in a soft,

low voice. "Grandmother not understand. I tell what you say."

Matt repeated what he had said and then waited impatiently while she spoke to her grandmother. The woman listened. Finally her grim lips parted in a single scornful phrase.

"*Aremus piz wat*," she said. Good-for-nothing dog.

Matt's awe vanished in anger. "Tell her maybe it is good for nothing," he ordered the girl. "Attean is fond of it. And it's hurt, hurt bad. We've got to get it out of that trap."

There was distress in the girl's eyes as she turned again to her grandmother. He could see that she was pleading, and that in spite of herself the old woman was relenting. After a few short words, the girl went into the cabin and came back in a moment holding in her hand a large chunk of meat, a small blanket folded over her arm.

"Me go with you," she said. "Dog know me."

In his relief, Matt forgot the torn hand he had been holding behind him. Instantly the old woman moved forward and snatched at it. Her eyes questioned him.

"It's nothing," he said hastily. "I almost got the trap open."

She gave his arm a tug, commanding him to follow her.

"There isn't time," he protested.

She silenced him with a string of words of which he understood only the scornful *piz wat*.

"She say dog not go away," the girl explained. "Better you come. Trap maybe make poison."

Having no choice, Matt followed them into the cabin. He saw now that the woman's straight posture had been a matter of pride. She was really very lame, and stooped as she walked ahead of him. While she busied herself over the fire, he sat obediently on a low platform and looked about him. He was astonished that the little room, strange, and so unlike his mother's kitchen, seemed beautiful. It was very clean. The walls were lined with birchbark and hung with woven mats and baskets of intricate design. The air was sweet with fresh grasses spread on the earth floor.

Without speaking, the woman tended him, washing his hand with clean warm water. From a painted gourd she scooped a pungent-smelling paste and spread it over the wound, then bound his hand with a length of clean blue cotton.

"Thank you," Matt said when she had finished. "It feels better."

She dismissed him with a grunting imitation of Sak-nis's "Good." The girl, who had been watching, moved swiftly to the door. As Matt rose to follow her, the grandmother held out to him a slab of corn bread. He had not realized how hungry he was, and he accepted it gratefully.

The girl took the lead, brushing aside the curious children and the still-suspicious dogs. At the river's edge she untied a small canoe, and Matt stepped into it, thankful that his half-dried clothes would not have to be drenched again. Once on the forest trail, she set the pace, and he did not find it easy to keep up with her

swift, silent stride. She was so like Attean, though lighter and more graceful.

After a time, Matt ventured to break the silence. "You speak good English," he said.

"Attean tell me about you," she answered. "You tell him good story."

"Attean didn't tell me he had a sister."

The girl laughed. "Attean think squaw girl not good for much," she said. "Attean only like to hunt."

"I have a sister too," he told her. "She's coming soon."

"What she name?"

"Sarah. She's younger than you. But Marie isn't an Indian name, is it?" Matt asked.

"Is Christian name. Me baptized by father."

Attean had never mentioned a priest either, but Matt knew that the French Jesuits had lived with the Indians here in Maine long before the English settlers came.

"When my sister comes, will you come with Attean to see her?" he asked.

"It might be so," she answered politely. She sounded as though it never would be.

At last they heard the yelping just ahead of them and they both began to run. Even in his terror, the dog recognized the girl, and greeted her with a frantic beating of his tail. He gulped at the meat she held out to him. But he still would not let either of them touch the trap. The girl had come prepared for this, and she unfolded the blanket she had carried, threw it over the dog's head, and gathered the folds behind him. With surprising strength, she held the struggling bundle

tightly in her arms while Matt took the trap in both hands and slowly forced the jaws open. In a moment the dog was free, escaping the blanket, bounding away from them on three legs, the fourth paw dangling at an odd angle.

"I'm afraid it's broken," Matt said. He was still breathing hard from that last run and from the effort of tugging those steel jaws apart.

"Attean mend," the girl said, folding up the blanket as calmly as though she were simply tidying up a cabin.

The dog hobbled slowly after them along the trail, lying down now and then to lick at the bleeding paw. They made slow progress, and now that the worry was over Matt was aware how tired he was. It seemed as though he had been walking back and forth over that trail all day, and the way to the village seemed endless. He was thankful when, halfway to the river, he saw Attean approaching swiftly along the trail.

"My grandmother send me," he explained. "You get dog out?"

"I couldn't do it alone," Matt admitted.

Attean stood watching as the dog came limping toward him. "Dog very stupid," he said. "No good for hunt. No good for smell turtle smell. What for I take back such foolish dog?"

His harsh words did not fool Matt for a moment. Nor did they fool the dog. The scruffy tail thumped joyfully against the earth. The brown eyes looked up at the Indian boy with adoration. Attean reached into his pouch and brought out a strip of dried meat. Then he bent and very gently took the broken paw into his hands.

❧ CHAPTER 19 ❧

"GRANDMOTHER SAY YOU COME TO VILLAGE TODAY," Attean announced two days later.

"That's kind of her," Matt answered. "But my hand is just about healed. It doesn't need any more medicine."

"Not for medicine."

Matt waited uncertainly.

"My grandmother very surprise white boy go long way for Indian dog," Attean explained. "She say you welcome."

So once again Matt crossed the river into the Indian stockade. This time, though the dogs barked at him and children stared and giggled, he did not feel so much like a stranger. Saknis held out a hand of welcome. Attean's grandmother did not exactly smile, but her thin lips were less grim. Behind her, Attean's sister smiled but did not speak. The old woman dipped a clamshell ladle into a kettle and filled three bowls with a stew of fish and corn, then drew back while Attean and Saknis and Matt ate their meal in silence. Neither she nor Marie ate till the men were finished.

After the meal Attean did not hurry him away. He rather grandly played host and led Matt about the village. He was amused when Matt kept stopping every

few feet to watch what the women were doing. Matt was filled with curiosity. He knew well enough that Attean was scornful of the squaw work the white boy had to do, but Attean didn't have to worry about what he was going to eat next day. There were so many things Matt wanted to learn. He observed carefully as two women pounded dried kernels of corn between two rounded stones, catching the coarse flour on a strip of birchbark. He marked how they spread berries on bark, so that the sun dried them hard as pebbles. He admired the baskets made of a single strip of birchbark, bent and fastened at the corners so tightly that water could be boiled inside. "I must remember that," he resolved. "I could do that myself if I tried."

For a time Attean good-naturedly answered his questions; finally he grew impatient of squaw work. He led Matt toward a cluster of boys who squatted in a circle in the dirt pathway, absorbed in some noisy game. The boys widened their ring to make room for two more, and Matt crouched awkwardly on his heels to watch them.

One after the other, they were shaking six smooth bone discs in a wooden bowl and tossing them out onto the ground. Each disc was marked on one side with a band of red paint. When each boy had had a turn, the one who had thrown the most discs to land painted-side up was proclaimed the winner, and with much gloating he collected from each of the others a number of small sticks. Then they handed the bowl to Matt. His luck was good. Five of the discs showed red bands,

and with laughter and clowning the others piled up before him a little heap of sticks.

What was so exciting about this simple game, he wondered, to cause so much shouting? The bowl went rapidly round the circle, the sticks kept changing hands, and presently he had the answer. One of the boys had no sticks left to pay. With a mocking groan he unclasped from his arm a wide copper band and tossed it to the winner.

So that's it, Matt thought silently. Sooner or later I'm bound to lose too, and when I do, what will they expect me to forfeit?

He did not have long to wait. At his next turn every one of the discs landed blank side up. Ruefully he handed over the last of the sticks he had won. There was a gleeful shout, and then they waited.

What do I have? he thought desperately. Nothing in his pocket but his jackknife, and his very life depended upon that knife.

Then the boy nearest him reached over and jerked roughly at the sleeve of his shirt. Matt pretended not to understand, and the boy tugged harder. Two of the others got to their feet, plainly ready to tear the shirt from his back. Attean made no move to help him. Grimly he pulled the shirt over his head and tossed it to the winner. It served him right, he supposed. His father had always forbidden him to gamble. But what was he going to do without that shirt? It was the only one he had.

Now Attean put an end to the game. He leaped to

his feet and produced from nowhere a soft ball made of deerskin. Instantly the others raced off in all directions and came back carrying thin sticks. One of these was thrust at Matt. It was a curious sort of bat, light and flexible, with a wide, flat curve at the tip. Forgetting his humiliation, Matt suddenly grinned. With a bat in his hand he could hold his own with any Indian. The boys back in Quincy could have told them that. Eagerly he joined in the scramble of choosing sides.

But never had he played a game like this, so fast and merciless. The ball could not be touched by hand or foot. It was kept flying through the air by the sticks alone. If it fell to the ground, some player scooped it up with the tip of his bat and sent it spinning again. The Indian boys were bewilderingly quick and skillful, and they wielded their bats with no heed for each other's heads, and certainly not for Matt's. It was no accident, he knew, when an elbow jabbed suddenly into his right eye. These boys were putting him to the test. Ignoring the blows that fell on his head and shoulders, Matt swung grimly at the whirling ball, missing it over and over, but sometimes feeling the satisfying thwack of bat against leather. He was thankful now that he had no shirt. If only he could be wearing a breechcloth instead of tight English breeches! But there was no time for worrying about his clothes. Finally, by pure luck, he sent the ball into the hole in the ground that marked the goal. Out of breath and dripping, he grinned as his side generously cheered him and whacked his sore shoulders.

Then, with a whoop, they raced all together through the stockade gate down to the river and went leaping like frogs into the water. Matt floated face down, grateful for the coolness against his burning cheeks. All at once a brown arm circled his neck and dragged him under. Squirming free, he seized a black head in both hands, and the two boys went down together. They came up gasping and grinning. Suddenly Matt was enjoying himself. It was almost as good as being back in Quincy again.

The sun had reached the tops of the pines when he went to Attean's cabin to bid the grandmother goodbye. She stood studying him, and he flushed under her sharp eyes. He must look a sight, he knew. There was a lump as big as an egg on his forehead, and his right eye was probably turning black. She turned and spoke a few stern words to Attean. With a shrug, he went out and returned in a few moments carrying Matt's shirt.

"They play trick on you," he grinned. "Joke."

"Some joke," Matt retorted. He wanted to refuse the shirt, but he couldn't afford to be proud about his only shirt. Resentfully he pulled it over his head.

Before they left, the old woman gave each of them a slab of cake heavy with nuts and berries. Her eyes, as she looked at her grandson, were warm and bright. Matt was minded how his mother had often looked at him, pretending to be angry with him but not able to hide that she was mighty fond of him just the same. Suddenly he felt a sharp stab of homesickness.

Outside the cabin Attean's dog was waiting. He

limped after them to the river, and when Matt stepped into the canoe the dog jumped in after him and settled down only a few inches from Matt's knees. He had never willingly come so close before.

Attean noticed and commented. "Dog remember."

Was that possible? Matt wondered. Could a dog caught in a trap, even though he snapped out in pain and fear, sense that someone was trying to help him? Could the dog remember that terrible ordeal at all? You couldn't read a dog's mind. But just possibly a dog could read a white boy's mind. Very slowly Matt reached down and laid his hand on the dog's back. The dog did not stir or growl. Gently, Matt scratched behind the ragged ear. Gradually, against the bottom of the canoe, the thin tail began to thump in a contented rhythm.

At the opposite bank Attean watched Matt climb out of the canoe, but he did not follow. Apparently this was as far as he intended to go. As Matt hesitated, he lifted his hand. It occurred to Matt that this might be a compliment. Without saying a word, Attean was acknowledging that Matt could now find his own way through the forest. Returning his wave, Matt set out with a confidence he did not quite feel. It was growing dark. He would have to walk fast or he would not be able to mark the signs along the trail.

He was very tired. The bump on his forehead was throbbing. He was sore from head to toe, and his eye was almost swollen shut. But to his surprise, deep inside he felt content. Was it because Attean's dog had finally trusted him? No, more than that had changed.

He had passed some sort of test. Not by any means with flying colors; he had plenty of bruises to remind him of that. But at least he had not disgraced Attean. He felt satisfied. And for the first time since his father had left him, he did not feel alone in the forest.

❧CHAPTER 20❧

FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS MATT WAITED EAGERLY. Early in the morning he finished his chores, so that at a word from Attean he would be ready to set out for the Indian village again. But Attean did not come. Matt resolved to be patient, but day by day his new confidence began to slide away. Perhaps he had only imagined that he had passed a test. In Attean's eyes perhaps he had failed.

It was a week before Attean came, and the moment Matt saw him he knew that there would be no invitation. The Indian boy was solemn and unsmiling, looking more like his grandfather than ever before. He sat staring at the book Matt opened, his mind plainly miles away. He did not want to listen to a story. He seemed to have forgotten the words he had learned the week before.

"I not remember," he said impatiently. "My grandfather teach me many thing."

"What sort of things?"

Attean did not answer. "Time of hunt come soon," he said finally.

Matt felt suddenly hopeful. Perhaps it was not any failure of his own that had caused Attean to stay away.

Every year, Attean had told him, when the leaves had fallen from the trees, the Indians hunted the caribou and the great moose. Whole families moved away from the village to follow the trail of the big animals. Matt knew that more than anything in the world Attean longed to hunt with the men. He could imagine now how Attean must have been staying close to his grandfather these last days, trying to be useful and to prove that he was fit to be one of them.

"I not come tomorrow," Attean added. "Maybe long time."

"You're going on the hunt!" Matt tried hard to keep the envy out of his voice.

Attean shook his head. "I go to find my manitou."

Matt was puzzled. Was *manitou* another word for moose?

"Maybe you call spirit," Attean explained. "All Indian boy must have manitou. It is time for me."

"How can you find a spirit?" For a moment Matt thought this was one of Attean's odd jokes. But he had never seen his friend so serious. Even troubled.

"My grandfather teach me," Attean repeated. "Manitou come in dream."

Then, seeing that Matt was not laughing, that he really wanted to understand, Attean went on, trying to explain in his clumsy English a mystery that could not truly be explained at all.

Every Indian boy must have a manitou, he said, before he could take his place as one of the men of his family. He had to find it for himself. No one could help him. His grandfather had been training him for

many days. He had had to learn many things. Now he must make the test.

He would go out into the forest alone. First, he would make special preparation, bathe himself carefully, and take a special medicine to make him clean inside and out. Then he would go far into the forest and build himself a wigwam of branches. He would stay there alone for many days. He would not eat anything at all, even berries. After sundown he would drink a little water from a brook. He would sing the songs that his grandfather had taught him and repeat the ancient prayers of his people, so that his heart would be worthy. If he did all this, if he waited faithfully, one day his manitou would come to him. Then he could go back to his village. He would have a new name. He would be a man and a hunter.

What would it be like, this manitou? Matt questioned. There was no way to know, Attean told him. It could come in many ways. In a dream he might see a bird or an animal, or even a tree. He might not see anything at all; instead he might hear a voice speaking to him. There would be no mistake. When it came, Attean would recognize that it was meant for him.

"What if the manitou should not come?" Instantly Matt was ashamed of his question. A dark shadow had crossed Attean's face. There was something in his eyes that Matt had never seen there before. Sadness and, more than that, fear.

"I wait," Attean said. "Till he come, I can never be hunter."

Matt could think of nothing at all to say. He felt shut away from his friend in a way that even the boy's scorn had never made him feel. This was something he could not understand or share. If he finds his manitou, he thought, he will go with the men. He may never come here again.

"You'll come back afterwards, won't you?" he asked anxiously, though he knew in his heart that it would never be the same.

"I come back," Attean promised.

Waking in the nights that followed, Matt pulled the blanket tighter about his shoulders. It must be very cold in the forest. He could not get Attean out of his mind. What would it be like, sitting in a shelter, just waiting, growing hungrier every day and more afraid? Because there was no doubt Attean had been afraid, Matt was sure of that. Attean was afraid he might fail, that he might have to return to the village and admit that his manitou had not appeared. For Attean this would be a disgrace, a shame that must be terrible if the thought of it had brought fear into his eyes.

Even though he dreaded that it would mean the end of all their adventures, Matt hoped that Attean would find his manitou.

❧CHAPTER 21❧

THEN ONE MORNING, ATTEAN RETURNED. MATT had been waiting, watching the forest trail impatiently, unwilling to go far from the cabin lest he miss the boy's coming. But when finally he saw Attean approaching, his heart sank. Attean was not alone. His grandfather stalked by his side. Matt sensed that this meant trouble. Perhaps Saknis had come to reproach him. He would surely know that the two boys had been neglecting those lessons. Dreading to face the old man, Matt walked out to meet him, courteously giving the greeting he had learned.

Saknis returned his greeting with dignity. He did not smile. His solemn face made Matt's heart sink still lower. Then, startled, Matt turned toward Attean. He did not dare to ask a question, but he saw at once that there was no need to ask. No doubt about it, Attean had found his manitou. He had changed. He stood straighter and taller. He looked older, and Matt suddenly realized why. The black hair, which had always hung straight down almost to his shoulders, was shaved away. His scalp, like his grandfather's, was bare, except for a single patch running back from his forehead and braided into a topknot fastened with red string. Like

the fresh bear grease that glistened on his skin, pride glistened all over him.

Moreover, he carried a gleaming new rifle.

"You've got a gun!" Matt cried, politeness forgotten.

"My grandfather trade many beaver skin," Attean answered. Though he had in these last days become a man, he had not learned altogether to hide his feelings. He did not say more. He waited now for his grandfather to speak.

The old man's face was grave, but he did not ask about the lessons. "Time of sun get shorter," he said, "like footsteps of bird. Soon ice on water."

"I know it's October," Matt said. "Maybe November." He had not wanted to count his sticks these last weeks.

"Indian go north now," Saknis continued. "Hunt moose. All Indians go. Attean not come more to learn white man's signs."

Matt could not answer.

"White father not come," Saknis went on.

Matt spoke quickly. "He ought to be here any day now."

Saknis looked at him soberly. "Maybe him not come," he said quietly.

Anger flared up in Matt. He could not allow this man to speak the fear he had never dared to admit to himself. "Of course he'll come," he said, too loudly. "He might even come today."

"Snow come soon," Saknis persisted. "Not good white boy stay here alone. White boy come with Indians."

Matt stared at him. Did he mean go on the hunt with them? The most important hunt of the year?

Saknis smiled for the first time. "Saknis teach white boy hunt moose like Attean. White boy and Attean be like brother."

A sudden joyful hope sprang into Matt's mind. He realized at this moment just how anxious he had been. This was a way out. He did not have to stay here alone through the long winter. Then, as swiftly as it had come, this new hope died away. In spite of his longing, in spite of being afraid, he knew what he had to answer.

"Thank you," he said. "I'd like to go on the hunt. But I can't do that. If—when my father comes, he wouldn't know where I had gone."

"Leave white man's writing."

Matt swallowed hard. "Something might happen to the cabin. He's trusting me to take care of it."

"Maybe him not come," Saknis said again, not smiling now.

"He'll be here soon," Matt insisted. He was ashamed that his voice broke in the middle of the word. "If he couldn't come, he'd send someone to tell me. He'd find some way, no matter what happened. You don't know my pa."

Saknis was silent for some time. "White boy good son," he said at last. "But better you come. Saknis glad for white boy be *nkweniss*."

Matt could only keep shaking his head. The man's words had brought a great lump in his throat. "Thank you," he managed. "You've been very good to me. But I have to stay here."

Without another word, Saknis held out his hand. Matt put his own hand into that bony grasp. Then the two Indians turned and went away. Attean had not even said goodbye. There would be no lesson that morning. No story. No tramping in the forest, or fishing. Not this morning or any other morning.

Close to panic, Matt wanted to run after them. He wanted to tell them that he had changed his mind. That he would go with them anywhere rather than stay here alone with winter coming on. But he set his jaw tight and stood where he was. After a few minutes he reached for his axe and fell to splitting logs with a fury.

He couldn't keep from thinking, however. Was he just being foolish and stubborn? Wasn't going with them the wisest thing he could have done? Wouldn't his father have understood?

He remembered hearing that many white men — and white women too — who had been captured by the Indians and had lived many years in the wilderness, did not want to return to the white world when they had a chance, but had chosen instead to live with the Indians. He had never understood that, but now he could see very well how it might happen. He no longer distrusted them. He knew that Attean and his grandfather would be kind, that even the grandmother would make him welcome, and that they would share with him whatever they had, no matter how little. He had found friendship and good will in their cabin. He had envied Attean his free, unhampered life in the forest,

and the boisterous comradeship in the village. If he had been taken captive as a child and raised as an Indian boy, how would he himself have chosen?

It wouldn't be the same to make that choice deliberately. He was proud that they had wanted him to live with them. But he knew that he could never be really proud, as Attean was proud, of being a hunter. He belonged to his own people. He was bound to his own family, as Attean was bound to his grandfather. The thought that he might never see his mother again was sharper than hunger or loneliness. This was the land his father had cleared to make a home for them all. It was his own land, too. He could not run away.

He was troubled that Attean had walked away without a word of farewell. Had he been offended? Had he really wanted Matt to go with them? To be a brother? Or was he only obeying his grandfather as he had had to do about the lessons? It was so hard to tell what Attean was thinking. Attean had become a hunter. He had a gun. He would not have time now to wander through the forest or to listen to stories. He would not have to bother any longer with a white boy who would never really be a mighty hunter. But surely Attean could have held out his hand, as his grandfather had done.

❧ CHAPTER 22 ❧

EVERY MORNING, IN SPITE OF HIMSELF, MATT KEPT an eye out for Attean. When four days had gone by he decided there was little chance that he would see his friend again. Doubtless the Indians had already left the village and were on their way north. So when he saw Attean coming through the woods with his dog at his heels he ran across the clearing to meet him, not bothering to hide his relief and pleasure.

"You think different?" Attean asked quickly. "You go with us?"

Matt's eagerness died away. "No," he said unhappily. "Please try to understand, Attean. I must wait for my father."

Attean nodded. "I understand," he said. "My grandfather understand too. I do same for my father if he still live."

The two boys stood looking at each other. There was no amusement and no scorn in Attean's eyes. How very strange, Matt thought. After all the brave deeds he had dreamed of to win this boy's respect, he had gained it at last just by doing nothing, just by staying here and refusing to leave.

"My grandfather send you gift," Attean said now.

He unstrapped from his back a pair of snowshoes. They were new, the wood smooth and polished, the netting of deerhide woven in a neat design. Before Matt could find words, Attean went on.

"My grandmother send gift," he said. He took from his pouch a small birch basket of maple sugar. Late in the season like this, Matt knew, sugar was scarce and dear to the Indians.

"Thank you," he said. "Tell your grandmother that when you come back I'll help gather more sap for her."

Attean was silent. "Not come back," he said then.

"In the spring, I mean, when the hunt is over."

"Not come back," Attean repeated. "Not live in village again. Our people find new hunting ground."

"But this is your home!"

"My people hunters. My grandfather say many white men come soon. Cut down trees. Make house. Plant corn. Where my people hunt?"

What could Matt answer to this? He had only one argument to offer. "Your grandfather wants you to learn to read," he reminded Attean. "I haven't been much of a teacher. But when my family comes it will be different. My mother will teach you to read, and to write too."

"What for I read? My grandfather mighty hunter. My father mighty hunter. They not read."

"Your grandfather wants you to be able to understand treaties," Matt insisted.

"We go far away. No more white man. Not need to sign paper."

An uncomfortable doubt had long been troubling

Matt. Now, before Attean went away, he had to know. "This land," he said slowly, "this place where my father built his cabin. Did it belong to your grandfather? Did he own it once?"

"How one man own ground?" Attean questioned.

"Well, my father owns it now. He bought it."

"I not understand." Attean scowled. "How can man own land? Land same as air. Land for all people to live on. For beaver and deer. Does deer own land?"

How could you explain, Matt wondered, to someone who did not want to understand? Somewhere in the back of his mind there was a sudden suspicion that Attean was making sense and he was not. It was better not to talk about it. Instead he asked, "Where will you go?"

"My grandfather say much forest where sun go down. White man not come so far."

To the west. Matt had heard his father talk about the west. There was good land there for the taking. Some of their neighbors in Quincy had chosen to go west instead of buying land in Maine. How could he tell Attean that there would be white men there too? Still, they said there was no end of land in the west. He reckoned there must be enough for both white men and Indians. Before he could think what to say, Attean spoke again.

"I give you gift," he said. "Dog like you. I tell him stay with you."

"You mean you're not taking him with you?"

"No good for hunt," Attean said. "Walk slow now. Good for stay here with *medabe* – with white brother."

Attean's careless words did not deceive Matt. He knew very well how Attean felt about that no-good dog that followed him everywhere he went.

And Attean had said white brother!

Matt could not find the words he needed, but he knew there was something he must do. He had to have a gift for Attean. And he had nothing to give, nothing at all that belonged to him. *Robinson Crusoe*? What could that mean to a boy who would never now learn to read it?

He did have one thing. At the thought of it, something twisted tight in his stomach. But it was the only thing he had that could possibly match the gifts Attean had given him.

"Wait here," he told Attean. He went into the cabin and took down the tin box. The watch was ticking away inside it. He had never forgotten to wind it, even when he was too tired to notch a stick. Now he lifted it out and held it in his hand, the way he had held it when his father had given it to him, as though it were a fragile bird's egg. His father would never understand. Before he could think about it another minute, Matt hurried back to where Attean stood waiting.

"I have a gift for you," he said. "It tells the time of day. I'll show you how to wind it up."

Attean held the watch even more carefully. There was no mistaking that he was pleased and impressed. Probably, Matt thought, Attean would never learn to use it. The sun and the shadows of the trees told him all he needed to know about the time of day. But Attean knew that Matt's gift was important.

"Fine gift," he said. He put the watch very gently

into his pouch. Then he held out his hand. Awkwardly, the two boys shook hands.

“Your father come soon,” Attean said.

“I hope you get the biggest moose in Maine,” Matt answered.

Attean turned and walked into the woods. The dog sprang up to follow him. Attean motioned him back and uttered one stern order. Puzzled, the dog sank down and put his chin between his paws. As Attean walked away, he whined softly, but he obeyed. Matt knelt down and put his hand on the dog’s head.

❧ CHAPTER 23 ❧

MATT FILLED HIS DAYS WITH WORK. HE MADE THE cabin trim. Where the clay had dried and crumbled away between the logs, he brought new mud, strengthened it with pebbles, and packed the spaces tightly. On the inside he chinked every tiny crack to make the room snug. The pile of logs stacked against the cabin wall grew steadily higher.

His meager harvest was safely stored away. The corn, the little he had managed to save from the deer and crows, had all been shucked. Sitting by the fire after his supper, he scraped the dried kernels from the cobs, remembering the many long evenings at home when he and his sister Sarah had been set to the same work with a corn scraper. Sarah would laugh now to see him rubbing away with an old clamshell like an Indian. Some of the ears of corn he had hung against the wall, by the twisted husks, as he had seen his mother do. She had said once they were like scraps of sunshine in the dark days. Overhead he hung strips of pumpkin on ropes of vine strung from wall to wall. They would be ready for his mother to make into pies.

In a corner leaned the old flour sack, overflowing with the nuts he had gathered, hickory and butternut,

and even the acorns he had once thought proper food only for squirrels. On the shelf ranged birch baskets filled with dried berries and the wild cranberries he had discovered shining like jewels along the boggy shores of the pond. They were puckery to the tongue, but when his mother came she would bring sugar, and the stewed cranberries would make a fine treat with her bread of white flour.

Matt forced himself to eat sparingly of these things. The corn he regarded as a sort of trust. His father had planted it, and would be counting on it to feed the family through the winter. And some must be saved for the spring planting. Proud though he was of his harvest, Matt knew in his heart that it was far from enough. The hunt for food would be never-ending.

Hour after hour, with his bow, Matt tramped through the forest, the dog beside him. There was not much game to hunt these days. More often than not, his snares were empty. Soon the animals would be buried deep in burrows. Twice he had glimpsed a caribou moving through the trees, but he had little hope of bringing down any large animal with his light arrows. Once in a long while he succeeded in shooting a duck or a muskrat. The squirrels were too quick for him. Although the dog was certainly not much of a hunter, he did occasionally track down some small creature. But he also had to eat his share, sometimes more than his share, because Matt could not resist those beseeching eyes. Truth to tell, they were both hungry much of the time.

Luckily, they would not starve with the pond and creeks teeming with fish. Matt knew that for many

months of the year fish filled the Indian cookpots. Luckily too, fish were easy to catch, though Matt had to be continually twisting and splicing new lines from vines and spruce roots. Mornings, now, he had to shatter a skim of ice on the pond. Soon he would have to cut holes with his axe and let his lines down deep. He shivered to think of it.

It was the cold that bothered him most. His homespun jacket was still sound, since he had had little use for it in the warm weather. But his breeches were threadbare. One knee showed naked through a gaping hole, and the frayed legs stopped a good five inches above his ankles. His linen shirt was thin as a page of his father's Bible, and so small for him that it threatened to split every time he moved. Even inside the cabin he was scarcely warm enough. The moment he ventured outside his teeth chattered. He thought enviously of the Indians' deerskin leggings. But a deer was far beyond his prowess as a hunter.

There were two blankets on his pine bed, his father's and his own. Why couldn't one of them cover him in the daytime as well as in the night? He spread a blanket out on the floor and hacked it with his axe and his knife, using his worn-out breeches as a pattern. From the leftover scraps he carefully pulled threads and twisted them together. He had seen the Indian women using bone needles, and he searched about outside the cabin till he found some thin, hard bits of bone. These he shaved down with his knife. He ruined three bits trying to poke a hole through the bone, before he thought to try a thin slit instead to hold the thread. Finally he

managed to sew his woolen pieces together. He thrust his legs into the shapeless breeches and gathered the top about his waist with a bit of rope. He was mighty pleased with himself. He was going to be forever hauling them up, and they were sure to trip him if he had to run, but at least he could kneel on the ice and pull in his lines.

From two rabbit skins he made some mittens without thumbs. He had no stockings, and his moosehide moccasins were wearing thin. He decided he could stuff them with scraps of blanket or even with duck feathers. He remembered that once, in a downpour, Attean had shown him how to line his moccasins with dried moss to soak up the rain. Perhaps moss could soak up the cold as well, and there was plenty of it about.

His most satisfying achievement was his fur hat. For this he knew he must have more fur. In the woods Attean had once pointed out to him a deadfall, constructed of heavy logs so intricately balanced that they would fall with deadly accuracy on an animal that attempted to steal the bait inside. Beaver and otter were caught in such traps, Attean explained, sometimes even bear. Now Matt determined to make one for himself. Perhaps a small one. It would take a very large log even to stun a strong animal, and he had no wish to come upon a wounded bear. Much as he would like a bearskin, he would try for a smaller animal.

He felled and trimmed two good-sized trees. Setting the logs on lighter posts was a feat of delicate balance that took him hours of patient trial and error. Over and over they crashed down, threatening his toes

and fingers. Finally they held to his satisfaction, and gingerly he slipped three fish inside the trap.

To his astonishment, on the third morning he found an animal lying under the fallen logs, so nearly dead that it was no task to club it. It was smaller than the otters he had seen playing along the banks. A fisher, perhaps?

That night he and the dog feasted on crackling bits of roast meat. It was strong-flavored, and he knew the Indians did not care to eat it, but he could not be so choosy. Other strips he hung over the fire to smoke. There was also a scant amount of yellow fat. Used sparingly, a spoonful of that fat would make his usual fish diet taste like a banquet. The real treasure was the pelt, heavy and lustrous. He worked on it slowly, as he had watched the Indian women work. With a sharp-edged stone he scraped away every trace of fat and flesh from the skin, washed it in the creek, and for days, in his spare hours, rubbed and stretched it to make it soft and pliable. Then he set to work with his bone needle. He was enormously proud of the cap he fashioned. Saknis himself would have envied it.

Most of this work he had done by firelight. He longed for candles. He ate his supper by the light of split pine branches set in a crack in the chimney. They gave light aplenty, but they smoked and dripped sticky pitch, and he was always afraid he might drop off to sleep and wake up to find the log chimney afire. At any rate, after a day of chopping and tramping he was tired enough to go to bed with the dark.

So often, as he did the squaw work that Attean would

have despised, thoughts of his mother filled his head. He imagined her moving about the cabin, humming her little tunes as she beat up a batch of corn bread, shaking out the boardcloth at the door—for of course she would not let them eat at a bare table. He could see her sitting by the firelight in the evening, her knitting needles clicking as she made a woolen sock for him. Sometimes he could almost hear the sound of her voice, and when he shut his eyes he could see her special smile.

He tried to think of ways to please her. She would need new dishes for the good meals she would cook. He whittled out four wooden trenchers and four clean new bowls, rubbing them smooth with sand from the creek. He made a little brush to clean them with from a birch sapling, carefully splitting the ends into thin fibers. In the same way, he made a sturdy birch broom to sweep the floor. Then he set himself a more difficult task, a cradle for the baby. With only an axe and his knife, the work took all his patience. His first attempts were fit only for kindling. But when the cradle was done he was proud of it. It was clumsy, perhaps, but it rocked without bumping, and there wasn't a splinter anywhere to harm a baby's skin. Sitting by the fire, it seemed a promise that soon his family would be there. When he had a few more rabbit skins he would make a soft coverlet.

For Sarah he made a cornhusk doll with cornsilk hair. He was surprised at how much he looked forward to Sarah's coming. Back at home she had been nothing but a pesky child, always following him about and pestering him to be taken along wherever he was going.

Now he remembered the way she had run to meet him when he came home from school, pigtails flying, eyes shining, demanding to know everything that had happened there. Sarah hated fiercely being a girl and having no school to go to. She would be full of curiosity in the forest. She wasn't afraid like most girls. She was spunky enough to try almost anything. She was like that Indian girl, Attean's sister. What a pity they couldn't have known each other!

❧ CHAPTER 24 ❧

MATT STOOD LOOKING UP AT THE SKY OVER THE clearing. "It's going to snow," he told the dog. "You can feel it, can't you?" The dog lifted its nose, testing the promise in the air.

Matt reckoned he had been lucky so far. The heavy snows had not come. There had been flurries, thin and swirling, sifting through the trees. Many mornings he had waked to find a coating of white on the cabin roof, which would melt away under the noonday sun. Today everything seemed different. The sky was the color of his mother's pewter plate. The brown withered leaves of the oak trees hung motionless from the branches. Three crows searched noisily among the dry cornstalks. A flock of small birds hopped nervously under the pines.

"It's almost Christmas," he said out loud. He could not remember for sure how many weeks belonged to each month. Sometimes he was not even certain that he had remembered to cut a notch every day. Each day was so like the day before, and Christmas Day, when it came, would not have anything to mark it from all the others. He tried to put out of his mind the thought of his mother's Christmas pudding.

"We'd better get in extra firewood," he said, and the dog scrambled eagerly after him.

Late in the day the snow began, soundlessly, steadily. Before dark it had laid a white blanket over the trees and the stumps and the cabin. When Matt and the dog went outside at bedtime the chilly whiteness reached over his moccasins and closed around his bare ankles. They were both thankful to hurry inside again.

Next morning, in the darkness of the cabin, Matt made his way to the door. He could scarcely push it open. The bank of snow outside reached almost to the latch. He stared at it in alarm. Was he going to be a prisoner in his own cabin? With all his preparations, he had never thought of a shovel. His axe would be about as much use as a teaspoon. He set himself to hewing a slab of firewood to make some sort of blade. By the time he had dug a few feet of pathway, the sun was high. He stepped into a dazzling white world.

Now at last he could make use of the snowshoes that hung on the cabin wall. Eagerly he strapped the bindings about his legs and climbed up out of the narrow path he had dug. The snowshoes held him lightly; he stood poised on the snow like a duck on water. But with his first steps he discovered that he could not even waddle like a duck on land. The clumsy hoops got in each other's way, one of them forever getting trapped beneath the other. All at once he got the knack of it, and he wanted to shout out loud.

He tramped from one of his snares to another, waiting every few moments for the dog who floundered happily behind him. The snares were buried deep, and empty,

and he set them higher, just in case some animal might venture out of its burrow. Then he tramped all the way to the pond for the sheer pleasure of it. Coming back through the woods he marveled at his own tracks, like the claw prints of a giant bird. Suddenly he realized that he was happy, as he had never been in the weeks since Attean had gone away. He was no longer afraid of the winter ahead. The snowshoes had set him free.

The cabin was warm and welcoming. He melted snow in his kettle and made a tea of tips of hemlock. He shelled and crushed a handful of acorns and boiled them with a strip of pumpkin. Afterwards, for the first time in weeks, he took down *Robinson Crusoe*. Reading by the firelight, he felt drowsy and contented. Life on a warm island in the Pacific might be easier, but tonight Matt thought that he wouldn't for a moment have given up his snug cabin buried in the snow.

❧ CHAPTER 25 ❧

THREE DAYS LATER SNOW THREATENED AGAIN, AND Matt gathered a pile of firewood to dry inside. He had just carried in his third armful when he heard the dog barking frantically a short distance away. Matt found him standing on the bank of the creek, his feet braced, the ridge of hair standing up along his back. Peering along the creek, Matt caught his breath. Something dark was moving along the frozen course of the stream, a huge shape, too large to be an animal, even a moose. Then he saw it was a man, dragging behind him some sort of sled. He didn't move like an Indian. As he watched, Matt made out a second, smaller shape just coming into sight around the bend of the creek.

He did not dare to shout for fear they would vanish like ghosts. He stood still, his heart pounding. Then finally he began to run.

"Pa!" he choked. "Pa!"

His father flung down the pack he carried. His arms went round Matt and held fast, though he could not manage to speak a word. Then Matt saw his mother, struggling to climb down from the sled. He bent and threw his arms around her. How small she seemed, even under the heavy cloak. Sarah came floundering

through the snow in her father's footsteps and stood staring at him, her eyes bright under the woolen hood. She wasn't the child he remembered. Awkwardly he put his arms around her and gave her a hug.

Then they were all talking at once, trying to be heard over the fierce clamor of the dog.

"Quiet!" Matt shouted at him. "This is my family! They've come! They're actually here!"

They pushed their way through the snow to the cabin, leaving the sled where it stood in the middle of the ice. Matt helped his mother over the doorstep. He could see she was scarcely able to stand, and he pulled a stool nearer the fire for her. She clung to him, her eyes on his face. Matt would hardly have recognized her, so thin and pale, with great shadows under her eyes. But those eyes were warm and shining, and her smile was as beautiful as he had remembered.

"I was bound we'd get here 'fore Christmas," she panted. "I couldn't of borne it to let Christmas go by. Oh Matt – you're safe!"

"It was the typhus," his father explained. "We all took sick with it, and the fever was bad. Takes all the strength out of a body. Your ma got took the worst. We'd ought to of waited longer till she was more fit, but she was dead set on starting. The river is 'most frozen shut. We had to wait at the trading post three weeks before anyone would risk carrying us. Then we had to get the sled made. But your ma, she kept pushing at us. She's a rare one, your ma."

"I had to," she said. "Thinking of you alone in this place."

"It wasn't so bad," Matt said stoutly. "I wasn't alone all the time. I had the Indians."

"Indians!" his mother gasped. "Are there Indians hereabouts?"

"Pa said there wouldn't be," Sarah exclaimed, wide-eyed. "What are they like?"

"They're gone now," Matt said. "But they were my friends." Then he brought it out proudly. "I had an Indian brother."

From the way they stared at him, he could see it was going to take a mighty lot of explaining before they could understand. He didn't suppose they ever would, truly. His father said nothing. He was looking soberly at the snowshoes propped against the wall and at the bow hanging over the door where the rifle should have been. Everywhere he looked, Matt realized, he must see something the Indians had given him or had taught him how to make for himself. However, his father seemed to think there was no time now for questions.

"We'd better unpack the sled," he said, "before it starts to snow again."

Matt sprang to help. There was one question he had not dared to ask till he and his father were alone. "The baby — did you leave it behind?"

His father ran a hand over his beard. His eyes were troubled. "The little one only lived five days," he answered. "'Twas a pitiful little thing would never have made this journey. Just don't say aught to your ma. She still takes it hard."

Matt promised. He wished he had somehow been able to hide the cradle before she noticed it.

Standing in the snow, his father reached to put a hand on Matt's shoulder. "You've done a grown man's job, son," he said. "I'm right proud of you."

Matt could not speak. It took his breath away to think that he might have gone with the Indians, that they might have come to an empty cabin and found that all his mother's fears had come true. He would never have heard the words his father had just spoken. This was how Attean had felt, he knew, when he had found his manitou and become a hunter.

As his father untied the bundles from the sledge, Matt lugged them into the cabin. Flour. Molasses. A fine new kettle. Warm, bright quilts. And, thanks be, new boots for him and a woolen jacket and breeches. He felt richer than Robinson Crusoe with all the plunder from that sunken ship. Then he noted that his father had a new rifle, and presently he discovered, poking out from his mother's pack, his own old musket. He hadn't a doubt she had learned to use it, and would have too, had her family been threatened. He suspected that even Sarah, so grown-up now, wouldn't have feared to pull that trigger if there'd been need of it. Well, there'd be no more need of it now, with two men to fend for them.

Inside the cabin Sarah was bustling capably about, unwrapping the pewter dishes, setting out the little whale-oil lamp that had always stood on the table in Quincy.

"That's the funniest-looking dog I ever saw," she said. "It won't come near us."

"He's an Indian dog," Matt told her. "He's suspicious of white folks. You wait. You'll get to like him."

He couldn't get over how much older she looked. But still spunky. Her eyes were sparkling, and Matt suspected that for her the long journey had just been an adventure. He should have made her a bow instead of a doll, and he would, too, the first chance he got.

His mother had thrown off her cloak, and the fire had brought a bit of color into her cheeks. She was making a great show of coming home. If the cabin seemed rough and cramped after the pretty house she had left behind, she never let on for a moment. She went about admiring everything – the drying ears of corn, the strings of pumpkin, the fine new wooden bowls he had carved.

"All this food," she marveled. "And I've been feared you were starving!"

He was thankful now for the times he had gone hungry to save what he could for their coming. "There's jerky for supper," he told her. "I tried not to eat too much of it. You can make a pretty fair stew with that and a little pumpkin. Some salt would sure help if you brought any."

As he started out again, his mother stopped him and put her hands on his shoulders. "Wait a minute," she said. "I just want to look at you." She had to tip her head back to do it. "You look different, Matt. You're 'most as tall as your pa. And awful thin. You're so brown I'd have taken you for an Indian."

"I almost was one," he said, giving her a quick hug to show he was joking. He hoped she'd never know how true it was.

"We're going to have neighbors," she said happily, as

she set the new kettle over the fire. "A man and his wife have a claim not five miles from here. They're staying at the trading post till spring. We plan to share a pair of oxen. They say three other families are coming too. They're going to set up a mill. 'Fore you know it we'll have a town here, maybe even a school for you children."

Neighbors. That was a thought that would take some getting used to. Matt supposed he ought to be pleased. Yes, of course he was pleased. It was just that he rather liked it as it was here in the forest. With all the gladness in him right now, you wouldn't think there'd be room for any other thought. But even now, with his family here, their voices filling the long silence, with all his worries vanishing like smoke up the chimney, he suddenly thought of the Indians. He wished that Attean and his grandfather could know that he had been right to stay, that his father had come as he had promised them. But the old man had been right, too. More white men were coming. There would be a town here on the land where the Indians had hunted the caribou and the beaver. If only he could be sure that the Indians had found a new hunting ground.

Matt thrust his arms into his new jacket and went out again into the snow. Behind him the cabin glowed, warm and filled with life. Already steam was rising from the new kettle. He'd cook one of his special stews for them for supper, and he wouldn't have to eat it alone. They would all sit together around the table and bow their heads while his father asked the blessing.

Then he would tell them about Attean.