The Sign of the Beaver

by Elizabeth George Speare

adapted by
Steve King and Julie Meves
Chapter 1

Matt was left alone with miles of wilderness around him. His father had gone. Matt and his father had built a house out of logs. It is called a cabin. Behind the cabin were corn and pumpkins.

Matt had been left alone before when his father had gone hunting. He did not like the silence.

Matt and his dad had a plan. They would be the first settlers in a new town in Maine. They would build a cabin and plant some corn. Then Matt’s dad would go back to Massachusetts to fetch his mother and sister and the new baby. Matt would stay and guard the cabin and the corn patch.

His father thought he would be gone six weeks. He told Matt to keep track by making a notch on a stick every day. When he had seven notches, he was to use a new stick. ”When you get to the seventh stick, start looking for us,” said his dad.

His dad also gave him his silver watch to help keep him company. It was a very special watch. It had belonged to his father’s father. Matt’s father also left Matt his rifle and took Matt’s rifle. It was a better rifle than Matt’s. Matt took special care with the rifle. He made sure it was clean when he loaded it, and then he tried to shoot a squirrel. He wasn’t used to his father’s rifle so he missed.
Matt walked back to the cabin. It was the first day and he still had to wait to make the first notch. Seven sticks would be August. He would have a birthday before August. By the time his family got back, he would be thirteen years old.
Chapter 2

The next morning Matt felt better. He thought it might be pleasant living alone. He liked being able to decide when to do his chores and how to do his chores. Matt found out that there was never enough time to do all the things he wanted to get done.

He had trees to chop down, weeds to pull, and wood to be stacked. He cooked his own meals, and took care of the fire. Twice the fire burned out and he woke up to cold ashes. Then he had to start the fire all over with twigs and a piece of flint. It took a long time to get a spark.

Matt had to take care of the corn. The plants needed a lot of water and he had to pull the weeds. He had to scare away the crows and keep animals from eating the plants.

Matt had to go hunting to have enough food. He would look for ducks or rabbits. Sometimes he would take his fish pole down to the creek or the pond. Twice he saw a deer. He promised himself he would catch one.

The only thing that bothered Matt were the mosquitoes, and the thought of Indians. Matt’s dad told him that most of the Indians had left Maine and gone to Canada, but sometimes Matt thought someone was watching him. He would see a shadow or a moving branch and he kept thinking that someone was there.
And then someone unexpectedly arrived.
Chapter 3

Matt was sitting on a flat stone outside his door while he was waiting for his supper to cook. Matt had shot a rabbit that morning and he could smell it cooking. It made his mouth water.

Matt saw a shadow move in the trees. It came nearer and Matt could hear the crackle of twigs. Matt leaped to his feet.

"Pa!" No answer. Was it an Indian?

The man who came out from the trees was not an Indian. He was heavyset, wearing a ragged blue army coat. His face was covered with red whiskers. Matt could see his small blue eyes as he looked inside Matt’s house. Matt was a little uneasy and told the stranger that his father would be home very soon.

"Your pappy wouldn’t want you to turn away a visitor, would he?" said the stranger. "I thought you might ask me to stay for supper."

Matt remembered his manners and began to relax around the man. His name was Ben and he had lots of stories to tell. While he talked, Matt started getting dinner ready. Ben noticed the rifle hanging over the door. Matt told him his father would not sell it. Ben ate most of the rabbit stew and then he fell asleep on the floor. Matt went to bed but
tried to keep his eyes open. He wondered if he should keep the rifle in bed with him. Then he felt bad for not trusting the stranger. When daylight came, he finally fell asleep. When Matt woke, Ben was gone and so was the rifle.

Now Matt had no protection. He would have to eat fish instead of meat. He still had a month to wait.
Chapter 4

Matt really missed his rifle and hunting for rabbits and squirrels. But he still could fish and he even found a patch of blueberries. So he was feeling a little better.

One day he was fishing and went home with four trout. Suddenly, he heard a noise. Then he saw the cabin. The door was broken. White flour was all over the floor.

Who had been here? Was it Ben? Was it Indians? No, it had to be a bear. Matt had forgotten to lock the door. Now he would not have any bread and he was out of salt too.
Chapter 5

Matt kept thinking about the bee tree. He and his father had discovered it weeks ago. His dad had said to leave the bees alone.

But Matt was tired of eating plain fish. He couldn’t stop thinking about honey. It was worth a bee sting or two. He made up his mind to try it.

The tree was easy to climb. There was a small hole. Matt looked inside and saw the golden honey. He pulled a piece of bark to make the hole bigger.

Then the bees came! The buzzing sounded like a roar. Matt felt a sharp pain on his neck, his arm, his hand, his hair, and his face.

He got down out of the tree and ran for water. The bees were all around him. He ran but could not see. He sank into the icy water. When he came up the bees were still there. He could not swim away.

Then something lifted him out of the water. He thought maybe it was his father but it wasn’t. It was two Indians, an old man and a boy.

The old man took the bee needles out of Matt. Matt was very weak. His body seemed to be on fire. He could not think clearly.
The next time he woke up he was in his cabin and the Indian was giving him some medicine.

He slept.
Chapter 6

Finally, Matt woke up and he was well. The Indian came in. He smiled.

"Good. White boy very sick. Now well.” His name was Saknis, family of beaver.

Matt told Saknis where his family was and why he was alone. He trusted Saknis and was very grateful to him. Saknis and the boy saw him go to the bee tree. They had been watching him all day.

Matt tried to get up and felt a sharp pain in his leg. The Indian noticed and took Matt’s ankle into his hands. It was not broken, but Matt could not walk on it. The Indian left a bowl of stew and a cake of corn bread. It was delicious.

The next day Saknis brought the boy with him. It was the Indian’s grandson (nkweniss). His name was Attean. The two boys stared at each other. They were almost the same age but looked very different. Attean did not speak a word.

Saknis brought Matt a crutch so he could take care of his foot when he walked. Matt tried it and was a little clumsy at first. He was sure Attean was laughing at him.

After the Indians left, Matt kept trying to use the crutch and got very good at walking around. The trouble was he had
only one boot. He lost the other one when he was running from the bees. Saknis saw this and three days later, he brought him new moccasins. Matt thought they were wonderful. They didn’t hurt his feet like new boots. They were light and quiet, too.

Suddenly, Matt felt bad. Saknis had saved him from the bees, had given him food and a crutch. Now he had given Matt these beautiful moccasins. How could he say thank you? He had some coins, but he didn’t think the Indian would take money. He looked around the cabin and saw two books on the shelf. They were the only books that he and his father had been able to carry with them. One book was the Bible. Matt could not give away his father’s Bible. The other book was Matt’s. It was the only book he had ever owned. It was called *Robinson Crusoe*. Matt got it down from the shelf and held it out to Saknis.

Saknis took the book and looked it over slowly. He opened it and stared at the page. Matt saw that the book was upside down.

”White boy know signs?” he asked. ”White boy read what white man write here?”

”Yes,” Matt said. ”I can read it.”

Suddenly Saknis smiled. ”Good. Saknis make treaty.”

Matt was puzzled, but he kept listening.
”Nkweniss hunt. Bring white boy bird and rabbit. White boy teach Attean white man’s signs.”

” The Indian boy’s face was full of anger until his grandfather explained. ”Attean learn so white man cannot make treaty and then take away Indian land. The boy left.

Matt would start teaching the next day.
Chapter 7

The next day Matt woke up. How was he going to teach the Indian boy to read? He tried to remember how his mother taught him his ABCs. He looked around the cabin. There was a table for T. That’s how he would do it. He could show him arm for A, bone for B, candle for C and door for D.

He didn’t think Attean would come, but he had to be ready. He got a piece of bark, made a pencil and waited.

Pretty soon Attean came in swinging a dead rabbit by the ears. He did not look very happy. Matt sat down and started to teach him.

”Here is the first letter. A. A is for arm.” He pointed to the A and to his arm. Attean stayed silent. Matt opened the book, Robinson Crusoe.

”Let’s pick out the A’s.” Attean put his finger on a letter A. But when Matt told him to find another A, Attean got mad.

”White man’s book foolish. Write arm, arm, arm, all over paper.”

Matt saw his mistake. ”A is in lots of words and there are twenty-five more letters.”
Attean scowled. "How long? How long to learn signs in book?"

Matt said, "It will take some time. It might take a year."

Attean knocked the book off the table and went out of the cabin. Matt thought that was the end of the lessons. He began to skin the rabbit.
The next morning Attean walked in without saying anything and sat at the table. Matt decided to skip B for bone and began the story.

He started reading and remembered how he had not liked the first page very much. He wanted to catch Attean’s attention so he turned to a new page. He started reading about the storm at sea. He read about Robinson Crusoe falling out of the lifeboat.

Attean did not show anything on his face. Matt was ready to give up.

”White man get out of water?” he asked.

”Yes,” said Matt. ”Everyone else on the ship drowns, but Robinson Crusoe lands on an island.

Attean left, but came back the next day. Matt read to him about the day after the storm when Robinson Crusoe swam out to the ship and got things that he would need. He brought back nails, bullets, a hammock, and a dozen hatchets.

Attean said, ”White man not smart like Indian. Indian not need anything from ship.”

Matt thought about that.
Chapter 9

A few mornings later, at the end of the lesson, Matt wanted to talk to Attean. “How did you kill the rabbit?” Matt asked. “There’s no bullet hole in it.”

Attean did not use a bullet to catch the rabbit. He took Matt outside to show him. They walked across the clearing and into the woods. Attean bent down under a tree and pulled up a long root. He used his knife and made a trap to catch the rabbit.

Matt watched him, and then made a couple of his own. They were not as good as Attean’s, but Matt did catch a partridge.

Matt kept teaching and Attean kept bringing food. Attean learned all the letters, but it was the story that really made Attean’s eyes gleam.

Matt read about the man, Friday. Cannibals on the island were chasing Friday. Robinson Crusoe saved Friday. The story said Friday knelt down and put Robinson Crusoe’s foot on his head and became his slave.

Attean jumped up very very angry. He did not believe it. ”No. He would never do that. Never kneel to white man. Not be slave.”

Then he left the cabin. Matt had a lot to think about.
Chapter 10

The next morning Attean walked into the cabin and sat down for the lesson. As soon as Matt could he picked up *Robinson Crusoe* but Attean did not want to hear any more. Matt tried to convince him. He told Attean that Friday was not really a slave, but a friend and companion.

Matt knew the story very well so he knew when trouble was coming. He skipped the part when Crusoe used the word ”master”.

Friday and Robinson Crusoe had adventures together, but Matt noticed that Friday was always learning things from Crusoe, instead of teaching him.

Attean asked Matt if he wanted to fish. Matt was really happy.

Attean took his knife and sharpened the end of a stick into a point making a spear. He caught one fish, but it was too small. He spoke to the fish and threw it back in the water. Soon he caught one that was big enough to keep. Now it was Mart’s turn. He knew he would look silly, but he had to try. After he fell into the water and saw Attean grin. Matt decided to use his fishing pole.

With his pole, Matt caught a good sized fish. His line broke, so he lost his fish and his hook.
Attean showed him how to make a hook using a branch and his knife. It worked great. Now Matt would never worry about losing a hook again. Attean made a fire and they cooked and ate their fish.
Chapter 11

One morning Matt laid his sticks in a row. Seven sticks meant it was August. It was time for his father to be coming back with his mother, his sister Sarah, and the baby.

He hoped his mother would take over the reading lessons because Attean made it plain he disliked the lessons. They would finish reading and go out hunting. They would check their traps or go fishing.

Attean always brought his dog. It was the sorriest-looking hound Matt had ever seen. Attean was very proud of his dog and the dog loved Attean. The dog never let Matt touch him.

One day Attean took Matt on a long walk. Matt was a little worried. He wasn’t sure he could find his way back, but he trusted Attean. Soon they came upon a row of short tree stumps. Were there settlers? Indians? Then he noticed the roug cuts and saw the trees in a pile on the creek. It was a beaver dam.

Matt wanted to catch one but Attean said no. The beavers were too young and these beavers belonged to Attean’s family. He showed Matt the mark of a beaver on a tree.

On the way back, Attean showed Matt trail markers that he had made so they would find their way back to the cabin.
Matt was learning a lot from Attean. Sometimes he felt they were just like Robinson Crusoe and Friday. Matt wished he could teach Attean something that would make Attean think better of him.
Chapter 12

One morning Matt decided he needed a bow. He liked the bow and arrows that Attean carried with him.

He cut a straight branch and put a notch at either end. Then he stretched a bit of string between the ends. Next he took his knife and made some arrows out of twigs. But something was wrong. His arrows would not fly straight or they flopped on the ground a few feet away.

The next morning Attean came while he was practicing. He told Matt he needed good wood. Attean tried several branches before he came back with a dead branch of ash as tall as him.

Matt scraped off the bark and then Attean told him to make it thinner. Matt went too fast and Attean told him to go slower and make it very smooth. Matt had to be patient.

Then Attean rubbed fish oil into the wood until it glistened. He threw away the string and started to make a new string out of roots. Again, it took a long time and lots of patience.

Finally, the bow was finished. It was a real beauty. Matt really liked it, but it was not easy to shoot. It took all his strength and the arrows flew with a lot of power.
As soon as he could make new arrows, he lost them. But he didn’t give up. He made a target out of birchbark and kept practicing. Everyday he got better and better.
Chapter 13

Matt started looking for Indian signs wherever he went. Once or twice he was sure he saw the sign of the beaver on a tree.

One day he and Attean were walking on a trail and heard a sound from the leaves. The boys looked and saw a fox crouching low and snarling at them. He was caught in a trap.

”White man’s trap,” said Attean. ”It’s made of iron.”

But a white man didn’t know how to hide a trap this well. It was a bad Indian hunting for a white man.

Matt didn’t want to leave the fox suffering, but Attean saw the sign of a turtle. That meant this hunting area belonged to the Turtle clan. Besides, the fox was going to get away. He was going to bite off his own foot.

Matt was learning many things from Attean. He learned about plants that made his food taste better, or a plant that took away stings. Attean also showed him which plants he could never eat.

The only thing Matt could teach Attean, Attean didn’t want to learn. But Matt noticed that Attean was learning anyway. His English sounded better and he even said
some of the words Matt said, like "reckon so" and "by golly".

And Matt liked to try out some Indian words, too.
Chapter 14

They had finished reading Robinson Crusoe. Matt had skipped half of it making sure to read the parts that had a lot of action. Now they were both disappointed that it was over. Attean had been telling the story to his brothers every night and they liked it.

Matt knew where there were lots of exciting stories. He took down the Bible. He could read about Samson, David and Goliath, or Joseph and his coat of many colors. There was lots of adventure and simple language.

Matt started with the story of Noah. He read about Noah building an ark and taking two of every kind of animal. He told about the flood that came after it rained forty days and forty nights.

Attean was smiling. The Beaver people tell a story like that. Attean told about a great rain that covered all the land. Gluskabe was the mighty hunter who made the wind blow, made thunder, and made all the animals. He made the Indian.

Matt had heard that the Indians had a Great Spirit, but this Gluskabe sounded like a hero from a story his mother used to tell him. He wondered if the Indians had more stories like that.
Chapter 15

This day was going to be their greatest adventure. Matt had hit a rabbit with his bow and arrow. It was the first time. Matt and Attean were going to visit the beaver dam again. Matt was carrying the rabbit and swinging it back and forth.

Suddenly, Attean stopped. He heard a sound in the bushes. It wasn’t like a rabbit or a snake. It was a small bear cub. It looked funny and Matt almost laughed out loud, but next came a larger bear with an angry look in its eyes.

Matt had the sense not to run. A bear could catch a running man in three jumps. The bear stood up on his legs and showed her claws. Matt didn’t know why but he threw the rabbit at the bear’s head. The bear hit the rabbit away, but in that instant, Attean was able to shoot an arrow right between the bear’s eyes. Then Attean leaped with his knife. Matt followed with his own knife, but the bear was already dying.

Attean stood over the bear saying words in a soft voice. He told Matt he was saying that he was sorry. He had not been hunting the bear. He asked the bear to forgive him.

Attean told Matt he had moved just like an Indian. Matt knew that Attean had killed the bear, but he did feel like he had helped. He was very proud and wished he could have
part of the bear to show his father, but Attean was sending a squaw to cut up the bear and bring it back to their village.

They let the cub go, but took the rabbit home. Matt knew he could not waste the animal he had hunted. Indians do not hunt for sport.
Chapter 16

Matt was sitting in the cabin doorway and couldn’t think of anything to do. He wanted to tell his father about the bear. He wanted his father to be home.

Something moved at the edge of the woods. Matt leaped to his feet. He saw a stranger with an ugly, painted face. It was Attean. He had streaks of blue and white paint on his face and he wore a necklace of new bear’s claws.

”What’s the war paint for?” asked Matt.

”It’s not war paint,” said Attean. ”We are having a feast for the bear and my grandfather say you come.”

Matt was very excited. He was going to go to the Indian village. It was a long way. They walked for more than an hour and then they got in a canoe and headed across the silver river. Matt followed Attean toward a light in the woods until they ran into a wall of tree posts.

Attean lead him through a gateway into an open space. There was a circle of cabins and cone-shaped wigwams. In the center of the circle was a fire with three iron pots. Matt could smell boiling meat.

Then he saw the Indians. They sat silently with their painted faces, some in Englishmen’s coats, others in
blankets and feathers. Women were in their bright cloth skirts and wore silver armbands and silver necklaces.

No one seemed to notice Matt. They seemed to be waiting. After a long pause, Saknis came toward him. His face was streaked with paint. He wore a long red coat and a crown of feathers. Matt thought he looked like a king.

Saknis welcomed him. ”Kweh,” he said.

The Indians yelled and shouted until Matt replied, ”Kweh, kweh.”

Attean took Matt to a log and let him sit. A squaw came to him with something to drink. The Indians waited. Then Attean began to speak. He was telling the story of the bear. He told how Matt had thrown the rabbit at the bear.

Attean was a good storyteller. He made it very exciting. When he was done, the Indians jumped to their feet. They made a long line and started to dance. Then the women danced. And then the children were dancing, too.

Matt joined the dance, filled with excitement and happiness. When he didn’t think he could dance one more step, the dance ended and the feast began. A squaw brought him a wooden bowl filled with thick, hot stew. It was bear meat, and it tasted good. Matt had two full bowls and then got very sleepy.
The celebration was very noisy, with lots of laughing. At last they fell silent and another story began. This story was not as exciting as Attean’s. Soon Mart’s head drooped. He had almost fallen asleep while sitting up.

Attean laughed and lead him away. They did not go home. He took Matt to a wigwam and showed him a bed covered with animal skins. Matt heard the Indians dancing again, but happily fell asleep.
Chapter 17

When Matt woke up, he could hear people outside the wigwam. He looked around the wigwam and saw cooking pots, rolled up mats, baskets and a heap of ashes sending up a wisp of smoke. He came outside and saw the village as it looked in sunlight. He saw a few cabins covered with bark, and wigwams that looked flimsy and weak. There were rows of drying fish hanging from branches, and heaps of shells and animal bones on the ground. Attean came to take Matt home.

Matt looked around at the Indians. The Indians were wearing their everyday clothes. Women were working with corn. Two women were pounding corn and others were grinding it with stones. Some old men sat in front of their tents smoking. Children were playing.

"Where are the men?" asked Matt.

"They are out hunting deer," said Attean.

"Why didn’t you go? asked Matt.

"I don’t have a gun. Guns cost a lot of beaver skins. And there are not many beavers," answered Attean. He sounded very angry.

Matt followed Attean to the canoe. He really wanted to stay, but he could see that Attean was ready to go. As he
walked, he found out some very unhappy things. First, Attean told him that Attean’s grandmother did not want Matt at the feast. She did not like white men because white men had killed her daughter, Attean’s mother. Attean’s father had gone to find the white man who killed her and never came back.

Matt could see now why Attean was very quiet around him. He saw that the Indians were poor and needed all the beavers. He knew the white man had hurt the Indians. Could they ever be friends?
Chapter 18

Matt looked at the sticks. There were ten. That meant August was long gone, and September was almost over. Where was his family?

He didn’t see Attean very often, so he was walking in the woods alone. He left trail signs to find his way back and looked for Indian signs. One day he saw a tree with the sign of the turtle. He knew it was time to turn back. He was okay with the Beaver clan, but didn’t know how the Turtle clan would like a white stranger.

As he started back, he heard a sound like a dog crying. Then he heard a low whining. It was the sound of a fox in a trap. Attean had told him not to mess with a Turtle trap, but Matt could not ignore the sound.

Matt found the sound, but it was not a fox. It was a dog, an Indian dog. It was Attean’s dog. Matt was not going to walk away from Attean’s dog. He tried to open the trap and the dog snapped at him. He tried again, and the dog snapped again. This was not going to work. He had to get Attean. He ran through the woods, following the signs he had left. He got to the river that was near the village and swam across. When he got to the village, he stopped when the dogs began barking.

”Where is Attean?” he asked the children. Out hunting.
”Where is Saknis?” Out hunting too.

”Then I must see Attean’s grandmother.” The children looked unsure. ”It is important!” said Matt. They took him to see her.

Matt started talking very fast. The woman stared at him. Then a girl came from inside. She looked a lot like Attean. She was Marie his sister.

Marie understood the problem and she told the grandmother. She pleaded with the grandmother until it was OK. She left for a few moments and came back with a blanket and a large chunk of meat. Before they could go, the grandmother made Matt come in so she could fix the cut on his hand.

Matt thanked the grandmother, but really wanted to go. Soon Matt and Marie were on the trail and back to the dog. The dog knew the girl and started wagging his tail, but he would not let them open the trap. The girl put the blanket over the dog’s head and held him in her arms. Matt opened the trap and the dog jumped out.

The dog hobbled on three legs, the fourth one stuck out at a funny angle. It was broken. Halfway to the river, they came up to Attean. He tried to be angry, but he really loved the dog. He took the broken paw into his hands.
Chapter 19

Two days later, Matt was invited back to the village. He was invited by the grandmother. She was surprised that a white boy would do so much for an Indian dog. She said he was welcome.

So once again Matt crossed the river and went to the Indian village. He did not feel so much like a stranger. Saknis held out his hand to welcome. The grandmother did not smile, but she did not frown either. Marie smiled, but did not speak. The old woman gave the men bowls with fish stew and corn.

After they ate, Attean took Matt around the village. Matt had lots of questions about "squaw work". He wanted to know how they fixed the food, made baskets that could boil water, and more. Attean did not want to talk about squaws. He wanted to play. He took Matt over to a group of boys. They played a game with stones like marbles. They played a game like soccer. Then they went swimming.

When it was time to go, the grandmother gave him a piece of cake. The dog was waiting outside. When Matt got into the canoe, the dog jumped in next to him. He had never done that before. Attean told him that the dog remembered what Matt had done, how he had saved him from the trap. Matt reached down and pet the dog. The dog’s tail thumped against the bottom of the canoe.
Attean let Matt out of the canoe, but did not follow. It was dark and Matt was a little worried. Attean was not worried. He believed in Matt. Matt felt like he had passed a test. For the first time since his father had gone, he did not feel alone in the forest.
Chapter 20

For the next few days Matt waited for Attean to come back and invite him to the village. Attean did not come for a week. He did not come to listen to a story. He had other things on his mind. He was going to go on a hunt.

Every year, in the fall, the Indians hunted the great moose. Whole families moved away from the village to follow the animal Attean was leaving the next day. He was not going to hunt moose, he was going to find his manitou. Manitou was a spirit. Every Indian boy had to find his manitou before he could be a man.

He was to go into the forest alone. He would build a wigwam out of branches, and stay there alone for many days. He would not eat anything at all. He would drink a little water, and sing the songs that his grandfather at taught him. If he did this, his manitou would come to him. He would have a new name. He would be a hunter.

This was something Matt could not understand. What would the manitou sound like, look like? What if it didn’t come? Would Attean still be a friend?

Matt walked that night and the nights that followed, thinking of Attean. He knew that Attean had been afraid. He knew that Attean must find his manitou. He hoped Attean would.
Chapter 21

One morning Attean came back. Matt had been waiting, but when he saw Attean, he was worried. Attean was not alone. He was with his grandfather, Saknis. Matt went out to greet them. Saknis did not smile. Matt looked at Attean. He did not smile either. He stood taller and straighter. He looked older. Attean had found his manitou. They had cut his hair and now he wore it like his grandfather’s. Also, he carried a shiny new rifle.

Attean was now a man, but he still got excited when he showed Matt his gun.

The old man came to tell Matt that the Indians were leaving. They were going north to hunt the moose. Saknis did not think that Matt’s father was coming back. He wanted Matt to come with the Indians before the snow came.

Matt was very excited. Saknis was asking him to go on the big hunt. But he could not go. He had to wait for his father. Saknis did not argue. He held out his hand and shook hands with Matt. Then the two Indians turned and went away.

Matt’s mind was filled with thoughts. He had heard stories of people who had lived with the Indians and did not want to go back to
the white world. He also knew that Attean’s family would treat him well. He had always liked the life that Attean had and he would like the people of the village. He just could not leave his family. He could not believe they would not be there.

And why had Attean walked away? Was he angry with Saknis? Was he tired of the white boy now that he was a hunter?
Chapter 22

Every morning Matt still kept an eye out for Attean. After four days he decided that he would never see his friend again. He thought the Indians must have left their village and started the hunt for the moose.

So he was very happy when he saw Attean come walking up with his dog behind him. When Attean saw Matt’s smile, he thought maybe Matt had changed his mind and was going to join him and his tribe. But Matt told Attean he must wait for his father.

Attean had a gift from his grandfather to give to Matt. It was a new pair of snowshoes. Then Attean pulled out a gift from his grandmother. It was a small birch basket of maple sugar. It was winter and Matt knew it would be very special.

Matt said, ”Thank you. Tell your grandmother I will help gather more sap for her when you come back.”

”Not come back,” Attean said. ”Not live in our village again.”

Matt did not understand how they could leave their home. Attean told him they had to leave because the white man was taking all the land. ”Was this your grandfather’s land?” asked Matt.
"How can it be? Land is for all people. For beaver and deer. Does deer own land?" asked Attean.

Matt did not know what else to say. He asked, "Where will you go?"

The Indians were going to the west to get away from the white man. How could Matt tell Attean that the white man was going west too. Maybe there was enough land for Indians and white men, too. Before Matt could think of something to say, Attean spoke again.

"I give you gift," he said. "Dog like you. I tell him to stay with you, medabe. Medabe-white brother."

Matt was shocked. He knew how much Attean cared about the dog. And Attean had said white brother!

Matt had to have a gift for Attean. But what? Robinson Crusoe? His knife? Then it hit him. The one thing that might match the gifts Attean had given him. He went into the cabin and took down the tin box. He got out the watch his father had given to him. He had never forgotten to wind it.

He handed it to Attean and showed him how to wind it. Attean was very pleased. Matt knew that Attean did not need a watch to tell the time. He used the sun and the shadows of the trees. But Attean knew that the gift was
important. He held out his hand and 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 started to follow and Attean sent him back. He stayed by Matt and Matt put his hand on the dog’s head.
Chapter 23

Matt kept busy by doing work. He made sure the cabin was clean and strong. He filled every crack. He made the pile of logs for fire grow higher and higher.

He had saved corn from the deer and crows. Now he scraped the dried kernels from the cobs. Instead of a corn scraper, he used an old clam shell like an Indian. He had hung strips of pumpkin on ropes of vine from wall to wall. His mother would be able to make pies.

In the old flour sack, he had all the different nuts he had gathered. And on the shelf were baskets filled with dried berries and wild cranberries. He did not eat these foods very much, especially the corn. He knew his father was counting on the corn for winter and in the spring they would plant some, too.

Matt would go into the woods with his bow and arrow and his dog beside him. There was not much to hunt, and what he did catch he shared with the dog. The truth was they were both hungry much of the time. Fish were still easy to catch except he had to cut holes in the ice so he could get his line into the water.

He hated the cold. His clothes were not very warm. He thought of the Indians’ deerskin clothes and wished he had some, but he knew he could not hunt for a deer.
Matt looked at the two blankets on his bed. He decided one could cover him in the daytime as well as in the night. He used his axe and knife to cut the blanket. Then he used some bone as a needle. Next he used two rabbit skins to make some mittens. He filled his moccasins with scraps of blanket or duck feathers. But his fur hat was very special.

Matt had made a special trap to catch an animal. He set up a log on top of two trees so that it would fall on top of an animal. He set some fish under the trap and went away. Three days later, he had caught a small animal. Matt and the dog enjoyed their meat and Matt worked on the fur. Again he used his bone needle and sewed a fur cap.

This was the squaw work that Attean never liked, never did. Matt didn’t mind. When he did these jobs, he thought of his mother and remembered how she did things for him. He thought of how he could help her. He made new bowls. Then he worked on a cradle for the baby. He made a doll for Sarah and was looking forward to seeing her.
Chapter 24

Matt knew the snow was coming. Heavy snow. ”It’s almost Christmas,” he said. ”We’d better get extra firewood,” he said to the dog who followed after him.

The next morning, Matt could barely open the cabin door. The snow had come up almost to the latch. He didn’t have a shovel so he started to make one out of a big piece of firewood. When the sun was high, he got out into the snow covered land.

Matt got on his snowshoes, the gift from Saknis. He could walk on the snow only after some practice. He went out and checked his traps. All were empty. He put the traps on top of the snow and went back to his cabin.

The cabin was warm. He melted some snow and made tea. Then he took down Robinson Crusoe and began to read.
Chapter 25

Three days later it looked like another storm was coming. Matt was gathering wood and taking it inside to dry.

The dog started barking. Matt looked along the creek. He could see a dark shape moving toward them. It was dragging some kind of sled. Then he saw a smaller shape just behind the first.

”Pa!” he yelled. ”Pa!”

His father ran toward him and grabbed him in his arms. Then Matt saw his mother trying to climb out of the sled. He threw his arms around her. Sarah came running up through the snow and he gave her a hug.

Matt stopped the dog’s barking. ”Quiet. This is my family. They’re here. They’re here.” Then Matt helped push the sled to the cabin. He helped his mother over the doorstep. She looked so thin and pale, but her eyes were warm and shining.

”I knew we’d make it before Christmas, I had to be here for Christmas,” she said. ”Oh Matt, you’re safe.”

”We all got sick with the typhus,” explained his father. ”Your ma got it the worst, but she wouldn’t let us wait any longer.”
"I was so worried about you being alone," said his mother.

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

His mother and father were very surprised. They just listened to the stories. As he looked around the cabin, Matt realized every thing was something he had been given or been taught by the Indians.

Matt and his father went out to unpack the sled. Matt asked about the baby. It had only lived five days. Matt wished he had been able to hide the cradle before his mother saw it.

"You’ve done a grown man’s job, son," Matt’s father said. "I’m right proud of you." Now Matt knew how Attean had felt when he got his manitou. He was very glad he had waited for his family.

What had his father brought? Flour. Molasses. A new kettle. Warm quilts. New boots and new clothes. Then he saw a new rifle for his father and Matt’s old gun was in his mother’s pack. He was sure she could use it, and he thought even Sarah could learn.

Sarah was inside busy unwrapping dishes and setting out a lamp. "That’s the funniest looking dog I ever saw," she said. "He won’t come near us." Matt explained that it was an Indian dog and would have to get to know them.
Matt’s mother looked over everything Matt had done. The bowls, the pumpkins, the corn. She had thought he might starve and was so surprised. She told Matt about the new neighbors they were going to have. White men and their families.

Neighbors. Matt was happy to have his family back together, but now he realized that Attean’s grandfather was right. He wished Attean could still be here. He hoped they had found a new hunting ground.

Tonight Matt would cook a special stew for his family. They would all sit together and his father would ask the blessing. Then he would tell them about Attean.