

JIST HUNTIN'

 
OZARK RIPLEY



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Marsh Friends

JIST HUNTIN'

TALES OF THE FOREST, FIELD
AND STREAM

By
OZARK RIPLEY

With an Introduction by
DIXIE CARROLL ✓



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DEDICATION

The big outdoors, in all its ramifications, is an inexorable taskmaker. Those who are willing to put up with its rigors soon learn its hidden treats and intrinsic beauties. To no others does it reveal itself as it is—alluring, a magician perpetually enthralling its favored audience with mysteries that it explains only to those who stand the test.

To the outdoors must be accorded the quickest means of learning a companion as he is; not as he wishes you to know him, but the actual man. The tests of the trail, the long canoe routes, the sedge and ragweed fields, and mist-laden streams disclose everything. There is nothing in the make-up of man that can be concealed in the wild places, above all friends and friendships. In such localities alone do we discover whether they are worth while or the kind that must endure.

The sifting process of Dame Nature ultimately decides for us, whether we wish or no, those whose sterling worth and varied experiences entitle them to the name of sportsmen. So while thinking over the days spent in undomesticated places, there stands one who has passed all the tests of friendship as an angler, hunter, and trail mate, I dedicated this work to Dixie Carroll.

OZARK RIPLEY.

INTRODUCTION

I HAD everything doped up for a regular high-class introduction for "Jist Huntin'," but the notes have flown, disappeared into the yawning mouth of my filing cabinet, probably lost forever. Although this cabinet is a thoroughly modern affair, it seems to take fiendish delight in helping me to keep my old-time record of "a place for everything and nothing in its place." How notes filed under the letter "A" can turn up later under "Q," or not at all, is a mystery too deep for me to solve.

Ozark Ripley is a man's man, a regular he-man who loves the out-o'-doors, the far reaches of the outlands, the quiet places of the hinterlands. He is one of the best pals I have ever had the pleasure of knowing, and when a fellow can say that of another lad, there is little more to say.

Ozark loves dogs, he knows more about hunting dogs and their training than any other man I know, and every dog I have ever known loved Ozark. A man who loves dogs and is loved by dogs always rings true. He is a friend always, one that you can count on to the last shot.

From twenty years living continuously in the

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wilds of the outlands, Ozark has had experiences with rod and gun that fall to the lot of few men, and these years have been spent in study of nature and her children. Few men know the real out-o'-doors like Ozark—not the out-o'-doors of the featherbed resorts, but the good old mother earth out-o'-doors with a frying pan, a pack o' flour, a piece of bacon, and a blanket. The out-o'-doors of the rushing, tumbling stream, the wind-kissed lake waters, the woodland trail and portage, the sweet flower-scented swamp-lands, God's greatest gifts to us his earth children.

Ozark, if you send the call, whether it comes from the swamp-lands of the South, the granite tipped mountains of the Rockies, the cold far reaches of the northlands, the wooded hill country of the land you love, the Ozarks, I'll pack the duffle and come a-running to spend a day, a week or months with you beside the old camp-fire, the trails and "sich," living over the days a-gone and the new ones ahead, for the joys o' trailing with you are what makes life worth living in these days of the canyon-walled cities builded by man.

DIXIE CARROLL.

FOREWORD

THAT irresistible urge, reminiscence, influenced the writing of this collection of outdoor tales. They are the experiences of a sportsman, naturalist and wanderer, who spent a quarter of a century in the big outdoors. The impulse to jot them down took hold, but he refrained until the habit of visualizing days in the forests, fields and on the streams could be denied no longer.

The simple, objective path was followed as a help to beginners. Close adherence to topography and the habits of wild life was pursued consistently to remind old timers of similar days and that their assistance is needed to help perpetuate the present supply of undomesticated creatures.

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I

In the Days of My Youth

THE age of fourteen is regarded by most parents as an early start for a boy in the shooting game. But Father insisted a boy was never too young to handle a gun, if he hunted alone. Such a thing as an accident he never considered probable; boys only got into mischief when with others. On account of his pet notions I had been given a gun, and with it the services of Father's old pointer, Duke.

For some reason Father preferred to shoot over younger dogs. And, as my mind hurtles back to the days of my youth, I distinctly recall that with them the old liver and white colored dog was a creature without an imperfection. As our quail season opened early in November, Duke always followed me to school. Because I carried my gun with me it was an additional incentive for the old campaigner. During the day his behavior was excellent, except after dinner, when every once in a while he snored loudly from his position back of teacher's desk. Then, too, he evoked much merriment from the pupils as he twitched grotesquely and uttered queer sounds, no doubt dreaming of some of his erstwhile amazing feats in the quail fields. A mere touch with the teacher's rule brought him back to a state of quies-

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cent slumber. But teacher's touch was gentle, as he had great admiration for Duke.

On the way home Duke and I hunted the fields. In this manner I kept the family larder well supplied with birds.

"Jack, why don't you ever take old Duke along?" said my mother as she directed loving glances at father. "You always take those two young pointers along. It seems as though you were neglecting the dear old fellow. It is not fair to the old dog!"

"Oh—Duke—is good enough," father replied, smiling half-apologetically while the big dog's brown eyes rested on him, "but the old fellow is incorrigible—breaks shot so badly that he would just ruin the young dogs."

Had Father struck me a blow with his fist it could not have shocked me more than this announcement. Ever since a child I had loved dogs. Always I had wanted to own one. When Duke was assigned to me by Father, I was in a state of rapture, only equaled by the occasion when Father presented me with my first gun.

That Duke had a fault I could not believe. To me he was the supreme being among dogs. I loved him, as only a healthy outdoor boy can love his field companion. It seemed as though some dreadful accusation had been lodged against my favorite. So surprised was I at my father's words that I stood motionless on the front porch, holding the straining lead of the old pointer, literally burning from the insult, speechless to the point that I never so much

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as bade him good by when he proceeded to the hunting grounds.

"Breaking shot—what is that?" I repeatedly asked myself while enroute to school with Duke. I examined the big fellow all over, expecting every moment to discover some blemish that had escaped me. I saw none. His gait was snappy, the carriage upstanding as ever. "What in the world did father mean by breaking shot? Wasn't I positive that Duke was the best dog in the world?"

"What is the matter, Bob?" questioned teacher at the noon hour. He had beheld me continually eying Duke and unusually silent.

"Oh—nothing." I almost whimpered. "I guess nothing."

"Now, Bob, out with it!" Mr. Hudson knew boys. "Don't treat your old shooting friend that way. Come on, now. Something the matter with Duke, eh?"

"Not exactly," grudgingly I admitted. Then, suddenly gaining courage, I asked: "Mr. Hudson, you have hunted a great deal with Father; what is breaking shot?"

"Breaking shot!" He laughed aloud. "Why such a question? Has your father been talking to you about it?"

"Yes."

"Well, if that is all that worries you, that old dog of yours used to be an expert at it and has never been cured. But, if you really don't know it is when a dog breaks in on birds to retrieve the instant the

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birds flush and the gun is fired. Old Duke was always incurable after once the habit got hold of him. Otherwise your father would not have given him solely for your shooting."

Without comment I received the old master's statement. But, as I sat in school the remainder of the afternoon, I felt sure I could cure my dog of the habit. I had been so long accustomed to regard him as the greatest of dogs, this one fault in my eyes assumed mammoth proportions and I determined to exert everything within my power to correct it.

It was on a Friday when the one frailty of my beloved Duke became known to me. As Saturday was my holiday it would prove an excellent time to start my efforts at correction toward my pet. I pored over the books my father had on dogs, for they were many, and memorized everything about training, mostly the use of the choke collar with a long lead, far more rapidly than I ever had my lessons.

Saturday was one of those cold, gray, cloudy days, presaging snow at any moment. To me, however, it was an ideal time for working with my pupil. Equipped with a long lead, in addition to my gun and a choke collar, Duke and I sought the quail grounds. He was as frisky as a two-year-old, covering the big fields in the fast swinging gait which had so endeared him to me.

Presently Duke drew up into a staunch point. Statuesque-like he stood; head high, against wind, nostrils aquiver, recording perfect recognition of body scent.

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While the dog remained fast in this position, I snapped the lead to the choke collar which I had placed around his neck when we left home. I stepped back, taking firm hold of the lead just as Father's book directed. I shouted. The birds flushed.

To keep with the instructions of the book, I bestowed my attention only on the dog's training, and fired my gun in the air, giving a jerk on the lead. The book assured that this would throw the dog back on his haunches the moment he broke prematurely for the birds. The writer of that book certainly never had had experience with a dog of Duke's strength. The instant the big fellow heard the gun he bolted. The lead was abruptly torn from my hands and Duke raced out madly for the flying birds.

Several times I tried to hold him. At first I suffered only disappointment, but at last having no success, I yielded to a sudden seizure of anger. Then I cried, shouted, and cried again, calling the old rascal every reviling name within my youthful vocabulary.

But Duke was obdurate as ever.

All at once a sinister inspiration assailed me. I would fix that old dog! He had gotten the best of Father, but I would show him! I knew a sure way of making him see his fault and correct it, too, for good!

While I was still in the throes of anger, Duke came to point on top of a small ridge which sloped on the other side into a heavy growth of briars and

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saplings. I backed off about fifty or sixty yards from the dog and fired my right barrel. Surely the devil had possession of me. For, when the old dog broke, I fired the left barrel directly at him. Just one yelp of pain I heard as the number 8 pellets rattled against the saplings. Only then I realized my folly.

I ran to the top of the ridge. I could neither hear nor see Duke. Here and there on the frost-stricken vegetation were small spots of blood. In trepidation I whistled and called, but Duke did not respond.

What a fool I had been! My dearest companion I had wounded fatally. No doubt he had crawled off somewhere in his misery to die. If a murderer has a conscience his suffering must be intense, granting that he only experiences half the anguish I did that day.

"You are not fit to own a dog!" I scourged myself as the wind beat against my back. "You are not fit to own a dog—nor a gun either!" And right then I vowed never again would I trust myself with a gun or even seek the possession of another dog.

My gloomy visage on arrival home excited no comment. The sleet had changed to snow. My silence and lack of game were attributed to the weather. But my heart was jumping every moment, for I anticipated the question, where was Duke?

Always the big pointer slept in a large box on the porch near my bedroom window, in which I had made a generous bed of rye straw. Duke was not there, nor was he to be found about any place. Because the matter of feeding the dogs was entrusted



On Game

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to me, his absence was not noticed, but my unusually silent deportment was.

Mother sent me to bed with a kiss, though I had heard her afterwards remark to father: "I fear Bob took cold out in the storm, he is so quiet tonight."

"Oh, I guess not," Father said in reply. "He's got the dumps because the weather stopped his shooting."

The number of times that night I raised the window and peeped into Duke's empty box I still can recall. The window was on a level with the porch. But, finally wearying from the vigil, my sobs ceased and I went to sleep.

Some time during the night a tapping sound on the window awoke me. Only a few days ago I reflected the Hawkins home had been visited by some one and many valuable things had been stolen. The sound ceased. But I could sleep no more, notwithstanding that I kept my head well covered.

After a while the noise was repeated. Then I gained courage and looked toward the window. The snow without was as bright as a silver blanket. Trembling, I got out of bed and lit the lamp. All at once a dark form appeared against the panes. Boy as I was I could stand the strain no longer. With a loud cry I ran to the window and opened it.

My cry awoke the entire household. Hastening with alarm, Mother and Father arrived at my room. But they soon realized that there was no cause for worry, as their only boy was down on his knees hugging and kissing his first dog.

II

Setter Against Pointer

IF ever Mac admitted that his setter, Jocko, had an equal, I am sure it was never done in my presence. There was nothing of beauty about his big setter, but he adored him from his black nose to his long bushy tail. Jocko weighed close to seventy-five pounds, a remarkable weight for the setter breed. But Mac never classed this as either a handicap or defect, and once lost his best farmer friend because he became indignant when that unfortunate individual, attracted by the immense size of the dog, asked if he rode him out shooting.

On other subjects Mac could stand humorous reference, but when they took in Jocko, never.

"Got a young dog you'd like to have learn something about quails?" queried Mac, regarding Jocko with supreme contentment. "If you have, let's hunt the hill lands tomorrow—he'll sure get experience."

This was Mac's annual way of broaching the subject of the opening of the quail season; and, knowing that I had sent off for a young dog, he thought it would be a good opportunity for Jocko to show him off. Before answering I stood still and surveyed Jocko with amusement.

"Alright, Mac," I agreed. "I got a youngster

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coming in tonight. Perhaps he will make that old, shaky setter of yours hustle some—never saw him—though.”

Mac interrupted further speech by laughing at my allusion to Jocko. In other eyes than his, the big fellow was no beauty. His coat was a dirty tri-color blend of black, white and tan. And, as a few years back he had suffered from an incurable attack of chorea, he still shook constantly, very much resembling the combined ills of a chill and an acute seizure of delirium tremens, working in perfect harmony.

“That’s quite a good looking dog for a pointer, said Mac next morning while bestowing a condescending look on a handsome, racy-built black and white pointer as we walked toward the shooting grounds. “And if there was ever such a thing as a pointer having a chance with a setter, which is impossible, that would be about the proper specimen.”

This was another persistent fancy on the part of my shooting chum; no pointer could ever hope to perform as well as a setter. With him it was an impossibility. His favoritism toward the long-haired breed was so strongly prejudiced as his obstinate predilection for his incorrigible Jocko.

“Let’s work out the Johnson field,” I suggested, the moment both dogs were free from their leads. Then I interjected, “it will test out the two dogs.”

“Yes, and right here is where that pointer of yours is going to be run off his legs, and before a half hour

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elapses, too," prophesied Mac. "Why, he won't find one tenth the birds Jocko does!"

As usual Jocko cast wide. While the big setter trembled, like well-functioned castanets, he had fair speed, good range, but at no time in his shooting career had he shown to be under control of his stocky, little, red-faced master. But the pointer also swung out wide, high-headed, beating for the wind, showing the mastery of the high class bird dog's art, for he handled every wind shift and set a pace hopelessly beyond the powers of the old setter.

The pointer, seemingly increasing speed as he came to a draw, flashed into a perfect upstanding point.

"He's got 'em!" I announced.

"False point," sneered Mac. "If birds were there Jocko would have had them long ago. Anyway, we will walk up and see."

When almost within shooting distance of the dog's point Jocko appeared, saw Rip, the pointer, and without exhibiting the slightest inclination to back the proper respect for another dog's point—galloped to his side, drew up for a second, then jumped into the quails, Mac all the while shouting at the top of his voice, "Steady, Jocko! Steady, Jocko!"

But the old setter did the damage, though one bird flew by Mac, which he stopped neatly.

"Did you see where the flock went, Jack?" Mac called out. "Where did Jocko go? I'll just have to have him find this dead bird!"

"Jocko," I laughed aloud, "last I saw of him he

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was in those tall rag weeds, in a dead run to beat those quails to the timber."

"That's just what a fellow gets for working Jocko with a green dog!" exclaimed Mac in a serious tone. "If it had not been for that fool young pointer flushing those birds, the old fellow never would have become excited."

"Fool young pointer!" I remarked to myself, for Mac's face had a purple tint. "By the way, Mac, that fool young pointer's still on point."

With affected unbelief that there could still be a bird remaining, Mac followed me to the dog's heel. A single quail burst in flight. Mac killed it, the bird dropping within a few feet of the first.

Rip retrieved both. Mac accepted them in rather an ungracious manner, though when Mac was shooting in good form usually he was kindly disposed toward man and beast. But the shaft of Jocko's shortcomings had sunk deeply; and the shortcomings were difficult to overlook notwithstanding Mac's pretense that they were nonexistent.

Apparently for a while Jocko had erased himself from the landscape. To this I called the quail hunter's attention.

"We'll find the old reliable somewhere on point," he predicted. "Never in his life has he been gone this long except when struck on birds."

We searched all over the farm, but no Jocko resulted. The pointer simply ate up distance and unerringly worked to the timber, where instantly he froze on one of the scattered birds. This was my

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chance for a shot. Much to Mac's delight I missed with both barrels, and he performed the friendly office of wiping my eye by killing the birds. One after the other the young pointer snapped birds up in point, with all the precision of an experienced field dog above ordinary ability.

After the shooting Jocko hove in sight, immediately pointed a single and remained steady on it.

"How's that for an intense point, Jack?" Mac said, as his big setter stood jerking as though every part of his anatomy was about to fly away.

Almost at the same moment Rip drew up to back but, feeling the wind, worked right on ahead.

Mac's wrath descended on the pointer: "That pointer's got no more nose than a land turtle!"

I could not wait to hear more, for one of those tiny field sparrows, locally called stink birds, flew out of the grass. It was too difficult an effort to restrain my desire to laugh. So, without looking at Mac, I strode in another direction, where the black and white had made a cast.

From that time Jocko appeared under control. Some little scene must have been enacted between him and my bosom shooting companion. Mac had not followed me. From a distance came profane sounds and an occasional yelp of a dog as though in pain.

The setter fancier was soon with me, however, and we proceeded over a rise where the pointer stood marble-like on birds. Evidently Mac's attention to Jocko was resultful. The old dog backed nicely

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and was steady to shot as we executed kills; Mac's being an extremely tantalizing double, and because I complimented him over the feat, the incident of the setter's omissions passed out of mind.

Though up until noon Jocko worked up to his toppest form, the class of the pointer unmistakably showed superiority. In speed, range, staunchness and bottom—for there was no let-up in his going—he was indelibly stamped a classy bird dog. With another dog perhaps Jocko might have shone, but in contrast with the pointer his work was unmistakably ordinary.

As Mac's shooting had been good, when we sat down by a spring for lunch he committed himself so far as to pet the black and white's head with some display of admiration, until at last my inability to keep back a secret forced me to say for comfort, if nothing else:

"Mac, I am seriously considering buying a pointer. This fellow appeals to me. In fact, I believe pointers are better than setters."

"Why, the idea!" my stocky shooting chum exclaimed, flushing scarlet. "Of course there are a few pointers, but altogether they can never compare with setters. Everything is positively in favor of the setter!"

It was certainly amusing to hear that quail hunter's discourse on his long-haired friends, as he cited Jocko for example. So bound up in the old dog had he been for the last seven years, there was not the slightest possibility of bringing forth anything in

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favor of pointers, no matter how I strove to effect it. He went so far after I spoke of buying a pointer that his attitude of friendliness toward Rip changed to one of offense. He could not see a thing good in him. His loyalty to the old dog and the breed he represented were unswerving.

But the afternoon with its abundance of birds only exhibited more the marvelous ability of the pointer. Once in a while Jocko found a covey, not through inability, but the surpassing class of the youngster left no other opportunities. Seemingly there was no let up to his speed. High-headed, frictionless in action, his pace accelerated as the day wore on. Never in all our hunts did we kill so many birds, nor in that time had we seen such a remarkable performer.

Jocko did his best at least. Age and disease had sapped some of his vitality, but at his best he never approached the class displayed by the young dog. And still that pointer continued at the same clip—perhaps even faster—for the rest of the day. Try as he would, Jocko could do no more than lag at a distance. The big fellow was succumbing to the hot pace set on both coveys and singles. But the pointer persisted, always flashing into spectacular points when the fields promised most to be barren of birds.

When the sun left a red glow over the western hardwoods we turned our faces toward home. Mac was silent. Jocko, sore-footed, dragged behind his master.

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For a while I waited for Mac to say something, and at last he did, as he regarded my many glances of admiration at the still hustling pointer.

"Pretty good young dog, Jack," Mac commented, not daring to look Jocko in the eye. He spoke as though with difficulty. "Even if he is not a setter, I'll admit that. Of course I don't want you to follow my advice, but, were I you and didn't mind it being a pointer so much, I'd buy that dog if I could get him cheap enough."

"Cheap enough, Mac!" I laughed uproariously, twining my arms around him to keep him from doing me damage in case of a sudden access of anger. "Why, Mac, I haven't enough money to buy the tip of his tail! I borrowed that dog to give that shaky setter of yours a good trimming. That's Captain Harrison's sensational field trial winner, Jingo Rip!"

III

A Day with the Longbills

MAC'S message coming twenty miles over the rural phone, announcing that the snipe were in, proved as always the influence the call of the wild had on me. Though I treated all of his announcements of the presence of game with verbal doubts, invariably I responded. I could never take Mac seriously, like he did himself. No one ever takes a fat man seriously, least of all when he is his closest friend and constant shooting companion.

The spring rains had come. Even in the hills where I resided I was aware that the jacksnipe were enroute north. Only a moment before Mac's call while standing on the front porch I felt sure I heard a bleating "Scaip!" from a distance in the meadow. Some fatigued long-billed gentleman had dropped in for a few hours rest. This had always been regarded by me as advance notice of their arrival in tremendous numbers over in the Black River swamps, where my serious little fat friend resided and guided the destinies of a large hardwood mill and its two thousand black employees.

"Don't look like much of a day for snipe!" pessimistically I remarked to Mac as early in the morning we walked to the snipe grounds. During the night the weather had turned cold, freezing the top soil

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slightly. Occasionally thin ice was visible where there was water. "Too cold; any jacks that came in lately must have hit the trail back for the South."

"Don't fret," Mac grumbled between chattering teeth, while trying to conceal his annoyance at the change in the weather conditions. "They are here somewhere, and soon our sixteens will be getting hot from overwork!"

"If they do, I'll be the most surprised man in the world!" I retorted, for I knew to differ with Mac was just what he most liked.

Mac's nature was one that never cared for a friend that agreed with him. I had learned this long ago. "Well, I'll show you; before we get to those woods east of us we will kick up a dozen or more," Mac vouchsafed rather earnestly.

We took the first wet meadow, pursuing a course due east. The underfooting was exceedingly miry, as during the incessant rains cattle had pastured there. They left deep, small holes wherever their hoofs had rested. On occasions they would be frozen sufficiently to bear our weight, then the next step our boots sank past ankle-deep in the mud. Mac separated from me, as was our customary manner of hunting jacks, forty yards to my right.

Though we hunted carefully over eighty acres of meadow, we were unable to flush a single bird. We entered another enclosure. Near a cattle feeding trough where the ground was soft Mac put up a jack at about thirty-five yards distance. This bird

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was in full racing trim, for he was off at a tremendous clip, zigzagging in flight so deceptively that Mac wasted two shells.

"No use snipe getting up near you," I flouted Mac with his miss, then softened the remark. "I guess those eyes of yours are going badly back on you. That snipe was seventy-five yards off when you shot at it. What's the matter with your eyes, anyway?"

"For several days my eyes have been troubling me," he exclaimed. "I am sure I will soon have to wear glasses."

By attributing any of Mac's shooting shortcomings to his eyes, I could always get on the best side of him. His most conspicuous hunting frailty was that every miss he blamed on his innocent eyes. Such a thing as imperfect alignment happening on his part he never considered possible. Naturally when he had an attack of gooseeggs, he did not blame himself, always those eyes. But none had ever heard Mac utter the slightest complaint when he was shooting in form.

Before our arrival at the woods east of us Mac missed another of those long-billed birds for which he had a consuming passion. It was an easy straight-away, and I was again on the point of referring to his failing sight when a negro's voice called from the road.

"Mistah Mac, am you atter dem snipes?" a small, aged black inquired politely, doffing his tattered felt hat.

"Do you know where they are, Ike?" Mac que-

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ried in reply. "All that were here yesterday seem to have left."

"Haint none of 'em left," declared Ike. "Reckon you all don't know whar they iz. Las' night when the stohm cum from de nawth I heered them a drappin' into the elbow bresh 'cross the railroad tracks. They sho' is a-gwine to stay in dar 'till the sun wahms up sum!"

"Bully for you, Ike!" I exclaimed. "Let's strike for over there, Mac."

Where the old negro directed us for miles a wet slash divided the flat through the fields of corn, cotton and grass. There was always water there; and in parts for at least a half mile it was well grown up with a riot of elbow brush. Frequently we had seen snipe pitch in it, but on account of the number of open fields we seldom followed.

By the time we came to the elbow brush thicket the sun had gained eminence, and already the frozen fields had thawed under its ardent rays. The very first step in the brush showed that all the snipe in the neighborhood had congregated there during the night for the shelter of the tall swamp grasses. This was the first time in my life I had ever seen such an assembly of *gallinago delicata*. Their numbers were unbelievable. Our first advance flushed birds far out of range and, as is the case on rare occasions of this kind, a single bird's note flushed thousands and thousands, and notwithstanding the greatness of their numbers not one was within shooting range.

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Scaip! Scaip! Scaip! we heard in every direction until the birds became mere pin specks against the sky.

But this promised later shooting, for the birds did not return to the elbow brush but scattered throughout the vast meadows and low-lying fields in singles and pairs. And so long as we looked, we could see them pitching into the fields until we lost estimate of the number of birds or their location.

For a time I heard nothing more of Mac's eyes. He shot splendidly. Almost every twenty feet we put up some of the artful dodgers, but I was not quite in such shooting form as my companion. I began by missing a few, then more as Mac bestowed advice on me which did not improve my skill.

Some old timers encourage novices with instructions on snipe shooting, which includes the advice to hunt against wind as then the birds invariably afford an easy crossing shot. The birds I shot at had never been educated along these lines. They would not perform according to putative rules established by experts. They got up any way they felt; against wind, down wind, to the sides, depicting gyrating dives, spiral flights, impossible angles, and the utmost speed. When I made three straight, which was seldom, Mac only sneered and continued making good runs.

Soon, however, I improved my shooting as I took to snap shooting, but Mac's steady pace was almost too much to overcome. I reflected, if I could do something to get on his nerves, perhaps there would

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be a chance to equal him. A sudden inspiration took hold of me. I would try it, though it threatened to disrupt our friendship for some time to come.

"By the way, Mac," I remarked, "your eyes never do hurt you when you are killing a bird every shot!"

"Why, of course not!" he said, turning a flushed face my way. "Why?"

"There never was nor will be anything the matter with your eyes," I commented as he finished a run of ten straight, regardless of his reception of my statement. "That's only an excuse when you miss!"

"Why—what—do—you—" Mac started to retort hotly. "You don't think for a moment I would offer an excuse when I know—"

But Mac never finished. A single fat jack flushed at his feet from a small bunch of sedge grass. It was the biggest yet the most sluggish snipe I ever saw.

"Kill that cripple, Mac!" I exclaimed.

Mac fired at it twice, missing with both shots. He never looked at me, but I could descry the purple-red coming in his face. The snipe dropped back in the marsh about sixty yards ahead.

"Come, watch me, Mac!" I cried, determined to kill that jack. Like he performed for Mac, he rose in flight lazily, but sure as I was, I missed him with both barrels.

As if eluding both of our guns was not sufficient that jack suddenly turned, beat back toward Mac and dropped in a wet swale a few yards away from

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him. Mac was positive the snipe's last flight was to begin. He walked up to the bird with an air of disdain for any opinion I held on the subject of his shooting. But that tantalizing longbill permitted his approach to fifteen yards, then flew, affording an easy side shot. Again, much to my amusement Mac missed twice.

"Your eyes hurting you?" I yelled gleefully as the jack scaiped near me, an easy overhead shot which I missed cleanly.

"No!" shouted Mac at me, "but yours are!"

What could we do but both laugh and forget the subject of his eyes. Afterward we agreed that jack bore a charmed life. We repeated our missing several times. After each flight the bird circled but dropped back in the same field. A spirit of competition to get that jack ensued. First I missed, then Mac performed in like manner. At last we drew a small fluttering feather, otherwise the bird appeared unharmed for he flew a little further than formerly before alighting.

"Come, Mac, forget what I said. Let's get together and kill that defiant rascal," I said.

"Alright," the fat hunter agreed, smiling. "Let's walk up to him and shoot together the instant he gets up."

When within twenty yards of the longbill, the bird shot up from the grass. We emptied the contents of both of our gun barrels. Not a feather dropped as reward. Toward the north the bird flew swiftly, towering and towering until, like some of

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his startled mates, he was only a pin speck. But he continued circling until almost overhead, then he dropped like a plummet into a meadow not many yards away.

"We will get him this time!" vehemently I predicted.

"Sure we will," Mac echoed, "for we will both hold carefully this time. No more fooling."

Cautiously we stepped over the low fence into the adjoining field. The bird did not flush. We walked around and around, but that queer bird refused to fly.

Presently something attracted my eyes, something white contrasting strangely with the young green herbage. I grasped Mac's hand and shook it heartily, as I viewed the tricky jack lying dead on its back, its white breast turned to the sky.

IV

In the Chicken Country

NOTHING less than the promises of the tall Kansan could have induced me to take the trip to the Nebraska prairies. His entertaining ways, actual knowledge of game, and many little kindnesses which he constantly showered my way when in the mountain country proved the irresistible factors luring me. Then there was the contagiousness of his presence; he was one of those blonde-headed, amiable outdoor chaps, with gray eyes and a love for everything associated with wild life, whom I wanted to shoot with again, even if it had to be far away in the country about which he talked so often.

"Well," he greeted me, smiling. And the warmth of his handshake impressed me more than words. "Took a lot of coaxing to get you away from that hill country. Thought you would come chicken shooting. Right now my old dog's sick. Reckon those two liver and white pointers you brought will be any good on chicken?"

"Just wait and see," I boasted a bit on account of my abiding faith in old Duke. I don't know about the youngster handling them, but the old fellow will do it, as though born to the game."

"Bet you he won't!" he retorted, exhibiting his old frailty, betting. Bob would bet on anything.

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It was his single mania. Truly he refrained from risking money or even about making such a proposition, but he bet all hours of the day against anything that did not concur with his fancy, the stakes ranging from chewing gum to elaborate dinners, in proportion to his interest in the subject at issue.

"Bet you Duke flushes the first five flocks of chickens," he resumed. "Cigars?"

"Cigars go," I replied. "Why, this country is made to order for him, though it is in the miserable North!"

My slighting allusion to the North only evoked a tolerant smile. Bob knew my fondness for the South, so when occasion arose he was equally adept in retort at my beloved Dixieland. But for once I was surprised that he made no adverse reference. Then I understood; I was the guest, and he regarded any comment on the land of my nativity would revive an unpleasant banter of words about localities which we had threshed out pretty thoroughly together during our summer fishing trip.

That the first day of September could be so cold never entered my mind. But early in the morning after my arrival, while daylight only showed a mite of gray and crimson streamers in the east, I shivered on the rear seat of the spring wagon and vowed it would be my last trip North. Even the two dogs coiled up in their ample bed of straw at our feet found the change from midsummer temperature to that bordering frost very uncomfortable. Bob gazed down on me and laughed, but generously

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contrived to give me the most of the old buffalo robe. The driver directed his team due north, pulled a blanket over his legs and dozed intermittently. At every lapse into wakefulness he plied the whip, and the two dun-colored ponies sped more briskly on their way.

"Bet you you freeze to death before we ever get to the shooting grounds," Bob prophesied in a humorous tone, which could give no offense.

"Chewing gum?" I asked.

"Just one package," Bob replied.

Then suddenly the sun shot over the east sand ridges and bestowed a well appreciated warmth. There was not the frost I felt sure of, and soon I felt my blood tingling. Bob observed me with pleasure and nodded as though to say: "You win."

After a long drive we arrived at a country of rolling prairie. The grass reminded me of my Southern sedge, though shorter and tinged with a red color which the sun seemed to accentuate. There was a certain sameness to all that Platte River country which contrasted much with the lay of my homeland.

Once more the driver awoke. I do not recall that I ever heard him speak. We got out the wagon and without command those two pointers jumped to the ground, shook themselves and, scanning the country with an appraising eye, raced out for the first swale, which was a half mile distant, before we had taken our guns from the cases and assembled them.

With all the speed at the young dog's command,

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old Duke was yet his master. I am sure the old fellow at last had found ideal conditions for his ability. Every censure I had made of his wide casts in the South in cane, cotton and corn, I forgot as simply with admiration I devoured his exhibition of speed, range and up-headed casts.

"Well, that old fool, Duke, certainly can get over ground—and the youngster, too!" Bob grudgingly admitted in an exclamatory manner, "They are just like real chicken dogs. My, look at him swing for that swale of grass—by Jove, he's pointing!"

The young dog was only a short way behind and, recognizing his elder companion's point, backed perfectly.

"False point!" declared Bob. "Bet you cigars it is. No green dog could handle chickens that easily."

"Cigars?" I asked.

"Yep!"

"Taken."

Then we both walked fast to the pointing dogs. The Kansan's eagerness to get to them did not show doubt in Duke's correctness. But Duke had lived in the South, and Bob had to have his fling.

Duke handled his first chickens with the skill of an old prairie campaigner. He was fastened to a big flock. When we came within twenty yards of the dog they flushed with a roar, Bob making a nice double, while I missed a left swinging bird.

"You can't hit chickens and never will," Bob commented encouragingly. "I'll bet you——"

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"Drop the bets for a while," I protested and let's get after the balance of the flock!"

The long-legged one agreed. The young dog retrieved both the birds. Duke bolted for a rise over which the chickens had just topped, stood still a moment, waiting until we showed a disposition to follow. Then he was again off with the youngster at his heels.

"He's sure like an old chicken dog," Bob remarked. "See him mark 'em?"

"Oh, he learned that on quails in the South!"

"Quails, nothing! Say, if he hasn't nailed them again down in those sunflowers!"

At quite a distance from where the first point had been made we discovered the two dogs on birds. For a long ways the country was level, and far off suddenly I perceived it stop against a line of cottonwoods and heavier cover, that my shooting mate advised me was a line of demarkation between the prairie and the North Platte River.

Duke was too wide and speedy to give my young dog any opportunity to perform except in the secondary rôle of backing and retrieving. Midway between the cottonwoods the old dog had slipped into point on another flock. The youngster respected it well, and four birds were credited to our score. The balance of the flock made for the cottonwoods. Duke started again but crimped up within two hundred yards of us. The young dog had cast independently far to our right. Presently he saw his sire pointing and galloped in haste toward him

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to share in the find. But as he came within fifty yards of Duke, he ran right into the birds. They flushed before we were within shooting distance and, like the other flock, beat straight for the cottonwoods where they scattered in the cover.

"That's my kind of game," I ejaculated. "Snap shooting is where I shine."

Strangely Bob made no proposal to bet; he was too busy observing Duke and his erratic son working toward the river. As the old dog drew near, we could see that where the birds dropped was cut off by a slough. Duke stepped mincingly into the water until he sank to his neck, then deliberately swam across. Prior to this always he had balked at water. The young dog refused to follow, running up and down the bank, giving occasional vent to his displeasure at the obstacle in a low, dismal whine.

"There's a big cottonwood up to the left we can cross on," Bob announced with glee. "Then the kid will be able to cross, too. Just like a Southern dog, anyway, to hate water!"

Hardly had he announced his opinion on dogs from Dixie when the youngster, overcoming his fear, plunged into the water and swam to where Duke had vanished in the cover.

Just as the Kansan had predicted we found the log. He was the first to reach it. It was still damp from its sodden environments. Bob always was a hasty individual. He started to run across with all the supreme confidence of a tight wire artist. When in the middle all at once both his feet disen-

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gaged themselves from the log and six feet-two of Kansas manhood dropped with a huge splash in the slough.

When Bob climbed up on the bank, he resembled a huge wet greyhound. His vocabulary was profusely profane. There was not a spot dry about him. I agreed to furnish him with shells until his were dry. He took all from his pocket and stacked them up to get the benefit of the sun's rays. We could pick them up on our return. Fortunately he had thought of his gun the first thing during his aerial flight and, holding it above his head, it remained his sole possession untouched by the cold water. For once Bob agreed with me and without betting. As there was no change of clothes available, the best thing for him to do was to keep in motion until the warmth of his body dried them out. He had no others in the wagon, which now was coming toward us and would await our return.

Soon I realized we were on an island, containing every imaginable tantalizing growth. It was a case of fighting our way every step through young cottonwoods, willows, tangled sharp-pointed vines and weeds that were amazingly high. But the exercise did much toward warming the elongated Kansan, as well as reviving his spirits, for the cold plunge had momentarily made his teeth chatter and his speech incoherent.

We had progressed for some distance through the barriers when again I heard from him, his old tendency having the upper hand.

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"Where are those pointers?" he speculated, unable to see twenty feet either through or above the undergrowth.

"Don't know," was my response. "On point somewhere, I guess."

"Point, nothing," contradicted the tall one.

"Can't be anywhere else," I suggested.

"Can't, eh?" Bob said gruffly. "When I took my morning bath we were so long getting started again they just went back to the wagon."

"Duke go back to the wagon—not on your life!" My reply was prompt and tingling with sarcasm.

"Well he has," insisted Bob. "The young one, too. Bet you a box of shells they've bolted."

"Done!" I championed the old dog. "The youngster might, but Duke—never! Let's look around this island before you become discouraged."

For twenty minutes we hunted faithfully without finding the dogs. It was like hunting the proverbial needle in a hay stack. I was at the point of advising the Kansan to return to the wagon when he stepped up on a huge cottonwood log and scanned the island with considerable interest.

"You win," suddenly Bob announced with a gleam of pleasure on his countenance. "They are both stuck on birds—about twenty yards apart and about a hundred yards to our left. Come here—see them in those tall weeds?"

After a minute's scrutiny I was able to descry the two dogs. Except from an elevation I would never have been able to locate them. In all my days at

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chicken hunting I was not treated to a more pleasing spectacle, nor did I ever see birds lie better. Apparently it was an area of refuge for every harrassed bird around there. Those birds remained still to the dogs' point, just like quails in timber, and bird after bird we killed when we had solved the difficulties of cover shooting. The number became such that we had to return to the wagon with our load. In that density of riotous growths it would have been hard to conceive how we would have found all our dead chickens, had it not been for the youngster's efficiency in retrieving. In this respect he surpassed his capable bird-finding sire.

Bob's shells were dry when we left the island and returned to the wagon. He suffered no more inconvenience from wet clothes as the rough grueling in the cover had done its part.

My memory is still fresh on the incidents of the day; the great work of the old dog whose powers of endurance were seemingly limitless. It was all a surpassing treat to me. The abundance of birds was far beyond my expectations, and the vastness of the open country strangely caused me to wonder if it ever had an ending. The youngster performed well, too, but his work lacked consistency and the spectacular attainment of the old-timer.

The light of day gradually began to fade as we trudged wearily toward the wagon. The sun had dropped behind the distant elevations. The prairie grass had lost its frost-red coloration as approaching dusk overtook us. In a low swale I saw the old dog

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wheel into point, advance, then stop again. I called Bob's attention to it.

"It's sure a false point this time!" he explained. "See him run—point—run—run and point. Sure it's a false point!"

"False point, nothing!" with asperity I contradicted. "The old dog never false points!"

"Of course it is," the tall one insisted. "I'll bet you—"

"The best dinner in North Platte," I interposed, "that he's sure got a prairie chicken, if it is a cripple!"

"Agreed!" declared the Kansan.

In the darkness we both advanced to the dogs, whose antics continued discouragingly inexplicable. He continued to move up—stop—move up and stop. But we walked rapidly to him.

Then I heard a whirr of wings as a bird rose and silhouetted to my left, hurtling for the distant river.

"We both lose!" Bob shouted, as my little Ithaca knocked the bird down on the prairie. He beat the young dog to the bird and retrieved it. "We both lose," I heard him repeat as in the dim light he held the bird aloft. "We both bet on it being a chicken, didn't we?"

"Sure," I replied, puzzled at his question.

As the Kansan came closer I heard him say again: "We both lose."

"What—isn't it a chicken?" I asked expectantly.

"Chicken nothing—it's a darn old Chink!" he shouted gleefully as he waved before my eyes a large ring neck hen pheasant.

V

Hunting Squirrels with Mizzoura

THE further I proceeded into the hills the more appeal they had. It was the one place near civilization that had yet suffered none from modernity. Here and there I passed farms still in the throes of snaky rail fences, with the houses resting for sole support against giant rock chimneys that suggested comforts of big open fireplaces, where fathers and mothers gathered with their offspring and related tales so dear to childish ears.

On I proceeded. The country assumed a rougher aspect. Hills succeeded hills, all apparently linked together in one chain of purple green hogbacks of transcending beauty. The way was up a hill, almost immediately down another, for I knew not the gaps nor the many passageways familiar to the natives.

"Better stay awhile, stranger!" a voice hailed me from a small dwelling close to the road. Darkness was approaching fast. All the familiar drawl and nasal tone unmistakably stamped the owner of the voice as a native of the Ozarks. "Cum in 'nd make yourself at home," he invited, his voice ringing a welcome. "I reckon you'ns haint 'quainted 'roun here, for hit's nigh three miles to the next house."

"Well, if you will feed me and let me stay all night,

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I will feel grateful," I replied, as I found the Ozarker at the gate and walked with him to the little two-room cabin, on the porch of which the owner relieved me of my packsack and rifle.

"Step right in the house, stranger," he said. "Lizie, light the lamp, got a pill peddler agoin' to stay tonight!"

Soon I was on a familiar footing with the entire Jabez Breathwaite family. There was quite a round of laughter occasioned when they learned my packsack did not contain anything in the pharmaceutical line. There was a boy about fifteen, rather a sleepy chap, they called him Lige. The wife, being kept in the background most of the time, I only knew her as angular, slim, swarthy and, like the boy, rather reticent in speech. Mizzoura, however, with her father made up in talkativeness, for she was of free manner, possessed of great beauty, despite her coat of tan and her ten years. The other respected members of the family were two dogs, that stayed under the table and scratched industriously throughout the evening meal.

Almost as soon as supper was over the children were sent to bed. The dogs remained in their same repose, and the wife, as before, made herself conspicuous by her absence.

"See that leetle yaller and black spotted dog? Wal, if yu'ns wants to hunt squirrels tomorrow, take him. They hain't nuther squirrel dog like him. I'll sell half a share in him and keep him here all the time for two dollars." This was Jabe's response to a

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question I had asked about squirrel hunting, and the likelihood of buying or borrowing a dog for the purpose.

"Your proposition looks good to me and I will right now become semi-proprietor," I said, handing over the required sum of money and proffering an additional amount as payment for my stay.

At the latter Jabe flushed red and refused to accept anything but the money for the dog, despite my pleadings to the contrary. But in the end he maneuvered to show another route by which I could pay my keep without violating native traditions of hospitality. He brought forth a mail order catalog. As the wife immediately appeared, I deducted that it was her favorite literature. She must have continually feasted her eyes, as well as rested her finger on a certain page. It was dirtier than others and showed the ravages of much handling. But still the bonnet which was pointed out to me as the desirable one, remained a goodly illustration of how much in the way of feathers, strange creatures, fruits, flowers and ribbons could be deposited on a limited circumference and sold, express paid, for \$2.89.

"Hit's purty high in price, hain't hit?" Mrs. Breathwaite felt me out expectantly. "But hit's shore a Prussian style!"

I did not know whether she referred to the famous French city or a part of Germany. But the instant I declared the bonnet a thing of beauty, to which

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I added a solemn assurance that it would soon adorn her head, her brown visage softened and radiated ineffable contentment. Then, as further token of appreciation and at the solicitation of her mate, she sang until bedtime in an inimitable nasal of the exploits of her hero outlaw, Jesse James.

Next morning it was with surprise that I received the news that Mizzoura would act as my guide. This was in response to my declaration that I was unfamiliar with the hills.

The pink tint of the morning heightened the beauty of the little girl. Her hair hung down her back without reflecting other attention than straight combing. Her dress was of clean, dark calico. Though there had been frost, she wore neither shoes nor hat, and I marveled at her ability to ignore the inflictions of the sharp, small flint rocks. Her charm was in her natural conformity to environment, her perfect confidence in herself and satisfaction with her conditions.

"Why do we'uns call him Barlow?" she answered my question about the dog in the softest voice, "'cause he's jist like a Barlow knife; sharp's can be. Hi on, Barlow, find sumthin'!"

What Barlow did not know about fox squirrels was not worth knowing. He ranged out fast, like a wide-going bird dog, and soon disappeared on a ridge of postoaks and hickory. Presently I heard his chatter—then three, sharp staccato barks.

"Treed!" shouted Mizzoura. "Whoopee! Woopee! Whoopee! Barlow, whoopee!"

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Then dashing in the direction of the dog, Mizoura signaled me to follow at the same pace.

"Are you sure the dog's treed?" I cried in hopes the hill girl would modify her pace.

"Barlow never lies—he simply can't lie!" she flung back to me for an answer.

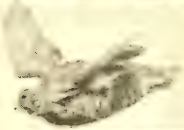
We discovered the spotted dog vociferously praying to some canine deity from the base of a large post oak. Frost had not yet stripped it of leaves. Nothing could we see. Barlow continued, however, in the same tonal striving.

With the scrutiny of an expert, the girl cast her black eyes amidst the saffron leaves, searchingly. She drew back a distance, took a turn or two around the tree, then, shading her eyes from the glaring sun, she announced and beckoned to me:

"There he is, a-layin on the first highest limb to the south." And, to aid, she pointed a well-formed, brown finger in that direction.

At last I saw the little tree rat, and at the same time elevated myself in the guide's esteem by killing it at the first shot.

"That's shore a hittin' leettle rifle, hain't hit," she remarked as she picked up the fallen game. "Killed it deader'n nit!" After which statement she resurrected a knife from her pocket, and proceeding to disenbowel the animal, she presented the entrails to the dog. "That's for you, Barlow," she said. Then she cut a short, hickory limb, sharpened both ends and inserted it in an incision made near the hindlegs of the squirrel, a method much vogueed



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in the hills for carrying them. As a final act she wiped the knife on some sedge grass.

I had many shots. The little tree varmints were exceedingly plentiful. Mizzoura, however, proved more of an attraction for me than either the capable Barlow or the hunting. Her queer sayings were amusing, and she showed something that I had found lacking in all humans I had met heretofore. She was perfectly contented, and showed a charming independence and ability to care for herself. As an expert at turning squirrels for a gunner I never saw her equal. Though several times I tried to bring forth a longing for the outside world, I failed. She listened, showing interest in my tales, but never so much as uttered a comment.

The performance of Barlow was beyond all my expectations. His knowledge of squirrels was simply marvelous. When in thickets the wily game leaped from tree to tree they were never able to throw him off. With almost uncanny precision he located them, never announcing until positive.

In a very tall hickory that despite my expert's attempts to show me the game, I could see nothing. At last I said as she pointed aloft:

"Mizzoura, I wish you could shoot."

"Shoot, Mister, jist give me the chance!" Mizzoura danced with joy as I entrusted my rifle to her outstretched hands. "Yu'ns git 'roun' on to her side. If the squirrel don't turn my way, take a stick 'nd scrape the tree with hit. Now do as I say."

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"Hurry 'roun', City Feller!" cried Mizzoura, backing off from the tree. "He's on your side, turn him!"

The whine of a small load of nitro powder smote the clear mountain air. A squirrel thudded dead on the rocky soil.

"Stay where yu'ns air!" commanded the child of the hills. "They's one—two more."

Again twice the nitro whined—reports so close together they were hardly distinguishable, but as proof two squirrels fell to the ground.

"You are certainly a great little shot," I complimented. "You can beat me to pieces."

"Oh, ennybody could shoot with this rifle!" Mizzoura declared. Then she disemboweled the squirrels and announced we had sufficient for the day. Again she took the rifle in her hands. "Why, if I had one like this, I'd—ruther have hit than Maw's bonnet, ennyday. Some day Pappay will get me one, if he sells that forty on Breshy crick."

"You are not going to have to wait that long, Mizzoura," I replied, a surge of sudden affection for the hill girl taking hold of me. "It is yours right now and I want you to keep it."

"Mine?" she exclaimed, unbelieving. "Oh, City Feller, Mister—Oh a trillion million thanks!"

On the road home, while appraising our big kill of squirrels, I said:

"Barlow's certainly a great little dog. I was lucky, indeed, in being able to buy half interest in him.

"Did Pappy sell yu'ns half interest?"

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“Yes. Why?”

“Yu’ns the tenth man,” she said, her face scarlet with unapproval, “that bought a half intrust in Barlow from Pappy!”

From then until our return home the hill girl was silent. The red in her face remained, and though her admiration for her rifle was undiminished—for she could never take her eyes from it—speech seemed to have deserted her.

Several more hunts had we together. All of them I enjoyed much. Then at last came the time for my departure. I bade all good-bye except Mizzoura. Neither she nor Barlow were about. The silence of Jabe on the subject was inexplicable, so I shouldered my packsack and proceeded on my way.

Down the road a mile from the house Mizzoura met me, suddenly appearing out of a thicket. She had a number of squirrels for me. She led Barlow unwillingly by a chain. Traces of recent tears were on her cheeks.

“Mizzoura!” I exclaimed. “Why—Barlow on a chain—what’s the matter?”

“Barlow’s yourn, take him,” she sobbed. “I made Pappy give him up to yu’ns. He won’t never more have none of his intrust sold. Good-bye—old Barlow—Oh, Barlow!”

Kneeling down I unsnapped the chain from Barlow’s little soft neck and deposited it in her hands. Barlow scampered off into the woods. I took Mizzoura in my arms for a moment and held her closely.

I continued on my way. Mizzoura waved her

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last good-bye from an eminence of flint rock. The pines and oaks whispered softly in the evening breeze. The pink tint of departing day seemed to enhance the beauty of the purple hogbacks. I was happy. I could still feel the moist impress of the little hill girl's kiss on my cheeks.

VI

My Ducking Pond in the Hills

PERHAPS it is mere association that binds me so closely to the pond in the hills. Yet somehow the more I wander from it the greater its influence is felt. Then, too, I think I am confronted with the more pertinent realization that it is because it is mine to do with as I fancy. Though it scarcely covers an acreage over an acre, what a pond for ducks it is! They never come there in quantities; they are there only unexpectedly. But when they do arrive the shooting is of a character that tries out my ability to the utmost.

As I reflect on this, I am sure it is one reason why I favor it above every ducking ground I have seen. My pond, however, is but a calm pool for livestock on top of a chain of hills. Hardly a frequenting place for wildfowl, I know you will exclaim with reason. But I am loyal to the little pond and can see no other in the same enticing light.

Many times I have tried to put aside its influence and memories by visiting famous ducking grounds. When the shooting was over invariably my mind raced back to the little pond on top of the hill.

As the pond became almost an obsession I thought the best curative was to visit other scenes, but the first thing on my return I had to see my little pond.

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Except as something sacred I never speak or contemplate my little pond. I dare not do otherwise. I am too cowardly and know that my conscience would reproach me. Sportsmen are so critical that I am sure they would discover faults in my little friend. As for myself being able to discover any, never!

Often tales of other fields have lured me to them and I visited solely for the great shooting. In this respect I was not disappointed. The ducks were there in unbelievable numbers and the vastness of the feeding grounds was beyond compare. Yet when the shooting was at its best that vagrant mind of mine wandered to the hills and visualized a small boy, creeping on hands and knees toward the little pond for a shot at his first duck.

A friend insisted that among all my former shooting I had tasted nothing of the real; shooting from a motor boat on the Mississippi was the sport unapproachable. I listened, longed, consented, I went. But after two hours murdering mallards and bluebills through this reprehensible method my little pond in the hills loomed in higher esteem, far above anything the day had shown, for it was there a small boy stopped his first green-headed drake.

Came a friend who told me of the treats of roost shooting in the Black River swamps. The distance was not great from home, and his descriptive powers were so wonderful that before I realized the act I was enroute to the shooting grounds.

MY DUCKING POND IN THE HILLS

We rode out to his favorite roost as the sun fell behind the water oaks and cypress. There was still an impress of pink on the bank surroundings. The moon promised to give us more light. That I had ever fancied any similar scene I could not recall. We waded out almost to our waist in the water, into the middle of the only open spot in the timbered area. If I had conjectured before about roost shooting, it had all been wrong. I knew nothing about it, of the opportunities for slaughter, or the certainty of violating every ethic of sportsmanship.

Just as the last touch of pink merged with the blackness of the big woods, the ducks began to come in. My instructions were to shoot before they dropped below the big cypress trees, otherwise they would prove invisible. At first in pairs they arrived and, after a few preliminary efforts at circling, they pitched for the water. The only trial of marksmanship required was to hold on the ducks before they dropped below the tree tops. In a little while it appeared as though every duck in creation had selected that round opening in the swamps for its roost. From pairs to thousands they piled in, determined to reach the roost irrespective of numbers or the presence of hunters.

Until our guns were hot we shot. The noise of rustling pinions and calling wildfowl was beyond anything in the way of din that I had ever heard, and fools that we were, we bombarded them continually. Ducks fell until we no longer thought of appraising the number. Others swam around us

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totally oblivious of our presence or the roar of our guns. It was their chosen roost, and they were following an irrevocable rule of their tribe to remain where former days had proved it sacred!

Soon our big supply of ammunition was exhausted and with the aid of flashlights we gathered our dead. Expecting quite a few, I was entirely unprepared for such a spectacle as our gruesome butchery presented. We had to leave ducks galore because we were unable to carry half of them away. My companion smiled contentment. In the glare of the electric light he looked at me, and seemingly construed my visage as radiating supreme pleasure. He was wrong! It was only my little pond once more invading my thoughts, for at that instant I was only making another scene live, for I was sure I experienced a far greater thrill when I stopped my first incomer, a canvasback, late one evening at my little pond in the hills.

Later on I visited Big Lake and the adjacent great acreage of Little River's overflow in the Sunken Lands. There was an irresistible lure about it, gained from sportsmen's tales. Some previous conception I had of its potentials as a ducking ground. It could be nothing else; the immense inundation grown with yoncapin, saw grass, flag and smartweed could serve no better purpose. Just glimpse at the forest of pinoaks skirting the shallows, could other estimate be gained?

The native guide I picked up at Hornersville told me he was a hill man by birth and former residence.

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Then I did not believe it. He answered all my questions with a resentful look and a sidelong glance at the town loafers, which obviously signified "City Dude!" Our shallow-draft duck boat, filled with noisy live decoys, signified his desire for me to get in, pushing out into the overflow with a languid, noncommittal effort. It was with him a daily occupation, and my inquiries, through stress of enthusiasm at the surroundings, brought forth but two monosyllabic answers, "yes" and "no."

Long before I got well into the ducking grounds I heard the staccato of the market hunters' guns. A battle with muskets at a distance might aptly convey the impression the constant shooting had on me, for nothing else could produce the same effect. Occasionally from somewhere out of the wild environments a duck boat came into view, loaded to the gunwales with dead wildfowl ready for market. Frequently the live decoys rode on top the gruesome load, quacking vociferously as though taking great pride in their part of the achievement. So frequently I beheld this that soon it lacked the interest of surprise and only evoked my silent disapproval. These, however, were perhaps only market hunters! Soon I would meet sportsmen and I was sure to leave with better ideals established in my mind.

But in the great overflow caused by over a hundred years of inundation no one followed any other doctrine than kill, kill, kill all you can! The very sight of the interminable slaughter all around sick-

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ened. There was a sameness about it that never relieved the monotony. Ever were the hunters in blinds, ever were heaps of live decoys close by, ever was the native's calling perfect. Flock after flock of ducks literally spewed out of the big areas of flanking timber and foolishly set sail for the living deceits, only to be received by death belching from every blind in a business-like manner, which formerly I had never regarded as possible.

A few natives with laden duck boats laughed at the insignificant dozen on the floor of mine. I expected more of sportsmen, but their guffaws were louder and always tinged with the bite of ridicule. If I could have conceived some feasible course to turn the wildfowl from those death-dealing blinds I would have done so.

I thought of the hills and my little pond. It had never experienced anything like this, and with the help of the deity it never would!

My feelings must have become imparted in some manner to my guide. For the first time his expression of indifference and sullenness relaxed into one bordering on amity when I told him I had enough ducks and I would derive more pleasure in going over the watery country than participating in the demise of more wildfowl.

Something of the lure of the swamps seized me. I began to experience real enjoyment as we paddled through the narrow lanes of saw grass that always threatened to end, only to open into new water routes under the perfect manipulation of my guide's

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long paddle. The staccato of the gunners persisted, but seemed now not so fraught with slaughter as our distance from them increased. The stark, dank water-killed tupelo and cypress black from exposure, slime and moss-covered from time, stood out in strange contrast with the immense beds of tawny, frost-stricken vegetation.

A promise of something worth seeing showed itself on the guide's grim visage as we worked through a forest of pinoaks only a foot deep with water, and finally emerged into an open area fringed with fat, red-seeded smart-weed. The sight was a surprise beyond expectation. It was impossible to see the water for the ducks in this one refuge considered sacred by the market hunters. Species mingled with species, and pintails, bluewings and other ducks that naturalists never associated together and were further on their year's Southern pilgrimage, swam, dived, tipped and uttered discordant sounds in close contiguity with mallards, redheads, scaups, widgeons, broadbills and canvasbacks.

The scene was far too much for my ability to describe. The shimmering of all colors in strange kaleidoscopic arrangement through their movements defied reproduction by pen or brush. We watched the crowded hole with enthusiastic enjoyment. Little did the ducks care for our presence, until the guide changed the spectacle into a storm of thundering, brilliant pinions when purposely he touched a lordly drake with his paddle. That started to empty the hole. But the ducks, soon

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realizing there was nothing to fear from the visitors, returned.

Dusk began to take hold of the swamps. The staccato of the pump guns increased as the glow of evening fell upon the placid inundation. We pushed on to the dock. Already a number of sportsmen had arrived. Ten duck boats were being unloaded of their weight of dead wildfowl. The hunters regarded me with amusement as they viewed my small kill.

But my guide shot back a glance of resentment at them while he tied my ducks together with a leather wood thong for easy carriage. Then he turned his attentions to me, staring as though puzzled considerably. A light of understanding showed on his tanned countenance. He extended his hand and I felt it close on mine in a warm clasp as though under the influence of a sudden access of affection.

For some time he retained my hand in his, his eyes turned in the direction of the western hill country. At that instant I knew that he, too, was thinking of some little pond in the hills!

VII

After Canadian Honkers

LONG before I should have discontinued the journey to the goose country had it not been for the urgings of Bob. The swamper swore by all the most formidable oaths of his kind that our trip quickly would terminate in a wheat-growing section where geese were in numbers beyond anything ever I had fancied. But in the flooded woodlands of big oaks, tall solemn-looking cypress and strange truncated bodies of tupelo gum, it seemed only a dank, somber, perpetual stretch of timbered swamp that forced me to the conclusion that either Bob had lost his way or his goose country was as remote as the other end of the rainbow.

Still we pushed on, until I began to marvel at the staunchness and versatility of our Kennebec canoe. In a manner it switched my mind from constantly doubting Bob's promised land, and helped some to relieve the monotony of the long swamp trip. That it performed miracles would be only hinting mildly at its innumerable achievements in the Little River Overflow. Loaded down with eight hundred pounds of outfit, it did everything expected and many unexpected things under the ministrations of our paddles, except to suffer a puncture from contact

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with the ever-menacing cypress knees, that were scarcely discernible in the dirty water.

After a time, from the manner in which the little craft passed over the obstacles, I began to believe it sensed them in advance. For from them I had real cause for anxiety; were our craft once wounded in that immense inundation of the scatters of Little River, it portended the loss of our outfit at the least. We could never have carried it to land, as at times we were miles away from terra firma.

"She actually jumps logs and cypress knees!" explained Bob optimistically. "If she did'nt, we never would have cum through the last cypress brake."

"That's about the right explanation, Bob," I concurred, "otherwise we would have been drowned in these unending swamps."

"Hain't no end—ain't they?" Bob retorted warmly. "Before sundown we'll be right in the goose country."

"That's to be seen," I murmured, without confidence in the swamper's declaration.

"Nevertheless hit's shore true!" the big, sandy-haired man insisted. "Looks long to you, because the swamps are flooded and you cain't tell where the river is. But I know we ain't far off. We're just getting into Nigger Wool Swamps and before night we'll be settled in camp on high ground, where we can crack down on some of them honkers."

"Nigger Wool Swamps?"

"Yep. Look ahead. See all them vines twined around everything?"

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"Yes."

"That's why hit's called Nigger Wool," Bob explained, while he cast an affectionate look on the perspective. "Them vines is around everything. Looks to you like we'd never get through. But she'll make it, alright. I'm glad now the swamps are up."

"Why?" promptly I asked.

"Well, right now Castor and Little Rivers meet in one whoppin' big flood. By keeping up through Nigger Wool in the woods we miss all the current and that dam near the big saw mill. This little log jumper that we are in so far has done so well she sure is going to end our paddling soon."

"If we were only duck shooting!" I exclaimed at the sight of the thousands of mallards spewing out of the beds of smart-weed and yoncapin.

"But, as we hain't, just keep a paddling," the sandy-haired one remarked, his big blue eyes actually laughing at my anxiety, " 'till we gets this brush, log and cypress knee wrecker out of these swamps."

How that swamper could tell directions it is beyond my ability to explain so much as the deportment of that sturdy canoe. But he always knew his route. In the tangle of Nigger Wool it was impossible to see twenty feet ahead. I believed with every stroke of my paddle amidst tall rushes and russet-colored meadows of frost-killed saw grass that the route would terminate suddenly. Bob sat back in the canoe, laconically commenting on the surroundings, still paddling swiftly and invari-

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ably guiding the craft into some concealed egress, a water route that none but a born swamper knew existed.

Three hours more of the same kind of paddling, then I saw light appear through the big overcup oaks in the east which promised our early advent into open country. We put more effort to our work, and all at once Bob gave forth a gleeful exclamation as he gazed in the same direction. Presently he pointed to a bank-full drainage ditch which emptied into the swamps, and directed our craft there. We followed in its course until two hours before sunset.

We camped on the high bank of the ditch between two wheat fields. Through a belt of intervening timber there was presented an unobstructed view of the Mississippi for some distance. The vast expanse of water was at flood stage.

"Lord, man, look at them!" cried Bob, his eyes scanning skyward to the north as the well-known sounds of geese in flight carried to our ears. "Three whopping big flocks, one after the other!"

Three big flocks of geese were passing low, flying slowly. Then we observed them wheel, chattering quaintly as they finally dropped into the young wheat about a half mile to the north. And flock after flock followed these, all coming from the direction of the Mississippi. These dropped into the wheat without any perfunctory circling.

"They seem to know their feeding ground, Bob, don't they?" I declared. "I think I'll drop over and get a few before supper."

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Bob slapped both knees in a recumbent position and laughed heartily.

"Yu'd never get one in all this world," he said. "Get up on this ditch bank. See that patch of moving gray over yonder. There's no less than a thousand geese, and yet you couldn't get within shooting range of them to save your life."

"Couldn't I? Why?"

"'Cause they's too wise. No geese tonight unless you picks one accidently coming too close to camp. But tomorrow—!"

"Yes—go on, Bob—tomorrow?"

"Why, we'll pit. And right now I'm going to paddle up this ditch to the Barry farm and borrow them tame honkers of his'n, if for once only you'll do the cooking of supper."

At no time during the night was I able to sleep long. Out in the wheat fields the geese chattered incessantly, and the answering of the talkative ten that Bob borrowed and coralled in a willow-stalked circle was none the less noisy.

Before sunrise when Bob awoke a strong wind blew from the north. He loaded the decoys in the canoe and paddled up the ditch while it was still very dark. Only then he informed me that we were enroute for a bar in the Mississippi, from which we would shoot geese as they returned from the wheat fields in the morning. But he had reckoned without a prior knowledge of the big river's condition. Dark as it was, we realized by the force of the current its high stage the moment the bow of the canoe hit it.

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Waves pounded at the staunch little craft, but we kept on the route Bob directed without capsizing; for the swamper's eyes seemed able to penetrate the darkness without trouble. But our steady, grueling work proved futile. The river was higher than Bob had considered possible, and the bars he had reckoned on were under water.

"But there's the wheat yet, Hillbilly!" Bob exclaimed, still enthused at the prospects for the sport. "When the sun passes through that tall brake in the cypress, we'll have shooting right near camp."

"I am not a bit doubtful about having any shooting," I answered cheerily. "With all the geese making in and out of those wheat fields, we can't help getting some with those decoys. Then there's that little hen there that simply can't quit talking."

Of all the talkative creatures on earth this hen was the greatest. I learned to appreciate her that day from the pit we selected in the middle of a big wheat field. But after a second glance she did not appear quite so diminutive. Only in height she differed from her associates. Both of her legs had been broken, which subsequently effected the shortening of the members.

Bob pointed toward the East and commanded silence. I saw a big flock coming from the Mississippi. At the same time the hen began to talk inviting goose language rapidly. She simply screamed to her wild kind, in her earnestness to attract their attention, and the balance of the decoys finally joined in the clamor.

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Straight for our pit came the geese. I had not asked advice of Bob. The big birds swung a little to our left out of range, then wheeled like well-drilled soldiers and came past the blind. What sluggish flyers and how close! Then I fired my right barrel at the leader and the left at one close to it.

"Well, of all the durned fools!" Bob cried, red-faced, as he witnessed my clean double miss. "Why don't you wait until they get in range? Them birds were ninety yards away."

"Why, Bob, those birds were so close and flying so slow—"

"That will do from you," he rebuked rather with kindness than in tone of severity. "Next time you shoot wait until you can see the white patch on their throats; and no matter how slow them big fellows seems to fly, you hold just ahead of them as you would on mallards. Look!"

Another flock shot in from over the timber line. Then the hen and her companions did their part effectively. With patience gained from observing the swamper, I waited. The flock wheeled, then swung, like the first. The flapping of pinions was almost deafening. Presently came into visibility the white patch on their throats. I led them as Bob had directed.

Simultaneously four geese changed ends and fell crashing on the young, green wheat. Gleefully I started out of the pit to retrieve them.

"Stick in the pit!" Bob commanded. "Here comes another bunch!"

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Instantly I dropped back to my former prone position. This time we brought three big birds to the ground.

About every fifteen minutes a flock came to us, some yielding to the lure of the decoys and others passed by without response, though that little hen tried mightily for all. A lone snow goose raced down from the north. Seeing our decoys, it started at once to lower in flight. But, suddenly becoming suspicious as it arrived above our pit, hurriedly it started to climb that invisible ladder, a feat in which all wild fowl are so well accomplished.

“Try for that white rascal—both of us!”

As quickly as Bob uttered the words I pulled both triggers of my gun. The firing of our two guns seemed so close that it apparently merged into one report. The big white goose stopped its flight in midair and fell dead not fifteen feet away from the blind.

“We sure crimped him!” was Bob’s well-pleased cry. “We worked the double slam proper on him!”

“Double slam don’t go this time,” I said with a smile, as I opened my gun to reload for the next goose and saw no empty shells. “You did all the slamming, Old Timer; for once I got excited and failed to load my gun.”

We encountered the usual lull in goose shooting, but in my mind our kill so far fully recompensed us for our long trip. Then occurred a happening which terminated our sport. Bob espied two incomers, bent straight for our pit, and flying very low.

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"Let's crumple up them incomers," Bob suggested.

Naturally at once we were on the alert. The two geese maintained their course. A hundred yards. Then fifty. We both fired.

The momentum of Bob's goose carried it past our place of concealment, where it collapsed like an expanded projectile from a big cannon, right on the back of the talkative hen. It knocked her flat on the ground. My first thought was that she was only stunned. But, as she remained motionless, Bob jumped out of the pit and started to her.

"There's another bunch coming—get back, Bob!" I cried.

But the swamper only hurried on until he came to the hen. He took her up in his arms.

"Come back to the pit!" vehemently I repeated.

Bob made no answer.

I turned my eyes from him and watched the geese fly to the west, where banding the horizon as the sun dipped behind the silhouetted cypress and gums, was a long smear of vermilion. Quickly I turned pleadingly to Bob. I called twice. Then I knew the sport had ended for the day, though he made no reply. I saw a tear drop from his big honest eyes on the back of his little favorite goose.

VIII

In the Lair of the Small-Mouths

“THAT old timer seemed to know his subject,” for the fifteenth time I remarked to myself. Then I counted on my fingers: “One, rattlesnakes; two, copperheads; three, cotton-mouths—our true moccasins. Those are the only poisonous snakes we have in the Ozark Mountains. For heaven’s sake, why do I continue to dwell so long on that snake-hunter’s lecture?”

The evening before my visit to the stream, while waiting for the delayed logging train in a small village, I stumbled into the town hall in an effort to discover a hotel and listened for two hours to an itinerant, tall, slender, bewhiskered old man in his strong Ozark intoning tell all he seemed to know about the poisonous reptiles in the hill country. But why should it all persist in my thoughts, I could not explain. But it did, as all the way to the stream on this glorious morning my mind centered on the old man and his discourse.

Gaining the foot of the last hill I had to achieve, the chant of the dashing river carried luring music to my ears, and a moment later the incense of a spring-nurtured swift waterway so intoxicated this earnest disciple of the divine Sir Izaak that the old man and his snakes were obliterated in my antici-

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pations of the day's sport with those famous Ozark red-eyes.

Every year since I had first held a fly rod in my hand I had obeyed the call of the stream. It would have been sacrilegious on my part to have done otherwise, so accustomed had I become to my annual pilgrimage after small-mouth bass. And in my mind this river held charms above others within my knowledge, for not only the fishing was beyond criticism but at each of its innumerable bends it unfolded scene treats altogether unlike any of the many preceding ones. Cramped between pine-topped, rock-ribbed, massive altitudes the stream apparently fretted continuously over its imprisonment. And it was a river of speed, everywhere in a hurry, and every mile or so it fruitlessly attempted to rip a course through the solid flint rock bluffs.

Quickly assembling my five-ounce split bamboo fly rod the instant I arrived at the water's edge, I considered a moment my selection of feathered de-ceits. Why should I even hesitate? Each year the first day of June I have invariably dressed the leader with two Babcock flies. And reminiscent thought proved the acceptable urge again. They had acted as killers before, tied on No. 4 hooks. And yet some laughed at my adherence to small hooks, but there is something of the ethical due to the brilliant warriors of the swift waterways and I pursued my old manner of obeying its dictates.

"Ugh!" I shuddered, as stepping toward the water while in the act of stripping a small part of the

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line, a lazy frog-fat, rusty-black cotton-mouth slipped off leisurely from a rotten birch log and disappeared in the clear water.

This was not an unusual spectacle. For every spring snakes were plentiful.

Always from where I stood I began working downstream. If that racing chute had ever failed to produce fish—and whopping ones, too—I could not recall the time. But, like all good things, it had its exactions. Here the river suddenly narrowed between steep red gravel banks that topped the herbage of the forest. The depth of the water was great—no less in any place than twenty feet for the entire length, which was no less than a half mile. I had, however, discovered that it was feasible to fish it. After careful observation I had found that there was a foot-wide ledge of rock covered by a foot or two of water, that projected along the east bank. By careful attention to how I placed my feet I had been able to fish it during normal stages. Once the venture was made there was no turning back, for an angler had to continue downstream until the termination of the chute.

For the very reason of its dangers the greater were the charms for the angler. And on this day its promises in the way of bass immediately began to be fulfilled. I landed four scrappy bronze backs before I had proceeded a hundred yards.

Then that snake subject came up again. Conditions were no different than other years. Every fifty yards or so a sunning cotton-mouth plunged



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from the bank into the water the instant the creature was apprised of my nearness.

"One, two," I counted aloud. "Were there not more snakes than usual this year?" And talking at the top of my voice was an old habit I had acquired in the wilderness country.

And just at that instant the old hillbilly professor and his lecture came to mind. I tried to cast the subject from me, but I could not.

Having progressed about three hundred yards with splendid success, the growing weight of the creel began to press. The space of the underfooting diminished appreciably. Every ten feet I reached up with my left hand, while retaining the rod in my right, I grasped a projecting limb or clump of grass to steady my legs.

Presently the ledge narrowed to no more than six inches of slime-slippery rock. I grabbed without looking for support. All at once as I touched a clump of grass I felt as though two red-hot needles had been suddenly thrust into the back of my hand and as quickly withdrawn. Then to my horror right from the grass and twining vines a monster moccasin flung himself from the bank, just brushing my back with the repulsive body before he gained the stream.

"My God!" I gasped, trembling with apprehension.

In a moment I gained firmer footing. During that brief time a thousand thoughts came to mind. I had become a coward. I did not dare to examine

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my hand, for I knew it only had a tale of death to tell. My eyes welled with tears. Then at last I drew my hand from the bank and cast a furtive glance at the offending member. Two small blood-spurting pricks about an inch apart on the back of my hand confirmed a happening which I tried not to believe. The aim of the devilish moccasin had been only too accurate.

For a brief spell I paused, my entire being atremble with icy fear as the smarting pain announced my terrible predicament. The first question that came was, How long would I live?

And then the old hillbilly's words interposed: "After the bite of a cotton-mouth a man can live over two hours without medical attention!"

"Two hours!" I exclaimed, again regarding the unmistakable imprint of the snake. "Two hours without medical attention, and it is ten miles over the roughest hills to the nearest farm! What chance was there for me?"

"None!" I admitted.

Trembling from the unusual seizure of fear, I determined at all hazards to keep on downstream until I had passed the confines of the chute, then hasten across the pine hills in the vain hope of finding some native's cabin.

But, at the realization of my predicament, suddenly anger had the upperhand. One plan I would follow to the last—I would cheat death somehow, I sneered:

"What an ideal place for the death of an angler!

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A long sleep—forever in the bosom of the wilderness.”

Presently my anger subsided under the influence of saner contemplation. My case was hopeless. I could feel the gasp of death almost on me. If I could only achieve the passage of the chute. Hope—perhaps? At least I could do no more than try. But in my terror my legs almost lost their strength. Several times I thought I would surely fall into the mad stream as my numbing hand seemed to have no more power to steady my meager progress. Death trailed every inch of my advance, I imagined. I stared at the river, speculating. By the snake or the river—which?

The river tempted.

With despair uppermost I released my hold and started to raise both hands aloft for the fatal plunge. All at once my eyes nearly bursted from their sockets. A sudden tug on my rod hand came near precipitating me prematurely in the stream. I looked across the chute. A bolt of shimmering, polished bronze flashed for a part of a second over the water, and I beheld a monster small-mouth bass bore for the depths of the river with my fly in its mouth.

Once more the lust of the angler prevailed. My last fish, I reflected. I would give him battle. One false step in the maneuvering signified death by water. What a fitting scene for a master artist! The setting of pines in mist-purple hills. A raging stream of silver spray. The subject—the man or the fish?

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I strove to check that fighting monster fish with all the skill at my command, but I failed to turn him. Beads of warm perspiration replaced the cold moistness of fear. Such a bass! Only once in an angler's lifetime does as great an opportunity present itself.

Cautiously giving line and recovering it at rare intervals, I gradually worked downstream, all the while the big fellow performing spiral subaqueous plunges and spectacular aerial flights with unbelievable rapidity. I fought, taking neither account of time nor distance—only the dangerous underfooting—until I sensed gravel under my feet. I had passed unscathed through the perilous chute and now was at the head of a raging shoal with all the needed fighting room.

Up and down the shoal I engaged the militant red-eye, until my waning strength urged me to give up the battle. But all at once I experienced an appreciable gain in line. I reeled it in rapidly.

After a time the big fellow's circles narrowed much; the leaps were shorter and less frequent. But still we fought on, until gaining a placid pool of backwater, exhausted, I coaxed into my landing net the largest small-mouth bass I had ever beheld.

Again fear prevailed just as prematurely I started to gloat over my conquest. Now my reproachful eyes sought my hand. I stared hard, stared again where the water had washed the wound, and brought it so close as powers of vision would permit. Not the slightest swelling had ensued. Strange! Scruti-

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nizing closely the two minute punctures, I leaped in the fullness of my joy and gave forth whoop after whoop that carried far into the wilderness country. Then I stood, laughed, and with my knife brought forth two tiny spines of green briar.

Turning to the fish which I had left gasping on the gravel bar, for I could never hope to place such a monster in my creel, I appreciated fully his massive proportions. Again my vision shifted to my hand, then to the conquered warrior. Stopping I took hold of my prize and held him aloft in silent wonderment of his size and beauty. He still kicked bravely. Immediately I strode to the stream and placed him tenderly in the water.

At first the big fish swam slowly and awkwardly until he reached midstream. There he gained speed and suddenly disappeared in the deep water.

IX

“Jist ‘Possums”

“HI, JACK!” The call arose from the valley and then repeated more shrilly, “Hi, J-a-c-k!”

“That’s John Wilson,” declared Jay, standing on the porch, “he’s calling his famous ‘possum dog. Let’s go ‘possum hunting tonight, Doc? John promised to take us.”

“Oh, I’m t-o-o tired,” yawned Doc, who liked eating and sleeping after quail hunting more than anything else.

“Oh, come on, Doc; I’m going to call John. Tomorrow is our last day here,” said the wiry little Jay, “and before my return East I am bound to have a ‘possum hunt.”

At last Doc agreed, and I did likewise. And a moment later John Wilson appeared, accompanied by his son Willie and a diminutive black dog bearing the name of Jack. Wilson was not the best type of hill manhood. He was rather a modified type instead, of olive complexion, quite slim, and his hair was the color and texture of an Indian’s. His inevitable companion, his son Willie, had eyes of such faded blue that it took a third conjecture to confirm their color. He was about twelve years old, with hair like yellow rope. Like his father, he placed no great importance on dress. All his clothes seemed

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eternally on the point of disclosing the garb in which he entered this world.

"Poppy," exclaimed Willie, that night looking with contempt on my old reliable black hound, Buster, "thar's gwine to be fun tonight; Jack'll run that ole black hound to death 'nd won't let him find nary a 'possum!"

"Now y'air a-talkin, Willie," giggled the admiring parent. "Hadn't we'uns better git started now?"

The supremacy of Jack over any dog in existence long ago had been established in the minds of the two native hunters. To us they spoke little, but prattled continually to themselves, the sole subject being the remarkable Jack.

We crossed a field, then came into a lengthy thicket of second growths. Already Buster was scouting for game. Jack kept industriously at heel until we reached the thicket and, at the sight of the largest tree, without further ado he bayed with all his might.

"'Possum!" cried John.

"'Possum," repeated Willie. "Jack's shore got one!"

With our flashlights we shone the tree all over, but were unable to get sight of any eyes. Buster arrived, heard the little dog, smelt the tree knowingly, then trotted off. Jack persisted. John reflected a sickly attempt at a smile. Willie blamed Buster.

Finally Jack seemed to tire of the tree, left it without instructions from his masters and imme-

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diately bestowed his attentions similarly on another.

"Nuther 'possum!" cried John excitedly.

"Nuther 'possum!" echoed Willie. "Jack's shore got one!"

Though the famous little Jack treed five times in succession, like his first, no 'possum could we find, notwithstanding that our searchlight played diligently every limb.

On leaving the fifth tree at a distance we heard Buster bay dolefully three times. Doc, Jay and I agreed simultaneously that Buster had something. John and Willie obdurately denied the possibility of the big fellow finding anything, but they guided us to the tree. Buster bayed at intervals. We discovered him beneath a small elm. The moment the light was shone upward it revealed two small balls of fire. Jack chattered in all the dog language at his command.

"'Possum!" John cried once more.

"Jack's shore treed a 'possum this time!" added Willie. "If we'uns hadn't taken Jack along that ole black houn' never wud found nothin'."

The older native climbed the tree, soon returning to terra firma holding a small marsupial by the tail. There was the joy of accomplishment in his eyes, as well as those of Willie. To show his sportsmanship he decided to free the 'possum for another race with the dog or dogs. He placed it on the ground.

That animal had great objections to any sort of race, though Willie's renowned black kept at a safe

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distance. Though the father prodded the ’possum with a stick, he could induce it to no other effort than to remain coiled as though dead. Finally, agreeing that the ’possum had no desire to compete with the dogs, John deposited it in a coarse sack and the dogs went in search of more game.

Obviously little Jack had obsessions which tempted him into prevarications. He barked at every tree, showing as much evidence of faith in his findings as on his first announcement. Not once did his notes prove truthful. Buster found five, none of which would race after capture, despite John Wilson’s liberal applications of a switch on their shoulders. Both he and Willie, however, credited Jack with all the game and seldom acknowledged Buster’s presence.

“S-o-m-e s-p-o-r-t,” Doc sleepily confessed.

“You are right, Doc,” at last agreed Jay. “Let’s turn in.” This was the first time I had ever noted the little Easterner having enough of any sport in so short a time.

It was at the moment when the unreliable Jack had lied at the fiftieth tree—or perhaps it was the sixtieth—that Buster sounded the loud notes of a strike dog registering a find. Almost at the same instant hot scent was recorded, and old Buster’s clarion notes rang clearly across the hills.

This awakened Doc.

“My!” he cried, “old Buster’s sure got a voice. Darned if it isn’t a sight race now, and whatever he is after, he’s going some. Red fox!”

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"Can't be, Doc," I gave my opinion, "they are going straight for the bottoms, and they have never taken a hill in the circles. It's a coon; that's what it is. It's a coon!"

"Coon!" echoed John Wilson.

"Coon!" chorused Willie, as he noticed Jack's chatter a mile in the rear. "Jack's a-givin' him hell, Pappy! He's shore runnin' Buster to death!"

If Jack was running the big hound to death, the trail must have led backward, for he never was within hearing distance of the hound. It had, however, developed into a sight race; quick, gasping, half-complete notes came from the ever-driving dog. Nothing could stay on the ground at such speed much longer. This proved to be true, for suddenly Buster's quick tonguing desisted, then three clear, sonorous notes sounded back in our direction.

"Treed, down in the Lowry bottoms!" exclaimed John.

"Treed!" Willie joined in, "Jack's made him take one of the big hollow sycamores."

Willie was correct. The coon was up a sycamore. At once the light proved this, as well as that it was a monster coon. As firearms had been forbidden we had only one thing to do, cut down the tree. It was too large to climb. John and I took turns with the axe. Buster continued to express vocally his interest in the tree, while Jack raced around, barking like mad from Willie's incessant encouragement, "kill him, Jack. Tear him to pieces, Jack!"

When that tree hit the ground, Jack yelped with

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fright and knocked Willie to the ground in his desperate attempt to get away, finally disappearing for the time being in the brush. That tree held terrors for the little dog which even his admirers would not notice.

A desperate battle ensued between Buster and the big coon. For a while in the darkness it was hard to tell which stood the best chance of emerging victor. But the old timer had had many years experience in coon fighting and finally killed the game animal, not before it had put up a terrific battle and left its marks on the hound. Its coat was of such splendid texture that we presented it to Jay, and several silver coins to the owners of Jack.

It was past midnight when we returned home. We found Jack reposing comfortably on the porch. Doc was too sleepy for utterance. Jay's time was taken in admiration of the kill, but its actual size was only realized as I opened the kitchen door and turned up the light. John and his son started for the valley. I went to the porch to listen to some note from Buster who had not returned.

“Come out here, Jay, and listen,” I called.

“That's shore a lot of money, Willie,” I heard John say as he doubtless examined his stock of money.

“That's right, Pappy,” replied a voice which I recognized as Willie's, “but we'uns never would a-had hit if Jack hadn't whipped h—ll outen that coon for Buster!”

X

With White River Elk

THE only thing of a humorous nature that happened in the White River country came in the way of a misadventure to our host, the peppery Major. In his well meaning efforts to provide the Governor's party with some of the beverage that made Milwaukee famous he had it brought over the mountains on pack horses. Furthermore, realizing that thirsty throats led to temptation, he hid it outdoors away from the guides and wranglers in a discarded bath tub filled with water. During the night the weather suddenly turned cold. The temperature fell to within a few degrees of zero.

On the following days the little Major was positively speechless with rage. By building a fire underneath the tub he tried to thaw out its contents. Others have tried the same process unsuccessfully in thawing out beer bottles. But the Major could see neither the humorous side nor reap comfort from scientific explanation. He blamed it all on the presence of the guides and wranglers, and seemingly derived some satisfaction from discharging the entire outfit.

This only left the Major and I for guides and general factotums in the vast hill country. Then, too, there were the guests to appease, no little matter,

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I reflected, for I was well aware of the Major's shortcomings in hunting. His knowledge of the environing mountains was only limited and his inclinations never prompted him farther than a short walk from his ranch. No one knew why he had isolated himself there, why he had such a tremendous collection of guns, or why always he carried one. No resident had ever seen him shoot or in possession of game that he had killed, but his stock of hunting tales concerning his own accomplishments surpassed anything of a modern baron of the type made famous by Cervantes.

The Governor's recital of the first day with the Major showed keen disappointment. He doubted the Major's ability as a hunter—at least his modes did not comply with his own as he said the little man paid not the slightest attention to wind, cover, nor the habits of game. Though disgust showed uppermost in the Governor's speech, finally he complimented the Major on one gift. No matter where he went, when the occasion for a drink was in evidence immediately he could find a cache of whiskey bottles. And the Governor persisted in saying that was the best exhibition he gave of his hunting proclivities.

But the Governor concluded his narrative with an explanation due the Major. The latter had stated that the cause of the numerous caches had been entirely due to his inability to conceal anything from pilfering employees.

It was easy to see that the innumerable caches

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held no lure for the Governor. How he shifted his host's attention to his secretary and drew me next day for the assignment I never knew, but I felt well honored. The chief executive of my State was a sportsman and I was anxious as he that he should not leave the White River country without an elk.

Snow fell during the night. But the following day was warm and soon under the touch of the sun the snow passed away, leaving the soil, where not too rocky, in a soft condition. We rode into a flat-rock country toward the northwest. At a tiny seep spring we found plenty elk tracks and in one clump of brush they had done considerable milling while browsing. For a time it was easy to follow them, for they bunched together well, rather a convincing proof that no old bulls were there, were not the small tracks sufficient.

On arriving at a broken rock country, which was more of a series of undulating small hills than typical of the balance of the environments, signs were fresh, as well as numerous.

Climbing a small hill, I faced a west wind as I peered down in a valley. I saw a fairly large band of elk. Without giving closer scrutiny I returned to the horses and apprised my companion of my discovery. On pointing out the elk to him I noticed there were no old bulls, mostly cows that seemed very adept at circling three young bulls. Even at a distance I could distinguish them from the cows.

Studying the situation we agreed to circle the small hill tops, doing our utmost to beat wind. At

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the same time both hazarded an opinion that perhaps a little way back in the timber there might be a bull of consequence, that was less willing to expose himself to the full view of onlookers.

Down on hands and knees we moved slowly. All at once something on the opposite hill seemed to disturb the elk. The band became restless, seemingly at first prompted only with one leading thought, to keep the young bulls encircled by the females. But at last all together they broke into a slow trot, which immediately increased in speed as the roar of an exploded black powder cartridge nearby came to our ears. We saw the clouds of smoke in the timber opposite. The band broke into a disorderly flight toward us.

We permitted them to pass. Only two young bulls came real close. Their heads were far below the Governor's standard. Again we heard a roar of black powder from the same place, immediately followed by three more shots from the same rifle. Then I beheld a young bull lagging behind the balance but headed for our direction.

On closer examination we observed simultaneously that the animal was badly crippled in the left foreleg and could just move. Unlike a white-tailed deer it showed none of the fervid determination to pile on speed until death siezed it. Rather it exhibited a dearth of fear of the presence of man as though it only sought a convenient place to lay down.

But we never saw the hunter. We watched for

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his appearance without result. Probably he was some one without a hunting license and, having caught sight of us, judged us to be officers and made his getaway.

Closer the crippled bull came to us. At once we observed that the front leg was broken. He was walking on three legs, the fourth dangling pitifully at his side. I looked for advice to the Governor. He put his hand before his eyes. The sight was too much for him. The animal was suffering intensely. I have never picked on unsophisticated young bulls, but mine was an act of mercy when I terminated his misery with a .303.

On examining the young bull we found the leg had been broken in two places about six inches apart. In the shoulder was lodged a large caliber bullet, such as some of the old model black powder rifles functioned.

The Major and the secretary were jubilant at what they were pleased to term our success. It was meat at least, and both showed that they had faithfully hunted the Major's caches and obviously had found them. As for ourselves we were not a bit proud of our achievement. I do not think either one of us—though the Major strove his utmost to entertain—could efface the persisting picture of the crippled young bull.

Faithfully I promised the Governor a big bull worthy of his prowess, with antlers that would prove acceptable. For five days I failed, and late the evening of the sixth we trailed a big track from



The End of the Quest

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a seep spring up into a very broken rock country, when darkness overtook us.

"We will find him early tomorrow morning layin' on one of those side hills!" I prophesied.

The Governor made no response. But the twinkle in his eye showed he was extremely optimistic and had so much faith as I in our chances for success the following day.

Long before day we were enroute to the place where we gave up the trail the night previous. Tying our horses to two sturdy saplings, we proceeded up a valley, then rested on a hillslope which was a splendid shelter from the north wind.

Day had scarcely topped the eastern peaks when we discovered the bull had passed the night before over the hill on which we were resting. Once in a while the impress was visible when the rocks were less frequent and the tawny sedge grass yielded to the weight of the monster. Finally as the sun began to show in full splendor we lost the trail in the middle of a small valley, flanked on both sides with sloping flat-rock hills, yellow and dark tan here and there with the ubiquitous sedge grass. We did our best to pick up the trail, but failed.

By mere accident I happened to search the east slope of the large hill to our left. Perhaps it was only intuition that urged me to look more carefully. Suddenly I stood still and stared, unbelieving. In a patch of sedge and stunted oaks, seemingly blended well with the surroundings, yet there was something there that caused me to drop to the ground and give

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my eyes further exercise. The Governor did likewise. He could see nothing unusual.

At first I doubted my eyes, but more careful attention proved their truthfulness.

"Keep down!" I whispered in excitement.

"See anything?" murmured the chief executive of one of the largest States in the Union.

"Don't you?"

"Not—a—thing!"

"Try again," I assured him in the lowest tones at my command.

"Not a d—m thing can I see!" irreverently confessed my companion.

"God—Look! Right between those twisted trees. Don't move!

"Not—a—thing—can—I—see," the Governor slowly admitted.

"Why, Governor! The biggest elk I ever saw is lying in that patch of sedge grass between them. See his head move a little?"

"No. Where?"

"My God, man, haven't you any eyes? He's a monster! He's winding us now!"

But, though I strove to point out the big elk, the Governor was unable to locate him. Strange, too, for usually he had a mighty fine pair of woods' eyes. And, even when that massive creature arose and stood in all his glorious majesty facing the eastern sun, the Governor could not see him, so well had blending coloration deceived him.

For an instant the monster bull gazed hard toward

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the east, a veritable picture of the monarch of the wilds. Then, still glancing in the same direction, cautiously he proceeded up the slope, all the while his massive head feeling the east for danger.

"There! There! See him? Now!" I cried, "get him before he steps into the cover!"

"Where?—" Then all at once the Governor discovered the bull. But the animal had observed our movements and broke for the cover in his rear.

Three times the Governor's old lever action spitefully whined its familiar note. Three times I thought he missed; and also was on the point of losing my sense of propriety by upbraiding him, when his fourth shot rang out through the hills.

I thought I could almost hear the impact of the bullet on the elk's side at the instant when he seemed to merge with the dark background. But he stopped all at once, throwing his head forward as though to dash toward us. But he suddenly dropped like a falling tree in a big patch of sedge.

Out of breath from scaling the height at unaccustomed speed, we found the big bull dead. When able to talk coherently, I congratulated the Governor, for all four bullets had lodged not eight inches apart, making four gory holes around the region of the big creature's heart.

XI

My Pet, the Woodcock

SINCE a boy these little brown birds have held my interest. I can recall my first kill and my hunting grounds. Though entirely separated now from the old scenes, they live as if I saw them only yesterday. In late years my love for the sagacious looking fellows made me desist from shooting so much as in former years, but where I know them best their numbers seem never to diminish.

Many friends I have had among woodcock. I can scarcely recall a year in which I have not made myself familiar with a few and felt strong regrets when the call of the warm South lured them away from my frequenting grounds. The covers seem desolate and without charm when they are away, despite the fact that they form hiding places for other wild creatures during the absence of the woodcocks.

My first pets came to me unheralded. What became of the parents I never knew. I found them close to my garden in some mayapple cover, where they stood staring at me unsuspectingly. I waited the longest time for the arrival of either mother or father woodcock, but they never came. And, as the youngsters showed no disinclination to permit my approach, I picked them up and carried them

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home with the greatest care. They were queer little fellows—all bill and all appetite. If there is any animal in the world the weight of a young woodcock that can eat one tenth as much, it has never been within the scope of my investigations.

From the first hour I adopted these fellows they acquired the eating habit. They could stow away as many worms as I could dig, and then cast a wistful look for more. Many times after I thought I had surfeited them with their favorite food, I discovered them in the garden storing away cutworms as avidly as though they had not had a bite for days. Notwithstanding that they were reared in the wildest environment, they exhibited no desire to leave, even after they could fly well. The farthest they ever went from our front yard was to a small pond near by, which was well covered by tangles of briar and buckbrush. They enjoyed themselves there during the warm part of the day, and generally indulged in a siesta for several hours under the shadows of the bonnet leaves that grew close to the water.

About four o'clock Tom and Jerry, as we called the pair, turned up and proceeded on their inevitable slow round through the garden after cutworms among the pea vines. I could pick them up anywhere, and they liked very much to be petted. But still I have a lingering belief that they appreciated my attentions more when I had a big supply of worms in my hands.

I became so devoted to my sagacious looking pair

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that I watched over them with as much care as a mother gives her youngest. If attendance on Tom and Jerry took me away from other duties, always I felt well repaid at night when they came to the porch and sought my caresses before roosting in their little enclosure.

Perhaps I will never look over a good woodcock cover without thinking of Tom and Jerry, for their departure was as unexpected as their arrival near my home. A number of woodcocks dropped into the thicket near my quarters late that fall. Tom and Jerry, like domesticated woodcocks should, for several days held themselves aloof from their wild cousins. Just after the first heavy frost, I went in search of the wild fellows. They were not there. I had heard no gunners in the neighborhood, but I am sure they enticed my little friends away, for I never saw them again.

For a while the loss of Tom and Jerry was forgotten in another woodcock. One spring day I found him under a mayapple plant close to a lazy little creek that coursed through a meadow. From the first day I classified him as a bachelor, and I still adhere to the correctness of my classification. From the first day in spring that I saw him never was he seen with another of his kind. His deportment in this respect remained the same until he left for a trip South the following fall.

At first he was not easy to get acquainted with. But I was persistent. I watched him day after day in his sodden lair until he began to realize that al-

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together I was rather a harmless creature. At first he began to feed, but if I made the slightest movement he retreated to his lair and waited at least ten minutes, standing as still as a statue, until again he dared venture forth. Later I began to place worms close to where I had been. Then, soon he began partaking of the delicacies, if I moved back a little. It did not take long for him to associate my presence with worms, and in a month's time I could place my hand on him. Within two months he permitted me to pick him up, but never until I had shown evidence of a copious stock of earth worms in my possession. The way to a man's affection is through his stomach: the same with a woodcock.

But my bachelor was as fickle in his affections as Tom and Jerry. He did not wait for company, but the first frost in fall he was off, perhaps as ever pursuing his life as a celibate.

My new woodcock grounds are anything but like what the naturalist tells you is their favorite habitat. It is up in a heavily timbered hill country, studded with various hardwoods, and covers of sumac, hazel and defying spinuous vines. The soil is moist—what there is of it. But the woodcock must seek arduously for his diet, for the ground is mostly covered with broken flint rock. My, the numbers that are there are almost beyond belief! They are in hundreds, and in a place where man is sure not to molest them! They are friendly woodcock, too, if one will only take the time and lives there long enough to encourage confidence.

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Last spring I went there, determined to adopt another Tom and Jerry. After I became one of the family I changed my mind. I could never hope to procure enough worms for that band of brown fellows. With me they were very much against familiarity for a long time. But I frequented their grounds day after day and they soon regarded me as only a harmless bird lover. But as much as they would permit my approach alone, never would they stand for the presence of a companion. I tried it several times. Each time I was unsuccessful. While they would not fly away, they would run with all their might and secrete themselves until the other human had departed.

Last fall I began to forget the effect that Tom and Jerry had once upon me. I heard of woodcocks in the neighborhood, and with gun and dog went in search of them. In a small thicket of sumac the old pointer froze stiffly in recognition of game. Two birds flushed. A good, easy chance for a double. I lined the sight on one, then shifted it quickly to the other. Then I fired the gun way over my bird, in a sudden desire to miss, as suddenly I heard the crisping whistle of the two birds simultaneously. To this day I vow I heard the voices of Tom and Jerry.

XII

No Feud

HOW A FAMOUS FOXHOUND BROUGHT PEACE AND
FORGIVENESS TO MURDEROUS HILL
MEN OF THE OZARKS

ALL morning, from his bed of saffron black-oak leaves, Grip observed with contempt the home-coming of Tom Breathwaite's pack of foxhounds. Ever since sunrise they had arrived in pairs and trios, sore-footed, hollow-stomached, red-eyed—exhibiting the inevitable dejection of dogs for whom the race had been too strenuous. From most of them the early call of the Ozarker's horn had brought no response. The killing race of the night previous had robbed them of both strength and ambition.

Two hours before the finish of the race, nineteen dogs out of the pack of twenty had dropped out. Gritty to the limit they had hung on to the trail as far as Nature permitted. But the swiftness of the fox had been so accelerated by the great speed of the lead dog, Grip, that long before day the tonal strivings of the pack had dwindled to the vibrant, bell-like notes of a single dog.

And yet Grip held on tenaciously to the trail. His big feet heeded not the inflictions of the sharp flint rocks; the muscles of flexible steel showed no fa-

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tigue. The great heart of the big black and tan Walker hound beat happily.

Even to Tom Breathwaite, mountaineer—tall, pale-eyed, and as hardy to the exigencies of the sport as the lead hound he owned—the race had been a trying one. No red fox within his memory had ever taken such long circles and unexpected diverging cuts across the mountains, to the extent that for some time he felt the race as impossible of terminating in favor of the dogs. When at times it was hottest and promised to end, that wily red changed tactics and threw off all the pack except the big hound, Grip.

Persevering, leech-like, determined—actually reveling in the punishment of the cruel going—Grip pursued across Bagamah Mountain, down into the valley of Gooseneck, up among the pine-crested craggy summit of Hargis, back over the same country, and then abruptly thru the broken-rock areas of Bog Hollow.

Now the Red—tho a moment before he felt that he could run the big dog off his feet, as he had the other nineteen hounds—began to realize his danger. Purposely he drew the big dog to Hargis Mountain, sensing that the chaos of rock would effect his undoing. But the hound's voice showed he was getting closer, and there was nothing in it of tremulousness or of incoherency to indicate extra effort. Immediately the red concluded he had hazarded too long a circle. He was tiring rapidly. Could that big hound hang on forever? At that instant it struck

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him that the distance from the place he had selected to hole was at least four miles. He flung his blood-hot tawny muzzle to the east, scenting the cool approach of morning. That was why he crossed a big rough hill—jumping from boulder to boulder and quickly shortening his half-achieved circle—on down into Bog Hollow; as from there to Phillip's Bluff was but a brief run, leaving him after that a straight unobstacled run of a half mile.

Conqueror tho he was of nineteen fast foxhounds, the red had underestimated the endurance and swiftness of the last remaining dog of the pack. Momentarily Grip's notes were somewhat muffled by intervening altitudes. But as the red gained the level top of Phillip's Bluff, Grip sounded menacingly on his trail. Now the race was a sight race—Grip coming fast at incredible speed and absolutely determined to make the kill. That fox accomplished prodigies in speed. The hound surpassed him. The last dash of the fox for his objective availed him nothing. Ten feet from the boulder which hid his den above Current River, Grip caught the game, foam-flecked little animal and killed it instantly.

Fifteen minutes later Tom Breathwaite rode on the scene. His saddle-horse reeked with fetid lather of profuse sweating. Its legs trembled. Tough little mountain horse that it was, it was evident it could no longer bear the weight of its master. The lanky Ozarker quickly dismounted, took off bridle and saddle, and gave the horse its liberty.

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Then, kneeling on the frost stricken ground, he drew the hound's head close to his own and exclaimed:

"Gee, Grip! you sho' air sum dawg!"

* * * * *

Again, later in the day, Breathwaite made the same exclamation. At his home he found Grip curled up in a bed of leaves against the south side of the smoke-house. At his presence the dog bounded to his feet, then stretched from hind leg to fore leg, and ejaculated a peculiar sound, which is construed by dog lovers as an expression of pleasure. Tho' Breathwaite eyed the dog critically, there was no evidence of strain or wear from the great race. Picking up the feet one by one, they shrank none at the pressing of the big brown forefinger. Then, when the Ozarker dropped the examination, his pale eyes glinted with boundless affection and self-satisfied appraisal.

"Grip, old boy," he commented, "youse air sho' a whoppin' houn'! Youse kin outrun ennything in the hills. Wide-chested, high in front, low behind, big-boned, t'aint nary a wonder youse kerries your big weight as if youse never had enny!"

"Hey thar, Tom!" A voice unmistakably addicted to the Ozark nasal twang called from the road in front of Breathwaite's cabin.

"Howdy, Jabe. Come and stay a while," drawled Tom in answer, while speculating fast on what might have brought Jabe Hancock from Bee Rock. Jabe was an old friend of Tom's.

The visitor was a small, dark, little man, garbed

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in well-worn clothes, which at an earlier period might have been of any color but their present one. Straggling, long, stiff, gray-black hair protruded thru a slit or tear in his hat, as tho the aperture had been purposely contrived for its accommodation. Jabe rode a small flea-bitten gray mule thru the gap in the yard fence, by which Tom's range animals came up to the cabin for a taste of salt or an occasional meager feed of corn. Dismounting, he took off bridle and saddle, and gave no further attention to his mount.

"Some dawg—hain't he?" Breathwaite began, as he saw Jabe's eyes linger admiringly on Grip. Then his eyes shifted to Jabe. "What the hell's the matter, Jabe? Something a-doin' aroun' Bee Rock? McIntyres?"

"Yep," nodded the little hill man enigmatically.

"Well?" demanded Breathwaite. "Let's go in the house."

Together they entered the two-room log cabin. Two separate houses had once been built—single room affairs—now unified into one structure thru the medium of a roofed porch. The room which Tom selected contained a generous fireplace, a single bed and two rough hickory chairs—all achievements of the owner's tools. The few adornments on the wall were confined to a hunting horn, shotgun, a riding bridle, and a well-cared-for modern rifle.

"Wall," Jabe narrated, after he had dexterously expectorated on the tiny flames issuing from a smouldering black oak log, and had accepted a chair

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from Breathwaite. "Cash McIntyre kilt your own brother, Polk, up near Bee Rock, jist after they'd fit a while over school meetin'. Cash started home fust. Breshed Polk near Big Crick. Put a .303 clear thru his chest!"

"And did—" Breathwaite started to ask without emotion.

"Jist lissen a minute, man!" Jabe interposed, and then narrated: "Kizzie, Polk's woman, heerd all erbout hit righterway. She put four buckshot inter Cash's forehead! She went to his home. When Cash heered her a-callin' he cum to the doah to see who hit wuz."

At this juncture the Bee Rock courier paused to ascertain the effect his news had on Breathwaite. He could distinguish the face paling, despite its coat of tan. The jaws thrust forward menacingly. Then Sam arose from his chair, and stared for a while at the fire.

"Go on, Jabe! I'm a-lis'nin'," Breathwaite said—a new light showing in the former expressionless face.

"When the news got erbout in the hills Sam McIntyre lit out," Jabe continued. "Sam 'lowed he wuz boun' for his cabin erbout Bagamah Mountain. He had a rifle with him, and he sho' had a chanct to git Keener Richmond, Kizzie's brother. Keener didn't have a thing to shoot with—nary a thing but his hands for to fight with. But Sam didn't do a thing erbout hit, and, tho he struck up Keener, he jist sed he wuz gwine to git outen the country, and for Keener to hike home. My! think of McIntyre

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a-sayin' that! He actually said he wah'nt a-goin' to stain his hands with no blood. He had nothin' agen nobody. Ther'd bin too much blood spilt already. I reckon he don't ricollect he's a McIntyre, if he is the las' one a-livin'!"

"He won't be the last McIntyre long!" exploded the tall Ozarker. "I'm the last of the Breathwaites. Polk had nary a kid. Jabe, take care of my shack for a day or two. Feed Grip well—and the rest of the dawgs. No use a-feedin' stock while there's some range left. But be sho' and don't forget Grip. Mind that, now!"

Without another word Breathwaite took his Savage rifle from its repository of half-green unbarked hickory pegs above the fireplace, worked the well-oiled action with the lever back and forth, and then filled the magazine with its quota of ugly bottle-shaped, soft-nosed cartridges.

A moment later, from the roadway door, Jabe beheld the Ozarker disappear into a clump of second growth bull pines.

* * * *

Perhaps it was the early urge of hunger or the inevitable promptings of his strain that brought to Grip a feeling of restlessness. In the faint moonlight that was giving precedence to steel-gray bands of luminance in the east, he perceived his associates scattered around the yard. They slept well. The effects of the memorable fox hunt still held them motionless. Neither approaching day nor the harrowing ululations of a gray timber wolf, in a deaden-

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ing on the slope of Kelley Bluff, could stir them to activity.

Grip scented the frost-laden air, rolled over, stretched, got to his feet, shook himself and stretched again; then trotted, head high, out of the yard for the woods. A day of inactivity had been too trying. Today he would satiate his self-hunting instinct. At first he cared little about what object he would pursue. Anything that caused his limbs fast action would do. He was not aware that it was a century of careful breeding that was acting as compelling force. He knew, however, that he must hunt or undergo a restless day at the mountain home. As a stimulant he started a swamp rabbit amidst elbow brush in a soggy sink of the hills, permitted it to race ahead for a while; then, presently realizing the chase was beneath his dignity, killed it and devoured a small part. His master never would have permitted this. Grip knew Breathwaite regarded no other chase than that of the fox as compatible with one of his blood, barring now and then a too bold timber wolf. But today was a day of his own designing, and he decided to make the most of it. Also he wished very much to appease an almost uncontrollable desire to chase deer. This, too, his master had always ruled against, tho not thru any particular qualms of sportsmanship. Deer were numerous, and, were dogs permitted to run them, the best planned fox hunt would terminate in a deer race. Grip had to conform to his master's will—despite instinct crying madly and continuously for a run

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after a swift, strong scented deer. Grip was positive his master was away. So he made no effort to trail him, as a village pot licker might have done.

For some time the big hound cold trailed a deer. But this slow work did not appeal—it might necessitate hours to start it from its bed. Several cold trails he followed, relinquishing them in disgust. As well as a drive dog, he was a peerless strike dog—a veritable scout. No more cold trailing for him. Now he was going to range wide, and chance starting a white-tail from its bed. Instinct, sharpened by self-hunting and scouting for foxes, announced the proper place. In November, just after the travail of rutting, the old bucks liked to lay up in the rough, inaccessible places during the day.

Trotting up the draw toward the south end of Gunn Bluff, head and flag well up as customary, just as he invaded the roughest brake of the country the longed-for scent came strongly from the stunted sumacs. Suddenly with increased vigor the west wind forced instant recognition. At once Grip bellowed forth to the wilds his insuperable joy. A large buck broke into a series of spectacular bounds from amidst the gray-lichened boulders, sumac, hazel and tall plume-like yellow sedge grass. Tho unable to see the quarry, the hound knew of its presence. A few agile jumps brought him to the buck's bed. Then the race was on!

* * * * *

At night Tom Breathwaite camped some distance from his home. Here Current River pursued its

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mad course. It is a river crystal clear, of continuous fast water, quick, treacherous bends, innumerable long rapids, and swift chattering shoals. That day the mountaineer had no expectation of finding Sam McIntyre. When he arose the next morning he went to the woods, killed two gray squirrels, cooked them over a driftwood fire, and after eating pressed into service a gentle range horse to carry him across a ford to the west side. Later he met a native, who paddled him downstream a number of miles. After deciding to pursue his course on foot, he left the boat. This was done thru a desire for self-preservation. In the undergrowth on either side McIntyre might be hiding. Notwithstanding his enemy's treatment of Keener Richmond, and his subsequent declaration to that individual, Sam was his born feud enemy. He had no other belief than a persisting one that Sam would try to kill him at sight. Breathwaite had no desire, brave tho he was to rashness, to furnish Sam the opportunity. So he was endeavoring to execute plans he had formulated for just the reverse.

As day wore on the Ozarker hugged the cover, resting now and then as the mood seized him. Accustomed as he was to being alone, he had formed the habit of talking to himself. Presently his thoughts wandered from McIntyre to Grip. The environments were reminiscent of the great race of two days ago after the red.

"Some dawg, Grip! I sho' say, he's some dawg!" he remarked in a voice only audible to himself.

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Then his thoughts abruptly reverted to the old feud. "I'll ketch Sam somewhere twixt Gooseneck and Bagamah. If I do, all this hyar McIntyre business will end right there. I reckon hit'll be a good thing, anyway. Breathwaites cain't live—no use a-talkin'—while there's a polecat of a McIntyre left!"

Far in the east from the direction of pine-backed Gunn Bluff he recognized the half audible notes of a running hound. The notes were fast—chattering fast.

"Hit's a durn good thing I never let Grip run deer," he commented. "If I had he wouldn't a been worth a torn 'possum hide for fox huntin'!"

The hound's voice—even at that distance away—was remarkably similar to Grip's. All the mountaineer's love for the dog instantly overwhelmed other emotions. Never had he craved human companionship. The opposite sex had never appealed in the least. Women were all right for some—but mostly got men in trouble. As for dogs: "They sure air always friends," he would have said. His needs were few; the small farm exacted little physical effort. Open range furnished most of the food for his livestock. He had sought the retreat far back in the hills solely to indulge in his love for the chase. Dogs—Grip—had supplanted affection for humans. His quest for McIntyre was partly automatic, like his dog's self-hunting—blood responding to blood type in years of breeding.

And now McIntyre was entirely forgotten. That hound was not fox hunting, but pushing a deer at

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a tremendous pace! "He's sho' a-makin' that deer hotfoot some, I'm a-thinkin'!" the Ozarker declared enthusiastically. Then the race almost immediately drew near the river.

"By Gawd, hit's Grip!" he shouted aloud. "Whoopee, Whoopee, boy! Whoopee! Sure's enny-thing, Grip's after that big eleven p'int buck, and he's aheadin' for McGonigal's Failure!"

Even in his excitement his devotion to the ethics of fox hunting did not desert him entirely. The famous deer crossing at McGonigal's Failure was well known to him. At the head of that treacherous rapid hundreds of times slim-legged deer had baffled hounds. Tho under no condition would he kill the deer, he was determined to be a spectator. Were he to kill the deer, not only would Grip's future as a fox dog be in jeopardy, but he might possibly announce his presence to his enemy. Sam was well acquainted with the bark of his Savage.

Down thru a small bottom came the deer—hotly, sternly pursued by the big chanting hound. The deer ran along the steep bank a few yards downstream; then, tossing its head back defiantly, it gracefully leaped to the stream—taking the water a short distance above the rapid. It angled considerably upstream until it reached breast-deep water. Then, a pace further, and only the sharp-pointed muzzle and antlers were observable.

Only a rod or so behind, Grip burst into sight—in happy, vibrant staccato drive song. The brush

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had partly concealed the movements of the deer. Tho he had no fear of the current, the dog ran downstream to discover if the buck had resorted to any deceits of its kind, such as simulating taking to the water as if to cross, but returning to the same bank. About twenty yards below the river is at its greatest frenzy--the entire current beating frantically and incessantly against the east bank. For a fleeting second Grip surveyed the river--instantly distinguished the swimming quarry--and announced his enthusiasm. He jumped into the water, but his chant changed to a howl of pain. In a tiny pocket of backwater along the yellow gravel bank his right forepaw touched the pan of a mink trap, and it closed on it viciously.

In a single bound, urged by mingled anger and pain, he exerted all the strength at his command. The root to which the trap chain was fastened gave way, but the trap held. Grip fell backward into the rushing water. With one mighty sweep it sucked him down. As he rose to the surface his figure righted, but the unyielding water flung him like a dry leaf midstream.

Tho hampered by the trap, Grip's attempt at swimming was fairly successful. Continuing in the course the current propelled him, he approached midstream, close to one of those many semi-submerged oak trees which are constant menaces to swift waterways. By some inexplicable means the trap chain became entangled in a projecting limb,

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and interfered with Grip's progress. Here the water ripped by at an amazing gait. The dog was a helpless prisoner. Now the water flung him against the tree, but as he attempted to climb the slippery trunk, the restrictions of the chain prevented. The dog whimpered some as the pain from the trap increased, but the current mockingly tossed him back with almost rhythmic precision. Again and again Grip struggled against the cruel conditions, the water, seemingly instilled by another mood, ducked his head repeatedly until his cry became almost inaudible.

"Grip's in a mink trap!" exclaimed the mountaineer, straining eye and ear for action and sound. "Gawd help the man that sot hit, if I ever ketch him!"

Tom Breathwaite was at least a fourth of a mile from his pet—no boat within sight; no possibility of succoring him. For half a mile a swift, unfordable cut-off effectively barred him from the river. Any effort in that direction would only delay. He ran downstream thru the tangle of hazel and sawbriars, sensing a cold wave of despair as he now and then caught sight of the cruel water beating the life out of his dog. He had given up hope—almost. There was no chance of his ever reaching Grip in time. Grip. Grip! the only creature he had ever loved! Even the feud lust died in him at the thought of the animal's predicament.

To Breathwaite it appeared as tho Grip was being

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pounded into the water for the last time. He closed his eyes to hide the spectacle. The dog's muffled cries had ceased. Then suddenly—in amazement—he saw a tall mountaineer step out into view from the willows nearby—no doubt having been attracted by the dog's struggle. The man, with one swift glance over the scene, threw down his rifle on the bar, and deliberately waded to Grip's assistance.

The mad current was in no humor to loose its victim thru the interference of a mere man. For a while it spun him around in a circle; then it carried him below the tree like a feather in a gale—finally flinging him impotent on the gravel bar. Again and again the man strove pluckily to effect the rescue of Grip, but each time, as before, he was carried beyond his goal, until seemingly he had no longer the strength to persevere longer.

Presently—conscious that such efforts were unavailing—with what little strength was left to him he dragged his tired body to the bar, and tho too weakened to stand, he crawled slowly on his hands and knees far upstream above the dog. For only a second or two he rested—all the while eyeing the stream. Then he took the water. His generalship was perfect. The race of water bore him directly to the tree. Extending a bare, brown, wet hand—steadying himself with a single hand—he reached down and released the obstructed trap chain.

When Breathwaite finally arrived at the termination of the rapid he found Grip's recuer on the

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bar, face downward, and in a half-unconscious state. Heedless of the manacled foot Grip licked the cold hands.

* * * * *

That night by a roaring fire—throwing sparks aloft into the tops of the tallest bull pines and tremendous luminance far down into the last reaches of McGonigal's—Grip stared at his master, whose arm rested affectionately on his rescuer's shoulder. For a while all was silent, except the petulant snapping of the green pine fire.

"That sho' is some dawg," Breathwaite finally said, in his soft drawl.

"He looks almost as tho he could talk," replied his companion, in unaffected admiration of the big hound.

"He's got the sense, Sam, even if he cain't talk," declared Breathwaite, with no little vehemence. "But, if he could right now he'd be a-saying I wuz a durned old fool if I didn't go up to Bee Rock and lick the fust man that said there wuz a feud twixt me and Sam McIntyre!"

XIII

Southern Bear Hunting

ASSOCIATION is the cause of many things, and I think that the reason I began to consider the Southern black bear as a sporting proposition was entirely due from the daily conversation I heard on the subject, and the infrequent signs I met up with in the swamps of Little and St. Francis Rivers. Perhaps I would have gotten into the game earlier, had I faith that one of my hounds had the ability purported to be the heritage of every long-eared dog in the swamps.

Once in a while I felt tempted to bring down one of my hillbilly foxhounds and try him out in a hunt, but usually my spirits were dampened as I broached the proposition to some lean native. They never told me not to, but they had another way of dissuading me. They forced me to listen to their recitals of the deeds of their famous dogs, and when they did my hill dogs suffered so much in comparison promptly I lost faith in them.

On two occasions without dogs I hunted alone. I combed the canebrakes pretty well where I had seen signs. But as far as results were concerned, I brought back no bears. None of my ventures I confided to the natives. I knew it would only produce ridicule; something to which at that time I

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was very sensitive. My first trip ended without the sight of game. My second I got sight of a big black fellow slipping into a small patch of switch cane before I could bring my rifle to my shoulder. I felt sure of him, however. The patch was not fifty yards long, and, except being flanked by a few cypress logs, there was nothing to hide him. The growth of cane was not over ten feet wide. If that bear moved out of the cover I felt sure of a shot. I entered the cane, and though I watched the outside I never got another sight of him. Truly I secured not the quarry I was after, but I gained a knowledge that had heretofore been kept secret from me; clumsy as is a Southern bear, he is adept at concealment and is a little wiser than most hunters of my caliber.

Came the time when I consented to join a hunt. They told me a few old-time bear hunters would attend. The southern Missouri native may have a tendency to exaggerate, but it was not in evidence on the subject of numbers. Their meaning of "few" proved to be some two hundred men on all sorts of mounts, from mule to bony nag, with guns of every vintage and an assortment of dogs which was beyond the powers of the greatest sage in kenneldom to classify. There was a single outstanding trait about the owners, if not so conspicuous in the dogs' performance, every owner chewed tobacco, every owner vowed that his bear dog was the best that ever ran in the Little River swamps.

Finally a leader was chosen, a man of rather di-

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minutive stature, extremely slender, with thread-bare clothing, a horn suspended from his shoulder and bearing in his right hand the longest ten-gauge, single-barrel shot gun mortal man had ever beheld. If the shot gun drew my attention it did not half interest me so much as his powerful voice. The roar of a lion was an insignificant whisper in comparison. You could hear Billy White's voice above that bedlam of dogs and boasting men. Hanging down this worthy's back by a cord was a long cane knife, which gave him the aspect of a rather belligerent creature. Though most of the men had cane knives, none of them altogether conveyed the same impression in my mind as Billy.

Billy White merely raised his hand aloft and let a roar, and then, as if by a single impulse, dogs and men were on the way to the canebrakes. A mile from the little saw-mill town at some distance a bitch sounded strike and the notes carried as clear as a bell through the swamps. At the same time every dog opened up, as if they were all the original discoverers of the trail, and each rider vowed no other hound could produce the same sound but his pet.

It was some relief that the chase was on. Suddenly I discovered I was not very comfortable on the small, round-bellied nag assigned me. Nig's punishing rough trot grew no better when confronted by down timber and the numerous logs. I never knew how long I would stay on that wide back, for the saddle kept sliding, though numerous times

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I did my best to get it cinched tightly. But the fat fellow's shape seemed never to adjust itself to the saddle, though I managed to keep in the wake of the rough riders, who made more noise with their yelping than the dogs.

Suddenly the entire race was brought to an end by the yelping of the dogs back in the cane. Something was certainly going on. Hounds bellowed with pain, and some, apparently keeping at safe distance from the bear, bellowed the treed note to the limit of their powers. No doubt the bear was a scrapping individual and whipped the dogs off. For soon the race was on again, only to terminate once more in a greater density of cane.

What the horses were up against in a bear race I had no suspicion of before. The tall, close-growing cane that looked impenetrable to man or beast they forced against by the over-liberal application of long cruel spurs. At times they would get into such a position they could go no further. Then the riders would dismount and cut an opening against which the horses once more were forced. The punishment drew blood from some of the mounts, and others seemed ready to drop from exhaustion. But they were game animals and did their part well. Apparently the spirit of the hunt enthused them, so their wounds were but mere incidents of the chase.

Once more from the sounds it was facile to note that the bear had whipped off the dogs. The race was on again. Presently it ended in deep, clamorous bayings, and every dog sounded treed. Their voices

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carried clearer and all the hunters felt sure that the bear had climbed for safety in a clearing or open space. To get to the quarry they forced their mounts on mercilessly, finally arriving at an opening in the cane of several acres.

A sole dead sweet gum tree, bare of bark from top to bottom, stood in center of an opening in the cane-brake. It might have once been a clearing. Every hound aimed its voice at something near the top; every hunter sighted his eye in the same direction and simultaneously let out a deafening whoop. Near the top, close to a limb that extended north, a black bear was affixed and peered down with two wicked, beady eyes at the gathering.

No doubt every one desired the honor of shooting. But the voice of Billy White interposed above the bedlam. From his department I knew that the honor rested with him, and nothing could take it from him. He commanded the hunters to stand back. Dropping on one knee, he took his long gun carefully from his shoulder, caressed it lovingly, then sighted it on the bear. Minutes seemed to elapse before the fatal trigger was pulled, but it was only a second or so. The roar of black powder reverberated through the swamps. Only for a moment the bear looked down. He tried to climb still higher. But all at once his great frame stiffened. He clawed a few times to get a more secure hold, then suddenly his paws let go and he pitched to the ground very close to Nig.

That was the last for a time I saw of the bear or

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the hunters. As though propelled by the force of a mighty hurricane, my horse leaped through dogs and men and carried me at a dizzy gait through the cane. Holding my head close to his neck I did my best to shield it from brush and cane. Pulling to the limit of my strength on the reins I tried to stop Nig. It was useless. He continued as though a thousand bears were after him, heading straight with me towards Little River.

There was no let-up to Nig's speed. On arriving close to the river, as the cane was less dense, he increased it. He had just started to leap a pile of dead timber near the river when he stopped almost in midair and came to earth with legs straightened out. The saddle gave way. I was shot off that horse as though propelled from a catapult, landing closer to a live, undomesticated black bear than even in my fondest dreams I had wished to be.

I sprawled on all fours on the sand. In my flight my rifle had fallen from my hands and I saw it about ten feet from me. The bear had been feeding on refuse dogfish cast aside by some fisherman from his hoop nets. I do not know which seemed most surprised or frightened. But Nig did not wait to see. He backed off and turning bolted for the densest cane.

The bear eyed me suspiciously, glared at the fish, then at me. I never moved from my position, though I wanted my rifle very much. No doubt there was something about me that did not appeal to Bruin; perhaps it was my longing glance at my rifle. But

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evidently he had a premonition that I was not altogether a desirable acquaintance. Without the slightest warning he emitted a loud woof and rushed for a near-by brake of switch cane.

Then only I came to my senses. I jumped for my rifle, lifted the safety and fired five times at the vanishing bear.

The feel of the rifle revived my courage. I had no idea that my bullet had touched him. I reloaded it with its quota of .250 cartridges and started slowly in the brake. I could see no blood, though the tracks were plainly visible in the damp sand. Without taking in consideration direction or where the tracks would lead, I followed until I came to a sink in the land. Close to a log I discovered a big black object flattened out as though a big roller had gone over it. Closer investigation showed it was my bear. He was lying in a pool of blood. Three bullets had mushroomed in the lungs.

At the same time I heard the bellow of native hounds in chase. They had hit the trail. Fifteen minutes later the entire bunch of hunters arrived on the scene in time to see me fighting the dogs away from my bear. But even the roar of Billy White commanding silence and the clamor of the hunters for their share could not rob me of my joy at the kill.

XIV

The Giant Gobbler of Gunn Bluff

"SEEN a red-bone bitch 'roun' here?" asked a tall, attenuated individual astride a small red-colored mule.

This surely must be Beanpole Williams, the famous turkey hunter, I was seeking. So positive was I of this from the description furnished me, I answered: "Come to think of it, I have. He is right now in my tent with his foot wrapped up—took him out of a fox trap, and was caring for him until I found an owner. Plucky dog, too. Say, are you Beanpole Williams?"

"How'd yu'ns 'er guess hit?" he admitted in the strangest nasal falsetto, while he disentangled his long legs from the stirrups, placed his feet on the ground, and permitted his mule to walk out from under him. Beanpole was fully seven feet in height and apparently no wider than a good-sized hoe handle.

"Oh," I flattered, "I've been wanting to find the best turkey hunter in the country to guide me and I was referred to a handsome, sturdy individual by the name of Beanpole Williams. Glad you came along; come in my tent. You are Beanpole Williams, aren't you?"

"H-ll yes, Sonny!" he admitted. "Les' see Drive."

Then we entered my tent, where we found the

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perfectly contented Drive coiled up on my pile of blankets. Beanpole evidently strove to display his gratitude at the recovery of his hound. But no doubt he had expanded his vocabulary for the time being, though he shook my hand, hugged Drive and made me understand that he was willing to take me turkey hunting if I agreed to his terms, which after a long pause and much mental calculation he submitted.

“Recken forty cents a day ’nd grub wud be too much?” he queried expectantly.

To this eagerly I submitted and accompanied Beanpole to his home across the ridge, where Beanpole consulted a short, bulky damsel, with a face as brown as the forest-stricken post oak leaves under foot. She surely must have been pleased at his announcement of my agreeing to his stiff terms, for the hard face melted into a smile before she went into the cabin and brought Beanpole his long single-barrel gun, kissed nine molasses-smearred children, kicked as many yelping hounds into submission on her reappearance, and directed her lord not to return until he had made two dollars.

Because all varieties of acorns were plentiful, Beanpole and I camped at Dark Bay. Though signs were everywhere, for two days we saw no turkeys. A logging crew stopped at our camp and told us the biggest turkey that ever ranged the hills was “a-hangin’ up ’roun’ Gunn Bluff.” They had seen him several times, but had been unable to get so much as a single shot at him, so wary was he.

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In our canoe we pushed up the river that evening into the hollow below Gunn Bluff; Beanpole's inevitable mule had followed like a dog along the bank. This famous turkey hunter proved to be an extremely taciturn individual and seldom spoke except to let out his only expression, "He-ll yes, Sonny!" and something had to happen out of the ordinary before he uttered it.

Early the following morning we sought the summit of the bluff and, as I faced east, watching the sun peeping pink over the pine tops, Beanpole, who was astride his mule, disengaged himself from the animal by merely standing upright, so the animal could walk out from under him, dropped to his knees and examined the leaf-carpeted ground. He turned over a number of leaves, and then suddenly startled me with his unexpected thin voice.

"Wal, I de-clare!" he exclaimed, without turning to me. "Look-a-yander!"

"Turkey tracks?" I asked.

"He-ll, yes, Sonny!" he shouted, "'nd the tracks air the biggest I ever seed. Whoopee! Whoopee!"

Falling to my knees, I examined the ground over which the upturned leaves had reposed. The imprints of a turkey's foot were plainly visible, but such large ones that momentarily I could not believe that they had been accomplished by any member of the turkey family. But every groove, ridge and structure of the foot was reproduced so distinctly I could doubt no longer. And then verification came almost immediately at a spot where ashes re-

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mained from a former campfire. The giant gobbler of Gunn Bluff had used it for a dusting place.

From that moment the giant gobbler became an obsession with us. For fear of frightening him from the vicinity we refrained from shooting other turkeys which we soon began to behold in abundance. But we hunted that weary old gobbler for days and days, with no other reward than an occasional bit of evidence that he had been nearby. Came the time when much against my will I decided to give up this end of the rainbow hunt. I had lived turkey, talked turkey over and over again with my sole companion, Beanpole, and at last declared I would leave the following day.

It was already late in the evening. Beanpole and I were in a small hickory bottom about to embark in my canoe. All at once I heard a flock of turkeys fly to roost midway of Gunn Bluff. They came in singles, pairs and trios. Just as I thought the last had crossed the river in the vanishing light, I observed an immense impalpable form sail across the river, then the crash of weighty pinions striking against the pines resounded far into the bottoms. That put a quietus on all my intentions of leaving.

We returned to camp. Beanpole was happy. He showed it; once in a while he talked, whistled, and just before my eyes closed in sleep I observed him sitting by the fire, his singular expression concentrated on the pine light.

It did not seem as though I had slept ten minutes,

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when I awoke and discovered the slim turkey hunter unceremoniously prodding me in the ribs with his large, heavy-shod foot.

"What's the matter—woods on fire?" I questioned, rubbing my eyes. The fire had burned low. The cold air of the bottom cut like a knife as I cast aside my blanket.

"Be sunup purty soon," vouchsafed Beanpole in a whisper. "Git reddy. Stow some of that thar coffee I made in them vitals of yourn. Hit'll waken yu'ns up, 'cause we'ns gotta git started quick."

In the dark I never believed that I would achieve the ascent of those tremendous flint rocks. But with the pulling and jerking of the long-limbed one I did it. A hunter's miracle, perhaps; though I could not accomplish it again were all giant gobblers in the world the temptation.

As though by instinct Beanpole bore due east. Other than by instinct no human being could have progressed through those dark thickets of bull pines and post oaks. My clothes became wet from copious perspiration. All at once Beanpole stopped. Overhead I could see stars, which cast down sufficient light so that I was able to note we were in an area which had once been a clearing. Also I realized we had made a detour and were again close by the river, as I could hear it chattering over the shoals like a flock of noisy Canada geese.

"Squat down in this hyar buckbresh, 'nd don't move nary a bit 'till sunup!" directed the sage of the wilderness in a piping falsetto.

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Obeying the command, in a short while I began to feel the cold. No longer could I do anything to keep me warm. Many times from sheer suffering and my cramped position I cursed myself for ever being led into a hunt at such an ungodly hour. I shook like a man in the throes of a malarial chill and vowed I never would hunt again if it necessitated undergoing such agony. But each time I gazed at the silent, uncomplaining woodsman I smothered my effort at utterance.

When nature seemed no longer able to endure the grueling I listened and heard a band of timber wolves terminating their nightly frolic in a series of ear-splitting ululations. For a while the wilderness again took on its garb of serenity. Then at last a few small birds chirped and moved in the dry leaves on the trees. The east grew gray. Objects attained distinctiveness, and presently showed more plainly under the pink impress of approaching day. I beheld an old field in front of me.

Beanpole remained stationary as ever. But presently I observed his mouth twitch in a homely grimace. He cast a knowing look at me, and then his piercing gray eyes turned expectantly for a survey of the field.

At first I was unable to observe anything unusual. But scanning more closely I saw a flock of turkeys run into a patch of buckbrush, scatter and feed.

The native guarded me closely with his eyes to see if I would yield to temptation, for I glanced at my .22 hi-power. But every desire to succumb

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to temptation was squelched by his forbidding look.

All at once I descried two young gobblers back out of the brush and scurry across the field, as though influenced by something not altogether to their liking. The balance followed in their wake. I gazed directly at the buckbrush and the sumac adjoining. I saw nothing to remark.

Immediately, after a cautioning gesture, the slim woodsman took a short pipe stem from his pocket and placed it in his mouth. "Keouk, Keouk, Keouk, Keouk, Keouk" sounded the cane over the frost-topped hills. Beanpole waited fully five minutes for a response, and when none came he repeated.

"Keouk, Keouk," Beanpole resumed the plaintive sound. "Keouk, Keouk."

This time the unmistakable note of a gobbler carried to our blind.

At that moment I stared hard at the sumacs to my left, just as the sun cast its first warming glow on the earth. The king of all gobblers stepped forth, brilliant with scintillant copper sheen, as the full luminance of the sun lighted his majestic figure. He stood at his full height, craning for dangerous objects and sounds, his great breast reflecting tints I never realized existed before.

For an instant, so startled was I at his size and kingly posture, I was unable to appreciate that right before me was the object of my long and arduous quest.

Only for a second the giant stood in the open. He

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made a move all at once for a patch of tall plume grass on my right.

Beanpole sounded softly the siren note. The gobbler gazed angrily around, his breast swelling with the indignation of disappointment. Detecting the false from the true he dashed for the screening plume.

Three times I discharged that hi-power .22, as fast as mortal man could function it. A thundering of flopping wings sounded across the field, and then I espied the long-legged one, running with all his might to the plume grass and disappear therein.

For a second or two I experienced grave misgivings, as I saw no more of Beanpole. But, still anxious to know my luck, I called out at the top of my voice: "Did I get him, Beanpole?"

Then the hills resounded my exultant cheer, as Beanpole shrilled back in joy:

"Hell yes, Sonny!"

XV

Hunting Ducks on a Swift Waterway

“DON’T reckon I ever heard about them, much less seen one,” commented my guide as he studied my question. “Canvasback ducks, canvasback ducks—is that the right name?”

“Yes,” I replied quickly, and repeated after him, “canvasbacks.”

“Nope, I never heard of them out this way,” my guide informed me, scratching his big gray head to encourage reminiscence. “Nope, was raised on this river, and ther hain’t been no canvasback or canvas-headed ducks ever come this way.”

“Oh, well,” I remarked optimistically, “we’ll get some ducks, anyhow, between here and our stopping place. The river looks good to me the entire route, even if it is a swift one.”

“Yu’ll get ducks, alright,” returned my guide, with cynical inflection to his last words, “if you kin hit ’em. But as far as them tent—canvasback ducks: I can’t promise a one.”

My selection of guide had fallen on an old water rat, Tom Bigbee, who knew the river and its innumerable bends far better than the average city dweller knows his streets. The wilderness appealed to me, as well as the day’s prospects, though it



Tender and True

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promised nothing but jump and flight shooting, the most entertaining sport that can be offered the wildfowler.

It was not long after I embarked in the long duck boat that I realized I was up against a different proposition in shooting than I had so far tried.

"Thought you could hit 'em!" laughed Tom, with a critical twinkle to his left optic, as I missed cleanly a big flock of mallards that simply spewed out, one by one, from a mossy pocket in the backwater at the end of a rapid. "You never touched a feather. If we're going to have duck for supper, you just gotta do better'n that!"

The old riverman's remarks were received in good spirit. My shortcomings were felt. I was up against another form of jump shooting, which was totally dissimilar to anything I could conjure from past experience. But in every way it had attractions, for shooting from a fast running boat was a novelty and assured great sport.

At Tom's advice I reflected and studied conditions. The sport had an irresistible appeal, if I mastered it. Our approach on the ducks was swift and sudden. Invariably they towered and bolted upstream as soon as they flushed.

On reaching the subsidence of the next rapid my score suffered another miss, but I elevated myself a bit in Tom's esteem when I killed a lone mallard that started to drop into a pocket on our right. He fell stone dead, though the shot was a long one. Then I witnessed a remarkable achievement on the

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part of my guide; how to pick up a duck on a swift waterway when a boat runs at full speed.

Tom advised me that at the termination of the next rapid was a round pond on our right which always contained ducks, if any were on the river. He suggested my getting out the boat and walking them up from the gravel bar. But mentally I had carefully covered my shooting deficiencies. So I refused, and told him that I would either solve the river's shooting riddle from a boat or quit.

The guide edged the boat toward the gravel bar, in this manner keeping our advance screened by the interposing willows. As we reached the neighborhood of the upper part of the pond, the suck of the angry stream carried us out and raced with us to the lower end.

The pond was full of mallards. As they turned I stood up and faced upstream. With two barrels I brought down a pair of lusty mallards. Then, loading quickly, I knocked down a single hen widgeon that had bestowed her company on the mallards. She spiraled a while in the air with outstretched wings, and, to our surprise, fell in the boat.

All at once the improvement in my shooting struck Tom.

"You can hit 'em, if you just try!" he complimented, "'nd if you keep up that lick we'll soon have a boat load."

And Tom was right, as he always was. At the very next pocket I repeated my performance on a flock of pintails, which were feeding close to a shoal

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and almost permitted us to run the boat in their midst.

"Them's the kind!" Tom declared. "They're the best eating ducks a-going, though it's pretty late for them. Some fellers likes other kinds. But give me a fat sprig, or pintail, as you calls them, and it can't be beat, in my mind, when it comes to good eatings!"

Through years of duck shooting I have never had occasion to dispute Tom's assertion. As a food delicacy a real fat pintail can not be surpassed by any other duck—not even the famed canvasbacks, so exalted by a horde of epicures.

"Do you see ahead that big raft of blackjacks?" Tom called my attention. "We'll be just in on them before they ever gets real wise."

Tom paddled into the bank and in a few moments constructed a blind of willows and sycamores in front of the boat.

"Notice them blackjacks," said Tom, "they are in a reach of still water. When we get within two hundred yards of it the river runs at an awful clip. Till we get to that fast water we'll drag along so slow they'll think it's a-going to take us a heap of time to get near them. As soon as we hits the fast water, we'll go like Old Nick, and we'll be upon them before they know it. All you do, is lay down out of sight and keep still."

Presently I was treated to an exhibition of Tom Bigbee's knowledge of the river and of ducks. He made every effort to retard the progress of the boat, dragging his long paddle and pushing the boat from

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bank to bank to convey the impression it was a mighty slow-going affair. All the while the scaups observed us, many times with wings cupped almost standing on the water, as though prepared to fly. Doubtless the eelgrass and moss beds provided them with food in abundance, and they were loath to leave the spot; for they kept constantly milling around, yet watching our craft.

For twenty minutes Tom kept the boat going back and forth, but all the while imperceptibly approaching the suck of the rapids. It seemed hours to me, and I wondered if he would ever accelerate the pace. The ducks began to lose their customary wariness, evidently confident they could appraise our speed and distance in time to take flight in safety. I was just about to question the boatman's dilatory tactics, as they had begun to prove very tantalizing, when all at once I sensed the boat being drawn in the rapids. Then it shot down the river like a frightened deer.

"Get ready, now!" Tom whispered.

Before I had time to answer, we were among the ducks. A black cloud of seething pinions lifted from the river. Some of the ducks I could have touched with the end of my gun, so bewildered they were at our presence. In their confusion they reminded me of ducks attracted to a light at night during a sleet storm.

Twice I fired into the biggest bunch that got straightened upstream. Then I reloaded rapidly and had two more shots.

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"Seven!" cried the boatman, "and, if you'd had a repeater, Lord knows how many more you'd killed. They must have been at least four hundred blackjacks in that bunch!"

To me there appeared to be thousands and, though Tom praised my execution, the number of my kill did not come up to my expectations. Those frightened ducks were so packed together it did not seem as if there were room for a single No. 6 shot to pass between them.

For several hours we floated with varying success. There was a fascination to the shooting which no other duck hunt had presented. The stealthy approach of the craft down the crystal-clear waterway under the guidance of a master paddler, together with the transcendent beauty of the surrounding hills in their gorgeous fall dress, were treats beyond appraisal. At all times the shooting was different. Often, when I felt certain of killing, I missed, and the reverse was as frequent. It never was an easy task to align the gun properly on those upstream-bent ducks, while the boat vibrated and sped swiftly through the rapids.

Elsewhere than at the pockets the ducks were seldom found, especially those adjoining the rapids. The scaups and one flock of mallards were the only ones flushed midstream. With all the difficulty I encountered in getting on the birds, I made a good killing and a varied one, at that. Each pocket held a different kind, though mallards predominated.

At last we floated to a long reach of quiet water

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as the sun left the western hills, shimmering with the pink of parting day. Tom was calling attention to the only hard paddling of the trip. He had to paddle two miles steadily until our landing place, as there was very little current. To make the labor lighter he whistled, but suddenly silenced as his eyes rested on the darkening Southern bluffs.

"Git down quick! Git down quick!" commanded Tom. "See 'em?"

"No—where?" I asked, immediately obeying.

"They are swinging along the right bluff—that's why you can't see them. They are purty low, too."

Even at the distance of a mile away I saw them break from the shadows of the bluff to the middle of the river. Large specks now, as they were only half a mile—then larger as they bore midstream, racing low with tremendous speed. Incredibly swift, whistling like boys, they were almost on us as they swung to one side at the sight of the boat. Then only I classified them and gave them a big lead.

Two drake canvasbacks sent up a spray of water.

"Canvasbacks at last, Tom!" I shouted. "Two canvasbacks."

The rest of the flock disappeared in the vanishing light faster than they had come.

Tom paddled over to the ducks, picked them up and eyed them carefully.

"Are them canvasbacks?" he queried.

"That's what they are, Tom."

"Well, if they are canvasbacks," he replied, "they are the first I ever saw on this or any other river."

XVI

Hunting Whitetails With Josh

“Cum lissen’ to that houn’,” cried Josh from the top of Phillips’ Bluff. “He’s shore gotta voice like a fifty-year-ole bull!”

“That dog has a loud enough voice, alright,” I grudgingly admitted as I reached Josh’s side, “but it is his speed that gets me. Why that pack behind have all they can do to keep within hearing distance!”

“By shot!” Josh broke in as the tonal strivings of the hound showed a different trend. “That thar houn’ aint a-runnin’ no red fox—he’s ater a deer. Say, let’s run down to Yaller Bank ’nd head him.”

“Not on your life, Old Timer!” I protested vehemently. “There is to be no killing deer in front of hounds when I am along. The law is against it, and, as far as we are concerned, it is going to be obeyed.”

“Which?” the little old weather-beaten man asked, chagrin showing in the many grooves of his countenance.

“It is against the law to run deer with hounds, and I am one who is going to see that the law is not infracted.” I tried to make this clear as possible,

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and that I neither considered it sportsmanlike nor good policy, considering that wardens were liable to appear any moment.

"But he's shore to cross the river at Yaller Bank!" Josh tried to tempt further, but, seeing I could not be persuaded, he accompanied me to camp, continually referring to the bellowing hound's voice and his positive knowledge of the gigantic proportions of the deer.

Next day broke clear and cold, the first hour the white frost making the big woods appear like a land of many decorated Christmas trees. Josh and I followed the windings of Bog Hollow on back into the Irish Wilderness, working so skillfully as we knew how every bit of the cover and the shifts of the wind. But before noon we parted, Josh returning to camp.

In the afternoon while crossing over a chain of hills I discovered many signs of deer, but was unable to get sight of any. One jumped in the hazels, then bounded into the tall plumes and sedge; and just for luck's sake I pumped my .303 in that direction. No hit was registered, as I could plainly hear it jumping until it passed over the summit of the hill.

After I found that I was on the south slope of Gooseneck Bluff, rather fatigued I determined to cross the altitude in order to shorten my journey to camp. When nearly to the crest I heard a commotion in the mingling of flint rock, bullpines, sedge and post oaks. Rather noisy for a deer, I thought, considering the fact, too, that only a while before I

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had remarked the snap of a hi-power rifle toward the north.

Stalking further, I noticed some disturbance in a clump of post oaks. Instantly I was on the alert. I perceived the form of a deer in the brush as though it was standing on its hind legs and browsing on some tidbit at quite a height.

There was only left to me now to distinguish the sex. If it was a buck I stood a reasonably sure chance of making a kill.

Taking advantage of each tree I drew closer. Presently I noted an antler-crowned head reach up. I raised my rifle. The sight had almost rested on the buck's left shoulder, when a tan color, that did not well conform with a deer, startled me. I nearly dropped my rifle in my anxiety to get my finger away from the trigger, to shift to safety.

"Say, you fool! What in the blazes do you mean!" I called at the top of my voice.

"Why—I was trying to hang this deer," a man's voice called back to me.

Brimming with anger, I ran to him and said: "You are lucky; in a half a second longer I would have killed you!" Finally, seeing anger was of no service, I did my best to show that city hunter the folly he had been guilty of; though for some time he could not understand that it was mighty risky business trying to hang a deer by the horns in cover when there were hunters in the woods; it could only result in drawing a hunter's fire, and a deer would not bleed in that manner.

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His explanation in return was, that he wanted to hang it out of reach of wolves until he could find his guide to tote it back to camp.

Too unnerved to enjoy the day further, I returned to the companionship of Josh. Dancing gleefully, he greeted me effusively.

"Say, seed a ghost?" he asked.

"Not exactly." Then I explained the incident.

"Yu'ns shore oughta teched him up a bit—shot a toe offen him or sumthin'—broke his hide jist for being sich a durned fool," couns led Josh, as only he could. "Say, but I seed the biggest buck in the hills, up on Trotter Bluff. Missed him three times—he got in the bresh so quick."

This was good news and I acknowledged it accordingly.

"If we'uns only had that houn', we shore could put him in the river erbout Hargis shoal!" the little old man declared.

"Forget the hound, Josh. But, if you start that buck for me tomorrow, you can call me Grandpa three times in succession."

"Whew, three dollars! I'll shore do hit. For I'm erbout sartin where the ole feller beds." With Josh, "Mister Johnnie" signified a loan of two bits, "Uncle Johnnie," fifty cents, and "Grandpa" never less than a dollar.

Notwithstanding Josh's declaration the night before that he would be able to start the buck, he failed miserably. All the beds he pointed to in the ubiquitous sedge grass showed to the touch no

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warmth of a recent occupant. So again we decided to separate, the old rascal promising to be in camp long before sundown, as well, too, that if he heard my rifle he would respond to the sound.

For the reason of having seen old tracks the day before I determined to hunt over the same ground. The wind was blowing from the west. I beat against it up a short valley that abruptly terminated in a chaos of big lichen-covered boulders, their immensity somewhat concealed by small bull pines, plume and scattered post oaks. If ever there was an ideal place created for an old buck to bed, this was it.

Hardly had the thought gained conception when I heard a big deer jump thirty yards in advance of me. Twice I missed it, when I observed it climbing a slope and was glad of my goose egg, as it turned out to be a fine big doe.

Still I worked the cover, obdurate about climbing the confronting altitude. Looking up to my left in order to appraise the possibility of a facile ascent, to my astonishment I beheld a tremendous buck going up a draw two hundred yards away. At first I was unable to see him well. He hugged the draw closely, almost creeping like a rabbit in his effort at concealment. My shots at the doe had started him.

Carefully waiting, though not elevating the sight, as he came into better view near the summit I fired. He stopped, looked around. Again I fired. He bounded sideways with drooping flag, then staggered. Once more I fired. He went to his knees, arose almost as quickly and vanished before I could

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place another shot. That I had scored two shots I was positive. In what part of the body I had yet no means of ascertaining. But I was sure he would not carry far two soft-nosed .303 bullets.

At the top of my speed I ran for the summit. But the difficulties of the rough ascent retarded me much. At no time is broken flint rock the best going—certainly not when on a slanting hillside that has a perilous pitch. Finally out of breath I reached the spot where I knew I had recorded a hit—if not more than one. The blood had splattered the hazels and bonnet leaves with tell-tale crimson blotches.

For a while it was easy to trail the buck. But, after following some distance a trail which led into post oaks and sedge, the blood ceased flowing and I lost the course completely. I circled many times without success, though time and again I returned to the starting point, followed and observed the trail vanish once more.

Immediately I concluded to hunt near the river. It was impossible to reconcile myself to the loss of the fine specimen. No doubt he made for the river and dropped near one of the favorite crossings in the moss and cress-covered bays. I searched strenuously a number of well-known bays; but no sign of the deer greeted my eyes.

When I was about to give up the quest as hopeless, the west wind flung down a welcome sound from Phillips' Bluff. It was that of a self-hunting hound uncertain of trail, until all at once to my

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unspeakable joy a strike was registered and as quickly followed the staccato of a sight race.

Seemingly the hills became alive with dogs, but above all the bedlam I could distinguish that big hound, so dear to Josh, leading easily. Shortly the race terminated abruptly close to the river with the baying of the dogs, which was constantly augmented by the arrival of the slower-footed ones, all determined to make the kill.

That bunch of potlickers had started my deer and were sure to tear him to pieces. How I ascended the bluff in the little time I did is beyond my powers of explanation. Enraged at the pack, I was determined to prevent their pulling down the deer. When I arrived at the scene I noted there was still time to prevent the slaughter. The deer was yet on his legs, very close to a ledge above the river.

The posture of that deer was one of majestic militancy and supreme contempt. He stood at bay not more than a few feet from the edge of the cliff, defying the dogs as the restless river like a long silver serpent coursed rapidly three hundred feet below. Blood gushed from his nostrils. From two holes on the left side it spouted out afresh. Evidently those dogs had had earlier experience with a wounded buck, for they kept well outside of the range of the deer's hoofs and antlers.

While the dogs waited impatiently, the deer stood like a veritable monarch of the pine woods, fighting off each rush of the pack. Once the big hound tried to close in. A thrust from the warrior's

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head sent him to ground, howling dismally from the long wound inflicted in his side.

Much as I had sought to kill, had there been some way to save his life, I would have done so. But I decided to end his misery at once. I drew a bead for his heart. Then I saw the front legs spread apart, shaking violently, and expected the game creature to fall.

All at once with a sudden accession of strength he stood up straight. Seemingly his bloodshot eyes were balls of fire. For the first time he seemed to be apprised of my presence. His nostrils still gushing blood, he eyed me closely as though prepared to charge. Again the limbs trembled. Momentarily he flung a glance at the snarling pack, then righting himself, he leaped off the bluff.

As Josh had heard the baying of the dogs he was across the river digging into the little gravel bar long before my arrival. He came at my call and paddled me over in his johnboat. The deer was buried to its shoulders in the small gravel. Both legs were broken in many places. The skull was crushed beyond saving, as well as the antlers.

"He's shore a cracker, ain't he, Mister Johnnie?" Josh said, viewing the kill with pride. Then, suddenly recalling his own affairs, he scraped his feet on the gravel and declared: "If hit hadn't been for that ere big houn' yu'ns never would got him—would you, Grandpa?"

Laughing, I counted out three silver dollars and presented them to Josh.

XVII

The Hillbilly's Guest

"WHOA, Josh!" I yelled my mightiest at the little Ozarker, as he tried to conceal himself in a grove of post oaks by the roadside. "Come on over here!"

No response came to my call.

The mere fact that I had been obliged to pay a small note for Josh, for some time had made him invisible. Willingly I had endorsed it, and when he failed to meet the obligation I paid it without quibbling. It was not an unusual occurrence on my part to act as security for small sums. Once in a while he paid one. But now what annoyed me most was Josh's aloofness, for I wanted him for a trip up Current River. If by chance I saw him at a distance, he feigned deafness, inability to see me, and always acted as if he were in great haste.

"Come on out of there, Josh!" I called once more, and wheeled my horse as though to ride at him. "You got to go hunting with me or I'll ride—"

"Wal, I declare, if that haint you, Mister Johnnie!" At the imminent risk of my sorrel tramping him, Josh stepped from the cover and lied amazingly well. "At fust sight I didn't know yu'ns. I thought hit was Bill Hancock, and I didn't want him to see me, 'cause—'cause—"

"Forget Bill, and tell the truth," I advised the old

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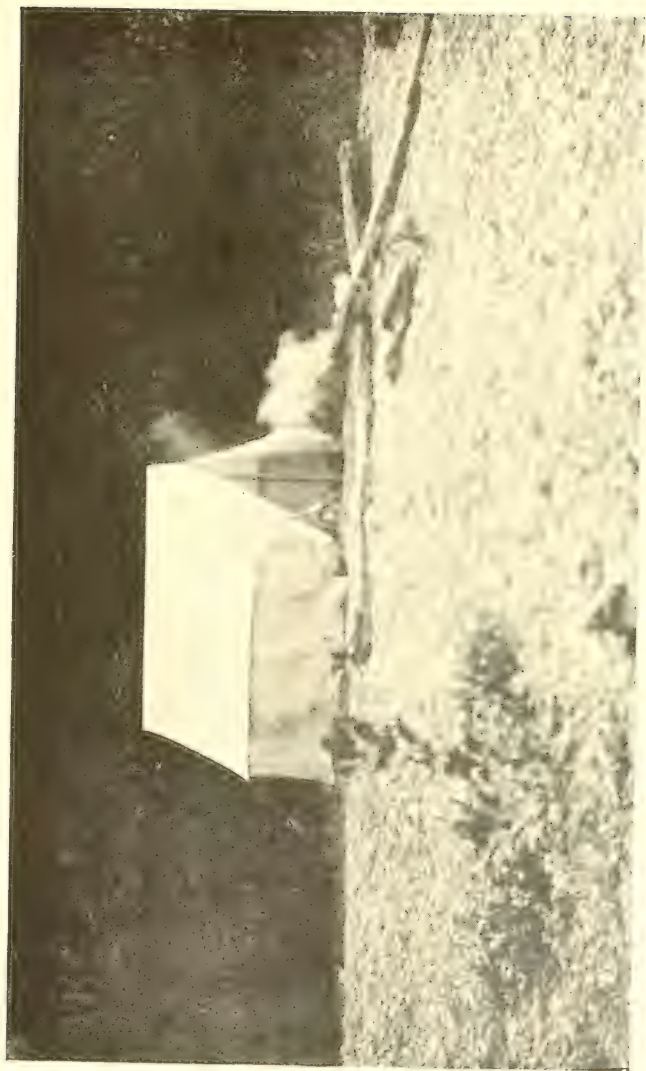
man. "I paid that note off, alright, and I have been searching for you during the last two weeks, to go up the river with me."

"Wal, of all the things in the world, I done forgot that note 'till jist now!" Josh once more resorted to exclamatory exaggeration, interspersed with promises of remunerating me at some near date.

When I told that little Ozarker not to worry about the note and told him it was settled forever, quickly he agreed to start with me the next day; and as proof of his sincerity borrowed two dollars, though he had vaguely hinted he was in possession of enough money to pay the note.

On the day destined for our start I went to the river and bailed out our long, spacious johnboat. Then I went up in town in quest of my irresponsible Ozarker, whom I had sent for supplies. As some imp of mischief invariably hugged him closely, and because he had been gone so long, I felt positive it was again on his trail.

Across from the post office I beheld Josh. Attached to his waist was a stout lead, and at its termination was the largest and most ill-favored black-and-tan hound it had ever been my displeasure to gaze at. In his right hand Josh balanced a long single-barrel shotgun. The barrel was no less than forty-five inches in length. Had I not known the strength of the Ozarker I would never have credited him with ability to handle it. Josh was in his usual dress of dirty overalls, the color of which was impossible to designate, and a faded blue shirt that, from constant



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wear and accumulations of grime and grease, admirably served the purpose of resisting weather and being impervious to rain. In the coldest weather he added no more garments. He vowed that he was comfortable and was very sensitive to any suggestion to the contrary.

"Where in the world did you get that hound?" I asked Josh in surprise and anger.

"Recken yu'ns haint seen him before?" Josh stammered and explained enigmatically. "I jist borrowed him from a feller going to yon side of the river. Let me make you 'quainted with Mister——"

At this juncture to my amazement a stranger stepped forth and offered his hand. He was tall, very thin, big glasses covered his very pale eyes. His garb was a bit startling, as it had been conceived by some tailor in the East as an apology for his ignorance of what constitutes a serviceable hunting garment.

"Your most interesting friend here," he said in a thin voice, "has invited me to accompany you on a hunting trip."

"You invited him, Josh?" I questioned the irresponsible Ozarker, with some display of anger.

"Let me explain," interposed the newcomer, as I observed his child-pink cheeks and white hands which, like his clothes, had never been subjected to exposure out of doors. "I heard Mr. Josh was a capable guide, and asked him if I could share in the party. I am an old, experienced hunter and, if I am not *un de trop*, I should like very much to go with you."

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"Trophy won't count," declared Josh and, as though disclosing an important communication, he continued: "he's my guest. I done invited him to go 'long at five dollars a day 'nd him to pay his part of the grub!"

At this announcement I knew that the imp of mischief that loved so well to inflict its presence on Josh was in full working order, right in our midst, too! And I believe that simultaneously the immense hound sensed the same thing, for he wanted to attack the misfit, had not our combined strength prevented it.

In a little while I found time for speech and discovered the newcomer bore the name of Percy Rushton Rushton. I was an Ozarker by adoption and had to abide by the rules of long residence. There was only one thing to do: make the best of it; so I politely invited Percy to make one of our party. But I could easily fancy without mental exaggeration a humorous, realistic, mental picture of what would ultimately take place between that ill-matched pair.

After commanding Josh to get together his guest's belongings and to follow with him immediately, I went to our boat landing.

I had all our light outfit packed when Josh, Percy and the wagon hauling his property arrived. It appeared to me that they had been a long time coming. Josh was perched on top, proclaiming loudly and shrilly in song his joy. The hound was striving his utmost to get at the guest, who rode gin-

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gerly on the seat and crouched close to the sleepy driver.

"Whoopee! Whoopee!" Josh sounded the hill cry joyously, while descending from the wagon after first knocking the villainous hound into submission with the butt of his gun. "Behave your fool self—I'll shore bust yu'ns if yu' don't!"

Had Percy Rushton Rushton been bound for the wilds of Africa he could not have been more generous nor more inconsistent in his outfitting. He had high-power rifles—enough cartridges to last a trip around the world—duffle bags galore, whose contents afterward proved sufficient to stock a village store. It was evident that Percy was well pleased with himself.

"This is a stunning shooting garment, isn't it?" he asked, admiring his thin figure, though failing to observe the incongruities of dress. He looked more like an Alpine mountain climber than a hunter. He solely lacked an alpenstock and a feather in his dinky soft hat to complete the illusion. That pink, childish face, with the mere smear of a strawish yellow moustache, was too much for me to view with anything but a ludicrous emotion. No wonder Josh's hound developed a villainous antipathy toward him!

"Would you believe it," he went on to explain, with a giggle that emitted a strong odor of a beverage that Josh loved well, "this is my first trip in your country? But I have roughed it in the wildest places. I have killed big game until I became tired

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of the sport, and since I have become acquainted with that quaint, interesting Mister Josh, I know I am going to love your country. I know you will like me, for I am the real thing in wild life. Won't you have a wee drappie?"

Paying no attention to the proffered silver flask, I had to get away so laughter would not escape me, I helped Josh pack the roomy boat. Then I just reflected, if Josh's guest kept plying him with liquor and followed him closely during his stay in the Irish Wilderness where we were bound, of roughing he would have a plenty!

Soon everything was ready for the long, strenuous, grueling, upstream going on the swift river. Josh was master of the long, iron-shod, push paddle. He took the stern to guide the craft, while with a long pole I worked from the bow end. Frail and aged as the Ozarker looked in his tattered clothes, long hair and untrimmed, rat-like whiskers, he was as spry as a boy: his muscles of tempered spring steel, and he pushed the boat up the rapids at a good pace.

In the first rapid our initial misfortune occurred—or to be exact Josh's and his guest's. On top of his pile of obese duffle bags we had stationed Rushton, both for his personal comfort and to balance the boat. Without any preparatory announcement that vile hound left his bed at the Ozarker's feet, made a single leap at the Easterner and grabbed his left leg in his huge jaws. At the time Rushton was taking a bottle of whiskey from a case. In the melee

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the entire stock of his whiskey landed in the rapids and sank immediately.

Before Josh made the slightest attempt to help, he watched the fate of the whiskey. Old river man that he was, he knew it was beyond recovery. The Easterner squealed like a stuck pig.

"Hold 'er steady, Mister Johnnie!" Josh sang out, "while I pries that houn' offen my guest."

I pushed my pole with all my weight into the yielding gravel. The boat held. Josh went to the rescue. He stared amusedly a while, then without comment knocked the hound senseless with the paddle. Whereupon he pulled it under the stern seat and resumed poling as though only an ordinary occurrence had marred our progress.

Fortunately the big hound had a better grasp on Rushton's trousers than his anatomy. But Percy was now pale and I was prone to reason that he recovered his poise more from Josh's absolute indifference than from anything I could have said to console him.

"Any danger of hydrophobia—blood poisoning?" queried Percy.

"Not while your skin's full of red-eye," assured Josh.

"I'm glad that whiskey is gone!" I declared vehemently. "Perhaps Josh will keep his eye on the crazy hound instead of that case."

"He wuz jist a playin'," Josh returned in apology. "They hain't no hahm to him."

"Isn't Mister Josh the quaintest and most origi-

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nal character in the world?" commented the unwise easterner. "I just admire so much his natural, unsophisticated ways."

Natural, unsophisticated ways! Josh! Too angry for coherent utterance, I expended my choler on the pole.

With a big, thick blanket covering him, Percy coiled himself on top of the outfit, away from access by the hound. There he slept the remainder of the trip. Despite the alcoholic impost on Josh, he worked steadily. The strength of the little old man was marvelous; he was tireless—always poling along splendidly; no matter what the impediment or the vagaries of the stream, he kept on with automatic precision.

Late in the day the johnboat glided into the bank close to our camp site. A cold, drenching rain fell, though it affected the Ozarker in no untoward manner. He refused a coat while the Eastern big-game hunter had recourse to a plenitude of waterproof garments. I was tired from my shoulders down to my feet.

But Josh worked fast and soon had everything under the cover of a big rock shelf in the overhanging bluff. It protected us well. The Ozarker laughed, shouted and danced while gleefully he prepared supper. His guest had been remarkably silent since his adventure with the hound. But Josh began to show him some attention and he became then more like a human.

Supper over, Josh stepped from the shelter and

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remarked that the rain had ceased. Later I observed him whisper to Percy, who had finished his attack on his second duck, which I had shot enroute. Something that crinkled and much resembled paper money passed from his to the Ozarker's hand.

"I'm gwine up to Dave Gideon's," Josh reported, with a side wink at his guest. "I wants to see him erbout drivin' deer with them houn's of his."

As I made no objection, Josh disappeared in the darkness, and by his whistling and singing I knew he was pursuing a path along the bluff. Darkness had no terrors for Josh—nor anything else!

The Easterner seeing that Josh's hound was securely fastened under another shelter of rock, and quite a distance from us, began to talk while he unpacked his outfit. All the conversation so far indulged in had been with the Ozarker. Evidently he did not consider me much of a factor in the hunt, though I had been the organizer.

Rushton had no less than five high-power rifles of the most modern type. As he drew each from its case he had a narrative associated with it, which he had to tell. A hunter is sometimes sentimental, often critical, always observant. In the latter class I arrayed myself.

"This Mannlicher," said Percy, doing his best to impress me, "is a wonder. When I was in, ah—ah—Canada—yes, southern Canada, at fifteen hundred yards I killed a caribou. It never moved a step after I shot it!"

"Remarkable!" I exclaimed. But I did not add

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that the rifle showed no usage, and the owner displayed obvious unfamiliarity with the handling of the arm and the functioning of the bolt. Then, too, his killing caribou in southern Canada—in June as he afterwards stated—exhibited a knowledge of the habits of game and laws for its protection on a par with his acquaintance with the Mannlicher.

"I sure wish I had been with you," I said. Then "for God's sake, man, keep the end of that Savage away from my belly!" He was pointing directly at me a Savage .250, which he had no more conception about operating than Josh's big hound.

"Mind you," he continued, still unaware of any *faux pas* and trying to impress me with his pale eyes, "with this rifle I killed four deer in one shot. They were all in a line when I fired!"

"The h-ll you did!" I was about to exclaim, unable longer to stand the pressure of his mendacity. But Josh's arrival with lanky Dave Gideon and his noisy pack saved me from telling Percy my opinion of his statements.

All at once bedlam broke loose. Josh's hound slipped his collar and tore into Dave's pack. In alarm Percy dropped his precious rifle and strove to do the impossible by exerting his utmost efforts to climb the perpendicular bluff. Had not Dave and Josh seized the big hound there would have been no hounds in condition for the morning's hunt. It required both the natives' strength to secure the dog and mine to prevent the Easterner from running

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right into the river, for in the darkness he was headed that way when I caught him.

As usual, Josh cackled at the hounds' belligerency, and then stormed at him for his attitude toward his guest. Dave, taking a seat at the fire next to Percy, was just recovering from his terror.

At which I was most vexed I did not know, and alternately cursed the hound, Josh, and his guest as my eyes rested on them. Finally, gaining nothing by it, I, too, took a seat by the fire.

For an instant Josh sidled into the bushes and returned bearing an immense demijohn. I was aware of the contents and soon Percy was to learn. I had passed the stage of interference. My mind was made up; Josh could do as he pleased with his guest, but on the morrow I would efface myself from their company.

On seeing the demijohn, Percy's eyes shone brightly.

Taking a tin cup from the outfit, Josh poured it full of the straw-colored liquor which the demijohn contained. The odor of semi-sour, fresh corn husks prevailed. It was a favorite beverage of the Ozarker. He proffered the cup to the Easterner. He accepted it.

"My!" Percy smacked his lips joyously after the first taste, then he drank the entire contents. "This is very good. . . . very good. It is so mild I don't think it would hurt anybody, would it Mister Josh?"

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"Wud'nt hurt a flea," assured the native. "Take another, Mister Guest, oh—I means—Mister—oh, have another."

"Rushton," Percy assisted, seeing Josh unable to handle his proper designation. He drank another cup and addressed me. "How in the world do they make this delicious, mild beverage?"

"Tell him, Josh." I passed the answer to the Ozarker. Josh grinned sheepishly, which I translated into: "Is it safe to tell him what it is?"

I nodded my head.

"Wal," Josh began, after drenching Dave and himself with a cup. "They takes pure white cohn, 'nd they sets hit outen the moonlight near a cold spring for three nights." The Ozarker paused, looked at me, then observing I made no sign of interference, he rejoined: "That's all ther's to hit. What yu'ns a drinking is the skimmings that fohms on the stuff. The moon makes the skimmings from the dew. That's why they calls hit moonshine, 'nd mountain dew!"

To escape being a party to further deception, I went under the big ledge of rock and spread out my blankets, then lying down I covered my body and for a long time watched the celebrants.

Soon Gideon succumbed to the potency of the mountain dew. He moved a little way from the fire and, coiling himself among his pack of dogs, he fell asleep.

From my bedding I viewed Josh and his guest. Between the two the cup traveled frequently. Josh

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danced, sang, told tales of the hills and vowed everlasting devotion to his guest. In a thin voice Percy made a feeble bluff at singing; then seeing that he was not a success, he reverted to his old fondness for relating tales about his wonderful hunts. The last I remember was that I saw the two with their arms around each other's necks and Percy was slaughtering tigers in India.

Two hours before daybreak I awoke. The pine logs were down to mere hissing embers. Neither Percy nor Josh were under the shelter. Very close to the fire Josh lay flat on his back and Percy's blonde head rested contentedly on his stomach. All rain signs had passed. The moon shone clearly. The air was piercing cold. Dragging the Easterner off his friend, I flung him on his blankets. I let Josh remain where he was, for weather conditions never affected him. For a moment I gazed at the Easterner. His pink, childish face evoked a sigh of pity. But when I recalled his fabulous tales and realized his ignorance of the ways of the woods, I determined to let him suffer some of the hardships as a possible curative against more of his characteristic recitals.

In another hour I aroused Josh. In an instant he was up, the wiry, alert, sage, incomprehensible, capable native of yore. At once he strode to the side of his friend Dave and, kicking him in the ribs, shouted: "Git up, Dave. Here I's been callin' yu'ns for the last two hours!"

Then altogether Dave's hounds resented the treatment of their master. In a body they started

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to attack Josh. But, as ever, Josh was master of the situation and began to launch forth two very active and accurate feet in the ribs of the hounds as fast as they came near.

Dave awoke and instantly stopped the battle.

In a twinkling these two masters of woodcraft had the fire burning brightly, and in a little while after a good piping-hot breakfast.

"Dave, do your ole fren' Josh a favor," Josh said, while pouring the coffee. "Go over to my guest and kick him in the ribs, so he can done set in on breakfast."

Gideon hesitated.

Noticing his diffidence, in three jumps Josh was at the Easterner's side and administered rapidly five terrific kicks in the ribs.

"Git up," said Josh in his most affable manner. "Breakfast's ready and we'uns wants to be on a deer stand in annudder hour."

Poor Percy! Rubbing his aching ribs, the slayer of countless deer, caribou, lions, tigers and what not did not radiate resemblance to such a terror of the wilds as he had depicted himself the night before. His bloodshot eyes, quavering voice and trembling hands did not emphasize him as a hunter. He looked like some lost babe in the woods, more than anything I could conjure.

But Josh was to his succor before I could interpose any remarks. He had him in his arms and poured down a tremendous drink of his favorite beverage in his waiting maw. Such a quantity would revive

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a dead man—make a wren fight an eagle. Though it had no fighting effect on Percy, silently he got up and took his place at breakfast. Another dose of the same medicine and he was chipper as ever.

“Josh,” said Dave Gideon after breakfast, “I’ll staht way back right now for the breaks of Bahn, and jist erbout sunrise I’ll turn my dogs loose and staht a deer. You takes the ole stands.”

“Dave, jist erbout sun-up we’ll be on our stands,” Josh shouted, as Dave’s hounds were proclaiming their delight at the anticipated chase. “Then as soon as your dogs commences to sing a while, I’ll turn that houn’ of mine loose. Then yu’ll shore hear sum race!”

Doubtless Dave agreed, for he walked away and soon was out of sight in the somber woods.

A few more potations of mountain dew and again Percy was himself. He donned another hunting suit—an experienced big-game hunter could not have been expected to wear the same clothes two days in succession.

“Mister Josh,” Percy asked, struggling before his artillery which he had stacked against a log, “which rifle would you use, if you were I?”

Now concerning the bolt type sporting rifle, Josh knew as much about one as he did of the history of ancient Greece. “Wal,” conjectured the Ozarker, indicating with a dirty finger the Mannlicher, “which air this called?”

“A Mannlicher,” Percy vouchsafed.

“The name licher sounds good,” Josh said with

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an air of finality. "Then las' night hit was the one yu'ns did all them big killins with, so jist take'r along. Now let's git a hustle on us, for the sun'll soon be over Wolf Holler Bluff."

With the big hound in leash and carrying that lengthy ten-bore single-barrel gun, Josh led the way. The gun contained an antiquated brass shell loaded with $4\frac{1}{2}$ drams of black powder and a plenitude of buckshot. This was Josh's favorite load, and at certain distances it was positively guaranteed to kill any wild animal in the woods. Percy followed gingerly over the brush and down timber as the guide laid down instructions, one of which was that the easterner was not to leave his stand on any account until Josh called for him.

Though I had been totally ignored in the planning of the day's hunt and the night before vowed nothing could make me participate, to act as a spectator I decided to follow unknown to the hunters. It promised amusement. Then, too, I was a bit keen to view Josh's new-found pet make his good personal record as a slayer of game. I concealed myself on the slope of a hill. From there I could view the place where both Josh and Percy would take their stands, as well as get the first sight of any deer coming over the ridge.

At a point at the foot of a hill Josh stationed his guest. The hill sloped to a valley, and in the valley Josh assumed his stand in a thicket about two hundred yards east of Percy. He tied the dog to a sapling, then deliberately laid on the ground and slept.

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After a while at a distance in the west the hounds opened up. From the start it was a sight race. They pushed that deer through the hills straight for Percy's stand. Josh woke up. The deer almost ran over his guest before he saw it.

Simultaneously Josh released the big hound.

Then I beheld Percy, hatless, running after the deer had passed him, and all the while crying his loudest: "Look out, boys, he's coming! Look out, boys, he's coming!" Then he fired his rifle in the opposite direction to the deer but directly toward Josh.

Immediately the big hound leaped in the air, and as suddenly dropped with Percy's bullet mushroomed in his brain.

The Ozarker went wild with anger. Before I had even a chance to interpose, he leveled that long shotgun at his guest and pulled the trigger. Only a ballistic miracle saved Percy for further flight. A cloud of dirt flung into his face. The sapling close by shivered from the impact of buckshot. With a look of fright as he saw the mad Ozarker, Percy fled at full speed. Before Josh got that long gun in action again he had passed over the big hill to the north and was still crying: "Look out, boys, he's a-coming!"

But I was on Josh before he could reload and follow. I disarmed him.

"Now get to camp!" I commanded. "Don't you move either until I get back."

Later I shipped Percy's outfit to him, though I did not find him until the following afternoon. I

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discovered him hiding in a clump of sedge grass between two immense boulders. He was cold and hungry, and implored me not to let Josh have him. I said little, but, taking him to a logging camp, I made arrangements for his conveyance to the nearest railway station. The effect of Josh's shot had been too much for his nerves, and I really feared that the combination of fright and moonshine had momentarily unbalanced him. But it was a vast relief to get him off my hands.

"Josh," I said, for I was still mad at my guide on arrival at camp, "that's a pretty mess you got this deer hunt into, with that precious guest of yours."

The Ozarker registered dejection. Knowing him well, I was positive the loss of the money he would have received from his guest was the only thing which could have brought about this state.

"Mister Rushton," I rejoined with an injured expression, "gave me thirty dollars to pay you for your trouble. But you don't get a cent of it!"

"Why?" Josh queried at once.

"That money," I explained, "is going to reimburse the owner of that hound."

"Turn that there money over to me then," he cried, "for there hain't no owner now but me."

"No owner—explain?" I said, dumbfounded.

"That ole fool houn'," Josh retorted, "was a-trailin' behin' one of them movin' waggins. He looked so hongry and poor, I jist totched my knife to the rope 'nd he followed me, so I reckon now I'm the only owner he's got. Hain't I right, Mister Johnnie?"

XVIII

The White Wolf

THE many tales related by timbermen and squatters about the white wolf were sufficient to create both doubt and interest. But I hunted the foothills a long time before I got close to this wiry fellow. At first I received the tales with unbelief, for so many of them when run down proved only fabrications of a fanciful mind.

Though I heard of white deer and had seen a few specimens, as well as albino ducks and opossums, it was hard to convince me that a white wolf existed. For some time I cast the subject aside and perhaps would have thought no more of it, until a dependable Canadian squatter, Louis Duprez, informed me he had seen a white wolf a few nights before. Immediately this revived my interest and at once I was seized with a determination to secure it as a prize.

Later I found others who had seen the white wolf, invariably on a moonlight night in a stretch of the swamps close to the foothills, which for some inexplicable reason had bestowed on it the name Arabia. It had no resemblance to that country, though, as inappropriately an overflow nearby was called the Red Sea, with no other historical backing than the statement from the oldest settler that it always had borne that appellation.

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Both Arabia and the Red Sea were heavily timbered swamps, flooded most of the year. With a road wagon a trip could be made across it only during September and October; these were the only periods when the swamps were feasible for any vehicle except the loggers' lizards. Cypress brakes, heavy belts of tupelo and sweet gum, hickory, ash, and giant water oak mingled together in stagnant pools, that seemed interminably joined by narrow sloughs. Even on foot the going was anything but comfortable; for centuries of floods and storms had piled down timber in heaps, that were made almost impassable by the riotous undergrowth of twining spiny vines. As the sun was unable to penetrate the dense foliage altogether, the surroundings were gloomy and forbidding. Here and there a knoll of overly fertile land had tempted a few squatters, as well as the egret roosts an occasional band of plume hunters. Most of the swamp residents, however, were engaged in hewing the big hickory and oak trees, and their homes were one-room, carelessly erected shanties scattered about the inundation.

The early advent of spring grasses tempted the cattle men, and as the range was free, they made the most of it with their stock. For a long while I had been cognizant of the big bands of timber wolves that made their home in the swamps. Food in the shape of swamp rabbits was plentiful, and when so disposed the wolves never hesitated to kill a calf or full-grown steer.

With some success I hunted wolves, but I found

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no trace of the white one. At times I abandoned the notion, but soon resumed my quest when another story came to my ears about the white fellow. The mystery attached to it doubtless caused me to continue my search.

"De beeg loup blanc she cum in yard las' night 'nd keel wan calf!" declared Mrs. Duprez, excitedly waving her hands. "Such wan jolie calf. She was a white wolf—le loup blanc. I seen heem in de moonlight. She was as beeg as—as—Je dunno what!"

This much I discovered from those who purported to have seen the white wolf; he was very large and had never been seen in day time. On the theory that he would return to the Duprez shanty after another calf, I laid out three nights. In all directions I heard wolves. A few came near the calf lot and I could see them plainly in the moonlight. But I was unable to perceive any bearing the slightest resemblance to a white one.

Once more I was on the point of relegating the white wolf to the realm of the fanciful.

"Comin' 'cross Open Pond las' night, j'ais—I seen de beeg white wolf!" Pierre Ledoux volubly assured me. "She cross sur une—wan cypress log at de upper entrance." Pierre always had laughed at the white wolf story. He was an old trapper—trapped during winter and shot egrets in the adjoining heronrys early in summer.

"Were any other wolves with him, Pierre?" I asked, now more interested than ever.

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"No. She be toutes seul—alone," he replied and went on; "I start crossin' at de west end of Open Pond. Tought I go see Cy Hall, she seek. Quand—when I look east as de moon she rize I see de white loup. She scent me, 'nd she run nord."

It was early in the fall when Pierre Ledoux told me about the white wolf. I considered his recital as irrefutable; as on account of hunting together for a number of years I thought I knew him much more intimately than even the Canadian timber hewers. His most conspicuous trait was truthfulness and an entire lack of inclination even to exaggerate. On this account I felt positive that a white wolf existed, and I determined to hunt the swamps until I found him. So many had laughed at my former unsuccessful attempts I said nothing further on the subject.

Early one evening I started through the swamps. Against my wishes an old Irish setter bitch of mine, Chlo, followed. If Chlo was afraid of anything on earth she had never displayed it. What she lacked in bird finding ability she made up in fighting. Somehow she had slipped her fastening and had picked up my trail. After second thought I was glad she came. Company is always welcome in the swamps, especially at night.

The swamps were drier than usual. I followed a path to the Duprez home, just as night enveloped the swamps in a fold of blackness. There I filled my water jug.

"Dit lui' pour rester jusque la lune s'eleve!" I heard the old lady call to her daughter.

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"Thanks, but don't worry about me," I replied, "I won't wait until the moon rises; I'll turn in at the McCracken camp right away."

I continued on my way, however, Chlo ranging out through the underbrush as though it were day. On arriving at a small knoll in a sand ridge, very close to a logging road, I camped. A little later supper preparations were in order, my faithful red dog awaiting patiently for the time I would give her a share.

Presently I heard as though hounds were baying in the big woods east. I thought a gun was fired far away. The baying ceased. A little later wolves sounded their nightly swamp rabbit chase. For a while they circled at long range, but as night drew on their circles narrowed and were closer to me. Once in a while they desisted, but not very long at a time, and soon they were running very near to my camp site, as I could distinguish their movements in the underbrush.

This was no cause for alarm on my part. Many nights I had spent in the swamps and no wolves had ever come close, though in big packs. I got ready my .303, however, in case of emergency. Chlo did not share my feeling of security. It was the first time I ever saw her exhibit fear of man or beast. She crouched close to me, shivering and occasionally uttering a low, whining note.

Presently, I reflected, wolves killed dogs in the swamps. No dog that self-hunted at night ever returned. Would the presence of Chlo precipitate

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an attack by this band? I asked myself this question a number of times.

But the wolves continued running. I was about to laugh at my apprehensions when the moon appeared vaulting the cypress timber and giving the white sand road through the swamp the glint of polished silver. Some animal crept softly from the underbrush, and for a second stood silently in the middle of the road fifty yards from me.

I could hardly contain myself as it dropped to its haunches and throwing back its head uttered three ear-splitting, blood-curdling ululations. I thought for an instant my eyes would burst from their fastenings. In the strong moonlight I saw that it was the white wolf.

Pulling myself together I aimed right at the big creature's breast, and squeezed the trigger as it lifted its head for another ululation. But the sound never gained utterance. With the spiteful shriek of nitro powder I saw the white wolf leap in the air, snap twice at vacancy, then drop all in a heap on the soft sand. For a time I waited for further movement on the part of the wolf, but as there was none I knew that it was dead.

Not a sound disturbed the serenity of the swamp. I found the animal stretched out, its tongue hanging out from its white-flecked muzzle and touching the damp sand. I called to Chlo, but no persuasion on my part could bring her near the kill. And even during the first minute of my exultation I could not restrain my inclination to laugh uproariously.

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Time showed that I had killed the white wolf of the natives, for he was heard of no more, but this one was not white. No doubt at some earlier period it had been subjected to a severe attack of the old enemy of canines, mange. From head to tail it was destitute of hair, and as the moonbeams fell upon its mottled pink and black smoothed skin at certain angles of vision it shone white.

XIX

Vacant Collars

FOR obvious reasons they were called the bibulous pair. And a bibulous pair they were. Had it not been so, this tale would never have seen paper. For two years they annoyed me with their constant importunities; always they were wanting to borrow a dog. Very often I accommodated them; and sometimes the good wife loaned a youngster that had been too frequently on terms of familiarity with her poultry, in hope that the bibulous pair would lose it.

The bibulous pair were employed at one of the big lumber mills and liked well the sport of quail shooting. Never had they been known to own a dog. A holiday seldom arrived without finding the bibulous pair filled up with hill liquor and a surpassing desire to hunt. The first condition always brought about the hunting instinct. Their libations invariably attained the humorous stage of liquor's influence and they remained in gleeful enjoyment until all effects had worn off. A sick day followed for each, as well as many promises of abstinence for the balance of their lives. But their promises they kept only until the next payday. And still they were liked, especially because they were strikingly amusing, never boisterous and regarded themselves very seriously.

"Say, can't you let us have a dog for tomorrow?"

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pleaded Jim, the inevitable self-appointed spokesman of the pair, flinging my way a stifling vapor of distilled corn. "You know we'll take care of it. Won't we, Rube?"

Though standing up, Rube was just sufficiently awake to acquiesce and allow a humorous leer to escape toward me.

"I'll tell you, boys," I returned, not having a youngster I cared to trust to their shooting, "up at Dandin old man Hicks has two great pointers he'll sell for twenty dollars. Why don't you drive up there tomorrow and buy them? They are cheap at the price; and then you will have dogs whether I have one to spare or not. Don't you think that is a good chance?"

"Sure!" assented Jim. "Rube, wake up. Shall we get 'em?"

The worthy addressed lurched forward, caught himself against the picket fence, smiled agreement, then closed his lips tightly as though something of vast importance might escape if he parted them. This was as near as Rube ever spoke when brimming with liquor.

"I'll tell you what," declared Jim, holding himself extremely erect, feeling no doubt that the occasion warranted an attitude of extreme dignity. "You len' us twenty dollars until next payday, two dog chains, two collars. We'll borrow Mermot's buggy and go get those dogs. Won't we, Rube?"

Rube repeated his speechless performance, which Jim translated as an agreement to his plans.

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Twenty-four hours after payday was too long an elapse of time to expect either to be in possession of twenty dollars. So they became obligated to me for the money and in other ways. But I yielded, for I realized it was an easy manner to get rid of their begging dogs for a year or two.

I happened by chance to be at Dandin the next day. As usual under the influence of their favorite beverage I saw them drive in Mermot's buggy to Hick's barn and quickly purchase the dogs. With chains they affixed them to the rear axle and drove off slowly. The dogs tugged strenuously to escape. But, realizing that the vehicle was something superior in the way of strength, finally they followed with a faint display of tractableness.

At every store enroute home the bibulous pair stopped, bought drinks for the crowd, and invited them to gaze on the dogs for which they had paid fifty dollars! In those days all the stores had Blind Tigers in the back room. As soon as Jim commanded the attention of the bystanders he bragged about the dogs and the sum expended for their purchase. At the third Blind Tiger they had paid two hundred dollars for the dogs. Dog flesh was advancing rapidly in price.

When the tenth Blind Tiger loomed into view through the dark and hard slanting rain, the price of dogs was still soaring. I was in front of the store when the bibulous pair fell out of their vehicle and entered. I followed them to the rear. Dogs had attained the excessive—one thousand dollars.

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"Hello, everybody!" exclaimed Jim. "Do you know we got some dogs—some dogs I say! Just got two from Noo York—cost a thousand dollars apiece. Didn't they, Rube?"

As customary Rube committed himself with an expansive smile, propped himself against the wall and fell into a dozing state.

"Come on, fellers," invited Rube's sociable friend. "Have a drink on me."

The joint was crowded with loafers, and as usual, very dry ones at that. All drank and all joined in the invitation which Jim extended to see the dogs. Rube awoke and followed them out in the darkness.

"Price Hawkins, len' me your lantern, please," requested Jim in his suavest manner.

The proprietor obligingly submitted to the demand.

"If you want to see something real gran'—real gran'— I say, if you want to see something real gran'," concluded Jim in mellowing tones. "Say, you wanta see the dogs—we got. Nothing can touch them—cost a thousand dollars apiece, didn't they?—"

Rube was not visible, so was not able to confirm the statement of his boon companion. Such a trivial matter, however, bothered Jim none, and he continued to expatiate on the transcending qualities of the dogs.

"Let's bring them in outen thuh rain, 'nd we kin all see 'em!" exclaimed a bright member of the loafer's fraternity.

"That's what I said long ago, didn't I, Rube?"

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retorted Jim, whose tongue was giving him trouble, owing to his inability to handle it briskly. "Come on—some dogs—cost thousan' dollars. Don't believe me ask—."

There was no Rube to fall back on for reference. Out of doors the rain pelted down mercilessly. The light of the lantern revealed Rube stretched out full length on the buggy seat, sleeping soundly and ignorant of the downpour.

"Come on, boys, here they are!" guided Jim.

Eager to behold the fabulous-priced dogs the patrons of the joint followed despite the soaking rain.

"Say, where air the dogs?" asked an inquisitive-minded hanger-on.

"The dogs—you durned fool—look under the rig! Where did you expect to see them—ridin' a horse?" Jim laughed in elation at his sally of wit.

Because the dogs could not be seen right off, it was due no doubt to the excessive darkness. With the rain and the black mist one could not see a foot ahead without a light.

"Hold the lantern, Price, 'nd I'll show you. Come on, Jake! Come on, Pete!" shouted Jim at the top of his voice as he floundered around in the muddy slush.

There was no response from the dogs, not even the rattle of a chain.

"Say—hold the light—under the buggy," asked Jim, his voice for some reason rather modulated and expressing dubitancy. "Shucks—they've—"

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Jim was unable to continue his speech. With the light in a position to view under the vehicle, all eyes peered unrewarded for some time in the lighted area. They beheld no dogs valued at a thousand dollars, not even a small dog valued at fifty cents. The chains were still there, as well as two collars very muddy and worn from dragging on the ground for a long time.

Jim gasped for utterance, then fell all in a heap in my arms. But Rube slept on blissfully unconscious of the vacant collars.

Raoul and My New Brunswick Moose

"EH BIEN! Sum day I breeng you up on Tobique—better still de Rancous," Raoul promised.

So it was the influence of Raoul that ultimately brought me to the moose country. He was a small, sturdy, red-cheeked chap, almost feminine of countenance, whose accent showed on occasions both Canadian and Acadian ancestry. This latter trait showed the more closer I saw him south or when he spoke about the Bayou Teche. But, when he referred to moose, the French of the north dominated.

In the hill country of the middle-west, I first met Raoul de Giberville. He was noted not so much for his remarkable artistry at hewing big timber, as for his ability to drink more whiskey than any man I had ever seen.

"Moose—by gar—they be so beeg—'nd deers—" began Raoul, who had taken a strong liking for me because I could speak French.

"But the expense—the cost of license," I interposed, "is almost too much for a man of my means."

"Poof! Poof! Ces rien," Raoul explained. But this was only an habitual exclamation of the little Frenchman. He performed it by distending both cheeks to the proportions of two inflated toy balloons and suddenly exploding them as he extended

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both hands, palms upward, in a gesture combining the Gaelic shrug and persuasiveness of a second-hand clothing-store salesman. At the same instant the aroma of fifty distilleries permeated the surroundings.

"Perhaps I'll go some day," was my nearest approach to any definite agreement.

"Up on de Rancous we will go, maitenant," he tried to persuade me. "No—not now. Eh bien, sum time later."

That was the last time I saw Raoul in the hill country, but his memory lingered, for the tales he had told me of his beloved Rancous had proven extremely alluring. Frequently I found myself speculating on the promises of the moose country and visualizing Raoul, as the little Frenchman's incomparable ability for storing liquor had left a trail of entertaining stories.

The next sight of Raoul I had was down in the Sunken Lands, in the St. Francis swamp country. Certainly it was the same Frenchman, a little stouter, now with Acadian accent showing he had been in Louisiana, with ruddy cheeks that were plumper and that had attained a purplish hue. But it was to my delight unmistakably the same Raoul, for the odor of liquor clung to his person as tenaciously as ever.

"Quel grande plaisir eet is to see you!" Raoul greeted me with open arms, as he stood hewing axe in hand, resting against a giant hickory he had just felled. Several natives gazed with drollery in their eyes at his effusive welcome.

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"Well, Raoul," I responded, a little-shame-faced at his embrace, yet well-pleased once more to behold my favorite. "How did you ever drift here?"

"The beeg heeckory timber she give out in de South; so much, so beeg she breeng me here. So much money I make, I go home to Rancous next fall. You cum wid me certainment this time—won't you?" And then he went on to relate what he had culled from letters received from a relative in New Brunswick.

"Ah, the beeg moose—by gar! Rien ici like it, Monsieur Laoreal!" Raoul related. "Dis year see hundreds—thousands! Vous cum wid me?" "But it is such a long trip for me!" I retorted, feeling that I was yielding to his mastery in recital on the subject of big game. "Poof! Poof!" Raoul deluged me with his ubiquitous perfume. "Seulment four jours—four days only 'nd we will be there. Let us drink to our meeting on the Rancous."

At last the little Frenchman gained my promise to a visit up in the moose country during the coming fall. From a pile of half-green brush he produced a glass gallon jug of whiskey. It was almost one-fourth filled. He passed it around. The natives sipped, as well as I. When it came to Raoul's turn, he eyed it with an expression of regret, though there was fully a pint remaining. Raising the jug to his lips, and tilting back his head, he drank all the straw-colored liquor.

"Say, Ral," exclaimed one of the swampers in a tone of envy, "how in the world do yu'ns do hit?"



A Record Head

MY NEW BRUNSWICK MOOSE

"Poof! Poof! Ces rien dutout!" contemptuously the little man replied. "An accomplishment it is. Nobody knows how to do it, unless he cum from de beeg moose country."

When I left the train at Indian town, Raoul was the first to see me. His pleasure at the occasion was much in evidence, also his famous odor. I thought he had gained in weight. He wore the woodsman garb of the North, and seemed perfectly enraptured at my arrival. He had my luggage together at a speed hardly believable, and I could perceive easily that he had something of importance to say, for he was doing his utmost to work me away from the populace.

"Parle Francais toujours—you speak French all de time," he advised, "dey tink you Can-a-dian. I tell 'em you my cousin. No have to pay license pour nonresident."

My silence Raoul conceived as acquiescence, though he gave me no time for appropriate answer. He rattled on volubly, expressing his inestimable pleasure at my visit.

"Les grandes moose!" he continually exclaimed. "There is wan, too, j'ais sauvais pour vous. The spread something won-der-ful!"

Two days of pushing upstream through unknown waterways we spent until we reached a country of small lakes, hills of spruce and small marshes of cedar. Then only we established a permanent camp. Enroute once we ate lunch at a camp of Easterners and they looked commiseratingly at my .35 Rem-

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ington automatic rifle, insisting that nothing but the high-power, bolt-type sporting rifle would prove effective against moose.

I knew little about moose, but before I left the party my head was a-whirl of confusion with giant moose, trajectory, spread of antlers palmations, and things I had little knowledge of whatever. But I do recall that none of the party had killed a moose. After we departed I remarked this to my companion, and also of the likelihood of my failure.

"Poof! Poof! Ces Rien," he consoled, anointing me with his inevitable perfume. "Beeg moose here, beaucoup. You kill wan sure. Ze guides make fool dem fellers. Make largent—money—that much more the longer she keep dem out. Voyez! Man, she kill moose first day—go home—guide get not so much. Mebbe feefty dollar for showing moose. Ten days, guide she get more pay—want moose more badly, pay guide more. Voyez, mon ami!"

Close to some spruce back from a large mirror-like lake we pitched our tent. The scenery was indescribably charming. The wild setting seemed to enthrall me as much as the prospects for the biggest moose.

Day after day I saw many cows, and occasionally a young bull, which I would have been prone to shoot had it not been for the continual interpositions of Raoul.

"Poof! Poof! Mon ami, ces tros petits, too leetle—plenty time—attendait unpeau. Then—ah—wan beeg feller."

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But days passed and I appeared no nearer the object of my quest. I enjoyed, however, the strangeness of the country and the quaintness of Raoul. All the atavism in my being was suddenly aroused by the distance from civilization. I experienced a longing to remain forever. The very serenity of the environments held me spellbound, for undomesticated places had always for me an unexplicable lure.

On the ninth day Raoul came into camp and announced that the moose of moose had been in the neighborhood. Once we followed a trail, but only gave it up at dusk, though we had lost it many hours before. Raoul was too much of a sportsman to use a call. But he still remained optimistic. He had "wan beeg moose" for me, and only patience would bring me near it.

The eleventh day Raoul advised me that he was obliged to go to a small settlement for supplies. Of the kind he most desired, I had my opinion. The last day, though his optimism was great as ever, there was something lacking about him which at first I could not classify. All at once it dawned upon me that his inevitable odor of liquor was refreshingly absent. This was the main reason why he was bound for the settlement; further examination revealed that we still had a fair stock of supplies, but the stock of bottles containing his favorite beverage had been entirely depleted.

With nothing else to do I decided to make a try for moose alone. Hardly had I left camp, when

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about an eighth mile up the lake on the right, I caught a glimpse of a big bull moving into the timber. Almost as fast as I beheld the creature I lost sight of him. This, however, was encouraging, so I took the same side of the lake.

Stepping back in the cover for the purpose of circling, I heard the longing call of a cow. Then sounded back from somewhere in the timber, OO—Wah, the answer of a big bull. Cautiously I progressed to get an unobstructed view of the lake and found myself standing in a shallow pond closely surrounded by cedars. The call of the cow was repeated faintly, and soon answered by the guttural oo-ruh of a bull ready for a scrap.

From the sound I judged the bull was not far away. Listening again for sound I heard the movements of some animal forcing its way through the close-grown forest near me. Then all was silent. Directing my eyes toward a growth of cedars, one spot seemed blacker and well corresponded with the surroundings.

Was it a surge of atavism that bade me to be on the alert? This was the only explanation I could offer then, for I stared hard, and a black apparition seemed apparently thrust forth into sight. It was motionless. A swart monster bull stood among the cedars in front of me. The experience gained in the South snap shooting quails in timber came to my rescue. Almost automatically, yet quickly, I covered the big bull's left shoulder and squeezed the trigger of my Remington twice.

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Instantly the huge animal swayed from side to side. Then almost with the same motion the front legs spread apart, bent, and the whole body pitched forward. The monarch of the New Brunswick forest dropped dead in the shallow water.

No feeling of elation came over me as the water splashed—rather a sensation of pity, when I viewed the big frame of the creature growing stiff in the last rigors of death. It had all been effected so easily, so unsportsmanlike. Achieving the death of the big creature with a modern high-power rifle was simplicity itself. A sense of disappointment overwhelmed me. Hundreds of times I had experienced greater thrills when stopping a hurtling, incoming quail in the brush.

And then followed in the wake of my performance a sense of regret, which neither the coming of Raoul nor his effusive commendation of my luck has ever been able to efface. It seemed a waste of nature's bounteousness to destroy such an immense creature without possibility of utilizing all for food purposes. Then a longing to bring back the head to civilization took hold of me. Apparently there was no chance in my mind. This I imparted to Raoul.

"Poof! Poof! Ces rien when you know how," he answered encouragingly as a whiff of his spirituous breath scented his speech. Immediately he went to work and in two hours we were enroute back to civilization with the head of the big bull in the bow of our canoe.

XXI

Strongfang of the Swamps

A GRAY-FLECKED, raven muzzle gaped and exposed two rows of sinister, trenchant, repelling white fangs. A low cry was borne on the heavy atmosphere to the canebrakes and shadowy flats of pin oak, only to die muffled in the cypress groves beyond. Again the cry found utterance, more vociferous now, and conveyed the impressiveness of sudden exultation.

By the children of the wild it was accepted as the voice of a conqueror. And repeated as it was, it encouraged no response. Strongfang fastened a triumphant look at the stricken foe on the knoll of hazels, then his eyes reverted to the meek, acquiescent mate. The conquest of the breeding season had been achieved.

At strongfang's command the female followed, with sloven, pacing stride at his flank.

No longer were there any challengers to bar his way. The pair traversed the heavily timbered swamp unmolested. As one after another of the contenders had met with defeat, at present Strongfang was sensing all the elation of triumph. Not another denizen of the swamp was there to fear. And fear was not a part of Strongfang; for even the heavy, sluggish black bear of the cane scatters ad-

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mitted him superior. And why not? Was he not too elusive for his embrace? Could he not traverse greater distances for his kills—tirelessly and without risk? Had he not repeatedly proven that he was fleetier than the planter's hounds? Woe to the courageous dog that ventured near him! A swift backward snap of those cruel jaws, and a hound invariably fell back, mortally wounded.

Pondering from his eminence, until intoxicated with pride over his recent achievements, Strongfang elevated his head and howled many challenges and maledictions at any possible aspirant to his honors. The sound floated far out to the open ponds, among waving beds of sawgrass, nodding flags, billowing yoncopins and russeted swards of fall-stricken smartweeds. No answer came to him.

Such was his expression of the maddening lust of victory. And the accompanying mate, ever brushing affectionately at his flank, made it all the greater. Now Strongfang gallantly strutted in the lead, but always on the alert for the one enemy, which, from his birth, he had avoided—Man. An instinctive recognition of his presence by scent had proven an unfailing safeguard against him. The black wolf boasted to himself of it.

Time and again he had arrived within close proximity of man, but always unseen. This sense, of which he had so vaingloriously prided himself, had often stood him in good stead. And now, as he paced carelessly over a carpet of sodden cane, that had been brought to this state by the last overflow, he

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gave an amorous bound toward his mate. His big right paw crushed through the rotted underfooting. He felt it touch something hard, and then a pair of vicelike, unbreakable jaws fastened upon it. He was a prisoner.

Momentarily the stoicism of his kind deserted him. Suddenly his conceit inspired confidence; he was positive that his great strength would effect his release. He gave a vigorous leap, but the effort was destitute of reward. The saw-garnitured jaws were unyielding.

Observing his predicament, the female loped to him; she sniffed of him, and while rubbing her sides against him she licked him with her passion-heated tongue. But as he struggled again and again, gaining nothing by it, she promptly recognized his peril. Slyly she sidled off from him, then emitting a timorous whine of dismay, she dropped her long, bushy tail and fled.

With head resting on his paw, he lay quiet all of the remainder of the day. Once, as the crimson streamers of passing day filtered through heavy cypress tops, he strove to free himself. Tugging as strenuously as he could, in long, extended strains, the jaws remained fast as ever. Then once more he resorted to a number of sudden agile bounds backward and forward, but the results were as ineffective as before.

When at last the gray of another day gave precedence to soft lights of red and gold, cheerlessly he surveyed for the thousandth time his inflamed limb.



Current River Wanderers

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Abruptly he cast his eyes to the sky and he knew that day was fast approaching. Never would it do for him to remain there! Some passing swamper would surely discover him. Was man ever known to spare the wild pilferer when found at his mercy? At this instant his imprisoned paw, now swollen abnormally, directed his attention. The pain had diminished and, instead, a deadly numbness permeated the entire limb.

After Strongfang had been forced to concede his impotence, an inspiration immediately assailed him. There was only one way to escape Man—and, if he failed to put in appearance, as merciless an enemy awaited him, starvation—that was to sever the limb. And he alone must act the surgeon!

Grimly he regarded the trap with agonized eyes; and, acknowledging that parting with the paw was less to be dreaded than the other two alternatives, he lovingly licked the offending member and, contrary to the customs of his kind when in such peril, commenced the gruesome operation. Never before, even in his most desperate engagements, had Nature so exhibited the cutting powers of his teeth. And yet, as he endured his surgery, he felt some pride in his instruments.

Just as the sun found the dwarf elbow brush with splotches of yellow, the operation was consummated. On three legs the huge black wolf dragged himself into an almost impenetrable thicket of switch cane and, sinking a gory stub in the damp sand, he reposed on his stomach in a state of exhaustion. To

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a considerable degree the sand acted as a palliative, and he remained there the balance of the day.

With the advent of late afternoon a new danger was presented to Strongfang. While peering from his bed he caught a glimpse of Pete La Forge, the little, brown-faced, stoop-shouldered trapper, wending his way parallel with the wolf's place of concealment. As Pete was unarmed, there was no need of Strongfang worrying himself further than watching his movements. He had observed him many times before, and between the throbs of suffering he speculated on what the man was doing at this time of the year in the woods without a gun.

Strongfang was not long to ascertain!

Though this was not the trapping season, Pete had suspended on his back a few rusty traps, which clanked stridently one against the other. Now Strongfang knew why Pete was there; the flood siege had departed from the lowland only a few weeks ago and the trapper was gathering the traps which the water had hidden. He would take them to his shanty, clean them with an unctuous application of his own devising, then store them for fall trapping days.

Strongfang regarded Pete's appearance with confused thoughts.

Presently, arriving at the place of the accident, Pete stooped and, with his short-handled axe, knocked loose the fastening of the trap. Just as he lifted it he became aware of the wolf's paw, his little black eyes shining with delight. He put the trap from

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him and, using the axe handle for a lever, the helve under a root, stood his entire weight on it. The jaws spread apart. The paw fell out. He took it in his hands gingerly and, extending it a short distance from him, as though better to appraise it, he suddenly flung it away in disgust.

All this happened before Strongfang's eyes.

With the wild creatures wounds heal rapidly. Pain ceases in a short while, but the memory is especially retentive of the cause of the affliction. Though the mind of Strongfang was pregnant with thoughts of revenge against his fickle mate, it gave birth to another determination. Strongfang never allowed to escape him the spectacle of Pete throwing away the severed paw. And only after his wound had healed was the presence of Strongfang noted amidst his tribe. Meanwhile, despite his handicap, he found ways of subsisting; swamp rabbits cavorting nearby and overly playful squirrels afforded food. On occasions, when these were denied him, he partook of decaying fish and turtles, which the fishermen had thrown out of their nets.

Far back in the great Saint Francis overflow his return to his tribe was marked with none of the conscious, swaggering mastery that characterized his deportment before the accident. He presented a forlorn appearance. When hailed by his fickle mate and her companion smiles of derision were hurled at him. But they might have spared this much; for now retaliation on her or her favorite was not a part of his plans. Just then none realized his in-

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firmity as fully as he. So he submitted to jeering voices without the slightest savagery of teeth, and finally made quarters on a small mound of rotted flags, where he was left to his own resources.

From former leader he had fallen to a straggler, scarcely tolerated; for the weakest and least valiant of the band upon every occasion delighted to vent their contempt on the one who had formerly domineered over them. His bullying had been of only too recent occurrence for them to forget it so soon. But, now that his position was reversed, he submitted meekly to the whims of Fate, and only bared his formidable fangs when the younger ones tormented him beyond endurance.

And thus he existed, the urgings of hunger alone goading him from his lethargy, and the dash and animation which he showed before in the chase were supplanted by slow cunning. His movements were ungraceful. He crawled at times to save himself from tiresome travel on three legs. As days passed on he became less gregarious, his frame partook of gauntness, and his formerly sleek black sides lost their ravening luster. He was continually brooding over something. Now his haunts were near the river, and, moreover, they appeared to have been selected near Pete La Forge's shanty. Was there some inducement there?

Crafty as was Strongfang, Pete sensed that something was dogging his steps.

Though the swamper had never beheld Strongfang's incriminating prints, three immense wolf paws

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molded in the murky soil strengthened the impression in his mind that a wolf was trailing him. In that country it is not altogether inordinary; frequently bands and singles follow at a distance, out of mere curiosity. But such great tracks, in appearing behind him, were enough to convince Pete that there was more to them than the mere hallucinations of a malaria-wrecked system. Pete often retraced his steps to examine the ground, and as often as he did the same prints were distinguishable. Pete was positive that his mind was not playing him a shabby trick.

Summer disappeared and autumn hurried on in its wake, bright and tingling with the first snap of energizing frost. The duck shooting and trapping seasons were on. If the wolf's tracks had any present significance, they had already been erased from Pete's mind, the demands of his vocation calling forth all his time. Fall is the only time of the year when the swamp resident works to any extent; and then he is persistent about it.

Pete had been busily engaged during the duck flight, and, now that it was terminating, he set out a number of traps.

On this day a fierce icy drizzle drove in from the Northwest. Strongfang hopped from his cover in the scatters of the Saint Francis River to the very edge of the backwater. Wading to a small flag-en-circled knoll, he dropped down behind the screening growths of interspersing sawgrass. The swamper was

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abroad, not as customary at this period of the year in his shallow-draft duck boat, but instead his legs were encased in high wading boots. While the wind was so vehement he had no desire to expose himself on the river. There were traps, however, near the skirting timber which he could visit.

Sloshing around in the water at the foot of a slight circular elevation formed by the muskrats, Pete lifted his last trap. It held a small mink. He crouched to release it, as a furious gale of rain and pelting snow momentarily blinded him.

As a man will, to ward the wind from his face, the trapper threw his arm up in front of him and, lowering his head, took a high step backward to release his feet from the sucking mud. Something caused Pete to lose his balance. In all probability it was the rubbery stem of a submerged yoncopin. Attempting to recover his balance, his brown claw-like hands sought for support a clump of flags.

From out of the midst shot forth a black form. Then it was catapulted on the trapper, bearing him down. Long arrow teeth of unusual whiteness snapped at his arms and wrested them from his face. A large hairy paw, accompanied by a hard-stubbed leg, pressed firmly against his chest.

Giving way before the onslaught, the trapper fell on his back in the shallow water. So bewildering had been the attack, that he let his axe fall and was unable to recover it. By sheer strength he tried to put his assailant aside. The futility of the act was

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apparent. As the beast waged his onslaught closer, the hot, fetid breath sickened him. Blood gushed from many wounds, crimsoning the clear water for yards around.

Impotent as he was before the infuriated beast that relentlessly continued its murderous attack, Pete had sufficient consciousness to disengage his lacerated, shielding hands and pilot one to his pocket. It seemed ages to him. The earth appeared to have reversed positions. The entire swamp whirled and flashed baffling lights.

Again and again he shrieked for assistance, but the blizzard mockingly flung back his cries. With the last particle of strength at his command he drew his precious claspknife. Mechanically pressing the spring, the blade flew open. But, as he repeatedly attempted to elevate himself for a thrust, the inexorable, blood-lusting jaws beat him back into the water.

All at once a bright inspiration broke through his dark cloud of despair; and yet, despite his nearness to death, it charged him with hope. Pete's limbs perceptibly relaxed, in indisputable second-by-second rigors of death.

Feeling all this, for an instant Strongfang drew back and proudly surveyed his work. Sinking to his haunches and rearing his massive blood-soaked head aloft, he ululated a joyful cry of victory. The trapper's body rolled against him, the click of death rattling in strange discord with the song of the storm.

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Pete's arm plunged rapidly and with accuracy. Its last earthly act drove the long blade in the black wolf's side.

The wind whistled belligerently and fitfully, then ceased. A ball of gleaming light pierced the clouds and revealed Pete's head pillowed on Strongfang's rigid body. He still retained hold of the knife buried in the wolf's heart.

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