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ON THE TRAIL of the GRIZZLY.

LONG, COMPLETE
ADVENTURE
TALE.

By
NAT BARR



**ON
THE
WATCH**
(See page 12.)

VOL. 1.

NO. 2.

NED WATCHED
THE APPROACH OF
GREAT MOOSE IN-
TENTLY. WHY WAS
THE INDIAN ACTING
IN THIS MANNER?



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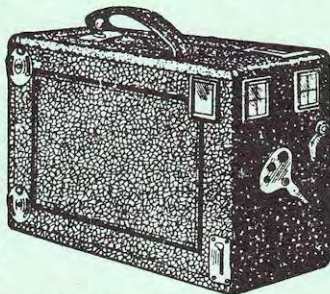
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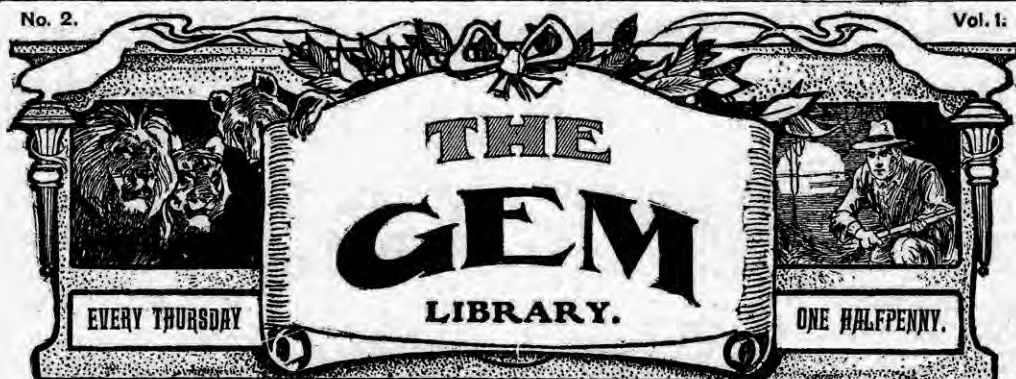
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ON THE TRAIL OF THE GRIZZLY

A Tale of Adventure.

By NAT BARR.

CHAPTER 1.

Ned Manners's Farm—Long Luke's Remarks—Watching!—The Sheep Stealer.

NED MANNERS kicked the logs into a blaze, pulled the heavy blanket closer round his shoulders, and sucked away at his pipe. His eyes, staring into the glow, held a contented expression, and altogether the young Britisher seemed well at his ease, as if the world were going very well with him. Yet this one-room shanty near Dalgelley, in the north of Canada, was hardly the height of luxury, while even the couple of thousand sheep grazing in the neighbourhood, all of which Ned Manners owned, did not represent a fortune.

The door of the shanty opened, letting in a swirl of cold, dry air, and a tall man—so tall that he had to stoop to pass through the doorway, entered the room, closing the door behind him. His dress was that of a cowboy, and was richly ornamented with silver, while even his blanket had a broad band of gold thread round it. His face was thin, high-cheekboned, tanned and gnarled by much exposure to the weather. The mouth was hidden by the heavy, falling, moustache.

"Hallo, Luke!" Ned said cheerfully, as the tall cowboy entered. "Left Abe to mind the sheep?"

Long Luke advanced to the fire, threw the blanket back from his shoulders, and stood with the blaze reddening his face.

"I've come ter borry a gun," he drawled.

Ned Manners promptly reached out to where a rifle leant



Great Moose had evidently struck a warm trail, for he ran fast, his eyes always turned towards the dust. (See page 12.)

against the wall, then he hesitated, and sat with the weapon across his knees, his eyes on the cowboy's face.

"What do you want it for?" he asked sharply.

"Wal," Long Luke drawled, "it ain't ter scare prairie dawgs, an' I dunno es it's ter shoot motorists out yere, but I guess it's ter shoot somethin'. Guns kind o' hez a gift thet way, I reckon."

Ned Manners laughed, and rose to his feet, the gun still in his hands.

"Look here, Luke," he said quietly, "you've been with me ever since I came out here from England to farm, and you've been straight with me. What's the trouble to-night?"

"B'ar," Long Luke answered shortly, seeing that he had got to explain, holding out his hand for the gun again. "Guess you lost a sheep lairst night—most folks round here's losin' 'em—an' I'm reckonin' ter hev a shot at stoppin' the trouble right now."

Ned Manners laughed sarcastically. He had learnt a good deal since his arrival in Canada, but he was soon to know that he had not learnt everything.

"Bears don't eat meat, Luke," he protested.

Long Luke took the gun and the cartridges that his master handed to him, and smiled grimly.

"Is thet so?" he drawled. "Guess it raises me good an' fine. I'll tell the boys, es it'll stop 'em bein' skeered 'bout losin' sheep, an'—"

"Then they do eat meat?" Ned interrupted hastily, to cover his confusion.

As Long Luke moved towards the door, taking the gun with him, he turned and grinned at his young master.

"I reckon," he agreed drily.

Snatching his hat from a peg, and pulling his poncho—blanket-cloak—round him, Ned followed Long Luke out into the night. It was dark, despite the moon that was shining, and on all sides there was nothing to be seen but the dense blackness of the night save away to the south, where something, perhaps a forest of pines, perhaps a low range of hills, rose upward and made a darker wall than the night. The air was bitterly keen, and Ned was not sorry when he stood in the shelter of the lean-to stable, in which half a dozen native ponies, for the use of Long Luke and himself, stood.

"Comin' after thet b'ar?" Long Luke asked casually, as he dropped his Mexican saddle on to the back of a pony.

"That's it, Luke," Ned Manners agreed, with a laugh. "Might learn something, you know."

Long Luke jerked the girths tight.

"It ain't above the acts o' Providence," he drawled.

The ponies were saddled and led out from the lean-to. They looked sleepy, like bears only half awake after their winter sleep—until they were mounted. Luke was the first up, swinging into the saddle without touching stirrup, and his knees were scarcely home before the brute had accomplished a combined buck, rear, and plunge, any one of which would have been sufficient to unseat the average rider. But Long Luke had been bred to this kind of thing, and he merely jabbed his spurs home, spurring the pony away into the darkness.

Ned Manners mounted a few seconds later, after some little trouble, and set off at a gallop after the cowboy. The air bit more keenly now, rushing by his face like so many knives, and his eyes were watering with the pain of it before he overtook Long Luke. The latter showed no sign of feeling the cold; but, then, he had never been known to show a sign of any kind, of heat, of cold, of pain, and his smile might have meant anything.

"Abe took 'em up by the canyon," Long Luke observed, as the two men galloped side by side; "he reckoned that the grass were better there. I warned him he'd be dead sure ter strike the b'ar what's bin playin' games the lairist month back, but Abe—well, I guess yer know Abe. Show him a madman with a gun an' he just hankers ter tote across an' pow-wow with him."

The ground over which the two men were riding was by no means smooth as a high road, and an English bred horse would most probably have come to grief in the first mile. True, it was grass over which the ponies galloped, but the grass was dotted with stones, some small, some quite large boulders pretty nearly as big as young mountains. The smaller ones the ponies took in their stride, while the larger ones they swerved round and dodged when they were right upon them.

The dark line of the hills visible from Ned Manners's shack—for hills they were—now showed plainly against the sky, and at one spot it could be seen that they were split, evidently by the mouth of a canyon. Near to the opening a large fire burned, clouds of sparks going up as the man beside it—his dark figure could be seen as he passed between the horsemen and the light—kicked the brush and logs into a fiercer blaze.

"Abe ain't above takin' things easy," Long Luke remarked. "Guess yer might loan him a feather-bed."

The curious, unmistakable smell of sheep reached the horsemen, and they eased their ponies, not without difficulty, into a slower pace. Sheep scuttled out of their way, in that blind, unthinking fashion peculiar to sheep, and it was only a dog, a half-bred collie, that kept them from stampeding down the canyon.

"Hallo, Abe!" Long Luke called, halting within a score of yards of the fire.

The man Abe, who had calmly watched the two men approach—or, at least, heard them do so—shifted the weight of his body on to his other elbow, and nodded a welcome. He was a small man, slightly built, hard-looking, dressed in much the same fashion as Long Luke, but without so much ornamentation.

"Hallo!" he answered. "Thet you, boss?"

"Yes," Ned Manners answered, dismounting; "we've come to look for bear. Any chance of findin' him?"

Abe Withers, to give him his full name, sniggered.

"Guess he'll find you," he drawled, rising to his feet, and taking a flaring pine-log from the fire. "See here."

Leading the way to a spot a score or so of yards from the fire, Abe held the burning brand close to the ground.

"B'ar!" Long Luke said shortly.

Ned Manners saw the mark on the ground, too, but if the others had not told him he would never have suspected that it was the track of a bear. That these men were not given to making mistakes over that kind of thing he knew.

"Reckon it's a big 'un, too," Luke drawled, fingering the rifle; "don't stand less nor seven feet—sure."

"Then can't we track him?" Ned asked eagerly.

"We kin," Long Luke drawled solemnly, "but we sha'n't 'less yer partic'lar anxious ter lose yer scalp."

"You mean—"

"That a fightin' b'ar ain't ter be looked fer in the dark," the cowboy answered meaningly. "Sides, it ain't impossible that thet b'ar'll be round agin mighty soon." He held the burning wood close to the tracks. "Yer see he toled along fer a feed, an' he's not struck it yet. Yer can bet he's lyn' round here waitin'—sure as death."

The three men moved back to the fire, and Abe at once squatted on the ground. Ned and Long Luke moved towards their horses, but before they could reach them they heard them snorting with terror. They were untethered, for they were well trained in waiting, and, despite their obvious terror, they made no attempt to escape. They just stood shivering, their ears cocked, their eyes staring wildly.

"B'ar," Long Luke whispered, clicking a cartridge into the rifle, while Ned, for want of a better weapon, drew his heavy revolver.

"Where?" Ned whispered excitedly. During his stay in Canada he had shot one or two bears, but it had been in the daylight, and he had believed then that the animals were not in the least dangerous, and incapable of attacking a man.

A frightened scurrying of sheep, almost throwing the two men from their feet, the loud, angry barking of the half-bred collie, and Long Luke, trailing the rifle, started forward at a run.

"B'ar," he said again.

The scurrying of the sheep was increasing, so that it was difficult for the men to move forward against them. It was risky, too, for the butt of a sheep is a nasty thing, and may easily result in a broken leg. Luckily, the sheep were not dense in this part, and they had soon all passed the two men.

Ned Manners halted, peering helplessly ahead into the darkness, while Long Luke, dropping to his hands and knees, sniffed at the ground.

"Look!" Ned cried sharply, and at the same moment his revolver cracked.

Right ahead, not a score of yards distant, a great bear, standing a clear seven feet, rose on to his haunches, a sheep suspended from his jaws. In the darkness his little eyes shone like points of light. The eyes of the sheep showed no spark, for the poor beast was mercifully dead.

Long Luke raised the rifle sharply to his shoulder, but even as he did so the bear dropped the sheep, swung round with marvellous agility, considering what an ungainly brute he looked, and dashed away into the shelter of the darkness. The rifle cracked, and the report was answered by a snarl of rage.

"Fleshed," Long Luke drawled, as he thrust in another cartridge. "Grazed the varmint's back likely."

"We'll get him if we go after him!" Ned cried excitedly.

"Wouldn't bet on it, boss," Luke drawled.

Ned Manners snatched the rifle from the man's hand, and started off at a run in the direction that the bear had gone. The brute had been stealing his sheep, he knew; and, besides, he would rather like to succeed where so old a hand as Long Luke had failed.

Ahead of him Ned could hear the bear growling as he trotted along—growling angrily, as if in pain, and he ran faster, hoping to catch it up before going far. In the darkness he could not see the bear, but could only hear him.

Making a sharp sprint, Ned did succeed in getting within sight of the bear, who looked just a dark patch in the night. He dropped to one knee, and raised the rifle to his shoulder. At the same moment, as if scenting the danger, rather than seeing it, the bear quickened his pace—quickened it to such an extent that he was out of sight before Ned could fire.

A rueful expression on his face, realising why Long Luke had made no attempt to follow, Ned turned to retrace his steps. Until now he had thought what most inexperienced men thought—that a bear was slow. Even now he did not know that there were few ponies fast enough to keep up with a bear, for a short distance, at least.

Long Luke, who was squatting with Abe by the fire, looked up solemnly as his master approached.

"Guess ya'd like me ter tote along an' skin thet b'ar, boss?" he suggested seriously.

"No!" Ned Manners answered shortly.

Long Luke raised his eyebrows with surprise.

"Yer don't mean ter say thet yer couldn't run faster nor a b'ar?" he said.

Ned Manners stared down angrily at Long Luke, so angrily, indeed, that the cowboy reached back for the gun at his hip. Ned saw the action, the angry expression cleared from his face, and he laughed.

"I'm learning things, Luke," he said.

Long Luke rose to his feet.

"So long es yer don't mind learnin', boss, yer'll do," he drawled.

CHAPTER 2.

The Dalgelly Saloon—The Reward—Jose Amused—Ned and Long Luke Try Tracking—The Trail of the Grizzly.

THE Canadian sun was blazing down hotly, despite the fact that it was close upon the fall of the year, and the drove of long-legged cattle passing the saloon of Dalgelly stirred up a cloud of reddish dust, until the cowboys riding on the wings and in the rear were nearly as red as the dust itself, and certainly as dry.

It was because of the dust, and because of the droves of cattle that stirred it up in passing, and because of the thirsty cowboys who rode on the wings and in the rear, that Jose—no one had ever heard his full name—had travelled from his home in Mexico and erected this little shanty, at which drink of a rather fiery description might be bought—at a price. During the past two years Jose had added store-keeping to his other trade, until it was now reported that he owned a heavy balance in one of the Canadian banks, and was thinking of having a house built of solid white marble on the spot where the shanty now stood. Certainly he had prospered, for during the past month he had entered into a contract to supply the mounted police at Fort Myers—a place five miles away—with fresh mutton.

As for Jose, as he stood in the door of his saloon and looked out at the cattle and the dust and the horsemen, he certainly looked contented enough. He was dressed very much as a cowboy—leather breeches, black silk shirt, and on his head was a sombrero, Mexican in pattern, round the edge of which dangled little silver bells, which jingled merrily as he walked. Between his lips was a cigarette, and it was said that no living man had ever seen him without one. One man had boasted over at Fork Creek that he had seen Jose without a cigarette between his lips; this had caused a fight, someone called someone else a liar, and the boastful man had been shot.

Two of the cowboys riding behind the cattle swung their nimble ponies round and came spurring towards the saloon. They dismounted by the entrance, hitched the ponies to the hooks provided for that purpose, and clanked, with great jingling of spurs, into the saloon, into which Jose had already gone, for he was always prompt to help customers of this stamp.

Jose pushed the bottle of whisky across the bar for the men to help themselves.

"The fall is slow this year," he remarked, in his curiously soft voice.

"Cuss the fall!" the shorter of the two cowboys growled.

"What yer know about falls, anyway?"

Jose threw up his narrow shoulders apologetically, making the little bells on his hat jingle.

"But it is late," he persisted. "By now there should be snow. There are those who would like to see it, too."

"Air there?" the cowboy snapped. "Guess I'd like ter meet 'em, fer exchange views. This yer dust is bad, but snow—Who wants it, anyway?"

Jose pushed the bottle forward again, and his dark eyes held a twinkle.

"There are those who think that the flesh-eating bear would den down—go for his winter sleep—when the snow comes," he persisted. "Many sheep have been killed and eaten by him in weeks past." The little Mexican's shoulders went up again.

"As if they didn't know that a flesh-eating bear doesn't sleep in the winter!"

One of the cowboys thrust his hand into his shirt and drew out a crumpled sheet of paper.

"Talkin' b'ars reminds me o' that," he drawled. "Cairn, Mile Bottom Rancho, wants yer ter shove thet up outside the saloon. S'long!"

The two cowboys went jingling out of the saloon unhitched their ponies, and went galloping away in a cloud of red dust in pursuit of the cattle, leaving Jose with the crumpled paper in his tobacco-stained fingers. He opened it without hesitation, and spread it on the counter. He read slowly, tracing the words with one lean brown finger, for he did not read English as he spoke it. There was not much to read, just these few words written in a large, bold hand:

"Two Hundred Dollars Reward
Will be Paid to Anyone
Killing the Grizzly Who
Has Been Stealing Sheep on
My Rancho.

"GEORGE CAIRN."

Jose read this through and frowned. He helped himself to a drink from the whisky bottle—a most unusual thing for him to do—and frowned again. Then he shook his head knowingly, took a hammer and nails from a drawer, and went outside the saloon.

Choosing a prominent place, Jose tacked the notice up,

and had just finished when Ned Manners and Long Luke came cantering up.

"Hallo, Jose," the cowboy drawled, "goin' ter hev a dance, or a cirks—or what?"

"You can read," Jose answered, with a shrug of his shoulders, for he was not fond of the tall cowboy.

"I kin read, sure," Long Luke agreed, as he dismounted and slowly spelled out the words of the notice. When he had finished he turned to Ned Manners, a cool smile on his face.

"Boss," he said, "things is mighty slack jest now, so I reckon yer kin spare me a few days."

"To hunt the bear?" Ned asked eagerly, for he, too, had read the notice.

"Sure as death!" Long Luke agreed. "Them there dollars might come in handy at Christmas, I reckon."

"All right," Ned agreed. "But I let you go on one condition—I go with you!"

Long Luke's face fell and he pulled at the ends of his long moustache.

"Two hundred dollars ain't sich a mighty high sum, boss," he drawled.

"Oh, I'm not coming for that!" Ned laughed. "So long as we bag the bear, you can have the money."

"Boss," Long Luke cried, holding out a horny hand, "yer top-hole boss in these yere parts! Shake!"

Jose laughed softly, as if something amused him, and his eyes were on the notice. Long Luke turned on the Mexican savagely.

"What yer laughing fer, greaser?" he drawled. His voice was rather low, and men who knew him were aware that that was a sure sign of trouble. Jose did not know it.

"Bah!" the Mexican sneered. "You are good to rope a steer—yes; to break a broncho—yes; but this bear has already killed two men." Jose held up two fingers so that there should be no mistake about the number. "He will kill you!"

The sneer in the Mexican's voice was too much for Long Luke, especially as he was quite aware that he really was not a great hunter, as he had never devoted his energies to the chase. He dropped a hand to his hip, with the quick action gotten of much practice. He drew it away, however, reached out, and gripped the Mexican by the collar. He shook him as a dog shakes a rat, then flung him through the doorway into the saloon.

Recovering his feet, Jose's hand went to the knife hidden in the neck of his shirt; but, quick though he was, Long Luke had him covered from the hip.

"Easy, sonny!" he drawled. "Lead ain't good fer the health."

The angry light died out of the Mexican's eyes as if it had been quenched with water.

"What can I do?" he asked.

"What shall we want for this expedition, Luke?" Ned asked.

"Couple o' bags o' flour—thet's all," Long Luke answered.

Five minutes later, the flour dangling from their saddles, the two men cantered away, reaching Ned Manners' rancho just before evening set in and the air began to bite chilly. A hasty meal was prepared and eaten, a couple of rifles were looked to, and it was scarcely dusk before the two men cantered away from the shanty to hunt the grizzly that had already had nearly three score of sheep from different flocks in the neighbourhood.

"If we strike the trail to-night we sha'n't have to lose much time Luke," Ned Manners observed, as they rode along. They were making for Cairn's rancho, as it was from there that the last sheep had been stolen by the grizzly.

"Meanin'," the cowboy drawled, "thet we hev jest ter track the b'ar an' shoot?"

"What else?" Ned demanded sharply.

Long Luke puffed away at his pipe before answering.

"B'ars is poison," he vouchsafed at last. "It's sure dead easy ter raise some o' 'em, but I've knowed one partic'lar b'ar ter be trailed fer weeks an' lost then."

Even now Ned Manners could not understand how it was that a clumsy-looking bear could be so difficult to hunt, and his face showed it. The cowboy beside him noticed the expression and grinned.

"Guess you'd down a b'ar all right if yer hed him right here in the open, boss," he drawled; "but fer real joy-with-out-end sport, yer hev jest got ter wait till one o' 'em takes ter the hills. Thar's not a man or pony livin' thet kin go as fast as a b'ar over rough ground."

"Then we've got to strike this animal while he's in the open," Ned said with conviction.

Long Luke chuckled, and examined the riata—lassoo—hanging from his saddle.

"I guess thet's so," he agreed.

The ride to George Cairn's shanty was not a long one, only a matter of five miles over fairly good ground, so that it was not long before the two horsemen sighted the lights from

the shanty. Then they rode cautiously, keeping to a worn trail that it was mighty hard to follow in the darkness. In this way they reached the fence of the corral, lifted the rails, and rode up to the shanty.

At the sound of the horses Cairn came out into the doorway. He was an elderly man, who had spent most of his life in Canada, and rumour had it that he had done well for himself, and could have returned to England years ago had he wished it. But perhaps he was like others—at first the old country had called strongly to him, but by degrees the call had grown fainter, and the call of the great woods and hills, the gloomy canyons, and the deep lakes, the prairies and its red dust and all, had grown too strong to be resisted.

"That you, Manners?" he asked, peering into the darkness, one hand over his eyes.

"Yes!" Ned answered promptly. "We just called in to tell you that we're going to have a shot for that bear."

"Good!" Cairn said eagerly. "The brute's had a matter of a score or more of my sheep already, though how he manages to eat them all I don't know."

Long Luke bent sideways in his saddle, despite the way the pony was fidgeting and all rearing up.

"Ye air sure the b'ar's hed 'em?" he asked.

Cairn laughed, and touched the butt of the heavy revolver lying at his hip.

"I reckon," he answered drily. "Old Sims tried that game on me once, but I raised him. No; I guess it's bear, for sure. Besides, the tracks are plain enough—leading to the hills yonder." Cairn pointed away to the right, where the hills rose up darkly.

Long Luke swung his pony round.

"S'long!" he cried. "We'll tote thet b'ar right here 'fore long."

With Long Luke leading the way, for he knew every yard of the ground about, the two men galloped away into the darkness, keeping along a track which led towards the Murray Hills. The wind was blowing in their faces, and as they rode the smell of Cairn's sheep there were thousands of them feeding near to the foot of the hills, where the pasture was good—was carried to them.

"If thet smell don't fetch the b'ar out ter-night ride me on a rail," Long Luke muttered, "an' thet means thet we'll strike a new trail at dawn."

"And why not to-night, with torches?" Ned Manners asked eagerly.

"B'ars," Long Luke chuckled, "ain't sociable. Like es not this yere brute would jest wait round a corner an' swat ye into a better land afore yer hed time ter do any killin'. No; it ain't healthy ter hunt b'ar at night."

The men in charge of Cairn's sheep had lighted large fires, with the idea of scaring the bear, and up to one of these the two men rode. They found a solitary man, heavy-eyed, squatting before it, a rifle beside him. He looked up at the two men, noted their trappings, and turned his eyes to the fire again.

"Out after thet bear?" he said, with the air of a man who states a fact.

"That is so," Luke agreed. "Seen anythin' of him round here recent?"

The man before the fire poked the embers with his boot.

"Guess so," he answered. "He's not bin along ter-night, an' it ain't likely thet he'll miss."

"From which direction does he usually come?" Ned Manners asked eagerly.

"Wal, he don't eggactly publish a timetable," the man before the fire answered, "an' he ain't bound ter run on one line; but if I was you—"

"Yes?"

"I'd jest lie round, comfortable-like, till the mornin', an' strike the trail by daylight," the man concluded.

With an angry motion, Ned Manners swung his pony round, and Long Luke, after winking at the man by the fire, followed his example.

"Where to, boss?" he asked.

"To where we can find a man of average intelligence," Ned answered angrily. He knew that the man by the fire had been playing with him, and it had roused his temper.

Long Luke knew well enough when it was wise not to argue with his young master, and therefore he kept quiet now, riding silently beside him despite the fact that they were going away from the hills. Flesh-eating bears usually took refuge in the hills, Long Luke knew, and it was in that direction that he meant eventually to search.

Ned's pony shied so violently that he very nearly unseated his rider, and Long Luke, catching sight of the cause of the animal's fright, reined in sharply.

On the ground lay a man at full length, a rifle thrust out in front of him, the barrel resting on a small boulder. He looked up angrily as the horsemen halted.

"This yere's my cirkis, Long Luke!" he snarled. "If ye're out arter thet reward, too, I reckon ye'd best strike a claim further off."

"I guess we'll strike where we like, Sam Martin," Long Luke drawled, "an' as this don't suit me I'll reckon ter move on S'long!"

But the man on the ground, looking for the bear whose coming might mean two hundred dollars in his pocket, never heard the remark, or, if he did, he did not trouble to answer it.

Half a mile further on Long Luke halted by a large boulder, and dismounted. He knelt on the ground, and struck a light.

"Sam Martin don't waste time usual," he drawled, as he rose to his feet, "an' he's dead sure struck the right trail this time."

CHAPTER 3.

Waiting for the Bear—A Shot in the Dark—The Great Moose Talks—The Tracks—Cigarette-ends.

TED MANNERS, his anger cooled, knew well enough that the best that he could do would be to follow Long Luke's example. He therefore dismounted and led his pony to behind the boulder, where the cowboy's horse already stood patiently, cropping at the few tufts of silver-grey grass within reach.

"Do you think it likely that the bear will come back along his old tracks, Luke?" Ned asked eagerly.

Long Luke thrust a cartridge into the breach of his rifle, and clambered up on to the flat top of the boulder before answering.

"B'ars is cunnin' varmints, boss," he whispered, as Ned joined him on the rock, "but they slip up over thet one thing—they're mighty fond of old tracks. Yer kin reckon on a grizzly usin' the same paith until he l'arns thet it's gettin' dangerous."

"And the bear has been along here?"

Long Luke nodded down towards the dusty ground.

"Sure as death, boss," he answered, his eyes peering away into the darkness to the left, the direction from which the bear would have to come to reach the grazing sheep.

The men lay silent. Even Ned was fully aware that a bear was possessed of remarkably clear hearing, and that the wind would carry a whisper a long way on such a night. They just lay prone on the top of the boulder, their eyes staring into the darkness—waiting.

How long it was that passed before anything happened Ned Manners had no idea, but he had a faint impression that it must have been at least a year since he clambered on to the top of the boulder, when Long Luke touched him on the arm. He did not speak, but pointed away to the left.

There was nothing to be seen there—at least, Ned Manners could see nothing—but his straining ears did catch the snapping of a twig.

Long Luke shifted his rifle a trifle, nestling the butt ready against his shoulder, and Ned did the same. As they did so a second twig cracked, and there could be no doubt that something was coming cautiously down the track made by the flesh-eating bear.

Was it the bear? It certainly seemed probable, for the creature's progress was slow and cautious. Besides, when the dark body did show, it could be seen that it approached on all fours.

The rifle in Ned's hand seemed to stiffen, and he fired at the moving object. The shot was at once answered by a cry so human that Long Luke leapt down from the boulder. He had heard bears give a cry that was almost human when they had been wounded, but this was not the cry of a bear. Ned Manners went after him.

Lying on the ground, still as if dead, was a finely-built Indian. His garments were of finely-worked leather, much ornamented in parts, and across his back hung a rifle in a skin case. He lay with his face against the ground, and neither moved nor groaned.

"Guess you've done it, boss!" Long Luke drawled, as he turned the man over on to his back.

Ned Manners felt a cold fear gripping at his heart, and he blamed himself for firing before he had made quite sure that the dark, moving object was a bear. He lit a match now, and his fingers trembled as he held it close to the handsome face of the Indian. A grunt of relief escaped Long Luke.

"No harm done," he remarked. "Thet bullet just grazed the temple—stunned him."

In confirmation of this the Indian stirred, opened his eyes, and sat up. As his eyes fell upon the two men bending over him his right hand dropped to the knife in his belt, but Long Luke, seeing the action, gripped the man's wrist.

"Don't try thet game!" he said sharply. "We're pards. Shot yer by accident—tho't yer was the flesh-eatin' b'ar."

The Indian rose to his feet, evidently little the worse for the injury to his head.

"Great Moose," he said, in a deep voice, striking himself on his broad chest to show that he spoke of himself.

Long Luke had noted the Indian's trapping and the rifle at his back.

"We're sorry fer the mistake, chief," he said. "Guess yer out huntin'?"

The Great Moose waved his right hand with natural dignity. In a white man the action would have appeared theatrical, but with the Indian it was perfectly natural.

"The spirit of the hunt has always called to my people," he answered, "and now that we are few it still calls, though the white men have left little to be hunted, and their red-coated men guard the buffalo which their brothers have slain until scarce one remains on the great prairies or among the trees of the forest."

"Ay, I reckon it ain't all joy fer yer," Long Luke agreed, leading the way back to the boulder. "But what brought yer out ter-night, chief?"

Before the Indian could answer, Sam Martin, rifle in hand, came running out of the darkness. He was trailing his rifle in his left hand, and in his right he held a revolver.

"Hands up, you!" he cried, addressing the Great Moose.

The Indian saw the revolver covering him, and the hand that had moved towards the knife in his belt became motionless. He betrayed no sign of fear, however, and made no attempt to raise his hands.

"Is the white man mad?" he asked in his deep voice.

"Guess not," Sam Martin growled; "but I savvy all along it weren't no ornary bear raisin' all them sheep, an' now I know that its prowl'n' skunks like you."

The Great Moose's head went up proudly, but still he did not raise his hands.

"It was the white men who stole the country of my people," he answered haughtily.

Sam Martin laughed, and it was not a pleasant sound to hear.

"You ain't goin' ter be alive long ter talk about it," he drawled. "Jest git yer back ter thet rock, an' I'll settle with yer right now."

Still the Indian did not move, and Ned Manners stepped calmly in front of him.

"What brought you here, chief?" he asked, his eyes on Sam Martin.

"To kill the flesh-eating bear," the Indian answered readily.

Once more Sam Martin laughed fiercely. He was one of those men, ignorant in every way, who believed that every man not his own colour was necessarily a thief or worse, and he honestly believed that this Indian had something to do with the loss of the sheep. Cairn had employed him to stop the thefts, whether they were made by animal or man, and he had decided that—

"Stand clear!" he ordered sharply, addressing Ned Manners. "This ain't your cirks. If yer weren't noo ter these yere part yer'd know what them red varmints is like. Stand clear!"

Ned Manners did not move, and Sam Martin, who had lowered his revolver, commenced to raise it again. Before he could draw a bead, however, Ned had jumped at him, the revolver was wrenched from his hand, and he was flung violently to the ground. He started to scramble to his feet, but only to find that he was covered with his own weapon.

"Gimme that gun!" he cried savagely.

Just for a moment Ned Manners hesitated, then he calmly tossed the revolver to Sam Martin, and turned his back on him. The latter grasped the weapon eagerly, and half raised it, but only to thrust it back into his belt.

"Boss," he said, and there was a reluctant note of admiration in his voice, "I guess yer raise me."

Without another word, Sam Martin turned and slouched away into the darkness. He was a man who had led a rough life, who had lived in Canada when a man literally held his life in his hands, and it had hardened him. But underneath all the man was still there, and he could admire a plucky action as well as another. Besides, it was only his hatred for the Indians as a race that had made him threaten the life of Great Moose after he had been brought to the spot by the track of Ned's rifle.

The Great Moose touched Ned on the arm.

"Brothers," he said quietly.

"Guess that's very nice an' pretty," Long Luke, who was leaning against the boulder, drawled, "but even thet don't explain what yer were really doin' on thet track, chief."

"Have I not already spoken?" the Indian answered haughtily, drawing himself up to his commanding height. "Shall not those to whom the beasts belong hunt them? To whom should they answer?"

Long Luke, lighting his pipe, eyed the chief thoughtfully, and decided that he was a straight man.

"But b'ar ain't usually much in your line," he continued,

"an' it ain't no consarn o' yours thet this beast hes bin raisin' the sheep."

Great Moose's eyes seemed to dim, and his chin fell forward on to his chest.

"The Long Rider"—already the Indian had found a name for Luke—"heard what his white brother said. Sheep have gone, and so they turn and say that my people have taken them. Because of that I struck the trail of this bear, meaning to kill it that suspicion might not fall upon me and the few men of my race still left to hunt and trap in the woods and in the rivers."

"It's an infernal shame!" Ned Manners said angrily, realising the truth of what the Indian said; "and I'm beastly sorry that I nearly shot you in mistake for the bear!"

"Until a brave is dead the squaws need not weep, and the arms of the chase are not laid above his grave," the Great Moose answered quietly.

Long Luke was getting tired of explanations; he was out after the flesh-eating bear, and he did not want to lose time. Even he, however, had another question to ask.

"But why were yer back-trackin' the trail?" he asked.

"To make sure that the track did lead from where the sheep grazed," Great Moose answered. "The other way I have tracked it—"

"Where does it lead?" Ned Manners asked excitedly.

"The night is yet young," the Indian answered, "and I will lead my brothers on the trail to where the feet of the man join it."

Long Luke, who had been slinging his rifle over his back, wheeled round sharply.

"What man?"

"It is not for the Great Moose to say," the Indian answered; "but the tracks are there, and they are those of a light man, short as a squaw."

Long Luke whistled softly, and touched Ned on the arm.

"Boss," he drawled, "I hed a kind o' idea thet that war more in this than jest b'ar. Do we go with the chief?"

"Yes," Ned agreed shortly.

Leading their ponies, Long Luke and Ned Manners followed the Great Moose. The latter walked swiftly, evidently sure of the track, only stopping now and again to kneel with his face close to the ground, sniffing at the trail that the others could not see. In this way a couple of miles were covered, the trail keeping to the open all the time, save when it passed through a small belt of wood. In this the chief paused to gather half a dozen short branches of pine, evidently to be used later on as torches.

Another mile was covered, then the Great Moose halted and lit one of the pieces of wood by the aid of a flint and steel. The resinous wood burned brightly, and, holding the flame near to the ground, the chief led the way on, but not far. He halted, dropped to his knees, and motioned the others to draw nearer.

"See, my brother," Great Moose said, "the trail of the bear."

Faintly in the dust were the marks of a bear's claws, looking curiously like the imprint of fingers, and even Ned could make them out plainly enough. Long Luke examined them carefully.

"Guess it's the same brute thet raised your sheep, boss," he drawled.

"How can you tell that?" Ned demanded in amazement.

Long Luke laughed softly, and even the Great Moose made a grunting sound in his throat, which was his nearest approach to merriment.

"Thar ain't two b'ars with the same hind-feet, boss," Long Luke explained; "an' though I don't reckon on bein' a hunter, I kin savvy that."

"The Long Rider's words are wise, and true as the great Buffalo Spirit," Great Moose agreed solemnly. "Follow."

Moving at a much slower pace now, the chief examining every foot of the way, the three passed on. A quarter of a mile they covered, then the chief halted again, pointing at the trail.

Once more the track of the bear was plainly visible, but beside it there was another track—that of a booted foot.

"Friend of the bear," Great Moose said solemnly, pointing at the footprint.

Ned Manners gasped with amazement, and stared blankly at the Indian.

"You don't mean to say," he began, "that—"

"Friend of the bear," the Great Moose repeated, and moved on to a spot a few yards distant. Then he stooped, picked something from the ground, and held it out on the palm of his hand towards the two men. It was a cigarette-end!

"Now, what the blazes does thet mean?" Long Luke drawled, a puzzled expression on his face.

CHAPTER 4.

A Discovery—Jose's Saloon—The Bear Freed—The Stolen Sheep—The Death of the Bear.

LONG LUKE took the cigarette-end from the chief and eyed it closely, the puzzled expression on his face growing deeper.

"Surely you don't expect to discover anything from that, Luke?" Ned protested.

"Even the twig tells its tale, and the bent grass may say how long the stag has passed," Great Moose observed.

"Cigarettes ain't smoked over common jest round these yere parts," Long Luke drawled thoughtfully. "Question is—who smokes 'em?"

"Jose!" cried Ned sharply.

The cigarette-end fell from Long Luke's hand, and an angry light sprang into his eyes. His fingers dropped suggestively to the revolver in his belt.

"Jose it is!" he cried sharply. "The varmint never reckons ter stop smokin' 'em 'cept when he's asleep. But what's he want foolin' with sheep-stealin'—thet's what I want ter know?"

The Great Moose, who had been examining the track again, spoke softly.

"The chief was at the fort of the white men," he said, "and there he learnt that the mutton was fresh, and that a Mexican—"

"He's hit it!" Long Luke interrupted sharply. "Jose got the contract ter supply the fort with fresh mutton two months back, an' it's since then that this sheep-stealin' happened. It's up against him, sure as death!"

Ned Manners saw how the evidence pointed at the man, but he was not willing to presume his guilt before he knew more.

"Who is supposed to have supplied Jose with the sheep for the fort?" he asked.

"Thet's it—thet's just it, boss!" Long Luke drawled, and the set of his mouth showed that he no longer had any doubt.

"Thar ain't a man es I know what hes sold him so much es a single sheep!"

"But the bear?" Ned protested. "You don't mean to suggest that he has trained the brute to steal?"

Long Luke swung into the saddle.

"Thar ain't no knowin' what kin be done with b'ars, boss," he drawled. "I've knowed 'em reared es kind o' watch-dogs, an' if thet kin be done, thar ain't no knowin' whar ther tricks stop. Anyway, we'll jest tote along an hev a look round the saloon. If we find nothin' I reckon thet thar's no harm done."

Ned mounted, too, for he realised that this proposal was fair enough. It seemed to him improbable that Jose could have trained the bear to steal, and yet, as Long Luke said, they were easily-trained animals. He remembered, too, the extraordinary number of sheep that had been stolen—far more than one bear could possibly eat.

"How about the chief?" he asked, remembering that Great Moose had no pony.

"The hunter's feet are swift," the Indian answered calmly, and sprang off at a fast trot to lead the way through the darkness. The two men followed, knowing that the man would take them the easiest and the shortest way.

The following of the trail had led the hunters back towards Dalgely, so that before they had been riding long they reached a spot within two hundred yards of Jose's saloon. Long Luke reined in at a signal from the Great Moose, and dismounted, Ned following his example. The latter knew that in some ways he had much to learn, and was quite content to follow the guidance of the more experienced men.

"Let the feet of the white man fall lightly," Great Moose cautioned, and led the way on.

No light came from the saloon, which meant that Jose had turned in for the night, unless he was out on one of the sheep-stealing expeditions—if he really was the wanted man. Great Moose halted once, a score or two of yards from the saloon, and pointed down into the dust. The eyes of the white men could not see anything, but it was evident that the Indian was satisfied.

"Bear!" he whispered—"bear and man!"

On again, circling round the shanty they went, and entered the roughly-made corral at the back. The wind blew in their faces now, coming from the direction of the saloon, and Great Moose halted and sniffed.

"Bear!" he said with conviction. And Long Luke loosened his revolver in its holster.

"Leave the ponies here!" he whispered. And they went without them.

At the back of the saloon a lean-to stable had been built, and beside this there was another erection, made of stout logs, in which there was only a small door, fastened outside by a padlock. Before this the men halted, and the two white men, sniffing the air sharply, knew that Great Moose was right. There was a bear inside.

Long Luke kicked softly against the wood with the toe of his boot, and a low growling at once answered him. The timbers creaked as a heavy body forced against them.

"What next?" Ned whispered excitedly.

"Jest goin' ter call, sociable-like, on Jose," Long Luke answered coolly, leading the way round to the entrance to the saloon.

There were no lights burning, and it was evident that Jose, if at home, had turned in for the night. This did not worry Long Luke, who kicked vigorously on the door, making the bolt on the other side shake in its socket. Great Moose stayed in the shadow, obviously unwilling to take part in the scene which was to follow.

A window was raised cautiously, and Jose looked down at the men before the door. His right hand was also thrust out, and the moonlight glimmered on the blue-black barrel of a revolver.

"What do you want?" he cried.

"Bin out late, Jose," Long Luke answered readily. "Tho't we'd jest licker-up afore ridin' back."

Even in the darkness Jose could recognise the two men, and he drew the revolver in. He had no reason to think that they had not really come for a drink.

"Down in a minute!" he cried, and drew his head in.

The minute turned into about five, and when Jose opened the door of the saloon it was seen that he had fully dressed himself, rolled a cigarette, and was now smoking in his customary manner. At sight of the cigarette Long Luke grinned, then followed Jose into the saloon. After them came Ned, while the Great Moose still remained outside. The hanging-lamp was lit, and the Mexican, installed behind the bar, the cigarette glowing between his lips, smiled upon his guests.

Long Luke helped himself from the bottle passed to him.

"Never knew afore thet yer kept a tame b'ar, Jose," he remarked slowly.

The Mexican's jaw dropped so that the cigarette dangled from his lips, and his thin fingers gripped hard on the edge of the bar. His hand went to the pocket in which his revolver lay, but Long Luke's hand was resting on the butt of his pistol in a suggestive manner, and the Mexican gripped the edge of the bar with both hands again. He shrugged his high shoulders sharply, and forced up the ghost of a smile. Ned Manners felt that if he had ever faced a guilty man suddenly discovered, it was now.

"Dalgely has strange men come to it," Jose said, in a low voice, which was not quite steady, "and the bear is better than a gun to guard me."

Long Luke, leaning indolently against the bar, pulled thoughtfully at the ends of his long moustache.

"Guess thet's so, Jose," he agreed; "but an animal like thet is calculated ter git out o' hand et times—steal sheep, mebber."

A little choking cry, which he converted into a laugh, escaped the Mexican, and he shrugged his high shoulders until they seemed to lift above his ears.

"The bear is honest as I am," he protested.

"Thet's jest what I reckoned," Long Luke drawled, and there was no mistaking his meaning.

Jose, realising the danger of the situation, reached down for his gun, but Long Luke was too quick for him, and had him covered before he could so much as finger the butt. The Mexican cowered back behind the bar, his usually brown face a mottled-grey hue.

"What do you—?" he began shakily.

"See here, Jose," Long Luke interrupted, "we ain't sayin' fer sure thet thet b'ar o' yours hes bin hev'in' sheep, but yer know es well as we do thet sheep hev bin raised by a b'ar jest recent."

"Lost some myself," Manners put in.

"Precisely," Long Luke drawled, "an' because o' thet, Jose, we reckon es how yer won't mind thet b'ar o' yours bein' put ter a fair test. Thet so?"

Jose pulled himself together, and smiled weakly. It was occurring to him that these men would find it hard to prove anything, and he was regaining confidence.

"All we're calculatin' ter do is this," Long Luke explained. "We're jest goin' ter let thet little b'ar out fer a stroll on his lonesome, an'—"

"It—it is not safe!" Jose interrupted quickly, all the terror back in his eyes again.

Long Luke helped himself to another drink with his left hand, for his right still rested on the butt of his gun.

"Oh, I reckon we kin see ter thet," he remarked. "Anyway, it's our cirks if we git left."

Long Luke reached up and lowered the wick of the lamp, for it was smoking badly. There was no look of excitement on his face, and it was only the prominence of the jaw which showed that the man was engaged in something rather out of the ordinary.

"Boss," he said over his shoulder, "I reckon it's time yer let that b'ar out fer a walk."

Ned Manners moved towards the door, and as he did so the Mexican, roused to desperation, made a snatching movement towards his pocket. It was for this that Long Luke had been waiting, and his gun went up.

"Jose," he drawled, "I guess thet Dalgelly'll be searchin' fer a noo bar-tender if yer ain't dead careful!"

The Mexican had his hand in his pocket, and Long Luke watched for the movement that would show that the man was covering him through the thin cloth.

"Put yer hands on the counter," he ordered. "Steady! I drop yer if thet hand don't come out straight."

Very slowly Jose drew his hand from his pocket and laid both on the counter. His dark eyes were on the cowboy's grim face, as if watching for a sign of weakening. Long Luke grinned as he noted the fingers stained by tobacco, and thought of the cigarette-end picked up on the trail. Ned Manners had already left the saloon for the purpose of freeing the bear.

"Jest come out o' thar," Long Luke ordered. "Guess we'll sit sociable-like by the winder an' watch fer the b'ar ter come home."

"There will be no sheep," Jose answered, but it was in the tone of a man trying a weak bluff.

"In thet case," Long Luke drawled, "it's up against me ter apologise."

Jose came from behind the bar, and as he did so Long Luke's arms went round him. A revolver was snatched from his coat-pocket, and a knife drawn from its hiding-place in the neck of his shirt. Both weapons were allowed to fall to the floor. The Mexican half stooped to snatch one of them up, but the cowboy's revolver was covering him again, and he thought better of it.

"Yer'll find it cooler by the winder," Long Luke suggested, and Jose moved slowly in that direction. He seated himself on a bench by the window, and Long Luke threw back the shutters so that they could see out.

The dark form of a bear, moving swiftly, as if with some definite object in mind, crossed directly in front of the saloon, making in the direction of where Cairn's flocks were grazing. As he caught sight of it, Jose half rose to his feet, and his lips opened.

"Drop it!" Long Luke cried sharply. "Yer kin speak lovin' words ter thet b'ar when he comes home."

Very quickly the bear was swallowed up by the darkness, and Ned Manners came into the saloon.

"Great Moose is following the bear," he whispered to Long Luke, "so that we may know everything."

Long Luke nodded, dropped his revolver back into its holster, for Jose could do nothing without arms, and drew a greasy pack of cards from his pocket.

"Poker?" he suggested, addressing the Mexican. "Yer raised me ten dollars lairst time we played."

But the Mexican was peering out into the night as if he could see a ghost, and he made no answer.

An hour had gone by since the bear was freed by Ned Manners, and during all that time Jose had sat staring out through the window. The expression on his face was a curious one. It looked as if he were hoping for something that he knew to be impossible—hoping against his better judgment. Long Luke and Ned Manners also sat close to the window, but both looked quite cool and collected. From time to time they whispered together.

"The Great Moose is to give the hoot of an owl," Ned said, "if the bear is coming back with a sheep."

Long Luke threw open the door of the saloon, so that a track of light shone out into the night. The bear would have to cross this, if he came back the way that he had gone, to reach his shed at the back of the saloon.

Jose watched the door opened, and knew well enough why it was done. His eyes contracted as he saw Ned take his place in the doorway, his rifle in his hands.

O-o-o! The cry of an owl distinctly reached the ears of the men in the saloon, and Ned Manners dropped to one knee, so as to get a steadier shot when the right moment arrived.

Something blacker than the night showed in the darkness, and a gasping cry broke from Jose.

Into the road of light the heavy body of a bear came, and from his jaws dangled the carcass of a sheep.

"Behind the shoulder, boss!" Long Luke drawled.

A rifle cracked just as the bear reached the centre of the path of light, and the animal collapsed as if all the bones had suddenly been taken out of him, and lay still, the dead sheep still in his jaws.

Leaving Jose sitting by the window, a dazed look on his face, Long Luke left the saloon with Ned Manners. They unhitched their ponies, and swung into the saddle. Long Luke forced his close to the window.

"Jose," he drawled, "I calculate thet it mightn't be healthy fer yer ter keep a tame b'ar again."

"I—," the Mexican stammered. "How should I know he stole? I—"

But Long Luke had ridden away after Ned Manners, and Jose had only the dead bear, his prey in his jaws, to address.

CHAPTER 5.

Claiming the Reward—Nearly Paid—Curious News—A Strange Trail.

ALL through the day following the killing of the flesh-eating bear Long Luke and Ned had plenty to occupy their time. First a part of one of the flocks took fright and stampeded, and the whole of the morning was occupied in rounding them up; then one of the ponies fell sick, and it was not until dusk that the two men finished doctoring it. In consequence, they had no time to talk over the previous night's happenings until they sat down to their supper, then Long Luke broached the subject at once.

"Boss," he said, "I reckon I've bin thinkin' haired all day."

"What about?" Ned Manners asked.

"Wal, it's like this," the cowboy explained, tugging at the ends of his drooping mustache. "It was you es actually shot the b'ar, an' it was Great Moose who trailed it. Thet bein' the case, I don't calculate thet I oughter git the reward."

Ned Manners filled his pipe, lit up, and smiled at the cowboy.

"I have already told you that I don't want the money," he answered, "and the Great Moose will be more than satisfied if you give him a hunting-knife."

An expression of relief came into Long Luke's eyes. He had reckoned out the various things that he would be able to do with the two hundred dollars, and the thought that he was not to have it after all had worried him considerably.

"Thet's es yer like, boss," he agreed, "though I guess it ain't many es would let them dollars slide so easy. Yer git the bulge on the crowd thar. But thar's this—how 'bout Jose?"

This aspect of the affair had not occurred to Ned Manners before, but now that it did he realised what a serious matter it was. The men who had had their sheep stolen were law-abiding men in the ordinary way, but if they were to learn how their sheep had been taken—by this Mexican—there was no telling what might happen.

There's only one thing to be done, Luke," he answered thoughtfully; "we'll have to keep our mouths shut about Jose, or there'll be murder done."

"Lynchin' ain't murder," Long Luke drawled. Ned Manners shrugged his shoulders, knowing that it would be of no use arguing with the cowboy. Men like Long Luke had led rough lives, and they still clung to their primitive ideas of justice when their tempers were fully aroused—a justice that was grimly sure.

"It doesn't matter what you call it," Ned Manners said, "it would mean death for Jose."

"That's so."

"And I should feel responsible for his death," Ned Manners concluded. "No; nothing must be said about him; it will be enough that no more sheep are taken now that the bear is dead."

Long Luke rose to his feet, and pulled on his poncho.

"Right, boss," he agreed. "I'll jost lope over ter Cairn's place an' raise them dollars from him. I'll tell him we tracked the b'ar an' shot it. He knows me, an' I don't reckon es he'll airsk questions."

Ned Manners heard the cowboy talking to his pony in the lean-to, caught the clink of the heavy bit, and settled himself for a quiet smoke over a week-old paper as the tapping of hoofs on the hard ground told him that the man had ridden away.

Riding fast, as was his custom, although there was no hurry, Long Luke soon covered the ground lying between the two ranches, and dismounted before Cairn's shanty, from the window of which a light was shining. He hitched his pony up, pushed the door of the shanty open without ceremony, and entered the room beyond.

Cairn, who was huddled close to the fire for warmth, nodded to the cowboy.

"How's bears, Luke?" he inquired, tossing his tobacco-pouch to the cowboy.

Long Luke filled up methodically before answering, drew an empty box close to the fire, and seated himself before the blaze. He threw off his poncho, and sat only in shirt and leather breeches.

"Sick, I guess?" he drawled.

An eager look came into Cairn's eyes. He had been the

biggest sufferer as far as the sheep-stealing was concerned. "I raise yer two hundred dollars," Long Luke added, with a broad grin. "Thet b'ar's dead es he ever will be."

"When was he killed," Cairn asked eagerly, "and who by?"

"Lairst night—by Manners and self," the cowboy answered.

Cairn rose to his feet, opened a roughly-made cupboard, and drew a canvas money-bag out. He turned his head and looked Long Luke in the eyes.

"Sure?" he insisted.

"Es death!" the cowboy said, with conviction.

For some time past Cairn had been losing sheep more or less regularly, and he was quite ready to pay the promised reward. It was not the value of the sheep that he had lost already, but the ones that might disappear in the future. Therefore he commenced to count the two hundred dollars out on to the rough table, while Long Luke, trying to look unconcerned, thought what a high old time he'd reckon to have over Christmas.

From outside came the clatter of hoofs, and Cairn looked up sharply from his counting.

"Guess thet's Young Bill," Long Luke drawled; "thar ain't another cuss round here rides like thet!"

The cowboy had scarcely finished speaking before the door was flung open, and a young man, in the picturesque garb of the cowboy, came quickly into the room. As Long Luke had guessed, it was the man known as Young Bill, one of Cairn's hands on the ranch.

"Trouble?" the latter jerked, with a stiffening of the muscles round his mouth.

"B'ar again," Bill answered.

"What?" Long Luke yelled in amazement.

Young Bill sniggered.

"Bin bustin' round Jose's saloon," he asked playfully, "or jest got a touch of the sun?"

Long Luke took an angry step forward, and there was a fierce expression in his eyes.

"I reckon I'd rop thet playful dorin'-room tone right now, Young Bill," he said, "an' jest chuck off yer chest whet's happened!"

Young Bill was no coward, but he knew Long Luke's reputation as a shot, and explained quickly.

"Told ye already, Luke," he said, "There's been b'ar at the sheep again—raised one not an hour back."

There was a jingle of money as Cairn swept the dollars back into the canvas bag, and Long Luke swung round angrily in that direction. At sight of the look in the cowboy's eyes, Cairn reached back to his hip, but did not draw.

"Yer reckon I've bin tryin' ter bluff thet b'ar was dead?" Long Luke demanded.

Cairn shrugged his shoulders, and laughed softly. It was an ugly, sneering laugh. He had always believed Long Luke to be a straight man, but he was convinced now that he was mistaken. It was unlikely that there were two flesh-eating bears in one district—very unlikely.

"I never reckon on anything," he sneered; "not even on a dead b'ar, till I see it."

Long Luke's hand hung slackly at his side, but Cairn kept his right hand on the butt of his revolver. The former noticed the action, and a curious little smile twisted his lips. Then, with an appalling suddenness his right arm woke to life, and, despite the fact that Cairn had his hand on his gun, he could not draw it before Long Luke had him covered.

Young Bill leant against the doorpost and looked on. It was no business of his—as yet, anyway.

As for Cairn, he was a plucky enough man, yet he seemed to grow limp before that blue-black barrel. He suddenly remembered Long Luke's reputation as a shot. He pulled himself together, and laughed harshly.

"I guess yer raise me, Luke," he drawled.

"It was the cowboy's turn to laugh; but he did so rather bitterly, at the same time lowering his weapon.

"Thet's so," he admitted, "an' ye're lucky thet ye've got the chance ter play again, fer the boys'll tell yer thet I'm not easy on takin' things like thet. I kim hero ter tell yer thet the b'ar was dead—shot lairst night—an' thet's true. I calculate I could raise them dollars off yer fer it—"

"You had the drop," Cairn admitted calmly.

"But I guess not," the cowboy continued, an angry tone in his voice. "I set out ter stop thet sheep-stealin', an' I guess I'll stop it, if I hev ter shoot fifty b'ars. Then I'll come for them dollars!"

Long Luke moved towards the door; but Cairn hurried after him, and touched him on the arm, holding out his hand at the same time.

"Guess not," Long Luke drawled; "not till I've raised thet b'ar!"

Out into the open went Long Luke, and unhitched his pony from the hook. As he did so Young Bill came out, and swung on to his pony's back.

"Show yer the noo tracks, Luke!" he cried, sent his spurs home, and galloped away at a mad pace into the darkness.

Cowboys are bound to be fine horsemen, and most of them are noted for their recklessness in riding; but even among such men Young Bill stood out alone. It was not only that he could and did ride anything, but it was his way of riding it.

Take this night—dark as pitch, without so much as a star to light the way—trees recently felled lying directly in the pony's path, to right and left fences of barbed-wire—yet he rode as if in broad daylight, and the pony was travelling along a specially-prepared prairie, in which all the dog-holes had been filled up.

And after him—for he was not a man to hold back, and was ready to follow where anyone would lead—went Long Luke. He rode low on his pony's neck, lunched up in a way that an English horseman would probably condemn; but then, your cowboy rides for his living, not for amusement or show. He is a part of his pony, riding close to him, and giving with his every stride, and therefore he does not consider it essential to ride with a stiff back and a crooked wrist.

Away into the darkness went Young Bill, his pony instinctively jumping the felled trees in the darkness, and Long Luke followed a couple of score of yards behind him until they sighted a fire ahead and slackened their pace at the outskirts of a dense flock of sheep.

Round this young Bill circled, until he came to a spot where a small wood reached to the edge of the pasture where the sheep were grazing. Here he slipped from his pony, struck a match, and held the light close to the ground. There was a briskish wind blowing, but the young cowboy was used to such things, and his hands and body screened the match so that it burned quite evenly.

Long Luke had dismounted, too, and he knelt beside the younger man, his eyes close to the ground.

There in the dust was the print of a bear's hind-foot, and as Long Luke examined it an exclamation broke from him.

"What's the cirks, Luke?" Young Bill asked eagerly.

But Long Luke did not answer, only knelt and peered again at the track in the dust. There was a look of amazement on his face, and it could scarcely be wondered at. The track had been made by the bear that Ned Manners had shot the night before. There were the same nails—the one curved curiously—the exact shape. Yet the bear had been killed right enough—of that the cowboy was sure. He rose to his feet, a blank expression on his face.

"Guess it licks me!" he muttered.

"What?" Young Bill demanded.

Long Luke hesitated, then he told the other cowboy the truth. He knew Young Bill to be 'cute, and it was possible that he could find an explanation.

"Thet track," Long Luke said slowly, as if he wished every word to be fully understood, "was made by the b'ar thet was shot lairst night by my boss!"

CHAPTER 6.

More Clues—A Call On Jose—The Great Moose Captured

YOUNG BILL whistled softly, and stared down at the track.

"Luke," he said, "I guess thet thet statement might hev been lairfed at if it hedn't bin made by you."

"It might," Long Luke drawled; "but it wouldn't be healthy fer the humorist."

"Thet's so, I reckon," young Bill agreed. "Still, it ain't eggssactly ornary thet a dead b'ar should leave a trail."

Long Luke lit his pipe and puffed away jerkily. He was puzzled, and not in the best of tempers.

"Thar's someone raisin' a bluff on us," he said at last.

"If thet's so, we'll bluff 'em at thet own game," Young Bill answered, and knelt down to examine the trail again, holding a match close to the ground. In this way he crawled forward on his knees to the next mark, which led towards the trees, and on to the third. Then he rose to his feet, a grin on his face.

"My sakes, Luke," he chuckled, "but I guess we're both mighty young—mighty young an' innocent es babes!"

"Thet so?" Long Luke drawled angrily.

Young Bill dropped to his knees again, beckoning the other man to join him, and held three matches, bunched together, close to the trail.

"Reckon it ain't usual ter find a b'ar walkin' fur on its hind-legs only," he said meaningly.

Then Long Luke saw what the other meant. There were the tracks of the hind-feet plain enough, but there was not a solitary mark of a fore-foot. He knew, too, what it meant.

"Some skunk wearing the b'ar's paws!" he growled, and glared round angrily, as if he expected to find him waiting within easy distance, his hand back on his gun.

"Jose!" he ejaculated. "The Mexican cur!"

"Why?" Young Bill asked sharply. Like most men of his stamp, he was not fond of Mexicans.

In a few words as possible Long Luke described the tracking to Jose's saloon, the finding of the bear there, and the shooting of the beast. As he finished Young Bill swung into the saddle again.

"It's time we fixed that b'ar o' Jose's good an' fine," he drawled.

"Bet on it!" Long Luke agreed, following the other's example. "I guess Jose leaves these yere pairs, or—"

"Or what?" Young Bill asked, as he spurred his pony and headed in the direction of where the saloon lay.

In the darkness Young Bill could not see his companion's face, or he would have seen that there was a grim smile on the tight lips, and that the eyes were hard and keen.

"I don't reckon ter be keen on helpin' even a greaser ter shuffle off this mortal coil," Long Luke answered; "but I guess that sheep-stealin' goin' ter stop right now."

In silence the two men rode hard and fast back towards Jose's saloon. Both felt sure that their surmise was correct, that the Mexican, now that the real bear was dead—shot by Manners—meant to still keep on with the sheep-stealing—so as to supply the fort at a greater profit than if he actually bought the meat—and had hit upon this ingenious method of avoiding suspicion. Among his own countrymen such a move might have proved successful, for few of them are great hunters or trackers; but with these men, born and bred to the prairie and the forest, he was soon to find how different it was.

In this wild ride to Jose's saloon Young Bill once more rode in the manner for which he was famous—get there anyhow, but get there, barring accidents. Once his horse tripped in a hole, and came down, so that his Roman nose touched the grasses, but Young Bill did not seem to even stir in the saddle, and the next second the pony was careering on again, faster than ever, as if eager to atone for his recent blunder. And Long Luke rode with him, his pony going stride for stride with Young Bill's Pinto, for they were evenly matched.

It was close upon midnight when Jose's saloon came in sight—or, rather, a speck of light shone ahead out of the darkness—and a final burst brought the ponies and their riders to the door.

Jose himself, a cigarette between his fingers, stood in the doorway, and his naturally dark face darkened as his eyes fell upon Long Luke. Then he shrugged his narrow shoulders almost imperceptibly, and led the way into the saloon. It was here that the light was burning.

As the two cowboys entered the saloon, Jose, who had already installed himself behind the bar, thrust a bottle and glasses forward for them to help themselves.

"Round another b'ar yet, Jose?" Long Luke drawled, but without helping himself to a drink.

"Bah! Is it likely?" the little Mexican snapped. "It takes a clever man a long time to train a bear, but it takes a fool—pouf—that is all, to kill one!"

"It stopped the sheep-stealin', I guess," Long Luke remarked, still quite carelessly.

Jose laughed, as if enjoying some hidden joke, and rolled a fresh cigarette.

"Is that so?" he answered, still laughing.

Long Luke suddenly leant across the bar and gripped the Mexican's right wrist and dragged it forward until the brown hand lay on the counter. Jose made an upward movement with his left hand, thought better of it, and grinned defiantly.

"Bin burtin' yerself, Jose?" Long Luke queried. "Thar's blood on yer sleeve an' wrist."

"Bin killin' sheep, mebbe," Young Bill suggested.

The colour went from under the Mexican's dark skin, and the hand lying on the counter trembled visibly.

"I—I do not understand," he said slowly. "Is it a joke or—"

"Guess it's the other thing," Long Luke interrupted sharply, and turned to Young Bill. "Jest keep an eye on this greaser, Bill," he said, "while I kind o' prospect round. I reckon some o' them swell doods back in the towns might like ter buy b'ar claws for their watchchains."

A curious gasping noise broke from Jose, and he leant back heavily against the shelf behind him. He watched Long Luke lift the flap of the bar and disappear into the living-rooms beyond, then his eyes came back to Young Bill. The latter was quietly helping himself to a whisky—on the principle of combining business with pleasure—but he used his left hand, for his right lay close to the butt of his gun. He was taking no chances.

Leaning against the shelf, his lips parted slightly to allow for the hurried breathing, Jose could distinctly hear Long Luke moving about in the rooms. He caught the sound of moving furniture, the grating of the home-made chairs as they were pushed back, the slam of a cupboard door as it was



"Been hurtin' yerself, Jose?" Long Luke queried, as he gripped the Mexican's right wrist and dragged it forward until the brown hand lay on the counter.

thrown open, and if ever a man looked to possess a guilty conscience he was that man. All the fight had gone out of him, too, and Young Bill, leaning against the bar, had not the slightest fear of attack. Not that it would have troubled him if the Mexican had yanked a knife from the neck of his shirt, for it was only such things as that which varied the monotony of the cowboy's existence.

The shifting of furniture ceased, and Long Luke, looking glum and puzzled, came out into the bar again. He reached over for the whisky bottle, and took a drink.

Jose had leant harder against the shelf as the man entered, but as he had realised that the cowboy carried nothing in his hands his back had stiffened, and a shred of colour had come back to his cheeks. But in his eyes there was a look of surprise. He glanced back towards the room behind the bar, then he began to roll a cigarette, with fingers which shook only a trifle, and smiled at the two cowboys.

Long Luke took his drink slowly, an uncommon trick with him, and his eyes were upon the Mexican the whole time the glass was at his lips. They were there, too, when he grounded the glass on the bar.

"Jose," he drawled, "yer've fooled us this time good an' fine, but I guess I wouldn't lairf about it too hairy if I was yer, fer we'll raise yer yet!"

Jose shrugged those expressive shoulders of his. All his old confidence had returned, though the look of surprise still lingered in his dark eyes.

"I do not understand," he said calmly. "You shoot my pet bear, then you come here and hold me up while you search the place. Why?"

Long Luke faced the grinning little Mexican angrily.

"Oh, I'll reckon ter tell yer that!" he cried. "I guess we know that it's you who's bin liftin' the sheep, an' I warn yer that es soon as we kin prove it, yer'll swing—sure es death."

The colour vanished from Jose's face again, but even then he contrived to laugh.

"Ah, when you can prove it!" he murmured. "It is possible to prove a thing that is untrue and—"

The Mexican stopped speaking as a distant clatter of hoofs penetrated into the saloon, and both the cowboys looked sharply towards the door. The hour was late, and it was not often that men called at the saloon at such a time. Besides, even then they were usually solitary travellers, or perhaps two men, but this time—

"I make it four men ridin'," Long Luke said.

"Sure," Young Bill agreed, and crowded quickly to the door. It may seem remarkable that he and Long Luke could say so confidently how many horsemen were approaching, yet

it is quite a common accomplishment for men of their calling.

Out of the darkness four men came riding, and between the two leaders another man ran on foot, his wrists fastened to the men's riatas. They made straight for the saloon, and dismounted without a word, Young Bill drawing back into the saloon.

Into the saloon strode Cairn, his face hard and set, his riata coiled in his hands, one end of it knotted round the wrists of Great Moose. The latter walked proudly, and there was no sign of fear in his bearing or in his eyes. Behind him came Ned Manners, and two ranchers named Harvey and Boyce. These two were both men who had lived and worked in Canada all their lives, had been there at a time when a man literally carried his life in his hands, and even now, with the mounted police only a mile or two away at Fort Myers, they were ready to take the law into their own hands—and rough hands they were—when they considered that they had a grievance.

Ned Manners crossed quickly to where Long Luke stood by the bar.

"They've got Great Moose!" he whispered hoarsely. "No," the cowboy answered sarcastically; "I tho't they was jest playin' a game with him."

"It's a game that'll mean his death!" Ned Manners continued excitedly. "After you left to-night, Cairn and the others asked me to join them in a hunt, saying that sheep had been taken after you had called for the reward. We rode off at once, and found the Great Moose in the woods, and at his girdle—those!"

Long Luke glanced quickly at the Indian's girdle, then he realised why the man had been taken a prisoner. From the broad leather band hung the hind feet of a bear. Little thongs of hide were fastened to them, so that they could be tied on to a man's feet. As Long Luke saw this, Jose did so, too.

"These dogs are the curse of the country!" he sneered.

Boyce and Harvey had crossed towards the bar, as if with the intention of having a drink, but Cairn, his face dark with anger, waved them back. He had lost more sheep than any man in that part, and his anger was hotter in proportion. He swung round and faced Great Moose, who stood stiffly upright, his bound hands before him.

"Speak the truth, you cur!" he cried. "Speak the truth afore we shoot you!"

So murderous did Cairn look that Ned Manners stepped quickly between him and the Indian.

"Give the man a fair trial and justice," he said quietly.

"Trial?" Cairn sneered. "Look at the feet hanging from his belt! Isn't that trial enough?"

Jose leaned well forward over the bar, and there was an eager look in his eyes. His face was flushed darkly, and his thin fingers gripped and ungripped on the edge of the bar.

"In my country the thief would be shot!" he cried. "All thieves are shot without mercy!"

Jest es well left, then," Long Luke sneered, and crossed the room until he stood beside Ned Manners.

"Guess I stand in with the boss, boys," he drawled. "Great Moose can hev a trial—right here an' now."

"Sure es death," Young Bill agreed, joining the other two.

Cairn glanced at the determined faces of the three men, and even in the heat of his anger he could see that it would be of no avail opposing them in this matter. He glared past Ned Manners into the face of Great Moose, but the Indian stared back at him steadily.

"We'll keep your death for the dawn!" he sneered.

CHAPTER 7.

The Trial of Great Moose—The Indian Speaks—Where is Jose?—Missing!

THE preparations for the trial were not elaborate, but, in their own way, they were complete. A bench was dragged to the bar, and on this Cairn, Long Luke, Ned Manners, and Boyce seated themselves, while Harvey leant against the door. The riata had been loosed from Great Moose's wrists, but even then he had not the slightest chance of making a dash for liberty.

Jose, behind the bar still, only the slight twitching of his mouth betraying his nervousness, handed a couple of bottles and glasses over the bar, and Boyce promptly filled them, placing them at the feet of the men who were to mete out life or death to Great Moose. Ned Manners made a motion of refusal, but Boyce took no heed of it.

And Jose stood waiting—anyone watching him could have seen that there was some purpose in his mind—waited for something to happen, and it was soon plain what it was. As Cairn, the angry expression still on his face, rose to his feet,

Jose slipped back into the room behind the bar. No one saw him go, for every eye was upon the Great Moose.

"The Indian's innocent, I'll swear it, Luke!" Ned whispered.

"Guess so, too, boss," the cowboy answered; "but I reckon thet we cairn't play the game till the cairds air dealt."

Cairn, his eyes never leaving the face of the Indian, stooped and picked up his glass. He drank coolly, until the tumbler was half emptied, and wiped his sleeve across his mouth.

"Great Moose," he said, and his voice was hoarse with anger, "you know why we've got you. To-night we caught you prowling in the woods, and we know for what you've been using them bear's feet. I've lost sheep, as every man here has, and I know that you're the skunk who took 'em. But there's tender-hearted men here"—there was an obvious sneer in the rancher's voice, but the others took no notice of it—"and so we're going to let you lie about it, say that you didn't steal them sheep—course you!—but I reckon that all the lying in the world isn't going to stop you dying."

"The words are not those of a man but of a foolish squaw," Great Moose said, as his accuser paused.

Cairn whipped his hand back angrily to his gun, but only to have his wrist gripped by Long Luke with a strength that bruised the flesh.

"Jest run easy, pard," the cowboy drawled. "Yer ain't runnin' this yere cirks on yer own even if yer hev lost the most sheep. Run easy!"

"That's right," Boyce agreed, for he was an older man than Cairn, and was none too pleased that he had taken the lead. "I reckon that we're runnin' this court o' justice on strictly moral lines, even if that hes ter be a bit o' shootin' ter keep things nice an' peaceful."

Long Luke released Cairn's wrist, and the latter made no further attempt to draw his gun. Even in his anger he realised what might happen if he tried to settle the prisoner right away.

This little scene had not moved Great Moose in the least, but he threw the cowboy a glance of gratitude. The Indian knew well enough that if it had not been for Long Luke and Ned Manners his death would have been short and sudden. There would have been no trial—only the execution.

"What I calculates that we oughter be doin'," Harvey observed from the doorway, "is ter hear the Injun's story!"

"A waste of time!" Cairn sniped. "We found him in the woods, I reckon, the bar's hind-feet at his belt, an' thet's good enough fer me!"

Long Luke, who was leaning against the bar now, shifted lazily on to his other foot, and twirled the ends of his long moustache.

"I kind o' tumbled that yer wanted ter finish Great Moose right now," he drawled; "but then, yer see, yer ain't the only ones consarned, an' thet bein' so, ye'd best be rounded in with the others."

"Yere, yero, Luke!" Boyce agreed readily. And Cairn saw that he was not to have his own way, and that the Indian—he really did believe him to be guilty of the sheep-stealing—was to have as fair a trial as possible.

"So fur as I kin foller," Long Luke continued, "Great Moose was found in the woods with them bar's feet at his belt, an' because o' thet, yer reckoned he was the thief."

"Sure es death!" Harvey growled from the doorway; "though that don't stop us giving the prisoner a fair trial, we bein' dead sure enlightened an' full o' desires fer peace, even if we don't git the article frequent. I begs ter suggest that Long Luke be the judge."

"Yero, yero!" Boyce agreed eagerly.

Without waiting to be elected in more formal manner, Long Luke lifted a rocking-chair from behind the bar on to the counter, seated himself in it, crossed his legs comfortably, and looked down upon the other men. A stranger chancing into the saloon would have said that the lean-faced cowboy, rocking slightly to and fro, in the chair, was probably the chairman of some kind of informal meeting, but he certainly would not have said that the man was a judge—a judge, with power to take life.

"Boys," the cowboy drawled, "I guess I'm feelin' a clear foot taller wi' pride et bein' elected fer this yere out o' the or'nary persition. I may add that it ain't usual fer me ter occupy elevated positions—cept on buckers—but it's up agin me ter do me best."

"Let her rip!"

It would have been ludicrous had it not been for the figure of the Indian, the stern faces of the men, and Harvey guarding the door. That it was no joke was apparent, too, when Cairn rose sharply to his feet and faced Long Luke. There was passion in every line of the man's face, hatred in his eyes.

"Jedge," he cried, even in his anger giving the cowboy his recently-acquired title, "yer know why we're here, an' I'll tell yer all thet yer don't know. Yer kim along this evenin' ter claim the reward fer—"

"Let that pass!" Long Luke interrupted sharply. "I reckon it ain't etiquette ter mention every little thing thet a jedge may hev had ter do!"

"Wal, airfter yer called," Cairn continued, "an' told me thet the flesh-eatin' b'ar was dead one o' the boys rode in ter say thet they'd follered the tracks o' the b'ar into a wood. It was then thet Harvey, Boyce, and me called on Manners ter git airfter the b'ar. We toted along ter the woods, an' thar we strouk the sheep-stealer—thet thief right thar!"

Cairn pointed a quivering hand at the Indian, but the latter did not stir even a muscle of his fine face.

"Speakin' now—put in, "I guess thet don't prove nothin'."

"An' thet!" Cairn cried fiercely, pointing to the feet of the bear hanging from the Indian's girdle. "Ain't thet proof?"

Ned Manners glanced quickly from the feet to the face of the Indian, and the doubt that had entered his mind was at once dispelled. Great Moose had not the bearing of a guilty man.

"He may explain how he came by them!" Manners said sharply.

Cairn laughed harshly, and without mirth.

"Silence!" Long Luke drawled, still rocking slowly backwards and forwards. "It ain't correct ter laugh in a court o' justice." He dropped his hand back to his hip, and stopped rocking.

Cairn stopped laughing, and contented himself with glaring at the Indian.

"Great Moose," Long Luke said, addressing the Indian now, "I guess it's up against yer ter say how yer come by them b'ar's feet."

Great Moose stiffened, showing his fine figure to its best advantage. His head was raised proudly, and he looked from man to man in the room. His eyes were contemptuous when they rested upon Cairn, angry as they looked for a moment at Boyce, expressionless, as they usually were, when they rested finally upon Long Luke.

The words of the Long Rider bring warmth to the heart of Great Moose, the Indian commenced in his deep voice. "To the Long Rider has the just mind of the Great Spirit been given, so that he may know the good from the bad, the brave from the thief, the lying tongue from one that speaks fair words."

"Git on!" Cairn growled savagely.

"But for the Long Rider, Great Moose would have journeyed to the happy hunting-grounds by now," the Indian continued. "This would not have brought sorrow to him, for most who are dear to him are there, and they call to him softly all day long, and sing to him through the watches of the night. Even the tracks through the forest seem to lead to them, and Great Moose will be ready to follow when the time comes."

Great Moose took a step forward, and into his eyes came a look of anger.

"But the Great Moose and the men of his tribe were never thieves!" he cried.

"How about the b'ar's feet?" Cairn sneered. "Guess yer ain't goin' ter suggest thet we didn't find 'em at yer belt, an' thet they ain't the feet thet made the track ter the spot whar the sheep were killed?"

Just for a moment a slight smile curled the Indian's lips, then his face resumed its usual stolidity.

"Great Moose has already said that he will speak the truth," he answered. "Listen! This night, shortly after the moon had risen dimly, shortly after the Great Spirit commenced to call from the waving branches of the trees of the forest, Great Moose entered the forest, meaning to rest there for the night. He kindled a fire of dry sticks for the night air was cold, shielding them round with blankets. Then he saw something that drove the thought of sleep from his brain."

The Indian threw out a hand dramatically, as if to emphasize his words, before continuing.

"Beside the fire Great Moose found the print of a bear's foot—one that he had seen before. It was the print of the bear that had stolen sheep, that Great Moose had helped the Long Rider and his white brother to track here, so that they shot it."

"Dead b'ars cairn't steal sheep!" Cairn sneered.

"The words of the white man are foolish," Great Moose answered quietly. "Great Moose saw that no bear walked on the feet, for they touched at the toe more than at the heel. He knew then that a man walked on the feet, so that when he stole the sheep others might say that it was a bear who was the thief. Then Great Moose began to follow the track, and so he came upon a man wearing the feet, and took them from him."

"Who was the man?" Ned Manners asked sharply.

"The Mexican who lives here," Great Moose answered.

"Thet does it, pard!" Long Luke drawled. "It was Jose who had the b'ar trained ter steal sheep, an' I reckon he

calculated ter go on with the job airfter we'd settled with the b'ar."

"I guess we'll want more proof than thet!" Cairn sneered, for he was not prepared to admit himself wrong so easily.

Great Moose took one of the feet from his belt, bent down, and inserted the toe of his moccasin into it. He tried to force the rest of his foot in, but it was of no use. He had the long foot of the Indian, and to have got it into the paw of the bear was obviously impossible.

"Is that proof?" he asked quietly.

Long Luke rose from the rocking-chair, as if to give more force to his words.

"Prisoner," he said, and his hand was on his gun as if to show that he was not in the mood to have his verdict interfered with. "I guess yer discharged!"

"Also," Young Bill put in, nodding his head towards the door, "it's up against us ter jail Jose!"

At the mention of the Mexican's name Cairn rose sharply, vaulted the bar, and sprang into the room at the back. If he had expected to find the Mexican there he was disappointed, for the place was empty. He was convinced, as the others were, that Great Moose was innocent, and that being the case, he meant to capture and punish the real thief.

"Gone!" Great Moose said. "Great Moose heard the horses taken from the door!"

"Then why didn't yer say so?" Long Luke yelled, running from the doorway.

"Is the accused man to mind the horses of the white men?" the Indian answered, a trifle bitterly.

The door was flung open, and the men found that the Indian was right enough. The ponies were gone!

"He'll pay fer this!" Cairn shouted wildly.

"Got ter catch him first, pard," Long Luke drawled. "With them ponies he's got an almighty fine stair, an' I reckon thet he'll reach Wellington almost afore we kin git fresh ponies."

Great Moose, the hanging-lamp, which he had taken from its hook, in his hand, came out into the open, and the white men moved aside, knowing that the Indian could be trusted to learn more of Jose's escape from the tracks on the ground than they could.

Moving slowly, dropping to his hands and knees, the lamp close to the ground, the Indian moved from place to place. When he rose to his feet there was a slight smile on his lips.

"Would the white men capture the real thief?" he asked.

"Ay, an' kill him!" Cairn cried fiercely.

"Ain't no chance," Harvey put in; "got too long a stair."

Great Moose examined the ground again as if to make sure of something before speaking further.

"The Mexican has the brain of a squaw!" he said contemptuously. "He knows that the foot of a man leaves a smaller trail than the hoof of a horse, and because of that he is journeying on foot."

"Sure!" Cairn asked eagerly.

"Great Moose is never on the wrong trail," the Indian answered proudly. "The hoofs of the ponies lead many ways, showing that there was no man to guide them; but the feet of the Mexican point away—so." Great Moose stretched a hand towards the north. "Would the white men follow the thief?" he cried.

"Yes!" Cairn answered, between his teeth; "we'll follow him—sure as death!"

"Then let them bring ponies here at dawn," Great Moose said, "and their Indian brother will lead them on the trail. To-night the journeying would be slow, but by the light of day, with the swift ponies beneath them, they will soon come upon the Mexican."

Cairn, his face flushed with anger, faced the others.

"Boys," he cried, "we take the trail at dawn!"

CHAPTER 8.

To Save Jose—Long Luke Consents—The Ride of the Rescuers—Who Will Win?

IN foot, some of them cursing beneath their breath at the unaccustomed form of exercise, the men struck out through the night, each making for his own ranch, only Great Moose remaining behind at the saloon, ready to start on the trail at dawn. That he would be there to do the work not one of the men doubted, for the Indian had suffered in the place of the man whom he was to hunt down, and because of that it was certain that he would not fail.

Ned Manners and Long Luke strode away together, making for the former's ranch.

"I tell yer what it is, boss," the cowboy drawled, "I'm reckonin' ter hev a real peach of a time ter-morrow."

Ned Manners started as if the other had roused him from a train of thought.

"What will they do to Jose when they get him?" he asked. He knew what the answer would be, yet, somehow, he felt that he wanted to hear it from this man's lips.

"Lynch him, I guess!" Long Luke answered coolly.

"Ah!"

In that simple ejaculation, coming sharply from Ned Manners's lips, there was a world of horror. He had thought that all such things as lynchings were things of the past, but he knew better now, and that indirectly he was going to be the cause of Jose's death unless he could find some means of preventing it. The man had stolen sheep from him, as he had from others, but—

"Luke," he said sharply, "the man must be saved."

"I reckon not," the cowboy answered with decision.

Ned Manners glanced sideways into his companion's face, and saw the hard lines of determination there. He opened his lips to speak, but shut them again, deciding to say no more on the subject until the shanty was reached. Then, even if he had to use force, he meant to try and save the Mexican from the awful fate which would so soon be bearing down upon him. That he would escape Great Moose and the others was very improbable. Ned knew, for he had already learnt the Indian's skill as a tracker.

It took some time to reach the shanty, but it was still some hours before the dawn when the two men entered it. Ned Manners at once lit the lamp, and threw logs on to the fire, which was still smouldering. Long Luke took a blanket from a corner, and prepared to sleep on the floor.

"There ain't time for burn, boss," he remarked. "Best git a sleep while yer can."

"There's something to be settled first, Luke," Ned answered firmly, seating himself by the fire.

Long Luke plugged his pipe with tobacco, lit up, and seated himself on an empty box.

"Let her rip, boss," he drawled. "I jost love these evenin' meetin's—saves wastin' time over sleep."

Through the smoke of his pipe Ned eyed the cowboy, and he knew as he followed the hard lines on the man's face that he had got no easy task before him.

"Luke," he said quietly, "we've got to save Jose from being lynched."

Long Luke glanced up sharply, and his mouth was hard and firm. There was an ugly glitter in his eyes.

"I guess we're doin' it, anyway," he drawled, "so thet fixes it for sure."

Then Ned Manners played his trump card, and played it well.

"Suppose I warn the police at Fort Myers?" he said slowly. "They have strict orders to put down such practices, you know."

Long Luke rose to his feet, an oath on his lips, his hand going back mechanically for his gun, but Ned made no attempt to draw his weapon. He just sat by the fire, the trace of a smile on his lips, and eyed the cowboy coolly.

"I guess you don't warn 'em, boss," Long Luke drawled. Ned Manners rose to his feet and moved quietly towards the door. He knew well enough that he was taking desperate chances, but he did not hesitate. His British blood, unused to such things, would not permit him to allow Jose to be lynched without making an effort to save him, especially as he would feel more or less responsible for the man's death.

"Hands up!" Long Luke cried as Ned reached the door.

"Shoot if you want to, Luke," he said.

Long Luke had raised his gun, but now he lowered it.

"I am going to remind you of one thing," Ned continued quickly. "I once thought that I should never have to—I don't like talking about such things—but you force it on me. A year ago I saved your life."

"Sure es death," Long Luke muttered.

"You swore then," Ned continued quickly, "that you would do as much for me if you got the chance. Did you mean it?"

"I reckon," Long Luke answered shortly.

"Well, I don't want my life saved, but I demand—ay, demand—the life of Jose. To-morrow you will ride on the trail with me, and help me to save the man from the hands of the others if it is possible."

A troubled look came into the cowboy's eyes, and he fidgeted with the revolver that he still gripped in his hand.

"It ain't to be done, boss," he said at last.

"Why?"

"I'd be goin' back on the boys, I reckon."

"And on me if you don't help save Jose," Ned said quietly. "Which is it to be—the boys or me?"

Then Long Luke thrust the revolver back into his belt, and held out a hand.

"It's you, boss," he said hoarsely.

Ned Manners had won, but he took care not to show any signs of triumph, knowing that they might irritate Luke. Instead, he quietly discussed plans for the morrow, and before the two men lay down in their blankets to snatch an hour or two of sleep everything was arranged. Their plan

was a simple one, but it was the only one that had any chance of succeeding, and it was risky enough in all conscience.

Until half an hour before the dawn the two men slept, then Long Luke, trained to such practices, rose and woke Ned. They snatched a hasty breakfast, and went out to the lean-to stable. There were two ponies there, fast and in hard condition, and the men saddled them in silence. Now that they were about to start on their mission—the freeing of Jose from desperate men like Cairn and his companions—they realised the danger that lay before them.

It was still dark when the men mounted their ponies, and the dawn was only just breaking when they reached a patch of rocky ground only a few hundred yards from the saloon. In one place the rocks lay piled to a height of many feet, the mouth of a cave showing darkly in the centre. There was room to lead the horses into this shelter, and there they hobbled them for greater security. From the mouth of the cavern the men could see the saloon plainly, and anything that happened near to it.

The light of day was fast growing stronger when Long Luke suddenly gripped Ned by the arm, pointing away with one lean hand to the rocks littering the ground.

"Great Moose!" he whispered.

Ned followed the direction of the other's hand, and his keen eyes made out a feather, some sixty yards distant, showing above a boulder.

"It's an Indian, Luke!" he agreed excitedly. "But how do you know that it's the Great Moose?"

"Guess it's much the same as a hoss turnin' tail on ter the wind," Long Luke drawled. "Kind of instinct, I reckon. Jest watch, anyway."

In the shadows of the cavern the two men were quite hidden, Ned craning forward close to the entrance, and watching the approach of the Great Moose. Why was the Indian acting in this manner? he asked himself; and his unspoken question was answered by Long Luke.

"Reckon he's struck our trail, boss," he observed, "an' is jest totin' along it ter make sure how it pans out."

That this explanation was the right one there could be little doubt, for Great Moose halted forty yards from the cavern, knelt for a second or two with his face close to the dust, then rose to his feet and trotted off to the saloon, into which he disappeared.

The light of day was rapidly growing stronger.

"They're right there already, boss," Long Luke said, pointing to the ponies tethered outside the saloon. "Thar's Young Bill's pinto, Cairn's yellor, an' them greys o' Boyce an' Harvey. I reckon they'll be stairtin' soon now Great Moose is with 'em."

Long Luke had scarcely spoken before the men named emerged from the saloon, Great Moose with them. The white men mounted, but the Indian remained on foot, moving forward with his eyes on the ground.

"We shall be able to outride them easily," Ned whispered, seeing how slowly the others were moving.

"Guess not," the cowboy drawled. "Jest yer wait till the Injin strikes the trail good an' fine, an' yer'll see then thet he'll make the pace fairer enough."

For a few hundred yards Great Moose advanced slowly, the four horsemen close behind him, then he could be seen to grasp Cairn's stirrup-leather, and the horses were thrown into a canter.

A cloud of red dust behind them, thrown up by the hoofs of the ponies, the fleeing Mexican somewhere ahead, the little party rode off on the trail, but in the shelter of the wood the two men waited, though Ned fidgeted nervously, as if anxious to be following at once.

"They won't recognise us at this distance, Luke," Ned said sharply, when Cairn and the others had covered a mile.

"The whites wouldn't," the cowboy answered, "but I'd bet on Great Moose spottin' us for sure," he reckoned they'll hav ter git another mile afore we dare follow."

The covering of this next mile by Cairn and his companions seemed to Ned to be very slow, though in reality it was covered at a fast canter. Great Moose had evidently struck a warm trail, for he ran fast, his right hand gripping Cairn's stirrup-leather, his left occasionally pointing out some mark on the ground, his eyes always turned towards the dust.

Vengeance was following hard upon Jose's heels.

At last Long Luke gave the signal to mount, much to Ned's relief, and the two men swung into the saddle, rode out of the wood, and set off at a canter in the wake of the others, who were practically hidden now by the cloud of red dust left behind them.

"Thar's only about three places Jose could hev made for, boss," Long Luke observed, "an' we'll know which he's took in about twenty miles."

"Not before?" Ned asked sharply, for he was all anxiety to get ahead of the trackers.

"Guess not, boss," the cowboy answered shortly. "Thia ain't a picnic, so it don't do ter take chances."

Riding on steadily, keeping always about two miles behind

the men in front, Ned and Long Luke rode on. Luckily for them they were crossing prairie, unbroken for miles, so that there was no chance of them losing sight of the men ahead.

In this way mile after mile was covered, until Ned began to wonder how Great Moose, being on foot, was able to keep up such a pace. It was remarkable, too, that he could follow the trail, he thought. But Long Luke thought nothing of it, for he had seen the Indians at work before, and knew their extraordinary powers in this direction.

Ten miles were covered without the pace being slackened, and the ten lengthened out into fifteen.

Twenty miles!

Ahead the ground was broken now. Straight ahead rose great hills, a canyon dividing them in one place, and as the men ahead advanced in their cloud of red dust, Long Luke reined in his pony to a standstill, and stood up in the stirrups, watching.

He saw the men ahead halt—or knew that they did so, as the cloud of dust began to settle down—then saw them bend away to the left and ride on.

"Jose's made fer Wellington, boss," he said, with conviction, and something like triumph in his voice. "We'll head them off fer sure now."

"But how?" Ned asked in amazement.

"Through the canyon," Long Luke answered. "It's a rough ride, I guess, but it'll put us a clear two miles ahead o' the others."

Without waiting for more, only thinking of the man he meant to save, Ned put spurs to his pony and rode straight for the mouth of the canyon, Long Luke beside him, and it was not long before they entered it, for they were riding hard now. An English horse would already have been knocked up; but these ponies, mean-looking though they were, were good for many miles more yet, and their spirit would not be broken until they dropped from sheer fatigue.

On both sides of the canyon rose darkly—just rock and scrub, and here and there a stunted, twisted tree, which seemed to hang in its place by little less than a miracle.

Beneath the men was hard ground, patches of grass here and there, dotted with great boulders. It was certainly a rough path, but neither of the men thought of drawing rein. Even Long Luke, now that he was fairly started on his mission, was as eager as Ned to outwit Cairn and the others. The spirit of rivalry, the sporting instinct of the West, was roused in him, and he would have ridden just as recklessly over ground many times worse than this valley of the canyon.

CHAPTER 9.

Ride On!—Too Late!—The Dash to Save Jose—The Passing Train.

THE boulders lay thickly in the path of the riders, and they left everything to their ponies. The nimble little animals knew the danger, and dodged them only as such ponies can. Round the larger boulders they swung, throwing showers of stones from beneath their flying hoofs, and the smaller ones they took in their stride, with the neatness and certainty of cats.

And so out of the canyon, and once more on to comparatively level ground.

Round again Long Luke led the way, and, keeping the hills on his left hand, galloped forward as if the quarry was already in sight.

A couple of miles ahead, cutting through the hills, was the railway-line running from Wellington, but before this was reached a second canyon, not so large as the first, had to be passed.

"You don't think that Jose has made for somewhere else than Wellington?" Ned asked anxiously, as he forced his pony on.

"Guess not, boss," the cowboy answered. "Wellington ain't more'n a few miles from here, but Muggerry's a matter o' thirty, Louisberg ain't fer less—no, it ain't likely; 'less Jose's a durned fool."

The railway-line ahead was plain enough, running like a snake across the prairie. At one time it had been fenced in by a rail-and-post fence, but this had long since been broken down by cattle, so that the line now ran along without guard of any kind until it entered the cutting through the hills.

"Look!" Ned cried excitedly.

"Jose!" Long Luke answered sharply.

Right ahead, his figure showing plainly, stood a man. He was beside the line, and was staring away in the direction of Wellington, as if looking for something. He was not looking without purpose, for the whistle of a train very far off—sound travels a long way over the prairies—was heard.

"In time!" Ned cried triumphantly.

But Ned Manners called out too soon, and the triumph died quickly from his face.

From the canyon ahead four men came riding swiftly, and with them was a man on foot. A glance at them was enough to show Luke and Ned that they were Cairn and the others, led by Great Moose.

The man standing by the railway-line—it was Jose right enough—turned sharply, caught

sight of the horsemen, and dashed madly across the line, as if hoping that he would be able to outrun the horses. And as he ran Cairn and the others, their quarry in sight, spurred forward, yelling like madmen, their desire for vengeance hot within them.

Away went Jose, behind him rode Cairn and his men, gaining upon him at every hoof-beat, and last came Long Luke and Ned, low on their horses' necks, riding to catch the others up, not pausing to think what they would be able to do even if they succeeded.

Only for a few hundred yards did Jose run through the grass of the prairie before Young Bill, who had forced his fleet pony ahead of the others, flung his riata. The thin hide rope curled and sailed through the air, hovered over the running man's head like a bird of prey, then fell. The pony was jerked back on to its haunches, the riata closed about the Mexican's arms, binding them fast to his sides, and he was wrenched to the ground.

With a rush the others were upon him, surrounding him so that he could not escape, even if he had the nerve left to make the attempt, but without binding him.

It was up to this little group that Long Luke and Ned Manners rode, to be greeted by a cheer from Young Bill,



This picture illustrates one of the many amusing incidents in next Thursday's long, complete "School Tale, entitled "Tom Merry's Schooldays," by Martin Clifford

who was elated by his success. Cairn only glared at them, while Great Moose left Cairn's side and stationed himself by Ned.

"The Great Moose has not failed," he said quietly. Ned Manners answered nothing, but threw a pitying glance at Jose, who had scrambled to his feet. From head to foot he was caked with dust, and his face was drawn and haggard with the exertions of the night and his present fear.

Cairn pointed to his left, to where the railway-line ran into the cutting through the hills. On the right-hand side of the cutting there was a rough platform, which looked as if it had been meant for a platform, though it was situated a matter of twenty feet above the line, and on this a few trees were growing weedly, gaining a scant sustenance from the rocky soil to which they clung.

"There!" Cairn cried fiercely. Tethering all their ponies into a bunch, Luke's and Ned's included, so that they could not wander, the men escorted Jose to this platform, Cairn and Young Bill holding his arms. Up on to the ledge of rock the men mounted, and as Jose saw the trees and knew what was going to happen, he dropped to his knees and fairly howled for mercy. Ned Manners at once took a step forward, as if to interfere now, but Long Luke gripped his arm and held him back.

"Not yet, boss," he whispered. From a mile or so away came the whistle of the approaching train, and every man on the rock heard it.

"Reckon we've got ter sling this cur up afore thet comes along," Cairn said fiercely. "Guess we may as well give the passengers somethin' ter look at."

As he spoke Cairn took the riata from Young Bill's hands, and slung the noosed end over a branch of the nearest tree. Boyce and Harvey pushed Jose forward.

The whistle of the train was much nearer now, and Long Luke saw that it would enter the cutting in a couple of minutes. The eyes of the cowboy were sparkling, and in them was the look of a man who sees a desperate chance and means to take it. He bent his lips close to Ned's ear.

"The train, boss," he whispered. "Hold the boys back. Let Jose jump fer the roof as she passes."

Ned set his teeth as he heard the words, and dropped his hand ready to the butt of his gun without any of the others noticing the action.

Without resistance, Cairn threw the loop of the riata over Jose's head.

"Swing on her, boys!" he cried, gripping the hide, and the others sprang forward to obey. "Hands up!"

There was no mistaking the meaning of the order, or that the two men meant business.

Mad with rage, but with his hands above his head, Cairn faced Ned and Long Luke. Harvey made a movement to

drop one of his hands, but before he could do anything he was covered by Long Luke.

"I guess I shouldn't try it ef I was yer," the latter drawled. "I used ter be rather a sure shot, an' I ain't reckonin' ter be much out o' practice. Keep yer hands up!"

Frightened though he was to the point of fainting, Jose saw that a chance of life was being given to him.

Ned Manners moved sideways, his eyes always on the men he was covering, until he reached the Mexican.

"Wait," he whispered. "Jump for the roof of the train as she comes past here."

Cairn and his companions were brave enough men, but even they dared not move in the face of those two unflinching pistols. Long Luke was known to be a dead shot, and Ned was also no novice. An attempt at resistance would certainly mean the death of two of them, and—

The train shrieked as it drew close to the mouth of the cutting, and Jose crouched close to the edge of the ledge. At the pace that the train was travelling there would be little danger in the leap. Even if there had been risk it would have been better than waiting for certain death.

Once more the train shrieked, a cloud of smoke billowed round the men on the ledge, and Jose leapt.

When the smoke cleared the train was gone, carrying Jose with it, and Ned knew that he and Luke had succeeded in saving the Mexican. Quietly he dropped his hand, and thrust his revolver back into its holster. With a shrug of his shoulders, Long Luke did the same, and the two men stood defenceless before the infuriated Cairn and his men.

"Pards," Long Luke drawled, "I guess this is whar yer do some fancy shootin'."

With an oath, Cairn yanked out his gun, but before he could use it Young Bill gripped him by the wrist.

"They've bluffed us good an' fine, boss," he drawled, "an' I reckon we're sports enough ter take it without shootin'."

Perhaps Cairn realised then how near the lynching would have been to murder; anyway, he turned on his heels and strode down towards where the ponies were tethered. The others followed slowly, and a few minutes later the whole party were making their way towards Dalgely.

It was late that night that the men came in sight of the saloon, and it was then that Young Bill laughed softly.

"Boys," he said, "we've got ter git a noo saloon-keeper."

In a moment Long Luke had spurred ahead, slipped off his pony, and entered the saloon. When the others followed into the building, they found him behind the bar.

"Boys," he observed, "let me introduce yer ter the noo proprietor—Long Luke."

THE END.

(Next Thursday, "Tom Merry's Schooldays," a long, complete school tale, by Martin Clifford. Please order your copy of THE GEM in advance.)

Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Rex Allingham, a typical British schoolboy, kicks the winning goal for Stormpoint College in an important match, and so gets in favour of Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school. But Jardon, a Fifth Former noted for his strength, bullies Rex, and under the pretence of asking him to make some toast gets him into his study and knocks him down. "I say, Jardon, do you want me to make this toast for you?" asked Rex, rising and facing him, as the bully gave him a vicious kick. (Now go on with the story.)

assumption that you are not an ass, there is no reason why you should behave like one, and kick."

"You little viper!" cried Jardon. "I'll— All right, I will show you. Go on making that toast. I shall have something more to say to you when it is made."

Rex went on with his task, and the bully laid the cloth, and got his tea ready. Rex stuck the edge of the plate between the bars after each slice he made, until he got it nearly red-hot. He buttered each slice as he went on, and as he appeared to be performing his task properly, Jardon did not interfere with him.

Just before the tea was ready, Jardon left his study, look-

An Interruption.

"I not only want you to make it for me, but I intend that you shall make it for me!" shouted Jardon.

"Ah, in that case, I will request you not to kick me. It might cause trouble, you know. I would not like to say anything to hurt the feelings of a thorough gentleman like you."

"Fury! What do you mean by that?"

"Are you not a thorough gentleman?"

"Of course I am, you little cad!"

"I prefer to be a little cad, after the information you have kindly given me concerning yourself. I would just point out to you that I am not a football, and on the

NEXT THURSDAY: A Tale of School Life and "TOM MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS."

ing the door on the outside, because he felt perfectly certain Rex would otherwise bolt. Even now he was not at all certain that he would not make his escape by the window. However, the bully soon returned with his chum Symes, and they were a well-matched pair.

"Now, then, you charming little swindler," cried Jardon, "hand up that toast."

Needless to say, Rex took up the plate by its cooler side, and handed it to Jardon, who caught hold of it without the slightest suspicion. The next moment he uttered a wild yell, and flung the plate into the air. Some of the toast dropped on his own head, and some of it went into Symes's lap, while the plate went to the floor with a crash.

"Too hot, Jardon?" inquired Rex calmly.

"Ah! Oh! I fancy you will find it a lot too hot before so very long!" yelled Jardon. "Why, you little fiend! Here, give me that riding-whip down, Symes. If I don't have vengeance! Ah, would you, you little brute! Help me to hold him, Symes. These kids need a lesson, and this one is going to have it."

Rex had no chance against the two bullies, who showed him no mercy. The scene that followed was utterly brutal, and when at last they released him, Rex's face was very white. The probabilities are they would not have released him then, had not someone knocked violently at the door. The two bullies glanced at each other for a moment, then Jardon put the whip up, and, opening the door, admitted Mr. Salmon.

He was a man of about thirty, with a clean-shaven face, and very keen eyes. That he was a clever man, one glance at his face was sufficient to reveal—in fact, he would not have been a master at that college had he not been clever.

"What is the meaning of this disturbance, Jardon?" demanded Mr. Salmon.

"I consider it my duty, sir, to chastise a boy who dares to refer to you by the ridiculous name of Seaslug."

"I am glad to hear that you do your duty, Jardon," said Mr. Salmon quietly. He knew perfectly well what his nickname was, and he also knew that this was not the reason why there had been any bullying. "Did you refer to me by that name, Allingham?"

"I have done so, sir."

"I am perfectly aware of it. I require this question answered. Do you consider that Jardon struck you for that reason?"

"No, sir."

"Of course he did!" cried Symes. "He called you Old Seaslug, sir, in our presence, and Jardon said he would not allow such gross insolence."

"Do you deny that, Rex?"

"It does not matter, sir."

"That is for me to judge. Answer my question."

"I never mentioned your name, sir."

"Why, you utter little rascal!" cried Jardon. "You certainly did not mention Mr. Salmon's proper name."

"How came that toast upon the floor, Allingham?" demanded Mr. Salmon very sternly. "Silence, Jardon! I am not asking you."

"I made the plate jolly well red-hot, sir, and—ha, ha!—handed the hot side to Jardon. He took the bait beautifully."

Mr. Salmon fixed his eyes on Jardon, and the bully quailed before the steadfast gaze.

"I assure you, sir, that lad is speaking falsely," mumbled Jardon, finding the silence too painful.

"I did not say he was not."

"Of course, sir, this is an unpleasant matter for me, but you surely will not take the word of that youngster against the assurance of two Fifth Form fellows?"

"I never said I doubted your words; but I do say this—either you have spoken falsely, or this lad has done so. Schoolboys frequently deceive masters. They will wriggle out of a scrape if they can. That is one thing. A deliberate falsehood is quite another matter. The one is wrong, the other a sin. Dr. Andale admires truthfulness in a boy, no matter what his age may be. I am quite content to base my rule on his, and, apart from that, admire boys who will, no matter what the consequences may be, stick to the truth. Allingham, either you have spoken falsely, or those two young men have done so. I have formed my opinion on the subject. There is very little evidence. Do you wish me to state what my opinion is?"

"No, sir."

"Very well! The matter shall end there. Come into my study, Allingham, and have tea with me. Let there be no further noise in your study, Jardon."

"He's nearly as smart as the doc," mused Rex, as he followed.

"Let's see," exclaimed Mr. Salmon, entering his study, followed by Rex. "What have we got now? Let's hope it

isn't something good, because you don't deserve it after spoiling Por—Parker's tea. Oh, I've heard all about it! By the way, don't you owe me a chapter from Caesar?"

"On my honour it's done, sir! I tried to palm it off on the cap, but he wouldn't have it."

"So he told me. Well, here we have plum jam, and here is part of a plum cake. We shall do all right. You can tear up that chapter. I expect it is full of blunders."

"Rather, sir! Hal and Jim looked out the words I didn't know, and I generally took the first one, 'cos, you see, it was against time, and you said I wasn't to use the crib."

"What do you think of those two on the field?"

"Ain't they grand, sir?"

"Their chum does not appear to be very grammatical."

"Ain't they grand, sir?"

"I never said 'ain't'!"

"Ha, ha, ha! No, it would sound rummy if a master said that. We slang a bit, you know."

"I have noticed it. Bread-and-butter and jam is a good beginning. You must be hungry after the play. Help yourself; don't wait to be asked."

Then Mr. Salmon chatted about sports, and, having gained his Blue at Oxford, he was no mean authority.

"He's just splendid, old chaps!" exclaimed Rex, in the dormitory that night.

"Too strict!" growled Bob.

"We all have our faults," observed Jim, "and I will admit that strictness in a master is a very bad one. That's what spoils the doc."

"It spoils Seaslug worse, because he takes our Form," declared Bob. "He's a lot too strict for a master. He's more fitted for a Russian executioner, or—"

"Is he really?" exclaimed Mr. Salmon, entering the room at that moment. He had not intended to come up silently—a thing he never did; but the fact is, they were making such a noise in the dormitory that they had not heard his approach. "Perhaps if he is so remarkably strict, you will get to bed, or he might exercise some of his severity on you."

"I believe I'm the most unlucky fellow who was ever born," growled Bob. "If I happen to pass a remark concerning a master, he's bound to pop up and hear it. I wish you would take to learning the bagpipes, sir."

"Your ideas are remarkably brilliant, Bouncer, but I do not see what benefit my learning the bagpipes would be to you."

"Why, don't you see, sir, you could play them as you went about, and then I should know you were coming. You would look no end picturesque in your cap and gown, going about tooting on the bagpipes. Besides, you could play them in class. I hate the bagpipes, but would rather listen to them any day than listen to the fact that the sun is—so many miles away from the earth."

"It is obvious to me that it is a matter concerning which you require some tuition. Get to bed immediately, and let this noisy cease."

"Funny he didn't take your suggestion, Bob!" exclaimed Jim. "It would be quite a novelty to see a master going about playing on the bagpipes; but look here, you fellows, if Seaslug comes back and finds that we have calmly ignored his order to get to bed, on the top of Bob's little recommendation, there will be ructions."

Jim was generally correct. The boys knew it, and tumbled into bed as fast as they could scramble; and Bob, noted for his abominable untidiness as a rule, was about the only one who carefully placed his clothes on a chair. Rex smiled, for he knew the signs.

Lights were out, so was Bob. He was standing by Rex's bedside.

"I've got an idea," he whispered.

"Bob bouncing?" murmured Rex.

Bob Bouncer was notorious for breaking bounds, and they frequently referred to it as B. B., or Bob bouncing.

"Yes. It's a brilliant idea."

"As brilliant as the bagpipes?"

"It's better than that. Pass it on to Jim, and tell him to be ready in five minutes," said Bob, stealing back, and hurrying on his clothes. It never occurred to him that it needed any pressure to induce his chums to come. When Bob had a scheme on, he kept it absolutely dark until the last moment, but it was always something desperately daring, so it appealed to Rex and Jim. They were dressed as soon as he, and all three crept from the dormitory. If any boy heard them he did not take the trouble to inquire what was the matter.

They had to pass the porter's door, but it was shut, and they could hear him snoring. The masters would be at supper, so that there was no difficulty in getting out. All they had to do was to scale the wall, and this they had done on many a previous occasion.



Stormpoint

(Continued from page 15.)

"What's the scheme, old chap?" inquired Rex, rather anxiously. The night was very cold, and the wind was

blowing hard.

"Fishing!" growled Bob. His mind was on his scheme, and when that was the case, his words were always few.

"My eyes!" gasped Jim. "I don't see much fun in fishing on such a night as this! It's cold, and—"

"I've thought of that," growled Bob.

"So have I," said Rex. "I'm thinking of it now, and until the sun comes out, I believe I shall keep on thinking of it."

"The fish are sure to bite."

"So is this frost."

"When the fish have done biting we shall start biting them," continued Bob, ignoring the complaint.

"What, eat them raw, like the Chinese do?" inquired Jim.

"Rats!"

"I'd rather eat rabbits!"

"We shall cook the fish. Everything is arranged. Leave it to me," said Bob, striding on towards the shore.

He would not give them any further information till they reached it, then he pointed to a rowing-boat.

"I've hired it. There's tackle aboard, provisions, that pail with the holes knocked in it is the fireplace, there's the frying-pan, potatoes, bread—yes, I have forgotten nothing. Help me shove her into the water. The tide is rising, so we need not get wet."

"That's a blessing," said Jim. "I'd much rather not get wet on a night like this. But I say, has your stepfather repented? This must have cost you money."

"He stopped my supplies long ago; but I can get money all right now. Push up, Rex; it will make you warm."

"I'm thankful to hear that," exclaimed Rex, putting his shoulder against the stern of the boat, while Jim's great strength helped them immensely.

The shore was very steep, so that they had not much difficulty in launching the boat.

"I've got a gallon of water up my sleeve, and it's cold," cried Jim, as he jumped in.

"It will soon get warm," declared Bob, seizing an oar, and pushing her off. "Now, you two fellows, row, while I light the fire. It is already laid, and we have got plenty of chunks of wood. I'll soon have a roaring fire, and that is bound to warm us."

"Yes, it will do all that," exclaimed Jim, "especially if we set the boat on fire. I was just wondering what the coast-guard will think when he sees a fire floating about on the sea."

"There is one consolation," exclaimed Rex—"the man can't think, not having a brain made for the purpose. All the same, be as careful as you can, Bob, 'cos it would not be so jolly pleasant to have to swim ashore."

"Pooh! There's no danger of that!" declared Bob. "The boat couldn't catch fire, and even if it did we should be able to put it out again directly with all this water knocking around. Crumbs! I've put my hand into something cold and clammy this time! Oh, I know! It's the lard for cooking the fish in and frying the potatoes. I've got three loaves of new bread, and that ought to be enough

for us. New bread is jolly nice with fried fish and potatoes!"

Bob soon got his fire going; the wind helped him with that. Rex and Jim pulled out for a considerable distance, and then dropped anchor.

"There's one consolation," said Jim, shivering with the cold, "if we don't catch any fish we can eat our bait."

"Bother it! I'm not eating sand-worms!" growled Bob.

"Pshaw! I did not mean to eat the worms. You've got some mussels there, and they are good to eat."

"Oh, I thought you meant the worms! I couldn't eat one of those beggars, with their crawling legs and nasty-looking bodies. I'd rather eat dry bread any day. Now, then, let's have a start. I've got a scrumpshus fire there, and I believe it's throwing out some heat."

"I would be particularly obliged to that fire if it would throw out some of its heat in my direction," said Rex. "I shall be like the skipper who blew a whiff from his pipe."

"Did he get warm," inquired Bob, busily engaged in baiting his hooks.

"He did not. He became a frozen corpse."

"Well, p'r'aps he hadn't got a fire," said Bob cheerfully.

"I'll bet we catch any amount of fish. It's just the sort of night for fishing."

"It is," exclaimed Jim, throwing over his line. "It feels to me a bit too chilly for it. The sort of night I would prefer, for it would be in the middle of summer when the sun is shining."

"You would have to go to Norway to get your requirements suited," said Rex. "But I've got a bite already."

So he had, and before many minutes had passed the chums forgot all about the cold in their excitement. Rock-throwing, sea-bream, and flat-fish were landed in fine style. The mussels pleased the fish, and the comrades preferred them to the worms, because they were not so nasty to put on the hooks, and Bob said he did not think it hurt the mussels, while he felt sure it must hurt the worms. At any rate, they soon got such a good haul that Bob said he would commence cooking operations.

He had taken the precaution of providing plates and knives and forks, but he found peeling the potatoes frightfully cold work, notwithstanding the fire, which rested on some bricks.

"I think these potatoes are just nicely done," said Bob at last. "Now for the fish. Don't bother about catching any more, you chaps. We shan't get through all these. You can be keeping the potatoes hot in this plate."

"Aren't you going to clean the fish, Bob?" inquired Rex. "Clean them? Why, they are perfectly clean! They have just come out of the sea."

"Bob, you want to take their insides out."

"I assure you I don't want to do any such thing," growled Bob. "I would rather you or Jim did that work. I'm only cooking them."

"Well, it must be done if we are going to eat them," said Jim. "You help me, Rex."

Rex looked as though he did not care for the task. However, they set about it, and were well repaid, for their supper was not to be despised.

And all the time the wind was rising, while when the tide turned, and it was against the wind, the little boat commenced to leap about in rather an alarming manner. They were all well accustomed to the sea, so that it had no disagreeable effect on them; but they would have been wise to cut their supper short, and get back. Once or twice Jim did remark that it was getting very rough, and Rex quite agreed with him, but no suggestion was made to leave the supper, so Bob went on with his cooking.

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