

JOHN GOLDFRAP

THE BORDER BOYS IN
THE CANADIAN
ROCKIES

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CHAPTER I

THE BOY FROM NOWHERE

“Hold on there a minute! Don’t you think you’re being unnecessarily rough with that boy?”

“Naw, I don’t. And if I am, it ain’t none of your business that I can see.”

“Perhaps I mean to make it so.”

“Aw run along and play, kid. Don’t bother me.”

The brakeman glared angrily at the tall, well-built lad who had accosted him. In so doing, he for an instant ceased belaboring a dust-covered, cowering lad in pitifully ragged clothing whom, a moment before, he had been cuffing about the head without mercy.

“Take that, you young tramp!” he had hurled out savagely, as each blow fell on the quivering form.

The boy receiving this unmerciful punishment had been discovered riding the blind-baggage on the long, dust-covered train of Canadian Pacific coaches that had just come to a stop.

Of course the boy had been summarily ejected, and the brakeman was now engaged in what he would have termed “dusting the young rascal’s jacket.”

It was a pitiful sight, though, to see the slender, emaciated lad, whose rags hardly covered his thin body, and who could not have been much above sixteen, cowering under the punishment of the burly trainman. The brakeman was not of necessity a brute. But in his eyes the lad was “a miserable tramp,” and only getting his just dues. To more humane eyes, though, the scene appeared in a different light.

Some of the passengers, gazing from the windows, had ventured to cry, “Shame,” but that was all that had come of it till Ralph Stetson, who had been standing with a group of his friends at the other end of the platform of the Pine Pass station, in the heart of the Canadian Rockies, happened to see what was going forward. Without a word he had hastened from them and come to the rescue. Ralph was a boy whose blood always was on fire at the sight of cruelty and oppression, and it appeared to him that the brakeman was being unnecessarily rough. Besides, there was something in the big, appealing eyes of the sufferer, and his ragged, ill-clad form, that aroused all his sympathies. So it came about that he had tried to check the punishment with the words quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Now he stood facing the brakeman who appeared quite willing for a minute to drop the lad he was maltreating and turn on the newcomer. Perhaps, though, there was something in Ralph’s eye that held him back. Old “King-pin” Stetson’s son looked thoroughly business-like in his broad-brimmed woolen hat, corduroy jacket and trousers, stout hunting boots and flannel shirt, with a handkerchief loosely knotted about the neck. Evidently he had come prepared to rough it in the wild country in the midst of which the train had come to a halt.

His life and experiences in the strenuous country along the Mexican border had toughened Ralph’s muscles and bronzed his features, and he looked well equipped physically to carry out the confidence expressed in his cool, clear eyes.

“Who are you, anyhow?” the brakeman hurled at him, growing more aggressive as he saw some of his mates running toward him from the head of the long train where the two big Mogul locomotives were thundering impatiently.

“Never mind that for now. Drop that boy and I’ll pay his fare to wherever he wants to go.”

“Well, you are a softy! Pay a tramp’s fare? Let me tell you, mister – ”

“Say, going to hold this train all day?” demanded the conductor bustling up. “What’s all this?”

“This kid got on the train in the night some place. Bin ridin’ the blind baggage. I was giving him ‘what for’ when this other kid butts in,” explained the brakeman.

“I said I was willing to pay this boy’s fare rather than see him abused,” struck in Ralph, flushing slightly.

“Well, that’s fair and square,” said the conductor, “so long as he pays his fare, that’s all I care. But I ain’t goin’ to hold my train. Where d’ye want to go, boy?”

“This is Pine Pass, ain’t it?” demanded the ride stealer, whom the brakeman had now released.

“This is the Pass, – yes. Come, hurry up.”

“Then I’ve come all the fur I’m goin’.”

As if to signify that his interest was over, the conductor waved his hand to the engineers peering from their cabs ahead. The brakemen scampered for their cars. The locomotives puffed and snorted and the long train began to move. As the conductor swung on he called back sarcastically:

“Sorry we couldn’t wait while you fixed it up. Wish you joy of your bargain.”

In another instant the train was swinging around into a long cut between deep, rocky walls. In yet another instant it was gone, and Ralph Stetson, with a rather puzzled expression on his good-looking face, stood confronting the scarecrow-like object he had rescued from the brakeman. In the tenement-house district of any large city the pitiful figure might not have looked out of place.

But here, in the Canadian Rockies, with a boiling, leaping torrent racing under a slender trestle, great scraps of rocks and pine and balsam-clad mountains towering above, and in the distance the mighty peaks of the Selkirks looming against the clean-swept blue, the spectacle that this waif of the big towns presented seemed almost ludicrous in its contrast. Ralph felt it so at least, for he smiled a little as he looked at the disreputable figure before him and asked:

“What are you doing at Pine Pass?”

The question was certainly a natural one. Besides the tiny station, no human habitation was in sight. Above it, threatening to crush it seemingly, towered a precipice of dark colored rock. Beyond this rose mighty pines, cliffs, waterfalls and, finally, climbing fields of snow. Everywhere peaks and summits loomed with a solitary eagle wheeling far above. In the air was the thunderous voice of the torrent as it tumbled along under the spidery trestle beyond the station, and the sweet, clean fragrance of the pines.

“What’m I doin’ at Pine Pass?” The ragged youth repeated the question. “I-I’m sorry, mister, but I can’t tell yer.” He paused, and a strange, wistful look came into his eyes as he gazed at the distant peaks, “I thought some time I’d get up among them mountains; but there’s a heap more of ‘em than I calculated on.”

“How did you get here? Where did you come from?” pursued Ralph.

“Frum Noo York.” And then, answering the unspoken question, he continued, “You kin call me Jimmie, and ef you want ter know how I got yere, I jes’ beat it.”

“Beat it, eh? Tramped it, you mean?”

“Yep. Stole rides when I could. Walked when I couldn’t. Bin two munts er more, I reckon. Steamboats, freights, blin’ baggage, anyting.”

“And what did you think you’d do when you got here?”

“Work till I got some coin togedder. But it don’t look much as if there was any jobs fer a kid aroun’ here, does it?”

“It does not. What can you do?”

“Anyting; that’s on the level.”

“Hum; you wait here a minute, Jimmie. I don’t quite understand what brought you here, and if you don’t want to tell me I won’t ask you. But you wait here a minute and I’ll see what I can do.”

“Say, you will? Kin you put me to woik? Say, you’re all right, you are, mister. I’ll bet you’d have put that braky away in a couple of punches, big as he wuz.”

And the boy gazed admiringly after Ralph's athletic form as the latter hastened toward the group at the end of the platform. They were standing beside what appeared to be a small mountain of baggage and they had just noticed his absence.

"Well, what under the sun – ?" began Harry Ware, whose full name, H. D. Ware, was, of course, shortened at Stone fell College to Hardware.

"Simpering serpents, Ralph," broke in Percy Simmons, who, equally, of course, was known to his boyish chums as Persimmons, "grinning gargoyles, we knew this was to be a collecting trip, but you appear to have started by acquiring a scarecrow!"

"Hold on a minute, boys," cried Ralph, half laughingly, for Persimmons' odd way of talking and explosive exclamations made everyone who knew him smile. "Hold on; listen to what happened."

The eldest member of the group, a tall and angular, but withal good-natured and kindly looking man with a pair of shell-rimmed spectacles perched across his bony nose, now struck in.

"Yes, boys; let us hear what Ralph has been up to now. I declare, since our experience along the Border I'm prepared for anything."

"Even what may befall us in the Canadian Rockies, eh, Professor Wintergreen?" asked Ralph. "Well, that lad yonder, if I'm not much mistaken, is our future deputy cook, bottlewasher, and midshipmate."

They all stared at him. Persimmons was the first to recover his voice.

"Giggling gophers," he gasped, "as if Hardware hadn't brought along enough patent dingbats without your adding a live one to the collection!"

CHAPTER II

THE TORRENT

Vacation time had rolled around once more at Stonefell College, which accounts for our finding Professor Wintergreen, Ralph Stetson, and the latter's chums at this isolated spot in the heart of the Canadian Rockies. Readers of former volumes of this series will at once recall the eccentric professor and his young companion Ralph. Harry Ware and Percy Simmons, however, we have not met before. Jack Merrill and Walt Phelps, the two young ranchmen who shared Ralph's adventure on the Mexican border, could not be with him on the present vacation, both boys being required at their western homes.

So it had come about that when Professor Wintergreen received a commission to hunt specimens in the Canadian Rockies, Ralph jumped at the chance to accompany him. His father, the railroad magnate, and Ralph's mother had planned a trip to Europe, but the boy, being given the choice of the Rocky Mountain expedition or the trip across the Atlantic, had, with his characteristic love of adventure, chosen the former without hesitation. His mother grieved rather over this, but his father approved. "King-pin Stetson," as Wall Street knew the dignified railroad magnate, approved of boys roughing it. He had seen how much good Ralph's western experiences had done the boy. His shoulders had broadened, his muscles hardened, and his eyes grown brighter during his strenuous times along the border. Not less noteworthy had been his mental broadening. From an indolent attitude toward studies, a condition caused, perhaps, by his former rather delicate health, Ralph's appetite for learning had become as robust as the rest of him.

There is no space here to detail all that had happened during Ralph's vacation on the Mexican border. But briefly, as told in "The Border Boys on the Trail," it included the exciting experiences attendant upon the capture of his chums and himself by a border bandit, and their sharing many perils and adventures on both sides of the frontier. In the second volume, called "The Border Boys Across the Frontier," the boys discovered the Haunted Mesa, and stumbled by the merest accident upon a subterranean river. The finding of this latter plunged them into a series of accidents and thrilling adventures, exciting beyond their wildest dreams. It is no laughing matter to be captured and suspected as spies by Mexican revolutionists, as the boys found out. But they managed to stop the smuggling of arms across the Border, as readers of that volume know.

"The Border Boys with the Mexican Rangers" showed how courage and skill may be more than a match for villainy and duplicity. With the "Rurales" the boys lived a life brimming to the full with the sort of experiences they had grown to love. The finding of a hidden mine, too, enriched them all and gave each lad an independent bank account of no mean dimension. The following book, which was entitled "The Border Boys with the Texas Rangers," found the three lads sharing the perils and hardships of the body that has done so much to keep law and order in a much vexed region. Brave, resourceful, and skillful, as their former experiences had trained them to be, the boys found full scope for all their faculties with the Rangers. A band of cattle thieves made trouble for them, and Jack Merrill's climb out of the Hidden Valley furnished the most thrilling experience of his life.

Dearly would Ralph have loved to share with his former companions the exciting times which he was sure lay ahead of him in the Canadian Rockies. But it was not to be, and so, when young Ware and Percy Simmons both begged to be "let off" from Bar Harbor and Newport, Professor Wintergreen had, on their parents' request, decided to allow them to come along. The professor's interests in the Canadian Rockies were purely scientific. His duty was to collect specimens of minerals, and also of animal life, for one of the best known scientific bodies in the east. Ralph, with his knowledge of hunting and woodcraft, was to be relied upon as a valuable aide. Young Ware and Percy Simmons were more or less Tenderfeet, though both had been camping before.

When Ralph had finished relating Jimmie's story to the others, the professor said:

"I'll talk to the lad myself. If he proves all that he appears to be from your description, Ralph, we might manage to use him. A boy willing to make himself useful around camp might come in handy."

So the professor stalked off on his long legs to interview Jimmie, who viewed his approach with awe, while the boys stood in a chattering group about the pile of baggage. It was to be remarked that most of it bore the initials H. D. Ware, of which more anon.

"Wonder what's become of that guide and the ponies?" spoke up Ralph, while the Professor interrogated the awe-struck Jimmie.

"Don't know," responded Hardware, gazing at a dusty track that wound itself up the cliff back of the station for a few yards, and was then lost around a scrap of rock that glittered with "fool's-gold." "Ought to be here by now, though."

"Fiddling fish," struck in Persimmons at this moment, "there ought to be trout in that stream below there, boys. I'm going down to have a look."

"All right. We'll wait for you and give you a hail when the ponies show up. Look out you don't fall in, though. Those rocks look slippery where the water has dashed over them," warned Ralph.

"I'm all right," responded Persimmons airily, and he set out, clambering down the rocky path leading to the brink of the foaming, brown torrent that roared through Pine Pass.

Shortly afterward, the Professor came back with his arm on Jimmie's shoulder. The man of science, childlike in some things and absorbed in study for the most part, was yet a fairly accurate reader of human nature.

"I've been talking to Jimmie, boys," he said, as he approached, "and he'll do. He's been officially engaged as general assistant to our guide with the Wintergreen expedition."

"Good for you, Jimmie," smiled Ralph, "and so now your troubles are at an end for a time, anyhow."

The eyes of the waif filled with tears.

"I dunno jes how ter thank you, boss," he said, addressing all of them, "but I kin promise you that I'll make good."

"Sure of that," said the Professor kindly, "but I can't make out why you won't tell us what brought you to such an out-of-the-way, not to say remote, part of the world as this."

"I'd tell yer if I could; honest I would, boss," spoke Jimmie; "but – but I can't jes' yet. Some time maybe –"

The lad broke off, and once more his wistful eyes sought the distant peaks.

"Is them the Selkirks over yonder?" he asked presently.

"Yes; those far peaks are," said the Professor, also gazing toward the giant ranges in the distance whose crests glimmered with the cold gleam of never-melting snow, "those are the Selkirks."

"Goin' that way?" asked Jimmie, his eyes still riveted on the far-flung ranges.

"Yes; we hope to penetrate as far as that. Why?"

"Oh, nuttin'. I hoped you was, that's all."

A smile played over Ralph's lips. He was about to ask Jimmie some bantering question about what he, the New York waif, expected to find in the distant mountains, but at that instant there came a piercing cry.

"Help! Guzzling grasshoppers! H-e-l-p!"

"Gracious! It's Persimmons!" cried Ralph, an alarmed look coming over his countenance. Well did he know his friend's capacity for getting into trouble.

"Run, boys, run! He must be in a serious predicament!" cried the Professor, as the cry came once more.

At top speed they ran toward the end of the platform and the rocky path leading to the thundering mountain torrent.

“If he’s fallen in that creek, he’s a goner!” shouted the station agent, rushing out of the depot.
“The falls are right below, and he’ll be swept into them!”

CHAPTER III IN PERIL OF HIS LIFE

Just how they clambered down that rocky, slippery track none of the party was ever able to recall in after life. But, burned deep on each boy's mind for as long as he should live was the picture they saw as they came in full view of the swirling, madly dashing torrent. Above a foam-flecked eddy, beyond which the main current boiled and seethed, towered the black, spider-like outlines of the trestle. On the other shore was a rocky steep covered with big pines and balsams.

Between the two, his white, frightened face showing above the current as he clung with might and main to a log, was Persimmons. This log, evidently the trunk of a tree which had fallen from its foothold beside the path on the depot side of the torrent, reached out some twenty feet above the devil's caldron of the stream. The roots and the main part of the trunk rested on the shore. That portion that projected over the water was nothing more than a slender pole. The freshets of spring had swept it clean of branch or limb. It was as bare as a flag-staff.

Under it the green water rushed frantically on toward a fall that lay beyond the trestle. The voice of the cataract was plainly audible in their ears, although in the extremity of their fear for Persimmons they gave it no heed. It was almost at the end of this frail support that the boy was clinging. Only his head and shoulders were above the water, which dragged malignantly at him, trying to tear loose his hold. It was plain at once that flesh and blood could not stand the strain long. If they did not act to save him, and that quickly, Percy Simmons was doomed speedily to be swept from his hold and hurtled to the falls and – but they did not dare dwell upon that thought.

How the boy could have got where he was, was for the present a mystery. But there he was, almost at the end of the slender tree trunk, which whipped under the strain of his weight.

“Can you hold on?” shouted Ralph, using the first words that came into his head.

They saw Persimmons' lips move, but could not hear his reply.

“Don't make him speak; he needs every ounce of breath he has,” said the professor, whose face was ashen white under his tan. The boys were hardly less pale. They looked about them despairingly.

“We must find a rope and get it out to him,” cried Harry Ware.

“But how? Nobody could maintain a foothold on that log,” declared Ralph.

“We might drift it down to him,” suggested the station agent; “get on the bank further up and allow the current to carry down a loop that he could grab.”

“That's a good idea,” cried the professor, hailing any solution of their quandary with joy, “have you got a rope?”

“Yes, in the shack above. I'll get it in a jiffy.”

Before he had finished speaking, the man was off, racing up the rocky path as fast as his legs could carry him.

“Hold on, Perce!” cried Ralph encouragingly, waving his hand. “We'll get you out of that in no time.”

They saw poor Persimmons' lips try to frame a pitiful smile, but the next instant a wave of foam dashed over him. After what seemed an agony of waiting, but which was in reality only a few minutes, the agent reappeared with several yards of light but strong rope.

“Now we shan't be long,” he said encouragingly, as he rapidly formed a loop in it.

No sooner was this done, than Ralph seized the rope and tried to throw it over Persimmons' head like a lasso. He had learned to throw a rope like a cowboy on the Border, but this time either the feat was beyond his skill, or he was too unnerved to do it properly. At any rate, at each attempt the throw fell short, and the current whirled the lifeline out of their comrade's reach.

Fortunately, Persimmons had managed, by this time, to brace his feet against an out-cropping rock, and so give his overstrained arms some relief. But it was obvious that, even with this aid, he could not hold on much longer.

Nothing remained but to try the plan that the agent had suggested, namely, to carry the rope up the bank a little and try to drift it down stream. With a prayer on his lips, Ralph made the first cast. The rope fell on the water in what appeared to be just the spot for the current to carry it down to the boy they were trying to rescue.

But their joy was short lived. Having carried the loop a short way, a viciously swirling eddy caught it and sucked it under the surface. It became entangled in a rock, and they had much ado to get it back ashore at all.

A sigh that was almost a groan broke from Ralph as he saw the futility of his cast. It looked like the last chance to save the boy whose life depended on their reaching him quickly. It was out of the question to get out on the slender, swaying end of the trunk to which young Simmons was clinging. Not one of them but was too heavy to risk it. And, in the event of the trunk snapping, they knew only too well what would ensue. A brief struggle, and their comrade would be swept to the falls, from which he could not possibly emerge alive.

“We must save him!” panted Ralph, “but how – how?”

“The only way is to get the rope to him,” said the professor.

“And we can’t accomplish that unless – I think I can do it, professor,” broke off Ralph suddenly.

“What do you mean to do?”

“To straddle that log and get the rope out to him in that way.”

“Nonsense, it would not bear your weight even if you could balance on it.”

But Ralph begged so hard to be allowed to put his plan into execution that the professor was at last forced to give way and consent to his trying the perilous feat.

“But come back the instant you are convinced you are in danger,” he commanded; “remember, I am in charge of you boys.”

Ralph eagerly gave the required bond. Fastening the rope to his waist, he straddled the narrow trunk and gingerly began working himself forward toward his imperiled chum.

He got along all right till he was in a position where his feet began to be clawed at by the hurrying waters below. He swayed, recovered himself by a desperate effort, and then once more began his snail-like progress. The sight of Persimmons’ blue lips and white cheeks, for in that land the waters are almost as cold in midsummer as in the depth of winter, gave him fresh determination to continue his hazardous mission.

But even the most determined will cannot always overcome material obstacles. A chunk of driftwood was swept against Ralph’s feet. He was almost overbalanced by the force of the blow. The watchers on shore saw him strive wildly for an instant to recover his equilibrium, and then a cry of alarm broke from their lips as they saw the boy suddenly lose his balance completely and topple off the trunk into the stream.

“The rope! Haul on the rope!” shouted the professor, as Ralph vanished, to reappear an instant later fighting for his life in the relentless torrent.

Well it was for the boy then, that he had tied the rope to his waist. Had he not done so, the moment might have been his last, for even the strongest swimmer that ever breasted water would have been but a helpless infant in that titanic current.

They all laid hold of the rope and pulled with every ounce of muscle their combined forces could command. But, even then, so strongly did the swiftly dashing stream suck at its victim that it was all they could do to get him ashore. Blue and shivering from cold, however, Ralph finally found footing and scrambled up the bank. Then, and not till then – such had been the strain – did they recollect Persimmons.

For an instant they hardly dared to look up. They feared that the end of the long log might prove to be tenantless. But, to their unspeakable relief, Persimmons still was clinging there. But even as they gave a shout of joy at the sight of him, another thought rushed in. Of what avail was it that the boy was there, when there appeared no possible way of getting him out of his predicament?

Were they to stand there helplessly and see him swept to his death before their very eyes? Was there nothing they could do? No untried way of getting that precious rope to him?

It appeared that the answer to these questions must be in the negative.

“Great heaven!” burst from the professor’s pale lips, and his voice sounded harsh and rough as if his throat was as dry as ashes. “Can’t we do anything? Can none of you suggest a way?”

“I tink I can get dat rope out dere, if you’ll gimme a chanct, boss,” piped a voice at his elbow.

They all looked around. It was Jimmie, whom, in the stress of the last minutes, they had forgotten as completely as if he had never existed. But now here he was, repeating, with calm assurance, but no braggadocio, his offer:

“I tink I can get it to him, if you’ll gimme a chanct.”

CHAPTER IV

JIMMIE'S PLUCK

“*You* can get that rope to him?”

The professor’s voice held a note of amazement and possibly one of unconscious incredulity, for Jimmie colored under his gaze.

“Sure I can.” He spoke rapidly, for it was no time to waste words. “I used ter be wid a circus for a time, see. I learned ter do a balancin’ act wid a troupe. I’ll jes’ take dat long stick dere fer a balancin’ pole, and I’ll snake him out fer youse, er – er I’ll go up de flume meself.”

Strange as it may appear, there was something in the manner of the waif that instilled a new confidence into their hearts. Under other circumstances they might not have felt it, but now, with Persimmons’ life in such danger, they were in the mood of drowning men who grasp at straws.

Jimmie was such a straw, and his self-confident manner formed to a not small degree the basis of their trust in his ability to carry out what he said he could accomplish. Carefully the rope was transferred from the dripping, half-frozen Ralph to Jimmie’s waist. This done, the lad carefully balanced a longish branch he had picked up, and appeared to find it suitable for use as a balancing pole; for, after one or two trials, he stepped out on the log and began such a “rope walking” act as has seldom if ever been witnessed.

Before starting, he had kicked off his ragged, broken boots, – stockings or socks he had none, – and was now barefooted. The rough bark of the tree trunk afforded a certain stability of footing, but they held their breath as they watched the waif’s slender, pitifully thin figure painfully making its way on that narrow bridge above the swirling, leaping waves of the torrent.

Once he hesitated and swayed, and a gasp went up from the watchers on the bank. Involuntarily they took a tighter grip on the rope. But it was only the green rush of waters under his feet that had momentarily caused Jimmie’s head to swim.

He swiftly recovered himself and, forcing his eyes to remain riveted on a definite object, he forged steadily ahead. Now he was only five feet from where Persimmons, with a sub-conscious strength, was hanging on to his precarious hold, now but four feet intervened, then three, two, – one! How the slender trunk swayed! It appeared impossible that anything human could keep its footing upon it.

But at last the young acrobat reached a point beyond which he dared not go. Holding his balancing pole with one hand, he undid the rope from his waist with the other. Bending, very slowly, very cautiously, he formed a loop and dropped it over Persimmons’ head. The numbed boy had just strength enough to work it under his armpits.

Then his strength gave out completely. He would have been swirled away had not Jimmie taken the precaution to pass the rope around the opposite side of the tree trunk to that on which the current was pulling. But Persimmons was safe. The rope held him firm. He took a brief interval for a breath, and then managed to work his way along the trunk while the others hauled.

As for Jimmie, he crouched low for a time, using his balancing pole with wonderful adroitness. Then, walking backward along that swaying, treacherous trunk, he reached shore just as they dragged young Simmons out. It was in the nick of time, too, for he could not have lasted much longer. As it was, when they laid him on the bank he collapsed utterly.

“Jimmie, if you ever were an acrobat, and there’s no room to doubt that, you must have been a marvel!” cried Ralph throwing his arms about the boy’s neck, while the professor and Hardware congratulated him hardly less enthusiastically, and the agent danced a jig.

“Gee!” exclaimed Jimmie, when he released himself, “if you tink I was a wonder, ask Sig. Montinelli, who trained me. I was so good dat he used to beat the life out uv me. Dat’s de reason I ran away frum de show and came up here, – dat and annudder reason.”

There was no time just then to ask him what he meant, for they were all immediately busied in chafing poor Persimmons’ body and bringing life back to him. The agent had rushed off up the rocky path for hot coffee, for he had been preparing his breakfast when the train came in. What with this stimulant and a brisk rub-down, Persimmons soon recovered and was able to sit up and thank his rescuer, which he did characteristically and warmly, despite the latter’s embarrassment and frequent interruptions of “It wasn’t nawthing.”

“Howling handsprings!” exclaimed Persimmons to Ralph, as the latter helped him up the rocky path, “and to think that I classed that kid in with Hardware’s dingbats! But that’s what he is, too,” he added with a sort of an inspiration; “Hardware’s got his bags and boxes full of fool fishing dingbats and cooking dingbats and chopping dingbats, but this one of yours, Ralph, is the greatest ever, he’s a life-saving dingbat. What can I give him?”

“Not money, if you take my advice,” said Ralph dryly. “While you were down and out there the professor offered him some, and his eyes blazed and he turned quite pale as he refused it. ‘I’ve joined this expedition to be generally useful, and that was only one of my jobs, see,’ was what he said.”

“Waltzing wombats! I hope he never has to be useful in just that way again,” breathed Persimmons fervently, as they reached the top of the trail.

“I hope not. But how did you ever come to get in such a fix?”

Persimmons explained that he had been looking at some wonderful trout disporting themselves in a pool some distance above where the tree trunk stretched out over the waters of the torrent. In some way his foot had slipped, and before he knew what had happened he was whirled out into midstream.

Hurried along, brushed by out-cropping rocks and bits of drift timber, he had caught at the first thing that offered, which happened to be the trunk that so providentially stretched out above the torrent.

“Bounding beetles! but it was a close shave, I tell you,” he concluded fervently. “I don’t think I could have held on a minute longer when Jimmie got that rope to me; but when I felt it, new strength seemed to come to me and I could help you fellows drag me ashore.”

For a consideration, the agent drew on his stores, and they made a hearty breakfast after this adventure. Jimmie, of course, was the hero of the occasion, although no one could have accused him of seeking honors. The boy looked actually embarrassed as they each, in turn and in chorus, told him over and over what they thought of his plucky act.

They were still eating when there came a clatter of hoofs on the cliff above.

“Something comin’ down the trail,” observed the agent; “shouldn’t wonder if that’s your man now.”

“I hope so, indeed,” said the professor, “this delay is most annoying.”

Emerging from the depot they saw a strange cavalcade coming down the dusty trail. In advance, on a wiry buckskin cayuse, rode a figure that might have stepped out of a book. His saddle was of the gaily rigged ranger’s type. But it was the person who sat in it with an easy grace that was more striking to the eye than any of his caparisons.

He was of medium height, it appeared, but of so powerful a build that his breadth of chest and massive loins seemed better fitted for a giant. His hair and beard were curly and as yellow as corn silk, his face fiery red by constant exposure to sun and wind and snow, while his eyes, deep-set in wrinkles, were as blue as the Canadian sky above them. His clothes were of the frontiersman’s type, and on his massive head was a colorless sombrero, badly crushed, with several holes cut in its crown.

Behind him came, in single file, four wiry looking little cayuses, saddled and bridled ready for their riders. These were followed by three pack animals of rather sorry appearance, but, as the party was to learn later, of proved ability on the trail.

“You Professor Summered?” he hailed, in a deep, hearty voice, as he saw the professor and the boys standing in a group outside the little depot, eyeing him with deep interest and attention.

“Wintergreen, sir! Wintergreen!” exclaimed the professor rather testily.

“Oh, ho! ho! Beg your pardon. I’m Mountain Jim Bothwell, at your service. Sorry to be late, but the trail up above is none too good.”

He struck his pony with his spurs, and the whole procession broke into an ambling trot coming down the trail in a cloud of yellow dust toward the waiting group of travelers.

CHAPTER V

THE START FOR THE ROCKIES

“Great Blue Bells of Scotland!”

Mountain Jim Bothwell uttered the exclamation as he gazed at the immense pile of baggage labeled H. D. Ware.

“Say, who *is* H. D. Ware, anyhow? He goin’ to start a hotel hereabouts? When’s the wagons comin’ for all this truck?”

“That’s my camping equipment,” struck in “H. D. Ware,” looking rather red and uncomfortable under the appraising blue eye of Mountain Jim.

“Young feller,” spoke Jim solemnly, “you’d need an ocean liner to transport all that duffle. We ain’t goin’ to sea; we’re goin’ inter the mountains. What you got in there, anyhow?”

“Dingbats,” said Ralph quietly, a mischievous smile playing about his mouth.

“Dingbats? Great Bells of Scotland, what’s them?”

“The things that the sporting goods catalogues say no camper should be without,” exclaimed Ralph; “we told him, but it wasn’t any good.”

“Well, my mother said I was to have every comfort,” said poor Hardware, crimsoning under the guide’s amused scrutiny. “When we were camping in Maine – ”

“When you were camping in Maine, I don’t doubt you had a cook – ”

Hardware nodded. He had to admit that, like most wealthy New Yorkers, his parents’ ideas of “a camp” had been a sort of independent summer hotel under canvas.

“Well, young fellow, let me tell you something. From what the professor here wrote me, you young fellers came up here to rough it. I’m goin’ to see that you do. The cooking will mostly be done by you and your chums; your elders will – will eat it, and that’ll be sufficient punishment for them.”

“But – but I’ve just engaged a lad to aid with the cooking and help out generally,” struck in the professor.

“That’s all right,” responded Mountain Jim airily, eying Jimmie, whose clothes, since they had been dried by the agent’s cook stove, looked worse than before, “that kid seems all right, and he can take his turn with the others. In the mountains it’s share and share alike, you know, and no favors. That’s the rule up this way.”

The boys looked rather dismayed. Already the standards of the city were being swept aside. Evidently this mountaineer looked upon all men and boys as being alike, provided they did their share of the work set before them.

Ralph, alone, whose wild life on the Border had already done for him what the Rockies were to perform for his companions, viewed the guide with approval. He knew that out in the wilderness, be it mountain or plain, certain false standards of caste and station count for nothing. As Coyote Pete had been wont to say in those old days along the Border, “It ain’t the hide that counts, it’s the man underneath it.”

“First thing to do is to sort out some of this truck and see what you do need and what you don’t,” decided Mountain Jim presently. “Most times it’s the things that you think you kain’t get along without that you kin, and the things you think you kin that you kain’t.”

“That’s right,” agreed Ralph heartily. “Daniel Boone, on his first journey into Kentucky, managed to worry along on pinole and salt, and relied for everything else on his old rifle and flint and steel.”

“Never heard of the gentleman,” said Mountain Jim, “but he must uv been a good woodsman. Now let’s get to work and sort out this truck.”

Ruthlessly the travelers' kits were torn open, and it was amazing, when Mountain Jim got through, what a huge pile of things that he declared unnecessary were heaped upon the depot platform. As for poor Hardware's "dingbats," a new kind of compass and a hunting knife that met with Jim's approval, alone remained.

"All this stuff can stay here till you get ready to come back," said Jim; "the station agent will look after it and see that it is put in the freight shed."

But it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Out of the rejected "Dingbats" a fine hunting suit, axe, knife and compass were found for Jimmie, who, indeed, stood sadly in need of them. When the boy had retired to the station agent's room and dressed himself in his new garments, the change in him was so remarkable, when he reappeared, as to be nothing less than striking. In the place of the ragged looking Bowery boy, they saw a well set-up lad in natty hunting outfit. A trifle emaciated he was, to be sure, but "We'll soon fill him out with hard work and good grub," declared Mountain Jim, who had been told the boy's story, and who had warmly praised his heroism in rescuing Persimmons.

The latter had also changed his wet garments and was in his usual bubbling spirits when they were ready, in Ralph's phrase, to "hit the trail." This was not till nearly noon, however, for the rejection of the superfluous "Dingbats," of which even Ralph and the professor were found to have a few, had occupied much time. Then, after hearty adieus to the station agent, who had incidentally been the recipient of a generous gratuity from the professor, they mounted their ponies and, with Mountain Jim in the lead, started on their long journey into the wilds. Jimmy, whose circus experience had taught him how to ride, was mounted on one of the pack animals, for, such had been Mountain Jim's ruthless rejection of "Dingbats," only a tithe of the expected "pack" remained.

Up the trail they mounted at an easy pace under the big pines that shook out honey-sweet odors as the little cavalcade passed beneath them. At the summit of the rocky cliff that towered above the depot, the trail plunged abruptly into a dense, black tunnel of tamarack, pine and Douglas firs.

As the horses' hoofs rang clear on the rocky trail and echoed among the columnar trunks that shot up on every side like the pillars of some vast cathedral roof, Mountain Jim broke into dolorous song:

"Hokey pokey winky wang;
Linkum, lankum muscodang;
The Injuns swore that th-e-y would h-a-n-g
Them that couldn't keep w-a-r-m!"

Over and over he sang it, while the shod hoofs clattered out a metallic accompaniment to the droning air.

"Can we ride ahead a bit?" asked Ralph after a while, for the monotony of keeping pace with the pack animals and the constant repetition of Mountain Jim's song began to grow wearisome.

"Sure; go ahead. You can't get lost. The trail runs straight ahead. The only way to get off it is to fall off," said Jim cheerfully, drawing out and filling with black tobacco a villainous-looking old pipe.

"Don't get into any trouble," warned the professor, who had been provided with a quiet horse, and who was intent, as he rode along, on a volume dealing with the geological formation of the Canadian Rockies.

"We'll be careful! So long! Come on, boys," shouted back Ralph, as he struck his heels into his pony.

Off they clattered up the trail, the rocks ringing with their excited voices till the sound died away in the distance. Jimmie alone remained behind. He felt that his duty as general assistant demanded it. When the last echo of the ponies' hoofs had died out, Mountain Jim turned to the professor with a profound wink.

“I can see where we have our hands full this trip, professor,” he remarked, as they ambled easily along.

The professor looked up from his book and sighed.

“Really, I wonder my hair is not snow white,” he said mildly. “But surely that is a fine specimen of *Aethusa Cijnapium* I see yonder!”

“Oh, that,” said Mountain Jim, gazing at the feathery plant indicated, which grew in great profusion at the trail side, “that’s ‘fool’s parsley.’”

“O-h-h!” said the professor.

He might have said more, but at that instant from the trail ahead, came a series of shouts and yells that made it appear as if a troop of rampant Indians was on the war-path. The sharp crack of a rifle sounded, followed by silence.

CHAPTER VI ALONG THE TRAIL

When they left the main body of the party behind, Ralph, Harry Ware, and young Simmons had kicked their ponies into a brisk “lope,” which speedily carried them some distance ahead. As they rode along, they gazed admiringly about them at the beauties of the rugged trail. The rough way soon left the tunnel-like formation of spruce and tamarack, and emerged on a muskeg, or patch of swampy ground, where rank, green reeds and flowers of gorgeous red, yellow and blue grew in the wetter places.

As they cantered into the midst of this pretty bit of scenery, a striped animal sprang from behind a patch of brush with a snort, and dashed off into the timber on the hillside beyond.

With a whoop and yell the boys, headed by Ralph, were after it.

“A wild cat!” shouted Ralph. “After him, boys!”

Their lively little ponies appeared quite to enter into the spirit of the chase. At any rate, they needed no urging, but darted off as nimbly as mountain goats among the trees. The gray and reddish form of the wild cat was speedily lost sight of; but Ralph, who had slipped his rifle from its holster, still kept on under the shadows of the forest, followed by the others.

Suddenly he thought he saw an elusive form slipping among the timbers ahead of him. Flinging the reins of his pony over the creature’s head, in Western fashion, he dismounted. Hardware and Persimmons followed his example. The eyes of all three boys were shining with the excitement of this, their first adventure in the Canadian wilds.

“Cantering cayuses, boys, but we’ll have a fine skin to take home before we’ve been on the trail ten minutes!” exclaimed Persimmons under his breath, as they crept along behind Ralph.

“Don’t count your skins before you get ’em,” was Hardware’s advice.

At this moment there was a sudden commotion among the ponies. They snorted and sniffed as if in terror of something, and Ralph rightly guessed that they had just scented the wild cat.

“You fellows go back and quiet ’em; I’ll keep on,” he said.

Dearly as his two companions would have liked to continue on the trail of the wild cat, there was nothing for them to do but to obey; for if the ponies stampeded they knew that Mountain Jim would have something to say that might not sound pleasant.

“Be careful now, Ralph,” warned Hardware, as their comrade kept on alone. “Wild cats are pretty ugly customers sometimes.”

But Ralph did not reply. With a grim look on his face and with his rifle clutched tightly, he slipped from trunk to trunk, his feet hardly making any noise on the soft woodland carpet of pine needles.

Suddenly, from a patch of brush right ahead of him, came a sort of yelping cry, not unlike that of a dog in pain or excitement.

“What on earth is up now?” he wondered to himself, coming to a halt and searching the scene in front of him with eager eyes.

Then came sounds of a furious commotion. The brush was agitated and there were noises as if two animals were in mortal combat in front of him. But still he could see nothing. All at once came distinctly the crunching of bones.

“It’s that wild cat and she’s made a kill of some sort, a rabbit probably,” mused Ralph. “Well, I’ll catch her red-handed and revenge poor Molly Cottontail.”

He cautiously tiptoed forward, making as little noise as possible. He was well aware that a cornered wild cat can make a formidable opponent, and he did not mean to risk wounding the animal

slightly and infuriating it. He was raising his rifle with a view to having it ready the instant he should sight the savage wood's creature, when he stepped on a dead branch.

It emitted a sharp crack, almost like a pistol shot, and Ralph bit his lip with vexation.

“That cat's going to run now, taking its prey along, and I'll not get within a mile of it,” was his thought.

But no such thing happened. Instead, from the bushes, there came an angry, snarling growl as the crunching of bones abruptly ceased. Ralph's heart began to beat a little quicker. It appeared that the cat, far from fleeing, was going to show fight. But Ralph, after his first surprise, did not worry: He knew his automatic would be more than a match for the wild cat if it came down to a fight.

With this thought in his mind he pressed boldly forward, parting the bushes as he went. He had not advanced more than a few yards when he came upon a curious sight. A lithe, tawny creature of reddish color, with oddly tufted ears, was crouched over the dead and torn body of a rabbit. It had been savagely rending the smaller animal, and as Ralph took all this in he realized, too, another fact. It was no wild cat that he had disturbed, but another and a far more formidable animal.

“Great juniper! A Canadian lynx, and a whumper, too!” gasped the boy to himself as he gazed at the creature which was almost as large as a good sized dog.

For a moment the realization that he was face to face with an animal that some hunters have described as being more formidable than a mountain lion, made Ralph pause, while his heart thumped in lively fashion. The great yellow eyes of the lynx, whose tufted ears lay flat against its head, regarded him with blazing hatred. Its teeth were bared under its reddened fangs, and Ralph saw that it was ready to spring at him. It was only waiting to measure its distance accurately.

“I'll give her all I've got in the gun,” thought Ralph, bringing the weapon to bear; “my only chance is to finish her quick.”

His finger pressed the trigger, but, to his amazement, no report followed.

“Great guns! The mechanism has stuck and I've not got an instant to fuss with it,” was the thought that flashed through his mind as the rifle failed to go off.

He had no time for more. With a growl and snarl the tawny body was launched into the air, as if propelled toward him by chilled steel springs. Ralph gave a hasty, almost involuntary step backward. His foot caught in an out-cropping root and the next instant he measured his length on the ground.

As he fell he was conscious of a flash passing before his face and caught a glimpse of two yellow eyes blazing with deadly hate and anger. The next instant there was a crash in the brush just beyond where he lay, and the boy realized that his fall had been the luckiest thing in the world for him. The lynx had overleaped him; but he knew that the respite would not last the fraction of a minute. He was in as great peril as before unless he acted and that quickly.

CHAPTER VII

TREED BY A LYNX

There was but one thing to do and Ralph did it. In the molecule of time granted to him, he got on his feet. At the same time he uttered a yell which had the intended effect of checking the second onslaught of the lynx for an instant.

Of that instant Ralph took good advantage. He bounded at full speed toward the nearest tree which looked as if it might sustain his weight. Luckily, there was one not far off – a dead cedar. He managed to reach it just ahead of the lynx and began scrambling into the low growing branches. The rifle that had failed him in that critical moment, he abandoned as useless; anyhow he could not have climbed, encumbered with the heavy weapon.

“If I ever get out of this I’ll stick to the old-fashioned repeater,” was his thought as he flung the weapon full at the head of the lynx, missing her, in his agitation, by a good foot.

Under the circumstances, Ralph had done what he thought best in making for the tree. In reality, though, had he had time for reflection, he would better have taken his chances in a race toward his companions, for of course a lynx can climb as well as any wild cat. In fact, Ralph had hardly gained a second’s security before the creature flung herself furiously against the foot of the tree and began climbing after the boy.

“She’s coming after me, sure as fate!” gasped Ralph desperately. “Gracious, look at those claws! I’ve got to stop her in some way; but I’d like to know how.”

By this time he had clambered some distance up the tree, an easy task, for the branches grew fairly thick, and as the tree was dead there were no leafy boughs to encumber his progress. But unfortunately, this made it equally easy for his assailant to pursue him. Ralph saw that unless he did something decisive pretty quickly, he would be driven to the upper part of the tree where it would be unsafe for his weight.

Just above him, at this juncture, he spied a fairly heavy branch which, it seemed, he might break off easily. Reaching above him, the boy gave it a stout tug, and found that he had at least a good, thick club in his possession.

The lynx was just below him. Ralph raised his luckily found weapon and brought it down with a resounding crack on her skull.

With a howl of rage the creature dropped; but caught on a lower branch and clinging there, glared up at him more menacingly than before. Far from injuring her as the boy had hoped, the blow had only served to infuriate the creature.

Suddenly, as if determined to bring the contest to a speedy termination, the lynx began climbing again. Once more Ralph raised his club and as the animal came within striking distance he brought it down again with all his force.

“I hope I crack your ugly head,” he muttered vindictively as he struck.

But by bad luck, Ralph’s hopes were doomed to be blasted. He had struck a good, hard blow and one that sent the lynx, snarling and spitting, scurrying down the tree. But with such good will had he delivered the blow that his club had broken in two. The best part of it went crashing to the ground, leaving him with only a stump in his hand.

“If she comes back at me now, I’m done for,” thought Ralph, as he looked downward.

But for the moment it appeared that the creature had no such intention. Perhaps the two blows had stunned and confused her. At any rate she lay on one of the lower boughs seemingly stupefied. As Ralph gingerly prepared to descend, however, hoping to pass by the brute, she gave a snarl and slipped with cat-like agility to the ground. There, at the foot of the tree she lay, gazing upward with

malicious eyes. Evidently she had given up her first method of attack, but meant to lie there like a sentinel and let Ralph make the next move.

“Gracious!” thought the boy as he saw this, “I am in a fine pickle. I can’t fire any shots to attract the attention of the bunch and I guess shouting won’t do much good. They may come to look for me, but they won’t know in what direction to search.”

Nevertheless, Ralph inhaled a good, deep breath and shouted with all his lung power. But no result was manifest, except that the lynx growled and snarled and lashed its stumpy tail angrily. Once it set up a dreary howl and the unpleasant thought occurred to Ralph that the creature might be calling its mate.

“If two of them come at me – ” he thought; but he didn’t dwell on that thought.

Instead, he cut himself another club and then sitting back, thought the situation over with all his might. As if in search of an inspiration he began rummaging his pockets. How he wished he had brought his revolver along, or even the ammonia “squirt-gun” that he carried occasionally when traveling as a protection against ugly-natured dogs. All at once, in an inside pocket, his hand encountered a small bottle. Ralph almost uttered a cry of joy. A sudden flash of inspiration had come to him. In the bottle was some concentrated ammonia. He had filled his “squirt-gun” that morning before placing it in the pack, and in the hurry of leaving the train at Pine Pass had shoved the bottle into his pocket.

“It’s an awfully long chance,” he thought as he drew out the bottle, “but, by Jove, I’ll try it. Desperate situations call for desperate remedies, and this is sure a tough predicament that I’m in.”

His movements had attracted the attention of the lynx, and it reared up on its hind legs and began clambering toward him once more. With trembling fingers Ralph drew the cork of the bottle, and a pungent odor filled the air. The reek of the ardent drug made the boy’s eyes water; but he was glad the stuff was so strong. It suited his purpose all the better.

What he had to do now was nerve-racking in the extreme. He did not dare to try to put his plan into execution till the lynx got closer to him, and to sit still and watch the ugly brute clambering toward him was enough to upset the stoutest nature. Ralph waited till the animal was on a branch directly below him and was glaring up at him as if making up its mind for the final onslaught.

Then suddenly he cried out:

“Take that, you brute!”

With a swift, sure aim he doused the contents of the ammonia bottle full in the face of the lynx. The effect was immediate and startling. With a scream of rage and pain the blinded animal dropped, clawing and scratching through the dead limbs, to the ground. Landing on all fours she began clawing up the earth in a frenzy of pain. The sharp, pungent ammonia was eating into her eyes like a red-hot flame.

Suddenly, above the yelps and howls of the maddened creature, there came another sound, a hail off in the woods.

“Ralph! oh, Ralph!”

“Here I am, fellows! This way! Come on quick!” shouted Ralph at the top of his voice.

Then as they grew closer, still shouting, he added a word of caution:

“Have your guns ready! I’m treed by a lynx!”

Through the trees the two boys burst into view. At the same instant the lynx dashed madly off toward the trail. As she dashed along she pawed her tingling eyes, trying in vain to rid them of the smarting fluid that Ralph’s lucky throw had filled them with.

Ralph slid to the ground and picking up his faithless rifle joined his chums in a wild chase after the animal. Yelling like Comanches they dashed after, making the uproar that had alarmed and startled the professor and Mountain Jim and their young companion. But it was not till they reached the trail, beyond the now tethered horses, that they came within shooting distance of it. Then Persimmons raised his rifle and fired.

As the shot echoed across the muskeg the lynx bounded into the air, turned a somersault, and just as the rest of the party rode up, lay twitching in death with Persimmons bending proudly over it. “Larruping lynxes,” he was shouting, “I guess we’ve got at least one skin to take home!”

CHAPTER VIII

A WALKING PINCUSHION

Ralph's story was soon told, with the accompaniment of a running fire of sarcasms from Mountain Jim concerning automatic rifles and all connected with them. An examination of Ralph's weapon showed that a cartridge from the magazine had become jammed just at the critical instant that he faced the lynx.

"There ain't nuthin' better than this old Winchester of mine," declared Mountain Jim, taking his well-oiled and polished, albeit ancient model rifle from its holster and patting it lovingly. "I've carried it through the Rockies for fifteen years and it's never failed me yet."

Nevertheless, the boys did not condemn their automatics on that account. In fact, Ralph blamed his own ignorance of the action of his new weapon more for its failure to work than any fault lying with the rifle itself.

With a few quick strokes of his knife and a tug at the hide, Mountain Jim had the lynx skinned with almost incredible rapidity. Salt was sprinkled liberally on the skin, and it was rolled up and tied behind Persimmons' saddle, to be carefully scraped of all fat and skin later on.

It was sunset when they left the well-traveled trail, along which, however, they had encountered no human being but a wandering packer on his way to an extension of the Canadian Pacific Railroad with provisions and blasting powder, borne by his sure-footed animals.

In the brief twilight they pushed on till they reached a spot that appeared favorable for a camp. A spring gushed from a wall of rock and formed one of an almost innumerable number of small streams that fed a creek, which, in turn, was later to pour its waters into the mighty Columbia. Ralph needed no instructions on how to turn the horses out, and while he and the rest, acting under his directions, attended to this, Mountain Jim got supper ready. By the time the boys had completed their "chores" and the tents were up, the guide had their evening meal of bannocks, beans and bacon, and boiling hot tea ready for them. For dessert they had stewed dried prunes and apples, and the boys voted the meal an excellent one. Indeed, they had been hungry enough to eat almost anything.

Supper despatched, it was not long before they were ready to turn into their blankets, which were of the heavy army type, for the nights in the Rockies are cool. To the music of a near-by waterfall, they sank into profound slumber, and before the moon was up the camp was wrapped in silence.

It was about midnight that they were aroused by a loud wail of distress from the tent which Persimmons shared with his two chums. Mountain Jim rolled out of his blankets – he disdained tents – and Jimmie, who likewise was content with a makeshift by the fire, started up as quickly. From the door of the professor's tent appeared an odd-looking figure in striped pajamas.

"Great Blue Bells of Scotland! What's up?" roared Mountain Jim.

"Wow! Ouch! He's sticking me! Ow-w-w-w!" came in a series of yells from Persimmons. "Ouch! Prancing pincushions, come quick!"

"Is that boy in trouble again?" demanded the professor, as he slipped on a pair of slippers and advanced with Mountain Jim toward the scene of the disturbance. The air was now filled with boyish shouts, echoing and re-echoing among the craggy hills that surrounded the small canyon in which the camp was pitched.

As they neared the tent, from under the sod-cloth a small dark form came shuffling forth. It grunted as it went, like a diminutive pig. Jim jerked his old Winchester to his shoulder and the death struggle of the small animal immediately followed the rifle's report.

Simultaneously, the three boys clad in their underclothing, dashed out of the tent door.

"Is it Indians?" shouted Hardware.

"A bear?" yelled Ralph, who had his automatic in hand.

“More like a walking pincushion,” yelled Persimmons, dancing about and nursing one of his hands, “look here!”

He held out his hand and they saw several objects which, in the moonlight, looked like so many knitting needles projecting from it.

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed Mountain Jim, whose mirth aroused Persimmons’ secret indignation, “I reckon it was a walking pincushion, all right. Boy, don’t never put your hand on a porcupine again, they always leave souvenirs.”

“A porcupine!” cried the professor.

“Sure enough,” rejoined the guide, and he rolled to their feet with his rifle barrel the body of the small animal he had shot.

It was surely enough one of those spiny and familiar denizens of the north woods.

“Nodding needles! No wonder I felt as if I’d struck a pincushion,” cried poor Persimmons, who had, by this, drawn the last of the offending quills from his hand. “I heard something grunting and nosing about my blankets, and when I put my hand out I got it full of stickers.”

“I’ll put some peroxide on,” said the professor, hastening to his tent for the medicine chest.

“They aren’t poisonous, are they?” asked Ralph, referring to the quills.

“No; just sharp, that’s all,” responded Mountain Jim. “Porcupines are the greediest and stupidest cusses in the woods. I reckon this one smelled grub and was investigating when he ran into Master Simmons here.”

“You mean that Persimmons ran into him,” corrected Ralph.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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