

Reid Mayne

Bruin: The Grand Bear Hunt



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Chapter One.

The Palace Grodonoff

On the banks of the Neva, near the great city of Saint Petersburg, stands a splendid palace, known as the Palace Grodonoff. It is the property of a Russian nobleman of that name, as it is also his place of residence. Were you to drive up to the front gate of this grand palace, you would see a coat-of-arms sculptured in granite over the entrance. In this piece of sculpture, the principal and most striking figure is a bear, with the blade of a knife buried in his breast, the haft being clutched by a human hand! Open the gate, and enter the spacious courtyard. Inside, on the right and left, you will observe two live bears – both of chestnut-brown colour, and each of them as big as a buffalo. You cannot fail to notice them, for, ten chances to one, they will rush towards you with fierce growls; and were it not that a strong chain hinders them from reaching you, you might have reason to repent having entered the courtyard of the palace Grodonoff. Look around you in the courtyard and over the different doors that open upon it; you will again see the crest of the bear, sculptured in stone; you will see it over the stables, the coach-house, the granary, the kitchens, – everywhere. You may know by all this, that it is the coat-of-arms of the Baron Grodonoff, whose crest is a bear with a blade buried in its breast, and a human hand clutching the haft.

You will naturally conclude that there is some history connected with this singular tableau – that it is the commemoration of some deed done by a Grodonoff, entitling him to use the bear as his heraldic device. This is quite true; and if you enter the picture-gallery of the palace, you will there behold the deed more explicitly represented, in a large oil-painting hung conspicuously in the centre of the wall. The scene of this painting is a forest of old trees, whose grey, gnarled trunks stand thickly over the ground. There is only a little open space or glade in the middle; and this is occupied by three figures, two men and a bear. The bear is between the two men; or, rather, one of the men is prostrate upon the ground – where he has been struck down by a blow from Bruin's paw – while the huge animal stands over him reared up on his hind quarters. The other man is upon his feet, apparently engaged in a desperate wrestle with the fierce brute, and likely to prove the conqueror – as he has already buried the blade of a large hunting-knife in the animal's breast, and directly over the region of its heart. Indeed, the shaggy monster already shows signs of succumbing. His paw has dropped from the shoulder of his antagonist, his long tongue lolls out, the blood rushes from his mouth and nostrils, and it is evident that his strength is fast forsaking him, and that he will soon sink lifeless upon the earth. You will notice that the two men who figure in the painting are very dissimilar in appearance. Both are young men, and both are in hunting costume; but so unlike in their dress, that you could not fancy they followed the same occupation. He upon the ground is richly attired. He wears a tunic of finest green cloth slashed with sable fur on the skirt, collar, and sleeves; his limbs are encased in breeches of white doeskin; and his boots, reaching nearly to his thighs, are of soft russet leather, ample at the tops. A belt around his waist is richly embroidered; and the hilt of a short hunting-sword, protruding from the sheath, appears chased and studded with jewels. A light plumed hat lies upon the ground near his head – evidently tossed off in the struggle – and beside it is a boar-spear that has been jerked out of his fingers as he fell. The whole costume is similar to that used upon the stage – when some young German or Slavonian prince is represented as hunting the wild boar in the forests of Lithuania.

In reality it is a prince who is depicted in the group of the gallery Grodonoff – but not a German prince. He is a Russian, and the bear is the Russian bear.

The other hunter – he who had given its death-blow to the fierce quadruped – is dressed in a style entirely different. It is the costume of a fur-hunter – a trapper of sables – and consists of skin coat and cap, with a strong leathern belt round his waist, and rough boots of untanned hide upon his legs and feet. The costume is rude, and bespeaks him a peasant; but his face, as the painter has represented it, is neither common nor ill-looking. It is not so handsome as that of the prince: for he would be an unskilful artist – one utterly reckless of his own fortune – who should paint the features of a peasant as handsome as those of a prince. In Russia, as elsewhere, such an imprudent painter would be a *rara avis* indeed.

The picture of which we are speaking is the *pièce de résistance* of the Grodonoff gallery. Its size and conspicuous position declare the fact; and the story attached to it will show that it merits the distinction. But for that picture, or rather the scene which it represents, there would be no Grodonoff gallery – no palace – no baron of the name. Paintings, palace, title, all have their origin in the incident there represented – the battle with the bear.

The story is simple and may be briefly told. As, already stated, he upon his back, hat off, and spear detached from his grasp, is a Russian prince – or rather was one, for at the time when our history commences he is an emperor. He had been hunting the wild boar; and, as often happens to sporting princes, had become separated from his courtier attendants. The enthusiasm of the chase had led him on, into the fastnesses of the forest, where he came suddenly face to face with a bear. Princes have their hunter ambition as well as other men; and, in hopes of tailing a trophy, this one attacked the bear with his boar-spear. But the thrust that might have penetrated the flesh of a wild boar, had no effect upon the tough thick hide of Bruin. It only irritated him; and as the brown bear will often do, he sprang savagely upon his assailant, and with his huge paw gave the prince such a “pat” upon the shoulder, as not only sent the spear shivering from his grasp, but stretched his royal highness at full length upon the grass.

Following up his advantage, the bear had bounded forward upon the prostrate body; and, no doubt, in the twinkling of a bedpost would have made a corpse of it – either squeezing the breath out of it by one of his formidable “hugs,” or tearing it to pieces with his trenchant teeth. In another moment the hope of Russia would have been extinguished; but, just at this crisis, a third figure appeared upon the scene – in the person of a young hunter – a *real* one – who had already been in pursuit of the bear, and had tracked him up to the spot.

On coming upon the ground, the hunter fired his gun; but, seeing that the shot was insufficient, he drew his knife and rushed upon the bear. A desperate struggle ensued, in which, as may be already anticipated, the young hunter proved victorious – having succeeded in sheathing his blade in the heart of the bear, and causing the savage quadruped to “bite the dust.”

Neither the prince nor the peasant came scathless out of the encounter. Both were well scratched; but neither had received any wound of a serious nature; and the amateur hunter rose once more to his feet, conscious of having made a very narrow escape.

I need not add that the prince was profuse in his expressions of gratitude to him who had saved his life. The young hunter was not one of his own party, but a stranger to him, whose home was in the forest where the incident occurred. But their acquaintance did not end with the adventure. The prince became an emperor – the peasant hunter a lieutenant in the Imperial Guard, afterwards a captain, a colonel, a general, and finally a baron of the empire!

His name?

Grodonoff, – he in whose palace hangs the picture we have described.

Chapter Two.

The Baron Grodonoff

In one of the apartments of the palace Grodonoff, behold its proprietor, the baron himself! He is seated in an old oak chair, with a heavy table of the same material in front of him. On the table is spread out a map of the world; and by the side of the chair stands a large terrestrial globe. Several shelves standing against the walls contain books; and yet the apartment is not a library in the proper sense of the word: rather is it a large oblong saloon; having three of its sides occupied by spacious glass cases, in which are exhibited objects of natural history, – birds, quadrupeds, reptiles, and insects, – all mounted in proper form and arranged in due order. It is, in fact, a museum, – a private collection – made by the baron himself; and the books that fill the shelves are works relating to natural history alone.

In a man of military aspect – an old veteran with snow-white hair, and grand moustaches of like hue – such as he who is seated at the table – you would scarce expect to meet the lover of a study so pacific in its character as that of natural history? Rather would you look to find him pouring over plans of fortifications, with the pages of Yauban spread open before him; or some history detailing the campaigns of Suwarrow, Diebitsch, Paskiewitch or Potemkin? In this instance, however, appearances were deceptive. Though the baron had proved an excellent military officer, and seen service, he was a student of Nature. His early years, spent as a hunter, had begot within him a taste for natural history; which, as soon as the opportunity offered, had become developed by study and research. It was now no longer a predilection, but a passion; and in his retirement nearly the whole of his time was devoted to his favourite study. A vast fortune, which his grateful sovereign had bestowed upon him, enabled him to command the means for gratifying his taste; and the magnificent collection by which he was surrounded gave evidence that no expense was spared in its gratification.

It was a map and globe of the world that now occupied his attention. Could these have reference to a question of natural history?

In an indirect manner they had, – and what follows will account for their presence.

A hand-bell stood upon the table. The baron rang it; and before its tingling had ceased, the door opened, and a servant entered the apartment.

“Summon my sons to attend me!”

The servant bowed, and retired.

A few minutes after, two youths entered the apartment. They appeared to be of the respective ages of sixteen and eighteen. One, the elder and taller, was of a darkish complexion, with brown waving hair, and hazel eyes. The expression of his countenance was that of a youth of firm and rather serious character; while the style of his dress, or rather his manner of wearing it, showed that he was altogether without vanity in matters of personal appearance. He was handsome withal, having that aristocratic air common to the nobility of Russia. This was Alexis.

The younger brother differed from him as much as if no kinship existed between them. He was more the son of his mother, the baroness; while Alexis inherited the features and a good deal of the disposition of his father. Ivan was a fair-haired lad, with golden locks curling over a forehead of bright blonde complexion, and cheeks that exhibited the hue of the rose. His eyes were of a deep azure-blue – such as is often seen among the Slavonic races – and their quick sparkle told that in the breast of Ivan there beat a heart brimming with bright thoughts, and ever ready for mischief and merriment, but without any admixture of malice.

Both approached their father with a serious expression of countenance. That of Alexis bespoke sincerity; while Ivan stole forward with the air of one who had been recently engaged in some sly mischief, and who was assuming a demure deportment with the design of concealing it.

A word about these two youths, and the object for which their father had summoned them into his presence. They had now been each of them more than ten years engaged in the study of books, under some of the ablest teachers that Russia could furnish. Their father himself had given much time to their instruction; and, of course, an inclination to their minds similar to that which characterised his own, but chiefly to the mind of Alexis.

The latter had imbibed a fondness for the study of nature, while Ivan was more given to admire the records of stirring events, with a strong *penchant* for the splendours of the world, in which he felt longing to bear a part. The nature of the books which had passed through their hands – a great number of them being books of travel – had begotten within these youths a wish to see the world, which, increasing each day, had grown into an eager desire. This desire had been often expressed in hints to their father; but at length, in a more formal manner, by means of a written petition, which the boys, after much deliberation, had drawn up and presented to him, and which was now seen lying open before him upon the table.

The petition was simply their united request, that their father would be so good as to allow them to travel and see foreign countries – where, and how, to be left to his wise guidance and discretion.

It was to receive an answer to this petition, that his sons were now summoned into his presence.

Chapter Three. The Sealed Orders

“So, my youngsters!” said the baron, directing his glance upon them, “you have a desire to travel? You wish to see the world, do you?”

“True, papa!” modestly answered Alexis; “our tutor tells us that we are sufficiently educated to go abroad; and, if you have no objection, we should very much like to make a tour.”

“What! before going to the University!”

“Why, papa! I thought you were not going to send us to the University for some time to come? Did you not say, that a year of travelling was worth ten at a University?”

“Perhaps I may have said so; but that depends upon *how* one travels. If you travel merely to amuse yourselves, you may go over all the world, and come back no wiser than when you started! I have known many a man return from a circumnavigation of the globe, without bringing with him the knowledge of a single fact that he might not have obtained at home. You would expect to travel in snug railway-carriages, and comfortable steam-ships, and sleep in splendid hotels – is that your expectation?”

“Oh no, papa! whatever way you may direct, that will be agreeable to me,” said Alexis.

“As for me,” rejoined Ivan, “I’m not particular. I can rough it, I’m sure.”

There was a little flavour of *bravado* in the manner of Ivan’s speech, that showed he was scarce inclined to the roughing system, and that he merely assumed the swaggering air, because he had no belief that he would be called upon to make trial of it.

“If I permit you to travel,” continued the baron, “where would you like to go? You, Alexis! to what part of the world would your inclination lead you?”

“I should like to see the new world of America – its noble rivers, and forests, and mountains. I should certainly visit America, if it were left to my choice; but I shall be guided by you, papa, and do as you direct.”

“You, Ivan?”

“Paris, for me, of all places in the world!” replied Ivan, without any suspicion that the answer would be displeasing to the father.

“I might have known so,” muttered the baron, with a slight frown clouding his forehead.

“O papa!” added Ivan, noticing the shade of displeasure which his answer had produced; “I don’t care particularly about Paris. I’ll go anywhere – to America, if Alexis likes it best – *all round the world* for that matter.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the baron; “that sounds better, Ivan; and, since you offer no objection to it, *all round the world you shall go*.”

“Indeed? I’m glad to hear it,” said Alexis.

“What! visit all the great cities of the world?” exclaimed Ivan, whose mind was evidently occupied with the delights of great cities.

“So” replied his father; “it is just that which I do not intend you shall do. There is a great deal to be learnt in cities, but much that would be better not learnt at all. I have no objection to your passing through cities – for you must needs do so on your journey – but one of the conditions which I shall prescribe is, that you make stay in no city, longer than you can arrange for getting out of it. It is through *countries* I wish you to travel – amidst the scenes of nature – and not in towns and cities, where you would see very little more than you can in Saint Petersburg itself. It is Nature I wish you to become acquainted with, and you must see it in its most primitive forms. There only can you appreciate Nature in all its sublimity and grandeur.”

“Agreed, papa!” exclaimed both the boys at once. “Which way do you wish us to go?”

“All round the world, as Ivan has suggested.”

“Oh, what a long voyage! I suppose we shall cross the Atlantic, and then by the isthmus of Panama to the Pacific; or shall we go as Magellan went, around Cape Horn?”

“Neither way – I wish you to make great journeys by land, rather than voyages by sea. The former will be more instructive, though they may cost more time and toil. Remember, my sons! I do not send you forth to risk your lives without a purpose. I have more than one purpose. First, I wish you to complete your studies of natural science, of which I have taught you the elements. The best school for this is the field of Nature herself, which you shall explore in your travels. Secondly, as you both know, I am fond of all natural objects, but especially those that have life – the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; these you must observe in their native haunts, with their habits and modes of existence. You will keep a journal of all facts and events that may be worth noting down, and write out in detail such adventures as may occur to you upon your route, and you think may prove interesting to me to read on your return. I shall provide you with ample means to accomplish your journey; but no money is to be wasted by idly sojourning in large cities: it must be used only for the necessary expenses of your travels. The emperor has been kind enough to give you a circular letter, which will get you funds and such other assistance as you may require from his agents in all parts of the world.”

“We promise, dear father, strictly to adhere to your instructions. But whither do you desire us to go?” Alexis asked the question.

The baron paused for some time before making reply. Then, drawing from his desk a sealed paper, which showed signs of having been but recently folded, he gravely said as he held it towards them —

“In this document you will find the conditions upon which I give you permission to travel. I do not ask you to agree to them, until you have carefully examined and reflected upon them. You will therefore retire to your room, read this document over, and, having given its contents due consideration, return, and signify whether you accept the terms; for if not, there is to be no travelling.”

“*By the Great Peter!*” whispered Ivan to Alexis, “they will be hard indeed if we don’t accept them.”

Alexis took the paper, and both, bowing to their father, retired to their own apartment.

The seal was immediately broken and not without some surprise did they peruse the contents of the document. It was in the form of an epistle, and ran thus: —

“My sons Alexis and Ivan! – You have expressed a desire to travel, and have requested me to give you my permission. I accede to your request, but only upon the following conditions: You must procure for me a skin of every variety of bear known upon the earth. I do not mean such varieties as are termed ‘accidental,’ arising from albinism or like circumstances, but every species or variety known to naturalists and acknowledged as ‘permanent.’ The bears from which these skins are to be taken must be killed in their native haunts, and by your own hands – with no other assistance than that of an attendant whom I shall appoint to accompany you. In order to accomplish the task which I have imposed upon you, it will be necessary for you to go ‘round the world;’ but I add the further condition, that you are to go *only once round it*. In *latitude*, I leave you free to range – from pole to pole, if it so please you (this was a stretch of liberty at which both boys laughed); but *longitudinally*, no. You must not cross the same meridian twice before returning to Saint Petersburg. I do not intend this condition to apply to such traverses as you may be compelled to make, while actually engaged in the chase of a bear, or in tracking the animal to his den: only when you are *en route* upon your journey. You will take your departure from Saint Petersburg, and go east or west, which you please. From the conditions I have imposed upon you, I hope you will have skill enough to discover that a route is traced out for you, and, that, on starting, you *can* follow it either eastward or westward. This, with all matters relating to your means and mode of travelling,

I leave to your own choice; and I trust that the practical education you have received will enable you to make your tour with proper judgment. ('Tour, indeed!' exclaimed Ivan.) Once out of my palace, I take no farther charge of you. You may be some years older before I see you again; but I trust the time will not be mis-spent; and that upon your return you may be able to give a proper account of yourselves, is the earnest hope and wish of your affectionate father, Michael Grodonoff."

Chapter Four.

Discussing the Conditions

The two youths were no little astonished by the contents of this singular epistle; but, for all that, the terms imposed did not seem to them either harsh or unreasonable, and they were only too pleased to accede to them. They partly guessed their father's motive. They knew that he loved both of them with a true paternal love; but his affection was not of that kind to pet and pamper them within the precincts of his luxurious palace. He had a different idea of what would be beneficial to their future interests. He believed in the education which is acquired in the rude school of toil and travel, more than in the book-lore of classic universities; and he was determined that they should have a full measure of this sort of training. He had resolved that they *should* see the world; not according to the ordinary understanding of this hackneyed phrase – not the world of towns and great cities, with their empty shows and vices – but the *world of Nature*; and, in order that they should have the opportunity of becoming thoroughly acquainted with this sort of world, he had traced out for them a route that would lead them into its very wildest scenes, and disclose to them its rarest and most primitive forms.

“By my word, brother!” exclaimed Ivan as soon as Alexis had finished reading the letter, “we shall have travelling to our hearts’ content. Certainly, papa has adopted a strange plan to keep us out of the walls of great cities.”

“Yes,” quietly answered Alexis; “there are not many cities where bears abound.”

“Such strange conditions!” added Ivan, “I wonder what father can mean by imposing them upon us.”

“Indeed, I hardly know myself. One thing only seems to explain it.”

“What is that, brother?”

“You are aware, Ivan, of the interest that papa takes in all matters relating to bears. As people say, it is almost a mania with him.”

“Oh! the great picture in the gallery will account for that,” said Ivan, laughing. “But for a *bear*, you know, our papa would never have been a *baron*.”

“True: that may have been what first led him to take an interest in these animals.”

“And yet to impose upon us these queer conditions!” continued Ivan; “it certainly does seem a little eccentric?”

“No doubt papa has his purpose,” said Alexis. “Who knows that he may not be intending to write a *monograph* of the bears; and it is for this he wishes to have full set of their skins – the complete costume of each individual member of Monsieur Bruin’s family? Well, we must do our best, and procure them for him. It is not for us to inquire into the motives of our dear father. It is our duty to obey his orders – even though the task be ever so irksome or difficult.”

“Oh, certainly, brother! I admit that; and I am ready to yield obedience and perform any task dear papa may think proper to impose on us.”

Certainly there was some reason for the surprise with which the youths had read the letter. Its contents might have appeared still more whimsical to them, had it not been their father that had written it; and, but for the fact that he had already given them a thorough training in the natural sciences, they would have found it difficult, if not altogether impossible, to carry out his instructions. A bear of every known variety was to be killed and skinned – killed, too, in its own haunts and by their own hands; which, of course, meant that they were to visit every country where bears are to be found, and obtain a skin of each kind. Notwithstanding their youth both boys were skilled hunters, and excellent marksmen. Himself brought up to the calling, their father had early initiated them into the hunter’s craft; and, in addition to the knowledge of natural history, which

he had imparted, he had taught them habits of self-reliance – such as are only acquired by ordinary individuals at the full age of manhood. Both were already inured to such perils and hardships as are incidental to a hunter's life; both could endure to go a day or two without food or drink – could sleep in the open air, with no other tent than the canopy of heaven, and no other couch than the grassy covering of the earth. All this sort of experience they had already gone through, in the cold climate of their own country; and it was not likely they would meet with one much more rigorous anywhere on the earth. The young Grodonoffs had been submitted to a training of almost Spartan severity – a perfect *Cyropoedia* – and dreaded neither hardships nor dangers. They were just the youths to carry out that singular programme which had been traced for them by the paternal hand.

Was it possible, however to do so? This was their first query. There were some very nice points in that brief chapter of instructions. *Latitudinally* they might traverse as circumstances required, but not *longitudinally*. Under these limitations would it be possible to visit the haunts of all the bears, – to cover, as it were, the whole area of Bruin's geographical distribution?

That it was possible might be inferred, from the fact of their father having issued the orders; but it was necessary for the young expeditionists to set out with caution: else might they take a wrong route, and be altogether unable to fulfil his injunctions. They must *not twice cross the same meridian*. It was this quaint condition that puzzled them, and rendered it necessary to guard against making a false start.

Lucky it was that Alexis was an accomplished zoologist, and thoroughly understood the geographical distribution of the genus *ursus*. But for this knowledge, they would certainly have been puzzled as to the route they were to take.

“Well, brother Ivan!” said Alexis with a smile, “had these orders been issued when the great Swede published his *Systema Naturae*, our task would have been easily accomplished. How far do you suppose our travels need to have extended?”

“I don't quite comprehend you, Alexis. How far?”

“Why, simply into the courtyard of our palace. It would have been only necessary to kill and skin one of the great bears chained by the gate, and that would have fulfilled all the conditions papa has imposed upon us.”

“And yet, I don't understand you,” rejoined Ivan, with a puzzled look.

“How obtuse you are, brother! Read the letter again; note well its terms!”

“Well, I understand them. We are to travel on, and not come home again till we have killed a bear of every variety known.”

“There – just so. Of course papa means every variety known to naturalists, – that is, to the ‘scientific world,’ as it is termed. Now you comprehend my meaning?”

“Oh, yes!” answered Ivan; “you mean that when Linnaeus published his ‘System of Nature,’ only our own brown bear of Europe was known to naturalists?”

“Precisely so – only the *ursus arctos*; and consequently we should have had but a very short journey to make, compared with what is before us now. It is true that previous to his death, the Swedish naturalist had made the acquaintance of the ‘Polar’ bear (*ursus maritimus*); but, strange enough, he regarded this as a mere variety of the *ursus arctos* – an error that one may wonder Linnaeus could have made.

“Oh, they are very different. I could tell that myself. To say nothing of the colour, they are unlike in shape; and, as everybody knows, their habits are very dissimilar. Why, one lives in forests, and feeds chiefly upon fruits; while the other dwells amidst fields of snow and ice, and subsists almost exclusively on flesh, or fish. Variety, indeed! no, they are surely different species.”

“Undoubtedly,” answered Alexis; “but we shall have an opportunity of comparing them hereafter. For the present we must drop the subject, and find out the route of travel which papa has traced out for us.”

“But he has not indicated any route – has he? He gives us permission to go where we please, so long as we get the bearskins, and do not return upon our meridian. We are not to take the *backtrack*– ha! ha! ha!”

“Of course not; but you will find, to avoid doing this, we shall have to go by a definite course, and can take no other.”

“By my word! brother, I don’t see what you mean. I shall trust all to you: so take me where you please – which way, then?”

“Ah! that has yet to be determined. I cannot tell myself; and it will take me some time before I can make quite sure as to what direction we are to take on starting out – whether east, west, north, or south. It will be necessary for me to examine a map of the world, and trace out the boundaries of the different countries in which King Bruin holds sovereignty.”

“Ah! that will be an interesting lesson for me. Here is the map; let me spread it out, and do what I can to assist you in finding our way.”

As Ivan said this, he drew a large travelling map of the world from its case, and opening it out, laid it upon the table. Both the youths sat down; and, running their eyes over the chart, proceeded to discuss the direction which, by the conditions imposed upon them, they must necessarily take.

Chapter Five. Tracing the Route

“In the first place,” said Alexis, “there is the brown bear (*ursus arctos*). Him we might find in many parts of our own country – since he is emphatically our ‘Russian bear’; but there is also a black bear, which some naturalists say is a variety of the *ursus arctos*, while others believe it to be a separate species, having given to it the specific name of *ursus niger*—*ursus ator* it is sometimes called. Now, whether it be a species or only a variety, we must get a skin of it all the same – since papa has definitely expressed it so.”

“This black bear is to be found in our own northern forests, is it not?”

“Yes; it has been observed there; but more frequently in the mountains of Scandinavia: and, as we might wander through all the north of Russia without finding one, our best plan will be to proceed at once to Norway or Lapland. There we shall be certain also of finding the brown bear, and thus kill two birds with one stone.”

“Say Lapland: I should like to see the little Laps, but where next? To North America, I suppose?”

“By no means. There is a bear in the Pyrenees, and other mountains of Spain – in the Asturias especially. It is also deemed by most naturalists to be only a variety of the *ursus arctos*, but it is certainly a distinct species; and papa thinks so. Some naturalists would have it that there are only three or four distinct species in the whole world. They might just as well say there was but *one*. I think it better to follow papa’s views upon this subject, and regard all those bears which have permanent marks of distinction – whether it be in size, colour, or otherwise – as being so many separate species, however much they may approximate in habits or disposition. Why, some naturalists even call the American black bear merely a variety of our brown; and, as I said a moment ago, Linnaeus himself believed the Polar to be the same species. This is now known to be an erroneous theory. Since papa has given as much time to the study of the bears as perhaps any one else, I shall follow his theory, and regard the Spanish bear (*ursus pyrenaicus* it is called) a distinct species.”

“You propose, then, to go next to Spain, and kill the Spanish bear?”

“We *must*. Having started in a westerly course by going to Lapland, we must keep on in that direction.”

“But how about the white bear of the Alps?”

“You mean the *ursus albus* of Lesson?”

“Yes. To reach the Alps, where it is said to be found, we should have to recross a meridian of longitude?”

“We should, if there were such an animal to be found in the Alps; but there is not. The white bear of Buffon and Lesson (*ursus albus*) was only a mere accidental variety or *albino* of the brown bear; and papa does not mean that we should collect the skins of such as these. He has said so. Indeed, Ivan, were that task imposed on us, we should both be old men before we could complete it, and return home again. It is only the skins of the *permanent* varieties we are to procure, and therefore the *ursus albus* is scratched out of our list.”

“Out with him then! where go we next? To North America, then no doubt?”

“No.”

“Perhaps to Africa?”

“No.”

“Are there no bears in Africa?”

“That is a disputed point among writers, and has been so since the days of Pliny. Bears are mentioned as having been exhibited in the Roman circus, under the name of *Numidian* bears; and Herodotus, Virgil, Juvenal, and Martial all mention *Libyan* bears in their writings. Pliny, however, stoutly denies that there were any of these animals in Africa; but it must be remembered that he equally denies that stags, goats, and boars existed on the African continent: therefore his statement about the non-existence of the Numidian bears is not worth a straw. Strange enough, the point is as much disputed now as in the days of Pliny. The English traveller Bruce, states positively that there are no bears in Africa. Another English traveller to Abyssinia, Salt, makes no mention of them; while the German, Ehrenberg, says that he has seen them in the mountains of Abyssinia, and heard of them also in Arabia Felix! Several French and English travellers (Dapper, Shaw, Poncet, and Poiret), bear testimony to the existence of bears in different parts of Africa – in Nubia, Babur, and Congo. In the Atlas mountains, between Algiers and Morocco, according to Poiret, bears are common enough; and this writer even gives some details as to their habits. He says that they are exceedingly fierce and carnivorous, and that the Arabs believe they can lift stones in their paws and fling them at those who may be in pursuit of them! He relates that an Arab hunter brought him the skin of one of those bears; and also showed him a wound in his leg, which he had received by the animal having launched a stone at him while he was pursuing it! Monsieur Poiret, however, does not vouch for the truth of the stone-throwing, though he stoutly maintains the existence of African bears.”

“What does papa think about it?” inquired Ivan.

“That there are bears in Africa – perhaps in all the mountainous parts of Africa – but certainly in the Atlas and Tetuan ranges. Indeed, an English traveller of veracity has put the question beyond a doubt, by giving some points in the description of these African bears. Naturalists thought that if such an animal existed in Africa, it would be the same species as the Syrian; but although the bears reported in the Arabian and Abyssinian mountains are likely enough to be of that species, those of the Atlas are evidently not only distinct from the Syrian bear, but from all other known kinds. One that was killed near Tetuan, about twenty-five miles from the Atlas mountains, was a female, and less in size than the American black bear. It was black also, or rather brownish black, and without any white marking about the muzzle, but under the belly its fur was of a reddish orange. The hair was shaggy and four or five inches long, while the snout, toes, and claws were all shorter than in the American black bear, and the body was of thicker and stouter make. The Englishman had learnt something of its habits too. The Arabs said it was rarely met with near Tetuan; that it fed on roots, acorns, and fruits, but was only an indifferent climber. Indeed it would be very improbable,” continued Alexis, “that the great ranges of the Atlas and Abyssinian mountains should be without these mammalia, since they exist in nearly all the other mountains of the globe. Moreover, it should be remembered that it is only a few years since the bears of the Himalayas, of the Great Andes of America, and those of the East-Indian islands – and even the bear of Mount Lebanon – became known to the scientific world. Why, then, should there not be a species in Africa – perhaps more than one – though civilised people are yet unacquainted with it?”

“But you say we are not going to Africa?”

“No; our instructions relate only to every variety of bear known to naturalists; and the African bear does not come under this category – since it has not yet been described by any naturalist. For that reason we shall have no errand into Africa.”

“Then, surely North America is our next stage?”

“Certainly not – you are aware that there is a South American bear.”

“Yes, the ‘spectacled bear,’ as he is called.”

“Just so – the *ursus ornatus*. I think we shall find two species in South America, though that is also a disputed point.”

“Well, brother, what if we should?”

“Why, both will be found in the Andes of Chili and Peru, and not in the eastern parts of South America.”

“And how should that affect our route of travel?”

“Very essentially indeed. Were we to go first to North America, we should find no less than five species, or four species and one well-marked variety. To reach the native haunt of one of these – I mean the grizzly (*ursus ferox*) – we should have to go farther west than any part of the South American Andes: how, then, could we afterwards reach the spectacled bear without doubling back on our meridian?”

“True, brother – I see that, by looking on the map. You propose, then, steering first to South America, and afterwards to the northern division of the American continent?”

“We are compelled to do so, by the very nature of our contract. Having procured the skins of *ursus ornatus* and another variety we shall find in the Andes, we can then travel almost due north. On the Mississippi we shall be able to pick up a skin of the American black bear (*ursus americanus*), and by the help of the Hudson’s Bay *voyageurs* we shall reach the shores of the great gulf in which that territory takes its name. There the ‘polar bear’ (*ursus maritimus*) can be found. Farther westward and northward we may hope to capture the ‘barren ground bear,’ which the English traveller Sir John Richardson thinks is only a variety of our European brown bear, but which papa – and good reasons he has – believes to be nothing of the kind. Crossing the Rocky Mountains, we shall be able, I hope, to knock over the famed and formidable grizzly (*ursus ferox*), and in Oregon, or British Columbia, we shall strip his hide from the ‘cinnamon bear’ (*ursus cinnamonus*), believed to be a variety of the American black. That will finish with the bears of America.”

“Asia next, I suppose?”

“Yes, straight across to Kamschatka. There we shall meet with the ‘Siberian,’ or ‘collared bear’ (*ursus collaris*). Of these, two varieties are said to exist, one of which, specified by the name *ursus sibiricus*, is also found in Lapland and Siberia.”

“Go on, brother! Where next?”

“From Kamschatka we shall make a long traverse to the south-west. Our best hunting-ground will be Borneo.”

“Ah! the beautiful little bear with the orange-coloured breast!”

“Yes; that is the ‘Bornean bear’ (*ursus eurypilus*), or ‘Bruang,’ as he is called by the Malays.”

“But there is another Bruang?”

“Yes – the ‘Malayan sun-bear’ (*ursus malagenus*). This we shall encounter in Sumatra or Java, whichever we choose to visit.”

“Well, the list is much larger than I expected; certainly it has been wonderfully lengthened since the days of the good old Linnaeus.”

“We have not reached the end yet.”

“Where next, brother?”

“Up the Bay of Bengal, and on to the Himalayas. First in the foot-hills of these mountains we shall have to search for the curious ‘sloth bear,’ or ‘juggler’s bear’ (*ours de jongleurs*) as the French writers term him. He is the *ursus labiatus* of naturalists; and we may find him in the plains of India, before reaching the Himalayas. Having skinned him, we shall proceed to climb the great mountains, and higher up we are certain to come across the ‘Thibet bear’ (*ursus thibetanus*) – by some very erroneously described as being one of the numerous varieties of the European brown bear! Still higher up we shall, I hope, have the good luck to encounter and kill a specimen of the ‘Isabella bear’ (*ursus isabelinus*), so called from his colour, but termed by Anglo-Indian sportsmen the ‘snow bear,’ because he frequents the declivities near the snow-line of these stupendous mountains.”

“That is all, is it not?”

“No, Ivan – one more, and that will be the last.”

“What is he?”

“The ‘Syrian’ (*ursus syriacus*); and though the last in our catalogue, this is the very first on record: for they were bears of this species that came out of the wood and ‘tare forty and two’ of the mockers of the prophet Elisha. We shall have to visit Syria, to procure a skin of the *ursus syriacus*.”

“Well, I hope their ferociousness has been tamed down since Elisha’s time, else we may stand a fair chance of being served in a similar fashion.”

“No doubt we shall have many a scratch before we encounter the bears of Mount Lebanon. When we have obtained a robe from one of them, there will be nothing more for us to do but take the most direct route home. We shall then have gone *once round the world*.”

“Ah, that we shall!” said Ivan, laughing; “and all over it too. Great Czar! I think by the time we have captured one of Elisha’s bears, we shall have had a surfeit of travel.”

“No doubt of it; but now, brother, that we know where we are going, let us waste no more time, but signify our acceptance of the conditions, and be off at once.”

“Agreed,” said Ivan; and both returning into the presence of the baron, announced their readiness to take the road.

“Are we to travel alone, papa?” inquired Ivan; “I think you spoke of an attendant?”

“Yes, one attendant. You must not be encumbered with too many servants to wait upon you. One will be quite sufficient.”

“Who is it to be?” asked Ivan.

The baron rang the bell, and a servant entered.

“Send Corporal Pouchskin to me!”

Shortly after, the door reopened, and a man of about fifty appeared. The tall well-balanced form and erect attitude – the close-cropped hair and enormous grizzled moustache – combined with great gravity of features, denoted a veteran of the Imperial Guard, – one of those grand and redoubtable soldiers who have seen service in the presence of an emperor. Though no longer wearing the military uniform, but dressed somewhat as a park or game keeper, the silent salute and attitude of “attention” were sufficiently indicative of the profession which Pouchskin had followed: for it was the veritable Pouchskin who had entered the apartment. He said not a word, nor did he look either to the right or left, – only directly forward, and at the baron.

“Corporal Pouchskin!”

“General!”

“I wish you to make a journey.”

“I am ready.”

“Not quite, corporal. I will give you an hour to prepare.”

“Where does the general wish me to go?”

“Round the world.”

“Half an hour will suffice.”

“So much the better, then. Prepare to start in half an hour.”

Pouchskin bowed and retired.

Chapter Six. To the Tornea

We shall not detail the parting interview between the Baron Grodonoff and his sons; there was the usual interchange of affectionate expressions, with as much feeling as is common on such occasions. Neither need we relate the ordinary incidents of travel which befell our expeditionists, on their way to the mountains of Lapland. Suffice it to say that they journeyed by post from Saint Petersburg direct to Tornea, at the head of the Great Bothnian Gulf. Thence they proceeded northward up this river Tornea – till they had reached the mountainous region in which this stream takes its rise. They were amply furnished with the means of travelling in the most expeditious manner, and were not encumbered with any great amount of luggage. A bag of roubles, which Pouchskin carried in a safe pocket, proved the most convenient article they could have taken along with them; since it enabled them to supply their wants from day to day, without troubling themselves with any cumbersome baggage. There are few parts of the world in which ready money will not command the necessaries of life; and as this was all our hunters cared for, they had no difficulty in obtaining supplies – even in the remote regions of uncivilised Lapland. The wild, half-savage Lap perfectly comprehends the value of a coin; and will exchange for it his reindeer flesh and milk, or anything else that may be asked from him. Our young hunters therefore travelled lightly – with little else in the shape of baggage than a pair of knapsacks which they carried on their backs, and which contained only a change or two of linen, and such toilet articles as were absolutely necessary to their comfort. A knapsack of much larger dimensions formed the chief care of Pouchskin; and although this, with its contents, would have been a heavy load for an ordinary man, the veteran of the Imperial Guard thought no more of it than if it had been a bag of feathers. Each in addition carried an ample fur cloak; which, on the march, was folded up and strapped to their backs on top of the knapsack, but at night was wrapped around their bodies, and served both as bed and bedclothes. All three were armed and equipped, in the most substantial manner. They carried guns, though differing in kind. The piece of Alexis was a handsome Jäger rifle; Ivan's was a double-barrelled shot-gun or fowling-piece; while Pouchskin balanced over his shoulder an immense fusil, the bullet of which weighed a good ounce avoirdupois. All were provided with a knife of one fashion or another.

In such guise did our young hunters enter the mountains of Lapland; and commence their search after the “old man in the fur coat,” as the Laplanders term the bear.

They had taken proper measures to secure success. They had secured the services of a guide, who engaged to conduct them to a district where bears existed in great plenty, and where he himself lived in a state almost as savage as the bears – for he was a true Laplander and lived in a tent in the very heart of the mountains. He was one of those who had no reindeer; and was therefore forced to depend on the chase for his subsistence. He trapped the ermine and beaver – killed the wild reindeer when he could – spent his whole life in battling with wolves and bears; and with the skins of these animals – which he sold to the fur-traders – he was able to supply himself with the few necessaries which such a state of existence called for.

Under his tent of coarse *wadmal* cloth the travellers found shelter, and such rude hospitality as the poor Lap could afford them – in return for which they had to live in the midst of a smoke that nearly put out their eyes. But they knew they had entered upon an expedition, in which many hardships were to be expected; and they bore the inconvenience with becoming fortitude.

It is not my intention to give the details of the everyday life of the young hunters, nor yet an account of the very many curious incidents, which occurred to them during their sojourn in Lapland. Much was noted down in their journal – from which this narrative has been drawn – interesting

only to themselves, or perhaps still more to their father the baron. For him they wrote an account of everything peculiar that they observed – such as the odd customs of the Laplanders – their mode of travelling in sledges with reindeer – their snow-skating on the *skidors* and *skabargers* – and, in short, a full account of the habits and manners of these singular people. Especially, however, did Alexis describe the objects of natural history which came under his notice – giving such details as he drew from personal observation, or derived from the native hunters, many of whom they encountered while engaged in the chase of the bear.

These details, were they given in full, would fill a book of themselves. We must content ourselves, therefore, with relating only the more interesting incidents, and striking adventures which happened to our heroes.

We may here state that it was in the early part of spring that they arrived in Lapland, or rather in the latter part of winter, when the ground is still covered with deep snow. At this season the bears are hidden away in their caves – in crevices of the rocks or hollow trees – from which they only issue forth when the spring sun makes itself felt, and the snow begins to disappear from the sides of the hills.

Every one has heard of this *winter sleep* of the bears; and it has been attributed to bears of all species. This, however, is a mistake, as it is only indulged in by a few kinds; and the climate and nature of the country which the bear inhabits has more to do with his *hybernation* than any natural instinct of the animal: since it has been observed that bears will go to sleep, or *hybernate*, as it is termed, in one part of a country, while individuals of the same species, in another region, will be found roaming about all the winter through. The state of torpor seems to be voluntary with these animals: since it is generally in districts where food could not be procured, that they submit themselves to this prolonged *siesta*.

However this may be, the brown bears of Lapland certainly indulge in a period of slumber – during which they are difficult to find. Never issuing from their places of concealment, they make no track in the snow by which they might be followed. At such seasons it is only by accident, or by the aid of his dog, that the Lap hunter chances to discover the retreat of a bear; and, when one is thus discovered, various methods are adopted for securing the valuable skin and carcass of the animal.

It so chanced that, previous to the arrival of the young Russians upon their hunting-ground, there had been a show of spring – that is, a few days of warm sun – but this had been succeeded by a return of the cold weather, with a fresh fall of snow. The spell of warmth, however, had aroused many bears from their lethargy – some of which had ventured out of their caves, and made short excursions among the hills – in search, no doubt, of the berries, that, preserved all winter by the snow, are sweet and mellow at this season, and a favourite food of the bears.

This casual occurrence of the spring having made a promise and not kept it, was just the chance for our hunters; since it enabled them in a *very* short time to track a bear to his den.

A few days after their arrival upon the hunting-ground, they were able to do this – having come upon the footmarks of a bear, that, followed for a mile or so through the snow, led them to the animal's lair. It led them also to an adventure, which was the first they had yet encountered; and which came very near being the last that Pouchskin was ever to have in the world. Pouchskin was certainly in great peril; and how he escaped from it will be learnt, by reading an account of the adventure.

Chapter Seven. Jack-in-the-Box

It was early in the morning, shortly after leaving the tent of the Laplander, they had chanced upon the track of the bear.

After following it for nearly a mile, it conducted them to a narrow gorge or ravine, lying between two rocky ridges. The ravine itself was not more than ten or a dozen yards in width, and its bottom was filled with snow to the depth of several feet. Along the sides the snow lay sparsely; and in fact there had been scarce any in that place before the fall the preceding night. This had only covered the ground to the depth of a few inches: but it was sufficient to show the footmarks of the bear; and they were able to follow the *spar*— so the Scandinavian hunters call the tracks of an animal — as fast as they chose to go.

Following it up, then, our hunters entered the ravine. They kept for some distance along one side — just by the edge of the deep snow; but at length, the track indicated where the bear had crossed to the other side; and of course they were compelled to cross likewise.

This deep snow was the accumulated deposits of different storms that had occurred during the winter; and, shadowed from the sun by the long branches of evergreen pines from both sides stretching outward over the ravine, it had remained without melting. There was a crust over it — strong enough to carry a man on *skidors*, but not without them, unless he proceeded with care and caution. The bear had gone over it; but these animals, notwithstanding their enormous weight and bulk, can pass over ice or crusted snow that will not carry a man. Their weight rests upon four points instead of two; and as they need only lift one foot at a time, they still have three points of support. A man must also lift one foot, which leaves him only one to stand upon; and therefore his whole weight presses upon a single point, and so endangers his breaking through. The great length of a bear's body, moreover, and the vast stretch between his fore and hind legs give him an additional advantage — enabling him to distribute his weight over a large surface — and this is why he can shuffle over ice or snow-crust, that may be too weak to carry a human being. Every boy knows — at least every boy who has skated or ventured upon a frozen pond — that by creeping on hands and knees, or, more certain still, by sprawling along on the breast, ice may be passed over, that would not bear the same boy in an erect attitude.

Such advantage, then, had the bear which our young hunters were tracking up; and it would have been well for them — at least for Pouchskin — had they thought of it. They did not. They supposed that where a great heavy animal like a bear had gone they might go too; and, without further reflection, they stepped out upon the deep bed of snow.

Alexis and Ivan being light weights passed over the snow safely enough; but Pouchskin, weighing nearly as much as both of them — and further loaded with a ponderous wood-axe and his huge gun, to say nothing of sundry well-filled pockets and pouches — was more than the crust would carry. Just when he had got about halfway across, there was heard a tearing crash; and before the boys could turn to inquire the cause, Pouchskin had disappeared, and all his *paraphernalia* along with him!

No, not quite all. There was seen about two feet of the barrel of his gun above the surface; and as that still pointed upward — while it moved around the circular hole through which the old guardsman had fallen — the boys concluded that the piece was in his hands, and that Pouchskin was still upon his feet.

At the same instant a voice reached their ears — in a hollow sepulchral tone, like that of a man speaking from the bottom of a well, or through the bung-hole of an empty cask!

Notwithstanding its *baritone* notes, the boys perceived that the exclamations made by the voice were not those of terror, but rather of surprise, followed by a slight laugh. Of course, therefore, their attendant had received no injury, nor was he in any danger; and, assured of this, Ivan first, and then Alexis, broke out into yells of laughter.

On cautiously approaching the trap-like hole, through which Pouchskin had disappeared, their merriment burst forth afresh, at the ludicrous spectacle. There stood the old guardsman, like a jack-in-the-box in the centre of a hollow funnel-shaped cylinder which he had made in the snow. But what was strangest of all, there was no snow among his feet: on the contrary, he was up to his knees in water, and not stagnant water either, but a current, that ran rapidly underneath the snow, and had swished the crusted fragments from the spot where he was standing!

A stream, in fact, ran down the ravine; and, although the snow completely hid it from view, there it was, rushing along underneath through a tunnel which it had melted out for itself – the snow forming a continuous bridge above it.

The boys did not know all this – for they could only just see the top of Pouchskin's head, with his long arms holding the gun – but they could hear the rushing noise of the water, and Pouchskin reported the rest.

It did not appear so easy to extricate him from his unpleasant predicament; for the resemblance between his situation, and that of jack-in-the-box, went no further. There was no jerking machinery by which the ex-guardsman could be jumped out of his box; and, since his head was full three feet below the crust of the snow, how he was to be raised to the surface required some consideration.

Neither of the young hunters dared to approach the circumference of the circular hole through which Pouchskin had sunk. They might have broken through themselves, and then all three would have been in the same fix. Of course, under this apprehension, they dared not go near enough to pull him out with their hands – even had they been able to reach down to him.

It is true he might have got out, after some time, by breaking the snow before him, and working his way at right angles to the course of the stream: for it was evident that the ground sloped sharply up in that direction, and the snow became shallower. Except above the water, it was firm enough to have borne his weight, and after a time he might have scrambled out; but a more expeditious plan of relieving him, and one far less troublesome to Pouchskin, suggested itself to Alexis.

One of the *impedimenta*, which the old guardsman carried on his shoulders, was a coil of stout cord – almost a rope. This they had brought with them, in the anticipation of being successful in their hunt; and, with the idea of its being required at the skinning of the bear – as also for packing the hide, or any similar purpose.

It was the presence of this cord that suggested to Alexis the scheme he had conceived, for relieving his faithful follower from his unhappy position; and the plan itself will be understood by our describing its execution, which took place on the instant.

Alexis called to Pouchskin to tie one end of the rope round his body, and then fling the other out upon the snow – as far as he could cast it. This request was instantly complied with; and the end of the rope made its appearance at the feet of Alexis.

The latter taking it in his hand, ran up the bank to the nearest tree; and, giving it a turn or two round the trunk, he handed it to Ivan, with the direction to hold it fast and keep it from slipping. A knot would have served the same purpose; but the whole thing was the work of only a few moments; and as Ivan was standing by doing nothing, his brother thought he might just as well take hold of the rope and save time.

Alexis now crept back, as near to the edge of the trap as it was safe to go. He took with him a long pole, which by a lucky chance, he had found lying under the trees. Slipping this under the

rope, and placing it crosswise, he shoved it still nearer to the circumference of the broken circle – his object being to give support to the cord, and keep it from cutting into the snow.

The contrivance was perfectly correct; and as soon as Alexis had got all ready, he shouted to Pouchskin to haul upon the rope, and help himself.

Meanwhile, the old guardsman had slung his fusil upon his back; and, immediately on receiving the signal, commenced his ascent – pulling hand over hand upon the rope, and assisting his arms by working his feet against the wall of snow.

The moment his head appeared above the surface, the laughter of his young masters, that had been for a while suspended, burst forth afresh. And it was no wonder: for the expression upon the old soldier's visage, as it rose above the white crust, his bent attitude, and the desperate exertions he was making to clamber upward, all combined to form a most ludicrous picture.

Ivan screamed till the tears ran down his cheeks. So overcome was he with mirth, that it is possible he would have let go, and permitted Pouchskin to tumble back into his trap; but the more sober Alexis, foreseeing such a contingency, ran up and took hold of the rope.

By this means, Pouchskin was at length landed safely on the surface of the snow; but even his tall boots of Russia leather had not saved his legs and feet from getting well soaked; and he was now dripping with muddy water from the thighs downwards.

There was no time, however, to kindle a fire and dry him. They did not think of such a thing. So eager were all three in the chase of the bear, that they only waited to coil up the cord, and then continued onward.

Chapter Eight. The Scandinavian Bears

“Really, now,” said Ivan, pointing to one of the tracks, “if it wasn’t that I see the marks of claws instead of toes, I should fancy we were tracking a man instead of a bear – some barefooted Laplander, for instance. How very like these tracks are to those of a human foot!”

“That is quite true,” rejoined Alexis; “there is a very remarkable resemblance between the footprints of the bear and those of a human being – especially when the trades have stood a while. As it is, now, you can see clearly the marks of the claws; but in a day or two, when the sun or the rain has fallen upon the snow, and melted it a little, the claw marks will then be filled up with the thaw, and, losing their sharp outlines, will look much more like the tracks of toes. For that reason, an old bear-track is, indeed, as you say, very like that of a human foot.”

“And quite as large too?”

“Quite as large: the tracks of some kinds even larger than those of most men. As, for instance, the white and grizzly species – many individuals of both having paws over twelve inches in length!”

“The bear does not tread upon his toes in walking, but lays the whole sole of his foot along the ground – does he not?” asked Ivan.

“Precisely so,” replied Alexis; “and hence he is termed a *plantigrade* animal, to distinguish him from those other kinds, as horses, oxen, swine, dogs, cats, and so forth, that all, in reality, step upon their toes.”

“There are some other plantigrade animals besides bears?” said Ivan, interrogatively; “our badger and glutton, for instance?”

“Yes,” answered the naturalist. “These are plantigrade; and for this reason they have been classed along with the bears under the general name *ursidae*; but in father’s opinion, and mine too,” added Alexis, with a slight sparkle of scientific conceit, “this classification is altogether an erroneous one, and rests upon the very insignificant support of the plantigrade feet. In all other respects the different genera of small animals, that have thus been introduced into the family of the bears are, as unlike the latter almost bears as are to blue bottles.”

“What animals have been included in this family *ursidae*?”

“The European glutton and American wolverine (*gulo*), the badgers of both continents, and of Asia (*meles*), the raccoon (*procyon*), the Cape ratel (*mellivora*), the panda (*ailurus*), the benturong (*ictides*), the coati (*nasua*), the paradoxure (*paradoxurus*), and even the curious little teledu of Java (*mydaus*). It was Linnaeus himself who first entered these animals under the heading of *bears*— at least, such of them as were known in his day; and the French anatomist, Cuvier, extended this incongruous list to the others. To distinguish them from the true bears, they divided the family into two branches – the *ursinae*, or bears properly so called, and the *subursinae*, or little bears. Now, in my opinion,” continued Alexis, “there is not the slightest necessity for calling these numerous species of animals even ‘little bears.’ They are not bears in any sense of the word: having scarce any other resemblance to the noble Bruin than their plantigrade feet. All these animals – the Javanese teledu excepted – have long tails; some of them, in fact, being very long and very bushy – a characteristic altogether wanting to the bears, that can hardly be said to have tails at all. But there are other peculiarities that still more widely separate the bears from the so called ‘little bears;’ and indeed so many essential points of difference, that the fact of their being classed together might easily be shown to be little better than mere anatomical nonsense. It is an outrage upon common sense,” continued Alexis, warming with his subject, “to regard a raccoon as a bear, – an animal that is ten times more like a fox, and certainly far nearer to the genus *canis* than that of *ursus*. On the other hand, it is equally absurd to break up the true bears into different *genera*— as these same

anatomists have done; for if there be a family in the world the individual members of which bear a close family likeness to one another, that is the family of Master Bruin. Indeed, so like are the different species, that other learned anatomists have gone to the opposite extreme of absurdity, and asserted that they are all one and the same! However, we shall see as we become acquainted with the different members of this distinguished family, in what respects they differ from each other, and in what they are alike.”

“I have heard,” said Ivan, “that here, in Norway and Lapland, there are two distinct species of the brown bear, besides the black variety, which is so rare; and I have also heard say that the hunters sometimes capture a variety of a greyish colour, which they call the ‘silver bear.’ I think papa mentioned these facts.”

“Just so,” replied Alexis; “it has been the belief among Swedish naturalists that there are two species, or at least permanent varieties, of the brown bear in Northern Europe. They have even gone so far as to give them separate specific names. One is the *ursus arctos major*, while the other is *ursus arctos minor*. The former is the larger animal – more fierce in its nature, and more carnivorous in its food. The other, or smaller kind, is of a gentler disposition – or at all events more timid – and instead of preying upon oxen and other domestic animals, confines itself to eating grubs, ants, roots, berries, and vegetable substances. In their colour there is no perceptible difference between the two supposed varieties – more than may be often found between two individuals notably of the same kind; and it is only in size and habits that a distinction has been observed. The latest and most accurate writers upon this subject believe that the great and little brown bears are not even varieties; and that the distinctive characteristics are merely the effects of age, sex, or other accidental circumstances. It is but natural to suppose that the younger bears would not be so carnivorous as those of greater age. It is well-known that preying upon other animals and feeding upon their flesh, is not a natural instinct of the brown bear; it is a habit that has its origin, first in the scarcity of other food, but which, once entered upon, soon develops itself into a strong propensity – almost equalling that of the *felidae*.”

“As to the black bear being a distinct species, that is a question also much debated among both hunters and naturalists. The hunters say that the fur of the black European bear is never of that jetty blackness which characterises the real black bears of American and Asiatic countries, but only a very dark shade of brown; and they believe that it is nothing more than the brown fur itself, grown darker in old age. Certainly they have reason for this belief: since it is a well-known fact that the brown bears do become darker as they grow older.”

“Ha!” said Ivan, with a laugh, “that is just the reverse with us. Look at Pouchskin there! Your hair was once black, wasn’t it, old Pouchy?”

“Yes, Master Ivan, black as a crow’s feathers.”

“And now you’re as grey as a badger. Some day, before long – before we get home again may be – your moustache, old fellow, will be as white as an ermine.”

“Very like, master, very like – we’ll all be a bit older by that time.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed Ivan; “you’re right there, Pouchy; but go on, brother!” he added, turning to Alexis, “let us hear all about these Scandinavian bears. You have not spoken yet of the ‘silver’ ones.”

“No,” said Alexis; “nor of another kind that is found in these countries, and that some naturalists have elevated into a different species – the ‘ringed bear.’”

“You mean the bears with a white ring round their necks? Yes, I have heard of them too.”

“Just so,” rejoined Alexis.

“Well, brother, what do *you* think? is it a distinct species, or a permanent variety?”

“Neither one nor the other. It is merely an accidental marking which some young individuals of the brown bear chance to have, and it scarcely ever remains beyond the age of *cubhood*. It is only very young bears that are met with of this colour; and the white ring disappears as they get

older. It is true that hunters now and then meet with an odd ringed bear of tolerable size and age; but all agree that he is the brown bear, and not a distinct kind. The same remarks apply to the 'silver' bear; and hunters say that in a litter of three cubs they have found all three colours – the common brown, the 'ringed,' and the 'silver,' – while the old mother herself was a true *ursus arctos*."

"Well, since papa only binds us to the brown and black, it will be a nice thing if we could fall in with a skin of the ringed and silver varieties. It would please him all the better. I wonder now what sort is this fellow we are following? By the size of his tracks he must be a wopper!"

"No doubt an old male," rejoined Alexis; "but if I am not mistaken, we shall soon be able to determine that point. The *spar* gets fresher and fresher. He must have passed here but a very short while ago; and I should not wonder if we were to find him in this very ravine."

"See!" exclaimed Ivan, whose eyes had been lifted from the trail, and bent impatiently forward; – "see! by the great Peter! yonder's a hole, under the root of that tree. Why might it not be his cave?"

"It looks like enough. Hush! let us keep to the trail, and go up to it with caution – not a word!"

All three, now scarce breathing – lest the sound should be heard – stole silently along the trail. The fresh-fallen snow, still soft as eider-down, enabled them to proceed without making the slightest noise; and without making any, they crept up, till within half-a-dozen paces of the tree.

Ivan's conjecture was likely to prove correct. There was a line of tracks leading up the bank; and around the orifice of the cavity the snow was considerably trampled down – as if the bear had turned himself two or three times before entering. That he had entered, the hunters did not entertain a doubt: there were no return tracks visible in the snow – only the single line that led up to the mouth of the cave, and this seemed to prove conclusively that Bruin was "at home."

Chapter Nine.

Hybernation of Bears

As already stated, it is the custom of the brown bear, as well as of several other species, to go to sleep for a period of several months every winter, – in other words, to *hybernate*. When about to take this long nap, the bear seeks for himself a cave or den, in which he makes his bed with such soft substances as may be most convenient – dry leaves, grass, moss, or rushes. He collects no great store of these however – his thick matted fur serving him alike for bed and coverlet; and very often he makes no further ado about the matter than to creep into the hole he has chosen, lie down, snugly couch his head among the thickets of long hair that cover his hams, and thus go to sleep.

Some naturalists have asserted that this sleep is a state of torpidity – from which the animal is incapable of awaking himself or of being awakened, until the regular period of indulgence in it may have passed. This, however, is not the case; for bears are often surprised in their sleep, and when aroused by the hunters act just as is usual with them at other times.

It must be observed, however, that the retirement of the bear into winter quarters is not to be regarded as of the same nature as the hybernation of marmots, squirrels, and other species of rodent animals. These creatures merely shut themselves up from the cold; and to meet the exigencies of their voluntary imprisonment, they have already collected in their cells a large store of their usual food. Bees and many other insects do precisely same thing. Not so with the bear. Whether it be that he is not gifted with an instinct of providence it is difficult to say; but certain it is, that he lays up no store for these long dark days, but goes to sleep without thought of the morrow.

How he is maintained for several months without eating is one of nature's mysteries. Every one has heard the absurd theory: that he does so by "sucking his paws," and the ingenious Buffon has not only given credence to this story, but endeavours to support it, by stating that the paws when cut open yield a substance of a milky nature!

It is a curious fact that this story is to be found scattered all over the world – wherever bears hybernate. The people of Kamschatka have it; so also the Indians, and Esquimaux of the Hudson's Bay territory, and the Norwegian and Lap hunters of Europe. Whence did these widely-distributed races of men derive this common idea of a habit which, if the story be a true one, must be common to bears of very different species?

This question can be answered. In northern Europe the idea first originated – among the hunters of Scandinavia. But the odd story once told was too good to be lost; and every traveller, since the first teller of it, has taken care to embellish his narrative about bears with this selfsame conceit; so that, like the tale of the Amazon women in South America, the natives have learnt it from the travellers, and not the travellers from the natives!

How absurd to suppose that a huge quadruped, whose daily food would be several pounds weight of animal or vegetable matter – a bear who can devour the carcass of a calf at a single meal – could possibly subsist for two months on the *paw-milk* which Monsieur Buffon has described!

How then can we account for his keeping alive? There need be no difficulty in doing so. It is quite possible that during this long sleep the digestive power or process is suspended, or only carried on at a rate infinitesimally small; that, moreover, life is sustained and the blood kept in action by means of the large amount of fat which the bear has collected previous to his *going to bed*. It is certain that, just at their annual *bed time*, bears are fatter than at any other season of the year. The ripening of the forest fruits, and the falling of various seeds of mast-worts, upon which, during the autumn, bears principally subsist, then supply them with abundance, and nothing hinders them to get fat and go to sleep upon it. They would have no object in keeping awake: were they to do so, in those countries where they practise hybernation, they would certainly starve, for, the ground

being then frozen hard, they could not dig for roots, and under the deep covering of snow they might search in vain for their masts and berries. As to foraging on birds or other quadrupeds, bears are not fitted for that. They are not agile enough for such a purpose.

They will eat both when they can catch them; but they cannot always catch them; and if they had no other resource in the snowy season the bears would certainly starve. To provide them against this time of scarcity, nature has furnished them with the singular power of somnolence. Indeed, that this is the purpose is easily proved. It is proved by the simple fact that those bears belonging to warm latitudes, as the Bornean, Malayan, and even the black American of the Southern States, do not hibernate at all. There is no need for them to do so. Their unfrozen forests furnish them with food all the year round; and all the year round are they seen roaming about in search of it. Even in the Arctic lands the polar bear keeps afoot all the year; his diet not being vegetable, and therefore not snowed up in winter. The female of this species hides herself away; but that is done for another purpose, and not merely to save herself from starvation.

That the stock of fat, which the bear lays in before going to sleep, has something to do with subsisting him, is very evident from the fact that it is all gone by the time he awakes. Then or shortly afterwards, master Bruin finds himself as thin as a rail; and were he to look in a glass just then, he would scarce recognise himself, so very different is his long emaciated carcass from that huge plump round body, that two months before he could scarce squeeze through the entrance to his cave!

Another great change comes over him during his prolonged sleep. On going to bed, he is not only very fat, but also very lazy; so much so that the merest tyro of a hunter can then circumvent and slay him. Naturally a well-disposed animal – we are speaking only of the brown bear (*ursus arctos*) though the remark will hold good of several other species – he is at this period more than usually civil and soft-tempered. He has found a sufficiency of vegetable food which is more congenial to his taste than animal substances; and he will not molest living creature just then, if living creature will only let him alone. Aroused from his sleep, however, he shows a different disposition. He appears as if he had got up “wrong side foremost.” His head aches, his belly hungers, and he is disposed to believe that some one has stolen upon him while asleep, and robbed him of his suet. Under this impression he issues from his dark chamber in very ill humour indeed. This disposition clings to him for a length of time; and if at this period, during his morning rambles, he should encounter any one who does not get speedily out of his way, the party thus meeting him will find him a very awkward customer. It is then that he makes havoc among the flocks and herds of the Scandinavian shepherd – for he actually does commit such ravages – and even the hunter who meets him at this season will do well to “ware bear.”

And so does the hunter; and so did Alexis, and Ivan, and Pouchskin. All three of them were well enough acquainted with the habits of the bear – their own Russian bear – to know that they should act with caution in approaching him.

And in this wise they acted; for instead of rushing up to the mouth of the hole, and making a great riot, they stole forward in perfect silence, each holding his gun cocked, and ready to give Bruin a salute, the moment he should show his snout beyond the portals of his den.

Had they not tracked him to his cave, they would have acted quite differently. Had they found a bear’s den – within which they knew that the animal was indulging in his winter sleep – they would not have cared so much how they approached it. Then he would have required a good deal of stirring up to induce him to show himself, so that they could get a shot at him; but the track told them that this one had been up and abroad – perhaps for several days – and as the new snow, in all likelihood, had hindered him from picking up much to eat, he would be as “savage as a meat axe.”

Expecting him to spring out almost on the instant, the three took stand at some distance from the mouth of the cave; and, with arms in readiness, awaited his coming forth.

Chapter Ten. Bruin at Home?

The entrance to the cave, if cave it was, was an aperture of no great dimensions – about large enough to admit the body of a full-grown bear, and no bigger. It appeared to be a hole or burrow, rather than a cave, and ran under a great pine-tree, among whose roots, no doubt, was the den of the bear. The tree itself grew up out of the sloping bank; and its great rhizomes stretched over a large space, many of them appearing above the surface soil. In front of the aperture was a little ledge, where the snow was hacked by the bear's paws, but below this ledge the bank trended steeply down – its slope terminating in the bed of deeper snow already described.

As stated, the three hunters had taken their stand, but not all together. Directly in front of the cave was Pouchskin, and below it, of course, on account of the sloping bank. He was some six paces from the aperture. On the right side Ivan had been placed, while Alexis had passed on, and now stood upon the left. The three formed a sort of isosceles triangle, of which Pouchskin was the apex, and the line of the bank the base. A perpendicular dropped from the muzzle of Pouchskin's gun would have entered the aperture of the cave. Of course Pouchskin's was the post of danger; but that was to be expected.

They stood a good while in silence. No signs of Bruin – neither by sight nor hearing.

It was then resolved that some stir should be made – a noise of any kind, that might bring the beast forth. They coughed and talked loudly, but all to no purpose. They shouted at length with like fruitless result – Bruin would not stir!

That he was inside none of them doubted. How could they? The tracks going to the cave, and none coming from it, set that question at rest. Certainly he was in his den? but whether asleep or not, it was evident he took no heed of their shouting.

Some other means must be adopted to get him out. He must be stirred up with a pole! This was the plan that suggested itself, and the one determined upon.

Pouchskin started off to procure a pole. The others kept guard – still holding their guns in readiness, lest the bear might make a rush in Pouchskin's absence. But Bruin had no such intention; nor was his presence betrayed by sight or sound, until Pouchskin came back. He had cut a pole with his axe, and had taken the precaution to select a long one. A young sapling it was, that when cleared of its branches appeared as long as a hop-pole. Pouchskin knew the advantage of its length. He had no particular wish to come to close quarters with the bear.

Creeping back pretty nearly into his old place, he inserted the end of the sapling into the aperture – then rattled it against the sides, and waited a bit. No response from Bruin! Once more the pole was pushed in, this time a little further, and again accompanied with similar noisy demonstrations. Bruin neither moves nor makes sound!

"He must be asleep! Try a little further, Pouchskin!"

This suggestion came from the impatient Ivan.

Encouraged by the words of his young master, Pouchskin approached, nearer to the aperture, and buried half of the pole inside. He then turned the stick and poked it all about, but could touch nothing that felt like a bear. Growing more confident, he crept yet nearer, and pushed the pole up till he could touch the bottom of the cave – once more feeling with its point in all directions, against the further end, along the sides, upwards and downwards, and everywhere. Still he touched nothing soft – nothing that felt as the shaggy hide of a bear should do – nothing, in fact, but hard rocks, against which the stick could be heard rattling wherever he pushed it!

This was very mysterious. Pouchskin was an old bear-hunter. He had poked his pole into many a burrow of Bruin, and he knew well enough when he had touched bottom. He could tell

moreover that the cave he was now exploring was all in one piece – a single-roomed house. Had there been any second or inner chamber he would have found the aperture that led to it; but there appeared to be none.

To make sure of this, he now approached quite near to the entrance, and continued to gauge the cavity with his stick. Alexis and Ivan also drew near – one on each side of him – and the exploration continued.

In a short while, however, Pouchskin became nearly satisfied that *there was no bear in the den!* He had groped with his stick all round and round it, and had come in contact with nothing softer than a rock or a root of the tree. As a last *resource* he lay down on the ground to listen – placing his ear close to the mouth of the cave; and, cautioning his young masters to keep silent, in this position he remained for some seconds of time.

Perhaps it was fortunate for them, if not for him, that they attended to his caution. Their silence enabled them to hear what Pouchskin could not – placed as he now was – and that was a sound that caused the young bear-hunters to start back and look upwards, instead of into the cave.

As they did so, a sight met their eyes that drew from both a simultaneous cry, while both at the same instant retreated several paces from the spot, elevating their guns as they went backward.

Slowly moving down the trunk of the great pine-tree appeared an animal of enormous size. Had they not been expecting something of the kind neither could have told that this moving object was an animal: since at first sight neither a head nor limbs could be distinguished – only an immense shapeless mass of brown shaggy hair.

The instant after a huge hairy limb was protruded below, and then another both terminating in broad ungulated paws, that in succession gripped the rough bark of the tree, causing it to rattle and scale off.

Singular as its shape was there was no mistaking the animal that was making this retrograde movement. It was Bruin himself, descending the tree buttocks downward!

Chapter Eleven. Hand to Hand

Alexis and Ivan, as they started back, simultaneously screamed out a shout of warning to Pouchskin. Both, almost at the same instant, raised their guns, and fired into the buttocks of the bear.

Pouchskin had heard their cries, but not the preliminary “sniff” which the animal had uttered: he had been too eager in *listening inside of the cave*, to hear aught that was passing without. He heard their warning cry however, and the reports of their guns; but not in time to get out of the way. Just as the shots were fired, he had half risen from his recumbent attitude; but the bear at that moment dropped down from the tree, and coming “*co-thump*” on the back of the old guardsman, once more flattened him out upon his face!

Perhaps it would have been as well for Pouchskin, if he had quietly remained in that attitude: for the bear had already turned from him, and showed signs of an intention to retreat; but Pouchskin, deeming that he was in the worst position he could well be in, scrambled suddenly to his feet, and made a “grab” at his gun.

This show of fight on the part of his antagonist – and the belief, perhaps, that it was Pouchskin that had so rudely tickled his posteriors – roused the fury of the bear; and instead of exposing his hind quarters to a second assault, he charged mouth open upon the ex-guardsman. By this time, the latter had recovered his gun, and promptly brought the piece to his shoulder; but, alas! the gun snapped! The lock had been wetted in the snow-trap. It was a flint lock, and the priming had got damped.

The failure only increased the fury of the animal; and a charge of swan-shot, which Ivan at the same instant fired from his second barrel, still further irritated him.

Pouchskin drew his long-bladed knife. It was the only weapon he could lay his hand upon, for the axe, which might have served him better, had been left above on the bank, where he had lopped the sapling.

He drew his knife, therefore, and prepared to defend himself in a *hand to paw* struggle.

He might still have retreated, though not with a certainty of safety – for in the hurry of the moment the bear had got on the bank above him: and had he turned his back, the fierce quadruped might have overtaken, and knocked him down at his will. Pouchskin thought it better to face the bear, and receive his onslaught at arm’s length.

There was but one way in which he could have retreated, and that was backward down the slope. He might make ground in that direction; and it occurred to him to do so, in order to get footing on a more level surface.

The bear having paused a moment to bite the place where the rifle bullet had stung him, gave Pouchskin time to gain some ground backwards; but only a few paces – since the whole affair did not occupy a tenth of the time taken in describing it.

Just as Pouchskin had reached the bottom of the slope, his angry assailant, with a terrific growl, rushed forth from the smoke, and galloped directly towards him. When about three feet distant from the hunter, Bruin reared upon his hind legs, in the attitude of a prize-fighter!

Pouchskin was seen to lunge forward with his right arm – the one which carried his knife; and, the moment after, both man and beast appeared closed together, “in grips.”

In this fashion they went waltzing over the snow, the spray of which rose in a cloud around them; and for a while they were seen only as one dark upright form, in confused and violent motion!

Ivan was uttering cries of fear – fear for the safety of his dearly-loved Pouchskin; while Alexis, more cool, was rapidly reloading his rifle, – knowing that the surest means of saving the life of their faithful attendant, was to encompass the death of the bear.

It was a moment of real peril for Pouchskin. The bear was one of the largest and fiercest he had ever encountered; and, perhaps, had he examined the brute more minutely before the conflict commenced, he would have thought twice before facing him. But the smoke from the guns was still over and around the spot, hanging upon the damp air. Up to the time when Pouchskin resolved to make stand, he had not yet had a clear view of his shaggy antagonist. When at length he perceived the formidable proportions of the animal, it was too late to retreat; and the struggle began as described.

In brief time Alexis – who at loading was quick as a tirailleur – had recharged his piece, and was now hastening up to the rescue.

Without going quite close he dared not fire: for in the way that man and bear were dancing about, there would be as much danger of killing the one as the other.

All at once, however, they appeared to separate. Pouchskin had torn himself out of the bear's clutches, and, evidently disinclined to a renewal of the embrace, was retreating backward, over the snow, still hotly pursued by the animal.

At this moment Alexis would have fired; but, unfortunately, the direction in which Pouchskin was going, kept his body nearly in a line with that of the animal; and Alexis could not fire without danger of hitting him.

The chase led across the ravine, and of course over the bed of snow. The pursued was doing his best to escape. But the pursuer had the advantage – for while the man was breaking through at every step, the broad-pawed quadruped glided over the frozen crust without sinking an inch.

Pouchskin had got a little the start, but his pursuer was fast gaining upon him. Once or twice, indeed, the bear was close enough to touch Pouchskin's skirts with his extended snout; but the necessity of rearing up, before making a stroke with his paw, required him to get still nearer, and Bruin knew that.

He had, however, got near enough even for this; and had risen on his hind feet, with the intention of clawing down his victim. Ivan and Alexis simultaneously uttered a cry of dismay; but before the dangerous stroke could descend, he for whom it was intended had sunk out of sight!

At first, the young hunters believed the blow had been struck, and that Pouchskin had fallen prostrate under it. They saw the bear spring forward as if to cover the fallen man; but the next moment their terror was mingled with astonishment on seeing, or rather *not* seeing, either man or bear: both had suddenly disappeared!

Chapter Twelve.

A Mysterious Disappearance

The sudden disappearance of both man and bear would no doubt have sadly perplexed our young hunters, had it not been for Pouchskin's previous adventure. With that still fresh in their memory, they were at no loss to comprehend what had occurred. While eagerly endeavouring to escape from his antagonist, Pouchskin had, no doubt, forgotten the dangerous snow-bridge; and, just as before, he had broken through it.

This time, however, it was no laughing matter. Pouchskin was no longer playing a solitary Jack-in-the-box, but, in all likelihood, he was under the huge body of the savage monster, in the act of being torn to pieces by his teeth, or perhaps drowned in the *subnivean* stream. Whether the bear had sprung voluntarily after him, or, in the impetus of charging, had been himself precipitated into the snow chasm without the power of preventing it, could not for the moment be known. The young hunters suspected that the bear had fallen in rather against his will; for certainly he had been seen to go down in rather an awkward and blundering manner, his hind legs pitching upwards as he broke through.

Whether the plunge had been voluntary or against his will could matter but little. He must be now upon top of the ex-guardsman; and, knowing the implacable fury of these animals when roused to resentment, his young masters had no other idea but that their attendant would be either drowned or torn to pieces.

As a last hope, however, Alexis rushed on over the snow, holding his rifle before him, and prepared to fire its contents into the bear the moment he should get sight of the animal.

As he advanced, he could hear a plunging and splashing of water, with other noises, – as the snorting and growling of the bear, and the crashing of frozen snow, all mixed up in confusion of sounds. Concluding that these noises were caused by the struggle still going on between the man and the bear, he hurried forward. Strange! there came no voice from Pouchskin!

When within about three paces of the broken edge, an object came under his eyes, that caused him to halt in his track. That object was the snout of the bear, that was projected upward above the surface of the snow. The eyes of the animal were not visible, nor any other part of it, except the aforesaid snout, and about six inches of the muzzle.

The thought instantly occurred to Alexis, that the bear had reared upon his hind feet, and was endeavouring to clamber out; and this was true enough, for the instant after, he was seen to spring perpendicularly upward, until his whole head and part of his neck became visible. Only for an instant, however; for Bruin, who now appeared to be playing Jack-in-the-box, sank once more out of sight, snout and all.

The young hunter was just regretting that he had not taken a snap shot at the animal's head; but before ten seconds of time had elapsed, the snout was again popped up by the edge of the hole. In all probability the bear would make a second attempt to spring out.

Alexis was therefore waiting till the whole head should show itself; but quick as a flash of lightning, it occurred to him that the brute might at the second effort succeed in reaching the surface of the snow, and then he would himself be in danger. To avoid this contingency, he resolved to fire at once; not at the snout, for, although he could not have failed to send his bullet through it, he knew that that would not kill the bear, but only render him more desperately furious, if such a thing had been possible.

It was the bear's skull he meant to take aim at. From the position of the animal's snout, of course he could tell exactly where the head must be, though he could not see it.

Had Alexis been an unskilled marksman, he would have stood his ground; and, guessing the position of the bear's head, would have fired at it through the snow. But he did not act in this manner. He had scientific knowledge sufficient to tell him that his bullet, sent in a slanting direction, might glance off the frozen crust, and miss the mark altogether. To ensure its direction, therefore, he instantly glided two steps forward, poked the barrel of his piece through the snow, until the muzzle almost touched the head of the bear – and then fired!

For some seconds he saw nothing. The smoke of the gunpowder, as well as the snow-dust blown up before the muzzle of the gun, formed a dense cloud over the spot. But though Alexis could not see the effect of his shot, he could tell by what he heard that his bullet had done good work. A loud “swattering” at the bottom of the hole proclaimed that the bear was struggling in the water; while his piteous whines and faint grunting told that his fierce strength was fast passing away.

As soon as the smoke had cleared off, Alexis upon his knees crept forward to the edge, and looked over it. There was blood upon the snow; the side against which the bear had stood was crimsoned with streams of it; and below, in the water, among the clumps of broken snow-crust, appeared a dark-brown mass, which Alexis knew to be the body of the animal.

It was still in motion; but as it was in a prostrate attitude, and making only feeble efforts, the young hunter knew that the life was nearly out of it.

It was not this that was now causing him to look down with such an anxious and troubled countenance. It was his apprehensions for Pouchskin. Where was he? At the bottom of the crater-like pit Alexis could see the body of the animal, but nothing of a man – neither arms, legs, nor body. Could he be under the bear, concealed by the shaggy hair? Was he hidden under the black water that filled the bottom of the ravine? – or, horrible thought! was he dead, and had his body been carried off by the current that rushed rapidly under the snow?

This was not improbable, for Alexis could see that there was a sort of arched tunnel between the snow and the water, quite large enough to have admitted the body of a man!

In agony he cried out, calling Pouchskin by name. He was repeating his despairing invocation, when all at once a loud laugh echoed in his ears, uttered close behind him. In the laughter he recognised the voice of Ivan.

Alexis suddenly leaped to his feet, wondering what on earth could be the cause of this ill-timed merriment. He turned towards Ivan with the intention of chiding him; but at that moment an object fell under his eye, that hindered him from carrying his intention into effect. On the contrary, the sight he saw caused him such joy, that he could not restrain himself from joining Ivan in his laughter. No wonder. The sight was odd enough to have drawn a smile from a dying man. A spectacle more ludicrous could scarce have been conceived.

A little further down the ravine, and about ten paces from where the boys were standing, an object was seen protruding above the snow. It was about ten inches in vertical diameter, something less horizontally, and of a roundish or oval shape. In colour it was almost white as the snow itself: for, indeed, it was sprinkled over with this material out of the bosom of which it had just emerged. A stranger coming upon the ground might have been sorely puzzled to make out what it was; but not so Ivan, who, on first beholding it, as it popped upward through the frozen crust, recognised it as the head of Pouchskin. Alexis also made it out at the first glance; and it was the comic twinkle of Pouchskin's eyes – denoting that no great damage had happened to him – that led Alexis to join his brother in the laughter.

Their merriment, however, was of short continuance – only an involuntary burst, for a moment's reflection told them that Pouchskin, although they saw him alive, might nevertheless have sustained some serious injury; and both at the thought hastened up towards the head.

On getting close to it, however, Ivan was unable to control himself, and once more gave way to a fit of involuntary laughter. The head of the old guardsman, standing up like a sphinx above the frozen surface, – his grizzled hair powdered all over with snow like the poll of some grand

flunkey, – his long moustache loaded with it, – his eyes sparkling and twinkling, and his features set in a serio-comic expression, – all combined to form a picture that it was difficult to contemplate with seriousness.

Alexis, however, anxious to ascertain as to whether Pouchskin had received any dangerous wound, did *not* this time join in his brother's mirth; and, as soon as they came near enough, his inquiries were directed to that end.

"Only scratched a bit, masters!" answered the old guardsman, – "only scratched a bit – nothing much; but the bear – the bear! where has the brute gone?"

"To his long home," answered Alexis; "you need be under no further apprehension about him. I think your knife must have well-nigh settled his account, for he was unable to get out of the hole again; but, fortunately, I have finished him with a bullet, and it only remains for us to haul his carcass up and take the skin off it. First, however, let us endeavour to extricate you, my good Pouchskin; and then you can tell us by what means you have managed to make an escape that certainly appears miraculous!"

So saying, Alexis, assisted by Ivan, commenced digging away the hard crust that surrounded the neck of Pouchskin; and kept on at it, until they had uncovered his shoulders. Then seizing him by the arms – one on each side – they drew him up, till his feet once more rested on the surface of the snow.

Chapter Thirteen.

A Subnivean Escape

Pouchskin proceeded to describe the manner of his escape – his young masters listening to him with great interest – although they already guessed pretty nearly how it had been accomplished. Still there were some points not so clear to them, which the old guardsman detailed.

In the first place, he had retreated from the bear, not because he believed himself vanquished, but because he had lost his knife. Its handle, wet with blood, had slipped from his grasp; and he could not tell what had become of it! Finding himself unarmed, of course his next thought was to get out of Bruin's way, for what could an unarmed man do in the embrace of a bear – and such a bear?

He then turned and ran; but he had quite forgotten the dangerous character of the snow-bed – the bridge that had refused to carry him before; though, indeed, over it was the only direction he could have taken. Had he attempted to run to the right or left, his course must have been up-hill; and the bear would have been certain to overhaul him in a couple of leaps. After all, he had taken the proper direction; and, as it proved in the end, his breaking through was the most fortunate accident that could possibly have happened to him. Had it not chanced so, he would, in all probability, have fallen into the clutches of the bear, and been torn to shreds by the infuriated animal.

Well, on touching bottom, he felt the water among his feet, and just then remembered how it had been before. He remembered the hollow archway under the snow, and, seeing the bear above, and in the act of being precipitated on top of him, he suddenly ducked his head, and pushed himself into the tunnel. He could feel the bear falling upon him behind, and the weight of the animal's body, as it was precipitated downwards, forced him still further under the snow-bridge.

Once in, he continued on down the stream, working both with head and arms, and clearing a space that would allow his body to pass. The soft snow was easily pressed out of the way; and, after going as far as he deemed necessary, he turned to the right, and worked his way upward to the surface.

It was while he was thus engaged that Alexis had been squaring accounts with the bear. The fierce creature had not followed Pouchskin under the snow. In all probability, his sudden "souse" into the water had astonished Bruin himself; – from that moment all his thoughts were to provide for his own safety, and, with this intention, he was endeavouring to get back to the surface of the snowdrift, when Alexis first caught sight of his snout.

At the moment that Alexis fired the final shot, or just a little after it, Pouchskin had popped up his head through the congealed crust of the snow, and elicited from Ivan those peals of laughter that had so much astonished his brother. Pouchskin, however, had not come unscathed out of the "scrimmage." On examining the old guardsman, it was found that the bear had clawed him severely; and a piece of skin, of several inches square was peeled from his left shoulder. The flesh, too, was rather badly lacerated.

Alexis was not without some surgical skill; and, without suffering a moment to be lost, he dressed the wound in the best manner possible under the circumstances. A clean handkerchief, which Ivan chanced to have, served as a covering for the scar; and this being tied on securely, with a strip torn from the sleeve of Pouchskin's own shirt, left the wounded guardsman in a condition to recover, as soon as it might please nature to permit. Nothing more could have been done by the most "skilful practitioner."

Their next business was to look after the bear. On going back to the hole, and, gazing into it, the animal, as Alexis had anticipated, was quite dead; and the water, partially dammed up by the huge carcass, was flowing over it.

Ivan, who had hitherto done least of all to secure the prize, now became the most active of the three; and, leaping down upon the body of the great brute, he looped the rope around one of its hind legs, and then stood on one side to help the rest in raising it upward.

Alexis and Pouchskin commenced hauling on the other end of the rope, and the vast mass slowly ascended upward, Ivan pushing from below, and guiding it past the inequalities of the snow. It would have been a different sort of a task, to have hauled Bruin out of such a hole three months earlier in the season; that is, about the time he had lain down for his winter *siesta*. Then he would have turned six or seven hundred pounds upon the scales, whereas at this time he was not more than half the weight. His skin, however, was in just as good condition as if he had been fat; and it was this, and not his carcass, that our hunters cared for.

After some tough pulling, accompanied by a good deal of shouting from Ivan at the bottom of the hole, the huge carcass was dragged forth, and lay at full length along the frozen snow. It was still necessary to raise it to the branch of a tree, in order that it might be skinned in a proper manner. This however, could be easily accomplished by means of the rope.

Up to this time Pouchskin had been puzzled about the loss of his knife. Everywhere he looked for it; but it was nowhere to be found. All the surface *over* which he had danced with the bear was carefully examined, and the snow scraped up to the depth of several inches. There was the blood of the bear, and some of Pouchskin's own too, but no knife! Could it have got into the water? No. Pouchskin declared that he had dropped it near the edge of the snow-bed: for this accident, as already stated, had been the cause of his retreat from the conflict.

It was only when the great carcass was being hauled up to the branch, that the lost knife made its appearance. Then, to the astonishment of the young hunters, as well as to Pouchskin himself, the knife was seen sticking in the shoulder of the bear! There it had been when the haft slipped from his hands, and there had it remained. No doubt that stab would have given the bear his death-blow; but still more fatal had been the bullet from the rifle of Alexis, which had passed through Bruin's brain, crushing his skull like a shell!

The skinning of the animal was accomplished with great care; for the coat was one of the finest, and the boys knew with what interest it would be regarded on its arrival at the palace Grodonoff. They spared no pains, therefore, in removing it from the carcass; and after the work was finished, it was neatly folded up, tied with the rope, and placed like a knapsack on Pouchskin's shoulders.

Of the carcass they took no heed; but leaving it to the wolves, the gluttons, or any other carnivorous creatures that might chance to stray that way, they turned back up the ravine; and, striking off on a path that led towards the tent of the Laplander, reached their smoky quarters in good time for dinner.

Chapter Fourteen. Ringing the Bear

The bear thus killed was the true *ursus arctos*, or brown bear – the latter name being given to him from the colour of his fur, which, in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, is a uniform brown. The name, however, is not appropriate, since there are other brown bears belonging to very different species.

Having secured his robe, as we have seen, the next call of our hunters was to obtain a skin from the body of his black brother. They were well aware that this would not be so easy of accomplishment, from the simple fact, that the *ursus niger*, or “European black bear,” is one of the rarest of animals – indeed, so few of them are obtained, that out of a thousand skins of the European bear that pass through the hands of the furriers, not more than two or three will be found to be of the black variety.

It is true that they were just in the country where they would be most likely to fall in with one; for it is only in the northern zone of Europe (and Asia also) where the black ones are found. This variety is not encountered in the southern ranges of mountains in the Alps, Pyrenees, and Carpathians. Whether this black bear is a distinct species was not a question with them. They knew that by most naturalists he is recognised as a variety – by some a permanent one. It was therefore certainly included in the conditions of their father’s letter; and a skin must be procured *coute qui coute*. This done, they would have no further business in Lapland, but might proceed at once to the Pyrenees.

It was not necessary to procure skins of the grey or silver bear, nor that with the white ring round its neck – known as the ringed or collared bear. As Alexis had said, it is acknowledged by all who know the *ursus arctos* his native haunts, that these are mere accidental varieties. The true “collared bear” (*ursus collaris*) is not found in Lapland, – only in northern Asia and Kamschatka, and it is he that is known as the “Siberian bear.” The boys therefore were not “bound” by their covenant to procure these varieties; but for all that, they were gratified at going beyond the strict letter of their agreement, which good luck enabled them to do; for while scouring the country in search of the *ursus niger*, they chanced upon another brown bear, a female, with three cubs, one of which was brown, like the mother; the second had the white ring round its neck, and the third was as grey as a little badger! All four were taken; and the young hunters not only had the gratification of being able to send the different varieties of skins to their father’s museum, but an additional satisfaction was afforded to Alexis, the naturalist, by this grand family capture. It proved incontestably, what he already suspected, and what, moreover, the native peasants and hunters had told him, that the “silver” and “ringed” bears were identical with the *ursus arctos*.

Notwithstanding their joy at the capture of the old she, and her parti-coloured pets, they were yet very anxious about the black bear. They had hunted all the forests and mountains for miles around, and had even succeeded in killing several other specimens of “Brownie,” but no “Blackie” was to be met with.

It had now got known among the native hunters what they were in search of; and, as they had offered a liberal reward to any one who could guide them to the haunt or den of a real black bear, it was not unlikely they should soon hear of one.

In this expectation they were not deceived. About a week after the offer had been proclaimed, a Finnish peasant (one of the Quäns, as they are called) made his appearance at their headquarters, and announced that he had “ringed” a black bear. It was welcome tidings; and the young Russians at once proceeded to the indicated place.

It may be necessary to explain what the man meant when he told them he had “ringed” the bear; since that is a phrase of specific meaning throughout the countries of Scandinavia. In these countries, when the track of a bear is observed in the snow, it is followed up by the person who has discovered it, with the intention of “ringing” the animal – that is, ascertaining as near as maybe, the locality in which it may have halted from its rambles, and lain down to rest. Of course, if the person thus trailing the bear be a hunter – or if it be a party of hunters actually engaged in the chase, they will keep on until they have found the bear in his den. But in nine cases out of ten, bears are not pursued in this fashion. Generally, their haunt – whether temporary or otherwise – has been ascertained beforehand, by some shepherd or woodcutter, and a party of hunters then proceeds to the spot, and makes a surround of the animal before rousing him from his lair.

This “surround,” however, has nothing whatever to do with the “ringing” of the bear, which is an operation of a different character, and is performed by the party who has first chanced upon the tracks. The mode of proceeding is simply to follow the trail, or *spar*, of the bear as silently as possible – until the tracker has reason to believe that the animal is not far off. This he discovers by observing that the *spar* no longer trends in a direct line, but doubles about in zigzags, and backward turnings, upon itself; for when a bear intends to lie down, it is his habit to quarter the ground in every direction, precisely as does the hare before squatting in her form.

Many other animals observe a similar caution before going to rest.

The bear-tracker having reached this point, then leaves the track altogether, and makes a circuit round that part of the forest within which he suspects Bruin to have couched himself. This circuit is of greater or less diameter, according to circumstances – depending on the season of the year, nature of the ground, and a variety of other considerations. While going round this circle, if it should be seen that the track of the bear leads beyond it, then that “ring” is given up, and another commenced further forward. If, on the other hand, the tracker gets round to the place whence he first started, without again coming upon the *spar*, he concludes that the bear must be lying somewhere within the circumference which he has traced, and will there be found. This, then, is termed “ringing” the bear.

You may wonder why the man does not follow up the *spar* until he actually reaches the den or lair of the animal. That is easily explained. The tracker is not always a bear-hunter, and even if he were, it would not be prudent for him to approach a bear without assistants, who, by surrounding the animal, should cut off its retreat. Were he to go forward direct to the bear’s hiding-place, Bruin would, in all probability, discover him before he could approach within shot; and, making a bolt, might carry him a chase of ten or twelve miles before stopping. The brown bear often does so.

The tracker, having ascertained the circle within which the animal has made its temporary resting-place, next proceeds to warn the hunters of his village or settlement; and then a large party go out for the destruction of the common enemy. They deploy around the ring, and closing inward, are pretty sure to find the bear either asleep in his den, or just starting out of it, and trying to get off. The “ring” will usually keep for several days – sometimes for weeks – for the bear, especially in winter time, will remain in the vicinity of his lair for long spells at a time. Frequently several days will elapse before any hunters arrive on the ground; but, if the bear should have strayed off in the mean time, his tracks in the snow will still enable them to follow and find him. If, however, fresh snow should have fallen, after the bear has made his exit from the marked circle, then, of course, the search will prove a blank, and Bruin make his escape – at least out of that “ring.”

One of the most singular features of this custom is, that he who has succeeded in “ringing” a bear, is regarded as the lawful proprietor of the animal – or rather of the “ring” – and can dispose of his right to any hunting party he pleases. Of course he cannot guarantee the killing of the bear: that is left to the skill of the hunters, who must take their chance. The tracker only answers for a bear being found within a prescribed circle, of which he gives proof by pointing out the *spar*. With such conditions, established by long and well-observed custom, it will easily be believed that the

woodcutters and other peasants make a market by ringing bears, frequently disposing of the “ring” to the more ardent hunters for a very considerable price! It was just with this view that the Finnish peasant had put himself in communication with our young Russians; and as the bounty they had already offered far exceeded the usual purchase-money in such cases, the Quän at once closed with their offer, and conducted them to the “ring.”

Chapter Fifteen. Old Nalle

While proceeding towards the ground where they expected to find the bear, their guide informed them that he had not only ringed the animal, but actually knew the den in which it was lying. This was still better: it would not only save them a search, but enable them to encompass the beast on all sides and cut off his retreat – should he attempt to bolt before they could get near.

On approaching the place, therefore, Pouchskin proposed that the three should separate, and, after having deployed into a circle, proceed inward from different directions.

But the guide opposed this suggestion – saying, with a significant smile, that there was no need of such precautions, as he would answer for the bear not leaving his den, until they had all got up as near as they might wish to be.

The hunters wondered at this confidence on the part of their guide, but in a few minutes' time they had an explanation of it. Going up to a sort of cliff that formed the side of a little stony knoll, the Quän pointed to a hole in the rocks, saying, as he did so: —

“Old *nalle* is in there.”

Now “*nalle*” is the nickname of the bear throughout the Scandinavian countries, and our Russian hunters knew this well enough; but that a bear could be inside the little hole, to which their guide had pointed, appeared utterly incredible, and Ivan and Alexis burst into a loud laugh, while Pouchskin was rather inclined to show a little anger about the matter.

The hole which the Quän had pointed out was a crevice between two great boulders of rock. It was about a yard above the ground, upon which they stood; and was certainly not more than six or eight inches in diameter. All round the orifice the rocks were thickly coated with ice; and from the top of the cliff on both sides huge icicles projected downwards, until their tips touched the earth, looking like enormous trunks of elephants, or such as even mammoths might have carried. One of these immense icicles was directly in front of the aperture; while on the ground just below its point stood up a huge mass of an irregular conical shape, the convex surface of which was coated with snow that had lately fallen.

The first impression of the hunters was, that they had been deceived by the cunning Quän. Pouchskin declared that they would not stand being tricked; and at once demanded back the ten rix-dollars which his young masters had paid for the “ring” of the bear.

“It was all nonsense,” he said; “even if there was a cave, no bear could be inside, for the simple reason that none, even the smallest, could possibly have squeezed his carcass through a hole like that; – a cat could hardly have crept into such an aperture. Besides, where were the tracks of the bear? There were none to be seen – neither by the mouth of the hole, nor in the snow outside.”

There were old tracks of the peasant himself and of a dog, but not of a bear.

“It’s a decided take-in,” grumbled Pouchskin.

“Patience, master!” said the Quän. “There is a bear inside for all that; and I’ll prove it, or else return you your money. See my little dog! he’ll tell you old *nalle* is there. It was he that told me.”

As the Quän said this he let slip a diminutive cur, which he had hitherto held in the leash. The animal, on being set free, rushed up to the hole, and commenced scratching at the ice, and barking in the most furious and excited manner. It certainly proved there was some living creature inside; but how could the Quän tell it was a bear? and, above all, a black bear!

He was interrogated on this point.

“By it,” replied the peasant, taking from his pouch a tuft of long black fur, which was evidently that of a bear; “that is how I know that old *nalle*’s in the cave, and the colour of the hair tells me that it’s *black nalle* who’s inside.”

“But how came you by that?” inquired all three in a breath, as the man held the tuft before their eyes.

“Well, masters!” answered the Quǎn, “you see some jaggy points on the rock, at the top of the hole, there. I found it sticking there, where the bear must have left it, as he was squeezing himself into his cave – that’s how it was.”

“But surely,” said Alexis, “you don’t mean to assert that a bear could pass through such a hole as that? Why, a badger couldn’t get in there, my man!”

“Not *now*,” said the Quǎn, “I admit; it’s three months since he went in. The hole was bigger then.”

“Bigger *then*?”

“Certainly, masters! the heap you see below is only ice. It’s the drip of that great icicle that has frozen up as it fell, and if it were not there you’d see a place big enough for a bear to get in. Ah! sirs! he’s there, I can assure you.”

“Why, he couldn’t get out of himself?”

“That is very true,” replied the peasant; “he’d be safe enough there till a good bit on in the spring. If we hadn’t found him, he would have been obliged to stay in his cave till the sun had thawed that great heap out of his way. It often happens so with the bears in these parts,” added the Quǎn, without seeming to think there was anything unusual about the circumstance.

What the man said was literally true. The bear had gone into this cleft or cave to take his winter nap, and during the long weeks, while he was thus hybernating, the water, of rain and melting snow, dripping from the top of the cliff, had formed enormous stalactites of ice, with stalagmites as well: since it was one of the latter that had closed up the entrance to the den, and fairly shut him up in his own house!

Not only does this curious accident often occur to Scandinavian bears, but these animals, notwithstanding their proverbial sagacity, frequently become their own jailers. They have a habit of collecting large quantities of moss and grass in front of their caves, which they place right in the aperture; and not inside as a bed to lie upon. Why they do so is not clearly understood. The Scandinavian hunters allege that it is for the purpose of sheltering them from the cold wind, that would otherwise blow up into their chamber; and in the absence of any better explanation this has been generally adopted. The heap soon gets saturated by rain and melting snow, and congeals into a solid mass, so hard that it requires to be cut with an axe before it can be got out of the way; and the bear himself is totally incapable of removing it. The consequence is that it often shuts up the entrance to his winter chamber; and Bruin, on awakening from his sleep, finds himself caught in a trap of his own construction. He has then no other resource but to remain inside till the spring heats have thawed the mass, so that he can tear it to pieces with his claws, and thus effect an exit. On such occasions, he issues forth in a state of extreme weakness and emaciation. Not unfrequently he is altogether unable to clear away the obstacle, and perishes in his den.

On hearing these explanations from the Quǎn, who appeared to be well acquainted with Bruin’s habits, the young hunters were satisfied that a bear was really in the cave. Indeed, they were not long upon the spot, till they had still more satisfactory evidence of this fact; for they could hear the “sniffing” of the animal, with an occasional querulous growl, as if uttered in answer to the barking of the dog. Beyond doubt, there was a bear inside.

How was he to be got out? That now became the important question.

Chapter Sixteen. The Staked Enclosure

They waited, for a time, in hopes that he might show his snout at the little aperture, and all three stood watching it, with guns cocked and ready. A good while passed, however, and, as no snout made its appearance, they came to the conclusion that the bear was not to be caught in that simple way. By the snorting growl they could tell that he was at no great distance from the entrance, and they thought a pole might reach him. They tried this, but found that it could be inserted only in a diagonal direction; and although Pouchskin poised in the pole, and bent it round like a rattan, he could not touch wool anywhere; while the bear, though he gave tongue now and then, still kept his place at the further end of the cave.

No other plan offered, except to cut away the icy mass, and set open the mouth of the cavity. If this were done, would Bruin be then likely to come forth? The Quān was confident he would; alleging as his reason, that, in consequence of the spell of warm weather there had been, the bear must have fully shaken off his winter drowsiness, and would no doubt have been abroad long ago, but for the ice preventing his egress from the den. As soon as that should be removed, he would be pretty sure to sally out – for hunger, said the peasant, will bring him forth, if not just at the moment, certainly within an hour or so. At the worst they could wait a while. Moreover, were the ice removed, they might be able to reach him with a pole; and that would be certain to put him in such a rage as would at once tempt him to make a *sortie*.

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