

Castlemon Harry

Frank in the Woods



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CHAPTER I

The Encampment

OUR scene opens in the swamp that stretches away for miles north of Lawrence.

It was a cold, dreary night. The wind moaned and whistled through the leafless branches of the trees, sending the snow in fitful gusts through every nook and corner of the forest. On the banks of a small lake, that lay hemmed in on all sides by tall trees, which bowed to every gust of the winter's storm, was an encampment. A rude hut – built, however, after the most approved hunter fashion, with its back to the wind, and its front open to a cheerful fire – stood in a little grove of evergreens, ready to receive beneath its friendly shelter four boys, whom you could easily recognize as our old friends of the sailing and fishing frolics described in “The Young Naturalist.” We left them, after a hard day's work at fox-hunting – Archie asleep on the bed, and Frank seated in his easy chair, reading one of his favorite authors; while George and Harry, who had a quarter of a mile to go before they reached home, were walking slowly along the road, so weary that they could scarcely drag one foot after the other. To enable the reader to understand how we come to find them here in the woods, twenty miles from any human habitation, we must conduct him back to Lawrence, and relate a few incidents with which he is not acquainted.

On the day following the one on which the foxhunt took place, the boys were too lame to tramp about, and they passed most of their time in the shop. Frank commenced to prepare the fox-skin for mounting in the museum, and Archie busied himself in putting his traps in working order. While thus engaged, Frank exclaimed:

“Archie, let's go and make Uncle Joe a visit. What do you say?”

“I should like to go very much,” said Archie; “but you know it's a mean journey to make in winter. I don't like the idea of carrying my baggage on” —

“We need not carry any thing,” interrupted Frank. “I have been thinking it all over, and I don't see why we can't do as the Canadian trappers do – drag our baggage after us on sleds.”

The village boys had always been in the habit of visiting Uncle Joe in the summer; the journey could then be made with scarcely any inconvenience, for Glen's Creek ran within a few feet of the old hunter's cabin; but in winter the traveling was much more difficult, for the boys were obliged to carry their provisions, blankets, and other needful articles, on their backs. But Frank's plan obviated this difficulty. The creek was frozen over, and using it as a highway, they could accomplish the journey to Uncle Joe's almost as easily as with a boat.

“That's a first-rate idea,” said Archie. “I wonder why we did not think of it before! Let us go right to work and make the sled.”

“We had better wait until we find out whether mother will let us go or not,” said Frank; “besides, we want Harry and George to go with us.”

“I think Aunt Mary will give her consent,” said Archie, laying aside his traps. “Let's go in and ask her.”

The boys readily answered all Mrs. Nelson's objections – such as being lost in the woods and eaten up by bears – by assuring her that they were well acquainted with the road to Uncle Joe's, for they had traveled it several times before; besides, they had a compass, and it was impossible to get lost; and, as to the bears, there were very few of them in the woods, and no bear that ever lived was a match for four boys, all good marksmen, armed with double-barrel shot-guns, and assisted by

three good dogs. So Mrs. Nelson was obliged to consent, and the boys started off to see George and Harry. The latter easily obtained their parents' permission, and the boys adjourned to the kitchen to talk over their plans. It was decided that two sleds would carry all their baggage, and that every thing should be ready for the start early on Monday morning; it was then Friday. After making all their arrangements, Frank and his cousin returned home, and immediately commenced working on their sled. A stout hickory sapling, which they had used in stretching and curing the skin of the deer they killed in the lake, was sawed in twain for the runners, and bent into shape by steaming. The braces were then put in, and before dark the body of the sled was completed. It was light and very strong, and Archie dragged it about the shop in high glee.

"It's all done but the box," said he.

"We don't want any box," said his cousin. "It would only make the sled heavy, without doing any good. We will get an old quilt or blanket from mother, and that will do better than a box."

This article was soon obtained, and fastened to the sled in such a manner that it could be strapped around the baggage; and just as Hannah called them to supper, the sled was pronounced ready for the journey.

The next day Hannah was kept busy baking biscuit and other provisions sufficient to last until they reached Uncle Joe's; while the boys busied themselves in cleaning their guns, sharpening their knives and axes, and getting every thing ready for the start.

Time seemed to move on laggard wings, so impatient were they to be off; but Monday morning came at length, and the boys were stirring long before daylight. As soon as they had eaten breakfast, the sled was brought out of the shop, and their baggage – which consisted of a change of clothes, blankets, ammunition, axes, and provisions – was strapped on securely. Just as they completed their preparations, George and Harry came along. Bidding Mrs. Nelson and Julia good-bye, they all started off; and, after a hard day's tramp, encamped at the place where we now find them.

After they had finished carrying their baggage into the hut, a lively scene was presented. Harry sat before the fire, cutting a pair of leggins out of a finely-dressed deer-skin, which he had spread on the floor of the hut; George was engaged in arranging their beds; Archie was in front of the hut, chopping the evening's supply of fire-wood; and Frank was superintending the cooking of their supper. The dogs lay stretched out on a blanket, enjoying a quiet nap.

"There," said Archie, at length, leaning on his ax, and surveying the pile of wood he had cut; "I guess that will last us through the night."

"Yes, that's a plenty," said Frank. "Come, boys, supper is ready!"

Archie accordingly entered the hut, and, after depositing his ax in a corner, picked out a warm place by the fire, and commenced helping himself to the eatables. The meal consisted of squirrels, which had been roasted on spits before the fire, coffee, and bread and butter. Their long tramp – they had made about twenty miles since morning – had sharpened their appetites, and the supper rapidly disappeared. But there was enough left for the dogs, and after they had been bountifully fed, and the supper dishes washed, the boys stretched themselves out on their blankets before the fire. Each seemed to be occupied with his own thoughts. The sifting of the snow over the roof of the hut, the crackling of the fire, and an occasional howl of a wolf, were the only sounds that broke the stillness. At length, Harry said:

"Now, boys, this is the kind of a life I enjoy. Doesn't it make a fellow feel comfortable, to lie here and listen to the storm, and know that he is securely sheltered? For my part, I don't see how a person can live cooped up in a city all his life."

"It is a difficult matter," answered Archie; "for I have tried it, and profess to know something about it. How many times I have sat in school, when I had a hard lesson to get, and looked out of the window, and wished that I was off in the woods somewhere!"

"Well, you're here at last," said George; "but the only way to pass a long winter evening is in listening to a good story. Come, Frank, give us one."

“Yes,” chimed in Harry, “give us something exciting.”

“A hunting adventure,” said Archie, “or a fight with the Indians.”

“O, you will hear plenty of such stories when we get to Uncle Joe’s,” said Frank. “But I will tell you of an adventure which happened to my uncle, who was a young lawyer at the time, settled in St. Louis;” and Frank, after rearranging his blanket commenced as follows:

CHAPTER II

An Unpleasant Companion

“IT was one bright evening, in the fall of 18 – ,” said my uncle, “while I was traveling on horseback through the northern part of Missouri, that I reined up before a pleasant little tavern, where I purposed to stop for the night. The landlord, a bustling little Englishman, soon had supper ready for me, and as I had not eaten a mouthful since morning, I sat down to it with a most ravenous appetite, and ate until I began to feel ashamed of myself, and finally stopped, not because I was satisfied, but because I had eaten every thing on the table, and did not wish to call for more. As I was rising from the table, the hostler entered the room, and said:

“‘What be the matter with your ’orse, sir? He be so lame he can ’ardly walk?’

“‘The matter with my horse!’ I repeated; ‘there was nothing the matter with him when I gave him into your charge;’ and, in no amiable mood, I started for the stable.

“My horse, which was the gift of a deceased friend, was one of the finest animals I ever saw. I had owned him for more than six years, during which he had been my almost constant companion; and as I had neither wife nor child to love, it is no wonder that my affections clustered around him. I found that he was indeed lame; one of his legs was swollen to twice its usual size, and it was with great difficulty that he could move. I was for some time entirely at a loss how to account for it, and felt very much like giving the hostler, who stood at a little distance, eyeing me as though he expected a kicking, a piece of my mind, when I happened to remember that, as I was that afternoon descending a steep hill, my horse had stepped upon a rolling stone, and almost thrown me from the saddle; and I noticed that he limped a little afterward; but I thought it was nothing serious, and had almost forgotten the circumstance. This I explained, in a few words, to the hostler, who drew a long breath, as if a mighty load had been removed from his breast. After rubbing the animal’s leg with some liniment, which I had brought with me, I saw him plentifully fed and bedded down, and returned to the tavern. After spending an hour listening to the ‘yarns’ of the occupants of the bar-room, I went up to bed, and was soon fast asleep. Near the middle of the night, I was aroused by loud voices under my window; and, as soon as I was fairly awake, I found that something unusual was going on. The shrill, frightened voices of the females mingled with the hoarse ejaculations of the men, and every thing appeared to be in the greatest confusion. I sprang out of bed, and after hastily drawing on my clothes, ran down into the bar-room.

“‘What’s the matter, landlord?’ I inquired of my host, as he hurried by me, pale and almost breathless with excitement.

“‘Matter!’ he repeated. ‘Come and see. Giles Barlow has been around again, and there is one poor fellow less in the world, I’m afraid.’

“He led the way to a small bed-room, which opened off the bar-room, where I found several persons crowded around a bed, on which lay the form of a man, and a surgeon was engaged in bandaging an ugly-looking wound, which he had received in his breast. As soon as the operation was completed, he informed us, in reply to an inquiry of one of the bystanders, that the wound was dangerous, but that by careful nursing the man might recover; and ended by requesting us to leave the room, as much depended on his being kept quiet. We moved back into the bar-room, and I inquired of one of the men who Giles Barlow was.

“‘Why, don’t you know?’ he asked, in surprise. ‘I thought everybody had heard of him! I guess you are a stranger in these parts, ain’t you?’

“I replied in the affirmative.

“‘You must live a good piece from here,’ said the man, ‘or you would certainly have heard of Giles Barlow. He is a highwayman, that has been about here for almost ten years, murdering folks and stealing their money. He goes on the principle that “dead men tell no tales.”’

“‘Why haven’t you arrested him before this time?’ I inquired.

“‘O, yes,’ answered the man, ‘that’s all easy enough to talk about. Haven’t we tried that game? We’ve hunted him with rifles, and tracked him with blood-hounds, but you might as well try to catch a will-o’-the-wisp.’

“‘What sort of a looking man is he?’ I asked.

“‘He’s a small man,’ answered my informant, ‘and looks like a dried-up mullen-stalk. But, the Lord love you, he’s quick as lightning, and he’s got an eye that can look right through a common man. And such hair! It is long and curly, and looks like snakes stuck on his head. I’ve seen him once, and I never want to meet him alone in the woods, now, I tell you.’

“‘I felt some curiosity to know something more of this noted robber, but before I could ask another question the man had walked away, shrugging his shoulders, and joined a group of his companions, who stood in one corner of the room, talking over the matter.

“‘After the exciting scenes through which I had just passed, sleep was of course out of the question; and I stretched myself out on a bench by the fireplace, and waited impatiently for the morning. It came at length, and, as was my usual custom, I hurried out to the stable to look after my horse. I found him much better, but his leg was still swollen, and I knew that he would not be in good traveling condition for at least a week.

“‘Landlord,’ I exclaimed, as I entered the bar-room, ‘where can I hire a horse for two or three days? I must be in Bennington by day after to-morrow, and my horse is too lame to travel.’

“‘Well,’ said the landlord, ‘you are in a nice fix. I don’t believe there is a horse about here you can get.’

“‘I must have one,’ I answered, ‘for I must be in Bennington as soon as possible.’

“‘Well, I’ll see what I can do for you,’ said the landlord, and, going to the door, he shouted to the hostler, who stood in the stable, rubbing down my horse, ‘Tom, go over to Bill Parker’s and see if you can get his mare. Tell him there’s a gentleman here who wants to hire her for two or three days.’

“‘Tom started off immediately, but soon returned with the information that Mr. Parker had gone off into the country to buy cattle, and would not return in less than a week.

“‘What should I do? I had an important case to attend to in Bennington, and must be there in time. I was about making up my mind that I would start off on foot, when the landlord suddenly exclaimed:

“‘I’ll tell you what you can do. This creek’ (pointing to a wide, deep stream which flowed by a little distance from the tavern) ‘runs within half a mile of where you want to go; and I guess you might hire Jim Hilton’s boat.’

“‘Mr. Hilton’s dwelling was pointed out to me, and, in a few moments, I found my man chopping wood in the yard. I made known my wants. After rolling his quid about in his mouth, he concluded to let me have the boat, or rather dugout, provided I would ‘do the fair thing’ by him. To this I readily agreed. After giving emphatic directions as to the treatment of my horse, I stepped into the canoe, and was soon out of sight of the tavern. I used my paddle with a will, and made good headway. When I became weary, I would cease paddling, and allow the canoe to glide along with the current, giving only an occasional stroke to direct its course.

“‘About noon, I began to grow hungry, and turned the canoe’s head toward the shore, to eat my dinner and rest myself, for I had become very tired from the cramped position in which I was obliged to sit. In about an hour I made preparations to continue my journey, and was about pushing the canoe from the shore, when a strong, cheery voice called out:

“‘Hallo, friend! whither bound?’

“I looked up, and saw a man, dressed in the garb of a hunter, standing on the bank above me, leaning on his rifle.

“‘I am going to Bennington,’ I replied.

“‘Are you? That’s lucky. I am traveling in the same direction. Would you have any objections to good company?’

“‘No sir,’ I replied. ‘Come on.’

“The hunter came down the bank; depositing his rifle and knapsack carefully in the bow of the canoe, he took up one of the paddles, and we pulled from the shore. As soon as we got out into the current, I turned, with some casual remark, to take a nearer look at my passenger. Merciful Heaven! how I started! He was a small man, considerably below the medium height, very slim, but well formed, and wiry as an eel, and the enormous muscles on his limbs showed plainly with every motion he made. But his eye! How it flashed! and when he turned it on me I felt as though he were reading my very thoughts. And then there were the long ‘snaky’ ringlets, which the man at the tavern had described to me. My companion was none other than Giles Barlow, the highwayman and murderer.

“You may be sure I was not very well pleased with this discovery, and the cold sweat started out from every pore of my body; still I did not feel afraid, for I was accustomed to scenes of danger, was well armed, and had the reputation of being a tough customer to handle. But the situation in which I was placed would have tried stronger nerves than mine. I thrust my hand into my pocket, and felt that my revolvers were safe. I concluded that, if the worst came to the worst, I could at least have two pulls at him before he could reach me; and, as I was a good shot, I had little fear of missing my mark.

“My companion was a very jolly fellow, and joked and laughed as though he felt extremely happy, and I, of course, joined with him, keeping a close watch on all his movements.

“The afternoon wore slowly away, and as it began to grow dark, I became doubly watchful, for I knew that if he intended to make an attempt upon my life, the time was approaching. About nine o’clock my companion suddenly said, as he wound up one of his stories:

“‘There’s no need of both of us sitting up. It’s a good forty miles to Bennington, and we shan’t reach it before morning.’

“‘Very well,’ said I, ‘you may go to sleep first, and I will call you at midnight.’

“‘O, no,’ said he, ‘I’m not in the least sleepy; I will steer the canoe, and you can lie down here in the bow, and sleep as long as you like.’

“Of course it would not answer for me to raise any objections to this, for I knew it would arouse his suspicions; so we changed places, and the highwayman took his seat in the stern of the canoe. After wrapping my cloak around me, and placing myself so that I could see every motion he made, I drew one of my revolvers, and waited impatiently to see what course things would take.

“For almost an hour my companion steered the boat very well, and I began to think that perhaps I had been mistaken in my man, when I saw him carefully draw in his paddle, muttering, as he did so:

“‘Ah, my chicken, you little thought that you had Giles Barlow for a passenger. I’ll just quietly douse your glim, and take what money and other little valuables you may have, to pay your traveling expenses to the other world.’

“As he spoke, he bent over and drew out of his knapsack a long, shining bowie-knife, and, after trying its edge with his thumb, rose slowly to his feet. In an instant, I threw aside my cloak, and, supporting myself on my elbow, I raised my revolver, and took a quick, steady aim at his breast. He uttered a cry of surprise, but without hesitating a moment, threw himself forward. But the sharp report of the revolver echoed through the woods, and the robber sank back into the canoe, dead.

“I arrived at Bennington the next morning about ten o’clock, and delivered the body to the authorities. The news spread like wildfire, for the name of Giles Barlow was as familiar as a household word.

“I prosecuted my case with success, and, in a week, returned to the place where I had left my horse. He had received excellent care, and was entirely cured of his lameness; but the landlord stubbornly refused any remuneration. He had heard of my exploit, and that was his way of showing his gratitude.”

CHAPTER III

An Indian Hunt

THE next morning, a little after daylight, Frank awoke, and, raising himself on his elbow, he gazed about him. The storm had ceased, and the morning was clear and intensely cold. The fire, however, still burned brightly, for the boys had replenished it several times during the night. His companions, comfortably wrapped up in their thick blankets, were sleeping soundly; but Frank thought it was high time they were stirring, for they had a good twenty miles to travel that day; so, reaching over, he seized Archie by the shoulder and shook him. The long tramp of the previous day had wearied the boys considerably; but with several hearty shakes, Frank succeeded in getting them all on their feet; then, after washing his hands and face in the snow, he commenced to prepare their breakfast.

After a good deal of yawning and stretching, the others began to bestir themselves; and while Archie cut a supply of wood, with which to cook their breakfast, George and Harry busied themselves in packing their baggage on the sleds. As soon as they had eaten breakfast, they put out the fire, and renewed their journey.

The traveling was much more difficult than it had been the day before, for the snow was piled on the ice in deep drifts, and it was dark before they reached Uncle Joe's cabin.

As they approached, they were welcomed by the old trapper's dogs, and Uncle Joe finally appeared at the door.

"Get out, you whelps!" he exclaimed. "Who's that a comin' there?" he continued, trying to peer through the darkness.

"Friends," answered Frank.

"Jeromagoot!" ejaculated the old man, who recognized Frank's voice. "What are you boys doin' out in these woods this time o' night? Come in – glad to see you any how," and Uncle Joe seized their hands as they came up, and shook them heartily. "What have you got on them sleds – your plunder?"

"Yes," answered Archie. "That's a new way we have got of carrying our baggage."

"Fetch it right into the house then, boys;" and, suiting the action to the word, Uncle Joe seized the sleds and pulled them into the cabin.

"Bars and buffalers!" exclaimed a voice, as the boys entered. "How de do youngsters?" and a tall, powerfully built man arose from his chair, and, striding across the floor, approached the boys. It was Dick Lewis – Uncle Joe's brother.

He was a fine specimen of a North American trapper; fully six feet in height, with a frame that seemed capable of enduring any amount of fatigue. Thirty years among savage beasts, and still more savage men, had brought him in contact with almost every variety of danger. He had hunted and trapped on every little stream between the Rio Grande and the Great Bear Lake; had taken more than one rough-and-tumble fight with Rocky Mountain grizzlies; was very expert with the rifle; could throw the tomahawk with all the skill of an Indian; and could lasso and ride the wildest horse that ever roamed the prairie.

He was a good-natured, jovial fellow, and when stretched out on his blanket before the cheerful camp-fire, no one delighted more to tell stories and crack jokes than he. He used to say that there was but one thing in the world he hated, and that was an Indian. And good cause had he for enmity; for, if the prairie and the deep, dark woods could speak, they could tell of many a deed of cruelty which he had seen practiced upon the unoffending trappers.

Dick had three times been bound to the stake, once when a mere boy, and had escaped by making use of his prodigious strength, and almost incredible swiftness of foot, which had won for him, from the Indians, the appellation of Big Thunder.

Of all the trappers, none was more active in punishing the Indians, or more hated and feared than he. One night, mounted on a powerful, well-trained mustang, he would appear, in spite of their vigilance, in their very midst, picking off their favorite chiefs, or “stampeding” their swiftest horses; and the next morning a warrior, seated at his solitary camp-fire, fifty miles away, would be startled by the crack of the rifle that was to start his spirit on its way to the happy hunting-grounds. He seemed to delight in danger, and being perfectly acquainted with the Indian mode of warfare, he eluded all the plans to capture him, with the same skill and cunning he would exhibit in laying his own. But he did not always escape unhurt, for many an ugly scar on his body bore evidence to the valor of his enemies, and the severity of the struggles in which he had engaged. He did not call Uncle Joe’s his home. He had lived on the prairie, and among the mountains, from boyhood, and despising the ordinary modes of conveyance used by more enlightened men, he had traveled the entire distance, from the head-waters of the Missouri to his brother’s cabin, on foot.

“How are you, youngsters? I say,” he exclaimed, continuing his greeting, which we have so unceremoniously interrupted; and he seized Frank’s hand, and gave it a gripe and a shake, which he felt for a quarter of an hour afterward.

“Draw a cheer up to the fire, young’uns,” said Uncle Joe, “an’ set down.”

The boys were well acquainted with the trappers, and always made themselves quite at home with them; so, after brushing the snow from their feet, they pulled off their overcoats and seated themselves before the huge fireplace. The cabin – or, as Uncle Joe called it, “shantee” – was built in the most primitive style, having but one room and a “loft,” to which access was obtained by a ladder. There were four beds in the room – rude-looking, indeed, but very clean, and abundantly supplied with quilts and blankets; while around on the walls hung the trappers’ rifles, hunting-knives, and powder-horns. Three large dogs lay stretched out before the fireplace, and one of them, a huge, powerful animal, was the only companion Dick had had for three years. He was an ungainly looking animal, but his strength and courage had been severely tested in many a desperate encounter, and twice he had saved his master’s life. No wonder, then, that he held a prominent place in the trapper’s affections. The only other inmates of the cabin were the four hired men – tall, brawny fellows, who despised the city, with its “eternal jostlings and monotonous noises,” but delighted in the freedom and solitude of the forest.

“Had any supper, youngsters?” inquired Uncle Joe, as the boys drew their chairs up to the fire. “No, I reckon not,” he continued, without giving them time to reply. “Bob, just fetch out some grub. I’ll bet the boys are as hungry as wolves, after their long tramp.”

The boys did not raise any objections, for they *were* hungry, and they knew that the supper they would get would be worth having.

Bob, who was one of the hired men, began to bustle about, and, after hanging the tea-kettle over the fire, he drew out a pine table, and covered it with a snow-white cloth, and dishes which shone in the fire-light in a manner that would have delighted a New England housewife. Then came ham and eggs, which, with the coffee, were cooked in the fireplace, wheat-bread, honey, and fresh butter and milk. Although they were forty miles from any settlement or neighbor, in the midst of an almost unbroken forest, there was no danger but what they would fare well, for Uncle Joe was famous for good living.

The boys ate very heartily, and Uncle Joe sat by, smoking his pipe, and watching them with evident satisfaction. After supper, while they were engaged in unpacking their sleds, Dick’s dog, which answered to the name of Useless, arose suddenly to his feet, looked toward the door for a moment, and uttered a dismal howl.

“Injuns ag’in, by all that’s miserable,” ejaculated Dick, removing his pipe from his mouth, and instinctively reaching toward his rifle, which hung on the wall above his head; but instantly recollecting himself, he resumed his former position, while a dark scowl settled on his face. In a few moments, light steps sounded in the snow outside the cabin, and Useless bounded toward the door barking, and showing his teeth, with every demonstration of rage.

“Come back here, dog,” said Dick; “I don’t blame you, ’cause they are a mean, thievin’ race. The animal understands their natur’ as well as I do,” he continued, as the dog reluctantly returned to his place. “Me an’ him war brought up to hate Injuns, an’ we believe in makin’ war on ’em wherever we find ’em. It’s a mighty wonder that they don’t steal Joe out o’ house an’ home.”

The country around Moosehead Lake was inhabited by the remnant of a once-powerful tribe, and the Indians, in going to and from the settlements to dispose of their furs, frequently made Uncle Joe’s cabin a stopping-place. Dick was not at all pleased with this state of affairs; but, as he often remarked, he was not “boss of the shantee, and couldn’t help himself.”

The footsteps drew nearer, and finally the door opened softly, and two Indians entered.

“How are you, Jim,” exclaimed Uncle Joe, shaking the outstretched hand of the foremost.

“How de do, brother,” replied the Indian, in imperfect English; and this was all the greeting that passed between them. They deposited their rifles and packs carefully in one corner of the cabin, and then advanced to the fire, and seated themselves on the floor without saying a word. They were dressed in the regular Indian costume, with leggins, moccasins, and hunting-shirts of the finest deer-skin, gaudily ornamented, and wore knives in their belts. Such sights were not new to the boys, for Lawrence was a regular Indian trading-post. Frank thought that he had never seen such fine specimens of savages before. But different thoughts seemed to be passing through Dick’s mind, for he twisted uneasily in his chair, and smoked and scowled more vigorously than ever. Useless seated himself by his master’s side, and watched them as closely as a cat ever watched a mouse, now and then uttering a low, angry growl. Neither of the Indians took part in the conversation that followed, but, after emptying their pipes, they spread their blankets out on the floor, and were fast asleep in a few moments.

“I don’t see what in tarnation you let them ar painted heathen camp in your shantee in this way for,” said Dick, at length, addressing himself to his brother. “The woods are open, an’ they won’t ketch cold by sleepin’ out-doors.”

“O, I don’t mind it,” answered Uncle Joe. “Me an’ the Injuns allers have been on good terms together.”

“Wal, you’ll wake up some mornin’ an’ find your shantee gone,” said Dick, “unless it is fastened down tarnation tight. I hate the rascals wusser nor pisen, an’ I allers ache to begin a knock-down-an’-drag-out fight with ’em whenever I see ’em. Now, Useless,” he continued, turning to his dog, and speaking as though the animal could understand every word he said, “I’m goin’ to bed, an’ I want you to keep an eye on them fellers;” and Dick stretched his heavy frame out on one of the beds, while Useless crawled under the blankets, and lay down beside him. The others soon followed his example, and, in a few moments, nothing was heard in the cabin but the regular breathing of the sleepers.

The next morning the boys slept later than usual. When they awoke, they found Bob engaged in getting breakfast. The Indians had gone. According to their usual custom, they had resumed their journey at the first peep of day. Dick sat by the fire, engaged in looking over his “plunder,” as he called it, to see if any thing had been stolen.

“Wal,” said Uncle Joe, as they arose from the breakfast-table, “what do you youngsters kalkerlate to do first?”

“Let’s go and set our traps for foxes,” said Archie, who was particularly fond of hunting that kind of game, and had become quite proficient in the art.

“Wal,” said Dick, “I’ll go with you. I have some traps that need ’tendin’ to;” and the trapper took down his long rifle and thrust his never-failing pipe into his pocket, and was ready for the start.

Archie began to overhaul his traps, which had been piled in one corner of the cabin. He looked them over and over several times, and finally inquired:

“Frank, do you know what has become of all my fox traps? Three of them are missing.”

“They ought to be in that pile with the others,” answered Frank.

“There are only two of them here,” said Archie. “My best ones are gone; I’m afraid we have lost them. They must have got loose, and tumbled off the sled.”

“No, I guess not,” said his cousin; “they were all there last night, for I counted them.”

“That ar is what comes of allowin’ them Injuns to camp here,” said Dick.

“Jeromagoot!” ejaculated Uncle Joe. “You don’t s’pose them Injuns stole the traps, do you?”

“Sartin, I do,” answered Dick, dropping the butt of his rifle heavily to the floor. “I don’t s’pose nothin’ else.”

“Wal, it’s the first thing I ever had stole,” said Uncle Joe.

“Thar’s whar the traps have gone to, any how,” said Dick. “Useless,” he continued, turning to his dog, “you aint worth a pinch o’ gunpowder. I told you to watch them fellers. I don’t see how the rascals could do it, for if Useless had seed one of ’em prowlin’ around, he would have muzzled him quicker nor lightnin’. If you want your traps, youngsters, you’ll have to foller them Injuns. I’ll go with you.”

“Will you,” exclaimed Archie. “Then, let’s start right off.”

“Wal, then,” said the trapper, “pull off them overcoats, ’cause it ’ill be the hardest job you ever done to ketch them Injuns.”

There was something novel and exciting in the idea of a chase after Indians. The boys had often read of such things, and now there was an opportunity for them to take part in one. They were soon ready for the chase. Shouldering their guns, they followed Dick from the cabin, and immediately set out on the trail of the Indians, which could be easily followed by the prints of their moccasins in the snow. All the dogs were left at home, except Useless; for he was the only one that understood “Injun hunting,” and the others would only be in the way. The trail ran directly down to the creek, and as soon as they were fairly on the ice, the trapper broke into a “dog trot,” and the boys followed close behind him, in Indian file. After going a little way, Frank said:

“Dick, I don’t believe that both of those Indians went this way.”

“Why not?” inquired the trapper.

“Because there is only a single track, such as one person would make.”

“I guess you haven’t hunted Injuns much,” said Dick, with a laugh. “Don’t you know that when they are travelin’, the hindermost ones step exactly in the leader’s tracks? If fifty Injuns had been along here, they would not have left a bigger trail nor those two have. But arter you have hunted and fit ’em as much as I have, you could tell by lookin’ at a trail how many there was in the party. I hope you youngsters are good at runnin’.”

“We should not care about running a race with you,” answered George; “but if you will hold this gait, we will agree to keep up with you.”

“O, you’ll have to go faster nor this, if you want to ketch them Injuns,” said Dick. “See here – here’s where the rascals began to run.”

“How can you tell?” inquired Archie.

“Why, easy enough. You see the tracks are further apart nor they wur a little piece back. Come, youngsters! let out a little.”

The boys thought that Dick “let out” a good deal, for he almost redoubled his pace, and they concluded it was best to discontinue their talking; for they soon found that they had no breath to waste. After they had gone about two miles, the trail led them from the creek off into the woods;

and, in a few moments, the trapper came to a stand-still on the bank of a small stream, where the trail abruptly ended.

"Where did they go to?" inquired Frank, after he had looked in vain for the trail. "They couldn't have jumped across the creek."

"No;" answered the trapper, "that would be a better jump nor I ever saw made. We must go back."

"What for?" asked George.

"Why, the thieves knowed that we would foller 'em, an' they have doubled on their trail, just like a fox."

"The tracks all point the same way," said Frank, stooping down and examining the trail.

"In course they do," said Dick. "You don't s'pose you can tell by the looks of a red-skin's track which way he is goin', do you? I have knowed 'em to travel backward for more 'n a mile, to throw their enemies off the scent. But we hain't got no time to waste. Come on."

The boys followed the trapper back to the creek, and he immediately started off again at a rapid pace. There was not the least sign of a trail, and they were at a loss how to account for the trapper's reasons for following the creek, when he knew that the trail ran back into the woods. At length he said, by way of explanation:

"This is takin' a short cut on the Injuns. You see, they went back into the woods, an' doubled an' twisted about on their trail, an' when they think they have fooled us nicely, they will come back to the creek again."

The next two miles were passed over in silence. The boys could not have talked if they had wished to, for the rapid pace was telling on them severely, and they began to think that they had never known what running was. But the trapper did not seem to mind it in the least. His motions were easy and graceful, and he appeared to move along without making any exertion whatever. They ran until almost noon, without seeing any signs of the Indians, and the boys began to think that the trapper had been mistaken in his calculations. But their doubts were soon removed by the finding of the trail.

"Hurry on now, youngsters," exclaimed Dick; "but don't make too much noise, for the redskins aint far off."

And so it proved; for the next bend in the creek brought them in sight of the Indians, who were walking leisurely along, with their packs on their backs, thinking, no doubt, that they had effectually eluded pursuit. But they soon became aware of the approach of the hunters, and, without stopping to look back, they commenced running at the top of their speed.

"Bars an' buffalers!" exclaimed the trapper. "This is somethin' like ole times. Now, youngsters, I'll show you some runnin' as is runnin'. Come, Useless, show us what you're made of."

The dog seemed to understand him perfectly, and was off on the instant, and the trapper followed after him at a rate of speed which the boys had never expected to see accomplished by a human being. The creek, for almost a mile, was perfectly straight, and afforded them a fine view of the race, which was worth going miles to see. The Indians were no inferior runners; and, as they had nearly three hundred yards the start of Dick, the boys were doubtful as to the manner in which the chase would end. But the trapper had lost none of that lightness of foot which had rendered him so famous, both among friends and foes, and before they had gone half a mile, he was near enough to seize one of the Indians, while Useless pulled down the other as though he had been a deer.

The boys had been doing their best; but, of course, were left far behind; and when they came up they found the Indians standing as motionless as statues, apparently perfectly unconcerned, and the trapper and his dog were keeping guard over them.

"Now, little 'un," said Dick, addressing himself to Archie, and pointing to the packs which the Indians had thrown down, "look in them ar bundles an' see if you can find your traps."

Archie accordingly handed his gun to his cousin, and, kneeling down in the snow, opened one of the packs, when the first thing he discovered was his missing property. He arose slowly to his feet, and surveying the Indian to whom the pack belonged, with a comical expression on his face, said:

“You’re a grand rascal. I’ve a good notion to take the ramrod out of my gun and give you a good trouncing.”

The Indian was a man fully as large as Dick, very powerfully built, and muscular; while Archie was a little, “spindle-shanked” fellow, very small for his age, and looked as though he were in danger of being carried away by the first gust of wind that passed. The former, after regarding the diminutive hunter for a moment, with an expression of contempt, drew himself up to his full height, and ejaculated:

“Ugh! me big Injun.”

He, no doubt, considered it a gross insult that a person of Archie’s proportions should talk of “trouncing” him.

“Wal,” said the trapper, “we’re done with you, you painted niggers; travel on about your business; but I wouldn’t advise you to cross my trail, in these woods, this winter;” and Dick tapped his rifle in a very significant manner.

The savages raised their packs to their shoulders without making any reply, and walked off as though nothing had happened. As soon as they were out of sight, Archie packed up his traps, and the hunters turned their faces homeward.

CHAPTER IV

THE “OLE SETTLER”

IT was dark before they reached the cabin, but they found a good supper waiting for them. After they had eaten heartily, they drew their chairs up around the fireplace, and Uncle Joe inquired:

“Wal, youngsters, how do you like Injun-huntin’?”

“I don’t believe we like it well enough to try it again,” said Harry. “I never was so completely tired out in my life.”

“O, that wasn’t nothin’ at all,” said Dick. “Such Injun-huntin’ as that we had to-day is fun. What would you have thought if we had follered them thieves for a week afore we found ’em? But, I must say, that you youngsters done very well. I’ll own up, that when we started, I thought I would see what sort o’ stuff you wur made of; an’ I thought I’d stretch your legs for you in a way that would make you give in. But you fellers are purty good shakes at runnin’, for boys of your age. But this reminds me o’ a scrape I onct had near the Colorado River. Do yer see this? If you can ketch as many grizzly bars in your lifetime as this trap has, you are smarter nor I think you are. This is what I call the ‘Ole Settler!’”

And, as the trapper spoke, he raised from the floor the object of his admiration, and held it up to the view of the boys. It was an ordinary bear-trap, with double springs, and huge jaws, which were armed with long, sharp teeth. It had received a thorough rubbing and greasing, and shone in the fire-light like silver; but, after all, there was nothing uncommon in its appearance. There were plenty of traps in the cabin that were quite as well made, and could, probably, do quite as much execution. In the trapper’s mind, however, the “Ole Settler” was evidently associated with some exciting event.

“The reason why I call this trap the ‘Ole Settler’” continued Dick, “is, ’cause it has been in the service so long. My gran’father bought it, when he war only a boy, of a Mexikin trader, an’ he give two ten-dollar bar-skins for it. When he got too ole to trap, he give it to my father, an’ he give it to me. It has been stole from me a good many times; but I allers made out to get it back agin. Onct a yaller-hided Mexikin Greaser bagged it, an’ I didn’t set eyes on it for more ’n a year; but I knowed it in a minit when I did see it; an’, arter a little brush with the Greaser, I made him give it up. The last time I lost it war while I war trappin’ in Utah. It war stole from me by a Blackfoot Injun; and the way it happened war this:

“I allers had the name of bein’ able to bring into market jest as many an’ jest as fine furs as any trapper in the mountains. But I had a good many good trappers to go agin, and arter awhile my huntin’-grounds begun to give out; so, one summer, I packed my plunder, an’ moved to the west side of the mountains. I war right in the heart of the Pawnee region, the wust Injun country in the world; but I kalkerlated to get all my trappin’ done arly in the spring, an’ move out; ’cause as soon as the ice breaks up in the spring, the red-skins allers come round on a grand hunt, an’ I didn’t care to have the rascals near me. I never yet see the Injun that I war afeared of, but it’s mighty onpleasant to have them around; they go screechin’ through the woods, shootin’ at a feller, when he can’t see ’em, an’ steal his traps an’ other plunder in a mighty onfriendly way.

“Wal, in less than a week arter I got to my new quarters, I war settled. I had all my traps sot in the best places, an’ had mighty good luck. The streams war full of beaver, otter, an’ mink, an’ I used to have a fight with the grizzlies in the mountains every day. In this way the winter passed; an’ about the time that spring come, I had well-nigh trapped every thing in the valley. It war gettin’ about time for the Injuns to come round on their reg’lar hunts; so one mornin’, arter a good breakfast on buffaler hump, I started out an’ begun to gather up my traps. A’most every one had some kind o’ game in it, an’ I soon got as big a load as I could wag under. So I started back for

camp. I war goin' along mighty keerless like, an' wasn't thinkin' o' nothin', when all to onct I seed something that made me prick up my ears, an' step a little lighter. I see that something had been passin' through the bushes. You, in course, wouldn't have noticed it, but I knowed in a minit that an Injun had been along; an', arter lookin' around a little, I found his track. It wasn't a Pawnee; but, arter examinin' the trail, I found that it war a Blackfoot. What one of them should be doin' so far from home I didn't know, but most likely he war layin' around for scalps.

“Wal,’ thinks I, ‘Dick Lewis, you had better be lookin’ out for them traps o’ yourn;’ so I hid my spelter in the bushes, an’ started up toward the mountains. I had sot the Ole Settler the day before, to ketch a grizzly that had been botherin’ me a good deal, an’ I war afeared the Injun would come acrost it an’ bag it. I saw plenty of Injun signs all the way, but the tracks had all been made by the same feller. I could see, by the way the rascal had moved, that he knowed I war in the valley; for he took mighty good care to cover up his trail as much as possible. Arter a few minits’ walk, I come to the place where I had set the Ole Settler; but, just as I had expected, the trap war gone. The Blackfoot had been there afore me, an’ I knowed that if I wanted my trap, I must look for it; an’ I made up my mind that I did want it, an’ that I would have it, if I had to foller the Injun clar to his home. So I started arter him, an’, for a mile or so, the trail was toler’ble plain, an’ I got along first-rate. I made up my mind that if the thief got away from me he would have to be smarter nor I thought he war. But, at last, I come to where he had tuk to a swamp, an’ two or three times I come mighty nigh losin’ the trail. The swamp war full o’ logs, an’ the Injun had walked on them, an’, in course, he didn’t leave no trail. I follered him more ’n a mile by the marks on the bushes, an’ finally I couldn’t see a single sign. There war the print of one of his moccasins in the mud as plain as daylight; an’ there the trail ended. I couldn’t tell which way the rascal had gone. I looked around, examinin’ every bush an’ twig, but it war no use. Now, I s’pose you think I war beat at the Injun’s own game, don’t you? Wal, I wasn’t. In course, I couldn’t find the trail in the swamp; but I knowed which way the Blackfoot war goin’, an’ if I crossed the swamp, I knowed that I would find it on the other side. So I started out, an’ as it war gettin’ late, I wanted to find the trail agin afore dark. I guess I made purty good time. I done my best, an’ the way I got through that swamp war a thing to look at. The runnin’ you see to-day wasn’t a patchin’ to the runnin’ I done that night. But I tuk mighty good care to keep my ears open, an’ to make no more noise than I could help; for, just as like as not, there war Injuns in the swamp, an’ one of ’em might take it into his head to send a chunk of lead into me when I couldn’t see him.

“About an hour afore dark, I reached the other side of the swamp; an’ in less nor ten minits more I had found the trail, and wur follerin’ it up as fast as my legs could carry me. But afore I had gone a mile it begun to grow dark. In course, I couldn’t foller the trail no further; an’ the only thing I could do, war to camp down where I war, an’ wait for daylight. So, arter makin’ my supper out o’ parched corn, I picked out a nice place by the side of a log, and settled myself down to sleep.

“The next mornin’, bright and arly, I war up, an’ on the trail agin. I follered it all day, without onct stoppin’ or losin’ sight of it, an’ about night it begun to grow fresher; but it came on dark agin, and I had to camp. Long about midnight I heerd a sort of rustlin’ like in the bushes. I war wide awake in a minit; for a feller that lives in the woods larns to keep his ears about him. I lifted my head an’ listened. Yes, thar war no mistake – I could hear something steppin’ keerfully over the leaves, an’ I thought it war comin’ right toward me. At first I thought it war some wild varmint; but, as it come nigher, I found that it war a two-legged critter; so I cocked my rifle an’ waited for the Injun – for I knowed by the step that it war a red-skin – to come in sight. The steps sounded nigher an’ nigher, an’ all to onct the bushes parted without any noise, an’ out come the biggest Blackfoot that it ever war my luck to set eyes on. He didn’t seem to know that me an’ my rifle war around; if he had, I reckon it wouldn’t have made him feel very pleasant; but he walked past, within ten foot of me, an’ disappeared in the darkness.

“Now, perhaps you would like to know why I didn’t up and shoot him. Wal, I’ll tell you. That would have jest knocked the hul thing in the head, an’ I should have had all my trouble for nothin’. I knowed that the Injun that stole my trap wasn’t a great way off, and I knowed, too, that the feller that jest passed war a sort of friend of his’n, an’ that they war goin’ to meet somewhere in the woods close by. So I thought that perhaps, if I took matters easy, I could rub out both of the rascals.

“As soon as the Injun wur out o’ hearin’, I picked myself up, an’ started along arter him, purty certain that before long I would come in sight of their camp-fire; an’ I wasn’t mistaken I hadn’t gone half a mile afore I see a light shinin’ through the trees; an’ droppin’ on all-fours, I begun to crawl along through the bushes, until I come to a place where I had a full view of the fire. As I had expected, there war two Injuns settin’ by it. One of them – the one that had just passed me – war eaten’ his supper, an’ the other lay stretched out on his blanket, and war showin’ his friend the trap he had stole from me; an’ they war both laughin’ over it, as though they thought it war a mighty good joke. This kinder riled me, an’ I knowed that I could soon put an end to their skylarkin’. I might have shot one of them where he sot easy enough, but that wouldn’t do, for the other would have escaped, an’ I wanted to make sure of both of ’em. I wasn’t fool enough to think of walkin’ into their camp an’ tacklin’ both of ’em to onct; they would have made an end of me in the shake of a buck’s tail. The only way I could work it war to get ’em apart, an’ take ’em one at a time. So I dropped my rifle an’ drewed my knife, an’ gave two loud yells, which war a signal to let the Injuns know that one of ’em war wanted. They both sprang to their feet an’ listened for a moment, an’ one of ’em – the one that had stole my trap – picked up his rifle and come toward me; an’ the other went on eatin’ his supper.

“I waited until the Injun had come within ten foot of me, then all to onct I stepped out from behind my tree an’ stood before him. Bar an’ buffaler! how the rascal started! He looked at me for a minit, as if to make sure that I war a human critter, an’ then, givin’ an unarthly yell, he dropped his rifle, an’ made at me with his tomahawk. But I met him half way, an’ ketchin’ hold of the hand that held the tomahawk, I give him a stab with my knife that settled his business for him. He fell to the ground like a log, an’ I had hardly time to grab my rifle afore I seed the big Injun comin’ toward me. But he hadn’t made more’n two steps, afore a chunk of lead brought him to the ground.

“I then walked up to the camp, and stretched myself out on one of the Injuns’ blankets; and arter makin’ a good supper on a piece of venison I found hung up on a tree close by, I covered myself up, an’ in a few minits war fast asleep.

“The next mornin’ I war up bright an’ arly, an’ pickin’ up my trap, an’ all the Injuns’ plunder I wanted, I drew a bee-line for camp. In another day I had gathered up all the rest of my traps, without seein’ any more Injun signs; but I knowed they would soon be around. As I didn’t care about bein’ in their company, an’ as game war gettin’ scarce, I tumbled all my spelter into my canoe, an’ started down the river.”

CHAPTER V

The Fight in the Woods

THE next morning, after breakfast, the trapper took down his long rifle, saying, as he did so: “Now, youngsters, I’m goin’ off into the woods, about twenty mile or so, to camp out for a week, an’ see if I can’t find some otter. If you want good sport, you had better go, too. The game is gettin’ too scarce around here to suit me.”

The boys readily agreed to this proposal, and began to talk of packing their sleds; but the trapper scouted the idea.

“You’ll never larn to be what I call woodsmen,” said he, “until you get rid of some of your city notions. You must larn to tote all your plunder on your backs. Just fill your possible-sacks¹ with coffee and bread; take plenty of powder an’ shot, a change of clothes, an ax or two, an’ some blankets, and that’s all you need.”

These simple preparations were soon completed, and, after bidding Uncle Joe good-by, they set out, accompanied by their dogs.

Dick carried the “Old Settler,” and had his blanket strapped fast to his belt. Frank and George each carried an ax. Archie had several of his fox-traps, which he could not think of leaving behind; and Harry brought up the rear, carrying a large bundle of blankets. Besides these necessary articles, the boys carried their shot-guns, and the trapper his long rifle.

Dick led the way directly up the creek, following the same course they had taken the day before in pursuit of the Indians, for about ten miles, and then struck off into the woods. About noon they halted in a little grove of evergreens, and the trapper said:

“We’ll camp here for awhile, youngsters, an’ eat our dinner.”

The boys were very glad to hear this; for, strong and active as they were, they found that they were no match for Dick in traveling. Archie and George leaned their guns up against a tree, took the axes, and commenced to clear away a place where they could build a fire.

“Now,” said the trapper, turning to the others, “we’ll leave them here to ’tend to the camp, an’ make a good cup of coffee for us agin we come back, an’ the rest of us will take a tramp through the woods, an’ see what we can get for dinner. Take different directions now, so as to scare up more game.”

The boys immediately set out as directed, each accompanied by his dog. Brave ran on ahead of his master, beating about through the bushes, but not a rabbit or squirrel showed himself. But Frank kept on, taking good care to remember the points of the compass, determined that he would not go back to the camp empty-handed. At length Brave’s well-known bark caused him to start forward at a more rapid pace, and the next moment he heard some heavy animal crashing through the underbrush, just in advance of him, at a tremendous rate. The woods were so thick that Frank could not see the game, but the angry yelping of the dog told him that it was being closely pursued. Guided by the noise they made, he followed after them as fast as his legs could carry him, keeping a sharp look-out on all sides, for he did not know but that it might be a bear which the dog had started. He remembered his meeting with the wild-cat, but felt no fear now, for he had his trusty gun in his hand, heavily loaded with buck-shot, and knew, from experience, that, at short range, it was a very efficient weapon. His first care was to find the trail which the game had made, and, upon examination, he found that Brave had started, not a bear, but several moose. He knew their tracks in a moment, for he had often seen them in the woods; but he could not tell how many of them there were, for their trails crossed each other in every direction. He had never had the fortune

¹ Haversack.

to meet one of these animals, and his feelings were worked up to the highest pitch of excitement by the discovery. He started forward again at the top of his speed. The rapid pace of the game soon carried all sounds of the chase out of hearing; but Frank had no difficulty in following the trail. He had run nearly a mile, when the angry yelps of the dog sounded through the woods in fiercer and more abrupt echoes. Frank hurried forward, and soon came in sight of the game. The moose – a huge bull, with wide-spreading antlers – was standing at bay, and the dog was bounding around him, watching an opportunity to seize him, but was met at every point. Now and then the moose would lower his head, and rush upon his enemy, but the latter nimbly kept out of his way.

Frank did not pause long to witness the battle, but immediately ran forward, holding his gun in readiness for a shot. The moose, upon discovering him, suddenly wheeled, and started off at a rapid trot. The snow in that part of the woods was nearly three feet deep, and was covered with a crust strong enough to sustain the hunter and his dog, but the moose sank into it at every step, and his trail could be easily traced by the blood which was running from numerous wounds on his legs, made by the sharp crust. He ran heavily, and Frank, who was exerting himself to his utmost, had the satisfaction of finding that he was gaining on him. Brave easily kept pace with him and finally succeeded in bringing the moose at bay again. This was what Frank wanted. Just as the deer was about to make a charge upon the dog, he fired, and the huge animal tumbled to the ground. The young hunter ran forward, intending to give him the contents of the other barrel, but, before he could fire, the moose staggered to his feet, and disregarding the attacks of the dog, which were renewed with redoubled fierceness and vigor, rushed straight upon the hunter, and bore him to the ground.

In falling, Frank lost his gun. The enraged animal pressed upon the young hunter, burying his antlers in the snow on each side of him, holding him fast to the ground. Frank gave himself up for lost; but he determined that he would not yield his life without a struggle. He was unarmed, and the contest must be one of strength and endurance. Before the moose could draw back to make another charge upon him, Frank seized him by the antlers, and clung to them with all his strength. Brave seemed to understand the perilous situation in which his master was placed, and fought more furiously than ever. But the moose, although severely wounded by the teeth of the dog, did not appear to notice him in the least, but struggled desperately to free himself from the young hunter's grasp. Frank was dragged about through the snow, and pressed down into it, until his clothing was almost reduced to tatters; and he was severely wounded by the sharp crust and the hoofs of the enraged deer, which cut through his garments like a knife. It required all his strength to retain his hold. He did not seem to be in the least frightened; but the manner in which he clung to the moose, and cheered on the dog, showed that he well knew the danger of his situation. But he was growing weaker every moment, while the moose appeared to be growing proportionately stronger, and his struggles became more furious and determined. Frank knew that the animal would soon succeed in freeing himself, and then – . It was a horrible thought!

At this moment he heard the noise of approaching feet on the crust, and a voice exclaimed, "Bars and buffaler! Hang on to the creetur jest a minute longer, youngster! Take 'em, dog! take 'em!" And the next instant a dark object bounded lightly over him, and commenced a furious battle with the moose. Benumbed and exhausted, Frank could hold out no longer. As the moose tore himself from his grasp, the young hunter saw him pulled to the ground by the trapper's dog, and then a mist gathered before his eyes, and he sank back on the snow insensible.

When his consciousness returned, he found himself in a rudely-constructed hut, lying in front of a blazing fire, and so tightly wrapped up in blankets that he could scarcely breathe. Dick sat in one corner of the hut, smoking his pipe, and gazing vacantly into the fire. Brave lay stretched out by his master's side, with his head resting on his shoulder, gazing into his face with every expression of concern. As soon as Frank opened his eyes, the faithful animal announced the fact by a joyful bark, which brought all the boys into the hut.

“How do you feel, Frank?” inquired Archie, whose pale face showed that he had more than a common interest in his cousin’s well-being.

“O! I’m all right,” answered Frank, in a weak voice. “But you’ve got me bundled up so tight I can hardly breathe. I wish you would take a dozen or two of these blankets off.”

“No, you don’t,” said Dick, as the boys crowded up around Frank. “I believe I’ve got the bossin’ of this yere job. Here,” he continued, as he[Pg 65][Pg 66] arose from his seat and approached his patient, “drink this;” and he raised Frank from his blankets with one hand, and, with the other, held to his lips a cup containing some of the most bitter stuff he had ever drank. The young hunter made wry faces over it, but succeeded in draining the cup. “Now,” resumed Dick, “lay down agin an’ go to sleep. Shut up! No back talk!” he continued, as Frank essayed to speak. “You musn’t talk till I say you may;” and the rough but kind-hearted trapper laid him back on his bed, and, drawing the blankets more closely about him, left him to his meditations.

He soon fell off into a refreshing slumber; and when he awoke it was dark, and his companions were seated around the fire, eating their supper.

“Wal, youngster,” said Dick, “how do you feel now?”

“O! I’m much better,” answered Frank; “and hungry as blazes. Won’t you give a fellow some thing to eat?”

“In course,” said Dick; and he brought Frank some pieces of toast and a cup of coffee.

“I don’t like your style of doctoring a bit,” said Frank, as the trapper carefully removed the blankets with which his patient was enveloped. “The remedies you use are worse than the disease. You’ve kept me wrapped up so tight that I am sore all over.”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” said the trapper, laughing heartily; “but that doesn’t come of bein’ wrapped up in the blankets. You war purty well chawed up when me an’ Useless diskivered you.”

Dick raised Frank to a sitting posture, and, in spite of his objections, once more drew the blankets about him, allowing him, however, the free use of his arms; and the young hunter soon discovered that he was not quite so well as he had imagined, for sharp pains shot through his body, and he was so weak he could scarcely sit up.

“I believe I had something of a fight with that moose, didn’t I?” he inquired, as he broke off a piece of the toast.

“I believe you did, judging from the looks of your clothes,” answered Harry, as he laid down his plate, and took from a peg in one corner of the hut all that remained of Frank’s garments.

The coat and pants were torn almost into shreds, and covered with blood, and the sole of one of his boots had been pulled off by the sharp hoofs of the deer. Brave had also suffered severely, judging from the bloody bandages that he wore.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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