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Kings in Exile



Charles Roberts

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LAST BULL

That was what two grim old sachems of the Dacotahs had dubbed him; and though his official title, on the lists of the Zoölogical Park, was “Kaiser,” the new and more significant name had promptly supplanted it. The Park authorities – people of imagination and of sentiment, as must all be who would deal successfully with wild animals – had felt at once that the name aptly embodied the tragedies and the romantic memories of his all-but-vanished race. They had felt, too, that the two old braves who had been brought East to adorn a city pageant, and who had stood gazing stoically for hours at the great bull buffalo through the barrier of the steel-wire fence, were fited, before all others, to give him a name. Between him and them there was surely a tragic bond, as they stood there islanded among the swelling tides of civilization which had already engulfed their kindreds. “Last Bull” they had called him, as he answered their gaze with little, sullen, melancholy eyes from under his ponderous and shaggy front. “Last Bull” – and the passing of his race was in the name.

Here, in his fenced, protected range, with a space of grassy meadow, half a dozen clumps of sheltering trees, two hundred yards of the run of a clear, unfailing brook, and a warm shed for refuge against the winter storms, the giant buffalo ruled his little herd of three tawny cows, two yearlings, and one blundering, butting calf of the season. He was a magnificent specimen of his race – surpassing, it was said, the finest bull in the Yellowstone preserves or in the guarded Canadian herd of the North. Little short of twelve feet in length, a good five foot ten in height at the tip of his humped and huge fore-shoulders, he seemed to justify the most extravagant tales of pioneer and huntsman. His hind-quarters were trim and fine-lined, built apparently for speed, smooth-haired, and of a grayish lion-color. But his fore-shoulders, mounting to an enormous hump, were of an elephantine massiveness, and clothed in a dense, curling, golden-brown growth of matted hair. His mighty head was carried low, almost to the level of his knees, on a neck of colossal strength, which was draped, together with the forelegs down to the knees, in a flowing brown mane tipped with black. His head, too, to the very muzzle, wore the same luxuriant and sombre drapery, out of which curved viciously the keen-tipped crescent of his horns. Dark, huge, and ominous, he looked curiously out of place in the secure and familiar tranquillity of his green pasture.

For a distance of perhaps fifty yards, at the back of the pasture, the range of the buffalo herd adjoined that of the moose, divided from it by that same fence of heavy steel-wire mesh, supported by iron posts, which surrounded the whole range. One sunny and tingling day in late October – such a day as makes the blood race full red through all healthy veins – a magnificent stranger was brought to the Park, and turned into the moose-range.

The newcomer was a New Brunswick bull moose, captured on the Tobique during the previous spring when the snow was deep and soft, and purchased for the Park by one of the big Eastern lumber-merchants. The moose-herd had consisted, hitherto, of four lonely cows, and the splendid bull was a prize which the Park had long been coveting. He took lordly possession, forthwith, of the submissive little herd, and led them off at once from the curious crowds about the gate to explore the wild-looking thickets at the back of the pasture. But no sooner had he fairly entered these thickets than he found his further progress barred by the steel-meshed fence. This was a bitter disappointment, for he had expected to go striding through miles of alder swamp and dark spruce woods, fleeing the hated world of men and bondage, before setting himself to get acquainted with his new followers. His high-strung temper was badly jarred. He drew off, shaking his vast

antlers, and went shambling with spacious stride down along the barrier towards the brook. The four cows, in single file, hurried after him anxiously, afraid he might be snatched away from them.

Last Bull, standing solitary and morose on a little knoll in his pasture, caught sight of the strange, dark figure of the running moose. A spark leapt into his heavy eyes. He wheeled, pawed the sod, put his muzzle to the ground, and bellowed a sonorous challenge. The moose stopped short and stared about him, the stiff hair lifting angrily along the ridge of his massive neck. Last Bull lowered his head and tore up the sod with his horns.

This vehement action caught the eyes of the moose. At first he stared in amazement, for he had never seen any creature that looked like Last Bull. The two were only about fifty or sixty yards apart, across the little valley of the bushy swamp. As he stared, his irritation speedily overcame his amazement. The curious-looking creature over there on the knoll was defying him, was challenging him. At this time of year his blood was hot and quick for any challenge. He gave vent to a short, harsh, explosive cry, more like a grumbling bleat than a bellow, and as unlike the buffalo's challenge as could well be imagined. Then he fell to thrashing the nearest bushes violently with his antlers. This, for some reason unknown to the mere human chronicler, seemed to be taken by Last Bull as a crowning insolence. His long, tasselled tail went stiffly up into the air, and he charged wrathfully down the knoll. The moose, with his heavy-muzzled head stuck straight out scornfully before him, and his antlers laid flat along his back, strode down to the encounter with a certain deadly deliberation. He was going to fight. There was no doubt whatever on that score. But he had not quite made up his wary mind as to how he would deal with this unknown and novel adversary.

They looked not so unequally matched, these two, the monarch of the Western plains, and the monarch of the northeastern forests. Both had something of the monstrous, the uncouth, about them, as if they belonged not to this modern day, but to some prehistoric epoch when Earth moulded her children on more lavish and less graceful lines. The moose was like the buffalo in having his hind-quarters relatively slight and low, and his back sloping upwards to a hump over the immensely developed fore-shoulders. But he had much less length of body, and much less bulk, though perhaps eight or ten inches more of height at the tip of the shoulder. His hair was short, and darker than that of his shaggy rival, being almost black except on legs and belly. Instead of carrying his head low, like the buffalo, for feeding on the level prairies, he bore it high, being in the main a tree-feeder. But the greatest difference between the two champions was in their heads and horns. The antlers of the moose formed a huge, fantastic, flatly palmated or leaflike structure, separating into sharp prongs along the edges, and spreading more than four feet from tip to tip. To compare them with the short, polished crescent of the horns of Last Bull was like comparing a two-handed broadsword to a bowie-knife. And his head, instead of being short, broad, ponderous, and shaggy, like Last Bull's, was long, close-haired, and massively horse-faced, with a projecting upper lip heavy and grim.

Had there been no impregnable steel barrier between them, it is hard to say which would have triumphed in the end, the ponderous weight and fury of Last Bull, or the ripping prongs and swift wrath of the moose. The buffalo charged down the knoll at a thundering gallop; but just before reaching the fence he checked himself violently. More than once or twice before had those elastic but impenetrable meshes given him his lesson, hurling him back with humiliating harshness when he dashed his bulk against them. He had too lively a memory of past discomfitures to risk a fresh one now in the face of this insolent foe. His matted front came against the wire with a force so cunningly moderated that he was not thrown back by the recoil. And the keen points of his horns went through the meshes with a vehemence which might indeed have done its work effectively had they come in contact with the adversary. As it was, however, they but prodded empty air.

The moose, meanwhile, had been in doubt whether to attack with his antlers, as was his manner when encountering foes of his own kind, or with his knife-edged fore-hoofs, which were the weapons he used against bears, wolves, or other alien adversaries. Finally he seemed to make up his mind that Last Bull, having horns and a most redoubtable stature, must be some kind of

moose. In that case, of course, it became a question of antlers. Moreover, in his meetings with rival bulls it had never been his wont to depend upon a blind, irresistible charge, – thereby leaving it open to an alert opponent to slip aside and rip him along the flank, – but rather to fence warily for an advantage in the locking of antlers, and then bear down his foe by the fury and speed of his pushing. It so happened, therefore, that he, too, came not too violently against the barrier. Loudly his vast spread of antlers clashed upon the steel meshes; and one short prong, jutting low over his brow, pierced through and furrowed deeply the matted forehead of the buffalo.

As the blood streamed down over his nostrils, obscuring one eye, Last Bull quite lost his head with rage. Drawing off, he hurled himself blindly upon the barrier – only to be hurled back again with a vigor that brought him to his knees. But at the same time the moose, on the other side of the fence, got a huge surprise. Having his antlers against the barrier when Last Bull charged, he was forced back irresistibly upon his haunches, with a rudeness quite unlike anything that he had ever before experienced. His massive neck felt as if a pine tree had fallen upon it, and he came back to the charge quite beside himself with bewilderment and rage.

By this time, however, the keepers and Park attendants were arriving on the scene, armed with pitchforks and other unpleasant executors of authority. Snorting, and bellowing, and grunting, the monstrous duellists were forced apart; and Last Bull, who had been taught something of man's dominance, was driven off to his stable and imprisoned. He was not let out again for two whole days. And by that time another fence, parallel with the first and some five or six feet distant from it, had been run up between his range and that of the moose. Over this impassable zone of neutrality, for a few days, the two rivals flung insult and futile defiance, till suddenly, becoming tired of it all, they seemed to agree to ignore each other's existence.

After this, Last Bull's sullenness of temper appeared to grow upon him. He was fond of drawing apart from the little herd, and taking up his solitary post on the knoll, where he would stand for an hour at a time motionless except for the switching of his long tail, and staring steadily westward as if he knew where the great past of his race had lain. In that direction a dense grove of chestnuts, maples, and oaks bounded the range, cutting off the view of the city roofs, the roar of the city traffic. Beyond the city were mountains and wide waters which he could not see; but beyond the waters and the mountains stretched the green, illimitable plains – which perhaps (who knows?) in some faint vision inherited from the ancestors whose myriads had possessed them, his sombre eyes, in some strange way, *could* see. Among the keepers and attendants generally it was said, with anxious regret, that perhaps Last Bull was "going bad." But the head-keeper, Payne, himself a son of the plains, repudiated the idea. *He* declared sympathetically that the great bull was merely homesick, pining for the wind-swept levels of the open country (God's country, Payne called it!) which his imprisoned hoofs had never trodden.

Be this as it may, the fact could not be gainsaid that Last Bull was growing more and more morose. The spectators, strolling along the wide walk which skirted the front of his range, seemed to irritate him, and sometimes, when a group had gathered to admire him, he would turn his low-hung head and answer their staring eyes with a kind of heavy fury, as if he burned to break forth upon them and seek vengeance for incalculable wrongs. This smouldering indignation against humanity extended equally, if not more violently, to all creatures who appeared to him as servants or allies of humanity. The dogs whom he sometimes saw passing, held in leash by their masters or mistresses, made him paw the earth scornfully if he happened to be near the fence. The patient horses who pulled the road-roller or the noisy lawn-mower made his eyes redden savagely. And he hated with peculiar zest the roguish little trick elephant, Bong, who would sometimes, his inquisitive trunk swinging from side to side, go lurching lazily by with a load of squealing children on his back.

Bong, who was a favored character, amiable and trustworthy, was allowed the freedom of the Park in the early morning, before visitors began to arrive who might be alarmed at seeing an elephant at large. He was addicted to minding his own business, and never paid the slightest

attention to any occupants of cage or enclosure. He was quite unaware of the hostility which he had aroused in the perverse and brooding heart of Last Bull.

One crisp morning in late November, when all the grass in the Park had been blackened by frost, and the pools were edged with silver rims of ice, and mists were white and saffron about the scarce-risen sun, and that autumn thrill was in the air which gives one such an appetite, Bong chanced to be strolling past the front of Last Bull's range. He did not see Last Bull, who was nothing to him. But, being just as hungry as he ought to be on so stimulating a morning, he did see, and note with interest, some bundles of fresh hay on the other side of the fence.

Now, Bong was no thief. But hay had always seemed to him a free largess, like grass and water, and this looked like very good hay. So clear a conscience had he on the subject that he never thought of glancing around to see if any of the attendants were looking. Innocently he lurched up to the fence, reached his lithe trunk through, gathered a neat wisp of the hay, and stuffed it happily into his curious, narrow, pointed mouth. Yes, he had not been mistaken. It was good hay. With great satisfaction he reached in for another mouthful.

Last Bull, as it happened, was standing close by, but a little to one side. He had been ignoring, so far, his morning ration. He was not hungry. And, moreover, he rather disapproved of the hay because it had the hostile man-smell strong upon it. Nevertheless, he recognized it very clearly as his property, to be eaten when he should feel inclined to eat it. His wrath, then, was only equalled by his amazement when he saw the little elephant's presumptuous gray trunk reach in and coolly help itself. For a moment he forgot to do anything whatever about it. But when, a few seconds later, that long, curling trunk of Bong's insinuated itself again and appropriated another bundle of the now precious hay, the outraged owner bestirred himself. With a curt roar, that was more of a cough or a grunt than a bellow, he lunged forward and strove to pin the intruding trunk to the ground.

With startled alacrity Bong withdrew his trunk, but just in time to save it from being mangled. For an instant he stood with the member held high in air, bewildered by what seemed to him such a gratuitous attack. Then his twinkling little eyes began to blaze, and he trumpeted shrilly with anger. The next moment, reaching over the fence, he brought down the trunk on Last Bull's hump with such a terrible flail-like blow that the great buffalo stumbled forward upon his knees.

He was up again in an instant and hurling himself madly against the inexorable steel which separated him from his foe. Bong hesitated for a second, then, reaching over the fence once more, clutched Last Bull maliciously around the base of his horns and tried to twist his neck. This enterprise, however, was too much even for the elephant's titanic powers, for Last Bull's greatest strength lay in the muscles of his ponderous and corded neck. Raving and bellowing, he plunged this way and that, striving in vain to wrench himself free from that incomprehensible, snake-like thing which had fastened upon him. Bong, trumpeting savagely, braced himself with widespread pillars of legs, and between them it seemed that the steel fence must go down under such cataclysmic shocks as it was suffering. But the noisy violence of the battle presently brought its own ending. An amused but angry squad of attendants came up and stopped it, and Bong, who seemed plainly the aggressor, was hustled off to his stall in deep disgrace.

Last Bull was humiliated. In this encounter things had happened which he could in no way comprehend; and though, beyond an aching in neck and shoulders, he felt none the worse physically, he had nevertheless a sense of having been worsted, of having been treated with ignominy, in spite of the fact that it was his foe, and not he, who had retired from the field. For several days he wore a subdued air and kept about meekly with his docile cows. Then his old, bitter moodiness reasserted itself, and he resumed his solitary broodings on the crest of the knoll.

When the winter storms came on, it had been Last Bull's custom to let himself be housed luxuriously at nightfall, with the rest of the herd, in the warm and ample buffalo-shed. But this winter he made such difficulty about going in that at last Payne decreed that he should have his own way and stay out. "It will do him no harm, and may cool his peppery blood some!" had been the

keeper's decision. So the door was left open, and Last Bull entered or refrained, according to his whim. It was noticed, however, – and this struck a chord of answering sympathy in the plainsman's imaginative temperament, – that, though on ordinary nights he might come in and stay with the herd under shelter, on nights of driving storm, if the tempest blew from the west or northwest, Last Bull was sure to be out on the naked knoll to face it. When the fine sleet or stinging rain drove past him, filling his nostrils with their cold, drenching his matted mane, and lashing his narrowed eyes, what visions swept through his troubled, half-comprehending brain, no one may know. But Payne, with understanding born of sympathy and a common native soil, catching sight of his dark bulk under the dark of the low sky, was wont to declare that *he* knew. He would say that Last Bull's eyes discerned, black under the hurricane, but lit strangely with the flash of keen horns and rolling eyes and frothed nostrils, the endless and innumerable droves of the buffalo, with the plains wolf skulking on their flanks, passing, passing, southward into the final dark. In the roar of the wind, declared Payne, Last Bull, out there in the night, listened to the trampling of all those vanished droves. And though the other keepers insisted to each other, quite privately, that their chief talked a lot of nonsense about “that there mean-tempered old buffalo,” they nevertheless came gradually to look upon Last Bull with a kind of awe, and to regard his surly whims as privileged.

It chanced that winter that men were driving a railway tunnel beneath a corner of the Park. The tunnel ran for a short distance under the front of Last Bull's range, and passed close by the picturesque cottage occupied by Payne and two of his assistants. At this point the level of the Park was low, and the shell of earth was thin above the tunnel roof.

There came a Sunday afternoon, after days of rain and penetrating January thaw, when sun and air combined to cheat the earth with an illusion of spring. The buds and the mould breathed of April, and gay crowds flocked to the Park, to make the most of winter's temporary repulse. Just when things were at their gayest, with children's voices clamoring everywhere like starlings, and Bong, the little elephant, swinging good-naturedly up the broad white track with all the load he had room for on his back, there came an ominous jar and rumble, like the first of an earthquake, which ran along the front of Last Bull's range.

With sure instinct, Bong turned tail and fled with his young charges away across the grassland. The crowds, hardly knowing what they fled from, with screams and cries and blanched faces, followed the elephant's example. A moment later and, with a muffled crash, all along the front of the range, the earth sank into the tunnel, carrying with it half a dozen panels of Last Bull's hated fence.

Almost in a moment the panic of the crowd subsided. Every one realized just what had happened. Moreover, thanks to Bong's timely alarm, every one had got out of the way in good season. All fear of earthquake being removed, the crowd flocked back eagerly to stare down into the wrecked tunnel, which formed now a sort of gaping, chaotic ditch, with sides at some points precipitous and at others brokenly sloping. The throng was noisy with excited interest and with relief at having escaped so cleanly. The break had run just beneath one corner of the keepers' cottage, tearing away a portion of the foundation and wrenching the structure slightly aside without overthrowing it. Payne, who had been in the midst of his Sunday toilet, came out upon his twisted porch, half undressed and with a shaving-brush covered with lather in his hand. He gave one look at the damage which had been wrought, then plunged indoors again to throw his clothes on, at the same time sounding the hurry call for the attendants in other quarters of the Park.

Last Bull, who had been standing on his knoll, with his back to the throngs, had wheeled in astonishment at the heavy sound of the cave-in. For a few minutes he had stared sullenly, not grasping the situation. Then very slowly it dawned on him that his prison walls had fallen. Yes, surely, there at last lay his way to freedom, his path to the great open spaces for which he dumbly and vaguely hungered. With stately deliberation he marched down from his knoll to investigate.

But presently another idea came into his slow mind. He saw the clamorous crowds flocking back and ranging themselves along the edge of the chasm. These were his enemies. They were coming to balk him. A terrible madness surged through all his veins. He bellowed savage warning and came thundering down the field, nose to earth, dark, mountainous, irresistible.

The crowd yelled and shrank back. "He can't get across!" shouted some. But others cried: "He can! He's coming! Save yourselves!" And with shrieks they scattered wildly across the open, making for the kiosks, the pavilions, the trees, anything that seemed to promise hiding or shelter from that onrushing doom.

At the edge of the chasm – at this point forming not an actual drop, but a broken slide – Last Bull hardly paused. He plunged down, rolled over in the débris, struggled to his feet again instantly, and went ploughing and snorting up the opposite steep. As his colossal front, matted with mud, loomed up over the brink, his little eyes rolling and flaming, and the froth flying from his red nostrils, he formed a very nightmare of horror to those fugitives who dared to look behind them.

Surmounting the brink, he paused. There were so many enemies, he knew not which to pursue first. But straight ahead, in the very middle of the open, and far from any shelter, he saw a huddled group of children and nurses fleeing impotently and aimlessly. Shrill cries came from the cluster, which danced with colors, scarlet and yellow and blue and vivid pink. To the mad buffalo, these were the most conspicuous and the loudest of his foes, and therefore the most dangerous. With a bellow he flung his tail straight in the air, and charged after them.

An appalling hush fell, for a few heart-beats, all over the field. Then from different quarters appeared uniformed attendants, racing and shouting frantically to divert the bull's attention. From fleeing groups black-coated men leapt forth, armed only with their walking-sticks, and rushed desperately to defend the flock of children, who now, in the extremity of their terror, were tumbling as they ran. Some of the nurses were fleeing far in front, while others, the faithful ones, with eyes starting from their heads, grabbed up their little charges and struggled on under the burden.

Already Last Bull was halfway across the space which divided him from his foes. The ground shook under his ponderous gallop. At this moment Payne reappeared on the broken porch.

One glance showed him that no one was near enough to intervene. With a face stern and sorrowful he lifted the deadly .405 Winchester which he had brought out with him. The spot he covered was just behind Last Bull's mighty shoulder.

The smokeless powder spoke with a small, venomous report, unlike the black powder's noisy reverberation. Last Bull stumbled. But recovering himself instantly, he rushed on. He was hurt, and he felt it was those fleeing foes who had done it. A shade of perplexity darkened Payne's face. He fired again. This time his aim was true. The heavy expanding bullet tore straight through bone and muscle and heart, and Last Bull lurched forward upon his head, ploughing up the turf for yards. As his mad eyes softened and filmed, he saw once more, perhaps, – or so the heavy-hearted keeper who had slain him would have us believe, – the shadowy plains unrolling under the wild sky, and the hosts of his vanished kindred drifting past into the dark.

THE KING OF THE FLAMING HOOPS

CHAPTER I

The white, scarred face of the mountain looked straight east, over a vast basin of tumbled, lesser hills, dim black forests, and steel-blue loops of a far-winding water. Here and there long, level strata of pallid mist seemed to support themselves on the tree-tops, their edges fading off into the startling transparency that comes upon the air with the first of dawn. But that was in the lower world. Up on the solitary summit of White Face the daybreak had arrived. The jagged crest of the peak shot sudden radiances of flame-crimson, then bathed itself in a flow of rose-pinks and thin, indescribable reds and pulsating golds. Swiftly, as the far horizon leapt into blaze, the aerial flood spread down the mountain-face, revealing and transforming. It reached the mouth of a cave on a narrow ledge. As the splendor poured into the dark opening, a tawny shape, long and lithe and sinewy, came padding forth, noiseless as itself, as if to meet and challenge it.

Half emerging from the entrance upon the high rock-platform which formed its threshold, the puma halted, head uplifted and forepaws planted squarely to the front. With wide, palely bright eyes she stared out across the tremendous and mysterious landscape. As the colored glory rushed down the mountain, rolling back the blue-gray transparency of shadow, those inscrutable eyes swept every suddenly revealed glade, knoll, and waterside where deer or elk might by chance be pasturing.

She was a magnificent beast, this puma, massive of head and shoulder almost as a lioness, and in her calm scrutiny of the spaces unrolling before her gaze was a certain air of overlordship, as if her supremacy had gone long unquestioned. Suddenly, however, her attitude changed. Her eyes narrowed, her mighty muscles drew themselves together like springs being upcoiled, she half crouched, and her head turned sharply to the left, listening. Far down the narrow ledge which afforded the trail to her den she had caught the sound of something approaching.

As she listened, she crouched lower and lower, and her eyes began to burn with a thin, green flame. Her ears would flatten back savagely, then lift themselves again to interrogate the approaching sounds. Her anger at the intrusion upon her private domain was mixed with some apprehension, for behind her, in a warm corner of the den, curled up in a soft and furry ball like kittens, were her two sleeping cubs.

Her trail being well marked and with her scent strong upon it, she knew it could be no ignorant blunderer that drew near. It was plainly an enemy, and an arrogant enemy, since it made no attempt at stealth. The steps were not those of any hunter, white man or Indian, of that she presently assured herself. With this assurance, her anxiety diminished and her anger increased. Her tail, long and thick, doubled in thickness and began to jerk sharply from side to side. Crouching to the belly, she crept all the way out upon the ledge and peered cautiously around a jutting shoulder of rock.

The intruder was not yet in sight, because the front of White Face, though apparently a sheer and awful precipice when viewed from the valley, was in fact wrinkled with gullies and buttresses and bucklings of the tortured strata. But the sound of his coming was now quite intelligible to her. That softly ponderous tread, that careless displacing of stones, those undisguised sniffings and mumblings could come only from a bear, and a bear frankly looking for trouble. Well, he was going to find what he was looking for. With an antagonism handed down to her by a thousand ancestors, the great puma hated bears.

Many miles north of White Face, on the other side of that ragged mountain-ridge to which he formed an isolated and towering outpost, there was a fertile valley which had just been invaded by settlers. On every hand awoke the sharp barking of the axe. Rifle-shots startled the echoes.

Masterful voices and confident human laughter filled all the wild inhabitants with wonder and dismay. The undisputed lord of the range was an old silver-tip grizzly, of great size and evil temper. Furious at the unexpected trespass on his sovereignty, yet well aware of his powerlessness against the human creature that could strike from very far off with lightning and thunder, he had made up his mind at once to withdraw to some remoter range. Nevertheless, he had lingered for some days, sullenly expecting he knew not what. These formless expectations were most unpleasantly fulfilled when he came upon a man in a canoe paddling close in by the steep shore of the lake. He had hurled himself blindly down the bank, raging for vengeance, but when he reached the water's edge, the man was far out of reach. Then, while he stood there wavering, half minded to swim in pursuit, the man had spoken with the lightning and the thunder, after the terrifying fashion of his kind. The bear had felt himself stung near the tip of the shoulder, as if by a million wasps at once, and the fiery anguish had brought him to his senses.

It was no use trying to fight man, so he had dashed away into the thickets, and not halted till he had put miles between himself and the inexplicable enemy.

For two days, with occasional stops to forage or to sleep, the angry grizzly had travelled southward, heading towards the lonely peak of White Face. As the distance from his old haunts increased, his fears diminished; but his anger grew under the ceaseless fretting of that wound on his neck just where he could not reach to lick and soothe it. The flies, however, could reach it very well, and did. As a consequence, by the time he reached the upper slopes of White Face, he was in a mood to fight anything. He would have charged a regiment, had he suddenly found one in his path.

When he turned up a stone for the grubs, beetles, and scorpions which lurked beneath it, he would send it flying with a savage sweep of his paw. When he caught a rabbit, he smashed it flat in sheer fury, as if he cared more to mangle than to eat.

At last he stumbled upon the trail of a puma. As he sniffed at it, he became, if possible, more angry than ever. Pumas he had always hated. He had never had a chance to satisfy his grudge, for never had one dared to face his charge; but they had often snarled down defiance at him from some limb of oak or pine beyond his reach. He flung himself forward upon the trail with vengeful ardor. When he realized, from the fact that it was a much-used trail and led up among the barren rocks, that it was none other than the trail to the puma's lair, his satisfaction increased. He would be sure to find either the puma at home or the puma's young unguarded.

When the puma, at last, saw him emerge around a curve of the trail, and noted his enormous stature, she gave one longing, wistful look back over her shoulder to the shadowed nook wherein her cubs lay sleeping. Had there been any chance to get them both safely away, she would have shirked the fight, for their sakes. But she could not carry them both in her mouth at once up the face of the mountain. She would not desert either one. She hesitated a moment, as if doubtful whether or not to await attack in the mouth of the cave. Then she crept farther out, where the ledge was not three feet wide, and crouched flat, silent, watchful, rigid, in the middle of the trail.

When the grizzly saw her, his wicked little dark eyes glowed suddenly red, and he came up with a lumbering rush. With his gigantic, furry bulk, it looked as if he must instantly annihilate the slim, light creature that opposed him. It was a dreadful place to give battle, on that straight shelf of rock overhanging a sheer drop of perhaps a thousand feet. But scorn and rage together blinded the sagacity of the bear. With a grunt he charged.

Not until he was within ten feet of her did the crouching puma stir. Then she shot into the air, as if hurled up by the release of a mighty spring. Quick as a flash the grizzly shrank backward upon his haunches and swept up a huge black paw to parry the assault. But he was not quite quick enough. The puma's spring overreached his guard. She landed fairly upon his back, facing his tail; but in the fraction of a second she had whirled about and was tearing at his throat with teeth and claws, while the terrible talons of her hinder paws ripped at his flanks.

With a roar of pain and amazement the grizzly struggled to shake her off, clutching and striking at her with paws that at one blow could smash in the skull of the most powerful bull. But he could not reach her. Then he reared up, and threw himself backwards against the face of the rock, striving to crush her under his enormous weight. And in this he almost succeeded. Just in time, she writhed around and outward, but not quite far enough, for one paw was caught and ground to a pulp. But at the next instant, thrust back from the rock by his own effort, the bear toppled outward over the brink of the shelf. Grappling madly to save himself, he caught only the bowed loins of the puma, who now sank her teeth once more into his throat, while her rending claws seemed to tear him everywhere at once. He crushed her in his grip; and in a dreadful ball of screeching, roaring, biting, mangling rage the two plunged downward into the dim abyss. Once, still locked in the death-grip, they struck upon a jutting rock, and bounded far out into space. Then, as the ball rolled over in falling, it came apart; and separated now, though still very close together, the two bodies fell sprawlingly, and vanished into the blue-shadowed deeps which the dawn had not yet reached.

Upon this sudden and terrible ending of the fight appeared a bearded frontiersman who had been trailing the grizzly for half an hour and waiting for light enough to secure a sure shot. With something like awe in his face he came, and knelt down, with hands gripping cautiously, and peered over the dreadful brink. "Gee! But that there cat was game!" he muttered, drawing back and sweeping a comprehensive gaze across the stupendous landscape, as if challenging denial of his statement. Obviously the silences were of the same opinion, for there came no suggestion of dissent. Carefully he rose to his feet and pressed on towards the cave.

Without hesitation he entered, for he knew that the puma's mate some weeks before had been shot, far down in the valley. He found the kittens asleep and began to fondle them. At his touch, and the smell of him, they awoke, spitting and clawing with all their mother's courage. Young as they were, their claws drew blood abundantly. "Gritty little devils!" growled the man good-naturedly, snatching back his hand and wiping the blood on his trouser-leg. Then he took off his coat, threw it over the troublesome youngsters, rolled them in it securely, so that not one protesting claw could get out, and started back to the camp with the grumbling and uneasy bundle in his arms.

Three months later, the two puma cubs, sleek, fat, full of gayety as two kittens of like age, and convinced by this time that man was the source and origin of all good things, were sold to a travelling collector. One, the female, was sent down to a zoölogical garden on the Pacific coast. The other, the male, much the larger and at the same time the more even-tempered and amenable to teaching, found its way to the cages of an animal-trainer in the East.

CHAPTER II

"King's kind of ugly to-night, seems to me; better keep yer eyes peeled!" said Andy Hansen, the assistant trainer, the big, yellow-haired Swede who knew not fear. Neither did he know impatience or irritability; and so all the animals, as a rule, were on their good behavior under his calm, masterful, blue eye. Yet he was tactful with the beasts, and given to humoring their moods as far as convenient without ever letting them guess it.

"Oh, you go chase yourself, Andy!" replied Signor Tomaso, the trainer, with a strong New England accent. "If I got to look out for King, I'd better quit the business. Don't you go trying to make trouble between friends, Andy."

"Of course, Bill, I know he'd never try to maul *you*," explained Hansen seriously, determined that he should not be misunderstood in the smallest particular. "But he's acting curious. Look out he don't get into a scrap with some of the other animals."

"I reckon I kin keep 'em all straight," answered the trainer dryly, as he turned away to get ready for the great performance which the audience, dimly heard beyond the canvas walls, was breathlessly awaiting.

The trainer's name was William Sparks, and his birthplace Big Chebeague, Maine; but his lean, swarthy face and piercing, green-brown eyes, combined with the craving of his audiences for a touch of the romantic, had led him to adopt the more sonorous pseudonym of "Signor Tomaso." He maintained that if he went under his own name, nobody would ever believe that what he did could be anything wonderful. Except for this trifling matter of the name, there was no fake about Signor Tomaso. He was a brilliant animal-trainer, as unacquainted with fear as the Swede, as dominant of eye, and of immeasurably greater experience. But being, at the same time, more emotional, more temperamental than his phlegmatic assistant, his control was sometimes less steady, and now and again he would have to assert his authority with violence. He was keenly alive to the varying personalities of his beasts, naturally, and hence had favorites among them. His especial favorite, who heartily reciprocated the attachment, was the great puma, King, the most intelligent and amiable of all the wild animals that had ever come under his training whip.

As Hansen's success with the animals, during the few months of his experience as assistant, had been altogether phenomenal, his chief felt a qualm of pique upon being warned against the big puma. He had too just an appreciation of Hansen's judgment, however, to quite disregard the warning, and he turned it over curiously in his mind as he went to his dressing-room. Emerging a few minutes later in the black-and-white of faultless evening dress, without a speck on his varnished shoes, he moved down along the front of the cages, addressing to the occupant of each, as he passed, a sharp, authoritative word which brought it to attention.

With the strange, savage smell of the cages in his nostrils, that bitter, acrid pungency to which his senses never grew blunted, a new spirit of understanding was wont to enter Tomaso's brain. He would feel a sudden kinship with the wild creatures, such a direct and instant comprehension as almost justified his fancy that in some previous existence he had himself been a wild man of the jungle and spoken in their tongue. As he looked keenly into each cage, he knew that the animal whose eyes for that moment met his was in untroubled mood. This, till he came to the cage containing the latest addition to his troupe, a large cinnamon bear, which was rocking restlessly to and fro and grumbling to itself. The bear was one which had been long in captivity and well trained. Tomaso had found him docile, and clever enough to be admitted at once to the performing troupe. But to-night the beast's eyes were red with some ill-humor. Twice the trainer spoke to him before he heeded; but then he assumed instantly an air of mildest subservience. The expression of a new-weaned puppy is not more innocently mild than the look which a bear can assume when it so desires.

“Ah, ha! old sport! So it’s you that’s got a grouch on to-night; I’ll keep an eye on you!” he muttered to himself. He snapped his heavy whip once, and the bear obediently sat up on its haunches, its great paws hanging meekly. Tomaso looked it sharply in the eye. “Don’t forget, now, and get funny!” he admonished. Then he returned to the first cage, which contained the puma, and went up close to the bars. The great cat came and rubbed against him, purring harshly.

“There ain’t nothing the matter with *you*, boy, I reckon,” said Tomaso, scratching him affectionately behind the ears. “Andy must have wheels in his head if he thinks I’ve got to keep my eyes peeled on *your* account.”

Out beyond the iron-grilled passage, beyond the lighted canvas walls, the sharp, metallic noises of the workmen setting up the great performing-cage came to a stop. There was a burst of music from the orchestra. That, too, ceased. The restless hum of the unseen masses around the arena died away into an expectant hush. It was time to go on. At the farther end of the passage, by the closed door leading to the performing cage, Hansen appeared. Tomaso opened the puma’s cage. King dropped out with a soft thud of his great paws, and padded swiftly down the passage, his master following. Hansen slid wide the door, admitting a glare of light, a vast, intense rustle of excitement; and King marched majestically out into it, eying calmly the tier on climbing tier of eager faces. It was his customary privilege, this, to make the entrance alone, a good half minute ahead of the rest of the troupe; and he seemed to value it. Halfway around the big cage he walked, then mounted his pedestal, sat up very straight, and stared blandly at the audience. A salvo of clapping ran smartly round the tiers – King’s usual tribute, which he had so learned to expect that any failure of it would have dispirited him for the whole performance.

Signor Tomaso had taken his stand, whip in hand, just inside the cage, with Hansen opposite him, to see that the animals, on entry, went each straight to his own bench or pedestal. Any mistake in this connection was sure to lead to trouble, each beast being almost childishly jealous of its rights. Inside the long passage an attendant was opening one cage after another; and in a second more the animals began to appear in procession, filing out between the immaculate Signor and the roughly clad Swede. First came a majestic white Angora goat, carrying high his horned and bearded head, and stepping most daintily upon slim, black hoofs. Close behind, and looking just ready to pounce upon him but for dread of the Signor’s eye, came slinking stealthily a spotted black-and-yellow leopard, ears back and tail twitching. He seemed ripe for mischief, as he climbed reluctantly on to his pedestal beside the goat; but he knew better than to even bare a claw. And as for the white goat, with his big golden eyes superciliously half closed, he ignored his dangerous neighbor completely, while his jaws chewed nonchalantly on a bit of brown shoe-lace which he had picked up in the passage.

Close behind the leopard came a bored-looking lion, who marched with listless dignity straight to his place. Then another lion, who paused in the doorway and looked out doubtfully, blinking with distaste at the strong light. Tomaso spoke sharply, like the snap of his whip, whereupon the lion ran forward in haste. But he seemed to have forgotten which was his proper pedestal, for he hopped upon the three nearest in turn, only to hop down again with apologetic alacrity at the order of the cracking whip. At last, obviously flustered, he reached a pedestal on which he was allowed to remain. Here he sat, blinking from side to side and apparently much mortified.

The lion was followed by a running wolf, who had shown his teeth savagely when the lion, for a moment, trespassed upon his pedestal. This beast was intensely interested in the audience, and, as soon as he was in his place, turned his head and glared with green, narrowed eyes at the nearest spectators, as if trying to stare them out of countenance. After the wolf came a beautiful Bengal tiger, its black-and-golden stripes shining as if they had been oiled. He glided straight to his stand, sniffed at it superciliously, and then lay down before it. The whip snapped sharply three times, but the tiger only shut his eyes tight. The audience grew hushed. Tomaso ran forward, seized

the beast by the back of the neck, and shook him roughly. Whereupon the tiger half rose, opened his great red mouth like a cavern, and roared in his master's face. The audience thrilled from corner to corner, and a few cries came from frightened women.

The trainer paused for an instant, to give full effect to the situation. Then, stooping suddenly, he lifted the tiger's hind-quarters and deposited them firmly on the pedestal, and left him in that awkward position.

"There," he said in a loud voice, "that's all the help you'll get from me!"

The audience roared with instant and delighted appreciation. The tiger gathered up the rest of himself upon his pedestal, wiped his face with his paw, like a cat, and settled down complacently with a pleased assurance that he had done the trick well.

At this moment the attention of the audience was drawn to the entrance, where there seemed to be some hitch. Tomaso snapped his whip sharply, and shouted savage orders, but nothing came forth. Then the big Swede, with an agitated air, snatched up the trainer's pitchfork, which stood close at hand in case of emergency, made swift passes at the empty doorway, and jumped back. The audience was lifted fairly to its feet with excitement. What monster could it be that was giving so much trouble? The next moment, while Tomaso's whip hissed in vicious circles over his head, a plump little drab-colored pug-dog marched slowly out upon the stage, its head held arrogantly aloft. Volleys of laughter crackled around the arena, and the delighted spectators settled, tittering, back into their seats.

The pug glanced searchingly around the cage, then selecting the biggest of the lions as a worthy antagonist, flew at his pedestal, barking furious challenge. The lion glanced down at him, looked bored at the noise, and yawned. Apparently disappointed, the pug turned away and sought another adversary. He saw King's big tail hanging down beside his pedestal. Flinging himself upon it, he began to worry it as if it were a rat. The next moment the tail threshed vigorously, and the pug went rolling end over end across the stage.

Picking himself up and shaking the sawdust from his coat, the pug growled savagely and curled his little tail into a tighter screw. Bristling with wrath, he tiptoed menacingly back toward the puma's pedestal, determined to wipe out the indignity. This time his challenge was accepted. Tomaso's whip snapped, but the audience was too intent to hear it. The great puma slipped down from his pedestal, ran forward a few steps, and crouched.

With a shrill snarl the pug rushed in. At the same instant the puma sprang, making a splendid tawny curve through the air, and alighted ten feet behind his antagonist's tail. There he wheeled like lightning and crouched. But the pug, enraged at being balked of his vengeance, had also wheeled, and charged again in the same half second. In the next, he had the puma by the throat. With a dreadful screech the great beast rolled over on his side and stiffened out his legs. The pug drew off, eyed him critically to make sure that he was quite dead, then ran, barking shrill triumph, to take possession of the victim's place. Then the whip cracked once more. Whereupon the puma got up, trotted back to his pedestal, mounted it, and tucked the pug protectingly away between his great forepaws.

The applause had not quite died away when a towering, sandy-brown bulk appeared in the entrance to the cage. Erect upon its hind legs, and with a musket on its shoulder, it marched ponderously and slowly around the circle, eying each of the sitting beasts – except the wolf – suspiciously as it passed. The watchful eyes of both Signor Tomaso and Hansen noted that it gave wider berth to the puma than to any of the others, and also that the puma's ears, at the moment, were ominously flattened. Instantly the long whip snapped its terse admonition to good manners. Nothing happened, except that the pug, from between the puma's legs, barked insolently. The sandy-brown bulk reached its allotted pedestal, – which was quite absurdly too small for it to mount, – dropped the musket with a clatter, fell upon all fours with a loud *whoof* of relief, and relapsed into a bear.

The stage now set to his satisfaction, Signor Tomaso advanced to the centre of it. He snapped his whip, and uttered a sharp cry which the audience doubtless took for purest Italian. Immediately the animals all descended from their pedestals, and circled solemnly around him in a series of more or less intricate evolutions, all except the bear, who, not having yet been initiated into this beast quadrille, kept his place and looked scornful. At another signal the evolutions ceased, and all the beasts, except one of the lions, hurried back to their places. The lion, with the bashful air of a boy who gets up to “speak his piece” at a school examination, lingered in the middle of the stage. A rope was brought. The Swede took one end of it, the attendant who had brought it took the other, and between them they began to swing it, very slowly, as a great skipping-rope. At an energetic command from Signor Tomaso the lion slipped into the swinging circle, and began to skip in a ponderous and shamefaced fashion. The house thundered applause. For perhaps half a minute the strange performance continued, the whip snapping rhythmically with every descent of the rope. Then all at once, as if he simply could not endure it for another second, the lion bolted, head down, clambered upon his pedestal, and shut his eyes hard as if expecting a whipping. But as nothing happened except a roar of laughter from the seats, he opened them again and glanced from side to side complacently, as if to say, “Didn’t I get out of that neatly?”

The next act was a feat of teetering. A broad and massive teeter-board was brought in, and balanced across a support about two feet high. The sulky leopard, at a sign from Tomaso, slouched up to it, pulled one end to the ground, and mounted. At the centre he balanced cautiously for a moment till it tipped, then crept on to the other end, and crouched there, holding it down as if his very life depended on it. Immediately the white goat dropped from his pedestal, minced daintily over, skipped up upon the centre of the board, and mounted to the elevated end. His weight was not sufficient to lift, or even to disturb, the leopard, who kept the other end anchored securely. But the goat seemed to like his high and conspicuous position, for he maintained it with composure and stared around with great condescension upon the other beasts.

The goat having been given time to demonstrate his unfitness for the task he had undertaken, Tomaso’s whip cracked again. Instantly King descended from his pedestal, ran over to the teeter-board, and mounted it at the centre. The goat, unwilling to be dispossessed of his high place, stamped and butted at him indignantly, but with one scornful sweep of his great paw the puma brushed him off to the sawdust, and took his place at the end of the board. Snarling and clutching at the cleats, the leopard was hoisted into the air, heavily outweighed. The crowd applauded; but the performance, obviously, was not yet perfect. Now came the white goat’s opportunity. He hesitated a moment, till he heard a word from Tomaso. Then he sprang once more upon the centre of the board, faced King, and backed up inch by inch towards the leopard till the latter began to descend. At this point of balance the white goat had one forefoot just on the pivot of the board. With a dainty, dancing motion, and a proud tossing of his head, he now threw his weight slowly backward and forward. The great teeter worked to perfection. Signor Tomaso was kept bowing to round after round of applause while the leopard, the goat, and King returned proudly to their places.

After this, four of the red-and-yellow uniformed attendants ran in, each carrying a large hoop. They stationed themselves at equal distances around the circumference of the cage, holding the hoops out before them at a height of about four feet from the ground. At the command of Tomaso, the animals all formed in procession – though not without much cracking of the whip and vehement command – and went leaping one after the other through the hoops – all except the pug, who tried in vain to jump so high, and the bear, who, not knowing how to jump at all, simply marched around and pretended not to see that the hoops were there. Then four other hoops, covered with white paper, were brought in, and head first through them the puma led the way. When it came to the bear’s turn, the whip cracked a special signal. Whereupon, instead of ignoring the hoop as he had done before, he stuck his head through it and marched off with it hanging on his neck. All four

hoops he gathered up in this way, and, retiring with them to his place, stood shuffling restlessly and grunting with impatience until he was relieved of the awkward burden.

A moment later four more hoops were handed to the attendants. They looked like the first lot; but the attendants took them with hooked handles of iron and held them out at arm's length. Touched with a match, they burst instantly into leaping yellow flames; whereupon all the beasts, except King, stirred uneasily on their pedestals. The whip snapped with emphasis; and all the beasts – except King, who sat eying the flames tranquilly, and the bear, who whined his disapproval, but knew that he was not expected to take part in this act – formed again in procession, and ran at the flaming hoops as if to jump through them as before. But each, on arriving at a hoop, crouched flat and scurried under it like a frightened cat – except the white goat, which pranced aside and capered past derisively. Pretending to be much disappointed in them, Signor Tomaso ordered them all back to their places, and, folding his arms, stood with his head lowered as if wondering what to do about it. Upon this, King descended proudly from his pedestal and approached the blazing terrors. With easiest grace and nonchalance he lifted his lithe body, and went bounding lightly through the hoops, one after the other. The audience stormed its applause. Twice around this terrifying circuit he went, as indifferent to the writhing flames as if they had been so much grass waving in the wind. Then he stopped abruptly, turned his head, and looked at Tomaso in expectation. The latter came up, fondled his ears, and assured him that he had done wonders. Then King returned to his place, elation bristling in his whiskers.

While the flaming hoops were being rushed from the ring and the audience was settling down again to the quiet of unlimited expectation, a particularly elaborate act was being prepared. A massive wooden stand, with shelves and seats at various heights, was brought in. Signor Tomaso, coiling the lash of his whip and holding the heavy handle, with its loaded butt, as a sceptre, took his place on a somewhat raised seat at the centre of the frame. Hansen, with his pitchfork in one hand and a whip like Tomaso's in the other, drew nearer; and the audience, with a thrill, realized that something more than ordinarily dangerous was on the cards. The tiger came and stretched itself at full length before Tomaso, who at once appropriated him as a footstool. The bear and the biggest of the lions posted themselves on either side of their master, rearing up like the armorial supporters of some illustrious escutcheon, and resting their mighty forepaws apparently on their master's shoulders, though in reality on two narrow little shelves placed there for the purpose. Another lion came and laid his huge head on Tomaso's knees, as if doing obeisance. By this time all the other animals were prowling about the stand, peering this way and that, as if trying to remember their places; and the big Swede was cracking his whip briskly, with curt, deep-toned commands, to sharpen up their memories. Only King seemed quite clear as to what he had to do – which was to lay his tawny body along the shelf immediately over the heads of the lion and the bear; but as he mounted the stand from the rear, his ears went back and he showed a curious reluctance to fulfil his part. Hansen's keen eyes noted this at once, and his whip snapped emphatically in the air just above the great puma's nose. Still King hesitated. The lion paid no attention whatever, but the bear glanced up with reddening eyes and a surly wagging of his head. It was all a slight matter, too slight to catch the eye or the uncomprehending thoughts of the audience. But a grave, well-dressed man, with copper-colored face, high cheek-bones and straight, coal-black hair, who sat close to the front, turned to a companion and said: —

“Those men are good trainers, but they don't know everything about pumas. *We* know that there is a hereditary feud between the pumas and the bears, and that when they come together there's apt to be trouble.”

The speaker was a full-blooded Sioux, and a graduate of one of the big Eastern universities. He leaned forward with a curious fire in his deep-set, piercing eyes, as King, unwillingly obeying the mandates of the whip, dropped down and stretched out upon his shelf, his nervous forepaws not more than a foot above the bear's head. His nostrils were twitching as if they smelled something

unutterably distasteful, and his thick tail looked twice its usual size. The Sioux, who, alone of all present, understood these signs, laid an involuntary hand of warning upon his companion's knee.

Just what positions the other animals were about to take will never be known. King's sinews tightened. "Ha-ow!" grunted the Sioux, reverting in his excitement to his ancient utterance. There was a lightning sweep of King's paw, a shout from Hansen, a *wah* of surprise and pain from the bear. King leaped back to the top of the stand to avoid the expected counter-stroke. But not against him did the bear's rage turn. The maddened beast seemed to conclude that his master had betrayed him. With a roar he struck at Tomaso with the full force of his terrible forearm. Tomaso was in the very act of leaping forward from his seat, when the blow caught him full on the shoulder, shattering the bones, ripping the whole side out of his coat, and hurling him senseless to the floor.

The change in the scene was instantaneous and appalling. Most of the animals, startled, and dreading immediate punishment, darted for their pedestals, —*any* pedestals that they found within reach, — and fought savagely for the possession of the first they came to. The bear fell furiously upon the body of Tomaso. Cries and shrieks arose from the spectators. Hansen rushed to the rescue, his fork clutched in both hands. Attendants, armed with forks or iron bars, seemed to spring up from nowhere. But before any one could reach the spot, an appalling screech tore across the uproar, and King's yellow body, launched from the top of the stand, fell like a thunderbolt upon the bear's back.

The shock rolled the bear clean over. While he was clawing about wildly, in the effort to grapple with his assailant, Hansen dragged aside the still unconscious Tomaso, and two attendants carried him hurriedly from the stage.

Audience and stage alike were now in a sort of frenzy. Animals were fighting here and there in tangled groups; but for the moment all eyes were riveted on the deadly struggle which occupied the centre of the stage.

For all that he had less than a quarter the weight and nothing like a quarter the bulk of his gigantic adversary, the puma, through the advantage of his attack, was having much the best of the fight. Hansen had no time for sentiment, no time to concern himself as to whether his chief was dead or alive. His business was to save valuable property by preventing the beasts from destroying each other. It mattered not to him, now, that King had come so effectively to Tomaso's rescue. Prodding him mercilessly with his fork, and raining savage blows upon his head, he strove, in a cold rage, to drive him off; but in vain. But other keepers, meanwhile, had run in with ropes and iron bars. A few moments more and both combatants were securely lassoed. Then they were torn apart by main force, streaming with blood. Blinded by blankets thrown over their heads, and hammered into something like subjection, they were dragged off at a rush and slammed unceremoniously into their dens. With them out of the way, it was a quick matter to dispose of the other fights, though not till after the white goat had been killed to satisfy that ancient grudge of the leopard's, and the wolf had been cruelly mauled for having refused to give up his pedestal to one of the excited lions. Only the pug had come off unscathed, having had the presence of mind to dart under the foundations of the frame at the first sign of trouble, and stay there. When all the other animals had been brought to their senses and driven off, one by one, to their cages, he came forth from his hiding and followed dejectedly, the curl quite taken out of his confident tail. Then word went round among the spectators that Tomaso was not dead — that, though badly injured, he would recover; and straightway they calmed down, with a complacent sense of having got the value of their money. The great cage was taken apart and carried off. The stage was speedily transformed. And two trick comedians, with slippers that flapped a foot beyond their toes, undertook to wipe out the memory of what had happened.

CHAPTER III

The show was touring the larger towns of the Northwest. On the following day it started, leaving Tomaso behind in hospital, with a shattered shoulder and bitter wrath in his heart. At the next town, Hansen took Tomaso's place, but, for two reasons, with a sadly maimed performance. He had not yet acquired sufficient control of the animals to dare all Tomaso's acts; and the troupe was lacking some of its most important performers. The proud white goat was dead. The bear, the wolf, and one of the lions were laid up with their wounds. And as for the great puma, though *he* had come off with comparatively little hurt, his temper had apparently been quite transformed. Hansen could do nothing with him. Whether it was that he was sick for Tomaso, whom he adored, or that he stewed in a black rage over the blows and pitchforkings, hitherto unknown to him, no one could surely say. He would do nothing but crouch, brooding, sullen and dangerous, at the back of his cage. Hansen noted the green light flickering fitfully across his pale, wide eyes, and prudently refrained from pressing matters.

He was right. For, as a matter of fact, it was against the big Swede exclusively, and not against man in general, that King was nursing his grudge. In a dim way it had got into his brain that Hansen had taken sides with the bear against him and Tomaso, and he thirsted for vengeance. At the same time, he felt that Tomaso had deserted him. Day by day, as he brooded, the desire for escape – a desire which he had never known before – grew in his heart. Vaguely, perhaps, he dreamed that he would go and find Tomaso. At any rate, he would go – somewhere, anywhere, away from this world which had turned unfriendly to him. When this feeling grew dominant, he would rise suddenly and go prowling swiftly up and down behind the bars of his cage like a wild creature just caught.

Curiously enough – for it is seldom indeed that Fate responds to the longing of such exiles from the wild – his opportunity came. Late at night the show reached a little town among the foothills. The train had been delayed for hours. The night was dark. Everything was in confusion, and all nerves on edge. The short road from the station to the field where the tents were to be set up was in bad repair, or had never been really a road. It ran along the edge of a steep gully. In the darkness one wheel of the van containing King's cage dropped to the hub into a yawning rut. Under the violence of the jolt a section of the edge of the bank gave way and crashed down to the bottom of the gully, dragging with it the struggling and screaming horses. The cage roof was completely smashed in.

To King's eyes the darkness was but a twilight, pleasant and convenient. He saw an opening big enough to squeeze through; and beyond it, beyond the wild shouting and the flares of swung lanterns, a thick wood dark beneath the paler sky. Before any one could get down to the wreck, he was out and free and away. Crouching with belly to the earth, he ran noiselessly, and gained the woods before any one knew he had escaped. Straight on he ran, watchful but swift, heading for the places where the silence lay heaviest. Within five minutes Hansen had half the men of the show, with ropes, forks, and lanterns, hot on the trail. Within fifteen minutes, half the male population of the town was engaged in an enthusiastic puma hunt. But King was already far away, and making progress that would have been impossible to an ordinary wild puma. His life among men had taught him nothing about trees, so he had no unfortunate instinct to climb one and hide among the branches to see what his pursuers would be up to. His idea of getting away – and, perhaps, of finding his vanished master – was to keep right on. And this he did, though of course not at top speed, the pumas not being a race of long-winded runners like the wolves. In an hour or two he reached a rocky and precipitous ridge, quite impassable to men except by day. This he scaled with ease, and at the top, in the high solitude, felt safe enough to rest a little while. Then he made his way down the long, ragged western slopes, and at daybreak came into a wild valley of woods and brooks.

By this time King was hungry. But game was plentiful. After two or three humiliating failures with rabbits – owing to his inexperience in stalking anything more elusive than a joint of dead mutton, he caught a fat wood-chuck, and felt his self-respect return. Here he might have been tempted to halt, although, to be sure, he saw no sign of Tomaso, but beyond the valley, still westward, he saw mountains, which drew him strangely. In particular, one uplifted peak, silver and sapphire as the clear day, and soaring supreme over the jumble of lesser summits, attracted him. He knew now that that was where he was going, and thither he pressed on with singleness of purpose, delaying only when absolutely necessary, to hunt or to sleep. The cage, the stage, the whip, Hansen, the bear, even the proud excitement of the flaming hoops, were swiftly fading to dimness in his mind, overwhelmed by the inrush of new, wonderful impressions. At last, reaching the lower, granite-ribbed flanks of old White Face itself, he began to feel curiously content, and no longer under the imperative need of haste.

Here it was good hunting. Yet, though well satisfied, he made no effort to find himself a lair to serve as headquarters, but kept gradually working his way onward up the mountain. The higher he went, the more content he grew, till even his craving for his master was forgotten. Latent instincts began to spring into life, and he lapsed into the movements and customs of the wild puma. Only when he came upon a long, massive footprint in the damp earth by a spring, or a wisp of pungent-smelling fur on the rubbed and clawed bark of a tree, memory would rush back upon him fiercely. His ears would flatten down, his eyes would gleam green, his tail would twitch, and crouching to earth he would glare into every near-by thicket for a sight of his mortal foe. He had not yet learned to discriminate perfectly between an old scent and a new.

About this time a hunter from the East, who had his camp a little farther down the valley, was climbing White Face on the trail of a large grizzly. He was lithe of frame, with a lean, dark, eager face, and he followed the perilous trail with a lack of prudence which showed a very inadequate appreciation of grizzlies. The trail ran along a narrow ledge cresting an abrupt but bushy steep. At the foot of the steep, crouched along a massive branch and watching for game of some sort to pass by, lay the big puma. Attracted by a noise above his head he glanced up, and saw the hunter. It was certainly not Tomaso, but it looked like him; and the puma's piercing eyes grew almost benevolent. He had no ill-feeling to any man but the Swede.

Other ears than those of the puma had heard the unwary hunter's footsteps. The grizzly had caught them and stopped to listen. Yes, he was being followed. In a rage he wheeled about and ran back noiselessly to see who it was that could dare such presumption. Turning a shoulder of rock, he came face to face with the hunter, and at once, with a deep, throaty grunt, he charged.

The hunter had not even time to get his heavy rifle to his shoulder. He fired once, point blank, from the hip. The shot took effect somewhere, but in no vital spot evidently, for it failed to check, even for one second, that terrific charge. To meet the charge was to be blasted out of being instantly. There was but one way open. The hunter sprang straight out from the ledge with a lightning vision of thick, soft-looking bushes far below him. The slope was steep, but by no means perpendicular, and he struck in a thicket which broke the full shock of the fall. His rifle flew far out of his hands. He rebounded, clutching at the bushes; but he could not check himself. Rolling over and over, his eyes and mouth choked with dust and leaves, he bumped on down the slope, and brought up at last, dazed but conscious, in a swampy hole under the roots of a huge over-leaning tree.

Striving to clear his eyes and mouth, his first realization was that he could not lift his left arm. The next, that he seemed to have jumped from the frying-pan into the fire. His jaws set themselves desperately, as he drew the long hunting-knife from his belt and struggled up to one knee, resolved to at least make his last fight a good one. Almost over his head, on a limb not six feet distant, crouched, ready to spring, the biggest puma he had ever seen. At this new confronting of doom his brain cleared, and his sinews seemed to stretch with fresh courage. It was hopeless, of course, as he knew, but his heart refused to recognize the fact. Then he noted with wonder that not at him at

all was the puma looking, but far over his head. He followed that look, and again his heart sank, this time quite beyond the reach of hope. There was the grizzly coming headlong down the slope, foam slavering from his red jaws.

Bewildered, and feeling like a rat in a hole, the hunter tried to slip around the base of the tree, desperately hoping to gain some post of vantage whence to get home at least two or three good blows before the end. But the moment he moved, the grizzly fairly hurled himself downwards. The hunter jumped aside and wheeled, with his knife lifted, his disabled left arm against the tree trunk. But in that same instant, a miracle! Noiselessly the puma's tawny length shot out overhead and fell upon the bear in the very mid-rush of the charge.

At once it seemed as if some cataclysmic upheaval were in progress. The air, as it were, went mad with screeches, yells, snarls, and enormous thick gruntings. The bushes went down on every side. Now the bear was on top, now the puma. They writhed over and over, and for some seconds the hunter stared with stupefaction. Then he recovered his wits. He saw that the puma, for some inexplicable reason, had come to his help. But he saw, also, that the gigantic grizzly must win. Instead of slipping off and leaving his ally to destruction, he ran up, waited a moment for the perfect opportunity, and drove his knife to the hilt into the very centre of the back of the bear's neck, just where it joined the skull. Then he sprang aside.

Strangely the noise died away. The huge bulk of the grizzly sank slowly into a heap, the puma still raking it with the eviscerating weapons of his hinder claws. A moment more and he seemed to realize that he had achieved a sudden triumph. Bleeding, hideously mangled, but still, apparently, full of fighting vigor, he disengaged himself from the unresisting mass and looked around him proudly. His wild eyes met those of the hunter, and the hunter had an anxious moment. But the great beast looked away again at once, and seemed, in fact, to forget all about the man's existence. He lay down and commenced licking assiduously at his wounds. Filled with astonishment, and just now beginning to realize the anguish in his broken arm, the hunter stole discreetly away.

After an hour or two the puma arose, rather feebly, passed the body of his slain foe without a glance, and clambered up the slope to the ledge. He wanted a place of refuge now, a retreat that would be safe and cool and dark. Up and up he followed the winding of that narrow trail, and came out at last upon a rocky platform before a black-mouthed cave. He knew well enough that he had killed the owner of the cave, so he entered without hesitation.

Here, for two days, he lay in concealment, licking his wounds. He had no desire to eat; but two or three times, because the wounds fevered him, he came forth and descended the trail a little way to where he had seen a cold spring bubbling from the rocks. His clean blood, in that high, clean air, quickly set itself to the healing of the hurts, and strength flowed back swiftly into his torn sinews. At dawn of the third day he felt himself suddenly hungry, and realizing that he must seek some small game, even though not yet ready for any difficult hunting, he crept forth, just as the first thin glory of rose light came washing into the cave. But before he started down the trail he paused, and stood staring, with some dim half memory, out across the transparent, hollow spaces, the jumbled hilltops, misty, gray-green forests, and steel-bright loops of water to which he had at last come home.

THE MONARCH OF PARK BARREN

CHAPTER I

From the cold spring lakes and sombre deeps of spruce forest, over which the bald granite peak of Old Saugamauk kept endless guard, came reports of a moose of more than royal stature, whose antlers beggared all records for symmetry and spread. From a home-coming lumber cruiser here, a wandering Indian there, the word came straggling in, till the settlements about the lower reaches of the river began to believe there might be some truth behind the wild tales. Then – for it was autumn, the season of gold and crimson falling leaves, and battles on the lake-shores under the white full moon – there followed stories of other moose seen fleeing in terror, with torn flanks and bleeding shoulders; and it was realized that the prowess of the great moose bull was worthy of his stature and his adornment. Apparently he was driving all the other bulls off the Saugamauk ranges.

By this time the matter became of interest to the guides. The stories gathered in from different quarters, so it was hard to guess just where the gigantic stranger was most likely to be found. To north and northeast of the mountain went the two Armstrongs, seeking the stranger's trail; while to south and southeastward explored the Crimmins boys. If real, the giant bull had to be located; if a myth, he had to be exploded before raising impossible hopes in the hearts of visiting sportsmen.

Then suddenly arrived corroboration of all the stories. It came from Charley Crimmins. He was able to testify with conviction that the giant bull was no figment of Indian's imagination or lumberman's inventive humor. For it was he whose search had been successful.

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