

finding a cave in the rocks that seemed exactly designed for his retreat, went no farther. He felt that he had come into his own domain.

II.

The settlers round the skirts of Lost Mountain were puzzled and indignant; for six weeks their indignation had been growing, and the mystery seemed no nearer a solution. Something was slaughtering their sheep—something that knew its business slaughtered with dreadful efficiency. Several honest dogs fell under suspicion, not because there was anything whatever against their reputations, but simply because they had the misfortune to be big enough and strong enough to kill a sheep if they wanted to; the brooding backwood-mind, when troubled, will go far on the flimsiest evidence.

Of all the wrathful settlers the most furious was Brace Timmins. Not only had he lost in those six weeks six sheep, but now his dog, a splendid animal, half deerhound and half collie, had been shot on suspicion by a neighbor on no better grounds apparently than his long legs and his long, killing jaws. Still the slaughtering of the flocks went on with undiminished vigor. And a few days later Brace Timmins avenged his favorite by publicly thrashing his too hasty neighbor in front of the cross-roads store. The neighbor, pounded into exemplary penitence, apologised, and as far as the murdered dog was concerned the score was wiped clean. But the problem of the sheep-killing was no nearer solution. If not Brace Timmins' dog, as every one now made prudent haste to acknowledge, then whose dog was it? The life of every dog in the settlement, if bigger than a woodchuck, hung by a thread, which might, it seemed, at any moment turn into a halter. Brace Timmins loved dogs; and not wishing that others should suffer the unjust fate which had overtaken his own, he set his whole woodcraft to the discovery of the true culprit.

Before he had made any great progress, however, on this trail, a new thing happened, and suspicion was lifted from the heads of all dogs. Joe Anderson's dog, a powerful beast, part sheep-dog and part Newfoundland, with a far-off streak of bull, and the champion fighter of the settlements, was found dead in the middle of Anderson's sheep-pasture, his whole throat fairly ripped out. He had died in defence of his charge; and it was plainly no dog's jaws that had done such mangling. What dog, indeed, could have mastered Anderson's Dan?

'It's a bear gone mad on mutton,' pronounced certain of the wise ones, idling at the cross-roads store. 'Ye see as how he ha'n't et the dawg noways, but just bit him, to teach him not to go interferin' as regards sheep.'

'Ye're all off,' contradicted Timmins, with authority. 'A bear'd hev tore him, an' batted him, an' mauled him more'n he'd hev' bit him. A bear thinks more o' usin' his forepaws than what he does his jaws if he gits into any kind of unpleasantness. No, boys, our unknown friend up yonder's a wolf, take my word for it.'

Joe Anderson snorted, and spat accurately out through the door. 'A wolf!' he sneered. 'Go chase yerself, Brace Timmins! I'd like to see any wolf as could a' done up my Dan that way!'

'Well, keep yer hair on, Joe,' retorted Timmins easily. 'I'm again after him, an' I'll show him to you in a day or two as like as not.'

'I reckon, Joe,' interposed the storekeeper, leaning forward across the counter, 'as how there be other breeds o' wolf besides the sneakin' little gray varmint o' the East here, what's been cleaned out o' these parts fifty years ago. If Brace is right—an' I reckon he be—then it must sure be one o' them big timber-wolves we read about, what the Lord's took it into His head to plank down here in our safe old woods to make us set up an' take notice. You better watch out, Brace. If he don't git the brute first lick he'll git you!'

'I'll watch out,' drawled Timmins confidently; and, selecting a strong steel trap-chain from a box beside the counter, he sauntered off to put his plans into execution.

These plans were simple enough. He knew that he had a wide-ranging adversary to deal with; but he himself was a wide ranger and acquainted with every cleft and crevice of Lost Mountain. He would find the great wolf's lair and set his traps accordingly—one in the runway, to be avoided if the wolf was as clever as he ought to be; and a couple of others a little aside, to really do the work. Of course he would carry his rifle, in case of need, but he wanted to take his enemy alive.

For several arduous but exciting days Timmins searched in vain alike the dark cedar-swamps and the high, broken spurs of mountain. Then, one windless afternoon, when the forest scents came rising to him on the clear air, far up the steep he found a climbing trail between grey, shelving ledges. Stealthily as a lynx he followed, expecting at the next turn to come upon the lair of the enemy. It was a just expectation; but, as luck would have it, that next turn which would have led him straight to his goal lay around a shoulder of rock whose foundations had been loosened by the rains. With a kind of long growl, rending and sickening, the rock gave way and sank beneath Timmins' feet.

Moved by the alert and unerring instinct of the woodsman, Timmins leaped into the air. Both high and wide he sprang, and so escaped being engulfed in the mass which he had dislodged. On the top of the ruin he fell; but he

fell far and hard, and for some fifteen or twenty minutes after that fall he lay very still, while the dust and debris settled into silence under the quiet flooding of the sun. At last he opened his eyes. For a moment he made no effort to move, but lay wondering where he was. A weight was on his legs, and glancing downward he saw that he was half-covered with earth and rubbish. Then he remembered. Was he badly hurt? He was half afraid now to make the effort to move, lest he should find himself incapable of it. Still, he felt no serious pain. His head ached, to be sure, and he saw that his left hand was bleeding from a gash at the base of the thumb. That hand still clutched one of the heavy traps which he had been carrying, and it was plainly the trap that had cut him, as if in a frantic effort to escape. But where was his rifle? Cautiously turning his head, he peered around for it; but in vain, for during the fall it had flown far aside into the thicket. As he stared solicitously, all at once his dazed and sluggish senses sprang to life again with a scorching throb which left a chill behind it. There, not ten paces away, sitting up on its haunches and eyeing him contemplatively, was a gigantic wolf, much bigger, it seemed to him, than any wolf had any right to be.

Timmins' first instinct was to spring to his feet with a yell that would give the dreadful stranger to understand that he was a fellow it would not be well to tamper with. But his woodcraft stayed him. He was not by any means sure that he could spring to his feet. Still less was he sure that such an action would properly impress the great wolf, who, for the moment at least, seemed not actively hostile. Stillness, absolute immobility, was the trump-card to be always played in the wilderness when in doubt. So Timmins kept quite still, looking inquiringly at Lone Wolf. And Lone Wolf looked inquiringly at him.

For several minutes this waiting game went on. Then, with easy nonchalance, Lone Wolf lifted one huge hindpaw and vigorously scratched his ear. This very simple action was a profound relief to Timmins.

'Sartain,' he thought, 'the crittur must be in an easy mood, or he'd never think to scratch his ear like that. Or, mebbe, he thinks I'm so well buried I kin wait, like an old bone.'

Just then Lone Wolf got up, stretched himself, yawned prodigiously, came a couple of steps nearer, and sat down again, with his head cocked to one side and a polite air as if asking, 'Do I intrude?'

'Sartain sure, I'll never ketch him in a better humor,' thought Timmins. 'I'll try the human voice on him.'

'Git out of that!' he commanded in a sharp voice.

(To be concluded.)

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