

The Death Gulch

A Prospector's Story of a Terrible Encounter with a Grizzly, and of Its Strange Termination.

THESE were three of us, Valary, Bob and myself. Bob was the little shaggy-haired mountain pony that had carried our kit from Kamloops into the heart of this interminable region of towering buttes and silent timbered slopes. Scenery? Yes, scenery of the grandest, for British Columbia would be hard to beat in that respect, but when one has lived long weeks in the bush, fighting flies, forest fires, and periodical hunger, one does not think very much about the scenery.

Valary was an Indian, an exceptionally good guide and woodsman, a hard worker, and—for an Indian—the best of company. The silence and loneliness did not trouble him to the same extent as, at times it troubled me, and he could always be depended upon to get game and fresh meat if there were any to be had. All things considered, I might have searched far for a better partner, and since we left Kamloops, four months ago, a very genuine friendship had cropped up between us.

Now, however, after the greater part of the summer spent in the wild, we had turned our faces homewards, and all things considered we should have our work cut out to get back before the dreaded freeze up. Our prospecting trip had proved a success, and Bob had as much yellow dust, together with gold bearing quartz samples, among his packs, as he could conveniently carry. It was, I think, on the second day of the return journey when, on coming suddenly round the end of a jagged shelf, we disturbed a huge eagle which was feeding on something in the ravine below. The eagle flew off, leaving its quarry, and after circling round us, screaming savagely, swept off into space.

Now a fresh killed mountain hare or young wild sheep is always worth picking up, and Valary did not waste much time in sliding down among the boulders to the spot from which the eagle had risen. What was his surprise when

he found, lying on the shelf, a beautiful silver fox, the fur of which was in excellent condition and none the worse for the eagle's attack. The pelt might be worth anything up to \$80, and this sum would make a very nice little bonus for Valary after the season's work. He lost no time in skinning the fox, returning triumphantly with his trophy, which he carefully pegged out and cured that evening.

It was a few days later that the first great misfortune befell us. We had made camp just above the timber belt, and during the evening we both of us noticed a strange unwholesome odor in the air. It came in gusts when the breeze blew from a certain quarter, and at midnight I awoke, feeling sick and ill, and with a splitting headache. Fearing we had been poisoned I wakened Valary to ask him how he felt, at which he put one hand to his head and the other to his stomach, indicating that he felt jolly ill.

"Break camp," he said briefly, "bad air. No stay here."

It was my first experience of the "bad air" of those mountain sides, but I was too dazed and ill to ask questions. I realized now that it was the very air we were breathing which was poisoning us, and to stay on might prove fatal.

It was light enough outside to pack up in comfort, and having strapped everything but our own personal gear on the pony, we left him to graze a moment while we got together our kit. He was not thirty paces from us, and was nosing about among the rocks for a few blades of grass.

Suddenly the intense stillness of the mountain side was broken by a terrific snarl, and glancing round both of us saw a huge grizzly dashing down the mountain side at the speed of an express train towards our pony. I should never have believed so large and cumbersome an animal could have travelled so fast had I not seen it with my own eyes, and how Bob evaded the first savage rush was marvellous. The little pony simply took one leap as the bear flung himself headlong down the precipitous slope, and the great brute's forepaw must actually have touched the pony's hind quarters.

Both of us shouted at the top of our voices in the hope of scaring the brute, but not much! It was clear from the first that he meant having that pony, and without glancing in our direction he continued the chase. Next moment both pony and bear vanished into the gloom. The Indian and I stared at each other. Our grub, our rifle, indeed everything we possessed except my light automatic pistol, our hand picks, and a few oddments, were gone with the pony. To lose these meant almost certain death in the midst of the solitudes.

For fully a minute neither of us spoke, then Valary drew his hand pick from his belt and said savagely: "Hunt grizzly now. He kill our pony. We kill him."

I must confess that, from the first, the task of hunting a grizzly with light hand picks and a small automatic pistol did not appeal to me, but one might as well die in that way as die inch by inch from starvation. That the grizzly was in no playful mood was clear, but while we could not save the pony we must, at any rate, try to save our equipment. I told the Indian I was ready, and muttering something about the gold dust and his precious fox skin in the packs he led the way to the point at which the grizzly had charged.

Valary had no trouble in following the tracks, though it seemed to me that we scrambled along the mountain side for over an hour, and all the time that horrible unwholesome scent in the air seemed to become stronger. It was as though we were approaching some unknown poison belt into which, perhaps, men had wondered before, and never returned. Suddenly, however, the Indian held up his hand, then crouching lower, pointed ahead. In the dim light I saw something, which I took to be a

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