



"It's a main lucky thing I've got enough matches anyway," I grumbled, a routin' in my pocket after a box pretty nigh full, I'd shoved in jest before I quit. I struck a light, give a couple 'o puffs, may be three, and looked up—

Boys, there stood that bear as large as life and twice as nateral, cur'ously obsarvin' me 'bout fifteen paces out.

Cur'ously obsarvin'. Wal I guess that ain't hardly correct. First of all he warn't so much lookin' interested as vicious—on one side of his face the blood was streamin' from a bullet wound and I never saw a bear look so mad before. Nor don't ever want to again nuther unless he's some place pretty much out of reach o' my carkiss. Beside that he did n't stop to look long, for before I had time to figure on what was to come next, he puts his head down and comes right toward me, showin' his teeth and tearin' around like everything.

He was just mad thet's a fact, and he didn't give me a heap o' time to think nuther. My rifle lay a couple of yards off, and I jumped to my feet with a sort of an idee of grippin' it, tho' I didn't have any very clear notions any way, Didn't have no time, you may believe.

Wal! I dunno' as I can tell jest how it happened: the bear was on me before I could so much as get right end up, and with that my foot caught in the stump on which I was sittin' or sumthin' and the minute after I was over the edge of the cliff. Wal, boys, it's a fact, so ye needn't look at me that way, and as I said I can't jest get the hang of how it happened myself. That's so. The first thing I knew was, that I was hangin' on one of them little ledges the Doctor and me had noticed 'bout twenty feet below the edge of the cliff.

You may believe I was considerably astonished, but the fun of it was that that bear was considerable more astonished than I was myself. I could hear him quite awhile a-sniffin' around 'bout the place where I'd been sittin' and a-swearin' to himself in bear language—likely sayin' "Where in thunder's that fellow flown to!" After awhile seems as though he'd got the idee; and then he pokes his nose over the edge, and looks down as vicious as ever. Wal, at that I started to laugh, tho' I was pretty considerable bruised by my fall, and I laughed till my sides ached to think how I'd fooled him.

Wal, boys, if that critter warn't all the same as a human, for whether you believe it or not, my laughin' made him real mad, and he tore around cussin' and swearin', so to speak, for quite a while. After I got through laughin' I started to look about me. The ledge I'd stuck on

the chance. It might be quite awhile before any of the boys happened that way, sence they'd seemin'ly got off the track o' the bear, most probable on to another, and I hadn't even my shooter to give 'em a signal with; while as for climbin' up or down that—

Great God! I was looking up to the overhangin' cliff to see if I had any chance that way, when I saw—I tell you, boys, it makes me sick to think of it even now—I saw the wrong end of that bear comin' over the edge right above where I was sittin'.



I'd given up botherin' about the ornery old brute, thinkin' I was rid of him anyway, but the critter warn't so easy fooled as I'd calculated. He was bound to see the thing through, and I reckon he was a bit extra riled by my laughin' at him, and thought he'd try to get the laugh on his own side, yet. He waited around awhile to see if I meant to come up and save him the trouble, and when he saw that I was likely to stay he concluded to come down after me. There was no blinking it. He meant biz, I could tell that by the crunch of his teeth, and the vicious way he clawed around with his hind paws to get a foothold on his way down.

I warn't much of a prayin' sort in those days, but I come pretty near sayin' a prayer then, boys, I tell yer, only it seemed takin' a kind o' mean advantage of the Lord, to start out prayin' when I got hitched, seein' I'd probable like take it all back ef ever I got clar through—I tell you, boys, it makes a man feel right mean when he's landed just so, to feel as how he's got no right

shots and dogs barking, and tryin' to holler, but everything's got sorter mixed.

The balance of the story I got from the boys a while after. That old bear that came so near makin' cold meat of me was the same one Charlie had shot, that had managed somehow to get away from the dogs. Them critters, jest as I'd reckoned, had got off on the track of another, a little feller. The boys finished him off, and allowed at first that Charlie was 'blowin' about the one he'd shot bein' as big again. Charlie stuck to it though, and after a spell the hull



was one of the largest anywheres in the neighbourhood, as you may say, and give me plenty of room to stretch myself and move around kinder comfortable. There'd been quite a piece of growth on it seemingly, but I reckon the frost or sumthin' had killed it, and nothin' was left but a bunch of dried twigs and withered leaves and grass. Howsumdever I calculated to make myself pretty comfortable for a piece, but

I felt kinder mean when I commenced to look around to see how I was goin' to get back to terry firmy. I'd fooled that thunderin' old idiot of a bear, but it seemed as though I hadn't altogether struck a bonanza in the matter of locality. Four feet square of ledge on the side of a precipice ain't the sort of place a man wants to pass any considerable length of time sittin' on—more especially when a feller's started out before breakfast and his stomach keeps a-remindin' him all the time of that interestin' fact. No, I didn't feel not to say luxur'ously comfortable, so as I wouldn't want to move ef I got the chance. The hull trouble of it was how to get

to pray—howsumdever, I didn't start out to preach, but to tell you a yarn, and you're wonderin by this time whether I'm the biggest liar in Canada, or how in thunder I come through this time with a whole skin.

Wal, I'd made up my mind to fight it out (I didn't have much choice anyway), though I'd nothing but my knife, and it was a bad fightin' ground, when my eye struck on that there box o' matches that had fallen down with me, and was lyin' just along side of me on the ledge.

Wal, boys the idee came on me all in a moment—may be the Lord wanted to give me another chance, spite o' my goin' back on Him so long—seemed like a kinder inspiration anyhow—I gripped a handful of dry grass and stuff and struck a match to it. It blazed up like tinder, and as the bear hung over the edge feelin' around for a hole for his toes, I held the blazin' torch at arms length, right under the place where his tail oughter been ef it hadn't been abbreviated after the manner of bears.

Boys, you never see a bear take on so. His dry fur reg'lar blazed up, and when he smelt that and felt his hind quarters a cookin', he didn't stop to say "good mornin'," as you may say.

Wal, it makes you laugh now boys, but I couldn't see the joke so plain then as I do now. I gave one yell that helped to move the bear—I reckon he thought the devil himself had him by the hind leg, same way as the old gentleman got served himself by St. Dunstan—and then, what with the excitement and the fall, I felt the rocks, and the sky and the bear goin' round before my eyes, and I don't rightly know what happened after that. I had a vague feelin' o'

crowd agreed to try back for the trail. All of 'em but Pete that is. That durned nigger started for camp mutterin', "Charlie plenty dam fool—no more bear—Pete plenty hungry—eat breakfast." Howsumdever the breakfast he got ready came in mighty handy when we struck the camp a while later. Wal! they found the trail easy enough, and got to the edge of the cliff just in time to hear my yell, and see the bear scramblin' up from below with his tail end in a blaze—"for all the world like a comet," as the Doctor used to say, tellin' the story—roarin' and tearing around same as ef a legion o' devils had hold of it.

I guess he scared the boys pretty considerable, most as much as he was scared himself, for seemin'ly the Doctor was the only one cool enough to put a head on the critter, which he did sure enough.

It was Weston too that smelt me out, allowin' from the holler they'd heard, and the frizzled state of the bear's carkiss, that he'd left someone with a box o' matches around where he hailed from, and reck'nin' that someone 'ud likely be me. The boys got ropes and hauled me up, but I didn't get over that scare for a couple o' days, and it larnt me one thing anyway. It's just an idee that a bear won't go for a human unless he's mighty hungry or hard pushed. Now that bear had no call to be hungry, for he was chuckfull of blue berries and sich, and I tell you he never waited to be pushed. So I guess that idee's pretty much exploded. No offence young man, you jest spoke out way you was brought up. On'y the next time a feller tells you that bears don't show fight 'ceptin' they're druv', jest you speak up and tell him what Dan. Wheeler's telled you. That's bears and bears, boys, but that 'un was a bear you may believe.

