

# The Lumberman's Thrilling Encounter.

Under the heading "The Capsuptic Panther: Thrilling Experience with a Man-hunter," a contributor to the "Field and Stream Magazine," tells the following story:—

It was night at Lower Metalluk—such a night as one can only know who has passed the month of August in the Maine woods. Overhead a myriad stars looked down upon us from the blue dome of the heavens, while the moon's bright crescent just rising above the tree-fringed hilltops to the east threw a flood of silvery radiance upon the sleeping waters of Metalluk and upon our white-tented encampment on its shores. Over all a deep silence rested, unbroken save by the occasional low cry of a night bird or the faint splash of a leaping fish on the pond.

Our little party, seven in all, sat grouped about the roaring blaze which arose from a great heap of spruce and hard-wood logs. Supper was just over, the necessary after duties completed, and we reclined upon the blankets spread on the ground, prepared to enjoy in unalloyed peace and contentment the hours before bedtime. In the front of the group, as near the blazing pile as the fierce heat allowed, sat young Mrs. Wilmont. At her feet reclined Henry Wilmont, her husband, his attention about divided between his pretty wife and a fragrant meerschaum pipe. Close by my friend McGrogger was entertaining the two girls, Marguerite and Claire, with some hair-raising tale of forest adventure; while over on the other side of the fire I listened with interest to the story of our guide George, of a big buck he had shot the previous fall on the slopes of Mount Escobos.

In the midst of the story he stopped abruptly, sat for a moment in a listening attitude, and said, "Someone is coming into the pond." At first I could hear the rhythmic thump of a paddle upon a canoe's side. It soon became evident that the voyager of the night, whoever he might be, was making in our direction, and presently his canoe shot into the freight and grated on the landing. George and I walked down to meet him, and as we approached we were pleased to find that our visitor was none other than big Percy Ridland, the Berlin Mills Company's timber cruiser, forest fire ward and camp watchman. Once or twice before he had passed the night with us, and his interesting personality, coupled with an almost endless repertoire of woodland tales drawn from more than twenty years of life and adventure in the great pine forests, made him an ever welcome guest. So when we drew near the fire he hailed with shouts of pleasure by the two girls, who had doubtless had quite enough of Fred's heroics and longed for something bearing at least a semblance to the truth.

However, as Ridland had paddled the twelve miles from the steamboat landing at the Lower Dam since mid-afternoon and had eaten nothing, supper was first in order for him, and George soon had a pan of savory trout on the rough table before him. These with the cold potatoes left from our late repast made as good a meal as the big woodsman asked, and he laughingly protested as much in answer to Marguerite's worried assertions that he had "nothing fit to eat." That young lady was only half satisfied, but seeing the rapidity and apparent gusto with which he put away the simple fare she finally became convinced, and remarked that "men must be different from other people, anyway."

"Now, Mr. Ridland, a story if you please," said Claire soon after our visitor had finished. "This is just the kind of night that makes one long for some thrilling woods tale." The whole party joined in the request, and Ridland, laughing good humoredly, stretched himself before the fire and prepared to indulge us. "Well," he said, "if you're not tired of my yarns, I guess I can keep on spinning them." We assured him as of one accord that we were far from being wearied by them, and Marguerite asserted with much warmth that she "could listen to them for ever," which raised a laugh at her expense. "All right," said Ridland, "if that is the sense of the meeting there's no getting out of it." Gazing with a reminiscent look into the blaze, he began:

"Eighteen years ago this fall, I think it was early in September, I

came up the Magalloway on a timber cruise with a gentleman named Hasbrook. He was a queer old fellow, sixty years of age or thereabouts. He wore a bushy gray beard, and I remember particularly a habit he had of stroking it as he talked. Eccentric in a good many ways, he was a good-hearted old chap withal, and easy enough to get on with when you understood him. He had an option on a big lot of pine over beyond Lincoln Pond, close to Cusuptic Stream on the east, and engaged me to explore it with him. That was before the dam was built at the head of the Falls, and of course there was no steamer on this part of the river, so we paddled up in my big eighteen-foot canoe. At that time the river was a good deal shallower than it is now, and there was a good bit of current all the way. We were pretty heavily loaded with provisions, tent, axes, blankets, cooking kit, and a lot of useless paraphernalia that the old fellow insisted on bringing, and as he wasn't much at paddling I had a pretty stiff job coming up. But we made out to reach Upper Metalluk the first day and camped where Shurtleff's camp now stands.

"Next morning I concealed the canoe and all the extra luggage in a thicket at the foot of a great old elm that grew some distance back from the pond and just at the edge of the thicker woods. Then I made a pack of our blankets, tent, provisions and a few dishes, and we set out on the trail toward Lincoln. I was obliged to leave my rifle with the canoe, as I had an axe to carry in addition to the heavy pack, and as old Hasbrook never carried a gun—he couldn't hit the woods at ten-foot range—we were unarmed, except for my big Colt's revolver, which I always had about me in those days.

"We stopped for dinner some miles beyond Lincoln Pond, and about four o'clock struck the western limit of Hasbrook's pine lots. It was virgin timber then, not a cut having been made there except by the axe of some stray hunter seeking wood for his campfire, and you may believe it was a fine sight. Hasbrook was well pleased, as well he might be, and as we made our way toward Cusuptic in search of a good camping ground and running water he showed his satisfaction more than once by exclaiming, 'Look at this old mammoth! Isn't he a beauty?' or 'Ha, Percy, what a stick that is! There's a four-horse load for you.' Usually the old fellow hadn't much to say, but he was an enthusiast on pine all right, and a pretty good judge of standing timber besides, as I soon found out.

"Toward sundown we struck the head-waters of a little brook that made its way down to Cusuptic on the east, and found a large spring of clear, cold water, while near by was an ideal camping spot, a little open space in the woods surrounded on all sides by the great pines and smaller growth trees. The old chap went into ecstasies over the place, and to tell the truth I wasn't at all sorry to find so good a camp ground ready to hand after backing the heavy pack all day. As we pitched the tent and made ready for supper I saw Hasbrook's true character for the first time. He seemed as happy as a boy on his first camping trip and flew around as though he had covered rods instead of miles since sun-up. He was a crank on the woods and no mistake. The very presence of the standing timber seemed to infuse a new spirit into him, and I could almost see him grow younger as he helped me make camp.

"That night he and I sat beside a fire just as we are doing now and talked pine, pine, until I was as drowsy as a great gray owl at noonday, and ready to fall asleep on my log. But the old fellow, possessed by the same excitement that had taken hold upon him from the moment we reached big timber, was as garrulous as a Canada jay, and chattered me awake just as I have seen a flock of these birds pestering a disgruntled old hooter. He reeled off story after story of different timber lots he had bought—how he had estimated them at so much and they had cut so and so, always a little more than his estimate. He must have been a rich old cove, for according to his tale he had lodged a good many hundred millions of pine and never got stuck on a trade. Finally, in one of the few stories that I managed to wedge in between his, I happened to mention a panther. Al Harvey and I had seen while exploring up above the lake three years before. Well, you should have seen the old fellow then! He contracted like a scared porcupine, and I could almost see his quills rising—on his head at least. He hadn't much more to say, and pretty quick he put off for the tent and bed. I could see he was thoroughly scared, and wondered about it some, but as I was glad enough of a chance to turn in I didn't ask any questions.

"Before he went to sleep he told me that his older brother, a lumber-

man like himself, had been killed by a panther when he was a youngster, and that he had felt a horror of the beast's very name ever since. 'For God's sake, Percy,' he said, 'don't mention panther to me again while we are up here, or you will have me making for the settlement at an Indian lope.' Well, I laughed a little to myself and thought I would be careful not to scare the old fellow again, for I wanted the job to last as long as possible. But I couldn't think that I knew a dead sure way to start him for bed in case of necessity. I didn't have to use it, though, for I think he never quite forgot the incident during the week that followed. At any rate he was always ready to turn in about as soon as it got dark in the trees back of the tent, and he made me keep a good fire going all night—for warmth so he said.

"We were four or five days exploring Hasbrook's option, and it turned out so well that he decided to look over some other lots farther north, and adjoining his original territory. He thought, I suppose, that if they were as good as the ones already covered he could afford to pay more for them than anyone else, and meant to be in a position to buy them if occasion offered. So we struck camp and moved a couple of miles above, pitching the tent on the west bank of Cusuptic at a place where a high, bare knoll gave a free view of the stream for a quarter of a mile in either direction. It wasn't so good a spot as the other, for there was no water except that from the river below us, but as we only expected to stay there a day or two at the most, we thought it would do.

"After the change we got in the habit of separating at the further limit of the land already explored, taking opposite courses at first and then working around in a sort of half circle till we finally met at or near a given spot. In this way we could cover about twice as much ground as when working together, for as but a short time remained before the expiration of his option, speed was becoming an object to my employer.

"At four o'clock in the afternoon of the second day we had reached a point a mile or more from camp, and the timber was still turning out well. Looking at his watch Hasbrook decided that we could go over one more small range before sundown, and indicating a particularly tall pine some distance ahead as a meeting point, he started on his circuit. Before disappearing he turned back and shouted, 'If you get a round first yod can go back to camp and get supper. I will follow you as soon as I finish.' So saying, he walked away, and I soon lost sight of him among the trees. Thinking it would be well to have supper all ready when he returned, I hurried as much as possible and got around to the big pine about half-past five. Hasbrook had not yet reached the spot, so after shouting to make sure he was not near by, I blazed the tree and returned to camp.

"A half hour later, as I was putting the finishing touches to the table, I heard, far up the stream, what I took to be the old fellow's voice shouting to me. Thinking he might have become a little turned around in the woods and was calling to me to get his bearings, I hallooed loudly in return. Immediately the cry was repeated, and this time there was something about it that gave me a queer feeling in the pit of my stomach. It seemed to be a human voice all right enough, but all the same there was a strange something in the sound that disturbed me. I kept on shouting at intervals, but for some time heard nothing more. Pretty soon, though, I heard something coming through the brush forty or fifty rods up river from where I stood, and in a minute I got an answer to my shouts. This time it was Hasbrook and no mistake, but I thought his voice had a queer sound, and from the racket he made I knew he was coming at a terrific rate—for him. Thinking something must be wrong, I started down the slope to meet him. When I got down into the woods I couldn't hear him so plainly, and mounting a log, I shouted, 'Hulloa, Mr. Hasbrook; where are you?'

"Well, I got an answer all right, but not the one I expected! From somewhere close at hand among the pines on my left arose such a cry as I had never heard before and hope never to hear again, at least not so close as that. It was such a sound as might come from a fiend of hell let loose on earth. Beginning with a low, deep, angry throat tone it rose by degrees to a shrill, quivering shriek as of anguish, trembling and pulsating on the air like the wall of a lost soul, then gradually subsiding again till at the last it ended suddenly with one long-drawn, savage yell that made one's flesh fairly creep.

"I was no youngster even then, and had been in the woods a good

number of years, but I am willing to admit that if there is such a thing as a man's hair standing, mine came pretty near getting on its feet. I only waited long enough to see Hasbrook coming on the jump from a different direction and to make sure he was unhurt, before taking a bee line back to the knoll. You may depend upon it I wasn't hankering after a hand-to-hand fight down there in the woods with the creature that had raised that cry.

"I didn't lose any time on the way, but the old fellow reached the opening ahead of me and raced up the knoll like a scared rabbit. When I reached the top he was sitting in the tent, the most abject picture of terror I ever saw. His breath came in short, wheezing gasps, his hat was gone, his eyes staring, and his face fairly livid with fear. Here and there little streams of blood trickled down his cheeks and forehead, speaking well for his headlong speed through and over all obstacles. It was some time before he got his breath enough to speak. When he finally did, he gasped, 'My God, Percy, did you see it?' 'No,' I answered, 'but I heard it, and that was bad enough.' He shuddered as if the horrid cry was even then ringing in his ears. A moment later we heard it again, but not as loud as before and apparently some way off. At the first sound the poor old chap fairly contracted with fear, and his features only relaxed when the last note had died away in the hills.

"After a while Hasbrook told his story, and I must say that as he went on I didn't wonder much at his fright, for it gave me a sort of cold shiver just to listen. It seems that on reaching the big pine he had seen a slight movement among the trees beyond, and thinking it might be me returning from my circuit, shouted to attract my attention. At the sound of his voice a great, yellow something leaped from the bushes to the trunk of a fallen tree within thirty yards of where he stood. He had just time to see that it was an enormous panther when the creature uttered a terrible scream that seemed to freeze his blood, and dropping to the ground came slowly toward him, its fierce yellow eyes watching his every movement. Then the old fellow did what I contend was a mighty brave thing. At any rate it probably saved him from an awful death. Instead of running he backed up against the big tree, and swinging his arms above his head raised a yell as loud as the panther's own, winding up with a series of unearthly howls that, I suppose, would have done credit to any Indian that ever lived. As soon as he could get his breath he repeated the performance, putting in a few extra quavers for luck.

"Well, that did the business for the beast, for at the old fellow's first screech it stopped short, looked behind it once as though half minded to run, and at the second whirled about and disappeared, with a couple of long springs, into the underbrush.

"Hasbrook didn't wait for it to come back, but started for camp on the double quick, increasing his speed, I guess, at every jump. For a while he didn't see anything of the panther, and thought he had frightened it away for good, but when he was about half way to camp he looked back just as he was crossing a thinly wooded spot, and there, a little to one side of his trail, was the great, tawny creature following him with long, easy, cat-like bounds. Pretty soon it gave a second yell, and a moment later still another. It was then that he began hallooing to me, and I suppose my answering shouts may have distracted the brute's attention somewhat. At all events it must have passed the old chap and made in my direction, for he saw or heard nothing more of it till it screeched again close beside me at the foot of the knoll.

"Not a bit of supper would the old fellow eat, though I had prepared the best the camp afforded. He had been hungry enough an hour before, but his appetite was clean scared out of him. I didn't put away a very big feed, either, for my own nerves had had quite a shaking, and seeing my companion's terror didn't help them any. I had to go down to the river with him while he washed away the blood, for he didn't dare go alone, and he kept looking over his shoulder all the time.

"It was now beginning to grow dark, and he made me collect nearly all our firewood into one enormous pile, simply keeping out enough to feed the blaze if it should burn down before morning. 'You can use it all,' he said. 'We set fire to the heap and we soon had a mighty blaze that put this one in the shade. Well, the old chap kept me awake all night long, urging me to punch up the fire or to put on fresh wood every time it showed signs of dying down. Sometime after midnight I heard a twig break in the woods below us, and a little later another

cracked in a different quarter. Hasbrook heard it, too, and his voice shook as he whispered, 'That's him. He is watching us.' I knew that he was right enough, and it gave me a sort of queer feeling to find that the varmint was travelling round and round the knoll, getting up courage to attack one of us if we should stray away from the fire. Once, on the side where the woods grew nearest the tent, I saw two bright spots that I took to be the creature's eyes, and fired my revolver at them, in hope of scaring it off. We heard it bound away for a short distance in the underbrush, but it soon came back and began its patrol of the camp again. The thing stayed about until an hour or so before daylight, when it must have sneaked away, as we heard nothing more of it."

"During Ridland's description of this night I caught more than one of our party, myself included, glancing nervously behind them as if half expecting to see the creature of his story. He noticed it, also, and smiled a little as he went on.

"Some of the old fellow's courage seemed to come back with the sun, for he managed to eat a little in the morning. But he was just as anxious to leave as ever, and had me strike the tent the moment breakfast was over. He had forgotten pine and everything else but putting miles between him and that panther. As soon as we left the knoll and got down into the deep woods all his fears came back, and he followed at my heels as closely as a dog, peering over his shoulder every other minute.

"We struck a pretty good pace and reached Lincoln Pond without seeing or hearing anything out of the ordinary. But I had a feeling I couldn't shake off that somewhere back toward Cusuptic a sneaking, tawny thing was creeping like a shadow on our trail. And near the pond I saw something that set me thinking pretty hard and made the feeling almost a certainty. There had been no rain since we passed the place before, over a week earlier, and our tracks still showed quite plainly in the soft mud by the water's edge. What startled me was seeing, close beside them, another track like that of a large dog that followed along all the way from where the footprints left the forest until they entered it again and were lost. Luckily my companion didn't notice the tracks, being too busy looking into the brush to waste any time on the ground, and I was glad of it, for he was badly enough scared as it was. So I said nothing, but I got to looking for those tell-tale tracks every time we came to a soft spot in the trail, and whenever our own tracks showed I found them, following always.

"I began figuring it out as we traveled, and I made up my mind that the creature had followed us all the way from Upper Metalluk to Cusuptic, and had hung around waiting to catch one of us alone and unawares. It wasn't very pleasant to think of the thing shadowing us all that time and we never suspecting it was about. I took to watching the woods on both sides of the trail and listening pretty closely myself, and it wasn't long before I heard a dry branch crack off to our right. The old fellow heard it all right, too, and said in a scared voice that was almost a whisper, 'He's following us yet. I knew it.' He quickened his pace and almost trod on my heels. I tried to quiet him by saying that the brute wasn't within ten miles of us, but I could see he didn't believe it any more than I did, for after that he looked behind him more than ever.

About two miles from Upper Metalluk the trail, after passing over a low ridge, wound down into a thinly-wooded valley, followed it perhaps an eighth of a mile, then climbed to the top of a second hill, from which point it descended gradually to the pond. We had crossed the valley and were just topping the second height of land when Hasbrook behind me uttered a frightened exclamation. 'Look, Percy,' he cried, 'Look there, quick!' I whirled about to see him pointing him outstretched arm, back across the valley. 'There,' he said, 'on the other hill-top. Don't you see it?' Following the direction of his shaking finger I saw, just for a single moment, at the point where the trail crossed the first ridge, a quick movement among the brakes as of some yellow thing making off. But it might have been a fox for aught I could tell, and I asked, 'What was it? Did you make it out?' 'The panther,' he answered, 'I saw its head and shoulders plainly. It was watching us above the ferns.' The old fellow was so worked up that, but for the instant's glimpse I had got of the thing, I should have thought he imagined it all. 'Come,' he said, 'let's get out of this accursed place.' Slipping by me in the path he started off ahead at a pace that was almost a trot. I lengthened my strides and followed him as best I could with my heavy

load. But excitement and loss of sleep had told on the old chap, and he soon slowed down to a moderate gait.

"Well, panther or no panther, the thing kept well out of sight after that, and in less than thirty minutes we came out upon the shore of the pond. Hasbrook heaved a big sigh of relief when he saw the water glistening through the trees, and I guess breathed freely for the first time in about twenty-four hours. He grew almost cheerful as we left the woods and headed for the thicket where the canoe and other truck were hidden. I own that I felt a little easier in my own mind, for the old fellows antics had kept me pretty well on edge, too.

"The pond was as calm as a mill-pond when we approached it, and it would be hard to imagine a more peaceful scene. A trout leaped upon its smooth surface as we drew near, and down in the bay at the lower end a deer was feeding quietly among the lily pads. Nothing seemed farther away than danger of any kind, and I felt like laughing at my nervousness of a few minutes before. Perhaps knowing that I was almost within reach of my good rifle, which I had been wishing for all day, had something to do with it.

"On reaching the thicket I unslung the big pack and straightened up for an instant to relieve my aching back and shoulders. I don't know to this day why I looked upward as I did so. It may have been only chance, or perhaps it was some sudden instinct of danger. I have read of such things and half believe in them. At any rate I threw my head back and looked up into the green top of the big elm, and something I saw there almost caused my heart to stop beating. Hanging from one of the lower limbs directly over my head and perhaps thirty feet from the ground was a long, thin, slim, snaky, brown object that whipped convulsively to and fro among the leaves. I knew what it was even before my eyes had followed it upward and made out, stretched at full length upon the limb, the lean, yellow body of the panther. It was so flattened out that it appeared almost a part of the tree, but that cat-like movement of the tail gave it away.

"For a minute I was simply frozen with surprise and fear. I was so scared that I couldn't think, and just stood staring at the creature as if fascinated. Then I pulled myself together and did the one thing I could do under the circumstances. If I turned to go away I felt sure the thing would pounce upon me. So, dropping my eyes and trying to appear as if I had not seen it, I moved toward the canoe, which lay over-turned a few feet away. If I could reach that and get my rifle from under it, there was a chance of killing the creature before it leaped. Every second I expected to hear the sound of its falling body, or to feel its teeth and claws in my back. I think the cold chills ran through me at the rate of a thousand a minute. But I reached the canoe in safety, and stooping down, was just raising it with one hand while I reached for my rifle with the other, when a terrified yell from behind me told that Hasbrook had discovered the panther. I knew that settled it, and grabbing the gun, which I had left loaded, I threw a shell into the barrel, quicker than I ever did before or since. Then I straightened up and looked for the panther.

"I was none too soon. Its lithe body was just gathering itself for a spring, its fierce greenish yellow eyes fixed not upon me but upon Hasbrook, who stood transfixed with horror, his eyes almost starting from his head. Throwing the rifle to my shoulder I took a quick aim behind the creature's ear and fired. And as soon as I could work the lever I gave it another, shooting at random through the smoke. I guess the second bullet was in the air by the time the first one struck, for I was just about scared enough to shoot live a Gatling. At once there was a terrible scratching and clawing up above, and a sort of coughing moan as though a yell had been stopped half way, and the next minute I saw the thing falling through the smoke.

"I thought my time was up then, for I wasn't half sure either of my bullets had hit. But I jumped to one side for all there was in me, thinking I might avoid the brute long enough to get in one more shot. I shouldn't have had time, though, for it landed close beside me—so close that I felt the wind from its body as it fell. But the creature never stirred after it struck the grouchy legs and tail. It was 'deader' than a door-nail before it left the limb, for by a lucky chance my first shot had gone true and the great 45.70 had crashed through its brain at the base of the skull.

(Continued on Page Twelve.)



CHAPTER XXXII.

"Charles, my dear, this sister in a tone of

strange, while she laid on his shoulder.

"Well, Mary, I will you like. Heaven know it to direct myself, no are you returned? I wrote you word to con-

clude the Christmas did not think you would mournful a home to come did you come?"

"You forget, Charles, Kyrle a while ago," O'Connell.

"Did I, I had forgotten Mr. Daly tossing extended his hand to burst into tears. Kyrle do so. He passed his aunt, and entered the house now deserted. He

was now deserted. He a small table before the leaning on his elbow, looking on the face of the river

try tide was flowing again and darkening glare, and of boats with close-reared black hulls, heeling their waves; the sky was low

the hills of Cratloe rose on either side in all their blueness of attire

wind stirred the dry woodlines that covered the cottage, and every landscape seemed to wear a

ter of dreariness and dis- Here he remained for a in the same dry and reflection. Not a single single sound of sorrow, by him to the general household. He never be- tried by an occasion of and his present apathy with alarm and astonish- listened to the walling men and children, and the moistened faces of hurried past his chair from time, until he began to self of want of feeling ar-

While he sat thus sily was opened and Low thrust in his head to it that the family were as say a litany in the of Kyrle rose, and proceed without reply or quest- Lowry oppressed with his retreat into the kitchen he was met by the nurse, him for some half-pence, might lay them, according to, on the lips and eyes corpse.

"I didn't like," she said, "tazing any o' the family an' they in trouble."

"Surely, surely," said while he searched his pocket coin. "Ah, nurse! so that ye let her go between ye! toora, Mrs. Daly! an' lost the good mistress in day! Soft and pleasant in Heaven this night! A will. You never refused hungry here, an' God fuse to feed you where you You never turned the poor house in this world, won't turn you out of his the other. Soft and please your bed in Heaven this

Daly! Winnie, eroo, was was telling me that the three first childer died at Old Winnie was sitting side, dandling the now for the infant in her arms, and with an ancient ditty, of following beautiful fragments the burthen:—

"Gilli beg le m' onum thu Gilli beg le m' chree! Coth yan me von gilli beg N' heur ve thu more a cre-

"My soul's little darling y heart's little darling! What will I do without r darling, When you're grown up and

"They did," she said, in to Lowry's question, "all be ter North-aist went off so they wor wained."

"See that!" said Lowry cried—I wasn't in the fami but still I know she cried for every one o' them. An it is now—she has them the angels waitin' to receive the gate of Heaven this day. the money, nurse, an' I wi-