

A Night in Devil's Gully.

It was the edge of the forest at last. I had wandered for hours since I missed my companions in the endless mazes of that gray Tasmanian forest, till I had almost made up my mind that I should have to spend the night there. The idea had been far from cheerful, and it was with a start of pleased surprise that I found myself, almost without any warning, in the open once more. It was just sunset; the western sky was still one blaze of crimson glory, and the long shadows from the opposite range were flung darkly across the lower ground before me.

Not a breath of wind was stirring. It was so quiet, indeed, that after the first minute or two I could hear the rush and murmur of the little stream which appeared to run through the bottom of the valley, though it was invisible from the spot on which I stood. The sound reminded me that I was thirsty, and I made my way with hasty strides down the slope to where the rivulet—for in this summer weather it was no more—found its way through a channel almost hidden by a luxuriant growth of tree-ferns and shrubs. I leaped hastily down the bank to the bed of pebbles below, and, leaning my gun against the bank, knelt on the stones and took a long draught of the deliciously cool water.

When I got up and looked around, the first thing I noticed was the strange way in which a great rock hung beetling over the bed of the stream, almost like a tower that had somehow got tilted to one side. It was but a few yards higher up the stream than where I stood, and my eye caught sight of a path ascending the bank which looked as if it had been used quite lately. I felt my spirits rise at once. After all, my luck was not so bad as I had begun to fancy. This was a good deal better, at any rate, than being lost in the bush. The path looked as if it had been a good deal used, and even if nobody came along it that night, I had only to wait for daylight to see the track for myself and find my way back again to my friends at Gartmore.

I paused to think what I should do in the meantime. As far as I could see, there was no particular reason why I should not make a bed among the clumps of fern that covered the ground near the banks of the stream; and yet, somehow, I didn't like the idea. There might be snakes about, and even water-rats would be disagreeable companions. The great boulder looked as if it had a flat top, and if I could only climb it I should certainly be out of harm's way during the night.

A dozen steps brought me to the foot of the rock, and as I looked up I saw that it was even higher than I had supposed. It seemed to rise almost perpendicular on two sides, while on a third it overhung the bed of the stream; but on the side nearest me it sloped more gradually. I was still looking at it doubtfully, when a distant sound from the forest, like the noise caused by the breaking of a branch, decided me to try it. I grasped my gun and scrambled up the face of the rock. It was not so difficult to climb as I had fancied, and in two or three minutes I had reached the top.

"Not such a bad place, either," I said to myself as I looked around. The top was nearly flat, or, if anything, slightly hollowed out, and there were tufts of grass and beds of moss upon it that promised to make something of a bed. I was satisfied that it would answer my purpose, and at any rate I wasn't likely to be disturbed by anything there. I was tired with my long tramp, but as yet I didn't feel sleepy, so I took a seat on the edge of the rock with my legs hanging over, and prepared to enjoy a smoke.

It was very quiet. As I listened, I couldn't hear a sound except the low musical gurgle of the stream below me. Then I suddenly remembered the sound that had seemed to come from the forest as I stood hesitating at the foot of the rock. What could it have been? It was not loud; but for the silence around I should perhaps hardly have heard it at all. But it certainly sounded like the noise of a breaking stick, on which something had put a heavy foot. There had been no wind at all, so it must surely have been some living animal. I was just in the state of mind in which

one is inclined to speculate lazily on passing things of little importance. It might have been cattle in the forest, of course, but I had been told that cattle in Tasmania were kept within fences. I listened for another sound of the same kind, till I had almost persuaded myself that I heard something move on the hill-side. I strained my eyes in the attempt to see what it was, but the night was too dark to make out anything even a few yards off. At last I gave it up. What did it matter, after all? It was most likely only my fancy; but even if there were anything there, I was well out of its way on the top of my rock. I don't know how long I sat there smoking and dreaming, but at last I began to grow sleepy, and before I mustered up energy enough to find a place to lie down, I must have dozed off where I sat.

I woke with a start and rubbed my eyes, uncertain for the moment where I was or what had happened. It was light; only a gray, uncertain light, indeed, but enough to enable me to see the shadowy outline of the wooded range in front, and after the first few seconds to distinguish vaguely more than one of the great boulders that stood up here and there along the bottom of the little valley, looking like ghostly sentinels in the dim light. The moon herself had not yet risen above the forest range behind me, but the whole of the eastern sky had already grown white with her coming. I was looking at the sky over my shoulder, when I was startled by a sound that seemed to come from the shadows in front. It was not a sound I had ever heard before, but by an instinct I felt sure that it came from some living creature. It was not loud enough to be called a roar; it wasn't sharp enough for a bark, nor shrill enough for a scream, nor dull enough to be mistaken for a grunt; yet in some strange way it seemed to have something in common with each of these. I turned with a quick start, and instinctively my hand reached out for my gun. I peered eagerly into the gray shadows for a glimpse of something which might explain the sound, but all was vague and misty. The edge of the forest on the higher ground loomed out darkly in the reflected light from the sky, but the tree-ferns and low shrubs that marked the course of the stream were blurred and indistinct in the ghostly mist, and I could no longer catch even a glimpse of the water that gushed and gurgled below me in the darkness. I glanced upward at the brightening sky and waited.

The light increased little by little. With each new minute the dark forest lines took more and more the shape of individual trees. Then the gray mist that hung over the low ground began to grow thin, and the heads of the taller tree-ferns and bushes began to show above it, like tree-tops on a river flat in flood-time. Again! And this time nearer. It was the same strange, composite sound, and now it made my nerves creep and my blood run cold. What could it be? I gripped my gun tightly with my hand, and laid it across my knees. Whatever it was, I would at least be ready.

It came like magic. Suddenly the broad face of the moon showed above the forest ridge. It was four of five days past the full, indeed, but still its silvery disk, clear and bright, threw a flood of light across the valley. I bent forward eagerly, and searched the still misty hollow with my eyes for the first sign of the thing that had startled me. Yes, there it was at last. Along the bank on the opposite side of the stream something was moving. Its movements were leisurely, almost slow. It was not so very large,—not larger than a fairly large wild pig, though it was certainly not a pig. It looked strange and weird and unnatural. What was the reason? The chief thing seemed to be its color. It was black,—so densely, absolutely, intensely black that it seemed to me at the moment as if I had never seen anything really black before. What could it be? I had lived all my life on the neighboring continent of Australia, and I had seen and hunted most of the wild animals there. I had chased kangaroos on horseback and stalked them on foot. I had shot wallabies and bandicoots by the score, and more than once, when I couldn't help it, I had killed an iguana. I had shot native bears, and once in northern Queensland I had even killed a large python. But what was this? I

had never seen or even fancied a creature like it. What could it be?

Whatever it was, it didn't hurry itself. Slowly and deliberately it came down the bank to the stream, and I could see it dimly in the shadow—a blacker spot in the darkness—stoop and drink. It seemed to be a long time about it, but it moved at last. It was coming across. I watched it as it waded slowly and deliberately through the water and climbed the bank on my side of the stream. Then it stood still, and it seemed to stare up at me as I sat in the moonlight. By this time the moonshine was falling full upon me, and I felt certain he was looking at me with a strange, questioning gaze. Suddenly he raised his head and repeated the cry I had heard before. Now that I saw him, I felt that it was exactly the cry I should have expected from him,—so strange, so weird, so savage.

It was by an impulse, rather than the result of thought, that I did it. A curious feeling of repulsion and antagonism, which I could not have reasonably explained, prompted the act. Something in his appearance, something in his savage cry, may have led to it, but at least I felt that I was in the presence of an enemy. I raised the gun to my shoulder; I covered him deliberately; I fired. Even in the very act I fancied his eyes fixed me with a fierce stare of hatred. I could have sworn he was looking me in the face at the moment. I fired, and for several seconds I lost sight of him in the smoke, but I knew I hadn't missed my aim. A cry, wilder, stranger, more savage than before, followed the report of the gun. And—yes, it was answered. Not one only, but half a dozen cries, each like an echo of the first, rang out a weird reply. Then I knew what it was,—a devil. Strange as it appears to me now in looking back, I had up to that moment utterly forgotten the Tasmanian devil. I had supposed the creature to be extinct, indeed, but I might have remembered the tales I had often heard as a boy of its demon blackness, its strange cries, and, above all, its temper of insatiable revenge.

As the smoke cleared away I saw him again. He was rolling on the ground, trying to tear himself savagely with fierce white teeth that glistened in the moonlight. Then he gave another of those fiendish cries, and again there came the answering echoes. He struggled to his feet, and his eyes seemed to look for me with savage, cunning glances. I watched him as if I had been fascinated, and saw him suddenly stumble along the bank towards my rock. He came slowly and painfully, but he reached the foot of the great boulder at last. I put my hand hastily to my belt and drew out a cartridge,—it was one of less than a dozen that were left,—and rose slowly to my knees. As I did so, I remembered that my cartridges had been intended only for shooting birds, and were certainly not meant for game like this.

He gave another cry, and again the echoes came from far and near. He had reared himself up, and put his feet on the sloping face of the rock, while all the time his eyes seemed to be fixed on mine with looks of fiendish malignity. Suddenly there was a cry close behind him, and, as if encouraged by the sound, he made what appeared to be a desperate effort, and the next moment he was scrambling, rolling or climbing up the face of the rock with a motion that was quite indescribable in its clumsy eagerness. As he did so, another black figure appeared at the bottom, and I heard a splash as a third began to wade the stream. It was growing serious indeed. I waited until he had got within a few feet of me, and then I fired. He gave a snarling howl, and rolled to the bottom.

When the smoke cleared, I could see him on the ground, but the other had begun to climb in his place. Slowly, carefully, doggedly, he came on, as if his one object in existence was to reach me. I waited till he got near the top, and then fired. He rolled half-way down, and then he seemed to cling to the rock and stop. Then he began to crawl up again, gnashing his teeth, and snapping fiercely at the places where the shot had wounded him. I had to fire again, this time almost into his face, before he rolled down again. And so it went on, with a sameness that grew more and more horrible, with a persistence which seemed to me nothing less than dia-

bolical. One by one they came in answer to the cries of the wounded; one by one they attempted to storm the rock, with the same slow, desperate, untiring energy. I used up my cartridges, and yet they came. I clubbed my gun and felled them one by one. It was like the most horrible of nightmare dreams. No sooner did one disappear than another took his place. Battered, bleeding, hardly able to crawl, still they crept up, one by one.

I seemed to myself to have stood there for hours. My head had grown dizzy, my arms had become weak and numb. I could scarcely raise the gun to strike, and everything seemed to sway and quiver before my eyes. The attacks had gradually become more rare, but I think the strain of watching for them was more terrible than ever. A burning thirst, too, had begun to creep over me, and a sense of horror which I could hardly resist. It seemed long since I had struck the last blow, but I didn't dare for a single moment to relax my watchfulness. Suddenly—it appeared to be within a yard of my foot—there was a black face, with fiendish eyes that gleamed, and great white teeth that glistened in the moonlight. With a sudden, desperate effort I heaved up the gun and struck at it. I thought the creature answered the blow with a diabolical laugh; and that was the last thought of which I was conscious.

Something cool fell on my cheeks, and I opened my eyes. It was Tom Boyd's anxious face that was bending over me; it was his hand that was sprinkling water on me.

"Tom," I gasped,—"Tom, where are they?"

Tom laughed. "The devils, you mean? Oh, they're all about among the scrub. I fancy you've cleared Devil's Gully for good and all."

Note.—The animal known in Australia as the Tasmanian devil is one of the only two survivors of what must at one time have been a widely-distributed class of animals, to judge from the fossil remains already found in many parts of Australia. Like nearly every mammalian quadruped of the continent, the devil is a marsupial; but, with the solitary exception of the so-called Tasmanian wolf, he is the only surviving marsupial animal that is carnivorous, and may be regarded as a beast of prey. The devil is now very scarce, and will soon be extinct; but in the early convict days of the island—when Tasmania, then called Van Dieman's land, was the penal settlement for the worst class of British convicts—they were plentiful, and many ghastly stories were afloat of their attacks upon escaped convicts who had taken to the bush. It is believed that the name of devil was bestowed on the animal by the convicts, who had learned to look upon them with almost superstitious fear, partly in consequence of their appearance, but still more owing to their untiring perseverance in following up an enemy to the last with what looked like undying hatred. No specimen has ever been found on the continent of Australia.—Owen Hall, in Lippincott's.

Never ask a man what he knows, but what he can do. A fellow may know everything that's happened since the Lord started the ball to rolling, and not be able to do anything to help keep it from stopping. But when a man can do anything, he's bound to know something worth while. Books are all right, but dead men's brains are no good unless you mix a live one's with them.—Old Goryon Graham.

The prize list for the Winnipeg Industrial Exhibition, to be held July 23 to 28, as announced in the advertisement in another column, is now ready for distribution, and furnishes the usual liberal bill-of-fare. The Clydesdale and Shire Horse Associations of Great Britain each give two gold medals to be competed for. With the energy and trained experience of the President (Mr. G. H. Greig) and the manager (Dr. A. W. Bell), and the evident desire of the directorate to make the coming exhibition in harmony with the importance of the Canadian West in the eyes of the world, it is assured that the exhibition this year will rival in varied interest the great exhibitions of the East.