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The Invaders

(Continued from page 9.)

making for the head of the lake, some seven or eight miles distant.

The pair of moose, in the meantime, gained the opposite shore and stalked up, black and dripping, beside the willows. But they did not stop there. The fever of change was upon them—and when a moose gets going he is liable to go far. With their long, shambling trot, which seems so effortless yet inexorably eats up the miles, they followed along the stream till the orange gleam was left far behind, and the bushy levels of the barren began to lift into low, rounded uplands, sparsely wooded. They had but one purpose, to put themselves as far as possible from those flitting green eyes and padding foot-falls in the black fir-woods by the lake.

They little guessed that the path of their indignant flight was converging toward that of the green eyes and padding feet.

It was a night of early moonrise, and the moon near the full. Far back among the low uplands the stream broadened out into a series of wide, still reaches that formed practically a sort of winding lake. At an abrupt elbow of this lake-like expansion, where a clump of tall water-ash, poplar and elderberry thicket made a little island in a space of open wild-meadow, lay hidden two hunters. They had come up from the coast to eastward, crossed over the height of land, and made their way down into this remote valley, looking for moose.

Both men carried rifles. One, a gigantic figure of a man, and from his dress obviously the guide, carried also a light axe, and a long roll of birchbark shaped something like a trumpet. This was the season for moose-calling.

Seating themselves with their backs to the trunk of a big water-ash, and in such a position that they were fairly hidden while commanding a free view of all approaches to their ambush, the two made themselves as comfortable as possible for a long, motionless wait. After some ten or fifteen minutes of a stillness which would strain the nerves of any one not trained to it, Adam Moore, the giant guide, lifted the birchbark tube to his lips and sounded through it the strang mating call of the cow-moose, harsh and formless, but indescribably wild, lonely, and desirous—the very voice, as it seemed, of the untamed solitudes. It came lingeringly from the guide's cunning lips.

"Faith, Adam," murmured Rawson, "but you've got a fetching note. I believe I'd come to that myself, if I were a moose."

Moore allowed himself a faint grin of acknowledgment; for this lean, hard-bitten, cool-eyed Englishman, who had hunted big game in every corner of the earth, was one of the very few sportsmen whose commendation he cared a farthing for. After a few moments' pause he sounded his appeal again, with added poignancy. Then he lowered the birchen tube, laid it across his knees and waited.

There was not a breath of air. The unstimulating, soundless wilderness seemed as if it had been enchanted into glass under the spell of the blue-white moon. But suddenly there came a far-off sound of crashing branches. It drew nearer swiftly. "I thought that would fetch him, Adam," murmured Rawson, no louder than a breath of air in the poplar leaves. "He's coming in such a hurry he doesn't care who knows it." He lifted his rifle and rose softly to one knee.

A moment later Moore laid a great hand softly on his arm.

"Queer, that!" he whispered. "There's two coming!"

Then from the thick growths across the meadow, perhaps three hundred yards away, burst the two fugitives. Even at that distance one could see that they were sore pressed and spent. The cow, in particular, staggered as she came on. The antlers of the bull were magnificent; but Rawson saw only the splendid beast's distress and lowered his gun involuntarily.

"I can't make it out!" muttered the guide, rising cautiously to his feet behind the elder bushes.

The fugitives came straight on, making for the refuge of the water-ash

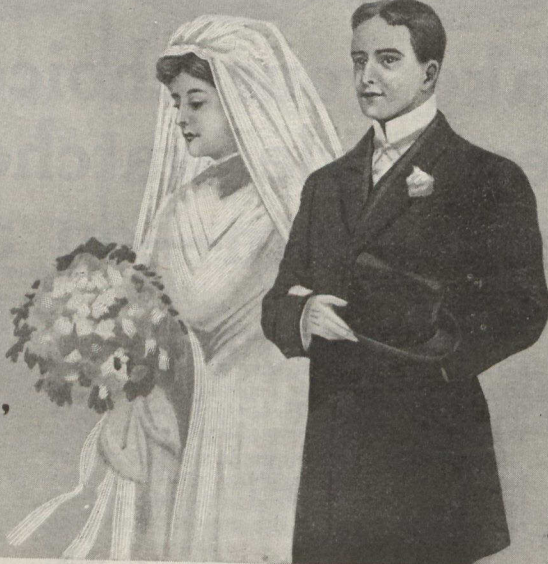


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