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## Chumming Up With Varmints

(Concluded from page 22.)

So one cold moonlight night we all started down the trail to a fine bog where the deer an' moose most always fed. You bet your life I toted erlong the gun, though Shadroe scowled pretty bad, an' I let on that what with bein' so used to the weight I was apt to travel in circles if I left it behind. "Take care there's no blood-lettin' then," says he, an' on we plods.

We was the best part o' the night squattin' behind the alders, callin' harkenin' an' freezin', 'fore there come an answer from the other side the water an' I nudged the old gent to watch out.

I up an' grunted sweetly through the horn, an' at that the bull plunged into the bog an' come at us with the lily-pads an' mud flyin' every which way at once. When it gained the top o' the bank not three yards off it stopped an' sniffed the air, an' I misremember seein' a finer sight in all my life. Big? Why it couldn't have passed a barn door its antlers were that wide, an' the moonlight glistenin' on the slime an' trailin' roots was simply grand—there's no other word for it.

Now here's were old Shadroe got busy. He'd been peerin' an' peerin' through the twigs, his eyes poppin' from his head an' his whiskers standin' straight out on either side, 'til, without a word o' warnin', he sprung to his feet, clinches Charlie by the shoulder an' shoves him out into the patch o' light clean in front o' the brute.

"My land!" I shouts, jerkin' up the gun, but 'fore I could take aim that bloomin' gal o' his circles her arms erbout my neck an' hugs me like a b'ar. "Oh, save him! Save him!" she wails, but how I could do it with her gluein' the barrel to my chin was more'n I could see.

Well sir, the bull let out a snort like a freight engine, rared right up on its hind legs an' then, jest as I looked for somethin' mighty unpleasant to happen to the Professor, who was walkin' up with his paw stuck out an' a happy grin on his mouth, it shot into the air clean over his head an' streaked like greased lightenin' into the bushes.

Then I come nigh to cussin', Charlie to fain'tin' an' old Shadroe to blubberin'—he were that disappointed at it gittin' away. "I'm deeply grieved," says he mournful like, "that you should have scart the poor critter so," an' I couldn't hit on a word to say.

Maybe every feller has his weakness, I don't know; but it weren't later than the followin' Sunday that we bumped up good an' hard ag'in old Shadroe's. It begun when the four o' us were out huntin' up some o' his animal pals. He'd keep 'way to the lead an' out o' sight so's the rest o' us wouldn't spoil his tricks. I was only needed to show him the way home when he got tuckered out, for he were the derndest goat at mislayin' himself I ever knowed.

Anyhow this mornin' we was startled half to death by havin' him chargin' down on us under a full head o' steam an' his face the colour o' biled pork. We naturally got out o' his path an' watched him sail 'round the next bend an' out o' sight. Then Miss Rosey sent Charlie to investigate an' me after her pa to ask what it were all erbout. I didn't catch him up 'til he arrove at the tent without no more wind than a bust bladder.

"What's ailin' yer?" says I.  
"Exercisin'," says he. "Runnin' on an empty stomach does one a world o' good. Try it, Ben."

Well sir, there's no denyin' I was pretty blame curious as to what'd worked him up, but Charlie wouldn't let on he knew. That same day the plot was revealed, I were down by the big pool hookin' in the trout in great shape an' makin' the most o' the chance when old Shadroe was snookin' off by himself—for he'd have put 'em all back fast as I'd ketch 'em if he knowed—when his darter galloped up screamin' an' tearin' her ravin' plumes.

"Quick, Ben, quick!" she shrieks, jerkin' my arm erbout as if it were a churn handle—jest when I had a whopper on the line, too.

"Is the bread burnin'?" asks I, realizin' it were somethin' real bad. But

she only goes "Pa—Pa—Pa—," an' keeps it up as if she was an alarm clock at four in the mornin'.

Naturally thinkin' the old boy had fallen into the fire, I dropped the rod an' made a bee line for the tents, the gal close behind me. But everythin' 'peared snug an' quiet to me, an' the Professor was nowhere erbout.

"There he is—there—there!" an' she lays ahold o' my back hair an' yanks my head over so I got to look up.

"By gosh, that's him sure enough!" I admits. "Who put him there?" He was way out on the end o' a branch near the top o' a birch tree, sittin' astride.

"He was drove there," she wails. "Save him 'fore it's too late."

"Why don't he come down? I can't save him up there," says I, wonderin' more an' more.

Now Miss Rosey was a pretty husky gal, an' all at once 'fore I kin so much as argue with her she gits behind me an' runs me over to the foot o' the tree.

"Up yer go," says she, givin' me a boost an' up I clomb. The first part was plain shinnin', but after that it got easy as walkin' up stairs, an' 'fore long I reached the limb old Shadroe was ridin'. I stuck my head through the leaves an' there he were on the very tip, which was bendin' like a fishin' rod, an' rubbin' out farther every second.

"Mind the ground," I warns, "it's jest below yer," but he didn't so much as raise his eyes, an' went on starin' an' starin' at the limb in front o' his paws.

When I'd got pretty nigh an' was jest on the pint o' reachin' for him my fingers fell on somethin' soft an' mushy an' I seen a big fat green grub was walkin' out ahead o' me. "Scat," says I, shootin' it off with my thumb.

WELL, could yer believe it, but it were that little act that saved the Professor's life! Up he come like a monkey, fist over fist, squeezed past me so hard he all but shot me down an' threw his arms erbout the trunk as if it had been his grandma. I had to use the handle o' my sheath-knife to pry him loose, an' then not carin' to risk any more such goin's on chucked him over my shoulder an' toted him to the ground.

Miss Rosey carried on in a scandalous manner, smackin' first me an' then him an' hintin' that I'd done somethin' real big; an' jest as the rumpus was loudest up saunters Charlie Worttle with his hands in his pockets and a vile cigarette in his teeth.

"What's the picnic, Ben, old chap?" he squeaks.

"A thrillin' rescue," says I. "The Professor was treed by a 'furiated catopiller thirstin' for his blood."

"Where is a fat, green one with no clothes on?" he cries.

"I reckon it was, but yer can investigate for yerself. It's lyin' under the limb there."

The youngster pounces on it like an early bird and lifts it gently in his paw.

"Yes, yes, it's Zachariah!" says he tearful like.

Old Shadroe sidles off a piece farther.

"Ah, a friend o' yours! I hope the poor little larva has come to no harm on my account."

"That cruel man shoved it off so hard it has clean bust its neck, sir," an' he shoots me a wink that shows me he ain't sech a dern fool after all.

"It was the varmint's neck or his," I growls. "You don't seem to have no sense o' gratitude."

"Desist, Mr. Niggs. I shall not have anyone casting aspersions on Mr. Worttle. He has profited by my teachin's beyond my fondest calations and has proved himself a son-in-law that any buggyologist would be proud o' claimin'."

Of course Charlie had set the grub on the Professor's trail, as soon's he saw him go up the tree to visit a cat-bird, and he was no more acquainted with the insect then you be. But his future pa was so tickled over his chummin' up with somethin' he himself was scared ter death of that he forgave him his other awful failin's an' started right back for the settlements to see he got all that was comin' to him, in the shape o' the joyous Rosey.

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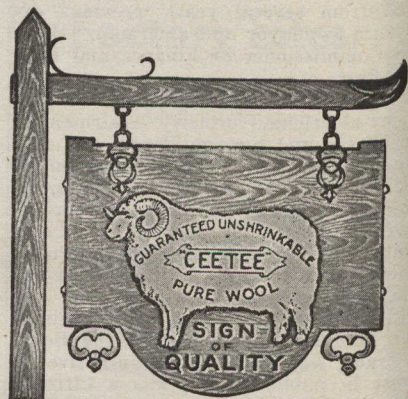
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