

NOVEMBER JOE
The Detective of the Woods

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by HESKETH PRICHARD

Continued.

November was even more slow spoken than usual.
"Val," he said, after some, "have you still got that pink necker Sally knitted for you?"
"Yes, I've got her."
"Where?"
"Right here," and Black pulled the muffler out of his pocket.
"Huh!" said Joe.
There was a silence, rather a strained silence, between the two.
Then November continued, "When was you last night?"
Val looked narrowly at Joe. Joe returned his stare.
"Say, November Joe, are you search for trouble?" asked Black in an ominously quiet voice.
"Seems as if trouble was searching for me," replied November.
There was another silence. Then Val jerked out, "I call your hand."
"I show it," said Joe. "You're suspected of robbing Sally's traps this month back. And you're suspected of entering Sally's house last evening and stealing pelts."
With a shout of rage Val made at Joe.

November stood quite still under the grip of the other's furious hands. "You act innocent, don't you, you old coyote!" he grinned ironically. "I never said I suspected you."
Black dug out, looking a little foolish, but he flared up again.
"Who is it suspects me?"
"Just Evans. And he's got good evidence. Where was you between 6 and 7 last night?"
"In the woods. I come back and sleep here."
"Was you alone?"
"Yes."
"Then you can't prove no alibi," Joe puffed.

It was at this moment that Evans, accompanied by two other forest rangers, appeared upon the scene. Quick as lightning he covered Black with his shotgun.
"Up with your hands," he cried, "or I'll put this load of birdshot into your face."
Black scowled, but his hands went up. He stood panting. At a sign one of the rangers sidled up, and the click of handcuffs followed.
"What am I charged with?" cried Black.
"Hobbery."
"You'll pay me for this, Simon Evans!"
"It won't be for awhile—not till they let you out again," retorted the warden easily. "Take him off up the trail hill!"

The rangers walked away with their prisoner, and Evans turned to Joe.
"Guess I have the laugh of you, November," he said.
"Looks that way. Where you taking him?"
"To Lavette. I've sent word to Mrs. Rone to come there tomorrow. And now," continued Evans, "I'm going to search Black's shack."
"What for?"
"The stolen pelts."
"Got a warrant?"
"I'm a warden—don't need one."
"You'll not search without it," said November, moving in front of the door.
"Who'll stop me?" Evans' chin shot out doggedly.

"I might," said Joe in his most genteel manner. "I'm in the right, for it's again the law, and you know it, Mr. Evans."
Evans hesitated. "Have it your way, but I'll be back with my warrant before sunup tomorrow, and I'm warning you, and maybe you'll find it's better to have me for a friend than—"
"Huh! Say, Mr. Quaritch, have you a bill of that light bacey of yours? I want scotch!"
As soon as Evans was out of sight, Joe beckoned me to a thick piece of scrub not far from the hut.
"Stay right here till I come back. Everything depends on that," he whispered.

I lay down at my ease in a sheltered spot, and then Joe also took the road for Lavette. Everything appeared to be against Black—the cartridge which fitted his rifle, the strands of the tell tale neckerchief, the man's own furious behavior, his manifest passion for Mrs. Rone, and the suggested motive for the thefts—all these things pointed, conclusively it seemed to me, in one direction. And yet I knew that almost from the beginning of the inquiry November had decided that Black was innocent.
The evening turned raw, and the thin snow was softening, and though I was weary of my watch I was still dreaming when I started under a hand that touched my shoulder. Joe was crouching at my side. He warned me to caution, but I could not refrain from a question as to where he had been.
"Down to the store at Lavette," he whispered. "I was talking about that search warrant—pretty high handed I said it was, and the boys agreed to that."

After a while Joe touched me to wakefulness, and I saw something moving on the trail below us. A second or two of moonlight gave me a glimpse of the approaching figure of a man, a bumped figure that moved swiftly. A whistle. No answer. And its hand went to the hatch. I heard Joe sigh as he crossed the man with his rifle. Then came his voice in its quiet tones.
"Guess the game's off, Sylvester. Don't turn! Hands up!"

The man stood still as we came behind him. At a word he faced round. I saw the high cheek bones and gleaming eyes of an Indian. His savage face was contracted with animosity.
"Now Mr. Quaritch," said November suggestively.
I flatter myself I made a neat job of tying up our prisoner.
"Thank you. What's in that bundle in his back?"
I opened it. Several skins dropped out. Joe examined them. "All got



"Guess the game's off. Don't turn! Hands up!"

Sally's mark on," he said. "Say, Mr. Quaritch, let me introduce you to a pretty mean thief."

I noticed that Joe took our prisoner along at a good pace toward Lavette. After a mile or two, however, he asked me to go ahead and if I met with Mrs. Rone to make her wait his arrival, but he added in an aside, "Tell her nothing about Sylvester."
I reached the village soon after dawn, but already the people were gathered at the store, where every one was discussing the case.
As I heard nothing of Mrs. Rone, I set out toward her house. When I met her I noticed that her gentle face wore a changed expression. I delivered my message.
"I'll never speak to November again as long as I live," she said with deep vindictiveness. "November's played double with me. I'll show him!"
I walked beside her in silence, and just before we came in sight of the houses we met with Joe alone. He had evidently left Sylvester in safe custody. Joe glanced from Sally to me. I read understanding in his eyes.
"We've got him trapped safe, Sally. Not a hole for him to slip out by."
Sally's rage broke from her control. "You're just too cute, November Joe," she blazed, "with your tracking and finding out things and putting Val in jail! What do you say to it that I've been fooling you all the time? I never lost no pelts! I only said it to get the laugh against ye. Ye was beginning to believe ye could hear the muskrats sneezing!"
"Is that so?" inquired Joe gently.
"Yes, and I'm going into Lavette this minute to tell them!"
Joe stepped in front of her. "Just as you like, Sally. But how'll ye explain these?" He flung open the bundle of skins he carried.
Mrs. Rone turned color. "Where did ye find them?" she gasped.
"On his back."
She hesitated a moment, then, "I gave Val that lot," she said carelessly.
"That's queer, now," said Joe, "cos it was in Injin Sylvester I found them."

Sally stared at Joe, then laughed suddenly, excitedly. "Oh, Joe, you're sure the cutest man ever made in this world!" And with that she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him.
"I'd best pass that on to Val Black!" said Joe calmly.
And Sally's blushes were prettier than you could believe.
There is no need for me to tell how Black was liberated from the hands of the crestfallen Evans, who was as nonplussed as I myself had been at the breakdown of the case, which up to the last moment had on the face of it seemed indestructible.
I have never looked forward to any explanation more than that which November gave to Mrs. Rone, Black and myself the same evening.
"It was the carcass of Rizpah give me the first start," said Joe. "As soon as I saw that I knew it weren't Val."
"Why?" asked Sally.
"You remember it was backed up! Now here was the case up to that: A thief had robbed Sally, and all the sign he left behind was a few threads of his necker and an English made cartridge. The thief goes out, and old Rizpah attacks him. He shoots her. Then he cuts her body nigh to pieces. Why? We all shook our heads.
"Because he wants to get his bullet out of her. And why does he want to get his bullet? Only one possible reason. Because it's different to the bullet he'd dropped on purpose in the house."
"By Jove!" I cried.
"From that it all fits in. It seems

funny that the thief should drop a cartridge, fanner still that he should not notice he'd left a bit of his necker stuck to the nails on the door. Still, I'd allow them two things might happen. But when it came to his having more bits of his necker torn off by the spruces where Evans found them, it looked like as if the thief was a mighty poor woodsman. Which he wasn't. He hid his tracks good and cunning. After that I guessed I was on the right scent, but I wasn't plumb sure till I come up to the place where he killed the porridge. While he was snoring it he rested his rifle against a tree. I saw the mark of the butt on the ground and the scratch from the foresight upon the bark. Then I knew he didn't carry no English rifle."
"How did you know?" asked Sally.
"I could measure its length against the tree. It was nigh a foot shorter than an English rifle."
Val's fist came down on the table. "Bully for you, Joe!"
"Well, now, there was one more thing. Besides that black fox, Sally here missed other marked pelts. They wasn't much value. Why did the thief take them? Again only one reason. He wanted 'em for making more false evidence against Val."
He passed. "Go on, Joe," cried Mrs. Rone impatiently.
"When Mr. Quaritch and I came to Val's shack we searched it. Nothing there. Why? Cos Val had been home all night and Sylvester couldn't get in without wakin' him."
"But," said I, "wasn't there a good case against Black without that?"
"Yes, there was a case, but his conviction wasn't an absolute cinch. On the other hand, if the stolen skins was found hid in his shack—That's why you had to be in that brush so long, Mr. Quaritch, while I went in to Lavette and spread it around that the shack hadn't been searched by Evans. Sylvester was at the store, and he fell into the trap right enough. We waited for him, and we got him."
"O' course," continued Joe, "revenge on Val weren't Sylvester's only game. He meant robbin' Sally, too, and had his plan laid. He must 'a' gone to Val's and stole a cartridge and the bits of necker before he robbed Sally's house. Last night he started out to leave a few cheap pelts at Val's, but he had the black fox skin separate in his pack with a bit of tea and four and tobacco, so if we hadn't took him he'd have lit out into Maine an' sold the black fox pelt there."

"But why should Sylvester have such a down on Val?"
Joe laughed. "Ask Val!"
"Ten years ago," said Val, "when we was both rising twenty year, I gave Sylvester a thrashing he'd likely remember. He had a dog what weren't no use, and he decided to shoot it. So he did, but he didn't kill it. He shot it far back and left it in the woods, and I come along."
"The brute!" exclaimed Sally.
"He's a dangerous Injin," said November, "and he's of a breed that never forgets."
"When he gets out of prison you'll have to keep awake, Joe," said Val.
"When he gets out I'll have the snow in my hair all right and you and Sally will be old married folks," retorted Joe. "You'll sure be tired of each other by then."
Sally looked at Val, and Joe caught the look.
"Leastways," he added, "you'll pretend you are better'n you do now."
We all laughed.

CHAPTER VIII.
The Case of Miss Virginia Planx.
NOVEMBER JOE and I had been following a moose since day break, moving without speech. Suddenly from somewhere ahead there broke out the sound of two shots and after a minute of two more.
"Two shots going on at steady intervals," said Joe. "That's a call for help. There they go again. We'd best follow them up."
We traveled for half an hour, guided by the sound, and came in sight of a man standing among the trees. We saw him raise his rifle and fire twice straight upward to the sky.
"It's Planx!" said Joe in surprise.
"What? The millionaire you went into the woods with to locate timber last year?"
"The identical man."
As we approached Joe halted him. Planx was a thick shouldered, stout man, his big body set back upon his hips, his big chin thrust forward in a way that accentuated the arrogance of his bulging lips and eyes.
"Ho! It's you, Joe!" he cried.
"Yes, Mr. Planx."
"That is lucky, for I need your help. My daughter was murdered yesterday. The words made me gasp, and not me only.
"Miss Virginia?" cried Joe. "You can't mean that. Nobody would be brute enough to kill Miss Virginia!"
As we walked Planx gave us the following facts: It appeared that he had been spending the last two weeks in a log hut which had been lent him by a friend, Mr. Wilshire. His household consisted of one servant—his daughter's nurse, a middle aged woman whom they had brought with them from New York—two guides and a man cook. On the previous day Miss Virginia had taken her rod after lunch, as she had often done before, and gone off to the river to fish.
"At 5 I went to join her. She was not there. Her rod lay broken, and there were signs of a struggle and the tracks of two men. I shouted for Ed, the old guide. He came running down, and we took up the trail. It led us straight over to Mooseshank lake. The rangers had put her in our own canoe and gone out on the lake."

Planx paused and presently continued.
"We went round the lake and found on the far side the spot where they had searched the canoe. Leading up into the woods from that point, we again struck the trail of the two men, but my daughter was no longer with them. When they left the canoe they were going light. They must have drowned her in the lake. It's clear enough. Presently I saw something floating on the water. It was her hat."
"Had Miss Virginia any jewelry on her?" asked Joe.
"A watch and a necklace."
"What value?"
"Seven or eight hundred dollars."
"Huh," said November reflectively. "And what did you do after finding her hat?"
"We trailed the two villains until they got on to some rocky ground. It was too dark then to do more, so we returned. Five thousand dollars for my hands on them," he said.
By the river the traces were so plain that any one could read them: the slender feet of the victim and the larger footprints of the two men. The fishing rod, snapped off toward the top of the middle joint, had been left where it had fallen. It seemed as if the girl had tried to defend herself with it. Next we went to the lake.
November literally nosed his way along. The moccasin tracks of the two men showed faintly here and there on the softer parts of the ground.
"Looks as if they was totting something," said Joe. "They must 'a' carried her. Stop! They set her down here for a spell."
Another moment brought us over the rise and in sight of Mooseshank lake. I halted involuntarily. The place seemed created for the scene of a tragedy.
November had pushed on to the spot where footprints and other signs showed where the men had entered the canoe. The deep slide of a moccasin foot in the mud seemed to tell of the effort it required to get the girl embarked.

"They took her out on the lake and murdered her!" groaned Planx. "Dragging? There's no use dragging, that water goes plumb down to the root of the world!"
After that we went around to the other side of the lake and saw the beached canoe. The two sets of moccasin tracks showed clearly on the strip of mud by the water, but were soon lost in the tumbled debris of a two-year-old stony landslide over which trailing appeared quite impossible. November was busy about this landing place for a longer time than I expected, then he crossed the landslide at right angles and disappeared from our view. Soon he came hurrying toward us.
"She isn't dead."
"What?"
"Anyways, she wasn't when she passed here. I have a proof here that you will think mighty good." He drew out a little leather case I had given him and extracted from it a long hair of a beautiful red gold color. "Look at that! I found it in the spruces above there."
Planx took it gently in his great fingers. He was visibly much moved. For a few seconds he held it without speaking, then, "That grew on Virginia's head, sure enough, Joe. Is it possible my girl is alive?"
"She is, sure! Don't be afeared. You'll soon have news of her. I can promise you that, Mr. Planx. This wasn't no case of murder. It's just an abduction. They'd never be such fools as to kill her. They're ceter than that. Isn't she your daughter? They'll hold her to big ransom. That's their game."

An ugly look came into Planx's eyes. "That's their game, is it? I'm not a man that it is easy to milk dollars from," said he.
By this time it was growing too dark for Joe to work any longer. We crossed the lake with Planx, and that night Joe and I camped near the end of Mooseshank lake, where a stream flowed from it.
At dawn, while we were having breakfast, Joe stood up and stared into the trees that grew thick behind us. As he called out I looked back and saw the indistinct figure of a man in their shadow watching us. He beckoned, and we approached him. I saw he was young, with a pale face and rather shabby town made clothes.
"Don't you remember Walter Calvey, November?" he said, holding out his hand. "I was with you and Mr. Planx and—and—her last year in the woods."
"Huh, yes, and what are you doing here, Mr. Calvey?" asked Joe, shaking hands.
"I heard about Virginia. How could I keep away after that?" exclaimed Calvey.
"You're no cause to fret yet," said Joe.
"What? When they've killed her, I'll go with you and if we can find those—"
"Huh! She's not dead! Take my word for it!" Joe's gray eyes gave me a roguish look. "Why, I've got a thing here in my pocketbook you'd give me \$100 for!" He held the red gold hair up to the light of the rising sun.
Calvey shook from head to foot.
"Virginia's! You couldn't find its match in Canada! Tell me!"
"I can't wait to tell you and you can't wait to hear. Light out now. Old man Planx could make it unhealthily for you."
"You're right! He hates me because Virginia won't marry Scheiberz of the combine. He hasn't at us meet for months. And more than that, he's ruined me and my partner in business. It was east for a nice haul to do that," added Calvey bitterly.

To be continued.

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