

The Bear's Face

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came from all about the bar. Toomey took out his watch, and considered.

"We start away at 5:40 a.m.," said he, "an' I must make out to get a wink o' sleep. But I reckon I've got time enough. As you'll see, however, before I git through, the drinks are on me, so name yer p'ison, boys. Meanwhile, you'll excuse me if I don't join you this time. A man kin hold just about so much Vichy an' milk, an' I've got my load aboard."

"It was kind of this way," he continued, when the barkeeper had performed his functions. "You see, for nigh ten years after I left Grantham Mills I'd stuck closer'n a burr to my business, till I began to feel I knew most all there was to know about trainin' animals. Men do git that kind of a fool feelin' sometimes, about lots of things harder than animal trainin'. Well, nothin' would

straight up the hill, an' him too close at my heels fer convenience. Then I remembered that a grizzly don't run his best when he goes uphill on a slant, so on the slant I went. It worked, I reckon, fer though I couldn't say I gained on him much, it was soothin' to observe that he didn't seem to gain on me.

"Fer maybe well onto three hundred yards it was a fine race, and I was beginnin' to wonder if the bear was gittin' as near winded as I was, when slap, I come right out on the crest of the ridge, which jest ahead o' me jutted out in a sort of elbow. What there was on the other side I couldn't see, and couldn't take time to inquire I jest had to chance it, hopin' it might be somethin' less than a thousand foot drop. I ran straight to the edge, and jest managed to throw myself flat on my face an' clutch at the grass like mad to keep from pitchin' clean out into space. It was a drop, all right—two hundred foot or more o' sheer cliff. An' the bear was not thirty yards behind me.

"I looked at the bear, as I laid there clutchin' the grass roots. Then I looked down over the edge. I didn't feel frightened exactly—so, fur — didn't know enough, maybe, to be frightened of any animal. But jest at this point I was mighty anxious. You'll believe, then, it was kind o' good to see, right below, maybe twenty foot down, a little pocket of a ledge, full o' grass an' blossomin' weeds. There was not time to calculate. I could let myself drop; an' maybe, if I had luck, I could stop where I fell, in the pocket, instead of bouncin' out an' down, to be smashed into flinders. Or, on the other hand, I could stay where I was, an' be ripped into leetle frayed ravelin's by the bear; an' that would be in about three seconds, at the rate he was comin'. Well, I let myself over the edge till I jest hung by the fingers, an' then dropped, smooth as I could, down the rock face, kind of clutchin' at every leetle knob as I went, to check the fall. I lit true in the pocket, an' I lit pretty hard, as ye might know; but not hard enough to knock the wits out o' me, the grass an' weeds bein' fairly soft. An' clawin' out desperately with both hands, I caught, an' stayed put. Some dirt an' stones come down, kind o' smart, on my head, an' when they'd stopped, I looked up.

"There was the bear, his big head stuck down, with one ugly paw hangin' over beside it, starin' at me. I was so tickled at havin' fooled him, I didn't think o' the hole I was in, but sez to him, saucy as you please, 'Thou art so near, an' yet so far.' At this he gave a grunt, which might have meant anything, an' disappeared.

"Ye know enough to know when you're euchred," says I. An' then I turned to considerin' the place I was in, an' how I was to git out of it. To git out of it, indeed! The more I considered, the more I wondered how I'd ever managed to stay in it. It wasn't bigger than three foot by two—or two an' a half, maybe—in width, out from the cliff face. On my left, as I sat with my back agin' the cliff, a wall o' rock ran out straight, closin' off the pocket to that side clean an' sharp, though with a leetle kind of a roughness, so to speak—nothin' more than a roughness—which I calculated might do, on a pinch, fer me to hang onto, if I wanted to try to climb round to the other side. I didn't want to, jest yet, bein' still shaky from the drop, which, as things turned out, was jest as well for me.

"To my right, a bit of a ledge, maybe six or eight inches wide, ran off along the cliff face for a matter of ten or a dozen feet, then slanted up, an' widened out agin to another little pocket, a shelf like, of bare rock, about level with the top o' my head. From this shelf a narrow crack, not more than two or three inches wide, kind o' zigzagged away till it reached the top o' the cliff, perhaps forty foot off. It wasn't much, but it looked like somethin' I could git a good fingerhold into, if only I could work my way along to that leetle shelf. I was figgerin' hard on this, an' had about made up my mind to try it, an' was reachin' out, in fact, to start—when I stopped sudden.

"A healthy-lookin' rattler, his diamond-pattern' back bright in the sun, come out

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"I was nigh jumpin' stright off that there ledge right into the landscape."

do me but I should go back to my old business of trappin' the beasts, only with one big difference. I wanted to go in fer takin' them alive, so as to sell them to menageries an' all that sort of thing. An' it was no pipe dream, fer I done well at it from the first. But that's not here nor there. I was gittin' tired of it, after a lot o' travelin' an' some lively kind of scrapes; so I made up my mind to finish up with a grizzly, an' then git back to trainin', which was what I was cut out fer, after all.

"Well, I wanted a grizzly; an' it wasn't long before I found one. We were campin' among the foothills of the upper end of the Sierra Nevada range, in Northern California. It was a good prospectin' ground fer grizzly, an' we found lots o' signs. I wanted one not too big fer convenience, an' not so old as to be too set in his ways an' too proud to larn. I had three good men with me, an' we scattered ourselves over a big bit o' ground, lookin' fer a likely trail. When I stumbled onto that chap in the cage yonder, what Captain Bird admires so, I knew right off he wasn't what I was after. But the queer thing was that he didn't seem to feel that way about me. He was after me before I had time to think of anything jest suitable to the occasion."

"Where in thunder was yer gun?" demanded the river man.

"That was jest the trouble!" answered Toomey. "Ye see, I'd stooed the gun agin a tree, in a dry place, while I stepped over a bit o' boggy ground, intendin' to lay down an' drink out of a leetle spring. Well, the bear was handier to that gun than I was. When he come fer me, I tell ye I didn't go back fer the gun. I ran,

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