

passing herd. Then his eyes gleamed—he remembered the bargain he had struck.

At dawn he crept forth. He trailed along the slope of the hill, making in the direction of the night's passing band. As he crept onward with shaking limbs, his bleary eyes searched the neighboring slopes, hunting for the quarry that had gone before. But while he looked one way and another, sharper eyes had seen him; and with a crash and rending of dry timber, the herd was up and gone. They had seen and scented him; and he sat down weakly, startled at the sudden burst of sound amid the silences, and cursed with many foul-mouthed oaths. That night he returned to his cabin, discouragement settling deeply in his heart. But for the fact that snow had closed the passes, he would have fled away beyond, taking the outfit with him, and letting his master go whistle. But at dawn he was up and away once more, resolved to make another try of it, though the luck was not encouraging. That afternoon, as he sat languidly on a hillside, staring moodily across the vast arrays of hills, a wapiti yearling stepped from a neighboring thicket, and innocently fed along. He sank back trembling, and clutched eagerly at his gun. The chance! With trembling fingers he cocked the hammer; and then for a moment stilling the wild beating of his heart, drew the trigger. Whoop! he screamed. The stricken thing was down. He ran in gleefully, brandishing his gun; and as the dying beast arose on its forelegs, dragging the shattered haunches behind it in a convulsive effort to flee, he poured bullet after bullet into its striving form. There it lay, then, quite dead, though quivering, and the slayer shot at it again. When it moved no more he stood his gun against a tree, and felt in his pockets for his knife. It was not there; he had left it at the shack. So for awhile he stood looking ruefully at the dead creature he had slain; and prying open its jaws, felt the teeth that represented the enterprise he had set out upon. After all this trouble he could not abandon them. So he hunted about till he found a stone, and laying the creature's head upon a fallen tree, tried to break off its jaw at the joints. But he failed in this, too, and realizing he could do nothing more, gave it up. He told himself he would return later on and save the hide and meat, too.

Luck, after this, turned his way. That night came a snow. It began at darkness and at dawn still fell, unabating. The grim and silent hills faded behind its curtains; the world shut in, and for three days more it snowed. But at dawn of the fourth day when he awoke from the dreams that troubled his drunken slumbers, the snow had ceased. Putting his shoulder to the door, he shoved it open and started forth.

There across the valley before his door stood a band of the creatures he was hired to destroy. One moment he stared at them idly, uncomprehending. The calm and the peacefulness of that world before him was still reflected in his eyes. He looked again, rubbing his reddened eyelids. Broadside stood the band, their necks arched, motionless, carved figures lithe and beautiful. At their feet, the wind had whipped the snow away; they stood there looking, revealed in all their wild grandeur—agile, splendid and complete. But of this the destroyer took no heed. He snatched up a gun and a hasty bullet went screaming across the interval. In the stillness, the hills roared back, hill to hill, the drowning echoes reverberating in their repeated uproar and each a crying terror. The band sprang forward. He sent another bullet speeding after, and turned them with the whining lead. As they floundered down the bank, the snow engulfed them. It clogged their way, and frantic they heaved deeper and deeper into the drifts, the younger and weaker falling hopelessly to the rear. He saw this, then, the destroyer, and dropping the gun, snatched up his snow-shoes from their place beside the door. With flying fingers he strung the things together, snatched up his gun again, and was away in swift pursuit. A wild flurry seized the clustering band. They broke like sheep, plunging deeper into the drowning drifts. He was among them now; and in his eyes gleamed the light of exultation—the bloodlust of wanton killing—the crying, murderous evilness of a beast unrestrained. Again the hills roared with the echoes; and at each crash a stricken creature fell. None escaped. The reddened snow lay dotted with heaving shapes; the maimed things writhed about or lay still in the rigor of the end. One by one, they gave way to the destroyer; and when the last great bull lay still—the last cow dead with the young and quivering unborn within her—then the work was ended. He stood up, and wiped his sweating brow. Exultation played upon his face. Here at last was success.

Hog Eye Forbush had found the level he sought.

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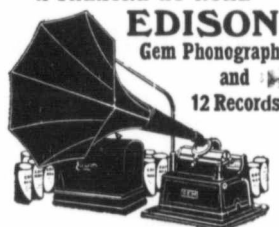
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