

Left Behind in the Mountains

(By Henry Elliot Thibadeau, in 'The Youth's Companion.' In Three Parts.)

PART III.

The 'knife' of my bear-trap was something like that of an old-fashioned hay-cutter, such as was worked by a lever. It was designed to behead the grizzly, which could not see the ax-blades, and hence would not be likely to dodge back when I jumped on the lever.

As it chanced my trap was sprung several times by smaller animals, and once by a wolf that escaped by digging its way out beneath one of the bottom logs of the camp. Three nights later I was awakened by a terrible roaring, and at once felt certain that there was a big bear in the pound.

I did not stir forth till daylight, for I had no desire to attempt to guillotine a bear in the dark. Then my conjecture that I had caught a very savage old veteran was fully verified. This bear was at least a third larger than the first one I had trapped.

Something familiar in his ponderous shape and the tint of his coat made me believe it was the same beast that had knocked my cabin door down in August, and I fancied that I could see a scar on his nose where I had cut him with the knife-stick. Unlike the other one, this bear roared and growled almost continuously.

I walked with caution round the trap, gaining such glimpses as I could without approaching too close; for the rage of such a monstrous beast is terrifying. I knew that if he broke out he would kill me with one stroke of his paw, and that it would be impossible to escape by running, for clumsy as these animals appear, they can move more rapidly than a man over open ground.

The margins of the hole which I had cut at the rear end of the camp seemed rubbed and torn, as if the bear's head had been out and in there often during the night. Hoping to see it come forth again, I approached and tried the workings of the lever gently.

'I will soon alter the tone of your roar, old fellow!' I muttered, as I put the lever in position. The beast heard me, and in an instant out popped his ugly head, roaring, frothing and foaming—the incarnation of savage rage.

Collecting all my strength, I jumped on the lever, threw my whole weight on the end of it, and caught the grizzly with the ax-blades just back of his ears.

When he felt those blades, he roared and pulled back. I think he was scared. The whole camp shook; but I jumped the harder, and kept my weight on the lever.

The animal realized that he must exert all his strength. So he set his feet against the logs inside, and gave first a twist and then a mighty upward boost. Then I saw the whole back side of the camp coming out upon me. A span of heavy draft-horses could not have pulled the end away as easily as the bear pushed it out.

I jumped off the lever and ran round the corner, where there was a short log standing up against the wall of the camp. With a spring and a scramble I mounted to the roof—what there was left of it, for the farther end had fallen in. I had hardly reached it when the bear jumped out at the collapsed end of the camp, shaking his head.

I expected that the maddened beast would charge at me, but I do not think he could have seen me, for he ran off a few steps and

headed round with a grunt. His neck was bleeding somewhat.

For some moments he stood looking at the camp and puffing. Perhaps if I had stirred he would have charged at me, but he continued shaking his head angrily, as if the cuts pained him, for perhaps half a minute, then suddenly wheeled about and went off at a shambling run.

I felt chagrined at this result. It seemed that I had been much mistaken in crediting myself with skill in trapping grizzlies.

That was the last I saw or heard of the bears that fall. The cold season was at hand, and I suppose they went into winter quarters.

Now I battened my camp thickly with cedar and fir boughs, prepared a great pile of fire-wood by chopping up one of the log camps, and entered upon the winter comfortably. In that great ravine, hedged about



'I STOOD THERE, QUITE DUMFOUNDED.'

with the huge spruces and firs of the ever-green forest, my cabin was well sheltered from storms.

Eight or ten inches of snow soon fell, and the weather became very cold. A species of mink then began to frequent the creek, swimming in the open pools, and I busied myself with efforts to trap them in small 'deadfalls.' Having caught four with much difficulty, I stretched their skins after the manner I had heard trappers describe.

A singular black-and-white creature which made its appearance at about this time, entered the deserted camps across the creek nearly every night for a week. Its tracks were as large as the palm of a man's hand. I repaired the smaller camp in which I had entrapped the bears, and succeeded in catching the animal a little before sunrise one morning.

It immediately began digging furiously beneath the sills, or bottom logs of the camp, and would have escaped in a short time if I had not struck it senseless with a club when it thrust out its head. It was a wolverene, I have been told, and it weighed perhaps thirty-five pounds.

I saw the tracks of many martens in the timber on the sides of the mountain to the south of the ravine, and caught two in deadfalls similar to those which I set for mink.

Elk ran past occasionally, and panthers' tracks were numerous. I also heard wolves howling at night, and one day I saw six of them coursing at speed down the ravine—ugly, gaunt, gray brutes that looked dangerous.

Before the middle of the month of January no more than a foot of snow fell. One could move about without much difficulty, and with the interest of trapping I had passed the time unoppressed by the solitude. But now came a prodigious snowfall of more than four feet during forty-eight hours.

The sun then broke forth and shone warmly for half a day, but the sky soon darkened again; and during the following night and day about two feet more of snow fell. Then I had a clear day, followed by two more days of snow. It was light, and came above the eaves of my camp on all sides. To move abroad was impossible, and it cost me two hours of hard work to shovel a road to my wood-pile. As I had never before seen such a snowfall, I was somewhat alarmed.

Indeed, there was good cause for alarm. While trying to cook my breakfast in the darkened cabin, I heard from a distance a noise which I at first mistook for that of a train on the railroad, but on reflection I felt sure that no train could be in motion that morning. The noise continued for a few moments before I reflected that it must be the sound of an avalanche.

Not long afterwards I heard another such roar, and during the day a great many. All were distant, some so far off among the mountains that they sounded like faint thunder.

The weather continued dark and cloudy, but grew much warmer. I had been asleep one night for several hours, when I was roused suddenly by a rumbling noise. Instantly I sprang to my feet and ran to the door of my cabin. The noise grew constantly louder.

When I pulled open the door the dark clouds were breaking away, and the moon shone out in the vast white mountain side opposite. That whole mountain side seemed to be in confused motion—gliding, twisting, rushing down!

A vast spray of snow flew up from it. Mingled with this white snow-surf were black objects, rocks and the trunks and broken tops of trees, whirling out for an instant amidst the snow. The noise was like one continuous, jarring thunder-peal close at hand, and I felt the very earth tremble as the vast, writhing mass rushed to the foot of the mountain.

It did not stop there. I saw what seemed to be an enormous tossing drift heave up into view nearer at hand. It seemed to cross the intervening space and come to my cabin in one second, rustling, crackling, hurling itself over my wood-pile and paths, gushing in at the door, and half-filling my cabin with mingled snow and broken boughs.

The awful jar started another avalanche from the mountain on the other side of the ravine, a few hundred yards farther to the west. This one I heard but could not see.

The snow and brush from the avalanche were difficult to clear away, and I was occupied for two days cutting a passage through it to my wood-pile. Rain came, then the weather turned colder, and the snow from the avalanche froze hard enough to bear my