



NOVEMBER JOE The Detective of the Woods by Hesketh Prichard.

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PROLOGUE.

One of the most interesting characters in fiction, November Joe, well deserves to take his place in the hall of fame alongside his more famous prototype, Sherlock Holmes.

CHAPTER I.

November 1.

It happened that in the early autumn of 1908 I, James Quiritch of Quebec, went down to Montreal. I was at the time much engaged in an important business transaction, which after long and complicated negotiations appeared to be nearing a successful issue.

"None better. The most capable on this continent, I verily believe. If Joe is free and can go with you, you will get your mouse with the sixty inch horns. I understand that he has entered into some sort of contract with the provincial police."

"With the police?" I repeated. "Yes. He is to help them in such cases as may be within the scope of his special experience. He is, indeed, the very last person I should like to have upon my trail had I committed a murder. He is a most skilled and minute observer, and you must not forget that the speciality of a Sherlock Holmes is the everyday routine of a woodsman. Observation and deduction are part and parcel of his daily existence. He literally reads, as he runs. The floor of the forest is his page. And when a crime is committed in the woods these facts are very fortunate. Their nature is the criminal's best ally. She seems to league herself with him in many ways. Often she delays the discovery of his ill doing; she covers his deeds with her leaves and her snow; his track she washes away with her rain, and more than all she provides him with a vast area of refuge; over which she slides the appointed hours of darkness, during which he can travel fast and far."

"My husband won't be home tonight. He's gone into the woods. No one is to send him any message. There is no one here but me and the children. Well, there's Mr. Quiritch, a sportsman staying the night. No I couldn't ask him."

"I hung up the receiver, turned to Mrs. Harding and told her the facts. 'So November is connected with police work now?' 'Didn't you read in the newspapers about the 'Long Island Murder'?' I remembered the case at once; it had been a nine days' wonder of head line and comment, and now I wondered how it was that I missed the mention of Joe's name."

"I threw the stump of my cigar into the fire. 'You have persuaded me,' I said. 'I will try to make a start by the end of the week. Where is Joe to be found?' 'As to that, I believe you might get into touch with him at Harding's farm. Silent Water, Beauce.'

old Tom was overtaken by one of his habits: his of talking big. Once when Tom spoke by the camp fire of some lake to which he stated that the shores had never been trodden by white man's foot. Joe had to cover his mouth with his hand. When we were alone, Todd having departed to make some necessary repairs to the canoe, I asked Joe what he meant by laughing at his elders."

"I suppose a boy's foot ain't a man's anyway," remarked Joe innocently, and more he would not say. The sun was showing over the trees tops when I drew rein by the door of the shack and at the same moment came in view of the slim but powerful figure of a young man who was busy rolling some gear into a pack. He raised himself and, just as I was about to speak, drawled out: 'My Mr. Quiritch, you! Who'd a thought it?'

"I felt that I shall never be able to describe November. Suffice it to say that the hose knit boy I remembered had developed into one of the finest specimens of manhood that ever grew up among the balsam trees; near six feet tall, lithe and powerful, with a neck like a column and a straight face, the sheer good looks of this son of the woods were disturbing. He was clearly also not only the product but the master of his environment."



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