

November Joe

The Detective of the Woods.
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by HESKETH PRICHARD

Continued.
CHAPTER X.

The Hundred Thousand Dollar Robbery

"I WANT the whole affair kept up official and secret," said Harris the bank manager.

November Joe nodded. He was seated on the extreme edge of a chair in the manager's private office, looking curiously out of place in that prim, brightly furnished room.

"The truth is," continued Harris, "we cannot afford to have our customers' minds unsettled. There are some losses from robbery of small deposits, especially in the outer districts, but we could stand a good deal of that if the robbers were known. If they know that this in D. C. [sic]—I mean Attersen had made off with a hundred thousand dollars, they'd never trust us again."

"A hundred thousand dollars is a wonderful lot of money," agreed Joe.

"Our reserve is over twenty millions two hundred thousand a hundred thousand," replied Harris coolly.

"Have you ever seen Attersen?"

"No."

I thought you might have. He always spends his vacations in the woods, fishing usually. The last two years he has fished Red river. This is what happened. On Saturday I told him to go down to the sitting room to fetch up a fresh batch of dollar and five dollar bills, as we were short. It happened that in the same safe there was a number of bearer securities. Attersen soon brought me the notes I had sent him for with the keys. That was about noon on Saturday. We checked at 1 o'clock. Yesterday, Monday, Attersen did not turn up. At first I thought nothing of it, but when it came to afternoon and he had neither appeared nor sent any reason for his absence I began to smell a rat. I went down to the strong room and found that over \$100,000 in notes and bearer securities were missing.

I communicated at once with the police, and they started to make inquiries. The constable at Roberville replied that a man answering to the description of Attersen was seen by a farmer walking along the Stoneham road and heading north on Sunday morning early."

At this point a clerk knocked at the door and, entering, brought in some letters. Harris stiffened as he noticed the writing on one of them. He cut it open, and when the clerk was gone out he read aloud:

Dear Harris—I hereby resign my position in the Grand Banks of Canada. It is a dog's dirty life.

Anyway it is no good for a man of spirit. You can give the week's screen that's owing to me to buy mink and bath him for the next meeting of directors. Yours truly,

J. ATTERSSEN.

"What's the postmark?" asked Joe.

"Rimouski, Sunday, 9:30 a.m."

"It looks like Attersen's the thief," remarked Joe. "I'm inclined to think because Attersen had that letter post by a con—con—what's the word?"

"Confederate?"

"You've got it. He was seen here in town on Sunday at 10:30, and he couldn't have posted no letter in Rimouski in time for the 9:30 a.m. or Sunday unless he'd gone there on the 7 o'clock express on Saturday evening. Yes, Attersen's the thief, all right. And if that really was he they saw Stoneham ways he's had time to get thirty miles of bush between us and him, and he can go right on till he's on the Labrador. I doubt you'll see your \$100,000 again, Mr. Harris."

"Huh!" coughed Mr. Harris. "My directors won't want to pay you \$2 a day for nothing."

"Twenty dollars a day?" said Joe in his gentle voice. "I shouldn't 'a' thought the two hundred times a hundred thousand dollars could stand a strain like that!"

I laughed. "Look here, November. I think I'd like to make this bargain for you. I'll sell your services to Mr. Harris here for \$5 a day if you fail and 10 per cent of the sum you recover if you succeed. Well, Harris, is it on or off?" I asked.

"Oh, on, I suppose, confound you!" said Harris.

Twenty hours later Joe, a police trooper named Hobson and I were deep in the woods. We had hardly paused to interview the farmer at Roberville and then had passed on down the old deserted roads until at last we entered the forest, or, as it is locally called, the "bush."

"Where are you heading for?" Hobson had asked Joe.

"Red river, because if it really was Attersen the farmer saw I guess he'll have gone up there. None of them trappers there now in July month, so he can steal a canoe easy. Besides, a man who fears pursuit always likes to get into a country he knows, and you heard Mr. Harris say how Attersen had fished Red river two vacations. Besides—he stopped and pointed to the ground—"them's Attersen's tracks," he said. "Leastways, it's a black fox to a lynx pelt they are his."

"But you've never seen him. What reason have you?" demanded Hobson.

"When first we happened on them about four hours back, while you was lightin' your pipe," replied Joe, "they come out of the bush, and when we reached near Cartier's place they wen back into the bush again. Then a mile beyond Cartier's out of the bush they come on to the road again. What can that circumstain mean? Folks who made the tracks don't want to be seen. No, 8 boots, city made, mats is sun rubber boots," came on."

I will not attempt to describe our journey hour by hour nor tell how November held to the trail, following its over areas of hard ground and rock noticing a scratch here and a broken twig there. The next morning November wakened us at daylight, and once more we hastened forward.

For some time we followed Attersen's footprints and then found that they left the road.

We moved on quietly and saw that not fifty yards ahead of us a man was walking steadily up and down. His head was sunk upon his chest in an attitude of the utmost despair. He waved his hands, and on the still air there came to us the sound of his moanings muttering.

We crept upon him. As we did so Hobson leaped forward and snapping his handcuffs on the man's wrists cried:

"Well, Attersen. Use got you."

"For the gods, I'd like to hear exactly what I'm charged with," said Attersen.

"Theft of \$100,000 from the Grand Banks. May as well hand them over and put me to more trouble."

Hobson plunged his hand into Attersen's pockets and searched him thoroughly, but found nothing.

"They are not big mind," he cried.

"Try his pockets."

From the pack November produced a square bottle of whisky, some bread and a small of motion that was all.

"Where have you hidden the stuff?" demanded Hobson.

Suddenlly Attersen laughed.

"So you think I robbed the bank?" he said. "I've got my eyes down on them, though I'm not the man. Anyway I'll blow you and them for wrongfully robbing the bank."

Hobson and I made a rapid examination of the vicinity. A few yards brought them to the end of Attersen's tracks.

"Here's where he slept," said Hobson. "It's all pretty clear. He was dog tired and just collapsed, I guess that was last night. It's an old camping place, this. But where has he cached the bank's property?"

For upward of an hour Hobson searched every conceivable spot. But not so November Joe, who, after a couple of quick casts down to the river, made a fire, put on the kettle and lit six pipe.

At length Hobson ceased his exertions and accepted a cup of tea Joe had brewed.

"There's nothing cached round here and his trail stops right where he slept. He never moved a foot beyond that nor went down to the river, 10 yards away. The chap's either cached them or handed them to an accomplice on the back trail. I'm thinking he confesses all right, when I get him alone."

He stood up as November moved to take a cup of tea over to Attersen.

"No, you don't!" he cried. "Prisoner Attersen neither eats nor drinks between here and Quebec unless he confesses where he has the stuff at."

"He won't ever put you wise," said Joe definitely.

"Why do you say that?"

"'Cause he can't. He don't know himself."

"Bah!" was all Hobson's answer as he turned on his heel.

November Joe did not move as Hobson, his wrist strapped to Attersen's disappeared down the trail by which he had come.

"Well," I said, "what next?"

"I'll take another look around." Joe led the way down to the river, which though not more than fifty yards away was hidden from us by the thick trees.

It was a slow flowing river, and in the soft mud of the margin I saw, to my surprise, the quite recent traces of a canoe having been beached. Beside the canoe there was also on the mud the faint mark of a paddle having lain at full length.

Joe pointed to it. The paddle had evidently, I thought, fallen from the canoe, for the impression it had left on the soft surface was very slight.

"How long ago was the canoe here?"

"At first light—maybe between 3 and 4 o'clock," replied Joe.

"Then I don't see how it helps you at all. Its coming can't have anything to do with the Attersen robbery, for the distance from here to the camp is too far to throw a packet, and the ab-

undance of brush makes it hard to follow."

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