



The Panther and the Two Little Boys Who Drove it Away With Stones and Then Brought a Man to Shoot it.

Two Little Boys and a Big Panther

Also a Few Jolts for Nature Fakirs

By BONNYCASTLE DALE

IN the mighty Province of British Columbia, with its snow-crested ranges, its deeply penetrating valleys, its dense, dark forests, one would expect to find—after reading the stories published in the Eastern press—monstrous man-eating bears, cowardly yet ferocious panthers and wolves, “with eyes that glared like demons and naked fangs slathered with foam.” Come with the lad Fritz and me into the wonderful fir woods, where the tall tops of the trees wave far above our sight and the ground is carpeted with a century old mat of fir and cedar needles. Alas! for years I had read the fearsome description of desk writers of the animals that range our forests. One story, deeply impressed on my boyish mind, was about the grizzly that killed seven men and ate them, too—without salt. Another was of how the black and brown bears frequented the berry patches so that they might pick off an innocent kiddy that had wandered away from its busy mother. Oh! how those tales of blood-thirsty wolves howling about the little clearing made my back over “goose-flesh.” Then, too, the water was filled with sea lions and devil fish—truly what an awful place British Columbia must be to live in!

But here we are, Fritz and I, far from the scenes of mid-continent, where in thirty years' experience I had never met an animal but was too shy and rapid for satisfactory camera work. So behold us on British Columbia shores, with bag and baggage. Fritz is just fourteen—I must really apologize for that lad's slow growth. I find, by turning to stories published some twenty-five years ago, that he was just fourteen then. I can only account for it on the supposition that I discovered a wonderful medium—a plant of the typewriterius-carbon-pulpus that had kept him boyish to this day—anyone wanting the recipe and enclosing money order for an hundred guineas will receive same by return mail.

“Are you all ready, Fritz?”

“Aye, aye, sir,” answered the brave lad.

“LET us go down this trail, it's the first we have come to, and no doubt whole bands of ferocious animals will be met. Keep up heart, lad,” I said, as I felt his soft, plump arm. “By the time they get through picking you clean I will have their pictures, and no doubt the men that find our remains will preserve them.”

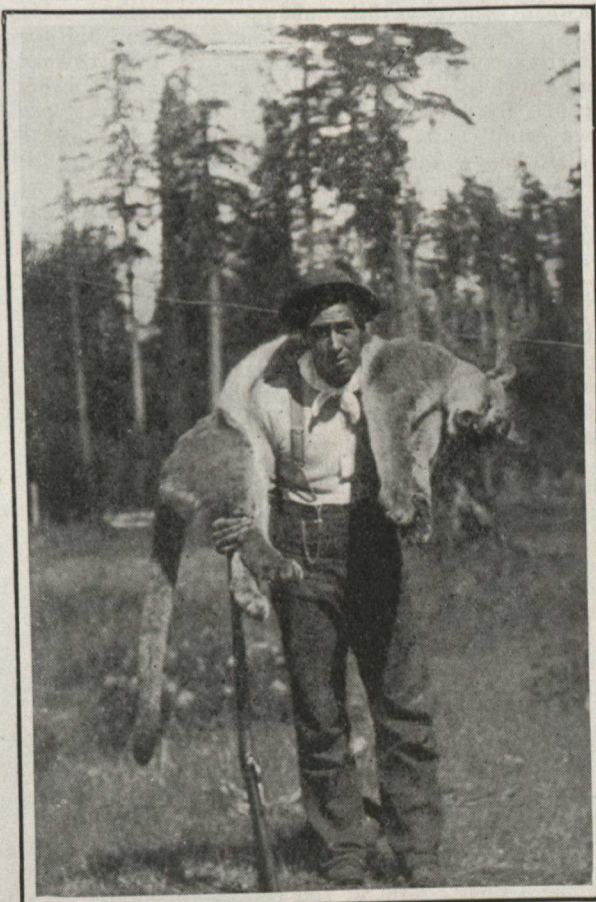
Our way led through the native forest. Tall Douglass firs made long aisles in the woods. Mighty red cedars supported a green waving roof canopy a hundred feet above our heads. All the soft debris of the woods covered the ground with so soft and yielding a substance that our progress was as noiseless as two big, black shadows. On either hand the mighty rock reared its moss-clad cliffs and benches and scarred rifts thousands of feet into the air. At our feet ran a mountain stream, a thing of swift waters and foaming rapids once the rains were on; now it was a thing of quiet beauty, just a many-curved, silvery ribbon tinkling away amid its mossy banks.

“Not a tiger yet,” gasped Fritz, for the trail was leading upwards. “Ah, he ejaculated, ‘what's that?’”

A swift leaf-crushing noise came from our right. We stood silent.

Out on a branch of an alder tree, a branch laden with bright green moss that was spattered with bright sunlight struggling through the mighty ball of verdure overhead stood a red squirrel—it would be best to call them dark-grey squirrels here—the first living thing we had seen in an hour's journey through the unbroken forest. Not a note of a bird nor the cry of an animal had enlivened the march. The noisy chattering of the inquisitive squirrel was the first vocal noise in all the great woods.

Leaving our tiny acquaintance, who industriously scolded us as we passed on up the trail, we at length



The Boys' Friend, Johnny White, Who Shot the Panther After His Dogs Had Treed It.

arrived at a beach or plateau of considerable size. Here we determined to break our fast and make our evening's camp. Our fire built, our frugal meal eaten, we watched the night mists gather over the far-distant, dark-blue Straits that lay beneath. In one long valley we could see the smoke of the supper fire of the settlers trailing off in a long, dense cloud, that settled like a newly-formed fog on the green summit of the forest. As we were in light marching order we had no tent. Our arsenal for defence against the savage animals of

these endless forests consisted of one fairly large pocket knife and one brass tripod.

Fritz chose him a bed in the soft needles where a blacktail deer had rested. I spread my blanket beside him. The inquisitive stars came out and peered down at us. The young moon rose a bow of silvery promise in the east. Then came the cry of the first wild animal. A long-drawn, tremulous whistling call.

“Why that's only a raccoon,” whispered Fritz.

Another call came upwards on the night air—a half snort, a half whistle, concluding with the whimper of a rabbit. There are no rabbits on this Island of Vancouver where we slept. It was the call of the blacktail deer to its mate, an invitation down the trail to eat of the young grass in the settler's field. Only the sharp cry of a mink, the distant murmur of a colony of gulls came to us as we drowsed to our full sleep.

The next morning Fritz was much aggrieved.

“Not a bally bear or a wolf or a panther in a ten-mile walk and a ten-hour sleep. I tell you, sir, this country is over-written.”

Could we but see into those leafy screens that hide the lower courses of the ever-diminishing stream this is what we would have seen. Two little lads—you may see them in the illustration—were even then fishing in the lower reaches of this mountain-fed rill. Where they stood the creek bed was wide and empty; only a few pools here and there sparkled amid the smooth, white, dry pebbles. The summer drought had dried the hills. The lowering water had driven the trout from many a swiftly drying rapid to the few deep pools. Here, with cedar pole and writhing worm artfully impaled on sharp hook and with but a bit of black cotton thread for a line the youthful fishermen were catching the clever, hard-fighting cut-throat trout and young of dog and coho salmon and mayhaps a rare young steelhead.

INTENT on the good sport, the boys baited and jerked and scrambled over the hot stones after the struggling wee trout that flew off the hook.

“What's that rustling in the bush?” called the younger.

In answer the elder lad seized a pebble and jerked it swiftly into the underbrush that grew closely down to the creek banks—and out walked a magnificent male panther in all his tawny splendour, a thing of creamy white breast and flank and rich yellowish tan coat, with a black strip that ran down the three-foot tail and finished in a bushy black end as big as your clenched fist. Now, pray, allow me to try and describe this beast as would our nature fakirs that never see them.

“The great cat stood with its soft-padded paws lightly pressing the smooth rocks of the creek bottom. Its green eyes of devilish cruelty malignantly glared at its prey. Its black-tipped tail swayed back and forwards with rather a serpentine motion. Slowly its big black lips parted. Slowly its huge mouth opened. One angry growl it gave that displayed so tremendous an array of great yellow fangs that the younger lad sank on his knees on the hot stones and with hands clasped prayed that he might be spared. Now the horrid beast slowly advances. One step at a time (two would be miraculous), with sinuous gliding motion it drew nearer and nearer to the devoted boy. It licked its dreadful lips in awful anticipation. With baleful glare that hypnotized its shrinking prey the monster crouched for the fatal leap and now—”

THIS is actually what did occur. No sooner had this magnificent specimen—its seven-foot ten-inch skin is beneath my feet as I write this, and a very handsome rug it makes—walked out on to the creek bottom than these two little lads—the elder is but eleven—grabbed handfuls of good, round, smooth stones and pelted it back into the bush. Then off they ran as fast as their legs would carry them.

“From fear?” ask you.

No, no; they ran to get a friend of theirs, one Johnny White, who, young man though he is, has often brought down the animals with his trusty rifle.

Back clattered the little lads, followed by the hunter and his dogs. The big, cowardly cat had retreated some fifty yards into the bush, and the dog instantly treed it and gave tongue. If these panthers had any spunk they could make a meal of many such dogs.

Ignominiously was the big cat shot, as it lay along a limb peering down at the little dogs that chased it.

“Bah, Fritz! Let us go back to the East and learn to throw stones aright; the savage beasts of the British Columbia forests exist only in the hunts—with a pen—of the impecunious desk writer.