

Where The Trail Ended

Continued from Page 8

irritated them. In that direction the grizzly moved, hiding where there seemed insufficient cover to hide a mouse, till he was within ten paces of the ponies. Then they winded him, though they could not see him, and threw up their heads with a snort. Pettit did not move, save that his hand closed upon the rifle, and he became terribly intent.

The grizzly was now directly behind the windfall to which the horses were tethered—leaning back on their ropes with snorts of terror. "Grind—grind," went the grizzly's jaws, then one, then the other of the ropes parted like strands of cotton. The horses wheeled, and stampeded into the darkness. There was a crash in the undergrowth near, and a balsam, which was stooping almost to the ground over the trail, suddenly sprang upright. At the same instant the leading horse reared grotesquely upwards, fell, and remained suspended in mid-air, only its hind hoofs upon the ground, while the balsam bobbed and bowed as the animal struggled. The second horse collided with it, swerved, but was too late in seeing a mammoth grey body hurtling through space towards it. The grizzly was on its hind legs, bounding forward like a huge gorilla, one paw upraised. The paw crashed home, full across the pony's flank, sent it spinning sideways into the bush a dozen paces away, where it lay with a moan.

Pettit jumped up. It had all been so sudden that he could not guess what had happened, but upon him was a sense of disaster. There was dead silence now, seeming more uncanny and sinister than the din of a few moments ago, and for once even Pettit's nerves failed him.

At length he lit a lantern and went out. There, strung up in the deadfall snare he had set for the grizzly, was his favorite saddle horse, already too far gone even to kick. Pettit drew his axe and cut the snare from below. The horse fell to earth, and lay very still, and then it was that Pettit saw the second horse, lying in the bush with one flank ripped open. He drew his revolver and did the only merciful thing, then he stood still and cursed. "I knew he'd come to-night," he muttered. "And it seems I wasn't far wrong, though things haven't panned out just as I'd arranged. One good horse gone and the other on the sick list for several days to come! If that ain't an unlucky beginning what is?"

At daybreak Pettit led his half-strangled horse over to Ward's property and found the place deserted. He took Ward's spare horse out of the stable and left his sick one in exchange for it, together with a note of explanation. On the way back a big white owl settled on the ledge ahead of him, flew off, and settled again. Pettit muttered hoarsely. Like all mountaineers he was a shade superstitious, and this bad omen quite upset him.

Uneventful days passed by. Sometimes the two men met, but if either saw the grizzly during that period he said nothing about it to the other. Pettit constructed several box traps up and down the range, and baited them with tempting morsels. In one he found a brace of skunks, in the second a black bear cub, and across the door of a third he found scrawled in an illiterate hand "rabbits only."

Next day Ward discovered a rabbit dangling aloft in one of his huge bear snares, and a close examination revealed the fact that it had been shot by a ball.

All the time, however, Pettit was learning what Ward already knew, and at the end of three weeks he had made himself thoroughly familiar with the home range of the grizzly. What he did next may have been brave and should have been effective, but it was not wise. He learnt that the grizzly, in passing from this valley to the next, went by way of a goat track, wide enough for a horseman to ride though too narrow for him to turn should he desire to retrace his steps midway. Once having set out along that shelf there was nothing for it but to go on to the end, and to negotiate it on foot was impossible, since at several points there were leaps too wide for a man to cross. On one

side the cliff rose sheer, on the other side was a clean drop through the canyon, depths so deep that a few hundred feet either way did not matter. The bear always passed along the shelf from the north end, so across the south end Pettit placed a fine cable net—fine, but inconceivably strong.

The grizzly knew nothing about nets. He would think them to be some kind of creeper, through which he could easily force his way. And this particular net was so designed that, should anything try to force through it, the fringes drew up, like the mouth of a bag, and inside the bag, irredeemably entangled, was the creature who had misjudged the whole affair.

According to Pettit's reckoning the plan could not fail. He had never known it to fail with mountain lion, and anyway it was worth risking. The net was spread so that there was no way of getting around it, and the guy rope made secure to the roots of an oak sprouting from the cliff edge, and this done Pettit took up his station overlooking the north end of the shelf, by which the grizzly was due to enter in a few hours' time.

On the brute came, prompt to the minute, slouching over the rugged ground at his easy, swinging stride, which seemed so slow yet which bore him out of sight in so few seconds. Pettit, from his retreat aloft, saw the bear set off along the shelf, gave him two minutes' start, then calmly rode off after him. There was to be no turning back for that bear. He was to be driven irresistibly ahead, scared into the net, and then—why then, of course, Pettit would proceed to Bellman Ward's cabin.

As Pettit neared the shelf he fired two shots and shouted, then boldly rode out along it in pursuit of the grizzly. The big brute had evidently heard him and bolted, for though Pettit could see along the track for several hundred yards, it was nowhere in sight. His pony snorted and was loath to go, for everywhere was the hot scent of grizzly, but now there was no turning back till they gained a point within a few yards of the net. So Pettit rode slowly in, shouting and firing, and Ward, who was watching the whole affair from the mountain side opposite, flung his hands to his eyes and muttered—"Tum back, you fool! O, you reckless, daredevil fool."

Ward could see the shelf for its entire length, and he lay with his glasses to his eyes, trembling a little. He saw the grizzly go up to the net, sniff it, turn undecided, then presently mount to a shelf directly above the main track. It did not seem that there was cover enough on that shelf to hide a rabbit, yet when the grizzly crouched, Ward, with his glasses, could not pick it out again.

Pettit came on, and Ward saw by the smoke that he was firing his revolver at intervals, though the distance was too great for the sound to reach him. As he drew near the spot where the grizzly had vanished, Ward held his breath, then an oath broke from his lips. He could not tell what had happened, but suddenly he saw horse and rider topple over the edge—saw them spinning giddily as they fell, faster, faster, saw them finally separate and spin apart, till both were swallowed up in the gloom of the gulch.

It was a sickening sight, and Ward rose. His weather-tanned face was pale. He closed his telescope with a snap, and stood looking down at his larrigans. "There goes one mighty good hunter and the best horse I ever had," he muttered thickly, then he straightened himself, and his jaws squared. "That grizzly's a devil!" he muttered thickly, "and I'll get him if it breaks me."

Pettit's prophecy had come true.

Two years passed by, but Ward never wavered from his steadfastness of purpose. Many hundreds of miles he travelled, at times losing the trail, but always picking it up sooner or later. He slept where the night found him, and rose in the morning from a couch hoary with frost. Sometimes a city lay in his route but he would ride straight through it, looking neither to left nor right. His hair became white and grizzled, his eyes lost their keenness. Men called him Grizzly Bell, and of course they knew. The lone-

Continued on Page 12



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