

The Lion That Went Through the Mill.

By
HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS.

All that was left of the one-time flourishing Point-View gold-mining camp was a line of empty cabins, a vast and vacant mill, one Jack Stevens, with his wife and two children, and myself.

It was lonely in the deserted camp, terribly so at times. The canon was deep and narrow, and the twilight early in the afternoon gathered round the dark spruces which lined the sides of the creek. Yet the place had a black and dreary grandeur of its own, that held one in certain fascination. We five mortals were sore put to it at times to find occupation which would take our minds from the fact that we were cut off from the rest of humanity. Every piece of necessary work was elaborated and spun out to the extreme limit. But of course it would eventually come to an end, and then we were obliged to invent some task.

One afternoon, as we were busy constructing a small water-mill, Jack stopped in his whittling and tossed the knife to his boy, saying:

"This thing wouldn't cut warm butter. Run over to the mill, Willie, and give it a rub on the grindstone. Sally, you go, too, and turn the stone for your brother."

The children trotted cheerfully off, and were soon swallowed up in the cavernous mill, while Jack and I sat down to rest, watching the sunlight creep up the eastern canon wall.

Suddenly shriek after shriek rang out from within the mill. Jack fairly flew in that direction, grabbing up an ax as he ran.

I made for the cabin to get the rifle. "Something wrong with the children?" I shouted to the astonished Mrs. Stevens, as I dashed into the house. I snatched up the rifle and rushed out again, followed by the frightened mother.

Half-way to the mill we met little Sally. She was almost out of her wits with fright.

"What is it, dear? What is it?" asked her mother, shaking her vigorously from excitement.

"Great big dog—tried to—tried to—jump on us!" cried the child between gasps.

That was enough for me. I knew there were no dogs round, but several times lately we had heard the snarling of a mountain-lion close at hand, and had also seen the prints of his padded feet in the soft earth of the creek banks. We paid little attention to these signs, for the puma, generally speaking, is a cowardly brute, with but little stomach for attacking a strong foe, unless urged on by the pangs of hunger. Then, however, with his great strength and agility, he becomes a very formidable antagonist indeed.

"Evidently," I thought, "the brute has made his den in the mill, where there are so many nooks and crannies that he could stay a year without our being a whit the wiser, unless he chose to reveal himself."

By the time I had this reasoned out I was at the door of the building. "Where are you, Jack?" I called, for it was dark as pitch in there, and at first I could see nothing.

"Here—the first set of stamps. Got the gun?"

"Yes, indeed! What happened?"

"Willie says that he and Sally were sharpening the knife, when they heard a noise and looking up, saw on the blacksmith's bench a—"

"Great big yellow animal!" burst in Willie. "Most as big as a horse. And he began to kind o' wriggle his nose at us an' holler, and Sally she screamed, an' I picked up the knife an' got ready for him. But he didn't like the noise that Sally made, I reckon, for he jumped clean over the boiler, an' he's in behind there somewhere now."

"This little story without stops was effective."

"Weren't you scared, Willie?" I asked, rather in awe of the youngster.

"Well—kind o'," he admitted. "But I was going to stay with him just the same."

"Pretty sandy boy, eh?" said Jack, with fatherly pride.

"Well, I should say so! But what do you think it was, Jack—mountain-lion?"

"Sure."

"What are you going to do?"

"Dig him out," responded Jack, promptly.

"Um!" said I.

"What's the matter? Ain't afraid, are you?"

"No—no. Not at all," I answered, earnestly. "Of course not. Why should I be. The worst that he could do would be to scatter me all over the mill. To be sure, I should prefer a more collected end, as it were. What's your plan of campaign?"

"Why, Willie will run up to the cabin and get some candles and my six-shooter, and then we'll drive him into a corner and plug him full of holes."

I whistled.

"Well," said Jack, "don't you approve of the idea?"

"Approve? Approve of chasing a full-grown puma through this mess of stamps and beams and truck by candle-light? Why, I think it is nothing less than genius which suggests the scheme. The only thing that I don't like is the idea of shooting him when we get him cornered—or he gets as cornered, as the case may be. I think it would be more sportsmanlike

to take him by the tail and snap his head off."

"Oh, quit your nonsense!" said Jack. "We can handle him all right. Now, Willie, hustle up to the house and get a handful of candies and my revolver. See that every chamber is loaded and fetch a box of cartridges besides. Tell your ma that we've got the hunt of our lives on hand. Skip now, son!"

Away went Willie in great glee. It seems that he got the needful article without attracting his mother's attention until it was too late for her to interfere; he had a well-grounded suspicion that she would enter a protest.

I tried to convince Jack that it would be the part of wisdom to wait for daylight, but he refused to listen. Jack was one of the best-hearted fellows in the world, but he possessed a lack of caution which was very irritating to more intelligent people.

Willie returned only too soon with the munitions of war, and we began our preparations.

"Are you going to get that candle lighted?" asked Jack impatiently.

I felt like answering, "Not if I can help myself," but I withstood the temptation, and said instead:

"It's the funniest candle I ever saw. I think it must be made of marble. Match doesn't seem to have any effect on it."

"That's 'cause your hand jiggles so," remarked Willie.

I bent a stern brow on the young man. "Willie," said I, "is it possible that you can make sport of the nervous agitation brought on by the knowledge of the danger through which you have just passed?"

"Beg your pardon," said Willie humbly.

Then I heard a sound that cheered my drooping soul. The mill door which Willie had closed—save us!—so that the lion could not get out, was opened, and a feminine voice shrilled through the echoing building with:

"Jack Stevens, come right out of there, and Willie, and you, too, Henry! I never heard of such foolishness! Come out, I say!"

"Look out, Mollie! Shut the door, quick! There he comes!" yelled Jack, in well-simulated fright.

"Siam! went the door, and a rapid pattering of feet showed that my only ally had deserted me. Then the hunt began.

It is a strange fact by nature that the man who is the least interested in an occasion of this kind is always the one who finds the quarry. This time went by the rule—I discovered the mountain-lion.

We had poked around for about a quarter of an hour, with the candle shadows flitting strangely and unpleasantly about, and the foolish notion entered my brain that perhaps the lion was only a creation of the children's imagination; therefore I relaxed my vigilant guard of the rear and plunged carelessly ahead. As I stooped to pass under one of the big braces of the mill, a yell as of forty-seven demented Sioux Indians assaulted my ear-drums, and I was knocked on the fat of my back in a twinkling.

"There he goes!" yelled Jack. "Are you hurt, Henry?"

"Oh, no!" I answered, cheerfully. "Nothing but a fractured skull and a few dislocated vertebrae. I hope the lion hasn't crippled himself. 'Twould be too bad to spoil the fun right at the start."

"Come on! Come on!" howled Jack. "Don't lie there talking!" And with that he and Willie tore after the fleeing beast.

The chase led up the rickety steps to the second floor of the mill. The lion made it in two jumps and Jack in four. I took it in a dignified one step at a time, not being in so much of a hurry. The scene which presented itself to my gaze as my head rose above the floor was a lively one.

The big cat, crazy with fright, bounded round the place in great leaps. After him went Jack and Willie, wildly excited and without any thought of possible consequences. All—myself included, as I found to my astonishment—were screaming and yelling their loudest.

The dust rose in stifling clouds from beneath the hurrying feet. The lion scrambled up one side of the mill, and galloped across the beams toward me.

"Head him off! Head him off!" shrieked Jack.

I let six bullets fly in the general direction of the animal before one could say "scat." I didn't hit him but the fountain of fire and noise caused him to change his mind.

He stopped midway between us, throwing quick glances first at one, then the other. He was a beautiful shot as he stood there, but the last shell had jammed in the gun, and I couldn't get it out to save me. As I tugged at the ejector Jack began to howl:

"Shoot! Shoot! You idiot! Why don't you shoot?" he waved his revolver over his head in a frenzy.

I dropped my rifle and regarded him calmly. "Think a moment," said I. "What's that in your right hand?"

He brought his hand down and looked at it. Then, I am pleased to state, he looked exceedingly foolish. "Oh!" said he, and pulled up to fire.

Before the hammer fell, though, the cat had jumped—one last beautiful spring had at least forty feet, right

down into the open door of an orchard that seemed to present a means of escape.

He landed fairly in the opening. There was a scratching and flurry, and then he slipped down to the floor below.

With a whoop of triumph Jack and I rushed to the chute. He was our captive now, beyond peradventure, as the chute, a mere box of wood, about four feet square, that led from the top floor of the mill to the stamp floor beneath us, was closed at its lower end by a hopper-shaped spout with an opening too small for anything larger than a house cat to crawl through.

The upper part of the chute, that portion above the door, was filled with partially crushed ore, which had jammed instead of sliding down, as it should have done. We were ready at the doorway, in case the brute managed to crawl up the nearly perpendicular sides. Thus his escape was cut off in every direction.

We bent eagerly over the doorway, and peered own through the darkness at our victim. There he was, his eyes shining green in the candle-light, growling and spitting.

As, rifle in hand, I leaned to get a better view, I lost my balance, and nearly pitched head first down to that incarnation of fury below. I struck out vigorously to recover myself, and in the hurry managed to discharge the rifle. The bullet smashed into the ore in the top of the chute. In an instant the whole mass, released by the shock of the bullet, slid down the chute with a dull roar. Clouds of dust puffed out into our faces, covering us with a coat of grime. There came a squawk from beneath us.

"Hoory!" said Jack. "Now we have got him."

As there was about five tons of dirt pressing down on the beast, I accepted the conclusion.

After the jubilation of victory came a council of war. Should we leave our victim to die a prolonged death from suffocation, or pull a board off and give him a more merciful end by bullet? While we were arguing a brilliant thought came to me.

"Why not take him alive?" said I. "Old Bronson, up at Deadwood, would give twenty dollars for such an addition to his menagerie."

That caught Jack immediately. We needed the money, for one thing, and then there was something novel in capturing a living puma.

We rushed down stairs and started to hunt up material for a cage. Fortune favored us. We soon found a strong crate, in which machinery had been shipped, that with a little changing served the purpose well. We put the open end of this over the mouth of the hopper; then, working with a crowbar between the slats, we pried the top board off the hopper.

A little round patch of yellow head showed above the smooth surface of the dirt. We dug round it with sticks until at last we had the whole head uncovered. At first we thought the brute was dead, but soon he opened his eyes and gazed about him.

His expression was meek and humble. Indeed his experiences were enough to break the proudest spirit. It was impossible for him to move in the closely packed earth.

Then we fell to work, and completed the excavation. When at last the puma was free, he shook himself vigorously, walked into the cage and lay down. He paid no attention while we moved the cage out and nailed the front on.

Willie and Jack went out to bring Mrs. Stevens in. We had completely forgotten that the coating of dirt altered our appearance remarkably. Therefore Jack didn't know what to make of it when his wife, after casting a glance upon him, gave one piercing shriek and shut herself up in the closet. It took some time for Jack to convince her that he was of a verity her husband, and not some strange, new kind of Indian. Then she and Jack and Willie and Sally marched into the mill.

Now I had watched the beast and can testify that he never moved a muscle. We all stood round the cage, wondering and admiring. The puma certainly was a fine animal. His body must have measured four feet.

"He's been as quiet as a cow ever since we caged him," said Jack.

"Dear me, isn't that strange?" said Mrs. Stevens. "I should have thought that he would have raised ructions."

At that moment, as if the words had convinced the animal that he was not acting a proper part, he sprang to his feet with a yell that stopped our circulation.

Jack, the hitherto untrifled, grabbed his wife and jumped backward. Willie and Sally ran behind their parents. I was too astonished to move and watched open-mouthed.

The puma went ramping, tearing mad. He bit and tore at the cage with such speed and fury that he rolled it over the place, snarling, growling, coughing and roaring, until it seemed that all the unpleasant noises of the world had been let loose in the mill.

The cage was fairly strong, but it was never intended to hold such a compound of active volcano and concentrated tornado as now raged in its midst. There came a sharp crackling; some slats flew across the floor; then, with a farewell yell, the puma sprang over the heads of Jack and his family and vanished through the open door of the mill.

"There goes our twenty dollars," said I, as soon as I was in a condition to speak.

"Yes," piped up Willie, in a tone that showed his disappointment, "and I don't believe he'll ever come back again, either." This was a true word. He never did.—Youth's Companion.

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Mark Twain has taken up the cudgels against over-speeding automobilists, and in a characteristic letter in Harper's Weekly he proposes a novel means of detecting and punishing them. The law, he says, "dresses a convict in a garb which makes him easily distinguishable from any moving thing in the world at a hundred and twenty-five yards, except a zebra. If he escapes in those clothes he cannot get far." He suggests that this principle be extended to include "his brother criminal, the Over-speeder," who every day, throughout America, runs over somebody and escapes. At present, he points out, the automobile numbers are so small that ordinary eyes cannot read them, upon a swiftly receding machine, at a distance of a hundred feet. He suggests enlarging the figures, making them readable at a hundred yards. For offences of over-speeding he would have the figures enlarged, as a penalty, in place of a fine,—to be re-enlarged for each subsequent offence. "With auto numbers readable as far as one could tell a convict from a barber-pole, none of these criminals could run over a person and escape."

To be drunk with success is to be indifferent to the sorrows of men.

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"93"
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Tonic



THOS. J. BROOKS



THOS. J. BROOKS

LOUISVILLE, Ky., May 24, 1905.

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