

# UNCLE TOM ANDY BILL

## VII. The Story of the Flood and the Mother Bear

By CHARLES MAJOR

Drawings by P. V. E. Ivory



LET a hint of hidden treasure once get into a boy's head," said Uncle Tom Andy Bill next evening, when we were all settled cozily about the fire, "and everything else gets out. There is a fascination about it that no boy can resist, and in my opinion no right minded boy ought to try to resist it.

"After Wyandotte left us, Balsar and I sat before the fire talking excitedly about the gold that lay hidden somewhere in the marvelous cave.

"Five chests!" exclaimed Balsar. "I tell you, Tom Andy Bill, we must find that cave!"

"Yes," said I, "we must; but how can we? One moon, two moons, three moons, journey from here. He might as well have said that the treasure was in the moon, for all the good his story does us."

"But think of it!" said Balsar. "Five chests! Suppose there are one thousand dollars in each chest,—and no decent chest would think of having less,—that would make five thousand dollars. Why, I tell you, Tom Andy Bill, we should be rich if we could find it! Twenty-five hundred dollars apiece! We could each buy three hundred acres of ground,—of good ground,—if we could find the treasure."

"Many a man has fallen over that little word 'if,'" said I.

"Oh, but we know so much about it already," returned Balsar. "We know that the treasure exists. We know that it is hidden in Wyandotte's cave. We know that the cave is near a great river, and we know even the number of chests of gold. We know all except the exact location of the cave."

"Yes," I said sarcastically. "That's all we don't know. How much more, for goodness sake, would you like not to know?"

"I admit it's a good deal not to know," said Balsar; "but what we have heard I think is a good deal to know. Wyandotte said the cave was near a great river. He must have meant the Ohio River."

"Or the Mississippi," I interrupted.

"Yes, he may have meant the Mississippi, or any other river; but we'll have that treasure some day, just as sure as you're alive!" said Balsar; and I said: "I hope you're right."

"Balsar and I continued to talk about the treasure till long past midnight, when we turned in and dreamed of chests of gold and caves and Indians until Solomon awakened us singing for corn.

AFTER the Wyandotte gold got to ringing in our ears, the pelts we took seemed almost worthless, and our zest in the work was sadly dimmed. We did not, however, neglect the traps and guns; but we loved best to sit before the fire after supper, discussing the treasure and talking of what we should do with the money. At times we said we should buy land; but the land would have to be cleared, and clearing was very hard work. We thought of a great many uses to which we could put the money; but always fell back on one plan: Balsar would give his part of the gold to his father, and I should give my part to my father.

"Won't it be great," said Balsar, "when I go into the house and throw a bagful of something down on the floor in front of father, and say kind of careless like, 'There's a present for you, father'? And father will look at it kind of careless like, and he'll say, 'What is it, son?' And I'll say, 'Oh, nothing much. Just a little gold.' And then— My! I wish I knew where the cave was!"

"I suppose there is not a man living that has become rich, having been poor, who will not say that his anticipation of wealth was far sweeter than the realization. I tell you, one dream dollar is worth a double eagle of gold, though I admit that it will not buy so much to eat. As long as I live, I'll never forget our dreams of treasure while sitting before the fire on our stump chairs in the cabin on Brandywine. We were rich then—richer than Croesus—in health, youth, and dreams. Merciful heavens! what more could a man ask? Health, youth, and dreams! That's the stuff heaven is made of!"

THE old man leaned forward, gazing in reverie at the fire; but he did not see the flames nor the glowing embers. He saw two boys sitting happily together in their rude cabin, dreaming and talking in their dreams. It was as if he was looking through an inverted telescope back through the long years. The boys looked so small and so far away that they seemed to him like beings of another race living in another world. We all knew what Uncle Tom Andy Bill was thinking about, and no one spoke a word to disturb his retrospection. Even little Mab felt the touch of sympathy, and she reached up from her chair, slipping her dimpled hand in his. He kissed it, lifted his head, sighed, and continued:

"Ah, life was sweet!" Then he relapsed into silence again.

After a little time Mab whispered, "It is sweet now, Uncle Tom."

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"So it is, Mab; so it is. It's always sweet; but when one gets old, some one else must furnish the sugar," answered Uncle Tom Andy Bill. "I believe I'll tell you about the flood," he continued.

"Oh, no!" protested Mab. "Tell us another bear story. We had all about the flood in Sunday school last Sunday. The teacher told us all about the Ark, and the animals, and Noah. We know all about that, and—"

"No, no, I don't intend to tell you about that flood," said Uncle Tom Andy Bill. "The flood I'll tell you about occurred while Balsar and I were living in the cabin on Brandywine, and the only animals that took any part in it were Solomon, Tige and Prince, a mother bear and her cubs."

"Oh, that's all right," said Mab, laughing contentedly and settling herself in her chair. "Now go ahead!" Mab was the toastmaster, and started the speaker off every evening.

WELL, the flood came upon us as most troubles come,—with a rush. It happened during the latter part of February. The winter had been very cold, and snow had accumulated in great quantities on the ground. I don't know that I have ever seen a more beautiful winter than that was. During the last week in February we noticed indications of a break in the cold weather.

"I especially remember one night. Balsar and I were talking treasure, as usual, before the fire. The room was too warm, and I opened the door. When I sat down again, I said:

"We'd better be moving home, Balsar, or the snow will melt, and poor old Solomon will have to drag the sled over the bare ground. That would break his heart, and if we want to save him the trouble, we shall have to be going pretty soon."

"You're right," answered Balsar. "There's another danger too. If the snow melts quickly, Bran-

dywine will come up before we can bat our eyes, and we'll be surrounded by water. The few acres of ground immediately about here is high enough to protect us from a small flood; but back of us the ground is low, and the creek is in front. If we wait till the snow melts, you and I and Solomon will have to wait for the flood to go off; for we shall be on an island. The cabin is on rather low ground, and the flood might reach even up to us. In that case, it would drive us to the little knoll behind the cabin, and we should be without shelter."

"That's right," said I. "Let us take up our traps to-morrow and start for home the day after."

"Agreed," answered Balsar. "Then we'll sell our pelts and start out to find the treasure."

"Which way will you start?" I asked, laughing. "One moon, two moon, three moon. I tell you, Balsar, we might as well start for the moon."

"Balsar's dreams, you see, were far more real to him than mine were to me."

"I don't know which way we'll start," he answered, slightly nettled. "If you don't want to try to find the treasure, say so, and I'll try it alone; for I tell you, Tom Andy Bill, I'm determined to have that gold! If we try, we may fail, probably shall; but if we don't try at all, we'll be sure not to find it."

"Your reasoning is good, Balsar," I responded. "I do want to try; but while I love to dream about it and to talk about it, I'll tell you candidly that I haven't much faith in Wyandotte's gold. But I should like to know your plan for beginning to try." You see I lacked imagination and persistence, and Balsar had plenty of both.

"I haven't a plan," he answered hesitatingly; "but I suppose the first thing to do is to ask everybody we meet to tell us if they know where there are any caves. If anyone should happen to tell us of a great cave near a river—well, we'll quit plowing corn and go to that cave. But if we hear of none

that answers Wyandotte's description, we'll wait till after the corn is laid by, and then we'll start out on our own hook. I would suggest that we go to the towns along the Ohio River and ask the people if they know of any caves in their vicinity, and— and—"

"By George! it's a good plan, Balsar," said I. "There is hope."

"Of course there is," he responded.

"From that hour I was afire with treasure fever. Next morning the weather had turned cold again, and we determined not to move till we saw further indications of a break.

THE latter part of a cold winter is the best time to take fur bearing animals. They long for spring, and come out of their burrows in search of food. It was during February that we captured most of the beavers taken by us that year. February was the cream of the season, as I might say. In ten days we took more than fifty beaver pelts, twice as many minks, and a score of weasels. We killed no less than a dozen red foxes, and so many muskrats and coons that we lost count. Of course, we devoted most of our time to hunting beavers, because their fur was far more valuable than that of any animal we could take except bear. As I have told you, the weather turned cold again; therefore we remained,



They Were as Much Frightened as I.