

LOST ON THE PRAIRIE



with its head down, at a remarkable gait. For a time the chase was close and exciting, and then the turkey became very tired, and confined itself solely to dodging from under the feet of the horse.

Henry struck at it several times, but failed to strike its head and end its life.

Then he did a very foolish thing.

In his excitement, thinking that he could easily catch a wild turkey so nearly exhausted, and forgetting that he was not riding his own horse, he sprang from his saddle and took after the gobble on foot.

The bird was gamey, and died hard. Henry had to run some distance before he finally got in a sharp blow on his head, which killed it instantly.

Panting from his run, he turned to look for his horse. With the deepest chagrin, he saw the animal disappearing over a ridge of the prairie.

He gave chase to the recreant animal, but it was fruitless, and he went back to the turkey, with what feelings may be easily imagined.

"I'm in a desperate situation now, sure enough," he soliloquized. "Lost on the prairie without horse or weapon, and no food but a single turkey. Well, I almost deserve it for leaving the horse free."

The situation was indeed serious. To you, who have never in all your lives been beyond the call and care of friends, his case will not appeal; but those who appreciate what a terrible thing it is to be alone and lost will understand the desperate plight of the boy that melancholy day on the great Texas plain.

The young scout accepted the condition bravely and philosophically, and proceeded to prepare his hard-earned dinner.

He ate heartily; and then, shouldering what remained of the turkey, he set off in the wake of the horse, believing that the animal would instinctively take the course home, and resolved to lose no time while the trail was fresh.

What a chase that horse led him! After hours of weary walking he discovered that the trail crossed itself, that he had made a great circuit, and was at the very spot where he was an hour before. Evidently the horse was lost as well as he.

He sat down to rest, and concluded that he would remain where he was till morning, and then proceed as his judgment dictated, rather than trust again to the guidance of the horse. He would travel toward the rising sun, and, by its aid, be able to travel in a straight line.

Alas! when the second day dawned it was as dark and murky as the preceding one, and the sun was not for one moment visible.

He remained where he was, and ate sparingly of the turkey.

On the third day the sun came up bright and clear, and he set out. All day long he traveled, with the sun at first in his face and then at his back, and, when night was almost upon him, he reached the bank of a river.

Here he camped for the night, going to bed supperless. "There's sure to be some camps along the river," he concluded.

And the next day he followed the course of the stream until he at last came upon the camp of some emigrants. Here he was cordially received, and he was pleasantly surprised to learn that he was only about a dozen miles from his original destination.

After a hearty meal with the emigrants, he pushed on, and, travel-worn and weary, reached the fort at nightfall.

It may be imagined that the safe delivery of the dispatches, after such an experience, afforded him no little satisfaction.

The horse that had deserted him on the wild prairie never returned to the fort, but its loss was made good by the fort commandant, and Henry was given an honorable mention and a promotion besides.

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YOU should know the delightful old colonel, Henry Pastnor.

He would tell you, in his characteristic way, some of his many strange and thrilling experiences in the early days on those wild and apparently boundless prairies that were his home for so many years. He was an old side partner of Kit Carson, a colonel in the United States army and a member of the staff of General Custer during the great Indian troubles after the Rebellion.

Once the colonel was hopelessly lost on the prairie, and I am familiar enough with the incident to relate it to you, though I fear my second-hand version of it will rob it of much of its charms.

He was in Northern Texas and was acting as government scout. On the occasion of the particular event referred to he was bearing dispatches across the lonely country from one fort to another, was unaccompanied, and was riding a borrowed horse, his own well-trained and faithful animal being stiff and crippled from a hard ride on the day preceding his start on the present mission.

When it is understood that the colonel was at that time only eighteen years of age, it will be plain that he was a remarkably brave and trustworthy young man to hold such a perilous and responsible position in the government service.

His first experience on this trip was exasperating enough, but it was only preliminary to the trouble that followed.

He had just forded a clear, bright stream, which lay across the prairie like a silver thread on cloth of brown, when he ran literally into the arms of a band of ambuscaded Comanches.

These "duffers," as he called them, robbed him of his gun and ammunition, and finally, after keeping him a prisoner several hours, tortured the animal by means of a thorn beneath the saddle, sent him at full speed out of their camp with yells of savage delight.

It was then almost midnight and dark as Egypt, for a storm was approaching and the sky was overcast.

The boy was unable to control the animal in the least, his hands being tied, and he was carried miles and miles over the prairie into a region with which he was totally unfamiliar.

The stars, his usual "night-compass," were obscured, and he was unable to judge of the direction he was going; so that at last when the horse stopped exhausted and he succeeded in liberating himself, he had no idea of his whereabouts.

Then the rain fell and the tracks of his horse were, of course, obliterated, so that any hope of returning to the trail by the way he had come was vain.

It was a pretty damp bed that he occupied that night, to be sure; but the young scout bore the hardship bravely and considered himself lucky in escaping the Indians with a whole skin.

"I'll get my bearings when the sun comes up in the morning," he thought.

But the sun was not visible all the following day. The sky was a sullen lead color, and he was as much "at sea" as ever.

About noon he became exceedingly hungry.

"There's a pretty poor show for me, it seems," he thought uneasily. "No game, no gun, no—nothing. Hold on—I've got a match! I can start a fire, if I had something to cook. But the something to cook—ah, there's the rub!"

Suddenly he bethought him of a plan to secure a dinner, which he at once put into execution.

A few hundred yards off on the prairie was a thick patch of timber, and mounting his horse, Henry made a circuit which brought the wind against his face, and then rode in among the trees.

He dismounted and secured a heavy branch about two yards long, and then, leading his horse, proceeded cautiously through the timber.

At last he arrived so close to the other side of the timber that he could see the open prairie extending beyond a long distance.

He led his horse in under an enormous live oak, whose heavy drapery of Spanish moss swept the ground on every side but one, almost completely hiding him from view.

The horse remained singularly still, and there followed several moments of utter silence, during which the young scout listened intently.

Presently he drew from his pocket a turkey-call—a small, round bone from the second joint of the turkey's wing—by the use of which he was able to imitate perfectly the "quit, quit" of the fowl. No plainsman is ever without a turkey-call.

Henry placed the bone to his lips and uttered a single call, plaintive and clear.

He listened again in silence.

No answer came to the call.

A second time he used the decoy and a loud "quit, quit" went through the wood.

Then came a faint "gobble-obble-obble!" and Henry was delighted by the sound.

He did not answer the wild turkey immediately, knowing full well that young turkey hens are shy, and a too quick response to the suitor's wooing meets with disfavor. Gobblers are exceedingly wise and cunning.

After a short time Henry called again, and immediately there was an answering gobble, not so far off as at first; and this time it

was succeeded by a second and a third, from as many different points.

Three turkeys instead of one!

Henry smiled, rapturously.

"I'm sure to get a dinner now," he told himself, gleefully.

There was another silence before he used the decoy again.

The "quit" was much lower than at first, but the effect was magical.

All three of the turkeys burst into a chorus of excited gobbles, and Henry could fancy them running toward him in the height of turkey eagerness and rivalry.

All at once, and almost simultaneously, the three majestic birds came into view. He could look through the veil of Spanish moss and out upon the prairie, and there, at the edge of the timber, he could see them strutting about with spreading tails and dragging wings.

Now if Henry had but a gun, it would only have been the work of an instant to bring down one or more of the turkeys; but gun he was without, and he meant to resort to the more difficult method of running one down and killing it with a stick.

The method is seldom employed save in the case of such an emergency as this, or when some young sportsman desires an exciting chase.

Holding the reins in his left hand, and his stout club in the other, Henry suddenly dashed from his concealment with a wild yell, and bore down upon the startled birds at full speed.

His object was to frighten them so badly that they would fly to the open prairie and away from the shelter of the trees. This plan succeeded admirably.

There was a loud and hurried flapping of wings, and the turkeys rose in the air and flew across the prairie for perhaps five hundred yards before alighting.

The young scout was close after them, with his horse on a run. As he came up with the birds, they essayed another flight, this time less than two hundred yards. On touching the ground they ran swiftly through the grass.

As Henry pressed them closely, they flew a third time, taking different directions, but flying only a very short distance.

The boy selected as his victim the fattest and heaviest of the gobblers, knowing that it would not only make the best eating, but was easiest run down as well. The turkey did not attempt to fly again, but darted along,

MAUDIE'S PRAYER

Maudie came to me last night,
Just before she went to bed,
In her little gown of white,
And the sleepy darling said:
"I tan't keep my eyes awake!"
(Lower drooped each drowsy lid);
"Won't you say 'for Jesus' sake?"
And the sleepy eyes were hid.

In my arms I took the child,
While I said her little prayer;
Sleepily she heard and smiled,
And forgot her troubles there,
And the darling said to me,
When she woke at peep of day,
"S'leepy folks tan't say their p'ayers,
'Tause they tan't see what to say."