

# THE BEARS SAVED THE LIFE OF

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THOSE four bears that I killed on the divide between the Fraser and the ocean just saved my life.

It is true that they nearly killed me in the first place and laid me up a cripple in the Canadian woods for three months, but if I had not had them to eat I should have died of starvation where I lay, for traveling was out of the question.

I left Vancouver in the latter part of July, taking with me the lightest sort of an outfit, and barely enough provisions to last me a week. A heavy coat and my regular clothing was all the protection I had from the weather. A bag of food containing flour, coffee, bacon, hardtack, sugar, and a heavy revolver for defense, comprised the balance of my outfit.

The region to which I intended going had been reported as showing rich placer prospects and some fine float rock had been brought in by a miner who gave me the exact location in which he picked it up. I was sufficiently familiar with the region to recognize his description and by the rough and unworn condition of the rock I knew that he must have found it close to the original ledge from which it came.

For that reason I thought it was better for me to make the trip alone as there would be no one to help me in case I could not make the necessary investigations and arrange for filling the claims.

My first day's journey was a hard one, as it was almost continuous uphill work, my intention being to get up in the higher ridges, where there was less timber in the way of traveling, and as the rocks were more exposed and less covered with detritus there was also a better chance of making some discoveries by the way.

The second day I made very much better time, for it was nearly all level going just enough of up and down to rest my legs with the variety. There was no brush in the way, on the contrary, there seemed to be on the very top of the divide a regular trail, which had probably been worn by wild animals, as I was far away from paths of travelers and there were no cattle in that region.

I made camp somewhat early in the head of a little ravine below the top of the ridge. It was an ideal spot, sheltered from the wind. A small stream tumbled over a fall at the upper end of the flat and fell again as it left the lower end, so I was in a way shut in, as there were steep, rocky walls on the sides. With my hunting knife, which was heavy as a mallet, I cut four pronged saplings, stuck them in the ground, put two poles in the croches lengthwise, laid some springy limbs across the poles, and had the foundation of a very good cot to keep me off the ground.

After cooking my supper I stowed my provisions under the bunk to keep the dew off them, built a good big fire and lay down to enjoy a smoke. It was somewhat cold, being held up with a free draft of air circulating under me, but I was tired and soon went to sleep.

It was not long before the cold awoke me and from then until nearly morning I spent my time huddling myself together and shivering. About dawn I fell soundly asleep and from my wakeful night leaving me so weary, I must have been in a regular trance, for I remember half waking up and dreaming that I was swinging in a hammock and that a large number of pigs were running around playing tag.

A heavy jolt nearly threw me off my bunk. I awoke with a start and heard a frightful "woosh! woosh!" right under me.

Three big bears were sniffing at my bed and one smaller one was rooting around under it trying to get the provisions out of the sack.

A blow with the barrel of my pistol on the back of the small bear under the bunk made him jump back and snap at me with another "woosh, woosh," like the noise made by a frightened hog. As he retreated a little way I got hold of the bag of provisions, which was all wet on the outside from his having mauling it around with his mouth. Taking it in my left hand and my pistol in my right I backed carefully away up the little gien under the impression that the bears would leave me alone, but as soon as I tried to climb the steep, rocky path by which I had descended their appetites seemed to get the better of their manners and they came after me, the little one first of all.

I think if it had not been for the foolishness of that little bear the rest of them might have gone away, but it seemed to have no fear and one of the big ones, which was its mother, followed it up growling, evidently intending that no harm should come to it.

"Cross as a bear" means something. It is not a mere empty expression. I realized that when I was being bullied around by those bears, not daring to run, not wishing to shoot for fear of precipitating an unnecessary conflict.

I knew that an old bear with a cub was the worst of all kinds to handle, for they are quicker, crosser and meaner than any other kind, so while the cub was bothering me the most I determined to try to kill the old one first. I did not know all about bears, but I knew enough of them to realize that there was no use shooting at their heads, which as a rule only makes them angry without hurting them unless struck in the mouth or eye. My hand was not any too steady, so I could not do this, but I did get a bullet in about where I wanted it between the neck and shoulder.

The report of the pistol and the growl of the wounded bear diverted attention for a minute and gave me a chance to get up on the hillside and replace the exploded empty cartridge with another; also to empty my cartridge box into my pocket, where I could get at the cartridges easily.

The wounded bear had recovered from her shock and came for me, but with one foreleg useless, I had just time to finish setting the pistol closed, when the two other large bears started as we got a bullet into one of them somewhere that dropped his hind legs useless and he went staggering himself by his forelegs. Only the third bear was now too close for combat.

when his grip began to loosen, he threw his head back, and I was free to crawl clear of him.

I hurriedly emptied the shells from the pistol and reloaded it from the cartridges in my pocket.

The bear which had hurt me was evidently in his last struggles. The cub was safely away at the upper end of the flat. The bear with the broken back and dragging hind legs was vainly trying to nurse his wound. The other one with the injured foreleg was coming for me. I took three or four shots to settle her. By this time I was getting so weak from loss of blood, pain and terror that I wanted to lie down and give up, but by laying my injured leg on top of the other one for a sort of sled, I managed to drag myself along on my hands up the flat until I was able to put a finishing shot in the broken-backed bear.

Some more painful crawling got me in the canyon, the bear gained on me every time. While I could go along the side-hill faster, he was much quicker and more careless in his way of rolling down hill. I tried several shots at him, each of which took effect, as was shown by increased snarlings and a way that had of biting, at the place where the wound was made, as though some living thing had bitten him there and he wished to catch it with his teeth. I had now but one shot left in my pistol and no time to put more, for the bear was close upon me.

In trying to hurry and gain time I stumbled as I went down the side of the canyon to cross the foot of the flat and before I could get up the bear was on me, teeth and claws all at once. In his rage he fortunately missed my hands. I rocked the pistol, pressed it to his side

and fired, at the same time sticking my knife into his side and fired, at the same time sticking my knife into him with the other hand.

and did not risk bringing him tumbling back wounded by another shot.

I was bleeding badly and knew of no better way to stop it than to crawl to the stream and let the cold water run over the wounds. The pain of this was intense but it washed the dirt out and I noticed that the flesh gradually turned white and the bleeding ceased. I was thirsty almost to choking. Lying down with my tired

head resting on a rock at the water's edge, I drank and lapped it up like a thirsty dog. That did me more good than anything else.

After my drink I lay down and slept, to rest only by fits and starts. I kept thinking that there might be more bears coming, and the pain of my wounds was unfeeling.

Moving about painfully and slowly though I did, it seemed to ease my mind from the horrible prospect before me of a slow death in those dreary mountains.

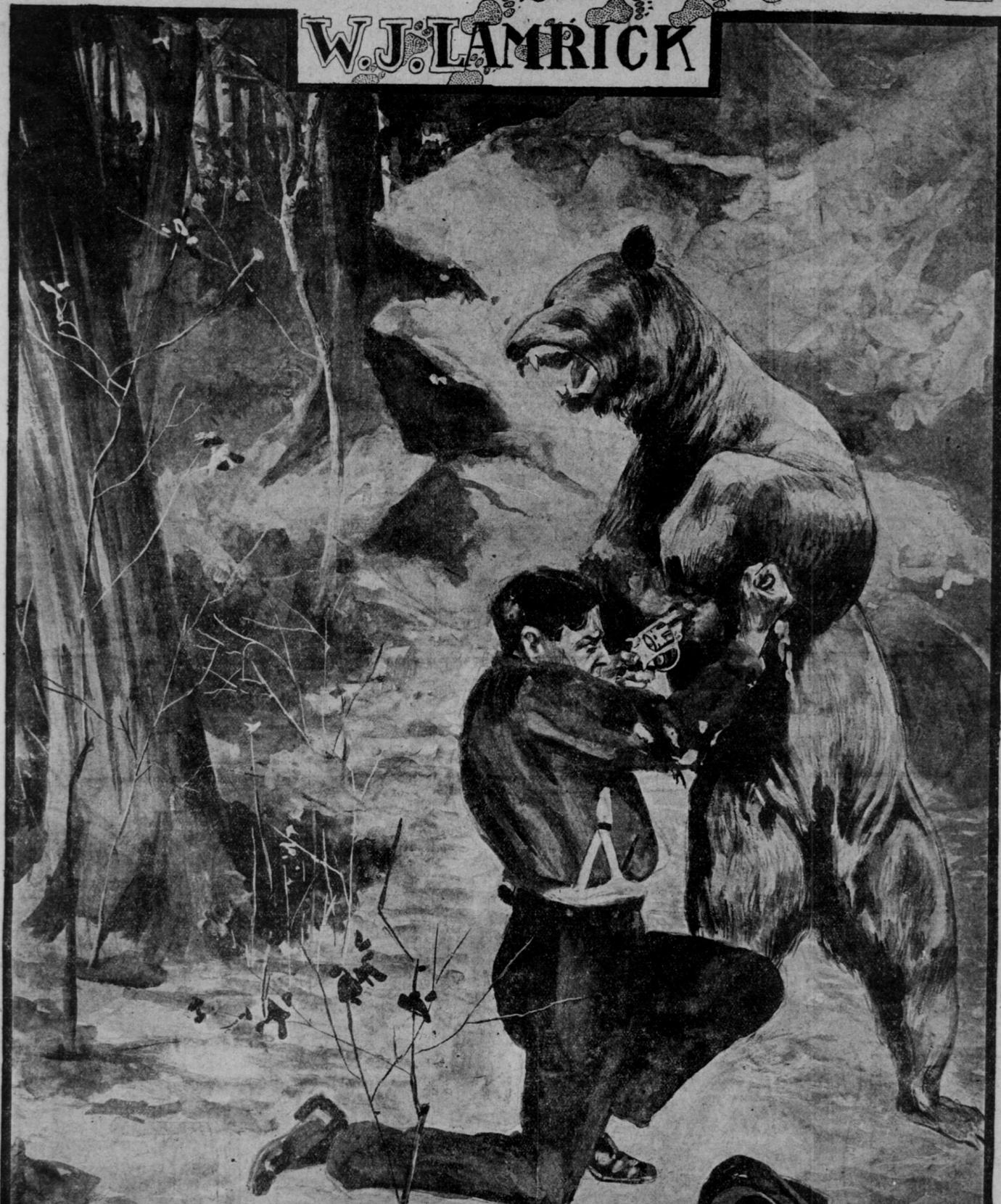
I knew from the ache in my body that there must be broken ribs in it. Whether they would ever knit so that I could crawl out of my rocky prison was a question. My leg was a sight. If I had known how

I had been, and his sympathy for me was the deeper.

Having some business of his own at Vancouver he agreed to take me there in his canoe.

And here I am.

I ROCKED THE PISTOL, PRESSED IT TO HIS SIDE AND FIRED, AT THE SAME TIME STICKING MY KNIFE INTO HIM WITH THE OTHER HAND.



I should have been tempted to cut it off, for it seemed impossible that it could ever heal. Still the worst was over; it could not hurt any more than it did then.

That was a consolation for me. I began to feel quite cheerful over the thought, and started in to make plans for the future. One thing that struck me very forcibly was that I should have to eat many a meal before I would be well enough to get away, if ever. And, fortunately, there was a fine supply of meat at hand.

Better still, there were bearskin robes to keep my wounded body warm, and, best of all perhaps, there was bear's grease in plenty to use as an ointment to heal the hurts the bears themselves had made.

It was a good illustration of being cured by a "hair of the dog that bit you."

The first thing I did was to sharpen my knife well on a piece of gritty rock by the water. Then I dragged myself over to the closest bear.

I got one-half of the bear skinned very nicely. Then came the awful work of rolling him over on his stretched out hide so that I could skin the other side. Again and again I tried, and thought each time that I should die in the attempt. Fortunately it was a trifle down hill, and at last I got him over. After that it was easier work. I began cutting the meat off in strips and laying them on the hide.

The bag of provisions was not far away. From it I took salt and pepper, which I had fortunately brought more than was required. I mixed up some together and rubbed the mixture on the strips of meat.

When I had a number prepared I hung them on a stick and had it across on two rocks to dry. The work was getting interesting now, and I commenced to feel like a sort of a second Robinson Crusoe, only that I was much more handicapped, for he had the entire resources of a large tropical island at his command, and I had but one small rocky dell. He had the cargo of a freighted ship for stores. I had three dead bears and a small hand-sack of provisions. He was whole and strong; I was maimed and half-dead.

Fortunately for me there were large quantities of down timber on the little flat, and it took but little exertion to get it.

Having demonstrated to myself that there was to be no danger of starving, I prepared an unusually good supper of broiled bear's meat, biscuit and coffee, after which, lighting my pipe, I set to work to tan the bearskin by rubbing it with grease and smoking the over the fire. Although not completely tanned, it made a welcome addition to my covering that night.

The next day I began with more enthusiasm than I should have believed possible at my work of butcher shop and tannery. I dressed the remaining two bears so that they would keep until I could get to them to cut up the meat. From the intestines I prepared some catgut strings, to use in snatching birds in case I should need to do so.

When I had finally completed cutting up the meat I had an easier time with my work, which was simply to smoke it and do my own cooking.

It was fortunate that I had been compelled to such painful activity during the time that I was first wounded, for it gave the injured muscles and tendons the stretchings which they needed, and I think it is to that and the large amount of fresh air I had that I owe my recovery.

It was slow and painful at best, for while the exercise had helped the muscles it had not helped the bones any, and they knitted more slowly than they would have done had I been able to give them the required rest.

For two and a half months I lived on the meat of those bears and the carefully economized provisions which I had with me. I then realized that, although I was unable to safely risk the long trip which I must make to get to the coast, the increasing cold weather promised a snow-fall, which might bury me for the winter and forever.

How far or how fast I could travel I had no idea. It was then necessary for me to take all of my small stock of food and my bearskin robes as well, for without them the cold frosty nights would have chilled me to death.

The pack was not a heavy one for a strong man, but for me it was a mountain. How I ever made the distance to the Indian village on the coast I cannot tell. It seems to me now a miracle. In miles I do not know the distance, but in steps it was hundreds of thousands, and each of them, short and halting though it was, cost me more pain than I like to remember.

Many a time, overturned by my scanty pack, I fell to the ground from pain and weakness, and then, unable to rise but driven on by will power alone, I would crawl and drag myself forward with my hands, in the same way that the bear with the broken back had done.

The most thankful moment of my life was when, approaching the coast with the last of my provisions gone and nearly ready to drop and die, I heard the barking of dogs at an Indian camp on an inlet.

Those Indians were full of the kind of charity that counts. From the little that they had they gave me all I needed.

One of them, an old hunter, had once been caught in almost the same way that