

ing. He was clearly master of his environment.

"I'm glad you've come along today, Mr. Quaritch. There's a fine buck nosing around by Widenedy Pond." Then, humor lit a spark in his splendid gray eyes as he looked up at me. "But we'll have a cup of tea first."

November Joe's weakness for tea had long been a target on which I had exercised my faculty for irony and banter. Perhaps it was a relief to find any weak point in this alarmingly adequate young man.

"I don't know about hunting, November," I said. "I've come with a message for you. . . . A man named Henry Lyon has been shot in his camp at Big Tree Portage. A lumberman found him and telephoned the news. The Chief of Police wants you to take on the case. He told me to say that success would mean fifty dollars."

"That's too bad," said he. "I was hoping you'd come for a hunt. . . . You'll find beans, flour and coffee inside," he pointed to the shack. "I suppose I must be getting off, myself."

"How far is it to Big Tree Portage?" I asked.

"Five miles to the river, and eight up it."

"I'd like to go with you."

He gave me one of his brief smiles. "Then, you must wait for your breakfast until we are in the canoe. Turn the mare loose; she'll make Harding's this afternoon."

Without more words, November slung up his pack and set out through the woods.

I have sometimes wondered whether he was not irked at the prospect of my too-easily proffered companionship, and whether he did not at first intend to shake me off by obvious and primitive methods. He has in later days assured me that neither of my suppositions was correct; but there has been a far-off look in his eyes while he denied them, which leaves me still half-doubtful.

However these things may be, it is certain that I had my work cut out for me in keeping up with November, who, although he was carrying a pack, while I was unloaded, traveled through the woods

at an astonishing pace. When at last we came out on the bank of a strong and swiftly flowing river, I was fairly exhausted, and felt that had the journey continued much longer I must have been forced to give in.

November threw down his pack and signed to me to remain beside it, while he walked off downstream, only to reappear with a canoe.

We were at once aboard her. Of the remainder of our journey I am sorry to say I can recall very little. The rustle of the water as it hissed against our stem, and the wind in the birches and junipers on the banks, soon lulled me; the swaying figure of November, as he stood plying the pole in the stern, gave place to the creatures of dreams. I was only awakened by the canoe touching the bank at Big Tree.

Big Tree Portage is a recognized camping-place, situated between the great main lumber-camp of Briston and Harpur and the settlement of St. Amiel, and it lies about equi-distant from both. Old fires in the clearing showed gray, not more than thirty yards from the water. Thus, from the canoe we were in full sight of the scene of the tragedy.

A small shelter of boughs stood beneath the spreading branches of a large fir, and the ground all about was strewn with tins and debris. On a bare space in front of the shelter beside the charred logs of a camp-fire, a patch of blue caught my eye. This resolved itself into the shape of a huge man. He lay upon his face, and the wind fluttered the blue blouse which he was wearing. It came upon me with a shock that I was looking at the body of Henry Lyon, the murdered man.

November, standing up in the canoe, a woods' picture in his buckskin shirt and jeans, surveyed the scene in silence; then, he pushed off again and paddled up and down, staring at the bank. After a bit, he put in and waded ashore. In obedience to a sign, I stayed in the canoe, from which I was able to watch the movements of my companion. First, he went to the body and examined it with

minute care; next, he disappeared within the shelter, came out, and stood for a minute staring toward the river; finally, he called to me to come ashore.

I had seen November turn the body over, and as I came up I was aware of a great orange-bearded face, horribly pale, confronting the sky. It was easy to see how the man had died, for the bullet had made a hole at the base of the neck. The ground beside him was torn up, as if by some small sharp instruments.

The idea occurred to me that I would try my hand at detection. I went into the shelter, where I found a blanket, two freshly-flayed bear-skins and a pack, which lay open. I came out again, and carefully examined the ground in all directions. Suddenly glancing up, I saw November Joe watching me with a kind of grim and covert amusement.

"What are you looking for?" said he.

"The tracks of the murderer."

"You won't find them."

"Why?"

"He made none."

I pointed out the spot where the ground was torn.

"The lumberman that found him . . . spiked boots," said November.

"How do you know he was not the murderer?"

"He did n't get here till Lyon had been dead for hours. Compare his tracks with Lyon's—much fresher. No, Mr. Sport, that cock won't fight."

"Then, as you seem to know so much, tell me what you *do* know."

November replied very gently:

"I know that Lyon reached here in the afternoon of the day before yesterday. He'd come from visiting his traps up stream. He had n't been here more'n a few minutes and was lighting a pipe in the shelter there, when he heard a voice hail him. He came out and saw a man in a canoe shoved into the bank. That man shot him dead and cleared off—without leaving a trace."

"How can you be sure of all this?" I asked; for not one of these things had occurred to my mind.

"Because I found a pipe of tobacco not rightly lit, but just charred on top, beside Lyon's body, and a newly-used match in the shack. The man that killed him come downstream and surprised him."

"How can you tell he came down stream?"

"Because if he'd come up, Lyon would 'a seen him from the shack," said November, with admirable patience.

But I was not done with him yet. "You say the shot was fired from a canoe?"

"The river's too wide to shoot across, and, any way, there's the mark of where the canoe rested against the bank. No, this is the work of a right smart woodsman, and he's not left me one clew as to who he is. But I'm not through with him, mister. Such men as him needs catching . . . fer's boil the kettle."

We laid the dead man inside the shack, and then, coming out once more into the sunlight, sat down beside a fire, which we built among the stones on the bank of the river. Here, November made tea in true woods fashion, drawing all the strength and bitterness from the leaves by boiling them.

I was wondering what he would do next, for it appeared to me that our chances of catching the cunning murderer were infinitesimal, since he had left no clew save the mark on the bank where his canoe had rested among the reeds while he fired his deadly bullet. I put my thought into words.

"You're right," said November. "When a chap who's used to the woods' life takes to crime, he's harder to lay hands on than a lynx in an alder patch."

"There is one thing which I don't understand," said I. "Why did not the murderer sink Lyon's body in the water? It would have been well hidden there."

The young woodsman pointed to the river which foamed in low rapids about dark heads of rock.

"He could n't trust her; the current's sharp, and would put the dead man ashore as like as not," he replied. "Besides, if he'd landed to carry it down to his canoe, he'd have left tracks. No, he's done his work to rights, from his point of view."

I saw the force of the argument, and nodded.

"And more'n that, there's few people," he went on, "travel up and down this river. Lyon might 'a laid in that clearing till he was a skeleton, but for the chance of that lumber-jack happening along."

"Then, which way do you think the murderer has fled?"

"Can't say," said he; "and, any how, he's may be eighty miles away by this."

"Will you try to follow him?" I asked.

"No, not yet. I must find out something about him first—if I can. But look here, mister, there's one fact you have n't given much weight to. This shooting was premeditated. The murderer knew that Lyon would camp here. The chances are a hundred to one against their having met by accident. The chap that killed him followed him down stream. Now, suppose I can find Lyon's last camp; I may learn something more. It can't be very far off, for he had a tidy-sized pack to carry, besides those green skins which loaded him a bit. . . . And, any way, it's my only chance."

So, we set out on our walk. November soon picked up Lyon's trail, leading from Big Tree Portage to a disused tote-road, which again led us due west between the aisles of the forest. From midday on through the whole of the afternoon we traveled. Squirrels chattered and hissed at us from the spruces, hardwood partridges drummed in the clearings; and once a red-deer buck bounded across our path, with its white flag waving and dipping as it was swallowed up in the sun-speckled orange and green of the woods.

Lyon's trail was fortunately easy to follow, and



We ran down in the canoe to St. Amiel