

WATER ON A RED-HOT STOVE

Why is it impossible to throw a few drops of water on a red-hot stove? Perhaps you never knew that this can't be done.

The water can never touch the stove at all. What you see is a few drops rolling rapidly over the surface. These become smaller and smaller until they entirely disappear. If the drops are on a perfectly level place it can be proved that they are not in contact with the stove itself by the fact that one can see under them to the other side of the room.

What is the explanation? The bottom of the drop changes at once to steam or vapor on coming close to the hot surface. This vapor is supplied by the drop as it gradually goes away—in other words, the drop rests on a cushion of vapor until it entirely disappears.

You may ask why the drop is not immediately evaporated or changed to steam. The answer is this: The water vapor that intervenes between its under surface and the red-hot stove is not a good conductor of heat; consequently the full intensity of the heat cannot get to the water itself, the only amount available for this purpose being that transmitted through the vapor.

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NOVEMBER
JOE
The Detective
of the Woods
by Hesketh Prichard.

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CHAPTER II.

The Crime at Big Tree Portage.

I HAVE sometimes wondered whether he was not irked at the prospect of my proffered companionship and whether he did not at first intend to shake me off by obvious and primitive methods. I had my work, and more than 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.

He moved from the thighs, bending a little forward. However thick the underbrush and the trees, he never once halted or even wavered, but passed onward with neither check nor pause. Meanwhile, I blundered in his tracks until at last, when we came out on the bank of a strong and swiftly flowing river, I was fairly done 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.

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. 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 Bristol and Harpur and the settlement of St. Amiel, and it lies about equidistant from both. A small shelter of boughs stood beneath the spreading branches of a large fir; 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 campfire, a patch of blue caught my eye. This, as my sight grew accustomed to the light, 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 wood picture in his buckskin shirt and jeans, surveyed the scene in silence, then pushed off again and paddled up and down, starting 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 watched 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 ginger bearded face, horribly pale, confronting the sky. It was easy to see how the man had died, for the bullet had torn 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. There I found a blanket, two freshly dayed bearskins and a pack, which lay open. I came out again and carefully examined the ground in all directions. Suddenly looking 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."

"He didn't make 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 didn'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. Lyon reached here in the afternoon of the day before yesterday. He'd been visiting his traps upstream. He hadn't been here more'n a few minutes and was lighting his pipe in the shelter there when he hears a voice call him. He comes out and sees 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?"

"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 this shack. The man that killed him come downstream and surprised him."

"How can you tell he came downstream?"

"Because, if he'd come upstream

Lyon would 'a' seen him from the shack," said November with admirable patience.

"You say the shot was fired from a canoe?"

"The river's too wide to shoot across, and, anyway, there's the mark of where the canoe rested again 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 he needs catching—let's boil the kettle."

We laid the dead man inside the shack, and 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 that our chance of catching the murderer was 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 thoughts 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 a alder patch."

"Why did not the murderer sink Lyon's body in the water? It would have been well hidden there."

"He couldn't trust her; the current's sharp and would put the dead man ashore as like as not," he replied. "And if he'd landed to carry it down to his canoe, he'd have left tracks. And more'n that, Lyon might 'a' laid in that clearing till he was a skeleton, but for the chance of that lumberjack happening along. There's one fact you haven'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 downstream. 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, anyway, it's my only chance."

So we set out upon 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 until Joe found the deserted camp.

The very first thing my eye lit upon caused me to cry out in excitement, for side by side were two beds of balsam branches that had evidently been placed under the shelter of the same tent cover. November, then, was right, Lyon had camped with some one on the night before he died.

I called out to him. His quiet patience and an attitude as if rather detached from events fell away from him like a cloak, and with almost uncanny swiftness he was making his examination of the camp. But I was destined to disappointment, for, as far as I could see, Joe discovered neither clew nor anything unusual.

To begin with, he took up and sifted through the layers of balsam boughs which had composed the beds, but apparently made no find. From them he turned quickly to kneel down by the ashy remains of the fire and to examine the charred logs one by one. After that he followed a well marked trail that led away from the lake to a small marsh in the farther part of

which masts of dead timber were standing in great profusion. Nearer at hand a number of stumps showed where the campers had chopped the wood for their fire.

After looking closely at these stumps November went swiftly back to the camp and spent the next ten minutes in following the tracks which led in all directions. Then once more he came back to the fire and methodically lifted off one charred stick after another. At the time I could not imagine why he did this, but when I understood it the reason was simple and obvious as was that of his every action when once it was explained.

Before men leave camp they seem instinctively to throw such trifles as they do not require or wish to carry on with them in the fire, which is generally expiring, for a first axiom of the true camper in the woods is never to leave his fire alight behind him in case of a chance ember starting a forest conflagration.

In this case November had taken off

nearly every bit of wood before I heard him utter a smothered exclamation as he held up a piece of stick.

I took it into my own hands and looked it over. It was charred, but I saw that one end had been split and the other end sharpened.

"What in the world is it?" I asked, puzzled.

November smiled. "Just evidence," he answered.

I was glad he had at last found something to go upon, for, so far, the camp had appeared to produce parsimoniously little that was suggestive. Nevertheless, I did not see how this little bit of spruce, crudely fashioned and split as it was, would lead us very far.

November spent another few minutes in looking everything over a second time, then he took up his ax and split a couple of logs and lit the fire. Over it he hung his inevitable kettle and boiled up the leaves of our morning brew with a liberal handful freshly added.

"Well," I said, as he touched the end of a burning ember to his pipe, "has this camp helped you?"

"Some," said November. "And you?" He put the question quite seriously though I suspect not without some inward irony.

"I can see that two men slept under one tent cover, that they cut the wood for their fire in that marsh we visited and that they were here for a day, perhaps two."

"One was here for three days, the other one night," corrected November. "How can you tell that?"

November pointed to the ground at the far side of the fire.

"To begin with, No. 1 had his camp pitched over there," said he; then, seeing my look of perplexity, he added pityingly: "We've a westerly wind these last two days, but before that the wind was east, and he camped the first night with his back to it. And in the



"Why did not the murderer sink Lyon's body in the water?"

new camp one bed o' boughs is fresher than the other."

The thing seemed so absurdly obvious that I was nettled.

"I suppose there are other indications I haven't noticed," I said.

"There might be some you haven't mentioned," he answered warily.

"What are they?"

"That the man who killed Lyon is thick set and very strong; that he has been a good while in the woods without having gone to a settlement; that he owns a blunt hatchet such as we wood chaps call 'tomahawk No. 3,' that he killed a moose last week; that he can read; that he spent the night before the murder in great trouble of mind and that likely he was a religious kind o' chap."

As November reeled off these details in his quiet, low keyed voice I stared at him in amazement.

"But how can you have found out all that?" I said at last. "If it's correct it's wonderful!"

"I'll tell you, if you want to hear, when I've got my man—if I ever do get him. One thing more is sure, he is a chap who knew Lyon well. The rest of the job lies in the settlement of St. Amiel, where Lyon lived."

We walked back to Big Tree portage and from there ran down in the canoe to St. Amiel, arriving the following evening. About half a mile short of the settlement November landed and set up our camp. Afterward we went on. I had never before visited the place, and I found it to be a little colony of scattered houses straggling beside the river. It possessed two stores and one of the smallest churches I have ever seen.

"You can help me here if you will," said November as we paused before the larger of the stores.

"Of course I will. How?"

"By letting 'em think you've engaged me as your guide, and we've come in to St. Amiel to buy some grub and gear we've run short of."

"All right." And with this arrangement we entered the store.

I will not make any attempt to describe by what roundabout courses of talk November learned all the news of desolate little St. Amiel and of the surrounding countryside. The provincial police had evidently found means to close the mouth of the lumberjack

Continued on page 7.

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