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"Yes, Mr. Petersham," said he in answer to a question. "When you went away last fall I did think things was settling down a bit, but a week ago while Puttick was on the eastern boundary I thought I'd go up to Senlis lake, where last year Keoghan had the brook netted. I was making a fire to boil my kettle when a shot was fired from the rocks up above, and the next I knew was that I was hit pretty bad through this knee.

"It was coming on dark, and I rolled into a bush for cover, but whoever it were didn't fire at me again. I don't think he wanted to kill me. If he had he could have put the bullet into my heart just as easy as in my leg. I tied up the wound the best way I could.



His Face Was Like That of Some Medieval Prisoner.

Lucky the bullet hadn't touched any big artery. Next morning I crawled up the hill and lit signal smokes till Puttick came. He brought me in

"I suppose Puttick had a look round for the tracks of the fella who gunned you?" asked November. "He did, but he didn't find out noth-

ing. There was a light shower between dark and dawn, and the ground on the hill above there is mostly rock." Such, then, was the story of our coming to Kalmacks, and for the next two or three days we spent our time fishing in the streams, the only move in the direction of the main object of our visit being that Joe, whom Linda insisted upon accompanying, walked over to Senlis lake and had a look at the scene of Worke's accident. The old tracks, of course, were long since washed away, and I thought, with the others, that Joe's visit had been fruitless until he showed me the shell of

an exploded cartridge. "The bullet which went through Bill Worke's leg came out of that. I found it on the hill above. It's a 45.75 central fire rifle, an old '76 model."

"This is a great discovery you and Miss Petersham have made."

Joe smiled. "There's nothing much to it, anyway. She lost her brooch somewhere by the lake and was lookin' for it when I found this." Joe indicated the exploded shell. "The mountains is full of 45.75 guns, 1876 pattern. Some years back a big ironmongery store down here went bust and threw a fine stock of them caliber rifles on the market. A few dollars would buy one, so there's one in pret-

ty nigh every house and two and three in some. Howsoever, it may be useful to know that him that shot Bill Worke carried that kind o' a rifle. Still, we'd best keep it to ourselves, Mr. Quaritch."

"All right," said L "By the way, Joe, there's a side to the situation I don't understand. We've been here four days, and nothing has happened. I mean Mr. Petersham has had no word of where to put the \$5,000 black-

"Maybe there's a reason for that"

"I can't think of any." "What about the sand?"

"The sand?" I repeated.

"Yes, haven't you noticed? I got Mr. Petersham to have two loads of sand brought up from the lake and laid all round the house. It takes a track wonderful. I guess it's pretty near impossible to come nigh the house without leaving a clear trail. But the first rainy night, I mean when there's

"Yes, they'll likely come."

"They'll come?"

rain enough to wash out tracks."

But as it happened Joe was wrong. I believe that his reasoning was correct enough, and that it was the fear of leaving such marks as would enable us to gather something of their identity that kept the enemy from pinning upon our door the letter which finally arrived prosaically enough in a cheap store envelope that bore the Priamville postmark. The contents of this letter were as follows:

Petersham, you go alone to Butler's cairn 11 o'clock Friday night. Take the dollars along; youl be met their and can hand it over.

Below was a rude drawing of a cof-

Petersham read the note out to Joe and myself. "Where's Butler's cairn?" he asked.

"I know it," said November. "Butler's cairn is on a hill about two miles

west of here." "I suppose you won't go?" said L

"With the money? Certainly not!" "You can hardly go without it." "Why not?"

"You would be shot down." "I'd talk to the ruffians first and then if there was any shooting, I guess I'd

be as much in it as they would." "I suggest that we all three go," I

But Joe would have none of this

"There's nothing to be gained by that. Mr. Quaritch. You bet these fellas'll keep a pretty bright lookout. If they saw three of us coming they'd

shoot as like as not. "I was thinking I might slip right along to Butler's cairn and maybe get a look at the fellas."

"No!" said Petersham decidedly. "I won't allow it. You say yourself you would be shot."

"I said we would get shot, not me sham turned to me. alone. Three men can't go quiet where one can."

And so finally it was arranged, though not without a good deal of ar-

gument with Petersham. "That's a fine fellow," remarked Petersham.

I nodded.

"The kind of fellow who fought with and bettered the Iroquois at their own game. I wonder what he will see at Butler's cairn?"

It was past midnight when Joe appeared again. Petersham and I both asked for his news.

November shook his head. "I've aothing to tell; nothing at all. I didn't see no one."

"Where were you?" "Lying down on top of the cairn it-

self. There's good corners to it." "You could see well round, then, and if any one had come you would not have failed to observe them."

"Couldn't be too sure. There was some dark times when the moon was shut in by clouds. They might 'a' come them times, though I don't think they did. But I'll know for certain soon unless it comes on heavy rain. There's a fine little lake they calls Butler's pond up there. You take your fishpole, Mr. Quaritch, and we'll go over at sunrise and you try for some of them trout, while I take a scout round for tracks."

This we did, but search as Joe would he failed to discover any sign at all. He told me this when he joined me at breakfast time.

After I had caught a nice string of trout we walked back to Kalmacks. circling round the house before we entered it. The sand lay undisturbed by any strange footstep, but when we got in we found Mr. Petersham in a state of the greatest excitement.

"One of the blackmailers has had a long talk with Puttick," he told us. "What?"

"Incredible as it sounds, it is so." "But when was this?"

"Early this morning, some time aft er you and Joe started. This is how it happened. Puttick had just got ur and gone down with a tin of rosin and some spare canvas and tin to mend that canoe we ripped on the rock yes terday. In fact, he had only just be

gun working when he was startled by a voice ordering him to hold up his

nands."

"By Jove, what next?"

"Why, he held them up. He had no choice. And then a man stepped out from behind the big rock that's just above where the canoe lies." "I hope Puttick recognized him."

"No. The fellow had a red handker chief tied over his nose and mouth. Only his eyes showed under the brim of a felt hat that was pulled low down over them He carried a rifle, that he kept full on Puttick's chest while they talked. But I'll call Puttick. He can finish the account of the affair himself. That's best."

Puttick answered to the call, and after running over the story, which was exactly similar to that we had just heard from Petersham, he continued:

"The tough had a red hanker tied over his ugly face, nothing but his eyes showing. He had me covered with his gun to rights all the time."

"What kind of a gun was it?" "I didn't see; leastways I didn't notice."

"Well, had he anything to say?" "He kep' me that way a minute before he started speaking. 'You tell Petersham.' says he, 'it's up to him to pay right away. Tell him unless be goes at once to Butler's cairn and takes the goods and leaves them there on the big flat stone by the rock he'll hear from us afore evening, and he'll hear in a way that'll make him sorry all his life. And as for you, Ben Puttick, you take a hint and advise old man Petersham to buy us off, and he can't be too quick about doing it either. If he tries to escape we'll get him on the road down to Priamville.' After he'd done talking he made me put my watch on the canoe-that I'd turned bottom up to get at that rent-and warned me not to move for half an hour. When the half hour was up I come right away and tell you."

"Tall or short was he?" "Medium-like."

watching for us."

"Which way did he go when he left

"West; right along the bank." "You followed his trail after the

half hour was over?" Puttick opened his eyes. "He didn't leave none."

"Left no trail! How's that?" cried Petersham.

But Joe interposed. "You mean he kep' to the stones in the bed o' the

brook all the time?" "That's it. And, anyway, if I'd got fooling lookin' for his tracks I'd 'a' got a bullet in me same as Bill Worke," ended the little man. "They're all

CHAPTER XV.

The Man In the Black Hat. E were silent for a moment Then Petersham turned to Puttick.

"What do you think of it, Ben? You have some experience of these squatters up here. Do you think they mean business?"

"There ain't much fooling about these mountain men." Puttick answered bitterly. "And now I says this to you, Mr. Petersham, and I can't never say nothing stronger. If you're minded to stay on here at this place, you must pay if you don't want Miss Petersham hurt or killed."

"My daughter?" "That's how I read it. What else could he mean? He said you'd be sorry all your life."

"Good heavens! Even the most hardened ruffians would not hurt a woman. You don't think it possible?" Peter-

"I think that Linda runs a very great risk by staying."

"Then she shall go." But when Linda was called and the facts made clear to her she absolutely refused to leave Kalmacks.

"You will force me to pay the money, then," said Petersham, "though I am well aware that this demand will only be the first of many. Whenever these blackmailers want \$1,000, aye, or \$10,000, they know they will only have to ask me to supply them. But I can't risk you-I'll pay."

Joe turned to Petersham. "If you climb down now I'll be right sorry I ever come with you. I don't hold with backing down under a bluff."

I, who knew Joe, was surprised to hear him offer so definite an opinion in such strong terms, but Linda clapped her hands.

"It's all nonsense, isn't it? Why, if any one attempted to hurt me Joe would make him regret it, wouldn't you, Joe?" She flashed him a glance of her glorious eyes.

"I'd sure try to hard enough," replied November. "And now, Mr. Quaritch, I'll ask Ben here to show me just where the fella stood when he held him up this morning."

So Joe went down to the brook, and I went with him. We were soon beside the canoe which Puttick had been mending.

"Here's where I was, and there's where he stood," said Puttick, pointing to a small mass of rock close by. "And there's the place I set down my watch." November glanced over the details and then followed the bank of the brook for some distance. Presently he returned.

"Did you strike his trail?" asked Puttick.

"No, the stones lead right away to the lake, and like as not he came in a canoe."

"Like as not," agreed Puttick and resumed his work on the canoe which had been so rudely interrupted earlies in the day. We found Linda in the living room

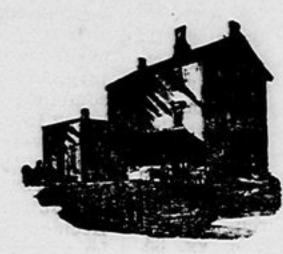
arranging some fishing tackle. She at once appealed to Joe. "Oh, Joe, I want to try some of those English lures Mr. Quaritch gave

Continued on page 7.



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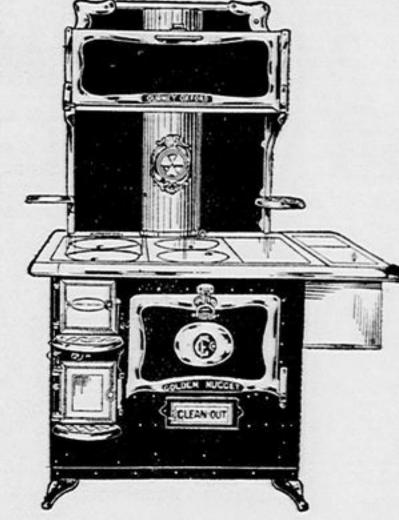
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