

AWAY IN THE WILDERNESS



R·M·BALLANTYNE

married to her, and then take her home—so here I am on my way to claim my bride. But there's one thing that puzzles me sorely."

"What is that?" asked Heywood.

"I've never heard from Marie from that day to this," said Jasper.

"That is strange," replied the other; "but perhaps she cannot write."

"That's true. Now, you speak of it, I do believe she can't write a line; but, then, she might have got some one to write for her."

"Did you leave your address with her?"

"How could I, when I had no address to leave?"

"But did you ever send it to her?"

"No, I never thought of that," said Jasper, opening his eyes very wide. "Come, that's a comfort—that's a good reason for never havin' heard from her. Thankee, lad, for putting me up to it. And, now, as we must be up and away in another hour, I'll finish my nap."

So saying, Jasper put out his pipe and once more drew his blanket over him. Heywood followed his example, and while he lay there gazing up at the stars through the trees, he heard the worthy hunter muttering to himself, "That's it; that accounts for my not hearin' from her."

A sigh followed the words, very soon a snore followed the sigh, and ere many minutes had passed away, the encampment was again buried in darkness and repose.

CHAPTER V

JOURNEYING IN THE WILDERNESS

IT seemed to Heywood that he had not been asleep more than five minutes, when he was aroused by Jasper laying his heavy hand on his shoulder. On rubbing his eyes and gazing round him, he found that the first streak of dawn was visible in the eastern sky, that the canoe was already in the water, and that his companions were ready to embark.

It is usually found that men are not disposed to talk at that early hour. Heywood merely remarked that it was a fine morning, to which Jasper replied by a nod of his head. Nothing more was said. The artist rolled up his blanket in a peice of oiled-cloth, collected his drawing materials and put them into their bag, got into his place in the centre of the canoe, and immediately went to sleep, while Jasper and the Indian, taking their places in the bow and stern, dipped the paddles into the water and shot away from the shore. They looked mysterious and ghostly in the dim morning light; and the whole scene around them looked mysterious and ghostly

too, for the water in the lake seemed black, and the shores and islands looked like dark shadows, and a pale thin mist rolled slowly over the surface of the water and hung overhead. No sound was heard except the light plash of the paddles as the two backwoodsmen urged their little canoe swiftly along.

By degrees the light of day increased, and Jasper awakened Heywood in order that he might behold the beautiful scenery through which they passed. They were now approaching the upper end of the lake, in which there were innumerable islands of every shape and size—some of them not more than a few yards in length, while some were two or three hundred yards across, but all were clothed with the most beautiful green foliage and shrubbery. As the pale yellow of the eastern sky began to grow red, ducks and gulls bestirred themselves. Early risers among them first began to chirp, and scream, and whistle their morning song,—for there are lazy ones among the birds, just as there are among men. Sometimes, when the canoe rounded a point of rock, a flock of geese were found floating peacefully among the sedges, sound asleep, with their heads under their wings. These would leap into the air and fly off in great alarm, with much difficulty and tremendous splutter, reminding one of the proverb, "The more haste the less speed." At other times they would come upon a flock of ducks so suddenly, that they had no time to take wing, so they dived instead, and thus got out of the way.

Then the yellow hue of sunrise came, a good while before the sun himself rose. The last of the bright stars were put out by the flood of light, and multitudes of little birds on shore began to chirp their morning song; and who can say that this was not a hymn of praise to God, when, in the Holy Bible itself, in the 150th Psalm, we find it written, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."

At last the sun burst forth in all his golden glory. Water, earth, and sky glowed as if they had been set on fire. What a blessed influence the sun has upon this world! It resembles the countenance of a loving father beaming in upon his family, driving away clouds, and diffusing warmth and joy.

The birds were now all astir together, insomuch that the air seemed alive with them. There are small white gulls, with red legs and red beaks, in those large inland lakes, just as there are on the ocean. These began to utter their sweet wild cries so powerfully that they almost drowned the noise of all the rest. Yet the united chorus of the whole was not harsh. It was softened and mellowed by distance, and fell on the ears of the two hunters as pleasantly as the finest music does in the ears of men trained to sweet sounds from infancy.

Not until the sun had ascended a considerable way on its course through the sky, did Jasper think it necessary to lay down his paddle. By that time the upper end of the lake had been reached, and the hunter ran the canoe close to a ledge of flat rock and

jumped ashore, saying that it was time for breakfast.

"I had almost got to believe I was in paradise," said Heywood, as he stepped ashore.

"I often think there's a good deal of the garden of Eden still left in this world," replied Jasper, as he carried the kettle up to the level part of the rock and began to kindle a fire, while the Indian, as usual, hewed the wood. "If we could only make use of God's gifts instead of abusin' them, I do believe we might be very happy all our days."

"See there, Jasper, is one of the birds I want so much to get hold of. I want to make a drawing of him. Would you object to spend a shot on such game.

Heywood pointed as he spoke to a grey bird, about the size of a blackbird, which sat on a branch close above his head. This creature is called by the fur-traders a whisky-John, and it is one of the most impudent little birds in the world! Wherever you go throughout the country, there you find whisky-Johns ready to receive and welcome you, as if they were the owners of the soil. They are perfectly fearless; they will come and sit on a branch within a yard of your hand, when you are eating, and look at you in the most inquisitive manner. If they could speak, they could not say more plainly, "What have you got there?—give me some!" If you leave the mouth of your provision sack open they are sure to jump into it. When you are done eating they will scarcely let you go six yards away before they make a dash at

the crumbs; and if you throw sticks or stones at them, they will hop out of the way, but they will not take to flight!

"It would be a pity to waste powder on them critters," said Jasper, "but I'll catch one for you."

As he said this he took a few crumbs of broken meat from the bottom of the provision sack and spread them on his right hand; then he lay down under a bush, covered his face with a few leaves, and thrust out his hand. Heywood and the Indian retired a few paces and stood still to await the result.

In a few seconds a whisky-John came flying towards the open hand, and alighted on a branch within a yard of it. Here he shook his feathers and looked very bold, but suspicious, for a few minutes, turning first one eye towards the hand, and then the other. After a little he hopped on a branch still nearer, and, seeing no motion in the hand, he at last hopped upon the palm and began to peck the crumbs. Instantly the fingers closed, and Jasper caught him by the toes, whereupon the whisky-John began to scream furiously with rage and terror. But I am bound to say there was more of rage than of terror in his cry.

Jasper handed the passionate bird over to the artist, who tried to make a portrait of him, but he screamed and pecked so fiercely that Heywood was obliged to let him go after making a rough sketch.

Breakfast was a repetition of the supper of the night before; it was soon disposed of, and the three

travellers again set forth. This time Jasper sang one of the beautiful canoe songs peculiar to that country, and Heywood and Arrowhead, both of whom had good voices, joined in the chorus.

They soon passed from the lake into the river by which it was fed. At first the current of this river was sluggish, but as they ascended, it became stronger, and was broken here and there by rapids.

The severe toil of travelling in the backwoods now began. To paddle on a level lake all day is easy enough, for, when you get tired you can lay down the paddle and rest. But in the river this is impossible, because of the current. The only way to get a rest is to push the bow of the canoe ashore. It was a fine sight to see the movements of Jasper and the Indian when they came to the first rapid. Heywood knew that he could be of no use, so, like a wise man, he sat still and looked on.

The rapid was a very strong one, but there were no falls in it; only a furious gush of water over the broken bed of the river, where many large rocks rose up and caught the current, hurling the water back in white foam. Any one who knew not what these hunters could do, would have laughed if you had told him they were about to ascend that rapid in such an egg-shell of a canoe!

They began by creeping up, in-shore, as far as they could. Then they dashed boldly out into the stream, and the current whirled them down with lightning speed, but suddenly the canoe came to a

halt in the very middle of the stream! Every rock in a rapid has a long tail of still water below it; the canoe had got into one of these tails or eddies, and there it rested securely. A few yards higher up there was another rock, nearer to the opposite bank, and the eddy which tailed off from it came down a little lower than the rock behind which the canoe now lay. There was a furious gush of water between them and this eddy, but the men knew what the canoe could bear, and their nerves were strong and steady. Across they went like a shot. They were swept down to the extreme point of the eddy, but a few powerful strokes of the paddle sent them into it, and next moment they were floating behind the second rock, a few yards higher up the stream.

Thus they darted from rock to rock, gaining a few yards at each dart, until at last they swept into the smooth water at the head of the rapid.

Many a time was this repeated that day, for rapids were numerous; their progress was therefore slow. Sometimes they came to parts of the river where the stream was very strong, but deep, and not broken by rocks, so that they had no eddies to dart into. In such places Arrowhead and Heywood walked along the bank, and hauled the canoe up by means of a line, while Jasper remained in it to steer. This was hard work, for the banks in places were very steep, in some parts composed of soft mud, into which the men sank nearly up to their knees, and in other places covered so thickly with bushes that it was

almost impossible to force a path through them. Jasper and the Indian took the steering-paddle by turns, and when Heywood required a rest he got into his place in the middle of the canoe; but they never halted for more than a few minutes at a time. All day they paddled and dragged the canoe slowly up against the strong current, and when night closed in they found they had advanced only three miles on their journey.

The last obstacle they came to that day was a roaring waterfall about thirty feet high. Here, it might have been thought, was an effectual check to them at last. Nothing without wings could have gone up that waterfall, which filled the woods with the thunder of its roar; but the canoe had no wings, so what was to be done?

To one ignorant of the customs of that country, going on would have seemed impossible, but nothing can stop the advance of a backwoods voyager. If his canoe won't carry him, he carries his canoe! Jasper and his friends did so on the present occasion. They had reached what is called a portage or carrying-place, and there are hundreds of such places all over Rupert's Land.

On arriving at the foot of the fall, Heywood set off at once to a spot from which he could obtain a good view of it, and sat down to sketch, while his companions unloaded the canoe and lifted it out of the water. Then Jasper collected together as much of the baggage as he could carry, and clambered up the bank with

it, until he reached the still water at the top of the fall. Here he laid it down and returned for another load. Meanwhile Arrowhead lifted the canoe with great ease, placed it on his shoulders, and bore it to the same place. When all had been carried up, the canoe was launched into the quiet water a few hundred yards above the fall, the baggage was replaced in it, and the travellers were ready to continue their voyage. This whole operation is called *making a portage*. It took about an hour to make this portage.

Portages vary in length and in numbers. In some rivers they are few and far between; in others they are so numerous that eight or twelve may have to be made in a day. Many of the portages are not more than an eighth of a mile in length, and are crossed for the purpose of avoiding a waterfall. Some are four or five miles in extent, for many long reaches in the rivers are so broken by falls and rapids, that the voyagers find it their best plan to take canoes and baggage on their backs and cut across country for several miles; thus they avoid rough places altogether.

Jasper delayed starting for half an hour, in order to give Heywood time to finish his sketch of the fall. It began to grow dark when they again embarked, so, after paddling up stream until a convenient place was found, they put ashore and encamped within sight of another waterfall, the roar of which, softened by distance, fell upon their ears all that night like the sound of pleasant music.

CHAPTER VII

A SAVAGE FAMILY, AND A FIGHT WITH A BEAR

ABOUT a week after our travellers left the outpost, Arrowhead had an adventure with a bear, which had well-nigh cut short his journey through this world, as well as his journey in the wilderness of Rupert's Land.

It was in the evening of a beautiful day when it happened. The canoe had got among some bad rapids, and, as it advanced very slowly, young Heywood asked to be put on shore, that he might walk up the banks of the river, which were very beautiful, and sketch.

In half an hour he was far ahead of the canoe. Suddenly, on turning round a rocky point, he found himself face to face with a small Indian boy. It is probable that the little fellow had never seen a white man before, and it is certain that Heywood had never seen such a specimen of a brown boy. He was clothed in skin, it is true, but it was the skin in which he had been born, for he had not a stitch of clothing on his fat little body.

As the man and the boy stood staring at each other, it would have been difficult to say which opened his eyes widest with amazement. At first Heywood fancied the urchin was a wild beast of some sort on two legs, but a second glance convinced him that he was a real boy. The next thought that occurred to the artist was, that he would try to sketch him, so he clapped his hand to his pocket, pulled out his book and pencil, and forthwith began to draw.

This terrified the little fellow so much, that he turned about and fled howling into the woods, Heywood thought of giving chase, but a noise attracted his attention at that moment, and, looking across the river, he beheld the boy's father in the same cool dress as his son. The man had been fishing, but when he saw that strangers were passing, he threw his blanket round him, jumped into his canoe, and crossed over to meet them.

This turned out to be a miserably poor family of Indians, consisting of the father, mother, three girls, and a boy, and a few ill-looking dogs. They all lived together in a little tent or wigwam, made partly of skins and partly of birch-bark. This tent was shaped like a cone. The fire was kindled inside, in the middle of the floor. A hole in the side served for a door, and a hole in the top did duty for window and chimney. The family kettle hung above the fire, and the family circle sat around it. A dirtier family and filthier tent one could not wish to see. The

father was a poor weakly man and a bad hunter; the squaw was thin, wrinkled, and very dirty, and the children were all sickly-looking, except the boy before mentioned, who seemed to enjoy more than his fair share of health and rotundity.

"Have ye got anything to eat?" inquired Jasper, when the canoe reached the place.

They had not got much, only a few fish and an owl.

"Poor miserable critters," said Jasper, throwing them a goose and a lump of venison; "see there—that'll keep the wolf out o' yer insides for some time. Have ye got anything to smoke?"

No, they had nothing to smoke but a few dried leaves.

"Worse and worse," cried Jasper, pulling a large plug of tobacco from the breast of his coat; "here, that'll keep you puffin' for a short bit, anyhow."

Heywood, although no smoker himself, carried a small supply of tobacco just to give away to Indians, so he added two or three plugs to Jasper's gift, and Arrowhead gave the father a few charges of powder and shot. They then stepped into their canoe, and pushed off with that feeling of light hearted happiness which always follows the doing of a kind action.

"There's bears up the river," said the Indian, as they were leaving.

"Have ye seen them?" inquired Jasper.

"Ay, but could not shoot—no powder, no ball. Look out for them!"

"That will I," replied the hunter, and in another moment the canoe was out among the rapids again, advancing slowly up the river.

In about an hour afterwards they came to a part of the river where the banks were high and steep. Here Jasper landed to look for the tracks of the bears. He soon found these, and as they appeared to be fresh, he prepared to follow them up.

"We may as well encamp here," said he to Arrowhead; "you can go and look for the bears. I will land the baggage, and haul up the canoe, and then take my gun and follow you. I see that our friend Heywood is at work with his pencil already."

This was true. The keen artist was so delighted with the scene before him, that the moment the canoe touched the land he had jumped out, and, seating himself on the trunk of a fallen tree, with book and pencil, soon forget everything that was going on around him.

Arrowhead shouldered his gun and went away up the river. Jasper soon finished what he had to do, and followed him, leaving Heywood seated on the fallen tree.

Now the position which Heywood occupied was rather dangerous. The tree lay on the edge of an over-hanging bank of clay, about ten feet above the water, which was deep and rapid at that place. At first the young man sat down on the tree-trunk near its root, but after a time, finding the position not quite to his mind, he changed it, and went close to

the edge of the bank. He was so much occupied with his drawing, that he did not observe that the ground on which his feet rested actually overhung the stream. As his weight rested on the fallen tree, however, he remained there safe enough and busy for half an hour.

At the end of that time he was disturbed by a noise in the bushes. Looking up, he beheld a large brown bear coming straight towards him. Evidently the bear did not see him, for it was coming slowly and lazily along, with a quiet meditative expression on its face. The appearance of the animal was so sudden and unexpected, that poor Heywood's heart almost leaped into his mouth. His face grew deadly pale, his long hair almost rose on his head with terror, and he was utterly unable to move hand or foot.

In another moment the bear was within three yards of him, and, being taken by surprise, it immediately rose on its hind legs, which is the custom of bears when about to make or receive an attack. It stared for a moment at the horrified artist.

Let not my reader think that Heywood's feelings were due to cowardice. The bravest of men have been panic-stricken when taken by surprise. The young man had never seen a bear before, except in a cage, and the difference between a caged and a free bear is very great. Besides, when a rough-looking monster of this kind comes unexpectedly on a man who is unarmed, and has no chance of escape, and rises on its hind legs, as if to let him have a full view

of its enormous size, its great strength, and its ugly appearance, he may well be excused for feeling a little uncomfortable, and looking somewhat uneasy.

When the bear rose, as I have said, Heywood's courage returned. His first act was to fling his sketch-book in Bruin's face, and then, uttering a loud yell, he sprang to his feet, intending to run away. But the violence of his action broke off the earth under his feet.¹ He dropt into the river like a lump of lead, and was whirled away in a moment!

What that bear thought when it saw the man vanish from the spot like a ghost, of course I cannot tell. It certainly *looked* surprised, and, if it was a bear of ordinary sensibility, it must undoubtedly have *felt* astonished. At any rate, after standing there, gazing for nearly a minute in mute amazement at the spot where Heywood had disappeared, it let itself down on its forelegs, and, turning round, walked slowly back into the bushes.

Poor Heywood could not swim, so the river did what it pleased with him. After sweeping him out into the middle of the stream, and rolling him over five or six times, and whirling him round in an eddy close to the land, and dragging him out again into the main current, and sending him struggling down a rapid, it threw him at last, like a bundle of old clothes, on a shallow, where he managed to get on his feet, and staggered to the shore in a most melan-

¹ See Frontispiece.

choly plight. Thereafter he returned to the encampment, like a drowned rat, with his long hair plastered to his thin face, and his soaked garments clinging tightly to his slender body. Had he been able to see himself at that moment, he would have laughed, but, not being able to see himself, and feeling very miserable, he sighed and shuddered with cold, and then set to work to kindle a fire and dry himself.

Meanwhile the bear continued its walk up the river. Arrowhead, after a time, lost the track of the bear he was in search of, and, believing that it was too late to follow it up farther that night, he turned about, and began to retrace his steps. Not long after that, he and the bear met face to face. Of course, the Indian's gun was levelled in an instant, but the meeting was so sudden, that the aim was not so true as usual, and, although the ball mortally wounded the animal, it did not kill him outright.

There was no time to re-load, so Arrowhead dropped his gun and ran. He doubled as he ran, and made for the encampment; but the bear ran faster. It was soon at the Indian's heels. Knowing that farther flight was useless, Arrowhead drew the hatchet that hung at his belt, and, turning round, faced the infuriated animal, which instantly rose on its hind legs and closed with him.

The Indian met it with a tremendous blow of his axe, seized it by the throat with his left hand, and endeavoured to repeat the blow. But brave and

powerful though he was, the Indian was like a mere child in the paw of the bear. The axe descended with a crash on the monster's head, and sank into its skull. But bears are notoriously hard to kill. This one scarcely seemed to feel the blow. Next instant Arrowhead was down, and, with its claws fixed in the man's back, the bear held him down, while it began to gnaw the fleshy part of his left shoulder.

No cry escaped from the prostrate hunter. He determined to lie perfectly still, as if he were dead, that being his only chance of escape; but the animal was furious, and there is little doubt that the Indian's brave spirit would soon have fled, had not God mercifully sent Jasper Derry to his relief.

That stout hunter had been near at hand when the shot was fired. He at once ran in the direction whence the sound came, and arrived on the scene of the struggle just as Arrowhead fell. Without a moment's hesitation he dropt on one knee, took a quick but careful aim and fired. The ball entered the bear's head just behind the ear and rolled it over dead!

Arrowhead's first act on rising was to seize the hand of his deliverer, and in a tone of deep feeling exclaimed, "My brother!"

"Ay," said Jasper with a quiet smile, as he re-loaded his gun; "this is not the first time that you and I have helped one another in the nick of time, Arrowhead; we shall be brothers, and good friends to boot, I hope, as long as we live."

"Good," said the Indian, a smile lighting up for one moment his usually grave features.

"But my brother is wounded, let me see," said Jasper.

"It will soon be well," said the Indian carelessly, as he took off his coat and sat down on the bank, while the white hunter examined his wounds.

This was all that was said on the subject by these two men. They were used to danger in every form, and had often saved each other from sudden death. The Indian's wounds, though painful, were trifling. Jasper dressed them in silence, and then, drawing his long hunting knife, he skinned and cut up the bear, while his companion lay down on the bank, smoked his pipe, and looked on. Having cut off the best parts of the carcass for supper, the hunters returned to the canoe, carrying the skin along with them.

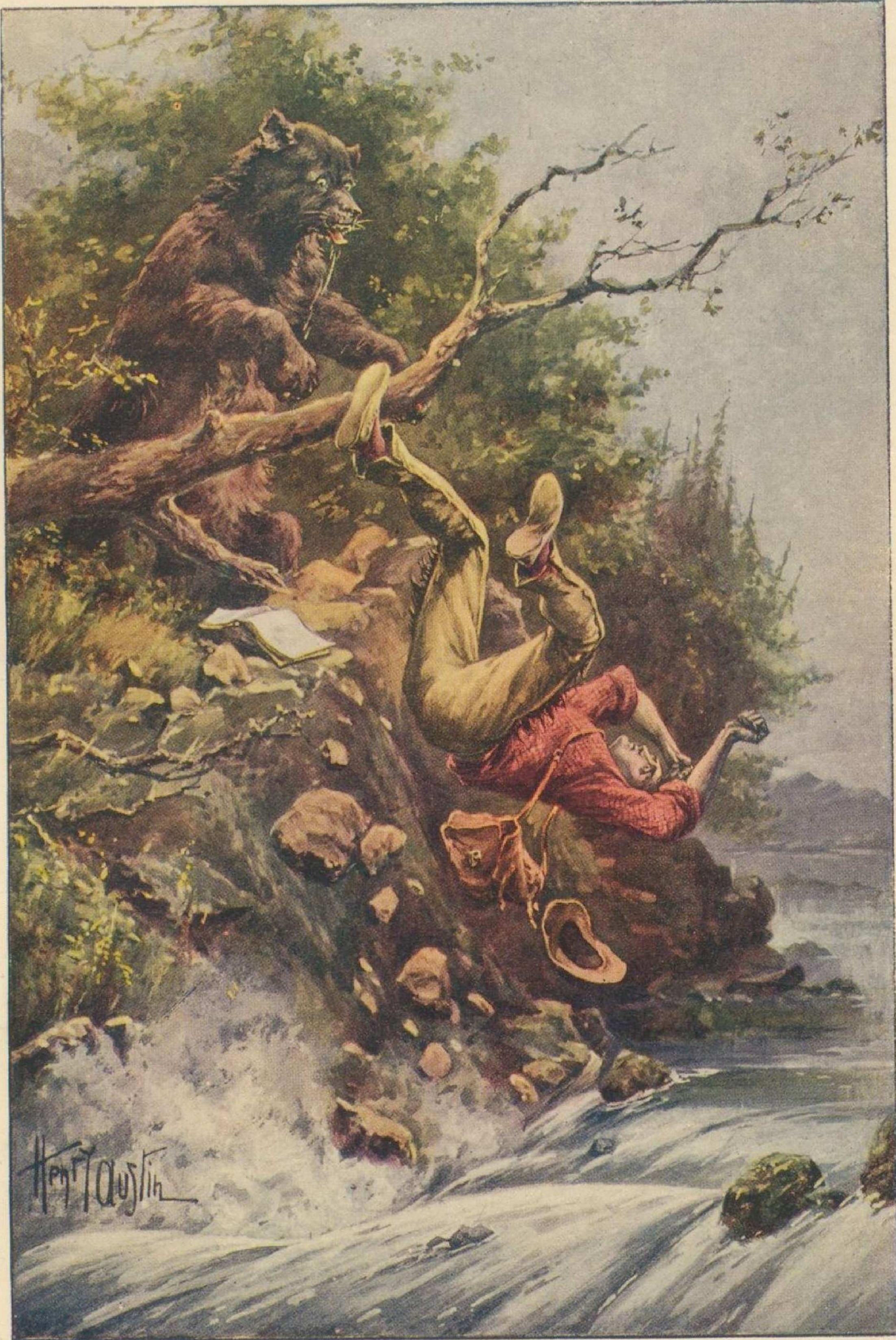
CHAPTER VIII

RUNNING THE FALLS—WILD SCENES AND MEN

NEXT day the travellers reached one of those magnificent lakes of which there are so many in the wild woods of North America, and which are so like to the great ocean itself, that it is scarcely possible to believe them to be bodies of fresh water until they are tasted.

The largest of these inland seas is the famous Lake Superior, which is so enormous in size that ships can sail on its broad bosom for several days *out of sight* of land. It is upwards of three hundred miles long, and about one hundred and fifty broad. A good idea of its size may be formed from the fact, that it is large enough to contain the whole of Scotland, and deep enough to cover her highest hills!

The lake on which the canoe was now launched, although not so large as Superior, was, nevertheless, a respectable body of water, on which the sun was shining as if on a shield of bright silver. There were numbers of small islets scattered over its surface;



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LIFE AMONG THE RED INDIANS
AND
FUR-TRADERS OF NORTH AMERICA

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