

November Joe

The Detective of the Woods

By HESKETH PRICHARD

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(Continued from Last Week)

"Get out of here," he cried, "or"—he paused on catching sight of Joe and myself.

"I'll go if you wish it," said Stafford dangerously, "but if I do it'll be to return with the police."

"And look here, Mr. Dutchman," broke in Joe gently, "if it comes to that you'll get put away for a fifteen years' rest cure, sure."

"Who are you?" bellowed Jurgensen.

"He's the man that told me your wife was weakly and spilled the water from the kettle when she lifted it, for he found her tracks at my place by the stove. He's the man that discovered six out log ends in Aleut Sam's fire on Blith Island when we knew Sam had no ax with him. He's the man I owe a lot to."

"Me also," said Jurgensen venomously as he bowed his head. "You want your terms?" he asked at last.

Stafford had his answer ready. "My own foxes—that's restoration—and two of yours by way of interest—that's retention."

"Ant if I say no?"

"You won't. Where's my foxes?"

Jurgensen hesitated, but clearly there could be only one decision in the circumstances. "I haf them in my kennels," he answered.

"Wire inclosures?" cried Stafford in disgust.

"Yes."

"You can't grow a decent peit in a cage," snapped Stafford, with the eagerness of a fanatic mounted upon his hobby. "You must let them live their natural life as near as possible or their color suffers. The pigmentary glands get affected."

"Poo! I haf read of all that in the book 'Zientific Zelection of Color Forms.'"

"Yes," put in Joe, "you read a good bit while you were at Mr. Stafford's place, that's so—lying in Mr. Stafford's blank."

Jurgensen raised startled eyes. "You see me?"

"No."

"How you know then?"

Joe laughed. "I guess the spiders must 'a' told me," said he.

CHAPTER XIII.

Linda Petersham.

NOVEMBER JOE had bidden me farewell at the little siding known by the picturesque name of Silent Water.

"Spect you'll be back again, Mr. Quaritch, as soon as you've fixed them new mining contracts, and then, maybe, we'll try a wolf hunt. There's a tidy pack comes out on the Lac Noir when it's moonlight."

But the shackles of business are not so easily shaken off, and the spring had already come before another vacation in the woods had begun to merge into possibility. About this time Linda Petersham rang me up on the telephone and demanded my presence at lunch.

"But I am engaged," said I. "What is it?"

"I will tell you when you come, I want you."

I made another effort to explain my position, but Linda had said her last word and rung off. I smiled as I called up the picture of a small Greek head crowned with golden hair, a pair of dark blue eyes and a mouth wearing a rather imperious expression.

The end of it was that I went, for I have known Linda all her life. The Petersham family consists of Linda and her father, and, though in business relations Mr. Petersham is a power to be reckoned with, at home he exists for the sole apparent purpose of carrying out his charming daughter's wishes. It is a delightful house to go to, for they are the happiest people I know.

I found myself the only guest, which surprised me, for the Petersham mansion has a reputation for hospitality.

"James, I want you to do this for me. I want you to persuade pop not to do something."

"I persuade him? You don't need me for that—you, who can make him do or not do anything, just as you wish?"

"I thought I could, but I find I can't."

"How is that?"

"Well, he is set on going back to Kalmacks."

"Kalmacks? I know it is the place Julius Fischer built up in the mountains. He used to go shooting and fishing there."

"That is it. It's a place you'd love—lots of good rooms and standing way back on a mountain slope, with miles of view and a stream tumbling past the very door. Father thought it last year and with it all the sporting rights

Julius Fischer claimed. The woods are full of moose, and there are beaver and otter, and that's where the trouble came in."

"But Fischer had trouble from the day he went up to shoot at Kalmacks. He had to run for it, so I was told. Didn't your father know that? Why did Mr. Petersham have anything to do with the place?"

"Oh, it was just one of pop's notions, I suppose," said Linda, with the rather weary tolerance of the modern daughter.

"They are a dangerous lot round there."

"He knew that. They are squatters—trappers who have squatted among those woods and hills for generations. Of course they think the country belongs to them. Pop knew that, and in his opinion the compensation Julius Fischer offered and gave them was inadequate."

"It would be," I commented. "I could without effort imagine Julius Fischer's views on compensation, for I had met him in business."

"Well, father went into the matter, and he found that the squatters had a good deal to be said for their side of the case, so that he did what he thought was fair by them. He paid them good high prices for their rights, or what they considered to be their rights, for in law, of course, they possessed none. Every one seemed pleased and satisfied, and we were looking forward to going there this spring for the fishing when news came that one of father's game wardens had been shot at."

"Shot at?"

Linda nodded the Greek head I admired so much.

"Yes. Last autumn father put on a couple of wardens to look after the game, and they have been there all winter. From their reports they have got on quite well with the squatters, and now suddenly, for no reason that we can guess, one of them, William Worke by name, has been fired upon in his camp."

"Killed?" I asked.

"No, but badly wounded. He said he was sure the bullet could have been put into his heart just as easily, but it was sent through his knee by way of a notice to quit, he thinks."

"Those folks up there must be half savages."

"They are, but that's not all. Three days ago a letter came, meant for father, but addressed to me. Whoever wrote it must have seen father and knew that he was not the kind of man who could be readily frightened, so they thought they would get at him through me. It was a horrible letter."

The words were written upon a sheet torn from an old account book. They ran as follows:

You, Petersham, you mean skunk! Don't you come in our woods unless you willing to pay five thousand dollars. Bring the goods and you be told where to put it, so it will come into the hands of ritters. Dollars ain't nothin' to you, but they can keep an expanding bullet out your hide.

"Do you think it is a hoax?"

"Well, no, I can't honestly say I do."

"Which means, in plain language, that if father does not pay up that \$5,000 he will be shot."

"Not necessarily. He need not go up to Kalmacks this fall."

"But of course he will go! He's more set on going than ever. You know father when he's dealing with men. And he persists in his opinion that the letter is probably only bluff."

I considered for a little before I spoke. "Linda, have you really sent for me to try to persuade your father that it would be wiser for him not to go to Kalmacks?"

Linda's lip curled scornfully. "I should not put it just like that! I can imagine father's answer if you did. I'm afraid it will be no good letting you say anything you don't know how."

"You mean that I have no tact?"

She smiled at me, and I instantly forgave her. "Well, perhaps I do, but you know it is far better to be able to give help than just to talk about it. Father is determined on going to Kalmacks, and I want you to come with us."

"Is?" I cried.

"Naturally, I'm going."

"But it is absurd! Your father would never allow it!"

"He can't prevent it, dear James," she said softly. "I don't for a moment suppose that even the Kalmacks people would attack a woman. And father is all that I have in the world. I'm going."

"Then I suppose I shall have to go too. But tell me what purpose does your father think he will serve by undertaking this very risky expedition?"

"He believes that the general feeling up at Kalmacks is in his favor, and the shooting of the warden as well as the writing of this letter is the work of a small band of individuals who wish to blackmail him. We will be quite a strong party, and he hopes to discover who is threatening him. By the way, didn't I hear from Sir Andrew McLerrick that you had been in the woods all these last falls with a wonderful guide who could read trails like Ueans, the last of the Delawares, or one of those old trappers one reads of in Fenimore Cooper's novels?"

"That's true."

"What is his name?"

"November Joe."

"November Joe," she repeated. "I visualize him at once. A wintry looking old man, with gray goatee and piercing eyes."

I burst out laughing. "It's extraordinary you should hit him off so well."

"He must come too," she commanded.

On Friday I got Joe, who arranged to meet us at Priamville, the nearest point on the railway to those mountains of Kalmacks was situated. I myself arranged to accompany the Petershams.

Into the story of our journey to

Priamville I need not go, but will pick up the sequence of events at the moment of our arrival at that enterprising town, when Linda, looking from the car window, suddenly exclaimed: "Look at that magnificent young man!"

"Which one?" I asked innocently as I caught sight of November's tall figure awaiting us.

"How many men in sight answer my description?" she retorted. "Of course I mean the woodsman. Why, he's coming this way. I must speak to him."

Before I could answer she had jumped lightly to the platform and, turning to Joe with a childlike expression in her blue eyes, said:

"Oh, can you tell me how many minutes this train stops here?"

"It don't generally stop here at all, but they flagged her because they're expecting passengers. Can I help you any, miss?"

"It's very kind of you."

At this moment I appeared from the car. "Hello, Joe," said I. "How are things?"

"All right, Mr. Quaritch. There's two slick buckboards with a pair of horses to each waiting and a wagonette fit for the king o' Russia. The road between this and the mountains is flooded by beaver working in a back water 'bout ten miles out. They say we can drive through all right. Miss Petersham needn't fear getting too wet."

"How do you know my name?" exclaimed Linda.

"I heard you described, miss," replied Joe gravely.

Linda looked at me.

"Good for the old mossback!" said I. Her lips bent into a sudden smile. "You must be Mr. November Joe. I have heard so much of you from Mr. Quaritch."

We went out and loaded our baggage upon the waiting buckboards. One of these was driven by a small, sawtoothed man, who turned out to be the second game warden, Puttick.

Mr. Petersham asked how Bill Worke, the wounded man, was progressing.

"He's coming along pretty tidy, Mr. Petersham, but he'll carry a stiff leg with him all his life."

"I'm sorry for that. I suppose you have found out nothing further as to the identity of the man who fired the shot?"

"Nothing," said Puttick, "and not likely to. They're all banded together up there."

On which cheerful information our little caravan started. At Linda's wish Joe took the place of the driver of Mr. Petersham's light imported wagonette, and as we went along she gave him a very clear story of the sequence of events, to all of which he listened with the characteristic series of "Well, now," and "You don't say!" with which he was in the habit of punctuating the remarks of a lady. He said them, as usual, in a voice which not only emphasized the facts at exactly the right places, but also lent an air of subtle compliment to the eloquence of the narrator.

When we stopped near a patch of pine trees to partake of an impromptu lunch it was his quick hands that prepared the campfire and his skilled ax that fashioned the rude but comfortable seats. It was he also who disappeared for a moment to return with three half pound trout that he had taken by some swift process of his own from the brook, of which we only heard the murmur. And for all these doings he received an amount of open admiration from Linda's blue eyes which seemed to me almost exaggerated.

"I think your November Joe is a perfect dear," she confided to me.

"If you really think that," said I, "have mercy on him! You do not want to add his scalp to all the others."

"Many of the others are bald," said she. "His hair would furnish a dozen of them!"

CHAPTER XIV.

Men of the Mountains.

SO the afternoon passed away, and as it became late we entered great tracts of gloomy pine woods. A wind which had risen with the evening moaned through their tops and flung the dark waters of innumerable little lakes against their moss bordered shores.

I noticed that Puttick unslung his rifle and laid it among the packs upon the buckboard beside him, and when ever the road dipped to a more than usually somber delf he eyes, quick and restless as those of some forest animal, darted and peered into the shadows. The light of the sun was fading when there occurred the one incident of our journey. It was not of real importance, but I think it made an impression on all of us. The road along which we were driving came suddenly out into an open space, and here in front of a shack of the roughest description a man was engaged in cutting logs. As we passed he glanced up at us, and his face was like that of some medieval prisoner—a tangle of wild beard, a mass of grayish hair and among it all a pair of eyes which seemed to glare forth hatred. There was something ominous about the wolfish face.

It was already dark when we arrived at the house, a long, low building of surprising spaciousness, set literally among the pines, the fragrant branches of which tapped and rustled upon the windows.

We went in, and while dinner was preparing Mr. Petersham, Joe and I went to the room where the wounded game warden Worke lay upon a bed smoking a pipe with a candle sputtering on a chair beside him.

"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 here."

"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 nothing. 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 looking 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 iron mongery 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 pretty high every house and two and three in some. However, 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 I. "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 blackmail these criminals are demanding of him."

"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 rain enough to wash out tracks."

"They'll come?"

"Yes, they'll likely come."

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 personally enough in a cheap store envelope that bore the Priamville postmark. The contents of this letter were as follows:

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

Below was a rude drawing of a coffin.

Petersham read the note out to Joe and myself.

"Where's Butler's cairn?" he asked.

"I know it," said November. "But-

ler's cairn is on a hill 'bout two miles west of here."

"I suppose you won't go?" said I.

"With the money? Certainly not!"

"You can't 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 said.

but Joe would have none of this plan.

"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 alone. Three men can't go quiet where one can."

And so finally it was arranged, though not without a good deal of argument 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 nothing to tell; nothing at all. I didn't see no one."

"Where were you?"

"Lying down on top of the cairn itself. 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 then 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 call 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 after you and Joe started. This is how it happened. Puttick had just got up and gone down with a tin of rosin and some bare canvas and tin to mend that canoe we ripped on the rock yesterday. In fact, he had only just begun working when he was startled by a voice ordering him to hold up his hands."

"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 handkerchief 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 kept 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 he 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."

"Which way did he go when he left you?"

"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 kept to the stones in the bed o' the brook all the time?"

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

CHAPTER XV.

The Man in the Black Hat.

WE 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?" Petersham turned to me.

"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 earlier 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 me. I'm going to fish, and I want to use this two jointed pole. Will you fix it for me?"

"I'd like you to make me a promise, Miss Linda."

"What is it?"

"Not to go out at all today."

"You don't think I'm in danger?"

"You're in great danger, Miss Linda."

"Then you must go out with me, Joe. If you are with me they will not dare."

"Look here, Miss Linda, if you'll stay in the house just over today I wouldn't wonder but it might be quite safe for you to go out tomorrow—and ever after."

"Joe, you mean you have discovered—"

"No; I ain't discovered nothing, but if you stay in the way I ask maybe I shall," Joe took up his hat.

"Where are you going, November?" I asked.

"Over to Senlis lake, Mr. Quaritch. Will you see Ben Puttick and tell him I won't be back till lateish and will be cook the potatoes and the cornflour cakes if I don't get back to time? Miss Linda, will you please tell every one, even your father, that you have a mighty-painful head and that's why you're staying in?"

"Yes, Joe," said Linda.

After Joe's departure I took a book and sat with it in the veranda, where I was joined in due course by Linda and Mr. Petersham.

WHAT RED CROSS SEALS DO.

Every Red Cross Christmas Seal that is sold is a real bullet in the fight against tuberculosis. These seals last year helped to support thousands of needy tuberculosis patients and to give them a chance for life. They provided for many visiting nurses, whose hundreds of thousands of visits brought instruction and cheer to numerous patients. They helped maintain dispensaries in scores of cities, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, where thousands of consumptive patients received free treatment, aid and advice. They provided the means to purchase millions of copies of circulars, pamphlets and other literature with which the public has been educated about tuberculosis. They have established and helped to maintain more than 300 open-air schools for children who need open-air treatment. These are just a few of the ways in which the \$450,000 received last year was expended. This year a million dollars is needed. Surely any one can help by buying at least ten seals.