

The Deputy Game Warden

By CLARA TAYLOR

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Harry Taylor, Yale graduate and all round good fellow and a general favorite, although it was known that he had no fortune, had gone into the Maine woods with a party of campers who, like himself, could not well afford the season at Newport. As it was the close season for all kinds of big game, they made little pretense of hunting. They had been in the woods for a week or ten days when Nick Barton, the game warden for that district, happened that way and was put up for the night. Before leaving in the morning he said to young Taylor:

"Look here, now. I have got to go out of the woods for a week, but it won't do to leave this district without a warden. There are plenty of campers coming in, and some of them will run any risk to secure the antlers of a moose. I've got to leave a deputy behind me to travel about and watch, and I'm wondering why you wouldn't fill the bill."

"I have never acted as a policeman yet," replied Harry, with a smile. "But this is a far different thing. I shall give notice to all the campers I come across that a deputy has been left in the woods and that any interference with the game laws will be stoutly and rigorously punished."

"But suppose I find the law being violated and make an arrest."

"All you have to do is to take your prisoner before the nearest justice of the peace and state your case. It isn't over twenty-five miles to the nearest magistrate. It will beat fishing and dawdling around all hollow."

Further objections were made and combated, and the upshot of the matter was that Harry Taylor was duly and legally appointed deputy game warden in and for a certain district



"I AM A DEPUTY GAME WARDEN, AND IT IS MY DUTY TO ARREST YOU."

until such time as relieved. He hadn't the slightest idea of bestirring himself as an official, and it never occurred to him that he would be called upon to exercise his official authority.

The unexpected was getting ready to happen, however. Four days after the departure of the warden his deputy took a stroll through the woods with gun upon his shoulder. It was simply a matter of conscience with him, and he did not intend to tire himself out. He had heard of no campers within a dozen miles, and he was therefore considerably surprised at hearing the report of a rifle a quarter of a mile from where he sat resting under a tree. He knew that the firearm had been discharged on the shore of a pond surrounded by thickets and known as the haunt of the moose. It was more than likely that whoever the hunter might be, he had fired at a moose and violated the law.

There was a feeling of authority in the young man's breast as he started out to run down the violator. He did not have much trouble about it. As he neared the lake he heard a wounded animal thrashing about in the grass and water, and getting still nearer, he could distinguish a person in a canoe. That person was holding the discharged rifle across his knees as he sat and watched the dying struggles of his game. The canoeist was wearing a nondescript garb, and it was three or four minutes before young Taylor made up his mind as to sex and muttered to himself:

"By jingo, but it's a girl camper, and she has surely shot a moose! What the deuce am I going to do about arresting her and conveying her twenty-five miles through the woods?"

Two or three minutes later the moose—for it was a moose, and a big bull at that—ceased his struggles, and the canoe was paddled to the bank.

"That's right—come ashore!" called Taylor. "Do you know that you have killed a moose in the close season and thereby subjected yourself to a heavy fine if not to imprisonment as well? I am a deputy game warden, and it is my duty to place you under arrest."

"Is it—is it Mr. Taylor?" inquired a girlish voice as the canoe was slowly pushed through the grass to the firm shore.

"Yes, and you—"

Taylor stood there for the next two minutes and stared. He had at last recognized Miss Bessie Whiting, daughter of the banker. He had met her half a dozen times in society, and it was whispered around the clubs and elsewhere that he had been more than "attracted." But she was the last person he expected to meet in the deep woods of Maine.

"Our camp is only two miles away," she explained as he gave her a hand to help her out of the canoe. "I came up the pond hoping to get a shot at a wild fowl, but I have had great luck. While I was resting and looking around a great moose pushed his way through the bushes to drink, and, though I fired only one shot, I brought him down. Such antlers! Why, all the girls in the city will envy me when I get back. Do you think they will have it in the papers?"

"I am very much afraid so," he said in a serious voice.

"Why, what is it?"

"Didn't your father or brother tell you that it is against the law to shoot a moose this time of year?"

"Why, no."

"Well, it is, and you have, as I said, laid yourself liable to a heavy fine. There may be imprisonment as well, but I am not sure about that."

"And what—what am I going to do?" she asked in faltering tones. "If you and I keep still about it, how are they to know that I shot the moose?"

"There's where the trouble comes in. You see, I am a deputy game warden, and it is my duty to arrest you and see that you are punished."

"And I've got to go twenty-five miles through the woods with you?"

"The nearest magistrate is that distance away."

The girl sat down on a log and began to shed tears. It would be in the papers with a vengeance if she were brought before the law.

After regarding her with a sympathetic look for a moment young Taylor made his way down to the edge of the pond to look at the moose. That the animal had fallen at the discharge of the rifle and floundered about for several minutes was a fact beyond dispute. The branches were broken and the grass all beaten down, but there was no moose. The bullet had hit an antler and stunned him, and on coming to the cunning animal had skulked away with no more noise than a rabbit. He said nothing of this, however, on his return to the weeping girl.

"When—when are you going to take me?" she asked as she looked up through her tears.

"Well, I suppose we ought to go to camp and see your father first. I don't exactly see what he can do in the matter, but—"

"Mr. Taylor, you must get me out of this scrape somehow. Why, I'd be a perfect laughingstock if the papers got hold of it. Can't father pay the amount of my fine to you?"

"He might, but there's the imprisonment, you see. Can you say that you thought the moose was an elephant or a rhinoceros?"

"I—I can't tell a lie, Mr. Taylor."

"Can you say that you shut your eyes when you pulled the trigger?"

"No-o-p-e."

"But there must be a way of saving you," he said as he sat down on the log beside her. "I think you shot at a wild goose. If not that, then the gun went off by accident. As yet I have not seen the dead moose, and I can't expect that you will give testimony against yourself. I think—"

"What?"

"If you are to be in the woods for the month, and if I stay here as well, and if I visit your camp every day to see that the law is not being violated, and if you find I am not altogether—altogether indifferent, why—why?"

A month later as they were getting ready to go out of the woods Miss Bessie said:

"What do you think became of the body of that moose? Father and Fred went for the horns next day, but the body had mysteriously disappeared."

"I think the body walked off on its own legs before we got through talking," he truthfully answered.

Her eyes flashed for a moment, and then she blushed and smiled and said:

"I didn't think there was such a mean man in all this world."

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