

November Joe

The Detective of the Woods

By Hesketh Prichard

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CHAPTER III.

"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron."

NO sooner were we away than I put my finger question, "What do you think of it?"

Joe shrugged his shoulders. "Do you know any of these men?"

"All of them."

"How about the fellow who is out bad terms with?"

November seized my arm. A man was approaching through the dusk. As he passed my companion bawled him. "Hello, Baxter! Didn't know you'd come back. Where you been?"

"Right up on the headwaters."

"Fiz come down with you?"

"No, stayed on the line of traps. Did you want him, November?"

"Yes, but it can wait. See any moose?"

"Nary one; nothing but red deer."

"Good night."

"So long."

"That settles it," said November. "If he speaks the truth, as I believe he does, it wasn't either of the Gurd's shot Lyon."

"Why not?"

"Didn't you hear him say they hadn't seen any moose? And I told you that the man that shot Lyon had killed a moose quite recent. That leaves just Miller and Highamson—and it weren't Miller."

"You're sure of that?"

"Stark certain. One reason is that Miller's above six foot, and the man as camped with Lyon wasn't as tall as six inches. Another reason, you heard the storekeeper say how Miller and Lyon wasn't on speaking terms. Yet the man who shot Lyon camped with him—beside him—must 'a' talked to him. That weren't Miller."

His clear reasoning rang true.

"Highamson lives alone away up above Lyon's," continued November. "He'll make back home soon."

"Unless he's guilty and has fled the country," I suggested.

"He won't 'a' done that. It 'nd be as good as a confession. No, he thinks he's done his work to rights and has nothing to fear. Like as not he's back home now."

The night had become both wild and blustering before we set out for Highamson's hut, and all along the forest paths which led to it the sleet and snow of what November called "a real mean night" beat in our faces.

It was black dark or nearly so when at last a building loomed up in front of us, a faint light showing under the door.

"You there, Highamson?" called out November.

As there was no answer, my companion pushed it open, and we entered the small wooden room, where on a single table a lamp burned dimly. He turned it up and looked around. A pack lay on the floor unopened, and a gun leaned up in a corner.

"Just got in," commented November. "Hasn't loosed up his pack yet."

He turned it over. A hatchet was thrust through the wide thongs which bound it. November drew it out.

"Put your thumb along that edge," he said. "Blunt? Yes? Yet he drove that old hatchet as deep in the wood as Lyon drove his sharp one. He's a strong man."

As he spoke he was busying himself with the pack, examining its contents with deft fingers. It held little save a few clothes, a little tea and salt and other fragments of provisions and a Bible. The finding of the last was, I could see, no surprise to November, though the reason why he should have suspected its presence remained hidden from me. But I had begun to realize that much was plain to him which to the ordinary man was invisible.

Having satisfied himself as to every article in the pack, he rapidly replaced them and tied it up as he had found it, when I, glancing out of the small window, saw a light moving low among the trees, to which I called November Joe's attention.

"It's likely Highamson," he said, "coming home with a lantern. Get you into that dark corner."

I did so, while November stood in the shadow at the back of the closed door. From my position I could see the lantern slowly approaching until it flung a gleam of light through the window into the hut. The next moment the door was thrust open, and the heavy breathing of a man became audible.

It happened that at first Highamson saw neither of us, so that the first intimation that he had of our presence was November's "Hello!"

Down crashed the lantern, and his bearer started back with a quick, hoarse gasp.

"Who's there?" he cried. "Who?"

"Them as is sent by Hal Lyon."

Never have I seen words produce so tremendous an effect.

Highamson gave a yell of fury, and the next instant he and November

were struggling together. I sprang to my companion's aid, and even then it was no easy task for the two of us to master the powerful old man. As we held him down I caught my first sight of his ash gray face. His mouth grimed open, and there was a terrible intention in his staring eyes. But all changed as he recognized his visitor.

"November! November Joe!" cried he. "Get up!" And as Highamson rose to his feet, "Whatever for did you do it?" asked November in his quiet voice. But now its quietness carried a menace.

"Do what? I didn't!"—Highamson paused, and there was something unquestionably fine about the old man as he added: "No, I won't lie. It's true I shot Hal Lyon. And what's more if it was to do again I'd do it again. It's the best deed I ever done. Yes, I say that, though I know it's written in the book, 'Who so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'"

"Why did you do it?" repeated November.

Highamson gave him a look. "I'll tell you I did it for my little Janey's sake. He was her husband. See here! I'll tell you why I shot Hal Lyon. Along of the first week of last month I went away back into the woods trapping muskrats. I was gone more'n the month, and the day I come back I went over to see Janey. Hal Lyon weren't there. If he had been I shouldn't never 'a' needed to travel so far to get even with him. But that's neither here nor there. He'd come to his bear traps above Big Tree. But the night before he left he'd got in one of

"I'm ready, November, but you'll let me see Janey again before you give me over to the police."

November looked him in the eyes. "Expect you'll see a good deal of Janey yet. She'll be lonesome over there now that her brute husband's gone. She'll want you to live with her," he said.

"D'ye mean?"

November nodded. "If the police can catch you for yourselves, let 'em, and you'd lesser the chance of that a wonderful deal if you want to burn them moose shank mecessins you're wearing. When did you kill your moose?"

"Tuesday's a week. And my mecessins was wore out, so I fixed 'em up woods fashion."

"I know. The hair on 'em is slipping. I found some of it in your tracks in the camp, away above Big Tree. That's how I knew you'd killed a moose. I found your candlestick too. Here it is." He took from his pocket the little piece of spruce stick, which had puzzled me so much, and turned toward me.

"This end's sharp to stick into the earth; that end's slit, and you fix the candle in with a bit of birch bark. Now it can go into the stove along of the mecessins." He opened the stove door and thrust in the articles.

"Only three know your secret, Highamson, and if I was you I wouldn't make it four, not even by adding a woman to it."

Highamson held out his hand. "You always was a white man Nov."

Hours later, as we sat drinking a final cup of tea at the campfire, I said: "After you examined Lyon's upper camp you told me seven things about the murderer. You've explained how you knew them, all but three."

"What are the three?"

"First, how did you know that Highamson had been a long time in the woods without visiting a settlement?"

"His mecessins was wore out and patched with raw moose hide. The tracks of them was plain," replied November.

I nodded. "And how could you tell that he was religious and spent the night in great trouble of mind?"

November paused in filling his pipe. "He couldn't sleep," said he, "and so he got up and out that candlestick. What'd he want to light a candle for but to read by? And why should he want to read in the middle of the night if he was not in trouble? And if he was in trouble, what book would he want to read? Besides, not on trapper in a hundred carries any book but the Bible."

"I see. But how did you know it was in the middle of the night?"

"Did you notice where he cut his candlestick?"

"No," said I.

"I did, and he made two false cuts where his knife slipped in the dark. You're wonderful at questions."

"And you at answers."

November stirred the embers under the kettle, and the firelight lit up his face as he turned with a yawn.

"My," said he, "but I'm glad Highamson had his reasons. I'd 'a' hated to think of that old man shut in where he couldn't see the sun rise. Wouldn't you?"



CHAPTER IV.

The Seven Lumberjacks.

THe more I saw of Joe in the days which followed, the more I appreciated the man and the more I became convinced of his remarkable gifts. It was not long after our return from St. Amel before Joe succeeded in getting me a fair shot at the large red deer buck of Widdemey pond, and it so happened that the killing of this buck brought us news of old Highamson, for we took the head down to him to set up.

Joe and I walked over and found him living with his daughter, Janey Lyon, for the police had never been successful in discovering the identity of the avenger of Big Tree portage. The two seemed very happy together, but I must acknowledge that I feared from what I saw that the beautiful Janey would not continue to bear the name of Lyon much longer. I said as much to November Joe as we were walking back.

"That's nature," said he. "Old Man Highamson told me that neither Baxter Gurd nor Miller don't give her no peace. Well, I guess a woman's better married anyway."

It was drawing on toward evening and had begun to rain when we turned from the woods into the mile long trail that led to November's shack. His quick glance fell at once upon the ground and, following his eye, I saw the impression of fresh tracks.

"What do they tell you?" I asked, for it was always a matter of interest to me to put November's skill to the little daily tests that came in my way.

"Try yourself," said he.

"A man in mecessins—probably an Indian—has passed along. Isn't that right?" I asked.

November Joe smiled grimly.

"Not just quite. The man isn't an Indian; he's a white man, and he carries his big news and has not come very far."

"You're sure?" I said, stooping to examine the trail more closely, but without result.

"Certain! The Indian mecessins has no raised heel. These have. He's not come far. He's traveling fast—see, he springs from the ball of the foot, and when a man finishes a journey on the run you may be sure he thinks he's got a good reason for getting to the end of it. This trail leads nowhere but to my shack, and we'll sure find our man there."

Ten minutes later, when we came in sight of November's home, we were aware of a big man sitting on a log smoking his pipe beside the door. He was middle aged, with a hard face,

and there was more gray in his russet beard than his age warranted. As soon as we appeared he leaped up and came across the open to meet us.

"Blackmask is at it again!" he cried. "I saw a gleam of anticipation, if not of pleasure, cross November's face. He turned to me.

"This is Mr. Close, manager of the River Star Pulp company's Camp C," he said. "I'd like to make you known to Mr. Quaritch, Mr. Close." This courtesy concluded, he added in his deliberate tones, "What's Blackmask done now?"

"He's at his old tricks! But this year we'll lay him by the heels, or my name's not Joshua Close." The speaker looked up, and, seeing my puzzled expression, addressed himself to me.

"Last year there were five separate robberies committed on the road between Camp C and the settlement," he explained. "Each time it was just a single lumberjack who got held up, and each time a man in a black mask was the robber. November here was away."

"Up in Wyoming with a Philadelphia lawyer after elk," supplemented the tall young woodsman.

"The police failed to make any arrest, though once they were on the ground within four hours of the hold-up," went on Close. "But all that is ancient history. It is what happened to Dan Michaels last night that brought me here at seven miles an hour high a three months' stretch, and the day before yesterday he came into the office and told me his mother was dead and he must have leave for the funeral. He had a good bit roll of bills due, and I could see he meant to blow them, so I paid him and told him I'd try to keep a job warm for him till he came back from the funeral. I gave him ten days to get through with his spree. Something I'd said annoyed him, and after telling the cook his opinion of me and saying he wouldn't sleep another night in a camp where I was boss he legged out for the settlement."

"By himself?"

"Yes, alone. Next morning, bright and early, he was back again, and this was the yarn he slung me. He'd made about eight miles when it came on darkish, and he decided to camp just beyond where we did the most of our timber cut last year. He slept at once, and remembers nothing more until he was started awake by a voice shouting at him. He sat up blinking, but the talk he heard soon fetched his eyes open.

"Hands up and no fooling!"

"Of course he put up his hands. He'd no choice, for he couldn't see any one. Then another man who was in the bushes behind his back ordered him to haul out his bundle of notes and chuck them to the far side of the fire or take the consequences. Dan saw a revolver barrel gleam in the bush. He cursed a bit, but the thieves had the drop on him, so he just had to out with his wad of notes and leave them over as he was told. A birch log in the fire flared up at the minute, and as the notes touched the ground he saw a chap in a black mask step out and pick them up and then jump back into the dark. Then the voice that spoke first gave him the hint not to move for two hours or he'd be shot like a dog. He sat out the two hours with his watch without hearing a sound and then came back to C.

"When the boys got all the facts the whole camp was nigh as mad as he was. They put up \$50 reward for any one giving information that will lead to catching the robbers, and I added another hundred for the company. So now, Joe, if you can clap your hand on the brutes you'll be doing yourself a good turn and others too."

Close ended his narration, and looked at November, who had listened throughout in his habitual silence.

"Do the boys up at C know you've come to me?" he said.

"No, I thought it wiser they shouldn't."

November remained silent for a moment.

"You'd best get away back, Mr. Close," he said at length. "I'll go down to Perkins' clearing, and have a look at the spot where the robbery took place, and then I'll find some excuse to take me to Camp C, when I can make my report to you."

To this Close agreed, and the two of us set out through the woods to the site of Dan Michaels' bivouac. The ashes of a fire and a few boughs made its scanty furnishings, and in neither did November take much interest. Forth and back he moved, apparently following lines of tracks which the drenching rain of the previous day had almost obliterated. Until, indeed, after ten minutes, he gave it up.

"Well, well," said he, in his soft endeavored voice, "he always did have the luck."

"Who?"

"The robber. Look at last year! Got clear every time."

"The robbers," I corrected.

"There's but one," said he.

"Michals mentioned two voices, and the man in the mask stepped into sight at the same moment as the fire gleamed on the revolver of the other man in the bushes."

Without a word November led me to the farther side of the dead fire and parted the boughs of a spruce, which I had previously seen him examine. At a height of less than five feet from the ground one or two twigs were broken, and the bark had been rubbed near the trunk.

"He was a mighty interesting man, him with the revolver," November laughed. "There was only one chap, and he fixed the revolver here in that fork. It was a good bluff he played on Dan, making him think there was



two again him! The rain's washed out most of the tracks, so we'll go up to Camp C and try our luck there. But first I'd better shoot a deer, and the boys'll think I only come to carry them some meat, as I often do when I kill anywhere nigh the camp."

As we made our way toward C, November found the tracks of a young buck which had crossed the tote road since the rain, and while I waited he slipped away like a shadow into the wild raspberry growth, returning twenty minutes later with the buck upon his shoulders.

On reaching Camp C November sold his deer to the cook, and then we went to the office. The men were all away at work, but we found the manager, to

CHAPTER V.

The Guilty Man.

THERE was no doubt about the fact that November was surprised. He said nothing for a full minute, then he looked up sharply.

"How many bottles of whisky had you?" said he.

"Nary one," answered Thompson. "There isn't no nearer than Lavalotte, as you well know. We wasn't drink, we was drugged. We must 'a' been, though how it was done beats me, for we had nothing but bread and bacon and tea, and I made the tea my self."

"Where's the kettle?"

"We left that and the frying pan back at the hut, for we're going to hunt the country for the thief. You'll come along, Nov?"

"On my own condition, or I'll have nothing to do with it."

"What's that?"

"That nary a man of you goes back to Tidson's bridge hut till I give you leave."

"But we want to catch the robber."

"Very well. Go and try if you think you can do it."

An outburst of argument arose, but soon one and another began to say: "We'll leave it to you, Nov." "Mind you fetch my \$100 back for me, Nov." "Leave Nov alone." "Go on, Nov."

November laughed. "I suppose you all slept with your money on you?"

It appeared they all had, and Lars and Chris, who possessed pocketbooks, and found them flung empty, in a corner of the hut.

"Well, Mr. Quaritch and me'll be getting along, boys. I'll let you know if I've any luck." Then suddenly November turned to the big sportsman and said, "By the way, Thompson, did you fill that kettle at the brook before you found you'd lost your cash?"

"No; I run right back."

"That's lucky," said November, and we walked away in a roar of shouted questions to the canoe placed at our disposal by Close. By water we could run down to Tidson's bridge in an hour or two.

"Do you think this is the work of the same man that held up Dan Michaels?"

"Guess so. Can't be sure. The ground's fine and soft, and we ought to get the answer to a good many questions down there."

Thanks to the canoe and a short cut known to November, we arrived at our destination in admirable time.

First of all, skirting the path, we went to the hut where the six had slept. A few articles dropped from the hastily made packs lay about, the frying pan beside the stove and the kettle on its side by the door. November moved round examining everything in his deft, light way. Lastly, he picked up the kettle and peered inside.

"What's in it?" said I.

"Nothing," returned November.

"Well, Thompson told you he hadn't filled it," I reminded him.

He gave me a queer little smile. "Just so," said he and strolled for fifty yards or so up the tote road.

"I've been along looking at the foot-marks of them six mossbacks," he volunteered. "Now we'll look around here."

The inspection of the tracks was naturally a somewhat lengthy business. November had studied the trail of the six men to some purpose, for though he hardly paused as he traced the tread, den ground, so swift were his eyes that he named each of the men to me as he pointed to their several tracks. As we approached the bank he indicated a distinct set of footsteps, which we followed to the hut and back again to the water.

"He's the chap that did it," said November. "That's pretty plain."

"He is a heavier man than I am, and he walks rather on his heels."

November nodded, and began to follow the trail, which went down into the stream. He stood at the water's edge examining some stones which had been recently displaced, then waded down into it.

"Where was his boot?" I asked.

But November had by now reached a large flat stone some feet out in the water, and this he was looking round and over with great care. Then he beckoned to me. The stone was a large, flat one, as I have said, and he showed me some scratches upon its further surface. The scratches were deep and irregular. I stared at them, but to me they conveyed nothing.

"They don't look like the mark of a boot," I ventured.

"They aren't. But that chap made them all right," he said.

"But how or why?"



November had reached a large flat stone.

added, "and he wasn't a 200 pound man nor heavier than you, but a little thin chap, and he hadn't a boot."

"Then how did he get away—by wading?"

"Maybe he waded."

"If he did he must have left the stream somewhere," I exclaimed.

"Sure."

"Then you'll be able to find his tracks where he landed."

"No need to."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm sure of my man."

"Is it the same who held up Dan Michaels?"

"Yes."

With that I had to be satisfied. It was late at night when we approached Camp C. We jumped ashore and went swiftly straight to the office, where the manager lived. A crowd stood round, and two men were holding the door; one was the burly Thompson. "Hello! You needn't bother no more, Nov," he shouted. "We've got him."

"Who've you got?"

"The blackguard that robbed us," "Good!" said November. "Who is it?"

"Look at him!" Thompson banged open the office door and showed us the manager, Close, sitting on a chair by the fire, looking a good deal disheveled.

"Mr. Close?" exclaimed November. "Yes, the boss—no other?"

"Got evidence?" inquired November, staring at Close.

"Tip-top! No one seen him from dark to dawn. And we got the boots. Found 'em in a biscuit tin on a shelf in the shanty just behind here where he sleeps."

"You fool! I was at my accounts all night," cried Close to Thompson.

November took no notice.

"Who found the boots?" said he.

"Cookee, when he was cleaning up. Found a bottle of sleeping stuff, too—nearly empty!" shouted two or three together.

November whistled. "Good for Cookee. Has he owned up?" he nodded at Close. "Was they your boots, Mr. Close?"

"Yes," roared Close.

"But he denies the robbery?" said Thompson excitedly.

"Of course I deny it!" cried Close. "Let's see them boots," put in November.

"The boys took 'em to the bunk house," said Thompson. "Say, Nov, think of him paying us with one hand and robbing us with the other, that—"

"Wonderful!" observed November in his dry way. He continued to stare hard at Close, who at last looked up, and I could have sworn I saw November Joe's dark lashed eyelid droop slightly in his direction.

A change came over the manager. "Get out of here," he cried angrily. "Get out of here, you and your woods detective!" and some uncommonly warm language charged out at the back of the closing door.

The men who had been robbed and their comrades closed round as November examined the boots.

"Seventeen in one heel and fifteen in the other—cowhide boots," said Chris. "That's what he that robbed us wore, and I'll swear to that."

"I could swear to it too," agreed November.

"Take them and the sleeping stuff," pursued Chris. "It's a silver fox skin to a red on a conviction, eh, November?"

"Have you sent for the police?"

"Not yet. We'd waited till you came up. We'll send now."

"The sooner the better," said November. "And whoever goes'll find four claps from Camp B in the hut by Tidson's bridge. They've orders to knock it down and take the roof off and carry the stove into D."

(To Be Continued.)