

A FIGHT TO THE DEATH BETWEEN MAN AND MOOSE

By CHARLES JACOBUS

IT WAS in the forests of Lower Canada, in front of a glowing campfire, after a day of fascinating sport with the *salmo fontinalis*, or spotted brook trout, with our tent duly pitched under the cedars on the shore of Squatook Lake, No. 4, on the line of the lovely, yet sometimes bold and rapid Madawaska, that the story was related.

Dr. Stephen Griggs, of Brooklyn, and myself were taking a canoe trip on these waters from their source in Mud Lake to their entrance into the St. John at Edmundston, at the northeastern corner of the State of Maine; and Peter Theriot, of Caribou, was our guide. He was scarcely out of his "teens," a powerful young man physically, and skilled in woodcraft, which seemed really first nature to him. He knew from trapping experience the entire region of the Tobique, the Green, the Restigouche, and other rivers, and had killed much game, large and small.

He was returning one day from his customary visit to his line of traps, which run for twenty miles or more, sometimes, and are set for mink, or fox, or other creature according to country and conditions. He carried a medium-sized, single-barrel, muzzle-loading gun, charged with buckshot, simply to be on the safe side. It was in the middle of the afternoon, near the end of his circuitous route, and the load of skins on his back attested not only his skill, but to the further fact that his physical powers that day had been drawn upon more than usual. Walking rapidly over a little rise of ground, he suddenly came upon an immense bull moose, lying down in the forest. The range was very short, and his gun, of course, more effective on that account, so that the discharge brought the moose, stunned and wounded, to the ground, the heavy buckshot rattling against his antlers. Pete's joy knew no bounds when this unexpected forest inhabitant, for which no trap had been set,

seemed likely to be an additional trophy to the spoils of the day. Instantly drawing his hunting knife, he sprang forward, unfortunately leaving his gun behind, to cut the animal's throat, after which the blood would run freely, and the meat be in better condition for the morrow when, with help he would return. Approaching quickly, but with great precaution, the keen edge had no sooner started on its artery-opening work, when presto! Like a dash of cold water the prick of the cold steel apparently revived the moose, which jerked back his head, and in a moment, as if that immense corporosity had been filled with powerful springs of steel, regained his feet. Pete jumped suddenly backward, and Mr. Man and Mr. Moose were thus brought by this unique introduction, face to face. Snort No. 2 followed as a blast evidently betokening war, and without waiting for Pete to get ready for defense, the moose in his anger, doubtless goaded by pain, rushed to the spot where the guide had, more quickly than ever before, gained a perpendicular position. Reader, did you ever see a full-grown bull moose? The bulls of Bashan, the war horses of the Orient, the excited Amazons of fable, cannot surpass his really terrible look. But let him be infuriated, his bristly hair standing up in a frightened way along that immense spine, his most ungainly snout below, those mammoth horns above, those eyeballs of most spiteful fury, and making mighty lunges straight *for you!* How would you "comport yourself," as the French say?

Pete himself had never taken moose in this way before. A few hunters have, but others have told the tale. "Buck fever!" Pshaw! What is that compared to moose fright, at a range so close that the moist, hot, panting breath from his furnace-lungs can be felt on your face! This was what Pete felt as he dexterously leaped one side, and let the plunge of the moose to which

his mighty *avoidupois* had given immense momentum, carry him beyond. That was a most narrow escape, and only the greatest agility and strength on Pete's part could have averted disaster and death. In a twinkling, the straps holding his bundle of spoils were cut by his hunting knife, as he started to the nearest tree, luckily of medium size, with the moose close behind him, as he had gathered himself for the back rush like a flash. Happily for Pete, the falling bundle of skins, tumbling down behind him and somewhat obstructing the vision of the moose, led him to think, if a moose ever thought, that here was a portion of his enemy's person, and thus gave Pete the second of time he needed. One plunge of the moose's antlers scattered the skins, and showed them not the hide he was after. Apparently he was madder for being fooled, and rushed, without studying the position, toward the tree, behind which, with hunting knife still in hand, Pete stood, every muscle tense, awaiting the fearful charge. Do you see the position? The Lord deliver us from such and similar!

On the moose came, skurrying the little snow, and making the frozen earth fairly rumble with his cantering hoofs; but the moose had to take the one side or the other, as the tree, fortunately for our guide, was too large to be broken down, and not large enough to give the moose any advantage. Of course, the side that the moose took would be minus Peter, and as the moose could not fight backward, but had to turn around each time to renew the fray, it gave Pete a breath and a half for recovery. After some half-dozen terrific lunges on the part of the moose, leaving hair from his scraped side on the back of the tree, Pete thought he had a soft snap of it, unless he should stumble; but as a half hour of this unique man-and-beast contest had left the moose apparently as fresh as ever, Pete began to reason as to endurance. He had already done a good day's work with his traps, and was not, therefore, physically fresh for this unexpected foray. He needed food, too, and began to think and to reason. The moose seemed to realize that he was making no headway, and would stand for some time, apparently studying the situation; then he would start again, but the limited field for action, and the impossible choice of an-

other, afforded him no chance for the development of any particular plans. Up to this time, Pete had had no chance to look around. His eyes had to narrowly observe, and his alert muscles had to quickly follow the directions that the brain flashed to them.

He began now to study the situation and to look around him. A little way off, a rod, perhaps, there was another tree, and from its stock near the ground, some vigorous shoots of wrist size appeared. A thought struck him—a tactful thought—a possible father of a possible deed, and he at once proceeded to put it into execution, for he knew that the setting sun could bring no darkness that would enable him to escape. He also well knew the bulldog tenacity of a moose, for once before, he had been treed, and kept up in it till, after a day's sojourn in that peculiar bivouac, his companions had secured his release. He banked not at all, therefore, on any withdrawal of the moose's attention, and so, watching his chance when the moose in one of his dashes slipped well by him in the opposite direction, instead of stopping behind the same tree, he sprinted well to the other tree. Whether the moose now reasoned that any change would be for the better, or, because he was temporarily outwitted, it cannot be said; but he rushed forward with an increase in his speed, which for a short time had not been so furious. He came up and found the same old objection to a free fight, viz.: an intervening tree. Pete, to remove every possible element of danger, holding his hunting knife in his teeth, now took off his loose-fitting but warm hunting jacket, and threw it one side. He was having exercise enough to keep warm, but he took it off for fear that one of the prongs of his enemy's antlers might catch in it, and so be the means of giving the moose the victory, and he had once fairly trembled as these prongs came in close proximity to his outer garment. The moose made a dash for the garment, but, like the bundle of skins, it afforded him no satisfaction. With his hunting knife, which was stout and strong and double-edged, Pete proceeded to trim off the superfluous twigs and upper growth of that vigorous sprout. He left it about as long as a broom handle, and it was a trifle larger. Then he commenced to cut it off at the base. All of

this work had to be done when he was on that side of the tree; and as the moose kept him moving most of the time, it was slow work, but finally, after several vigorous thrusts with his staunch and trusty blade, he succeeded in wrenching clear and free from its parent stock that strong, young shoot. His eye gleamed with hope as he handled it, hefted it, and measured its capabilities. After such further trimming to smooth its surface as his continual forest dance would allow—for the moose got madder yet, apparently, when even a short respite came—he cut a few small creases like the thread of a screw around the smaller end, and shaved one side of it flat for nearly six inches. He laid the handle of his hunting knife upon this flattened surface, and looked carefully for any place where a little removal of wood would make the handle fit as snug as possible, and then, after a little more paring, under circumstances that naturally would take pieces of fingers with it, a bigger hope shone in his eye. Neither he nor the moose had yet uttered a sound.

Now Pete took from his breeches pocket, the always-carried buckskin string, and laying the handle of his knife upon the end of his impromptu spear handle, with its double edge of steel for the projecting spear blade, he commenced carefully and strongly to tie the thong into the notches previously made for its firm holding. He took up all loose places, and made that hunting knife and handle to feel and practically be like one solid piece. Then, very coolly taking from his pocket a small piece of Nova Scotia whetstone about the size and shape of a package of chewing gum, he turned the spear point up, as a woodsman does an axe, and after moistening the stone with saliva, he plied it in a lively manner, with apparently as much nonchalance as a barber does a razor to his favorite hone. Many times he had been obliged to change his position, but his

physical strength had up to this time met every demand upon it. He knew the fight had but just commenced; but it was his turn now, and before the moose could take the least precaution, or realize the changed state of affairs, he thrust the spear head around the tree like a flash, and the keen blade went under the bottom of his jaw, out of sight, inflicting a smarting wound. He followed it up with another right on the snout, as that was most exposed, and scored again, for, like Hamish, in the famous story of Sidney Lanier, "No blood, no count." In all these thrusts he was compelled to exercise great care lest some prong of the quickly-moving antlers should disarm him. As the moose came up against the tree, Pete put in his best work, reaching for the vital throat artery, whose location he so well knew.

What a fool the moose was! His madness took away his judgment. If he had just stood back a little way from the tree, he would have been out of Pete's reach, and yet virtually kept his enemy penned; but his very madness stood in the way of his own safety. Pete's really skilful thrusts were beginning to tell, till finally, the great artery of the neck, to the joy of our guide, was severed, and a tide of blood, to which the rest had been as drops, now deluged the ground. The moose seemed to realize that his time had come. He stood with all fours well out from his body, and let the life blood flow, as he must. It was the speediest, yet gentlest dissolution of great living forces, Pete stood unmoved. The shadows of natural darkness and physical death were settling down together. The sun had gone down, and Pete knew the contest was over. While gratitude was beginning to swell Pete's heart, the great monarch of the forest suddenly collapsed, and fell to the earth; and Pete, gathering up his hunting coat and scattered pelts, returned to camp, leaving his last conquest for additional help on the morrow.