



Silvertip Settles It

By
Austin Hall

Author of "A Problem for Rex," etc.

BECAUSE he was a bear man and stood up for a bear's merits, John Harper Adams had to stand for no small amount of ridicule. Men believed him, but at the same time there was much more satisfaction in taking his assertions with a grain of salt. Besides, there was always the pleasure of getting him riled—and John Harper Adams, riled, was something to conjure on. Now, "Old John" was riled today; he had just been over to the sheriff's office where Sheriff Byrnes had given him his opinion of all bears—pet bears in particular. And now Old John had come over to the Mountain House with blood in his eye. He intended to stay all night, and in the morning he proposed to go back to the mountains.

But when John reached the hotel, he ran into a new angle. On the front porch was a heavy-set individual, khaki clad, and bristling with importance. A few natives were listening in while the stranger expounded the points of a new gun. Old John was interested in the gun, but he was much more interested in the man's conversation.

"Just the thing for bear," the man was saying. "Stops them every time. Good for grizzly. When you hunt a grizzly you got to be careful."

The old man sat down. With him the shooting of a grizzly was just a little bit short of sacrilege. He cut into the conversation.

"Young fellow," he spoke, "did you ever shoot a grizzly?"

"Several," said the man.

"What did you shoot them for?"

"Why—why, for sport, of course," came the puzzled answer.

"Fine sport," said Old John. "Rather dangerous, I imagine."

"The most dangerous sport in the world," replied the other. "And because it's dangerous, it makes it the best. Besides, you know that you are doing somebody some good. You're killing a killer, and perhaps saving a life. A grizzly now—"

But Old John had heard enough; he had been tormented all day, but he knew that most of it had been good-natured raillery; this man was serious. The natives on the porch were waiting for his explosion.

"I guess you've said just about all you know," he spoke. "Some day when you've got the time, you'd better come up to Old John's, and I'll teach you something about grizzlies. But don't come for a kill. I'm here to tell you now that the only thing that man has got against a grizzly, is that he's a scrapper. If you go hunting for a grizzly's hide, there's a-going to be a fight or a retreat, and it ain't a-going to be the grizzly that does the retreating. It ain't his fault that he resents being killed. I kinda resent it myself. Mr. Grizzly fights in self-defense, my boy, and I'm telling you he's some fighter. I'll admit that once in a while he gets to be a cattle killer; but not often. As far as that goes, I've seen men who were a whole lot worse. When a grizzly does kill, he's a hell popper, and it takes brains to get him. None of you city fellers. Ninety-nine times in a hundred, he's blamed for somebody else's kill. And don't

ever think that a grizzly is a-going to hunt for you. He ain't. He's the smartest animal in the mountains, and he's got too much sense. You leave him alone. Some day when you want some sport, come up to me and I'll introduce you to a real Silvertip. You'll have more sport with a grizzly than you've ever had in your life. But leave that gun behind. If you come up a-hunting to kill, Old John'll go a-hunting for you. And I'm a dang site worse than any grizzly that ever lived. I shoot from the hip. And that goes for the whole mountains and the whole wide world besides. There ain't a-going to be no grizzly shooting in my territory!"

And with that Old John Harper Adams stomped off to bed.

Next morning John set out at daybreak for the long trip into the mountains. The way was slow, up the tortuous cañon, across the river a dozen times, and finally over the mountain to his own cañon. In the distance were the blue mountains, snow-tipped, that formed the boundary of his own territory. Up there was the little lake among the snow peaks, and on this side was the little cabin snuggled alongside the tumbling creek. That was the country that Old John called his own, and into which he had forbidden the entrance of all bear hunters.

As he rode along, he thought of the good-natured taunts that he had received in town, and the ridicule that he had earned in defense of the grizzly. The taunts of the mountaineers he could endure, but those of an outsider were a different matter. The man on the hotel porch had boasted of being a bear hunter, and now Old John was wondering whether he was. He wondered whether the man would come to see him and, if he did, whether he would come bear hunting.

John Harper Adams did not know that the man was a city keeper of a "blind tiger" of the cheapest sort, and that the man had a cherished ambition to own a genuine grizzly, stuffed, that he could display in his trophy room. Neither did he know that even now, while he was riding up the cañon, the said keeper was making arrangements for a trip into the mountains after Silvertip. The men in the hotel had told him that the bear was the old man's pet, tame to a certain degree, and more or less the boss of the snow peaks. But that did not matter. The city man had listened to the old man, and then to the old man's friends, and had

thereupon resolved to go after Silvertip. It would be an easy matter to kill a pet grizzly. Here was a chance for big game and no risk. All he had to do was to make the kill and hurry back to the city. There he could have his picture taken, gun in hand, with the grizzly in front of him, and after that he could start out on his wonderful string of boasting.

Had the men of the little mountain town known of his plans, there would have been an equal division among them as to how he should be dealt with. About half of them out of sheer mercy would have tarred and feathered him, and sent him back to the city in a box car. The other half, more vindictive, would have sent him straight into the mountains after Silvertip. Certainly there was not a settler in the mountains who would have taken his chance. Said one: "Old John Harper Adams shoots from the hip. He's the quickest thing on a running shot that ever come into these parts, and if there's anything that he'd miss, I ain't never seen it."

And so it happened that while Old John was just riding into the clearing in front of his cabin, another party was setting out from the hotel in quest of Silvertip.

As it happened, the old man was having a visitor. He had just opened the cabin door to peer inside when he heard a whir down in the shaft of the mine that was only too familiar. There would come a whir and a bang, and then silence; and after that another whir and more silence. The old man listened, and then picked up his rifle. There was always a chance for an intruder, and just now he was having his suspicions. The noise was familiar. When he reached the bank of the creek, he sat down. Another whir in the shaft and then the car slamming into the trip. Old John's grizzly came shuffling out of the mine. He looked wisely up and down the creek, and then with a single movement of his paw, straightened the car on the track, after which he made another sweep and sent the car whizzing into the shaft with the speed of a bullet. Bang! John heard the thud as the car crashed against the bank in the tunnel. Then the bear twisted about on his paws and wobbled back into the shaft.

"Playing," said Old John. "Come back to his cub tricks, eh? Now I wonder! Guess I had ought to have learned him to use a pick and shovel; then old John wouldn't have had nothing to do but sit

down.”

He crossed the creek and looked into the shaft. The bear was throwing some loose rocks into the car. Then the old man side-stepped just in time, for the grizzly had turned and made a lightning swipe that sent the car spinning out to the trip. Behind the car came the shambling hulk of Silvertip. The bear stopped at the entrance, his little eyes twinkling and his ears pricked up at the sight of the old prospector.

“Well, well,” said the old man, placing his hand on the bear’s head. “Come down to see me, eh? And nobody home! You old scalawag! That’s it. You lay down and we’ll rub that belly of yours just like old times, eh?”

There was a vast difference in this bear that was lying down on his back and the little cub that had learned to have his stomach scratched, but both the man and the bear enjoyed it. Finally Old John thought of supper, and stood up.

“Come on, Silver,” he said, “you and me has got to go to the cabin and get something to eat. There’s scraps, and mebbe we can make a real bear’s stew. And let’s see. Well, you old son of a gun! You found it, eh?”

The bear had smelled around to the old man’s pocket. John had brought home a bag of candy; and now he held it up while he pressed a stick against the bear’s nose.

“Thought I done forgot you, eh? Well, when Old John goes to town, he ain’t a-going to forget his old pal, and don’t you think it. Pretty nice stuff, ain’t it? Now you just come over to the cabin and we’ll see what we can do.” And just then he looked down the cañon and over at the mountain that he had crossed in the morning. “He’s a bear hunter, eh?” he muttered. “Well, I’m saying that he had better not come up here after Silvertip.”

That night Old John filled the bear up to his heart’s delight, cooked him a real bruin stew, and allowed him to finish the prized bag of candy. The bear hung around during the night, helped the man eat breakfast, and then lay down flat on his back to take in a sun bath. The old man was hoping that he would stick around the cabin for a while, but that was not to be. The bear awoke along in the afternoon and held up one ear while he watched something on the opposite side of the cañon.

The river was calling, and there was a cool swim waiting in the big pool down by the

willows. Besides, it was the full of the moon, and just the time for roaming. Along toward evening the bear stood up, stretched, and wobbled down the creek to the river. There he found his favorite log near the bank, shoved it into the stream, and began disporting to his heart’s delight. Then he streaked it to the bank and rolled over and over to wipe himself on the soft, clean sand.

After that he saw a streak of sunshine flooding through some dense maples and wandered over to investigate it. The slanting sunshine puzzled him. He reached up and then followed it to the lighted spot on the ground. Then he passed his paw through it and studied when it came out with nothing. He must have been satisfied, for he immediately began thinking about the huckleberry patch up on the top of the peak. That led him up the ridge to his old stamping ground over by the little lake. The full moon came up, and a berry-gorged bear stalked along the backbone of the mountain. There he could look down on the great world below him, where the soft shadows lay under the silvery moon and the forest stretched out toward the mysterious west.

Next morning John Harper Adams had a visitor—had two of them. The man in khaki had learned the way, had hired a man of his own ilk, and had followed John straight over the mountain. The old man had just gone to work in the shaft and was in the act of dumping his first load of gravel onto the dump when they drove up. The smaller of the two men saw the gravel, and then wandered over to the sluice box. What he saw made him cast a meaning look at his companion, but the man in khaki winked back and shook his head. John Harper Adams was leaning against the car; he had seen both glances, but his own expression was that of blank innocence. He noticed that both men had brought their guns.

“Well, young feller,” he greeted. “You come, I see. You’re taking my invitation kinda early.”

“Yep,” said the big fellow, looking up. “We just got here. After you left, we heard that you had some mighty good hunting up here around the peaks. Thought we’d drop in on the way up and get the lay of the ground. Maybe you could show us that bear.”

“That’s fine,” said Old John. “And you’re welcome. Humans is always welcome in a place like this. That bear? He was here yesterday, but I guess he’s made a run of it. Mebbe he’s over

around by the lake. That's where he goes."

The two men were anxious to know about the lake and whether there was game thereabouts. They were after deer, they said, and perhaps a lynx or two, or perhaps a mountain lion. Old John nodded pleasantly and told them all he knew; then he invited them up to the cabin where they could partake of venison galore. The men exchanged glances from time to time, and with the conceit of city men thought that they were putting it over. They even got the old man to tell about the bear, size, description, everything. The man in khaki was mentally elated. The old man was merely a duffer, an old codger of accommodating simplicity. The old fellow even went so far as to tell them of camping grounds.

"On the north side of the lake," he said, "you'll find a gulch leading up to Black Peak. About a mile up you'll find a pocket of blade alder, and up on the hill a little flat, surrounded with oaks. There's a fine spring up there, and an old copper kettle. That kettle is one of those old forty-nine affairs—heavy, but just the thing for a camp fire. You can put up some poles and hang the kettle on a cross arm, if it isn't already up, and cook enough food to last you a month. I don't know just how that big kettle ever got there. Some old miner of the old days, I suppose. It's too heavy to lug out, and so it's always stayed there. I found it one day when I was fooling around with Silvertip."

So far so good. Next morning the men took their departure with the blandest of friendship. Said the man in khaki:

"Well, good-by, Mr. Adams. Let us thank you for a very pleasant night. We'll hardly be going out this way on our way back, and so we may not meet again. Good-by."

"Well," said the old man, "mebbe we'll meet again, and then again mebbe we won't. But I wouldn't be sure if I was you."

On the way up the hill, the man in khaki turned to his companion.

"They told me down below that that old codger was a regular tartar, but to me he looks like easy meat. Silvertip! Getting that grizzly will be just like buying fish in a fish market. We can come down another cañon and hit the level country sixty miles below. Wait till I show that grizzly to the boys in town. Boy, oh, boy! Won't we put it over?"

He did not know that Old John was sitting in his doorway smoking his pipe and waiting till they reached the top of the ridge. Neither did he know that the old man had taken down his rifle and was holding it over his knee.

"Hunting deer, eh? Well, mebbe you are, and then again mebbe you aren't. Old John ain't so sure. Just the same, there's a certain grizzly that's saved Old John's hide a coupla times, and this may be a chance to pay him back. We'll just wait till you get up on that ridge, and then Old John'll just walk along to see that them deer don't bite you."

The two men continued on up the ridge, over the summit, and along in the afternoon came down to the little lake that nestled at the foot of the peak. Up the gulch they found the camp just as the old man had said—also the big copper kettle, and it was hanging on the crossbar between the posts—all in shape, even to the chains that held the bar to the uprights. The big man took the load off the pack mule while the other went out in the dusk to look for a deer. The hunting was good, and that night they had venison.

"Not so bad at that," said the big fellow. "Tonight we can broil some steaks, but tomorrow I'm in favor of boiling up a feed that will last a moon. That there copper kettle was just made to order. Wonder how it got here? The old man said some forty-niner. Talking about miners, did you notice the old man's pay dirt? They say she's a humdinger. I'll bet that old codger has got enough thousands salted away around that cabin to last us the rest of our lives. If we could only get him away while we did some ransacking, we might pick up enough dust to pay the freight on that grizzly hide, eh? We'd want to be clever, though. No trace. No violence. For instance, one of us could get him here while the other went out hunting. If he squawked, that would be a different matter."

The other agreed. The gold had attracted him from the start, and had been the motive for the trip. The big fellow could have the grizzly, but the little fellow had his own plans.

Morning. Bright morning, with the newly risen sun resting on the mountaintop and lighting up the sheen of the great forest. Mountain music—the whirl of life and the lilting of the song

birds among the willows. Up on the hillside a mountain whistler had come out to add his shrill note to the welcome of another day. A crow was sailing its way over the lake; and down below the trout were plunking the water in search of breakfast. The whistler, or marmot, had climbed down the rocks and was standing again to sound his shrill whistle. Then, he stopped! The next instant there was a flash of color, but no whistler. Usually the marmot would have waited; but not now. He had seen something that behooved speed.

That something was the form of a big Silvertip that had lurched out of the willows. The form was brown, silver-tipped, massive; but it had the speed of a cottontail. The bear arrived too late to nab the marmot, but that did not bother him at all. In that hole was a whole family of whistlers, and the bear knew it. Besides, digging to a grizzly is almost as great a pleasure as eating. For a moment the dirt flew in all directions, and a hole of some dimensions was started in the mountainside. Then of a sudden his way was blocked by a rock that barred further progress. Here was a place for a little grizzly engineering. The bear drew out of the hole, scraped the dirt away from the entrance, and then returned to the boulder.

There was another flurry of dirt, and then the bear straightened up with the rock in his arms. The stone rolled down the hill, crashing the hazels and finally splashing into the lake. The bear watched it curiously until the last ripple had died down in the water, and then returned to his digging. Five minutes later a terrified whistler shot out of the hole and darted down the hillside with the grizzly in full pursuit. There was a flash of a paw, a streak, and then a dead marmot. The Silvertip returned to the hole. Another pocket was dug out, and a whole family of whistlers succumbed in one swift moment. After that the bear had breakfast, looked about contentedly for a moment, and then started down for a dessert of water lilies. By that time the day had warmed, and it was just the time for bathing. The bear started swimming across the lake.

But the bear was not alone. Upon the crest of the ridge, three men had been watching him dig out that whistler. Two of the men were sitting together, passing a set of binoculars back and forth, and commenting on a line of attack. The other man was sitting all by himself, hidden by a

clump of scrub oak, waiting. The old man was interested in the bear, but just now he was giving the men the greater part of his attention. Had he known all that was on their minds, he would have acted sooner than he did, but it was not the old man's custom to regard any man as a thief.

The men were talking about the bear, but both were thinking about the old man's pay streak. Old John was pretty sure to have a cache of gold. The two had discussed it the night before, and had then gone to sleep with the same thought in mind. Crooks are always strong on acquiring a stake, but just as short on its division. Old John did not know that the canker of greed had entered their heads and that now each was distrusting the other. John Harper Adams was merely thinking about his half-tame grizzly. If the men were really after deer, all right and good; but if they were after Silvertip, something was bound to happen.

The men held their places until the bear had started into the lake in quest of the lilies; then they separated. Both men disappeared back of the ridge; and presently they came back at different spots and began working their way down the hillside. Old John watched them shift their way from clump to clump until they had ensconced themselves on either side in complete command of the lake. The bear had started across. Old John was in a convenient place, with both men within easy gunshot. He waited.

And then—the big man in khaki let out a yell! He spun around for a second, grabbed his hat off the ground, and then flopped on his stomach behind a boulder. What had happened was this: The man in khaki had started to draw a bead on the old man's bear, but before he could get well set, the old man had sent a bullet through his hat. Both guns had gone off almost simultaneously. At the next instant, he had given the other hunter a dose of the same medicine. Another yell and another man crawling into cover. So far so good. But he was not prepared for what was to follow. The big man in khaki was crawling on his stomach and shifting his position. His voice came up to old John.

"Well, you will, will you!" came his snarl. "So that's your game, eh? Get me over here in a convenient place, and then shoot me in the back. Well, if that's what you want, old side kick, there's two of us that can play the same game. Here's a little dose of the same kind of stuff!"

What followed was another yell, and the other man digging farther into cover. Then a shot came from the other side of the hill. The battle was on. By this time the bear had gained the shore and was looking out of a thicket at this strange explosion that had broken the mountains' silence. Old John was sitting among the oaks and wondering what had come off.

"Looks as though I started something, don't it?" said the old man. "Our guns went off kinda together, and so he thought it was the other fellow. Kinda looks as though we was a-going to have a murder." Then he laughed. Both of the men were such poor shots that their efforts were pitiful. It was apparent that they were both frightened to death. Still, there was danger of one of them getting hit by a stray shot, and that might mean death. But for all that, the old gunman could not deny himself a few minutes of pleasure. The men were pumping away like a couple of Mexican sharpshooters.

"Prettiest shooting I ever did see," said Old John. "But one of you might get hit, and that would be awful. Now, we'll see what Old John can do."

The big man in khaki was the first target. The old man drew his bead. The next instant the big fellow's rifle was spinning out of his hands, and the man was crawling on his belly. Another shot and the smaller belligerent was creeping, sans rifle, sans voice, sans courage, into the deep underbrush.

After that there was a strange, deep silence. The old man waited and took out his spy glass. Had either man been half as good a shot as he was a sneak, there would have been a death registered in the first shot of the battle. It was half an hour before the old man could distinguish either of them. Then he caught sight of the smaller man worming like a snake through the fire brush up near the crest of the ridge. He was just going over. Over on the north side there was a fleck of color behind the oaks, and the old man recognized khaki. They were going back to camp together. At least they would get there together, thought Old John. He was wondering what would happen when they met.

"By cracky!" said the old man. "It might be interesting at that. Kinda funny that they should explode like a couple of fools. They might have known. Now I wonder—"

The old man had seen men go mad in the mountains before. He remembered suddenly the look that had passed between them the day before, when the smaller man had examined the gravel. That might be it, and then again it might not. One thing was certain, and that was that if the two men met, there would be a fight. And it would be a villainous fight between two villains. Old John chuckled. He turned down the hill and started up the gulch that led toward Black Peak.

He went along leisurely, because he wanted the two men to get to camp before him. He was certain that neither of them had suspected what had really happened; and he was equally certain that neither of them had imagined that he was being watched. Just now they would be scooting back to camp with their black hearts raging. The old man would let them get there first. There was plenty of time. He found some blackberries growing between some logs and stopped to fill up. As he ate, he hummed a love song that he had learned in his callow youth. Then he sat down for a long smoke, while he thought things over. He remembered that big kettle, and wondered whether they had anything in it.

After a bit he stood up. "Well," he said, "I guess they've had time enough. We'll just mosey along slow and see what we see. Mebbe they'll have some venison in that big pot. After this morning's hike and that blackberry relish, a stew would go pretty good."

About a mile up the stream the old man left the creek bed and hit for the side of the hill. The camp was on a little flat, and he wanted to come down from above. As he worked his way through the woods, he caught the scent of cooking meat, and the scent made him hungry. But of the men themselves there was no sight and no sound whatever. He was directly above the flat, now, and he could not understand. Nevertheless, he made up his mind to come down and test that meat. The men had followed his instructions perfectly. The big kettle was hanging from the cross bar, and full of meat. There had been a fire under it, but the fire had almost burned out. But there was the odor of steam; the meat had been boiling recently. The old man walked up to the kettle, took a sharp stick and ran it into a piece of meat. Then he stopped. He had heard a grunt. And that grunt was of the kind that is made by only one man in the world—a man fighting and on the

brink of death. The sound came from the creek directly below him. He had looked down before, and he had seen nothing. Now he knew why.

The grunt had come from behind a clump of willows. Just as he looked over, the interlocked bodies of the two men shot into view, rolled over, and then straightened up. It was a silent battle. Both men were a sight to behold. The big man was ripped to tatters, and the smaller man had been beaten to a pulp. There was no sound. The big fellow was slowly forcing a knife down on the little man; and the smaller man was straining to hold it up.

The old man climbed down the bank; he had come to see a fight, not a killing. With one swift pass he struck the wrist that held the weapon. He caught the knife and sent it tomahawking into a log. The blade sang for a minute, and then held an upright position, buried two inches into the wood.

"By cracky!" he spoke. "You young fellers don't want to be acting this a-way. What's the idea?"

The smaller man was glad for the respite; he staggered back and picked up a rock. The big man mopped the crimson from his face; there was blood in his eyes, and the lust to kill.

"Put down that rock," said Old John. "They ain't nothing to fight for. You fellers is a-going to be friends."

The short man still held the rock; out of his panting, he began speaking. "He—" he began.

"No, he didn't either," said Old John. "He didn't do anything of the sort. You just thought he did. And he thought the same thing. But you're both mistaken. It was me that put them shots through your hats, gentlemen, just to let you know that I wouldn't stand for your shooting at my bear. Then I had to shoot the guns out of your hands to keep you from murdering each other. Then I thought that I'd come up here and explain, but I guess I got here a little late."

Had Old John had just a bit more acquaintance with the rogues gallery, he might have been prepared for what followed. He would have known that when in sight of prey, all crooks are pardners. It is only among themselves that they fall out. The big man was still swaying; hate was in his eyes, and the lust to kill. But all that was suddenly smothered in the blandness of the villain. A sickly smile spread over his face; he looked at the other and the other looked at him.

"A mistake?" asked the man. "You say—"

"All a mistake," said Old John. "All a mistake. You're in a bad fix, my man. Your ear needs a stitch. Come here. Awful sorry."

Right there the old man made the mistake of his life. The big man had come over and was holding out his hand. The old man took it in simple faith. Then it happened. The big man, with all his strength, lurched forward. The wiry old man spun around, and then the little fellow closed in. The next instant Old John was on his back, disarmed, with the two men holding him down.

"Get a rope," shouted the big man. "Get a rope. He wanted us to murder each other, eh? Well, we'll fix him. Here's he is, Bill. His hands! Tie them!"

The old man was thinking fast; the fight was two to one, and he knew that his old body would be no match for that of the two young men in a physical encounter. But if they were going to tie him up, it was evident that they were not going to kill him. Old John had faith in his wits. What befuddled him was their sudden lapse into alliance. That could mean but one thing—his pay streak. He noticed that they had not tied his legs. His guns had been thrown to one side, and they had taken his knife. But there was still the knife sticking into the log. The old man had his plan.

"Well," he drawled, "I guess you've got me, boys. Only I don't see your idea. I kept you from killing each other, and now you turn on me. Kind of a nice little party."

This time the little fellow started talking. "You bet it is, old fellow. And it's a-going to be a well-paid one, if you take it from me. Me and Tom here had you all figured out last night. This beating that both of us got settles it. You got to pay for our wounds. See? We got damages coming, and big ones. You've got gold, and we're going to have it. We're going to put you on that pack horse and lead you back to your cabin. And you're going to dig up. And if you don't—well, there's more than one way to make you dig!"

The old man said nothing; he had measured the distance to that knife in the log. He could swing his arms down on that and cut the rope. Then his gun. This time he would be prepared. All he wanted was the opportunity. Then he stopped thinking. His bear-trained ears had caught the slightest shuffle among the leaves in the flat above him. It was Silvertip!

Silvertip, having been reared through cubhood by Old John, had no positive fear of a man. He had swum across the lake that morning, and had heard shooting. Out of instinct he had hidden himself in the thicket while he watched the curious banging on the mountainside. Then he had seen the men crawling like snakes over the crest of the ridge. After that, Old John had slipped from his hiding place and had descended to the gulch that led to Black Peak. Silvertip was a grizzly, and had a grizzly's curiosity. He followed.

Then the old man stopped. While the old man ate the berries and smoked, the bear spent a leisurely half hour watching a little wren hopping *pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat*, around in the underbrush. Then the old man started up the gulch again. The bear smelled meat. He saw the old man start up the hill, so he cut in above him. Then he watched Old John descend the hill, take a stick, and thrust it into the kettle, but for some reason he brought nothing out. Instead, he turned and descended the steep bank that led to the creek. Strange sounds were coming out of the creek bed, but that meant nothing to Silvertip. He was not afraid of men. Here was meat and here was a chance to eat it.

But he was a bear, and his instinct gave him a certain amount of caution. He waited for a few minutes, and then waddled sidelong down into the flat. The kettle was hanging on the cross bar, and it had an odor that would make an ever-hungry bear turn somersaults. But he was curious. He had lived in the companionship of Old John, and that companionship had made him stove wise and wise also to the danger of steam; and his natural instinct would have warned him had there been a fire under the kettle. But here there was nothing of the sort; it had died out, only the most tantalizing of odors coming out of that big pot. That odor held his attention from the men in the creek. He walked around and around the kettle, sizing it up. Then he decided that he would have a piece of meat. He stood up and thrust in his paw.

"Yeeruuup! Ouuu! Zip!"

A ton of exploding dynamite is a fair measure of a grizzly's temper. The scalding of his paw and Silvertip's swipe at the kettle were almost instantaneous. It was a real grizzly swipe.

Kettle, cross bar, posts, and venison went sailing into the air and down into the creek. The bear went through the camp with a roar. A yell came up from the creek bed.

Old John had heard Silvertip. He was hoping for a diversion, but for nothing like this. Yet when that kettle came shooting out of the air, he knew just what had happened. The falling kettle struck against the big man's legs and upset him; the little man took to the creek. Old John sprang for the knife in the log. Two swipes of the rope over the blade and he was free. Then his rifle. The other two did not know what it was all about. From the flat above came a roar, where Silvertip was venting his rage on the camp. The old man had picked up his guns. There was death looking out of his .45.

"All right, boys," he chuckled. "We said we was going to have a little party. We are. Kind of a diversion, eh? You needn't be afraid of that noise up there. That's just my friend, Silvertip. I guess he put his hand in that hot meat. Silvertip, he's got a fractious temper. But him and me is great pals, and I ain't a-going to let him hurt you. I'm the one that's dangerous. Here, you little fellow, you come over here and tie this big man up. And tie him according to mountain specifications. When you get that done, I'll take care of you. Then we'll march."

Two days later a strange caravan came into the little mountain town. It was just train time, and so the little group of mountaineers gathered at the station did not get more than a glimpse. But that glimpse was enough. The old man hurried them to the ticket seller, bought tickets, and hustled them onto the train.

"Well, good-by, boys," he spoke. "No hard feelings. But next time you go bear hunting, be careful whose bear you shoot."

"What's the matter, John?" asked a bystander.

"Oh, nothing," came the answer. "Them boys is all right, I guess, only they're city bred. Up here they get wild. I had to take them in hand to keep them from killing themselves. They'll be all right in the city."