

# Snow Hunters



by Raymond  
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**I**N the beginning a snow-storm does one thing well; it covers over, it hides, and it conceals. But in the end, snow reveals, with relentless and unmistakable clearness. Therefore it is easy to make a serious mistake about snow-storms and snow.

There are four thousand square miles of the big woods and the forest canopy covers mountains, ridges, knolls and flats; it rovers valleys, swamps, bottoms and lowlands. In the autumn, winter makes tentative advances upon the wilderness by scouting snow-clouds, which lay miles-wide swaths of snow, like white ribbons across the woods and mountains.

The snow sometimes covers the land and trees from the mountain tops down to the twenty-three-hundred-foot level, say, and while all the land above that level is white with snow, very sharply, the parts below that level are dark, black even, with autumnal purples and wetness.

Of humans, hunters are most concerned with the autumn snows. They want tracking snow, so that they can tell where the deer have been, where they came from, and especially, whither they are bound.

Up to, and including the 15th of November, the woods are greatly occupied by men who wish to let go of their instinct to kill their own meat, but on the 16th, the great majority of hunters put on their packs, tuck

their guns into the crooks of their elbows and amble down out of the woods and climb stiffly into their conveyances, to take their courses to less exposed, more comfortable, less attractive abodes and places of occupation.

Men commonly desert the wilderness, just when it become most wild; just when the woods are most solemn, quiet, given over to the perfect coordination of Nature's forces, humans turn their back, on the fastnesses, because, perforce, the law no longer permits them to kill deer—of all large wild creatures, the easiest and the most pitiful to kill.

Take bears, for example; bears are legal game, and there are only four or five real bear hunters among the two or three hundred thousand hunters who go in the big woods. By bear hunters one does not mean men who set traps, baited with odorous and attractive temptations to suit a bear's appetite, but men who shoulder their rifles and slip into the wilderness, to hunt down the bear, and shoot him in the spot where it will do the most damage—wherever that may be, as hunters continually dispute whether a heart, neck or head shot is worst for bears.

Bears are self-sufficient animals. They take advantage of those first autumnal snows. They use them in visualizing the

presence of their natural born enemies, the riflemen of the woods.

A bear, following a beech flat, from nut tree to nut tree, will inspect a hunter's moccasin track with nose, and even with tentative picking with a long forepaw claw. Of all noses in the woods, a bear's is the keenest and the most accurate; it registers the odor of a man from a mile, or even miles, up wind; and a bear's ears put a deer's or fox's to shame for acuteness and identification.

A bear knows the step of a deer, the jump of a rabbit, the whirl of a partridge's wings, and the faint, practiced, villainous crouch of a still-hunter, armed with a rifle, with a point-blank of two hundred yards.

A human, with keen ears, will hear the distant scared cry of a cub suddenly deserted—for lesson's sake—by a mother bear, in full flight at the least taint in the woods' pure air.

The fact is, the woods are full of odors, and a fish caught dead upon a lake beach, a deer dead of slow wounds, the muck of dead-wood, the slip of wet leaves—all these things are pure and of the woods; but not the odor of men, modern men, with their tobacco, their cooked food, their natural smell, for not even the smoke of an open dead-wood fire—the abomination of the woods in these days of burning dead and down timber, instead of slim beech, birch, and maple—not even the dank smudge of half-rotten spruce or balsam, can purify a man and make him sweet to the green timber creatures.

Snow blankets the earth, and covers all that was; but immediately everything that is is revealed, forthwith. And on this account, Jerry Tilcum rejoiced when he entered the timber, between days, on bare ground, which was immediately covered, flake by flake, with snow. Jerry had reason for desiring to be absent, without trace.

He was a pot-hunter; he was

determined to kill venison for his winter meat; he needed snow to hide his trail, to reveal the deer, and to cover the fact of his violations. He went into the woods on the 17th of November, which was the day after the last of the law-abiding deer hunters shouldered their packs for the regretful pull-down out of the woods into the highways where they sought home comforts, including home cooking.

Jerry lived in Boulder, and he knew that Game Protector Vincuss had his eye on him. Jerry had violated all the game laws, fish laws and forest laws that he felt inclined to break.

Otherwise, he was a very law-abiding, circumspect citizen. He didn't have to violate the law, as a matter of livelihood; it was merely a sport with him, like playing poker with a member of the police board, or buying a glass of good liquor on Sunday from the alderman of the ward.

The trouble was, Game Protector Vincuss was without humor, and he had a sense of duty. Not for the world would Vincuss sit down and eat a venison steak with a boon companion for an early December dinner.

Having sat down to such a dinner, he would immediately arise and take his host to the justice of peace, and force a confession of judgment, with costs, amounting, all told, to \$111.14, including war tax on railroad fares.

Before going into the woods Jerry ascertained that Vincuss was trying to catch boys who were shooting muskrats, when muskrat shooting was illegal, because it spoils the hide.

He knew, too, that Vincuss was looking around trying to find automobiles with parts of the meat of does in them, killing female deer being among the innumerable possible violations of the law.

Between days, Jerry slipped his

flivver out of his garage; he ran it twenty miles up the Creek Road; he turned it into an old log camp tote road (throwing down some dead brush where he left the main-highway, to cover his tire tracks), and hid the little car in some hemlock second growth.

Then he shouldered his pack and slipped back four miles to a hunting country in which he had great confidence.

Deer were there in plenty; hunters had missed that locality, having gone too far into the woods, or not gone far enough in, to locate this game pocket.

There was a big, overhanging boulder there, and under this Jerry had often slept, on a bed of hemlock and balsam boughs. In front of it was a built-up stone fireplace, which reflected heat back under the big boulder, where it was dry and cozy. A passer-by, glancing at the camp, would have thought it was occupied only by porcupines, for all the human conveniences were cunningly hidden and obscured by dead-wood, a fallen tree top, and other camouflage.

Jerry reached the camp before midnight. He rolled up in his woolen-waterproof canvas sleeping bag, till just before dawn, he awakened and ate a hot breakfast. At the first streak of dawn, he warmed the grip of his rifle barrel over his little fire, and ten minutes later he slipped forth in the falling snow, his moccasins making no noise on the slushy, wet ground.

"I guess I've given old Vincuss the slip, this time!" he grinned to himself.

He hunted slowly, and with the minimum of motion commensurate with covering the ground at the rate of a little less than two miles an hour. Knowing the habits of deer like a successful violator, he sought them where they were most likely to be in such a mild storm, either in rather thick evergreen timber, or working along the beech ridges pawing among the wet leaves

for beechnuts.

The deer were very wild; they had been driven into that small area by the activities of legal hunters of three days previous on all sides, some driving the ridges with wild ballyhoos, and some sneaking with more or less craftiness, according to more or less crude ideas about the art of still-hunting.

Deer tracks were plenty in the dead leaves, showing through the thin white of the snow. The woods, black at the beginning of the storm, seemed to grow whiter and brighter apparently under the inspiration of the snow, rather than because of the coming of day.

The illusion, one of Nature's prettiest, was perfect. The snow was making daylight!

Jerry crossed an area of spruce knolls; ascended an open beech ridge; descended into another evergreen patch—a balsam swamp, this time—and worked his way diagonally up the side of a great, master ridge where deer found a succulent moss along the north side. He struck a deer runway which led into a deep gap in the ridge, and following it, he sat down to breathe at the crossing of many wild animal trails.

Deer runways, cut by sharp hoofs in the soil, were most conspicuous; but the practiced eyes of the veteran poacher discovered the claw prints of a fisher, the fresh pads of a fox, and various other sights revealed to him the fact that bears had been using that gap a good deal lately.

Having arrived at a certain monarch hemlock, at the foot of which he could sit down and watch the converging runways, he put his back to the friendly trunk, and with his rifle across his lap, he began a vigil which does very well in place of active hunting, when game is uneasy and when wild life is wandering about very much a foot.

He sat there quite a long time. It was, to his wicked mind, perfectly beautiful. He could not hear a shot of any fellow violator in any direction.

He knew that, except for one trapper, whose line was three miles west, up Sand Creek, it was unlikely another man would be in that part of the woods again before the following hunting season, in October.

The sense of possessing the great wilderness for his own private purposes pleased him very much, and a feeling of snugness, a glow of warmth, combined to soothe his eagerness.

Inspired by the loveliness of the scene, soothed by the certainty of his aloneness, he unconsciously yielded to the demand that he make up for some of the weariness excitement and effort incident upon his loss of sleep and scurrying like a hunted man away from his happy home into the realms of game law breaking and sense of fugitive necessity.

No deer in a snug bed, no bear under a dense evergreen, no rabbit in its found ever slept with the soundness that closed the eyes of Jerry Tilcum. He was as much a part of the wilderness as any man could possibly be—smoked by his camp fire, a fugitive in fact, a raider in instinct, and wearied by his exertions.

So the snow sifted softly down, whitening him; and the faint breeze sifting through the trees, pulled loose a number of late hanging beech leaves, two or three of which drifted down on him, one on his hat, one on his mitts, and one on the toe of a moccasin.

He might have been a wart on the roots of the hemlock, for all he looked, after half an hour.

From the other side of the ridge, something began to approach the gap. It ambled up, worked back a snuffle or two, ambled up a little further; it stopped to

scratch into an old stump.

Then it sat on its haunches, and scratched under its shortest rib. When it came up a little higher, and out into a little more open a space, it was revealed that this was a bear, a cub bear which would weigh about forty pounds.

Cub bears are not old, keen-nosed specters of the wilderness. They have much to learn. They are eager to learn it.

This cub's mother was about three hundred yards down the side of the mountain, lying under a clump of hemlock second growth, trying to get to sleep. Her cub was a very great care on her mind, and every once in a while she had to go hunting all over some valley, or mountain, trying to find the little brute, only to discover that the cub had laid down to sleep somewhere, without the least regard to being found by a hunter, or getting sick from eating too much, without drinking enough water, or some other ailment known to mother bears.

She was going to lie down, now, and sleep, no matter what happened to the little wretch, looking after whom was enough to keep four mother bears and two or three yearlings busy. So she was asleep, but with one ear cocked for sake of her cub.

The cub rambled up to the gap, at last, and seeing a great, beautiful hemlock tree, with elegant rough bark, to climb, and a chirring red squirrel sitting anxiously upon a knot, the cub reached up the grade to the foot of the hemlock, and walked halfway around it, still looking up, planted one long forepaw upon a protuberance, reached with the opposite hind claw to take a good hold of a pliable, yielding, grippable substance, sank all its claws in, to take a most firm grasp, and then fell over backward with a wild cub call for help, which blended admirably with the nightmare yell of a man.

Jerry Tilcum, sleeping absolutely peaceably, caught first with his nostrils the

odor of bear, and it started subconscious trains of thought which rapidly developed and expanded and became vivid as something cold and clammy settled upon his warm neck, and then something short, powerful, and full of energy, gripping power and action, seized upon the mittened fist on his rifle, across his lap.

Jerry Tilcum's nightmare lasted several seconds. While it lasted, it was the liveliest thing ever seen or experienced in the big gap of the long ridge where he had drifted into sleep.

He grabbed it, he fought it, he spurned it, and he tumbled up and down and around in its embrace. It filled him with irresistible distraction and dismay.

He sprang up, at last, gave three jumps, fell into the space over a steep slope, and pitching and plunging, half awake, he rolled and fell and scrambled a hundred yards down the mountainside. When he finally recovered his consciousness, he looked around in bewilderment.

Stunned by the utterly incomprehensible attack, he did not at first remember that he was in the woods. His dream had been that he was in perfect serenity in the quiet of his own bedroom. The bearskin rug, in the adjoining room, rose up and began to snuffle around.

It had shambled sidewise through the doorway, while he lay there, perfectly helpless. It had reached up with a hind leg and clawed his neck; it had lathered upon his face with its gutta-percha tongue.

Then it had fondly clutched at his throat with all four legs, and three sets of claws, not including the ones the bear had lost in the trap that had been its doom; all the claws had then rivaled one another in seizing his throat.

Struggling against the horrors of being destroyed by a heretofore perfectly innocent bearskin rug, trophy of much skill

and effort, Jerry Tilcum tumbled and pitched and clawed, and he had actually rolled and fallen a hundred yards before he awakened to the fact that it was—well, what was it?

The swath he had made coming down the ridge was perfectly plain. The snow was wiped up in spots, and the brush was bent, broken, pulled up by the roots, so that there were white places, covered with snow, and black places, where the ground had been torn up.

There was plain evidence that he had slid twenty feet down an old glacial polish on a ledge of rock.

Fifty feet up the mountain Jerry found his rifle, with the muzzle jammed ten inches in a soft spot. He examined the barrel to see if it was bent—it was not; and he, with great care, fished about five inches of humus and sand plug out of the thirty caliber barrel, and then carefully wiped it out with a string cleaner. By this time not less than an hour had passed.

Jerry had reconciled himself to the fact that he had suffered a nightmare, and after glancing up the steep, brushy hillside where he had rolled and torn up the shrubs by the roots, he neglected one of the cardinal virtues of the wilderness. He did not climb back up the tiresome grade to see what signs he had made in his wrestling match with the nightmare. He did not feel like it!

Jerry Tilcum's neck was sore, but he ascribed it to the fact that he had scrambled head first through green ash and witch-hopples, not to mention the top of a windfall spruce and past a few edged stones and rounded boulders.

Lust of sport, lust of game law breaking, hunger for venison, had largely been appeased in the heart of Jerry Tilcum. He regarded himself as a fool for going to sleep up there in the gap.

There was no excuse for him, an old-time hunter, defiant of game laws, going to

sleep in the cozy arms of a hemlock's roots soothed by the whisperings of faint winds, and charmed by the soft falling of a beautiful tracking snow.

At the same time, with the departure of his lust and appetite, he found his pride coming to him. He had come into the woods for the deliberate purpose of killing a big venison and taking it out home, to put down for the winter.

Pride would not permit him to return home, especially now, after dreaming like a tenderfoot, without making the most valiant effort to kill big game.

"Dreams don't mean anything!" he assured himself, thinking of the clutches of that awful fur rug.

He had made enough noise, with his scramble down the mountain and his yells—he knew that he had yelled, that no one in the wide world but would have yelled, even a stoic—to scare all the deer anywhere around there.

Accordingly, he walked along the hillside rather rapidly for half a mile, and then worked up onto the back of the ridge, to approach the point at the end. Nervous, noisy, clumsy, still thinking of the nightmare, he could not hunt thoroughly well.

It was after eleven o'clock, and deer were certainly lying down over the noon of the day. Even if it was snowing, perhaps some big buck would be up there on the point, hardening—no, a buck's horns were already hard. Anyhow, big bucks like to sleep on points.

He was sore, and he ached, here and there. But at last he hunted with care, and like an old woodsman, without relaxing his vigilance in the least.

A tenderfoot will be even skillful and careful in the first few hours of a hunt, but as he grows tired, hungry, and begins to question his prowess and wish he was home,

he relaxes and begins to stumble, and thus loses perhaps the only opportunity he would have of killing big game.

Jerry hunted on, and found where a big buck had been routed out, and had fled down a mountain. He went hunting for another big buck, and true to form, late in the afternoon, when the big circle course he had taken through the timber began to close in on his big rock camp, there stepped out in front of him, a buck with antlers as wide as a window.

Jerry dropped his rifle sights in line with the foreshoulder of the noble brute, took aim for the fraction of a second, and pressed the trigger.

One shot—one jump—and a splendid head of live game was reduced to good venison.

Tilcum had never killed a finer deer. He had never seen a better shot. He had never felt a greater satisfaction in his own prowess than at that moment.

The butchery was rapidly and expertly performed; the head, cut off close to the ears—the hair around the horns was pretty long to have mounted that year! He cut off the quarters, and carried them only a little more than a quarter of a mile to his camp; he returned and brought in all the rest of the meat; the horns he hung in a hardwood tree, thinking that he would some time return there and get it, and that squirrels would be less likely to gnaw it in the open hardwood than in an evergreen's branches.

Then Jerry Tilcum took out of his pack-basket a contrivance of the most villainous kind, regarded from the standpoint of the game laws. It was a sausage grinder, and when he had finished with that instrument, beside which a burglar's jimmy is as the attribution basket passed at a suffrage meeting, he had exactly one hundred pounds of—sausage.

He had added to the meat two

spoonfuls of sage, three spoonfuls of black pepper, one half spoonful of Cayenne pepper, and four spoonfuls of fine salt, at the rate of ten pounds of meat per each dose of spice.

He put each ten pound batch of meat on a great sheet of oiled paper, and set it out on the rocks where it would freeze, and cool and “blow” or steam—a hundred pounds of pure sausage.

The hide was taken out and buried under a log, very carefully. The bones were buried with the hide.

Jerry also threw some waste stuff away. He viewed, with delight, the steadily falling snow. Every sign and trace of his villainy were covered over, without question.

It happened that he had in his pockets a newspaper, one printed the evening before, and he read it by firelight, for a little while.

Then he chucked it away, turned in and went to sleep. He slept peacefully, and without dreams.

In the morning the sun was shining, and Jerry hid his outfit under the rock, shouldered his pack, almost full of sausage, and started out in the new-fallen snow. His hundred-pound load felt heavy, and he stopped frequently to rest it on a log or stone, and at last hoisted it into the automobile with a sigh of relief.

He brushed eight inches of snow off the top of his car with a hemlock bough, filled his radiator from a near-by brook, gave the crank a lift or two, and then pulled it over hard. The flivver began to shiver, shake, puff, blow, and expound like twenty horses.

Jerry, however, had a second thought. He reflected that as he had a contrabrand load, he ought not to take a chance of meeting his neighbor Vincuss, the game protector, anywhere down the road.

He decided that he had better let the car remain where it was till nightfall, when he would surely escape an unwelcome

search by the game protector. Accordingly, having let the radiator warm up good, he stopped the motor and went out around to look at the woods.

A woodsman can never sit at his ease in the woods; he must go out and around and look at the timber, at the tracks in the snow, so wherever a woodsman is, there is activity and wandering and observation.

Jerry Tilcum wandered off three or four miles, and circled around in a rabbit swamp, and shot two snow-shoe hares. He felt proud of them, and slung them from his shoulder by a stout cord.

He sat on a log and watched a yearling deer feeding and nuzzling around in the snow—he didn’t dream of killing it, for he had all the meat he wanted.

By and by, he returned to the automobile, and, all wrapped up, to keep off the chill, he went to sleep, deliberately.

The pride of Jerry Tilcum was unspeakable! He thought, he believed, that he could go to sleep any time he wanted to, anywhere he wanted to. And he might have done any one of a hundred things, as for example, he might have run his little flivver out into the old tote road, and down the old woods road to the Wilderness Highway, six miles away, and gone to sleep in sight of it.

Then—well, other things happen in the woods besides what a man does. A man, even an old woodsman, is at best an extraneous creature, in the green timber.

Game Protector Vincuss had been so successful cleaning up his district of violators that it was difficult for him to discover and apprehend violators. For two months he had nursed a case against a man who had killed a woodpecker, accumulating corroborative evidence. He had his eye on a certain hotel, where he reckoned a game dinner might be served with illegal viands, to the proper, paying kind of sports.

He was even thinking of making a

foray on some small boys, who were suspected of the villainy of shooting muskrats.

Being a game protector of experience and resourcefulness and success, he was without pride. He was more humble than any man of his acquaintance.

On his head fell the curses of more deliberate violators than on any other law enforcer north of the moonshine belt. His humility was real and earnest, for he knew that the more he knew about game law breakers, the more he had to learn.

Nothing, positively nothing, could be permitted to escape his vigil, or escape his attention. So he discovered that Jerry Tilcum had gone away in his flivver.

The fact is, one of the victims of the law had cursed Vincuss because Jerry could go out any time and violate the law, and “nothin’ is done to him! Why, he went out with his 30-30 just to-night, an’ I seen ’im—course, he’s gone huntin’ red skurrels, er chipmunks!”

“The United States Constitution gives any man the right to bear arms,” Vincuss replied gently, and with a kind of piety.

“Yen—yeh!” the man who had paid a fine fairly yelled. “Yeh—”

Vincuss saw the Tilcum garage door was open, and the garage empty. He slipped into it, by way of exploration, and found that a big fur robe had been thrown over the work bench, which proved it wasn’t a social or pleasure ride. An extra overcoat, of the kind commonly carried for chance or visiting passengers, was dumped out, too.

“Yeh!” Vincuss muttered. “Now, where’s the cuss gone?”

He sneaked out of the garage, and homeward, unseen. He slept a little, but he was awake a good deal more of the time, trying to think, trying to imagine or divine where Jerry Tilcum would be likely to go,

and finally, his wife began to scold him for waking her up all the time, with his pitching and tossings around.

“I got to get an early start in the morning,” he apologized to her, though that was the first time he knew he had to get an early start that particular next morning.

“Shucks! I’ll wake you up!” she retorted, and so Vincuss went to sleep, knowing that his wife surely would rout him out, which she did, one hour before daybreak.

Half an hour later, having eaten his buckwheats, he kicked the starter of his five passenger, six cylinder and went out into the cold dawn. It had been raining some down in the valleys, but the hills around were white with snow, and accordingly, when he reached the end of the State Road, he put chains on all four of his wheels, and began to buck the mud and snow into the big woods.

He was on a blind chase. He knew, in his heart, that Jerry Tilcum had gone into the big woods, almost surely to kill a deer.

The best he could do was trust to the luck that makes things right. He picked a little trapper’s camp over on Sand Creek, and leaving his car at a farmhouse, he went across to the creek.

The camp was cold, deserted, and had not been occupied in several days. Then he went out “for a walk.” When a game protector goes for a walk it is a fearful thing, meaning perhaps ten miles, perhaps twenty; they have sauntered away for a “little walk,” and spent a week and traveled a hundred and fifty miles.

Vincuss had no idea that he would, go far or see much. He just ambled along, listening for distant shots; looking for fresh tracks in the snow that was falling, alert for any least indication.

He was walking along, about half past ten, when he bethought himself of some molasses cake which his wife had put into a



game bag for his lunch. There were other things besides molasses cake in the lunch, but the cake—um-m.

Vincuss brushed the snow off a log; sat down and he drew out one slab of the cake, which had been baked in a tin nine inches wide. The slab was nine inches long and three inches wide.

He broke it in two, and carefully put one half back into the piece of oiled paper, with another slab of the same kind, and began to eat; not because he was hungry, but because in ail the world there was nothing exactly like a piece of the molasses cake which Mrs. Vincuss made to remind him of her during his absences from his home hearth.

He had eaten almost all of the half-slab, when, suddenly, there raced tearing through the woods, not fifty feet from him, an old bear, with a cub galloping at her heels. She was going for further information, and the cub was uttering an alarmed whine at every jump.

They were the most scared bears that Game Protector Vincuss, had ever heard of. He watched them come, pass, and go with ever so little vindictiveness in his heart.

He had been a good sportsman before he became game protector. Now he had no wish to kill game, not even legal bears. He had in his pocket a .45-caliber automatic pistol, but he did not think to use it on the bears. He was a hunter for bigger game!

The racing, frightened, whining bears were a wilderness sign. Vincuss, marshaling his ideas, recalled the keenness of the bear's nose, its acuteness of hearing, its certainty of vision. One thing, and perhaps only one thing, will make a black bear in the big woods take to its heels and go to a new country—and that is having been scared by a man; sight, sound, and hearing of a man.

These bears had been scared by something, terribly scared. So Vincuss,

having digested his thoughts, and eaten his molasses cake, started on the back track of the two bears.

He knew that bears sometimes ran for twenty miles from the source of their alarm. These bears had crossed Sand Creek half a mile east of him; he crossed on a fallen tree, and took up the back track in the snow.

It was still storming; the snow was several inches deep. Every jump the claws of the bears had dug down to the ground. They had thrown black humus and wet leaves upon the snow behind them.

They left one of those revealing trails. Vincuss followed it back and he ran it into a thick clump of hemlocks, and there he found the bed which the old bear had occupied. The cub had come right straight into that bed, and the mother bear had jumped ten feet from her dreams into full flight.

Vincuss followed the cub tracks up the mountain, and he did so with comparative ease, for the cub had every time jumped ten feet, and slid five feet clear down the steep southside of the great ridge.

Up on top of the mountain, in the big gap there, he found an extraordinary thing. He found a place where a man had been sitting, and the cub's tracks started from that point. The bear had gone south, the man had gone north, and Game Protector Vincuss studied the signs in the snow, quite unable to determine what had happened.

Apparently, the man had rolled end over end down the ridge!

But there were a man's tracks. They were partly obscured by the snow, but the snow had not begun to fall till the previous night; ergo, the man tracks, from the viewpoint of a game protector, were very satisfactorily, fresh.

Vincuss did not know what man it was, but he took to the trail, for luck—

always for luck!

It was a long trail; it was hard to follow in some places; but it was, unmistakably, the trail of a deer hunter, seeking game in the points, where bucks lie, on hardwoods, where deer feed, and in the evergreen clumps where they find shelter and moss to eat. It was sometimes impossible to follow the moccasin tracks in the evergreens, because there the snow was thin, and more snow had fallen on the tracks than had been on the ground before they had been made.

All day long, sometimes step by step, Vincuss followed the trail. That night he sat in a thicket, all huddled up, to wait for day.

Again he ate his wife's molasses cake and it was solace, comfort, food and encouragement. In the dawn he went on again.

The sun was shining; it had stopped snowing; the hunter's tracks were so faint in the obscuring snow that Vincuss almost despaired of following it to his quarry. As yet, he had not found any proof that a deer had been killed, but he knew the signs; deer were being hunted. He spent hours, trying to follow the trail, and, finally, he lost it. It was in a big hardwood, and though he circled, he could not pick it up.

So he started with the feeling of defeat for the main road, miles distant, and as he came down over a ridge, a kind of big hardwood flat, he saw something in a tree ahead of him.

It was draped with snow, but he ran up to it, and uttered an exclamation—a great pair of buck antlers, with the head cut off close to the ears, hide and all.

That was confession of illegality! Fur-there proof was the red drip of fresh blood. Also, no one who had killed a pair of horns like that legally would ever have left them in the woods.

From the horns it was only a little

ways to the kill—forty feet or so. Already foxes had come to the place, and the three trips which the hunter had made coming and going in the snow had left a plain trail.

In ten minutes Vincuss was at the great rock, with its hidden boughs, its covered fireplace, and another trail which led to the tide and bones of the deer under the log.

Evidence? Plenty of it! There was a newspaper, partly covered by the snow. Its date line read November 16, and it was an evening paper.

There was a little yellow shred of paper on the first page, and that paper had some printing on it.

The hands of Game Protector Vincuss trembled as he breathed upon the paper to melt the ice with which it was covered. When he shook the water away, there was the plain reading:

Jerry Tilcum,

November 22, '16.

“Lucky thing for Jerry if his subscription had expired seven days sooner,” Vincuss mused. “Now to nail the cuss to his job!”

Vincuss looked around the camp, and found an empty cardboard can which had held sage, and tucked back under the rock was a cache of salt, red pepper, black pepper, a sausage grinder and a simple cooking outfit.

When the pepper was delivered from the grocery, a piece of gummed paper had been stuck on the can, to hold the written address of J. Tilcum.

Then Vincuss took the fresh morning trail out of the woods; it was a trail that went deep into the snow at every footstep, and where it crossed logs, and passed stones, the violator had sat down to rest with a basket heavy laden. But not a drop of blood had

dripped from the meat within.

Vincuss grinned.

“A scientist,” he mused, “would have the hardest kind of job proving that venison made into sausage, and flavored, is venison.”

It was late in the day when Game Protector Vincuss discovered the flivver by its black top ahead of him in a hemlock thicket. He studied it carefully.

He did not know how desperate the violator would be. He recognized that Jerry Tilcum might be “bad,” at this moment, when he was caught, red handed.

Accordingly, Vincuss, the man-hunter, slipped up to the flivver with utmost caution. As he drew near it, he heard a little snuffle.

He knew a snore by its sound. Grinning, he crept closer.

Yes, Jerry Tilcum had gone to sleep again. In his pride, he had been sure that he was perfectly safe. There he slept in the back seat, with his mittened hands crossed in front of him, a red line of wrist above the mitts.

The 30-30 carbine was in the front seat. Vincuss, all nerve and alert, slipped up to the side of the car, not daring to breathe. He opened both jaws of his handcuffs, and with a jaw in each hand, he aimed them at the narrow, bare lines of the wrists, and with a swift, sure drive, snapped them both in place, and then, seizing the 30-30, dropped the lever far enough to see that there was a loaded shell in the barrel, in front of the hammer plunger.

“Hi-i— I— I— Gee— Holy— Moses! Save me!”

Jerry Tilcum screamed, springing to his feet and then lunged headfirst out onto the ground, half burying himself in the snow. He jumped up, struggling and blowing and pulling at the handcuffs.

Game Protector Vincuss stood by, smiling. He, too, had got his game. He was not exactly proud, for he knew better, from,

hard experience in the big woods, than to be proud. He saw his prisoner come up out of deep, unhappy slumberland into a more unhappy consciousness.

Tilcum suddenly realizing what had happened, and identifying the handcuffs on his wrists, wiped the snow off his face and the sweat out of his eyes. He turned a shamed, trapped-bear look at his captor. He blinked, and gave a trapped-bear look out into the wide, open wilderness, in which a man could be free.

He looked back again, and meeting the level gaze of the game protector, accusing him, he dropped his glance in shame to the torn up snow where he had fallen in his nightmare.

“You got me,” Tilcum confessed.

“You’ll confess judgment?” Vincuss suggested.

“Why—you mean—”

“If you will, you can sign the paper right here, and then—”

Vincuss drew out the wallet in which he carried his papers, and Tilcum read the judgment blank.

“I might’s well.” Tilcum said, and when Vincuss had filled it in, he signed.

“Now I’ll take them off,” Vincuss said, and he unlocked the slim steel rings.

They rode out of the thicket together, down the old tote road into the State Highway. When they reached the farmhouse where Vincuss had put up his car, the game protector took the sausage, in the pack-basket which he borrowed from Tilcum, and started to carry it to his car. He stopped, however, and turned back.

“Jerry,” he said, doubtfully, “it’s none of my business, but—er—I’d like to know what happened over on that big ridge, in the gap there—”

“Eh—you—you were there?” Tilcum demanded.

“Yes—I tracked you from there. I

saw two bears running like the devil over beyond Sand Creek. I knew—well, I thought something had scared them. So I followed their back tracks.

“The old one had a bed down at the foot; of the mountain. The cub came from up in the gap, and things were tore up—I couldn’t tell very well—it’d snowed quite a lot, you know.”

Tilcum felt of his neck, and Vincuss saw under the collar a big, raw scratch.

“Why—I thought I had a devil of a dream!” Tilcum gasped. “I thought my old bear hide rug had grabbed me—I could smell it—feel it—”

“Say! Is that right? You know—I couldn’t tell, but it looked to me just as

though that cub had stepped on you—”

Tilcum blinked. He pulled at his thick shirt collar, and picked up something to look at it.

“Ain’t that bear hair?” he asked.

“Why—it is!”

“Yes, sir! I wrestled with that fool cub!” Tilcum blinked. “If I’d knowed that—um-m. Say, Vincuss, I’m paying right up—no fuss nohow—only I got a favor to ask?”

“Yes?”

“Sure. Mum’s the word, you know. Not the ketching me—that’s all right—but you know, me getting caught twice, asleep!”

“Well, all right,” Vincuss hesitated, adding: “Gee!”