THE POETIC JUSTICE OF UKO SAN

BY JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

Illustrated by Stanley M. Arthurs

TWO trips to the Barren Lands and a third to Hudson Bay—months spent on snowshoes and dog sledge and amid the haunts of big game—have brought me face to face with more than one exciting adventure, but never have I felt that creeping, tingling sensation, which some describe as "rising of the hair," as on this particular afternoon in May when I met Uko San and his mother. As the following pages from the history of Uko San may hold more than a merely romantic interest for most of my readers, I will be somewhat explicit as to details of name and place.

A week before I had come up the Duluth Extension from Port Arthur, and at the Forty-Eight mile post had joined Teddy Brown, trapper and guide. Together we were in camp on Arrow Lake, seven miles back in the mountains, looking over what is without doubt the best moose and bear country in Canada, when I blundered into one of the most uncomfortable situations it is possible for a hunter to be in.

I must confess that I was lost, a confession which any hunter will know is ample proof that I am telling the truth; or, to put it mildly, the camp had gone astray. Without a compass in my pocket, with nothing heavier than a pigeon gun in my hands, and with a young hound and a mongrel cur at my heels I came around a huge mass of rock and the next instant was within half a dozen paces of a monster black brute who was apparently as much astonished as I at the unexpected meeting.

One moment's cool judgment should have told me what to do, for immediately behind the big bear were two cubs, hardly larger than full-grown house cats, and even as I stopped and the dogs fled in frightened retreat behind me the mother turned leisurely away to give me the path. Some one has said that a fool is his own executioner. *Deo volente*—so he is! For while the beast was half broadside to me I raked her with two charges of number seven shot!

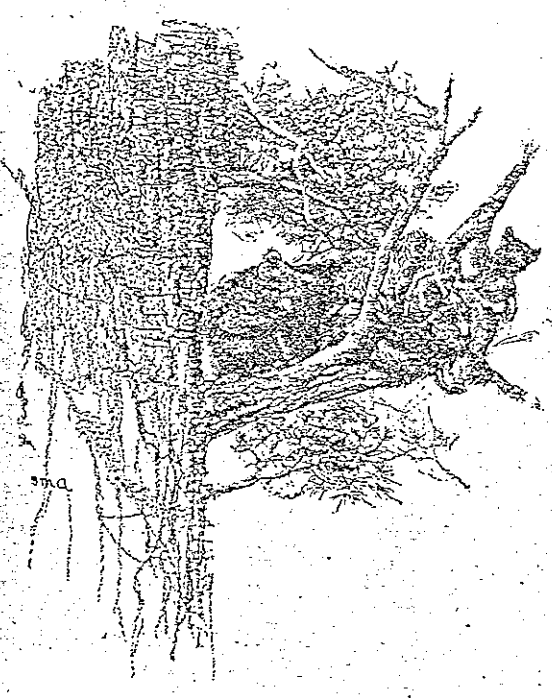
Have you ever heard the cry of a wounded cub—that half wailing, half whining cry which ends like the sobbing of a child stifling its pain? Better to hear the snarling scream of a lynx at your back than that—when the mother is near and you hold in your hands a gun that is mighty good for its purpose but as useless as a bean blower against four hundred pounds of maddened flesh and blood. In a flash I saw what I had done. One of the cubs was kicking and scratching in the trail, and the mother, enraged by her own pain and the cries of her offspring, whirled upon me with a deep-throated growl that was almost a roar.

Perhaps at this critical moment I should have drawn my long hunting knife, heroically faced the bear, and modestly state here that after a terrific struggle I slew her. But I didn't. With a yell of terror I dropped my gun and with a second yell plunged back among the rocks, shouting at every other leap after this for the cowardly dogs. At the first scent and sight of bear the young hound had darted into the bush, and now, as at every moment I expected to feel the ripping clutch of my pursuer, I heard Juno's sharp, excited baying from behind me—and *beyond* the cubs.

It was that puppish tongue that saved me. I fancied that I could almost feel the breath of bruin's angry snort as she dug up the gravel and stones in her

eagerness to stop and turn. Not for an instant did I wait to see what happened, but continued my flight for another hundred yards, climbed twenty feet up a birch, and gave silent thanks for my deliverance while I tried to call the dogs.

Immediately after this I heard the retreating tongue of both dogs; then the sound came nearer and still nearer, until at last I knew from the sharp excitement in the mongrel's cries that Mother Bruin and her cubs, like myself, had taken to a tree. Quickly sliding down my birch I hurried back to the rock. Fifty yards beyond this was a huge white pine, and up this the bear was climbing, urging her two cubs ahead of her.



It was slow work, for this was undoubtedly the cubs' first experience, and after each nudge of the mother's brown nose they would clamber up a foot or two, then hug close to the ragged bark and look down until they were nudged again. The lowest limbs were about fifty feet from the ground and it took the three at least ten minutes to make this distance. One of the cubs lodged himself in a crotch; the other flattened itself upon a limb, and the mother spread herself out comfortably over two limbs, like a scaffolding, and looked down upon the dogs from between her forepaws.

I came out boldly now, recovered my gun, and roundly cursed my luck for not having brought a rifle. For two seasons I had been endeavoring to capture a bear cub, and now Fate seemed perched up there in a tree laughing at me. In my vexation I sat down at the foot of the tree, loaded my pipe, and began to smoke. Scheme after scheme flashed through my mind. The idea of tying the dogs near the tree while I sought for the camp occurred to me.

I had known of this being done once upon a time—and it might have succeeded had not the bear descended upon the dog and killed him while the hunter was gone. I yelled until I was hoarse, but got no response from my comrade and guide. At intervals I fired my gun, but still no response. Meanwhile Mother Bruin and her little family gazed down upon us not at all ill-humoredly, wondering, I suppose, why we did not stop our senseless noise and go along about our business.

At last I decided to stay all night, build a big fire, and trust to Teddy coming after me with a rifle. No sooner had I conceived of this plan than another and more exciting one occurred to me. Close beside the big pine was a slender spruce whose top reached within twenty feet of the mother and her cubs. From that distance I knew that my full-choke pigeon gun would send shot like a round ball. Stripping off my coat I began the climb, the big bear watching my progress with more curiosity than fear.

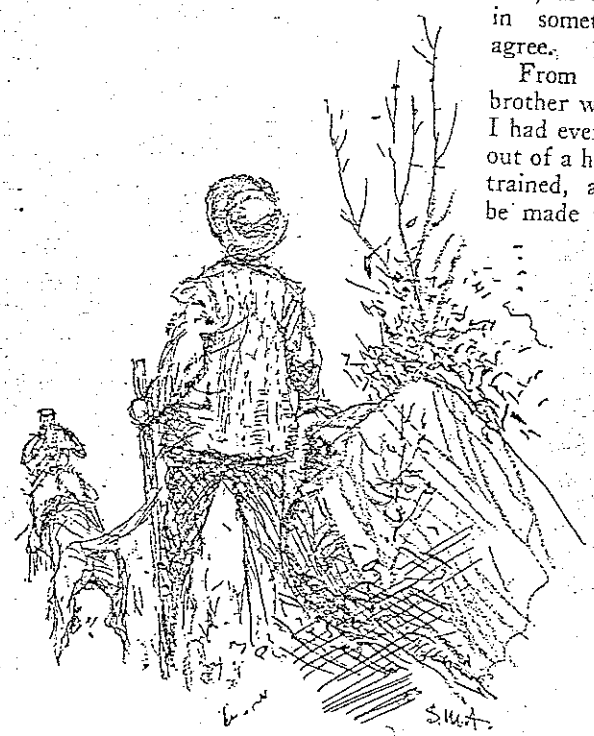
At the first charge, which I directed fair into her breast, she scarcely moved; at the second she drew herself slowly back toward her cubs. It took six shots to kill her, and with the last spark of life in her body she dragged herself upward so that her great body sheltered the cringing cub in the tree crotch. That cub was Uko San. And when

the mother hung limp and lifeless, wedged into the tree, the cub behind her crawled half over her back, and I saw a little blood-soaked face and snarling white teeth, and instead of the whimpering, child-like cry that I had heard below, there came from it now a hissing snarl.

Late that evening I found my way into camp, and the next morning, guided by the marks I had left upon trees with my belt ax, Teddy Brown and I hastened back to the scene of my adventure. High up in the pine we found the three, the dead mother and her cubs. Fifteen minutes with an ax and the pine shivered, swung gently for a few feet, then crashed to earth. It was an easy matter to catch Uko San, who even after the tree had fallen refused to run. Scratching and biting, he fought like a little fiend, and not until he was in my sack, with only his head protruding, did I see what my shot had done to him in the trail the day before. One eye—his right eye—was gone.

Three trees were felled before the second cub was captured. Four days after this we returned to my comrade's backwoods home, where, at the time, my friend's sister from Minneapolis was a visitor. This young lady was called upon to name the cubs. One she named Teddy, after her brother. To the other, who had lost his eye, she gave the name of a character from a Japanese story she was reading in a magazine. It was Uko San.

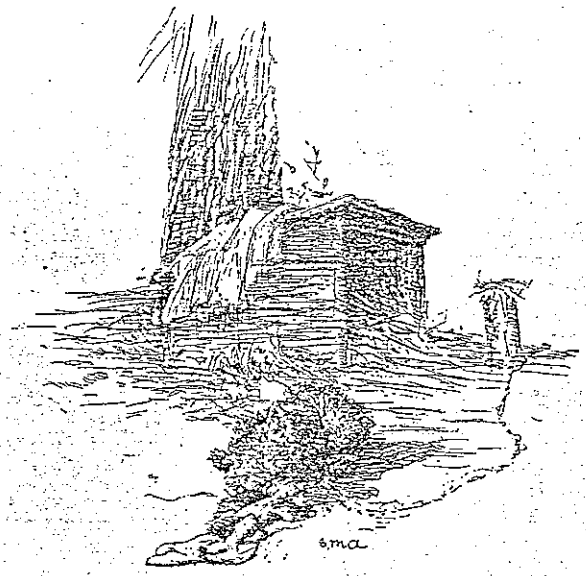
It is at this point that I wish to call particular attention to what followed in the lives of Uko San and his brother. I am not, in the first place, sympathetically inclined toward nature fakirs, who, I have found, are those least acquainted with the wild things of the wilderness. And yet I believe that there are wonders and mysteries of animal life, and I speak from my own experience, far more interesting than the ridiculous characteristics bestowed upon them by some imaginative writers. In fact, the wilderness is one of those very few places where truth is stranger than fiction, as any old hunter who takes joy in something besides slaughter will agree.



MOTHER BRUIN AND HER LITTLE FAMILY GAZED DOWN UPON US.

From the first, Uko San and his brother were unlike any other cubs that I had ever known. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a bear cub is very easily trained, and by proper treatment can be made to love his master. But not so these two. Never did I come near Uko San but he drew back, snarling and ready to fight, all the fierceness of vengeance and hatred gleaming in his one eye. Was it the killing of his mother in the tree top that transformed this lovable little creature into a thing at war with everything with which he came in contact in captivity? Was it the memory of her and of the strange enemy that had shot her to death that set him into a fury every time he saw a dog or a human face?

A child of human parents can grow up, nurturing and fostering a desire for ven-



ONE DAY THE WIND TOOK MY HAT WITHIN HIS REACH.

geance, until he is unlike other men, all his desires and passions centering in one single purpose. Can a scene of tragedy, an early hour of pain, create such a growth in the heart of a beast? I do not make the statement that it can, but ask the question only, and I would give a good deal to hear the experiences of others who have spent more than an amateur year or two in the silent places.

If not these things, then something else made Uko San and his brother strangers to their breed. For days and weeks I strove to gain the confidence of the one-eyed cub. He would sniff at the sugar I offered him only as a ruse to tear at the hand that offered it. He would feign sleep in order that something to rend and tear might come within his reach. His shaggy lids closed over the socket of his lost eye, and his other seemed to hold the watchfulness and cunning and murderous intent of both.

His hatred passed beyond those who were human about him. Everything that had the scent of the human upon it, or that belonged to the human, came within the pale of what I had come to call his vengeance. One day a wind took my hat within his reach and he tore it into ribbons. He found that he could lure the chickens within his beaten prison circle, and he killed until the fowls would no longer come within fifty feet of his post. One day he tore a skirt from the young woman who was attempting to make a friend of him.

He would leave a drink of sugar and water, thrust in to him by means of a pole, to rage and tug at his chain when anyone dared to come near the forbidden circle. Both Teddy Brown and myself bore the scars of wounds which he inflicted upon our hands and arms.

At this time, after two months of futile effort to tame our captives, I returned into the south, and "Teddy," the second cub, was put into a strong cage and shipped to Philip Squires, at Port Arthur. Late in the summer, by letter, I was informed of the dramatic ending of the second chapter in the lives of Uko San and his brother. Teddy, like Uko San, had become so fierce and unmanageable that he was regarded as a public menace, a "danger to life and limb," and his owner was compelled to call in an old hunter, Captain Ross, who shot him to death.

A week after this I received a letter from my old guide and friend, and in this letter, which I now have before me, he said:

"Uko-San is gone. Yesterday he caught Juno (the dog) and ripped open her belly. When I got up this morning I found the bear gone. He had broken his collar. I tracked him as far as I could on the hard ground, and when I lost him he was on the Pigeon River trail going toward Arrow Lake. I sewed up the dog and she'll be O. K. for fall hunting."

"Good!" I exclaimed, for no news could have brought me greater satisfaction than this of Uko San's escape.

Nearly three years after the capture of Uko San, Teddy Brown and myself were again in camp on Arrow Lake, prepared for our autumn bear hunt. We

were filled with high expectations, for never had signs of our game been more promising. The season had produced an unusual crop of mountain ash berries, especially in the rugged country immediately about the old abandoned logging camp in which we found comfortable shelter. Everywhere there were beaten trails leading over the mountains and through the ravines, and along these trails the smaller of the mountain ash trees were broken down and stripped.

On the first day, after building two houses and setting two traps, we discovered a tree fully four inches in diameter broken off about five feet from the ground. The next day we found other trees of unusual size pulled down, and on the morning of the third, close to our cabin door, we saw the footprints of an enormous bear. He had evidently made us a visit during the night, had even sniffed at the threshold, and had disappeared without arousing Juno, who, since her first experience with Uko San, had become a moderately good bear hunter.

We were therefore astonished and disappointed when she refused to pick up the trail. That same day she treed a small bear for us after giving tongue at its heels for three-quarters of an hour. During the week that followed scarcely a day passed that we did not see signs of the big bear, and at no time could we induce Juno to give chase. She would sniff at the tracks with cautious nervousness, as though they bore a strange scent for her, and so long as we pursued the trail ourselves she followed at our heels. No amount of urging or threatening could induce her to work, and finally, in a moment of senseless vexation, we gave her a flogging. She took the whipping without a whimper, and slunk even farther behind us.

Shortly after this, on a morning succeeding an unusually hard day's hunt, I was awakened by my companion pulling off my blanket and shouting for me to get up.

"We'll get 'im to-day," he declared. "There's snow, and he's been up to the cabin again. Man, oh, man, come take a look!"

Only under the most extraordinary circumstances does Teddy Brown use that expression. In an instant I was out of bed. Half dressed I followed him to the door. Two inches of light snow had fallen during the night, and in front of the door it was *literally beaten down* by the feet of our big bear! He had circled around the cabin three distinct times, and under our one window the snow was beaten as hard as in front of the door.

The brute had come from a mountain gorge to the southeast. He had turned back into that same gorge, passing within four feet of one of our baited traps, within a dozen paces of the other. Before each he had halted, sniffed, but had not approached. What did it mean? For an investigating bear to approach a camp, travel about it, and sniff at doors and windows was not a remarkable occurrence in itself. But for this same bear to pass two well-

HE HAD CIRCLED AROUND THE CABIN THREE DISTINCT TIMES.

baited trap houses and *not investigate* was something outside our experience. The greatest mystery of all lay in Juno's silence. The bear had been within a few feet of her and yet she had given no warning, had not even aroused us from our sleep!

Quickly eating our breakfast we took up the trail, never ceasing our exertions to urge Juno ahead of us in the pursuit. Through the gorge, over rough and jagged ridges, through chaotic masses of fallen timber and deep into swamps, running at times, but never stopping to rest, we hurried after the big bear. An hour after we had begun the chase he took us to the top of a big mountain; then down into the chasmlike break between it and the next, to the top of the second.

We had scarcely reached the summit of this second ridge when five or six hundred yards ahead of us, in the center of a small rock-strewn "burn," we caught a glimpse of our game. He was lumbering slowly ahead of us, picking his way without apparent haste, and even at our distance we could see that he was a monster of his kind. He was making straight for a cover two hundred yards away, and with every bit of endurance that was left in us Teddy and I began to race across the burn.

At sight of the bear Juno gave tongue for the first time. Instead of running faster, bruin stopped, looked coolly back at us, and we gained fifty yards. Then he lumbered on, no faster than before, and by the time he was forty yards from the edge of the spruce forest we were within a three hundred and fifty yard range. This is nice shooting, in clearance—especially in camp-fire or trophy-room stories. But we missed, and shouting and roaring at Juno, who was now gaining a little enthusiasm and courage, we raced on.

A wall of rocks seemed to bar our passage at the edge of the forest, but Juno herself now found a break for us, and to our astonishment and joy set off in full cry. We had reached the top, breathless and weak limbed, our hearts pounding like hammers, when from far ahead there came one wild wailing, shrieking cry, the cry which only a hound can give in an agony of pain or fear.

No sound came after that, and I caught a peculiar look in Teddy's face as he turned for a moment toward me, and then set off on a half run.

Over and between rocks as big as houses, scratching and tearing our hands in a haste that now had a greater meaning than mere "kill," we tore toward the spot from which the sound had come. Two minutes after the cry we came around a mass of rock, and with a stifled yell my companion stopped so suddenly that my own impetus carried me into him from behind and knocked him off his feet.

Not more than fifteen yards from us, standing at bay on a flat slab of rock, was the bear. Directly under his great head, and half between his forelegs, was Juno, twisted and torn, her blood reddening the snow for yards around. Teddy had risen and was at my side. Simultaneously we leveled our rifles, and in that instant, even as my finger pressed the trigger, a strange thrill shot through me.

It was Uko San!

Even as I hesitated I heard a low exclamation beside me, and as if by a common impulse both Teddy and I lowered our guns. In the same moment we had made the astonishing discovery. It was impossible to mistake the identity of the huge creature in front of us. Another bear might have lost his eye, but not as Uko San had lost his. The right eye was gone. Where it had been there was nothing now but a growth of shaggy hair. And that one eye that remained, glaring at us with all of its old madness, with all of its old hatred, told us that Uko San had not forgotten.

A movement, and I turned to find Teddy with his rifle at his shoulder. Before he could fire I placed a hand over the sight. I remember that in that moment not a word was spoken. A hundred times I had voiced my repentance of the incident in the big white pine, and my companion understood me now. Step by step we backed away, holding our guns in readiness. At our retreat Uko San moved his head slowly,

A STRANGE THRILL SHOT THROUGH ME. IT WAS UKO-SAN!

turned without haste or fear, and disappeared in a fissure behind the flat rock on which he had stood.

Juno was dead. We saw where Uko San had gone into the fissure, stopped, and waited for the dog, which had sprung straight into the death trap.

On the second day after this another light snow fell, but during the two weeks of our hunt that followed we never again saw a sign of Uko San.

Why had the bear haunted the neighborhood of our cabin during the first few days of our hunt? What had induced him to return not only once, but twice, to sniff at our very door and window? Had some process of brute instinct or reason stirred within him memories of days that were gone—of the May afternoon in the big white pine, and of the weeks and months of his own captivity? In other words, did Uko San know that his old enemies had returned to him, and was it in a spirit of vengeance—or by mere accident—that he slew one of them?

I do not say but that it was all a matter of strange coincidence. The incidents I have narrated as they actually occurred.

A GOOD WAY TO COOK TROUT

BY BANNISTER MERWIN

WHEN I see a mess of trout brought to the table colored a dirty gray by cooking or enwrapped in an unattractive coating of browned corn meal, I feel as though an outrage had been done to nature. Part of the pleasure of having a trout on your plate ought to be in the sight of him, slim and strong in his Joseph's coat. I may be a novice in the art of trout fishing, but I can go some people one better in cooking them.

You are out on the stream some morning. You have only intended to fish for a couple of hours and you have told the family that you would be home by noon. But by the time the sun is over your head you are having a good time, and there is an interesting stretch of water just beyond—and there doesn't seem to be any particularly good reason for going home anyway except for something to eat. You hesitate. But, hold! Are there not fish in your basket? What's easier than to build a fire and cook some of your catch?

A trout held over the coals to be smoked and dried at the end of a forked twig may satisfy hunger, but it has no temptation for the epicure. A trout baked in clay, or cooked on a flat stone, may taste good, but it does not look as good as it tastes. Let me give you my recipe, and I doubt if you'll ever go home at noon as long as there is a fish in your creel.

First, catch your fish—but we had got past that point. Build your fire and let it burn until you have a good bed of hot stones and ashes. Have your trout, cleaned and washed, ready at hand on anything convenient. Pluck an armful of balsam twigs. Rake out your fire, leaving a base of hot stones and ashes. Upon this base lay balsam twigs till you have a layer from six to ten inches thick. Now put your trout in a row upon this layer, and cover with another layer of equal thickness; over all lay ashes and hot stones. Then smoke your pipe for, say, twenty minutes or thereabouts.

When at last you gently remove the coverings, you will think at first that the trout have not been cooked at all. There they lie, in all their moist beauty, colored as when they first came to your basket. But be careful how you handle them, or they will fall apart, so tender are they. Steamed through and through by the heated essences of the balsam, they give out a faint aromatic redolence that adds a subtle perfection to the flavor.