

**THE BEARS OF  
BLUE RIVER**

by

**CHARLES MAJOR**

*with illustrations*

*by A. B. Frost and others*



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## CHAPTER I

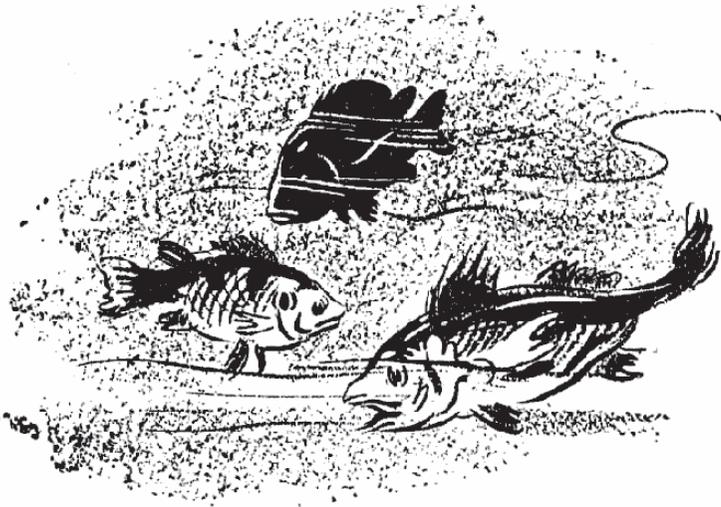
# THE BIG BEAR

AWAY back in the “twenties,” when Indiana was a baby state, and great forests of tall trees and tangled underbrush darkened what are now her bright plains and sunny hills, there stood upon the east bank of Big Blue River, a mile or two north of the point where that stream crosses the Michigan road, a cozy log cabin of two rooms—one front and one back.

The house faced the west and stretching off toward the river for a distance equal to twice the width of an ordinary street, was a blue-grass lawn, upon which stood a dozen or more elm and sycamore trees, with a few honey-locusts scattered here and there. Immediately at the water’s edge was a steep slope of ten or twelve feet. Back of the house, mile upon mile, stretched the deep dark forest, inhabited by deer and bears, wolves and wildcats, squirrels and birds, without number.

In the river the fish were so numerous that they seemed to entreat the boys to catch them, and to take them out of their crowded quarters. There were bass and black suckers, sunfish and catfish, to say nothing of the sweetest of all, the big-mouthed redeye.

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*Bass and sunfish and the big-mouthed redeye*

South of the house stood a log barn, with room in it for three horses and two cows; and enclosing this barn, together with a piece of ground, five or six acres in extent, was a palisade fence, eight or ten feet high, made by driving poles into the ground close together. In this enclosure the farmer kept his stock, consisting of a few sheep and cattle, and here also the chickens, geese, and ducks were driven at nightfall to save them from “varmint,” as all prowling animals were called by the settlers.

The man who had built this log hut, and who lived in it and owned the adjoining land at the time of which I write, bore the name of Balser Brent. “Balser” is probably a corruption of Baltzer, but, however that may be, Balser was his name, and Balser was also the name of his boy, who was the hero of the bear stories which I am about to tell you.



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Mr. Brent and his young wife had moved to the Blue River settlement from North Carolina, when young Balsler was a little boy five or six years of age. They had purchased the “eighty” upon which they lived, from the United States, at a sale of public land held in the town of Brookville on Whitewater, and had paid for it what was then considered a good round sum—one dollar per acre. They had received a deed for their “eighty” from no less a person than James Monroe, then President of the United States. This deed, which is called a patent, was written on sheepskin, signed by the President’s own hand, and is still preserved by the descendants of Mr. Brent as one of the title-deeds to the land it conveyed. The house, as I have told you, consisted of two large rooms, or buildings, separated by a passageway six or eight feet broad which was roofed over, but open at both ends—on the north and south. The back room was the kitchen, and the front room was parlour, bedroom, sitting room and library all in one.

At the time when my story opens Little Balsler, as he was called to distinguish him from his father, was thirteen or fourteen years of age, and was the happy possessor of a younger brother, Jim, aged nine, and a little sister one year old, of whom he was very proud indeed.

On the south side of the front room was a large fireplace. The chimney was built of sticks, thickly covered with clay. The fireplace was almost as large as a small room in one of our cramped modern houses, and was broad and deep enough to take in backlogs which were so large and heavy that they could not be

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lifted, but were drawn in at the door and rolled over the floor to the fireplace.

The prudent father usually kept two extra backlogs, one on each side of the fireplace, ready to be rolled in as the blaze died down; and on these logs the children would sit at night, with a rough slate made from a flat stone, and do their "ciphering," as the study of arithmetic was then called. The fire usually furnished all the light they had, for candles and "dips," being expensive luxuries, were used only when company was present.

The fire, however gave sufficient light, and its blaze upon a cold night extended halfway up the chimney, sending a ruddy, cozy glow to every nook and corner of the room.

The back room was the storehouse and kitchen; and from the beams and along the walls hung rich hams and juicy side-meat, jerked venison, dried apples, onions, and other provisions for the winter. There was a glorious fireplace in this room also, and a crane upon which to hang pots and cooking utensils.

The floor of the front room was made of logs split in halves with the flat, hewn side up; but the floor of the kitchen was of clay, packed hard and smooth.

The settlers had no stoves, but did their cooking in round pots called Dutch ovens. They roasted their meats on a spit or steel bar like the ramrod of a gun. The spit was kept turning before the fire, presenting first one side of the meat and then the other, until it was thoroughly cooked. Turning the spit was the children's work.

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South of the palisade enclosing the barn was the clearing—a tract of twenty or thirty acres of land, from which Mr. Brent had cut and burned the trees. On this clearing the stumps stood thick as the hair on an angry dog's back; but the hard-working farmer ploughed between and around them and each year raised upon the fertile soil enough wheat and corn to supply the wants of his family and his stock, and still had a little grain left to take to Brookville, sixty miles away, where he had bought his land, there to exchange for such necessities of life as could not be grown upon the farm or found in the forests.

The daily food of the family all came from the farm, the forest, or the creek. Their sugar was obtained from the sap of the sugar-trees; their meat was supplied in the greatest abundance by a few hogs, and by the inexhaustible game of which the forests were full. In the woods were found deer just for the shooting; and squirrels, rabbits, wild turkeys, pheasants, and quails, so numerous that a few hours' hunting would supply the table for days. The fish in the river, as I told you, fairly longed to be caught.

One day Mrs. Brent took down the dinner horn and blew upon it two strong blasts. This was a signal that Little Balsler, who was helping his father down in the clearing, should come to the house. Balsler was glad enough to drop his hoe and to run home. When he reached the house his mother said:—

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“Balsar, go up to the drift and catch a mess of fish for dinner. Your father is tired of deer meat three times a day, and I know he would like a nice dish of fried redeyes at noon.”

“All right, mother,” said Balsar. And he immediately took down his fishing-pole and line, and got the spade to dig bait. When he had collected a small gourdful of angle-worms, his mother called to him:—

“You had better take a gun. You may meet a bear; your father loaded the gun this morning, and you must be careful in handling it.”

Balsar took the gun, which was a heavy rifle considerably longer than himself, and started up the river toward the drift, about a quarter of a mile away.

There had been rain during the night and the ground near the drift was soft.

Here, Little Balsar noticed fresh bear tracks, and his breath began to come quickly. You may be sure he peered closely into every dark thicket, and looked behind all the large trees and logs, and had his eyes wide open lest perchance “Mr. Bear” should step out and surprise him with an affectionate hug, and thereby put an end to Little Balsar forever.

So he walked on cautiously, and, if the truth must be told, somewhat tremblingly, until he reached the drift.



*Little Balser noticed fresh bear tracks,  
and his breath began to come quickly.*



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Balser was but a little fellow, yet the stern necessities of a settler's life had compelled his father to teach him the use of a gun: and although Balser had never killed a bear, he had shot several deer, and upon one occasion had killed a wildcat, "almost as big as a cow," he said.



*A wildcat almost as big as a cow*

I have no doubt the wildcat seemed "almost as big as a cow" to Balser when he killed it, for it must have frightened him greatly, as wildcats were sometimes dangerous animals for children to encounter. Although Balser had never met a bear face to face and alone, yet he felt, and many a time had said, that there wasn't a bear in the world big enough to frighten him, if he but had his gun.

He had often imagined and minutely detailed to his parents and little brother just what he would do if he should meet a bear. He would wait calmly and quietly until his bearship should come within a few yards of him, and then he would slowly lift his gun. Bang! And Mr. Bear would be dead with a bullet in his heart.

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But when he saw the fresh bear tracks, and began to realize that he would probably have an opportunity to put his theories about bear killing into practice, he began to wonder if, after all, he would become frightened and miss his aim. Then he thought of how the bear, in that case, would be calm and deliberate, and would put *his* theories into practice by walking very politely up to him, and making a very satisfactory dinner of a certain boy whom he could name. But as he walked on and no bear appeared, his courage grew stronger as the prospect of meeting the enemy grew less, and he again began saying to himself that no bear could frighten him, because he had his gun and he could and would kill it.



*Fresh bear tracks*

So Balsler reached the drift; and having looked carefully about him, leaned his gun against a tree,

## THE BIG BEAR

unwound his fishing-line from the pole, and walked out to the end of a log which extended into the river some twenty or thirty feet.

Here he threw in his line, and soon was so busily engaged drawing out sunfish and redeyes, and now and then a bass, which was hungry enough to bite at a worm, that all thought of the bear went out of his mind.

After he had caught enough fish for a sumptuous dinner he bethought him of going home, and as he turned toward the shore, imagine, if you can, his consternation when he saw upon the bank, quietly watching him, a huge black bear.



*Imagine . . . his consternation when he saw upon the bank, quietly watching him, a huge black bear.*

If the wildcat had seemed as large as a cow to Balsler, of what size do you suppose that bear appeared? A cow! An elephant, surely, was small compared with the huge black fellow standing upon the bank.

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*The bear had a peculiar, determined expression about him.*

It is true, Balsler had never seen an elephant, but his father had, and so had his friend Tom Fox, who lived down the river; and they all agreed that an elephant was “purt nigh as big as all outdoors.”

The bear had a peculiar, determined expression about him that seemed to say:—

“That boy can’t get away; he’s out on the log where the water is deep, and if he jumps into the river I can easily jump in after him and catch him before he can swim a dozen strokes. He’ll *have* to come off the log in a short time, and then I’ll proceed to devour him.”

About the same train of thought had also been rapidly passing through Balsler’s mind. His gun was on the bank where he had left it, and in order to reach it he would have to pass the bear. He dared not jump into the water, for any attempt to escape on his part would bring the bear upon him instantly. He was very much frightened, but, after all, was a cool-headed little

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fellow for his age; so he concluded that he would not press matters, as the bear did not seem inclined to do so, but so long as the bear remained watching him on the bank would stay upon the log where he was, and allow the enemy to eye him to his heart's content.

There they stood, the boy and the bear, each eyeing the other as though they were the best of friends, and would like to eat each other, which, in fact, was literally true.

Time sped very slowly for one of them, you may be sure; and it seemed to Balsler that he had been standing almost an age in the middle of Blue River on that wretched shaking log, when he heard his mother's dinner horn, reminding him that it was time to go home.

Balsler quite agreed with his mother, and gladly would he have gone, I need not tell you; but there stood the bear, patient, determined, and fierce; and Little Balsler soon was convinced in his own mind that his time had come to die.

He hoped that when his father should go home to dinner and find him still absent, he would come up the river in search of him, and frighten away the bear. Hardly had this hope sprung up in his mind, when it seemed that the same thought had also occurred to the bear, for he began to move down toward the shore end of the log upon which Balsler was standing.

Slowly came the bear until he reached the end of the log, which for a moment he examined suspiciously, and then, to Balsler's great alarm, cautiously stepped out upon it and began to walk toward him.

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Balser thought of the folks at home, and, above all, of his baby sister; and when he felt that he should never see them again, and that they would in all probability never know of his fate, he began to grow heavy-hearted and was almost paralyzed with fear.

On came the bear, putting one great paw in front of the other, and watching Balser intently with his little black eyes. His tongue hung out, and his great red mouth was open to its widest, showing the sharp, long, glittering teeth that would soon be feasting on a first-class boy dinner.

When the bear got within a few feet of Balser—so close he could almost feel the animal's hot breath as it slowly approached—the boy grew desperate with fear, and struck at the bear with the only weapon he had—his string of fish.



*When the bear got within a few feet of Balser . . . the boy grew desperate with fear, and struck at the beast with the only weapon he had—his string of fish.*

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Now, bears love fish and blackberries above all other food; so when Balsar's string of fish struck the bear in the mouth, he grabbed at them, and in doing so lost his foothold on the slippery log and fell into the water with a great splash and plunge.

This was Balsar's chance for life, so he flung the fish to the bear, and ran for the bank with a speed worthy of the cause.

When he reached the bank his self-confidence returned, and he remembered all the things he had said he would do if he should meet a bear.

The bear had caught the fish, and again had climbed upon the log, where he was deliberately devouring them.



*The bear had caught the fish and again  
had climbed upon the log.*

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This was Little Balsers's chance for death—to the bear. Quickly snatching up the gun, he rested it in the fork of a small tree near by, took deliberate aim at the bear, which was not five yards away, and shot him through the heart. The bear dropped into the water dead, and floated downstream a little way, where he lodged at a ripple a short distance below.

Balsers, after he had killed the bear, became more frightened than he had been at any time during the adventure, and ran home screaming. That afternoon his father went to the scene of battle and took the bear out of the water. It was very fat and large, and weighed, so Mr. Brent said, over six hundred pounds.

Balsers was firmly of the opinion that he himself was also very fat and large, and weighed at least as much as the bear. He was certainly entitled to feel "big"; for he had got himself out of an ugly scrape in a brave, manly, and cool-headed manner, and had achieved a victory of which a man might have been proud.

The news of Balsers's adventure soon spread among the neighbours and he became quite a hero: for the bear he had killed was one of the largest that had ever been seen in that neighbourhood, and, besides the gallons of rich bear oil it yielded, there were three or four hundred pounds of bear meat; and no other food is more strengthening for winter diet.

There was also the soft, furry skin, which Balsers's mother tanned, and with it made a coverlid for Balsers's bed, under which he and his little brother lay many a cold night, cozy and "snug as a bug in a rug."

## CHAPTER II

### HOW BALSER GOT A GUN

FOR many years after the killing of the big bear, as told in the preceding chapter, time was reckoned by Balsler as beginning with that event. It was, if I may say it, his "Anno Domini." In speaking of occurrences, events, and dates, he always fixed them in a general way by saying, "That happened before I killed the big bear;" or, "That took place after I killed the big bear." The great immeasurable eternity of time was divided into two parts: that large unoccupied portion preceding the death of the big bear, and the part, full to overflowing with satisfaction and pride, after that momentous event.

Balsler's adventure had raised him vastly in the estimation of his friends and neighbours, and, what was quite as good, had increased his respect for himself, and had given him confidence, which is one of the most valuable qualities for boy or man. Frequently when Balsler met strangers, and the story of the big bear was told, they would pat the boy on the shoulder and call him a little man, and would sometimes ask him if he owned a gun. Much to Balsler's sorrow, he was compelled to admit that he did not. The questions as to whether or

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not he owned a gun had put into his mind the thought of how delightful life would be if he but possessed one; and his favourite visions by day and his sweetest dreams by night were all about a gun; one not so long nor so heavy as his father's but of the shorter, lighter pattern known as a smooth-bore carbine. He had heard his father speak of this gun, and of its effectiveness at short range; and although at long distances it was not so true of aim as his father's gun, still he felt confident that, if he but possessed the coveted carbine he could, single-handed and alone, exterminate all the races of bears, wolves and wildcats that inhabited the forests round about, and "pestered" the farmers with their depredations.

But how to get the gun! That was the question. Balser's father had received a gun as a present from *his* father when Balser Sr. had reached the advanced age of twenty-one, and it was considered a rich gift. The cost of a gun for Balser would equal half of the sum total that his father could make during an entire year; and, although Little Balser looked forward in fond expectation to the time when he should be twenty-one and should receive a gun from his father, yet he did not even hope that he would have one before then, however much he might dream about it. Dreams cost nothing, and guns were expensive; too expensive even to be hoped for. So Balser contented himself with inexpensive dreams, and was willing, though not content, to wait.

But the unexpected usually happens, at an unexpected time, and in an unexpected manner.

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About the beginning of the summer after the killing of the big bear, when Balsers father had "laid by" his corn, and the little patch of wheat had just begun to take on a golden brown as due notice that it was nearly ready to be harvested, there came a few days of idleness for the busy farmer. Upon one of those rare idle days Mr. Brent and Balsers went down the river on a fishing and hunting expedition. There was but one gun in the family, therefore Balsers could not hunt when his father was with him, so he took his fishing-rod, and did great execution among the finny tribe, while his father watched along the river for game, as it came down to drink.

Upon the day mentioned Balsers and his father had wandered down the river as far as the Michigan road, and Mr. Brent had left the boy near the road fishing, after telling him to go home in an hour or two, and that he, Mr. Brent, would go by another route and be home in time for supper.

So Balsers was left by himself, fishing at a deep hole perhaps a hundred yards north of the road. This was at a time when the river was in flood, and the ford where travellers usually crossed was too deep for passage.

Balsers had been fishing for an hour or more, and had concluded to go home, when he saw approaching along the road from the east a man and woman on horseback. They soon reached the ford and stopped, believing it to be impassable. They were mud-stained and travel-worn, and their horses, covered with froth, were panting as if they had been urged to their greatest

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speed. After a little time the gentleman saw Balser, and called to him. The boy immediately went to the travellers, and the gentleman said:—

“My little man, can you tell me if it is safe to attempt the ford at this time?”

“It will swim your horses,” answered Balser.

“I knew it would,” said the lady, in evident distress. She was young and pretty, and seemed to be greatly fatigued and frightened. The gentleman was very attentive, and tried to soothe her, but in a moment or two she began to weep, and said:—

“They will catch us, I know. They will catch us. They cannot be more than a mile behind us now, and we have no place to turn.”

“Is some one trying to catch you?” asked Balser.

The gentleman looked down at the little fellow for a moment and was struck by his bright, manly air. The thought occurred to him that Balser might suspect them of being fugitives from justice, so he explained:—

“Yes, my little fellow, a gentleman is trying to catch us. He is this lady’s father. He has with him a dozen men, and if they overtake us they will certainly kill me and take this lady home. Do you know of any place where we may hide?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Balser, quickly; “help me on behind you, and I’ll take you to my father’s house. There’s no path up the river, and if they attempt to follow they’ll get lost in the woods.”

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Balsler climbed on the horse behind the gentleman, and soon they plunged into the deep forest, and rode up the river toward Balsler's home. The boy knew the forest well, and in a short time the little party of three was standing at the hospitable cabin door. Matters were soon explained to Balsler's mother, and she, with true hospitality, welcomed the travellers to her home. During the conversation Balsler learned that the gentleman and lady were running away that they might be married, and, hoping to finish a good job, the boy volunteered the advice that they should be married that same evening under his father's roof. He also offered to go in quest of a preacher who made his home some two miles to the east.

The advice and the offer of services were eagerly accepted, and the lady and gentleman were married that night, and remained a few days at the home of Mr. Brent until the river was low enough to cross.

The strangers felt grateful to the boy who had given them such timely help, and asked him what they could do for him in return.

Balsler hesitated a moment, and said "There's only one thing I want very bad, but that would cost so much there's no use to speak of it."

"What is it, Balsler? Speak up, and if it is anything I can buy, you shall have it."

"A gun! A gun! A smooth-bore carbine. I'd rather have it than anything else in the world."

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“You shall have it if there’s one to be bought in Indianapolis. We are going there, and will return within a week or ten days, and you shall have your carbine if I can find one.”

Within two weeks after this conversation Balser was the happiest boy in Indiana, for he owned a carbine, ten pounds of fine powder, and lead enough to kill every living creature within a radius of five miles.

Of course the carbine had to be tested at once. So the day after he received it Balser started out with his father on a hunting expedition, fully determined in his own mind to kill a bear twice as large as his first one. They took with them corn-bread and dried venison for dinner, and started east toward Conn’s Creek, where the houses of the settlers were thinly scattered and game plentiful.

They had with them two faithful dogs, “Tige” and “Prince.” Balser considered these dogs the most intelligent animals that walked on four feet. They were deer-hounds with a cross of bulldog, and were swift of foot and very strong.

Our hunters had travelled perhaps three or four miles into the forest when they started a deer, in pursuit of which the dogs bounded off with their peculiar bark, and soon deer and dogs were lost to sight. Balser and his father listened carefully for the voices of the dogs, for should the deer turn at bay, the dogs, instead of the quick bark, to which they gave voice in the chase, would utter a long-drawn-out note—half howl, half yelp.

The bay of the hounds had died away in the distance,

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and Balser and his father had heard nothing of them for two or three hours.

The hunters had seen other deer as they walked along, but they had been unable to obtain a shot. Smaller game was plentiful, but Balser and his father did not care to frighten away large game by shooting at squirrels or birds. So they continued their walk until they reached the bank of Conn's Creek, near the hour of noon; by that time Balser's appetite was beginning to call loudly for dinner, and he could not resist the temptation to shoot a squirrel, which he saw upon a limb of a neighbouring tree. The squirrel fell to the ground and was soon skinned and cleaned. Balser then kindled a fire, and cutting several green twigs, sharpened the ends and fastened small pieces of the squirrel upon them. He next stuck the twigs in the ground so that they leaned toward the fire, with the meat hanging directly over the blaze. Soon the squirrel was roasted to a delicious brown, and then Balser served dinner to his father, who was sitting on a rock near by. The squirrel, the corn bread, and the venison quickly disappeared, and Balser, if permitted to do so, would have found another squirrel and would have cooked it. Just as dinner was finished, there came from a long way up-stream the howling bark of Tige and Prince, telling, plainly as if they had spoken English, that the deer was at bay.

Thereupon Balser quickly loaded his gun, and he and his father looked carefully to their primings. Then Mr. Brent directed Balser to climb down the cliff and move toward the dogs through the thicket in the

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bottom, while he went by another route, along the bluff. Should the hunters be separated, they were to meet at an agreed place in the forest. Balsler climbed cautiously down the cliff and was soon deep in a dark thicket of tangled underbrush near the creek.

Now and then the deep bay of the dogs reached his ears from the direction whence he had first heard it, and he walked as rapidly as the tangled briars and undergrowth would permit toward his faithful fellow-hunters.

He was so intent on the game which he knew the dogs held at bay, that he did not look about him with his accustomed caution, and the result of his unwatchfulness was that he found himself within ten feet of two huge bears before he was at all aware of their presence. They were evidently male and female, and upon seeing him the great he-bear gave forth a growl that frightened Balsler to the depths of his soul. Retreat seemed almost impossible; and should he fire at one of the bears, his gun would be empty and he would be at the mercy of the other. To attempt to outrun a bear, even on level ground, would be almost a hopeless undertaking; for the bear, though an awkward-looking creature, is capable of great speed when it comes to a foot-race. But there, where the tangled underbrush was so dense that even walking through it was a matter of great difficulty, running was out of the question, for the thicket which would greatly impede Balsler would be but small hindrance to the bears.

After Balsler had killed the big bear at the drift, he

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felt that he never again would suffer from what hunters call "buck ager"; but when he found himself confronted by those black monsters, he began to tremble in every limb, and for the life of him could not at first lift his gun. The he-bear was the first to move. He raised himself on his haunches, and with a deep growl started for poor Balsler. Balsler should have shot the bear as he came toward him, but acting solely from an instinct of self-preservation he started to run. He made better headway than he had thought possible, and soon came to a small open space of ground where the undergrowth was not so thick, and where the bright light of the sun dispelled the darkness. The light restored Balsler's confidence, and the few moments of retreat gave him time to think and to pull himself together. So, turning quickly, he lifted his gun to his shoulder and fired at the bear, which was not two yards behind him. Unfortunately, his aim was unsteady, and his shot wounded the bear in the neck, but did not kill him.

Balsler saw the disastrous failure he had made, and felt that the bear would be much surer in his attack upon him than he had been in his attack upon the bear. The boy then threw away his gun, and again began a hasty retreat.

He called for his father, and cried, "Tige! Prince! Tige! Tige!" not so much with a hope that either the dogs or his father would hear, but because he knew not what else to do. Balsler ran as fast as he could, still the bear was at his heels, and the frightened boy expected every moment to feel a stroke from the brute's huge rough paw. Soon it came, with a stunning force that

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threw Balser to the ground, upon his back. The bear was over him in an instant, and caught his left arm between his mighty jaws. It seemed then that the light of the world went out for a moment, and he remembered nothing but the huge, blood-red mouth of the bear, his hot breath almost burning his cheeks, and his deep, terrible growls nearly deafening his ears. Balser's whole past life came up before him like a picture, and he remembered everything that had ever happened to him. He thought of how deeply his dear father and mother would grieve, and for the only time in his life regretted having received the carbine, for it was the gun, after all, that had got him into this trouble. All this happened in less time than it takes you to read ten lines of this page, but it seemed very, very long to Balser, lying there with the huge body of the bear over him.

Suddenly a note of hope struck his ear—the sweetest sound he had ever heard. It was the yelp of dear old Tige, who had heard his call and had come to the rescue. If there is any creature on earth that a bear thoroughly hates, it is a dog. Tige wasted not a moment's time, but was soon biting and pulling at the bear's hind legs. The bear immediately turned upon the dog and gave Balser an opportunity to rise. Of this opportunity he quickly took advantage, you may be sure. Soon Prince came up also, and in these two strong dogs the bear had foemen worthy of his steel.

Balser's great danger and narrow escape had quickened all his faculties, so he at once ran back to the place where he had dropped his gun, and although his left

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arm had been terribly bitten, he succeeded in loading, and soon came back to the help of the dogs, who had given him such timely assistance.

The fight between the dogs and the bear was going on at a merry rate, when Balsler returned to the scene of action. With Prince on one side and Tige on the other, both so strong and savage, and each quick and nimble as a cat, the bear had all he could do to defend himself, and continually turned first one way and then another in his effort to keep their fangs away from his legs or throat. This enabled Balsler to approach within a short distance of the bear, which he cautiously did. Taking care not to wound either of his faithful friends, he was more fortunate in his aim than he had been the first time, and gave the bear a mortal wound.



*Balsler was more fortunate in his aim,  
and gave the bear a mortal wound.*

## *THE BEARS OF BLUE RIVER*

The wounded animal made a hasty retreat back into the thicket, followed closely by the dogs; but Balsler had seen more than enough of bear society in the thicket, and prudently concluded not to follow. He then loaded his gun with a heavy charge of powder only, and fired it to attract his father's attention. This he repeated several times, until at last he saw the welcome form of his father hurrying toward him from the bluff. When his father reached him and saw that he had been wounded, Mr. Brent was naturally greatly troubled; but Balsler said: "I'll tell you all about it soon. Let's go in after the bears. Two of them are in the thicket up there next to the cliff, and the dogs have followed them. If Tige had not come up just in time, one of the bears would have killed me; but I think the shot I gave him must have killed him by this time."

So without another word, Balsler having loaded his gun, they started into the dark thicket toward the cliff, in the direction whence came the voices of the dogs.

They had not proceeded farther than a hundred yards when they found the bear which Balsler had shot, lying dead in the path over which Balsler had so recently made his desperate retreat. The dogs were farther in, toward the cliff, where the vines, trees, and brush grew so thick that it was almost dark.

The two hunters, however, did not stop, but hurried on to the help of their dogs. Soon they saw through the gloom of the thicket the she-bear, and about her the dogs were prancing, barking, and snapping most furiously.

## HOW BALSER GOT A GUN

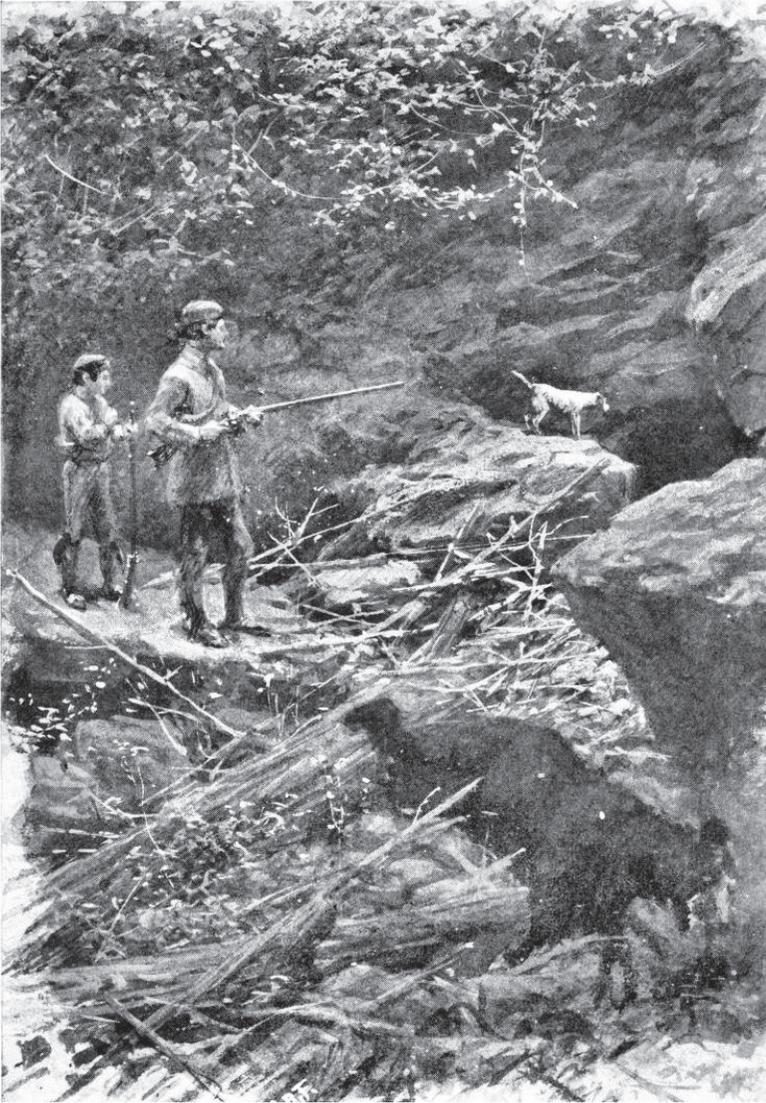
Carefully Balsler and his father took their position within a few yards of the bear, and Balsler, upon a signal from his father, called off the dogs so that a shot might be made at the bear without danger of killing either Tige or Prince.

Soon the report of two guns echoed through the forest, almost at the same instant, and the great she-bear fell over on her side, quivered for a moment, and died. This last battle took place close by the stone cliff, which rose from the bottom-land to a height of fifty or sixty feet.

Balsler and his father soon worked their way through the underbrush to where the she-bear lay dead. After having examined the bear, Balsler's attention was attracted to a small opening in the cliff, evidently the mouth of a cave which had probably been the home of the bear family that he and his father had just exterminated. The she-bear had taken her stand at the door of her home, and in defending it had lost her life. Balsler examined the opening in the cliff, and concluded to enter; but his father said:—

“You don't know what's in there. Let's first send in one of the dogs.”

So Tige was called and told to go into the cave. Immediately after he had entered he gave forth a series of sharp yelps which told plainly enough that he had found something worth barking at. Then Balsler called the dog out, and Mr. Brent collected pieces of dry wood, and made a fire in front of the cave, hoping to drive out any animal that might be on the inside.



*Tige was told to go into the cave.*

## HOW BALSER GOT A GUN

He more than suspected that he would find a pair of cubs.

As the smoke brought nothing forth, he concluded to enter the cave himself and learn what was there.

Dropping upon his knees, he began to crawl in at the narrow opening, and the boy and the two dogs followed closely. Mr. Brent had taken with him a lighted torch, and when he had gone but a short distance into the cave he saw in a remote corner a pair of gray-black, frowzy little cubs, as fat and round as a roll of butter. They were lying upon a soft bed of leaves and grass, which had been collected by their father and mother.

Balsers' delight knew no bounds, for, next to his gun, what he wanted above all things was a bear cub, and here were two of them. Quickly he and his father each picked up a cub and made their way out of the cave.

The cubs, not more than one-half larger than a cat, were round and very fat, and wore a coat of fur, soft and sleek as the finest silk. Young bears usually are gray until after they are a year old, but these were an exception to the rule, for they were almost black.

Leaving the old bears dead upon the ground, Balsers and his father hurried down to the creek, where Mr. Brent washed and dressed his son's wounded arm. They then marked several trees upon the bank of the creek by breaking twigs, so that they might be able to find the bears when they returned that evening with the horses to take home the meat and skins.

All this, which has taken so long to tell, occurred

## THE BEARS OF BLUE RIVER

within the space of a few minutes; but the work while it lasted was hard and tiresome, and, although it was but a short time past noon, Balser and his father were only too glad to turn their faces homeward, each with a saucy little bear cub under his arm.



*Each with  
a saucy little bear cub*

“As we have killed their mother,” said Balser, referring to the cubs, “we must take care of her children and give them plenty of milk, and bring them up to be good, honest bears.”

The evening of the same day Mr. Brent and a few of his neighbours brought home the bear meat and skins. Balser did not go with his father because his arm was too sore. He was, however, very proud of his wound, and thought that the glory of the day and the two bear cubs were purchased cheaply enough after all.