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Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whittman
Darwin Thoreau Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
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Boyhood in Norway

Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen

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BOYHOOD IN NORWAY

Stories Of Boy-Life In The Land Of The Midnight
Sun

By Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen

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THE BATTLE OF THE RAFTS

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE WAR

A deadly feud was raging among the boys of Numedale. The East-Siders hated the West-Siders, and thrashed them when they got a chance; and the West-Siders, when fortune favored them, returned the compliment with interest. It required considerable courage for a boy to venture, unattended by comrades, into the territory of the enemy; and no one took the risk unless dire necessity compelled him.

The hostile parties had played at war so long that they had forgotten that it was play; and now were actually inspired with the emotions which they had formerly simulated. Under the leadership of their chieftains, Halvor Reitan and Viggo Hook, they held councils of war, sent out scouts, planned midnight surprises, and fought at times mimic battles. I say mimic battles, because no one was ever killed; but broken heads and bruised limbs many a one carried home from these engagements, and unhappily one boy, named Peer Oestmo, had an eye put out by an arrow.

It was a great consolation to him that he became a hero to all the West-Siders and was promoted for bravery in the field to the rank of first lieutenant. He had the sympathy of all his companions in arms and got innumerable bites of apples, cancelled postage stamps, and colored advertising-labels in token of their esteem.

But the principal effect of this first serious wound was to invest the war with a breathless and all-absorbing interest. It was now no longer "make believe," but deadly earnest. Blood had flowed; insults had been exchanged in due order, and offended honor cried for vengeance.

It was fortunate that the river divided the West-Siders from the East-Siders, or it would have been difficult to tell what might have happened. Viggo Hook, the West-Side general, was a handsome, high-spirited lad of fifteen, who was the last person to pocket an injury, as long as red blood flowed in his veins, as he was wont to express it. He was the eldest son of Colonel Hook of the regular army, and meant some day to be a Von Moltke or a Napoleon. He felt in his heart that he was destined for something great; and in conformity with this conviction assumed a superb behavior, which his comrades found very admirable.

He had the gift of leadership in a marked degree, and established his authority by a due mixture of kindness and severity. Those boys whom he honored with his confidence were absolutely attached to him. Those whom, with magnificent arbitrariness, he punished and persecuted, felt meekly that they had probably deserved it; and if they had not, it was somehow in the game.

There never was a more absolute king than Viggo, nor one more abjectly courted and admired. And the amusing part of it was that he was at heart a generous and good-natured lad, but possessed with a lofty ideal of heroism, which required above all things that whatever he said or did must be striking. He dramatized, as it were, every phrase he uttered and every act he performed, and modelled himself alternately after Napoleon and Wellington, as he had seen them represented in the old engravings which decorated the walls in his father's study.

He had read much about heroes of war, ancient and modern, and he lived about half his own life imagining himself by turns all sorts of grand characters from history or fiction.

His costume was usually in keeping with his own conception of these characters, in so far as his scanty opportunities permitted. An old, broken sword of his father's, which had been polished until it "flashed" properly, was girded to a brass-mounted belt about his waist; an ancient, gold-braided, military cap, which was much too large, covered his curly head; and four tarnished brass buttons, displaying the Golden Lion of Norway, gave a martial air to his blue jacket, although the rest were plain horn.

But quite independently of his poor trappings Viggo was to his comrades an august personage. I doubt if the Grand Vizier feels more flattered and gratified by the favor of the Sultan than little Marcus Henning did, when Viggo condescended to be civil to him.

Marcus was small, round-shouldered, spindle-shanked, and freckle-faced. His hair was coarse, straight, and the color of maple sirup; his nose was broad and a little flattened at the point, and his clothes had a knack of never fitting him. They were made to grow in and somehow he never caught up with them, he once said, with no intention of being funny. His father, who was Colonel Hook's nearest neighbor, kept a modest country shop, in which you could buy anything, from dry goods and groceries to shoes and medicines. You would have to be very ingenious to ask for a thing which Henning could not supply. The smell in the store carried out the same idea; for it was a mixture of all imaginable smells under the sun.

Now, it was the chief misery of Marcus that, sleeping, as he did, in the room behind the store, he had become so impregnated with this curious composite smell that it followed him like an odoriferous halo, and procured him a number of unpleasant nicknames. The principal ingredient was salted herring; but there was also a suspicion of tarred ropes, plug tobacco, prunes, dried codfish, and oiled tarpaulin.

It was not so much kindness of heart as respect for his own dignity which made Viggo refrain from calling Marcus a "Muskrat" or a "Smelling-Bottle." And yet Marcus regarded this gracious forbearance on his part as the mark of a noble soul. He had been compelled to accept these offensive nicknames, and, finding rebellion vain, he had finally acquiesced in them.

He never loved to be called a "Muskrat," though he answered to the name mechanically. But when Viggo addressed him as "base minion," in his wrath, or as "Sergeant Henning," in his sunnier moods, Marcus felt equally complimented by both terms, and vowed in his grateful soul eternal allegiance and loyalty to his chief.

He bore kicks and cuffs with the same admirable equanimity; never complained when he was thrown into a dungeon in a deserted pigsty for breaches of discipline of which he was entirely guiltless, and trudged uncomplainingly through rain and sleet and

snow, as scout or spy, or what-not, at the behest of his exacting commander.

It was all so very real to him that he never would have thought of doubting the importance of his mission. He was rather honored by the trust reposed in him, and was only intent upon earning a look or word of scant approval from the superb personage whom he worshipped.

Halvor Reitan, the chief of the East-Siders, was a big, burly peasant lad, with a pimpled face, fierce blue eyes, and a shock of towy hair. But he had muscles as hard as twisted ropes, and sinews like steel.

He had the reputation, of which he was very proud, of being the strongest boy in the valley, and though he was scarcely sixteen years old, he boasted that he could whip many a one of twice his years. He had, in fact, been so praised for his strength that he never neglected to accept, or even to create, opportunities for displaying it.

His manner was that of a bully; but it was vanity and not malice which made him always spoil for a fight. He and Viggo Hook had attended the parson's "Confirmation Class," together, and it was there their hostility had commenced.

Halvor, who conceived a dislike of the tall, rather dainty, and disdainful Viggo, with his aquiline nose and clear, aristocratic features, determined, as he expressed it, to take him down a peg or two; and the more his challenges were ignored the more persistent he grew in his insults.

He dubbed Viggo "Missy." He ran against him with such violence in the hall that he knocked his head against the wainscoting; he tripped him up on the stairs by means of canes and sticks; and he hired his partisans who sat behind Viggo to stick pins into him, while he recited his lessons. And when all these provocations proved unavailing he determined to dispense with any pretext, but simply thrash his enemy within an inch of his life at the first opportunity which presented itself. He grew to hate Viggo and was always aching to molest him.

Halvor saw plainly enough that Viggo despised him, and refused to notice his challenges, not so much because he was afraid of him, as because he regarded himself as a superior being who could afford to ignore insults from an inferior, without loss of dignity.

During recess the so-called "genteel boys," who had better clothes and better manners than the peasant lads, separated themselves from the rest, and conversed or played with each other. No one will wonder that such behavior was exasperating to the poorer boys. I am far from defending Viggo's behavior in this instance. He was here, as everywhere, the acknowledged leader; and therefore more cordially hated than the rest. It was the Roundhead hating the Cavalier; and the Cavalier making merry at the expense of the Roundhead.

There was only one boy in the Confirmation Class who was doubtful as to what camp should claim him, and that was little Marcus Henning. He was a kind of amphibious animal who, as he thought, really belonged nowhere. His father was of peasant origin, but by his prosperity and his occupation had risen out of the class to which he was formerly attached, without yet rising into the ranks of the gentry, who now, as always, looked with scorn upon interlopers. Thus it came to pass that little Marcus, whose inclinations drew him toward Viggo's party, was yet forced to associate with the partisans of Halvor Reitan.

It was not a vulgar ambition "to pretend to be better than he was" which inspired Marcus with a desire to change his allegiance, but a deep, unreasoning admiration for Viggo Hook. He had never seen any one who united so many superb qualities, nor one who looked every inch as noble as he did.

It did not discourage him in the least that his first approaches met with no cordial reception. His offer to communicate to Viggo where there was a hawk's nest was coolly declined, and even the attractions of fox dens and rabbits' burrows were valiantly resisted. Better luck he had with a pair of fan-tail pigeons, his most precious treasure, which Viggo rather loftily consented to accept, for, like most genteel boys in the valley, he was an ardent pigeon-fancier, and had long vainly importuned his father to procure him some of the rarer breeds.

He condescended to acknowledge Marcus's greeting after that, and to respond to his diffident "Good-morning" and "Good-evening," and Marcus was duly grateful for such favors. He continued to woo his idol with raisins and ginger-snaps from the store, and other delicate attentions, and bore the snubs which often fell to his lot with humility and patience.

But an event soon occurred which was destined to change the relations of the two boys. Halvor Reitan called a secret meeting of his partisans, among whom he made the mistake to include Marcus, and agreed with them to lie in ambush at the bend of the road, where it entered the forest, and attack Viggo Hook and his followers. Then, he observed, he would "make him dance a jig that would take the starch out of him."

The others declared that this would be capital fun, and enthusiastically promised their assistance. Each one selected his particular antipathy to thrash, though all showed a marked preference for Viggo, whom, however, for reason of politeness, they were obliged to leave to the chief. Only one boy sat silent, and made no offer to thrash anybody, and that was Marcus Henning.

"Well, Muskrat," cried Halvor Reitan, "whom are you going to take on your conscience?"

"No one," said Marcus.

"Put the Muskrat in your pocket, Halvor," suggested one of the boys; "he is so small, and he has got such a hard bullet head, you might use him as a club."

"Well, one thing is sure," shouted Halvor, as a dark suspicion shot through his brain, "if you don't keep mum, you will be a mighty sick coon the day after to-morrow."

Marcus made no reply, but got up quietly, pulled a rubber sling from his pocket, and began, with the most indifferent manner in the world, to shoot stones down the river. He managed during this exercise, which everybody found perfectly natural, to get out of the crowd, and, without seeming to have any purpose whatever, he continued to put a couple of hundred yards between himself and his companion.

"Look a-here, Muskrat," he heard Halvor cry, "you promised to keep mum."

Marcus, instead of answering, took to his heels and ran.

"Boys, the scoundrel is going to betray us!" screamed the chief. "Now come, boys! We've got to catch him, dead or alive."

A volley of stones, big and little, was hurled after the fugitive, who now realizing his position ran for dear life. The stones hailed down round about him; occasionally one vicious missile would whiz past his ear, and send a cold shudder through him. The tramp of his pursuers sounded nearer and nearer, and his one chance of escape was to throw himself into the only boat, which he saw on this side of the river, and push out into the stream before he was overtaken.

He had his doubts as to whether he could accomplish this, for the blood rushed and roared in his ears, the hill-side billowed under his feet, and it seemed as if the trees were all running a race in the opposite direction, in order to betray him to his enemies.

A stone gave him a thump in the back, but though he felt a gradual heat spreading from the spot which it hit, he was conscious of no pain.

Presently a larger missile struck him in the neck, and he heard a breathless snorting close behind him. That was the end; he gave himself up for lost, for those boys would have no mercy on him if they captured him.

But in the next moment he heard a fall and an oath, and the voice was that of Halvor Reitan. He breathed a little more freely as he saw the river run with its swelling current at his feet. Quite mechanically, without clearly knowing what he did, he sprang into the boat, grabbed a boat-hook, and with three strong strokes pushed himself out into the deep water.

At that instant a dozen of his pursuers reached the river bank, and he saw dimly their angry faces and threatening gestures, and heard the stones drop into the stream about him. Fortunately the river was partly dammed, in order to accumulate water for the many saw-mills under the falls. It would therefore have been no

very difficult feat to paddle across, if his aching arms had had an atom of strength left in them. As soon as he was beyond the reach of flying stones he seated himself in the stern, took an oar, and after having bathed his throbbing forehead in the cold water, managed, in fifteen minutes, to make the further bank. Then he dragged himself wearily up the hill-side to Colonel Hook's mansion, and when he had given his message to Viggo, fell into a dead faint.

How could Viggo help being touched by such devotion? He had seen the race through a fieldglass from his pigeon-cot, but had been unable to make out its meaning, nor had he remotely dreamed that he was himself the cause of the cruel chase. He called his mother, who soon perceived that Marcus's coat was saturated with blood in the back, and undressing him, she found that a stone, hurled by a sling, had struck him, slid a few inches along the rib, and had lodged in the fleshy part of his left side.

A doctor was now sent for; the stone was cut out without difficulty, and Marcus was invited to remain as Viggo's guest until he recovered. He felt so honored by this invitation that he secretly prayed he might remain ill for a month; but the wound showed an abominable readiness to heal, and before three days were past Marcus could not feign any ailment which his face and eye did not belie.

He then, with a heavy heart, betook himself homeward, and installed himself once more among his accustomed smells behind the store, and pondered sadly on the caprice of the fate which had made Viggo a high-nosed, handsome gentleman, and him—Marcus Henning—an under-grown, homely, and unrefined drudge. But in spite of his failure to answer this question, there was joy within him at the thought that he had saved this handsome face of Viggo's from disfigurement, and—who could know?—perhaps would earn a claim upon his gratitude.

It was this series of incidents which led to the war between the East-Siders and the West-Siders. It was a mere accident that the partisans of Viggo Hook lived on the west side of the river, and those of Halvor Reitan mostly on the east side.

Viggo, who had a chivalrous sense of fair play, would never have molested any one without good cause; but now his own safety, and, as he persuaded himself, even his life, was in danger, and he had no

choice but to take measures in self-defence. He surrounded himself with a trusty body-guard, which attended him wherever he went. He sent little Marcus, in whom he recognized his most devoted follower, as scout into the enemy's territory, and swelled his importance enormously by lending him his field-glass to assist him in his perilous observations.

Occasionally an unhappy East-Sider was captured on the west bank of the river, court-martialed, and, with much solemnity, sentenced to death as a spy, but paroled for an indefinite period, until it should suit his judges to execute the sentence. The East-Siders, when they captured a West-Sider, went to work with less ceremony; they simply thrashed their captive soundly and let him run, if run he could.

Thus months passed. The parson's Confirmation Class ceased, and both the opposing chieftains were confirmed on the same day; but Viggo stood at the head of the candidates, while Halvor had his place at the bottom. 1

During the following winter the war was prosecuted with much zeal, and the West-Siders, in imitation of Robin Hood and his Merry Men, armed themselves with cross-bows, and lay in ambush in the underbrush, aiming their swift arrows against any intruder who ventured to cross the river.

Nearly all the boys in the valley between twelve and sixteen became enlisted on the one side or the other, and there were councils of war, marches, and counter-marches without number, occasional skirmishes, but no decisive engagements. Peer Oestmo, to be sure, had his eye put out by an arrow, as has already been related, for the East-Siders were not slow to imitate the example of their enemies, in becoming expert archers.

Marcus Henning was captured by a hostile outpost, and was being conducted to the abode of the chief, when, by a clever stratagem, he succeeded in making his escape.

The East-Siders despatched, under a flag of truce, a most insulting caricature of General Viggo, representing him as a rooster that seemed on the point of bursting with an excess of dignity.

These were the chief incidents of the winter, though there were many others of less consequence that served to keep the boys in a delightful state of excitement. They enjoyed the war keenly, though they pretended to themselves that they were being ill-used and suffered terrible hardships. They grumbled at their duties, brought complaints against their officers to the general, and did, in fact, all the things that real soldiers would have been likely to do under similar circumstances.

II. THE CLASH OF ARMS

When the spring is late in Norway, and the heat comes with a sudden rush, the mountain streams plunge with a tremendous noise down into the valleys, and the air is filled far and near with the boom and roar of rushing waters. The glaciers groan, and send their milk-white torrents down toward the ocean. The snow-patches in the forest glens look gray and soiled, and the pines perspire a delicious resinous odor which cheers the soul with the conviction that spring has come.

But the peasant looks anxiously at the sun and the river at such times, for he knows that there is danger of inundation. The lumber, which the spring floods set afloat in enormous quantities, is carried by the rivers to the cities by the sea; there it is sorted according to the mark it bears, showing the proprietor, and exported to foreign countries.

In order to prevent log-jams, which are often attended with terrible disasters, men are stationed night and day at the narrows of the rivers. The boys, to whom all excitement is welcome, are apt to congregate in large numbers at such places, assisting or annoying the watchers, riding on the logs, or teasing the girls who stand up on the hillside, admiring the daring feats of the lumbermen.

It was on such a spring day, when the air was pungent with the smell of sprouting birch and pine, that General Viggo and his trusty army had betaken themselves to the cataract to share in the sport. They were armed with their bows, as usual, knowing that they were always liable to be surprised by their vigilant enemy. Nor were they in this instance disappointed, for Halvor Reitan, with fifty or sixty followers, was presently visible on the east side, and it was a foregone conclusion that if they met there would be a battle.

The river, to be sure, separated them, but the logs were at times so densely packed that it was possible for a daring lad to run far out into the river, shoot his arrow and return to shore, leaping from log to log. The Reitan party was the first to begin this sport, and an arrow hit General Viggo's hat before he gave orders to repel the assault.

Cool and dignified as he was, he could not consent to skip and jump on the slippery logs, particularly as he had no experience in this difficult exercise, while the enemy apparently had much. Paying no heed to the jeers of the lumbermen, who supposed he was afraid, he drew his troops up in line and addressed them as follows:

"Soldiers: You have on many previous occasions given me proof of your fidelity to duty and your brave and fearless spirit. I know that I can, now as always, trust you to shed glory upon our arms, and to maintain our noble fame and honorable traditions.

"The enemy is before us. You have heard and seen his challenge. It behooves us to respond gallantly. To jump and skip like rabbits is unmilitary and unsoldierlike. I propose that each of us shall select two large logs, tie them together, procure, if possible, a boat-hook or an oar, and, sitting astride the logs, boldly push out into the river. If we can advance in a tolerably even line, which I think quite possible, we can send so deadly a charge into the ranks of our adversaries that they will be compelled to flee. Then we will land on the east side, occupy the heights, and rout our foe.

"Now let each man do his duty. Forward, march!"

The lumbermen, whose sympathies were with the East-Siders, found this performance highly diverting, but Viggo allowed himself in nowise to be disturbed by their laughter or jeers. He marched his troops down to the river-front, commanded "Rest arms!" and repeated once more his instructions; then, flinging off his coat and waistcoat, he seized a boat-hook and ran some hundred yards along the bank of the stream.

The river-bed was here expanded to a wide basin, in which the logs floated lazily down to the cataract below. Trees and underbrush, which usually stood on dry land, were half-submerged in the yellow water, and the current gurgled slowly about their trunks with muddy foam and bubbles. Now and then a heap of lumber would get wedged in between the jutting rocks above the waterfall, and then the current slackened, only to be suddenly accelerated, when the exertions of the men had again removed the obstruction.

It was an exciting spectacle to see these daring fellows leap from log to log, with birch-bark shoes on their feet. They would ride on a