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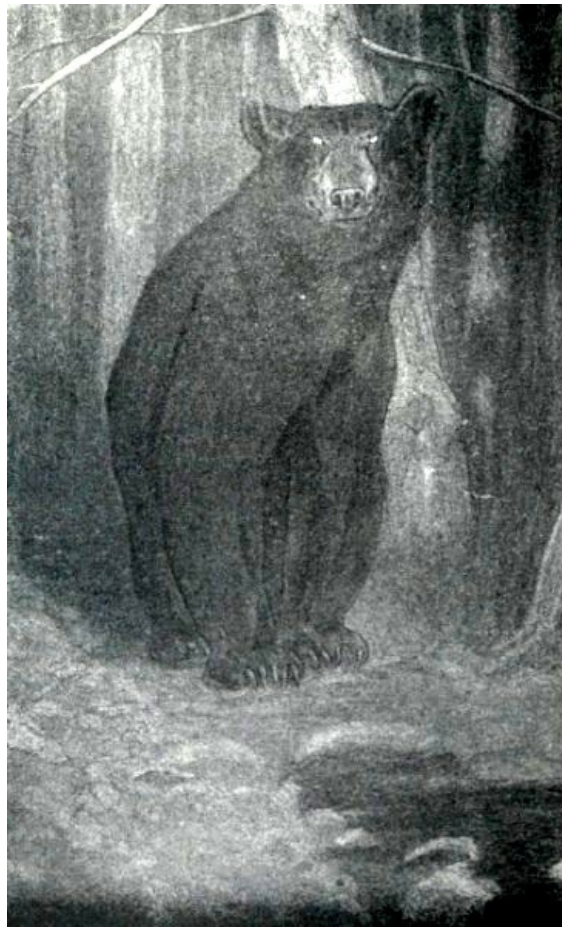


# **The Watchers of the Trails**

## **A Book of Animal Life**



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"A HUGE BLACK BEAR STANDING IN THE TRAIL." (See page 177)

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## THE • WATCHERS OF • THE • TRAIL

A • BOOK • OF • ANIMAL • LIFE • *by*  
CHARLES • G • D • ROBERTS

*Author of*

*"The Kindred of the Wild," "The Heart of the  
Ancient Wood," "Barbara Ladd," "The Forge in  
the Forest," "Poems," etc.*



*With many Illustrations by*  
*CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL*

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**To**

**My Fellow of the Wild**

**Ernest Thompson Seton**



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## Prefatory Note



In the preface to a former volume<sup>[1]</sup> I have endeavoured to trace the development of the modern animal story and have indicated what appeared to me to be its tendency and scope. It seems unnecessary to add anything here but a few words of more personal application.

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[1] "The Kindred of the Wild."

The stories of which this volume is made up are avowedly fiction. They are, at the same time, true, in that the material of which they are moulded consists of facts,—facts as precise as painstaking observation and anxious regard for truth can make them. Certain of the stories, of course, are true literally. Literal truth may be attained by stories which treat of a single incident, or of action so restricted as to lie within the scope of a single observation. When, on the other hand, a story follows the career of a wild creature of the wood or air or water through wide intervals of time and space, it is obvious that the truth of that story must be of a different kind. The complete picture which such a story presents is built up from observation necessarily detached and scattered; so that the utmost it can achieve as a whole is consistency with truth. If a writer has, by temperament, any sympathetic understanding of the wild kindreds; if he has any intimate knowledge of their habits, with any sensitiveness to the infinite variation of their personalities; and if he has chanced to live much among them during the impressionable periods of his life, and so become saturated in their atmosphere and their environment;—then he may hope to make his most elaborate piece of animal biography not less true to nature than his transcript of an isolated fact. The present writer, having spent most of his boyhood on the fringes of the forest, with few interests save those which the forest afforded, may claim to have had the intimacies of the wilderness as it were thrust upon him. The earliest enthusiasms which he can recollect are connected with some of the furred or feathered kindred; and the first thrills strong enough to leave a lasting mark on his memory are those with which he used to follow—furtive, apprehensive, expectant, breathlessly watchful—the lure of an unknown trail.

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There is one more point which may seem to claim a word. A very distinguished author—to whom all contemporary writers on nature are indebted, and from whom it is only with the utmost diffidence that I venture to dissent at all—has gently called me to account on the charge of ascribing to my animals human motives and the mental processes of man. The fact is, however, that this fault is one which I have been at particular pains to guard against. The psychological processes of the animals are so simple, so obvious, in comparison with those of man, their actions flow so directly from their springs of impulse, that it is, as a rule, an easy matter to infer the motives which are at any one moment impelling them. In my desire to avoid alike the melodramatic, the visionary, and the sentimental, I have studied to keep well within the limits of safe inference. Where I may have seemed to state too confidently the motives underlying the special action of this or that animal, it will usually be found that the action itself is very fully presented; and it will, I think, be further found that the motive which I have here assumed affords the most reasonable, if not the only reasonable, explanation of that action.

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C. G. D. R.

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**The Freedom of the Black-faced Ram**

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# The Watchers of the Trails



## The Freedom of the Black-faced Ram



n the top of Ringwaak Hill the black-faced ram stood motionless, looking off with mild, yellow eyes across the wooded level, across the scattered farmsteads of the settlement, and across the bright, retreating spirals of the distant river, to that streak of scarlet light on the horizon which indicated the beginning of sunrise. A few paces below him, half-hidden by a gray stump, a green juniper bush, and a mossy brown hillock, lay a white ewe with a lamb at her side. The ewe's jaws moved leisurely, as she chewed her cud and gazed up with comfortable confidence at the sturdy figure of the ram silhouetted against the brightening sky.

This sunrise was the breaking of the black-faced ram's first day in the wilderness. Never before had he stood on an open hilltop and watched the light spread magically over a wide, wild landscape. Up to the morning of the previous day, his three years of life had been passed in protected, green-hedged valley pastures, amid tilled fields and well-stocked barns, beside a lilled water. This rugged, lonely, wide- visioned world into which fortune had so unexpectedly projected him filled him with wonder. Yet he felt strangely at ease therein. The hedged pastures had never quite suited him; but here, at length, in the great spaces, he felt at home. The fact was that, alike in character and in outward appearance, he was a reversion to far-off ancestors. He was the product of a freak of heredity.

[4]

In the fat-soiled valley-lands, some fifteen miles back of Ringwaak Hill, the farmers had a heavy, long-wooled, hornless strain of sheep, mainly of the Leicester breed, which had been crossed, years back, by an imported Scotch ram of one of the horned, courageous, upland, black-faced varieties. The effect of this hardy cross had apparently all been bred out, save for an added stamina in the resulting stock, which was uniformly white and hornless. When, therefore, a lamb was born with a black face and blackish-gray legs, it was cherished as a curiosity; and when, in time, it developed a splendid pair of horns, it became the handsomest ram in all the valley, and a source of great pride to its owner. But when black-faced lambs began to grow common in the hornless and immaculate flocks, the feelings of the valley folks changed, and word went around that the strain of the white-faced must be kept pure. Then it was decreed that the great horned ram should no longer sire the flocks, but be hurried to the doom of his kind and go to the shambles.

[5]

Just at this time, however, a young farmer from the backwoods settlement over behind Ringwaak chanced to visit the valley. The sheep of his settlement were not only hornless, but small and light-wooled as well, and the splendid, horned ram took his fancy. Here was a chance to improve his breed. He bought the ram for what he was worth to the butcher, and proudly led him away, over the hills and through the great woods, toward the settlement on the other side of Ringwaak.

The backwoodsman knew right well that a flock of sheep may be driven, but that a single sheep must be led; so he held his new possession securely by a piece of stout rope about ten feet long. For an hour or two the ram followed with an exemplary docility quite foreign to his independent spirit. He was subdued by the novelty of his surroundings,—the hillocky, sloping pastures, and the shadowy solemnity of the forest. Moreover, he perceived, in his dim way, a kind of mastery in this heavy-booted, homespun-clad, tobacco-chewing, grave-eyed man from the backwoods, and for a long time he felt none of his usual pugnacity. But by and by the craving for freedom began to stir in his breast, and the blood of his hill-roving ancestors thrilled toward the wild pastures. The glances which, from time to time, he cast upon the backwoodsman at the other end of the rope became wary, calculating, and hostile. This stalwart form, striding before him, was the one barrier between himself and freedom. Freedom was a thing of which he knew, indeed, nothing,—a thing which, to most of his kind, would have seemed terrifying rather than alluring. But to him, with that inherited wildness stirring in his blood, it seemed the thing to be craved before all else.

[6]

Presently they came to a little cold spring, bubbling up beside the road and tinkling over the steep bank. The road at this point ran along a hillside, and the slope below the road was clothed with blueberry and other dense shrubs. The backwoodsman was hot and thirsty. Flinging aside his battered hat, he dropped down on his hands and knees beside the spring and touched his lips to the water.

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In this position, still holding the rope in a firm grasp, he had his back to the ram. Moreover, he no longer looked either formidable or commanding. The ram saw his chance. A curious change came over his mild, yellow eyes. They remained yellow, indeed, but became cold, sinister, and almost cruel in their expression.

The backwoodsman, as he drank, held a tight grip on the rope. The ram settled back slightly, till the rope was almost taut. Then he launched himself forward. His movement was straight and swift, as if he had been propelled by a gigantic spring. His massive, broad-horned forehead struck the stooping man with terrific force.

With a grunt of pain and amazement, the man shot sprawling over the bank, and landed, half-stunned, in a clump of blueberry bushes. Dazed and furious, he picked himself up, passed a heavy hand across his scratched, smarting face, and turned to see the ram disappearing among the thickets above the road. His disappointment so overcame his wrath that he forgot to exercise his vigorous backwoods vocabulary, and resumed his homeward way with his head full of plans for

[8]

the recapture of his prize.

The ram, meanwhile, trailing the length of rope behind him, was galloping madly through the woods. He was intoxicated with his freedom. These rough, wild, lonely places seemed to him his home. With all his love for the wilderness, the instinct which had led him to it was altogether faulty and incomplete. It supplied him with none of the needful forest lore. He had no idea of caution. He had no inkling of fear. He had no conception of the enemies that might lurk in thicket or hollow. He went crashing ahead as if the green world belonged to him, and cared not who might hear the brave sound of his going. Now and then he stepped on the rope, and stumbled; but that was a small matter.

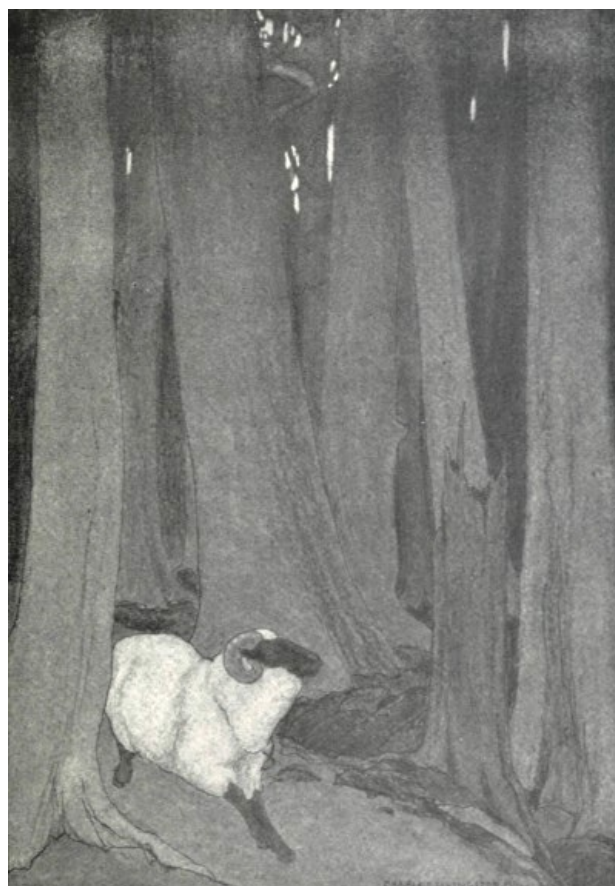
Through dark strips of forest, over rocky, tangled spaces, across slopes of burnt barren, his progress was always upward, until, having traversed several swampy vales and shadowy ravines, toward evening he came out upon the empty summit of Ringwaak. On the topmost hillock he took his stand proudly, his massive head and broad, curled horns in splendid relief against the amber sky.

As he stood, surveying his new realm, a low bleat came to him from a sheltered hollow close by, and, looking down, he saw a small white ewe with a new-born lamb nursing under her flank. Here was his new realm peopled at once. Here were followers of his own kind. He stepped briskly down from his hillock and graciously accepted the homage of the ewe, who snuggled up against him as if afraid at the loneliness and the coming on of night. All night he slept beside the mother and her young, in the sheltered hollow, and kept no watch because he feared no foe. But the ewe kept watch, knowing well what perils might steal upon them in the dark. [9]

As it chanced, however, no midnight prowler visited the summit of Ringwaak Hill, and the first of dawn found the great ram again at his post of observation. It is possible that he had another motive besides his interest in his new, wonderful world. He may have expected the woodsman to follow and attempt his recapture, and resolved not to be taken unawares. Whatever his motive, he kept his post till the sun was high above the horizon, and the dew-wet woods gleamed as if sown with jewels. Then he came down and began to feed with the ewe, cropping the short, thin grass with quick bites and finding it far more sweet than the heavy growths of his old pasture. [10]

Late in the morning, when pasturing was over for the time, the ram and the little ewe lay down in the shade of a steep rock, comfortably chewing their cud, while the lamb slept at its mother's side. The ram, deeply contented, did not observe two gray-brown, stealthy forms creeping along the slope, from bush to rock, and from stump to hillock. But the ewe, ever on the watch, presently caught sight of them, and sprang to her feet with a snort of terror. She knew well enough what a lynx was. Yet for all her terror she had no thought of flight. Her lamb was too young to flee, and she would stay by it in face of any fate.

The ram got up more slowly, turned his head, and eyed the stealthy strangers with grave curiosity. Curiosity, however, changed into hostility as he saw by the ewe's perturbation that the strangers were foes; and a sinister glitter came into the great gold eyes which shone so brilliantly from his black face.



Seeing themselves discovered, the two lynxes threw aside their cunning and rushed ravenously upon what they counted easy prey. They knew something of the timorous hearts of sheep, and had little expectation of resistance. But being, first of all, hungry rather than angry, they preferred what seemed easiest to get. It was upon the lamb and the ewe that they sprang, ignoring the ram contemptuously. [11]

One thing which they had not reckoned with, however, was the temper of the ewe. Before one fierce claw could reach her lamb, she had butted the assailant so fiercely in the flank that he forgot his purpose and turned with a snarl of rage to rend her. Meanwhile the other lynx, springing for her neck, had experienced the unexpected. He had been met by the lightning charge of the ram, fair in the ribs, and hurled sprawling into a brittle, pointed tangle of dead limbs sticking up from the trunk of a fallen tree.

Having delivered this most effective blow, the ram stepped back a pace or two, mincing on his slender feet, and prepared to repeat it. The lynx was struggling frantically among the branches, which stuck into him and tore his fine fur. Just in time to escape the second assault he got free,—but free not for fight but for flight. One tremendous, wildly contorted leap landed him on the other side of the dead tree; and, thoroughly cowed, he scurried away down the hillside. [12]

The ram at once turned his attention to the ewe and her antagonist. But the second lynx, who had not found his task so simple as he had expected it to be, had no stomach left for one more difficult. The ewe was bleeding about the head, and would, of course, if she had been left to fight it out, have been worsted in a very short time. But the enemy had felt the weight of her blows upon his ribs, and had learned his lesson. For just a fraction of a second he turned, and defied the ram with a screeching snarl. But when that horned, black, battering head pitched forward at him he bounded aside like a furry gray ball and clambered to the top of the rock. Here he crouched for some moments, snarling viciously, his tufted ears set back against his neck, and his stump of a tail twitching with rage, while the ram minced to and fro beneath him, stamping defiance with his dainty hoofs. All at once the big cat doubled upon itself, slipped down the other side of the rock, and went gliding away through the stumps and hillocks like a gray shadow; and the ram, perhaps to conceal his elation, fell to grazing as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. The ewe, on the other hand, seeing the danger so well past, took no thought of her torn face, but set herself to comfort and reassure the trembling lamb. [13]

After this, through the slow, bright hours while the sun swung hotly over Ringwaak, the ram and his little family were undisturbed. An eagle, wheeling, wheeling, wheeling in the depths of the blue, looked down and noted the lamb. But he had no thought of attacking so well guarded a prey. The eagle had a wider outlook than others of the wild kindred, and he knew from of old many matters which the lynxes of Ringwaak had never learned till that day.

There were other visitors that came and glanced at the little family during the quiet content of their cud-chewing. A weasel ran restlessly over a hillock and peered down upon them with hard, bright eyes. The big ram, with his black face and huge, curling horns, was a novel phenomenon, and the weasel disappeared behind the hillock, only to appear again much nearer, around a clump of weeds. His curiosity was mingled with malicious contempt, till the ram chanced to rise and shake his head. Then the weasel saw the rope that wriggled from the ram's neck. Was it some new and terrible kind of snake? The weasel respected snakes when they were large and active; so he forgot his curiosity and slipped away from the dangerous neighbourhood. [14]

The alarm of the weasel, however, was nothing to that of the wood-mice. While the ram was lying down they came out of their secret holes and played about securely, seeming to realize that the big animal's presence was a safeguard to them. But when he moved, and they saw the rope trail sinuously behind him through the scanty grass, they were almost paralyzed with panic. Such a snake as that would require all the wood-mice on Ringwaak to assuage his appetite. They fairly fell backward into their burrows, where they crouched quivering in the darkest recesses, not daring to show their noses again for hours.

Neither weasel nor wood-mice, nor the chickadees which came to eye him saucily, seemed to the big ram worth a moment's attention. But when a porcupine, his quills rattling and bristling till he looked as big around as a half-bushel basket, strolled aimlessly by, the ram was interested and rose to his feet. The little, deep-set eyes of the porcupine passed over him with supremest indifference, and their owner began to gnaw at the bark of a hemlock sapling which grew at one side of the rock. To this gnawing he devoted his whole attention, with an eagerness that would have led one to think he was hungry,—as, indeed, he was, not having had a full meal for nearly half an hour. The porcupine, of all nature's children, is the best provided for, having the food he loves lying about him at all seasons. Yet he is for ever eating, as if famine were in ambush for him just over the next hillock. [15]

Seeing the high indifference of this small, bristling stranger, the ram stepped up and was just about to sniff at him inquiringly. Had he done so, the result would have been disastrous. He would have got a slap in the face from the porcupine's active and armed tail; and his face would have straightway been transformed into a sort of anguished pincushion, stuck full of piercing, finely barbed quills. He would have paid dear for his ignorance of woodcraft,—perhaps with the loss of an eye, or even with starvation from a quill working through into his gullet. But



fortunately for him the ewe understood the peculiarities of porcupines. Just in time she noted his danger, and rudely butted him aside. He turned upon her in a fume of amazed indignation; but in some way she made him understand that the porcupine was above all law, and not to be trifled with even by the lords of the wilderness. Very sulkily he lay down again, and the porcupine went on chiselling hemlock bark, serenely unconscious of the anger in the inscrutable yellow eyes that watched him from the ram's black face.

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When the shadows grew long and luminous, toward evening, the ram, following some unexplained instinct, again mounted the topmost point of Ringwaak, and stood like a statue gazing over the vast, warm-coloured solitude of his new domain. His yellow eyes were placid with a great content. A little below him, the white lamb wobbling on weak legs at her side, the ewe pastured confidently, secure in the proved prowess of her protector. As the sun dropped below the far-off western rim of the forest, it seemed as if one wide wave of lucent rose-violet on a sudden flooded the world. Everything on Ringwaak—the ram's white fleece, the gray, bleached stumps, the brown hillocks, the green hollows and juniper clumps and poplar saplings—took on a palpitating aerial stain. Here and there in the distance the coils of the river gleamed clear gold; and overhead, in the hollow amber-and-lilac arch of sky, the high-wandering night-hawks swooped with the sweet twang of smitten strings.

Down at the foot of the northern slope of Ringwaak lay a dense cedar swamp. Presently, out from the green fringe of the cedars, a bear thrust his head and cast a crafty glance about the open. Seeing the ram on the hilltop and the ewe with her lamb feeding near by, he sank back noiselessly into the cover of the cedars, and stole around toward the darkening eastern slope, where a succession of shrubby copses ran nearly to the top of the hill.

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The bear was rank, rusty-coated, old, and hungry; and he loved sheep. He was an adept in stalking this sweet-fleshed, timorous quarry, and breaking its neck with a well-directed blow as it dashed past him in a panic. Emerging from the swamp, he crept up the hill, taking cunning advantage of every bush, stump, and boulder. For all his awkward looking bulk, he moved as lightly as a cat, making himself small, and twisting and flattening and effacing himself; and never a twig was allowed to snap, or a stone to clatter, under his broad, unerring feet.

About this time it chanced that the backwoodsman, who had been out nearly all day hunting for his lost prize, approached the edge of the forest at the other side of Ringwaak,—and saw the figure of the ram against the sky. Then, seeing also the ewe with the lamb beside her, he knew that the game was his.

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Below the top of the hill there was not a scrap of cover for a distance of perhaps twenty paces. The bear crept to the very last bush, the ram being occupied with the world at a distance, and the ewe busy at her pasturing. Behind the bush—a thick, spreading juniper—the bear crouched motionless for some seconds, his little red eyes aglow, and his jaws beginning to slaver with eagerness. Then selecting the unconscious ewe, because he knew she was not likely to desert the lamb, he rushed upon his intended victim.

The ewe, as it chanced, was about thirty-five or forty feet distant from the enemy, as he lunged out, black and appalling, from behind the juniper. At the same time the ram was not more than twenty or twenty-five feet distant, straight above the lamb, in a direction at right angles to the path of the bear. The ewe looked up with a startled bleat, wheeled, sprang nimbly before the lamb, and faced her doom dauntlessly, with lowered head.



"HE CREPT UP THE HILL."

The ram's mild gaze changed in a flash to one of cold, yellow savagery at the sight of the great black beast invading his kingdom. Down went his conquering head. For just a fraction of a second his sturdy body sagged back, as if he were about to sit down. This, so to speak, was the bending of the bow. Then he launched himself straight down the slope, all his strength, his weight, and the force of gravity combining to drive home that mighty stroke. [19]

The bear had never, in all his experience with sheep, encountered one whose resistance was worth taking into account. The defiance of the ewe was less than nothing to him. But as he saw, from the corner of his eye, the huge bulk plunging down upon him, he hesitated, and half turned, with great paw upraised for a finishing blow.

He turned not quite in time, however, and his defence was not quite strenuous enough for the emergency. He struck like lightning, as a bear always can, but just before the stroke could find its mark the ram's armed forehead crashed into his ribs. The blow, catching him as it did, was irresistible. His claws tore off a patch of wool and skin, and ploughed red furrows across the ram's shoulder,—but the next instant he was sprawling, his breath jarred from his lungs, against a stump some ten feet down the slope.

As the bear struggled to his feet, furious but half-daunted with amazement, the ram danced backward a pace or two on his nimble feet, as if showing off, and then delivered his second charge. The bewildered bear was again caught unready, irresolute as to whether he should fight or flee; and again he was knocked headlong, a yard or two further down the slope. His was not the dauntless spirit that most of his kindred would have shown in such a case, and he would willingly have made his escape at once if he had seen his way quite clear to do so. But at this moment, while he hesitated, he heard a man's voice shouting loudly, and saw the tall backwoodsman running toward him up the hill. This sight turned his alarm into a blind panic. His feet seemed to acquire wings as he tore madly away among the thickets. When he was hidden by the leafage, his path could still be followed by the crashing of dry branches and the clattering of loosened stones. [20]

The woodsman had seen the whole incident, and was wild with enthusiasm over the prowess of his prize. Bears had been the most dreaded scourge of the settlement sheep-farmers, but now, as he proudly said to himself, he had a ram that could "lick a b'ar silly!" He bore no grudge on account of his discomfiture that morning beside the spring, but rather thought of it with appreciation as a further evidence of his favourite's cunning and prowess; and he foresaw, with a chuckle, that there were painful surprises in store for the bears of the Ringwaak range. He had made a wise purchase indeed when he saved that splendid beast from the butcher. [21]

Hearing the man's voice, the ram had halted in dismay just when he was about to charge the bear a third time. He had no mind to go again into captivity. But, on the other hand, for all his lordliness of spirit, he felt that the man was his master. At first he lowered his head

threateningly, as if about to attack; but when the backwoodsman shouted at him there was an authority in those tones which he could not withstand, and he sullenly drew aside. With a good-natured laugh, the man picked the lamb up in his arms, whereupon the mother stepped timidly to his side, evidently having no fear. The man rubbed her nose kindly, and stroked her ears, and gave her something from his pocket which she ate greedily; and, as the ram looked on, the anger gradually faded out from his yellow eyes. At length the man turned and walked slowly down the hill, carrying the lamb. The ewe followed, crowding as close to him as she could, and stumbling as she went because her eyes were fixed upon her little one.

The ram hesitated. He looked at the hillside, the woods, and the sky beginning to grow chill with the onrush of twilight. Then he looked at the retreating figures. Suddenly he saw his world growing empty and desolate. With an anxious bleat he trotted after the ewe, and took his docile place a few feet behind the man's heels. The man glanced over his shoulders, and a smile of pleasure softened his rugged face. In a few moments the little procession disappeared in the woods, moving toward the settlement, and Ringwaak Hill was left solitary in the dusk, with the lonely notes of the night-hawks twanging over it.

[22]

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## The Master of Golden Pool

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[25]

### The Master of Golden Pool



ne shore of the pool was a spacious sweeping curve of the sward, dotted with clumps of blue flag-flowers. From the green fringes of this shore the bottom sloped away softly over a sand so deep and glowing in its hue of orange-yellow as to give the pool the rich name by which it was known for miles up and down the hurrying Clearwater. The other shore was a high, overhanging bank, from whose top drooped a varied leafage of birch, ash, poplar, and hemlock. Under this bank the water was deep and dark, a translucent black with trembling streaks and glints of amber. Fifty yards up-stream a low fall roared musically; but before reaching the fresh tranquillity of the pool, the current bore no signs of its disturbance save a few softly whirling foam clusters. Light airs, perfumed with birch and balsam and warm scents of the sun-steeped sward, drew over the pool from time to time, wrinkling and clouding its glassy surface. Birds flew over it, catching the small flies to whom its sheen was a ceaseless lure. And huge dragon-flies, with long, iridescent bodies and great jewelled, sinister eyes, danced and darted above it.

[26]

The cool black depths under the bank retained their coolness through the fiercest heats of summer, because just here the brook was joined by the waters of an icy spring stealing down through a crevice of the rocks; and here in the deepest recess, exacting toll of all the varied life that passed his domain, the master of Golden Pool made his home.

For several years the great trout had held his post in the pool, defying every lure of the crafty fisherman. The Clearwater was a protected stream, being leased to a rich fishing club; and the master of the pool was therefore secure against the treacherous assaults of net or dynamite. Many times each season fishermen would come and pit their skill against his cunning; but never a fly could tempt him, never a silvery, trolled minnow or whirling spoon deceive him to the fatal rush. At some new lure he would rise lazily once in awhile, revealing his bulk to the ambitious angler,—but never to take hold. Contemptuously he would flout the cheat with his broad flukes, and go down again with a grand swirl to his lair under the rock.

[27]

It was only to the outside world—to the dragon-fly, and the bird, and the chattering red squirrel in the overhanging hemlock—that the deep water under the bank looked black. To the trout in his lair, looking upward toward the sunlight, the whole pool had a golden glow. His favourite position was a narrow place between two stones, where he lay with head up-stream and belly about two inches from the sandy bottom, gently fanning the water with his party-coloured fins, and opening and closing his rosy gill-fringes as he breathed. In length he was something over twenty inches, with a thick, deep body tapering finely to the powerful tail. Like all the trout of the Clearwater, he was silver-bellied with a light pink flush, the yellow and brown markings on his sides light in tone, and his spots of the most high, intense vermilion. His great lower jaw was thrust forward in a way that gave a kind of bulldog ferocity to his expression.

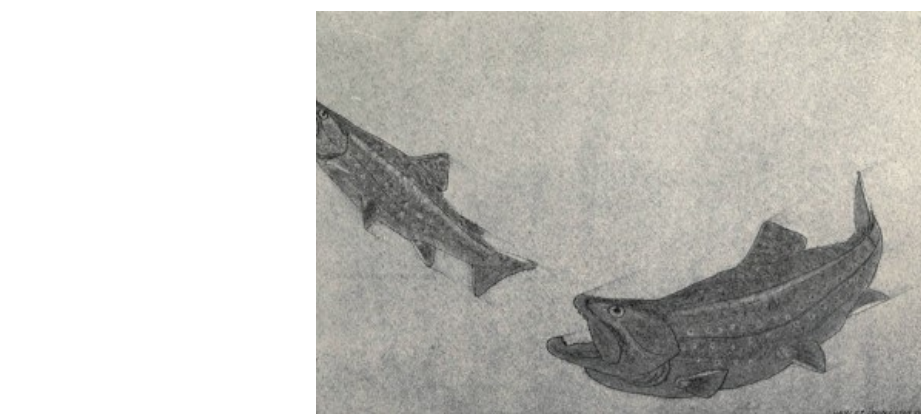
The sky of the big trout's world was the flat surface of Golden Pool. From the unknown place beyond that sky there came to his eyes but moving shadows, arrangements of light and dark. He could not see out and through into the air unobstructedly, as one looks forth from a window into the world. Most of these moving shadows he understood very well. When broad and vague, they did not, as a rule, greatly interest him; but when they got small, and sharply black, he knew they might at any instant break through with a splash and become real, coloured things, probably good to eat. A certain slim little shadow was always of interest to him unless he was feeling gorged. Experience had taught him that when it actually touched the shining surface above, and lay there sprawling helplessly with wet wings, it would prove to be a May fly, which he liked. Having no rivals to get ahead of him, there was no need of haste. He would sail up with dignity, open his great jaws, and take in the tiny morsel.

[28]

Sometimes the moving shadows were large and of a slower motion, and these, if they chanced to break through, would prove to be bright-coloured moths or butterflies, or glittering beetles, or fat black and yellow bumblebees, or lean black and yellow wasps. If he was hungry, all these things were good for food, and his bony, many-toothed mouth cared nothing for stings. Sometimes when he was not at all hungry, but merely playful, he would rise with a rush at anything breaking the sheen of his roof, slap it with his tail, then seize it between his hard lips and carry it down with him, only to drop it a moment later as a child might drop a toy. Once in awhile, either in hunger or in sport, he would rise swiftly at the claws or wing-tips of a dipping swallow; but he never managed to catch the nimble bird. Had he, by any chance, succeeded, he would probably have found the feathers no obstacle to his enjoyment of the novel fare. [29]

At times it was not a shadow, but a splash, that would attract his attention to the shining roof of his world. A grasshopper would fall in, and kick grotesquely till he rose to end its troubles. Or a misguided frog, pursued perhaps by some enemy on land, would dive in and swim by with long, webbed toes. At this sight the master of the pool would dart from his lair like a bolt from a catapult. Frogs were much to his taste. And once in a long time even a wood-mouse, hard pressed and panic-stricken, would leap in to swim across to the meadow shore. The first time this occurred the trout had risen slowly, and followed below the swimmer till assured that there was no peril concealed in the tempting phenomenon. After that, however, he always went at such prey with a ferocious rush, hurling himself half out of water in his eagerness.

But it was not only to his translucent sky that the master of the pool looked for his meat. A large part of it came down upon the current of the brook. Bugs, grubs, and worms, of land and water, some dead, others disabled or bewildered by their passage through the falls, contributed to his feasting. Above all, there were the smaller fish who were so reckless or uninformed as to try to pass through Golden Pool. They might be chub, or suckers, or red-fin; they might be—and more often were—kith and kin of his own. It was all the same to the big trout, who knew as well as any gourmet that trout were royal fare. His wide jaws and capacious gullet were big enough to accommodate a cousin a full third of his own size, if swallowed properly, head first. His speed was so great that any smaller fish which he pursued was doomed, unless fortunate enough to be within instant reach of shoal water. Of course, it must not be imagined that the great trout was able to keep his domain quite inviolate. When he was full fed, or sulking, then the finny wanderers passed up and down freely,—always, however, giving wide berth to the lair under the bank. In the bright shallows over against the other shore, the scurrying shoals of pin-fish played safely in the sun. Once in a long while a fish would pass, up or down, so big that the master of the pool was willing to let him go unchallenged. And sometimes a muskrat, swimming with powerful strokes of his hind legs, his tiny forepaws gathered childishly under his chin, would take his way over the pool to the meadow of the blue flag-flowers. The master of the pool would turn up a fierce eye, and watch the swimmer's progress breaking the golden surface into long, parabolic ripples; but he was too wise to court a trial of the muskrat's long, chisel-like teeth. [30]



**"THEY MIGHT BE—AND MORE OFTEN WERE—KITH  
AND KIN OF HIS OWN."** [31]

There were two occasions, never to be effaced from his sluggish memory, on which the master of the pool had been temporarily routed from his mastership and driven in a panic from his domain. Of these the less important had seemed to him by far the more appalling.

Once, on a summer noonday, when the pool was all of a quiver with golden light, and he lay with slow-waving fins close to the coldest up-gushing of the spring which cooled his lair, the shining roof of his realm had been shattered and upheaved with a tremendous splash. A long, whitish body, many times his own length, had plunged in and dived almost to the bottom. This creature swam with wide-sprawling limbs, like a frog, beating the water, and leaping, and uttering strange sounds; and the disturbance of its antics was a very cataclysm to the utmost corners of the pool. The trout had not stayed to investigate the horrifying phenomenon, but had darted madly downstream for half a mile, through fall and eddy, rapid and shallow, to pause at last, with throbbing sides and panting gills, in a little black pool behind a tree root. Not till hours after the man had finished his bath, and put on his clothes, and strode away whistling up the shore, did the big trout venture back to his stronghold. He found it already occupied by a smaller trout, whom he fell [32]

upon and devoured, to the assuaging of his appetite and the salving of his wounded dignity. But for days he was tremulously watchful, and ready to dart away if any unusually large shadow passed over his amber ceiling. He was expecting a return of the great, white, sprawling visitor.

His second experience was one which he remembered with cunning wariness rather than with actual terror. Yet this had been a real peril, one of the gravest with which he could be confronted in the guarded precincts of Golden Pool. One day he saw a little lithe black body swimming rapidly at the surface, its head above the water. It was about ten feet away from his lair, and headed up-stream. The strange creature swam with legs, like a muskrat, instead of with fins like a fish, but it was longer and slenderer than a muskrat; and something in its sinister shape and motion, or else some stirring of an inherited instinct, filled the big trout with apprehension as he looked. Suddenly the stranger's head dipped under the surface, and the stranger's eyes sought him out, far down in his yellow gloom. That narrow-nosed, triangular head with its pointed fangs, those bright, cruel, undeceivable eyes, smote the trout with instant alarm. Here was an enemy to be avoided. The mink had dived at once, going through the water with the swiftness and precision of a fish. Few trout could have escaped. But the master of the pool, as we have seen, was no ordinary trout. The promptness of his cunning had got him under way in time. The power of his broad and muscular tail shot him forth from his lair just before the mink got there. And before the baffled enemy could change his direction, the trout was many feet away, heading up for the broken water of the rapids. The mink followed vindictively, but in the foamy stretch below the falls he lost all track of the fugitive. Angry and disappointed he scrambled ashore, and, finding a dead sucker beside his runway, seized it savagely. As he did so, there was a smart click, and the jaws of a steel trap, snapping upon his throat, rid the wilderness of one of its most bloodthirsty and implacable marauders. A half-hour later the master of the pool was back in his lair, waving his delicate, gay-coloured fins over the yellow sand, and lazily swallowing a large crayfish. One claw of the crayfish projected beyond his black jaw; and, being thus comfortably occupied, he turned an indifferent eye upon the frightened swimming of a small green frog, which had just then fallen in and disturbed the sheen of his amber roof.

Very early one morning, when all his world was of a silvery gray, and over the glassy pallor of his roof thin gleams of pink were mingled with ghostly, swirling mist-shadows, a strange fly touched the surface, directly above him. It had a slender, scarlet, curving body, with long hairs of yellow and black about its neck, and brown and white wings. It fell upon the water with the daintiest possible splash, just enough to catch his attention. Being utterly unlike anything he had ever seen before, it aroused his interest, and he slanted slowly upward. A moment later a second fly touched the water, a light gray, mottled thing, with a yellow body, and pink and green hairs fringing its neck. This, too, was strange to him. He rolled a foot higher, not with any immediate idea of trying them, but under his usual vague impulse to investigate everything pertaining to his pool. Just then the mist-swirls lifted slightly, and the light grew stronger, and against the smooth surface he detected a fine, almost invisible, thread leading from the head of each fly. With a derisive flirt of his tail he sank back to the bottom of his lair. Right well he knew the significance of that fine thread.

The strange flies skipped lightly over the surface of the pool, in a manner that to most trout would have seemed very alluring. They moved away toward a phenomenon which he just now noticed for the first time, a pair of dark, pillar-like objects standing where the water was about two feet deep, over toward the further shore. These dark objects moved a little, gently. Then the strange flies disappeared. A moment later they dropped again, and went through the same performance. This was repeated several times, the big trout watching with interest mingled with contempt. There was no peril for him in such gauds.

Presently the flies disappeared for good. A few minutes later two others came in their place,—one a tiny, white, moth-like thing, the other a big, bristling bunch of crimson hairs. The latter stirred, far back in his dull memory, an association of pain and fear, and he backed deeper into his watery den. It was a red hackle; and in his early days, when he was about eight inches long and frequented the tail of a shallow, foamy rapid, he had had experience of its sharp allurements. The little moth he ignored, but he kept an eye on the red hackle as it trailed and danced hither and thither across the pool. Once, near the other side, he saw a misguided fingerling dart from under a stone in the shallow water and seize the gay morsel. The fingerling rose, with a jerk, from the water, and was no more seen. It vanished into the unknown air; and the master of the pool quailed as he marked its fate. After this, the pair of dark, pillar-like objects moved away to the shore, no longer careful, but making a huge, splashing noise. No more strange flies appeared; and the gold light of full day stole down to the depths of the pool. Soon, flies which the master well knew, with no fine threads attached to them, began to speck the surface over him, and he fed, in his lazy way, without misgiving.

The big trout had good reason for his dread of the angler's lure. His experience with the red hackle had given him the wisdom which had enabled him to live through all the perils of a well-known trout-stream and grow to his present fame and stature. Behind that red hackle which hooked him in his youth had been a good rod, a crafty head, and a skilful wrist. His hour had sounded then and there, but for a fortunate flaw in the tackle. The leader had parted just at the drop, and the terrified trout (he had taken the tail fly) had darted away frantically through the rapids with three feet of fine gut trailing from his jaw. For several weeks he trailed that hampering thread, and carried that red hackle in the cartilage of his upper jaw; and he had time to get very familiar with them. He grew thin and slab-sided under the fret of it before he succeeded, by much nosing in gravel and sand, in wearing away the cartilage and rubbing his jaw



clear of the encumbrance. From that day forward he had scrutinized all unfamiliar baits or lures to see if they carried any threadlike attachment.

When any individual of the wild kindreds, furred, feathered, or finned, achieves the distinction of baffling man's efforts to undo him, his doom may be considered sealed. There is no beast, bird, or fish so crafty or so powerful but some one man can worst him, and will take the trouble to do it if the game seems to be worth while. Some lure would doubtless have been found, some scheme devised for the hiding of the line, whereby the big trout's cunning would have been made foolishness. Some swimming frog, some terrified, hurrying mouse, or some great night-moth flopping down upon the dim water of a moonless night, would have lulled his suspicions and concealed the inescapable barb; and the master of the pool would have gone to swell the record of an ingenious conqueror. He would have been stuffed, and mounted, and hung upon the walls of the club-house, down at the mouth of the Clearwater. But it pleased the secret and inscrutable deities of the woods that the end of the lordly trout should come in another fashion.

[38]

It is an unusual thing, an unfortunate and pitiful thing, when death comes to the wild kindred by the long-drawn, tragic way of overripeness. When the powers begin to fail, the powers which enabled them to conquer, or to flee from, or to outwit their innumerable foes,—then life becomes a miserable thing for them. But that is not for long. Fate meets them in the forest trails or the flowing water-paths; and they have grown too dull to see, too heavy to flee, too indifferent to contend. So they are spared the anguish of slow, uncomprehending decrepitude.

[39]

But to the master of Golden Pool Fate came while he was yet master unchallenged, and balked the hopes of many crafty fishermen. It came in a manner not unworthy of the great trout's dignity and fame, giving him over to swell no adversary's triumph, betraying him to no contemptible foe.

One crisp autumn morning, when leaves were falling all over the surface of the pool, and insects were few, and a fresh tang in the water was making him active and hungry, the big trout was swimming hither and thither about his domain instead of lying lazily in his deep lair. He chanced to be over in the shallows near the grassy shore, when he saw, at the upper end of the pool, a long, dark body slip noiselessly into the water. It was not unlike the mink in form, but several times larger. It swam with a swift movement of its forefeet, while its hind legs, stretched out behind with the tail, twisted powerfully, like a big sculling oar. Its method, indeed, combined the advantages of that of the quadruped and that of the fish. The trout saw at once that here was a foe to be dreaded, and he lay quite still against a stone, trusting to escape the bright eyes of the stranger.

[40]

But the stranger, as it happened, was hunting, and the stranger was an otter. The big trout was just such quarry as he sought, and his bright eyes, peering restlessly on every side, left no corner of the pool uninvestigated. They caught sight of the master's silver and vermilion sides, his softly waving, gay-coloured fins.

With a dart like that of the swiftest of fish, the stranger shot across the pool. The trout darted madly toward his lair. The otter was close upon him, missing him by a fin's breadth. Frantic now with terror, the trout shot up-stream toward the broken water. But the otter, driven not only by his forefeet but by that great combined propeller of his hind legs and tail, working like a screw, swam faster. Just at the edge of the broken water he overtook his prey. A set of long, white teeth went through the trout's backbone. There was one convulsive twist, and the gay-coloured fins lay still, the silver and vermilion body hung limp from the captor's jaws.

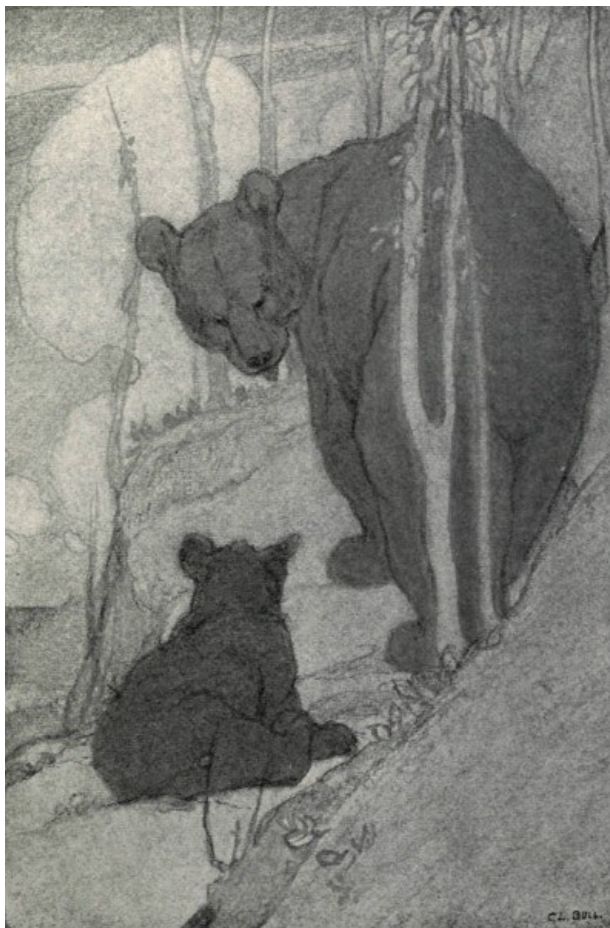
For many days thereafter, Golden Pool lay empty under its dropping crimson and purple leaves, its slow sailing foam flakes. Then, by twos and threes, small trout strayed in, and found the new region a good place to inhabit. When, in the following spring, the fishermen came back to the Clearwater, they reported the pool swarming with pan-fish, hardly big enough to make it worth while throwing a fly. Then word went up and down the Clearwater that the master of the pool was gone, and the glory of the pool, for that generation of fishermen, went with him.

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## The Return to the Trails

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"HE WOULD SIT BACK AND WHINE FOR HIS MOTHER."

## The Return to the Trails

[45]



own from the rocky den under the bald peak of Sugar Loaf, the old black bear led her cub. Turning her head every moment to see that he was close at her heels, she encouraged him with soft, half-whining, half-grunting sounds, that would have been ridiculous in so huge a beast had they been addressed to anything less obviously a baby than this small, velvet-dark, wondering-eyed cub.

Very carefully the old bear chose her path, and very slowly she moved. But for all her care, she had to stop every minute or two, and sometimes even turn back a few paces, for the cub was continually dropping behind. His big, inquiring ears took in all the vague, small noises of the mountainside, puzzling over them. His sharp little nose went poking in every direction, sniffing the strange new smells, till he would get bewildered, and forget which foot to put forward first. Then he would sit back and whine for his mother.

[46]

It was the cub's first adventure, this journey down the world outside his den. Hitherto he had but played about his doorway.

When the little fellow had somewhat recovered from his first bewilderment, the old bear moved more rapidly, leading him toward a swampy, grassy pocket, where she thought there might be roots to dig. The way was steep, winding down between rocks and stunted trees and tangles of thick shrubbery, with here and there a black-green spur of the fir forests thrust up tentatively from the lower slopes. Now and again it led across a naked shoulder of the mountain, revealing, far down, a landscape of dark, wide stretching, bluish woods, with desolate, glimmering lakes strung on a thread of winding river. When these vast spaces of emptiness opened suddenly upon his baby eyes, the cub whimpered and drew closer to his mother. The swimming deeps of air daunted him.

Presently, as the two continued their slow journey, the mother bear's nostrils caught a new savour. She stopped, lifted her snout, and tested the wind discriminatingly. It was a smell she had encountered once before, coming from the door of a lumber camp. Well she remembered the deliciousness of the lump of fat bacon which she had succeeded in purloining while the cook was out getting water. Her thin, red tongue licked her lips at that memory, and, without hesitation, she turned up the side trail whence came the luring scent. The cub had to stir his little legs to keep pace with her, but he felt that something interesting was in the wind, and did his best.

[47]

A turn around a thick clump of juniper, and there was the source of the savour. It looked pleasantly familiar to the old bear, that lump of fat bacon. It was stuck on the end of a pointed stick, just under a sort of slanting roof of logs, which, in a way, reminded her of the lumbermen's cabin. The cabin had done her no harm, and she inferred that the structure before her was

equally harmless. Nevertheless, the man smell, not quite overpowered by the fragrance of the bacon, lurked about it; and all the works of man she viewed with suspicion. She snatched hastily at the prize, turning to jump away even as she did so.

But the bacon seemed to be fastened to the stick. She gave it an impatient pull,—and it yielded suddenly. At that same instant, while her eyes twinkled with elation, that roof of massive logs came crashing down.

It fell across her back. Weighted as it was with heavy stones, it crushed the life out of her in a second. There was a coughing gasp, cut off abruptly; and the flattened form lay still, the wide-open mouth and protruding tongue jammed down among the mosses. At the crash the cub had jumped back in terror. Then he sat up on his haunches and looked on with anxious bewilderment.

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When, early the following morning, the Indian who had set the deadfall came, he found the cub near perishing with cold and fear and hunger. He knew that the little animal would be worth several bearskins, so he warmed it, wrapped it in his jacket, and took it home to his cabin. Fed and sheltered, it turned to its captor as a rescuer, and acquired a perilous faith in the friendliness of man. In fact, it speedily learned to follow the Indian about the cabin, and to fret for him in his absence.

That same autumn the Indian took the cub into Edmundston and sold him for a price that well repaid his pains; and thence, within three or four months, and by as many transfers, the little animal found his way into the possession of a travelling circus. Being good-natured and teachable, and inclined, through his first misunderstanding of the situation which had robbed him of his mother, to regard mankind as universally beneficent, he was selected to become a trick bear. In the course of his training for this honour, he learned that his trainer, at least, was not wholly beneficent, and toward him he developed a cordial bitterness, which grew with his years. But he learned his lessons, nevertheless, and became a star of the ring; and for the manager of the show, who always kept peanuts or gingerbread in pocket for him, he conceived such a warmth of regard as he had hitherto strictly reserved for the Indian.

[49]

Valued and well cared for, he grew to a magnificent stature, and up to the middle of his fifth year he never knew what his life was missing. To be sure, it was exasperatingly monotonous, this being rolled about the world in stuffy, swaying cage-cars, and dancing in the ring, and playing foolish tricks with a red-and-white clown, and being stared at by hot, applauding, fluttering tiers of people, who looked exactly the same at every place he came to. His memory of that first walk down the mountain, at his great mother's heels, had been laid to sleep at the back of his curiously occupied brain. He had no understanding of the fierce restlessness, the vague longing, which from time to time, and especially when the autumn frosts began to nip and tingle, would take possession of him, moving him almost to hatred of even his special friends, the manager and the clown.

[50]

One vaporous, golden afternoon in early autumn, the circus drew into the little town of Edmundston, at the mouth of the Madawaska River. When the noise of the train stopped, the soft roar of the Little Falls grew audible,—a voice at which all the weary animals pricked their ears, they knew not, most of them, why. But when the cars and cages were run out into the fields, where the tents were to be raised, there drew down from spruce-clad hills a faint fragrance which thrilled the bear's nostrils, and stirred formless longings in his heart, and made his ears deaf to the wild music of the falls. That fragrance, imperceptible to nostrils less sensitive than his, was the breath of his native wilderness, a message from the sombre solitudes of the Squatook. He did not know that the lonely peak of Sugar Loaf was but thirty or forty miles away. He knew only that something, in the air and in his blood, was calling him to his own.

The bear—well-taught, well-mannered, well-content—was not regarded as even remembering freedom, let alone desiring it. His fetters, therefore, were at times little more than nominal, and he was never very closely watched. Just on the edge of evening, when the dusk was creeping up the valley and honey-scents from the fields mixed with the tang of the dark spruce forests, his opportunity came. His trainer had unhitched the chain from his collar and stooped over it to examine some defect in the clasp.

[51]

At this instant that surge of impulse which, when it does come, shatters routine and habit to bits, seized the bear. Without premeditation, he dealt the trainer a cuff that knocked him clean over a wagon-pole and broke his arm. Before any of the other attendants could realize what had happened, the bear was beyond the circle of wagons, and half-way across the buckwheat-fields. In ten minutes more he was in the spicy glooms of the spruce-woods.

His years of association with men had given the bear a great confidence in their resources. He was too crafty, therefore, to slacken his efforts just because he had gained the longed-for woods. He pressed on doggedly, at a shambling, loose-jointed, but very effective run, till it was full night and the stars came out sharply in the patches of clear, dark sky above the tree-tops. In the friendly dark he halted to strip the sweet but insipid fruit of an Indian pear, which for a little assuaged his appetite. Then he rushed on,—perhaps aimlessly, as far as conscious purpose was concerned, but, in reality, by a sure instinct, making toward his ancestral steeps of Sugar Loaf.

[52]

All night he travelled; and in the steely chill of dawn he came out upon a spacious lake. The night

had been windless, and now, in the first of the coming light, the water was smooth like blue-black oil under innumerable writhing wisps and streamers of mist. A keen smell, raw but sweet, rose from the wet shores, the wet spruce and fir woods, and the fringe of a deep cedar swamp near by. The tired animal sniffed it with an uncomprehending delight. He did not recognize it, yet it made him feel at home. It seemed a part of what he wanted.

Being thirsty as well as hungry, he pushed through the bushes,—not noiselessly, as a wild bear moves, but with crashing and tramlings, as if there were no need of secrecy in the wilds,—and lurched down to the gravelly brink. Here, as luck would have it, he found a big, dead sucker lying half-awash, which made him a meal. Then, when sharp streaks of orange along the eastern horizon were beginning to shed a mystic colour over the lake, he drew back into the woods and curled himself up for sleep behind the trunk of a big hemlock. [53]

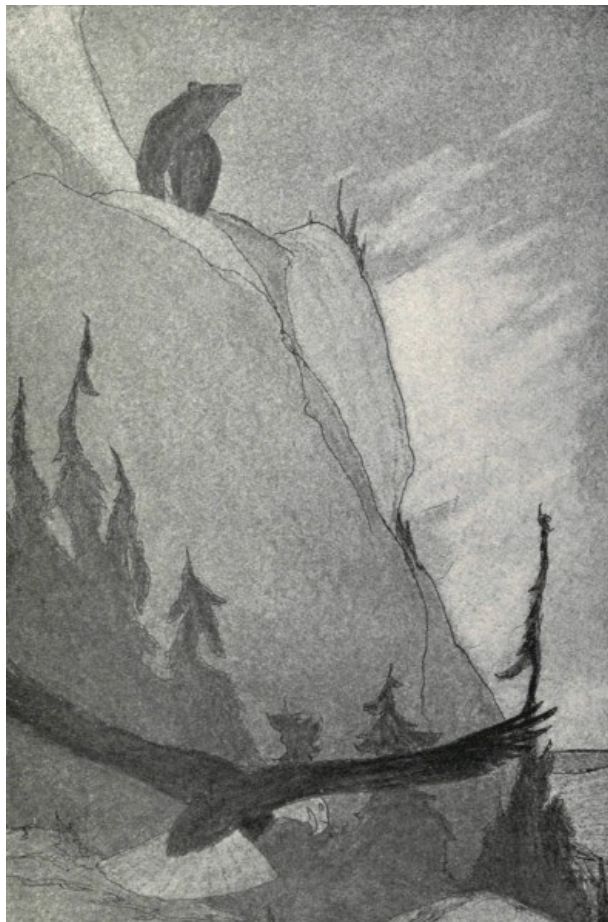
When the sun was about an hour high he awoke, and made haste to continue his journey. Along the lake shore he went, to the outlet; then down the clear, rushing Squatook; and in the afternoon he came out upon a smaller lake, over which stood sentinel a lofty, beetling mountain. At the foot of the mountain, almost seeming to duplicate it in miniature, a steep island of rock rose sharply from the water.

The bear halted on the shore, sniffed wistfully, and looked up at the lonely mountain. Dim memories, or emotions too dim to be classed as memories, began to stir in the recesses of his brain. He hurried around the lake and began to climb the steeps. The lonely mountain was old Sugar Loaf. The exile had come home.

It was his feet, rather than his head, perhaps, that knew the way so well. Upward he toiled, through swamps and fir woods, over blueberry barrens and ranges of granite boulders, till, looking down, he saw the eagle flying far below him. He saw a vast, empty forest land, beaded with shining lakes,—and a picture, long covered up in his brain, came back to him. These were the great spaces that so long ago had terrified the little cub creeping at his mother's heels. He knew now where his den was,—just behind that whitish gray rock with the juniper shrub over it. He ran eagerly to resume possession. [54]

It was now, for the first time, that he found the wilderness less empty than he had imagined it. Another bear was in possession of the den,—and in no mood to be disturbed.

He flung himself upon the intruder with a savage roar. The next moment the two, clutched in a madly clawing embrace, went crashing through a fringe of bushes and rolled together down a twenty-foot slope of bald rock. They landed in a crevice full of roots, with a violence that half-stunned them and threw them apart. As they picked themselves up, it was plain that the exile had had the best of the tussle. His rich black fur, to be sure, was somewhat torn and bloody, but he showed no other signs of battle; while his antagonist breathed heavily and held one paw clear of the ground.



"THE EAGLE FLYING FAR BELOW HIM."

The exile was quite fearless, and quite ready to fight for what he wanted, if necessary. But he was not conscious of any particular ill-will toward his assailant. What he wanted was possession of that den. Now, instead of taking advantage of his adversary's partly disabled condition, he clambered with undignified haste up the steep rock and plunged into the cave. It was certainly much smaller than he had imagined it, but it was, nevertheless, much to his taste. He turned around in it two or three times, as if to adjust it to himself, then squatted on his haunches in the entrance and looked out complacently over the airy deeps. The dispossessed bear stood for a few minutes irresolute, his small eyes red with wrath. For a moment or two he hesitated, trying to work himself up to the attack. Then discretion came to his rescue. Grumbling deep in his throat, he turned and limped away, to seek new quarters on the other side of the mountain. [55]

Now began for the returned exile two or three months of just such a life as he had longed for. The keen and tonic winds that blew around the peak of Sugar Loaf filled his veins with vigour. Through his lack of education in the lore of the wilderness, his diet was less varied than it might have been; but this was the fat of the year, and he fared well enough. When the late berries and fruits were all gone there were sweet tubers and starchy roots to be grubbed up along the meadow levels by the water. Instinct, and a spirit of investigation, soon taught him to find the beetles and grubs that lurked under stones or in rotting logs,—and in the course of such a search he one day discovered that ants were good to eat. But the small animals with which a wild bear is prone to vary his diet were all absent from his bill of fare. Rabbits, woodchucks, chipmunks, wood-mice, they all kept out of his sight. His ignorance of the law of silence, the universal law of the wild, deprived him of many toothsome morsels. As for the many kinds of fungus which grew upon the mountain, he knew not which were edible and which poisonous. After an experiment with one pleasant-smelling red-skinned specimen, which gave him excruciating cramps, he left the whole race of fungi severely alone. [56]

For perhaps a month he had the solitudes to himself, except for the big, scornful-looking eagle which always spent a portion of every day sitting on the top of a blasted pine about a hundred feet above the den. But, at length, one crisp morning, when he was down by the lakeside fishing, he found a mate. A young she-bear came out of the bushes, looked at him, then turned as if to run away,—but didn't. The exile stopped fishing, and waited civilly to see if the newcomer wanted to fight. Evidently she had no such desire.

The exile took a few steps up the beach,—which action seemed to terrify the newcomer almost into flight. Seeing this, he sat down on his haunches amiably, and waited to see what she would do. What she did, after much hesitation and delay and half-retreat, was to come up to his side and sniff trustfully but wonderingly at the great iron-studded leather collar on his neck. After that the two soon reached an understanding; and for the next six weeks or so they spent most of their time together. [57]

Under his mate's instruction, or else by force of her example, the big bear made some progress in woodcraft, and gained some inklings of the lesson of silence. He learned, also, to distinguish between the wholesome and the poisonous fungi. He learned the sweets of a bee-tree, and how a bear must go to work to attain them. Moving through the shadows more quietly, he now had glimpses of rabbits and chipmunks, and even caught sight of a wood-mouse whisking into his hole under a root. But before he had acquired the cunning to capture any of these shy kindreds, his mate wandered away, on her own affairs intent; and he found himself once more alone. Frosts by this time were binding swale and pool. Ice was forming far out from the edges of the lake. The first snows had fallen and the great snows were threatening. And the little she-bear was getting ready to creep into a hole and curl up for her winter's sleep. She no longer wanted company,—not even the company of this splendid, black comrade, whose collar had so filled her with admiration. [58]

When, at length, the winter of the north had fairly settled down upon the Squatooks, the exile's ribs were well encased in fat. But that fortunate condition was not to last long. When the giant winds, laden with snow and Arctic cold, thundered and shrieked about the peak of Sugar Loaf, and in the loud darkness strange shapes of drift rode down the blast, he slept snugly enough in the narrow depths of his den. But the essential winter lore of his kind he had not learned. He had not learned to sleep away the time of storm and famine. As for instinct, it failed him altogether in this emergency. During his five years of life with the circus, he had had no chance to gratify his winter drowsiness, and gradually the power to hibernate had passed away from him. The loss was irremediable. By this one deprivation his contact with man had ruined him for the life of nature.

When man has snatched away from Nature one of her wild children, Nature, merciless in her resentments, is apt to say, "Keep him! He is none of mine!" And if the alien, his heart aching for his own, insists upon returning, Nature turns a face of stone against him. [59]

Unskilled in hunting as he was, and unable to sleep, the bear was soon driven to extremes. At rare intervals he succeeded in capturing a rabbit. Once or twice, after a fierce frost had followed a wet sleet storm, he had climbed trees and found dead birds frozen to their perches. But most of the time he had nothing but starvation rations of wood-ants and buds. In the course of a few weeks he was lean as a heron, and his collar hung loose in his fur. He was growing to hate the icy and glittering desolation,—and, as he had once longed for an untried freedom, now he longed for the companionship of men.

He was now wandering far afield in his daily quest for food, sometimes not returning for three or four days at a time. Once, on an excursion over into the Madawaska Valley, he came upon a deadfall temptingly baited with pork. He rushed forward ravenously to snatch the bait,—but just



in time that scent called up an ancient memory. The horror and the shock of that far-off day when such a trap had crushed his mother's life out, came back upon him. It was not the scene, exactly, that came back, but rather the memory of an anguish. Obscure as it was, it had power to master his appetite and drive him to another foraging-ground. Thenceforth he foraged no more in the Madawaska Valley.

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In such a desolate fashion the exile dragged through the frozen weeks, till February came in with deeper snows and fiercer frosts. At this time hunger and loneliness drove him far over to the valley of the Toledi; and here, one still and biting day, he came upon a human trail.

Delightedly he sniffed at the familiar scent, which to him, as pleasant memories of food and companionship welled up in his heart, represented nothing but kindness. His little disagreements with his trainer were forgotten. He remembered only his unfailing friends, the manager and the clown. The trail was a broad and mixed one,—the trail of oxen, and of men with larriganed feet. It led toward a camp of lumbermen, near the river. Joyously and confidently the exile followed it. Soon he heard men's voices, and the familiar clank of chains. Then a biting breeze drew through the forest,—biting, but sweet to the bear's nostrils. It carried a savour of richness from the cook's steaming boilers. It was dinner-hour at the camp.

For the second time in his life, the bear felt that he had come home. Captive, indeed, he had been among men,—but a captive always highly valued and heedfully cared for. He never for a moment doubted that these men-creatures, who had always wanted him, would want him now. They would chain him up, of course,—for fear he would change his mind and leave them again. But they would feed him,—all he could eat; and stare at him; and admire him. Then he would dance for them, and do foolish things with a gun, and perhaps stand on his head. Whereupon they would applaud, and laugh, and feed him with peanuts and gingerbread. His famished jaws dripped at the thought.

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Within the camp one of the hands, glancing from the window, saw him just as he came in view. In an instant every man was looking out. The boldness of the animal stirred up a great excitement. His terrible leanness was noticed. He was coming straight for the door,—evidently savage, insane with hunger! And such a big fellow, too!

Men seized their axes. The boss snatched down his big-bore Snider rifle, slipped in a cartridge, and coolly threw open the cabin door. He was a tall, ruddy-faced, wide-mouthed man, much like the kindly manager of the show. At sight of him, standing there in the door, the bear was overjoyed, and broke into a shuffling run.

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Seeing what seemed to them such reckless ferocity, the lumbermen cried out in amazement, and shouted hoarse warnings to the boss. But the boss was a man of nerve. Raising his rifle to the shoulder, he stepped right out clear of the door. He was a dead shot, and very proud of the fact. When the bear was within thirty paces of him, he fired.

The massive bullet sped true; and the exile fell forward on his snout without a gasp, shot through the brain.

The men gathered about the body, praising the shot, praising the prize, praising the reckless audacity which had led the beast to rush upon his doom. Then in the long, loose fur that clothed his bones they found the heavy collar. At that they all wondered. The boss examined it minutely, and stood pondering; and the frank pride upon his face gradually died into regret.

"I swan, boys," said he, presently, "if that ain't the b'ar that run away from the circus las' fall! I heard tell he was reckoned always kind!"

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## The Little Wolf of the Pool

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## The Little Wolf of the Pool



he bottom of the pool (it was too small to be called a pond) was muddy, with here and there a thicket of rushes or arrow-weed stems. Down upon the windless surface streamed the noon sun warmly. Under its light the bottom was flecked with shadows of many patterns,—circular, heart-shaped, spear-shaped, netted, and barred. There were other shadows that were no more than ghosts of shadows, cast by faint, diaphanous films of scum which scarcely achieved to blur the clear downpour of radiance, but were nevertheless perceived and appreciated by many of the delicate larval creatures which made a large part of the life of the pool.

For all its surface tranquillity and its shining summer peace, the pool was thronged with life. Beneath the surface, among the weeds and stalks, the gleams and shadows, there was little of tranquillity or peace. Almost all the many-formed and strange-shaped inhabitants of the pool were hunting or being hunted, preying or being preyed upon,—from the goggle-eyed, green-throated bullfrog under the willow root, down to the swarming animalculæ which it required a microscope to see. Small crawling things everywhere dotted the mud or tried to hide under the

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sticks and stones. Curled fresh-water snails moved up and down the stems of the lilies. Shining little black water-bugs scurried swiftly in all directions. In sheltered places near the surface, under the leaves, wriggled the slim gray larvæ of the mosquitoes. And hither and thither, in flickering shoals, darted myriads of baby minnows, from half an inch to an inch and a half in length.

In a patch of vivid sunshine, about six inches from a tangle of arrow-weed stems, a black tadpole lay basking. Light to him meant not only growth, but life. Whenever, with the slow wheeling of the sun, the shadow of a lily leaf moved over him, he wriggled impatiently aside, and settled down again on the brightest part of the mud. Most of the time he seemed to be asleep; but in reality he was keeping that incessant sharp lookout which, for the pool-dwellers, was the price of survival.

Swimming slowly up toward the other side of the arrow-weed stems, came a fantastic-looking creature, something more than an inch and a half in length. It had a long, tapering, ringed and armoured body, ending in a spine; a thick, armoured thorax, with six legs attached; and a large head, the back of which was almost covered by two big, dully staring globes of eyes. The whole front of its head—part of the eyes, and all the face—was covered by a smooth, cleft, shieldlike mask, reaching well down under the breast, and giving the creature an expression both mysterious and terrible. On its back, folded close and obviously useless, were rigidly encased attempts at wings. [67]

The little monster swam slowly by the motion of its long and strong legs, thrusting out two short, hornlike antennæ over the top of its mask. It seemed to be eyeing a snail-shell on a stem above, and waiting for the snail's soft body to emerge from the citadel; when on a sudden, through the stems, it caught sight of the basking tadpole. Instantly it became motionless, and sank, like a waterlogged twig, to the level of the mud. It crept around, effacing itself against the brown and greenish roots, till it was just opposite the quarry. Then it sprang, propelling itself not only by its legs, but by the violent ejection of a little stream of water from the powerful breathing-valves near its tail.

The tadpole, as we have seen, was not asleep. With a convulsive wriggle of its tail it darted away in a panic. It was itself no mean swimmer, but it could not escape the darting terror that pursued. When the masked form was almost within reach of its victim, the mask dropped down and shot straight out, working on a sort of elbow-shaped lever, and at the same time revealed at its extremity a pair of powerful mandibles. These mandibles snapped firm hold of the victim at the base of its wriggling tail. The elbow-shaped lever drew back, till the squirming prize was held close against its captor's face. Then with swift jets from the turbine arrangement of its abdominal gills, the strange monster darted back to a retreat among the weed stems, where it could devour its prey in seclusion. [68]

Under those inexorable jaws the tadpole soon disappeared and for a few minutes the monster rested, working its mandibles to and fro and rubbing them with its front legs before folding back that inscrutable mask over its savage face. Presently a plump minnow, more than an inch long, with a black stripe along its bronze and silver sides, swam down close by the arrow-weed stems. The big eyes of the monster never moved. But, suddenly, out shot the mask once more, revealing the face of doom behind it; and those hooked mandibles fixed themselves in the belly of the minnow. Inexorable as was the grip, it nevertheless for the moment left unimpeded the swimming powers of the victim; and he was a strong swimmer. With lashing tail and beating fins, he dragged his captor out from among the weed stems. For a few seconds there was a vehement struggle. Then the minnow was borne down upon the mud, out in the broad sheen where, a little before, the tadpole had been basking. Clutching ferociously with its six long legs, the conqueror crawled over the prey and bit its backbone in two. [69]

Swift, strong, insatiably ravenous, immeasurably fierce, the larva of the dragon-fly (for such the little monster was) had fair title to be called the wolf of the pool. Its appearance alone was enough to daunt all rivals. Even the great black carnivorous water-beetle, with all its strength and fighting equipment, was careful to give wide berth to that dreadful, quick-darting mask. Had these little wolves been as numerous as they were rapacious, there would soon have been left no life at all in the pool but theirs and that of the frogs. Between these there would have been a long and doubtful struggle, the frogs hunting the larvæ among the weed stems, and the larvæ devouring the tadpoles on their basking-grounds. [70]

It chanced that the particular larva whose proceedings we have noted was just on the eve of that change which should transport it to the world of air. After eating the minnow it somehow failed to recover its appetite, and remained, all the rest of the day and through the night, clinging to one of the weed stems. Next morning, when the sun was warm on the pool, it crawled slowly up, up, up, till it came out into a new element, and the untried air fanned it dry. Its great round eyes, formerly dull and opaque, had now grown transparent, and were gleaming like live jewels, an indescribable blend of emerald, sapphire, and amethyst. Presently its armour, now for the first time drying in the sun, split apart down the back, and a slender form, adorned with two pairs of crumpled, wet wings, struggled three-quarters of its length from the shell. For a short time it clung motionless, gathering strength. Then, bracing its legs firmly on the edges of the shell, it lifted its tail quite clear, and crawled up the weed a perfect dragon-fly, forgetful of that grim husk it was leaving behind. A few minutes later, the good sun having dried its wings, it went darting and hurtling over the pool, a gemlike, opalescent shining thing, reflected gloriously in the polished mirror beneath.

## The Little Wolf of the Air



he pool lay shimmering and basking in the flood of the June sun. On three sides, east, west, and north, the willows and birches gathered close about it, their light leafage hanging motionless in the clear, still heat. On the south side it lay open toward the thick-grassed meadows, where bees and flies of innumerable species flickered lazily over the pale crimson clover-blooms. From the clover-blooms and the vetch-blooms, the wheel-rayed daisies, and the tall umbels of the wild parsnip, strange perfumes kept distilling in the heat and pulsing in across the pool on breaths of air too soft to ruffle its surface.

Above this unruffled surface the air was full of dancing life. Gnats hung in little, whirling nebulae; mosquitoes, wasplike flies, and whirring, shard-winged beetles, passed and repassed each other in intricate lines of flight; and, here and there, lucently flashing on long, transparent, veined wings, darted the dragon-flies in their gemlike mail. Their movements were so swift, powerful, and light that it was difficult, in spite of their size and radiant colour, to detect the business that kept the dragon-flies so incessantly and tirelessly in action. Sometimes two or three would hurtle out for a brief expedition over the blossoming meadow. Often one would alight for a moment on a leaf or twig in the sun, and lie there gleaming, its two pairs of wings flatly outspread in a way that showed every delicate interlacing of the nerves. Then it would rise again into the air with a bold, vehement spring; and when ever it began its flight, or whenever it abruptly changed the direction of its flight, its wings would make a dry, sharp, rustling sound.

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The business that so occupied these winged and flashing gems, these darting iridescences, was in truth the universal business of hunting. But there were few indeed among all the kindred of earth, air, and water whose hunting was so savage and so ravenous as that of these slender and spiritlike beings. With appetites insatiable, ferocity implacable, strength and courage prodigious for their stature, to call them the little wolves of the air is perhaps to wrong the ravening gray pack whose howlings strike terror down the corridors of the winter forest. Mosquitoes and gnats they hunted every moment, devouring them in such countless numbers as to merit the gratitude of every creature that calls the mosquito its foe. But every summer fly, also, was acceptable prey to these indomitable hunters, every velvet-bodied moth, every painted butterfly. And even the envenomed wasp, whose weapon no insect can withstand, was not safe. If the dragon-fly could catch her engrossed in some small slaughter of her own, and, pouncing upon her from above, grip the back of her armed abdomen in his great grinding jaws, her sting could do nothing but dart out vainly like a dark, licking flame; and she would prove as good a meal as the most unresisting bluebottle or horse-fly.

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Down to the pool, through the luxurious shadows of the birches, came a man, and stretched himself against a leaning trunk by the waterside. At his approach, all the business of life and death and mating in his immediate neighbourhood came to a halt, and most of the winged kindred, except the mosquitoes, drew away from him. The mosquitoes, to whom he had become, so to speak, in a measure acclimatized, attacked him with less enthusiasm than they would have displayed in the case of a stranger, and failed to cause him serious annoyance. He fixed himself in a position that was thoroughly comfortable, and then lay quite still.

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The man's face was under the shadow of the birch-tree, but his body lay out in the full sun, and the front of his soft white summer shirt made a patch of sharp light against the surrounding tones of brown and green. When it had for a time remained quite still, the patch of whiteness attracted attention, and various insects alighted upon it to investigate. Presently the man noticed a very large steel-blue dragon-fly on rustling wings balancing in the air a few feet in front of him. At this moment, from a branch overhead, a hungry shrike dashed down. The dragon-fly saw the peril just in time; and, instead of fleeing desperately across the pool, to be almost inevitably overtaken by the strong-winged bird, it dashed forward and perched for refuge on a fold of the dazzling white shirt. The foiled shrike, with an angry and astonished twitter, flew off to a tree across the pool.

For perhaps a minute the great fly stood with moveless, wide-spread wings, scintillating aerial hues as if its body was compacted of a million microscopic prisms. The transparent tissue of its wings was filled with a finer and more elusive iridescence. The great rounded, globose, overlapping jaws, half as big as the creature's whole head, kept opening and shutting, as if to polish their edges. The other half of its head was quite occupied by two bulging, brilliant spheres of eyes, which seemed to hold in their transparent yet curiously impenetrable depths a shifting light of emerald and violet. These inscrutable and enormous eyes—each one nearly as great in circumference as the creature's body—rolled themselves in a steady stare at the man's face, till he felt the skin of his cheeks creep at their sinister beauty. It seemed to him as if a spirit hostile and evil had threatened him from beneath those shining eyes; and he was amused to experience, for all his interest, a sense of half-relief when the four beautiful wings hurtled crisply and the creature darted away.

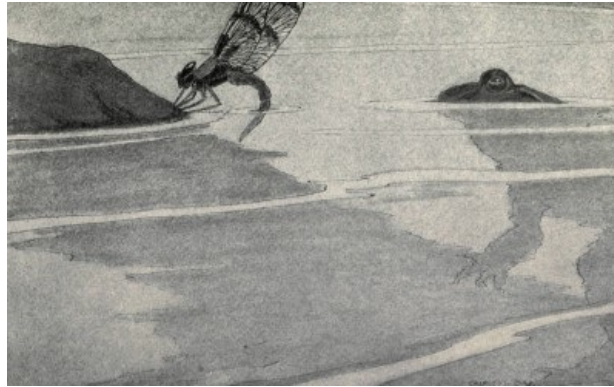
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It would seem, however, that the fold of white shirt had found favour in those mysteriously

gleaming eyes; for a minute or two later the same fly returned to the same spot. The man recognized not only its unusual size and its splendour of colour, but a broken notch on one of its wing films, the mark of the tip of a bird's beak. This time the dragon-fly came not as a fugitive from fate, but as a triumphant dispenser of fate to others. It carried between its jaws the body of a small green grasshopper, which it had already partly eaten.

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Fixing the enigmatic radiance of its eyes upon the man's face, the dragon-fly calmly continued its meal, using the second joints of its front pair of legs to help manipulate the rather awkward morsel. Its great round jaws crushed their prey resistlessly, while the inner mouth sucked up the juices so cleanly and instantaneously that the repast left no smallest stain upon the man's spotless shirt. When the feast was over there remained nothing of the victim but a compact, perfectly rounded, glistening green ball, the size of a pea, made up of the well-chewed shell-like parts of the grasshopper's body. It reminded the man of the round "castings" of fur or feathers which an owl ejects after its indiscriminating banquet. Having rolled the little green ball several times between its jaws, to make sure there was no particle of nourishment left therein, the dragon-fly coolly dropped it into a crease in the shirt-bosom, and rustled away.



**"A LARGE FROG RISE TO THE SURFACE JUST BELOW HER."**

It chanced that this particular and conspicuous individual of the little wolves of the air was a female. A half-hour later, when the man had almost grown tired of his watching, he again caught sight of the great fly. This time she alighted on a half-submerged log, one end of which lay on shore by the man's feet, while the other end was afloat in deep water, where it could rise and fall with every change in the level of the pool. Quivering and gleaming with all her subtle fires, the dragon-fly stood motionless on the log for a few seconds. Then she backed down close to the water's edge, thrust her long, slender abdomen a good inch into the water, and curled it under her as if she were trying to sting the hidden surface of the log. In reality, as the man at once understood, she was busy laying eggs,—eggs that should presently develop into those masked and terrible larvæ of hers, the little wolves of the pool. She laid the eggs in a row under the log, where there was no danger of the water receding from them. She moved along the log daintily, step by step, and her wings fluttered over the task.

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The man had taken out his watch as soon as he saw what she was about, in order that he might time the egg-laying process. But he was not destined to discover what he wanted to know. The dragon-fly had been at her business for perhaps two minutes, when the man saw a large frog rise to the surface just below her. He liked all dragon-flies,—and for this one in particular he had developed a personal interest. Suddenly and violently he jumped to his feet, hoping to chase her away from the approaching doom. But he was just too late. As he jumped, the big frog sprang, and a long, darting, cleft tongue clutched the busy fly, dragging her down. The frog disappeared with his prize,—to come to the surface again at the edge of a lily-pad, a few feet off, and blink his goggle-eyes in satisfaction. He had avenged (though about that he cared as little as he knew) the lives of a thousand tadpoles.

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## The Alien of the Wild

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## The Alien of the Wild



full day's tramp back from the settlement, on the edge of a water-meadow beside the lonely Quah-Davic, stood the old woodsman's cabin. Beside it he had built a snug log-barn, stored with hay from the wild meadow. The hay he had made that August, being smitten with a desire for some touch of the civilization to which as a whole he could not reconcile himself. Then, with a still enthusiasm, he had built his barn, chinking its crevices scrupulously with moss and mud. He had resolved to have a cow. The dream that gave

new zest to all his waking hours was the fashioning of a little farm in this sunny, sheltered space about his cabin. He had grown somewhat weary of living by trap and snare and gun, hunting down the wild creatures whom he had come to regard, through lapse of the long, solitary years by the Quah-Davic, as in some sense comrade and kin to him.

It was late autumn, and the asters fading out like smoke along the river edges, when the barn was finished and the hay safe stored therein. Then the old woodsman journeyed out to the settlement to buy his cow. He found one exactly to his whimsical liking,—a small, dark red, long-horned scrub, with a look in her big, liquid eyes that made him feel she would know how to take care of herself in the perilous wilds. He equipped her with the most sonorous and far-sounding bell he could find in all the settlement. Then proudly he led her away to her new domain in the wilderness. [84]

When the long-horned little cow had been salted and foddered in the new barn, and when her liquid eyes had taken in the surroundings of the sunny little meadow and cabin by the lonely Quah-Davic, she was well enough content, and the mellow *tunk-a-tonk, tank tonk* of her bell was sounded never out of ear-shot from the cabin. The meadow and the nearest fringes of the woods were range enough for her. Of the perils that might lurk in the further depths she had a wary apprehension. And the old woodsman, busy grubbing out a narrow cellar under his cabin, was happy in his purchase. The *tunk-a-tonk* of the mellow bell was sweetest music in his ears as he worked.

Now it chanced that that autumn was one of unusual drought. In the channel of the Quah-Davic rocks appeared which the old woodsman had never seen before. The leaves fell early, before half their wonted gamut of colour was run through. They wore a livery of pallid tones—rusty-reds, cloudy light violets, grayish thin golds, ethereal russets—under a dry, pale sky. The only solid, substantial colouring was that of the enduring hemlocks and the sombre, serried firs. Then there came a mistiness in the air, making the noonday sun red and un radiant And the woodsman knew that there were forest fires somewhere up the wind. [85]

A little anxious, he studied the signs minutely, and concluded that, the wind being light, the fires were too far distant to endanger the Quah-Davic region. Thereupon he decided to make a hurried trip to the settlement for a sack of middlings and other supplies, planning to return by night, making the round trip within the twenty-four hours in order that the little red cow should not miss more than one milking.

On the afternoon of the woodsman's going, however, the wind freshened into a gale, and the fires which had been eating leisurely way through the forest were blown into sudden fury. That same evening a hurricane of flame swept down upon the lonely cabin and the little wild meadow, cutting a mile-wide swath through the woods, jumping the Quah-Davic, and roaring on to the north. It was days before the woodsman could get back along the smoking, smouldering trail, through black, fallen trunks and dead roots which still held the persistent fire in their hearts. Of cabin and barn, of course, there was nothing left at all, save the half-dug cellar and the half-crumbled chimney. Sick at heart and very lonely, he returned to the settlement, and took up his new abode on a half-reclaimed farm on the outskirts, just where the tilth and the wilderness held each other at bay. [86]

The red cow, meanwhile, being shrewd and alert, had escaped the conflagration. She had taken alarm early, having seen a fire in the woods once before and conceived an appreciation of its powers. Instead of flying straight before it, and being inevitably overtaken, she ran at once to the river and galloped madly down the shallow margin. Before the flames were actually upon her, she was beyond the zone of their fury. But she felt the withering blast of them, and their appalling roar was in her ears. With starting eyes and wide, palpitating nostrils, she ran on and on, and stopped only when she sank exhausted in a rude cove. There she lay with panting sides and watched far behind her the wide red arc of terror drawn across the sky. [87]

The next day she wandered some miles farther down the Quah-Davic, till she came to a neighbourhood where the water-meadows were strung thickly along the stream and where the pasturage, though now dry and untasty, was abundant. Back from the water-meadows was a region of low hills covered with a second growth of young birches and poplars. Among the hills were ravines thick with hemlock and spruce. Here she established herself, and at night, either because she missed the narrow quarters of her stable, or because some wild instinct within her led her to adapt herself quickly to the ways of the wild kindred, she would make her lair in the deepest and most sheltered of the ravines, where a peculiarly dense hemlock veiled the front of an overhanging rock. This retreat was almost as snug as her old stable; and, lying down with her long horns toward the opening, she felt comparatively secure. As a matter of fact, though all these woods of the Quah-Davic were populous with the furtive folk, the little red cow saw few signs of life. She was surrounded, wherever she moved, by a wide ring of resentful solitude. The inexplicable *tunk-a-tonk, tunk, tonk* of her deep-throated bell was disquieting to all the forest kindred; and the least move of her head at night was enough to keep the most interested prowler at a distance from the lair behind the hemlock. There was not a bear, a wolf, or a panther on the Quah-Davic (there was but a single pair of panthers, indeed, within a radius of fifty miles!) that cared to investigate the fighting qualities of this keen-horned red creature with the inexplicable voice. [88]

Till the snow fell deep, covering the dry grass on the meadows, the little cow throve well enough. But when the northern winter had fairly settled in, and the great white stillness lay like sleep upon the ancient wood, and the fir-trees, with their cloaking of snow, were so many spires and



domes and pinnacles of glittering marble under the icy sunlight, then the wanderer would have starved if she had not chanced to be both resourceful and indomitable. From her lair under the hemlock, which was sheltered from all winds, her deeply trodden trail led both to the meadows and the birchen hill-slopes. She could paw her way down to the deep-buried grasses; but it took so much digging to uncover a few poor and unsatisfying mouthfuls that she could never have kept herself alive in this fashion. Being adaptable, however, she soon accustomed herself to browsing on the slimmest of the birch and poplar twigs, and so, having proved herself one of the fittest, she survived. When the late, reluctant spring brought the first green of sprouting grasses to the meadows of the Quah-Davic, it found the red cow a mere bag of bones, indeed, but still alive, and still presenting an undaunted pair of horns to a still distrusted world.

[89]

Into this unfriendly world, when the painted trilliums and the purple wake-robins were dotting every half-exposed glade, was born a sturdy bull-calf. His sire was a handsome black half-breed Durham which had been brought into the settlement the previous summer for the improvement of the scrubby backwoods stock. The calf was jet-black in colour. As he grew, he soon began to show hints of his sire's broad forehead and massive fore-quarters. He had his mother's large, half-wild, discriminating eyes; and his legs, soon throwing off the straddling awkwardness of calfhood, developed his mother's almost deer-like activity.

The summer passed uneventfully for the pair of aliens in the wilderness. With abundant pasturage on the Quah-Davic water-meadows, they had no occasion to wander into the perils of the deep wood; and the little red cow had none of that prevision of wild mothers, which leads them to instruct their young in the two great vital points of woodcraft,—the procuring of food and the avoiding of enemies. She herself knew little woodcraft save what she and the calf were absorbing together, unconsciously, day by day. For the time they needed none, their food being all about them, their enemies kept at bay by the ceaseless *tunk-a-tonk* of the mellow bell. Thus it came about that to the black bull-calf the wilderness seemed almost empty of life, save for the birds, the insects, the squirrels, and the fish leaping in the pool. To all these the bell was a matter of indifference.

[90]

Once only, late in the autumn, did he get a glimpse of the old Quah-Davic panther. He and his mother were lying in the sun by the meadow's edge, comfortably chewing the cud, when the long, tawny beast, following their trail with more curiosity than hunger, came upon them suddenly, and stopped short about twenty paces distant. The little red cow, recognizing the most dangerous of all her possible enemies, had sprung to her feet with a bellow and lowered her defiant horns. Thereupon, the panther had slunk off with a whipped look and a drooping tail; and the little black bull conceived a poor opinion of panthers. But it was the sudden *tonk-tonking* of the bell, not the challenge of his redoubtable mother, that had put the fierce-eyed prowler to flight.

[91]

It was much the same with the bears, who were numerous about the Quah-Davic. They regarded the noisy bell with hatred and invincible suspicion. But for that, they would probably have put the red cow's horns to the test, and in all likelihood the career of the lonely alien would have come to an end ere the snow fell. As it was, however, the black bull-calf never saw a bear in any attitude save that of sulkily slinking away from his mother's neighbourhood; and therefore, in that first summer of his life, he conceived a very dangerous contempt for bears. As for the lynxes,—those soundless-footed, gray shadows of the wild,—neither he nor his mother ever saw them, so fearful were they of the voice of the bell. But their screeches and harsh caterwaulings often filled his heart with wonder. Fear he had as yet had no occasion to learn; and therefore he had little real part in the ever-watchful life of the wilderness.

The next winter was a hard one for all the beasts of the Quah-Davic; and, ere it went by, the lair under the hemlocks was surrounded by many lynx tracks. But to neither red cow nor black calf did tracks carry much significance, and they had no thought for the perils that begirt them. Once, indeed, even the two panthers came, and turned upon them pale, bright, evil eyes. But they did not come very near. The cow shook her horns at them defiantly; and the calf shook his broadening, curly forehead at them; and wild were the clamours of the vigilant bell. The hearts of the hunting beasts turned to water at these incomprehensible voices. In their chagrin they shifted their range farther east; and for several years they came no more to the water-meadows of the Quah-Davic.

[92]

Late in the following summer, when the fireweed was beginning to crimson the open spaces on the hillside, fate came to the water-meadows in a form which the bell was powerless to avert. An Indian, paddling down the Quah-Davic to the sea, caught sight of the red cow drinking by the waterside. He knew there was no settlement within leagues. He knew the cow was a stray, and therefore no man's property. He knew he wanted fresh meat, to say nothing of cowhide for moccasins and thongs. Up went his big smooth-bore muzzle-loader. There was a deafening, clattering report, unlike the smart detonation of a rifle. The little red cow fell on her knees, with a cough and a wild clamour of the bell, then rolled over in the shallow, shimmering water. With a whoop of exultation, the Indian thrust ashore; and, as he did so, the black yearling, taught terror at last by the report and by the human voice, broke from his covert in a willow thicket and dashed wildly into the woods.

[93]

When he came back, hours later, the Indian had vanished, and, with that strident bellow of his, from which the calf-bleat was not yet quite gone, he trotted down the bank to look for his mother. But the smell of fresh blood, and the red spectacle which he saw on the pebbles of the river-beach, struck a new and madder terror into his heart. With stiffly uplifted tail and staring eyes, he dashed away again into the woods.

From that day he never again went near that particular meadow; neither, though for days he called to her in his loneliness, did he search any more for the mother who had so suddenly disappeared out of his life. Standing on the edge of a bluff, in the fading sunset, he would thrust his head and neck out straight and bellow his sonorous appeal. Then he would stop and listen long for an answer. And as he called, evening after evening in vain, a deeper, surer tone came into his voice, a more self-reliant, masterful look into the lonely but fearless eyes with which he surveyed the solitude.

[94]

Again came autumn to the Quah-Davic, with the pale blue smoke of asters along the meadow-edges, the pale gold glimmer of birches on the slopes, and the wax-vermilion bunches of the rowan-berries reflected in each brown pool. By this time the black bull was of the stature of a well-grown two-year-old, massive in the shoulder, lean and fine in limb and flank, with a cushion of dense, close, inky curls between his horns. The horns themselves—very short, thick, keen-pointed spikes of horns—were not set forward, but stood out absolutely straight on either side of his broad black head. Young though he was, he was an ominous figure to all the furtive eyes that watched him, as he stood and bellowed from his bluff in the fading sunset.



**"BUT THEY DID NOT COME VERY NEAR."**

About this time it was that the young bull began to find the solitude more populous. Since the voice of the bronze bell was hushed, the wild creatures were no longer held aloof. Hitherto the red squirrels and the indifferent, arrogant porcupines were the only animals he had noticed. But now he saw an occasional slim and snaky mink at its fishing; or a red fox stealing down upon the duck asleep in the lily patch; or a weasel craftily trailing one of the brown hares which had of a sudden grown so numerous. All these strange little beasts excited his curiosity. At first he would sniff, and snort, and approach to investigate, which would lead, of course, to an immediate and discouraging disappearance. Only the fox was too haughty to disappear. He would maintain a judicious distance, but otherwise seemed to regard the inquisitive bull with utter unconcern. This unconcern, together with the musky smell of the bush-tailed red stranger, at last so aggravated the bull that he charged furiously again and again. But the fox eluded him with mocking ease, till the bull at last sulkily ignored him.

[95]

The bull's next important acquaintance was the lynx. He was lying under a scarlet maple, chewing his cud, and lazily watching a rabbit scratching its ears some dozen paces distant. Suddenly a soundless gray shadow shot from a thicket and dropped upon the rabbit. There was a squeak, a feeble scuffle; and then a big lynx, setting the claws of one paw into the prey, turned with a snarl and eyed venomously the still, dark form under the maple. This seemed like a challenge. With a mixture of curiosity and indignation, the young bull got up, grunted, pawed the earth once or twice by way of ceremony, and emerged to the encounter. But the lynx had no stomach to meet the charge of that sturdy front. He snatched up the rabbit in his jaws and bounded away into the underbrush.

[96]

A few days later, as the bull again lay under the scarlet maple and looked out contemplatively over his yellow autumn world, a large bear lumbered past, taking his own well-beaten trail to the waterside. The bull lurched to his feet, and stood on guard, for this was a formidable-looking stranger. But the bear, fed fat with autumn berries, was at peace with all the world. He gave the black bull a shrewd glance out of his little cunning eyes, and paid no further attention; and the bull, seeing no incentive to a quarrel, snorted doubtfully and lay down again. After this he saw several more bears, but, being well fed and lazy, they made no effort to molest him. Then, one unfortunate day, as he came up dripping from his favourite pool, he met one face to face.

The bear was surprised, and halted. He half-settled back upon his haunches, as if to turn aside and yield the path. Then he thought better of it and held his ground, being at the moment good-natured enough, but careful of his dignity, as a bear is apt to be. The young bull, however, was enraged at this obstinate intrusion upon his trail. He was unlucky enough to remember how often he had seen bears slink off to avoid his mother's charge. With an angry bellow, he lifted his tail, lowered his head, and launched himself upon the intruder. [97]

The bear, poising himself upon three legs, gracefully and lightly avoided the attack, and at the same instant delivered a terrific buffet upon the young bull's neck. The blow struck low, where the muscles were corded and massive, or the neck would have been broken. As it was, the bull went staggering to his knees at one side of the trail, the blood spurting from his wounds. In that moment he realized that he was not yet a match for a full-grown bear. Smarting with pain and wrath, he rushed on up the trail, and hid himself in the old lair under the hemlock. When again, some days later, he met another bear, he made haste to yield the right of way.

In the wild, as in the world, to be once beaten is to invite the fist of fate. While the young bull's wounds were still red and raw, there came a big-antlered, high-shouldered bull-moose to the bluff overlooking the Quah-Davic. The moose was surprised at sight of the short-legged, black animal on the bluff. But it was rutting season, and his surprise soon gave way to indignation. The black bull, whose careless eyes had not yet noticed the visitor, began to bellow as was his evening wont. The moose responded with a hoarse, bleating roar, thrashed the bushes defiantly with his antlers, and shambled up to the attack. The bull, astonished and outraged, stood his ground boldly, and at the first charge got in a daunting blow between the enemy's antlers. But he was not yet strong enough or heavy enough to hold so tough an antagonist, and, after a very few minutes of fierce grunting and pushing, he was thrust clear over the bank and sent rolling down into the river. All next day he sulked, but when night came he returned to the bluff, his eyes red with rage. He found the moose before him, but not alone. A tall, dingy-coloured, antlerless cow was there, fondling her mate's neck and ears with her long, flexible muzzle. This sight gave the young bull a new and uncomprehended fury, under the impulse of which he would have attacked an elephant. But the moose, thus interrupted in his wooing, was far more dangerous than he had been the night before. Like a whirlwind of devastation he rushed to meet the intruder; and the young bull was hopelessly overmatched. Within five minutes he was gored, beaten down, pounded from the field, and driven bellowing through the bushes. For several weeks he hardly showed himself in the open meadows, but lurked all day in the thickets, nursing his wounds and his humiliation. [98] [99]

The next winter set in early and severe, driving the drowsy bears into their winter quarters and their long, snow-comforted sleep before they had time to get hungry and dangerous. The lynxes, no longer mystified by the voice of the bell, came prowling about the lair beneath the hemlock, but the sullen front and angry, lonely eyes of the black bull held them in awe. Not even in the worst of the cold, when they had taken to hunting together in a loosely organized pack, did they dare to trouble the bull. When spring came, it found him a big, burly three-year-old, his temper beginning to sour with an unhappiness which he did not understand; and by the time the bears came hungry from their winter sleep he was quite too formidable to be meddled with. Stung by humiliating memories, he attacked with fury every bear he saw; and they soon learned to give him a wide berth.

As the summer wore along, his loneliness grew more bitter and distracting. He would spend sometimes a full hour upon the bluff, when the yellow day was fading into dusk, bellowing his calls across the stillness, and waiting for he knew not what reply. He was now a huge and daunting figure. When, at last, came round again the full October moon, and the spirit of mating went abroad on the crisp air, he grew more restless than ever. Then, one night, on a clear white stretch of sand some distance down the shore, he saw a cow-moose standing close by the water. He was much interested, and half unconsciously began to move in her direction. When she stretched out her long, ungainly head and uttered her harsh call, he answered with a soft, caressing bellow. But at almost the same instant her call was answered by another and a very different voice; and a tall bull-moose strode out arrogantly upon the sand. [100]

The black bull's heart swelled with wrath and longing. With a roar he charged down from the bluff; and the moose, diverted from his wooing, turned to meet the assault. But he was no match for this dreadful black bulk that descended upon him with the resistlessness of doom. He went down at the first crash, a pathetic sprawl of long limbs and long, ineffective, beautiful antlers; and barely escaping with his life, he fled away into the thickets. Then, satisfied with his victory, the black bull lifted his head and turned to the watching cow.

The cow, after the manner of her kind appreciating a conqueror, awaited somewhat doubtfully his approach. But when he was within a few feet of her, wonder and interest gave way to terror. His bulk, his blackness, his square, mighty head, his big, blazing eyes, and short, thick muzzle [101]

filled her with repulsion and amazement. His voice, too, though unmistakably caressing and persuasive, was too daunting in its strangeness. With a wild snort, she turned and fled into the woods with a speed that he could not hope to match.

After this experience the black bull's loneliness grew almost intolerable, and his temper so bad that he would go raging up and down the woods in search of bears to chase. The winter cooled him down somewhat, and in the spring his temper was not so raw. But he was now troubled with a spirit of wandering, and kept ranging the woods in every direction, only returning to the young green of the water-meadow once or twice a day.

One afternoon, however, there came a change. He was browsing irritably near the bank when he heard voices that made him look up sharply. A canoe was passing up-stream, poled by two men. It passed slowly, surging against the current. As he looked at the men, a dreadful memory stirred within him. He recalled the loud report which had driven him mad with fear on that day when the red cow disappeared. He remembered an appalling sight on the beach of that lower meadow which he had never visited since. His eyes went red. With a grunt of fury, he thundered down the bank and out knee-deep into the current. [102]

The men in the canoe were astonished, and hastily pushed over toward the other shore. The one in the bow laid down his pole and reached back for his rifle. But the man in the stern intervened.

"What's the good o' shootin' him?" said he. "He can't git at us here, an' we ain't a-wantin' for grub. Let him be!"

"That's so!" said the other, picking up his pole again. "But ain't he handsome? An' mad, eh? How do you suppose he come here, anyways?"

"Strayed!" grunted the man in the stern, bending to his pole as the canoe met a heavier rush of the current.

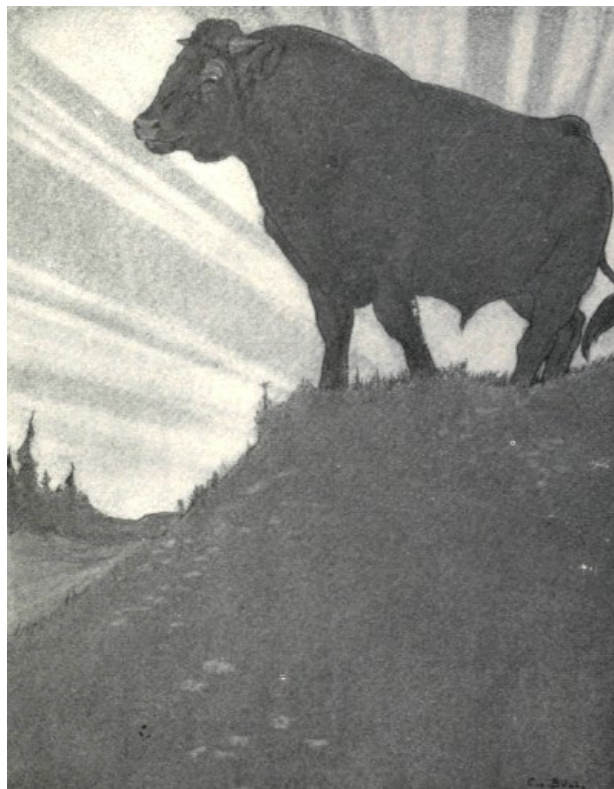
As the two voyagers pursued their strenuous way up-stream, rock and eddy and "rip" consuming all their attention, the furious bull kept abreast of them along the shore, splashing in the shallows and bellowing his challenge, till at length a deep inseting of the current compelled him to mount the bank, along which he continued his vain pursuit for several miles. At last a stretch of dense swamp headed him off, and the canoe vanished from his sight. [103]

He was now in unknown territory, miles away from his meadows. His rage against the men had all died out, but some faint stirring of inherited instincts impelled him to follow for companionship. Had they suddenly reappeared, close at hand, doubtless his rage would have burst forth anew. But when they were gone, he had to follow. A dim intuition told him that where they were going dwelt some kind of relief for his loneliness. He skirted the swamp, rejoined the river, and kept slowly on his way up-stream, pasturing as he went. He had turned his back for ever on the water-meadows and the life of which he could not be a part, and was off on the quest for that unknown which he felt to be his own.

After two days of leisurely journeying he passed through a belt of burnt lands, and had his curiosity mildly excited by a blackened chimney rising from a heap of ruins near the water. Through this burnt land he travelled swiftly; and about dawn of the fourth day of his quest he came out upon the pasture-lands skirting the rear of the settlement.

Here he found a rude but strong snake fence, at which he sniffed with wonder. Then, beyond the fence, a creature shaped something like himself, but red and white in colour, got up from among the misty hillocks and stared at him. But for the colour, he might have thought it was the little red mother who had vanished two years before. *This* was what he had come for. This was the object of his quest. Two or three other cows, and some young steers, presently arose and fell to feeding. He lowed to them softly through the rails, and they eyed him with amiable interest. With a burst of joy, he reared his bulk against the fence, bore it down, trotted in confidently, and took command of the little herd. There was no protesting. Cows and steers alike recognized at once the right of this dominant black stranger to rule; and soon he fell to pasturing among them quietly, his heart healed at last of its loneliness. [104]

The two canoemen, meanwhile, on their arrival at the settlement, had told of their encounter with the wild black bull. As they described the adventure to a little circle gathered in the back room of the grocery, the old woodsman whose cabin had been burned in the great fires was one of their most interested listeners.



**"A LORDLY BLACK BEAST IN COMMAND OF THE  
HERD."**

"I'll bet he's mine! I'll bet he's out of the little red cow I bought just afore the fire!" he exclaimed at last. And his theory, duly expounded, met with general credence. [105]

When, therefore, a couple of mornings later, the old woodsman, on going to the pasture to fetch in his cows for the milking, found a lordly black beast in command of the herd, he understood at once. Fortunately for him, he understood so well that he took certain precautions, instead of walking straight into the middle of the pasture as usual to get the cows. With judgment born of intuitive understanding, he let down the pasture bars unnoticed, then went over near the stable door and called. At the familiar summons the cows lifted their heads, and came filing lazily toward the open bars, which lay a little to one side of the direct way to the house. But the black bull was of another mind. He saw the man; and straight his eyes saw red. He pawed the earth, roared angrily, gave one uncertain glance at the cows sauntering away from him, and then charged straight for the unknown foe. The works of man might, indeed, have some strange inherited attraction for him; but man, the individual, he hated with destructive hate.

The woodsman noticed that the bull was not heading for the bars. [106]

"The fence'll stop him!" he said to himself, confidently.

But not so. The wild bull had no conception of the sanctity and authority of fences. The stout rails went down before him like corn-stalks. The old woodsman shook his head deprecatingly, stepped into the stable, and latched the door.

The bull, much puzzled at the unaccountable disappearance of his foe, stopped for a moment, snorting, then dashed around the barn to see if the enemy were hiding on the other side. Twice he circled it, his rage increasing instead of diminishing; and then he caught sight of the man's face eyeing him calmly through the little square stable window.

He stopped again to paw the earth, bellowing his heavy challenge; and the old woodsman wondered what to do. He wanted the splendid black bull for his little herd, but he was beginning to have serious misgivings. Moreover, he wanted to get into the house. He threw open the stable door; and as the bull dashed in he scrambled through a manger, swung himself into the loft, dropped from the hay window, and darted for the house at top speed. He had had an idea of shutting the stable door, and imprisoning his unmanageable visitor; but the bull was too quick for him. He got the heavy kitchen door slammed to just in time. Thoughtfully he rubbed his grizzled chin as he glanced out and saw the black beast raging up and down before the window. [107]

"Can't do nothin' with that, I'm afeared!" he muttered.

Just then the bull stopped his ravings, turned his head, and stared away up the road. There came a clamour of gay young voices; and the old woodsman, following the beast's eyes, saw a little group of children approaching on their way to school. Among them he noticed a girl in a bright scarlet waist. This the bull noted also. He forgot his enemy in the house. He grunted savagely, gave his tail a vicious twist, and trotted down the lane toward the road.

The old woodsman saw that the time had come for prompt action. He snatched up his loaded rifle



from the corner where it stood always ready, ran out upon the steps, and shouted at the bull. The great black animal stopped and looked around, mumbling deep in his throat. He wheeled half-about to return to the old enemy. Then he paused irresolutely and eyed the gay bevy of children. Which foe should he obliterate first?

While he hesitated, the rifle rang out, and the heavy bullet found its mark just back of his fore-shoulder. He sank forward upon his outstretched muzzle and his knees, his tail stiffening straight up, and quivering. Then he rolled over on his side. [108]

The old woodsman strode down the lane, and stood over the great black form. His shrewd gray eyes were filled with regret and sympathetic comprehension.

"Spiled!" said he. "Clean spiled all 'round! The woods, they wa'n't no place fer you, so ye had to quit 'em. But they spiled you fer the habitations o' man. It's a born stranger and an alien you was, an' there wa'n't no place fer ye neither here nor there!"

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## The Silver Frost

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[111]

## The Silver Frost



In the heart of an almost impenetrable thicket of young firs the rabbit had crouched all night, sometimes sleeping the light sleep of the woodsfolk, sometimes listening to the swish of the winter rain on his roof of branches. In spite of the storm, he had been warm and dry all night, only a big drop coming through from time to time to make him shift his couch. Hearing the rain, he was vaguely puzzled because he felt so little of it; for he knew that even the densest of fir thickets were not proof against a prolonged and steady rainfall. He was glad to profit, however, by a phenomenon which he could not comprehend, so he lay close, and restrained his impatient appetite, and kept his white fur dry and warmly fluffy. Had the night been fine, he would have been leaping gaily hither and thither over the deep, midwinter snow, and browsing on the tender, aromatic shoots of the young birches which dotted the little woodland valley.

Early in the night, soon after the rain began, the lower air had turned cold, and every wet branch and twig had found itself on a sudden encased with ice. Meanwhile, in the upper dark a warm and moisture-laden current had kept drifting up from the southwest, and ceaselessly spilling its burden on the hushed world. Had this fine rain been less warm, or had the wrapping of cold air next to the earth been deeper, the drops would have frozen in their descent, and fallen as sleet; but as it was, they waited till they fell, and then froze instantly. Thus every limb, and branch, and twig, and every delicate, perennial frondage of fir and hemlock, gathered an ever-increasing adornment of clearest crystal. And thus it was that the rabbit in the fir thicket slept dry through the storm, the branches above him having been transformed into a roof of ice. [112]

The rain had stopped a little before dawn, and just as the sunrise colours began to spread down the valley, the rabbit came hopping out from his snug retreat. He stopped in surprise, sat up, and waved his long ears to and fro, while his large, bulging eyes surveyed the world in wonder. He was a young rabbit, born the spring before, and his world had changed in the night to something he had never dreamed of. He hopped back beneath the firs for a moment, and sniffed about to reassure himself, then came out and stared again. [113]

The valley was an open space in the woods, with wooded hills all about it except on the east, where it stretched away toward the fields and scattered farmsteads of the settlement. It had once been cleared, but young seedlings of birch and poplar and maple, with willows along the course of a hidden stream, had been suffered to partly reclaim it. Here and there a group of dark fir or hemlock stood out among the slenderer saplings. Now, all this valley was transmuted to crystal. The soft white surface of the snow was overlaid with a sheet of transparent silver, flashing white light and cold but coloured fire. Every bush and tree was a miracle of frostwork, lavish, inexhaustible, infinitely varied, and of an unspeakable purity wherever it failed to catch the young light. But that light, spreading pink and yellow and rose from the growing radiance upon the eastern horizon, seemed to penetrate everywhere, reflected and re-reflected from innumerable facets; and every ray seemed to come from the live heart of a jewel. Each icy tree and bush emitted thin threadlike flames, high and aerial in tone, but of a piercing intensity. It was as if the quiet valley had been flooded all at once with dust of emerald and opal, of sapphire and amethyst and diamond. And as the light grew the miracle changed slowly, one keen gleam dying out as another flashed into life. [114]

Having convinced himself that this dazzling and mysterious world was really the world he knew, the rabbit thought no more about it, but went leaping gaily over the radiant crust (which was just strong enough to support him) toward some young birches, where he proposed to nibble a breakfast. As he went, suddenly a curious sound just under his feet made him jump wildly aside. Trembling, but consumed with curiosity, he stared down at the glassy surface. In a moment the sound was repeated. It was a sharp, impatient tapping against the under side of the crust. To the

rabbit's ears the sound conveyed no threat, so he hopped nearer to investigate. What he saw beneath the clear shell of ice was a cock-partridge, his wings half-spread, his head thrown back in the struggle to break from his snowy grave. His curiosity satisfied, the rabbit bounded away again, and fell to nibbling the young birch-twigs. Of small concern to him was the doom of the imprisoned bird.

At dusk of the preceding evening, when the cock-partridge went to roost, there had been no suggestion of rain, but a bitter air from the northwest searching through the woods. The wise old bird, finding cold comfort on his perch, had bethought him of a trick which many a time before had served his turn. In the open, where the snow was deep, he had rocketed down, head foremost, with such force that he was fairly buried in the light, feathery mass. A little kicking, a little awkward burrowing, and he had worked his way to a depth of perhaps two feet. Turning about and lifting his wings gently, he had made himself a snug nest, where neither wind nor cold could reach him, and where there was small likelihood that any night marauder would smell him out. Here in the fluffy stillness he got no word of the change of the wind, no hint of the soft rain sifting over him. When he woke and started to revisit the outer world, he found a wall of glass above him, which his sturdy beak could not break through. A fate that overtakes many of his kindred had caught him unawares. [115]

While the partridge was resting after his struggles with the inexorable ice, through which he could look out dimly on the jewelled world of freedom, a red fox appeared on the edge of the wood. His crafty eyes fell on the rabbit, and crouching flat, he crept noiselessly forward. But the crust, strong enough to support the rabbit, was not strong enough to quite support the heavier animal. With light, crackling sound one foot broke through, and the rabbit, with a frightened glance at the most dreaded of all his foes, went sailing away in long bounds. Soundless though his padded footfalls were, his flight was accompanied and heralded by a crisp rattling of icicles as the frozen twigs snapped at his passing. [116]

Laboriously the fox followed, breaking through at every other stride, but hungry and obstinate, and unwilling to acknowledge himself baffled. Halfway across the valley, however, he gave up. After pausing a moment to consider, he retraced his steps, having apparently had some scheme in mind when diverted by the sight of the rabbit. The latter, being young and properly harebrained, and aware of his present advantage, now came back by a great circle, and fell to browsing again on the birch-twigs. As he fed, however, he kept a sharp eye on the enemy.

The fox, meanwhile, was growing more and more exasperated. He was happening upon every weak spot in the crust, and floundering at almost every step. All at once, as the surface broke there came to his nostrils the familiar smell of a partridge. It was a fresh scent. The fox forgot his indignation. He poked his narrow snout into the snow, sniffed sharply, and began to dig with all his might. [117]

Now it chanced that the imprisoned bird, in his search for an exit, had worked away from the spot where he had slept. The fox was puzzled. That alluring scent was all about him, and most tantalizingly fresh. He understood this partridge trick, and had several times made his knowledge supply him with a meal. But hitherto he had always found the partridge asleep; and he had no idea what the bird would do in such a case as the present. He dug furiously in one direction, then fiercely in another, but all in vain. Then he lifted his head, panting, his pointed ears and ruddy face grotesquely patched with snow. At this moment a great puff of the white powder was flapped into his eyes, a feathery dark body jumped up from under his very nose, and the crafty old bird went whirring off triumphantly to the nearest tree. With his tongue hanging out, the fox stared foolishly after him, then slunk away into the woods. And the white rabbit, nibbling at his birch-twigs, was left in undisputed possession of the scintillating rainbow world.

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## By the Winter Tide

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## By the Winter Tide



ehind the long, slow-winding barrier of the dyke the marshes of Tantramar lay secure, mile on mile of blue-white radiance under the unclouded moon. Outside the dyke it was different. Mile on mile of tumbled, mud-stained ice-cakes, strewn thickly over the Tantramar flats, waited motionless under the moon for the incoming tide. Twice in each day the far-wandering tide of Fundy would come in, to lift, and toss, and grind, and roll the ice-cakes, then return again to its deep channels; and with every tide certain of the floes would go forth to be lost in the open sea, while the rest would sink back to their tumbled stillness on the mud. Just now the flood was coming in. From all along the outer fringes of the flats came a hoarse, desolate roar; and in the steady light the edges of the ice-field began to turn and flash, the strange motion creeping gradually inland toward that impassive bulwark of the dyke. Had it been daylight, the chaotic ice-field would have shown small beauty, every wave-beaten floe being soiled and streaked with rust-coloured Tantramar mud. But under the transfiguring touch of the moon the unsightly levels changed to plains of infinite mystery—expanses of shattered, white granite, as it were, fretted and scrawled with blackness—reaches of loneliness older than time. [122]

So well is the mask of eternity assumed by the mutable moonlight and the ephemeral ice.

Nearer and nearer across the waste drew the movement that marked the incoming flood. Then from over the dyke-top floated a noiseless, winnowing, sinister shape which seemed the very embodiment of the desolation. The great white owl of the north, driven down from his Arctic hunting-grounds by hunger, came questing over the ragged levels. His long, soft-feathered wings moved lightly as a ghost, and almost touched the ice-cakes now and then as his round, yellow eyes, savagely hard and brilliant, searched the dark crevices for prey. With his black beak, his black talons protruding from the mass of snowy feathers which swathed his legs, and the dark bars on his plumage, one might have fancied him a being just breathed into menacing and furtive life by the sorcery of the scene. [123]

Suddenly, with a motion almost as swift as light, the great owl swooped and struck. Swift as he was, however, this time he struck just too late. A spot of dark on the edge of an ice-cake vanished. It was a foraging muskrat who had seen the approaching doom in time and slipped into a deep and narrow crevice. Here, on the wet mud, he crouched trembling, while the baffled bird reached down for him with vainly clutching claws.

On either side of the two ice-cakes which had given the muskrat refuge, was a space of open mud which he knew it would be death to cross. Each time those deadly black talons clutched at him, he flattened himself to the ground in panic; but there were several inches to spare between his throat and death. The owl glared down with fixed and flaming eyes, then gave up his useless efforts. But he showed no inclination to go away. He knew that the muskrat could not stay for ever down in that muddy crevice. So he perched himself bolt upright on the very edge, where he could keep secure watch upon his intended victim, while at the same time his wide, round eyes might detect any movement of life among the surrounding ice-cakes. [124]

The great flood-tides of Fundy, when once they have brimmed the steep channels and begun to invade the vast reaches of the flats, lose little time. When the baffled owl, hungry and obstinate, perched himself on the edge of the ice-cake to wait for the muskrat to come out, the roar of the incoming water and the line of tossing, gleaming floes were half a mile away. In about four minutes the fringe of tumult was not three hundred yards distant,—and at the same time the vanguards of the flood, thin, frothy rivulets of chill water, were trickling in through the crevice where the little prisoner crouched. As the water touched his feet, the muskrat took heart anew, anticipating a way of escape. As it deepened he stood upright,—and instantly the white destruction cruelly watching struck again. This time the muskrat felt those deadly talons graze the long, loose fur of his back; and again he cowered down, inviting the flood to cover him. As much at home under water as on dry land, he counted on easy escape when the tide came in.

It happens, however, that the little kindreds of the wild are usually more wise in the general than in the particular. The furry prisoner at the bottom of the crevice knew about such regular phenomena as the tides. He knew, too, that presently there would be water enough for him to dive and swim beneath it, where his dreadful adversary could neither reach him nor detect him. What he did not take into account was the way the ice-cakes would grind and batter each other as soon as the tide was deep enough to float them. Now, submerged till his furry back and spiky tail were just even with the surface, his little, dark eyes glanced up with mingled defiance and appeal at the savage, yellow glare of the wide orbs staring down upon him. If only the water would come, he would be safe. For a moment his eyes turned longingly toward the dyke, and he thought of the narrow, safe hole, the long, ascending burrow, and the warm, soft-lined chamber which was his nest, far up in the heart of the dyke, high above the reach of the highest tides and hidden from all enemies. But here in the hostile water, with a cruel death hanging just above him, his valorous little heart ached with homesickness for that nest in the heart of the dyke; and though the water had no chill for his hardy blood, he shivered. [125]

Meanwhile, the long line of clamour was rushing steadily inland. The roar suddenly crashed into thunder on the prisoner's ears and a rush of water swept him up. The white owl spread his wings and balanced himself on tiptoe, as the ice-cake on which he was perching lurched and rolled. Through all the clamour his ears, miraculously keen beyond those of other birds, caught an agonized squeak from below. The jostling ice had nipped the muskrat's hind quarters. [126]

Though desperately hurt, so desperately that his strong hind legs were almost useless, the brave little animal was not swerved from his purpose. Straight from his prison, no longer now a refuge, he dived and swam for home through the loud uproar. But the muskrat's small forelegs are of little use in swimming, so much so that as a rule he carries them folded under his chin while in the water. Now, therefore, he was at a piteous disadvantage. His progress was slow, as in a nightmare,—such a nightmare as must often come to muskrats if their small, careless brains know how to dream. And in spite of his frantic efforts, he found that he could not hold himself down in the water. He kept rising toward the surface every other second.

Balancing had by this time grown too difficult for the great, white owl, and he had softly lifted himself on hovering wings. But not for an instant had he forgotten the object of his hunt. What were floods and cataclysms to him in the face of his hunger? Swiftly his shining eyes searched the foamy, swirling water. Then, some ten feet away, beside a pitching floe, a furry back appeared for an instant. In that instant he swooped. The back had vanished,—but unerringly his talons struck beneath the surface—struck and gripped their prey. The next moment the wide, white wings beat upward heavily, and the muskrat was lifted from the water. [127]

As he rose into the air, though near blind with the anguish of that iron grip, the little victim

writhed upward and bit furiously at his enemy's leg. His jaws got nothing but a bunch of fluffy feathers, which came away and floated down the moonlight air. Then the life sank out of his brain, and he hung limply; and the broad wings bore him inland over the dyke-top—straight over the warm and hidden nest where he had longed to be.

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## The Rivals of Ringwaak

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## The Rivals of Ringwaak

### I.



white flood, still and wonderful, the moonlight lay on the naked rampikes and dense thickets of Ringwaak Hill. Beneath its magic the very rocks, harsh bulks of granite, seemed almost afloat; and every branch, spray and leaf, swam liquidly. The rampikes, towering trunks of pine, fire-blasted and time-bleached, lifted lonely spires of silver over the enchanted solitude.

Apparently, there was neither sound nor motion over all Ringwaak, or over the wide wilderness spread out below its ken. But along the secret trails, threading the thicket, and skirting the granite boulders, life went on with an intensity all the deeper and more stringent for the seal of silence laid upon it. The small, fugitive kindreds moved noiselessly about their affairs, foraging, mating, sometimes even playing, but ever watchful, a sleepless vigilance the price of each hour's breath; while even more furtive, but more intermittent in their watchfulness, the hunting and blood-loving kindreds followed the trails.

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Gliding swiftly from bush to rock, from rock to thicket, now for an instant clear and terrible in a patch of moonlight, now ghost-gray and still more terrible in the sharp-cut shadows, came a round-eyed, crouching shape. It was somewhere about the size of a large spaniel, but shorter in the body, and longer in the legs; and its hind legs, in particular, though kept partly gathered beneath the body, in readiness for a lightning spring, were so disproportionately long as to give a high, humped-up, rabbit-like look to the powerful hind quarters. This combined suggestion of the rabbit and the tiger was peculiarly daunting in its effect. The strange beast's head was round and cat-like, but with high, tufted ears, and a curious, back-brushed muffle of whiskers under the throat. Its eyes, wide and pale, shone with a cold ferocity and unconquerable wildness. Its legs, singularly large for the bulk of its body, and ending in broad, razor-clawed, furry pads of feet, would have seemed clumsy, but for the impression of tense steel springs and limitless power which they gave in every movement. In weight, this stealthy and terrifying figure would have gone perhaps forty pounds—but forty pounds of destroying energy and tireless swiftness.

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As he crept through a spruce thicket, his savage eyes turning from side to side, the lynx came upon a strange trail, and stopped short, crouching. His stub of a tail twitched, his ears flattened back angrily, his long, white fangs bared themselves in a soundless snarl. A green flame seemed to flicker in his eyes, as he subjected every bush, every stone, every stump within his view to the most piercing scrutiny. Detecting no hostile presence, he bent his attention to the strange trail, sniffing at it with minute consideration.

The scent of the trail was that of a wildcat; but its size was too great for that of any wildcat this big lynx had ever known. Wildcats he viewed with utter scorn. For three years he had ruled all Ringwaak Hill; and no wildcat, in those three years, had dared to hunt upon his range. But this newcomer, with the wildcat smell, seemed about as big as three wildcats. The impression of its foot on a patch of moist mould was almost as large as that of the lynx himself—and the lynx well knew that the wildcats were a small-footed tribe. Like most of the hunting beasts, he was well-schooled in the lore of the trails, and all the signs were to him a clear speech. From the depth and definiteness of that footprint, he felt that both weight and strength had stamped it. His long claws protruded from their hidden sheaths, as he pondered the significance of this message from the unknown. Was the stranger a deliberate invader of his range, or a mere ignorant trespasser? And would he fight, or would he run? The angry lynx was determined to put these questions to the test with the least possible delay.

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The trail was comparatively fresh, and the lynx began to follow it, forgetful of his hunger and of the hunt on which he had set out. He moved now more warily than ever, crouching flat, gliding smoothly as a snake, and hoping to score the first point against his rival by catching him unawares. So noiselessly did he go, indeed, that a weasel, running hard upon the trail of a rabbit, actually brushed against him, to bound away in a paroxysm of fear and rush off in another direction, wondering how he had escaped those lightning claws. In fact the lynx, intent only upon the hunting of his unknown foe, was almost as astonished as the weasel, and quite unprepared to seize the sudden opportunity for a meal. He eyed the vanishing weasel malignly for a moment, then resumed his stealthy advance. A white-footed mouse, sitting up daintily at the door of her burrow, fell over backwards, and nearly died of fright, as the ghost-gray shape of doom sped up and passed. But the lynx had just then no mind for mice, and never saw her.

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The strange trail, for some hundreds of yards, kept carefully to the thickets and the shadows. In one place the marks of a scuffle, with a heap of speckled feathers and a pair of slim claws, showed that the intruder had captured and devoured an unwary partridge mothering her brood. At this evidence of poaching on his preserves, the big lynx's anger swelled hotly. He paused to sniff at the remnants, and then stole on with added caution. The blood of the victim was not yet dry, or even clotted, on the leaves.

A little further on, the trail touched the foot of a clean-stemmed young maple. Here the trespasser had paused to stretch himself, setting his claws deep into the bark. These claw-marks the lynx appeared to take as a challenge or a defiance. Rearing himself against the tree, he stretched himself to his utmost. But his highest scratch was two inches below the mark of the stranger. This still further enraged him. Possibly, it might also have daunted him a little but for the fact that his own claw-marks were both deeper and wider apart than those of his rival. [136]

From the clawed tree, the trail now led to the very edge of the open and thence to the top of an overhanging rock, white and sharply chiseled in the moonlight. The lynx was just about to climb the rock, when there beneath it, in the revealing radiance, he saw a sight which flattened him in his tracks. The torn carcass of a young doe lay a few feet from the base of the rock; and on top of the prey, glaring savage challenge, crouched such a wildcat as the lynx had never even dreamed of.

## II.

A few days before this night of the white full moon, a gigantic wildcat living some fifteen miles from Ringwaak had decided to change his hunting-grounds. His range, over which he had ruled for years, was a dark, thick-wooded slope overlooking the brown pools and loud chutes of the Guimic stream. Here he had prospered hunting with continual success, and enjoying life as only the few overlords among the wild kindreds can hope to enjoy it. He had nothing to fear, as long as he avoided quarrel with a bear or a bull moose. And a narrow escape when young had taught him to shun trap and snare, and everything that savoured of the hated works of man. [137]

Now, the lumbermen had found their way to his shadowy domain. Loud axe-strokes, the crash of falling trees, the hard clank of ox-chains, jarred the solemn stillness. But far more intolerable to the great cat's ears was the noise of laughter and shouting, the masterful insolence of the human voice unabashed in the face of the solitude. The men had built a camp near each end of his range. No retreat was safe from their incursions. And they had cut down the great pine-tree whose base shielded the entrance of his favourite lair. All through the winter the angry cat had spent the greater portion of his time slinking aside from these boisterous invaders or glaring fierce hate upon them from his densest coverts. Thus occupied, he had too little time for his hunting, and, moreover, the troubled game had become shy. His temper grew worse and worse as his ribs grew more and more obvious under his brownish, speckled fur. Nevertheless, for all his swelling indignation, he had as yet no thought of forsaking his range. He kept expecting that the men would go away.

When spring came, and the Guimic roared white between its tortuous shores, some of the loud-mouthed men did go away. Nevertheless, the big cat's rage waxed hotter than ever. Far worse than the men who went were three portable steam sawmills which came in their place. At three separate points these mills were set up—and straightway the long, intolerable shriek of the circulars was ripping the air. In spite of himself, the amazed cat screeched in unison when that sound first smote his ears. He slunk away and hid for hours in his remotest lair, wondering if it would follow him. When, in the course of weeks, he grew so far accustomed to the fiendish sound that he could go about his hunting within half a mile of it, he found that the saws had worked him an unspeakable injury. They had fouled his beloved fishing-pools with sawdust. [138]





**"HIS ROUND FACE BENT CLOSE DOWN TO THE GLASSY SURFACE."**

It was the big cat's favoured custom to spend hours at a time crouched over one or another of these pools, waiting for a chance to catch a trout. Where an overhanging rock or a jutting root came out into deep water, he would lie as motionless as the rock or log itself, his round face bent close down to the glassy surface, his bright eyes intently following the movements of the big, lazy trout in their safe deeps. Once in a long while, often enough to keep his interest keen, a May-fly or a fat worm would drop close past his nose and lie kicking on top of the water. Up would sail a big trout, open-jawed to engulf the morsel. At that instant the clutching paw of the watcher would strike down and around more swiftly than eye could follow—and the next instant the fish would be flopping violently among the underbrush up the bank, with leaves and twigs clinging to its fat, silvery, dappled sides. The sport was one which gave the big wildcat never-failing delight; and, moreover, there was no other food in all the wilderness quite so exquisite to his palate as a plump trout from the ice-cool waters of the Guimic. When, therefore, he found his pools covered, all day long, with the whitey-yellow grains of sawdust, which prevented the trout feeding at the surface or drove them in disgust from their wonted haunts, he realized that his range was ruined. The men and the mills were the conquerors, and he must let himself be driven from his well-beloved Guimic slopes. But first he would have revenge. His caution somewhat undermined by his rage, he crept much nearer to the main camp than he had hitherto dared to go, and hid himself in a low tree to see what opportunity fate might fling to him.

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Belonging to the camp was a brindle dog, a sturdy and noisy mongrel whose barking was particularly obnoxious to the wildcat. Of a surly yet restless temper, the mongrel was in reality by no means popular in the camp, and would not have been tolerated there but for the fact that he belonged to the Boss. In the wildcat's eyes, however, as in the eyes of all the wild kindreds, he seemed a treasured possession of the menkind, and an especially objectionable expression of all their most objectionable characteristics. Moreover, being four-footed and furred, he was plainly more kin to the wild creatures than to man—and therefore, to the wild creature, obviously a traitor and a renegade. There was not one of them but would have taken more satisfaction in avenging its wrongs upon the loud-mouthed mongrel than upon one of the mongrel's masters; not one but would have counted that the sweetest and completest form of vengeance.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the big cat quivered with eager hate when he saw the dog come lazily out of the cook-house and wander toward the spring—which lay just beyond the thick tree! His eyes blazed green, his fur rose slightly, and he set his claws into the bark to gain firm foothold.

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Confident and secure, the dog approached the tree. On the way he jumped savagely at a chipmunk, which dodged in time and whisked into its hole. For a minute or two the dog pawed and scratched at the hole, trying to dig the little fugitive out. Then he gave up the vain task, and moved on toward the spring.

The wildcat gave one quick glance on every side. There was not a man in sight. The cook was in the cook-house, rattling tins. Then the dog came beneath the tree—and stopped to sniff at the wildcat's track.

There was a sharp scratch in the tree above—and in the next instant a brown furry shape dropped upon him noiselessly, bearing him to the ground. This thing was a mass of teeth and claws and terrific muscles. It gave one sharp screech as the dog's yelping howl arose, then made no sound but a spitting growl as it bit and ripped. From the first the brindled mongrel had no ghost of a chance; and the struggle was over in three minutes. As the cook, astonished by the sudden uproar, came rushing axe in hand from his shanty, the wildcat sprang away with a snarl and bounded into the cover of the nearest spruce bushes. He was none the worse save for a deep and bleeding gash down his fore-shoulder, where his victim had gained a moment's grip. But the dog was so cruelly mauled that the woodsman could do nothing but compassionately knock him on the head with the axe which he had brought to the rescue. [142]

Savage from the struggle, and elated from his vengeance, the wildcat with no further hesitation turned his back upon his old haunts, crossed the Guimic by great leaps from rock to rock, and set southward toward the wooded slopes and valleys overlooked by the ragged crest of Ringwaak.

The indignant exile, journeying so boldly to confront the peril of which he had no suspicion or forewarning, belonged to a species confined to the forests of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia or the neighbourhood of their boundaries. He was a giant cousin of the common wildcat, and known to the few naturalists who had succeeded in differentiating and classifying his species as *Lynx Gigas*. In weight and stature he was, if anything, more than the peer of his other and more distant cousin, the savage Canada lynx. The cook of the camp, in telling his comrades about the fate of the dog, spoke of the great wildcat as a "catamount," to distinguish him from the common cat of the woods. These same woodsmen, had they seen the lynx who ruled on Ringwaak Hill, would have called him a "lucерfee," while any Madawaska Frenchman in their company would have dubbed him *loup cervier*. Either catamount or lucerfee was respectfully regarded by the woodsmen. [143]

For an hour the great cat journeyed on, wary and stealthy from habit rather than intention, as he was neither hunting for prey nor avoiding enemies. But when he found himself in strange woods—a gloomy cedar swamp, dotted with dry hardwood knolls like islands—with true cat instinct he delayed his journey to look about him and investigate. Prowling from side to side, and sniffing and peering, he presently found something that he was not looking for. In a hollow beneath a granite boulder, behind the roots of two gnarled old cedars, he came upon two glossy black bear cubs, fast asleep. The mother was nowhere in sight, but the intruder shrank back with an abashed and guilty air and ran up the nearest tree. Thence he made his way from branch to branch, and did not return to the ground till he had put three or four hundred yards between him and the den. He had no mind to bring relentless doom upon his trail.

Not till he was well clear of the cedar swamp did the catamount remember that he was hungry. The idea of being suspected of an interest in young bear's meat had taken away his appetite. Now, however, coming to a series of wild meadows, he lingered to hunt meadow-mice. Among the roots of the long grass the mice had innumerable hidden runways, through which they could travel without danger from the hawks and owls. Crouching close to one of these runways, the big cat would listen till a squeak or a faint scurrying noise would reveal the passing of a mouse. Then a lightning pounce, with paws much wider apart than in his ordinary hunting, would tear away the frail covering of the runway, and usually show the victim clutched beneath one paw or the other. This was much quicker as well as craftier hunting than the more common wildcat method of lying in wait for an hour at the door of a runway. Three of these plump meadow-mice made the traveller a comfortable meal. Forgetting his wrongs, he stretched himself in the full sun under the shelter of a fallen tree, and slept soundly for an hour. Once only he awoke, when his ears caught the beat of a hawk's wings winnowing low over his retreat. He opened wide, fiercely bright eyes, completely alert on the instant; but seeing the source of the sound he was asleep again before the hawk had crossed the little meadow. [144]

His siesta over, the exile mounted the fallen tree, dug his claws deep into the bark, stretched himself again and again, yawned prodigiously, and ended the exercise with a big, rasping miaow. At the sound there was a sudden rustling in the bushes behind the windfall. Instantly the catamount sprang, taking the risk of catching a porcupine or a skunk. But whatever it was that made the noise, it had vanished in time; and the rash hunter returned to his perch with a shamefaced air. [145]

From this post of vantage on the edge of the meadows he could see the crest of old Ringwaak dominating the forests to the south; and the sight, for some unknown reason, drew him. Among those bleak rampikes and rocks and dark coverts he might find a range to his liking. He resumed his journey with a definiteness of purpose which kept him from squandering time on the chase. Only once he halted, and that was when the cries and flutterings of a pair of excited thrushes caught his attention. He saw their nest in a low tree—and he saw a black snake, coiled in the branches, greedily swallowing the half-fledged nestlings. This was an opportunity which he could not afford to lose. He ran expertly up the tree, pounced upon the snake, and bit through its back bone just behind the head. The strong, black coils straightened out limply. Carrying his prize between his jaws, the catamount descended to the ground, growling and jerking savagely when the wriggling length got tangled among the branches. Quick to understand the services of their most unexpected ally, the desperate birds returned to one surviving nestling, and their clamours [146]

ceased. Beneath the tree the exile hurriedly devoured a few mouthfuls of the thick meat of the back just behind the snake's head, then resumed his journey toward Ringwaak.

It was close upon sunset when he reached the first fringes of the northward slope of the mountain. Here his reception was benign. On the banks of a tiny brook, rosy-gold in the flooding afternoon light, he found a bed of wild catnip. Here for a few minutes he rolled in ecstasy, chewing and clawing at the aromatic leaves, all four paws in air, and hoarsely purring his delight. When, at last, he went on up the slope, he carried with him through the gathering shadows the pungent, sweet aroma of the herb. In a fierce gaiety of spirit he would now and then leap into the air to strike idly at some bird flitting high above his reach. Or he would jump and clutch kittenishly with both paws at a fluttering, overhanging leaf, or pounce upon an imaginary quiet mouse crouched among the leaves. [147]

About twilight, as he was nearing the summit of the hill, he came across a footprint which somewhat startled him out of his intoxication. It was a footprint not unlike his own, but distinctly larger. Being an old sign, there was no scent left to it—but its size was puzzling and disquieting. From this on he went warily, not knowing when he might be called upon to measure forces with some redoubtable possessor of the range. When the moon rose, round and white and all-revealing, and threw sinister shadows from rampike and rock, he kept to the densest thickets and felt oppressed with strangeness. But when he succeeded in surprising a hen partridge hovering over her brood, with the blood warm in his mouth he began to feel at home. This fine range should be his, whoever might contest the sovereignty. Coming across a deer trail leading beneath an overhanging rock, he climbed the rock and crouched in ambush, waiting to see what might come by.

For an hour he crouched there, motionless as the eternal granite itself, while the moon climbed and whitened, and the shadows of the rampikes changed, and the breathless enchantment deepened over Ringwaak. At long intervals there would be a faint rustling in some near-by clump of juniper, or a squeak and a brief scuffle in the thickets; or, on wings as soundless as sleep, a great owl would pass by, to drop sharply behind a rock, or sail away like a ghost among the rampikes. But to none of these furtive happenings did the watcher on the rock pay any heed. He was waiting for what might come upon the trail. [148]

At last, it came. Stepping daintily on her small, fine hoofs, her large eyes glancing timorously in every direction, a little yearling doe emerged from the bushes and started to cross the patch of brilliant light. The strange, upright pupils of the catamount's eyes narrowed and dilated at the sight, and his muscles quivered to sudden tension. The young doe came beneath the rock. The cat sprang, unerring, irresistible; and the next moment she lay kicking helplessly beneath him, his fangs buried in her velvet throat.



**"SOMETHING MADE HIM TURN HIS HEAD QUICKLY."**

This was noble prey; and the giant cat, his misgivings all forgotten, drank till his long thirst was satiated. His jaws dripping, he lifted his round, fierce face, and gazed out and away across the moonlit slopes below him toward his ancient range beyond the Guimic. While he gazed, triumphing, something made him turn his head quickly and eye the spruce thicket behind him.

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### III.

It was at this moment that the old lynx, master of Ringwaak, coming suddenly out into the moonlight, saw the grim apparition beneath the rock, and flattened to the ground.

Through long, momentous, pregnant seconds the two formidable and matched antagonists scrutinized each other, the lynx close crouched, ready to launch himself like a thunderbolt, the catamount half risen, his back bowed, one paw of obstinate possession clutching the head of his prey. In the eyes of each, as they measured each other's powers and sought for an advantage, flamed hate, defiance, courage, and savage question.

Seen thus near together, catamount by lucerfee, they were obviously akin, yet markedly different. The cat was heavier in the body, outweighing his rival by perhaps not far from ten pounds, but with shorter and more gracefully shaped legs, and smaller feet. His head was more arched, seeming to indicate a greater intelligence, and his flaming eyes were set wider apart; but his mouth was smaller, his fangs less long and punishing. His fur was of a browner, warmer hue than that of the lynx, whose gray had a half-invisible ghostliness in the moonlight. The tails of both were ridiculously short, not six inches in length, but that of the catamount was straight and stiff, while that of the lucerfee had a curious upward twist that somehow mocked the contortions of his huge and overlong hind legs. The eyes of the lynx, under his flatter forehead, were the more piercing, the less blazing. Altogether the great wildcat was the more beautiful of the two beasts, the more intelligent, the more adaptable and resourceful. But the lynx, with his big, uncouth, hind quarters, and great legs gathered under him, and exaggerated paws, looked to be the more formidable fighting machine.

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Thus, unstimulating, they eyed each other. Then with a strident screech that seemed to tear the spell of the night to tatters, the gray body of the lynx shot through the air. It landed, not upon the catamount, but squarely upon the carcass of the doe, where, a fraction of a second before, the catamount had stood. The wary intruder had not waited to endure the full shock of that charge, but lightly as a puff of down had leaped aside. The next instant he had pounced, with a yowl of defiance, straight for the lynx's neck.

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Lightning quick though he was, the lynx recovered in time to meet the attack with deadly counter-stroke of bared claws, parrying like a skilled boxer. In this forearm work the catamount, lighter of paw and talon, suffered the more; and being quick to perceive his adversary's advantage, he sought to force a close grapple. This the lynx at first avoided, rending and punishing frightfully as he gave ground; while the solemn height of old Ringwaak was shocked by a clamour of spitting and raucous yowling that sent every sleepy bird fluttering in terror from its nest.

Suddenly, perceiving that the lynx was backing dangerously close to the face of the rock, the great cat sprang, took a frightful, ripping buffet across the face, broke down his foe's guard and bore him to the ground by sheer weight. Here, in this close embrace, the hinder claws of both came into play with hideous effect. The clamour died down to a tense, desperate, gasping snarl; for now the verdict of life or death was a matter of moments. But in this fearful and final test, when there was no more room for fencing, no more time for strategy, the more powerful hind legs and longer, more eviscerating claws of the lynx had the decisive advantage. Though borne down, and apparently getting the worst of the fight, the master of Ringwaak was in reality ripping his enemy to pieces from beneath. All at once the latter sprang away with a scream, stood for a second erect and rigid, then sank limp beside the torn carcass of the doe.

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The lynx, badly torn and bitten, but with no fatal injury, pounced upon the unresisting body of the catamount and mauled it till well assured of the completeness of his victory. Then, heedless of his wounds, he mounted the carcass of the doe, lifted his head high, and screeched his challenge across the night. No answer coming, he tore a mouthful of the meat to emphasize possession, stepped down, and crept off to nurse his hurts in some dark retreat; for not easy had been the task of defending his lordship. When all was still once more on Ringwaak, presently descended again the enchantment of the mystic light. And under its transforming touch even the torn bodies lying before the bright face of the rock lost their hideousness, becoming remote, and unsubstantial and visionary.

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## The Decoy

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## The Decoy

igh above the flat-spread earth, their strong wings driving them at tremendous speed





through the thin, cold air of dawn, the wild-goose flock journeyed north. In the shape of an irregular V they journeyed, an old gander, wise and powerful, at the apex of the aerial array. As they flew, their long necks stretched straight out, the living air thrilled like a string beneath their wing-beats. From their throats came a throbbing chorus, resonant, far-carrying, mysterious,—*honka, honka, honka, honk, honka, honk*. It seemed to be the proper utterance of altitude and space.

The flight was as true as if set by a compass; but the longer limb of the V would curve and swerve sinuously from time to time as the weaker or less experienced members of the flock wavered in their alignment. Flat, low-lying forests, and lonely meres, and rough, isolated farms sped past below the rushing voyagers,—then a black head-land, and then a wide, shallow arm of the sea. For a few minutes the glimmer of pale, crawling tides was everywhere beneath them,—then league on league of gray-green, sedgy marsh, interlaced with little pools and lanes of bright water, and crisscrossed with ranks of bulrush. The leader of the flock now stretched his dark head downward, slowing the beat of his wings, and the disciplined array started on a long decline toward earth. From its great height the flock covered nearly a mile of advance before coming within a hundred yards of the pale green levels; and all through the gradual descent the confusion of marsh, and pool, and winding creek, seemed to float up gently to meet the long-absent wanderers. At length, just over a shallow, spacious, grassy mere, and some thirty feet above its surface, the leader decided to alight. It was an old and favoured feeding-ground, where the mud was full of tender shoots and tiny creatures of the ooze. The wings of the flock, as if on signal, turned out and upward, showing a flash of paler colour as they checked the still considerable speed of the flight.

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In that pause, just before the splash of alighting, from a thick cover of sedge across the pool came two sharp spurts of flame, one after the other, followed by two thunderous reports, so close together as to seem almost like one. Turning straight over, the leader fell upon the water with a heavy splash; and immediately after him dropped his second in leadership, the strong young gander who flew next him on the longer limb of the V. The flock, altogether demoralized, huddled together for a few seconds with loud cries; then rose and flapped off seaward. Before the hunter in the sedge could get fresh cartridges into his gun, the diminished flock was out of range, making desperate haste to safer feeding-grounds.

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Of the two birds thus suddenly smitten by fate, the younger, shot through the heart, lay motionless where he had dropped, a sprawl of black and white, and ashen feathers tumbled by the little ripples of the pool. But the older bird was merely winged. Recovering himself almost instantly from the shock of the wound and the fall, he made one pathetically futile effort to rise again, then started swimming down the pond, trailing his shattered wing behind him and straining his gaze toward the departing flock.

Immediately after the two shots, out from the shelter of the rushes had sprung a large, curly-coated, brown retriever. With a yelp of excitement he had dashed into the water and dragged ashore the body of the dead bird. Now the hunter, standing up and stretching his legs as if cramped from a long lying-in-wait, started on a sharp run down the wet shore of the pond, whistling the retriever after him. He had noted the splendid stature of the wounded bird, and wanted to capture him alive.

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Not without cause had the great gander achieved the leadership of the flock, for he possessed not only strength but intelligence. When he saw that his trailing wing so hampered his swimming that he would presently be overtaken, he turned and darted into the sedges of the opposite shore, trusting to the difficulties of the swamp to protect him. He did not know that the big brown retriever was almost amphibious, and more cunning than himself.

The hunter stopped, and pointed to the spot of waving reeds where the bird had disappeared.

"Fetch him, Pete!" he commanded,—*"But gently, boy, ge-e-ently!"* And the wise old dog understood, either from the words or from the tone in which they were uttered, that this was to be a bloodless capture. Barking joyously, he tore around the pond to the place where the gander had vanished, and dashed splashing into the reeds. A few seconds later a tumult arose, the reeds were beaten down, and the dog reappeared, dragging his prize by the uninjured wing.

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The great bird, powerful and dauntless, made a gallant fight; but he was hopelessly handicapped. His most formidable weapons were the bony elbows of his strong, untiring wings; and of both these he was now deprived, one wing being shattered, and the other in the grip of the enemy's jaws. He struck and bit and worried with his hard bill; but the dog, half-shutting his eyes, took the mauling grimly and dragged his troublesome captive into the water.

Here, however, he made a mistake. The great bird was a mighty swimmer, and indomitable; and in half a minute his captor was glad to drag him to land again. Then the hunter arrived on the scene; and the dog, gladly relinquishing so unmanageable a prisoner, sat back on his haunches, with tongue hanging out, to see what his master would do. The dauntless gander bit furiously, and pounded with his one undamaged wing, and earned his adversary's unstinted commendation: but in a minute or two he found himself helpless, swathed like a cocoon in a stout, woollen hunting-coat, and his head ignominiously bagged in one of the sleeves. In this fashion, his heart bursting with fear and wrath, his broken wing one hot throb of anguish, he was carried under the hunter's arm for what seemed to him a whole night long. Then he was set free in a little open pen in a garden, beside a green-shuttered, wide-eaved, white cottage on the uplands.

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The hunter was so kind to his captive, so assiduous in his care, that the wild bird presently grew almost indifferent to his approach, and ceased to strike at him savagely with his free wing whenever he entered the pen. The other wing, well cleaned and salved, and bound in cunning splints, healed rapidly, and caused no pain save when its owner strove to flap it,—which he did, with long, desolate, appealing cries, whenever a wild-goose flock went honking musically across the evening or morning sky.

At length, while the injured wing was still in bandage, the hunter took the bird in spite of all protest, tucked the long neck and troublesome head under his arm, and attached to one leg a little leather wrapping and a long, strong cord. Then he opened the pen. The big gander strode forth with more haste than quite comported with his dignity. Straight down the slope he started, seeking the wide marshes where he expected to find his flock. Then suddenly he came to the end of his cord with a jerk, and fell forward on his breast and bill with a *honk* of surprise. He was not free, after all, and two or three violent struggles convinced him of the fact. As soon as he realized himself still a prisoner, his keen, dark eyes turned a look of reproach upon his jailer, who was holding the other end of the cord and watching him intently. Then he slackened on the tether, and fell to cropping the short grass of the lawn as if being tied by the leg was an ancient experience. It was a great thing, after all, to be out of the pen.

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"He'll do!" said the man to himself with satisfaction, as he fixed the tether to a young apple-tree. When he had gone into the house the bird stopped feeding, turned first one eye and then the other toward the empty sky, stretched his long, black neck and clean white throat, and sent out across the green spaces his appealing and lonely cry,—*honka, honka, honka, ho-onka!*

Very early the following morning, before the stars had begun to pale at the approach of dawn, the captive was once more wrapped up securely and taken on a blind journey. When he was uncovered, and anxiously stretched out his head, he found himself again on the edge of that shallow pool in the marshes where fate had overtaken him. The brown retriever was sitting on his haunches close by, regarding him amicably. The man was fastening one end of the tether to a stake at the water's edge, and from the east a grayness touched with chill pink was spreading over the sky.

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A moment later the surprised bird found himself standing among the wet sedge, close to the water. With a nervous glance at the dog, whom he shrank from with more dread than from the man, he launched himself into the water and swam straight out from shore.

This time, surely, he was free. Next to the spacious solitudes of the air, this was his proper element. How exquisite to the thin webs of his feet felt the coolness of it, as he pushed against it with strong strokes! How it curled away luxuriously from his gray, firm-feathered breast! This was to live again, after the pain and humiliation of his captivity! And yonder, far down the mere, and past those tall reeds standing shadowy in the pallor, surely he would find the flock which had moved on without him! Then, all at once, it was as if something had clutched him by the leg. With a startled cry and a splash he tipped forward, and his glad journey came to an end. He had reached the limit of his tether.

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Remembering his experience of the day before, he made no vain struggle, but floated quietly for a minute or two, stricken with his disappointment. The man and the big brown dog had disappeared; but presently his keen and sagacious eyes detected them both, lying motionless in a thicket of reeds. Having stared at them indignantly for a few moments, swimming slowly to and fro and transfixing them with first one eye and then the other, he ducked his head and began biting savagely at the leathern wrapping on his leg. But the uselessness of this soon appearing to him, he gave it up, and sought to ease his despair by diving and guttering with his bill among the roots of the oozy bottom. In this absorbing occupation he so far forgot his miseries that all at once he tried to lift himself on the water, flap his wings, and sound his trumpet-call. One wing did give a frantic flap. The other surged fiercely against its bandages, sending a throb of anguish through his frame, and the trumpet-call broke in a single hoarse *honk*. After this he floated for a long time in dejection, while the level rays of sunrise stole mysteriously across the pale marshes.

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The hunter, tired of his long stillness in the sedge, was just about to stand up and stretch himself, when from far down the sky to southward came a hollow and confused clamour. The hunter heard it, and the brown retriever heard it; and both crouched low behind their shelter, as motionless as stones. The wild captive, floating at the end of his tether out on the pink-and-gold mirror of the pond, also heard it, and stretched his fine black head aloft, rigid with expectancy. Nearer and nearer came the thrilling voices. Blacker and larger against the sky grew the journeying V as it approached the marshes. The heart of the captive swelled with hope and longing. Not his own flock, indeed, but his own kin, these free and tireless voyagers coming confidently to safe feeding-grounds! Forgetting everything but his great loneliness, he raised himself as high as he could upon the water, one wing partly outspread, and called, and called again, summoning the travellers to alight.

Hearing this kindly summons, the flock dipped at once and came slanting steeply toward earth. In their haste they broke rank, descending more abruptly than usual, their customary caution quite laid aside when they saw one of their own kind waiting to receive them. The joyous captive ducked and bowed his head in greeting. In another moment the whole flock would have settled clamorously about him, and he would have been happy,—but before that moment came there came instead two bursts of flame and thunder from the covert of sedge. And instead of the descending flock, there fell beside the captive two heavy, fluttering gray-and-black shapes, which beat the water feebly and then lay still.

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As the betrayed and panic-stricken flock flapped away in confusion the captive tugged frantically at his tether, crying shrilly and struggling to follow them. In his desperation he paid no heed whatever as the big, brown dog dashed out and triumphantly dragged the bodies of the two victims to land. He was horrified by the terrible noise, and the killing; but his attention was chiefly engrossed by the fact that the flock had been frightened away, leaving him to his loneliness. For several minutes he continued his cries, till the flock was far out of sight. Then silence fell again on the marshes.

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A quarter of an hour later much the same thing happened again. Another flock, passing overhead, came clamouring fearlessly down in response to the captive's calls, met the doom that blazed from the reed-covert, and left two of its members gasping on the surface of the pond. This time, however, the despair of the captive was less loud and less prolonged. As leader, for two seasons, of his own flock, he had necessarily learned certain simple processes of deduction. These pitiful tragedies through which he had just passed were quite sufficient to convince him that this particular shallow pond, though so good a feeding-ground, was a fatal place for the voyaging geese to visit. Further, in a dim way, his shocked and shuddering brain began to realize that his own calling was the cause of the horrors. If he called, the flocks came fearlessly, content with his pledge that all was well. Upon their coming, the fire, and dreadful thunders, and inexplicable death burst forth from the sedge; and then the great brown dog appeared to drag his prey to shore. The whole mischief, as it seemed to him, was the work of the dog; and it did not occur to him that the man, who seemed fairly well-disposed and all-powerful, had anything whatever to do with it. This idea gradually grew clear in the captive's brain, as he swam, very slowly, to and fro upon the brightening water. In a vague way his heart determined that he would lure no more of his kindred to their doom. And when, a little later, a third flock came trumpeting up the sky, the captive eyed their approach in despairing silence.

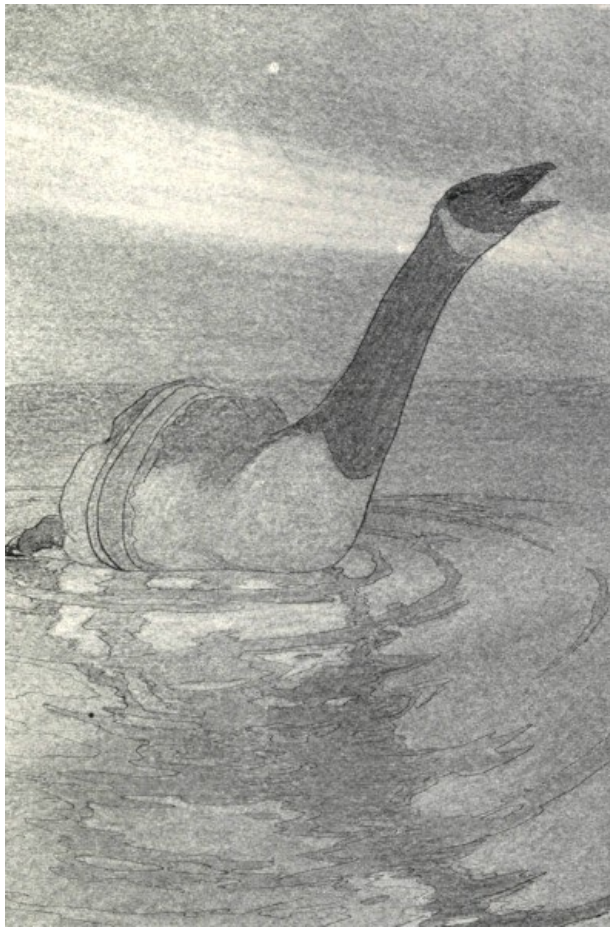
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As the beating wings drew near, stooping toward the silvery pools and pale green levels, the captive swam back and forward in wild excitement, aching to give the call and ease his loneliness. The flock, perceiving him, drew nearer; but in his excited movements and his silence its leader discerned a peril. There was something sinister and incomprehensible in this splendidly marked bird who refused to summon them to his feeding-ground, and kept swimming wildly back and forth. Keeping well beyond gunshot, they circled around this smiling but too mysterious water, to alight with great clamour and splashing in a little, sheltered mere some two or three hundred yards farther inland. The hunter, crouching moveless and expectant in his ambush, muttered an exclamation of surprise, and wondered if it could be possible that his incomparable decoy had reached an understanding of the treacherous game and refused to play it.

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"There's no smarter bird that flies than a wild gander!" he mused, watching the great bird curiously and with a certain sympathy. "We'll see what happens when another flock comes by!"

Meanwhile the new arrivals, over in the unseen pond behind the rushes, were feeding and bathing with a happy clamour. They little dreamed that a pot-hunting rustic from the village on the hills, flat on his belly in the oozy grass, was noiselessly worming his way toward them. Armed with an old, single-barrel duck gun, the height of his ambition was to get a safe and easy shot at the feeding birds. No delicate wing-shooting for him. What he wanted was the most he could get for his powder and lead. Big and clumsy though he was, his progress through the grass was as stealthy as that of a mink.



**"HE LIFTED UP HIS VOICE IN A SUDDEN ABRUPT  
'HONK, HONK!'"**

It chanced that the path of the pot-hunter took him close past the further shore of the pond where the captive was straining at his tether and eating his heart out in determined silence. The homesick, desolate bird would swim around and around for a few minutes, as a caged panther circles his bounds, then stop and listen longingly to the happy noise from over beyond the reed-fringes. At last, goaded into a moment of forgetfulness by the urge of his desire, he lifted up his voice in a sudden abrupt *honk, honk!*

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The pot-hunter stopped his crawling and peered delightedly through the sedgy stems. Here was a prize ready to his hand. The flock was still far off, and might easily take alarm before he could get within range. But this stray bird, a beauty too, was so near that he could not miss. Stealthily he brought his heavy weapon to the shoulder; and slowly, carefully, he took aim.

The report of the big duck gun was like thunder, and roused the marshes. In a fury the hunter sprang from his ambush across the mere, and ran down to the water's edge, threatening vengeance on the lout who would fire on a decoy. The brown retriever, wild with excitement, dashed barking up and down the shore, not knowing just what he ought to do. Sandpipers went whistling in every direction. And the foraging flock, startled from their security, screamed wildly and flapped off unhurt to remoter regions of the marsh. But the lonely captive, the wise old gander who had piloted his clan through so many hundred leagues of trackless air, lay limp and mangled on the stained water, torn by the heavy charge of the duck gun. The whimsical fate that seems to play with the destinies of the wild kindreds had chosen to let him save one flock from the slaughterer, and expiate his blameless treason.

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## The Laugh in the Dark

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## The Laugh in the Dark



hough the darkness under the great trees was impenetrable, it gave an impression of transparency which invited the eyes to strain and peer, as if vision might be expected to reward an adequate effort. It was that liquid darkness which means not mist, but the utter absence of light on a clear air; and it was filled with elusive yet almost illuminating forest scents. To the keen nostrils of the man who was silently mounting the trail, it seemed as if these wild aromas almost enabled him to veritably see the trees which towered all

about him, so clearly did they differentiate to him their several species as he passed,—the hemlock, in particular, and the birch, the black poplar, and the aromatic balsam-fir. But his eyes, though trained to the open, could in truth detect nothing whatever, except now and then a darting gleam which might come from a wet leaf, or from the gaze of a watching wood-mouse, or merely from the stirrings of the blood within his own brain.

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The man was on his way up from the lake, by an old trail long ago familiar to his feet, to make camp for the night in a deserted lumber shanty about a quarter of a mile back from the water. Over the dimly glimmering, windless water, under a cloudless sky, he had groped his way in his canoe to the old landing. Turning the canoe over his supplies for protection in case of rain, he had set out for the lumber shanty with only a blanket and a couple of hardtack. His rifle he had indifferently left in the canoe, but in his right hand he carried a paddle, to steady his steps and help him feel his way through the dark.

Once the grayness of the open shore had faded behind him, the man found himself walking stealthily, like the stealthiest of the wild kindred themselves. The trail being well-worn, though long deserted by man, his feet kept it without difficulty; but he held the paddle out before him lest he should stumble over a windfall. Presently he took note of the fact that the trail was marvellously smooth for one that had been so long deserted, and with a little creeping of the skin, which was not in any sense fear but rather an acknowledgment of mystery, he realized that it was other than human feet which were keeping the lonely path in use. What kind were they, he wondered,—the great, noiseless pads of bear, or lynx, or panther, the hard hoofs of moose or deer, or the airy, swift feet of hare and mink and marten? As he wondered, moving more and more furtively as the spirit of the unseen wild pervaded and possessed him, his nostrils discerned across the savours of the trees and the mould a sudden musky scent; and he knew that one of the frequenters of the trail was a red fox, who had just gone by.

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Impressed by a sense that he was not so utterly alone as he had imagined himself to be, the man now obeyed one of the wary impulses of the wood-folk. He stepped aside from the trail, feeling his way, and leaned his back against a huge birch-tree. The ragged, ancient, sweet-smelling bark felt familiar and friendly to his touch. Here he stood, sniffing the still air with discrimination, testing with initiated ears every faint forest breathing. The infinitesimal and incessant stir of growth and change and readjustment was vaguely audible to his fine sense, making a rhythmic background against which the slightest unusual sound, even to the squeak of a wood-mouse, or the falling of a worm-bitten leaf, would have fairly startled the dark. Once he heard a twig snap, far in the depths on the other side of the trail, and he knew that some one of the wild kindred had moved carelessly. But on the trail nothing went by.

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Had there been ever so small a glimmer of light, to enable his eyes to play their part in this forest game, the man could have watched for an hour as moveless as the tree on which he leaned. But in that strange, absolute dark the strain soon grew almost intolerable. The game certainly ceased to be amusing after an uneventful fifteen minutes had passed. He was just about to give up, to step forth into the trail and resume his journey to the cabin, when he caught a strange sound, which made him stiffen back at once into watchful rigidity.

The sound was a great breath. In its suddenness and its vagueness the listener was unable to distinguish whether it came from a dozen yards down the trail, or a couple of dozen inches from his elbow. His nose, however, assured him that he had not the latter alternative to face; so he waited, his right hand upon the knife in his belt. He could hear his heart beating.

For several minutes nothing more was heard. Then through the high leafage overhead splashed a few big drops of rain, with the hushing sound of a shower not heavy enough to break through. The next moment a flash of white lightning lit up the forest aisles,—and in that moment the man saw a huge black bear standing in the trail, not ten feet distant. In that moment the eyes of the man and the eyes of the beast met each other fairly. Then the blackness fell once more; and a thin peal of midsummer thunder rolled over the unseen tree-tops.

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When all was silence again the man felt uncomfortable, and regretted the rifle which he had left under the canoe. That the bear would attack him, unprovoked, he knew to be improbable; but he also knew enough about bears to know that it is never well to argue too confidently as to what they will do. The more he waited and listened, the more he felt sure that the bear was also waiting and listening, in an uncertainty not much unlike his own. He decided that it was for him to take the initiative. Clapping his hands smartly, he threw back his head, and burst into a peal of laughter.

The loud, incongruous sound shocked the silences. It almost horrified the man himself, so unexpected, so unnatural, so inexplicable did it seem even to his own ears. When it ceased, he knew that it had accomplished its purpose. He heard rustling and snapping noises swiftly diminishing in the distance, and knew that the bear was retreating in a panic. At this he laughed again, not loudly, but to himself, and stepped out into the trail.

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But the man was not yet done with the effects of his loud challenge to the solemnities of the dark. Hardly had he taken three steps along the trail when a little in front of him—perhaps, as he guessed, some five and twenty paces—there arose a slashing and crashing noise of struggle. Branches cracked and rustled and snapped, heavy feet pounded the earth, and a confusion of gasping grunts suggested a blind menagerie in mortal combat. The man, fairly startled, groped his way back to the tree, and waited behind it, knife in hand. In fact he had a strong inclination to climb into the branches; but this impulse he angrily restrained.

For a whole minute the daunting uproar continued, neither approaching nor receding, and at length the man's curiosity, ever insatiable where the mysteries of the wild were concerned, got the better of his prudence. He lit a match and peered from behind his shelter. The little, sudden blaze spread a sharp light, but whatever was making the uproar went on as before, quite heedless of the singular phenomenon. When the match died out it left the man no wiser. Then with hurried hands he stripped some birch bark, and rolled himself a serviceable torch. When this blazed up with its smoky flame, he held it well off to one side and a little behind him, and made his way warily to the scene of the disturbance.

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A turn in the trail, and the mystery stood revealed. With a cry of indignation the man darted forward, no longer cautious. What he saw before him was a great, gaunt moose-cow reared upon her hind legs, caught under the jaws by a villainous moose-snare. With her head high among the branches, she lurched and kicked in a brave struggle for life, while every effort but drew tighter the murdering noose. A few feet away stood her lanky calf, trembling, and staring stupidly at the light.

The man lost not a moment. Dropping his bundle and paddle, but carefully guarding the torch, he climbed the tree above the victim, lay out on a branch, reached down, and dexterously severed the noose with his knife. What matter if, with his haste and her struggles, he at the same time cut a slash in the beast's stout hide? The blood-letting was a sorely needed medicine to her choked veins. She fell in a heap, and for a minute or two lay gasping loudly. Then she staggered to her feet, and stood swaying, while she nosed the calf with her long muzzle to assure herself that it had not been hurt in the cataclysm which had overtaken her.

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The man watched her until his torch was almost gone, then climbed down the tree (which was not a birch) to get himself another. Noticing him now for the first time, the moose pulled herself together with a mighty effort, and thrust the calf behind her. Could this be the enemy who had so nearly vanquished her? For a moment the man thought she was going to charge upon him, and he held himself in readiness to go up the tree again. But the poor shaken beast thought better of it. Pain, rage, fear, amazement, doubt,—all these the man fancied he could see in her staring, bloodshot eyes. He stood quite still, pitying her, and cursing the brutal poachers who had set the snare. Then, just before the torch gave its last flicker, the great animal turned and led her calf off through the woods, looking back nervously as she went.

When the light was out, and silence had come again upon the forest, the man resumed his journey. He travelled noisily, whistling and stamping as he went, as a warning to all wild creatures that a man was in their woods, and that they must give room to a master. He carried with him now, besides his blanket and his paddle, a generous roll of birch bark, with which to illuminate the lumber shanty before going in. It had occurred to him that possibly some lynx or wildcat might have taken up its dwelling therein; and if so, he was no longer in the mood to meet it at close quarters in the dark.

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## The Kings of the Intervale

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## The Kings of the Intervale



Far out over the pale, smooth surface of the river a crow flew, flapping heavily. From time to time he uttered an angry and frightened squawk. Over, under, and all around him, now darting at his eyes, now dropping upon him like a little, arrow-pointed thunderbolt, now slapping a derisive wing across his formidable beak, flashed a small, dark bird whose silvery white belly now and then caught the sun.

The crow's accustomed alert self-possession was quite shattered. He had forgotten his own powers of attack. He seemed to fear for his eyes,—and among all the wild kindred there is no fear more horrifying than that. When he ducked, and swerved, and tried to dodge, he did it awkwardly, as if his presence of mind was all gone.

His assailant, less than a third of his weight, was a king-bird, whose nest, in the crotch of an elm on the intervale meadow, the crow had been so ill-advised as to investigate. The crow was comparatively inexperienced, or he would have known enough to keep away from the nests of the king-birds. But there it was, in plain sight; and he loved eggs or tender nestlings. Before he had had time to find out which it was that the nest contained, both the parent birds had fallen upon him with a swift ferocity which speedily took away his appetite for food or fight. Their beaks were sturdy and burning sharp. Their short, powerful wings gave them a flight so swift and darting that, for all his superior strength, he felt himself at their mercy. His one thought was to save his eyes and escape.

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Both birds chased him till he was well out over the river. Then the female returned to her nest, leaving her mate to complete the intruder's chastisement. Had the crow been an old and cunning bird, he would have sought the extreme heights of air, where the king-bird is disinclined to follow; but lacking this crow-wisdom, he kept on at the level of the tallest tree-tops, and was



forced to take his punishment. He was, in reality, more sore and terrified than actually injured. That darting, threatening beak of his pursuer never actually struck his eyes. But for this, it is probable, he had only the indulgence of the king-bird to thank. When at last the chastiser, tired of his task, turned and flew back up the river toward the nest in the elm-crotch, the ruffled crow took refuge out of sight, in the top of the densest hemlock, where he rolled his eyes and preened his plumage silently for an hour before daring again the vicissitudes of the wilderness world.

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The nest to which the triumphant king-bird hurried back was audaciously perched in plain view of every prowler. The crotch of the elm-tree which it occupied was about twelve feet from the ground. The intervale, or water-meadow, by the side of the river, held but a few widely scattered trees,—trees of open growth, such as elm, balsam-poplar, and water-ash. It was free from all underbrush. There was nothing, therefore, to shield the nest from even the most careless eyes; and with an insolence of fearlessness matched only by that of the osprey, it was made the more conspicuous by having great tufts of white wool from a neighbouring sheep-pasture woven into its bulky, irregular frame. So irregular and haphazard, indeed, did it appear, that it might almost have been mistaken for a bunch of rubbish left in the tree from the time of freshet. But if the two king-birds relied on this resemblance as a concealment, they presumed as so clever a bird is not likely to do upon the blindness or stupidity of the wild kindred. The wild kindred are seldom blind, and very seldom stupid, because those members of the fellowship who are possessed of such defects sooner or later go to feed their fellows. Hence it was that most of the folk of the riverside, furred or feathered, knew well enough what the big whitish-gray bunch of rubbish in the elm-crotch was.

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There were five eggs at the bottom of the smooth, warm cup, which formed the heart of the nest. They were a little smaller than a robin's egg, and of a soft creamy white, blotched irregularly with dull purplish maroon of varying tone. So jealous of these mottled marvels were the king-birds that not even the most harmless of visitors were allowed to look upon them. If so much as a thrush, or a pewee, or a mild-mannered white throat, presumed to alight on the very remotest branch of that elm, it was brusquely driven away.

One morning early, the male king-bird was sitting very erect, as was his custom, on the naked tip of a long, slender, dead branch some ten feet above the nest. The morning chill was yet in the air, so it was a little early for the flies which formed his food to be stirring. But he was hungry, and on the alert for the first of them to appear. Only the tense feathers of his crest, raised to show the flame-orange spot which was his kingly crown, betrayed his eagerness; for he was a self-contained bird. The sun was just beginning to show the red topmost edge of his rim through the jagged line of firs across the river, and the long, level streaks of aerial rose, creeping under the branches, filled all the shadowed places of the wilderness with mysterious light. The eastward sides of the tree-trunks and naked branches glimmered pink; and dew-wet leaves, here and there, shone like pale jewels of pink, amber, and violet. The mirror-like surface of the river was blurred with twisting spirals of mist, silvery and opalescent, through which the dim-seen figure of a duck in straight flight shot like a missile.

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As the king-bird sat erect on his branch, watching with bright eyes the miracle of the morning, an over-adventurous dragon-fly arose from a weed-top below him and flew into the rosy light. The bird darted straight and true, zigzagged sharply as the victim tried to dodge, caught the lean prize in his beak, and carried it very gallantly to his mate upon the nest. Then he fluttered back to his post on the branch.

As the sun got up over the hill, and the warmth dried their wings, the intervale began to hum softly with dancing flies and hurrying beetles, and the king-bird was continually on the move, twittering with soft monotony (his sole attempt at song), between each successful sally. At length the female rose from her eggs, stood on the edge of the nest, and gave an impatient call. Her mate flew down to take her place, and the two perched side by side, making a low chirping sound in their throats.

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Just at this moment a small black snake, warmed into activity and hunger by the first rays of the sun, glided to the tree and began to climb. Bird's-nesting was the black snake's favourite employment; but it had not stopped to consider that the nest in this particular tree was a king-bird's. It climbed swiftly and noiselessly, and the preoccupied birds did not get glimpse of it till it was within two feet of the nest.

There was no time for consultation in the face of this peril. Like lightning the two darted down upon the enemy, buffeting its head with swift wing-strokes. The first assault all but swept it from the tree, and it shrank back upon itself with flattened head and angry hiss. Then it struck fiercely, again and again, at its bewildering assailants. But swift as were its movements, those of the king-birds were swifter, and its fangs never hit upon so much as one harassing feather. Suddenly, in its fury, it struck out too far, weakening for a moment its hold upon the crevices of the bark; and in that moment, both birds striking it together, its squirming folds were hurled to the ground. Thoroughly cowed, it slipped under cover and made off, only a wavering line among the grasses betraying its path. The king-birds, with excited and defiant twittering, followed for a little its hidden retreat, and then returned elated to the nest.

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Among the kindred of the wild as well as among those of roof and hearth, events are apt to go in company. For day after day things will revolve in set fashion. Then chance takes sudden interest in a particular spot or a certain individual, and there, for a time, is established a centre for events. This day of the black snake was an eventful day for the little kings of the intervale. They had hardly more than recovered from their excitement over the snake when a red squirrel, his

banner of a tail flaunting superbly behind him, came bounding over the grass to their tree. His intentions may have been strictly honourable. But a red squirrel's intentions are liable to change in the face of opportunity. As he ran up the tree, and paused curiously at the nested crotch, a feathered thunderbolt struck him on the side of the head. It knocked him clean out of the tree; and he turned a complete somersault in the air before he could get his balance and spread his legs so as to alight properly. When he reached the ground he fled in dismay, and was soon heard chattering vindictively among the branches of a far-off poplar.

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It was a little before noon when came the great event of this eventful day. The male king-bird was on the edge of the nest, feeding a fat moth to his mate. As he straightened up and glanced around he saw a large marsh-hawk winnowing low across the river. As it reached the shore it swooped into the reed-fringe, but rose again without a capture. For a few minutes it quartered the open grass near the bank, hunting for mice. The two king-birds watched it with anxious, angry eyes. Suddenly it sailed straight toward the tree; and the king-birds shot into the air, ready for battle.

It was not the precious nest, however, nor the owners of the nest, on which the fierce eyes of the marsh-hawk had fallen. When he was within twenty paces of the nest he dropped into the grass. There was a moment of thrashing wings, then he rose again, and beat back toward the river with a young muskrat in his talons.

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Considering the size and savagery of the hawk, any small bird but the little king would have been well content with his riddance. Not so the king-birds. With shrill chirpings they sped to the rescue. Their wings cuffed the marauder's head in a fashion that confused him. Their wedge-like beaks menaced his eyes and brought blood through the short feathers on the top of his head. He could make no defence or counter-attack against opponents so small and so agile of wing. At length a sharp jab split the lower lid of one eye,—and this added fear to his embarrassment. He dropped the muskrat, which fell into the river and swam off little the worse for the experience.

Relieved of his burden, the hawk made all speed to escape. At the farther shore the female king-bird desisted from the pursuit, and hurried back to her nest. But the avenging wrath of the male was not so easily pacified. Finding the tormentor still at his head, the hawk remembered the security of the upper air, and began to mount in sharp spirals. The king-bird pursued till, seen from the earth, he seemed no bigger than a bee dancing over the hawk's back. Then he disappeared altogether; and the hawk, but for his nervous, harassed flight, might have seemed to be alone in that clear altitude. At last his wings were seen to steady themselves into the tranquil, majestic soaring of his kind. Presently, far below the soaring wings, appeared a tiny dark shape, zigzagging swiftly downward; and soon the king-bird, hastening across the river, alighted once more on his branch and began to preen himself composedly.

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## The Kill

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## The Kill



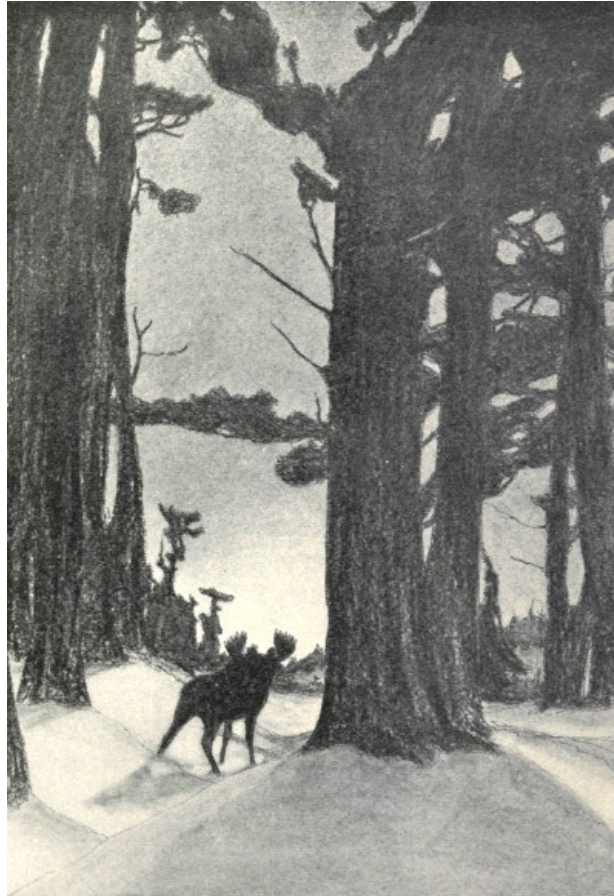
It was early winter and early morning, and the first of the light lay sharp on the new snow. The sun was just lifting over a far and low horizon. Long, level rays, streaking the snow with straight, attenuated stains of pinkish gold and sharp lines of smoky-blue shadow, pierced the edges of the tall fir forests of Touladi. Though every tint—of the blackish-green firs, of the black-brown trunks, of the violet and yellow and gray birch saplings, of the many-hued snow spaces—was unspeakably tender and delicate, the atmosphere was of a transparency and brilliancy almost vitreous. One felt as if the whole scene might shatter and vanish at the shock of any sudden sound. Then a sound came—but it was not sudden; and the mystic landscape did not dissolve. It was a sound of heavy, measured, muffled footfalls crushing the crisp snow. There was a bending and swishing of bare branches, a rattling as of twigs upon horn or ivory—and a huge bull moose strode into view. With his splendid antlers laid far back he lifted his great, dilating nostrils, stared down the long, white lanelike open toward the rising sun, and sniffed the air inquiringly. Then he turned to browse on the aromatic twigs of the birch saplings.

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The great moose was a lord of his kind. His long, thick, glistening hair was almost black over the upper portions of his body, changing abruptly to a tawny ochre on the belly, and the inner and lower parts of the legs. The maned and hump-like ridge of his mighty fore-shoulders stood a good six feet three from the ground; and the spread of his polished, palmated antlers, so massive as to look a burden for even so colossal a head and neck as his, was well beyond five feet. The ridge of his back sloped down to hind-quarters disproportionately small, finished off with a little, meagrely tufted tail that on any beast less regal in mien and stature would have looked ridiculous. The majesty of a bull moose, however, is too secure to be marred by the incongruous pettiness of his tail. From the lower part of his neck, where the great muscles ran into the spacious, corded chest, hung a curious tuft of long and very coarse black hair, called among woodsmen the "bell." As he turned to his browsing, his black form stood out sharply against the background of the firs. Far down the silent, glittering slope, a good mile distant, a tall, gray figure on snow-shoes appeared for a second in the open, caught sight of the pasturing moose,

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and vanished hurriedly into the birch thickets.



**"STARED DOWN THE LONG, WHITE LANELIKE  
OPEN."**

Having cropped a few mouthfuls here and there from branches within easy reach, the great bull set himself to make a more systematic breakfast. Selecting a tall young birch with a bushy top, he leaned his chest against it until he bore it to the ground. Then, straddling it and working his way along toward the top, he held it firmly while he browsed at ease upon the juiciest and most savoury of the tips.

For some minutes he had been thus pleasantly occupied, when suddenly an obscure apprehension stirred in his brain. He stopped feeding, lifted his head, and stood motionless. Only his big ears moved, turning their wary interrogations toward every point of the compass, and his big nostrils suspiciously testing every current of air. Neither nose nor ears, the most alert of his sentinels, gave any report of danger. He looked about, saw nothing unusual, and fell again to feeding.

Among the wild kindreds, as far as man can judge, there are occasional intuitions that seem to work beyond the scope of the senses. It is not ordinarily so, else would all hunting, on the part of man or of the hunting beasts, be idle. But once in a while, as if by some unwilling telepathic communication from hunter to hunted, or else by an obscure and only half-delivered message from the powers that preside over the wild kindreds, a warning of peril is conveyed to a pasturing creature while yet the peril is far off and unrevealed. The great moose found his appetite all gone. He backed off the sapling and let its top spring up again toward the empty blue. He looked back nervously over his trail, sniffed the air, waved his ears inquiringly. The more he found nothing to warrant his uneasiness, the more his uneasiness grew. It was as if Death, following far off but relentlessly, had sent a grim menace along the windings of the trail. Something like a panic came into the dilating eyes of the big bull. He turned toward the fir forest, at a walk which presently broke into a shambling, rapid trot; and presently he disappeared among the sombre and shadowy colonnades. [200]

In the strange gloom of the forest, a transparent gloom confused by thin glints and threads of penetrating, pinkish light, the formless alarm of the moose began to subside. In a few minutes his wild run diminished into a rapid walk. He would not go back to his feeding, however. He had been seized with a shuddering distrust of the young birch thickets on the slope. Over beyond the next ridge there were some bushy swales which he remembered as good pasturage—where, indeed, he had a mind to "yard up" for the winter, when the snow should get too deep for wide ranging. Once more quickening his pace, he circled back almost to the fringe of the forest, making toward a little stretch of frozen marsh, which was one of his frequented runways between ridge and ridge. That nameless fear in the birch thickets still haunted him, however, and he moved with marvellous quietness. Not once did his vast antlers and his rushing bulk disturb the dry undergrowth, or bring the brittle, dead branches crashing down behind him. The only sound [201]

that followed him was that of the shallow snow yielding crisply under his feet, and a light clicking, as the tips of his deep-cleft, loose-spreading hoofs came together at the recovery of each stride. This clicking, one of the most telltale of wilderness sounds to the woodsman's ear, grew more sharp and insistent as the moose increased his speed, till presently it became a sort of castanet accompaniment to his long, hurried stride. A porcupine, busy girdling a hemlock, ruffled and rattled his dry quills at the sound, and peered down with little, disapproving eyes as the big, black form fled by below him.

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The snowy surface of the marsh was stained with ghosts of colour—aerial, elusive tinges of saffron and violet—as the moose came out upon it. As he swung down its lonely length, his gigantic shadow, lopsided and blue, danced along threateningly, its head lost in the bushes fringing the open. When he came to the end of the marsh, where the wooded slope of the next ridge began, he half paused, reaching his long muzzle irresolutely toward the tempting twigs of a young willow thicket; but before he could gather one mouthful, that nameless fear came over him again, that obscure forewarning of doom, and he sprang forward toward the cover of the firs. As he sprang, there was a movement and a flash far down a wooded alley—a sharp, ringing crack—and something invisible struck him in the body. He had been struck before, by falling branches, or by stones bounding down a bluff, but this missile seemed very different and very small. Small as it was, however, the blow staggered him for an instant; then he shuddered, and a surge of heat passed through his nerves. But a second later he recovered himself fully, and bounded into the woods, just in time to escape a second bullet, as a second shot rang out in vain behind him.

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Straight up the wooded steep he ran, startled, but less actually terrified now, in fleeing from a definite peril, then when trembling before a formless menace. This peril was one that he felt he could cope with. He knew his own strength and speed. Now that he had the start of them, these slow-moving, relentless man-creatures, with the sticks that spoke fire, could never overtake him. With confident vigour he breasted the incline, his mighty muscles working as never before under the black hair of shoulder and flank. But he did not know that every splendid stride was measured by a scarlet sign on the snow.

For a few minutes the moose rushed on through the morning woods, up and up between the tall trunks of the firs, half-forgetting his alarm in the triumph of his speed. Then it began to seem to him that the slope of the hill had grown steeper than of old; gradually, and half-unconsciously, he changed his course, and ran parallel with the ridge; and with this change the scarlet signs upon his trail grew scantier. But in a few minutes more he began to feel that the snow was deeper than it had been—deeper, and more clinging. It weighted his hoofs and fetlocks as it had never done before, and his pace slackened. He began to be troubled by the thick foam welling into his nostrils and obstructing his breath. As he blew it forth impatiently it made red flecks and spatters on the snow. He had no pain, no realization that anything had gone wrong with him. But his eyes took on suddenly a harassed, anxious look, and he felt himself growing tired. He must rest a little before continuing his flight.

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The idea of resting while his enemies were still so near and hot upon the trail, would, at any other time, have been rejected as absurd; but now the brain of the black moose was growing a little confused. Often before this he had run till he felt tired, and then lain down to rest. He had never felt tired till he knew that he had run a great distance. Now, from his dimming intelligence the sense of time had slipped away. He had been running, and he felt tired. Therefore, he must have run a long distance, and his slow enemies must have been left far behind. He could safely rest. His old craft, however, did not quite fail him at this point. Before yielding to the impulse which urged him to lie down, he doubled and ran back, parallel to his trail and some fifty paces from it, for a distance of perhaps two hundred yards. Staggering at every other stride, and fretfully blowing the stained froth from his nostrils, he crouched behind a thicket of hemlock seedlings, and watched the track by which his foes must come.

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For a little while he kept his watch alertly, antlers laid back, ears attentive, eyes wide and bright. Then, so slowly that he did not seem aware of it himself, his massive head drooped forward till his muzzle lay outstretched upon the snow. So far back from the gate of the senses drew the life within him, that when three gray-coated figures on snow-shoes went silently past on his old trail, he never saw them. His eyes were filled with a blur of snow, and shadows, and unsteady trunks, and confusing little gleams of light.

Of the three hunters following on the trail of the great black moose, one was more impetuous than the others. It was his first moose that he was trailing; and it was his bullet that was speaking through those scarlet signs on the snow. He kept far ahead of his comrades, elated and fiercely glad, every nerve strung with expectation. Behind each bush, each thicket, he looked for the opportunity to make the final, effective shot that should end the great chase. Not unlearned in woodcraft, he knew what it meant when he reached the loop in the trail. He understood that the moose had gone back to watch for his pursuers. What he did not know or suspect was, that the watcher's eyes had grown too dim to see. He took it for granted that the wise beast had marked their passing, and fled off in another direction as soon as they got by. Instead, however, of redoubling his caution, he plunged ahead with a burst of fresh enthusiasm. He was very properly sure his bullet had done good work, since it had so soon compelled the enduring animal to rest.

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A puff of wandering air, by chance, drifted down from the running man to the thicket, behind which the black bull lay, sunk in his torpor. The dreaded man-scent—the scent of death to the wilderness folk—was blown to the bull's nostrils. Filled though they were with that red froth,

their fine sense caught the warning. The eyes might fail in their duty, the ears flag and betray their trust; but the nostrils, skilled and schooled, were faithful to the last. Their imperative message pierced to the fainting brain, and life resumed its duties. Once more the dull eyes awoke to brightness. The great, black form lunged up and crashed forward into the open, towering, formidable, and shaking ominous antlers.

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Taken by surprise, and too close to shoot in time, the rash hunter sprang aside to make for a tree. He had heard much of the charge of a wounded moose. As he turned, the toe of one snow-shoe caught on a branchy stub, just below the surface of the snow. The snow-shoe turned side on, and tripped him, and he fell headlong right in the path of the charging beast.

As he fell, he heard a shout from his comrades, hurrying up far behind him; but the thought that flashed through him was that they could not be in time. Falling on his face, he expected the next instant to feel the bull's great rending hoofs descend upon his back and stamp his life out.

But the blow never fell. The moose had seen his foe coming, and charged to meet him, his strength and valour flashing up for an instant as the final emergency confronted him. But ere he could reach that prostrate shape in the snow, he forgot what he was doing, and stopped short. With legs a little apart he braced himself, and stood rigid. His noble head was held high, as if he scorned the enemies who had dogged him to his last refuge. But in reality he no longer saw them. The breath came hard through his rattling nostrils, and his eyes, very wide open, were dark with a fear which he could not understand. The life within him strove desperately to maintain its hold upon that free and lordly habitation. The second hunter, now, was just lifting his rifle,—but before he could sight and fire, the chase was ended. That erect, magnificent figure, towering over the fallen man, collapsed all at once. It fell together into a mere heap of hide and antlers. The light in the eyes went out, as a spark that is trodden, and the laboured breathing stopped in mid-breath. The fallen hunter sprang up, rushed forward with a shout, and drew his knife across the outstretched throat.

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## The Little People of the Sycamore

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## The Little People of the Sycamore

### I.



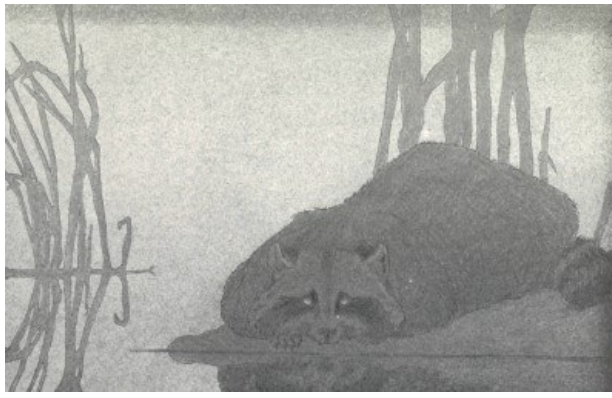
he fantastic old sycamore, standing alone on the hill, thrust out its one gaunt limb across the face of the moon. It was late April, and the buds not yet swollen to bursting. On the middle of the limb, blackly silhouetted against the golden disk, crouched a raccoon, who sniffed the spring air and scanned the moon-washed spaces. From the marshy spots at the foot of the hill, over toward the full-fed, softly rushing brook, came the high piping of the frogs, a voice of poignant, indeterminate desire.

Having reconnoitred the night to her satisfaction, the raccoon returned to a deep hole in the sycamore, and hastily touched with her pointed nose each in turn of her five, blind, furry little ones. Very little they were, half-cub, half-kitten in appearance, with their long noses, long tails, and bear-like feet. They huddled luxuriously together in the warm, dry darkness of the den, and gave little squeals in response to their mother's touch. In her absence they had been voiceless, almost moveless, lest voice or motion should betray them to an enemy.

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Having satisfied herself as to the comfort of the furry children, the old raccoon nimbly descended the tree, ran lightly down the hill, and made for the nearest pool, where the frogs were piping. She was a sturdy figure, yet lithe and graceful, about the bulk of the largest cat, and with a tail almost the length of her body. Her legs, however, were much shorter and more powerful than those of a cat; and when, for a moment of wary observation, she stood still, her feet came down flatly, like those of a bear, though in running she went on her toes, light as the seed of the milkweed. Her head was much like a bear's in shape, with the nose very long and pointed; and a bar of black across the middle of her face, gave a startling intensity to her dark, keen, half-malicious eyes. Her fur, very long and thick, was of a cloudy brown; and the black rings on her gray tail stood out sharply in the moonlight. Both in expression and in movement, she showed that strange mixture of gaiety, ferocity, mischievousness, and confident sagacity, which makes the raccoon unlike in character to all the other wild kindreds.





**"CROUCHED FLAT, MOVELESS AS THE LOG ITSELF."**

Though she was on important affairs intent, and carrying the cares of the family, she was not too absorbed to feel the glad impulse of the spring; and for sheer exuberance of life, she would go bounding over a stick or a stone as if it were a tree or a boulder. Though life was a serious matter, she was prepared to get out of it all the fun there was to be had. [213]

But when she neared the noisy pools she went stealthily enough. Nevertheless, for all her caution, the pipings ceased in that section of the pool when she was within two or three feet of the waterside; and, in the little space of sudden silence, she knew that every small piper was staring at her with fixed, protruding eyes. On she went, straight out to the end of a half-submerged log, and there crouched flat, moveless as the log itself. She knew that if she only kept still long enough, she would come to be regarded by the pool-dwellers as nothing more than a portion of the log. Meanwhile the high chorus from the adjoining pools swelled ever louder and shriller, as the small musicians voiced the joy of spring.

For perhaps ten minutes the space about the waiting raccoon on the log appeared lifeless. Then one little black spot, which had seemed like a lump of mud against a dead grass-stalk, moved; then another, and another, and another—all over the pool. Pale throats began to throb rhythmically; and the pipings once more pulsed forth buoyant and strong. The frogs had utterly forgotten the intruder, and their bulging eyes were no longer fixed on the log. Nevertheless, as it chanced, there was not a single piper within reach of the watcher's paw. [214]

The raccoon's eyes gleamed with intenser fire, but she never stirred. She knew that the price of a meal, to most of the wood-folk, was patience as untiring as a stone. Only her full, dark eyes, set in their bar of black, moved watchfully, searching the pallid spaces all about the log.

A moment more and her patience was rewarded. A big frog from the neighbour pool, unaware that there had been any intrusion here, came swimming up, on some errand of private urgency, and made directly for the log. The next instant, before he had any inkling of the imminence of doom, the raccoon's forepaw shot out like a flash. It was a wide-spread, flexible paw, like a little, black, lean hand, strong and delicate, the fingers tipped with formidable claws. It caught the swimming frog under the belly, swept him from the water, and threw him far up on to the shore. With a pounce, the raccoon was upon him; and a snap of her strong teeth ended his struggles. [215]

The raccoon was very hungry, but, unlike others of the hunting tribes, she did not fall instantly to her meal. The mauled victim was covered with bits of dried stubble and leaf and earth, which clung to its sticky skin and were most distasteful to her fastidious appetite. Picking it up in her jaws, she carried it back to the pool. There, holding it in her claws, she proceeded to wash it thoroughly, sousing it up and down till there was not a vestige of soilure to be found upon it. When quite satisfied that no washing could make it cleaner, she fell to and made her meal with relish.

But what was one frog to a raccoon with a family, a mother whose breast must supply five hungry little mouths? She ran over to the brook, and followed down its bank to a spot where it widened out and a strong eddy made up against the hither shore, washing a slope of gravel. Here, in the shallows, she heard a feeble flopping, and knew that a sick or disabled fish was making its last fight with fate. It was a large chub, which had evidently been hooked by some heedless trout-fisher farther up-stream, torn from the hook in anger because it was not a trout, and thrown back into the water, to survive or die as the water-fates should will. It turned on one side, revealing its white belly and torn gills; then, feeling itself washed ashore by the eddy, it gave one more feeble flop in the effort to regain the safe deeps. At this moment the raccoon, pouncing with a light splash into the shallows, seized it, and with a nip through the backbone ended its misery. [216]

Having eaten the fish, and daintily cleaned her fur, the raccoon ascended the bank, with the purpose of returning to her lair in the old sycamore. She stopped abruptly, however, as a new sound, very different from that of the frog chorus, fell upon her heedful ear. It was an excited, yelping whine; and presently she caught sight of a long-legged, plummy-tailed dog, rushing wildly hither and thither, nose to earth, quartering the ground for fresh trails.

The raccoon knew the dog, from a distance, for the young, unbroken, brown Irish setter which had lately come to the neighbour farm. His qualities and capabilities, however, were, as yet, unknown to her. Though she knew herself more than a match for the average dog, and

particularly for the small black and white mongrel which, up to a month ago, had been the only dog on the farm, she did not know just how dangerous the Irish setter might be. Therefore, though the light of battle flamed into her eyes, she considered her responsibilities, and looked around for a tree. [217]

There was no tree near, so she turned, crouched close to the ground, and attempted to steal off unperceived. But as she turned the dog caught sight of her. At the same instant he also caught her scent. It was a new scent to him, a most interesting scent; and he rushed upon her, with streaming tail and a peal of joyously savage yelpings. The raccoon backed up against a granite rock, and stood at bay, her long, white teeth bared, her eyes fierce, fearless, and watchful.

The Irish setter was a wild, undisciplined pup, harebrained and headlong after the manner of his breed. Of raccoons and their capabilities he had had no experience. This small, crouching animal, under the rock in the moonlight, seemed to promise an easy victory. He sprang upon her, open-mouthed, and snapped confidently at her neck.

All his big jaws got were a few hairs; for on the instant the raccoon had dodged. Her keen claws raked the side of his face, and her fine, punishing fangs tore a gash in his neck, dangerously near his throat. With a yelp of pain and terror he tore himself free of those deadly teeth and bounded out of reach. And the raccoon, silently triumphant, backed up again into her posture of defence against the rock. [218]

But the Irish setter, in that half-minute, had learned a great deal about raccoons. He now refused to come within four or five feet of his small antagonist. He leaped up and down, snapping and barking, but had no more stomach for the actual encounter. His noisy threatenings, however, which did violence to the silver magic of the night, soon brought no answer; and the black and white mongrel, barking in great excitement, rushed up to take a hand in the affray.

At the sight of the quietly desperate raccoon he stopped short. But his hesitation was from discretion, not from cowardice. He knew that the raccoon could master him. He took some sort of swift counsel, therefore, with the blustering setter; and then, having apparently received assurance of support, sprang boldly on the enemy.

There was a sharp tussle, a confusion of snapping, snarling, clawing, growling, and squealing; while the Irish setter, having reconsidered his promise to take a hand, contented himself with barking brave encouragement from a safe distance. At last the black and white mongrel, finding that he was getting badly worsted and receiving no support, tried to draw away; and the raccoon, fearing to be dragged from her post of vantage against the rock, at once let him go. Both combatants were breathless and bleeding, and they eyed each other with the watchfulness born of respect. [219]

The little mongrel now seemed to hold a second and more elaborate conference with the Irish setter. Possibly he conveyed his opinion of the latter's character, for the proud-plumed tail drooped disconsolately, and the loud-mouthed threatenings ceased. Just what new courage the sagacious mongrel might have succeeded in infusing into the volatile heart of his ally, just what plan of concerted action might have been evolved, to the ruin of the heroic little fighter under the rock, will never be known; for at this moment a second and larger raccoon came running swiftly and silently up the bank.

It was the mother 'coon's mate, who had heard the noise of combat where he was foraging by himself, far down the brook. At sight of this most timely reinforcement, the beleaguered raccoon made a sortie. Recognizing the weak point in the assailing forces, she darted straight upon the hesitating setter, and snapped at his leg.

This was quite too much for his jarred nerves, and with a howl, as if he already felt those white teeth crunching to the bone, the setter turned and fled. The black and white mongrel, highly disgusted, but realizing the hopelessness of the situation, turned and fled after him in silence. Then the triumphant raccoons touched noses in brief congratulation, and presently moved off to their hunting as if nothing had happened. The wild kindred, as a rule, maintain a poise which the most extravagant adventures this side of death seldom deeply disturb. [220]

## II.

Up to this time, through the hungry weeks of late winter and the first thaws, the raccoons in the old sycamore had resisted the temptation of the farmer's hen-roosts. They knew that the wilderness hunting, though the most difficult, was safe, while any serious depredations at the farm would be sure to bring retaliation from that most crafty and dangerous creature, man. Now, however, after the fight with the dogs, a mixture of audacity with the desire for revenge got the better of them; and that same night, very late, when the moon was casting long, sharp shadows from the very rim of the horizon, they hurried through the belt of forest, which separated their sycamore from the cleared fields, and stole into the rear of the barn-yard. [221]

The farm was an outpost, so to speak, of the settlements, on the debatable ground between the forces of the forest and the forces of civilization, and therefore much exposed to attack. As the raccoons crept along behind the wood-shed they smelt traces of a sickly pungent odour, and knew that other marauders had been on the ground not very long before. This made them bolder in their enterprise, for they knew that such depredations as they might commit would be laid to the account of the skunks, and therefore not likely to draw down vengeance upon the den in the

sycamore. They killed a sitting hen upon her nest, feasted luxuriously upon her eggs and as much of herself as they could hold, and went away highly elated. For three successive nights they repeated their raid upon the fowl-house, each night smelling the pungent, choking scent more strongly, but never catching a glimpse of the rival marauder. On the fourth night, as they crossed the hillocky stump-lot behind the barns, the scent became overpowering, and they found the body of the skunk, where fate had overtaken him, lying beside the path. They stopped, considered, and turned back to their wildwood foraging; and through all that spring they went no more to the farmyard, lest they should call down a similar doom upon themselves.

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As spring ripened and turned to summer over the land, food grew abundant in the neighbourhood of the sycamore, and there was no temptation to trespass on man's preserves. There were grouse nests to rifle, there were squirrels, hare, wood-mice, chipmunks, to exercise all the craft and skill of the raccoons. Also there were the occasional unwary trout, chub, or suckers, to be scooped up upon the borders of the brook. And once, more in hate than in hunger, the old mother raccoon had the fierce joy of eradicating a nest of weasels, which she found in a pile of rocks. She had a savage antipathy to the weasel tribe, whose blood-lust menaces all the lesser wood-folk, and whose teeth delight to kill, after hunger is sated, for the mere relish of a taste of quivering brain or a spurt of warm blood. The raccoon carried more scars from the victory over the weasels than she had to remind her of the scuffle with the dogs. But she had the nerve that takes punishment without complaint, and the scars troubled her little.

When the five young raccoons came down from the sycamore and began to depend upon their own foraging, it soon became necessary to extend the range, as game grew shyer and more scarce. Even chub and suckers learn something in course of time; and as for wood-mice and chipmunks, under such incentive as an active family of raccoons can give them they attain to a truly heartless cunning in the art of making their enemies go hungry. Hanging together with an intense clannishness, the raccoon family would make expeditions of such length as to keep often for two or three days at a time away from the home in the sycamore.

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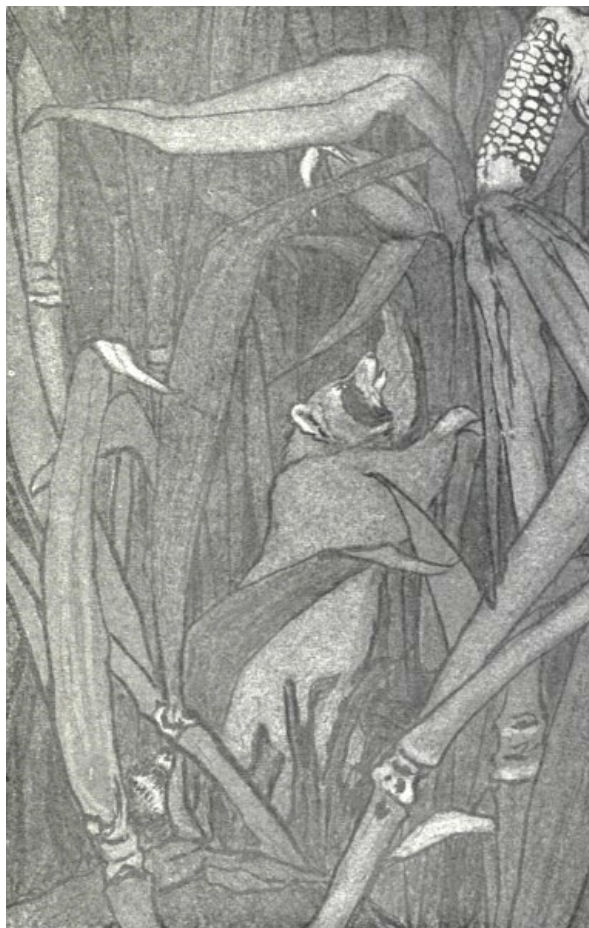
At last, one night in late summer, when the stars seemed to hang low among the warm and thick-leaved trees, and warm scents steamed up wherever the dew was disturbed by furry feet, the raccoons wandered over to the edge of the corn-field. It chanced that the corn was just plumping to tender and juicy fulness. The old raccoons showed the youngsters what richness of sweetness lay hidden within the green wrappings of the ears; and forth-with the whole clan fell to feasting recklessly.

In regard to the ducks and chickens of the farm, the raccoons were shrewd enough to know that any extensive depredations upon them would call down the swift vengeance of the farmer-folk; but they could not realize that they were in mischief when they helped themselves to these juicy, growing things. The corn, though manifestly in some way involved with the works of man, seemed nevertheless to them a portion of nature's liberality. They ran riot, therefore, through the tall, well-ordered ranks of green, without malice or misgiving; and in their gaiety they were extravagant. They would snatch a mouthful out of one sweet ear, then out of another, spoiling ten for one that they consumed.

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Night after night they came to the corn-field, and waxed fat on their plunder, till at last, when they had done the damage of a herd of oxen, one silvery night they were discovered. The young farmer, with his hired boy and the harebrained, Irish setter, chanced to come by through the woods, and to notice that the corn was moving although there was no wind. The raccoons were promptly hunted out; and one of the young ones, before they could gain the shadowy refuge of the trees, was killed with sticks,—the setter contributing much noise, but keeping at a very safe distance. When the affray was over, and the young farmer, going through the field, found out what damage had been done, he was eloquent with picturesque backwoods blasphemies, and vowed the extermination of the whole 'coon clan. With the aid of the setter, who now, for the first time, was able to prove the worth of his breeding, he tracked the escaping marauders through the woods, and at last, after a long hunt, located their lair in the old sycamore-tree on the hill. At this his wrath gave way to the hunter's elation. His eyes sparkled.

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**"THEY RAN RIOT ... THROUGH THE TALL, WELL-ORDERED RANKS OF GREEN."**

"To-morrow night," said he, to the hired boy, "we'll have a reg'lar old-fashioned 'coon hunt!"

Then, whistling off the setter, who was barking, jumping, and whining ecstatically at the foot of the sycamore-tree, he turned and strode away through the moon-shadows of the forest, with the dog and the hired boy at his heels. The diminished raccoon family, with beating hearts and trembling nerves, snuggled down together into the depths of the sycamore, and dreamed not of the doom preparing for them.

### III.

On the following night, soon after moonrise, they came. Stealthily, though there was little need of stealth, they crept, Indian file, around the branchy edges of the fields, through the wet, sweet-smelling thickets. The hunter's fever was upon them, fierce and furtive. They came to the corn-field—to find that the raccoons had paid their visit, made their meal, and got away at the first faint signal of the approach of danger. With an outburst of excited yelpings, the dogs took up the hot trail, and the hunters made straight through the woods for the sycamore-tree.

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It was a party of five. With the young farmer, the hired boy, the harebrained Irish setter, and the wise little black and white mongrel, came also the young schoolmaster of the settlement, who boarded at the farm. A year out of college, and more engrossed in the study of the wild creatures than ever he had been in his books, he had joined the hunt less from sympathy than from curiosity. He had outgrown his boyhood's zeal for killing things, and he had a distinct partiality for raccoons; but he had never taken part in a 'coon hunt, and it was his way to go thoroughly into whatever he undertook. He carried a little .22 Winchester repeater, which he had brought with him from college, and had employed, hitherto, on nothing more sentient than empty bottles or old tomato-cans.

Now it chanced that not all the raccoon family had made their escape to the deep hole in the sycamore. The old male, who was rather solitary and moody in his habits at this season, had followed the flight of the clan for only a short distance; and suddenly, to their doubtful joy and complete surprise, the two dogs, who were far ahead of the hunters, overtook him. After a moment's wise hesitation, the black and white mongrel joined battle, while the setter contributed a great deal of noisy encouragement. By the time the hunters came up the mongrel had drawn off, bleeding and badly worsted; and the angry raccoon, backed up against a tree, glared at the newcomers with fierce eyes and wide-open mouth, as if minded to rush upon them.

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The odds, however, were much too great for even so dauntless a soul as his; and when the enemy were within some ten or twelve paces, he turned and ran up the tree. In the first fork he crouched, almost hidden, and peered down with one watchful eye.

The young farmer was armed with an old, muzzle-loading, single-barrelled duck-gun. He raised it to his shoulder and took aim at the one bright eye gleaming from behind the branch. Then he lowered it, and turned to his boarder with a mixture of politeness and rustic mockery.

"Your first shot!" said he. "I'll shoot the critter, after you've tried that there pea-shooter on him!"

"He's licked the dogs in fair fight," said the schoolmaster. "Let's let him off!"

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The farmer swore in unaffected amazement. "Why, that's the — — that does more damage than all the rest put together!" he exclaimed. "You'll see me fix *him*. But you take first shot, Mister Chase. I want to see the pea-shooter work!"

The young schoolmaster saw his prestige threatened,—and with no profit whatever to the doomed raccoon. Prestige is nowhere held at higher premium than in the backwoods. It is the magic wand of power. The young man fired, a quick, but careful shot; and on the snappy, insignificant report, the raccoon fell dead from the tree.

"You *kin* shoot some!" remarked the farmer, picking up the victim, and noting the bullet-hole in its forehead. And the hired boy spread his mouth in a huge, broken-toothed grin of admiration.

The old sycamore stood out lonely in the flood of the moonlight. Not a raccoon was in sight; but the round, black doorway to their den was visible against the gray bark, beside the crotch of the one great limb. The frantic yelpings of the dogs around the foot of the tree were proof enough that the family were at home. The hunters, after the ancient custom of men that hunt 'coons, had brought an axe with them; but the hired boy, who carried it, looked with dismay at the huge girth of the sycamore.

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"Won't git that chopped down in a week!" said he, with pardonable depreciation of his powers.

"Go fetch another axe!" commanded the farmer, seating himself on a stump, and getting out his pipe.

"It would be a pity to cut down that tree, the biggest sycamore in the country, just to get at a 'coon's nest!" said the young schoolmaster, willing to spare both the tree and its inhabitants.

The farmer let his match go out while he eyed the great trunk.

"Never mind the axe," said he, calling back the hired boy. "Fetch me the new bindin' rope out of the spare manger; an' a bunch of rags, an' some salmon-twine. An' stir yerself!"

Relieved of his anxiety as to the chopping, the boy sped willingly on his errand. And the young schoolmaster realized, with a little twinge of regret, that the raccoon family was doomed.

When the boy came back, the farmer took the bunch of rags, smeared them liberally with wet gunpowder, and tied them into a loose, fluffy ball, on the end of a length of salmon-twine. Then, having thrown the rope over the limb of the sycamore, he held both ends, and sent the hired boy up into the tree, where he sat astride, grinning and expectant, and peered into the well-worn hole.

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"Now," said the farmer, tossing the ball of rags up to him, "light this 'ere spittin' devil, an' lower it into the hole, an' we'll see what's what!"

As he spoke, he turned, and gave the schoolmaster a slow wink, which quickened the latter's expectations. The next moment the boy had set a match to the rags, and they were ablaze with wild sputterings and jets of red flame. Eagerly, but carefully, he lowered the fiery ball into the hole, paying out the string till it was evident that the tree was hollow almost down to the butt.

Suddenly there was a wild commotion of squeals, grunts, and scratchings in the depths of the invaded hole. The sounds rose swiftly up the inside of the trunk. Then there was an eruption at the mouth of the hole. A confusion of furry forms shot forth, with such violence that the startled boy almost lost his balance. As it was, he backed away precipitately along the branch, amid derisive encouragement from his friends below.

Having eluded, for the moment, the flaming invader of their home, the raccoons paused on the limb to survey the situation.

"Fling 'em down to us," jeered the farmer, hugely amused at the boy's dismay.

The latter grinned nervously, and started forward as if to obey. But at this moment the raccoons made their decision. The dogs and men below looked more formidable than the hesitating boy astride of their branch. In a resolute line, their fierce old mother leading, they made for him.

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The boy backed away with awkward alacrity, but still keeping his hold on the salmon-twine. Consequently, by the time he had nearly reached the end of the limb, the still sputtering fire-ball emerged from the hole in the crotch. At the sound of it behind them the young raccoons turned in terror, and straightway dropped from the tree; but the old mother, undaunted, darted savagely upon her foe. The boy gave a cry of fear. The next instant there was a spiteful crack from the schoolmaster's little rifle. The old raccoon stopped, shrank, and rolled lifeless from the limb.

Meanwhile, the youngsters were in a *mêlée* with the two dogs. Though little more than three-fourths grown, they had courage; and so brave a front did they oppose to their enemies that for a few moments the dogs were cautious in attack. Then the black and white mongrel sprang in; and



the big setter, realizing that these were no such antagonists as their parents had been, followed, and was astonished to learn that he could stand a bite from those sharp teeth and resist the impulse to howl and run away. In less time than it takes to describe, one of the raccoons was shaken to death in the setter's great jaws, and then the other three scattered in flight.

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One was overtaken in two seconds by the black and white mongrel, and bitten through the back. The second ran past the farmer, and was killed by a quick blow with his gun-barrel. The third, full of courage and resource, flew straight at the setter's throat, and so alarmed him that he jumped away. Then, seeing no tree within reach, and probably realizing that there was no escape by any ordinary course, he fled straight to the farmer.

The farmer, however, mistook this action for the ferocity of despair. He struck out with his gun-barrel, missed his aim, swore apprehensively, and caught the little animal a kick, which landed it within a couple of yards of the spot where stood the young schoolmaster, watching the scene with mingled interest and pity. His sympathies now went out warmly to this brave and sole survivor of the little people of the sycamore. His quick intuitions had understood the appeal which had been so cruelly repulsed.

For a second the young raccoon stood still where he had fallen, and his keen, dark eyes flashed a glance on each of his enemies in turn. Both dogs were now rushing upon him. The ever-imminent doom of the wild kindred was about to lay hold of him. He half-turned, as if to die fighting, then changed his mind, darted to the feet of the young schoolmaster, ran up his trouser-leg, and confidently took refuge under his coat.

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"Shake him off! Shake him off! A 'coon's bite is pizen!" shouted the farmer, in great excitement.

"Not much!" said the young schoolmaster, with decision, gathering his coat snugly around his panting guest. "This 'coon hunt's over. This little chap's coming home to live with me!"

The farmer stared, and then laughed good-naturedly.

"Jest as you say," said he. "Recken ye've 'arned the right to have a say in the matter. But ye'll find 'coons is mighty mischeevous 'round a house. Fetch the karkisses, Jake. Reckon we've done pretty well for one night's huntin', an' there ain't goin' to be no more 'coons messin' in the corn *this* summer!"

In a few minutes the procession was again plodding, Indian file, through the still, dew-fragrant, midnight woods. The little raccoon, its heart now beating quietly, nestled in secure contentment under the young schoolmaster's arm, untroubled even by the solemn and deep-toned menace of a horned-owl's cry from the spiky top of a dead hemlock near at hand. From the lake behind the hill came the long laughter of a loon, the wildest and saddest of all the wilderness voices. And a lonely silence settled down about the old sycamore on the hill, solitary under the white, high-sailing moon.

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## Horns and Antlers

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## Horns and Antlers



he young red and white bull was very angry. He stood by the pasture bars grumbling, and blowing through his nostrils, and shaking his short, straight horns, and glaring fiercely after the man, who was driving three cows down the hill to the farmyard in the shadowy valley. Every evening for weeks the man had come about sunset and taken away the cows in that fashion, rudely suppressing the young bull's efforts to accompany his herd, and leaving him to the sole companionship of two silly and calf-like yearlings whom he scorned to notice. For the past few evenings the bull had been trying to work himself up to the point of fairly joining issue with the man, and having it out with him. But there was something in the man's cool assurance, in his steady, compelling eye, in the abrupt authority of his voice, which made the angry animal hesitate to defy him. Certainly the bull could see that the man was very much smaller than he,—a pigmy, indeed, in comparison; but he felt that within that erect and fragile-looking shape there dwelt an unknown force which no four-footed beast could ever hope to withstand. Every evening, after the man and cows had gone half-way down the hillside, the bull would fall to bellowing and pawing the ground, and rolling his defiance across the quiet valley. But when next the man came face to face with him, and spoke to him, he would assume, in spite of himself, an attitude of lofty and reluctant deference.

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The high hill pasture, with its decaying stumps, its rounded hillocks, its patches of withering fern and harsh dwarf juniper, was bathed in all the colours of the autumn sunset, while the farmyard down in the valley was already in the first purple of the twilight. The centre of the pasture was the hilltop, roughly rounded, and naked save for one maple-tree, now ablaze with scarlet and amber. Along the line of hills across the dusk valley the last of the sunset laid a band of clear orange, which faded softly through lemon and pink and violet and tender green to the high, cold gray-blue of the dome above the hill, where one crow was beating his way toward the tree-tops

on the farther ridge. The tranquillity of the scene was curiously at variance with the loud vapourings of the bull, as he raged up and down behind the bars, watched tremblingly by the pair of awestruck yearlings.

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Over on the other side of the hill, behind the red maple, where the hillocks and fern patches lay already in a cool, violet-brown shadow, stood a high-antlered red buck, listening to the bull's ravings. He had just come out of the woods and up to the snake fence of split rails which bounded the pasture. With some curiosity, not unmixed with scorn, he had sniffed at the fence, a phenomenon with which he was unfamiliar. But the voice of the bull had promptly absorbed his attention. There was something in the voice that irritated him,—which seemed, though in a language he did not know, to convey a taunt and a challenge. His fine, slim head went high. He snorted several times, stamped his delicate hoofs, then bounded lightly over the fence and trotted up the slope toward the shining maple.

For most of the greater members of the wild kindred,—and for the tribes of the deer and moose, in particular,—the month of October is the month of love and war. Under those tender and enchanting skies, amid the dying crimsons and purples and yellows and russets, and in the wistfulness of the falling leaf, duels are fought to the death in the forest aisles and high hill glades. When a sting and a tang strike across the dreamy air, and the frosts nip crisply, then the blood runs hot in the veins and mating-time stirs up both love and hate. The red buck, as it happened, had been something of a laggard in awakening to the season's summons. His antlers, this year, had been late to mature and overlong in the velvet. When he entered the field, therefore, he found that other bucks had been ahead of him, and that there were no more does wandering forlorn. He had "belled" in vain for several days, searched in vain the limits of his wonted range, and at last set out in quest of some little herd whose leader his superior strength might beat down and supplant. Of his own prowess, his power to supplant all rivals, he had no doubt. But hitherto he had found none to answer his challenge, and his humour was testy. He had no idea what sort of an animal it was that was making such objectionable noises on the other side of the hill; but whatever it might be, he did not like it. He knew it was not a bear. He knew it was not a bull-moose. And of nothing else that walked the forest did he stand in deference, when the courage of rutting-time was upon him.

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Stepping daintily, the red buck reached the top of the hill and saw the bull below him. A formidable antagonist, surely! The buck stopped where he was. He had now less inclination to pick a quarrel; but he was consumed with curiosity. What could the heavy red and white beast be up to, with his grunting and bellowing, his pawings of the sod, and his rampings to and fro? The buck could see no object for such defiance, no purpose to such rage. It was plain to him, however, that those two odd-looking, rather attractive little animals, who stood aside and watched the bull's rantings, were in no way the cause or object, as the bull completely ignored them. Growing more and more inquisitive as he gazed, the buck took a few steps down the slope, and again paused to investigate.

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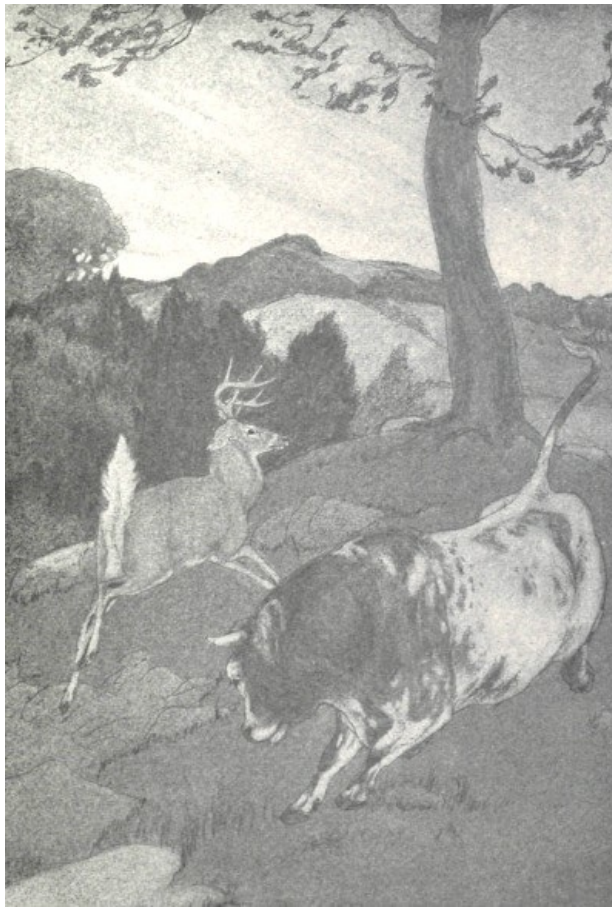
At this point the bull caught sight of the intruder, and wheeled sharply. His half-artificial rage against the man was promptly forgotten. Who was this daring trespasser, advancing undismayed into the very heart of his domain? He stared for a moment or two in silence, lashing his tail wrathfully. Then, with a rumbling bellow deep in his throat, he lowered his head and charged.

This was a demonstration which the red buck could very well understand, but his ill-humour had been swallowed up in curiosity, and he was not now so ready to fight. In fact, it was with large apprehension that he saw that dangerous bulk charging upon him, and his great, liquid eyes opened wide. He stood his ground, however, till the bull was almost upon him, and then bounded lightly aside.

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The bull, infuriated at this easy evasion, almost threw himself in his effort to stop and turn quickly; and in a few seconds he charged again. This time the charge was down-hill, which doubled its speed and resistlessness. But again the buck sprang aside, and the bull thundered on for a score of yards, ploughing up the turf in the fierce effort to stop himself.

And now the big, wondering eyes of the buck changed. A glitter came into them. It had angered him to be so hustled. And moreover, the ponderous clumsiness of the bull filled him with contempt. When the bull charged him for the third time, he stamped his narrow, sharp hoofs in defiance, and stood with antlers down. At the last moment he jumped aside no farther than was absolutely necessary, and plowed a red furrow in the bull's flank as he plunged by.



"THIS TIME THE CHARGE WAS DOWN-HILL."

Beside himself with rage, the bull changed his tactics, trying short, close rushes and side lunges with his horns. But the buck, thoroughly aroused, and elated with the joy of battle, was always just beyond his reach, and always punishing him. Before the fight had lasted ten minutes, his flanks and neck were streaming with blood. [243]

With his matchless agility, the buck more than once sprang right over his enemy's back. It was impossible for the bull to catch him. Sometimes, instead of ripping with the antlers, he would rear straight up, and slash the bull mercilessly with his knifelike hoofs. For a time, the bull doggedly maintained the unequal struggle; but at length, feeling himself grow tired, and realizing that his foe was as elusive as a shadow, he lost heart and tried to withdraw. But the buck's blood was up, and he would have no withdrawing. He followed relentlessly, bounding and goring and slashing, till the helpless bull was seized with panic, and ran bellowing along the fence, looking vainly for an exit.

For perhaps a hundred yards the conquering buck pursued, now half in malice, half in sport, but always punishing, punishing. Then, suddenly growing tired of it, he stopped, and went daintily mincing his steps back to where the two yearlings stood huddled in awe. They shrank, staring wildly, as he approached, but for some reason did not run away. Sniffing at them curiously, and not finding their scent to his taste, he lifted his slim muzzle, and "belled" sonorously several times, pausing between the calls to listen for an answer from the forest. Then, receiving no reply, he seemed to remember his interrupted quest, and moved off over the hill through the fading light. [244]

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## In the Deep of the Grass

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## In the Deep of the Grass



isty gray green, washed with tints of the palest violet, spotted with red clover-blooms, white oxeyes, and hot orange Canada lilies, the deep-grassed levels basked under the July sun. A drowsy hum of bees and flies seemed to distil, with warm aromatic scents, from the sun-steeped blooms and grass-tops. The broad, blooming, tranquil expanse, shimmering and softly radiant in the heat, seemed the very epitome of summer. Now and again a small cloud-shadow sailed across it. Now and again a little wind, swooping down upon it gently, bent the grass-tops all one way, and spread a sudden silvery pallor. Save for the droning bees and flies there seemed to be but one live creature astir between the grass and the

blue. A solitary marsh-hawk, far over by the rail fence, was winnowing slowly, slowly hither and thither, lazily hunting.

All this was in the world above the grass-tops. But below the grass-tops was a very different world,—a dense, tangled world of dim green shade, shot with piercing shafts of sun, and populous with small, furtive life. Here, among the brown and white roots, the crowded green stems and the mottled stalks, the little earth kindreds went busily about their affairs and their desires, giving scant thought to the aerial world above them. All that made life significant to them was here in the warm, green gloom; and when anything chanced to part the grass to its depths they would scurry away in unanimous indignation.

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On a small stone, over which the green closed so thickly that, when he chanced to look upward, he caught but the scantiest shreds of sky, sat a half-grown field-mouse, washing his whiskers with his dainty claws. His tiny, bead-like eyes kept ceaseless watch, peering through the shadowy tangle for whatever might come near in the shape of foe or prey. Presently two or three stems above his head were beaten down, and a big green grasshopper, alighting clumsily from one of his blind leaps, fell sprawling on the stone. Before he could struggle to his long legs and climb back to the safer region of the grass-tops, the little mouse was upon him. Sharp, white teeth pierced his green mail, his legs kicked convulsively twice or thrice, and the faint iridescence faded out of his big, blank, foolish eyes. The mouse made his meal with relish, daintily discarding the dry legs and wing-cases. Then, amid the green débris scattered upon the stone, he sat up, and once more went through his fastidious toilet.

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But life for the little mouse in his grass-world was not quite all watching and hunting. When his toilet was complete, and he had amiably let a large black cricket crawl by unmolested, he suddenly began to whirl round and round on the stone, chasing his own tail. As he was amusing himself with this foolish play, another mouse, about the same size as himself, and probably of the same litter, jumped upon the stone, and knocked him off. He promptly retorted in kind; and for several minutes, as if the game were a well-understood one, the two kept it up, squeaking soft merriment, and apparently forgetful of all peril. The grass-tops above this play rocked and rustled in a way that would certainly have attracted attention had there been any eyes to see. But the marsh-hawk was still hunting lazily at the other side of the field, and no tragedy followed the childishness.

Both seemed to tire of the sport at the same instant; for suddenly they stopped, and hurried away through the grass on opposite sides of the stone, as if remembered business had just called to them. Whatever the business was, the first mouse seemed to forget it very speedily, for in half a minute he was back upon the stone again, combing his fine whiskers and scratching his ears. This done to his satisfaction, he dropped like a flash from his seat, and disappeared into a small hollow beneath it. As he did so, a hairy black spider darted out, and ran away among the roots.

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A minute or two after the disappearance of the mouse, a creature came along which appeared gigantic in the diminutive world of the grass folk. It was nearly three feet long, and of the thickness of a man's finger. Of a steely gray black, striped and reticulated in a mysterious pattern with a clear whitish yellow, it was an ominous shape indeed, as it glided smoothly and swiftly, in graceful curves, through the close green tangle. The cool shadows and thin lights touched it flickeringly as it went, and never a grass-top stirred to mark its sinister approach. Without a sound of warning it came straight up to the stone, and darted its narrow, cruel head into the hole.

There was a sharp squeak, and instantly the narrow head came out again, ejected by the force of the mouse's agonized spring. But the snake's teeth were fastened in the little animal's neck. The doom of the green world had come upon him while he slept.

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But doomed though he was, the mouse was game. He knew there was no poison in those fangs that gripped him, and he struggled desperately to break free. His powerful hind legs kicked the ground with a force which the snake, hampered at first by the fact of its length being partly trailed out through the tangle, was unable to quite control. With unerring instinct,—though this was the first snake he had ever encountered,—the mouse strove to reach its enemy's back and sever the bone with the fine chisels of his teeth. But it was just this that the snake was watchful to prevent. Three times in his convulsive leaps the mouse succeeded in touching the snake's body,—but with his feet only, never once with those destructive little teeth. The snake held him inexorably, with a steady, elastic pressure which yielded just so far, and never quite far enough. And in a minute or two the mouse's brave struggles grew more feeble.

All this, however,—the lashing and the wriggling and the jumping,—had not gone on without much disturbance to the grass-tops. Timothy head and clover-bloom, oxe-eye and feathery plume-grass, they had bowed and swayed and shivered till the commotion, very conspicuous to one looking down upon the tranquil, flowery sea of green, caught the attention of the marsh-hawk, which at that moment chanced to be perching on a high fence stake. The lean-headed, fierce-eyed, trim-feathered bird shot from his perch, and sailed on long wings over the grass to see what was happening. As the swift shadow hovered over the grass-tops, the snake looked up. Well he understood the significance of that sudden shade. Jerking back his fangs with difficulty from the mouse's neck, he started to glide off under the thickest matting of the roots. But lightning quick though he was, he was not quite quick enough. Just as his narrow head darted under the roots, the hawk, with wings held straight up, and talons reaching down, dropped upon him, and clutched the middle of his back in a grip of steel. The next moment he was jerked into the air, writhing and coiling, and striking in vain frenzy at his captor's mail of hard feathers. The hawk

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flew off with him over the sea of green to the top of the fence stake, there to devour him at leisure. The mouse, sore wounded but not past recovery, dragged himself back to the hollow under the stone. And over the stone the grass-tops, once more still, hummed with flies, and breathed warm perfumes in the distilling heat.

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## When the Moon Is over the Corn

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### When the Moon Is over the Corn

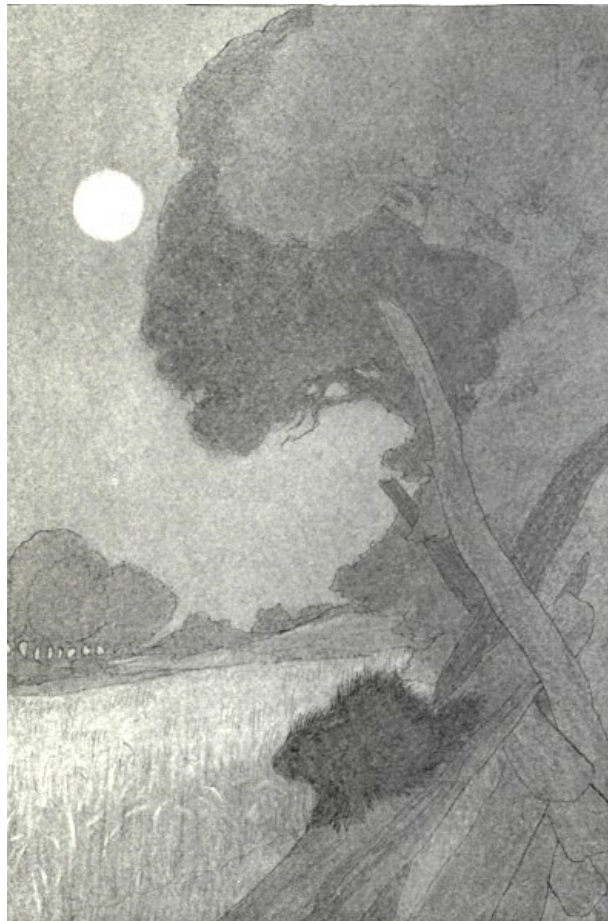


In the mystical transparency of the moonlight the leafy world seemed all afloat. The solid ground, the trees, the rail fences, the serried ranks of silver-washed corn seemed to have lost all substantial foundation. Everything lay swimming, as it were, upon a dream. The light that poured down from the round, gold-white, high-sailing moon was not ordinary moonlight, but that liquid enchantment which the sorceress of the heavens sheds at times, and notably at the ripe of the summer, lest earth should forget the incomprehensibility of beauty. A little to one side, beyond the corn-field and over a billowy mass of silvered leafage, stood the gray, clustered roofs of a backwoods farmstead.

In the top of a tall, slim poplar, leaning out from the edge of the woods and over the fence that marked the bounds of the wilderness, clung a queer-looking, roundish object, gently swaying in the magic light. It might almost have been mistaken for a huge, bristly bird's-nest, but for the squeaky grunts of satisfaction which it kept emitting at intervals. Whether it was that the magic of the moonlight had got into its blood, driving it to strange pastimes, or that it was merely indulging an established taste for the game of "Rock-a-bye-baby," observation made it plain that the porcupine was amusing itself by swinging in the tree-top. Any other of the woods folk would have chosen for their recreation a less conspicuous spot than this poplar-top thrust out over the open field. But the porcupine feared nobody, and was quite untroubled by bashfulness. He cared not a jot who heard, saw, or derided him. It was a pleasant world; and for all that had ever been shown him to the contrary, it belonged to him.

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After a time he got tired of swinging and squeaking. He straightened himself out, slowly descended the tree, and set off along the top of the fence toward the farmyard. Never before had it occurred to him to visit the farmyard; but now that the moon had put the madness into his head, he acted upon the whim without a moment's misgiving. Unlike the rest of the wild kindreds, he stood little in awe of either the works or the ways of man.



"SET OFF ALONG THE TOP OF THE FENCE."



Presently the fence turned off at a sharp angle to the way he had chosen to go. He descended, and crawled in leisurely fashion along an unused, grassy lane, wandering from side to side as he went, as if time were of no concern to him. About a hundred feet from the fence he came to a brook crossing the lane. Spring freshets had carried away the little bridge, doubtless years before, and now the stream was spanned by nothing but an old tree-trunk, carelessly thrown across. Upon the end of this,—for him an ample bridge,—the porcupine crawled, never troubling himself to inquire if another passenger might chance to be crossing from the other side.

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At the very same moment, indeed, another passenger raised furtive, padded paws, and took possession of the opposite end of the bridge. It was a huge bob-cat, with stubby tail and wide, pale green, unwinking eyes. It had come stealing down from the thick woods to visit the farmyard,—driven, perhaps, by the same moon-madness that stirred the porcupine. But at the edge of the silent farmyard, white and tranquil under the flooding radiance, the man-smell on the bars had brought the bob-cat to a sudden halt. No moon-madness could make the cautious cat forget the menace of that smell. It had turned in its tracks, and concluded to look for woodchucks in the corn-field.

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When the bob-cat had taken a few paces along the log, it paused and glared at the porcupine vindictively, its eyes seeming to emit faint, whitish flames. The porcupine, on the other hand, came right on, slowly and indifferently, as if unaware of the bob-cat's presence. The latter crouched down, flattened back its ears, dug long, punishing claws into the bark, opened its sharp-toothed jaws, and gave a savage spitting snarl. Was it possible that this insignificant, blundering, sluggish creature, this pig of the tree-tops, was going to demand the right of way? The porcupine, unhurried, continued to advance, nothing but an increased elevation of his quills betraying that he was aware of an opponent. The cat's absurd stub of a tail twitched spasmodically, and for a few seconds it seemed as if rage might get the better of discretion. But all the wild creatures know the qualities of that fine armory of quills carried by the porcupine. The big cat pulled himself together with a screech, ran back, and sprang off to a rock on the bank, whence he spat impotently while the porcupine crawled by.

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So leisurely was the progress of the bristling little adventurer that it was a good half-hour ere he reached the farmyard bars. Here he stopped, and sniffed curiously. But it was no dread of the dreaded man-smell that delayed him. The bars had been handled by many hot, toiling hands; and the salt of their sweat had left upon the wood a taste which the porcupine found pleasant. Here and there, up and down, he gnawed at the discoloured surfaces. Then, when the relish was exhausted, he climbed down on the inside, and marched deliberately up the middle of the yard toward the kitchen door. His quills made a dry, rustling noise as he went; his claws rattled on the chips, and in the unshadowed open he was most audaciously in evidence. His bearing was not defiant, but self-reliant, as of one who minded his own business and demanded to be let alone. From the stables across the yard came the stamping of horses' hoofs; a turkey in the tree behind the barn *quit-quit* warningly; and a long-drawn, high-pitched *kwee-ee-ee-ee-ee* of inquiry came from the wakeful Leghorn cock in the poultry-house. To all these unfamiliar sounds the porcupine turned the deaf ear of self-contained indifference.

At this moment around from the front door-step came the farmer's big black and white dog, to see what was exciting his family. He was a wise dog, and versed in the lore of the wilderness. Had the intruder been a bear he would have sought to attract its attention, and raised an outcry to summon his master to the fray. But a porcupine! He was too wary to attack it, and too dignified to make any fuss over it. With a scornful *woof*, he turned away, and strolled into the garden, to dig up an old bone which he had buried in the cucumber-bed.

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The porcupine, meanwhile, had found something that interested him. Near the kitchen door stood an empty wooden box, shining in the moonlight. First its bright colour, then its scent, attracted his attention. It had recently contained choice flakes of salted codfish, and the salt had soaked deep into its fibres. With the long, keen chisels of his front teeth, he attacked the wood eagerly,—and the loud sound of his gnawings echoed on the stillness. It awoke the farmer, who rubbed his eyes, arose on his elbow, listened a moment, muttered, "Another of them durn porkypines!" and dropped to sleep again.

When the leisurely adventurer had eaten as much of the box as he could hold, he took it into his head to go home,—which meant, to any comfortable tree back in the woods. His home was at large. This time he decided to go through a hole under the board fence between the barn and the fowl-house. And it was here that, for the first time on this expedition, he was induced by a power outside himself to change his mind. As he approached the hole under the fence, from the radiance of the open yard beyond came another animal, heading for the same point. The stranger was much smaller than the porcupine, and wore no panoply of points. But it had the same tranquil air of owning the earth. The moonlight, shining full upon it, showed its pointed nose, and two broad, white stripes running down the black fur of its back.

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The stranger reached the opening in the fence about three seconds ahead of the porcupine. And this time the porcupine was the one to defer. He did not like it. He grunted angrily, and his deadly spines stood up. But he drew aside, and avoided giving any offence to so formidable an acquaintance. No foot of ground would his sturdy courage yield to bob-cat, bear, or man; but of a skunk he was afraid. When the skunk had passed through the fence, and wandered off to hunt for eggs under the barn, the porcupine turned and went all the way around the fowl-house. Then he struck down through the back of the garden, gained the rail fence enclosing the corn-field, and at length, whether by intention, or because the fence, a convenient promenade, led him to it, he

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came back to the leaning poplar. With a pleasant memory drawing him on, he climbed the tree once more. The round moon was getting low now, and the shadows she cast out across the corn were long and weird. But the downpour of her light was still mysterious in its clarity, and in its sheen the porcupine, rolled up like a bird's nest, swung himself luxuriously to sleep.

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## The Truce

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## The Truce



Too early, while yet the snow was thick and the food scarce, the big black bear had roused himself from his long winter sleep and forsaken his snug den under the roots of the pine-tree. The thawing spring world he found an empty place, no rabbits to be captured, no roots to be dug from wet meadows; and his appetite was sorely vexing him. He would have crept back into his hole for another nap; but the air was too stimulatingly warm, too full of promise of life, to suffer him to resume the old, comfortable drowsiness. Moreover, having gone to bed thin the previous December, he had waked up hungry; and hunger is a restless bedfellow. In three days he had had but one meal—a big trout, clawed out half-dead from a rocky eddy below the Falls; and now, as he sniffed the soft, wet air with fiercely eager nostrils, he forgot his customary tolerance of mood and was ready to do battle with anything that walked the wilderness.

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It was a little past noon, and the shadows of the tree-tops fell blue on the rapidly shrinking snow. The air was full of faint trickling noises, and thin tinklings where the snow veiled the slopes of little rocky hollows. Under the snow and under the rotting patches of ice, innumerable small streams were everywhere hurrying to swell the still ice-fettered flood of the river, the Big Fork, whose roomy valley lay about a half-mile eastward through the woods. Every now and then, when a soft gust drew up from the south, it bore with it a heavy roar, a noise as of muffled and tremendous trampling, the voice of the Big Fork Falls thundering out from under their decaying lid of ice. The Falls were the only thing which the black bear really feared. Often as he had visited them, to catch wounded fish in the ominous eddies at their foot, he could never look at their terrific plunge without a certain awed dilation of his eyes, a certain shrinking at his heart. Perhaps by reason of some association of his cubhood, some imminent peril and narrow escape at the age when his senses were most impressionable, in all his five years of life the Falls had never become a commonplace to him. And even now, while questing noiselessly and restlessly for food, he rarely failed to pay the tribute of an instinctive, unconscious turn of head whenever that portentous voice came up upon the wind.

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Prowling hither and thither among the great ragged trunks, peering and sniffing and listening, the bear suddenly caught the sound of small claws on wood. The sound came apparently from within the trunk of a huge maple, close at hand. Leaning his head to one side, he listened intently, his ears cocked, eager as a child listening to a watch. There was, indeed, something half childish in the attitude of the huge figure, strangely belying the ferocity in his heart. Yes, the sound came, unmistakably, from within the trunk. He nosed the bark warily. There was no opening; and the bark was firm. He stole to the other side of the tree, his head craftily outstretched and reaching around far before him.

The situation was clear to him at once,—and his hungry muzzle jammed itself into the entrance to a chipmunk's hole. The maple-tree was dead, and partly decayed, up one side of the trunk. All his craft forgotten on the instant, the bear sniffed and snorted and drew loud, fierce breaths, as if he thought to suck the little furry tenant forth by inhalation. The live, warm smell that came from the hole was deliciously tantalizing to his appetite. The hole, however, was barely big enough to admit the tip of his black snout, so he presently gave over his foolish sniffings, and set himself to tear an entrance with his resistless claws. The bark and dead wood flew in showers under his efforts, and it was evident that the chipmunk's little home would speedily lie open to the foe. But the chipmunk, meanwhile, from the crotch of a limb overhead, was looking down in silent indignation. Little Stripe-sides had been wise enough to provide his dwelling with a sort of skylight exit.

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Suddenly, in the midst of his task, the bear stopped and lifted his muzzle to the wind. What was that new taint upon the air? It was one almost unknown to him,—but one which he instinctively dreaded, though without any reason based directly upon experience of his own. At almost any other time, indeed, he would have taken the first whiff of that ominous man-smell as a signal to efface himself and make off noiselessly down the wind. But just now, his first feeling was wrath at the thought of being hindered from his prospective meal. He would let no one, not even a man, rob him of that chipmunk. Then, as his wrath swelled rapidly, he decided to hunt the man himself. Perhaps, as the bear relishes practically everything edible under the sun except human flesh, he had no motive but a savage impulse to punish the intruder for such an untimely intrusion. However that may be, a red light came into his eyes, and he swung away to meet this unknown trespasser upon his trails.

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On that same day, after a breakfast before dawn in order that he might make an early start, a

gaunt trapper had set out from the Settlement on the return journey to his camp beyond the Big Fork. He had been in to the Settlement with a pack of furs, and was now hurrying back as fast as he could, because of the sudden thaw. He was afraid the ice might go out of the river and leave him cut off from his camp,—for his canoe was on the other side. As the pelts were beginning to get poor, he had left his rifle at home, and carried no weapon but his knife. He had grown so accustomed to counting all the furry wild folk as his prey that he never thought of them as possible adversaries,—unless it might chance to be some such exception as a bull-moose in rutting season. A rifle, therefore, when he was not after skins, seemed to him a useless burden; and he was carrying, moreover, a pack of camp supplies on his broad back. He was tall, lean, leather-faced and long-jawed, with calm, light blue eyes under heavy brows; and he wore a stout, yellow-brown, homespun shirt, squirrel-skin cap, long leggings of deerhide, and oiled cowhide moccasins. He walked rapidly with a long, slouching stride that was almost a lope, his toes pointing straight ahead like an Indian's.

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When, suddenly, the bear lurched out into his trail and confronted him, the woodsman was in no way disturbed. The bear paused, swaying in surly fashion, about ten paces in front of him, completely blocking the trail. But the woodsman kept right on. The only attention he paid to the big, black stranger was to shout at him authoritatively—"Git out the way, thar!"

To his unbounded astonishment, however, the beast, instead of getting out of the way, ran at him with a snarling growl. The woodsman's calm blue eyes flamed with anger; but the life of the woods teaches one to think quickly, or rather, to act in advance of one's thoughts. He knew that with no weapon but his knife he was no match for such a foe, so, leaping aside as lightly as a panther, he darted around a tree, regained the trail beyond his assailant, and ran on at his best speed toward the river. He made sure that the bear had acted under a mere spasm of ill-temper, and would not take the trouble to follow far.

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When, once in a long time, a hunter or trapper gets the worst of it in his contest with the wild kindreds, in the majority of cases it is because he had fancied he knew all about bears. The bear is strong in individuality and delights to set at nought the traditions of his kind. So it happens that every now and then a woodsman pays with his life for failing to recognize that the bear won't always play by rule.

To the trapper's disgusted amazement, this particular bear followed him so vindictively that before he realized the full extent of his peril he was almost overtaken. He saw that he must deliver up his precious pack, the burden of which was effectively handicapping him in the race for life. When the bear was almost upon him, he flung the bundle away, with angry violence, expecting that it would at once divert the pursuer's attention.

In about ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, perhaps, it would have done so, for among other things it contained bacon and sugar, dainties altogether delectable to a bear's palate. But as luck would have it, the bundle so bitterly hurled struck the beast full on the snout, making him grunt with pain and fresh fury. From that moment he was a veritable demon of vengeance. Well enough he knew it was not the bundle, but the man who had thrown it, upon whom he must wipe out the affront. His hunger was all forgotten in red rage.

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Fortunate it was now for the tall woodsman that he had lived abstemiously and laboured sanely all that winter, and could depend upon both wind and limb. Fortunate, too, that on the open trail, cut years before by the lumbermen of the Big Fork Drive, the snow was already almost gone, so that it did not seriously impede his running. He ran almost like a caribou, with enough in reserve to be able to glance back over his shoulder from time to time. But seeing how implacable was the black bulk that pursued, he could not help thinking what would happen, there in the great, wet, shadow-mottled solitudes, if he should chance to trip upon a root, or if his wind should fail him before he could reach the camp. At this thought, not fear, but a certain disgust and impotent resentment, swelled his heart; and with a challenging look at the ancient trunks, the familiar forest aisles, the high, branch-fretted blue, bright with spring sunshine, he defied the wilderness, which he had so long loved and ruled, to turn upon him with such an unspeakable betrayal.

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The wilderness loves a master; and the challenge was not accepted. No root tripped his feet, nor did his wind fail him; and so he came out, with the bear raging some ten paces behind his heels, upon the banks of the Big Fork. Once across that quarter-mile of sloppy, rotting ice, he knew there was good, clear running to his cabin and his gun. His heart rose, his resentment left him, and he grinned as he gave one more glance over his shoulder.

As he raced down the bank, the trampling of the Falls, a mile away, roared up to him on a gust of wind. In spite of himself he could not but notice how treacherous the ice was looking. In spite of himself he noticed it, having no choice but to trust it. The whole surface looked sick, with patches of sodden white and sickly lead-colour; and down along the shore it was covered by a lane of shallow, yellowish water. It appeared placid and innocent enough; but the woodsman's practised eye perceived that it might break up, or "go out," at any moment. The bear was at his heels, however, and that particular moment was not the one for indecision. The woodsman dashed knee-deep through the margin water, and out upon the free ice; and he heard the bear, reckless of all admonitory signs, splash after him about three seconds later.

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On the wide, sun-flooded expanse of ice, with the dark woods beyond and soft blue sky above, the threat of imminent death seemed to the woodsman curiously out of place. Yet there death was, panting savagely at his heels, ready for the first mis-step. And there, too, a mile below, was death in another form, roaring heavily from the swollen Falls. And hidden under a face of peace, he

knew that death lurked all about his feet, liable to rise in mad fury at any instant with the breaking of the ice. As he thought of all this besetting menace, the woodsman's nerves drew themselves to steel. He set his teeth grimly. A light of elation came into his eyes. And he felt himself able to win the contest against whatever odds.

As this sense of new vigour and defiance spurred him to a fresh burst of speed, the woodsman took notice that he was just about half-way across the ice. "Good!" he muttered, counting the game now more than half won. Then, even as he spoke, a strange, terrifying sound ran all about him. Was it in the air, or beneath the ice? It came from everywhere at once,—a straining grumble, ominous as the first growl of an earthquake. The woodsman understood that dreadful voice very well. He wavered for a second, then sprang forward desperately. And the bear, pursuing, understood also. His rage vanished in a breath. He stumbled, whimpered, cast one frightened glance at the too distant shore behind him, then followed the woodsman's flight,—followed now, with no more heed to pursue.

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For less than half a minute that straining grumble continued. Then it grew louder, mingled with sharp, ripping reports, and long, black lanes opened suddenly in every direction. Right before the woodsman's flying feet one opened. He took it with a bound. But even as he sprang the ice went all to pieces. What he sprang to was no longer a solid surface, but a tossing fragment which promptly went down beneath the impact of his descent. Not for nothing was it, however, that the woodsman had learned to "run the logs" in many a tangled boom and racing "drive." His foot barely touched the treacherous floe ere he leaped again and yet again, till he had gained, by a path which none but a riverman could ever have dreamed of traversing, an ice-cake broad and firm enough to give him foothold. Beyond this refuge was a space of surging water, foam, and ice-mush, too broad for the essay of any human leap.

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The Big Fork, from shore to shore, was now a tossing, swishing, racing, whirling, and grinding chaos of ice-cakes, churning in an angry flood and hurrying blindly to the Falls. In the centre of his own floe the woodsman sat down, the better to preserve his balance. He bit off a chew from his plug of "blackjack," and with calm eyes surveyed the doom toward which he was rushing. A mile is a very short distance when it lies above the inevitable. The woodsman saw clearly that there was nothing to be done but chew his "blackjack," and wait on fate. That point settled, he turned his head to see what the bear was doing.

To his surprise, the animal was now a good fifty yards farther up-stream, having evidently been delayed by some vagary of the struggling ice. He was now sitting up on his haunches on a floe, and staring silently at the volleying cloud which marked the Falls. The woodsman was aware of a curious fellow feeling for the great beast which, not five minutes ago, had been raging for his life. To the woodsman, with his long knowledge and understanding of the wild kindreds, that rage and that pursuit now appeared as lying more or less in the course of events, a part of the normal savagery of Nature, and no matter of personal vindictiveness.

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Now that he and his enemy were involved in a common and appalling doom, the enmity was forgotten. "Got cl'ar grit, too!" he murmured to himself, as he took note of the quiet way the bear was eyeing the Falls.

And now it seemed to him that the trampling roar grew louder every second, drowning into dumbness the crashing and grinding of the ice; and the volleying mist-clouds seemed to race up-stream to meet him. Then, with a sickening jump and turn of his heart, a hope came and shook him out of his stoicism. He saw that his ice-cake was sailing straight for a little rocky islet just above the fall. Two minutes more would decide his fate,—at least for the time. He did not trouble to think what he would do on the island, if he got there. He rose cautiously and crouched, every sinew tense to renew the battle for life.

Another minute fled away, and the island was close ahead, wrapped in the roar and the mist-volleys. A cross-current seized the racing ice-cake, dragging it aside,—and the man clenched his fists in a fury of disappointment as he saw that he would miss the refuge after all. He made ready to plunge in and at least die battling. Then fate took yet another whim, and a whirling mass of logs and ice, colliding with the floe, forced it back to its original course. Another moment and it grounded violently, breaking into four pieces, which rolled off on either side toward the abyss. And the woodsman, splashing into the turbulent shallows, made good his hold upon a rock and dragged himself ashore.

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Fairly landed, he shook himself, spat coolly into the flood, and turned to see what was happening to his fellow in distress. To the roaring vortex just below him—so close that it seemed as if it might at any moment drag down the little island and engulf it—he paid no heed whatever, but turned his back contemptuously upon the tumult and the mists. His late enemy, alive, strong, splendid, and speeding to a hideous destruction, was of the keener interest to his wilderness spirit.



**"HE LAUNCHED HIMSELF AGAIN, DESPERATELY."**

The bear was now about twenty paces above the island; but caught by an inexorable current, he was nearly that distance beyond it. With a distinct regret, a pang of sympathy, the man saw that there was no chance of his adversary's escape. But the bear, like himself, seeing a refuge so near, was not of the temper to give up without a struggle. Suddenly, like a gigantic spring uncoiling, he launched himself forth with a violence that completely up-ended his ice-cake, and carried him over a space of churned torrent to the edge of another floe. Gripping this with his mighty forearms till he pulled it half under, he succeeded in clawing out upon it. Scrambling across, he launched himself again, desperately, sank almost out of sight, rose and began swimming, with all the energy of courage and despair combined. [281]

But already he was opposite the head of the island. Could he make it? The man's own muscles strained and heaved in unconscious sympathy with that struggle. The bear was a gallant swimmer, and for a moment it looked as if there might be the ghost of a chance for him. But no, the torrent had too deadly a grip upon his long-furred bulk. He would *just* miss that last safe ledge!

In his eagerness, and without any conscious thought of what he was doing, the man stepped down into the water knee-deep, bracing himself, and clinging with his left hand to a tough projecting root. Closer came the bear, beating down the splintered refuse that obstructed him, his long, black body labouring dauntlessly. Closer he came,—but not quite close enough to get his strong paws on the rock. A foot more would have done it,—but that paltry foot he was unable to make good. [282]

The man could not stand it. It was quite too fine a beast to be dragged over the Falls before his eyes, if he could help it. Reaching out swiftly with his right hand, he caught the swimmer by the long fur of his neck, and heaved with all his strength.

For a moment he wondered if he could hold on. The great current drew and sucked, almost irresistibly. But his grip was of steel, his muscles sound and tense. For a moment or two the situation hung in doubt. Then the swimmer, stroking desperately, began to gain. A moment more, and that narrow, deadly foot of space was covered. The animal got first one paw upon the rocks, then the other. With prompt discretion, the woodsman dropped his hold and stepped back to the top of the island, suddenly grown doubtful of his own wisdom.

Drawing himself just clear of the torrent, the bear crouched panting for several minutes, exhausted from the tremendous struggle; and the man, on the top of the rock, waited with his hand upon his knife-hilt to see what would come of his reckless act. In reality, however, he did not look for trouble, knowing the natures of the wild kindreds. He was merely holding himself on guard against the unexpected. But he soon saw that his caution was unnecessary. Recovering breath, the bear clambered around the very edge of the rocks to the farther side of the island, as far as possible from his rescuer. There he seated himself upon his haunches, and devoted himself to gazing down, as if fascinated, at the cauldron from which he had been snatched. [283]

During the next half-hour the woodsman began to think. For the present, he knew that the bear was quite inoffensive, being both grateful and overawed. But there was no food on the island for either, except the other. So the fight was bound to be renewed at last. And after that, whoever might be the victor, what remained for him? From that island, on the lip of the fall and walled about with wild rapids, there could be no escape. The situation was not satisfactory from any point of view. But that it was clear against his principles to knuckle down, under any conditions, to beast, or man, or fate, the woodsman might have permitted himself to wish that, after all, his ice-cake had missed the island. As it was, however, he took another bite from his plug of "blackjack," and set himself to whittling a stick. [284]

With a backwoodsman's skill in the art of whittling, he had made good progress toward the shaping of a toy hand-sled, when, looking up from his task, he saw something that mightily changed the face of affairs. He threw away the half-shaped toy, thrust the knife back into his belt, and rose to his feet. After a long, sagacious survey of the flood, he drew his knife again, and proceeded to cut himself a stout staff, a sort of alpenstock. He saw that an ice-jam was forming just above the falls.



The falls of the Big Fork lie at a sharp elbow of the river, and cross the channel on a slant. Immediately above them the river shoals sharply; and though at ordinary seasons there is only one island visible, at times of low water huge rocks appear all along the brink. It chanced, at this particular time, that after the first run of the ice had passed there came a second run that was mixed with logs. This ice, moreover, was less rotten than that which had formed near the falls, and it came down in larger cakes. When some of these big cakes, cemented with logs, grounded on the head of the island, the nucleus of a jam was promptly formed. At the same time some logs, deeply frozen into an ice-floe, caught and hung on one of the unseen mid-stream ledges. An accumulation gathered in the crook of the elbow, over on the farther shore; and then, as if by magic, the rush stopped, the flood ran almost clear from the lip of the falls, and the river was closed from bank to bank.

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The woodsman sat quietly watching, as if it were a mere idle spectacle, instead of the very bridge of life, that was forming before his eyes. Little by little the structure welded itself, the masses of drift surging against the barrier, piling up and diving under, till it was compacted and knit to the very bottom,—and the roar of the falls dwindled with the diminishing of the stream. This was the moment for which the man was waiting. Now, if ever, the jam was solid, and might hold so until he gained the farther shore. But beyond this moment every second of delay only served to gather the forces that were straining to break the obstruction. He knew that in a very few minutes the rising weight of the flood must either sweep all before it, or flow roaring over the top of the jam in a new cataract that would sweep the island bare. He sprang to his feet, grasped his stick, and scanned the tumbled, precarious surface, choosing his path. Then he turned and looked at the bear, wondering if that animal's woodcraft were subtler than his own to distinguish when the jam was secure. He found that the bear was eyeing him anxiously, and not looking at the ice at all; so he chuckled, told himself that if he didn't know more than a bear he'd no business in the woods, and stepped resolutely forth upon the treacherous pack. Before he had gone ten paces the bear jumped up with a whimper, and followed hastily, plainly conceding that the man knew more than he.

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In the strange, sudden quiet, the shrunken falls clamouring thinly and the broken ice swishing against the upper side of the jam, the man picked his way across the slippery, chaotic surface of the dam, expecting every moment that it would crumble with a roar from under his feet. About ten or a dozen yards behind him came the bear, stepping hurriedly, and trembling as he looked down at the diminished cataract. The miracle of the vanishing falls daunted his spirit most effectively, and he seemed to think that the whole mysterious phenomenon was of the man's creating. When the two reached shore, the flood was already boiling far up the bank. Without so much as a thank you, the bear scurried past his rescuer, and made off through the timber like a scared cat. The man looked after him with a slow smile, then turned and scanned the perilous path he had just traversed. As he did so, the jam seemed to melt away in mid-channel. Then a terrific, rending roar tortured the air. The mass of logs and ice, and all the incalculable weight of imprisoned waters hurled themselves together over the brink with a stupefying crash, and throbbing volumes of spray leapt skyward. The woodsman's lean face never changed a muscle; but presently, giving a hitch to his breeches under the belt, he muttered thoughtfully:

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"Blame good thing we come away when we did!"

Then, turning on his larriganed heels, he strode up the trail till the great woods closed about him, and the raving thunders gradually died into quiet.

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## The Keeper of the Water-Gate

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**"IT WOULD HAVE SEEMED LIKE NO MORE THAN A DARKER, SWIFTLY-MOVING SHADOW IN THE DARK WATER."**

## **The Keeper of the Water-Gate**

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Some distance below the ice, through the clear, dark water of the quiet-running stream, a dim form went swimming swiftly. It was a sturdy, broad-headed, thick-furred form, a little more than a foot in length, with a naked, flattened tail almost as long as the body. It held its small, handlike forepaws tucked up under its chin, and swam with quick strokes of its strong hind legs and eel-like wriggings of the muscular tail. It would have seemed like no more than a darker, swiftly-moving shadow in the dark water, save for a curious burden of air-bubbles which went with it. Its close under-fur, which the water could not penetrate, was thickly sprinkled with longer hairs, which the water seemed, as it were, to plaster down; and under these long hairs the air was caught in little silvery bubbles, which made the swimmer conspicuous even under two inches of clear ice and eighteen inches of running water.

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As he went, the swimmer slanted downward and aimed for a round hole at the bottom of the bank. This hole was the water-gate of his winter citadel; and he, the keeper of it, was the biggest and pluckiest muskrat on the whole slow-winding length of Bitter Creek.

At this point Bitter Creek was about four feet deep and ten or twelve feet wide, with low, bushy shores subject to overflow at the slightest freshet. Winter, setting in suddenly with fierce frost, had caught it while its sluggish waters were still so high from the late autumn rains that the bushes and border grasses were all awash. Now the young ice, transparent and elastic, held them in firm fetters. The flat world of field and wood about Bitter Creek was frozen as hard as iron, and a biting gale, which carried a thin drift of dry, gritty snow, was lashing it pitilessly. The branches snapped and creaked under the cruel assault, and not a bird or beast was so hardy as to show its head abroad. But in the muskrat's world, there under the safe ice, all was as tranquil as a May morning. The long green and brown water-weeds swayed softly in the faint current, with here and there a silvery young chub or an olive-brown sucker feeding lazily among them. Under the projecting roots lurked water-snails, and small, black, scurrying beetles, and big-eyed, horn-jawed larvæ which would change next spring to aerial forms of radiance. And not one of them, muskrat, chub, or larva, cared one whit for the scourge of winter on the bleak world above the ice.

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The big muskrat swam straight to the mouth of the hole, and plunged half-way into it. Then he suddenly changed his mind. Backing out abruptly, he darted up to the surface close under the edge of the bank. Along the edge of the bank the ice-roof slanted upward, the water having fallen several inches since the ice had set. This left a covered air space, about two inches in height, all along the fringes of the grass roots; and here the muskrat paused, head and shoulders half out of water, to take breath. He was panting heavily, having come a long way under water without stopping to empty and refill his long-suffering little lungs. Two inches over his head, on the other side of the ice, the thin, hard snow went driving and swirling, and he could hear the alders straining under the bitter wind. His little, bead-bright eyes, set deep in his furry face, gleamed

with satisfaction over his comfortable security.

Having fully eased his lungs, the muskrat dived again to the bottom, and began to gnaw with fierce energy at a snaky mass of the roots of the yellow material. Having cut off a section about as long as himself, and more than an inch in thickness, he tugged at it fiercely to loosen the fibres which held it to the bottom. But this particular piece was more firmly anchored than he had expected to find it, and presently, feeling as if his lungs would burst, he was obliged to ascend to the air-space under the ice for a new breath. There he puffed and panted for perhaps a minute. But he had no thought of relinquishing that piece of succulent, crisp, white-hearted lily-root. As soon as he had rested, he swam down again, and gripping it savagely tore it loose at the first pull. Holding the prize lengthwise that it might not obstruct his entrance, he plunged into the hole in the bank, the round, black water-gate to his winter house. [294]

The house was a most comfortable and strictly utilitarian structure. The entrance, dug with great and persistent toil from the very bottom of the bank, for the better discouragement of the muskrat's deadliest enemy, the mink, ran inward for nearly two feet, and then upward on a long slant some five or six feet through the natural soil. At this point the shore was dry land at the average level of the water; and over this exit, which was dry at the time of the building, the muskrat had raised his house. [295]

The house was a seemingly careless, roughly rounded heap of grass-roots, long water-weeds, lily-roots and stems, and mud, with a few sticks woven into the foundation. The site was cunningly chosen, so that the roots and stems of a large alder gave it secure anchorage; and the whole structure, for all its apparent looseness, was so well compacted as to be secure against the sweep of the spring freshets. About six feet in diameter at the base, it rose about the same distance from the foundation, a rude, sedge-thatched dome, of which something more than three feet now showed itself above the ice.

To the unobservant eye the muskrat house in the alders might have looked like a mass of drift in which the rank water-grass had taken root. But within the clumsy pile, about a foot below the centre of the dome, was a shapely, small, warm chamber, lined with the softest grasses. From one side of this chamber the burrow slanted down to another and much larger chamber, the floor of which, at the present high level of the water, was partly flooded. From this chamber led downward two burrows,—one, the main passage, by which the muskrat had entered, opening frankly, as we have seen, in the channel of the creek, and the other, longer and more devious, terminating in a narrow and cunningly concealed exit, behind a deeply submerged willow-root. This passage was little used, and was intended chiefly as a way of escape in case of an extreme emergency,—such as, for example, the invasion of a particularly enterprising mink by way of the main water-gate. The muskrat is no match for the snake-swift, bloodthirsty mink, except in the one accomplishment of holding his breath under water. And a mink must be very ravenous, or quite mad with the blood-lust, to dare the deep water-gate and the long subaqueous passage to the muskrat's citadel, at seasons of average high water. In time of drought, however, when the entrance is nearly uncovered and the water goes but a little way up the dark tunnels, the mink will often glide in, slaughter the garrison, and occupy the well-built citadel. [296]

The big muskrat, dragging his lily-root, mounted the narrow, black, water-filled passage till he reached the first chamber. Here he was met by his mate, just descending from the upper room. She promptly appropriated the piece of lily-root, which the big muskrat meekly gave up. He had fed full before coming, and now had no care except to clean his dragged fur and make his toilet before mounting to the little dry top chamber and curling himself up for a nap. [297]

This toilet was as elaborate and painstaking as that of the cleanliest of cats or squirrels. He was so loose-jointed, so loose-skinned, so flexibly built in every way, that he could reach every part of his fur with his teeth and claws at once. He would seem to pull great folds of skin from his back around under his breast, where he could comb it the more thoroughly. It was no trouble at all for him to scratch his left ear with his right hind foot. He went about his task with such zeal that in a very few minutes his fur was as fluffy and exquisite as that of a boudoir kitten. Then he rubbed his face, eyes, and ears vigorously with both forepaws at once in a half-childish fashion, sitting up on his hind-quarters as he did so. This done, he flicked his tail sharply two or three times, touched his mate lightly with his nose, and scurried up to the little sleeping-chamber. Something less than a foot above his head the winter gale howled, ripped the snow-flurries, lashed the bushes, sent the snapped twigs hurtling through the bare branches, turned every naked sod to stone. But to the sleeping muskrat all the outside sound and fury came but as a murmur of Jun trees. [298]

His mate, meanwhile, was gobbling the lily-root as if she had not eaten for a week. Sitting up like a squirrel, and clutching the end of the root with both little forepaws, she crushed the white esculent into her mouth and gnawed at it ravenously with the keen chisels of her teeth. The root was as long as herself, and its weight perhaps a sixth of her own. Yet when it was all eaten she wanted more. There were other pieces stored in the chamber; and indeed the whole house itself was in great part edible, being built largely of such roots and grasses as the muskrat loves to feed on. But such stores were for emergency use. She could forage for herself at present. Diving down the main passage she presently issued from the water-gate, and immediately rose to the clear-roofed air-space. Here she nibbled tentatively at some stems and withered leafage. These proving little to her taste, she suddenly remembered a clam-bed not far off, and instantly set out for it. She swam briskly down-stream along the air-space, her eyes and nose just out of the water, the ice gleaming silvery above her head.

She had travelled in this position perhaps fifty yards when she saw, some twelve or fifteen feet ahead of her, a lithe, dark, slender figure with a sharp-nosed, triangular head, squeeze itself over a projecting root which almost touched the ice. The stranger was no larger than herself,—but she knew it was not for her to try conclusions with even the smallest of minks. Catching a good lungful of air, she dived on the instant, down, down, to the very bed of the creek, and out to mid-channel.

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The mink, eagerly desirous of a meal of muskrat-meat, dived also, heading outward to interrupt the fugitive. He swam as well as the muskrat,—perhaps faster, indeed, with a darting, eel-like, deadly swiftness. But the stream at this point had widened to a breadth of twelve or fifteen yards,—and this was the little muskrat's salvation. The mink was afraid to follow her to such a distance from the air-space. He knew that by the time he overtook her, and fixed his teeth in her throat, he would be fairly winded; and then, with no breathing-hole at hand, he would die terribly, bumping up against the clear ice and staring madly through at the free air for which his lungs were agonizing. His fierce heart failed him, and he turned back to the air-space under the bank. But the sight of the muskrat had whetted his appetite, and when he came to the muskrat house in the alders, he swam down and thrust his head inside the water-gate. He even, indeed, went half-way in; but soon instinct, or experience, or remembered instruction, told him that the distance to the air-chamber was too great for him. He had no more fancy to be drowned in the muskrat's winding black tunnel, than under the clear daylight of the ice; so he turned away, and with red, angry eyes resumed his journey up-stream.

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The little muskrat, seeing that her enemy was disheartened, went on cheerfully to the clam-bed. Here she clawed up from the oozy bottom and devoured almost enough clams to make a meal for a full-grown man. But she took longer over her meal than the man would, thereby saving herself from an otherwise imminent indigestion. Each bivalve, as she got it, she would carry up to the air-space among the stones, selecting a tussock of grass on which she could rest half out of the water. And every time, before devouring her prize, she would carefully, though somewhat impatiently, cleanse her face of the mud and dead leafage which seemed to be an inseparable concomitant of her digging. When she had eaten as many clams as she could stuff into her little body, she hastened back to join her mate in the safe nest over the water-gate.

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In the upper world the winter was a severe one, but of all its bitterness the muskrats knew nothing, save by the growing thickness of the ice that sheltered them. As Bitter Creek shrank to normal, winter level, and the strong ice sank in mid-channel, the air-space along shore increased till they had a spacious, covered corridor in which to disport themselves. Food was all about them—an unlimited abundance of lily-roots and clams; and once in awhile their diet was varied by the capture of a half-torpid sucker or chub. There were no otters in Bitter Creek; and the mink, which had investigated their water-gate so hungrily, got caught in a trap at an open spring up-stream, where he was accustomed to fish for eels. So the muskrats had no dangerous enemies to mar their peace.

The spring thaws came suddenly, while the ice was yet strong, and the flood went wide over the low banks of Bitter Creek. But the little house among the alders withstood them sturdily. The water rose till it filled the lower chamber. Inch by inch it crept up the last passage, till it glistened dimly just an inch below the threshold. But it never actually touched that threshold; and the little grass-lined retreat stayed warm and dry. Then the ice went out, under the sun and showers of late April, and the waters sank away as rapidly as they had risen; and the muskrats, wild with the intoxication of spring, rolled, played, and swam gaily hither and thither on the surface of the open creek. They made long excursions up and down-stream for the sheer delight of wandering, and found fresh interest in every clam-flat, lily cove, or sprouting bed of sweet-flag. Their appetites they had always with them; and though it was fun to chase each other, or to roll and wallow luxuriously on the cool surface of the water when the sun shone warm, there was nothing quite so worth while, day in and day out, as eating. Other muskrats now appeared, the wander-spirit seizing them all at once; and the males had many fierce fights, which left their naked tails scarred and bleeding. But the big muskrat, from the house in the alders, was denied the joy of battle, because none of his rivals were so hardy as to confront him.

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About this pleasant season, in the upper chamber over the water-gate, was born a family of nine very small and very naked young muskrats. Their big father was amiably indifferent to them, and spent most of his time, when at home, in the lower chamber, which was now dry and clean enough for his luxurious tastes. Their small mother, however, was assiduous in her care; and in an exceedingly short time the youngsters, very sleek and dark in their first fur, were investigating the wonderful, great world beyond their water-gate. They had prodigious appetites, and they grew prodigiously. One, on their very first outing, got snapped up by a greedy black duck. The attention of the little mother was just then occupied, and, never having learned to count up to nine, she, apparently, never realized her loss; but she was destined to avenge it, a week or two later, by eating two new-hatched ducklings of that same black duck's brood. Another of the little muskrats encountered fate on the threshold of his existence, being snatched by the hungry jaws of a large pickerel, which darted upon him like lightning from under the covert of a lily-pad. But in this case, vengeance was instant and direct. The big muskrat chanced to be near by. He caught the pickerel, while the latter was preoccupied with his meal, bit clean through the back of his neck, and then and there devoured nearly half of him. In the engrossing task of cleaning his fur after this feast, and making his toilet, which he did with minute nicety on a stranded log by the shore, he promptly forgot the loss to his little family, the wrong which he had so satisfactorily and appropriately avenged. As for the remaining seven, they proceeded to grow

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up as rapidly as possible, and soon ceased to stand in any danger of pickerel or mallard.

Though fairly omnivorous in his tastes, the big muskrat, like all his tribe, was so content with his lilies, flag-root, and clams, that he was not generally regarded as a foe by the birds and other small people of the wilderness. He was too well fed to be a keen hunter.

Having learned (and taught his fellows) to avoid muskrat-traps, the big muskrat enjoyed his lazy summer life on Bitter Creek with a care-free spirit that is permitted to few, indeed, of the furtive kindred of the wild. There was no mink, as we have seen, to beware of; and as for hawks, he ignored them as none of the other small wild creatures—squirrels, hares, or even the fierce and fearless weasel—could afford to do. The hawks knew certain inconvenient capacities of his kind. When, therefore, that sudden alarm would ring clamorous over the still, brown woods, that shrill outcry of the crows, jays, and king-birds, which sends every weak thing trembling to cover, the big muskrat would sit up, untroubled, on his log, and go on munching his flag-root with as fine an unconcern as if he had been a bear or a bull moose.

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**"WITH A SCREAM OF PAIN AND FEAR, THE BIRD DROPPED HIM."**

But one day, one late, rose-amber afternoon, when the gnats were dancing over the glassy creek, he was startled out of this confidence. He was standing in shallow water, digging out an obstinate, but tempting root, when there arose a sudden great outcry from all the birds. It meant "A hawk!—A hawk!—A hawk!—A hawk!" He understood it perfectly; but he never lifted his head from his task. Next moment there was a mighty rush of wind in his ears; a thunderbolt seemed to strike him, frightful claws gripped him, piercing his back, and he was swept into the air. But it was a young hawk, unversed in the way of the muskrat, which had seized him. What those steely claws really clutched was little more than a roll of loose skin. Hurt, but not daunted, the muskrat twisted his head up and back, and sank his long, punishing incisors into the enemy's thigh. He did not hang on, in bulldog fashion, but cut, cut, cut, deep through the bird's hard feather armour, and into the cringing red strata of veins and muscles. With a scream of pain and fear, the bird dropped him, and he fell into the water. At first, he dived deep, fearing a second attack, and came up under a tangle of grasses, from which he could peer forth unseen. Then, perceiving that the hawk had vanished, he, by and by, came out of the grass, and paddled to his favourite log. He was bleeding profusely, and his toilet that evening was long and painful. But in a few days he was as well as ever, with an added confidence.

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About this time, however, a small, inquisitive, and particularly bloodthirsty mink came down from the upper waters of the creek, where game had grown scarce under the ravages of her insatiable and implacable family. One of her special weaknesses was for muskrat-meat, and many a muskrat house she had invaded so successfully that the long, smothering, black, drowned galleries had no more terrors for her.



She came to the house in the alders. She noted its size, and realized that here, indeed, was good hunting. She swam down to the water-gate at the bottom of the channel, poked her nose in, and returned to the surface for a full supply of air. Then, with great speed, she dived again, and disappeared within the blackness of the water-gate.

It chanced that the big muskrat was just descending. From the inner darkness he saw the enemy clearly, before her savage, little, peering eyes could discover him. He knew all the deadliness of the peril. He could easily have escaped, turning back and fleeing by the other passage while the foe went on to her bloody work in the chambers. There was no time to warn the rest.

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But flight was far from the big muskrat's mind in that crucial moment. Not panic, but a fierce hate blazed in his usually good-natured eyes. With a swift, strenuous kick of his powerful hind legs, he shot downward upon the enemy, and grappled with her in the narrow tunnel.

The mink had seen him just before he fell upon her, and quicker than thought itself had darted up her snake-like jaws to gain the fatal throat-hold. But long success had made her over-confident. No muskrat had ever, within her experience, even tried to fight her. This present impetuous attack she mistook for a frantic effort to crowd past her and escape. Half careless, therefore, she missed the fatal hold, and caught only a mouthful of yielding skin. Before she could try again—borne down and hampered as she was by the muskrat's weight—a set of long, tenacious teeth, crunching and cutting, met in the side of her face, just at the root of the jaw.

This time the muskrat was wise enough to hold on. His deep grip held like a vise. The mink's teeth, those vindictive teeth that had killed and killed for the mere joy of killing, now gnashed impotently. In utter silence, there in the choking deep, the water in their eyes and ears and jaws, they writhed and strove, the mink's lithe body twisting around her foe like a snake. Then, with a convulsive shudder, her struggles ceased. Her lungs had refused to hold the strained breath any longer. They had opened—and the water had filled them. Her body trailed out limply; and the muskrat, still maintaining that inexorable grip, dragged her out through the water-gate which he had so well kept. Out in the brown, blurred light of the current he still held her down, jamming her head into a patch of bright sand, until the ache of his own lungs gave him warning. Then, carrying the body to the surface, he flung it scornfully over a root to await the revival of his appetite, and proceeded to calm his excitement by a long, elaborate toilet. Steely dark and cold the waters of Bitter Creek slipped by between their leafless, bushy banks. And inside the dome of the house in the alders the thick-furred muskrat colony slept luxuriously, little dreaming of the doom just averted from their door.

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## When the Moose Cow Calls

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## When the Moose Cow Calls



he smell of the burning rubbish heaps—the penetrating November smell—spread up from the clearings and filled the chilly, windless evening air. It seemed a sort of expression of the cold sky, those pale steel-gray and sea-green wastes, deepening into sharp straight bands of orange and smoke colour along the far horizon. It seemed equally an expression of the harsh, darkening upland pastures, dotted with ragged stumps and backed by ragged forests. It was the distinctive autumn smell of the backwoods settlements, that smell which, taken into the blood in childhood, can never lose its potency of magic, its power over the most secret springs of memory and longing.

On the rude snake fence at the back of the pasture sat a boy, with a roll of birch bark in his hands. The bark was fashioned into the shape of a fish-horn, and the boy handled it proudly. He took deep breaths of the pungent-smelling air, and felt an exciting thrill as he glanced over his shoulder at the dark woods just behind him. It was for the sake of this thrill, this delicious though unfounded apprehension, that he had come here to the very back of the pasture, in the twilight, after bringing up the cows from the milking. The cows he couldn't see, for they were feeding in the lower pasture, just under the rise of the hill. The lights beginning to glimmer in the farmhouse were very far down in the valley; and very far down were the little creeping flames whence came that pungent smell pervading the world; and the boy felt his spirit both expand and tremble before the great spaces of the solitude.

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It was for the purpose of practising privately the call of the cow-moose that the boy had betaken himself to the lonely back pasture. On the previous evening an old hunter, just back from a successful "calling" over on Nictau Lake, had given the boy some lessons in this alluring and suggestive department of woodcraft, and had made his joy complete by the gift of the bark "moose-call" itself, a battered old tube with many "kills" to its credit. The boy, with his young voice just roughening toward the bass of manhood, had proved an apt pupil. And the hunter had not only told him that practice would make him a first-class "caller," but had promised to take him hunting next season. This promise had set the boy's imagination aflame, and all day he had been dreaming of tall moose-bulls, wide-antlered, huge-belled, black of mane and shoulder.

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Of course, when he went up to the fence of the back pasture to practise his new accomplishment, the boy had no idea of being heard by anything in the shape of a bull-moose, still less of being able to deceive that crafty animal. Had he imagined the possibility of gaining any response to his call, he would have come well-armed, and would have taken up his post in the branches of some safe tree. But it was getting near the end of the season, and what was more to the purpose, there ran a tradition in the settlement that the moose never came east of Five Mile Creek, a water-course some four miles back from the fence whereon the boy was sitting. Such traditions, once established in a backwoods village, acquire an authority quite superior to fact and proof against much ocular refutation. The boy had an unwavering faith that, however seductively he might sound the call of the cow, never a moose bull would hear him, because never a moose bull could be found this side of Five Mile Creek. It was fascinating to pretend,—but he had no will to evoke any monstrous apparition from those dark woods behind him, on which he found it so thrillingly hard to keep his back turned.

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After sitting silent and moveless for a few minutes, listening to the vague, mysterious stir of the solitude till his eyes grew wide as a watching deer's, the boy lifted his birchen tube in both hands, stretched his neck, and gave forth the harsh, half-bleating bellow, or bray, with which the cow-moose signals for a mate. It was a good imitation of what the old hunter had done, and the boy was proud of it. In his exultation he repeated it thrice. Then he stopped to listen,—pretending, as boys will, that he expected an answer.

The silence following upon that sonorous sound seemed startling in its depth; and the boy held his breath lest he should mar it. Then came an unexpected noise, at which the boy's heart jumped into his throat,—a sharp crashing and rattling of branches, as if somebody was thrashing the underbrush with sticks. It seemed to be some hundreds of yards away, beyond the farthest fence of the pasture. For a moment the boy wondered tremulously what it could be. Then he thought he understood. "Some fool steer's got through the fence and gone stumbling through the brush piles," he muttered to himself. The explanation had the merit of explaining; and when the sound had ceased the boy once more set the bark trumpet to his lips and sounded its harsh appeal.

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This time he called twice. As he paused to draw breath, a little creepy feeling on the skin of his cheeks and about the roots of his hair made him turn his head and fix his eyes upon a dense spruce thicket some twenty paces behind him. Surely there was a movement among the young spruce tops. Almost as smoothly as a mink slips from a rock the boy slipt down from his too conspicuous perch and crouched behind the fence. Peering between the rails he saw a tall, dark shape, with gigantic head, vast antlers, and portentous bulk of shoulder, step noiselessly from the thicket and stand motionless. With a heart that throbbed in mingled exultation and terror, the boy realized that he had called a bull-moose.

Huge as seemed its stature to the boy's excited vision, the moose was in reality a young and rather small bull, who had been forced by stronger rivals to go unmated. Driven by his restless desire, he had wandered beyond his wonted range. Now he stood like a statue, head uplifted, peering on every side to catch sight of the mate whose voice had so resistlessly summoned him. Only his wide ears moved, waving inquisitively. His nostrils, ordinarily his chief source of information, were dulled almost to obtuseness by that subtly acrid perfume of the smoke.

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The boy in his fence corner, with a gray stump beside him, shrank within himself and stared through half-closed eyes, trembling lest the mighty stranger should detect him. He had a very reasonable notion that the mighty stranger might object to the deception which had been practised upon his eager emotions, and might not find the old rail fence much barrier to his righteous wrath. For all his elation, the boy began to wish that he had not been in such haste to learn moose-calling. "Don't call till you've some idea who'll answer!" was a rule which he deduced from that night's experience.

It is possible that the bull, during those few minutes while he stood waiting and watching, saw the dim figure of the boy behind the fence. If so, the figure had no concern for him. He caught nothing of the dreaded man-smell; and he had no reason to associate that small, harmless creature with the mate to whose calling he had sped so eagerly. But there was no doubt that the calling had come from this very place. Was it possible that the cow, more coquettish than her kind are apt to be, had hidden herself to provoke him? He came closer to the fence, and uttered a soft grumble in his throat, a sound both caressing and appealing. "My! how disappointed he'll be!" thought the boy, and devoutly wished himself safe at home.

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At this trying moment came relief from an unexpected quarter. That distant threshing of the bushes which the boy had heard after his first calling had not been a stray steer. Not by any means. It was the response of another young wandering moose bull, beating on the underbrush with his ill-developed, but to himself quite wonderful, antlers. He, too, was seeking a mate in a region far remote from that where ruled the tyrannous elder bulls. Silently and swiftly, assured by the second summons, he had hurried to the tryst; and now, to his ungovernable rage, what he saw awaiting him in the dusk was no mate at all, but a rival. Pausing not to consider the odds, he burst from the covert and rushed furiously to the attack.

The first bull, though somewhat the larger of the two, and by far the better antlered, was taken at a disadvantage. Before he could whirl and present his formidable front to the charge, the newcomer caught him on the flank, knocked him clear off his feet, and sent him crashing into the fence. The fence went down like stubble; and the boy, his eyes starting with astonished terror, scurried like a rabbit for the nearest tree. Climbing into the branches with an agility which surprised even himself, he promptly recovered from his panic and turned to watch the fight.

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The first bull, saved from serious injury by the defects of his adversary's antlers, picked himself up from the wreckage of the fence, and, grunting with anger, plunged back to meet his assailant. The latter, somewhat puzzled by the fence and its zig-zag twistings, had drawn a little to one side, and so it happened that when the first bull rushed at him, the angle of a fence corner intervened. When the opposing antlers came together, they met harmlessly between the heavy rails, and got tangled in a way that seemed to daunt their owners' rage. In the pushing and struggling the top rail was thrown off and fell smartly across the newcomer's neck. At the same time one of the stakes flew up and caught the first bull fairly on the sensitive muzzle. Sneezing violently, he jumped back; and the two stood eyeing each other with fierce suspicion over the top of the fence.

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The boy was trembling with excitement there in his tree, eager for the fight to go on and eager to see which would win. But in this he was doomed to disappointment. The end came in a most unlooked-for fashion. It chanced that the boy's "calling" had deceived others besides the two young bulls. The old hunter, in his cabin under the hill, had heard it. He had snatched his rifle from behind the door, and stolen swiftly up to the back pasture.

From a clump of hemlock not fifty yards away came a red flash and a sharp report. The bull on the near side of the fence sprang into the air with a gasping cough, and fell. The smaller bull, who knew what guns meant, simply vanished. It was as if the dusk had blotted him out, so noiselessly and instantaneously did he sink back into the thickets; and a moment later he was heard crashing away through the underbrush in mad flight. As the hunter stepped up to examine his prize, the boy dropped from the tree, grabbed his birch-bark tube, and came forward proudly.

"There wasn't any cow at all,—'cept me!" he proclaimed, his voice ringing with triumph.

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## The Passing of the Black Whelps

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"OVER THE CREST OF THE RIDGE, INKY BLACK  
FOR AN INSTANT AGAINST THE MOON, CAME A  
LEAPING DEER"

## The Passing of the Black Whelps

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lopsided, waning moon, not long risen, looked over the ragged crest of the ridge, and sent long shadows down the sparsely wooded slope. Though there was no wind, and every tree was as motionless as if carved of ice, these spare, intricate shadows seemed to stir and writhe, as if instinct with a kind of sinister activity. This confusion of light and dark was increased by the patches of snow that still clung in the dips and on the gentler slopes. The air was cold, yet with a bitter softness in it, the breath of the thaw. The sound of running water was everywhere—the light clamour of rivulets, and the rush of the swollen brooks; while from the bottom of the valley came the deep, pervading voice of the river at feshet, labouring between high banks with its burden of sudden flood.

Over the crest of the ridge, inky black for an instant against the moon, came a leaping deer. He vanished in a patch of young firs. He shot out again into the moonlight. Down the slope he came in mighty bounds, so light of foot and so elastic that he seemed to float through the air. From his heaving sides and wild eyes it was evident that he was fleeing in desperation from some appalling terror. Straight down the slope he came, to the very brink of the high bluff overlooking the river. There he wheeled, and continued his flight up the valley, his violent shadow every now and then, as he crossed the spaces of moonlight, projecting grotesquely out upon the swirling flood.

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Up along the river bluff he fled for perhaps a mile. Then he stopped suddenly and listened, his sensitive ears and dilating nostrils held high to catch the faintest waft of air. Not a sound came to him, except the calling of the waters; not a scent, save the raw freshness of melting snow and the balsamic tang of buds just beginning to thrill to the first of the rising sap. He bounded on again for perhaps a hundred yards, then with a tremendous leap sprang to one side, a full thirty feet, landing belly-deep in a thicket of scrub juniper. Another leap, as if he were propelled by steel springs, carried him yet another thirty feet aside. Then he turned, ran back a couple of hundred yards parallel to his old trail, and lay down in a dense covert of spruces to catch breath and ease his pounding heart. He was a very young buck, not yet seasoned in the craft of the wilderness, and his terror shook him. But he knew enough to take his snatched rest at the very edge of his covert, where his eyes could watch the back trail. For a quarter of an hour, however, nothing appeared along that staring trail. Then he got up nervously and resumed his flight, still ascending the valley, but now slanting away from the river, and gradually climbing back toward the crest of the ridge. He had in mind a wide reach of swales and flooded meadows, still miles away, wherein he might hope to elude the doom that followed him.

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Not long after the buck had vanished there arose a strange sound upon the still, wet air. It came in a rising and falling cadence from far behind the ridge, under the lopsided moon. It was a high, confused sound, not unmusical, but terrifying—a cry of many voices. It drifted up into the silvery night, wavered and diminished, swelled again, and then died away, leaving a sense of fear upon the quiet that followed. The soft clamour of the waters, when one noticed them again, seemed to have taken a new note from the menace of that cadenced cry.

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Presently over the top of the ridge, at the gap wherein had first appeared the form of the leaping buck, a low, dark shape came, moving sinuously and with deadly swiftness. It did not bound into the air and float, as the buck had seemed to do, but slid smoothly, like a small, dense patch of cloud-shadow—a direct, inevitable movement, wasting no force and fairly eating up the trail of the fleeing deer.

As it came down the slope, disappearing in the hemlock groves and emerging upon the bright, snowy hollows, the dread shape resolved itself into a pack of seven wolves. They ran so close, so evenly, with fanged muzzles a little low, and ample, cloudy tails a little high, that one might have almost covered the whole deadly pack with a table-cloth. Their tongues were hanging out, and their eyes shot green fire. They were fiercely hungry, for game was scarce and cunning that winter on their much ravaged range, and this chase was already a long one. When the trail of the buck wheeled at the river-brink, the leader of the pack gave one short howl as he turned, barely escaping the abyss. It seemed to him that the buck must have been nearly winded, or he would not, even for an instant, have contemplated taking to such mad water. With the renewed vigour of encouragement, he swept his pack along up the edge of the bluff.

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On the pack-leader's right flank ran a sturdy wolf of a darker colour than his fellows—nearly black, indeed, on the top of his head, over his shoulders, and along his stiff-haired backbone. Not quite so tall or so long-flanked as the leader, he had that greater breadth of skull between the eyes which betokens the stronger intelligence, the more individualized resourcefulness. He had a look in his deep-set, fierce eye which seemed to prophesy that unless the unforeseen should happen he would ere long seize the leadership to himself.

But—the unforeseen did happen, at that moment. The trail, just there, led across a little dip wherein the snow still lingered. Thinly covered by the snow lay a young pine-tree, lightning shivered and long dead. Thrust up from the trunk was a slim, sharp-pointed stub, keen and hard and preserved by its resin. Upon this hidden dagger-point, as he ran, the dark wolf planted his right fore foot—planted it fair and with a mighty push. Between the spreading toes, between the fine bones and sinews and the cringing nerves of the foot, and out by the first joint of the leg it thrust its rending way.

At the suddenness of the anguish the dark wolf yelped, falling forward upon his muzzle as he did so, and dropping from his place as the pack sped on. But as he wrenched his foot free and took one stumbling stride forward, the pack stopped, and turned. Their long white fangs snapped, and the fire in their eyes took a different hue.

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Very well the dark wolf knew the meaning of the halt, the turn, the change in his fellows' eyes. He knew the stern law of the pack—the instant and inevitable doom of its hurt member. The average gray wolf knows how to accept the inevitable. Fate itself—the law of the pack—he does not presume to defy. He will fight—to justify his blood, and, perhaps, to drug his despair and die in the heat of the struggle. But he does not dream of trying to escape.

And in this fashion, fighting in silence, this dark wolf would have died at the brink of the river bluff, and been eaten by his fellows ere they continued their chase of the leaping buck—in this fashion would he have died, but for that extra breadth of skull between the eyes, that heightened individualism and resourcefulness. Had there been any chance to escape by fighting, fighting would have been the choice of his fierce and hardy spirit. But what was he against six? [329]

Defying the fiery anguish in his foot, he made a desperate leap which took him to the extreme overhanging edge of the bluff. Already the jaws of the executioners were gnashing at his heels. A second more and they would have been at his throat. But before that second passed he was in mid-air, his legs spread wide like those of a squirrel, falling to the ice-cakes of the swollen river. From the brink above, the grim eyes of the baffled pack flamed down upon him for an instant, and then withdrew. What was a drowned wolf, when there was a winded buck not far ahead?

But the black-shouldered wolf was not drowned. The flood was thick, indeed, with crunching ice-cakes and wallowing logs and slowly turning islets of uprooted trees and the *débris* of the winter forest. But fortune so favoured the wolf that he fell in a space of clear water, instead of being dashed to a pulp on ice-cake or tree trunk. He disappeared, came to the surface gasping, struck out hardily through the grim and daunting turmoil, and succeeded in gaining one of those islets of toughly interlaced *débris* which turned slowly in the flood. Upon this precarious refuge, crouched shivering on the largest tree root and licking persistently at his wounded paw, he was carried swiftly down-stream through the roar of waters. [330]

## II.

When the lopsided moon, now hung high over a low, desolate shore of blanched rampikes, was fading to a papery whiteness against a sky of dawn, the roar of the river grew louder, and the islet, no longer slowly revolving, plunged forward, through a succession of wallowing waves, over a wild half-mile of ledges, and joined itself to a wider and mightier stream. The wolf, drenched, shivering, and appalled by the tumult, clung to his refuge by tooth and claw; and the islet, being well compacted, held together through the wrenching plunges, and carried its burden safely forth upon the quiet current.

For a day and a night and a day the starving wolf voyaged down the flood, till his gaunt sides clung together, and a fierce ache gnawed at his vitals. But with the fasting and the ceaseless soothing of his tongue his wound rapidly healed; and when, after sunset of his second evening on the river, the islet grounded in an eddy under the bank, he sprang ashore with speed little impaired. Only a limp and an ache remained to remind him of the hurt which had so nearly cost him his life and had exiled him to untried hunting-grounds. [331]

His feet once more on firm ground, the wolf halted warily. The air that came down the bank carried a strange and warning scent. Noiselessly he crept up the steep, went through a few yards of shrubbery like a ghost, and peered forth upon a rough back-settlement road. At one side he saw a cabin, with a barn near it, and two long-horned steers (he had seen steers at a lumber camp in his own wild land), thrusting their muzzles over the fence. Down the road toward the cabin came a man, in gray homespun and cowhide larrigans, with an axe over his shoulder. It was the man-smell which had made the wolf so cautious.

With savage but curious eyes he watched the man, with no thought of attacking alone so redoubtable a foe. Presently the latter began to whistle, and at the incomprehensible sound the wolf shrank back, fear mingled with his curiosity. But when the man was well past, there came a new scent upon the air, a scent quite unknown to him; and then a small black and white cur trotted into view, nosing along the roadside in quest of chipmunks. The jaws of the starving wolf dripped water at the sight. He gathered himself for a rush. He saw that the man had disappeared. The dog ran across the road, sniffing a new chipmunk trail, and halted, in sudden apprehension, not five feet from the hidden wolf. There was a rustle, a leap, a sharp yelp; and the wolf was back into cover with his prey. [332]

Emboldened by the success of this, his first hunting in the unknown land, the wolf slept for a few hours in his bushy retreat, and then, when the misshapen moon was up, went prowling cautiously around the outskirts of the scattered little settlement. Everywhere the man-smell kept him on his guard. Once he was careless enough to get between the wind and a farmyard, whereupon a watchful cur started a barking, which was taken up and kept up for an hour by all the dogs of the village. At this the wolf, with snarling, contemptuous jaws apart, withdrew to a knoll, sat quietly erect upon his haunches, and waited for the din to subside. He noted carefully the fact that one or two men were aroused by the alarm, and came out to see what was the matter. When all was quiet again he sought the house of the nearest yelper, took him by surprise, and killed him in sheer rage, leaving his torn body beside the very door-step, instead of dragging it away for a later meal. This was a mistake in hunting craft. Had he been more familiar with the man-folk, his wide-skulled intelligence would have taught him better than to leave a clue behind him in this careless fashion. [333]





**"HE BARED HIS FANGS DISDAINFULLY."**

From the farmyard he wandered back toward the hills, and came upon a lonely sheep pasture. Here he found killing so easy that he slew in wantonness; and then, about daybreak, gorged and triumphant, withdrew to a rocky hillside, where he found a lair to his taste.

Later in the day, however, he realized his mistake. He had called down upon himself the wrath of the man-folk. A din of dogs aroused him, and, mounting a rock, he saw a motley crowd of curs upon his trail, with half a dozen men following far behind them. He bared his fangs disdainfully, then turned and sought the forest at a long gallop, which, for all his limp and his twinge, soon carried him beyond ear-shot of his pursuers.

For hours he pressed on ever eastward, with a little trend to the south, crossing many a trail of deer, caribou, and moose, passing here and there a beaver village, and realizing that he had come to wonderful hunting-grounds. But when he came to the outskirts of another settlement, he halted. His jaws ran water at the thought of finding another sheep pasture, and he decided to range for awhile in this neighbourhood. He was quick to realize the disadvantage of man's proximity, but he would dare it for a little before retiring into the untainted wilderness. He had learned his lesson quickly, however. That night he refrained from stirring up the dogs of the settlement; and he killed but one sheep, in a secluded corner of the pasture.

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Now, by singular chance, it happened that at this particular settlement there was already a sheep-killer harrying the thick-wooled flocks. A wandering peddler, smitten with a fever while visiting the settlement, had died, and left to pay for his board and burial only his pack and his dog. The dog, so fiercely devoted to him as to have made the funeral difficult, was a long-legged, long-haired, long-jawed bitch, apparently a cross between a collie and a Scotch deerhound. So unusual a beast, making all the other dogs of the settlement look contemptible, was in demand; but she was deaf, for a time, to all overtures. For a week she pined for the dead peddler; and then, with an air of scornful tolerance, consented to take up her abode with the village shopkeeper. Her choice was made not for any distinction in the man, but for a certain association, apparently, with the smell of the contents of her late master's pack. For months she sulked and was admired, making friends with neither man, woman, nor child, and keeping all the village curs at a respectful distance.

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A few days, however, before the arrival of the journeying wolf, a new interest had entered into the life of the long-jawed bitch. Her eyes resumed their old bright alertness, and she grew perceptibly less ungracious to the loafers gathered around the stove in the back store. She had entered upon a career which would have ended right speedily with a bullet in her reckless brain, but for an utterly unlooked-for freak of fate. She had discovered that, if every night she could hunt, run down, and kill one sheep, life might again become worth living, and the coarse-clodded grave in the little lonely cemetery might be forgotten. It was not the killing, but the chase, that she craved. The killing was, of course, merely the ecstatic culmination. So she went about the sport with artistic cunning. To disguise her trail she came upon the flocks from the side of the forest, as any wild beast would. Then she would segregate her victim with a skill born of her

collie ancestry, set it running, madden it to the topmost delirium of fear and flight, and almost let it escape before darting at its throat and ending the game with the gush of warm blood between her jaws.

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Such had been her adventures for three nights: and already the settlement was concerned, and already glances of half-formed suspicion had been cast upon the long-legged bitch so innocently asleep by the stove, when the wandering wolf arrived upon the outskirts of the settlement. The newcomer was quick to note and examine the tracks of a peculiarly large dog—a foeman, perhaps, to prove not unworthy of his fangs. And he conducted his reconnoitring with more care. Then he came upon the carcass of a sheep, torn and partly eaten. It was almost like a wolf's work—though less cleanly done—and the smell of the cold trail was unmistakably dog. The black-backed wolf was puzzled. He had a vague notion that dogs were the protectors, not the hunters, of all the four-legged kindred belonging to men. The problem seemed to him an important one. He crouched in ambush near the carcass to consider it for a time, before setting out upon his own sheep-hunting.

As he crouched, watching, he saw the killer approach. He saw a tall, lean bitch come up, tear carelessly at the dead sheep for a moment or two, in a manner of ownership, and turn to leave. She was as long in leg and flank as himself, and possessed of the like punishing jaws; but she was not so massive in the shoulder. The wolf felt that he could master her in combat; but he felt no disposition for the fight. The dog-smell that came to his nostrils did not excite the usual hot aversion. On the contrary, it made him desire to know more of the sheep-killing stranger.

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But acquaintance is not made lightly among the wild kindred, who are quick to resent a presumption. The wolf slipped noiselessly back into his covert, emerged upon the farther side of the thicket, and at a distance of some twenty paces stood forth in the glimmering light. To attract the tall bitch's attention he made a soft, whining sound.

At the unexpected noise behind her the bitch wheeled like lightning. At sight of the big wolf the hair rose along her back, her fangs bared themselves dangerously, and she growled a deep note of challenge. For some seconds the wolf thought she would fly at him; but he stood motionless, tail drooping humbly, tongue hanging a little way from his lips, a soft light in his eyes. Then he sat back upon his haunches, let his tongue hang out still farther, and drooped his head a little to one side—the picture of conciliation and deference.

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The long-jawed bitch had never before seen a wolf, but she recognized him at once as a natural enemy. There was something in his attitude of unoffending confidence, however, which made her hesitate to attack, although he was plainly a trespasser. As she eyed him, she felt her anger melting away. How like he was to certain big, strong dogs which she had seen once or twice in her wanderings with the peddler! and how unlike to the diminutive, yelping curs of the settlement! Her bristling hairs smoothed themselves, the skin of her jaws relaxed and set itself about her teeth in a totally different expression; her growling ceased, and she gave an amicable whine. Diffidently the two approached each other, and in a few minutes a perfect understanding was established.

That night they hunted sheep together. In the joy of comradeship and emulation, prudence was scattered to the winds, and they held a riot of slaughter. When day broke a dozen or more sheep lay dead about the pastures. And the wolf, knowing that men and dogs would soon be noisy on their trail, led his new-found mate far back into the wilderness.

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### III.

The tall bitch, hating the settlement and all the folk therein, was glad to be quit of it. And she found the hunting of deer far more thrilling than the tame pursuit of sheep. Slipping with curious ease the inherited sympathies of her kind, she fell into the ways of the wild kindred, save for a certain brusque openness which she never succeeded in laying off.

For weeks the strangely mated pair drifted southward through the bright New Brunswick spring, to come to a halt at last in a region to their liking between the St. John and the Chiputneticook chain of lakes. It was a land of deer and rabbits and ducks, with settlements small and widely scattered; a land where never a wolf-snout had been seen for half a hundred years. And here, on a thick-wooded hill-slope, the wanderers found a dry cave and made it their den.

In due course the long-jawed bitch bore a litter of six sturdy whelps, which throve amazingly. As they grew up they showed almost all wolf, harking back to the type—save that in colour they were nearly black, with a touch of tan in the gray of their under parts. When they came to maturity, and were accredited hunters all, they were in general larger and more savage than either of their parents, differing more widely, one from another, than would the like number of full-blooded wolves. The eight, when they hunted together, made a pack which, for strength, ferocity, and craft, no like number of full-blooded wolves in all Canada could have matched.

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The long-jawed bitch, whose highly developed brain guided, for the most part, the destinies of the pack, for a time kept them from the settlement and away from the contact with men; and the existence of wolves in the Chiputneticook country was not dreamed of among the backwoods settlements. In this policy she was backed by the sagacity and strength of her mate, under whose wide-arched skull was a clear perception of the truth that man is the one master animal. But the hybrid whelps, by some perversion of inherited instinct, hated man savagely, and had less dread of him than either of their parents. More than once was the authority of the leaders sharply

strained to prevent a disastrous attack upon some unsuspecting pair of lumbermen, with their ox-team and their axes.



**"THEY PROWLED AND HOWLED ABOUT THE DOOR."**

The second winter of the wolves in the Chiputneticook country proved a very hard one—game scarce and hunting difficult; and toward the end of February the pack drew in toward the settlements, in the hope of more abundant foraging. Fate promptly favoured the move. Some sheep, and a heifer or two, were easily killed, with no calamitous result; and the authority of the leaders was somewhat discredited. Three of the young wolves even went so far as to besiege a solitary cabin, where a woman and some trembling children awaited the return of the man. For two hideous moonlit hours they prowled and howled about the door, sniffing at the sill, and grinning in through the low window; and when the sound of bells came near they withdrew sullenly, half-minded to attack the man and horse.

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A few nights after this, when the pack was following together the discouraging trail of a long-winded and wily buck, they crossed the trail of a man on snow-shoes. This trail was fresher, and to the young wolves it seemed to promise easier hunting. The leaders were overruled, and the new trail was taken up with heat.

The trail was that of a gaunt, tan-faced backwoodsman, on his way to a lumber camp a few miles down the other side of the lake. He was packing a supply of light needfuls, of which the lumbermen had unexpectedly run short, and he was pressing forward in haste to avoid a second night on the trail. The pack was carried high on his powerful shoulders, in a manner to interfere as little as possible with his long, snow-shoeing stride. In one hand he carried his axe. From under the brim of his coonskin cap his piercing gray eyes kept watch with a quiet alertness—expecting no danger, indeed, and fearing none, but trained to cool readiness for every vicissitude of the wild.

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He was travelling through a stretch of heavy timber, where the moonlight came down in such scant streaks that he had trouble in picking a clear path, when his ear was caught by an unwonted sound far behind him. He paused to listen, no unwonted sound being matter of indifference to them who range the wood. It came again, long-drawn and high and cadenced. The big woodsman looked surprised. "I'd 'a' took my oath," said he to himself, "ther' wa'n't a wolf in New Brunswick! But I knowed the deer'd bring 'em back afore long!" Then, unconcernedly, he resumed his tramp, such experience as he had had with wolves in the West having convinced him that they would not want to meddle with a man.

In a few minutes, however, the instinct of the woods awoke in him suddenly, and told him that it was not some buck, but himself, whom the hunting pack were trailing. Then the sound came again, perceptibly nearer, though still far off. The woodsman gave a grunt of impatience, angry to

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think that any four-foot creature of the forest should presume to hunt *him*. But the barest prudence told him that he should make haste for the open. Under protest, as it were, he broke into a long trot, and swerved to the right, that he might sooner reach the lake.

As he ran, the novel experience of feeling himself pursued got on his nerves, and filled him with rage. Were there not plenty of deer in the woods? he thought, indignantly. He would teach the vermin a lesson. Several times he was on the point of stopping and waiting, to have it out with them as soon as possible. But wisdom prevailed, and he pushed on to the open. On the lake, the moonlit snow was packed hard, and the running good. About a mile from shore a little, steep, rocky island, upthrusting itself boldly, suggested to the woodsman that if his pursuers were really going to have the audacity to attack him, it might be well to have his back to a rock, that he might not be surrounded. He headed for the island, therefore, though with protest in his heart. And just as he got to it the wolves emerged from cover, and darted out upon the shining level. [344]

"Looks like they really meant it!" growled the big woodsman, loosing his pack-strap, and setting his jaws for a fight.

When the pack came near he was astonished first at the stature and dark colour of its members, and he realized, with a sudden fury, that the outcome was not so assured as he had taken for granted it would be. Perhaps he would never see camp, after all! Then he was further astonished to note that one of the pack-leaders looked like a dog. He shouted, in a voice of angry command; and the onrushing pack hesitated, checked themselves, spread apart. From that dominating voice it was evident that this was a creature of power—not to be attacked carelessly, but to be surrounded.

That voice of command had thrilled the heart of the long-jawed bitch. Something in it reminded her of the dead peddler, who had been a masterful man. She would have none of this hunting. But she looked at each of her savage whelps, and knew that any attempt to lead them off would be worse than vain. A strange hatred began to stir within her, and her fangs bared toward them as if they, not the man against the rock, were the enemy. She looked again at the man, and saw the bundle, so like a peddler's pack, at his feet! Instantly her heart went out to him. She was no longer a wolf, but a dog; and there was her master—not her old master, but such a one as he had been. At his side, and fighting his foes, was her place. Like a flash, she darted away from her companions, stopped a few feet in front of the ready woodsman, turned about, and faced the pack with a savage growl. Her hair was stiffly erect from neck to tail; her long, white teeth were bared to the roots; her eyes were narrowed to slits of green flame; she half-crouched, ready to spring in mad fury and tear the throat of any beast which should try to hurt the man. [345]

As for the woodsman, he knew dogs, and was not greatly surprised at his strange ally. At her sudden approach he had swung his axe in readiness, but his cool eye had read her signals aright. "Good dog!" he said, with cheerful confidence. "We'll lick the varmints!"

But the young wolves went wild with rage at this defection and defiance, and rushed in at once. They sprang first upon the bitch; though one, rushing past, leaped venomously at the woodsman's throat. This one got the axe in his skull, and dropped without a sound. Meanwhile, the old wolf, who had been holding back in uncertainty, had made his decision. When he saw his mate attacked, his doubts vanished, and a red haze for an instant went over his eyes. These unnatural whelps that attacked her—he suddenly saw them, not as wolves at all, but as dogs, and hated them with a deadly hate. Silently he fell upon the nearest, and tore him savagely. He was too late, however, to save his mistress. The long-jawed bitch, for all her strength and her valiant spirit, was overwhelmed by her powerful offspring. One she had killed, and for one she had crunched a leg-joint to splinters; but now she lay mangled and still under the struggle. The brute whose leg-joint she had smashed dragged out from the *mêlée*; and her faithful mate, the wide-skulled old wanderer wolf, found himself in the death-grapple with three raging adversaries, each fairly his match for weight and strength. True wolf, he fought in silence; but in his antagonists the mixed breed came out, and they fought with yelps and snarls. [346]

At this juncture, fortunately for the old wolf, the woodsman's understanding eye had penetrated the whole situation. He saw that the black-haired beasts were the common enemy; and he fell upon the three with his axe. His snow-shoes he had kicked off when making ready for the struggle. In his mighty grasp the light axe whirled and smote with the cunning of a rapier; and in a few seconds the old wolf, bleeding but still vigorous, found himself confronting the man across a heap of mangled black bodies. The man, lowering his axe, looked at the bleeding wolf with mingled doubt and approbation. The wolf glared back for an instant,—fear, hate, and grief in the green gleam of his eyes,—then turned and fled, his pace accelerated by the cheerful yell which the man sent after him. [347]

"He's got the sand, sure!" muttered the woodsman, to himself, wiping his axe. "Glad I didn't hev to knock him on the head, too!"

Then turning about, he saw the disabled whelp trying to sneak off, and, with unerring aim, threw his axe. The black mongrel sank with a kick, and lay still. The woodsman got out his pipe, slowly stuffed it with blackjack, and smoked contemplatively, while he stood and pondered the slain. He turned over the bodies, and patted the fur of the long-jawed bitch, which had so splendidly turned back to her traditions in the time of need. As he thought, the main elements of the story unfolded themselves to him. Considerately he carried the limp body, and securely buried it under a heap of stones on the island. The rest he cached carelessly, intending to return and skin them on the morrow. [348]

"Them black pelts'll be worth somethin', I reckon!" he said to himself with satisfaction as he took up his pack.

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## The Homeward Trail

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### The Homeward Trail



In the lumber camp, far back upon the lonely headquarters of the Quah-Davic, there was the stir of something unusual afoot. It was Christmas Eve, and every kerosene lamp, lantern, and candle that the camp could boast, was blazing. The little square windows gleamed softly through the dust and cobwebs of unwashed years. For all the cold that snapped and bit through the stillness of the forest night, the door of the camp was thrown wide open, and from it a long sheet of light spread out across the trodden and chip-littered snow. Around the doorway crowded the rough-shirted woodsmen, loafing and smoking after their prodigious dinner of boiled pork, boiled beans, and steaming-hot molasses cake. The big box-stove behind them, which heated the camp, was wearing itself to a dull red glow; and the air that rushed out with the light from the open door was heavy with the smell of wet woollens, wet larrigans, and wet leather. Many of the men were wearing nothing on their feet but their heavy, home-knit socks of country yarn; but in these they did not hesitate to come out upon the dry snow, rather than trouble themselves to resume their massive foot-gear.

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Before the door, in the spread of the light, stood a pair of sturdy, rough-coated gray horses, hitched to a strong box sled, or "pung." The bottom of the pung was covered thick with straw, and over the broad, low seat were blankets, with one heavy bearskin robe. Into the space behind the seat a gaunt, big-shouldered man was stowing a haunch of frozen moose-meat. A lanky, tow-haired boy of fifteen was tucking himself up carefully among the blankets on the left-hand side of the seat. The horses stood patient, but with drooping heads, aggrieved at being taken from the stable at this unwonted hour. In the pale-blue, kindly, woods-wise eyes of both the man and the boy shone the light of happy anticipation. They seemed too occupied and excited to make much response to the good-natured banter of their comrades, but grinned contentedly as they hastened their preparations for departure. The man was Steve Williams, best axe-man and stream-driver in the camp; the boy, young Steve, his eldest son, who was serving as "cookee," or assistant to the camp cook. The two were setting out on a long night drive through the forest to spend Christmas with their family, on the edge of the lonely little settlement of Brine's Brook.

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When all was ready, the big-shouldered woodsman slipped into the seat beside his son, pulled the blankets and the bearskin all about him, and picked up the reins from the square dashboard. A sharp *tchk* started the horses, and, amid a chorus of shouts,—good nights and Merry Christmases, and well-worn rustic pleasantries,—the loaded pung slid forward from the light into the great, ghost-white gloom beyond. The sled-bells jangled; the steel runners crunched and sang frostily; and the cheerful camp, the only centre of human life within a radius of more than twenty miles, sank back behind the voyagers. There was the sound of a door slamming, and the bright streak across the snow was blotted out. The travellers were alone on the trail, with the solemn ranks of trees and the icy-pointed stars.

They were well prepared, these two happy Christmas adventurers, to face the rigours of the December night. Under their heavy blanket-coats were many thicknesses of homespun flannel. Inside their high-laced, capacious "shoe-packs" were several pairs of yarn socks. Their hands were covered by double-knit home-made mittens. Their heads were protected by wadded caps of muskrat fur, with flaps that pulled down well over the ears. The cold, which iced their eyelashes, turned the tips of their up-turned coat-collars and the edges of their mufflers to board, and made the old trees snap startlingly, had no terrors at all for their hardy frames. Once well under way, and the camp quite out of sight, they fell to chatting happily of the surprise they would give the home folks, who did not expect them home for Christmas. They calculated, if they had "anyways good luck," to get home to the little isolated backwoods farmhouse between four and five in the morning, about when grandfather would be getting up by candle-light to start the kitchen fire for mother, and then go out and fodder the cattle. They'd be home in time to wake the three younger children (young Steve was the eldest of a family of four), and to add certain little carven products of the woodsman's whittling—ingenious wooden toys, and tiny elaborate boxes, filled with choicest globules of spruce gum—to the few poor Christmas gifts which the resourceful and busy little mother had managed to get together against the festival. As they talked these things over, slowly and with frugal speech, after the fashion of their class, suddenly was borne in upon them a sense of the loneliness of the home folks' Christmas if they should fail to come. Under the spell of this feeling, a kind of inverted homesickness, their talk died into silence. They sat thinking, and listening to the hoarse jangle of their bells.

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In such a night as this, few of the wild kindreds were astir in the forest. The bears, raccoons, woodchucks, and chipmunks were snugly "holed up," and sleeping away the great white cold. The deer and moose were in their well-trodden "yards," for the snow was deep. The travellers knew that there were plenty of wood-mice astir,—that if there had been light enough they would have



seen their delicate trails wandering everywhere among the trees. But the jangling of the sled-bells was enough to keep all shy beasts at a distance. Only the porcupine was quite undaunted by the strange sounds. One came out into the middle of the road, and stood there seemingly to dispute passage. The boy, in whom primal instincts were still dominant, was for getting out and killing the insolent little bristler. But the father turned the team aside, and gracefully yielded the road, saying:

"Let him be, son! The woods is his'n as much as our'n. An' I respect him, fer he ain't skeered of nothin' that goes on legs!" [356]

An hour later, when the boy was getting very drowsy from watching the ceaseless procession of dark fir-trees, his father nudged him, and whispered, "Look!" The boy, wide awake on the instant, peered into the gloom, and presently his trained young eyes made out a shadowy, slouching form, that flitted without a sound from tree to tree.

"Lucivee?" he asked, breathless with interest, laying his mittened hand on his little rifle under the blankets.

"Yes, lucivee! lynx!" answered the father.

"Let me take a shot at him," said the boy, removing the mitten from his right hand, and bringing out his weapon.

"Oh, what's the good o' killin' the beast Christmas times!" protested the father, gently. And the boy laid down the gun.

"What does he think he's follerin' us fer?" he inquired, a moment later.

"The moose-meat, maybe!" replied the man. "He smells it likely, an' thinks we're goin' to give it to him for a Christmas present!"

At this suggestion the boy laughed out loud. His clear young voice rang through the frosty shadows; and the lynx, surprised and offended, shrank back, and slunk away in another direction. [357]

"Bloodthirsty varmints, them lucivees!" said the boy, who wanted a lynx-skin as a trophy. "Ain't it better to shoot 'em whenever one gits the chance?"

"Well," said the father, dubiously, "maybe so! But there's better times fer killin' than Christmas times!"

A little farther ahead, the road to Brine's Brook turned off. Here the going was very heavy. The road was little travelled, and in places almost choked up by drifts. Most of the time the horses had to walk; and sometimes the man and boy had to get out and tramp a path ahead of the discouraged team.

"At this rate, dad, we ain't a-goin' to git home in time fer breakfast!" exclaimed the boy, despondently. To which the man replied, "Don't you fret, son! It'll be better goin' when we git over the rise. You git into the pung now an' take the reins, an' let me do the trampin'."

The boy, who was tired out, obeyed gladly. He gathered up the reins,—and in two minutes was sound asleep. The man smiled, tucked the blankets snugly around the sleeping form, and trudged on tirelessly for a couple of hours, the horses floundering at his heels. Then the drifts ceased. The man kicked the snow from his trousers and shoe-packs, and climbed into the pung again. "We'll make it in time fer breakfast yet!" he murmured to himself, confidently, as the horses once more broke into a trot. [358]

They were traversing now a high table-land, rather sparsely wooded, and dotted here and there with towering rampikes. Suddenly from far behind came a long, wavering cry, high-pitched and peculiarly daunting. The horses, though they had probably never heard such a sound before, started apprehensively, and quickened their pace. The man reined them in firmly; but as he did so he frowned.

"I've hearn say the wolves was comin' back to these here parts," he muttered, "now that the deer's gittin' so plenty agin! But I didn't more'n half-believe it afore!"

Presently the grim sound came again. Then the man once more awoke the boy.

"Here's somethin' to interest you, lad," said he, as the latter put a mittened fist to sleepy eyes. "Hark to that there noise! Did you ever hear the like?"

The boy listened, paled slightly, and was instantly wide awake. [359]

"Why, that's like what I've read about!" he exclaimed. "It must be wolves!"

"Nary a doubt of it!" assented his father, again reining the uneasy horses down to a steady gait. "They've followed the deer back, and now, seems like their a-follerin' us!"

The boy looked thoughtful for a moment, then said, carelessly:

"Oh, well, I reckon there's deer a-plenty for 'em, an' they're not likely to come too nigh us, lookin' fer trouble. I reckon they ain't much like them Roosian wolves we read about, eh, dad?"

"I reckon," agreed the father. At the same time, it was with a certain satisfaction that he set his

foot on his trusty axe, amid the straw in the bottom of the pung.

As the high, quavering voices drew nearer, the horses grew more and more alarmed; but the man soothed them with his voice, and sternly held them in, husbanding their strength lest there should be more heavy going farther ahead. At length, some three hundred yards behind them, they caught a glimpse of their pursuers, four swiftly running shapes.

"Only four!" cried the boy, scornfully, as he patted his little rifle. "I thought there was always more'n that in a pack!" [360]

"You needn't grumble," said the man, with a grin. "It's gittin' home fer breakfast we're after, not fightin' wolves, son!"

The road was so much better now that the man gave the horses their head a little, and the pung flew over the singing snow. But in a few minutes the four wolves, though keeping a distance of a couple of hundred yards, were running abreast of them. The animals were evidently unacquainted with horses or men, and shy about a close investigation. The sled-bells, too, were to them a very suspicious phenomenon. Deer, assuredly, were safer hunting; but they would, at least, keep this strange, new kind of quarry in sight for awhile, to see what might turn up.

For the next half-hour there was no change in the situation. From time to time, where the woods thickened, the wolves would draw nearer to the pung; and the boy, with shining eyes, would lift his rifle. But presently they would sheer off again; and the boy grew more and more scornful. Then came the winter dawn, a creeping, bitter gray, and for a few minutes the forest was an unreal place, full of ghosts, and cold with a cold to pierce the soul. Then, a growing, spreading, pervading glory of pink and lilac and transparent gold. As the light streamed through the trees, the wolves got a clearer view of their quarry; and perceiving in it a something distinctly dangerous, they dropped the chase and faded back into the thickets. The man looked at the boy's disappointed face, and said, smilingly: [361]

"I reckon they was extry-ordinary civil, seein' us home that way through the woods!"

A few moments later the woods were left behind, and the travellers came out among the snowy stump-fields. There below them, half-way down the hill, was home, bathed in the sparkling sun. Smoke was pouring cheerfully from the chimney; and there in the yard was grandfather, bringing in a pail of milk from the barn.

"Mother'll have breakfast jest about ready!" cried the man, his rough face tender and aglow.

"But I wisht I could've brought her a nice wolf-skin for Christmas!" exclaimed the boy, sighing softly as he laid down the little rifle.

## THE END.

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