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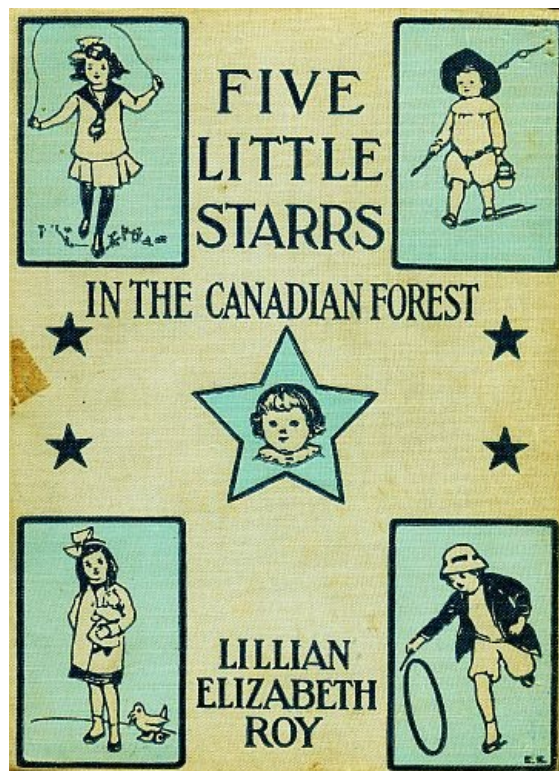
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**Mike Sat Down on a Log to
Watch Over the Children.**

FIVE LITTLE STARRS IN THE CANADIAN FOREST

BY

LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY

AUTHOR OF THE "BLUE BIRD SERIES"



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I A LUMBER CAMP IN PROSPECT	7
II A LUMBER CAMP IN WINTER	30
III THE INDIAN TRAPPER	53
IV THE ENGINEER'S ASSISTANTS	76
V JUMPIN' JANE'S ANTICS	100
VI OUTDOOR FUN IN A LUMBER CAMP	126
VII CHRISTMAS AT THE LUMBER CAMP	147
VIII MIKE'S BEAR TRAP	170
IX FATHER BEAR VISITS THE CAMP	190
X AFLOAT ON THE RIVER RAFT	212

FIVE LITTLE STARRS IN A CANADIAN FOREST

[7]

CHAPTER I

A LUMBER CAMP IN PROSPECT

"DADDUM, are we 'most there?" asked Dorothy Starr, impatiently, as the uncomfortable local train creaked over its uneven tracks through dense forests in Western Ontario.

"Almost, Dot—have a little more patience and soon you will be able to exercise those active little legs," returned Mr. Starr, as he consulted his watch.

[8]

"Guess we'll all be glad to exercise after this awful smoky, crampy ride," grumbled Donald, Dot's twin brother.

"Our winter in the lumber camp will have to be mighty fine to make us forget this outlandish trip ever since we left Grand Forks," declared Meredith Starr, the oldest boy.

"We have one consolation, Mete, and that is, we don't have to travel home in the Spring by the same route," laughed his sister Lavinia.

"Well, children, you all have had some remark to make about the discomforts of this car and the dreadful condition of the tracks, but it is far better than riding in a springless lumber wagon for the same distance," commented Mrs. Starr, shifting the baby's sleepy head from her shoulder to her knees.

[9]

"We'd never have come if Daddum knew we had to travel *that* way!" exclaimed Don.

"No, but Daddum had to travel that way, and on horseback, years ago, before this track was laid," replied Mrs. Starr.

"Did you, Daddum? Oh, do tell us about it!" cried the restless children, as they crowded into the seat beside their father.

"It isn't an exciting tale, but it is very appropriate at this time," replied Mr. Starr, smiling at the eager faces. "I was a very young man then. I didn't find out until I returned to New York after that trip what a prize your mother was."

[10]

"Oh, how does Mumzie know about the trip, then?" asked Dot.

"Because I have often told her how that trip decided for me my future business life," replied Mr. Starr.

"Dot, please don't interrupt Daddum with silly questions again," said Lavinia to her little sister.

"When I got off the train at Grand Forks, on that trip, I expected to meet an old friend at the station, but he was not there. I stopped at the best hotel in the town, which would have been about sixth-rate anywhere else, and the next morning my friend Dean came in. He had had to ride about forty miles out of his way on account of a flooded river and that was why he was not on time to meet me.

[11]

"Well, after he had made a few purchases in town he was ready to start back. I had a good horse waiting for me at the hotel shed, and soon we were on the return trip.

"The further north we went the more beautiful and wilder the scenery became until I thought we would be lost in the dense primeval forests. How Dean managed to find his way I could not make out, but he seemed to know every stump, every mound, and every blaze on the trees along the trail.

[12]

"We stopped at noon to rest the horses and have a bite to eat. While we lay under the trees smoking our pipes and waiting for the horses to finish their oats, an old hunter passed by.

"We invited him to join us but he was anxious to meet an Indian trapper some miles further on, so we were compelled to decline Dean's invitation.

"After finishing our pipes, we started on the last half of our journey.

"We hadn't gone more than four miles before we saw in the trail the deep cut of a wagon-track that struck in from a side-trail that led to an eastern lumber-town.

[13]

"'Huh! Must be pretty heavy pulling for the horses,' said Dean, knowing that it would take a heavy load to make the wheels sink down so far in the soft soil.

"'Were they here yesterday, when you came by?' I asked.

"'No, and I should say the outfit wasn't very far ahead, either,' replied Dean.

"And so it was. In a short time we caught up with a kind of 'prairie-schooner' wagon, and found

that a pioneer with his family had dared the wilderness of the Canadian forest to wrest a living from the earth.

"Dean rode alongside for a time, giving the man some valuable points about the country, and advising him as to the best trails. The man thanked us profusely as we rode on. [14]

"While Dean talked with the man I rode by the side of the wagon and spoke with the wife who was a very sweet woman of about thirty. She held a child about two years old in her lap while a boy of five slept upon a bundle of clothing on the rough wagon-floor.

"Now, this family had come from a town eighty miles east of the trail where we met them, and they were bound for a distant, fertile valley about a hundred miles further to the west where they intended to stop and look about for a permanent home. The woman and children were stiff and sore from the jolts of the springless wagon as it bumped over huge rocks, or suddenly slid into wide ruts made by washouts. But they never complained about aching bones, for they knew the father couldn't help them, and they were trying to keep up his spirits. [15]

"Dean and I continued along the trail until we came to the flooded region that made him miss my coming the day before. The river seemed higher than ever, Dean said, and we had to try the roundabout way again. We traveled along the banks for at least thirty miles, but not a spot could be found where we could ford, or even swim our horses.

"Finally, we pulled rein to discuss the problem, when Dean saw a thin wreath of smoke rising among the trees near at hand. As no forester ever permits the sight of smoke to go uninvestigated for fear of forest fires, he jumped off of his horse and rushed into the woods. After a short time he returned with our friend the hunter and an Indian. [16]

"The men say we can't get over to-day—we'll have to wait about until the water recedes somewhat,' Dean explained.

"Can't we cross where you did last night?' I asked.

"Not to-day—the water has risen much higher since then and it would be taking too much of a chance to risk it. We'll stay here until it is safe,' said Dean, as he led his horse into the woods toward the Indian's temporary camp. [17]

"I followed the three men and wondered how the Indian ever got the name of Mike. Later I heard that his own name was so hard to pronounce that everyone who knew him abbreviated it to 'Mike'.

"Well, we camped and hunted and fished there with the two elderly men for a week before we could go on, but it was a week of rare sport, for the hunter and trapper were experts, and they had many exciting stories to tell of narrow escapes from wild animals and other adventures.

"Dean and I finally arrived at the lumber camp where the men had decided to send out a scout to trail Dean, who they feared was lost, or injured somewhere on the way. So, they were greatly relieved to see us ride along the river-road that led into the camp which consisted of a small group of huts." [18]

"Daddum, that story wasn't as good as most of yours are," criticised Don.

"Perhaps not, my son," laughed Mr. Starr, "for I see we are nearing our destination and I only planned to keep up the tale long enough to keep you from thinking of your tired selves."

"Get there in about seven minutes, sir," announced the old conductor as he shuffled through the car. [19]

"Hurrah!" cried Don, jumping upon the seat to get his baggage.

"Why, I can't see any town!" exclaimed Dot, looking out of the car window.

"Don't bother about the town, Dot, but take your hat and jacket out of the rack," advised Lavinia, who was busy trying to gather together the various belongings of the family.

"Babs! Wake up, little sister," called Mrs. Starr as she gently shook the sleepy little girl.

"Is 't mornin'?" yawned the baby.

Everybody laughed so that Babs soon sat up and looked about in surprise. [20]

"Oh, see out there—the funny place!" exclaimed Dot.

"That's the city where we shall stay over night," said Mr. Starr, carrying suit-cases and grips toward the door.

A surprise awaited the Starr family as they descended from the train, for Mr. and Mrs. Latimer were there to greet them.

"Well, when did you get here?" asked Mr. Starr, after greetings were over.

"Day before yesterday, so we thought we would wait and start for the camp together," returned Mr. Latimer.

As there were no porters or cabs in the isolated town, they had to carry their own luggage. Mr. [21]

Latimer undertook to find a boy with a wheelbarrow to take the trunks to the hotel. "Hotel! Is there such a thing here, Mr. Latimer?" laughed Meredith.

"Wait until you see! You will be very proud to send home picture post-cards of the place!" replied Mrs. Latimer.

"Where's Paul and Marjory?" suddenly asked Meredith, who had missed Jinks, his chum, on the trip from Oakdale.

"Why, Marjory is reading to an old invalid this afternoon and Paul went fishing with some boys," explained Mrs. Latimer.

While the Starrs are following their friends, the Latimers, from the station to the hotel, let us see how they all came to be in this faraway place in Canada. [22]

When the Starrs left the island in Casco Bay in the early part of September, Mr. Latimer, who lived in Portland, Maine, mentioned a trip to the lumber regions of Canada. As Mr. Starr was interested in a large lumber deal with Mr. Latimer, and had spent his summer in Maine on that account, he decided to associate himself with Mr. Latimer in the Canadian Pine Investment Co.

Consequently, the Starr family packed up their belongings and returned to Oakwood from Maine several weeks sooner than they had expected, for it was necessary that the children be completely fitted out with warm clothing, and other necessities, if they were to spend the winter in a lumber camp with the Latimers. [23]

Of course, Mrs. Starr worried about keeping the children from school all winter, but Mrs. Latimer said that the governess, who had been with her children for several years, could so arrange her hours that all the children could study under her direction. This arrangement satisfied Mrs. Starr, and the only drawback to enjoying the novelty of life in a lumber camp was entirely removed.

The Starrs left Oakwood the latter part of October and reached Grand Forks the first of November. From there they traveled by various routes until they reached their destination in the extreme southeastern part of Manitoba. [24]

Here, the Latimers awaited them, and had made all arrangements for the further journey into the heart of the forests where the pine and other valuable timber stood.

The lumber crew, consisting of a foreman, cook and two helpers, hostlers, drivers, and most of those that felled trees, had gone on to the camp some time previous to the Starrs' arrival, but a few of the men were still in town waiting for their foreman. [25]

The lumbermen who were waiting to start for camp stood about the small stoop of the house which was known as the "hotel," and scanned the group slowly walking toward them. The Latimers were already known to the men, but the new-comers were a source of curiosity.

The men who were to supervise the cutting, hoisting and hauling of the timber to be cut that winter were of a rugged, good-natured type, and the Starrs were glad to note their clean-cut appearance.

Mr. Latimer had explained to the new arrivals the presence of the crew at the hotel, and also the various work the different men had charge of. Don and Dot had overheard this conversation, and the moment the family reached the porch Don carefully looked over the group and whispered to Dot. Together they walked over to the men and entered into an animated discourse with them. [26]

"I heard that one of you men was an engineer on the engine that pulls the trees out of the woods," said Don.

"I'm the one," remarked a tall muscular man, while his companions smiled at the two children.

"We know how to run an engine," began Dot.

"Sh!" interrupted Don to his sister. "We didn't come over to tell you that, but we wanted to say that we are glad to meet you. We three ought to have some nice rides this winter on that engine of yours." [27]

This brought a laugh from all but the engineer. He looked very serious as he said, "I sure am glad to make your acquaintance. I reckon we'll be very friendly." And he stuck out his large hand and shook Don's and Dot's small hands most energetically.

"Did you say you run an engine?"

"Yep! when we were down on my grandfather's ranch in Texas. There were some Indians always stealing and hiding in the woods and Dot and I helped catch 'em," said Don, looking about to see if any of his family overheard his remark. [28]

"Don, that wasn't when we drove the engine. You know—I mean the time the old thing ran away with us and everybody was so frightened!" corrected truthful Dot.

"Well, it doesn't matter, now," hurriedly said Don. "I haven't heard your name yet, mister. My twin-sister's is Dot an' mine is Don."

"My name is Jim—Jim Akerman, all told, but just call me Jim. An' now I'll introduce you to the

crew if you like," said the man, smiling at the twins. "This man is fireman on the engine and his name is Pete. We call him Pete on account of his job of piling peat on the fire."

"Do you use peat? Why, I thought you burned wood," said Don. [29]

"We do up here, but down in Carolina we used a lot of bog-peat, 'cause it's so hot a fire," explained Jim; then continued:

"Here's Bill, the tackle man; an' Jake, the swing-man; Ben and Johnny, there, are hook-men. Then there's Alf, Jerry, and Mack, who have charge of the cables."

Just as the introductions were over, Mr. Starr called from the front door telling the children to come in and dress for supper.

CHAPTER II [30]

A LUMBER CAMP IN WINTER

THE boss of the machinery crew came by the morning train and the next day the entire party were ready to start on their way.

The men rode, while the women and children sat in a comfortable carry-all drawn by four horses. The baggage and extra camp outfits were packed in a cart drawn by two mules.

"Jus' like a picture of folks going west in the gold-fever time," ventured Don, looking ahead at the escort and behind at the cart and a few riders. [31]

"Let's play we are pioneers, shall we?" cried Dot, always ready for an exciting adventure.

"And Mete can be the pioneer and Venie his wife. Babs will be their only child," explained Don.

"Then who are we?" asked Dot.

"Me and you? Why, we are the Indians that hold up the wagon and shoot everyone," replied Don, trying to look savage.

"Oh, dear, if we had only known this we could have worn our Indian suits that we left home," sighed Dot.

"Never mind; I'll pin on this horse-blanket that's under the seat, and you can wrap this linen dust-coat about you," said Don, dragging the blanket out from its hiding place. [32]

"I won't look a bit like an Indian in that old coat. Can't you see another blanket with stripes on it?" asked Dot.

"Not a blanket, but here's a plaid lap-cover," replied Don, as he spied the cotton cover under the blanket.

"What are you children pulling from under that seat?" asked Mrs. Starr, who always watched the twins in fear and trembling.

"We're jus' goin' to be Indians and wear these things," explained Don, carelessly.

Meredith had been sitting with the driver of the cart for some time, hearing stories of life in the wilds, and Lavinia had been playing with Babs during the time the travelling was bad, when the wagons went slowly. [33]

This was Don's opportunity.

Dot and he managed to get out of the back of the carry-all unnoticed.

They hid behind some bushes and as the leaders came opposite, Don jumped out and shouted, dancing about and waving a club over his head. Dot followed her brother's example, and both pranced and shrieked such blood-curdling yells that Mrs. Starr almost fainted while Mrs. Latimer hurriedly leaned out of the wagon to see who had been run over.

The horses merely jumped at the unexpected apparitions, then kept plodding up the hill. Don and Dot clambered up the steps of the carry-all trying to mimic the real scalpers, but Mrs. Starr caught each one by an arm and bade them sit down and not get out again without her permission. [34]

Meredith had witnessed the whole performance from the cart and laughed teasingly at the climax of the raid.

The journey took two days; the first day, at five o'clock, Mr. Latimer called a halt for camp. This part of the trip was great sport for the children for they roamed about the woods while the men cut fir branches for beds, and watched the cook prepare a fine dinner out in the wilderness. [35]

The second day, about noon, the travellers reached the place selected for a permanent camp. Of course, everyone was deeply interested in the novel appearance of their winter home and, as

soon as the twelve o'clock dinner was served, started in to investigate the quarters.

The children trailed after the grownups, making their own observations of affairs.

The bosses' cabins were among some magnificent trees, about one hundred yards from the main camp. They were rough little log huts large enough to hold four bunks, two on either side—a lower and an upper bunk—and a chest of drawers at the side opposite the door. An opening in the roof gave ventilation, and a small square window at each side of the chest of drawers gave light in the daytime. The only light to be had at night was from a candle, and heat, if the city folks needed any, must be had from oil heaters, several of which had been included in the outfit. [36]

The bunks of the crew were directly opposite the "bosses'" huts. A large cleared space lay between the two sections, and at one end stood the cook's quarters, with a long shed-like cabin in front of it to screen the kitchen from the company. This shed was dining-room, parlor, and general social center. At the fourth side, opposite the dining-room and kitchen, was a commodious office with three rooms. Here the clerical force worked, and the bosses planned and ordered the work of the company. [37]

This sort of life suited Don and Dot perfectly, and they peeped into every bunk, and hovered about the kitchen, with the satisfaction of having reached the great goal in life.

"This bunk is for the children—Don and Dot, Venie and Babs," explained Mr. Starr, showing the bunks adjoining the hut which would be occupied by himself and wife.

"Can't Dot and I have a hut all to ourselves?" asked Don, who hoped to have great fun in these little huts. [38]

"Not much!" laughed Mr. Starr. "I doubt if Venie can keep you two in order, but we will try it."

"Where's Mete going to live?" asked Dot eagerly.

"Meredith and Paul will have bunks in the same hut with the foreman, and Elizabeth has a bunk partitioned off from her father and mother's half of a hut," replied Mrs. Starr.

"Well, guess I'll have a look at my house," ventured Don, stepping into the log cabin which was to be his abode for a time.

"Dot, look'a here! they don't have bed-springs in these bunks," whispered Don, lifting up a corner of a sweet smelling mattress. [39]

"And the mattress! What is it stuffed with?" exclaimed Dot.

"Don't know, but it smells fine, don't it?" said Don.

Meredith and Paul peeped in just then and seeing the two examining the beds, laughed.

"You ought to see ours, if you think the company ought to provide you with Dutch feather-beds," said Paul.

"What are yours?" Don asked.

"Just balsam branches heaped up in the bunks; we spread a blanket over them at night and sink into peaceful dreams." [40]

"Then we want balsam branches, too," demanded Dot.

"Why should we have these things if the other men have branches?" queried Don.

"We'll ask Daddum next time we see him," said Meredith, as Paul and he continued on their way.

"Dot, we'll just go over and take a look at those balsam beds. If we like them better, we will ask Mumzie to have ours changed. If ours is best, we won't say anything," whispered astute Don.

They found Paul's bunk filled with balsam branches as he said, but they felt perfectly content with their nice soft mattresses after the balsam had been tested. [41]

Before any further matters of interest could be found, a deafening sound came from the cook's quarters. The twins ran out to the clearing to find the meaning of the noise, and saw one of the cook's helpers walking about banging a wooden potato-masher furiously upon the bottom of a brass pan. The echoes of the strokes could be heard coming from every direction in the forest.

"What's that for?" asked Don, running over to Mose, the helper.

"I'se callin' you-alls for dinner," grinned Mose.

"Hey, Dot! come quick," called Don, turning to see if his sister was in sight. "It's dinner time, and Mose is ringin' the bell." [42]

Without further ado, Don went over to the shed and looked for his place at the long table. For once he was undecided. There were two long tables, and the places set were so exactly alike that Don was not sure where he was supposed to sit.

"Where are all of the other men, Daddum?" asked Lavinia, seeing that only half of the men were present.

"They have been cutting out rough roads from our timber to the river, and have taken their dinner in pails, as it is too far for them to come to camp and then return afterward," said Mr. Starr.

"What river, Daddum?" asked Don, quickly.

[43]

"The river down which the logs float in the spring," said Mr. Starr.

"Do you own the river?" asked Dot, wondering how much of the earth her father possessed.

"We own the right to use it for our logging business," replied Mr. Starr, and smiled at his little girl's disappointed look.

"Why do they cut roads, Daddum? Aren't there any ready made that you can use?" asked Dot.

"Not in the forests, Dot. We have to break out roadways so the heavy skidding and loading machines can go in among the trees and lift the cut timber up and on the sledges that will cart it down to the water," explained Mr. Starr.

[44]

"You will soon be able to see the way it has to be done and then you will understand better," added Mr. Latimer.

"When can we see—this afternoon?" asked Don, impatiently.

"Maybe you will have time to go with me directly after dinner," hinted Mr. Latimer.

"Yes, yes! Of course we will, 'cause we don't begin lessons 'till Monday, you know," exclaimed Don and Dot together.

The rice pudding was almost forgotten that day, so eager were the children to go and see the interesting work of the men of the camp.

They trudged along the newly cut road which they had travelled over in the morning, but, after walking for half a mile, Mr. Latimer left the road and went along a narrow trail that ran into the thick forest. Walking along this for a mile or so, the children heard the sound of chopping, and crashes every now and then, and the shouting of men to each other. In about ten minutes' time they could see moving figures between the thick trunks of trees, and soon came to the place where the road was being broken out.

[45]

Here, indeed, was activity and exciting work. The children were cautioned about the danger.

Don watched with every faculty strained to its utmost. He saw an opening through the thick growth of pine trees running far into the depths of the forest. In the opposite direction, where the men were working, the forest remained intact.

[46]

"Guess that's the road Daddum said they were breaking out," he commented, to the other children.

"An' that's what they have to cut down to get out to the river," added Paul, pointing toward the thick trees on the other side.

Suddenly, a shout of "Ye-ho!" was heard and the lumbermen ran off in every direction, while a crackling sound came from the tree that was being cut; in another moment down crashed the giant pine, tearing away obstructing branches from other trees.

[47]

"Oh!" sighed Don, clutching his hands in tense interest, and the other children sat as rigid as statues until the tree was down.

Some men instantly hopped upon the fallen giant and started lopping off the branches, while the other men began work on the next tree in the road.

The "breaking out" of the road through the virgin forest kept on in this way until the men were some distance farther on than they were when the children first came upon the scene. When Mr. Latimer returned to take them back to camp they were quite willing to go.

[48]

That evening the children had a great deal to tell their mothers and Don added, "Guess I'll be a lumberman when I'm big."

"Have you decided to give up the canal-boat life that you promised Molly you would lead?" asked his father, teasingly.

"Well, a man can run a canal-boat and be a lumberman, too, can't he?" returned Don, not willing to admit his loss of interest in the canal-boat life.

"I always said that it was better for a man to do one thing and do that well, than to try and do several things poorly," hinted Mr. Starr.

The others laughed, for one of Don's weaknesses was to take a tremendous interest in anything new and then leave it half finished for the next absorbing idea.

[49]

"Well, I'm eating these pork and beans just now, and I'm doing it well, ain't I?" retorted Don, making everyone laugh again.

"Dot and you always do the meal-work thoroughly," replied Mrs. Starr, still laughing.

No one about the table that evening seemed to have a failing appetite, for the wonderful pine-scented air and the unusual life made everyone hungry for the brown bread, beans, baked potatoes, and slices of crisp ham.

A huge log fire was built in the center of the clearing and, immediately after supper, the crew and the bosses' families sat about it in a circle while the "timber-children," as Mr. Latimer called them, told the other children wild stories of adventures in the forests. [50]

Don sat with wide-opened eyes and body leaning forward listening eagerly to every word. These tales were stored away in his mind for some future development or use.

At eight o'clock Mr. Latimer called out, "Youngsters' bedtime!"

"Why we never have to go so early as this," said Don.

"In a lumber camp every man goes to bed at nine o'clock, sometimes earlier, if the day is long. We are up at five, you see, and work from six. Just wait until you see us work some nights until long after your tired eyes have closed," explained Mr. Latimer. [51]

"Crickets! From five until night! I guess I wouldn't like *that* life!" announced Don, emphatically.

"No, indeed," added Meredith, while everyone laughed at Don's honest confession. "Don loves his warm bed in winter."

As the children rose to leave the fire, they thanked the men for the entertainment and said good-night. The engine-driver had been quite near to Don all evening and now Don asked a question.

"Most ready with that engine that I'm goin' to help you with?" [52]

"Not yet, Mister Don; we have to break out that road before I can run my engine in there, you see," whispered the man.

Perfectly contented to think that he wouldn't miss any fun on that engine, Don said good-night to Jim and ran after the family who were on the way to the bunks.

CHAPTER III

[53]

THE INDIAN TRAPPER

THE routine of life in a lumber camp never became tiresome, but it systematized matters for the children. Every morning at five o'clock the rising gong was beaten by the cook's helper, and at five-thirty the men had breakfast. The families ate at six-thirty, and at seven-thirty an hour was given to study of the daily lessons. Then an hour of freedom came, followed by three hours of close application to school. The classes met in one of the large rooms of the office building and Miss Miller had scholars who were eager to study, for not one of them wished to be detained after school; there were too many wonderful things to be done, and being detained after school hours meant the missing of some of the wonders. [54]

After the first week in camp the children became quite resigned to the early rising and breakfast, for it seemed to lengthen out the hours of the day so that a great deal more could be crowded into the time for fun and play.

On the second Sunday in camp everyone was sitting in the dining-room listening while Mr. Latimer read the service. He had finished the Bible reading and suggested a hymn that all of the men knew by heart, when the door opened at one end of the shed and a queer old face peered in. [55]

Don sat nearest the door and, seeing a stranger at the door, nudged his twin. She leaned over and stared at the wrinkled skin, twinkling eyes, and long straight hair.

"Why, Don, it's an Injun!" whispered Dot, with surprise.

By this time the door had opened far enough to admit the stranger and he stepped in and squatted down just inside.

Most of the men sitting with faces toward the door saw him but the reader and part of his audience were not aware of the visitor. Dot nudged her father and whispered about the Indian's presence. The service continued, however, without interruption, to the final song. Then many of the men rose and came over to the visitor. [56]

"Hello, Wilotemike! Where'd you come from?"

"Wilotemike! Let me see him!" exclaimed Mr. Starr, in great surprise. He stepped out before the old Indian and saw the same friendly trapper that had advised his friend Dean about the flooded river, and entertained them for a week. He came forward and held out a welcoming hand.

"Well, well, I don't believe you know me, Mike, do you?" asked Mr. Starr, grasping the old man's hand. [57]

After thinking deeply for a few moments, the Indian's face lit up and he smiled recognition at Mr. Starr.

"Mike know friend! Many moons he not come back!" said the Indian reprovingly.

"Not my fault, Mike. Me want to come but find a nice squaw and she keep me home," laughed Mr. Starr, beckoning for his wife to join him.

Of course the children were shown to Mike and the old Indian smiled as he allowed his hand to light gently upon Bab's yellow curls.

Most of the timber men knew Mike, or had heard of the trapper, and he was generally welcomed at any camp he visited. In this case, however, he was doubly welcome, for he was a friend of one of the bosses, and the story soon went the rounds of the entire camp. [58]

"Going to visit us for the winter, Mike?" asked Mr. Latimer, thinking of the great boon he would be to go about with the children after school hours. Knowing the forests as he did, he could teach and show them everything and at the same time prevent any danger from coming to them.

"Mike set traps nex' moon, way up mountain," replied Mike, laconically. [59]

"Mike stay here till time for trap to catch big game!" eagerly came from Mr. Starr, who sensed part of Mr. Latimer's plan.

"Mike, get much money for time he stay. Mike show little ones all over woods and teach many good things about everything!" added Mr. Latimer.

By this time the ladies realized what the two men were after, and abetted the plan with all of their persuasions.

Mike stood uncertain. He smiled down at the children who showed in their faces how delightful life would be with a real Indian trapper to show them about the woods, while the ladies urged the proposition resistlessly, and the men stood waiting expectantly for an answer. [60]

"Mike not make much pelts las' year. Not eat much this year. Mike tink dis snow make a big pelt time—make much money," explained the trapper.

"Mike take all this money from this day to trapper's day. Mike go to mountain on trapper day and set traps. Watch much. Get big pelt and come back soon; Mike make more money here with white man," spoke Mr. Starr, taking a roll of bills from his pocket and counting out fifty dollars upon the table, giving Mike to understand that the money was his if he would remain in camp until December 15, which day was generally Trapper's Day in the North. [61]

The Indian looked about at the faces and saw only the kindly desire to have him remain, and his eyes became misty at the unusual welcome from the white men.

Don and Dot could hardly restrain their impatience to have Mike say "yes," so Don ran over, took the dark hand of the trapper in both his and shook it, saying, "Come on, Mike, we want you."

The children all flocked about, coaxing the Indian to remain, until he smiled and consented to be their guard after school hours. Miss Miller heaved an audible sigh of relief, for she had had her troubles in the last two weeks, trying to keep Babs and the twins always in a "safety circle" beneath her watchful eye. [62]

Cook came in just then and asked a question.

"Hey, boss, when is church out? My dinner is cooked an' waitin' fer the two boys to set up de tables."

At that everyone hurried out that the cook might not be delayed in his programme of feeding so many hungry people.

"Take Mike into the office and tell him all you have seen since you have been here," suggested Mr. Latimer to the children.

While the children danced over the frozen ground showing the Indian the way to the office, the elders gathered in the Starr's log hut and discussed the value of the trapper. [63]

"Everybody knows Mike for hundreds of miles around this part of the country, and he knows every foot of ground, the depth of waters, the bog-lands, and the haunts of wild animals. He is as true and honorable as any white man, and more trustworthy than many," explained Mr. Starr.

"He is almost too old a man to continue trapping, I should think," remarked Mr. Latimer. "Why, he must be almost seventy years old."

"More than that, I think," replied Mr. Starr.

"You never can tell an Indian's age after a certain period. He may be a hundred and fifty and he would not show it any more than to-day," said Mrs. Latimer. [64]

"Well, the one essential thing is that he is perfectly capable and agile enough to guard the children in their wanderings," added Mrs. Starr, who was greatly relieved to have such a treasure.

"If he would consent to give up trapping this winter, I would willingly pay him more than he will get out of any pelts he might get. And life here would be much easier for him without being too civilized," said Mr. Starr.

"Well, we'll let him try it for a time and perhaps he will like the children enough to wish to remain for the season," suggested Mr. Latimer. [65]

Meanwhile, the children were having a glorious time with their new friend and guardian. The twins were enchanted to be living with a real, true Indian, and Babs seemed to take a violent fancy to the long haired old man.

Mike was like one of the children, telling them Indian legends in his own queer English, which Paul called "Pidgin English." The afternoon passed quickly for the children and they were all amazed when the gong banged for supper.

The following day while the children were at school, Mike looked about the camp with curiosity and then walked away to see how much timber the men had cut. Unknown to anyone, Babs quietly crept after her new play-fellow, and soon was out of sight of the camp. [66]

Babs was past three years and quite able to amuse herself at times, and since coming to the woods she had enjoyed playing in the clearing with a toy shovel and pick and a blunt axe. She liked to make believe she was chopping down trees and piling them up in tiny heaps of firewood that cook's helper generally used for kindlings. No one was concerned about the child as she had played quietly in that way for several days and she was not given to adventure like the twins. So, it was with a startled expression that Mrs. Starr called Babs and, receiving no reply, went to the door of the log cabin to find her. As no Babs was to be seen, and nobody had seen her anywhere for the past half hour, Mrs. Starr felt frightened. [67]

Mrs. Starr and Mrs. Latimer ran over to the school room to inquire, but no one had seen Babs there. Then, they ran to the office where the two bosses were writing and figuring, but neither one of them had seen Babs.

"Where's Mike?" asked Mr. Starr.

"Oh, I never thought of him," replied Mrs. Starr with a feeling of relief. [68]

"If Mike isn't about the clearing you can rest assured that he has Babs with him, and she is as safe as she would be in bed," said Mr. Starr, going out of the office to inquire about Mike at the cook's quarters.

As Mike had not been seen about for an hour, there was no doubt that Babs and he were out together.

Now Mike had loped silently over the frozen ground toward the direction of the timber cutting, without ever looking behind him. Had he glanced back he might have seen a tiny little girl making great efforts to follow after him. Mike was too entirely a creature of nature to walk in a beaten path when a short-cut through the woods saved so many steps. Therefore, Babs found her path beset by many obstacles as she tried to follow exactly in the way Mike had chosen. [69]

Her short little legs could not keep up with his agile old ones, and soon Babs was left behind. Try as she would she could not run fast enough to find Mike again. She could barely remember in which direction she last saw him going, and finally, she sat down upon a flat rock and cried. She was tired, she was hungry, she wanted to go home, and she wanted Mike. But not one of these wants were satisfied, and she cried lustily for someone to come and find her.

Since living in the forest, Mother had often warned the children never to go out of sight of the clearing, for there might be bears about the woods. To add to her fear of being lost, came a queer sound among the underbrush. [70]

"Oh, it's a bear!" wailed Babs, trying to locate the wild beast and seeking shelter behind a huge tree.

She hugged the immense trunk of the pine while she poked her yellow head out to see if the bear was in sight, but he had not yet come into view.

She stood behind the tree until wearied of inaction, and as the noise could no longer be heard, crept out of hiding, and Babs started off in a direction she hoped would bring her to Mike. She stumbled and fell over roots, got up and went on again; dodged between the thick growth of pine trees, and finally came to the road that was broken out by the men when they first came to camp—the road that led to the trail running into town. [71]

Babs was thankful to find a road but not sure which direction to take, and when a little girl is very tired and hungry and forlorn the work of thinking hard is apt to put her to sleep, especially if she sits down upon a large pile of pine needles and leans against a stump to think. And so it was with Babs. She leaned her tousled curls against the stump and closed her eyes. [72]

In taking the short-cut to the timber-cutters, Mike had seen tracks of wild hares and quail, and finding that the work in the timber was not as interesting as he thought it would be, he decided to follow the road back and get his rifle to shoot some game for the cook.

He was quietly loping along the road when he saw the little white hood bobbing down behind the pine stump.

Mike looked all about for some evidence of the children or elders, but not a sign or sound was to be heard except the strange cracklings of forest silences. Mike gave a shrill whistle to call anyone who had strayed close by, but no one answered except Babs who was suddenly awakened from her nap.

[73]

"O-oh, Mike! Did oo know I is losted affer oo?" said she, rubbing her eyes with her mittened hands.

"Mike take Babby home," coaxed Mike, lifting the child to his shoulder.

Reaching the clearing Mike carried Babs over to the office where he heard how everyone missed the child and, finding that Mike was gone also, they felt that Babs was safe, for doubtless the two were together.

Mike understood perfectly but said nothing about finding Babs alone a mile from the clearing, for he silently vowed never to leave the little one alone again.

[74]

So the devotion of the old man proved a great boon to Babs, for she soon knew many simple wood-secrets that Mike taught her, as well as being shown the homes of hares, quail, squirrels, and other small denizens of the forests.

One day, Mike went off alone, with his rifle over his shoulder. Babs had to remain indoors that day as she had fallen into a pool of water and had to have all of her clothes dried in the kitchen. That night Mike came into camp with a medium sized deer slung over his back. Everyone was interested in the event and watched Mike hang it up by the legs, while he went to his tiny log hut and brought out a sharp knife. The deer was soon skinned and the meat cut up into steaks and chops which were sent over to the cook. The skin was then prepared, as only an Indian can cure it, and left for a time to season.

[75]

"What are you going to do with it, Mike?" asked Don.

But Mike smiled as he shook his head, refusing to tell.

The children insisted, however, and Mike confessed that he intended making a deer-skin suit for Babs to wear out-of-doors.

CHAPTER IV

[76]

THE ENGINEER'S ASSISTANTS

ONE day, soon after Babs' adventure in the woods, Mr. Starr received a letter from a large machine company at Grand Forks. He read it aloud at the dinner table, thereby making all of the timber men very happy.

"The skidder is on the road, boys," said Mr. Starr.

"She is!"

"When will she git here?"

"Mos' time—we are beginnin' to need her!"

These and many other exclamations greeted his news, and Mr. Starr looked at the date of the postmark to figure out the time they might expect the skidder to arrive at camp.

[77]

"The roads are frozen fine and hard now, and there hasn't been any snow except a few flakes now and then, so she ought to get here by tomorrow, I should think," replied Mr. Starr.

"It'll begin to look as if we were workin' some, when the logs begin to move out toward the river," declared the foreman.

"She'll have some logs to haul!" said Mr. Latimer, pleasing the men by the suggested praise of their work.

[78]

"What's a skidder, Daddum?" asked Dot.

"Why do you call it a she?" added Don.

While many who heard Don's question, laughed, Mr. Starr tried to explain to the twins what a skidder was and what use it was.

"Then the engineer has to drive her, eh?" asked Don, eagerly looking over at Jim.

"Yes, he has to steer her, watch over her steam works, and keep her from going into the crooked paths of evil," laughed Mr. Latimer.

"She sure does get into evil ways, sometimes," added Jim, laughingly.

"Why, I saw one of 'em once, that was reely possessed with a contrary spirit. She never *would* go the road she was shown, but allus went down a side track as like a horse that shies as

[79]

anything I ever saw," exclaimed Bill.

"Ah, but Bill, yeh know why she shied that way!" said Jerry. "She was put together skew-geed an' one side of her was so out of geer that she couldn't run straight even on a macadam road."

"There's everything in puttin' the parts together right, Mr. Starr. Is the fact'ry goin' to send a man down to show us how to gear her up and run her?" asked Jim.

"Yes, indeed. We wouldn't take any chances with such an expensive machine unless a machinist came along to show us what to do in case of emergency."

[80]

The next day a caravan hove into sight coming slowly along the new road leading in from the old trail. As the first team came to the road broken out from the timber to the river, some of the lumbermen spied it. They shouted and soon every man that could get away from his job gathered about the interesting machinery. There were four trucks and four horses to each truck. The machinists who came from Grand Forks to put the different parts of the skidder together, jumped down from the driver's seats and shook hands with the bosses.

"Where are you goin' to run her?" asked one of the men of Mr. Latimer.

[81]

"We'll begin down near the river, and clear all of that land first; that will give us open space to pile our logs along the waterfront and at the same time pack the road down harder and harder every trip the teamsters make," said Mr. Latimer.

So, the heavy trucks were taken in upon the new road broken out between the dense pine trees and, after several miles on this road, a halt was called. A small clearing had been made by cutting down all of the timber. Here the skidder would find space in which to swing her great arms and lift the immense trunks from their resting place over to the low sledge waiting to receive them.

[82]

It took all of that day and the greater part of the next to fit the machine up for work. The horses of the party were cared for by the men but extra bunks there were none, for visitors were not expected, so the men had to sleep upon the floors of the offices and school-room. Being city men, it was rather interesting to sleep upon a heap of fresh hemlock boughs and wash in a shed where a long row of basins and towels were provided for the men. But the few days braced them up wonderfully, and they always delighted in telling of the camp where the cook prepared fine meals, and the system and orderliness of the timber men were so good that ladies and children mingled with them as freely as if they were the sons of clergymen. As timber men had the reputation of being everything coarse and evil, this story gave an entirely new view of them.

[83]

As soon as the parts were together, the experts tried the machine. She soon had steam up in her boilers and, at the signal, one of the men threw out her tackle and a huge pine trunk was lifted as lightly as a feather and carried over and laid parallel with the roadside.

The men stood about in a circle admiring the wonderful machine that seemed almost human in its methods of work; the long arms that reached out in the direction of the fallen tree, the fingers that opened to grip the trunk, the graceful swing of the arm as it carried the log exactly where it was wanted and then opened its hand again to give up the grasp the fingers had on their burden.

[84]

"If you had your sledge here by the roadside we could load up a pile in no time and the men could cart them to the river," said one of the experts to Mr. Latimer.

"I figured on that and told several teamsters with sleds to come with us," replied Mr. Latimer.

"She makes the work jump along all right!" ventured the foreman, greatly pleased with the headway he could make.

[85]

The machinists remained all that day to watch the men work with "Jumpin' Jane" as she had been called, and, the following morning, left the camp to return to the city.

The work of cutting, loading and hauling logs went forward with tremendous speed after Jumpin' Jane arrived.

After a week's work the logs began to bank up along the river's edge, while the clearing about the Jumpin' Jane grew into a wide area.

The ladies and children at camp heard stories every night of the experiences of the day and felt sorry that they could not witness some of the adventures. Finally, Mrs. Latimer spoke:

[86]

"If it is a fine day tomorrow, why can't we come down to the cutting and see Jumpin' Jane work? We want to see everything worth while."

The next day was cold and clear and the children were bundled up well, while the ladies muffled themselves to the ears. Mike was included in the party, and, as usual, had charge of Babs.

The men knew there was to be an observation party, so had work planned that would show off the spectacular part of lumber cutting.

"Ho, there, Jim, can we come up on Jumpin' Jane and help you?" called Don, when he saw his old friend fingering the valves and levers of the engine.

[87]

"Pretty soon, mebbe. It's all up to your ma," said Jim.

"Not now, Don; wait until we see how it works," replied Mrs. Starr, catching hold of Don's hand to keep him beside her.

Meantime, the timber men had been running a huge saw through a giant pine tree until the foreman shouted "All Back!"

Instantly, everyone ran to safety, except the man who fastened the "clutch" of the Jumpin' Jane into the trunk of the tree. Then he too ran back to join his associates.

The foreman gave the signal, Jumpin' Jane gave a little wrench, and lo! the king of the forest started to lower his head. With a crash and a dragging off of all the branches impeding its descent, the pine measured its enormous length along the cleared ground. No sooner was it down than a dozen men jumped over and lopped off boughs until it looked like a telegraph pole. Another signal was given to Jim, and he pushed a lever that governed the huge steel arm of the machine. This arm swung over toward the pine and whirled out a cable with the hooks wide open ready to clasp about the tree. A man stood by and as soon as the hooks descended he guided them about the trunk and locked them. A signal, and Jim pushed upon another lever that brought the steel arm back to first position, dangling the immense pine over the flat sledge as if it were a tooth-pick. A man was waiting to use his cant-hook to steady the log at one end while the cable deposited its freight lengthwise on the floor of the sledge. Before the steel arm of Jumpin' Jane could be signalled for another trip, another huge tree had been sawed through and awaited its downfall. [88] [89]

Don and Dot were so excited over Jumpin' Jane that they could not keep their eyes from her. After constant coaxing, they succeeded in gaining unwilling permission to climb up to the engineer's caboose and watch Jim work.

Jim managed to show them the different levers and valves during the intervals between loading and lifting. The twins were completely fascinated by the machine and asked many pertinent questions that Jim delighted in answering. If Jim had known the twins better, or had spent the summer with them on the ranch in Texas, he would not have explained so minutely how the engine worked. But he thought they craved knowledge, and he told them all he could. [90]

After witnessing all of the branches of the work, the visiting party started back but Don and Dot looked behind, wistfully, many times before the trees hid the Jumpin' Jane from their view.

The men worked late that night as the following day would be Sunday when they could rest. Jim wondered what would be best to do—bank up the fires in Jumpin' Jane or let them die out and build fresh ones on Monday morning. Deciding to act upon the latter plan, he saw that everything about the great truck and engine was in perfect order, then ran after the men who had started for the clearing. [91]

"The first thing Monday morning, we must have Jane hoist some of those small trees out of our way. They have been cluttering the work all afternoon, but I was so anxious to get those big trees down on the river crib that the little ones just had to lay there and wait a turn," said Mr. Latimer, as they reached camp. [92]

Now, Don and Dot had plotted all afternoon just what they could do if they had an opportunity to run Jumpin' Jane. They overheard Mr. Latimer's sentence as he passed the little ice-puddle where the twins were sliding, and they looked at each other knowingly.

That night, just before the children were sent to bed, Don and Dot crept to the Cookee's bunk and asked for some bread and butter. The twins were great favorites with Cookee, so he grunted as he rose from his chair and went to the shed where he kept his stock.

"Oh, Cookee, those are nice apples!" hinted Don. [93]

"Want some?" laughed the man, handing an apple to each child.

"An' I love crackers, too," added Dot, seeing a can of graham crackers standing upon the shelf.

"Here, now, take this sandwich, an' I'll give ye each a cracker," said the Cookee, handing a thick double slice of bread and jam to the children. Then taking out a handful of crackers, he gave them to the eager hands that were outstretched.

"Whist, now! run off to bed wid ye," laughed he, watching the twins skip across the clearing toward their own bunk.

As the twins were afraid that Lavinia might hear them talk inside, they whispered before they entered the bunk. Don placed a sandwich in each deep pocket of his mackinaw coat, and pushed an apple on top of each. The crackers were too tempting to keep, so they were gradually nibbled until all disappeared. The twins then stole softly to bed, to wait until everyone was asleep. [94]

Dot did her very best to remain awake, but her eyes refused to obey orders and soon she was fast asleep. Not so, Don. He made up his mind to keep awake and, when his eyelids started to drop over his eyes in sleep, he pinched himself. Finding that this plan soon lost its effect, he sat bolt upright in bed until he heard Lavinia breathing regularly in her sleep. [95]

Don slept in the upper berth, or bunk, so he had to scramble down without making any noise. He dragged his blankets after him, and then proceeded to wake Dot up without causing an outcry. Dot was tired and slept heavily, but he succeeded in rousing her after a struggle, and she

began to remember the great fun they were going to have with Jumpin' Jane. She crawled cautiously out of bed and took her blanket out.

Both children donned their heavy clothing and pulled toboggan hoods down over their ears. Then wrapping the blankets about them, they opened the door on a crack to see if the coast was clear. [96]

Being Saturday night, the men and elders of the camp were still in the dining-room. The timber-jacks were playing cards while the Starrs and Latimers were having a game of chess. All was quiet in the solemn light of the full moon.

"Good! We can get away easy," whispered Don, as he stepped carefully from the doorway.

Dot followed and closed the door behind her.

The twins ran forward as fast as they could until they were out of the circle of light shed by the great lanterns that were hung on trees all about the clearing. Then they went slower as they reached the cut-road.

"Yah! I'm sleepy," yawned Dot. [97]

"So'm I," said Don.

"It's awful cold," shivered Dot.

"Wait till Jumpin' Jane gets fired up an' you won't feel cold," encouraged Don.

They tried to hurry over the frozen rough road but found the blankets an impediment, so Don suggested that they take them off and carry them instead. This was done and walking was much easier.

"I'm hungry, shall we eat the apple?" asked Dot.

"You'll be hungrier for breakfast if you eat the apple now. Remember, we ate the crackers," said Don.

So Dot stoically resisted the temptation to devour the apple in Don's pocket. [98]

"Oh, I'm so tired! Let's sit down here a minute and rest," said Dot.

"No, you mustn't! Haven't you ever heard that it's dangerous to sit down in the cold when you're tired? Folks get frozen stiff that way," said Don.

After a long, cold walk—the latter half dragged out by half-frozen feet—the children reached the spot where the timber cutting was being done. The gaunt forest trees looked very weird in the moonlight, and Jumpin' Jane stood like a grim ogre waiting to swallow anything so small as the twins.

"Oh! but she looks awful!" whispered Dot, as they drew near the great black thing. [99]

"I hope her fires didn't go out! We couldn't have a speck of fun if they were," worried Don, as he climbed up inside the caboose to investigate.

Don had flung his blanket over Dot's arm while he climbed into the machine, but soon he reappeared and told Dot to come in out of the cold, taking the blankets from her while she got up.

CHAPTER V [100]

JUMPIN' JANE'S ANTICS

"**H**ERE, Dot, throw the blankets down on that seat," said Don, pointing to a tiny bench next to the boiler.

"I don't see's it's any warmer in here than outdoors," grumbled Dot, rubbing her eyes and yawning again.

"Soon will be. I haven't looked at the fire, yet," returned Don, as he tried to open the fire-pot door.

"Gee! fire's most out! I've got to get some wood an' keep her going or we won't have any fun in the morning." [101]

"There's some pieces right by your side," said Dot, seeing a few sticks of pine lying by the fire-pot.

"Good stunt! This'll keep her going till I can get some more."

"I saw a big heap of pine knots and thick chunks of wood piled in a heap back there," Dot yawned.

"Ah, stop your yawning an' help me, can't you!" cried Don, with exasperation as the wood refused to burn.

"What d'ye want me to do?" asked Dot, testily.

"Go back and get some of those chunks," replied Don.

"I will if you go with me, but I'm not going to walk past those woods alone. A bear might jump out!"

[102]

"Pooh, no bears about—wish there were, then we'd have some fun catching him," bragged Don.

"Yes you would, like you did the brown calf on the canal," teased Dot. As the calf-bear story was one Don preferred forgotten, he made no answer, but prepared to accompany his sister.

"When we get back, that wood in there will be burning," said he, taking a last look at the smouldering pine.

The twins found the heap of wood and took as much as their arms could carry. This was strenuous work for the chunks were heavy and awkward, and the children cold and tired. They managed, however, to lift them to the engine room and then Don easily dragged them over to the door.

[103]

Meantime, his fuel had ignited and the pine was beginning to burn brightly. One of the large chunks was thrown in and the children felt better. As soon as the chunk started blazing the whole place began to grow warmer, and the children grew drowsier.

They laid down in their blankets to talk plans for working Jumpin' Jane, but soon fell asleep.

They might have slept on until found by Jim in the morning, but the fire died down again and the cold made the twins restless. Finally, Don sat up and grumbled for more covers. Finding himself on a hard floor he soon recalled their escapade. He looked about. The moon had set and a grey streak showed through the cut announcing that dawn was on its way.

[104]

"Guess I had better not sleep any more," said Don to himself, as he got up and looked into the fire-pot.

"Gee, she's most out again!" said he, looking about for kindlings.

Some twigs and small pieces of pine were in a box not seen in the dark of the night, so Don threw them all into the embers and as soon as they were burning, he pushed one of the chunks of pine inside. He looked down at Dot and was about to call her to duty, then thought better of it and decided to have a roaring fire going before he made her get up.

[105]

In the growing light he found all the pine wood he wanted and soon had a fierce fire blazing away in the engine. The sparks that flew out of the funnel shot up and seemed to act like tiny demons dancing in the wind that tossed them up and over the trees.

Dot awoke with the noise Don made about the engine, and jumped up to see what was cracking the engine to pieces.

"It's the steam!" explained Don. "I haven't found the right valve to turn it into the feeder."

"Why, Jim said this big black handle did it," advised Dot, taking hold of a valve handle.

[106]

Don turned it a bit and immediately the feeder began banging and cracking like a cannon.

"Sounds just like our radiator in the playroom at Oakwood, doesn't it?" grinned Dot.

"Yes," said Don, absent-mindedly, as he looked out of the little window at the small trees lying about.

"We may as well carry those trees out of the way for the men to begin work tomorrow. You know, Mr. Latimer said he would have to get them cleaned out of the path for the big ones to come down," said Don.

"But—can you work Jane?" asked Dot.

[107]

"Sure thing! Didn't Jim show me just how to do it?"

"What do you want me to do to help you?" asked Dot.

"We'll have breakfast first, then we'll go to work," replied Don, taking the sandwiches from his pocket.

"I'm glad now that I didn't eat my apple, 'cause I'm so awful hungry. I just can taste how good those pancakes and maple-syrup tastes this morning," said Dot, smacking her lips.

Don took out an apple and laid it on the floor, but seemed not to remember his own.

"That's only one—where's the other?" asked Dot.

"Gone!"

[108]

"Where? did you lose it?" asked Dot, sympathetically.

"No, I ate it this mornin' when I woke up. I did a heap of work long before you got up and I had to have something to stay my stomach," admitted Don, in the words often heard from Jim.

"Then break mine and take half," offered Dot.

Never backward in such things, Don thanked his sister, and split the apple in two.

Breakfast over, the two went to work in their exciting experiments.

"Now, you go over by that tree trunk and wait for Jane's arm to run out. The moment I blow the whistle, you watch out for the tackling clutch to come down and lock it around the tree. Then, I'll work the arm and bring the tree over by the roadside and drop it in the ditch," explained Don. [109]

"You're sure you know which thing to pull out or push in," ventured Dot.

"Sure—watch me!" and Don opened the valve that sent steam into the feeder. He pulled a lever at the left and immediately a great vibration started as the travelling crane, or arm, swung about their heads and tossed the steel cables about in the air.

"Hi, that's the way, all right!" laughed Don, at his successful experiment. [110]

Dot saw the cables with the grappling hooks swing over her head and dodged down inside the caboose.

"You go over to the trees and play you're a timber-jack. I'm the engineer that runs Jumpin' Jane," ordered Don.

Dot jumped down and ran over to the place where several small pine trees lay parallel upon the ground. Don started the lever and watched the travelling crane swing around on the opposite side of the skidder from that where Dot waited to hook up the grapplers.

"Humph! guess I pushed on the wrong side of the board," murmured Don, as he pushed the other lever over on the right hand side. [111]

He forgot to pull the first one back in place so the arm swung over to the right and back again to the left, then reversed until its cables with grappling hooks were swinging back and forth dangerously near to the children's head.

Dot screamed: "Turn her off, for goodness sake! Those hooks'll tear us to pieces!"

Don was nervous over the error and wondered why they acted that way. Suddenly, he saw that he had not turned off the first lever. As soon as they were both shut off the arm remained where it was, and the cables gradually stopped swinging.

"Say, Don, how long shall I stand here waiting?" [112]

"Just a minute—I'm trying another handle," said Don.

He had spied a smaller handle near the large one, so he turned on the large one that sent the crane out over Dot's head, and then, seeing that the cables were almost over a log, he pulled back the small lever.

"Wait a minute, until I catch hold of these lines," shouted Dot, but Don had already pulled the small lever over.

As he did so, the grappling hook caught hold of Dot's belt of patent leather that fastened her heavy coat about the waist. The smaller lever locked the irons and Dot was swung up high in the air as Don pulled back the large lever. He was so intent upon the machine that he failed to see his sister up about twenty feet in the air suspended over the logs. [113]

Dot was so surprised that she failed to utter a sound for a moment, but as soon as she felt herself going up in the air she started to scream. One scream after the other rent the quiet forest morning until Don became so excited he forgot which lever to pull that would let the crane come down to the ground again. He pulled out the right one and swung Dot over to the forest trees, then he pushed it back and swung her back again.

Meantime, no one missed the twins for they were supposed to be asleep in bed. The chess game was very exciting and, after that, Cookee served some hot lemonade and cakes, so that the men and bosses enjoyed a veritable party. It was later than usual when they said good-night and Mrs. Starr went to her cabin to find Babs dreaming and beating the bed in her effort to wake up. [114]

In the morning, Jim had a lame back and stayed in bed longer than usual. Being Sunday morning, the breakfast was later than on work days, and Jim took advantage of this.

Lavinia awoke and called the twins but received no answer. She jumped up and looked in the bunks. Dot's was empty but pulled to pieces, while Don's sheets were dragged down and the blanket gone. Instantly, Lavinia recalled kidnapping stories, and bears and Indians carrying away little children. [115]

She opened the door and cried for her mother to come.

"Mumzie, I can't find the twins, and I can't think where they have gone!" wept Lavinia.

"Oh, just about somewhere with Mike," replied Mr. Starr, to console Lavinia and allay his

wife's fear.

"But their blankets are gone and Don's bed hasn't been used," said Lavinia.

Mr. Starr stepped up and examined the upper bunk.

"Oh, yes, it has, Viney, but he forgot to pull down the second sheet.

[116]

"You see the dent in the pillow where his head lay," said Mr. Starr, in a tone that made them all feel easier.

"Just one more of the twins' tricks of mischief," added Mr. Starr, as he went out to look for Mike.

But Mike was nowhere about either, and the family were all quite sure that the old trapper had taken the twins out on some new hunt very early in the morning, and the twins had thought the sport would be enhanced if it were kept secret. So, the camp sat down to breakfast without a misgiving as to the twins' welfare.

Early that same morning, Mike stole out of his tiny cabin and made for some distant traps he had set the day before.

[117]

The day was cold and invigorating and Mike loped over the ground, straight through the maze of forest trees as if he were following a pathway. He reached his traps and found one sprung but nothing in it, and the other one just as he had left it. But tracks all about in the light covering of snow showed that several large animals had sniffed at the bait and tried to get it away.

Mike's eyes smiled with gratification as he said to himself: "Mike make big one! Him come agin for supper!"

Then, seeing there was nothing he could do, he decided to walk down by the river and see how much timber had been piled in the roll-ways.

[118]

From there, he started up the cut from the river toward the forest-timber where stood the Jumpin' Jane.

Several times he stopped and put his ear to the ground to listen, then shook his head.

"Mike go old! Mike hear noise!" said the Indian to himself.

After loping some distance he was sure he heard the call, and stood perfectly still to await another sound. It came.

"Mike good ear!" commented the old trapper as he started on a swift run up the road.

[119]

Coming through the dense growth of trees when quite near the clearing, Mike saw the cause of the shouting.

There hung Dot, by belt and garment, high up in the air, while just under her were several immense logs. She was too frightened to kick or squirm, which saved her from a painful fall.

Don was trying to climb out on the iron derrick when Mike came on the scene.

"Dun—no, no!" cried Mike, running over to hold Don.

"Mike get lil' gal down," concluded he.

"You can't budge it, Mike. I've tried in every way," wept Don, who was more frightened at seeing his beloved twin hanging so high above his head, than Dot was.

[120]

Mike had no intention of using the machinery to lower the derrick, but he resorted to an Indian manner of rescue.

He sought for and found a rope coiled up near some trees. In this he made a loop which he flung with such dexterity that it shot over the upper end of the derrick, just above the grapple that held the cables. By pulling on the other end of the rope, Mike slipped the knot so hard and fast that nothing could have moved it from the grapple.

He then ran the other end of the rope about the trunk of a tree in a line where Dorothy hung. This end he fastened, and Mike then started, hand over hand, up the inclined rope until he reached the cable where Dorothy was suspended. Here he threw an arm over the cable and twisted his legs about the rope. In this way he kept his hold of the rope while sliding himself closer to the little girl. In a short time he saw what had clutched her.

[121]

"Doot, put arms in Mike's neck!" advised the Indian.

Dot turned her head as far as she could and saw Mike's head just beside her. She tried to squirm about but could only get her left arm about the Indian's neck.

"Doot hol' fast?" asked Mike.

[122]

"Sure as anything!" replied the brave little girl.

"No hands slip?" queried Mike.

"Nope! I can hang on your neck like a string of beads."

Mike smiled in spite of the danger and felt assured of the undertaking.

He lifted the child with one hand as his other, that was slung over the cable, cut away the belt and coat that were caught in the irons.

"Now, hol' tight!" warned Mike, as the last shred was severed and he swung the little girl about and held her fast.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" yelled Don, as he jumped up and down with excitement.

[123]

An answering call seemed to come from the direction of the camp, and Don wondered if they knew of the escapade.

It was not so easy for Mike to get hold of the rope again with his hands as it was to climb up on it, for Dorothy had to be held with one arm.

After many maneuvers, however, the old trapper managed to shift the little girl upon his chest, where both her arms could hold fast about his neck. Then he slid down the inclined rope and soon felt the ground under his feet.

At the same time, a number of timber-men, with Mr. Starr, Mr. Latimer, Paul and Meredith, came running out of the road that led to camp. They were just in time to see Mike make his descent.

[124]

"What's all this?" asked Mr. Starr, suspicious of the twins' mischief.

"Lil' Doot hang oop there," replied Mike, not knowing how she got there, or that he was leading Don into punishment.

"Don, what *does* this mean?" insisted Mr. Starr, sternly.

"Well, you see, Daddum, Dot and I know all about engines, so we thought we would help the men clean away these little trees," Don started to explain.

"Yes, and try to see just how much fun and daring you could get out of it!" remarked his father.

[125]

When the whole story was told, Don's father reprimanded him severely, and Don promised never to be so venturesome again.

CHAPTER VI

[126]

OUTDOOR FUN IN A LUMBER CAMP

SNOW and ice prevailed after the middle of November, and the cold was there to stay for the winter. The roads already cut out had frozen hard before the snow came, and that made easy travelling for the huge sledges that carried the timber from forest to riverside.

The men were now cutting close to the main road, and the walk from camp to cutting was not so tiresome for the ladies and children, and it often happened that they visited the men in the afternoon.

[127]

The children had toy hatchets and saws, and they loved to play about the felled trees, chopping off small branches or sawing off rough fragments. Then, too, it was fine sport to be lifted up on top of a high heap of huge logs and ride down to the river-bank. On the return trip they would sit down on the low braces of the sledge, and the horses would make quick time with no load to pull.

One Saturday morning the sun shone so brightly that Mrs. Starr said the children might go with Mike, to play near the cutting, but they must keep a long distance away from the actual work of the men.

The men had come across a dip in the forest which was filled with water, and this water had frozen solid during the past week. The trees had been cut before the ice was hard, and here was offered a nice spot for skating. The children slung their skates over their shoulders and planned hockey games, and tag, and other sports on the ice. When they beheld the pond, however, they soon realized that it would be impossible to play hockey, but tag! Yes, tag would be great fun, as the stumps stuck up through the ice, here and there, and the skater could dodge around these stumps to get away from the one who was "it."

[128]

Babs had her tiny shovel and hatchet to play with, and Mike sat down on a log to watch over the children. They shouted, skated and tore at each other for a long time, then wearied of the game and sat down on the log by Mike to hear a story.

[129]

Just as Mike finished telling of an adventure, a loaded sledge came down the road and Paul called to the driver.

"Give us a ride?"

"Climb up!" replied the man.

"Room for us all?" asked Meredith.

"'Nodder comin' right behind," replied the driver.

Paul looked and nodded.

"Metee, you and the kids get on this one with Mike, and Vene, Elizabeth and I will get on the next load. We'll all meet down by the river and come back together." [130]

"Let's take our dinner with us and eat it down there. Then we can sit on the logs by the river and come back with the men on the next load," suggested Meredith.

"Good idea!" exclaimed Paul. "You get up on this and I'll run for the lunch boxes and get back before the other sleigh gets here."

So the Starr children, with Mike, climbed up and sat upon the logs of the first sledge, and the other children waited for the second load to come in sight.

The sleigh-ride over the rough road to the river was great fun, for often the sleigh would bump over a huge snow-covered stump or rock, and make the children roll against each other and cling fast to the chains that bound the logs together. [131]

The horses went slowly, for the loads were heavy and the road hard and rough, so the ride of two miles took some time.

The children had visited the roll-ways at the river before, but had never had an opportunity to remain and understand the whole scene.

Arrived at the roll-ways, the men made quick work of unloading the logs from the sledge and rolling them down to the river's edge. In many cases, where the water was shallow, or the ice thick enough, the logs were rolled out a few feet, and piled up in tiers so that when the spring freshet came they would sink down into the water and be the first to float down stream. [132]

In several instances, rafts had been made and floated out a short distance from the shore, and here the timber-men used to fish before the river froze over. These rafts were still there, and the ice between them and the shore was safe.

After the sledges returned to the forest, Meredith suggested that they walk out to the rafts and have their lunch there. The other children greeted the idea with glee and Mike looked carefully about to decide that it was all right. [133]

"Mike get fire, boys take dinner out," advised Mike, as he began picking up kindlings and pieces of wood for a fire.

The children picked up their dinner boxes and started off across the ice. The largest raft held all of them, and soon Mike came over with a huge bundle of wood that he dragged across the ice to the raft.

He deftly prepared a kindling fire and placed a few of the large pine chunks upon it. In a short time the children were as warm as if it were summer time, and the smoke of the wood fire rose straight up in the clear windless air.

They enjoyed the novelty of the raft dinner so much that several loads came and the sledges returned before the children were willing to talk of going back. [134]

"This is dandy ice—wish we could take a skate up and down," ventured Don.

"'Tis fine ice, isn't it?" abetted Meredith, looking up and down the river as far as eye could see.

"Let's! Just one spin around," said Paul.

"Mike won't like it," hinted Lavinia.

"Mike won't care. We are perfectly safe on such thick ice," said Don, looking out of the tail of his eye in Mike's direction.

Mike squatted on the raft smoking his pipe, but he said nothing. He was thinking over the words the children had spoken. [135]

"Mike, guess we'll take a spin over the ice," said Paul.

"Mike no like him—pouf! full of holes of air!" said Mike, making a sound to show the children the danger of air-holes.

"We know an air-hole when we see it—and I can't see any of them around here," replied Paul.

"Besides, we are only going to skate around the raft," said Don.

"Mike no like him, big boys like him, what Mike can do?" said the Indian helplessly, as he shrugged his shoulders.

"Mike, I won't go—neither shall Dot," said Lavinia. [136]

"Oh, but I am, Viney! Don't think that I am going to sit here like a baby when Don is off streaking across the ice or doing the 'outer edge,'" retorted Dot, taking her skates from the bag

and unbuckling the heel straps.

Two sledges had finished unloading and the drivers called out to Mike.

"Comin' back this trip?"

"Nah! we're going to have a skate on the ice," shouted Paul, waving the men back to the forest.

The boys and Dot put on their skates while Lavinia and Babs sat beside the fire and watched them. Mike had gone on shore to find something. [137]

After the boys were off, Mike returned dragging a long slender birch tree along the ice. He placed it near the raft and sat down on the edge of one of the logs, saying nothing about his errand.

For half an hour, enjoyment of skating made the forest depths echo with laughter from the children. Then they got tired and Paul made a suggestion.

"Let's go out to that log that sticks end up out of the ice, and starting from that, skate back to see who can win a race."

The idea appealed to the others, but Meredith ordered Dot to go back to the raft.

"I, wa-wa-nt to race too! I do-do-n't wa-a-nt to g-go back!" chattered Dot, with blue lips. [138]

"You've got to! You're so cold now you can't talk straight!" exclaimed Meredith.

"Ah, go on, Dot! You're spoilin' my fun!" cried Don, turning to give Dot a little shove toward the raft.

"No, I won't," pouted Dot, dropping upon the ice in sheer contrariness.

"All right, sit there, if you want," said Meredith, starting off, followed by the other two boys.

Dot watched them for a while, but feeling too uncomfortably cold she slowly skated back to the raft and crouched near the fire. [139]

Mike heard her telling Lavinia what the boys were going to do, and he jumped up, grabbed the end of the birch tree and ran swiftly across the ice with his sure-footed buck-skins helping him.

"Hi! Hi!" cried Mike, trying to get the boys' attention. But the wind was against him.

"Him channel! Big hole! Water swish!" yelled Mike, in an agony of fear lest the boys reach the channel-mark before he could get there.

Paul and Meredith were swift skaters and soon outstripped Don, but just as they came near the log which was the goal, Paul's skate loosened and he fell down on the ice. Meredith came over to assist him, and they found that a screw was loose. [140]

"Don's got a broken knife blade that we can use for a screw-driver. We'll wait for him," said Meredith.

Don soon skated up and produced the knife with the broken blade, and Paul tried to fasten the screw in place again.

So intent were they over the repairing of the skate that neither of them heard an ominous crack along the ice as soon as Don's extra weight came near the log.

A few more dull cracks sounded as the ice seemed suddenly to become lined with crooked white lines. Before Paul could fasten his skate on again, however, Mike's voice reached them. [141]

"Back! Back! Big channel by log!"

At the same time, a grinding crack went directly under the boys' feet and Don shot back toward Mike, screaming for Meredith and Paul to come back.

Meredith saw the danger and tried to help Paul up and away, but Paul's skate was still loose and it made him stumble. As he fell down again, the ice, now all ready to yawn for its victim, slowly sunk down with the weight placed upon it, and Paul was almost submerged before Meredith could drag him over to the piece upon which he clung. [142]

At the same time, Mike ran the birch tree over the ice and advised the boys to cling to it for all they were worth.

Paul had all he could do to cling fast to the trunk, for the suction of the channel waters under his stomach and legs was awful!

After some struggling, however, Mike and Don dragged on their end until the boys were pulled over out of the danger zone of the channel.

During this interval, Lavinia sat spell-bound with fear, but Babs was too busy poking twigs in the embers to notice her sister's white face.

As Mike drew the two boys over the ice, Lavinia heaved a mighty sigh and started to cry softly. [143]

"Him big hole! Mike know river oop and down. Mike lil' Injun, so big, Mike take canoe oop and

down," explained the trapper, holding his hand down to his knees to show the boys how long he had been acquainted with the treacherous channel.

Paul was soaked and Meredith partially wet, so the boys ran over to the raft where a hot fire was soon blazing to dry off their outer clothing. Mike made the older children sit close together facing the fire, while he took the dry coats of Don, Lavinia and Dot, and spread them over the backs of the five, then he hung the wet coats upon a sapling near the heat to dry.

[144]

In half an hour a shout came from the shore and two more sledges were emptied of logs and waiting for the children to go back. In a few moments, they were all sliding and running across the ice and clambered up the bank to get aboard the sleighs.

Dot was eager to tell all about the accident and rescue, but Mike shook his head, and Lavinia placed her hand over her sister's mouth.

The horses were tired after a long day's hauling and moved slowly back to the forests where the men were still cutting timber.

From there, Mike hurried all of his party along the road toward camp and told the girls not to speak of the incident then.

[145]

Meredith and Paul were taken to Cooke's cabin and made to sit near the fire while their clothes were hung up to dry. Lavinia went to their bunks and brought clean underclothes to Mike, and so no one knew of it until several days after.

Don and Dot strolled over to the office while the others were in the kitchen, and sat down by the table to have a game of dominoes.

After playing several games, Don made a remark.

"Those rafts will make fine play this spring."

"We won't be here when the river thaws," replied Dot.

"Maybe—who knows how long Daddum'll have to stay."

[146]

"Well—s'pose we do, what then?" asked Dot, curiously.

"They're chained fast to the logs—can't break away. We can have heaps of fun playin' on them and paddlin' them back and forth to the shore."

"Ye'es, I s'pose so! But I won't play on 'em until I see for myself whether the chains are rusty or good," retorted Dot, thinking of all the other scrapes her twin had led her into, in which she generally got the worst of the bargain.

CHAPTER VII

[147]

CHRISTMAS AT THE LUMBER CAMP

CHRISTMAS was seldom made much of among the timber-jacks, but this winter they were to have such a celebration as they had never dreamed of before.

Mr. Starr had held several secret meetings with his wife and the Latimers, and the result was that one day in the early part of December, he took the fastest team and the sleigh and drove to town.

Mr. Starr went directly to the express office of the little station and made inquiries.

[148]

"Has any box come for me from Grand Forks?" asked he.

"Yaas, guess that's what you're lookin' fer," replied the man who was ticket-agent, baggage-master and express agent, all three in one.

"That's it!" smiled Mr. Starr, taking his money out to pay the charges.

"All paid, and nuthin' to c'lect," laughed the man.

"Ho, that so? Well, then, just keep this and buy the kiddies some Christmas," said Mr. Starr, handing the man a dollar.

A whole dollar for a present meant more to this man out in the wilderness than a hundred dollars would to one in the city.

[149]

The box was set up in front of Mr. Starr's feet in the cutter, and the horses pranced away with sleigh-bells jingling like a veritable Santa Claus!

Several stops were made at stores where candy, pop-corn, trimmings for trees, fruit, and toys were sold. Mr. Starr then drove his team to the stable and left word to be called for an early start in the morning. He went into the house, greeted the hotel keeper who had never before had a transient guest in the winter, and had supper with the family. Early that night he went to bed,

leaving orders to be called at five.

By six o'clock the next morning, Mr. Starr, with all of his shopping piled in the back, under the seat, and in front of the sleigh, was flying back to the lumber camp. [150]

The weather held good, and late that night the camp heard the jangle of bells as Mr. Starr drove over to the stables.

Great secrecy and whispers were the result of that trip to town. And many hours, while the children were at school, Mrs. Starr and Mrs. Latimer were busy sewing.

Finally, the great festival time arrived, and everyone wondered what sort of Christmas fun could be had out in the woods.

The two ladies had spent several days in the kitchen showing Cookee some marvelous things! He had never seen a plum pudding cooked before, but he declared he could make one like it, after having watched Mrs. Starr prepare an immense one. [151]

High, flaky cakes, with chocolate or jelly between the layers, were baked and stood hidden in the closet back of the table.

The timber men had come across a cranberry swamp in the early days of cutting and Mrs. Starr had quietly appropriated the pretty red berries for a future use. Now they reappeared as cranberry sauce.

"Huh! who'd a'thought them sour little balls'd made sich a fine juice!" exclaimed Cookee, smacking his lips after a taste of the sauce. [152]

"That's to go with the venison on Christmas Day," said Mrs. Latimer.

"Didn't yeh know? Heven't yeh hearn what Mike cotched?" asked Cookee eagerly.

"No, what?" asked the ladies, expectantly.

"Couple of wil' turkeys! Dey was roostin' near his trap, and Mike ain't never had a catch in it this year, so he was feelin' like a mighty poor kind of a trapper, when dese turkeys lit on a line wid his eye. It was some job to cotch bote on em, 'cause one allus flies away soon's a sound is hearn. But, Mike—he jest says to hisself, 'By gum! I'll git bote on yer or chase yer all over the Nort!'" and Cookee laughed as he thought of Mike's determined manner when he threw down both turkeys. [153]

"Why, how perfectly lovely! We will have a real Eastern dinner after all," cried Mrs. Starr.

"An dat ain't all dere is to it, nuther! Mike, he's gone duck shootin' to-day an 'spects to bring back several brace of ducks to hep out on de turkeys," said Cookee, grinning at the way he gave away Mike's secrets for Christmas dinner.

"We'd better save the venison steak for New Year's, then," suggested Mrs. Latimer.

"Huh, huh! I will," replied Cookee, who was a favored mortal in camp, for timber-jacks could do without sleep but not without food. [154]

"Now's we got the juice done, an' the cakes baked, I'll jes' show you what I done made fer the feast," said Cookee, leading the ladies into a lean-to shed that he had built up against the cabin, to store his cooked foods safely away from men and children.

In the spare minutes between meals when he had to cook and serve food for more than fifty hungry men, Cookee had delighted in baking cookies of every conceivable shape. These were for the children.

From the ankle bones and hoofs of the deer he had boiled out the jelly and flavored it with lemon and nutmeg and made a mould of jelly that looked exactly like calf's-foot jelly, but tasted much better. It shook upon its platter like the showpiece in any caterer's window. [155]

He had cored large apples, and, with a concoction of beaten eggs, molasses, nuts and a bit of mint to flavor it, filled the gaps and baked them. The apples were soft and shiny when they came forth from the oven, and immediately, Cookee poured some melted sugar over them and allowed them to crystallize in the cold.

Several other unique side dishes had been made by the ingenious cook, and the ladies were most generous in their praise.

For several nights preceding Christmas Eve, the children had been sent to bed as soon as supper was over, to give the elders plenty of time to string pop-corn, make paper trimmings, and arrange generally for the great tree they were to have in the clearing if the day was fair, or in the dining-room if it stormed. [156]

Christmas Eve was very clear and not too cold to be enjoyable out of doors. So, the men planted the tree in the middle of the clearing in the morning, and the children wandered about it all that day, trying to figure out how it ever would get trimmed.

"Tause," said Babs to Dot, "Dere ain't any chimbley fer Santy to come down!"

"But, we are almos' up in his home an' mebbe he don't use chimbleys at the North Pole," [157]

ventured Dot, who was somewhat suspicious of fat old Santa ever creeping down their chimneys at Oakwood.

That afternoon, Mike was told that the driver of one of the sledges would be free to take the children on a sleigh-ride party to the place where he knew the holly and mistletoe grew. The children were eager to go, and soon were out of the way.

The moment the coast was clear the elders hurried out of the cabins with huge bundles of trimmings for the tree and started to dress it up in all manner of finery. Long chains of white and colored pop-corn, fancy cut and fluted tissue-paper chains, paper flowers, rosy apples, numerous paper bundles that meant gifts for everyone, tinsel threads everywhere from tip to tip of the branches, and last of all large candles that would not blow out in a light breeze and would burn a long time. [158]

Huge pine torches were stuck in safe places all about the clearing, and the large lanterns that hung on poles were ready for the illumination.

The timber men came in early that day, for they knew of Santa Claus' visit early that night, and washed and dressed for the occasion.

The sledge with the children returned about four o'clock laden with vines and berries for trimming the dining-room. [159]

The moment the children came toward the clearing, however, they gave shrieks of pleasure. Everyone ran out to see the cause of the joy and everyone was surprised (?) to find the tree all ready for lighting.

"Oh, Mumzie, I thought Santa never came until night!" cried Dot, disappointed to find that her plot to catch him had failed.

"That is the way down home, of course; but here, why I suppose this will be his first stop as we are so near his home," replied Mrs. Starr.

Babs stood gaping at the tree and never saying a word.

"Say, Mumzie, you jus' said 'Would be his first stop' but he's been and done it!" exclaimed Don. [160]

"Oh, but he hasn't distributed the gifts. Don't you think he will want to hand them about himself?" asked Mrs. Starr.

"Maybe he won't have time, you know. He has to go so far to-night. Maybe that's why he hung them here so early—so's we could he'p ourselves," ventured Dot, thoughtfully.

"Well, we will wait until dark and see. If he hasn't returned by five-thirty or six o'clock, I guess we will do the giving," said Mrs. Starr, leading Babs away to the cabin to be dressed for Santa in case he should come.

"I'm goin' to put on my best dress, too, Mumzie," said Dot, and Don whispered that he wanted to put on his Sunday suit. [161]

"All right, dearies, but hurry so you will be here if he comes," returned Mrs. Starr, smiling with anticipation.

Now, the postman who brought mail and any shopping from the town to the camp, every week, had been engaged to keep up the delivery all winter for very good pay, and he willingly took the risk of getting caught in a storm for the salary he got. He had a brother who was the very image of a Santa Claus—short, fat, with white beard and ruddy complexion; jolly as could be, too. Mr. Starr talked with him while he was in town and arranged for both of the men to spend Christmas Day at the camp where the jolly one was to play Santa Claus for the children. [162]

Mr. Starr had purchased material for clothing and the ladies cut and sewed them. The jolly man would have to hide himself all evening, so Babs and the twins would not see him and thus find out the trick played upon them. But, he could reappear the next morning in costume and remain so until time for the brothers to return to town. This would make the whole Christmas Day one of bliss for the three little ones—to think that Santa stayed with them a whole day on the return trip to the North Pole, after his night's work was done! [163]

The children were dressed and warmly wrapped up by the time a horn was heard. Heads popped out of cabin-doors, and everyone looked in the direction of the tree. It was wonderfully illuminated, every candle flickering brightly in the dark. All about the clearing the great pine knots flared and the lanterns burned steadily, making the entire place a glow of light.

"Oh, Dot, run, run!" called Don, dragging his sister out by the hand.

"O-oh! isn't it grand!" sighed Dot, standing with clasped hands.

The others came out of their cabins and hurried over to the tree.

"Santa's come again and lit de lights!" cried Babs, ecstatically. [164]

"Did he, Daddum?" asked Don, doubting that Santa did the lighting.

"I didn't do it, and I don't believe anyone of the men did it—did you?" asked Mr. Starr, turning

to the group of smiling men.

"I didn't, and I know not one of the timber-jacks did it," said Mr. Latimer, soberly.

Suddenly, Babs, who was seeking under a branch for a tempting ball of pop-corn that hung low, gave a shriek of mingled fear and joy.

"Oh, he's here! He's sleeping in here!" cried she, pointing her chubby fingers toward the tree.

"Who? What?" demanded the twins, running over to Babs. [165]

Meredith and Paul hurried over also and stood surprised to see real Santa Claus come out from under the branches, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"Well, well, well, friends! I must have taken a nap! I am so tired from working nights over all the dolls and toys! But, now I will soon have to go!" chuckled the jolly old fellow.

Babs stood as still as could be, but Don and Dot danced a frenzied dance and shouted with joy to find dear old Santa really there with them.

"Oh, Santa, we are *so* glad to see you," they cried, while everyone smiled and repeated the welcome. [166]

"And I'm glad to be with you. I made up my mind that I would try to stop early on my way to the other children. Now, if you want me to give you these gifts, I'd better be busy for I have a long way to travel to-night, you know. But I may stop over in the morning and see how you like your presents."

This was too much for the twins' cup of happiness, and they ran up and clung to their beloved friend.

The distribution of gifts then took place and everyone from Mike to Mr. Latimer was remembered.

The children knew there was no place toys could be had in that faraway forest, so of course Santa Claus had brought them when he came! [167]

The revelation that there was a really and truly Santa Claus gave Dot and Don more happiness than anything else, for, at home, some of the boys and girls said it was all make-believe.

While everyone sat in the dining-room eating supper, and talking their heads almost off about the tree and the fun, Santa went away, for he was nowhere to be found when the children ran out again toward the tree.

During the singing of carols, and the story of the Star of Bethlehem, Don and Dot often turned their heads to listen, but no jingle of bells could they hear, so he *must* have gone on his route. [168]

The children slept like tops that night, but early in the morning when they came out for breakfast, there sat Santa, under the tree, as happy and fresh as could be, after his long night's work.

All that day was one long uninterrupted dream that had come true. Santa played all kinds of games with the children and seemed to have the time of his life. Then, toward dusk, he shook hands with everyone in camp and said he had to start for the North Pole.

"Come again, Santa!" called Babs, as she waved her hand at the old fellow.

"I'll try to, Baby," said Santa Claus as he went toward the stable. [169]

"Gee, Dot, we never thought to peep in the stable and see his reindeers and sleigh," whispered Don.

Mrs. Starr suspected what Don had said, however, and replied, "No, of course not! Do you suppose we want Santa to think we are such ill-bred people as to be curious? Let the dear old man depart in peace."

CHAPTER VIII [170]

MIKE'S BEAR TRAP

WORK and play went quickly after the holidays and February soon arrived with the timber-men working harder than ever to get out all the logs possible before the thaw set in. Just as soon as the thaw sets in in the northern woods, the roads become almost impassable and ice starts to break up. The river overflows its banks and carries everything before it.

The river that was expected to flood and carry down the logs of the Manitoba Lumber Company generally drove them into a large lagoon where the saw-mills belonging to the company stood. [171]

February was a short month, but the weather held good so that the men got out more timber

that month than in January. The banks of the river were completely hidden under immense roll-ways of pine logs, so arranged that the moment the water rose the logs lying in the edge of the water would float out and that would gradually roll the entire mass of lumber into the water.

The first few days in March were very warm, and cracklings of ice could be heard distinctly through the woods. The men feared that work for the season was over, for, with the thaw, the work of hauling timber would have to cease. Still, they hoped that a period of cold would come on top of the thaw and that would just about permit them to finish the area of forest timber that had been mapped out in the Fall. [172]

Mike had decided to abandon his trip to the North Woods for hunting and trapping, for he figured out that he could make more money by accepting the bosses' offer. This money was clear profit and he could put it in the bank at Winnipeg to await his old age when he could work no more.

But Mike set traps and did some hunting about the woods and kept the camp supplied with game and venison. He had one large trap set several miles from camp, but as yet had not caught anything in it. [173]

The day before the warm spell set in, Mike sniffed the air and took note of various signs in the woods that told him a thaw was on the road. Consequently he knew that, if it was of a long enough period of time, many of the animals that sleep during the winter months would be tempted to come out and look about.

Finding nothing to eat, they would be led to seek farther afield, for they would be hungry after a long sleep.

Mike loped over to his traps that afternoon, and, having found the large one in good order, he baited it and arranged it so deftly that not one bit of the iron showed through the twigs and leaves. [174]

As he expected, the thaw began that night and the temperature became higher each day until the trees seemed about to burst into blossom.

Mike didn't visit the trap the first day of the thaw, but on the afternoon of the second day he hurried out to cross the forest in the direction of his traps. Halfway there, he stopped and looked at some tracks in the soft slushy snow.

"Ha! Mike in time for him. Him big bear. Him hungry an' come see camp, but smell meat in trap—ha!" [175]

Mike followed the tracks eagerly and found they led him almost directly to the place where his long-awaited-for prize was caught.

The bear was exhausted from struggling to escape from the trap and Mike soon put an end to her pain with a rifle-bullet.

She was an immense black bear which must have come some distance for food. Mike looked her over carefully and nodded his head with understanding as he spoke to himself while loosing the spring on the trap.

"Her got cubs at home in her cave. Her hungly an' hunt eats for her babbies. Mike mus' hunt for babbies an' carry home to feed." [176]

The trap was set again, and with satisfaction that his whole winter was not wasted in a civilized life—proof—the bear he was dragging back to camp—Mike appeared at the clearing just as the children wondered what had become of their play-mate.

Mike dragged the improvised carrier made of boughs, with the black bear laid out upon them, into the camp where everyone gathered to behold the trophy of the Indian's trap. They felt of the thick fur, the still warm nose, and examined the sharp claws that could be so cruel.

"My, but she's a big one, Mike!" said Mr. Latimer.

"Humph! Her got two cubs—home. Mike mus' go fin' 'em now. Babbies hungly an' got no eats. Babbies starve." [177]

The bear was taken to a place under the trees back of the Cookee's cabin, and Mike filled his belt with ammunition and saw to it that his rifle was in perfect order, for he might meet with opposition from some hungry animals on his way to find the cave.

Cookee packed a good kit of food for Mike, and, strapping this, with a blanket, upon his back, he started off on his quest. The children stood mournfully watching him disappear through the thick forest, then turned their attention to planning what to do with the little bears. [178]

"Wish I could have gone with him," said Paul.

"Me too! What's the use of spending a winter in Canada if you have to snoop around camp all the time," added Meredith.

Mike found the tracks of the bear where he had first seen them, and followed them closely.

That night, Mike made camp out in the open forest, and heard enough beasts prowling about

his fire during the night to prove that they had not all been frightened away.

Early in the morning, after a hasty breakfast, Mike picked up the tracks again and kept on going until the steep cliffs of the mountain were reached. Here he became very watchful, for at any moment a panther or bear might pounce upon him. [179]

Mike was prepared to battle with the mate of the old she-bear if necessary, but he thought it likely that the bear had followed his mate, in search of food for the cubs. If he had, he would most likely get caught in the trap also. If he was about the cave, Mike would have his hands full in smoking him out, or in watching for him and shooting him when he found him.

The trapper surely was favored that day, for he soon found the trail that led to a large cave in the side of the cliffs, and after careful investigation, found that tracks of both bears led down the mountain side, but that none returned. He lit a torch of resinous wood and crept carefully toward the cave. [180]

He looked all about and laid his ear to the ground to ascertain if anything were approaching. Finding all quiet, except a faint rustle of leaves in the cave, Mike poked the long pole, with the torch at the end, ahead of him into the cave.

After following the winding tunnel for some yards, he suddenly came out into an open space about seven feet wide, and five feet high in the middle. He had to stoop to get in and, when his eyes grew accustomed to the circle of light thrown upon the walls of the cave, he saw two fat little cubs curled up in a bed of dried leaves and twigs. He planted the torch against the wall and turning over one little cub he found they were both fast asleep—probably had not yet opened their eyes since they were born. As Mike had to bring both away to keep them from starving, he slung his rifle over his back and took a little cub under each arm. He started out of the cave very carefully, on guard against the old fellow who might come in at any time. But there was no obstacle to his getting down the side of the mountain quickly and along the trail by which he came. [181]

The little cubs shivered slightly and curled up closer to Mike's side, and he chuckled over them as he thought of the surprise they would receive at camp. [182]

Mike avoided the trail after he reached familiar woods and struck off across the forest for camp. His gun had to be slung upright at his back to permit his passage between trees, but he soon came out upon the road-cut and then it was easy walking. The fat little cubs felt heavy before Mike reached camp and Mike was only too thankful to deposit them in his bunk at the little cabin which he called his own.

He tried to waken the furry balls by pulling their ears and rolling them over and over, but they snoozed on as peacefully as if cuddled by their old mother's paws. [183]

Mike had been gone from camp two days, and the children were not yet aware of his presence, but Cookee saw him lope across the clearing and enter his cabin.

"Cookee, give us some crackers?" asked Don, as Dot and he rushed into the kitchen after the cook.

"Crackers! what fer? to feed Mike?" teased Cookee.

"Mike? No, for ourselves. Wish Mike was back, though, 'cause Paul said the other old bear might kill him."

"Mike's back—I saw him go in his cabin a few minutes ago," said Cookee, turning to take some crackers from a jar.

He turned again to hand them to the twins but laughed when he found them gone—running for all they were worth to Mike's cabin. [184]

"Funny lil' critters! An' don' they just love Mike!" said the cook to himself, as he started to roll out the biscuit dough.

"Hello, Mike! when did you get back?" cried both Don and Dot as they rushed into the cabin.

Without waiting for an answer, both children saw the two furry balls on the bunk and stepped softly over, to see what they were.

"Oh, the cuties! what are they, Mike?" cried Dot.

"Cubs; old bear's babbies!" said Mike, smiling at the twins as they hugged and cuddled the cubs. [185]

"Oh, Mike! *they* will never grow up to hurt anyone, will they?" asked Dot, doubtfully.

"No siree! 'cause we are goin' to keep 'em and train 'em to be as good as a Newfoundland dog," said Don.

"But they are Mike's bears," said Dot.

"But Mike will give 'em to us, if we love 'em," replied Don.

"Dat's what dey for!" said Mike.

"Oh, oh! Look Mike, see this little one stick out his tiny pink tongue," shouted Dot, excitedly.

"Him hungly! Mike git dinner!"

So, leaving Don and Dot to watch the cubs, Mike went to the cook's cabin and hunted for a bottle with a slender neck. With a red-hot wire he bored a small hole through a cork and, after filling the bottle with diluted condensed milk and oatmeal gruel, he drove the cork into the neck. He wrapped the bottle inside his coat and hurried over to the cabin with it. [186]

The ladies and the other children had been called to the exhibition by Don, after Mike went to the kitchen, and all of them were delighted over the dear little fur-balls. Lavinia held one of the soft, velvety paws in her hands smiling at the tiny toes and pink skin underneath. Suddenly, however, the cub stretched and from the velvet paw there shot out five sharp nails, long enough to make the children gasp. [187]

"Where does he hide them?" said Lavinia.

"Gee! I never thought bear babies had claws like that!" said Don, showing more respect for the cubs thereafter.

"Oh, Mike, what are you going to do?" asked everyone who had seen the bottle.

"Feed babbies," grinned Mike, as he opened a cub's mouth and stuck the bottle inside at an angle that would let the liquid run out—and in.

Immediately, the cub gulped and started sucking at the impromptu feeding bottle.

Mike watched the milk diminish and when the bottle was half empty he took it away and opened the other little cub's mouth for its food. The first one, being comfortably fed, rolled over and went on sleeping. [188]

The second cub was the smaller of the two and could not drink the milk as rapidly as the sturdier one. Several times it choked and had to cough and sneeze, which made the children laugh delightedly, but Mike waited patiently until it had recovered breath.

"Mike, won't they wake up and play?" asked Dot.

"Him wake up, tree-four-five day!" replied Mike.

"Not before?" asked Don.

"Not before him eye open—'bout five day!" returned Mike. [189]

Mike made a bed of balsam tips covered with an old buck-skin shirt.

The cubs were deposited upon the new bed and curled up close together, never missing their old home or realizing that they had a foster-mother. Mike fed them regularly, and the children found them a never-ending source of delight.

CHAPTER IX

 [190]

FATHER BEAR VISITS THE CAMP

THE following morning after his return from the cave, Mike started off to inspect his traps. He rather suspected that the old father bear had deserted the mother and cubs and wandered over the mountain in another direction and possibly been trapped by some hunter. If such was not the case, he might have come upon his mate's tracks and followed her to the trap. In that case he might have been trapped as his mate was. There was still another thought which came to Mike, but he disliked dwelling on it: the bear might scent the man who stole the babies and follow him. Mike knew of cases where a mother bear had followed her cubs for miles and miles and then fought with the thief. [191]

Therefore, Mike was very observing as he crept through the woods and started through the glade where the trap was set. He saw tracks, which had been recently made, all over the soft top ground, for the thaw had melted the snow that bore the she-bear's tracks and soaked the ground enough to soften it for half an inch into the frost; here were plainly seen the marks of great paws as they trampled the area about the trap, but never came near enough to be caught. [192]

But there was no sign of a bear about. Looking very carefully from right to left, Mike started back to camp, prepared at the first sound or sign to shoot.

Mike had almost reached the camp when he heard shouts and cries of terror. He ran as fast as he could, and found the women and Babs in the dining-room with doors closed, shouting directions from a partially opened window. Cookee was at the window of his kitchen waving a pail of boiling water about. The older children were shut in the office with faces pressed close against the panes of glass, but Don and Dot were in his own cabin which had but one small pane of glass let in the front of the door. The door was closed, but a ponderous shaggy bear stood snuffling at the crack at the bottom, and uttering, ever and again, the most terrifying growls. [193]

The people had sought safety wherever they had been caught at the time the bear marched into the clearing, after following the scent of his dead mate's body. With nose to the ground he must have been on his way toward the little shed where the she-bear hung, when a new scent greeted his nose. He made for Mike's cabin and began to realize that his children were in there.

[194]

Immediately he tore at the wood and demanded in stern tones to be admitted.

Don and Dot, looking at each other in dismay, peeped out of the window to behold that most appalling hulk standing at the door!

Mike understood, but he must plan to get a good sure shot at the maddened bear without hitting the glass in the door.

He crawled noiselessly across half of the clearing to get an aim at the bear from another vantage-point, but the bear, in his intensity, was all alert to sound, and heard the almost imperceptible noise the Indian made on the soft ground.

He turned, and stood glowering at his enemy who was about thirty feet away. He seemed to know intuitively that this was the man who had ruined his home, and he stood looking him over from head to foot.

[195]

Mike, very slowly, so as not to cause the beast any action, brought his rifle up to his shoulder, but before he could take aim, the bear sprang forward toward the man.

It took Mike but a moment to dodge into the children's cabin and shut the door. No, not quite!

The bear wheeled as soon as Mike dodged, and came after him. The time lost in turning the door-knob and getting inside gave the bear time to get to the door. The door was almost closed upon the catch when the nose of the beast came plump up against the wooden obstacle. The door was pushed halfway open, but Mike exerted all of his strength to shove it back again, and dragged the bureau up against it. Before he could turn the lock to make the catch hold better the bear threw his entire weight up against the outside and forced the door in again.

[196]

While he held his shoulder against the door to keep the bear out, he used his rifle to smash in the glass of the little square window near the door.

The moment this was done, Mike jumped from his post behind the door and managed to squeeze his body through the window, while the bear, feeling resistance give way from inside, forced himself in to devour his enemy.

[197]

Mike got out and immediately caught hold of the door from the outside and banged it shut, caging the bear in the little room.

The bear's face appeared at the window whence his intended victim had escaped, and he tried to get out. He could barely push his large head through but his shoulders stuck fast in the opening.

Mike looked about for help and found every window about the clearing with a face pressed against it. He yelled for the cook.

"Cookee! Him make Mike's lil' gun ready!—in cabin!"

[198]

The cook, seeing that the wild beast was safely shut up for the time being, ran out of his kitchen and hurried over to Mike's aid. Mike made him understand that a revolver was to be found in his cabin. Cookee ran and loaded it, coming back to Mike's side, just as the bear, snarling and chewing at the inner sill in his rage to get out, poked his head through the opening.

"Cookee, hol' fas' door—Mike put gun in him head!" said Mike, as he motioned the cook to take his place at the door.

At that moment, Don came out and shouted to Mike.

"Hi, there, Mike! Let's leave him in there and keep him caged up until we go home. Dot and I'll sleep in the office if you'll let the bear live there."

[199]

"Yes, Mike, please do," added Dot.

"Whaf'fer?" asked Mike.

"To sell to the Central Park Menagerie!" shouted Don.

"The big father bear and his two children will be fine for everyone to come and see, and Dot and I'll get a heap of money fer 'em, and you can have half," added Dot.

Just at that crisis, when the ladies were going to call to Mike to shoot the bear and be done with it, the timber-men were heard coming from the cutting.

Mr. Starr and Mr. Latimer came first, and, seeing that some unusual event was going on, they ran over to Mike to ask the cause. Just as Mr. Latimer's eyes came opposite the opening of the window, the bear stuck his big bushy head out and, with eyes like balls of fire, he uttered a snarl that curled back his lips, showing frightful fangs ready to tear everyone to shreds.

[200]

Mr. Latimer made a queer noise, halfway between a shriek and a groan, and fell up against Cookee. It was so unexpected and sudden that Cookee was toppled off of his feet and the door

swung halfway open again. In that second the bear came down from the window and thundered at the door, but Mike was too agile an Indian to have that door open, and before the bear could get his nose through the crack, the door slammed shut again, and Mr. Starr was stationed there to hold it.

[201]

"Meester Don an' Doot, say, 'Keep bear live for park,'" explained Mike, waiting orders from the bosses.

As soon as Cookee gained his breath, which had been knocked out by the sudden fall, he explained.

"The twins want to let the bear stay in this cabin and they'll sleep in the office. They want to sell him to the park and get a lot of money."

"Shoot him, quick!" ordered Mr. Starr, seeing the wet nose of the bear appear at the opening again.

[202]

Mike took a good aim this time and soon a crack of the gun, followed by a heavy thud inside the cabin, made them all breathe easier. The doors of the other buildings opened and the prisoners stepped out to ask if it was safe to come over.

Don and Dot did not wait for an answer but ran to join the men.

Mike carefully crept up to the window and tried to see the inside of the cabin, but he could only see the two bunks opposite the window. After a short time, not a sound being heard inside, Mike pushed his head inside the window.

There lay the ponderous animal on the floor under the window just as he had dropped.

[203]

"All gone!" said Mike, laconically as ever.

The door was opened and the men peeped in first. Then the door was opened wide and everyone went in.

"Two big dead bears, and two little live ones," said Meredith.

"Not so bad for one trap's work, eh?" said Paul.

"I was just thinking: what did Mike want these for? Did we need food, or fur, or was it just the natural hunting spirit in most men that made him do this," said Meredith.

"I feel that way, myself, Mete," added Lavinia. "And I am dreadfully sorry for those dear little babies. What will we ever do with them?"

[204]

"I'm going to keep one," cried Don.

"An' I've decided to keep the other," added Dot.

"And remain in Canada after we go home, eh?" laughed Mr. Starr.

"Why, no, we'll take them with us," said Don.

"Not with my consent. Pay double fares from Winnipeg to New York, then have everything in Oakwood torn to pieces, including the family, when the bears grow larger."

"Oh, we'll only keep them while they are cute like puppy dogs, then we'll send them to the menagerie," replied Don.

"Better turn them loose in the woods," said Cookee.

[205]

"Why, no, now that we have had all the trouble of getting them, and they are orphans, they will never know any other home than a cage, so I agree with the children—let us keep them while we remain and they will play like puppies, then ship them to the city to be trained," said Mrs. Starr.

As her word was generally obeyed, the matter was considered settled, and the cubs remained where they were for a time.

In a few days, the cubs opened their tiny twinkling eyes, and soon were able to roll around. At first they tried to stand, but their fat little legs would not hold them up, and they rolled on the floor like balls of fur. Many a shout of glee rang out from the dining-room when the cubs tried to exercise. But in a week's time they could jump and run after the twins if they teased them.

[206]

A long, hard spell of cold weather followed the bear-fight, and the children had to play indoors every afternoon for some time, but they preferred it on account of their new play-fellows.

The little bears grew strong and mischievous, and many a bout they had with Don and Dot, the latter generally having to climb upon the table to get away from them.

Mike took especial pride in keeping them clean and chubby, and the two bears followed him as if he was a natural protector. He never teased them and said little, but they knew that he was their foster-mother.

[207]

The first week in March, the cold broke up and the thaw began slowly but surely to melt away the deep snows which fell in February, and ice started to soften and crack.

The men realized that most of their season's work was completed and were happy to find that they had cut several thousand feet more than the figure given them. As they still had several days in which they might work, it would figure up to nearly 50,000 extra feet of timber ready to market.

One morning, Mr. Starr stood talking to his wife, when the children came across the opening toward the school-room. Close upon the twins' heels came the two cubs, stopping now and then to sniff at something on the ground, then trying to run and catch up but falling over each other in the attempt. [208]

As the group came up to Mr. and Mrs. Starr, the former said, "Well, children, our winter in the forest is almost over. Mumzie and I were just talking about packing up for home."

"Home!" said Don, aghast.

"Oh, no!" added Dot.

"Yes, home," repeated Mr. Starr. "The rivermen will soon start the logs down stream and there is nothing further to keep us here, but I am needed at the other end." [209]

"Oh, I was hoping we might live here until summer," said Lavinia, regretfully.

"You are not homesick, then," smiled Mrs. Starr.

"Homesick! I should say not!" declared the children.

"Well, to tell the truth, children, I've had a most unusual winter of enjoyment, but I shall be heartily glad to see my beautiful home again," said Mrs. Starr.

"So shall I," added Mrs. Latimer. "Camp life is fine for a few months, but I have had enough to last me a long time. I want a porcelain bathtub and electric lights for a change." [210]

Everyone laughed, and the children went on to school, but the suggestion made them all feel a bit homesick, though reluctant to leave the grand old forests.

A few days later, Mrs. Starr and Mrs. Latimer began to pack their various belongings, to have things in readiness to leave when the time came.

Cookee also began packing the travelling outfit, for he would accompany the men on the trip down the river. They would make a camp at a place for a night or two, and then move on, as the large drift of logs permitted.

A large case had been ordered from the town for the cubs, and it was decided to put them in, nail slats across the top and ship them directly to the park commissioner at Central Park, for the menagerie there. [211]

CHAPTER X

 [212]

AFLOAT ON THE RIVER RAFT

AS the milder weather settled down to stay, Don began thinking of the river and the fun of watching the piled up logs gradually sink down into the water, so he spoke to Dot about it.

"Let's go down to the river on Saturday morning and play," suggested he.

"Oh, it's awful far, Don, an' we won't get back to dinner," objected Dot.

"We'll get Cookee to give us something to eat and we can walk slowly so you won't get tired. The roads are all cut out now, and there is no snow," persisted Don. [213]

"All right. I'll go. Goin' to bring the others?"

"Course not!" retorted Don.

Saturday morning was warm and clear and Don ran into Cookee's kitchen after breakfast with a request for some lunch as Dot and he were going to have some fun. Cook willingly gave lunch—glad to have the twins out of the way for the morning while the baking was done.

Don and Dot hurried off without being seen by anyone. Mike had kept an eye on them since their escapade of the Jumpin' Jane, but he was busy showing Babs the bear cub's sharp white teeth and warning the baby about playing with them when no one else was about. [214]

The timber-jacks were cutting way back beyond the road that ran past the clearing, and the twins had every opportunity to get down to the river without being seen. Even the road that had been cut from the forest to the river was now abandoned by the teamsters, for they had cut a new road some miles the other side of the old one and had it paved with logs to keep the wheels of the low truck from sinking into the soft thawing earth.

It took the twins some hours to gain the river-side, for the walking was troublesome. In some places where the ice and snow still clung to the exposed knolls, it was slippery, but in others, [215]

where the thaw had melted the frost and poured its waters into the glades, they had to skirt the pools or go through them. Consequently, by the time they reached the river, they were tired and wet to the knees.

"Ah! here we are at last!" cried Dot, as she sat down to rest.

"Come up on this tall heap of logs," said Don, scrambling up to the top of a twenty foot pier.

The children sat there looking all about the country with delight. The air was warm enough to be comfortable, and the river looked wonderful with the swift current pouring down the center and huge blocks of ice floating up against the banks or being whirled into the stream by suction of the current. [216]

"Great, isn't it!" exclaimed Don.

"Yes, but I wouldn't want to be on one of those cakes of ice," shivered Dot.

"Neither would anyone!"

"I'll tell you what I would like to play," said Dot.

"What?" asked Don.

"I'd play I was one of the river-men with a peavie an' I'd try to push the logs down in the river," said Dot, looking down at some logs lying halfway in the water.

"How could we manage—let me see! We could get out on that raft and stand on that to push the logs out," suggested Don. [217]

"Sure! We'll pull the raft up to the bank by the chains, an' then push her out again with our peavies."

So the two scrambled down from the logs and hunted about for two long sticks that would answer for the peavies the timber-jacks used. After finding two desirable poles, the twins ran down to the river to pull in the raft.

This was not quite so easy as it would seem, for the logs were water-soaked after a long winter in the water, but after a long tiresome haul they brought the raft near enough to board it by climbing out over a huge cake of ice. [218]

"But we can't reach the logs from here!" cried Dot, finding that they were on the other side of the ice-cake.

"We'll have to shove that iceberg out into the river," said Don, looking about for the best channel to work through.

"Let's push our raft up behind it and then we can push the ice easier," advised Dot.

This was sensible, so both children pushed their peavies into some smaller ice floes and managed to move the ponderous raft into a position so the large ice-floe could be moved. The ice was thick and the weight of it made it sink down low in the water, but after many breathless efforts it was moved out of the way far enough to permit the twins to work the raft in closer to shore. Here they met with a new difficulty, for the logs were still clinging to the ground with frost and were not to be coaxed into the water. [219]

"If we only had cant-hooks so we could yank them in!" sighed Dot.

"Guess I'll have to jump ashore and try to tip one of those top logs down," said Don, looking up at the pile they had sat upon.

"Pooh! you can't budge them a mite! It takes two men with hooks to pull them out," said Dot.

Nevertheless, Don made up his mind to get *one* log in the river at any cost. He couldn't stand the thought of being defeated by an inanimate log. [220]

He found that, the large ice-floe being out of the pathway to shore, he would have to jump from one small cake to another and follow the bank of the river until he reached a small land-jetty about fifty feet down stream.

This he did while Dot watched him breathlessly, expecting every moment to see the ice sink and slide him into the stream.

Don reached the bank in safety and then ran back toward the place where the raft was anchored. Before he reached the place, however, he stopped and looked with interest at some attraction on the bank. Dot saw him stop but could not see what it was as the logs all along the edge of the river hid the object from view. [221]

After a few minutes, he ran on to the narrow landing where they had boarded the raft.

"Say, Dot, there are lots of logs lying almost in the water down there by that crooked tree. If we could move that raft down there we could have lots of fun floating them out to the current," said Don.

"That's easy to say—move the raft! How can you move anything that's chained as this is?" asked Dot, disgustedly.

"I don't know! Let me think!"

Don crawled in under the tier of logs to the place down at the edge of the river where the chain of the raft ran ashore. He pulled the chain up as it lay slack in the water and found that the loop on shore was thrown about a low stump of pine that was left sticking out of the bank, almost hidden by the high pile of logs over it. [222]

"Ha! if I can haul the raft in a few feet, while you push with your stick, I can lift this chain off of the stump," called Don, showing Dot how the raft was fastened.

Dot began pushing and Don pulled until the heavy raft floated in shore far enough for Don to drag the chain off the stump.

The raft, released from its moorings, moved slightly out toward the former position, the chain slipping into the water and dragging behind. [223]

Don was satisfied with the result of his idea and ran down to the spot where the logs could be readily edged into the water if the small ice floes were out of the way. He pushed and worked at the ice until a clear pathway of water lay before the logs. Those in the edge of the water, were easily shoved out, but the others were too heavy to budge.

"Hi, there! Dot, shall I bring out the lunch for the raft?" called Don, as he bethought him of going back to Dot.

"Yes, an' hurry up, 'cause I think this raft is movin' some toward the river!" replied Dot, anxiously. [224]

"Ah, naw, she ain't! She's only swirling about a bit in the motion of the water!" said Don.

He ran and got the lunch and then tried to jump from one cake of ice to another just as he did when he went ashore. But he found that going ashore against the current was much easier than going out with the current, for every cake of ice he jumped upon shot out from under his feet with the river current.

As he was halfway over, he had to continue or leave Dot alone on the raft. That was entirely out of his plans, so he used his pole to push himself over as near to the large ice-floe as possible. The cake of ice he was on was small enough to be submerged every time Don pushed his pole against anything, and by the time he was able to jump on the large ice-floe his feet and legs were soaking wet again. Once up on the large floe, Don felt relieved for a fear had assailed him when he found he couldn't jump the small cakes. [225]

"Push the raft over to me—I can't make this floe budge!" called Don.

So Dot shoved the pole against a mass of ice and moved the raft over toward Don's floe. As soon as he could jump, he came on the raft and the two felt better for being together.

"I'm hungry, aren't you?" said Don, taking the lunch from his pockets. [226]

"Yes; let's have lunch now, and play river-men after," returned Dot.

As they sat munching the lunch the motion of the wavelets under the raft, dancing it up and down, made them laugh.

The ice-floe stuck close to them after Don jumped from it, and they never noticed that the floe and raft were slowly floating out from shore.

A sudden jar of the raft against another huge ice-floe that came down stream made them take notice of their greater distance from shore.

"Gee! Dot, we have floated out more'n ten feet from the bank!" said Don, looking about doubtfully.

"So we have! We'd better pole back again," said Dot. [227]

Without another word, both children tried to pole back, but they were working against the current that had begun to take hold of the ice-floe and raft.

The ice-floe was so deep down in the water that the current that ran underneath drew it along. But the raft being on the surface was not so easily carried. Don thought for a few seconds.

"Dot, if we try to push that floe off we won't be dragged along with it. She's doin' all the mischief!"

So both children turned their effort to shoving off the ice-floe and soon succeeded in moving it beyond the reach of the poles. As they watched it being caught gradually by the river current, Don whispered to his sister. [228]

"Now, let's get back as quickly as we can!"

But the poles were too short now to touch bottom, and there were no ice cakes about to offer the necessary resistance.

"What now?" asked Dot, looking at Don with full understanding of their dangerous position.

"What would you advise?" said Don, looking at the dark water.

"Can we swim ashore?" asked Dot.

"Nope! not in this current. Besides the water's as cold as ice, you know. We'd have cramps in a minute." [229]

Silence for some time, while each one thought of some way to escape from the raft.

"I know! Pull up the chain from the water and let's sling it over something on shore as soon as we float opposite!"

"Ain't that just like a girl! Why, Dot, I thought that bein' my twin you'd have more sense than that!" replied Don, disdainfully.

True to her feminine nature, however, Dot lay down flat upon the raft and hauled in the chain with the loop at the end.

"You can't fling it 'cause it's too heavy, and the raft will float out further all the time—not toward shore!" objected Don, as he watched. [230]

Dot was still down on the raft but Don was standing up when, suddenly, an immense ice-floe coming down stream struck another one and shot out toward shore striking the corner of the raft such a blow that Don measured his full length out on the logs. The raft was partially submerged but was shoved out of the way of the floe, and left within a few feet of the bank.

"Hurrah! Now we can pole back!" yelled Don, scrambling to his feet to snatch his pole. He looked about but the pole had been washed off when the corner of the raft went under water.

"Hi, there, Dot, gim'me yours—quick!" cried Don, as he saw the raft slowly turn about and go out into the current again. [231]

Dot rolled off of her pole, upon which she had been lying, thereby saving it from the water.

Don pushed and pushed for all he was worth and managed to propel the clumsy raft further toward shore. Every foot made it easier, for the water was shallower and the current less. Within a few feet of shore, Dot flung her chain out, bound to have her way about a rescue. As the chain shot out, Dot slipped on the wet logs, and fell into the water.

Don was stupefied for a moment, but Dot had great presence of mind and was going to swim when she felt a solid foundation two feet under water. She managed to stand up and called to Don: [232]

"See, I'm standing on something hard. Guess it's logs!"

As it was on one side of the raft, Dot held on to the edge of the raft and felt her way along the hard logs under water until she reached the extreme end of the raft. Here she let go and slowly shoved her foot ahead of her until she felt the water getting shallower as she proceeded toward shore. She was now but five feet from the bank where a huge pine log had fallen end-wise into the river. She climbed up and held on to the rough bark, scrambling, hand over hand, along the trunk until she reached the towering pile from which the pine had rolled. [233]

Don saw the way to go ashore, and immediately sat down on the edge of the raft and slid off into the water just where Dot had held on to the corner of the raft. He also felt the hard logs underneath and crept along until he reached the pine-tree.

As soon as he was up beside his sister, they looked at each other and heaved a mighty sigh.

"The raft's skidding," said Dot, pointing out to the water.

Don looked; sure enough, the raft must have been caught in a side current and sent down stream.

"That tumble of mine was the best thing I did!" grinned Dot. [234]

"Yes! an' if you hadn't slung that chain ashore you wouldn't have tumbled into the water," admitted Don.

"Say, Don, how do you s'pose those logs are kept under water?" asked Dot, wondering about her escape.

After a few moments silence, Dot said, "Don, I guess I'm just a little bit cold. These things won't dry out here!"

"So'm I—let's go home!"

So the two trudged home, cold, forlorn, and hungry.

"That's the first time I got left when I made up my mind to do anything!" grumbled Don, as the camp was reached. [235]

"We didn't get left! the river wanted to gobble us, and *it* got left—just because I knew enough to fling that chain!" said Dot; the latter half of her sentence was given with a grin at her brother.

"Mercy sakes alive! where *have* you two been to get so wet!" cried Mrs. Latimer, meeting the

twins.

"We were playing and fell into the water!" was all Don said, and no one ever knew the narrow escape the twins had from being whirled down the dreadful river, and, perhaps, drowned.

They were soon hustled into dry clothing and made to drink hot lemonade with plenty of ginger in it.

No unpleasant effects were felt from the drenching as every one of the children were too hardy from the outdoor life to take cold easily.

[236]

The very next day, Sunday, the weather grew so warm that everything was dripping. The timber-men found it impossible to cut more that season and started to get ready for the logging on the river. Cookee was ready to move on with the men, and the two families finished packing and were ready to start back to civilization early Tuesday morning.

The cubs were shipped off Monday morning with the trunks.

Mike almost cried as he said good-bye to the children, but he had had a fine winter's income, and the sale of the cubs would give him enough money to keep him with care, in old age.

[237]

As the carry-all, filled with children and the ladies, started out of camp, the timber-men waved their hats and yelled after the disappearing vehicle, making the children feel that they were leaving good friends behind.

So the Five Little Starrs left their Winter Camp in the Canadian Forest and went home. We next hear of them in the book "Five Little Starrs on a Motor Tour."

THE END

Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FIVE LITTLE STARRS IN THE CANADIAN FOREST ***

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