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Hoof and Claw
, by Sir Charles G. D. Roberts**

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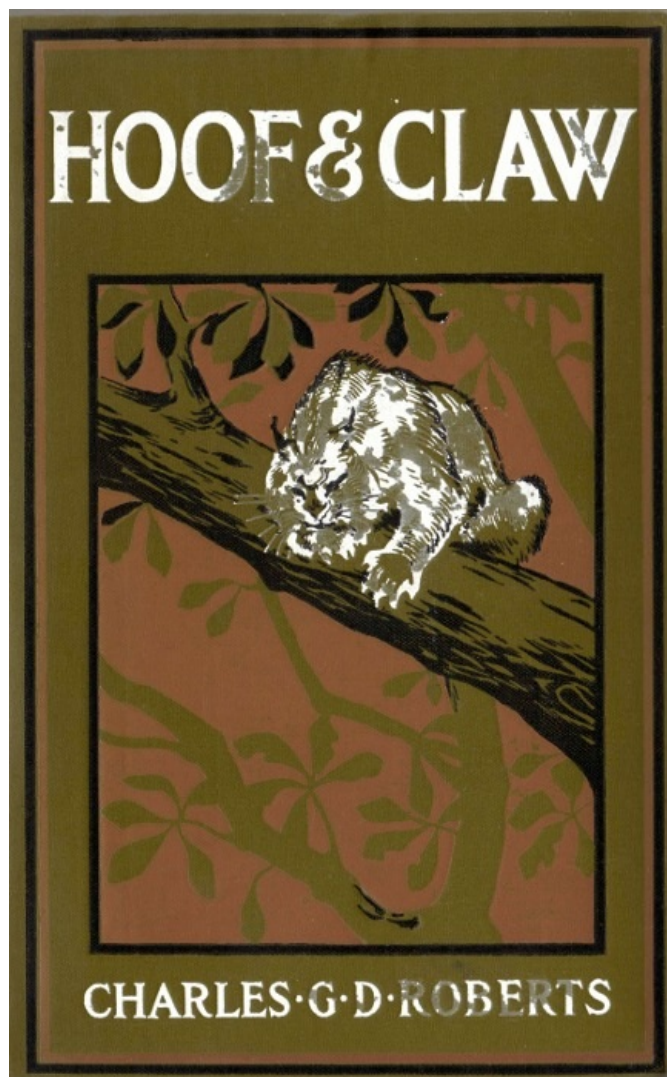
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HOOF AND CLAW





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"He saw Jeff with one lynx down, slashing at its throat."
Frontispiece

HOOF AND CLAW

BY
CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF "KINGS IN EXILE," "NEIGHBORS UNKNOWN,"
"THE FEET OF THE FURTIVE," ETC.

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The Bear that thought he was a Dog

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The gaunt, black mother lifted her head from nuzzling happily at the velvet fur of her little one. The cub was but twenty-four hours old, and engrossed every emotion of her savage heart; but her ear had caught the sound of heavy footsteps coming up the mountain. They were confident, fearless footsteps, taking no care whatever to disguise themselves, so she knew at once that they were the steps of the only creature that presumed to go so noisily through the great silences. Her

heart pounded with anxious suspicion. She gave the cub a reassuring lick, deftly set it aside with her great paws, and thrust her head forth cautiously from the door of the den.

She saw a man—a woodsman in brownish-grey homespuns and heavy leg-boots, and with a gun over his shoulder—slouching up along the faintly marked trail which led close past her doorway. Her own great tracks on the trail had been obliterated that morning by a soft and thawing fall of belated spring snow—"the robin snow," as it is called in New Brunswick—and the man, absorbed in picking his way by this unfamiliar route over the mountain, had no suspicion that he was in danger of trespassing. But the bear, with that tiny black form at the bottom of the den filling her whole horizon, could not conceive that the man's approach had any other purpose than to rob her of her treasure. She ran back to the little one, nosed it gently into a corner, and anxiously pawed some dry leaves half over it. Then, her eyes aflame with rage and fear, she betook herself once more to the entrance, and crouched there motionless to await the coming of the enemy.

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The man swung up the hill noisily, grunting now and again as his foothold slipped on the slushy, moss-covered stones. He fetched a huge breath of satisfaction as he gained a little strip of level ledge, perhaps a dozen feet in length, with a scrubby spruce bush growing at the other end of it. Behind the bush he made out what looked as if it might be the entrance to a little cave. Interested at once, he strode forward to examine it. At the first stride a towering black form, jaws agape and claws outstretched, crashed past the fir bush and hurled itself upon him.

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A man brought up in the backwoods learns to think quickly, or, rather, to think and act in the same instant. Even as the great beast sprang, the man's gun leaped to its place and he fired. His charge was nothing more than heavy duck-shot, intended for some low-flying flock of migrant geese or brant. But at this close range, some seven or eight feet only, it tore through its target like a heavy mushroom bullet, and with a stopping force that halted the animal's charge in mid-air like the blow of a steam hammer. She fell in her tracks, a heap of huddled fur and grinning teeth:

"Gee," remarked the man, "that was a close call!" He ejected the empty shell and slipped in a fresh cartridge. Then he examined critically the warm heap of fur and teeth.

Perceiving that his victim was a mother, and also that her fur was rusty and ragged after, the winter's sleep, sentiment and the sound utilitarianism of the backwoods stirred within him in a fine blend.

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"Poor old beggar!" he muttered. "She must hev' a baby in yonder hole. That accounts fer her kind of hasty ways. 'Most a pity I had to shoot her jest now, when she's out o' season an' her pelt not worth the job of strippin' it!"

Entering the half darkness of the cave, he quickly discovered the cub in its ineffectual hiding-place. Young as it was, when he picked it up, it whimpered with terror and struck out with its baby paws, recognizing the smell of an enemy. The man grinned indulgently at this display of spirit.

"Gee, but ye're chock-full o' ginger!" said he. And then, being of an understanding heart and an experimental turn of mind, he laid the cub down and returned to the body of the mother. With his knife he cut off several big handfuls of the shaggy fur and stuffed it into his pockets. Then he rubbed his hands, his sleeves, and the breast of his coat on the warm body.

"There, now," said he, returning to the cave and once more picking up the little one, "I've made ye an orphan, to be sure, but I'm goin' to soothe yer feelin's all I kin. Ye must make believe as how I'm yer mammy till I kin find ye a better one."

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Pillowed in the crook of his captor's arm, and with his nose snuggled into a bunch of his mother's fur, the cub ceased to wonder at a problem too hard for him, and dozed off into an uneasy sleep. And the man, pleased with his new plaything, went gently that he might not disturb the slumber.

Now, it chanced that at Jabe Smith's farm, on the other side of the mountain, there had just been a humble tragedy. Jabe Smith's dog, a long-haired brown retriever, had been bereaved of her new-born puppies. Six of them she had borne, but five had been straightway taken from her and drowned; for Jabe, though compassionate of heart, had wisely decided that compassion would be too costly at the price of having his little clearing quite overrun with dogs. For two days, in her box in a corner of the dusky stable, the brown mother had wistfully poured out her tenderness upon the one remaining puppy; and then, when she had run into the house for a moment to snatch a bite of breakfast, one of Smith's big red oxen had strolled into the stable and blundered a great splay hoof into the box. That had happened in the morning; and all day the brown mother had moped, whimpering and whining, about the stable, casting long distraught glances at the box in the corner, which she was unwilling either to approach or to quite forsake.

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When her master returned, and came and looked in hesitatingly at the stable door, the brown mother saw the small furry shape in the crook of his arm. Her heart yearned to it at once. She fawned upon the man coaxingly, lifted herself with her forepaws upon his coat, and reached up till she could lick the sleeping cub. Somewhat puzzled, Jabe Smith went and looked into the box. Then he understood.

"If you want the cub, Jinny, he's your'n all right. An' it saves me a heap o' bother."

Driven by his hunger, and reassured by the smell of the handful of fur which the woodsman left with him, the cub promptly accepted his adoption. She seemed very small, this new mother, and she had a disquieting odor; but the supreme thing, in the cub's eyes, was the fact she had something that assuaged his appetite. The flavor, to be sure, was something new, and novelty is a poor recommendation to babes of whatever kindred; but all the cub really asked of milk was that it should be warm and abundant. And soon, being assiduously licked and fondled, and nursed till his little belly was round as a melon, he forgot the cave on the mountainside and accepted Jabe Smith's barn as a quite normal abode for small bears. [Pg 7]

Jinny was natively a good mother. Had her own pups been left to her, she would have lavished every care and tenderness upon them during the allotted span of weeks, and then, with inexorable decision, she would have weaned and put them away for their souls' good. But somewhere in her sturdy doggish make-up there was a touch of temperament, of something almost approaching imagination, to which this strange foster-child of hers appealed as no ordinary puppy could ever have done. She loved the cub with a certain extravagance, and gave herself up to it utterly. Even her beloved master fell into a secondary place, and his household, of which she had hitherto held herself the guardian, now seemed to her to exist merely for the benefit of this black prodigy which she imagined herself to have produced. The little one's astounding growth—for the cubs of the bear are born very small, and so must lose no time in making up arrears of stature—was an affair for which she took all credit to herself; and she never thought of weaning him till he himself decided the matter by preferring the solid dainties of the kitchen. When she could no longer nurse him, however, she remained his devoted comrade, playmate, satellite; and the cub, who was a roguish but amiable soul, repaid her devotion by imitating her in all ways possible. The bear being by nature a very silent animal, her noisy barking seemed always to stir his curiosity and admiration; but his attempts to imitate it resulted in nothing more than an occasional grunting *woof*. This throaty syllable, his only utterance besides the whimper which signalled the frequent demands of his appetite, came to be accepted as his name; and he speedily learned to respond to it. [Pg 8]

Jabe Smith, as has been already pointed out, was a man of sympathetic discernment. In the course of no long time his discernment told him that Woof was growing up under the delusion that he was a dog. It was perhaps a convenience, in some ways, that he should not know he was a bear—he might be the more secure from troublesome ancestral suggestions. But as he appeared to claim all the privileges of his foster-mother, Jabe Smith's foreseeing eye considered the time, not far distant, when the sturdy and demonstrative little animal would grow to a giant of six or seven hundred pounds in weight, and still, no doubt, continue to think he was a dog. Jabe Smith began to discourage the demonstrativeness of Jinny, trusting her example would have the desired effect upon the cub. In particular, he set himself to remove from her mind any lingering notion that she would do for a lap-dog. He did not want any such notion as that to get itself established in Woof's young brain. Also, he broke poor Jinny at once of her affectionate habit of springing up and planting her forepaws upon his breast. That seemed to him a demonstration of ardor which, if practiced by a seven-hundred-pound bear, might be a little overwhelming. [Pg 9]

Jabe Smith had no children to complicate the situation. His family consisted merely of Mrs. Smith, a small but varying number of cats and kittens, Jinny, and Woof. Upon Mrs. Smith and the cats Woof's delusion came to have such effect that they, too, regarded him as a dog. The cats scratched him when he was little, and with equal confidence they scratched him when he was big. Mrs. Smith, as long as she was in a good humor, allowed him the freedom of the house, coddled him with kitchen tit-bits, and laughed when his affectionate but awkward bulk got in the way of her outbursts of mopping or her paroxysms of sweeping. But when storm was in the air, she regarded him no more than a black poodle. At the heels of the more nimble Jinny, he would be chased in ignominy from the kitchen door, with Mrs. Jabe's angry broom thwacking at the spot where Nature had forgotten to give him a tail. At such time Jabe Smith was usually to be seen smoking contemplatively on the woodpile, and regarding the abashed fugitives with sympathy. [Pg 10]

This matter of a tail was one of the obstacles which Woof had to encounter in playing the part of a dog. He was indefatigable in his efforts to wag his tail. Finding no tail to wag, he did the best he could with his whole massive hindquarters, to the discomfiture of all that got in the way. Yet, for all his clumsiness, his good-will was so unchanging that none of the farmyard kindreds had any dread of him, saving only the pig in his sty. The pig, being an incurable sceptic by nature, and, moreover, possessed of a keen and discriminating nose, persisted in believing him to be a bear and a lover of pork, and would squeal nervously at the sight of him. The rest of the farmyard folk accepted him at his own illusion, and appeared to regard him as a gigantic species of dog. And so, with nothing to mar his content but the occasional paroxysms of Mrs. Jabe's broom, Woof led the sheltered life and was glad to be a dog. [Pg 11]

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It was not until the autumn of his third year that Woof began to experience any discontent. Then, without knowing why, it seemed to him that there was something lacking in Jabe Smith's farmyard—even in Jabe Smith himself and in Jinny, his foster-mother. The smell of the deep woods beyond the pasture fields drew him strangely. He grew restless. Something called to him;

something stirred in his blood and would not let him be still. And one morning, when Jabe Smith came out in the first pink and amber of daybreak to fodder the horses, he found that Woof had disappeared. He was sorry, but he was not surprised. He tried to explain to the dejected Jinny that they would probably have the truant back again before long. But he was no adept in the language of dogs, and Jinny, failing for once to understand, remained disconsolate.

Once clear of the outermost stump pastures and burnt lands, Woof pushed on feverishly. The urge that drove him forward directed him toward the half-barren, rounded shoulders of old Sugar Loaf, where the blue-berries at this season were ripe and bursting with juice. Here in the gold-green, windy open, belly-deep in the low, blue-jeweled bushes, Woof feasted greedily; but he felt it was not berries that he had come for.

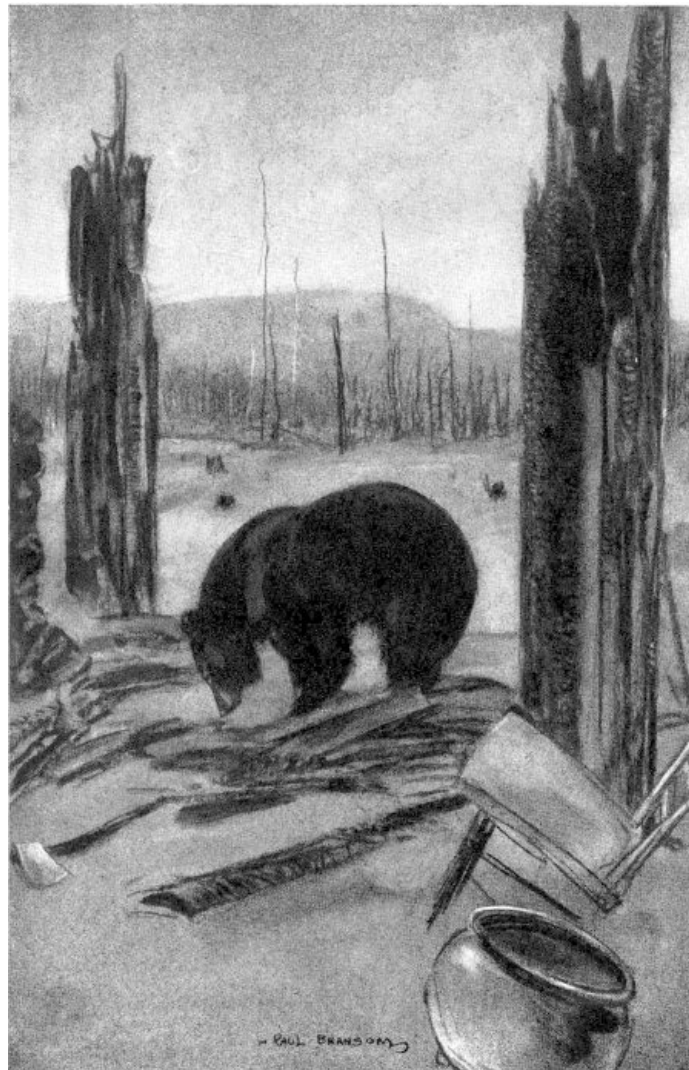
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When, however, he came upon a glossy young she-bear, her fine black muzzle bedaubed with berry juice, his eyes were opened to the object of his quest. Perhaps he thought she, too, was a dog; but, if so, she was in his eyes a dog of incomparable charm, more dear to him, though a new acquaintance, than even little brown Jinny, his kind mother, had ever been. The stranger, though at first somewhat puzzled by Woof's violent efforts to wag a non-existent tail, apparently found her big wooer sympathetic. For the next few weeks, all through the golden, dreamy autumn of the New Brunswick woods, the two roamed together; and for the time Woof forgot the farm, his master, Jinny, and even Mrs. Jabe's impetuous broom.

But about the time of the first sharp frosts, when the ground was crisp with the new-fallen leaves, Woof and his mate began to lose interest in each other. She amiably forgot him and wandered off by herself, intent on nothing so much as satisfying her appetite, which had increased amazingly. It was necessary that she should load her ribs with fat to last her through her long winter's sleep in some cave or hollow tree. And as for Woof, once more he thought of Jabe Smith and Jinny, and the kind, familiar farmyard, and the delectable scraps from the kitchen, and the comforting smell of fried pancakes. What was the chill and lonely wilderness to him, a dog? He turned from grubbing up an ant stump and headed straight back for home.

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When he got there, he found but a chimney standing naked and blackened over a tangle of charred ruins. A forest fire, some ten days back, had swept past that way, cutting a mile-wide swath through the woods and clean wiping out Jabe Smith's little homestead. It being too late in the year to begin rebuilding, the woodsman had betaken himself to the Settlements for the winter, trusting to begin, in the spring, the slow repair of his fortunes.



"For a day he wandered disconsolately over and about the ruins."

Woof could not understand it at all. For a day he wandered disconsolately over and about the

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ruins, whining and sniffing, and filled with a sense of injury at being thus deserted. How glad he would have been to hear even the squeal of his enemy, the pig, or to feel the impetuous broom of Mrs. Jabe harassing his haunches! But even such poor consolation seemed to have passed beyond his ken. On the second day, being very hungry, he gave up all hope of bacon scraps, and set off to the woods to forage once more for himself.

As long as the actual winter held off, there was no great difficulty in this foraging. There were roots to be grubbed up, grubs, worms, and beetles, already sluggish with the cold, to be found under stones and logs, and ant-hills to be ravished. There were also the nests of bees and wasps, pungent but savory. He was an expert in hunting the shy wood-mice, lying patiently in wait for them beside their holes and obliterating them, as they came out, with a lightning stroke of his great paw. But when the hard frosts came, sealing up the moist turf under a crust of steel, and the snows, burying the mouse-holes under three or four feet of white fluff, then he was hard put to it for a living. Every day or two, in his distress, he would revisit the clearing and wander sorrowfully among the snow-clad ruins, hoping against hope that his vanished friends would presently return.

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It was in one of the earliest of these melancholy visits that Woof first encountered a male of his own species, and showed how far he was from any consciousness of kinship. A yearling heifer of Jabe Smith's, which had escaped from the fire and fled far into the wilderness, chanced to find her way back. For several weeks she had managed to keep alive on such dead grass as she could paw down to through the snow, and on such twigs of birch and poplar as she could manage to chew. Now, a mere ragged bag of bones, she stood in the snow behind the ruins, her eyes wild with hunger and despair.

Her piteous mooings caught the ear of a hungry old he-bear which was hunting in the woods near by. He came at once, hopefully. One stroke of his armed paw on the unhappy heifer's neck put a period to her pains, and the savage old prowler fell to his meal.

But, as it chanced, Woof also had heard, from a little further off, that lowing of the disconsolate heifer. To him it had come as a voice from the good old days of friendliness and plenty and impetuous brooms, and he had hastened toward the sound with new hope in his heart. He came just in time to see, from the edge of the clearing, the victim stricken down.

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One lesson Woof had well learned from his foster-mother, and that was the obligation resting upon every honest dog to protect his master's property. The unfortunate heifer was undoubtedly the property of Jabe Smith. In fact, Woof knew her as a young beast who had often shaken her budding horns at him. Filled with righteous wrath, he rushed forward and hurled himself upon the slayer.

The latter was one of those morose old males, who, having forgotten or outgrown the comfortable custom of hibernation, are doomed to range the wilderness all winter. His temper, therefore, was raw enough in any case. At this flagrant interference with his own lawful kill, it flared to fury. His assailant was bigger than he, better nourished, and far stronger; but for some minutes he put up a fight which, for swift ferocity, almost daunted the hitherto unawakened spirit of Woof. A glancing blow of the stranger's, however, on the side of Woof's snout—only the remnant of a spent stroke, but enough to produce an effect on that most sensitive center of a bear's dignity—and there was a sudden change in the conditions of the duel. Woof, for the first time in his life, saw red. It was a veritable berserk rage, this virgin outburst of his. His adversary simply went down like a rag baby before it, and was mauled to abject submission, in the smother of the snow, inside of half a minute. Feigning death, which, indeed, was no great feigning for him at that moment, he succeeded in deceiving the unsophisticated Woof, who drew back upon his haunches to consider his triumph. In that second the vanquished one writhed nimbly to his feet and slipped off apologetically through the snow. And Woof, placated by his victory, made no attempt to follow. The ignominies of Mrs. Jabe's broom were wiped out.

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When Woof's elation had somewhat subsided, he laid himself down beside the carcass of the dead heifer. As the wind blew on that day, this corner of the ruins was a nook of shelter. Moreover, the body of the red heifer, dead and dilapidated though it was, formed in his mind a link with the happy past. It was Jabe Smith's property, and he got a certain comfort from lying beside it and guarding it for his master. As the day wore on, and his appetite grew more and more insistent, in an absent-minded way he began to gnaw at the good red meat beside him. At first, to be sure, this gave him a guilty conscience, and from time to time he would glance up nervously, as if apprehending the broom. But soon immunity brought confidence, his conscience ceased to trouble him, and the comfort derived from the nearness of the red heifer was increased exceedingly.

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As long as the heifer lasted, Woof stuck faithfully to his post as guardian, and longer, indeed. For nearly two days after the remains had quite disappeared—save for horns and hoofs and such bones as his jaws could not crush—he lingered. Then at last, urged by a ruthless hunger, and sorrowfully convinced that there was nothing more he could do for Jabe or Jabe for him, he set off again on his wanderings.

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About three weeks later, forlorn of heart and exigent of belly, Woof found himself in a part of the forest where he had never been before. But some one else had been there; before him was a broad trail, just such as Jabe Smith and his wood sled used to make. Here were the prints of horses' hooves. Woof's heart bounded hopefully. He hurried along down the trail. Then a faint, delectable savor, drawn across the sharp, still air, met his nostrils. Pork and beans—oh,

assuredly! He paused for a second to sniff the fragrance again, and then lurched onwards at a rolling gallop. He rounded a turn of the trail, and there before him stood a logging camp.

To Woof a human habitation stood for friendliness and food and shelter. He approached, therefore, without hesitation.

There was no sign of life about the place, except for the smoke rising liberally from the stove-pipe chimney. The door was shut, but Woof knew that doors frequently opened if one scratched at them and whined persuasively. He tried it, then stopped to listen for an answer. The answer came—a heavy, comfortable snore from within the cabin. It was mid-morning, and the camp cook, having got his work done up, was sleeping in his bunk the while the dinner was boiling.

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Woof scratched and whined again. Then, growing impatient, he reared himself on his haunches in order to scratch with both paws at once. His luck favored him, for he happened to scratch on the latch. It lifted, the door swung open suddenly, and he half fell across the threshold. He had not intended so abrupt an entrance, and he paused, peering with diffidence and hope into the homely gloom.

The snoring had stopped suddenly. At the rear of the cabin Woof made out a large, round, startled face, fringed with scanty red whiskers and a mop of red hair, staring at him from over the edge of an upper bunk. Woof had hoped to find Jabe Smith there. But this was a stranger, so he suppressed his impulse to rush in and wallow delightedly before the bunk. Instead of that, he came only half-way over the threshold, and stood there making those violent contortions which he believed to be wagging his tail.

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To a cool observer of even the most limited intelligence it would have been clear that these contortions were intended to be conciliatory. But the cook of Conroy's Camp was taken by surprise, and he was not a cool observer—in fact, he was frightened. A gun was leaning against the wall below the bunk. A large, hairy hand stole forth, reached down and clutched the gun.

Woof wagged his haunches more coaxingly than ever, and took another hopeful step forward. Up went the gun. There was a blue-white spurt, and the report clashed deafeningly within the narrow quarters.

The cook was a poor shot at any time, and at this moment he was at a special disadvantage. The bullet went close over the top of Woof's head and sang waspishly across the clearing. Woof turned and looked over his shoulder to see what the man had fired at. If anything was hit, he wanted to go and get it and fetch it for the man, as Jabe and Jinny had taught him to do. But he could see no result of the shot. He whined deprecatingly and ventured all the way into the cabin.

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The cook felt desperately for another cartridge. There was none to be found. He remembered that they were all in the chest by the door. He crouched back in the bunk, making himself as small as possible, and hoping that a certain hunk of bacon on the bench by the stove might divert the terrible stranger's attention and give him a chance to make a bolt for the door.

But Woof had not forgotten either the good example of Jinny or the discipline of Mrs. Jabe's broom. Far be it from him to help himself without leave. But he was very hungry. Something must be done to win the favor of the strangely unresponsive round-faced man in the bunk. Looking about him anxiously, he espied a pair of greasy cowhide "larrigans" lying on the floor near the door. Picking one up in his mouth, after the manner of his retriever foster-mother, he carried it over and laid it down, as a humble offering, beside the bunk.

Now, the cook, though he had been undeniably frightened, was by no means a fool. This touching gift of one of his own larrigans opened his eyes and his heart. Such a bear, he was assured, could harbor no evil intentions. He sat up in his bunk.

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"Hullo!" said he. "What ye doin' here, sonny? What d'ye want o' me, anyhow?"

The huge black beast wagged his hindquarters frantically and wallowed on the floor in his fawning delight at the sound of a human voice.

"Seems to think he's a kind of a dawg," muttered the cook thoughtfully. And then the light of certain remembered rumors broke upon his memory.

"I'll be jiggered," said he, "ef 'tain't that there tame b'ar Jabe Smith, over to East Fork, used to have afore he was burnt out!"

Climbing confidently from the bunk, he proceeded to pour a generous portion of molasses over the contents of the scrap pail, because he knew that bears had a sweet tooth. When the choppers and drivers came trooping in for dinner, they were somewhat taken aback to find a huge bear sleeping beside the stove. As the dangerous-looking slumberer seemed to be in the way—none of the men caring to sit too close to him—to their amazement the cook smacked the mighty hindquarters with the flat of his hand, and bundled him unceremoniously into a corner. "'Pears to think he's some kind of a dawg," explained the cook, "so I let him come along in for company. He'll fetch yer larrigans an' socks an' things fer ye. An' it makes the camp a sight homier, havin' somethin' like a cat or a dawg about."

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"Right you are!" agreed the boss. "But what was that noise we heard, along about an hour back? Did you shoot anything?"

"Oh, that was jest a little misunderstandin', before him an' me got acquainted," explained the

The Trail of the Vanishing Herds

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Once again, but sluggishly, as if oppressed by apprehensions which they could not understand, the humped and lion-fronted herds of the bison began to gather for the immemorial southward drift. Harassed of late years by new and terrible enemies, their herds had been so thinned and scattered that even to the heavy brains of the fiercer old bulls a vague idea of caution was beginning to penetrate. Hitherto it had been the wont of the colossal hordes to deal with their adversaries in a very direct and simple fashion—to charge and thunder down upon them, to roll over them in an irresistible flood of angry hooves, and trample them out of existence. Against the ancient enemies this straightforward method of warfare had been efficacious enough, and the herds had multiplied till the plains were black with their marching myriads. But against the new foe—the white man, with his guns and his cunning, his cool courage and his insatiable greed—it had been a destructive failure. The mightier their myriads, the more irresistible the invitation to this relentless slaughterer; and they had melted before him. At last a new instinct had begun to stir in their crude intelligences, an instinct to scatter, to shun the old, well-worn trails of migration, to seek pasturage in the remoter valleys and by small streams where the white man's foot had not yet trespassed. But as yet it was no more than the suggestion of an instinct, too feeble and fumbling to sway the obstinate hordes. It had come to birth too late. Here and there a little troop—perhaps half a dozen cows under the lordship of some shaggy bull more alert and supple-witted than his fellows—resisted the summons to assemble, and slipped off among the wooded glades. But the rest, uneasy, yet uncomprehending, obeyed the ancestral impulse and gathered till the northern plains were black with them.

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Then the great march began, the fateful southward drift.

The horde of the giant migrants was not a homogeneous mass, as it would have seemed to one viewing it from a distance and a height. It was made up of innumerable small herds, from a dozen to thirty or forty bison in each. Each of these little groups hung together tenaciously, under the dominance of two or three old bulls, and kept at a certain distance, narrow but appreciable, from the herds immediately neighboring it. But all the herds drifted southward together in full accord, now journeying, now halting, now moving again, as if organized and ordered by some one central and inflexible control. Rival bulls roared their challenges, pawed the earth, fought savage duels with their battering fronts and short, ripping horns, as they went; but always onward they pressed, the south with its sun-steeped pastures drawing them, the north with its menace of storm driving them before it. And the sound of their bellowings and their tramlings rose in a heavy thunder above their march, till the wide plain seemed to rock with it.

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Countless as was their array, however, they seemed dimly conscious, with a sort of vague, communal, unindividual sort of perception, that their numbers and their power were as nothing in comparison with the migrations of preceding autumns. The arrogance of irresistible might had passed from them. They went sullenly, as if under a cloud of dark expectation. And the separate herds hung closer to their neighbors than had hitherto been the custom in the horde, as if seeking reassurance against an unknown threat.

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All around the far-flung outskirts of the host ran, skulking and dodging, its accustomed, hereditary foes—the little slim, yellow-gray coyotes and the gaunt timber wolves. The coyotes, dangerous only to the dying or to very young calves separated from their mothers, were practically ignored, save for an occasional angry rush on the part of some nervous cow; and, trusting to their amazing speed, they frequently ran far in among the herds, in the hope of spotting some sick animal and keeping it in view till the host should pass on and leave it to its fate. The great gray timber wolves, however, were honored with more attention. Powerful enough alone to pull down a yearling calf, they were always watched with savage and apprehensive eyes by the cows, and forced to keep their distance. The stragglers, old and young, were their prey, or sometimes a wounded bull, worsted in battle and driven from his herd, and weak from loss of blood. In twos and threes they prowled, silent and grimly watchful, hanging on the flanks of the host or picking their way in its vast, betrampled, desolated trail.

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On the outermost edge of the right or western wing of the bellowing host went a compact little herd, which hung together with marked obstinacy. It consisted of a dozen cows with their calves and yearlings, and two adult bulls, one of which, the younger and less heavily maned, kept diffidently at the rear and seemed to occupy the busy but subordinate post of a sort of staff-sergeant. The other was an immense bull, with splendid leonine front and with a watchful, suspicious look in his eyes which contrasted sharply with the sullen stare of his fellows. He had the wisdom learned in many eventful migrations, and he captained his herd imperiously, being sure, in the main, as to what was best for them. But of just one thing he seemed somewhat unsure. He appeared irresolute as to the southward march or else as to the companionship of the host. By hanging upon the skirts of it, he held himself ready to detach his little herd from its company and make off among the foothills in case of need. At the same time, by thus keeping on the outskirts of the host he secured for his little knot of satellites the freshest and sweetest pasturage.

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However disquieting the brown bull's apprehensions, they were too vague to let him know what it

was he feared. For the accustomed perils of the march he entertained just so much dread as befitted a sagacious leader—no more. The skulking coyotes he disdained to notice. They might skulk or dart about like lean shadows, as near the herd as the jealous cows would permit, and he would never trouble to shake the polished scimitars of his horns at them. The great gray wolves he scorned; but, with perhaps a dim prevision of the day when he should be old and feeble, and driven out from the herd, he could not ignore them. He chased them off angrily if they ventured within the range of his attention. But against an enemy whom he had learned to respect, the Indian hunters, he kept an untiring watch, and the few white hunters, who had already so thinned the bison host, he remembered with a fear which was mingled with vengeful resentment. Nevertheless, even his well-grounded fear of those human foes was not enough to account for his almost panicky forebodings. These enemies, as he had known them, struck always on the flanks of the host; and he had tactics to elude even the dreadful thunder and spurted lightning of their guns. His fear was of he knew not what and therefore it ground remorselessly upon his nerves.

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For the present, however, there were none of these human enemies near, and the host rolled on southward, with its bellowings and its trappings, unmolested. Neither Indians nor white men approached this stage of the migration. The autumn days were sunny, beneath a sky bathed in dream. The autumn nights were crisp with tonic frost, and in the pink freshness of the dawn a wide-flung mist arose from the countless puffing nostrils and the frost-rimed, streaming manes. Pasturage was abundant, the tempers of the great bulls were bold and pugnacious, and nothing seemed less likely than that any disaster could menace so mighty and invincible a host. Yet Brown Bull was uneasy. From time to time he would lift his red-rimmed nostrils, sniff the air in every direction, and scan the summits of the foothills far on the right, as if the unknown peril which he apprehended was likely to come from that direction.

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As day by day passed on without event, the diffused anxiety of the host quite died away. But Brown Bull, with his wider sagacity or more sensitive intuition, seemed to grow only the more apprehensive and the more vigilant. His temper did not improve under the strain, and his little troop of followers was herded with a severity which must have taxed, for the moment, their faith in its beneficence.

The host lived, fought, fed, as it went, halting only for sleep and the hours of rest. In this inexorable southward drift the right flank passed one morning over a steep little knoll, the crest of which chanced to be occupied by Brown Bull and his herd just at the moment when the moving ranks came to a halt for the forenoon siesta. It was such a post of vantage as Brown Bull loved. He stood there sniffing with wide, wet nostrils, and searching the horizon for danger. The search was vain, as ever; but just behind him, and closer in toward the main body of the host, he saw something that made his stretched nerves thrill with anger. An old bull had just been driven out from a neighboring herd, deposed from his lordship and hideously gored by a younger and stronger rival. Staggering from his wounds, and overwhelmed with a sudden terror of isolation, he tried to edge his way into the herd next behind him. He was ejected mercilessly. From herd to herd he staggered, met always by a circle of lowered horns and angry eyes, and so went stumbling back to that lonely doom which, without concern, he had seen meted out to so many of his fellows, but had never thought of as possible to himself. This pitiful sight, of course, was nothing to Brown Bull. It hardly even caught his eye, still less his interest. Had he been capable of formulating his indifferent thoughts upon the matter, they would have taken some such form as: "Serve him right for being licked!" But when at last the wounded outcast was set upon by four big timber wolves and pulled, bellowing, to his knees, that was another affair. Brown Bull could not tolerate the sight of the gray wolves triumphing. With a roar of rage he charged down the knoll. His herd, astonished but obedient, lowered their massive heads and charged at his heels. The wolves snarled venomously, forsook their prize, and vanished. Brown Bull led the charge straight on and over the body of the dying outcast, trampling it into dreadful shapelessness. Then, halting abruptly, he looked about him in surprise. The wolves were gone. His rage passed from him. He led his followers tranquilly back to their place on the knoll, to the accompaniment of puzzled snortings from the neighbor herds.

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The herd fell to feeding at once, as if nothing in the least unusual had happened. But Brown Bull, after cropping the sweet, tufted grass for a few minutes, was seized with one of his pangs of apprehension, and raised his head for a fresh survey of the distance. This time he did not resume his feeding, but stood for several minutes shifting his feet uneasily until he had quite satisfied himself that the ponies which he saw emerging from a cleft in the foothills were not a harmless wild troop, but carried each a red rider. He had reached the Indian country, and his place on the flank of the host, as his craft and experience told him, was no longer a safe one.

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For a little, Brown Bull stood irresolute, half inclined to lead his followers away from the host and slip back into the wooded foothills whence they had come. Then, either moved by a remembrance of the harsh winter of the north, or drawn by the pull of the host upon his gregarious heart, he lost the impulse. Instead of forsaking the host, he led his herd down the knoll and insinuated it into a gap in the ranks.

Here Brown Bull was undoubtedly a trespasser. But instead of forcing a combat or, rather, a succession of combats, he contented himself with holding his straitened ground firmly rather than provocatively. His towering bulk and savage, resolute bearing made the nearest bulls unwilling to challenge his intrusion. Little by little the herds yielded way, half unconsciously, seeking merely their own convenience. Little by little, also, Brown Bull continued his crafty encroachments, till at length, after perhaps a couple of hours of maneuvering, he had his charges some four or five hundred yards in from the exposed flank and well placed near the front of the

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march, where the pasturage was still sweet and untrampled.

The Indians, sweeping up on their mad ponies, rode close to the flank of the host and chose their victims at leisure. Killing for meat and not for sport, they selected only young cows in good condition, and were too sparing of their powder to shoot more than they needed. They clung to the host for some hours, throwing the outer fringe of it into confusion, but attracting little attention from the herds beyond their reach. Once in a while some bull, more fiery than his fellows, would charge with blind, uncalculating valor upon these nimble assailants, only to be at once shot down for his hide. But for the most part, none but those herds actually assailed paid much attention to what was going on. They instinctively crowded away from the flying horsemen, the flames and thunder of the guns. But their numbers and the nearness of their companions seemed to give them a stolid sense of security even when the swift death was almost upon them. As for Brown Bull, all this was just what he had expected and made provision against. The assault came nowhere near his own charges, so he treated it as none of his affair.

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The Indians withdrew long before nightfall; but the following day brought others, and for a week or more there was never a day without this harassing attack upon one flank or another of the host, or sometimes upon both flanks at once. Again and again, as the outer ranks dwindled, Brown Bull found himself nearing the danger zone, and discreetly on each occasion he worked his herd in a few hundred yards nearer the center.

Then, for a space of some days, the attacks of the Indians ceased, and the wolves and coyotes came back to dog the trail of the diminished host. But Brown Bull was not unduly elated by this respite. He held his followers to their place near the center of the march, and maintained his firm and apprehensive vigilance untiringly. The days were now hot and cloudless, and so dry that the host seemed literally to drink up every brook or pond it passed, and an irritating dust-cloud overhung the rear of the trampling hoofs.

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But these few days of peace were but prelude to harsher trial. From somewhere far to the left came now a band of white hunters, who rode around the host and attacked it on both flanks at once. They killed more heedlessly and brutally than the Indians, for the sake of the hides rather than for meat, each man hurriedly marking his own kill and then dashing on to seek more victims. Each night they camped, and in the cool of the morning overtook the slow-moving host on their tireless mustangs. The trail of stripped red carcasses which they left behind them glutted all the wolves, coyotes, and carrion crows for leagues about, and affronted the wholesome daylight of the plains. This visitation lasted for five or six days, and the terror it created spread inwards to the very heart of the host. Gradually the host quickened its march, leaving itself little time for feeding and only enough rest for the vitally essential process of rumination. At last the white marauders, satiated with slaughter, dropped behind, and immediately the host, now shrunken by nearly a third, slackened its pace and seemed to forget its punishment. Phlegmatic and short of memory, the herds were restored to content by a day of heavy rain, which laid the dust, and freshened their hides, and instilled new sweetness into the coarse plains grasses. But Brown Bull's apprehensions redoubled, and he grew lean with watching.

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The path of migration—the old path, known to the ancestors of this host for many generations—now led for many days along the right bank of a wide and turbulent but usually shallow river. The flat roar of the yellow flood upon its reefs and sand banks, mixed with the bellowings and tramlings of the host to form a thunder which could be heard in the far-off foothills, transmuted there to a murmur like the sea.

There came now a day of intense and heavy heat, with something in the air which made the whole host uneasy. They stopped pasturing, and the older bulls and cows sniffed the dead air as if they detected some strange menace upon it. Toward the middle of the afternoon a mysterious haze, of a lovely rosy saffron hue, appeared in the southeast beyond the river. It spread up the hot, turquoise-blue sky with a terrifying rapidity, blotting out the empty plain as it approached. Soon all the eyes of the host were turned upon it. Suddenly, at the heart of the rosy haze, a gigantic yellow-black column took shape, broad at the base and spreading wide at the summit, till it lost itself in a swooping canopy of blackish cloud. It drew near at frightful speed, spinning as it came, and licking up the surface of the plain beneath.

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Brown Bull, whose herd was just now in the front rank of the host, stood motionless for some seconds, till he had judged the exact direction of the spinning column. Then, with a wild bellow, he lunged forward at a gallop, apparently to meet the oncoming doom. His herd charged close at his heels, none questioning his leadership, and the whole host followed, heads down, blind with panic.

Two or three minutes more, and the sky overhead was darkened. An appalling hum, as of giant wires, drowned the thunder of the galloping host. The hum shrilled to a monstrous and rending screech, and the spinning column swept across the river, wiping it up to the bottom of the channel as it passed. Brown Bull's herd felt a sickening emptiness in their lungs, and then a wind which almost lifted them from their feet; and their knees failed them in their terror. But their leader had calculated cunningly, and they were well past the track of doom. The cyclone caught the hinder section of the host diagonally, whirled it into the air like so many brown leaves, and bore it onward to be strewn in hideous fragments over the plain behind. Immediately the sky cleared. There was no more wind, but a chilly, throbbing breath. The yelling of the cyclone sank away, and the river could be heard once more brawling over its reefs and bars. A full third of the host had been blotted from existence. The survivors, still trembling, remembered that they were hungry, and fell to cropping the gritty and littered grass.

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On the following day the shrunken host forded the river, which at this point turned sharply westward across the path of the migration. The river had risen suddenly owing to a cloudburst further up its course, and many of the weaklings and youngsters of the host were swept away in the passage. But Brown Bull's herd, well guarded and disciplined, got over without loss; and for the next few days, there being no peril in sight, its wary captain suffered it to lead the march.

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And now they came into a green and fertile and well-watered land, where it would have been comforting to linger and recover their strength. But here, once more, the white man came against them.

At the first signs of these most dreaded foes, Brown Bull had discreetly edged his herd back a little way into the host, so that it no longer formed the vanguard. The white men killed savagely and insatiably all along both flanks, as if not the need of hides and meat, but the sheer lust of killing possessed them. One hunter, whose pony had stepped into a badger-hole and fallen with him, was gored and trampled by a wounded bull. This fired his comrades to a more implacable savagery. They noticed that the host was a scanty one compared with the countless myriads of preceding years. "Them redskins up north have been robbing us!" they shouted, with fine logic. Then they remembered that the migrating herds were anxiously awaited by other tribes of Indians further south, who largely depended upon the bison for their living. An inspiration seized them. "Let's fix the red varmints! If we jest wipe these 'ere buffalo clean out, right now, the redskins'll starve, an' this country'll be well quit o' them!"

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But strive as they might to carry out this humane intention, for all their slaughter on the flanks, the solid nucleus of the host remained unshaken, and kept drifting steadily southward. It began to look as if, in spite of Fate, a mighty remnant would yet make good its way into the broken country, dangerous with hostile Indians, whither the white hunters would hesitate to pursue. It was decided, therefore, to check the southward march of the host by splitting it up into sections and scattering it to this side and that, thus depriving it of the united migrant impulse, and leaving its destruction to be completed at more leisure.

These men knew the bison and his deep-rooted habits. In knots of three and four they stationed themselves, on their ponies, directly in the path of the advancing host.

On the flanks they attracted small attention. But directly in front, the sight of them aroused the leaders of the march to fury. They pawed the ground, snorted noisily, and then charged with their massive heads low down. And the whole host, with sudden rising rage, charged with them. It looked as if those little knots of waiting men and ponies must be annihilated.

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But when that dark, awful torrent of rolling manes, wild eyes, keen horns, and shattering hoofs drew close upon the waiting groups of men, these lifted their guns and fired, one after the other, straight in the faces of the nearest bulls.

The result was instantaneous, as usual. Whether, as in most cases, the leaders fell, or, as in other instances, they escaped, the rolling torrent split and parted at once to either side as if the flame and roar from the muzzles of the guns had been so many shoulders of rock. Once divided, and panic-stricken by finding their foes at the heart of their array, the herds went to pieces hopelessly, and were easily driven off toward all points of the compass.

But in one instance—just one—the plan of the slaughterers did not work out quite as anticipated.

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Three of the hunters had taken station exactly opposite the center of the host. Brown Bull and his herd were immediately behind the front rank at this point. When the great charge was met by the roar and the spirting flames, the leading bull went down, and the front rank split, as a matter of course, to pass on either side of this terrifying obstacle. But Brown Bull seemed to feel that here and now, straight before him, was the unknown peril which had been shaking his heart throughout the whole long march. In this moment his heart was no more shaken, and the tradition of his ancestors, which bade him follow his leaders like a sheep, was torn up by the roots. He did not swerve, but swept down straight upon the astonished knot of horsemen; his trusting herd came with him; and all behind, as usual, followed blindly.



"The shambles of the plain."

The three white men turned to flee before the torrent of death. But Brown Bull caught the leader's pony in the flank, ripped it and bore it down, passing straight on over the bodies, which, in a dozen seconds, were hardly to be distinguished from the earth to which they had so suddenly and so awfully been rendered back. Of the other two, one made good his escape, because his pony had taken alarm more quickly than its master and turned in time. The third was overtaken because a cow which he had wounded stumbled in his way, and he and his pony went out along with her beneath the hoofs of Brown Bull's herd.

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Brown Bull gave no heed to his triumph, if, indeed, he realized it at all.

What he realized was that the apprehended doom had fallen upon the host, and the host was no more. He kept on with his long, lumbering gallop, till he had his herd well clear of all the struggling remnants of the host, which he saw running aimlessly this way and that, the slaughterers hanging to them like wolves. The sight did not interest him, but, as it covered the whole plain behind him, he could not escape it if he looked back. Forward the way was clear. Far forward and to the right, he saw woods and ridgy uplands, and purple-blue beyond the uplands a range of ragged hills. Thither he led his herd, allowing them not a moment to rest or pasture so long as the shambles of the plain remained in view. But that night, the tiny, lonely remnant of the vanished myriads of their kin, they fed and slept securely in a well-grassed glade among the hills.

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A Master of Supply

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Unlike his reserved and supercilious red cousin of kindlier latitudes, Blue Fox was no lover of solitude; and seeing that the only solitude he knew was the immeasurable desolation of the Arctic barrens, this was not strange. The loneliness of these unending and unbroken plains, rolled out flat beneath the low-hung sky to a horizon of white haze, might have weighed down even so dauntless a spirit as his had he not taken care to fortify himself against it. This he did, very sagaciously, by cultivating the companionship of his kind. His snug burrow beneath the stunted bush-growth of the plains was surrounded by the burrows of perhaps a score of his race.

During the brief but brilliant Arctic summer, which flared across the lonely wastes with a fervor which strove to compensate for the weary duration of its absence, the life of Blue Fox was not arduous. But during the long, sunless winters, with their wild snows, their yelling gales, their

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interminable night, and their sudden descents of still, intense frost, so bitter that it seemed as if the incalculable cold of outer space were invading this undefended outpost of the world, then Blue Fox and his fellows would have had a sorry time of it but for two considerations. They had their cheer of association in the snug burrows deep beneath the covering of the snows; and they had their food supplies, laid by with wise forethought in the season when food was abundant.

Therefore, when the old bear, grown too restless and savage to hibernate, had often to roam the darkness hungry, and when the wolf-pack was forced to range the frozen leagues for hardly meat enough to keep their gaunt flanks from falling in, the provident foxes had little to fear from either cold or famine.

The burrow of Blue Fox was dug in a patch of dry, sandy soil that formed a sort of island half a dozen acres broad in the vast surrounding sea of the swampy tundra. The island was not high enough or defined enough to be called a knoll. To the eye it was nothing more than an almost imperceptible bulge in the enormous monotony of the levels. But its elevation was enough to secure it good drainage and a growth of more varied herb and bush than that of the moss-covered tundra, with here and there a little open space of turf and real grass which afforded its tenants room to bask deliciously in the glow of the precipitate summer.

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Hot and melting as the Arctic summer might be, it could never reach with its ardent fingers the foundations of eternal frost which underlay all that land at a depth of a very few feet. So Blue Fox dug his burrow not too deep, but rather on a gentle slant, and formed his chamber at a depth of not much more than two feet below the roots of the bushes. Abundantly lined with fine, dry grasses, which he and his family kept scrupulously clean, it was always warm and dry and sweet.

It was an afternoon in the first of the summer, one of those long, unclouded, glowing, warm afternoons of the Arctic, when the young shoots of herb and bush seem to lengthen visibly under the eye of the watcher, and the flower-buds open impetuously as if in haste for the caresses of the eager moths and flies. For the moment the vast expanses of the barren were not lonely. The nesting juncos and snow-buntings twittered cheerfully among the busy growths. The mating ducks clamored harshly along the bright coils of the sluggish stream which wound its way through the marshes. On an islet in the middle of a reedy mere, some half-mile to the east, a pair of great white trumpeter swans had their nest, scornful of concealment. A mile or more off to the west a herd of caribou browsed the young green shoots of the tundra growth, moving slowly northward. The windless air was faintly musical with the hum of insects and with the occasional squeaks and scurrings of unseen lemming mice in their secret roadways under the dense green sphagnum. Blue Fox sat up, not far from the entrance to his tunnel, blinking lazily in the glow and watching the play of his fuzzy cubs and their slim, young, blue-gray mother in and out their doorway. Scattered here and there over their naked little domain he saw the families of his kindred, similarly care-free and content with life.

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But care-free as he was, Blue Fox never forgot that the price of freedom from care was eternal vigilance. Between his eyes and the pallid horizon he detected a wide-winged bird swinging low over the marshes. He knew at once what it was that with slow-moving, deliberate wings came up, nevertheless, so swiftly. It was no goose, or brant, or fish-loving merganser, or inland wandering saddleback gull that flew in such a fashion. He gave a shrill yelp of warning, answered at once from all over the colony; and at once the playing cubs whisked into their burrows or drew close to their mothers, and sat up to stare with bright, suspicious eyes at the strong-winged flier.

Blue Fox himself, like most of his full-grown fellows, never stirred. But his eyes never swerved for a second from the approach of that ominous, winnowing shape. It was a great Arctic hawk-owl, white mottled with chocolate; and it seemed to be hunting in a leisurely fashion, as if well fed and seeking excitement rather than a meal. It came straight on toward the colony of the foxes, flying lower and lower, till Blue Fox began to gather his steel-like muscles to be ready for a spring at its throat if it should come within reach. It passed straight over his head, its terrible hooked beak half open, its wide, implacable eyes, jewel-bright and hard as glass, glaring downward with still menace. But, with all its courage, it did not dare attack any one of the calmly watchful foxes. It made a sweeping half-circuit of the colony, and then sailed on toward the mere of the white swans. Just at the edge of the mere it dropped suddenly into a patch of reeds, to flap up again, a second later, with a limp form trailing from its talons—the form of a luckless mother-duck surprised in brooding her eggs. A great hubbub of startled and screaming water-fowl pursued the marauder; but the swans from their islet, as the foxes from their colony, looked on with silent indifference.

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Blue Fox, basking in the sun, was by and by seized with a restlessness, a sense of some duty left undone. He was not hungry, for the wastes were just now so alive with nesting birds and swarming lemmings, and their fat little cousins, the lemming mice, that his hunting was a swift and easy matter. He did not even have to help his mate, occupied though she was, in a leisurely way, with the care of her cubs. But across his mind came an insistent memory of the long and bitter Arctic night, when the world would seem to snap under the deadly intensity of the cold, and there would be no birds but a few ptarmigan in the snow, and the fat lemmings would be safe beneath the frozen roofs of their tunnels, and his cleverest hunting would hardly serve him to keep the keen edge off his hunger. In the first sweet indolence of spring he had put far from him the remembrance of the famine season. But now it was borne in upon him that he must make provision against it. Shaking off his nonchalance, he got up, stretched himself elaborately, and trotted down briskly into the tundra.

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He picked his way daintily over the wide beds of moist sphagnum, making no more sound as he

went than if his feet had been of thistledown. At some distance from the skirts of the colony the moss was full of scurrying and squeaking noises. Presently he crouched and crept forward like a cat. The next instant he pounced with an indescribable speed and lightness, his head and forepaws disappearing into the moss. He had penetrated into one of the screened runways of the little people of the sphagnum. The next moment he lifted his head with a fat lemming dangling from either side of his fine jaws. He laid down the prize and inspected it with satisfaction—a round-bodied creature some six inches long, of a gray color mottled with rusty red, with a mere apology for a tail, and with the toes of its forepaws exaggeratedly developed, for use, perhaps, in constructing its mossy tunnels. For a few seconds Blue Fox pawed his prey playfully, as one of his cubs would have done. Then, bethinking himself of the serious business which he had in hand, he picked it up and trotted off to a dry spot which he knew of, just on the fringe of the island.

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Now, of one thing Blue Fox was well aware, it having been borne in upon him by experience—viz., that a kill not soon eaten would speedily spoil in this weather. But he knew something else, which he could only have arrived at by the strictly rational process of putting two and two together—he understood the efficacy of cold storage.

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Burrowing down through the light soil, he dug himself a little cellar, the floor of which was the stratum of perpetual frost. Here, in this preservative temperature, he deposited the body of the fat lemming, and covered the place from prying eyes with herbage and bush drawn lightly over it. Hunting easily and when the mood was upon him, he brought three more lemmings to the storehouse that same day. On the next day and the next an Arctic tempest swept over the plain, an icy rain drove level in whipping sheets, the low sky was crowded with hurrying ranks of torn black vapor, and the wise foxes kept to their holes. Then the sun came back to the waste places, and Blue Fox returned to his hunting.

Without in any way pushing himself, without stinting his own repasts or curtailing his hours of indolence or of play, Blue Fox attended to his problem of supply so efficiently that in the course of a couple of weeks he had perhaps two score plump carcasses, lemmings and mice, laid out in this cold storage cellar of his. Then he filled it in right to the top with grass roots, turf, and other dry stuff that would not freeze into armor-plate, covered it over with light soil and bushes, and left it to await the hour of need.

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In the course of the summer, Blue Fox, like all his fellows, established a number of these lemming *caches*, till by the time when the southward bird-flight proclaimed the summer at an end, the question of supply was one to give him no further anxiety. When the days were shrunken to an hour or two of sunlight, and the tundra was frozen to stone, and the winds drove the fine snow before them in blinding drifts, then Blue Fox dismissed his stores from his mind and devoted himself merrily to the hunting of his daily rations. The Arctic hares were still abundant, and not yet overwild from ceaseless harrying; and though the chase of these long-legged and nimble leapers was no facile affair, it was by no means too arduous for the tastes of an enterprising and active forager like Blue Fox.

In the meantime the household of Blue Fox, like all the other households in the little colony, had been substantially reduced in numbers. All the cubs, by this time grown nearly to full stature, if not to full wisdom, had migrated. There was neither room nor supply for them now in the home burrows, and they had not yet arrived at the sense of responsibility and forethought that would lead them to dig burrows for themselves. Gently enough, perhaps, but with a firmness which left no room for argument, the youngsters had all been turned out of doors. There seemed but one thing for them to do—to follow the southward migration of the game; and lightly they had done it. They had a hard winter before them, but with good hunting, and fair luck in dodging the traps and other perils that were bound to dog their inexperienced feet, they would return next spring, ripe with wisdom and experience, dig burrows of their own, and settle down to the responsibilities of Arctic family life.

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To Blue Fox, sleeping warm in his dry burrow when he would, and secure in the knowledge of his deep-stored supplies, the gathering menace of the cold brought no terrors. By the time the sun had disappeared altogether, and the often brilliant but always terrible and mysterious Arctic night had settled firmly upon the barrens, game had grown so scarce and shy that even so shrewd a hunter as Blue Fox might often range a whole day without the luck to capture a ptarmigan or a hare. The hare, of course, like the ptarmigan, was at this season snowy-white; and Blue Fox would have had small fortune, indeed, in the chase had he himself remained in summer livery. With the setting in of the snow, he had quickly changed his coat to a like color; and therefore, with his wariness, his unerring nose, and his marvelous lightness of tread, he was sometimes able to surprise the swift hare asleep. In this fashion, too, he would often capture a ptarmigan, pouncing upon it just as the startled bird was spreading its wings for flight. When he failed in either venture—which was often enough the case—he felt himself in no way cast down. He had the excitement of the chase, the satisfaction of stretching his strong, lithe muscles in the race across the hard snow. And then, when the storm clouds were down close upon the levels, and all the world was black, and the great winds from the Pole, bitterer than death, raved southward with their sheeted ghosts of fine drift—then Blue Fox, with his furry mate beside him, lay blinking contentedly in the deep of his burrow, with food and to spare close at hand.

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But happy as he was in the main, Blue Fox was not without his cares. Two enemies he had, so strong and cunning that the menace of them was never very far from his consciousness. The wolf, his master in strength, though not in craft, was always ready to hunt him with a bitter combination of hunger and of hate. And the wolverine, cunning beyond all the other kindreds of

the wild, and of a sullen ferocity which few would dare to cross, was forever on the search for the stored supplies of the foxes.

The wolverine, solitary and morose, slow of movement, and defiant even toward the Polar storm, prowled in all weathers. One day chance led him upon one of Blue Fox's storage cellars. The snow had been recently pawed away, and the wolverine, quick to take the hint, began instantly to dig. It was astonishingly easy work. His short, powerful forepaws made the dry turf and light earth fly, and speedily he came to the store of frozen lemmings. But before he had quite glutted his great appetite, he was interrupted.

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Though the storm was raging over the outer world, to Blue Fox in his burrow had come a monition of evil. He had whisked out to inspect his stores. He found the wolverine head downward in his choicest cellar.

Hot as was his rage, it did not burn up his discretion. This was a peril to be dealt with drastically. He knew that, if the robber was merely driven off, he would return and haunt the purlieus of the colony, and end by finding and rifling every storehouse in the neighborhood.

Blue Fox stole back and roused the occupants of the nearest burrows. In two minutes a dozen angry foxes were out and creeping through the storm. In vengeful silence they fell upon the thief as he feasted carelessly; and in spite of the savage fight he put up, they tore him literally to pieces.



"He found the wolverine head downward in his choicest cellar."

The danger of the wolves was more terrible and more daunting. All through the first half of the winter there had been no sign of a wolf in the neighborhood, the trail of the wandering caribou having lured them far to the eastward. Then it chanced, when Blue Fox was chasing a hare over the snow, beneath the green, rose, and violet dancing flames of the aurora, that a thin, quavering howl came to his ears. He stopped short. He lost all interest in the hare. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw a grayish patch moving swiftly under the shifting radiance. It was on his trail, that patch of death. He lengthened himself out, belly to earth, and sped for the burrows. And the dancing lights, shifting from color to color as they clustered and hurtled across the arch of sky, seemed to stoop in cold laughter over his lonely and desperate flight.

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Blue Fox could run fast, but his best speed was slow in comparison with that of his gaunt and long-limbed foes. He knew that, had the race before him been a long one, it could have but one result. A glance over his shoulder, as he ran, showed him that the gray shapes were overhauling him; and, knowing that the distance to his burrow was not long, he felt that he had a chance. A

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sporting chance, however small, was enough for his courageous spirit, and he raced on with good heart at a pace which soon stretched his lungs near to bursting. But he spared breath for a sharp yelp of warning, which carried far in the stillness and signaled to his fellows the peril that approached.

As the wolves came up, the fugitive could hear the strong, relentless padding of their feet, and then, half a minute later, the measured hiss of their breathing, the occasional hard click of their fangs. But he did not look back. His ears gave him all the information he required, and he could not afford to risk the loss of the slenderest fraction of a second. As he reached the nearest burrow—it was not his own—it seemed as if the dreadful sounds were already overwhelming him. He dived into the burrow, and jaws of steel clashed at his tail as he vanished.

With a chorus of snarls, the disappointed pack brought up abruptly, checking themselves back upon their haunches. The leaders fell to digging at the burrow, while others scattered off to try the same experiment at the other burrows of the colony. But Blue Fox, breathless and triumphant, only showed his teeth derisively. He knew that no wolf-claws could make any impression on the hard-frozen earth surrounding the inner portals of the colony. The wolves discovered by chance one of the supply cellars, and quarreled for a moment over the dozen or so of tit-bits which it contained. And then, realizing that it was no use hanging about in the expectation that any fox would come out to be eaten, the wise old pack-leader swung the pack into ranks and swept them off to hunt other quarry. When the thudding rhythm of their footsteps died into silence, the foxes all came out and sat under the dancing lights, and stared after the terrible receding shapes with a calm and supercilious scorn.

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The White Wolf

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On the night when he was born, in the smoke-smelling wigwam beside the lone Michikamaw, there had come a strange, long howling of the wind amid the cleft granite heights which overhung the water. At the sound the fainting girl on the pile of deerskins opened eyes which grew suddenly wild and dark. She listened intently for a moment, and then groped for the little form which had been laid at her breast.

"That is his name," she muttered. "He shall be called Wind-in-the-Night."

The old squaw, her husband's mother, who was attending upon her, shook her head.

"Hush, my daughter!" she said soothingly. "That is not the wind. That is the old white wolf howling on the mountain. Let us call him White Wolf, since he is of the totem of the wolf. And perhaps the old white wanderer, who disdains to hunt with the pack, will befriend him and bring him good fortune."

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"His name is Wind in-the-Night," said the young mother, in a voice suddenly loud and piercing. Then she turned her head toward the wall of the wigwam wearily, and, with a sharp sigh, her spirit passed from her lips, hurrying out over the black spruce ridges and barren hills to seek the happy hunting grounds of her fathers.

The old woman snatched up the child, lest the mother's spirit in passing should lure it away with her.

"Yes," she cried hastily, hiding the little one in a fold of her blanket and glancing over her shoulder, "his name *is* Wind-in-the-Night."

It would never have done—as the father afterward agreed—to gainsay the child's mother at that moment of supreme authority, but the old woman had her misgivings; for she believed it was the white wolf, not the wind, who had spoken in that hour, and she trembled lest the child should come under his ban.

As the years passed, however, it began to appear that the old squaw's fears were groundless. Among the lodges beside the bleak Michikamaw the child grew up without misadventure; and when he was big enough to begin his boyish hunting and to follow the trails among the dark spruce forests, it began to be rumored that he was in some special favor with the wolf folk. It was said—and, though he could not be persuaded to talk of it, he was never known to deny it—that the old white wolf, whose howling was like the wind in the mountain clefts, had been seen again and again following the boy, not obtrusively, but at a little distance and with an air of watching over him. Certain it was that the boy was without fear to go alone in the forest, and went always as if with a sense of being safeguarded by some unseen influence. Moreover, whenever the wind howled in the night, or the voice of the solitary wolf came quavering down, like the wind, from the granite heights, the boy would be seized with a restlessness and a craving to go forth into the darkness. This impulse was quelled sternly by his father until the lad was old enough and wise enough to restrain it of his own accord; but it was not held, among the tribe, to be any unaccountable or dreadful thing that the boy should be thus compassed about with mystery, for this was the tribe of the Nasquapees, the "Wizards," who were all mystics and credited with secret powers.

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As Wind-in-the-Night grew to manhood, the white wolf grew less and less conspicuous in his affairs, till he came to be little more than a tradition. But at any time of crisis there was sure to

be some suggestion of him, some reminder, whether in a far-off windy howl that might be wolf or might be wind, or else in a gaunt, white shadow flitting half-seen across the youth's trail. Whether, as all the tribe took for granted, it was always the same wolf, a magic beast forever young and vigorous, or whether the grim warder who had presided over the child's birth had bequeathed his mysterious office to a descendant like himself, is a point that need not be decided. Suffice to say that when, at the age of eighteen, Wind-in-the-Night underwent his initiation into the status of full manhood, a great white wolf played an unbidden but not unlooked-for part in it. When, during that long and solitary fasting on the hilltop, the young man's fainting eyes saw visions of awe and unknown portent, and strange, phantasmal shapes of beast and bird came floating up about him with eyes of menace, always at the last moment would come that pallid, prowling warder and drive the ghosts away.

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* * * * *

It was a bad winter. In the gray fishing village at the mouth of the Natashquouan came word to Wind-in-the-Night that certain of the scattered bands of his tribe in the interior were near to starving. He had been now some six months absent from home, guiding a party of prospectors, and his heart was troubled with desire for the little, lonely cluster of lodges on the shore of the Michikamaw. He thought of his own spacious wigwam of birch bark, with the crossed poles projecting above the roof. With a pang of solicitude, he thought of the comely and kindly young squaw, his wife, and of that straight-limbed, copper-colored little five-year-old, his son, whose dark eyes danced like the sunlight on the ripples, and who would always run laughing to meet him and clutch him by the knees so sturdily.

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Wind-in-the-Night wondered if they were hungry. Was it possible that there could be fear and famine in that far-off wigwam deep in the snows, while he, here under the white man's roof, was warm and well fed? With smoldering eyes and no explanations, he resigned his profitable post and started inland, on his snowshoes, with a toboggan load of pemmican and flour. The men of the village, pipe in hand, and weary-eyed with their winter inactivity, looked after him from their doorways and shook their heads.

"He'll never make the Michikamaw with that there load," muttered one.

"It's the wolves'll be gittin' the load an' him too!" growled another.

Another spat tobacco juice into the snow in a sort of resigned derision. Then all closed their doors tight against the deathly cold, huddled up to their stoves, and dreamed grumblingly of spring. The solitary figure bending to the straps of his toboggan never looked back. His thoughts were all on the distant wigwam of birch bark and the woman and child within it, who might be hungry.

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Once across the bleak ridge which overlooked the settlement, Wind-in-the-Night was swallowed up in the untamed, untouched Labrador wilderness—everywhere a confusion of low hills, bowl-like valleys, and spruce forests up-thrusting their dark, pointed tops above the enormous overlay of the snow. Wind-in-the-Night swung on with a long, loping, bent-kneed, straight-footed stride, his immense, racquet-like snowshoes settling into the snow at each step with a curious muffled sigh that had small resemblance to any other sound on earth.

He chose his path unhesitatingly, picking up his landmarks without conscious effort among hill-tops and valleys and ravines which to the uninitiated eye must have all looked alike. Just before noon he halted, lit a fire, made himself a kettle of tea after the comforting fashion he had learned from the white men, and chewed a rocky morsel of pemmican without taking time to cook it. Then he pushed on eagerly.

The shadows began to fall early in that latitude; and as they began to fall, Wind-in-the-Night began glancing from time to time over his shoulder. He did it half-unconsciously, so absorbed was he in his thoughts. At last he caught himself at it, as it were, and for a moment wondered what he did it for. The next instant, with a little tingling at the nape of his neck—just where, on a dog or a moose, the hair stiffens at such moments—he understood.

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He felt that he was being followed.

His path was the open, snow-sheeted channel of a little river, with the fir woods crowding down to its brink on either side. Wind-in-the-Night halted and peered into the thickets with eyes trained and penetrating, but he could distinguish nothing. He listened, but there was not a sound in all that lifeless world, save a ghostly settling of the snow somewhere behind him. He sniffed the air, but his nostrils could detect no taint upon it. He pushed on again, and immediately he felt in his spine, in his hair, that the depths of the forest, to right and to left, were full of moving life.

Then he knew that he was being trailed by many wolves.

It was the thought of the woman and the boy, hungry in their wigwam on the Michikamaw, that made his heart sink. He knew that for the moment he was safe, but, when the night came, it would be another matter. He was not afraid physically, for his muscles and his nerves stretched to the thought of the great fight he would make before the gray beasts should pull him down. But that the food, the succor he was bringing, should never reach the wigwam—this thought turned his heart cold. He increased his pace, hoping to find a spot where he might encamp to advantage and fortify himself for the night.

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In that broken country of wide-sown boulders and fantastic outcrop, Wind-in-the-Night had

reason to hope for a post of better advantage than the open trail. And after a half-mile's further traveling, while yet there was daylight enough to discourage the wolves from showing themselves, he found it. About halfway up a sparsely wooded hillside to his right he marked a steep-faced boulder, at the foot of which he resolved to make his stand.

On his way up the slope he passed a small dead fir tree and a stunted birch, both of which he hastily chopped down and flung across his toboggan for firewood. Arriving at the rock, he thrust the loaded toboggan close against its foot, and then, at a distance of about ten feet before it, he hastened to start his fire. It was a little fire, a true Indian's fire, economical of fuel; for there was no more wood in sight except green spruce, which made but poor and precarious burning unless with plenty of dry stuff to urge it on. He thought for a moment of venturing some little way into the woods in search of fuel; but, even as he was weighing the chances of it, the dusk gathered, and the wolves began to show themselves along the skirts of the timber. Some prowled forth and slipped back again at once into the gloom, while others came out and stood eyeing him steadily.

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But more fuel, of some sort, Wind-in-the-Night knew he must have. About halfway between the rock and the skirts of the close growth stood a single small spruce. He knew that its sappy wood would burn with difficulty, but it would do to make the rest of the fuel last longer—possibly, with the most parsimonious care, even till sunrise. Stirring his fire to a brisker blaze—at which, for a moment or two, the wolves drew back into their covert—he strode forth and felled the spruce in half a dozen skilful strokes. Then he dragged it back toward the rock.

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To the watchers in the shadow, however, this looked like a retreat. Their hesitation vanished. As if at a signal, they shot from covert and launched themselves, a torrent of shadowy, flame-eyed, leaping shapes, upon the man. He, catching sight of the dreadful onslaught over his shoulder, dropped the tree he was dragging, and sprang desperately for the doubtful shelter of his fire.

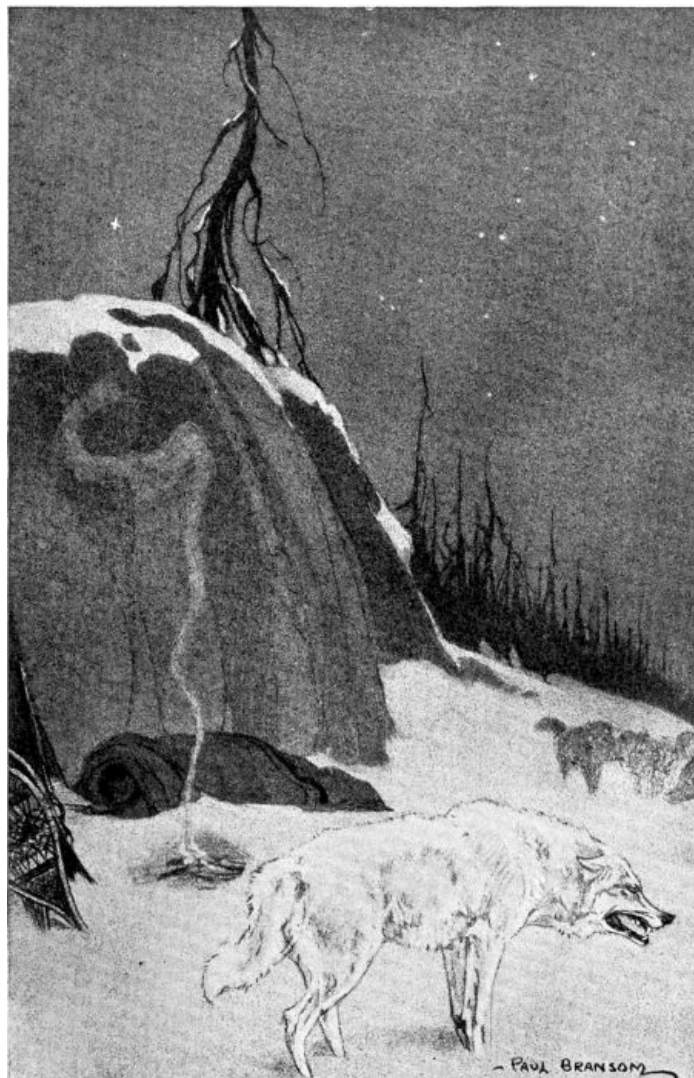
He felt in his heart, however, that he was too late, that he would never reach the fire. Well, he would not die pulled down like a fleeing doe from behind. He faced about and swung up his axe, his lean, dark jaw set grimly.

The hordes of his assailants were within a dozen paces of him, when suddenly they stopped, thrusting out their forefeet with violence and going back upon their haunches with low snarls. An immense white wolf had sprung in between the hordes and their quarry, and stood there rigid, confronting his fellows with bared fangs, flattened ears, and every hair erect along his back. His authority seemed to be unquestionable, for not a wolf ventured to pass him. Reluctantly, sullenly, they drew back to within a few paces of the edge of the wood; and there they halted, some crouching, some sitting, some moving restlessly to and fro, and all eyeing their inexorable chief expectantly, as if looking for him to withdraw his inhibition at any moment and let them at their prey.

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Wind-in-the-Night gave one long look at his strange protector, then calmly turned and strode back to his fire. Calmly he proceeded to chop his wood into small billets, for the more frugal use. Then he moved the fire closer in toward the foot of the rock, in order that a smaller blaze might suffice to warm him through the night. Seating himself with his back to the loaded toboggan, he prepared his supper. His appetite craved a thick, hot soup of pemmican, but he had a feeling that the enticing smell of such a meal on the icy air might make the wolves forget their deference to his protector. He contented himself with a sticky and unpalatable gruel made by stirring a couple of handfuls of flour into the boiling tea, and he felt a reasonable confidence that the smell of such fare would prove no irresistible temptation to wolfish nostrils. The thought occurred to him that perhaps he ought, in courtesy, to throw a chunk of pemmican to his protector, who was now pacing slowly and methodically to and fro before him like a sentinel, with eyes fixed ever on those waiting hordes. But to Wind-in-the-Night the great white beast was no mortal wolf, and he feared to affront him by the offer of white man's food.

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"The gaunt, tirelessly patrolling shape of his white sentinel."

The brief meal done, Wind-in-the-Night lighted his pipe and smoked stolidly, crouching over the small fire. In spite of the terrific cold, he was warm enough here, with the rock close at his back, the snow banked up at either side, and his blankets about him. From time to time he fed the fire frugally, and calculated that at this rate he could make his fuel last the whole night through. But sleep was not to be thought of. His small, unflinching eyes looked out across the meager flames, through the thin reek of the smoke, and met calmly the scores of cruel, narrowed eyes glaring upon him grimly from the edges of the timber. But the eyes of the tireless sentinel he did not meet, for they were kept always turned away from him. How long, he wondered, would the sentinel remain tireless? Or how long would those ravening watchers remain obedient to the authority that denied their hunger relief? No, decidedly he must not sleep.

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Smoking endlessly, feeding the little fire and crouching over it, thinking of the wigwam on the lone white shore of the Michikamaw, and watching ever that dread half-circle of hungry eyes, and the gaunt, tirelessly patrolling shape of his white sentinel, he began to see strange visions. The waiting wolves vanished. In their place, emerging like mists from the forest and taking form in the firelight, came the spirits of the totems of his ancestors—white bears and black with eyes of men, eagles that walked stridingly, gray lynxes with a stare that seemed to pierce him through the bone, and towering black moose bulls with the storm-drift whirling in their antlers. They filled him with awe and wonder, but he had no fear of them, for he knew that he had done no trespass against the traditions. Then, without surprise, he saw his white guardian, the living presentment of his own totem, grow at once to the stature of a caribou, and come and sit down opposite him just across the fire, and look meaningly into his eyes. Wind-in-the-Night strove desperately to interpret that grave meaning. As his brain groped after it, suddenly a long, thin howling filled his ears, whether the voice of the wind or the voice of a wolf he could not tell.

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The sound grew louder, louder, more penetrating and insistent, and then he came out of his vision with a start. He lifted his head, which had fallen on his breast. A late and aged moon hung distorted just over the line of the treetops before him. He was deadly cold, and the fire had burned down to a little heap of red embers. The dreadful waiting hordes had all vanished from the skirts of the timber, whirling off, doubtless, on the trail of some unprohibited quarry. Only the white sentinel remained, and he had shrunk back to his former stature, which was beyond that of his fellows, indeed, but not altogether incredible. He was sitting on his haunches just the other side of the dying fire. His long muzzle was lifted straight in the air, and he was howling to the decrepit moon.

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As Wind-in-the-Night lifted his head the white wolf stopped howling, dropped his nose, and stared

earnestly into the man's eyes. Hurriedly but carefully, the man thrust some dry sticks into the embers and fanned them into flame. Then he stood up. He knew that the white wolf's howling had awakened him and saved him from being frozen to death.

"Thank you, white brother," he said simply, with firm confidence that the mystical beast could understand human speech in the tongue of the Nasquapees.

The great wolf cocked his ears at the sound, and gazed at the man inquiringly for a second or two. Then he arose slowly and sauntered off into the forest.

Wind-in-the-Night knew that the peril had passed. He heaped wood on the fire with what was, for an Indian, lavish recklessness. When he was well warmed he went and dragged up the tree which he had felled, then he cooked himself a liberal meal—a strong stew of pemmican and flour—and, having eaten it, felt mightily refreshed. Having no more inclination for sleep, he resumed his journey, resolving to snatch at the midday halt what sleep he should find himself needing.

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Now, it had chanced, some days earlier than this, that in one of the lodges by the Michikamaw a child had fallen sick. There was bitter famine in the lodges, but that was plainly not what ailed the little one. None of the wise men of the tribe could diagnose the sickness, and the child was near to death. Then an old brave, the child's uncle, who had been much about the posts of the Hudson Bay Company, which are scattered over Labrador, said that the white man's medicine was a magic to cure all disease, and that, if the little one could but come to one of the posts, his life would surely be saved. The old brave was himself hungering for an excuse to get away to the warmth which was to be found in the dwellings of the white man, and he said that he would take the little one out to North West River to be healed. And the mother, dry-eyed, but with despair at her heart, had let him go. It was only a chance, but it seemed the only chance; and she greatly feared to meet the child's father if it should die in his absence.

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Wind-in-the-Night had made good going, and was eating up the long miles of his journey. At noon, in a deep trough dug with his snowshoes in the snow, and with a good fire at his feet, he had slept soundly for two hours. In that pure and tonic air but little sleep was needed. That night there was no more sign of wolves, and he felt assured that his strange protector had led them off to other hunting.

The trail from the Natashquouan was leading him almost due north. Late in the afternoon of the fourth day of his journey, he crossed the fresh trail of a wolf-pack running east. He thought little of it, but, from the habit of the trained hunter and trapper, he gave it a searching scrutiny as he went. Then he stopped short. He had marked another trail underlying that of the wolf-pack.

It was the trail of a man on snowshoes, drawing a loaded sledge and traveling eastward.

Wind-in-the-Night concluded at once, from his direction, that the traveler came from the lodges on the Michikamaw. It must be one of his own people. He examined the tracks minutely, and presently made out that the traveler was going unsteadily, with an occasional stumble, as if from weariness or weakness. And the wolf-pack was hunting him.

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The trails being fresh, it was plain that the hunt could not be far ahead. Acting on the first impulse of his courageous spirit, Wind-in-the-Night started instantly in pursuit, hunting the hunters. Then came the memory of his errand, the thought of the woman and the boy in the wigwam of birch bark, hungry and needing him; and he stopped, half-turning to go back.

For some seconds he stood there in an agony of irresolution, his heart dragging him both ways. If he went to the help of the hunted man, he might, more than probably, himself be pulled down and devoured by the ravaging pack. He must think of his own first, and save his life for them. Then he thought of his fellow-tribesman, worn out with flight, making his last fight alone in the silence and the snow. His wife and boy, at least, were sheltered and with their people about them, and would not be left utterly to starve so long as there was a shred of meat to be shared in the tribe. He tried to turn back to them, but the picture of the spent and stumbling fugitive was too much for him. He snatched up his rifle, a repeating Winchester, from the toboggan, and with a groan raced onward in the trail of the wolves.

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It was not yet sunset, and he felt reasonably assured that the pack would not dare to close in upon their prey before dusk began to fall, so he continued to drag his loaded toboggan along, knowing that, if he should leave it behind him, its precious cargo would fall a prey to the lynxes and the foxes. He calculated to overtake the chase at any moment. As he ran, sweating in his harness in spite of the intense cold, he studied the trail of the wolves, and saw that the pack was not a large one—perhaps not much beyond a score in number. If the fugitive should prove to have any fight left in him, they two would stand back to back and perhaps be able to pull the desperate venture through.

Before he had gone half a mile, Wind-in-the-Night saw the trail of the pack divide and seek the coverts on either side of the track of the lonely snowshoer. That track grew more and more irresolute and uneven, and he knew that the fugitive could not be far ahead. He pictured him even now turning wearily at bay, his back to some rock or steep hillock, his loaded sledge up-tilted before him as a barricade, and the wolves crowding the thickets on either side, waiting for the moment to rush in upon him.

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He pushed on furiously, expecting this picture to greet his eyes at every turn of the trail. But still it delayed, and the tension of his suspense grew almost unbearable. The dusk began to gather

among the white-shrouded fir thickets. Why did not the fugitive stop and make ready some defense? Then he rounded a corner, and there, fifty paces ahead of him, was what he was looking for.

But there was a difference in the picture. There were the wolves, no longer in hiding, but stalking forth from the thickets. There was the upthrust of rock. There was the man, at bay, with his back to it. But the loaded sledge was not before him as a barrier. Instead of that, it was thrust behind him, as something precious to be guarded with his life. The tall figure, at first bent with fatigue, straightened itself up defiantly, lifted a musket, and fired at a bunch of wolves just springing from the woods on his left. Flinging down the weapon—an old muzzle-loader, which there was no time to recharge—he reached back to the sledge for his axe.

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At that moment Wind-in-the-Night recognized the old brave's face. With a gasp, he twisted himself clear of his harness and sprang forward. In the same instant the wolves closed in.

In the front of the attack was a great white beast, so swift in his leap that the man had no time to swing up his weapon in defense.

A hoarse cry, whether of grief or horror, burst from the lips of Wind-in-the-Night as the mystic white shape of his protector sprang at the old brave's throat. But he did not hesitate. He whipped up his rifle and fired, and the white wolf dropped sprawling over the front of the sledge.

In a sort of frenzy at the sacrilege of which, in his own eyes, he had just been guilty, Wind-in-the-Night fired shot after shot, dropping a wolf to every bullet. But the fate of their great leader seemed to have abashed the whole pack; and before half a dozen shots were fired they had slunk off, stricken with panic.

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Without a glance at the man whom he had saved, Wind-in-the-Night stalked forward and flung himself down upon the body of the white wolf, imploring it to pardon what he had done. As he poured out his guttural pleading, a feeble child's voice came to his ears, and he lifted his head with a sudden tightening at his heart.

"I *thought* you would come pretty quick, father," said the small voice tremblingly, "for I'd been calling you ever so long."

A little face, meager and burning-eyed, was gazing at him trustfully from among the furs in the sledge. Wind-in-the-Night forgot the slain wolf. He bent over the sledge and clutched the frail figure to his breast, too amazed to ask any questions. He shook in every nerve to think how nearly he had refused to come to that unheard call.

The old brave was starting to light a fire.

"The boy was very sick," said he calmly, unjarred by the dreadful ordeal which he had just passed through. "I was taking him to North West River to be cured by the white man's medicine. But already he recovers, so we will go back to the Michikamaw with the food."

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"Good," said Wind-in-the-Night. He stood up and stared long at the body of the great beast whom he had slain.

"We will take him with us," he said at last, "and give him the burial of a chief. It would be ill work if we should leave him to be eaten by foxes."

Up a Tree

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McLaggan stopped short in the middle of the trail and peered sharply into the thick undergrowth on his right. At odd moments during the past half-hour he had experienced a fleeting sensation of being followed; but, absorbed in his own thoughts, he had paid no attention to it. Now, however, he was on the sudden quite convinced of it. Yet he could have sworn he had heard nothing, seen nothing, smelt nothing, to justify the conviction. For nearly half a mile the trail stretched away behind him between the giant trunks and fringing bush-growth—narrow, perfectly straight, completely shadowed from sun and sky, but visible all the way in that curiously transparent, glassy gloom of the under-forest world. There was nothing behind him on the trail—at least, within a half-mile of him. And the Presence of which he had been warned was very near. As is so often the case with the men who dwell in the great silences, he was conscious at times of possessing something like a sixth sense—a kind of inexplicable and erratic power of perception which frequently neglected to exercise itself when most needed, but which, when it did consent to work, was never guilty of giving a false alarm. Peering with trained eyes, wise in all woodcraft, through the tangle of the undergrowth, he waited absolutely motionless for several minutes. A little black-and-white woodpecker, which had been watching him, ran nimbly up the mast of a giant pine. Nothing else stirred, and there was no other living creature to be discerned. Yet McLaggan knew his intuition had not fooled him. He knew now to a certainty that he was being observed and trailed. He pondered on the fact for a little, and then, muttering to himself, "It's a painter, sure!" he resumed his journey.

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McLaggan was not nervous, although for this journey he had left his rifle behind him in camp, and he was aware that a panther, if it meant mischief, was not an adversary to be scorned. But,

skilled as he was in all the lore of the wilderness folk, he knew that no panther, unless with some bitter wrong to avenge, would willingly seek a quarrel with a man. That powerful and crafty cat, not from cowardice but from sagacity, recognized man for its master, and was wont to give him a wide berth whenever possible. Another thing that McLaggan knew was that the panther has occasionally a strange taste for following a man in secret, with excessive caution but remarkable persistence, as if to study him and perhaps find out the causes of his supremacy.

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But McLaggan's knowledge of the wild creatures went even further than an acquaintance with their special habits and characteristics. He knew that it was impossible for man to know them thoroughly, because there was always the incalculable element of individuality to make allowance for—an element that delights in confounding the dogmatic assertions of the naturalists. He was sure that the chances were a hundred to one against this unseen pursuer daring to make an attack upon him or even contemplating such a piece of rashness. But, on the other hand, he recognized that remote hundred-and-first chance. He adjusted the straps of his heavy pack—the cause of his leaving his rifle behind—so that he could rid himself of it on the instant, if necessary, and he carried loose a very effective weapon, the new axe which he had just bought at the Settlement. It was a light, hickory-handled, general-utility axe, such as any expert backwoodsman knows how to use with swift and deadly effect, whether as a hand-to-hand weapon or as a missile. He was not nervous, as we have seen, but he was annoyed that he, the old trailer of many beasts, should thus be trailed in his turn, from whatever motive. He kept an indignantly watchful eye on all the coverts he passed, and he scrutinized suspiciously every considerable bough that stretched across the trail. He had bethought him that the panther's favorite method of attack was to drop upon his quarry's neck from above; and, in spite of himself, the little hairs on the back of his own neck crawled at the idea.

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The trail running in from the Settlement to McLaggan's camp among the foothills was a matter of some fifteen miles, and uphill all the way. But in that bracing autumn air, amid those crisp shadows flecked with October's gold, McLaggan was little conscious of the weight of his pack, and his corded muscles felt no fatigue. Under the influence of that unseen and unwelcome companionship behind the veil of the leafage, he quickened his pace gradually, growing ever more and more eager to reach his rifle and take vengeance for the troubling of his journey.

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Suddenly, from far ahead, the silence was broken by the high, resonant bugling of a bull elk. It was a poignantly musical sound, but full of menace and defiance, and it carried a long way on that still, resilient air. Again McLaggan regretted his rifle, for the virile fulness of that bugling suggested an unusually fine bull and a splendid pair of antlers. McLaggan wanted meat, to be dried for his winter larder, and he wanted the antlers, for a really good elk head was by this time become a thing of price. It was a possession which enthusiastic members of the Brotherhood of the Elks were always ready to pay well for.

The bugling was several times repeated at brief intervals, and then it was answered defiantly from far on the left. The sonorous challenges answered each other abruptly and approached each other swiftly. McLaggan still further hastened his pace. His gray eyes, under their shaggy brows, blazed with excitement. He forgot all about his unseen, stealthy pursuer. His sixth sense stopped working. He thought only of being in time to see the duel between the two bull elks, the battle for the lordship of the herd of indifferent cows.

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To his impatience, it seemed no time at all ere the rival buglings came together and ceased. Then his straining ears caught—very faintly and elusively, as the imperceptible airs of the forest drew this way and that—the dry clash of opposing antlers. It was evident that the battle was nearer at hand than he had imagined. He broke into a noiseless trot, hoping yet to be in time.

Presently he was so near that he could catch, amid the clash of antlers, occasional great windy snortings and explosive, groaning grunts. All at once these noises of battle stopped, changed, passed into a confused scuffling mixed with groans, and then into a wild crashing of flight and pursuit. The fight was over, but McLaggan perceived with a thrill that the flight was coming his way.

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Half a minute later the fugitive broke out into the trail and came dashing down it, wild-eyed, nostrils blowing bloody foam and flanks streaming crimson. McLaggan stepped politely aside to let him pass, and he passed unheeding. He had no eyes even for the arch-foe man in this moment of his defeat and humiliation.

But not so the victor! The most splendid specimen of a bull elk that McLaggan's eyes had ever rested upon, he stopped short in his pursuit at sight of the gray, erect figure standing there motionless beside the trail. McLaggan expected him to turn and flee back to his cows and hasten to shepherd them away from danger. But the great beast, now in the hour of his triumph and his most arrogant ferocity, had far other intention. He stood staring at McLaggan for several seconds, but McLaggan saw that there was nothing like fear in that insolent and flaming regard. The bull stamped sharply on the sod with one knife-edged fore-hoof; and McLaggan, knowing what that meant, glanced around discreetly for the easiest tree to climb. He was now furious at the lack of his rifle, and vowed never again to go without it.

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Fortunately for McLaggan, the great bull was no mere blind and brutal ruffian of a fighter. Like all his aristocratic breed, he had a certain punctilio to observe in such affairs. He had first to stamp his challenge several times, snort vehemently, and advance his antlers in fair warning. Then he came on, at first daintily and mincingly, and only after that formal preliminary did he break into his furious rush.

But already McLaggan had swung himself into the tree, just out of reach, leaving his pack at the foot.

For a little McLaggan was engrossed in wondering if he really *was* quite out of reach, so vigorous were the rearings and thrustings of his enemy, so agile the high strokes of those fine, destructive hoofs. Then out of the tail of his eye he caught sight of several elk cows—the herd stealing warily down the trail to see how it was faring with their victorious lord. They halted, noses in air and ears pricked forward anxiously, wondering at their lord's strange antics under the tree. Then, all together, they wheeled about sharply, as if worked on a single spring, and fled off in enormous bounds over and through the thickets. McLaggan stared after them in surprise, wondering at their abrupt flight. A moment later it was explained to him, as he saw the tawny head and shoulders of an immense panther emerge for just the fraction of a second into the trail.

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McLaggan was gratified at this confirmation of his woodcraft, but he was now a little anxious as to what was going to happen next. He realized that in traveling without his rifle he had fairly coaxed the unexpected to happen; and it seemed to him that this particular panther was not going to play by the accepted rules of the game, or he would never have been so audacious as to reveal himself even for that instant in the open trail. He looked down upon his magnificent adversary raging below him, and felt a generous impulse to give him warning of the peril lurking in the undergrowth. As between the elk and the panther, his sympathies were all with the elk, in spite of that misguided beast's extremely inconvenient hostility.

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"Instead of stretchin' yer fool neck that way, tryin' to get at *me*," he expostulated, leaning from his branch, "ye'd a sight better be keepin' yer eyes peeled fer yer own hide. There's a durn big painter hidin' somewheres in them bushes yonder, an' while ye're a-claw-in' after me—which ain't no use at all—he'll be getting his claws inter *you*, first thing ye know!"

But it was plain that the bull did not understand English, or, at least, McLaggan's primitive variation on English. He seemed to grow more pugnacious than ever at the sound of these mild exhortations. He made the most extravagant efforts to reach McLaggan's refuge with horn or hoof. Convincing himself at last that this was impossible, he glared about him wrathfully till his eyes fell on McLaggan's pack lying near by.

Appearing to regard it as part of McLaggan, he fell upon it triumphantly. His edged hoofs slashed it and smashed it, his pronged antlers ripped it wide open, and in a dozen seconds he had sent the contents flying in every direction. The contents were miscellaneous, as McLaggan had been in to the Settlement for the purpose of replenishing his stores. They included, among other items, a two-gallon tin of molasses, a little tin of pepper enveloped in a flaring scarlet label, a white cotton bag of flour, a paper bag of beans, and another of sugar. The beans and the sugar went all abroad at the first attack, the big and the little tin rolled away, and the bull devoted his attention for a moment to the bag of flour. He ripped it wide open with his antlers, then blew into it scornfully so that the flour puffed up into his face. Having accomplished all this with such surprising ease, he seemed to think he might now succeed in getting at McLaggan himself. He came under the branch once more and glared upwards through what looked like a pair of white goggles, so thickly were his eye-sockets rimmed with flour. He snorted fresh defiance through wide red nostrils nicely fringed with white.

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"His pronged antlers ripped it wide open."

McLaggan was now too angry to appreciate the extraordinary appearance of his foe. At the scattering of his precious supplies, his sympathies had gone over completely to the panther. He spat down upon his adversary in impotent indignation.

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"I hope the painter'll git ye, after all!" he cried, with a bunch of expletives too virile for the cold exposure of the printed page.

In reply, the bull made another earnest effort to reach him. Then, once more disappointed, he returned to the pack to see what further satisfaction he could get out of it.

Finding that there was no resistance left in the beans, the sugar, or the bag of flour, he went after the little scarlet tin of pepper which had been thrown some distance and lay under a neighboring tree. He slashed it open with a stroke of the hoof, then jabbed it with a prong of his antlers and flung it into the air. It fell on his shoulders, emptying most of its contents into the long hair on the ridge of his neck. Startled at this attack, he jumped around sharply, and was just in the middle of pounding the impertinent thing viciously under foot, when, to his annoyance, he began to sneeze. It was such sneezing as he had never experienced before. He spread his legs wide and devoted himself to it with all his energies.

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This was too much for McLaggan's wrath. He forgot it in an ecstasy of delight. He was just on the point of explosion, when he saw something which made him check himself with a choked expletive.

The panther was creeping out upon a great branch almost over the sneezing bull's head. The next moment it dropped from the branch and fastened teeth and claws in the bull's neck.

The bull was just in the middle of a terrific paroxysm, but the cruel shock of this assault brought him to. With a grunt he bounded into the air, coming down upon all four feet again, stiff-legged like a bucking horse, as if thinking the jar might shake his assailant off. Failing in this, he sprang violently sideways, and at the same time, being a beast of resource, he struck back with the prongs of his antlers by jerking his muzzle sharply upward.

In the meantime the panther was clawing and biting savagely, and seemed likely to maintain his hold in spite of the clever tactics of his adversary. But just at this point the pepper in the bull's mane began to take irresistible effect, both in eyes and nostrils. The amazed panther let out a screech of protest which ended in a convulsive sneeze. In the midst of this convulsion, the bull side-stepped again with distressing energy, and the panther, half-blinded and wholly bewildered, was thrown to the ground. The maneuver was almost equally disastrous to McLaggan, who,

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rocking with laughter, all but fell out of his tree.

The moment he had shaken himself clear, the bull, undaunted, whirled and struck like lightning with his formidable fore-hoofs. With equal alertness the panther succeeded in eluding the stroke. He doubled lithely aside and sprang again, seeking to recover his former advantage. But, being half-blinded, he fell short and only got a grip with his front claws. As he struggled savagely to make good his hold against the plunging and the thrashing antlers of his antagonist, once more the pepper in his nostrils began to work with power. In spite of his passionate refusal of the gigantic titillation, his head went up in the air, his spine straightened itself out, his jaws and his claws opened, and the huge sneeze ripped stridently from his lungs. It ended in a screech of rage and disappointment as he found himself once more rolling on the ground, striking out blindly with futile claws.

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As he recovered himself, he warily bounced aside, lightly as a loosed spring. But he was not quite quick enough. One of those battering hoofs that were playing for him so nimbly caught him on the haunch. It caught him aslant, or it would have shattered the great joint beyond hope of recovery. But it was enough for his catship. With a scream, he darted off beneath a low-branched thicket, ran lamely up another tree, and crept away from the place of his discomfiture by the path of the interlacing branches. He wanted no elk-meat which tasted like that.

The victor stood glaring after him for half a minute, snorting and shaking his triumphant antlers. Then he came and glared up at McLaggan, as much as to say: "Did you see that? That's the way I'd fix you, too, if only you'd come down here and stand up to me!"

As for his cruel wounds on flank and neck, he seemed quite unaware of them. But he was evidently a little tired, for he made no further attempts to reach McLaggan's refuge.

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"You're sure some punkins!" declared McLaggan admiringly, wiping his eyes on his sleeve. "Who'd ever 'a' thought any bull elk could lick a painter *that* quick?"

Scorning to be conciliated by compliment, the bull turned away to see if there was any further damage he could inflict on McLaggan's belongings.

Ah, yes, to be sure, there was the bright, unsullied tin of molasses just where he had hurled it. He pranced over and slashed at it, in spite of McLaggan's appeals, and opened a generous gash, through which the amber-brown stickiness came bulging forth phlegmatically. The bull eyed this phenomenon, and then, scornful of what he could not understand, prodded the can with an eviscerating antler. He prodded it so hard that not only one prong but a tiny projecting fork also went clean through the tin. Then he threw up his head sharply, expecting to toss the wreck into the air.

To his surprise, it refused to be tossed. It just clung where it was, and began to pour its contents down in a sticky, deliberate stream all over his head and ears and face. He shook his antlers indignantly, and the can thereupon threw wider its suave coils of richness, till they laced his neck and his gashed flank. Finding that the insignificant but obstinate thing would not let go, he lowered his antlers and struck at it indignantly with one of his hinder hoofs. When this attempt proved futile, he fell to rooting and prodding the ground, till the stickiness had gathered a copious tribute of leaves and twigs and dirt. This process not accomplishing his purpose, he lifted his head and glanced about him with a worried air, his faith in his own prowess apparently for the first time shaken.

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McLaggan shrieked. He flung both arms and legs about his branch to keep from falling, and clung there, gurgling.

At the strange sound of his laughter, the bull returned beneath the branch and gazed up at him, no longer, as it seemed to McLaggan, insolently, but reproachfully.

"Go 'way, durn ye, or ye'll be the death o' me yet!" gasped McLaggan.

Once more the bull's eyes blazed, and again he shook his antlers in defiance. But, as he did so, the can, now quite empty and resonant, gave forth a hollow clatter. The fire faded from the bull's eyes, and he jumped aside nervously. The can clattered again, still in the same place. The bull jumped yet again and shook his head more violently. The can gave voice more clamorously. At that the courage of the valiant fighter, whom neither rival bull nor panther nor man himself could daunt, melted to skim milk. He broke into panic flight through the bushes, and the hollow protestings of the can kept time to the madness of his going.

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McLaggan, with aching ribs, climbed down from his refuge and stood surveying the wreckage of his supplies. There was nothing left worth picking up, except his axe.

"I'm obleeged to ye for leavin' me the axe," said he. "But ye might 'a' took it, an' welcome. The show was worth the price!"

The Eyes in the Bush

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Low over the wide, pallid, almost unruffled expanse of tide a great ghost-gray bird came flapping shoreward heavily. The shore, drowsing under the June sun, was as flat and seemingly as

limitless as the sea, except to the right, where the unfenced levels of the grass foamed golden-green along the fringe of the wooded hills. Between the waveless pallor of the water and the windless warm glow of the grass was drawn a narrow riband of copper red—the smooth mud flats left naked by the tide. Just at the edge of the grass the bleached ribs of an ancient fishing-smack, borne thither years ago in some tempestuous conspiracy of wind and tide, stood up nakedly from the dry red mud, and seemed to beg the leaning grass to cover them. Upon one of these gray ribs the great gray bird alighted, balancing himself unsteadily for a moment, as if in the last stage of exhaustion, and then settling to an immobility that seemed to make him a portion of the wreck itself.

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For the better part of an hour the Gray Visitor never stirred, never ruffled a feather—not even when a gorgeous black-and-red butterfly alighted, with softly fanning wings, within a foot of him; not even when a desperate mouse, chased by a weasel, squeaked loudly in the grass-roots behind him. The bees and flies kept up a soft hum, the very voice of sleep, among the clover blossoms scattered through the grass, and the hot scents of the wild parsnip steamed up over the levels like an unseen incense. The still air quivered, glassy clear. Along the other side of the strip of red began a soft, frothy hiss, as the first of the flood-tide came seething back across the flats. A heavy black-and-yellow bumble bee, with a loud, inquiring boom, swung in headlong circles over the wreck, more than once almost brushing the feathers of the motionless stranger. A sudden flock of sand-pipers puffed down along the shore, alighted, piping mellowly, on the mud just beyond the wreck, and flickered gray and white as they bobbed their stiff little tails up and down in their feeding.

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But the great gray owl never moved a feather. For an hour he sat there with fast-shut eyes in the broad blaze of the sunshine, while life crept slowly back along his indomitable but exhausted nerves. An estray from the Polar North, he had been blown far out to sea in a hurricane. Taking refuge on a small iceberg, he had been carried south till the berg, suddenly disintegrating, had forced him to dare the long landward flight. The last of his strength had barely sufficed him to gain the shore and the refuge of this perch upon the ribs of the ancient wreck.

At last he opened his immense round yellow eyes—discs of flaming yellow glass with the pupils contracted to mere pinheads in the glare of the unshadowed light. Revolving his round, catlike head very slowly upon his shoulders, as if it were moved by clockwork, he surveyed his strange surroundings. The conspicuousness of his perch and the intensity of the sunlight were distasteful to him. Lifting his wide wings, he hopped down into the interior of the wreck, which was half-filled with mud and *débris*. Here, though the side-planking was all fallen away so that prying eyes could see through and through the ribs in every direction, there was yet a sort of seclusion, with some shadow to ease his dazzled eyes.

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Having recovered somewhat from his numbing exhaustion, the Gray Visitor became conscious of the pangs of his famine. He sat motionless as before, but now with all his senses on the alert. His ears—so sensitive that he could hear innumerable and tell-tale sounds where a human ear would have perceived nought but a drowsy silence—caught a chorus of rustlings, squeaks, and rushes, which told him that the neighboring depths of the grass were populous with the mouse folk and their kindred. At one point the grass-fringe came so close to the wreck that its spears were thrusting in between the ribs. The Gray Visitor hopped over to this point, and waited hopefully, like a cat at a frequented mouse-hole.

He had been but a few moments settled in his ambush when a fat, sly-faced water-rat came ambling into the wreck at the other end of the keel, nosing this way and that among the *débris* for sleepy beetles. Keen as were the rat's eyes, they did not notice the ghost-gray erect figure sitting up like a post beside the grass-fringe. The Visitor waited till the rat should come within reach of an unerring pounce. His sinews stiffened themselves in tense readiness. Then something like a brown wedge dropped out of the sky. There was a choked squeal, and the rat lay motionless under the talons of a mottle brown marsh-hawk, which fell instantly to tearing its victim, as if obliged to lunch in a hurry.

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The downy wings of the Gray Visitor lifted. His swoop was as soft, soundless and effortless as if he had been but a wisp of feathers blown on a sudden puff of wind. His mighty talons closed on the neck and back of the feasting hawk. There was a moment's convulsive flapping of the mottled brown wings beneath the overshadowing gray ones. Then the stranger set himself voraciously to the first square meal which had come his way for days. When he had finished, there was little left of either the hawk or the water-rat.

The Visitor wiped the black sickle of his beak on a block of driftwood, glared about him, and then rose softly into the air. He wanted a darker and more secluded place than the ribs of the wreck for his siesta. Along the foot of the uplands to the right he marked a patch of swamp, sown with sedgy pools and clumps of dense bushes. Just at its edge towered a group of three immense water-poplars, whose tops he decided would serve him as a post of outlook for his night hunting. For the moment, however, it was close covert which he wanted, where he could escape the glare of the sun and sleep off his great meal. Flying low over the grass-tops, and ignoring the hushed rustle of unseen scurriers beneath, he winnowed down the shore to the swamp and plunged into the heart of the leafiest thicket. A half-rotted stump, close to the ground, offered him an inviting perch, and in half a minute he was the soundest-sleeping gray owl on this side the Arctic Circle.

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Some little time after, a fussy red-winged blackbird came bustling into the thicket, perhaps to hunt for drowsy night-moths asleep on the under sides of the twigs. He alighted on a branch about two feet from the Gray Visitor's head, and stared impertinently at the spectral, motionless

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shape. As he stared, a pair of immense round eyes, brass yellow and terrible, opened wide upon him. For one petrified second he stared straight into them. Then, recovering the use of his wits, he fell backward off his branch with a protesting squeak, and fluttered out from the bush that held such horrors. The Gray Visitor turned his head slowly, to see if there were any more such intruders upon his solitude, then tranquilly went to sleep again.

It was perhaps a half-hour later when a big black mink came poking his pointed nose into the thicket. His malicious eyes, set close together in his cruel, triangular face, detected at once the sleeping form of the Gray Visitor, and glowed deeply as if all at once transformed to drops of garnet. His first impulse was to hurl himself straight upon the slumberer's throat. But, fearless and joyous slaughterer though he was, there was something in this gray shape that made him hesitate. He had never before seen an owl of this ghostly color, or of even half this size. His long, low, sinuous body gliding almost like a snake's, he slipped up to within a couple of feet of the sleeper, and paused irresolute.

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To the mink's own ear, keen as it was, his motion was as soundless as a moving shadow. But the ear of the owl is a miracle of sensitiveness. In the deep of his sleep the Gray Visitor heard some warning of danger. Just as the mink was gathering his lithe muscles for a spring, a pair of immense, palely blazing discs opened before his face with a light so sudden, so bright, and so hard that he recoiled in spite of himself.

The Gray Visitor had no need of thought to tell him that the long black creature before him, with the narrow snarling mouth and venomous eyes was dangerous. His instinct worked quicker than thought. His wings spread, and he rose as if lifted by a breath from beneath. Then he dipped instantly and struck downward with his knifelike, clutching talons. In the same moment the mink sprang to meet the attack, lengthening out his elastic body prodigiously and reaching for his adversary's throat.

But what the mink did not know was his undoing. He did not know that the deep covering on the Gray Visitor's throat and breast—firm, close-lying feathers and a lavish padding of down—was an armor too thick and resistant for even his keen teeth. He got a choking mouthful of feathers. He even achieved to scratch the skin beneath and draw blood. Then his savage jaws stretched wide in a choking screech as the steel talons closed inexorably on his throat and his slim loins, and the fiery light in his brain went out in a flame of indignation, amazed that it in turn should suffer the fate which it had so continually and so implacably inflicted.

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The Gray Visitor was already hungry again by this time, for an owl's digestion is astonishingly swift. He made a good meal, therefore, upon the flesh of the mink, though that flesh is so tough, so stringy, and so rank that few other flesh-eaters will deign to touch it unless in the extremity of famine. Then he went to sleep again, for he had long arrears to make up, and the hot glow of afternoon was still heavy on the reaches of sea and grass.



"And the fiery light in his brain went out."

But just after sunset, when the glow had faded, and the first thin wave of lilac and amber came washing coolly over the wide landscape, and the blossoms gave out new scents at the touch of the dew, and the night-hawks twanged in the pale green upper heaven, then the Gray Visitor awoke to eager activity. He floated upward from out his covert like a ghost from a pool, circled over it twice, and flew off to those high and lonely treetops which he had marked in the earlier part of the day. [Pg 117]

In the nearest tree, not far from the top, was what looked like an immense accumulation of dead sticks. To the Gray Visitor, coming from a region so far north that there were no tall treetops, this dark mass had no significance. In his world of the Arctic barrens nothing of the nature of a nest would ever be built in such an exposed position, where the first icy hurricane screaming down from the Pole would rip it to shreds. Therefore it never occurred to him that the clumsy platform of dead sticks was the nest of a pair of blue herons. In fact, he had no idea that any such creature as a blue heron existed. He flew noiselessly to the very top of the tree and perched there some ten or a dozen feet above the dusky platform of sticks. [Pg 118]

All the wide, glimmering twilight world beneath him was very still and quiet. Nothing seemed astir but the two or three night-hawks swooping and twanging high up in the hollow heaven, and he had no thought of hunting any such elusive quarry as the night-hawks. With a view to startling some wary hiders into activity, he opened his beak and gave utterance to an unearthly screeching hoot. As he did so, there was a sharp movement on the platform of sticks, and a keen, defiant eye looked up at him. He discerned instantly that the platform of sticks was a nest, and that an immense bird, with an astonishingly long head and bill, was sitting upon it.

In his own desolate north the great gray owl knew that no creature on wings could rival him. He was the undisputed tyrant of the Polar air, even the dashing, white chocolate-mottled hawk-owl flying precipitately before him. It never occurred to him that this straight-billed nester could be in any way dangerous. He dropped down upon her quite casually, as upon a sure and easy victim.

But, before he was within striking distance, the narrow head of the heron was drawn far back between her shoulders, and the long straight javelin of her bill presented its point directly toward the attack. [Pg 119]

The Gray Visitor noted what a weapon confronted him, and paused warily. In the next instant the snaky neck of the heron uncoiled itself and the javelin bill darted up at him like lightning. It was a false stroke on the heron's part, for her assailant was not quite within reach. But the Gray Visitor took note of the deadly possibilities of that darting bill, and promptly sailed a little further out of

its range.

But he was only warned, not daunted. For several minutes he circled slowly just above the nest, now approaching, now retiring, while he pondered the unaccustomed problem. And all the time the heron, her head drawn back between her hunched shoulders, watched his flight unwinkingly, and kept her menacing point at guard. On the flexible coil of her neck her head pivoted perfectly, and from whichever quarter the enemy approached, there was that fiery yellow point always confronting him, waiting to dart upward and meet him full in the breast.

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Suddenly he swooped again. Up came that darting stroke to meet him. But he did not meet it. Swerving craftily, he caught the stroke in his wing feathers and smothered it, buffeting it down. With a harsh *quah-ah* of despair, the heron strove to regain her position for another stroke. But already her adversary had his clutch upon her throat. A moment more and the long neck straightened out, and the narrow head hung limply over the edge of the nest. The eggs, crushed in the struggle, oozed slowly down through the loose foundations of the platform, and the great gray owl began to tear greedily at the most lavish banquet his hunting had ever won him.

But Nature is apt to deal remorselessly with the unprepared. And the Gray Visitor, not being at home with his surroundings, had neglected to prepare for the return of the dead mother's mate. Busy at his feasting, he failed to notice at first the flapping of heavy wings. When he did notice it he looked up sharply, his beak dripping, his round, pallid face dappled with blood. The tall cockheron was just settling upon the edge of the platform. His head was drawn back between his shoulders, behind the long yellow lance of his bill, and his eyes, hard as jewels, met those of the murderer without any expression of rage or fear or hate. They were as unchanging as the gemmed eyes of an idol.

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The Gray Visitor sprang into the air, in order to give battle on more advantageous terms. But this time he sprang a little too slowly. The heron's head darted downward at him, as if spearing a frog. The stroke caught him full in the wing-elbow, splitting it and totally disabling him for flight. With a hiss of fury, he pounced at his stilt-legged antagonist, striking out frantically with his terrific, clutching talons. But his trailing wing jerked him sideways, so that he utterly missed his aim and sprawled at the heron's feet. Before he could recover himself, the avenger struck again with the full drive of his powerful neck, and the stroke went home. The Gray Visitor dropped in a heap, with the javelin bill clean through his throat. His round yellow eyes opened and shut several times, and his beak snapped like a pair of castanets. Then he lay quite still, while the heron, standing at full height on the edge of the outraged nest, stabbed repeatedly and with slow deliberation at the unresisting mass of shadowy feathers.

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The Runners of the High Peaks

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Motionless upon his knife-edged pinnacle, the great brown ram stood poised, his gray, uplifted muzzle out-thrust toward the sunrise as if he would sniff in its rose-red glories as they flamed across the ice peaks of the jagged horizon. The enormous corrugated spirals of his horns lay back over his neck and shoulders as he stood, and his arrogant eyes of black and gold appeared half-shut as they searched the jumble of peaks, ravines, and lake-dotted valleys outspread in still confusion beneath him. The silence in his ears was absolute, save for the occasional throb of thunder from a waterfall leaping out into the light of dawn a thousand feet below, and heard only when some wandering eddy of air pulsed upward from the depths. There was no enemy to be descried, either in the still shadowed valleys or on the brightening slopes and steps; but the stately watcher kept his station, immovable, staring as if physically hypnotized by the immensity of the vision that filled his eyes. Then at last a white-headed eagle, passing low overhead, yelped at him defiantly. He paid no attention to the challenge, but the harsh, thin cry seemed to break his trance. He dropped his head and glanced down at the narrow table-like ledge just below his pinnacle, where another ram, smaller and less splendidly horned than himself, with six little spike-horned ewes, cropped the short sweet grasses which grew in the clefts of the rock.

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Far down in the shadow beneath the wild ram's peak a white tent glimmered beside the misty coils of the stream which threaded the valley. It was quite too far off to give the ram any concern. Even his sagacious and penetrating vision could barely make out that a man had stepped forth from under the tent-flap and now stood motionless beside it. His confidence would have gone to pieces in uncomprehended terror had he known that the man, with a pair of powerful glams to his eyes, was studying him minutely, and could see him as clearly as if he were not more than a couple of hundred yards away.

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Pete Allen was prospecting. Smitten with the wanderlust, he had struck clear across the continent from the spruce woods and rich river meadows of New Brunswick to the gigantic mountain chaos of the Rockies in British Columbia. In New Brunswick he had been a hunter and guide. Now he had forsaken the trails of moose and bear and caribou to seek the elusive "color" in the sands of the mountain streams, or the unobtrusive outcrop of the quartz that carries gold. But the old instincts were still strong in him. He felt the lure of a splendid and unknown quarry. He coveted the magnificent head of that calm watcher on the peak; and, having heard that the wild mountain ram of the Rockies was an extraordinarily difficult quarry to bring down, he itched to try his old eastern woodcraft in this new chase and win the prize unaided. He had two Indians with him as carriers, but he was determined that they should have no part in this hunting. After

he had well studied, through his glasses, the lay of the ridges and ravines about the peak where the ram was standing, he reëntered the tent for his rifle. He stuffed some cold meat and hard tack into his pockets, told his Indians they need not expect him back before night, and started up the course of a small stream which seemed to come from the shoulder of the mountain. As soon as he plunged into the thickets he lost sight of the watcher on the peak; but he had laid his course, and he pushed on confidently, working around the mountain so that he might come upon the quarry with the sun at his back. When, after an hour's hard work, pushing through matted thickets and crossing jagged gullies, he came out upon a knoll which commanded a view of the peak, he saw that the great ram had disappeared. But this did not trouble him, as he felt sure he would pick up the trail in course of time.

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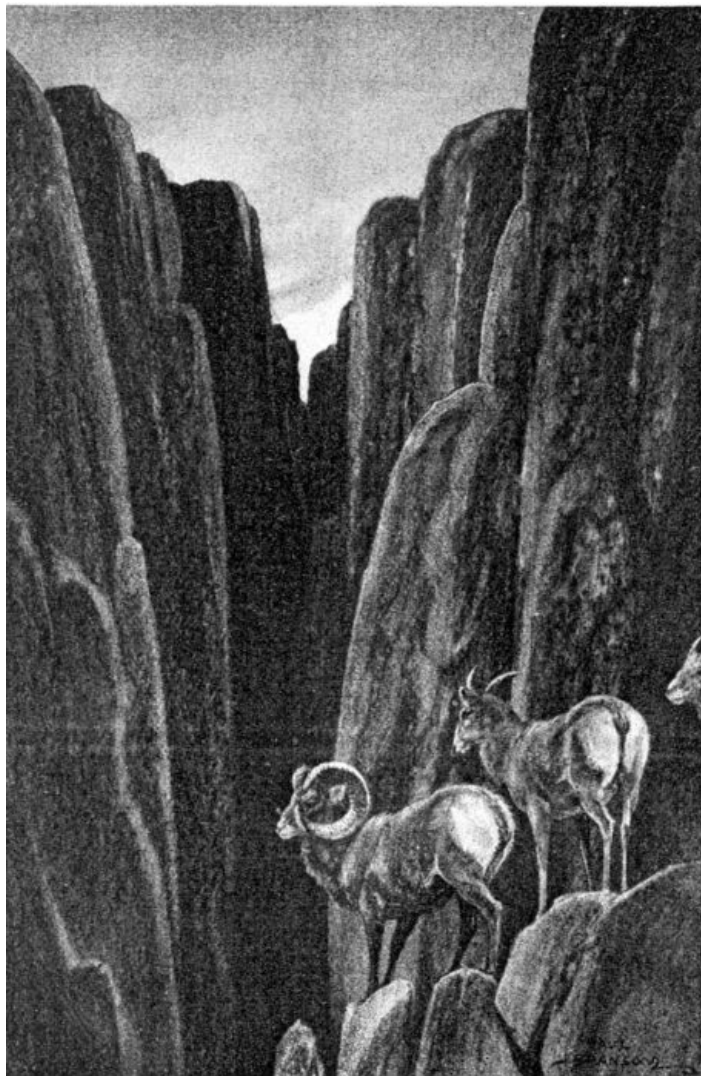
Up on the high ledge below the peak the spring grass was sweet, but there was little of it. The mountain sheep, cropping hungrily with their short, eager bites, soon exhausted their high pasturage. They lifted their heads discontentedly, whereupon the old ram, whose supercilious eyes nevertheless missed little of what concerned him, stepped mincingly down from his pinnacle. Between the edged summit and the ledge where his flock pastured was an all but perpendicular drop of smooth-faced rock. Smooth as it looked, however, his dainty and discriminating hoofs were able to find some unevennesses upon it, for he took it in two effortless leaps, and landed among his followers with a shake of his splendid horns. Then he led the way down the naked steep, now flooded with the level radiance of the three-fourths risen sun, toward the fresh spring pasturage along the upper limits of the timber-belt.

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He took no pains to choose an easy path, this light-foot runner of the aërial peaks. Along dizzy ledges that looked no more than a track for lizards or a clinging place for swallows, he led the way without pause or hesitation, the flock in single file at his heels. From ledge to ledge he dropped, over hair-raising deeps of transparent air, with a precision and ease that made it seem as if his sturdy frame was as imponderable as the air itself. He ploughed down chutes and funnels of loose stone, the *débris* of the rock walls above. He sprang carelessly over crevices whose bottoms were lost in blackness, till at last the young-leaved birch and the somber pointed fir lay just below him, skirted by the steep ribands and intersected by the narrow glens of greening turf.

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At this point the wise old ram began to go warily. In this remote corner of the Rockies the hunter's rifle was as yet practically unknown. On the ultimate heights, therefore, where none could follow him but the eagles and the falcons, he had no enemies to keep watch against. For the eagles he had small concern, except just at lambing-time, and even then each ewe mother, with her short, spiky horns and nimble, razor-edged hoofs, was quick and able to protect her own little one. But down here, along the edge of the timber, were the dreaded enemies—the wolves, the mountain lions, the black bears, and the grizzlies. The temptation of the new grass was one not to be resisted, but the price of it was an unsleeping watchfulness of eye and ear and wits.



"He took no pains to choose an easy path."

The uppermost fringe of grass, where it thinned away into the broken rock, was scanty and stunted; but here the great horned leader elected to do his own pasturing, while the younger ram stood guard. The spot was a safe one, being several hundred yards from the timber, and bounded along its upper edge by a broken steep, which offered no obstacle whatever to these light-footed peak-runners, but was all but impassable, except at a crawl, to the most agile of their foes. If the gaunt gray timber wolf should come darting, belly to earth, from the woods, for all his swiftness the flock would be bounding lightly far up the steep, as if lifted on a sudden wind, before he could come anywhere within reach of them.

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When he had quite satisfied his own hunger, and with lifted nostrils sniffed suspiciously every air that drew upward from the woods, the old ram led his flock further down into one of those steep glens where the grass was more abundant. Or, rather, instead of leading them, he shepherded them before him, keeping them all under his eye, and himself guarding the rear, while the oldest and wariest of the ewes, prick-eared and all a-quiver with suspicion, led the way, questioning every bush and every shadow. But there was no hint of danger anywhere to be discerned; and presently the flock was pasturing greedily on such sweet herbage as they had not tasted since the previous year, while on a hummock near the bottom of the glade, at the post of danger, the ram kept watch, turning his head continually.

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But enthusiasm over young pasturage may make even a mountain sheep absent-minded. From time to time the flock straggled. Straightway it would close up again, drawing away from the thickets. Then, in a minute or two more, it would open out fan-wise, as each impatient feeder followed up some vein of especially luscious herbage. Just at the point where the slope of grass was intersected by another and narrower glade, almost at right angles to the first, a heedless young ewe had branched off a score or so of paces to one side, up the cross-glade. Lifting her head suddenly, she realized her isolation, and started to rejoin her fellows.

At that same instant a lean, gray shape shot noiselessly from the underbrush straight in her path, and leaped at her with wide jaws. With a bleat of terror she sprang back up the cross-glade; and then, frantic at the prospect of being cut off from the flock, she wheeled again and tried to dodge past her assailant. The wolf, understanding her tactics, and absolutely sure that she could not escape him, headed her off without too violently exerting himself. He knew that here, away from her steeps and pinnacles, she was no match for him in speed, and he knew, too, that once she saw herself deserted by the flock her powers would fail her in sheer panic. For a few seconds he almost played with her. Then, getting her fairly cornered in a bend of the thickets, he sprang savagely for her throat.

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Behind him, meanwhile, the flock went bounding by, headed for their high refuge. Last came the great ram, snorting with wrath and fear. Just as he was passing he saw that final rush of the wolf. He saw the young ewe penned in her corner. He heard her shrill, despairing bleat. The look of fear faded from his yellow eyes, leaving the rage only. It was not his wont to pit himself against the mighty timber wolf, because he had no morbid taste for suicide, but this young ewe was a favorite. Just as the gnashing jaws were about to snap upon the victim's neck something not unlike the stroke of a pile-driver caught the wolf fairly on the crupper. Aided by his own spring, it lifted him clean over the struggling ewe's back, doubled him together, and dashed him with stunning effect against a tree. Slowly he picked himself up, to see his quarry and the great ram just vanishing up the glade, far beyond any such pursuit as he was at the moment equal to. With a shamefaced air he glanced about him. There, across the glade, stood a tawny puma, eyeing his discomfiture through narrowed lids. This was too much. Tucking his tail between his legs, he slunk off into the underbrush.

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Having gained what he considered a safe height among the rocks, the ram halted his followers upon a jutting buttress, where they stood huddled about him, and stared down resentfully upon the grassy glades. Such was their confidence in their lord, and in their own powers of flight, that they were none of them particularly frightened, except the young ewe who had had such a narrow escape. She, trembling and with panting sides, crowded close against her rescuer, who, for his part, kept scrutinizing the edges of the timber to see if the enemy were going to follow up the attack. He saw no more of that enemy, but he caught a glimpse of the tawny form of the puma gliding into a tree. Thereupon he decided that this part of the mountain was no place for his flock.

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He turned and made off straight up the steep, till he had put a good mile between himself and the point of danger. Then, dropping into a ravine till their course was quite hidden from all hostile eyes in the timber, he led the way around the mountainside for several miles. On a high ledge, secure from any unseen approach, the flock rested for an hour or two, chewing the cud in peace in the vast silence of the bare and sun-bathed peaks. When once more they descended to the timber belt and its seductive pasturage there were three or four miles of tangled ridge and ravine between them and the scene of their morning's adventure.

In the meantime, Pete Allen, weary with climbing, sore with disappointment, tormented with as many flies as his own New Brunswick backwoods would have let loose upon him at the worst of the season, was beginning to wonder if the hunt of the mountain sheep was as simple an affair as he had fancied it. After climbing all the morning he had failed to gain another glimpse of the great brown ram. At last, however, about noon, he came upon their trail, leading down to the grass. With a long breath of relief, he stopped, drank at a bubbling icy spring, ate his cold bacon and crackers, and smoked a pipe. The trail was none too fresh, so he knew there was nothing to be gained by rash haste. After his pipe, he followed the trail down to the glades. His trained eyes soon told him what had happened. The encounter with the wolf was an open page to him. Having satisfied himself that there was nothing of interest left in that patch of timber—though all the while the puma was eyeing him with curious interest from a great branch not far overhead—he took up the trail of the flock's flight, and started once more up the mountain. Sweating heavily, and angrily brushing the flies from his eyes and nose and ears, he managed to distinguish the trail for a couple of miles along the difficult ravines, but at last, at the root of a precipice which, in his eastern judgment, was quite impassable to anything without wings, he lost it irretrievably.

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Arguing that the flock must sooner or later return to their pasturage, he picked his way on a long diagonal down the mountainside, traversed a succession of grass patches, which showed never a trace of hoof print, and at length found himself in a bewildering maze of low, abrupt ridges, dense thickets, and narrow strips of green glade.

From all that Allen had been able to gather as to the habits of mountain sheep he concluded that this was about the last place in the world where he would be likely to find them. He began, after long self-restraint, to curse softly under his breath, as he glared about him for the most practical exit from the maze. All at once his face changed. The anger faded out from his shrewd light-blue eyes. There was the trail of the flock leading straight down the steepest and most uninviting of the glens. It was a fresh trail, too—so absolutely fresh that some of the trodden blades were still lifting their heads slowly from the hoof prints.

"Gee!" muttered Allen. "Seems I don't know's much about these here critters as I thought I did!" And he slipped noiselessly back into the cover of a thicket.

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His problem now was to keep the trail in sight while himself remaining under cover. It was the hardest piece of tracking he had ever tackled. The cover was dense, the slope steep and tormentedly broken. He had to be noiseless as a mink, because he knew by hearsay that the ears of the mountain ram were almost as keen as an owl's. And he had to keep himself perfectly out of sight, which forced him to take the most difficult part of the underbrush for his path. But, for all this, he was no longer angry; he no longer heeded the flies or the heat, and when the sweat streamed down into his eyes he merely wiped them cheerfully on his sleeve. He felt sure now of winning the longed-for trophy of that magnificent head, and of winning it, moreover, by his own unaided woodcraft. Presently, through an opening in the leafy screen, he caught a glimpse of a tranquilly pasturing ewe, not much more than two hundred yards away. She moved slowly across his narrow line of vision and vanished. Keyed now to the highest pitch of anticipation, with every faculty concentrated on his purpose, he worked his silent way onward, expecting momentarily to gain a view of the great ram.

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But there was an element in the situation which, had he known it, would have interfered with Allen's concentration of purpose. He was not the only hunter of mountain sheep in that particular corner of the mountains.

A shaggy and sly old "silver-tip," as it chanced, had had his eye for some time on that flock. He loved mutton, and he knew it was very hard to get, especially for a bear. He was making his approaches, therefore, with a stealthy craft surpassing that of Pete Allen himself. So it came about quite naturally that he saw Allen first. Thereupon he took every precaution that Allen should not see him.

In this remote district the grizzlies had not yet learned the vital lesson that man is by far the most formidable of all the animals. Yet a rumor had come to him, somehow, that the insignificant creature was not to be trifled with. There was something masterful in his bearing—as the grizzly had observed from safe ambush on several occasions—which suggested unknown powers, and hitherto the old silver-tip, being well fed and having no special grudge against man, had refrained from courting a quarrel. Now, however, he was angry. This was his own game which the man was stalking. This was a trespass upon his own preserves—a point in regard to which the grizzly is apt to be sensitive. His first impulse was to rush upon the intruder at once. Then a mixture of prudence and curiosity held him back, or, rather, delayed his purpose. He changed his course, and began to stalk Pete Allen even as Pete Allen was stalking the sheep. And high overhead, in the unclouded blue, a soaring eagle, catching brief glimpses of the drama through the openings in the leafage, gazed down upon it with unwinking, scornful eyes.

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Huge and apparently clumsy as was the bulk of the bear, he nevertheless made his way through the tangle as soundlessly as the man, and more swiftly. He drew gradually nearer, and, as he approached, he began to forget the other game in a savage interest in this new and dangerous quarry. He was not directly behind the man, but now drawing nearly abreast of him, on the other side of the narrow steep of grass. He was just beginning, indeed, to stiffen his sinews instinctively for the final rush which should avenge the intrusion upon his range, when he saw the man stop abruptly and raise something that looked like a long brown stick to his shoulder. At this sight the bear stopped also, his wrath not being yet quite hot enough to consume his curiosity.

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Pete Allen at last had caught a clear view of the great brown ram standing at guard not a hundred yards away. It was a beautiful, easy shot, the target isolated and framed in green. He raised his rifle steadily, bracing himself with knees and feet in a precarious position. Before he could draw a bead, however, to his amazement he saw the ram bound into the air and vanish from his narrow field of vision. Puzzled, he lowered the rifle from his shoulder. As he did so that unknown and quite incalculable sense which seems to have its seat in the fine hairs on the back of one's neck and in the skin of the cheeks commanded him to turn his head. He was just in time to see the giant form of the grizzly burst from the underbrush and come lunging across the strip of open.

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Confronted by such an emergency the New Brunswicker fired on the instant, and, being quite sure of himself and the bear above him, he took a difficult shot. He aimed at the middle of the beast's throat, trusting to sever the spinal column, for he had heard that a shot straight through the heart often fails to stop the rush of a grizzly.

There was nothing the matter with Pete Allen's shooting or with his nerve. But at the very fraction of a second when his finger started to pull the trigger the whimsical Fates of the wilderness took a hand in the game. They undermined Pete Allen's footing. As he fired he fell, and the long, soft-nosed, deadly bullet, instead of piercing the grizzly's spine, merely smashed through his right shoulder.

Pete Allen fell sprawling some eight or ten feet down the slope, losing hold of his rifle in the effort to stop himself. To his anxious indignation he saw the rifle strike a branch and bounce perversely a dozen feet away. He scrambled for it furiously; but, before he could quite get his grip upon it, it slipped through the branches and dropped another dozen feet or so. At the same time, with something more near cold terror than he had ever before experienced, he saw the dark bulk of the grizzly wallowing down upon him, huge as a mountain. Staggered for a few seconds by the shock of the bullet, the beast had hesitated and turned around on his tracks, biting at the wound. Then, on three legs, and grunting with rage, he had launched himself upon his adversary.

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In the course of the next three seconds, as he struggled toward his gun, Pete Allen thought of a thousand things, mostly unimportant. But at the back of his brain was the cool conviction that this was the time when he was going to pass in his checks. Those brute paws would smash him before he could reach his rifle. But he was wrong, for again the whimsical Fates interfered, perceiving a chance for such a trick as they had probably never played before.

The great brown ram, his eyes nearly starting from his head, came leaping madly up the narrow incline, his flock at his heels, blind with fright. In the glade below one of the flock had just been pounced upon by a puma, and another puma had sprung out at them, but missed his kill. The ram saw the bear straight in his path, plunging across it. There was no time to change his direction, and in his panic the peril in front was nothing to compare with the peril behind. Had the bear been a mastodon or a megatherium it would have been all the same to the panic-stricken ram. With the madness of utter terror he lowered his mighty head and charged this dark mass that barred his flight.

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The bear, blazing with vengeance, had no eyes in that moment for sheep. Suddenly something like a falling boulder crashed into his ribs, catching him with his forefeet off the ground and almost rolling him over. The breath belched out of his astonished lungs with a loud, coughing grunt, and the ram went over him, spurning him with sharp hoofs. The next moment the whole flock was passing over him, a bewildering bombardment of small, keen, battering hoofs and woolly bodies. Recovering from his amazement, he struck out with his unwounded forepaw, caught the last unhappy ewe as she went over him, and hurled her carcass, mangled and quivering, far down the slope. Then, a little dazed, but undeterred from his vengeance, he glared about him for his original antagonist.

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Interesting and, indeed, unparalleled as the intervention of the brown ram had been, Pete Allen had not taken time to observe it with the minute care which so novel an incident was entitled to. He had been busy getting his gun. Now he had it he did not hurry. With this shot he was taking no chances. Just as the bear caught sight of him, and started at him open-mouthed, he fired, and the animal sprawled forward, a huge furry heap, with a ball through the base of his brain.

Back in New Brunswick Pete Allen had had the name of being a cool hand in a corner. In that land of tried woodsmen and daring stream-drivers he would not have gained that name without deserving it. Even as the grizzly was in the act of falling forward Allen raised his rifle again. He covered accurately the form of the brown ram leaping up the slope a hundred yards away. There was his trophy, the splendid horns which he had striven so hard to win, within his grasp at last. But something seemed to tug suddenly at his arm—or was it at his heart? Pete Allen had always prided himself on playing fair, in the spirit as well as in the letter. He dropped his rifle with a growl of vexation.

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"It'd be a dirty trick to put a ball into yeh," he muttered, "seein' what a hell of a hole you've just pulled me out of!"

The Pool

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The current that went circling through its depths, keeping them always crystal pure and sweet, was so leisurely that the clear brown mirror of the surface was never broken, unless by some slow-wandering foam-cluster eddied in from the frothy little falls outside, or by the dropping of a leaf, or by the sluggish rise of a trout to some unwary skimming fly.

To the fish that dwelt in it the pool was an abiding place of perfection. It was deep; but the entrance to it was narrow and shoal, just spacious enough for the slow interchange of waters with the vivifying outer current. At the same time this entrance was so set that innumerable choice morsels, fly and beetle, grub and berry, having been battered down over the falls, were then persuasively swept into it. It was darkly overhung by great-limbed water-ash and maple; but when the sun was some two or three hours past noon its downpour reached and flooded the surface and made very wholesome basking. The bottom, moreover, offered a judicious variety of attraction. For some way in from the entrance it was of a clean bright sand, more or less broken with stones. While the inner portion, right up to the perpendicular banks and the jutting tree-roots, was floored with silted mud, fruitful in the small, ephemeral water-growths of herb and insect.

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The fish inhabiting the delectable pool were all big ones, except for a few scattered young fry which dwelt precariously in the extremest shallows where the big ones could not come at them. And the fish were of just two kinds, the trout and the suckers. The suckers, lazy, pig-like, inoffensive beings, congregated over the stretch of mud, from whose fat surface their small, round, defenseless, downward-opening mouths sucked up their sustenance incessantly. Their bulk, and the power of their sinewy tails, alone protected them from the trout, whose wide, rapacious jaws and insatiable appetite were effective in keeping the size of all the pool-dwellers up to standard.

The trout, as a rule, had none of the reposefulness of the suckers. They ranged restlessly, now over the mud reaches, now over the sand and rocks, wherever quarry, large or small, might perhaps be encountered. Frequently one or another would flash out through the narrow exit, to hunt and test its strength in the bright turmoil of the rapids. And from time to time one would return lazily, perhaps with the tail of a smaller relation sticking out of its mouth, and settle down under the bank to digest its heavy meal.

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To the pair of great fish-hawks, whose huge, untidy nest, like a cart-load of sticks and rubbish, filled the top of a tall dead pine-tree half a mile above the falls, the pool was a ceaseless aggravation. In the continual flight up and downstream their keen eyes were wont to search the pool enviously. But the big fish swimming so calmly in its depths were safe from them, because it was so overhung that they were unable to swoop down upon it with any effective speed. In the clear open they could drop like a wedge of steel, and flick up a darting trout from the very lip of the fall. But the pool they could reach only by a deliberate, flapping approach which gave even the drowsiest basker ample time to seek refuge in the safe depths.

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But there was one wild fisherman whom the pool suited exactly. A big half-submerged root, jutting out for about three feet directly over that section of the pool where the suckers

congregated, afforded the great lynx just the post of vantage which he loved. Here he would lie in wait for an hour at a time, patient and immobile as the root on which he crouched. His round, black, savage moon-face, with its pale eyes bright and hard, its stiff whiskers, and its tufted ears, would be held down so close to the glassy surface that the confused reflections of the overhanging branches were unable to interfere with his vision, and he could see with perfect clearness every detail of the transparent depths. He would stare with endless craving at the massive suckers which lay placidly mouthing the mud; but nothing could ever bring them near the surface, so he knew nothing of them but that they were fat and looked very desirable.

But it was the trout that chiefly concerned him. They had none of the fat placidity of the suckers. One or another of them, with his gold and silver and vermilion glinting up through the pellucid gloom, would be forever on the move, quartering the bottom for caddis and beetle, and now and then sailing up toward the surface to investigate some floating atom that may chance to be a fly. Sometimes it was a fly, or a moth, or a caterpillar or some edible berry. And sometimes, too, the slow circling of the current in the pool would bring it close to that still watcher on the root before it caught the eye of the feeding fish. Then the sinews of the watcher would grow rigid, his claws protrude from their sheaths, a little green flame flicker spectrally in his eyes. As the trout came slanting up on scarlet fin, shouldered the surface apart, and sucked down the morsel, out from the root above him would flash a wide-taloned paw, unerring, inescapable, scooping him from his element, and in half a second he would be flopping convulsively among the wintergreen leaves, far up the bank. In the next half of that fatal second the lynx would be upon him with an exultant pounce, holding down his slippery struggles with both forepaws, and biting through the back of his massive neck.

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The lynx being so silent and discreet a fisherman, his fishing never disturbed the pool at all, or cast any shadow of doubt upon its reputation as a haven of security and repose. The victim simply vanished, without any fuss. Of the other dwellers in the pool not one knew how he had vanished; not one cared; not one was troubled with apprehension.

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One hot morning as the great cat lay on the root, staring down into the depths with his fierce moon eyes, he was disappointed to observe that on this particular day even the trout were too indolent to stir. The heat seemed to have taken away their appetites. As motionless and indifferent as the suckers themselves, they hung on softly fanning fins, and took no notice when even the most tempting morsels traversed the glassy surface. They did not mingle with the suckers, but poised themselves superciliously a foot or so above them, or lurked singly under the shelter of the scattered rocks on the bottom. In vain did fly or moth, or the most seductive squirmer of a fat grub, come circling slowly over the surface above them. They would not so much as cock a scornful eye up at it. They were not feeding. And when a trout won't feed he just won't, and there's an end of it. Though just when the pangs of appetite may come back upon him with a rush no fisherman can say with certainty. It is such uncertainty that has taught fishermen the virtues of patience and hope. It has also taught them unveracity, by giving them abundant time for the weaving of tales wherewith to amuse the credulous.

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The lynx, as a fisherman, was both hopeful and patient. But this morning his patience was being sorely tried; for he was hungrier than usual, and his hunger was particularly bent on fish. His ridiculous stump of a tail, which was quite hidden from the sight of the pool-dwellers, began to twitch angrily. He was almost on the point of giving up, and stealing away to hunt rabbits, when from the corner of his eye he caught sight of something which made his ruff bristle and every hair stand up in jealous wrath. An intruder, a stranger, a rival whose skill as a fisherman made his own attempts seem nothing worth, had arrived at the entrance of the pool and was peering down into it with keen eyes.

The lynx moved, for the first time in a half hour. He turned his head full round, and fixed his green, implacable stare upon the intruder.

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The new arrival had come by way of the river, and, from his bearing, the pool was evidently new to him. His long, sinuous, dark body lay crouched in the middle of the entrance, hinder half in the water and head and shoulders out of it. Sleek and glistening, with his low-set supple form, heavy-jawed and almost dog-like face, inconspicuous ears, dark eyes, and long, powerful tail, he presented the sharpest possible contrast in type to the great, shadowy, moon-eyed cat, though in actual weight and bulk the two were not greatly dissimilar.

But it was not at the silent watcher on the tree-root across the pool that the other was looking. He was peering down, with exultant eyes, into the peopled depths. Hunting had been bad, and he was hungry. A moment more and he plunged downward with a heavy swirl, but smoothly, as if oiled. The eyes of the lynx followed, with savage intentness, his swift and fishlike dartings beneath the water.

The drowsing pool-dwellers awoke and scattered in a panic, even the dull suckers displaying a miraculous agility. But it was not the coarse-fleshed suckers that this discriminating fisherman was after.

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As the frantic fugitives dashed this way and that, weaving strange patterns over the bottom, and half forgetful, in their terror, of the narrow way out to safety, the otter slashed at such as came in his way, biting through their backbones, so that they presently rolled to the surface, belly upward. But it was the biggest trout of the pool that he wanted.

And one great fish there was who was fatally supreme. His supremacy had been fatal to many

smaller fish before. Now it was fatal to himself. Him the otter chose out for his prize. Feeling himself so chosen, he flashed frantically from side to side, and up and down, ever missing the exit—or cleverly headed off from it—but also, for some minutes, evading the inexorable pursuit. The otter, though a four-footed land-dweller, was really more swift and agile in the water than any trout; but over and over again he was balked or delayed by other maddened fugitives getting in his way, or tempting him to delay for a slashing bite.

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Through all the lashed turmoil the lynx never stirred, save to follow with his hard, bright stare the lightning evolutions of the flight and the pursuit. At last the doomed trout flashed up beneath the point of the root, and doubled just at the surface. In that fraction of a second when he seemed to pause for the turn, down swept the furry paw; and the trout was hurled far up the bank. From the spot at which the trout had so surprisingly vanished up shot the head of the otter. For one instant the otter's dark and furious eyes blazed into the pale eyes of the lynx, at a distance of not more than a dozen or eighteen inches. Then the lynx was gone up the bank at a bound, to pin down and finish off the victim.

Now, there were plenty more trout in the pool to be caught, and three dead or dying fish floating there to be picked up. But this fact to the otter was of no account whatever. He had been robbed of his kill. His prize had been impudently snatched from his teeth. There was room in his soul for no emotion but the rage of the avenger. He scrambled out on to the root and glided noiselessly up the bank.

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From the point of view of the lynx, on the other hand, it was he who had all the grievance. The pool was his own private preëmption, long held without a challenge. The otter was an insolent trespasser. As a rule, two wild beasts of different species, if so nearly matched that the event of a combat might be doubtful, will avoid each other discreetly. The plain uncertainty is apt to daunt them both. They do not understand each other's methods of fighting. And each has too much at stake. But here, in each case, was a question of the honor of the wilds. It was a great quarrel which neither would shirk. Having killed the writhing fish, the lynx turned sharp about, crouched with one paw on the prize, and eyed the approaching otter warily.

At first the otter came on with a steady rush, as if disdaining all fence and all precaution. At a distance of half-a-dozen feet, however, he paused, as if that pale, menacing stare of his crouching adversary had disconcerted him. He met it fairly, however, and steadily, and it was plain that he was in no way daunted. A moment more and he began to creep slowly forward, very slowly, inch by inch.

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To the lynx, with his more fiery but less tenacious temperament, this very deliberate and long-drawn-out approach was more trying than a savage rush would have been. His courage was sound, but his nerves were jumpy. He opened his jaws wide and hissed harshly, and followed this demonstration by a strident yowl. Neither of these appearing to impress the creeping foe, he felt it impossible to keep still any longer. With a sudden bounce he shot into the air, to come down, as he calculated, square on the otter's back. But when he came down the otter's back was no longer where he had expected it to be. It had been discreetly removed. The next instant the otter's teeth snapped at his throat, but missed hold by a hair's breadth. For some seconds the two gnashed snarling in each other's faces; then, as if by common consent, they sprang apart, and began a slow, wary circling, each impressed with a sense of the other's prowess. That moment's clash of snarling jaw on jaw had seemed to let in a flash of understanding upon their hot hearts.

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As they circled, each sparring for a chance to catch the other at a disadvantage, the dead trout lay gleaming and bleeding on the turf between them. Presently the otter made a little rush in, as if to seize it. But at this the lynx pounced in also, with a startling growl. The otter shrank back a little. The lynx checked his spring. In another moment the two were once more circling and sparring for vantage as before.

The longer the otter studied that gray, prowling, shadowy shape, with the wide eyes, the powerful hunched hind-quarters, the long and ripping claws, the less certain he felt of his ability to handle it, the more surely did his fighting lust cool down. He began to think of his other prizes in the pool, to be gathered without an effort; and, but for his pride, he would willingly have withdrawn from the doubtful venture which now involved him. But he was of dogged temper, and he showed no outward sign of his irresolution. The lynx, on the other hand, being less obstinate and of more variable mood, began to think of rabbits and such like easy enterprises. The more he studied that low, sinewy, dark figure with its keen teeth and punishing jaw, the less he liked it, and the more indifferent he grew to the attractions of trout as a diet. The radius of his menacing prowl grew gradually wider. In response the otter discreetly drew back a few feet. The lynx paused, and glanced up into a tree, as if suddenly interested in the flittings of a black-and-white woodpecker. The otter sniffed inquiringly at the ground, as if discovering a new scent there. The trout seemed to be forgotten. It lay glistening in a patch of sun; and a large blue-bottle alighted upon it.

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Half a minute later the lynx strolled away, very deliberately. At the edge of a bush some thirty or forty paces distant he sat down on his tail, and looked around with elaborate carelessness to see what his rival was going to do. At the slightest provocation he was ready to return and fight the matter out. But the otter was no longer provocative. He swung about, glided back to the pool, slid into it, and snatched up one of the fish which he had already slain. Dragging it out upon the further bank, he fell to his meal with relish, in full view of his late antagonist. Thereupon the lynx came prowling back. He put his paw on the prize, and glared across the water with a defiant growl. There was no response, his rival being apparently too busy to heed him. He snatched up

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the fish in his teeth, and growled again. Still no reply from the otter. Then, with his stub tail stiff in the air, and stepping haughtily, he marched off into the silent green shades to make his meal.

The Shadows and John Hatch

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When John Hatch found the lynx kittens in their shallow den on the bright and windy shoulder of Old Sugar Loaf, he stood for some minutes looking down upon them with a whimsical mixture of compassion and hostility. In his eyes all lynxes were vermin of the worst kind. They had killed three of his sheep. An old male had clawed his dog so severely that the dog had lost its nerve and all value as a hunting partner. They were great destroyers of the young deer, the grouse, and the hares, and so interfered with the supply of John Hatch's larder. In a word, they were his enemies, and therefore, according to his code, to be destroyed without compunction. But these were the first kittens of the hated breed that Hatch had ever seen. Unlike the full-grown lynx, whose fur is of a tawny, shadowy gray, these youngsters had sleek, brilliant coats adorned with stripes like a tiger's. They were so young that their eyes were not yet open, and they lay huddled cosily and trustingly together, in their bed of brown leaves, like so many exaggerated kittens of the hearthside tabby. But this was no extenuation of their crime, in John Hatch's eyes. It pleaded for them not at all, for he had his established custom in dealing with superfluous kittens.

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Presently he stooped down and stroked the huddle of shining fur. Blind babies though they were, the youngsters knew the touch for an alien one, the unknown smell for the smell of an enemy. Their tails and the ruffs of their necks bristled instantly, and, with a feeble spitting, they turned and clawed savagely at the intruding hand. The little claws drew blood, and John Hatch withdrew his hand with a laugh that had a touch of admiration in it.

"Gosh, but ye're spunky little devils!" he muttered. "But ye ain't a-goin' to grow up to use them claws on my sheep nur my dawg, an' don't ye fergit it!" For a moment he thought of wringing their necks, as the simplest way of getting the matter off his hands. But his kindly disposition shrank from the barbarity of the process; and, after all, to his mind they were kittens of a kind, and therefore entitled to a more gracious form of taking off. For all their spitting and clawing, he picked them up by the scruffs of their necks, stuffed two of them into his capacious pockets, carried the other two in his fist, and made his way hastily down the mountain, keeping a watchful eye over his shoulder, lest the mother-lynx should happen back from her hunting and attempt a rescue. He made his way to a little well-like pool, a sort of pocket of black water in a cleft of the granite, which he had passed and noted curiously on his upward climb. Into this icy oblivion he dropped the baby lynxes in a bunch, with a stone tied to them, as he was wont to do with the superfluous kittens at home. "Good riddance to that rubbish!" he muttered, as he strode on down the mountain.

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But, underestimating the strength of these wild kittens, he had tied the string carelessly. In their drowning struggles, the string had come undone, and the victims, freed from the stone, had risen to the surface. But by this time they were too weak for any effectual effort at escape, and in their blindness they could not find the shore. Two, by chance, drifted upon a lip of rock, where they sprawled half-awash and were presently dead of the chill. The other two sank again into the black depths.

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Their puny struggles had not long been stilled—five minutes, perhaps, or ten—when the mother-lynx arrived at the edge of the pool. Returning to her den and finding her little ones gone, the footprints and the trail of the woodsman had told her the story. Crouching flat, with ears back and teeth bared to the sockets, she had glared about her with terrible eyes, as if thinking that the ravisher might yet be within reach. Then, after one long, agonized sniff at the spot where her young had lain, she had sped away noiselessly down the steep, running with nose to the blatant trail and wild eyes peering ahead through the tangle of the brush.

At the edge of the pool she stopped. Though Hatch's trail went on, she saw at once, from his halt at the edge, that something had happened here. In a moment or two her piercing eyes detected those two little limp bodies lying awash on the lip of granite at the other side of the pool.

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Eagerly she called to them, with a harsh but poignant mew, and in two prodigious leaps she was leaning over them. With tender, mothering lips she lifted them from the water by their necks, curled herself about them for warmth, and fell to licking them passionately with soft murmurs of caress. She did not notice, apparently, the absence of the other two, or perhaps her sense of numbers was defective, and she could not count. However that may be, she devoted herself with concentrated fervor for some minutes to the two limp and bedraggled little forms striving passionately to stir them back to life. Then, as if realizing on the sudden that they were dead, she almost spurned them from her, sprang to her feet with a long yowl, and ran around the pool till she again picked up John Hatch's trail.

It was about four in the afternoon when John Hatch crossed the last of the half-bare slopes, with their scant growth of poplar and sapling birch, which fringed the foot of Old Sugar Loaf, and plunged into the dark spruce woods which separated him from his lonely farm on the banks of Burnt Brook. His trail was now an easy one, an old and moss-grown "tote-road" of the lumbermen. It was some ten or a dozen years since this region had been lumbered over, and by this time the young timber which had then been left, as below the legal diameter for cutting, had

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grown to the full and stately stature of the spruce. The great trees, however, had not yet had time to kill out the bushy undergrowth which had sprung up luxuriantly in the wake of the choppers, and consequently the forest on either side of the trail was a dense riot of jungle to the height of six or eight feet.

John Hatch knew that the mother-lynx, had he caught her at home, would have put up a valiant fight in defense of her babies. He thought that she might even have attacked him in the open if she had come up with him while he had the kittens on him. He despised all lynxes as cordially as he hated them; but he knew that a mother, of almost any breed, may do desperate things for her young. Having his axe with him, however, and the nicest of woodsman's skill in using it, he had had no misgivings at any moment, and, now that the kittens were at the bottom of the pool, he dismissed the whole matter from his mind. There remained of it nothing at all but a dim satisfaction that four dangerous enemies to his sheep had been thus easily disposed of.

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Suddenly, without knowing why, John Hatch stopped in his stride, gripped his axe instinctively, and glanced over his shoulder. The skin of his cheeks, beneath the grizzled stubble, crept curiously. He felt that he was being followed. But there was nothing on the trail behind him, which was clear and straight to his view for a good two hundred yards back. He peered deep into the undergrowth, first on one side, then on the other. No living thing was to be seen, except a little black-and-white woodpecker, which slipped behind a hemlock trunk and peered around at him with bright, inquiring eyes.

"Guess I've got the creeps," growled Hatch, with certain unprintable expletives, which seemed to indicate annoyance and surprise. Whirling angrily on his heel, he resumed his long, loose-kneed woodsman's stride.

But he could not get rid of that sensation of being followed. For a long time he resolutely ignored it. There was nothing in the woods that he had need to fear. He knew there was no wild beast, not even the biggest bear between Old Sugar Loaf and the Miramichi, that would be so rash as to seek a quarrel with him. As for the mother-lynx, she had passed out of his mind, so ingrained and deep was his scorn of all such "varmin." But presently the insistence of that unseen presence on his trail became too strong for him, and, with a curse, he turned his head. There was nothing there. He bounded into the wood on the left of the track, parting the undergrowth furiously with both arms outstretched before his face. To his eyes, still full of the sunlight, the brown-green gloom was almost blackness, for the moment. But he seemed to see, or imagined he saw, a flitting shadow—whether darker or lighter than its surroundings he could not have told—fade into the obscurity around it.

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Hatch swore softly and turned back into the homeward trail. "It's nawthin' but that lynx!" he muttered. "An' I'm a fool, an' no mistake!"

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The mystery thus satisfactorily solved, he swung on contentedly for the next mile or so. Then once more that uncanny impression of being trailed began to tingle in his cheeks and stir the roots of the hair on his neck. He laughed impatiently, and gave no further heed to it. But, in spite of himself, a peculiar picture began to burn itself into his consciousness. He realized a pair of round, pale, baleful eyes, piercing with pain and vengeful fury, fixed upon him as they floated along, close to the ground, in the midst of a gliding shape of shadow. Knowing well that the beast would never dare to spring upon him, he spat upon the ground in irritated contempt. At the same time he was nettled at its presumption in thus dogging his trail. He could see no object in it. The futile menace of it angered him keenly.

"I'll bring my gun along next time I'm over to Sugar Loaf," he murmured, "an' I'll put a ball through her guts if she don't keep off my trail!"

His vexation was not mollified by the fact that, when he came out from the spruce woods into the open pastures of his clearing, and saw his farmyard below him basking in the sun, he felt a distinct sense of relief. This was an indignity that he could never have dreamed of. That a lynx should be able to cause him a moment's apprehension! It was inconceivable. Yet—he was glad of the open. He resolved to get out all his traps and snares at once, and settle scores with the beast without delay.

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That night, however, he dismissed the idea of traps from his mind as making too much of the matter. As he sat by his kitchen fire, smoking comfortably, his chores all done up, the battle-scarred dog asleep beside his chair, and forgiving tabby curled up on his knee, and the twang of night-hawks in a clear sky coming in through the open window with the fresh smell of the dew, he chuckled at his own folly.

"I sure *did* have the creeps," he explained to the cat, which opened one eye at him and shut it again noncommittally. "But I ain't a-goin' to have 'em ag'in. No, sir-ee!"

But the scarred dog, a lean black-and-tan mongrel, with some collie strain revealed in his feathering and in his long, narrow jaw, stirred uneasily in his sleep and whimpered.

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John Hatch had two cows and a yoke of red steers. At this kindly time of year they all stayed out at pasture, day and night, with the sheep, in the upper burnt lot—a ragged field of hillocks and short, sweet grass, and fire-blackened stumps slowly rotting. Along the left of the field the dark spruce woods came down close to the zigzag snake fence of split rails which bounded Hatch's clearing. At this point were the pasture bars, which served the purpose of a gate; and here, about sundown, the two cows stood lowing softly, waiting for Hatch to come with his tin milk pails and

ease their heavy udders of the day's burden.

On the evening following Hatch's trip up Old Sugar Loaf, he was a little later than usual at his milking, and the pasture was all afloat in violet dusk as he dropped the two upper bars at one end and swung his long legs over with a clatter of his two tin pails. He picked up his three-legged stool, hitched himself under the flank of the nearest cow, gripped a pail between his knees, and in a moment began the soft, frothy thunder of the two white streams pulsating down alternately into the tin under the rhythmic persuasion of his skilled fingers. The dog, who was not *persona grata* to the cows, because he had at times to rebuke them for trespassing on the oat field or the turnip patch, sat up on his haunches at the other side of the fence and watched the milking indifferently.

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The first cow was milked and had wandered off to feed, and Hatch was almost through with the second, when through the bars he saw the dog get up quickly and go trotting off homeward with an air of having been kicked. Mildly wondering, he muttered to himself: "Got more whims 'n a mare colt, that Jeff!"

A moment later the cow snorted and gave a jump which would have upset a less wary milker than John Hatch. She ran away down the field, tossing her horns, to join her companion and the steers. And Hatch was left sitting there with the pail between his legs, staring fixedly into the dark woods. For the fraction of a second he half fancied that a shadow flitted across them. Then he knew it was an illusion of his eyes, straining suddenly in that illusive light.

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Very angry—too angry to find expression in even the most unparliamentary of speech—he rose to his feet, set the pail of milk beside its fellow, grabbed the sturdy milking-stool by one leg, vaulted the fence, and plunged into the woods. It was not a particularly handy weapon, the stool, but John Hatch was not a particularly prudent man. If there was anything there in the woods, prying on his steps and frightening his "critters," he wanted to come to grips with it at once.

But there was nothing there, as far as he could see. Once more the fine hairs crept and tingled up and down the back of his neck. He stalked indignantly back to the fence, vaulted it, flung down the milking-stool, grabbed up the milk pails so roughly that the contents slopped over on to his homespun breeches, and set off for home. Not once did he allow himself to look back, though, to his impatient wrath, he felt sure all the way down the lane that malevolent eyes were watching him through the fence.

On the following day John Hatch spent most of the time in the woods with his gun, hunting the coverts for miles about the clearing. He hunted stealthily now, as noiseless and furtive as any of the wild kindred themselves. He saw nothing more formidable than a couple of indifferent skunks and a surly old porcupine which rattled its quills at him. He wanted to shoot the skunks as "varmin," inimical to his chickens; but he refrained, lest he should give the alarm to the unknown enemy whom he was hunting. He searched assiduously for anything like a hostile trail; but there had been no rain lately, and the ground was hard, and the dead-brown spruce needles formed a carpet which took little impression from wary paws, and he gained no clue whatever. He turned homeward, somewhat relieved, toward milking time. But, before he reached the edge of the woods, once more came that warning and uncanny creep at the roots of his hair.

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In a flash of fury he wheeled and fired into the thickets just behind him. He could have sworn that a gray shadow flitted away behind the gray trunks. But his most minute search could discover no trail save here and there a light disturbance of the spruce needles. It was easy for him to infer, however, with his instinct and his woodcraft, that these disturbances were due to the great, softly padded paws of a lynx.

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He bared his teeth in scorn, and on the following day he fairly sowed that section of the forest with snares and traps. Within a week he had taken a weasel, three woodchucks, half a dozen skunks, and thirteen rabbits. Then, feeling that the game was carried on under a surveillance which he could neither locate nor evade, he suddenly quitted it, and fell back upon an attitude of contemptuous indifference. But he cleared away all the undergrowth in the woods within fifty yards of the pasture bars, because he would not have the cows scared at milking.

As long as Hatch kept out of the woods, or the very immediate neighborhood of them, he was quite untroubled by the sense of the haunting shadow and the unseen, watching eyes. For a time now he did keep out of them, being fully occupied with his tasks in the little farm. Then came a day when he found that he wanted poles. The best poles, as he knew, grew on the shores of a little lake some miles away, near the foot of Sugar Loaf. But he thought he would make shift to do with the very inferior poles which grew along the edge of the wild meadow at the other side of the farm. At first he persuaded himself that his object in this was merely to save time. Then he realized that he was shrinking from the journey through the woods. Flushing with shame, he consigned his folly and all lynxes to the place of eternal torment, hitched his old sorrel mare to the drag, and set out after those superior poles which grew below Sugar Loaf. But he took his gun along with him, which had not been hitherto by any means his invariable custom.

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On the way out there occurred nothing unusual. The green summer woods seemed once more to John Hatch the old, friendly woods, with neither menace nor mystery to his rather unimaginative spirit. He whistled gaily over his chopping, while the old sorrel pastured comfortably in a patch of wild meadow by the lake, troubled by nothing but the flies, whose attention kept her long tail ceaselessly busy. Well along in the afternoon he started homeward with a light heart, as many trimmed poles on his drag as the sorrel could comfortably haul.

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The journey was uneventful. After a time, indeed, Hatch felt himself once more so completely at home in his familiar wilderness that the tension of his nerves relaxed, and the exasperating experiences of the past weeks were forgotten. He reached a turn of the wood road, where it crested a rise about half a mile from his clearing, and saw his homely cabin, with its farmyard and its fields basking in the low afternoon sunshine, straight before him.

It was a comfortable picture, framed as in a narrow panel by the dark uprights of the spruce on either side of the mossy road. Hatch framed his lips to whistle in his satisfaction at the picture.

But the whistle wavered out in a thin breath, as he felt once more that hated creeping of the skin, that crawling at the back of his neck. He dropped the reins and snatched up his gun from where it lay on top of the load of poles. At the same moment the sedate old sorrel shied violently, almost knocking him over, and then started on a wild gallop down the road, spilling the poles in every direction as she went. [Pg 177]

With a crisp oath, Hatch burst through the undergrowth which fringed the road. He fancied that he saw a gray shadow fading off among the gray trunks, and he fired at once.

Hatch was a good shot, and he felt sure that he had scored a hit. In keen exultation he ran forward, expecting to find his enemy stretched on the spruce needles. But there was nothing there. He turned on his heel in deep disgust, and caught sight of another shadowy shape flickering off in another direction. Up went his gun again to the shoulder. But he did not fire, for there was no longer anything to fire at. He lowered his gun and rubbed his chin thoughtfully, feeling even his old lumber-camp vocabulary inadequate.

Outwardly cold, but boiling within, Hatch stalked slowly homeward, ignoring the scattered poles along the way. He felt no more of the presence of the dogging shadows, presumably because they had withdrawn themselves at the sound of the gunshot. Arrived at home, he found the old sorrel, with the empty drag, waiting at the gate to be let in, and Jeff, who always stayed at home to guard the house, wagging his tail interrogatively beside her, puzzled to know why she had come home without her master or her load. [Pg 178]

John Hatch looked at the dog musingly.

"Jeff," said he, "if ye warn't so blankety blank *blank* afeerd o' lynxes, ye'd help me a sight in runnin' them varmin down. But ye ain't got no nerve left. Reckon I'll have to take ye into the woods now an' ag'in, kind of fur discipline, an' help ye to git it back. Ye ain't much account now, Jeff."

And the dog, feeling the reproach in Hatch's quaint speech, dropped his tail and pretended he had business behind the barn.

After this, when Hatch's affairs took him into the woods, Jeff went with him. But he went unhappily, crowding at his master's heels, with head and ears and tail one unanimous protest. To Hatch these expeditions sometimes proved uneventful, for sometimes the hostile shadows seemed to be off somewhere else, and too occupied to follow Hatch's trail. On such occasions Hatch knew that the unseen surveillance was withdrawn, because he had none of those warning "creeps" at the nape of his neck. But to Jeff every covert or thicket within a radius of fifty yards was an ambush for lynxes, and only at his master's heels did he feel secure from their swift and eviscerating claws. When he saw John Hatch stop abruptly, glare about him, and plunge into the underbush, then Jeff would try to get between his legs, an effort not helpful to Hatch's marksmanship or to his temper. And the shadows—for there seemed to John Hatch to be two of them haunting him now—would fade off elusively into the environing and soundless shade. [Pg 179]

All through the summer and the autumn this mysterious trailing went on, till Hatch, disgusted by the futility of his attempts to shake it off, assumed indifference and pretended to himself that he rather liked being haunted. He remarked to Jeff—with whom he could allow himself to speak more frankly than to most—that an occasional creepy feeling about the roots of one's hair might be good for the scalp, a preventive of baldness even. But in the depths of his heart he grew more and more uneasy. Such vigilant and untiring vindictiveness on the part of creatures which are wont to shun all human neighborhood with an incorrigible savagery of shyness was unnatural. It seemed to him to suggest a very madness of hate, an obsession which might culminate in some deed of desperation unheard of among lynxes. [Pg 180]

When, however, the winter had once settled in with full rigor, Hatch found that he was being shadowed with less and less insistence. He inferred at once that this was because his foes were now forced to spend most of their time in foraging for their own livelihood, and he drew a wry face of self-disgust as he realized the depth of his relief. As the winter advanced, and the cold bit fiercer, and the snow gathered as if to bury the wilderness world away from sight forever, it came at last to seem as if the unknown purpose of the avengers was forgotten. No more, upon his tramps on snowshoes through the muffled woods, did John Hatch feel those admonitory creepings of his flesh, and presently he forgot all about the haunting shadows and their menace.

John Hatch's chief occupation, during the winter months, was the chopping and hauling of cord wood for the settlements. On a certain day he was enjoying himself greatly in the felling of a huge birch. The crisp, still air was like wine in his veins. The axe was keen, and under the bite of its rhythmic strokes the big white chips flew off keenly. Sitting on the wood sled at a safe distance, Jeff watched the chopping with alert interest, while the old sorrel dreamed with drooping head and steamed in the dry frost. The tree, cut nearly through, was just beginning to [Pg 181]

lean, just tottering to its fall, when once more John Hatch was conscious of that hated crawling in the skin of his cheeks, the lifting of the hairs on his neck. With a savage curse, he wheeled about, swinging up his axe. With a soft, swishing, crackling roar, down came the tree. It fell true, as he had chopped it, so he did not have to spring out of its path or even to glance at it. But, as it fell, it crashed heavily upon a dead branch in a neighboring tree. The dead branch flew hurtling through the air and smote John Hatch violently on the back of the head. He dropped like a log and lay quite still in the chip-strewn snow.

There was a clatter of chains and harness, as the old sorrel, sniffing the enemy, started at a gallop for home. Jeff, seeing that his master was down, sprang to his side, whining, and fell to licking frantically at his unconscious face. Getting no response, he suddenly remembered the taint in the air, which was already making his back bristle. Bestriding Hatch's body, he turned his head with a savage snarl. He could not see the enemy, but he smelled them all too clearly. With ears laid flat to the skull, lips curled up from his long white teeth, and half-open eyes flaming green, he glared at the spruce thicket whence that menacing scent came to his nostrils. With the responsibility for his master's care thus suddenly thrust upon him, his fear of lynxes vanished.

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The noise of the old sorrel's flight died away down the white wood road, and for several minutes nothing stirred. The lynxes had long practiced patience, and, for all their hate, they were prudent. They could not make out at first why their enemy, who was always so vehemently active, should now be lying so still there in the snow. But wild animals are usually quick to realize it when an enemy or a quarry has been disabled. They presently concluded that here at last was the opportunity which they had been waiting for. For the dog they had nothing but scorn. They had mauled and beaten him once before. They had grown accustomed to his frank terror of them. Now he did not enter into their calculations.

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One from each side of the spruce thicket, they crept stealthily forth, crouching low, their ears laid back, their round, pale eyes glaring boldly from their round, gray, cruel faces. Their big padded paws went lightly over the snow. Very gradually they crept up, half expecting that John Hatch might spring to his feet any moment and rush at them with a roar. They had no great fear of his roars, however, having never known much hurt to come of them.

And all the time Jeff was tugging madly at John Hatch's arm, adjuring him to wake and meet the peril.

Apparently satisfied at length that there was no trap laid for them in John Hatch's quiescence, the two lynxes ran forward swiftly and sprang at his neck. To their surprise, they were met by Jeff's teeth. With that lightning side-snap which he had inherited from his collie ancestors, the dog managed to slash both his opponents severely in the space of half a second. In a blaze of fury, they fell upon him, both at once. A yellow tangle of claws and teeth and legs and fur surged and bounced upon John Hatch's body.

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John Hatch slowly came to. The pandemonium of snarls and screeches that filled his ears bewildered him. He thought he was having a nightmare. His legs were held down, it seemed, by battling mountains. With a mighty effort he sat up. Then in a flash his wits came back to him. He saw Jeff with one lynx down, slashing at its throat, while the other clung upon his back and ripped him with its claws.

Bouncing to his feet, he clutched this latter combatant with both hands by the scruff of the neck, whirled it around his head and dashed it, yowling wildly, against a tree. Then he turned his attention to the other, which, though at a terrific disadvantage, was still raking Jeff murderously with its hinder claws.

Hatch grabbed up his axe. But he could find no chance to strike, lest he should injure the dog. At last, in desperation at seeing how Jeff was getting punished by those raking claws, he dropped the axe again and seized the beast by the hind legs. Dragging it out from under the astonished Jeff, he swung it several times about his head, and then launched it sprawling and screeching, high through the air. As it landed he was upon it again, this time with the axe, and a straight short-arm blow ended the matter. The other lynx, which was recovering from its contact with the tree, saw that its mate was slain, and sped off among the trees, just escaping the axe which Hatch hurled after it.

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Jeff was lying down in the snow, licking his outrageous wounds, and content to leave the finishing of the affair in his master's hands.

"I was mistaken in yeh, Jeff," said John Hatch, "an' I apologize handsome. Ye're sure some dawg. I reckon there'll be no more shadders come sneakin' along *our* trail after this, an' thanks to you!"

The Fisher in the Chutes

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He was plainly a duck. The most casual and uninitiated of observers would have said so at a glance. Yet not the most stupidly casual could have taken him for any ordinary duck. He was too imposing in appearance, too gorgeous in apparel, too bold and vigilant in demeanor to be so misunderstood. Moreover, he was not in the situation or the surroundings which one is wont to associate with ducks.

In fact, after the fashion of a cormorant or a kingfisher, he was perched motionless on a big dead stub of a branch. This branch was thrust out very obligingly in just the place where this most singular of ducks would have desired it if it had been consulted in the matter. It directly overhung a transparent amber-brown chute of unbroken water in the midst of the loud turmoil of North Fork Rapids. The strange-mannered duck had no proper talons wherewith to grasp his perch, but his strong-clawed webs held him steadily, none the less, as he peered downward into the clear rush of the torrent.

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The duck was a handsome male of the red-breasted merganser family, and the absorbing interest of his life was fish. It was not in the quiet pools and long, deep reaches of dark water that he loved to seek his prey, but rather to snatch it from the grasp of the loud chutes and the roaring rips. Here, where the North Fork stream fell into the Ottanoonsis, was a resort exactly to his liking. And most of the fish—trout, salmon, grilse or parr—which journeyed up and down either the Fork or the parent river chose to pass through that sluice of swift but unbroken flow immediately beneath the overhanging branch on which he perched.

For all the splendor of his plumage, the merganser was not conspicuous where he sat. All about him was a tumult of bright and broken color, scattered in broad splashes. The rapids were foam-white, or golden-ruddy, or deep, shining green-brown under the sharp and patchy sunlight, and they were sown thickly with wet black rocks, here and there glinting with purple. The merganser had a crested head of iridescent green-black, a broad collar of lustrous white, black back, black-and-white wings, white belly, sides finely pencilled in black and white, and a breast of rich chestnut red, streaked with black. His feet were red, his long narrow beak, with its saw-toothed edges and sharp hooked tip, was bright red. In every line and hue he was unmistakably an aristocrat among ducks, and an arrogant one at that.

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His fierce red eyes, staring down fixedly into the flowing amber of the current, marked piercingly every fish that passed up and down. Most of them were much too big, not for his appetite, but for his powers. His beak, with its keen-toothed edges, was a formidable weapon, by means of which he could doubtless have captured, disabled, and dragged to shore even a fish of a pound or so in weight. But here he was at a terrible disadvantage as compared with the owls, hawks, and eagles. He had no rending claws. Had he taken such a prize, he could not have profited by it, having no means of tearing it to pieces. He had no use for fish too big to be swallowed whole; so he was obliged to watch greedily and savagely the great salmon, the grilse, and the larger trout, as they darted through the sliding glow beneath his perch.

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But suddenly, straight and swift as a diving cormorant, he shot down into the torrent and disappeared beneath the surface. A watcher directly overhead, escaping the baffling reflections, might have seen him swimming, head outstretched, mastering the tremendous rush of the stream with mighty strokes, fairly out-speeding the fish in their own element. Near the limit of the clear water he overtook and seized the quarry which he had marked—a trout not far from seven inches in length. The saw-toothed edges of his beak gripped it securely, and he rose with it to the surface just where the chute was breaking into a smother of trampled foam.

With a furious flapping of wings, he lifted himself almost clear of the flood, and beat along the tossed surface, dragging tail and feet for perhaps a dozen yards before he could get into full flight. Once fairly a-wing, however, he wheeled and made back hurriedly for his perch. Here he proceeded to swallow his prize head first. It was a long, difficult, choking process, for the fish was one of the stoutest he had ever attempted. But a little choking was of small consequence in view of his heroic appetite, and, after many an undignified paroxysm, he accomplished the task. It might have seemed that a trout of this size was a fairly substantial meal. But such was his keenness that, even while the wide flukes of his engorged victim were still sticking out at the corners of his beak, his fierce red eyes were once more peering downward into the torrent in search of fresh prey.

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Just about this time, in the clear blue overhead, a green-winged teal was beating his way above the treetops, making for the stream with the fear of death at his heart. A mighty flier, his short, muscular wings drove him through the air at a speed not much less than ninety or a hundred miles an hour. But behind him, overtaking him inexorably, came the shape that stood for doom itself in the eyes of all his tribe—the dreadful blue falcon, or duck-hawk. The teal knew that his only chance of escape from this long-winged pursuer was to reach the water, plunge beneath it, and swim for some hiding-place under the fringing weeds.

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The teal's wings, throbbing with a swift, short vibration, whistled shrilly in the still air, so that a prowling wildcat by the waterside heard the sound even above the dull roar of the rapids, and glared upward alertly. The long wings of the hawk, bent sharply at the elbows, worked more slowly, but with a nervous, terrific thrust which urged him through the air like a projectile. For all its appalling speed, the sound of his flight was nothing more than a strong pulsating hiss.

Close ahead of him now the teal saw refuge—the flashing line of the rapids. But the hawk was already close upon him. In despair he hurled himself downward too soon. The pursuer also shot downward and struck. But the lofty top of a water ash, just missed by the short wings of the fugitive, forced the long pinion of the hawk to swerve a little, so that he partly missed his stroke. Instead of clutching the victim's neck and holding it securely, he dealt merely a glancing blow upon the back behind the wings. It was enough, however, and the unhappy teal was hurled earthward, flapping through the tips of the branches. The great hawk followed hurriedly, to retrieve his prey from the ground.

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As it chanced, however, the victim came down with a thud almost beneath the whiskered nose of the wildcat. A pounce, and the great cat had her paw upon it, and crouched snarling up at the hawk. In a fury the hawk swooped and struck downward. But wisdom came to him just in time, and he did not strike home. His swoop became a demonstration merely, an expression of his rage at having his prey thus snatched from his beak. With one short, shrill cry of anger, he swerved off and sailed upward over the river. The cat growled softly, picked up the prize in her jaws and trotted into the bushes to devour it.

The spot where all this happened was perhaps a hundred yards below that dead tree upon whose outthrust naked branch the splendid merganser drake was making his meal. In fact, he had just finished it—the last of the trout's tail had just vanished with a spasm down his strained gullet—when the baffled hawk caught sight of him and swooped. Happily for him, he on his part caught sight of the hawk, and dropped like lead into the torrent. The hawk alighted on the dead branch, and sat upright, motionless, as if surprised. The change was so sudden that it almost seemed as if the duck had been metamorphosed into a hawk on the instant, by the stroke of an invisible enchanter's wand.

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The fisher of the chutes, meanwhile, was swimming straight downstream for the broken water. Like his unfortunate little cousin, the teal, he, too, had felt the fear of death smitten into his heart, and was heading desperately for the refuge of some dark overhanging bank, deep-fringed with weeds, where the dreadful eye of the hawk should not discern him.

The hawk sat upon the branch and watched his quarry swimming beneath the surface. At last the swimmer came to the broken water and plunged into it. Almost instantly he was forced to the top. With only head and wings above the mad smother, he flapped onward frantically, beating down the foam about him. Straightway the hawk glided from his perch and darted after him.

The drake sank again instantly. But at this point in the rapids it was impossible for him to stay down. As long as his body was completely submerged, it was at the mercy of the twisting and tortured currents, which rolled him over and over, in spite of his swimming craft. He would have been drowned, the breath battered clean out of him, in half a minute more, had he maintained the hopelessly unequal struggle. Once more he half emerged, filled his gasping lungs, and pounded onward desperately, half flying and half swimming. It was a mongrel method of progression, in which he was singularly expert.

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Immediately over his outstretched gleaming head flew the hawk. But this frequenter of the heights of air, for all his savage valor, was troubled at the leaping waves and the tossing foam of these mad rapids. He did not understand them. They seemed to jump up at him, and he dare not let his sweeping wing-tips touch them, lest they should seize and drag him down. As he flew, his down-reaching, clutching talons were not half a yard above the fugitive's head. Where the waves for an instant sank, they came closer,—but not quite within grasping reach. The marauder from the upper air was waiting till his quarry should reach less turbulent waters.

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A few yards further on, the torrent fell seething over a long ledge into a pool of brief quiet. Immediately beyond the lip of the ledge the hawk lifted his wings high over his back and struck downward, so that his talons went deep into the water. But water was all they clutched. The wily drake had plunged with the plunge of the fall itself, and was now darting onward at a safe depth. The hawk followed, his wing-tips now almost brushing the water. The pool was, perhaps, a hundred yards in length. Then the combined flow of the North Fork and the Ottanoonsis broke once more into turbulence, and once more the desperate swimmer was forced to the surface. But, as before, the leaping waves of the rapids were too much for his pursuer, and he was able to flap his way onward in a cloud of foam, while doom hung low above his head, yet hesitated to strike.

The odds, however, were now laid heavily against the fugitive. The hawk, embittered by the loss of his first quarry, had become as dogged in pursuit as a weasel, not to be shaken off or evaded or deceived. The rapids would presently come to an end. Then, in the still water, unless he should chance upon a hiding-place, the drake would soon be forced to come to the top for breath, and those throttling talons would instantly close upon his neck. But the antic forest Fates, wearied of the simple routine of the wilderness, had decreed an altogether novel intervention, and were giggling in their cloaks of ancient moss.

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Beside the pool at the foot of the rapids stood a fisherman, casting for trout amid the whirling foam-clusters. He had three flies on his cast, and, because in these waters there was always the chance of hooking a grilse, he was using heavy tackle. His flies, as befitted these amber-brown, tumultuous northern streams, were large and conspicuous—a Parmacheenie Belle for the tail fly, with a Montreal and a Red Hackle for the drops.

Far across the pool, where an eddy sucked sullenly at the froth-patches as they swung by, the fisherman had just had a heavy rise. He had struck too quickly, deceived by the swirl of the current, and missed his fish. He had a lot of line out, and the place was none too free for a long cast; but he was impatient to drop his flies again on the spot where the big fish was feeding.

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Just as he made his cast, he saw the fleeing drake and the pursuing hawk come round the bend. He saw the frantic fugitive dive over the ledge and disappear. He saw the great hawk swoop savagely. He tried to check his cast, but it was too late. A remark unsuitable to the printed page exploded upon his lips, and he saw his leader settle deliberately over the long beating wings, the tail-fly coiling about them like a whip-lash.

The last drop-fly, as luck would have it, caught just in the corner of the hawk's angrily open beak,

hooking itself firmly. At the sudden sharp sting of it, the great bird turned his head and noticed, for the first time, the fisherman standing on the bank. At the same moment he felt the light restraint of the almost invisible leader upon his wings, where the other two flies had affixed themselves. He shot up into the air, and heard a sharp, disconcerting rattle as the taut line raced from the reel. The drag upon his beak and the light check upon his wings were inexplicable to him, and appalling. Drake, teal, hunger and wrath were all alike forgotten, and he beat upwards with a rush that made the reel fairly screech its indignant protest. For a moment the fisherman, bewildered, tried to play him like a salmon. Then the leader parted from the line. The fisherman reeled in the limp coils, and the worried hawk flew off with the flies.

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The drake, unrealizing that the dreadful chase was done, sped onward beneath the surface till he could go without breath no longer. Then he came up among some arrowweeds, lifted his head beneath the shelter of one of the broad-barbed leaves, and floated there quivering. For a good ten minutes he waited, moveless, with the patience of the wild things. Then his terror faded, appetite once more began to invite his attention, and he took note of a minnow flickering slowly over the sun-flecked mud below him. He dived and caught it, came to the surface and swallowed it. Much refreshed, he looked about him. There was no such thing as a hawk in sight. Some way up the shore there was a man at the water's edge, fishing. The drake was suspicious of men, though he did not greatly fear them, as he and his rank-fleshed tribe were not interesting to the hunters. He rose noisily into the air, made a detour over the tree-tops to avoid the fisherman, and flew back to his dead branch overhanging the amber rush of the chutes.

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The Assault of Wings

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In his high place in the unclouded blue, a thousand feet above the topmost pinnacle of Bald Face, the great white-headed eagle stared downward toward the far-off reek and roofs of the busy town by the sea. It was not often that his eyes troubled themselves to turn in that direction, for all his concern was with the inland lakes and watercourses which linked themselves tranquilly about the spreading bases of Old Bald Face, and he hated the acrid smokeclouds which rose from the chimneys of the town. But this morning his gaze—that miraculous vision which could scrutinize a rabbit or an ailing lamb at a distance when our best eyes would hardly discern an elephant—had been caught by an apparition which amazed and disconcerted him.

Flying in wide circles above a green field on the outskirts of the city was a gigantic bird, in form and stature quite unlike any other bird that the great eagle had ever seen. As it passed over a red brick cottage at one corner of the field, quite blotting it from view for an instant, he got an impression of its incredible size, and felt, with a pang of angry dread, that his own stately dimensions would have seemed little better than a sparrow's beside it. Its vast white wings were square at the tip, and of the same width from tip to base—an inexplicable innovation in wings—and he noted with apprehension that they flew without any motion at all.

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He himself, soaring in the blue heights as he was, flew *almost* without motion of the wings, riding by subtle poise and balance on the thrust of the light aerial draught. But even now, the breeze failing, he had to recover his impetus by a rushing descent. He tipped his snowy head and shoulders forward, and the air hissed sharply in the tense web of the hinder edges of his wings as he swept down the viewless slopes of air, turning upwards again after a swoop of a hundred yards or so, which was as nothing at that height. A slow stroke or two restored him to his former level, with impetus to spare for his splendid effortless soaring. But, meanwhile, he had not taken his eyes for a moment from that portentous shape circling so mysteriously above the green field on the outskirts of the town, and he had not seen it either swoop or mount or once flap its flat-spread wings.

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Moved from his accustomed arrogant indifference, the eagle flew over toward the town to get a better look at this disquieting phenomenon. On nearer approach he made out that the monstrous square-winged bird was ridden by one of those man-creatures whom he so hated and despised—ridden as he had seen, with wonder and scorn, that horses permitted themselves to be. The man sat in a hollow in the strange bird's back, between its wings, and seemed to master and guide it even as he would master and guide a horse.

The eagle hated man, because man was the only creature that had ever given him, hitherto, the loathed sensation of fear. He despised man because he saw the proud and cunning creature chained to earth, compelled to crawl upon earth's surface even as a sheep or a woodchuck. But now, if man were able to ride the dwellers of the air, there would be no escaping his tyranny.

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The eagle had been conscious for some moments of a curious humming roar in his ears, the source of which was not at once obvious to him. Suddenly he realized that it was the noise of the blunt-winged monster's flight. The realization daunted him. How was it possible that such an awful sound should come from those unmoving wings? He was inclined to turn and fly back to the shelter of Old Bald Face, but, after a moment's irresolution, his stout heart arose to the magnitude of the peril. He flew onward, till soon he was directly over the field, but so high that to the spectators around the edges of the field he was a scarcely visible speck against the blue.

At this moment the aeroplane began to mount skyward. It scaled the air swiftly in a steep spiral. The eagle was almost panic-stricken to observe that even now, when mounting so directly, it did

not flap its wings, although there was no wind on which to rise. At the curious blunt beak of the monster he discerned a sort of circle of faint haze, a bluish blur, but this was something which did not seem to concern him, and he made no effort to understand it. What did concern him was the fact that the monster, with its human rider, was apparently coming up after him. His courage and his curiosity gave way together, and he fled back in a panic to his ledge in the recesses of Old Bald Face.

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The extreme summit of Bald Face was a level plateau of granite some dozen of acres in extent, with a needle-like pinnacle of splintered granite at its eastern or seaward end. The broad southeastern face of the summit was of naked granite, whitened by the storm and frost of ages, whence the name of Old Bald Face. But between this bleak, wind-harried front and the rich plain country by the sea were many lesser pinnacles and ridges, with deep ravines between, all clothed with dark spruce woods and tangled undergrowth. Around to full south and west and north lay an infertile region, thin-soiled and rocky, producing little timber but hemlock and stunted paper birch, and therefore not worth the attention of either the lumberman or the squatter. The whole of this district was interlaced with watercourses and sown with lakes having their ultimate outlet in the tidal estuary which washed the wharves of the town.

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If the land in this region skirting Old Bald Face was barren, its waters were not. They swarmed with fish—lake-trout, white fish, and huge suckers, as well as the ordinary brook-trout. They supplied hunting-ground, therefore, for not only a number of fish-hawks, but also for no less than three pairs of the fish-hawks' dreaded tyrants, the white-headed eagles. These three pairs of eagles had their nests in the uppermost and most inaccessible ledges of Bald Face; and the wild country below was divided among them into six ranges, each great bird having his or her own hunting ground, upon which not even their own mates could poach with impunity.

The nests of the three royal pairs were all within a distance of perhaps half a mile of each other, but each was austere secluded and jealously hidden from its neighbors. Each pair regarded its neighbors with a coldly tolerant aversion, and kept an aloof but vigilant watch upon them as possible poachers.

When the first eagle, smitten with fear by the vision of the swiftly mounting aeroplane, fled back to his eyrie to warn his fierce-eyed mate of this portentous monster of the air, his perturbation was detected by the female of the next pair, who chanced to be homing at that moment with a fish for her hungry nestlings. Fear seems to travel by some uncomprehended but very efficient wireless, and fear in the lords of the air was a thing too unusual to be ignored. Hastily depositing her burden, the newcomer flapped upward and around to the east, till she, too, caught sight of the mounting monoplane. It was far off, indeed, but already so high above earth that to her eyes it stood out dark and sinister against the pale expanse of sea beyond the town. She flapped over for a nearer view, flew close enough to hear the mysterious roar of the motor and to detect the man-creature riding the monster's neck, and fled back to her nestlings with rage and terror at her heart. No longer could she feel secure on the dizziest and remotest ledges of the peaks, no longer were even the soundless deeps of sky inaccessible to man! Within an hour every eagle of Bald Face knew of this dreadful invasion of their hitherto impregnable domain. It was the time of year when their nestlings were most helpless, and that is the time of year when the white-headed eagles will face all odds with an incomparable ferocity of valor at the hint of menace to their skyey homes.

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The airman at the town of X— was one Rob MacCreedy, who had recently been making a name for himself at the aviation grounds some hundred miles down the coast. He had come up to X— primarily to turn a needed penny by exhibition flights and passenger-carrying over the spacious and level fields behind the town. But his secondary object was to experiment with the dangerous eddies and wind-holes that were likely to be met with above the profound ravines of Bald Face and its buttressing hills. His purpose was to go to Europe and win fame by some sensational flights over the Alps or the Pyrenees; and having a very practical Canadian ambition to survive for the enjoyment of the fame he planned to win, he was determined to prepare himself effectively for the perils that would confront him.

But MacCreedy had another object in view, which he did not talk about lest matter-of-fact folk should call him childish. He wanted to see what there was on top of Old Bald Face. That gaunt gray summit was regarded as practically unscalable. It had indeed been scaled, men said, some thirty or forty years ago, after desperate effort and altogether hair-raising adventure, by a greatly daring trapper, who had barely survived to tell of his exploit. Since then, the men of X— not being wholehearted or skilled mountain-climbers, all such attempts had ended in failure. Among the legends which had gathered about the austere summit, there was none to suggest that gold might be found thereon, else the cloudy sanctuary had doubtless been violated without unnecessary delay. But the traditions handed down from the adventure of that old trapper were as stimulating to MacCreedy's imagination as any myth of quartz vein or nugget could have been. They told of a remarkable level plateau, like a table for the gods, with a little lake of black crystal set in the center of it, ice cold and of unfathomable depth. It was, in effect, according to tradition, bottomless.

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To MacCreedy's eager and boyish imagination this lofty plateau and this mysterious uninvestigated lake were irresistible. He was determined to know more about them both; and as the top of Bald Face, for all its inaccessibility, was less than five thousand feet above sea-level, his monoplane seemed to offer him an easy way to it.

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The third day after MacCreedy's arrival at X— was windless and without a cloud in the blue. The air almost sparkled with its clarity, and there was an unspringlike tang in it which made MacCreedy's nerves tingle for adventure. After he had given the crowd their money's worth in swift mountings and breath-taking *vols-planés*, he started off, at a height of some two thousand feet, toward the mountain, standing pallid and grim against the intense blue. He mounted swiftly as he went, and the spectators stared after him doubtfully, till they grasped his purpose.

"He's going to visit the top of Old Bald Face!" went the murmur round the crowded edges of the field. And a feeling that he might bring back some interesting information made them content to wait, without grumbling, for his return. [Pg 210]

Since their first sight of the giant-winged monster soaring and humming over X—, the eagles of Bald Face had not dared to venture far from home in their foragings. Their nerves were raw with angry anxiety for their nests. MacCreedy, as he came within a mile or two of the mountain, took note of an eagle not far ahead, circling at a higher level than himself.

"The old bird thinks he can fly some," mused MacCreedy, "but I bet I'm going to give him the surprise of his life!"

A few moments more, and he was himself surprised, as the solitary sentinel was joined by another, and another, and another, till presently there were six of the great birds flapping and whirling between him and Bald Face, about at the level of the edge of the plateau.

"Seem to be as interested in aeroplanes as any of us humans," thought MacCreedy, and gave his planes a lift that should carry him over the plateau at a height of not much over a hundred feet. He would make a hasty observation first, then circle around and effect a landing, if the surface looked smooth enough for him to attempt it without too much risk. He was surprised somewhat by the attitude of the eagles, who were now circling nearer, and seemed to be more angry than curious or terrified at his approach. Then his attention was abruptly withdrawn from their threatening evolutions. It was all required, and that urgently, by the aeroplane. [Pg 211]

Having arrived over the deeply cleft and ridged outworks of Bald Face, the aeroplane had plunged into a viewless turmoil of air-currents and vortices. It dropped with startling suddenness into a "pocket," and fell as if a vacuum had opened beneath it. MacCreedy saw a vicious granite ridge, whiskered with fir trees, lurch up at him insanely from a thousand feet below. He was almost upon it before his planes bit upon solid air again and glided off from the peril, slanting upward rockingly over a gaping abyss. Yelping with triumph, the eagles had swooped down after him; but he could not hear their cries, of course, through the roar of the Gnome; and of eagles, at that moment, he was thinking not at all.

Realizing the imminence of his danger from these vortices, MacCreedy changed his course and swept back again as fast as he could toward the open, his machine careering wickedly in the eddies and upthrusts of air. He decided that he must get far above this area of disturbance, and then spiral down directly over the plateau, where, as he calculated, the currents would be less tumultuous. [Pg 212]

The eagles, imagining that the loud monster had been put to flight by their threats, came following in its wake, determined to see it safely off their premises and give it no time to recover from what they conceived to be its panic. But they were far too sagacious to attack and force a more than doubtful conflict. They were filled with awe of this gigantic being which flew with rigid wings and such appalling roar, yet allowed itself to be ridden by the man between its shoulders. They were perplexed, too, by the fierce wind which streamed out behind its level wings. Their amazement was heightened by the fact that their own long and powerful wings, which were able to overtake so easily the flight of the agile fish-hawk, were forced to beat furiously in order to keep up with this incomprehensible stranger, who was apparently making no effort at all. [Pg 213]

A swift motor-car, which had followed MacCreedy's flight at top speed across the plain, had halted at the point where the highway passed nearest to the broken and impassable region surrounding the mountain. Its occupants, watching MacCreedy's movements through their field-glasses, and noting the great birds crowding behind him, thought at first that the eagles had put him to flight and forced him to give up his venture. They were undeceived, however. Then they saw him turn—at such a height that, even to their powerful glasses, the pursuing eagles were no more than specks—and soar back till he was directly over the summit.

At the height which he had now gained the air was icy cold, but still as a dream. The world below looked like a vast, shallow bowl, the sides concaving upwards around him to the horizon. Two-thirds of this horizon rim were of dark green woods, threaded with the gleaming silver of water-courses. The remaining third was of sea, which looked as if it overhung the town of X—, and were withheld only by a miracle from flowing in and filling the bowl. Directly beneath him, two to three thousand feet down, the mighty summit of Old Bald Face looked insignificant. It lay outspread quite flat and shelterless in the sun, its secrets clean revealed, and there, sure enough, at its center, was the pool of tradition, gleaming upward, glassy still. At the same time he saw, though without much interest, the eagles. They were very far below him now, hardly above the level of the plateau, flying in occasionally over its edges, but for the most part circling out above the surrounding gulfs. In a casual way MacCreedy inferred that they must have nests in the ledges of the precipices. [Pg 214]

In a somewhat narrow spiral he now began his descent, gradually and under power, that he

might be in full readiness to grapple with the treacherous gusts which came leaping up at him from under the brink of the plateau. He was surprised to see that, as he descended, the eagles rose hurriedly to meet him; but at first he paid no attention to them, being intent upon the search for a good landing-place, and upon the mystery of that sky-inhabiting pool. A minute or two more, however, and it was no longer possible for him to ignore the approaching birds, who were rising at him with unmistakable manifestations of rage. For the first time it occurred to him that they might be thinking he had come to rob their nests. "Plucky beggars!" he said to himself admiringly, "to think of showing fight to a grown-up aeroplane!"

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The next moment, as he noted the spread of those flapping wings, the shining, snowy, outstretched heads and necks, the firm and formidable half-opened beaks, a sweat of apprehension broke out all over him. What if one of the misguided birds should foul his propeller or come blundering aboard and snap a stay or a control wire? The idea of being dashed to pieces in that skyey solitude was somehow more daunting to his spirit than the prospect which he faced indifferently every day—that of being hurled down upon familiar earth.

For a few seconds MacCreedy was tempted to drive his planes heavenward again and withdraw from the situation, to return another day with a passenger and a shot-gun for his defense. Then he grew angry and obstinate. He had come to explore the summit of Bald Face, and he was not going to be balked by a flock of birds. He was low enough now to satisfy himself that the plateau afforded a good landing, so he dipped his descent to a steeper angle, making haste to get through the suspense.

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Immediately the eagles were all about him. To his relief, they seemed afraid to fly directly in front of him, as if apprehending that this monstrous bird of his might carry some terrible weapon in its blunt-faced beak. Mounting swiftly, they passed the descending aeroplane on either side, and then gathered in above it, swooping and yelping. Through the roar of his motor MacCreedy caught the strident shrillness of their cries. He felt that at any moment one might pluck up courage to pounce upon the plane or upon his head. He wondered if his leather cap would be stout enough to resist the clutch of those edged talons which he saw opening and shutting viciously above him. He wished himself safely landed.

He was low enough now to choose his landing-place. He was just about to shut off the engine for the final glide, when one of the female eagles, growing desperate, swooped and struck the right wing of the plane not far from its tip. The extended talons went right through the cloth, tearing a long gash, and, before the bird could recover herself, she was caught by one of the strong wires that braced the wing. The aeroplane rocked under her struggles, but in the next moment she was thrown clear, so badly crumpled that she fell topsy-turvy through the air for some little distance before she could pull her wits together and right herself. Then, dishevelled and cowed, she flew off to one side, with no more stomach left for another assault.

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MacCreedy had brought his plane to a level keel, the better to withstand the attack. Now he laughed grimly and resumed his descent. Almost in the same instant he realized that an immense eagle was swooping straight at his head. He ducked—the only way to save his face. The grasping claws sunk deep into his shoulders. With a yell he straightened himself backward violently. His assailant, unable for a moment to free his claws from the tough tweed of the jacket, and swept backward by the rush of the plane, plunged down among the supporting stays, where he struggled and flapped wildly to extricate himself.

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Smarting with pain and wrath, and with his heart in his mouth lest the stays should snap and the planes collapse, MacCreedy cut off the power and slid sharply downward. The eagle behind him got free, and flapped off, much daunted by the encounter. The remaining four birds hung immediately over the swiftly dropping plane, but hesitated to attack after the rough experience of their fellows.

MacCreedy touched ground at somewhat higher speed than he had calculated upon, and found the level stone, swept by the storm of ages, so smooth that his wheels ran along it much too easily. Thus he found himself confronted by a new peril. Could he check himself before reaching the brink? He steered a long curve around the edge of the shining pool, gathered his legs under him so that he might jump clear, if necessary, and came to a stop with his vacillating propeller almost peering over the abyss. Just before him was a drop of a cool thousand feet. He sprang out, hauled the machine back a dozen yards or so, and drew the longest breath of relief that had been forced from his lungs since his first ventures in aeroplaning.

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Then he snatched the heaviest wrench from his tool kit and turned in a rage to settle accounts with his tormentors. But the eagles were now in a less militant frame of mind. Two of their number had had more than enough, and were already flapping back dejectedly toward their nests. The others seemed to realize that the monster, now that its rider had dismounted, was merely another of the man-creature's tools, such as a boat or a canoe, inanimate and harmless except when its dreaded master chose to animate it. Moreover, now that MacCreedy was out of the machine, erect upon his feet, glaring up at them with masterful eyes, and shouting at them in those human tones which all the wild kindreds find so disconcerting, they were much more afraid of him than before. Their anger began to die away into a mere nervous dread and aversion. It seemed to occur to them that perhaps, after all, the man did not want their nests. He was nowhere near them. They yelped indignantly at him, and flew off to perch on their eyries and brood over the problem.

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MacCreedy watched them go, and dropped his weapon back into the kit. Then he went over his

precious machine minutely, to assure himself that it had sustained no damage except that slit in one wing, which was not enough to give serious trouble. Then, with a rush of exultation, he ran over to examine the mysterious pool. He found it beautiful enough, in its crystal-clear austerity; but, alas, its utter clearness was all that was needed to shatter its chief mystery. It was deep, indeed, but it was certainly not bottomless, for he could discern its bottom, from one shore or the other, in every part. He contented himself, however, with the thought that there was mystery enough for the most exacting in the mere existence of this deep and brimming tarn on the crest of a granite peak. As far as he could judge from his reading, which was extensive, this smooth flat granite top of Bald Face, with its little pinnacle at one end and its deep transparent tarn in the center, was unlike any other known summit in the world. He was contented with his explorations, and ready now to return and tell about them.

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But if content with his explorations, he was far from content on the score of his adventure with the eagles. He felt that it had been rather more of a close call than it appeared; and there was nothing he desired less than an immediate repetition of it. What he dreaded was that the starting of the motor might revive the fears of the great birds in regard to their nests, and bring them once more swooping upon him. He traversed the circuit of the plateau, peering downward anxiously, and at last managed roughly to locate the three nests. They were all on the south and southeast faces of the summit. He decided that he would get off as directly and swiftly as possible, and by way of the northwest front; and by this self-effacing attitude he trusted to convince the touchy birds that he had no wish to trespass upon their domesticity.

He allowed himself all too brief a run, and the plane got into the air but a few feet before reaching the brink. So narrow a margin was it, indeed, that he caught his breath with a gasp before she lifted. It looked as if he were going to dive into space. But he rose instead, and as he sailed out triumphantly across the abyss, the eagles came flapping up over the rim of the plateau behind. They saw that he was departing, so they sank again to their eyries, and congratulated themselves on having driven him away. A few minutes later, at an unprovocative height, he swept around and headed for home. As he came into view once more to the anxious watchers in the automobile, who had been worried over his long disappearance, the car turned and raced back over the plain to X—, ambitious to arrive before him and herald his triumph. But the fact that that triumph was not altogether an unqualified one remained a secret between MacCreedy and the eagles.

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The Cabin Door

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What was known as the County Line Road, though in winter a highway of some importance for the sleds and sleighs of the lumbermen, was in summer little more than a broad, straight trail, with grass and wild flowers growing undisturbed between the ruts. Just now, in the late and sodden northern spring, it was a disheartening stretch of hummocks and bog-holes, the bog-holes emphasized by a leg-breaking array of half rotten poles laid crossways. It was beautiful, however, in its lonesome, pallid, wistful fashion, for its hummocks, where dry enough, were already bluing tenderly with the first violets, its fringes were sparsely adorned with the shy blooms of wind-flower, dog-tooth, and hepatica, and scattered through the dark ranks of the fir trees on either side were little colonies of white birch or silver poplar, just filming with the first ineffable green.

To the slim girl who, bundle in hand and with skirts tucked up half-way to the knee, was picking her steps along this exasperating path, the wildness of the scene—its mingled harshness and delicacy—brought a pang which she could but dimly understand. The pale purpling of the violets, the aerial greening of the birch tops against the misty sky, the solemnity of the dark, massed fir trees—it was all beautiful in her eyes beyond anything words could suggest, but it made her heart ache with something like an intolerable homesickness. This was incomprehensible to her, since she was already, in a sense, at home. This was her native wilderness, this was the kind of chill, ethereal, lonesome spring which thrilled through the memories of her childhood. And she was nearing—she could not now be more than twelve miles from—the actual home of her childhood, that gray cabin on the outskirts of the remote and wind-swept settlement of Stony Brook.

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For the past three years—going on for four now, indeed—Sissy Bembridge had been away from this wild home, working hard, and saving her wages, in the big shoe factory at K—, down by the sea. Called home suddenly by word that her mother was ill, she had come by train to the end of the branch, and tried to get a rig to take her around by the main road to Stony Brook. There was no rig to be had for love or money. Too anxious to wait, and confident in her young vigor, she had left her luggage, tied up a few necessaries and eatables in a handy bundle, and set out by the short cut of the old Line Road. Deaf to all dissuasions, she had counted on making Stony Brook before nightfall. Moreover—though she would never have acknowledged to herself that such a consideration could count for anything when all her thoughts were on her mother's illness—she was aware of the fact that Connor's gang was stream-driving on the Ottanoonsis, and would be by now just about the point where the Line Road touches the river. Mike Farrell would be on the drive, and if she should chance to pass the time o' day with him, and let him know she was at home—why, there'd be no harm done to anybody.

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For hours the girl trudged on, picking her way laboriously from side to side of the trail, and often

compelled to stop and mend a bit of the corduroy roadway before she could get across some particularly bad stretch of bog. Her stout shoes and heavy woolen stockings were drenched with the icy water, but she was strong and full of abounding health, and she felt neither cold nor fatigue. In spite of her anxiety about her mother, her attention was absorbed by the old familiar atmosphere of the wilderness, the haunting colors, the chill, elusive, poignant smells. It was not till fairly well along in the afternoon, therefore, that she awoke to the fact that she had not covered more than half the distance which she had to travel. The heavy going, the abominable state of the road, had utterly upset her calculations. The knowledge came to her with such a shock that she stopped short in consternation, almost dropping her bundle. At this rate she would be in the forest all night, for it would be impossible to traverse the bog-holes in the dark. Child of the backwoods though she was, she had never slept out alone with the great trees and the mysterious night stillness. For the first time she cast a look of dread into the vistaed shadows of the fir trees. Forgetting the violets, the greening birches, the delicate spring smells, she hurried on at a reckless pace which soon forced her to stop and recover her breath. The best she could hope was to reach the river-shore before dark, and perhaps find the camp of the stream-drivers. She felt cold, and tired, and small, and terribly alone.

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Yet, as a matter of fact, she was by no means so alone as she imagined. For the past half hour or more she had been strangely companioned.

Keeping parallel with the road, but at a distance, and hidden in the shadows, went an immense and gaunt black bear. For all his bulk, he went as noiselessly as a wild-cat, skirting the open spaces, and stopping from time to time to sit up, motionless as a stump, and listen intently, and sniff the air with sensitive nostrils. But his little, red-rimmed, savage eyes never lost sight of the figure of the girl for more than a few seconds at a time.

For bears this was the hungry season, the season of few roots and no fruits, few grubs and little honey. The black bear loves sweets and berries far better than any flesh food, however dainty. And human flesh he either fears or dislikes so heartily that only under special stress can he bring himself to contemplate it as a possible article of diet. But this bear considered himself under special stress. His lean flanks were fairly clinging together from emptiness. To his eyes, thus prejudiced, the fresh young form of Sissy Bembridge, picking its way down the trail, looked appetizing. Girl was something he had never tried, and it *might* be edible. At the same time, this inoffensive and defenseless-looking creature undoubtedly belonged to the species Man, as his nostrils well assured him. Therefore, small as she was, she was apt to be very dangerous, even to go off at times with flame and a terrifying noise. He was afraid to show himself to her, but his hunger, coupled with curiosity, led him to track her, perhaps in the hope that she might fall dead in the trail and so make it safe for him to approach and taste.

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The girl, meanwhile, under the influence of her uncertainty and fatigue, was growing more and more apprehensive. She assured herself that there was nothing to fear, that none of the wild inhabitants of these New Brunswick woods would dare to interfere with a human being. At the same time she found herself glancing nervously over her shoulder, as the shadows lengthened and deepened, and all the wilderness turned to dusky violet. From the wet pools began the cold and melancholy fluting of the frogs, the voice of solitude, and under the plangency of it she found the tears running down her cheeks. At this she shook herself indignantly, squared her shoulders, stamped her foot, and plunged ahead with a firm resolution that the approach of dark should *not* make her a fool. And away in the shadows of the firs the bear drew a little nearer, encouraged by the fading of daylight.

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Just as it was growing so dark that she found it hard to choose her path between the pools and the bog-holes, to her infinite relief she caught sight of a cabin roof crowning a little rise of ground by the roadside. She broke into a run in her eagerness, reached the door, and pounced upon it breathlessly. But there was no light in the window. With a sinking heart she realized that it was empty—that it was nothing more than a deserted lumber-camp. Then, as if in answer to her vehement knocking, the door swung slowly open, showing the black darkness within. It had been merely closed, not latched. With a startled cry she sprang back, her skin creeping at the emptiness. Her first impulse was to turn and run. But she recovered herself, remembering that, after all, here was shelter and security for the night, infinitely preferable to a wet bivouac beneath some dripping fir tree.

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She could not bring herself, however, to grope her way into the thick darkness of the interior. Stepping some paces back from the threshold, she nervously untied her bundle and got out a box of matches. Lighting one, she shaded it with her hand, crept forward, and cautiously peered inside. In the spurt of light the place looked warm and snug. She returned for her bundle, went in and shut the door. Then she drew a long breath and felt better. The camp was small, but dry and in good repair. It was quite empty, except for the tier of bunks along one wall, a rough-hewn log bench, a broken stove before the rude chimney, and several lengths of rust-eaten stove-pipe scattered on the floor. Lighting match after match, she hunted about for something to serve as fuel, for she craved the comfort, as well as the warmth of a fire.

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There was nothing, however, but a few handfuls of dry, fine spruce tips, left in one of the bunks. This stuff, she knew, would flare up at once and die in a couple of minutes. She made up her mind to go out and grope about in the wet gloom for a supply of dead branches, though she was now conscious of a childish reluctance to face again the outer solitude. Almost furtively she lifted the heavy latch and opened the door half-way. Instantly, with a gasp, she slammed it to again and leaned against it with quaking knees. Straight in front of her, not twenty feet away, black and

huge against the gray glimmer of the open, she had seen the prowling bear.

Recovering herself after a few seconds, she felt her way stealthily to the bench and sat down upon it so as to face the two windows. The windows were small—so small that she was sure no monster such as the one which had just confronted her could by any possibility force its way through them. But she waited in a sort of horror, expecting momentarily that a dreadful shadowy face would darken one or the other of them and glare in upon her. She felt that the eyes of it would be visible by their own light, and she summoned up all her resolution that she might not scream when it appeared. For the time, however, nothing of the sort took place, and the two little squares continued to glimmer palely.

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After what seemed to her an hour of breathless waiting, she heard a sound as of something rubbing softly along the logs of the back wall. She swung around on her seat to stare with straining eyes at the spot where the sound came from. But, of course, all was blackness there. And she could not keep her eyes for more than a few seconds from the baleful fascination of the window-squares.

The door of the camp was a heavy one and sturdily put together, but along its bottom was a crack some half an inch in width. Presently there came a loud sniffing at this crack, and then the door creaked, as if a heavy body were leaning against it. She shuddered and gathered herself together for a desperate spring, expecting the latch or the hinges to give way. But the honest New Brunswick workmanship held, and she took breath again with a sob.

After this respite, a thousand fantastic schemes of defense began to chase themselves through her brain. Out of them all she clung to just one, as possibly offering some hope in the last emergency. Noiselessly she gathered those few handfuls of withered spruce twigs and heaped them upon the top of the stove. If the bear should succeed in squeezing through the window or breaking down the door, she would light the dry stuff, and perhaps the sudden blaze and smoke might frighten him away. That it would daunt him for a moment, she felt sure, but she was equally sure that its efficacy would not last very long.

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As she was working up the details of this scheme—more for the sake of keeping her terror in check than for any great faith she had in it—the thing she had been expecting happened. One of the glimmering gray-blue squares grew suddenly dark. She gave a burst of shrill, hysterical laughter and ran at it, as a trapped rat will jump at a hand approaching the wires. As she did so, she scratched a bunch of four or five matches and threw them, spluttering and hissing, in the face of the apparition. She had a glimpse of small, savage eyes and an open, white-fanged mouth. Then the great face withdrew itself.

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Somewhat reassured to find that the monster could be disconcerted by the spurt of a match, she groped back to her seat, and fell to counting, by touch, the number of these feeble weapons still left in the box. She had only six more, and she began to repent of having used the others so recklessly. After all, as she told herself, *that* bear could not possibly squeeze himself through the window, so why should he not amuse himself by looking in at her if he wanted to? It might keep him occupied. It occurred to her that she ought to be glad that the bear was such a big one. His face alone had fairly filled the window. She would save the remaining matches.

For a good ten minutes nothing more happened, though from time to time her intent ears caught the sound of cautious sniffing on the other side of the log walls, as if the enemy were reconnoitering to find a weak point in her fortress. She smiled scornfully there in the dark, knowing well the strength of those log walls. Then, all at once her face stiffened and she sat rigid, clutching the edge of the bench with both hands. The door had once more begun to creak and groan under the weight of a heavy body surging against it.

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There was a sound of scratching, a rattle of iron claws, which told her that the beast was rearing itself upright against the door. The massive paws seemed to fumble inquisitively. Then her blood froze. She heard the heavy latch lift with a click.

The door swung open.

She felt as if she were struggling in a nightmare. With a choked scream she leapt straight at the door. She had a mad impulse to slam it in the monster's face and brace herself, however impotently, against it. As she sprang, however, her foot caught in one of the pieces of stove-pipe. She fell headlong, and the pipe flew half-way across the floor, clattering over its fellows as it went, and raising a prodigious noise.

Through a long, long moment of horror she lay flat on her face, expecting a gigantic paw to fall upon her neck as a cat's paw falls upon a mouse. Nothing happened. She ventured to raise her head. The door was wide open and the doorway quite clear. A dozen feet away from it, at the edge of the road, stood the bear, staring irresolutely. He had been rather taken aback by the suddenness with which the door had flown open, and had hesitated to enter, fearing a trap. The wild clatter of the stove-pipes had further disturbed him, and he had withdrawn to consider the situation. In one bound the girl was at the door and had shut it with a bang.

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The problem was now to fix the latch so that it could not again be lifted from the outside. She lit one more precious match, examined the mechanism, and hunted frantically for a splinter of wood with which to jam it down. There was nothing in sight that would serve. She tried to tear off a strip of her petticoat to bind it down with, but all her underwear was of a most serviceable sturdiness, and would not tear. She heard the bear moving again outside. She heard his

breathing close to the door. Desperately she thrust a couple of fingers into the space above the latch, so that it would not lift. Then with the other hand she whipped off one shoe and stocking. The stocking was just the thing, and in a minute she had the latch secure.

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It was no more than secure, however, before the weight of the bear once more came against the door. From the heavy, scratchy fumbings the girl could perceive that her enemy was trying to repeat his former maneuver. On this point, at least, she had no anxiety. She knew the door could not now be unlatched from the outside. She could almost afford to laugh in her satisfaction as she groped her way back to her seat.

But her satisfaction was of brief life. The door began to creak more and more violently. It was evident that the bear, having once learned that this was a possible way in, was determined to test it to the utmost. The girl sprang up. She heard the screws of a hinge begin to draw with an ominous grating sound. Now at last the crisis was truly and inevitably upon her. And, to her amazement, she was less terrified than before. The panic horror had all gone. She had small hope of escape, but her brain worked calmly and clearly. She moved over beside the broken stove, and stood, match in hand, ready to set fire to the pile of dry spruce tips.

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The door groaned and creaked. Then the upper hinge gave way, and the door leaned inward, admitting a wide streak of glimmer. For some moments, thereafter, all sounds ceased, as if the bear had drawn back cautiously to consider the result of his efforts. Then he came on again with more confidence. Under his weight the door came crashing down, but slowly, with the noise of yielding latch and snapping iron. As it fell, the girl scratched the match and set it to the dry stuff.

In the doorway the bear paused, eyeing suspiciously the tiny blue spurt of the struggling match. After a second or two, however, he came forward with a savage rush, furious at having been so long balked. The girl slipped around the stove. And just as the bear reached the place where she had been standing, the spruce tips sparked sharply and flared up in his face. With a loud *woo-ooof* of indignation and alarm, he recoiled, turned tail, scurried out into the road, and disappeared.

In a couple of minutes the cabin was full of sparks and smoky light. The girl ran to the door and peered out. Her heart sank once more. There was the bear, a few paces up the road, calmly sitting on his haunches, waiting. He had seen camp fires before, and he was waiting for this one to die down.

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Sissy Bembridge knew that it would die down at once, and then—well, her last card would have been played. She wrung her hands, but in the new self-possession which had come to her, she could not believe that the end had really arrived. It was unbelievable that within some half a dozen minutes she should become a lifeless, hideous, shapeless thing beneath those mangling claws. No, there must be—there was—something to do, if she could only think of it.

And then it came to her.

At first thought the idea was so audacious, so startling, so fantastic, that she shrank from it as absurd. But on second thoughts she convinced herself not only that it was the one thing to be done, but also that it was practical and would almost certainly prove effective. But there was not a moment to be lost.

Snatching up one of the fragments of stove-pipe, she used the edge as a shovel, and carried a portion of the blazing stuff to the open doorway. Here she deliberately set fire to the dry woodwork, nursing with hand and breath the tiny uplicking flames. She fed them with a few more scraps of spruce scraped up from another bunk, till she saw that they would surely catch. Then, with her stove-pipe shovel, she started another fire in the further corner of the camp, and yet another in the uppermost bunk. When satisfied that all were fairly going, she retrieved her stocking from the broken latch, reclothed her naked foot and set her bundle safely outside. Then she looked at the bear, still sitting on his haunches a little way up the road, and she laughed at him. At last she had him worsted. She darted in through the doorway—now blazing cheerfully all up one side—and dragged forth the heavy bench, that she might have something dry to sit on while she watched the approaching conflagration.

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Her calculation—and she knew it was a sound one—was that the cabin, a solid structure of logs, would burn vigorously the whole night through, and terrify the bear to final flight. If it should by any chance die down before full daylight, she would be able to build a circle of small fires with the burning remnants. And she felt sure that in daylight her enemy would not dare to renew the attack.

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In another ten minutes the roof was ablaze, and soon the flames were shooting up riotously. The woods were lighted redly for hundreds of yards around, the pools in the road were like polished copper, and the bear was nowhere to be seen. Sissy dragged her bench and bundle still further away, and sat philosophically warming her wet feet. The reaction from her terror, and her sense of triumph, made her so excited that fatigue and anxiety were all forgotten. She grew warm and comfortable, and finally, opening her bundle, she got out a package of neglected sandwiches and made a contented meal.

As she was shaking the crumbs from her lap, she heard voices and pounding, splashing hoofs from up the trail. She sprang to her feet. Three lumbermen came riding into the circle of light, and drew rein before her in astonishment. "Sissy—Bembridge—you!" cried the foremost, springing from his saddleless mount.

The girl ran to him. "Oh, Mike," she exclaimed, crying and laughing all at the same time, and clutching him by the arm, "I *had* to do it! The bear nigh got me! Take me to mother, quick. I'm *that* tired."

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A Basket of Fish

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Fresh and tender, the light of the mild spring afternoon caressed the little abandoned clearing in the wilderness. At the back of the clearing, beneath a solitary white birch tree just bursting into green, stood a squatter's log cabin, long deserted, its door and window gone, its roof of poles and bark half fallen in. Past the foot of the clearing, with dancing sparkle and a crisp, musical clamor, ran a shallow stream some dozen yards in width, its clear waters amber-tawny from the far-off cedar-swamps in which it took its rise. Along one side came the deeply rutted backwoods road, skirting the clearing and making its precarious way across the stream by a rude bridge not lightly to be ventured after dark. Over all the face of the lonely backwoods world was washed the high, thin green of the New Brunswick May-time, under a sky of crystal cobalt dotted with dense white fleeces.

Before the ruined cabin stood a light wagon, its wheels and polished body bespattered with mud. In the open back of the wagon, thrust well under the seat to be in the shade, lay a large wicker fishing-basket, with a tuft of grass sticking out through the square hole in the cover. Some ten or a dozen paces distant, tethered beneath the birch tree, a sorrel horse munched the last remnants of a bundle of hay, and whisked his long tail industriously to keep off the flies.

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From behind a corner of the ruined cabin peered craftily a red fox. He eyed the wagon, he eyed the horse beneath the birch tree, he scrutinized the whole clearing, the road, and the open stretch of the stream. Then his narrowed, searching gaze returned to the wagon and to the fat basket in the back of the wagon. At length he stepped forth mincingly into full view, trotted up, and sniffed inquisitively. As if in doubt, he raised himself on his hind legs, with his fore-paws on the tire of the nearest wheel, and took a long, satisfying sniff. Yes, undoubtedly there were fish in the basket, fresh fish—trout, in fact.

He wanted those fish exceedingly. It seemed easy enough to get them. He shifted his fore-paws to the back of the wagon, and studied the situation. Why should he not climb up and help himself? The sorrel horse, catching a whiff of his pungent scent, looked around at him suddenly and snorted. But what did he care for the disapproval of the sorrel horse? All horses, submissive and enslaved, he held in profoundest scorn. He would have those trout, whether the horse liked it or not. And, anyhow, he saw that the horse was tethered to the tree. He settled himself back upon his haunches to spring into the wagon.

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Then a new idea flashed into his cunning red head. No one who valued fresh-caught trout at their full worth would leave them thus unguarded unless for a sinister purpose. They were surely left there as a trap. The fox wrinkled his nose with mingled regret and disdain. He knew something of traps. He had once been nipped. He was not to be caught again, not he. What fools these men were, after all! His satisfaction at having seen through their schemes almost compensated him for the loss of the expected meal. He drew back, sat down on his tail, and eyed the wagon minutely for a while. Then he trotted away into the forest again to hunt wood-mice.

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But it was just here that the red prowler's cunning overreached itself. The basket in the wagon was full of trout, and there was no trap to be feared. He might have feasted to his heart's content, and incurred no penalty more serious than the disapproval of the tethered horse, had he not been quite so amazingly clever. For even among the wild kindreds the prize is not always to him of nimble wit.

The trout were there in the basket simply because the fishing had been so good. The two fishermen who had driven out from town, in the gray of dawn, over those fifteen miles of bad backwoods road, had fished the stream upward from the bridge throughout the morning. At this season the trout—fine, vivid fish, of good pan size—were lying in the open, dancing runs and about the tails of the rapids; and they were rising freely to almost any bright fly, though with a preference for a red hackle. Toward noon the fishermen had returned to the clearing to lunch beneath the birch tree and to feed and water the horse. They had emptied all their catch into one basket, stowed the basket under the wagon seat, then started off again to fish the finer reaches of the stream, with its wide pools and long, sunlit rapids, below the bridge. Good fishermen, but not expert woodsmen, they had no idea that, here in the solitude, they ran any risk of being robbed of their morning's spoils.

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Soon after the departure of the over-crafty fox, a backwoods tramp came by, with a ragged little bundle slung from the stick on his shoulder. His eyes lighted up at sight of the unguarded wagon from town, and he understood the situation at a glance. In the front of the wagon, by the dashboard, he found a lunch-basket, still half full, as the fishermen had provided themselves for another substantial meal. He hurriedly devoured about half the contents of the lunch-basket, transferred the rest to his dirty bundle, and with huge satisfaction lighted a half-burned cigar which one of the fishermen had left lying on a log. Next he investigated the fishing-basket. Half a

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dozen of the finest fish he took out and strung upon a forked twig. This he did not regard as stealing, but merely as the exaction of a small and reasonable tribute from a Society which had of late neglected to feed him any too well. Puffing his cigar butt in high good humor, he went over and made friends with the horse, feeding it with a few handfuls of fresh grass. Then, with the string of fish dangling beside his bundle and flapping against it as he walked, he resumed his solitary journey, picked his way over the dilapidated bridge, and vanished into the fir forest beyond. The horse, feeling rather lonely, neighed after him as he disappeared.

An abandoned clearing or a deserted log cabin, something to which man has set his hand and then withdrawn it, seems always a place of peculiar fascination to the creatures of the wilderness. They have some sense, perhaps, of having regained a lost dominion. Or possibly they think, from these his leavings, to learn something significant of man's mysterious over-lordship. In any case, the attraction seldom fails.

The tramp had not been long gone, when a new visitor arrived. Up from the fringing bushes along the stream's edge came furtively a little, low, long-bodied beast, in shape much like an exaggerated weasel, but almost black in color. Its head was almost triangular; its eyes, set near together, were bright and cruel. It came half-way across the meadow, then stopped, and eyed for some time the tethered horse and the deserted wagon. Seeing nothing to take alarm at, it made a wide circuit, ran behind the cabin, and reappeared, as the fox had done, at the corner nearest the wagon. From this point of vantage it surveyed the situation anew, a little spark of blood-red fire alternately glowing and fading in its eyes as its keen nostrils caught the scent of the fish. [Pg 249]

Satisfied at length that there was no danger within range, the mink glided up to the wagon. The horse it paid no heed to. It circled the wagon a couple of times in a nervous, jerky run, its head darting this way and that, till its nose assured it beyond question that the fish it scented were in the wagon itself. Thereupon—for the mink lacks the fox's hair-splitting astuteness, and does not take long to make up its mind—it clambered nimbly up through one of the wheels and fell straightway upon the fish-basket. [Pg 250]

Now, the tramp, courteous in his depredations, had taken thought to refasten the basket. The mink was puzzled. The hole in the top of the basket, though he might have squeezed his head through it, was not large enough to let him reach the fish. He began jerking the basket and pulling it about savagely. The back of the wagon consisted of a hinged flap, and the fishermen had left it hanging down. The basket, dragged this way and that, came presently to the edge, toppled over, and fell heavily to the ground on its bulging side. The fastening came undone, and the cover flopped half open. The mink dropped down beside it, flung himself upon it furiously, and began jerking forth and scattering the contents, tearing mouthfuls out of one fish after another in a paroxysm of greed, as if he feared they were still alive and might get away from him.

The basket emptied and his first rage glutted, the mink now fell to the business of making a serious meal. Selecting a fish to his taste, he ate it at great leisure, leaving the head and the tail upon the grass. Then he picked out a larger one, as if he regarded the first as merely an appetizer. [Pg 251]

As he gnawed luxuriously at the silver-and-buff, vermilion-spotted tit-bit, an immense shadow floated between him and the sun. He did not take time to look up and see what it was. It was as if the touch of that shadow had loosed a powerful spring. He simply shot from his place, at such speed that the eye could not distinguish how he did it, and in the minutest fraction of a second was curled within the empty fishing-basket, which still lay on its side, half open. A pair of long, black, sickle-curved talons, surmounted by thickly feathered gray shanks, clutched at the place where he had stood.

Furious at having missed her strike, the great horned owl, that tigress of the air, flapped up again on her soundless, downy wings, and swooped suddenly at the basket, as if trying to turn it over. As her talons clawed at the wickerwork, feeling for a hold, the head of the mink, on its long, snaky neck, darted forth, reached up, and struck its fine white fangs into her thigh.

But the great owl's armor of feathers, though it looked so soft and fluffy, was in fact amazingly resistant. The mink's long teeth reached the flesh and drew blood, but he gained no grip. That steel-muscled thigh was wrenched from his jaws, leaving him with an embarrassing mouthful of down. He jerked his head into cover again, just as the bird made another lightning clutch at him. [Pg 252]

For all his rage, the mink kept his wits about him. He knew the owl for one of his most dangerous rivals and adversaries. He knew that he could kill her if once he could reach her throat or get his grip fixed on one of her mighty wings close to the base. But that *if* kept him prudent. He was too well aware that in an open combat he was more than likely to get his neck or his back into the clutch of those inexorable talons, and that would be the end of him. Discreetly, therefore, he kept himself well within the basket, which was large enough to hold him comfortably. He snarled shrilly through the little square hole in the cover, while his assailant, balked of her prey and furious with the smart of her wound, pounced once more upon the basket and strove to claw an entrance. A chance blow of one of her pounding wings drove the lid—the basket being still on its side—completely to. The sorrel horse under the birch-tree swung round on his tether and rolled his eyes and snorted, deeply scandalized at such goings-on about his familiar wagon. [Pg 253]

It was just at this point in the mink's adventure that the fox returned to the clearing. He had had rather poor luck with the wood-mice, and his chaps watered with the memory of those trout in the wagon. Something of an expert in dealing with traps, he made up his mind that he would try

to circumvent this one.

The sight that met his shrewd eyes, as he emerged warily from the cover of the fir woods, amazed him. He halted to take it in thoroughly. He saw the basket lying on the ground, and the angry owl clawing at it. The fish he did not see. He concluded that they were still in the basket, and that the owl was trying to get at them. This particular kind of owl, as he knew, was a most formidable antagonist; but with his substantial weight and his long, punishing jaws, he felt himself much more than a match for her. His eyes flamed green with indignation as he watched her trying to steal the prize which he had already marked down for his own. He darted forward on tip-toe—noiselessly, as he thought—and made a long leap at the flapping, dusky wings.

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But the ears of an owl are a very miracle of sensitiveness. They can catch the squeak of a mouse at a distance which, for ordinary ears, would make the sharp clucking of a chipmunk inaudible. To the bird on the basket the coming of those velvet footsteps were like the scamper of a frightened sheep. She sprang into the air without an effort, hung for a moment to glare down upon the fox with her hard, round, moon-pale eyes, and then sailed off without a sound, having no mind to try conclusions with the long-jawed red stranger.

The fox was surprised to find the trout lying scattered about the grass, some of them bitten and mangled. What, then, was in the basket? What was the great owl trying to get at, when the precious fish were all spread out before her? Curiosity dominating his hunger, he stepped up to the basket and sniffed at the hole in the lid. Instantly there was a shrill, vicious snarl from within, and a wide-open, triangular mouth, set with white teeth, darted at his nose. He drew back hastily and sat down on his tail, ears cocked and head tilted to one side, to consider.

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It puzzled him greatly that there should be a mink in the basket. Tip-toeing cautiously around it, he saw that the lid was slightly open, so that the mink could come out if he wished. But the fox did not want him to come out. What the fox wanted was fish, not a fight with an adversary who would give him a lot of trouble. By all means, let the mink stay in there.

Keeping a sharp watch on the lid of the basket, the fox backed away cautiously several feet, lay down, and fell to devouring the trout. But never for an instant did he take his eyes off that slightly moving lid. He lay with his feet gathered under him, every muscle ready for action, expecting each moment to find himself involved in a desperate battle for the prize he was enjoying. He could not imagine a fiery-tempered personage like the mink tamely submitting to the rape of his banquet. He felt sure that in the next second or two a snaky black shape, all teeth and springs and venom, would dart from the basket and be at his throat. He was ready for it, but he was not hankering after it.

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Meanwhile, there behind the basket lid, the mink was raging irresolutely. It galled him to the marrow to watch his big, arrogant, bush-tailed rival complacently gulping down those fine fat trout. But—well, he had himself already eaten one of the trout and a good part of another. His hunger was blunted. He could rage within reason, and his reason admonished him to keep out of this fight if it could be managed. He knew the whipcord muscle underlying that soft red fur, the deadly grip of those long, narrow jaws. There is no peace counsellor like a contented belly. So he snarled softly to himself and waited.

The fox, having swallowed as much as he could hold, stood up, stretched himself, and licked his chaps. The look which he kept upon the basket was no less vigilant than before, but there was now a tinge of scorn in it. There were still some trout left, but he wanted to get away. He snatched up the two biggest fish in his jaws and trotted off with them to the woods, glancing back over his shoulder as he went.

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Before he had gained the cover of the fir trees, the mink glided forth, planted his forepaws on the remaining fish, and stood staring after him in an attitude of challenge. Had the fox returned, the mink would now have fought. But the fox had no thought of returning. There was nothing to fight about. He had got what he wanted. He had no rooted objection to the mink having what was left. He trotted away nonchalantly toward his burrow under the roots of an old birch tree on the hill.

The mink stuffed himself till he could not get another mouthful down. There were still a couple of trout untouched. He eyed them regretfully, but he had not the fox's wit or providence to carry them off and hide them for future use. He left them, therefore, with a collection of neatly severed heads and tails, to mock the fishermen when they should return at sunset. He was feeling very drowsy. At a deliberate pace, quite unlike his usual eager and darting movements, he made off down the clearing toward the water. Beneath the bank was an old musquash hole which he was well acquainted with. Only the other day, indeed, he had cleared out its inhabitants, devouring their litter of young. He crawled into the hole, curled up on the soft, dead grass of the devastated nest, and cosily went to sleep.

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Brannigan's Mary

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Brannigan was wanting fresh meat, red meat. Both he and his partner, Long Jackson, were sick to death of trout, stewed apples, and tea. Even fat bacon, that faithful stand-by, was beginning to lose its charm, and to sizzle at them with an unsympathetic note when the trout were frying in it. And when a backwoodsman gets at odds with his bacon, then something has got to be done.

Going noiselessly as a cat in his cowhide larrigans, Brannigan made his way down the narrow trail between the stiff dark ranks of the spruce timber toward the lake. As the trail dipped to the shore he caught a sound of splashing, and stopped abruptly, motionless as a stump, to listen. His trained ears interpreted the sound at once.

"Moose pullin' up water-lily roots!" he muttered to himself with satisfaction. Edging in among the trunks beside the trail to be the better hidden, he crept forward with redoubled caution. [Pg 260]

A few moments more and a sparkle of sunlight flashed into his eyes, and through the screening spruce branches he caught sight of the quiet water. There, straight before him, was a dark young moose cow, with a two-months calf at her side, wading ashore through the shadows.

Brannigan raised his rifle and waited till the pair should come within easier range. Cartridges are precious when one lives a five-days' tramp from the nearest settlement; and he was not going to risk the wasting of a single shot. The game was coming his way, and it was the pot, not sport, that he was considering.

Now, no one knew better than Brannigan that it was against the law of New Brunswick to shoot a moose at this season, or a cow moose at any season. He knew, also, that to shoot a cow moose was not only illegal, but apt to be extremely expensive. For New Brunswick enforces her game laws with a brusque and uncompromising rigor; and she values a cow moose at something like five hundred dollars. Brannigan had no stomach for a steak at such price. But he had every reason to believe that at this moment there was not a game-warden within at least a hundred miles of this unimportant and lonely lake at the head of the Ottanoonsis. He was prepared to gamble on this supposition. Without any serious misgivings, he drew a bead on the ungainly animal, as she emerged with streaming flanks from the water and strode up toward the thickets which fringed the white beach. But the calf by her side kept getting in the way, and Brannigan's finger lingered on the trigger, awaiting a clearer shot. [Pg 261]

Suddenly a dense thicket, half-a-dozen yards or so distant from the leisurely cow, burst open as with an explosion, and a towering black form shot out from the heart of it. It seemed to overhang the cow for a fraction of a second, and then fell forward as if to crush her to the earth. Brannigan lowered his gun, a look of humorous satisfaction flitting over his craggy features.

"Thank you, kindly, Mr. B'ar," he muttered. "Ther ain't no game-warden on 'arth as kin blame me for that!"

But the matter was not yet as near conclusion as he imagined. The cow, apparently so heedless, had been wideawake enough, and had caught sight of her assailant from the tail of her eye, just in time to avoid the full force of the attack. She leapt aside, and the blow of those armed paws, instead of breaking her back, merely ripped a long scarlet furrow down her flank. [Pg 262]

At the same instant she wheeled and struck out savagely with one razor-edged fore-hoof. The stroke caught the bear glancingly on the shoulder, laying it open to the bone.

Had the bear been a young one, the battle thus inauspiciously begun might have gone against him, and those lightning hooves, with their far-reaching stroke, might have drawn him in blood and ignominy to refuge in a tree. But this bear was old and of ripe experience. As if daunted by the terrific buffet he drew back, upon his haunches, seeming to shrink to half his size.

The outraged cow came on again furious and triumphant, thinking to end the matter with a rush. The bear, a wily boxer, parried her next stroke with a blow that broke her leg at the hock. Then his long body shot out again and upward, to its full height, and crashed down upon her neck, with a sick twist that snapped the vertebræ like chalk. She collapsed like a sack of shavings, her long dark muzzle, with red tongue protruding, turned upward and backward, as if she stared in horror at her doom. [Pg 263]

The bear set his teeth into her throat with a windy grunt of satisfaction.

At that moment Brannigan fired. The heavy soft-nosed bullet crashed home. The bear lifted himself straight up on his hind legs, convulsively pawing at the air, then dropped on all fours, ran round in a circle with his head bent inwards, and fell over on his side. The calf, which had stood watching the fight in petrified amazement, had recovered the use of its legs with a bound at the shock of the report, and shambled off into the woods with a hoarse bleat of terror.

Hugely satisfied with himself, Brannigan strode forth from his hiding and examined his double prize. The bear being an old one, he had no use for it as food, now that he was assured of a supply of choice moose-venison; for he knew by experience the coarseness and rankness of bear-meat, except when taken young. [Pg 264]

Touching up the edge of his hunting knife on the sole of his larrigan, he skinned the bear deftly, rolled up the heavy pelt, and tied it with osier-withes for convenience in the lugging. Then, after a wash in the lake, he turned back to fetch his partner and the drag, that they might haul the dead moose to the camp and cut it up conveniently at home. Glancing back as he vanished up the trail, he saw the orphaned calf stick its head out from behind a bush and stare after him pathetically.

"Mebbe I'd oughter shoot the little beggar too," he mused, "or the bears 'll jest get it!" But being rather tender-hearted where all young things were concerned, he decided that it might be big enough to look after itself, and so should have its chance.

A half hour later, when Brannigan and his partner, hauling the drag behind them briskly, got back to the lake, they found the calf standing with drooped head beside the body of its mother. At their approach it backed off a dozen yards or so to the edge of the bushes, and stood gazing at them with soft, anxious eyes.

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"Best knock the ca'f on the head, too, while we're about it," said Long Jackson practically. "It looks fat an' juicy."

But Brannigan, his own first impulse in regard to the poor youngster now quite forgotten, protested with fervor.

"Hell!" he grunted, good-naturedly. "Ain't yer got enough fresh meat in this 'ere cow I've foraged fer ye? I've kinder promised that there unfortunate orphant she shouldn't be bothered none."

"She's too young yet to fend fer herself. The b'ars 'll git her, if we don't," argued Long Jackson.

But Brannigan's sympathies, warm if illogical, had begun to assert themselves with emphasis.

"This 'ere's *my* shindy, Long," he answered doggedly. "An' I say the poor little critter 'd oughter have her chance. She *may* pull through. An' good luck to her, ses I! We got all the fresh meat we want."

"Oh, if ye're feeling *that* way about the orphant, Tom, I ain't kickin' none," answered Jackson, spitting accurate tobacco-juice upon a small white boulder some ten or twelve feet distant. "I was only thinkin' we'd save the youngster a heap of trouble if we'd jest help her go the way of her ma right now."

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"You ax her fer *her* opinion on that p'int!" grunted Brannigan, tugging the carcass of the moose on to the drag.

Long Jackson turned gravely to the calf.

"Do ye want to be left to the b'ars and the h'a'nts, in the big black woods, all by yer lonesome?" he demanded.

The calf, thus pointedly addressed, backed further into the bush and stared in mournful bewilderment.

"Or would ye rather be et, good an' decent, an' save ye a heap o' frettin'?" continued Long Jackson persuasively.

A bar-winged moose-fly, that vicious biter, chancing to alight at that moment on the calf's ear, she shook her lank head vehemently.

"What did I tell ye?" demanded Brannigan dryly. "She knows what she wants!"

"Kinder guess that settles it," agreed Long Jackson with a grin, spitting once more on the inviting white boulder. Then the two men set the rope traces of the drag over the homespun shoulders, and, grunting at the first tug, started up the trail with their load.

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The calf took several steps forward from the thicket, and stared in distraction after them. She could not understand this strange departure of her mother. She bleated several times, hoarsely, appealingly; but all to no effect. Then, just as the drag, with its dark, pathetic burden, was disappearing around a turn of the trail, she started after it, and quickly overtook it with her ungainly, shambling run. All the way to the cabin she followed closely, nosing from time to time at the unresponsive figure on the drag.

Brannigan, glancing back over his shoulder from time to time, concluded that the calf was hungry. Unconsciously, he had come to accept the responsibility for its orphaned helplessness, though he might easily have put all the blame upon the bear. But Brannigan was no shirker. He would have scorned any such sophistry. He was worrying now over the question of what he could give the inconveniently confiding little animal to eat. He decided, at length, upon a thin, lukewarm gruel of corn-meal, slightly salted, and trusted that the sturdiness of the moose stomach might survive such a violent change of diet. His shaggy eyebrows knitted themselves over the problem till Long Jackson, trudging at his side, demanded to know if he'd "got the bellyache."

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This being just the affliction which he was dreading for the calf, Brannigan felt a pang of guilt and vouchsafed no reply.

Arriving at the cabin, Jackson got out his knife, and was for setting to work at once on the skinning and cutting up. But Brannigan intervened with prompt decision.

"Don't ye be so brash, Long," said he. "This 'ere's *Mary*. Hain't yer got no consideration for *Mary's* feelings? She's comin' to stop with us; an' it wouldn't be decent to go cuttin' up her ma right afore her eyes! You wait till I git her tied up 'round behind the camp. Then I'll go an' fix her some corn-meal gruel, seein's we haven't got no proper milk for her." And he proceeded to unhitch the rope from the drag.

Jackson heaved a sigh of resignation, seated himself on the body of the slain cow, and fished up his stumpy black clay pipe from the depths of his breeches pocket.

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"So ye're goin' to be *Mary's* ma, eh?" he drawled, with amiable sarcasm. "If ye'd jest shave that

long Irish lip o' yourn, Tom, she'd take ye fer one o' family right enough."

He ducked his head and hoisted an elbow to ward off the expected retort; but Brannigan was too busy just then for any fooling. Having rubbed his hands and sleeves across the hide of the dead mother, he was gently approaching the calf, with soft words of caress and reassurance. It is improbable that the calf had any clear comprehension of the English tongue, or even of Brannigan's backwoods variant of it. But she seemed to feel that his tones, at least, were not hostile. She slightly backed away, shrinking and snorting, but at length allowed Brannigan's outstretched fingers to approach her dewy muzzle. The smell of her mother on those fingers reassured her mightily. Being very hungry, she seized them in her mouth and fell to sucking them as hard as she could.

"Pore little eejut," said Brannigan, much moved by this mark of confidence, "ye shall have some gruel quick as I kin make it." With two fingers between her greedy lips and a firm hand on the back of her neck, he had no difficulty in leading her around behind the cabin, where he tied her up securely, out of sight of the work of Long Jackson's industrious knife. [Pg 270]

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On Brannigan's gruel Mary made shift to survive, and even to grow, and soon she was able to discard it in favor of her natural forage of leaves and twigs. From the first she took Brannigan *in loco parentis*, and, except when tied up, was ever dutifully at his heels. But she had a friendly spirit toward all the world, and met Long Jackson's advances graciously. By the end of autumn she was amazingly long-legged, and lank, and awkward, with an unmatched talent for getting in the way and knocking things over. But she was on a secure footing as member of the household, petted extravagantly by Brannigan and cordially accepted by Long Jackson as an all-round good partner. As Jackson was wont to say, she was not beautiful, but she had a great head when it came to choosing her friends. [Pg 271]

As would naturally be supposed, Mary, being a member of the firm, had the free run of the cabin, and spent much of her time therein, especially at meals or in bad weather. But she was not allowed to sleep indoors, because Brannigan was convinced that such a practice would not be good for her health. At the same time she could not be left outdoors at night, the night air of the wilderness being sometimes infected with bears, lynxes, and wild-cats. A strong pen, therefore, was built for her against the end wall of the cabin, very open and airy, but roofed against the rain and impervious to predatory claws. In this pen she was safe, but not always quite happy; for sometimes in the still dark of the night, when Brannigan and Long Jackson were snoring in their hot bunks within the cabin, she would see an obscure black shape prowling stealthily around the pen, and hungry eyes would glare in upon her through the bars. Then she would bawl frantically in her terror. Brannigan would tumble from his bunk and rush out to the rescue. And the dread black shadow would fade away into the gloom. [Pg 272]

When winter settled down upon the wilderness, it did so with a rigor intended to make up for several mild seasons.

The snow came down, and drove, and drifted, till Mary's pen was buried so deep that a tunnel had to be dug to her doorway. Then set in the long, steady, dry cold, tonic and sparkling, but so intense that the great trees would crack under it with reports like pistol shots upon the death-like stillness of the night. But all was warmth and plenty at the snow-draped cabin; and Mary, though she had no means of knowing it, was without doubt the most comfortable and contented young moose in all Eastern Canada. She was sometimes a bit lonely, to be sure, when Brannigan and Jackson were away on their snow-shoes, tending their wide circuit of traps, and she was shut up in her pen. At such times, doubtless, her inherited instincts hankered after the companionship of the trodden mazes of the "moose yard." But when her partners were at home, and she was admitted to the cabin with them, such faint stirrings of ancestral memory were clean forgotten. There was no companionship for Mary like that of Brannigan and Long Jackson, who knew so consummately how to scratch her long, wagging ears. [Pg 273]

But Fate, the hag, growing jealous, no doubt, of Mary's popularity, now turned without so much as a snarl of warning and clawed the happy little household to the bone. In some inexplicable, underhanded way, she managed to set fire to the cabin in the night, when Brannigan and Jackson were snoring heavily. They slept, of course, well clad. They awoke choking, from a nightmare. With unprintable remarks, they leapt from their bunks into a scorching smother of smoke, snatched up instinctively their thick coats and well-greased larrigans, fumbled frantically for the latch, and burst out into the icy, blessed air. Mary was bawling with terror, and bouncing about in her pen as if all the furies were after her.

Brannigan snatched her door open, and she lumbered out with a rush, knocking him into the snow, and went floundering off toward the woods. But in a couple of minutes she was back again and stood trembling behind Long Jackson. [Pg 274]

At first both woodsmen had toiled like demons, dashing the snow in armfuls upon the blazing camp; but the fire, now well established, seemed actually to regard the fluffy snow as so much more congenial fuel. Knowing themselves beaten, they drew back with scorched faces and smarting eyes and stood watching disconsolately the ruin of their home. Mary thrust her long-muzzled head around from behind her partners, and wagged her ears, and stared.

In the face of real catastrophe the New Brunswick backwoodsman does not rave and tear his hair. He sets his teeth and he does a good deal of thinking. Presently Brannigan spoke.

"I noticed ye come away in a hurry, Long!" he remarked drily. "Did ye think to bring anything to eat with ye?"

"Nary bite!" responded Jackson. "I've brung along me belt—it was kind of tangled up wi' the coat—an' me knife's in it, all right." He felt in the pockets of his coat. "Here's baccy, an' me pipe, an' a bit o' string, an' a crooked nail! Wish't I'd know'd enough to eat a bigger supper last night! I hadn't no sort of an appetite." [Pg 275]

"I've got me old *dudheen*," said Brannigan, holding up his stubby black clay. "An' I've got two matches, *jest two*, mind yer! An' that's all I *hev* got."

They filled their pipes thoughtfully and lit them frugally with a blazing splinter from the wood pile.

"Which is nearest," queried Jackson, "Conroy's Upper Camp, or Gillespie's, over to Red Brook?"

"Conroy's, sure," said Brannigan.

"How fur, would ye say?" insisted Jackson, who really knew quite as much about it as his partner.

"In four foot o' soft snow, an' no snowshoes, about ten thousan' mile!" replied Brannigan consolingly.

"Then we'd better git a move on," said Jackson.

"I'm *thinkin'* we ain't got no time to waste starin' at bonfires," agreed Brannigan.

They turned their backs resolutely and headed off through the night and the snow toward Conroy's Camp, many frozen leagues to the south-eastward. Mary, bewildered and daunted, followed close at Brannigan's heels. And they left their blazing home to roar and fume and vomit sparks and flare itself out in the unheeding solitude. [Pg 276]

Accustomed as they were to moving everywhere on snowshoes in the winter, the two woodsmen found it infinitely laborious and exhausting to flounder their way through a four-foot depth of light snow. They took half-mile turns, as near as they could guess, at going ahead to break the way.

Once they thought of putting this job upon Mary. But it was not a success. Mary didn't want to go ahead. Only with assiduous propulsion could they induce her to lead; and then her idea of the direction of Conroy's Camp seemed quite unformed. Sometimes she would insist upon being propelled sideways. So they soon gave up the plan, and let her take her place in the rear, which her humility seemed to demand.

Both men were in good condition, powerful and enduring. But in that savage cold their toil ate up their vitality with amazing speed. With plenty of food to supply the drain, they might have fought on almost indefinitely, defying frost and fatigue in the soundness of their physique. But the very efficiency of their bodily machinery made the demand for fuel come all the sooner. They smoked incessantly to fool their craving stomachs, till their pipes chanced to go out at the same time. Much too provident to use one of their two matches, which might, later on, mean life or death to them, they chewed tobacco till their emptiness revolted at it. [Pg 277]

Then, envious of Mary, who browsed with satisfaction on such twigs and saplings as came in her way, they cut young fir branches, peeled them, scraped the white inner bark, and chewed mouthfuls of the shavings. But it was too early for the sap to be working up, and the stuff was no more eatable than sawdust. They speedily dropped this unprofitable foraging, pulled their belts tighter, and pushed on with the calm stoicism of their breed.

Long Jackson was first to call for a halt. The pallid midwinter dawn was spreading up a sky of icy opal when he stopped and muttered abruptly— [Pg 278]

"If we can't eat, we must rest a spell."

Brannigan was for pushing on, but a glance at Jackson's face persuaded him.

"Give us one o' them two matches o' yourn, Long," said he. "If we don't hev' a fire, we'll freeze, with nothin' in our stommicks."

"Nary match, yet," said Jackson doggedly. "We'll need 'em worse later on."

"Then we'll have to warm ourselves huggin' Mary," laughed Brannigan. It was a sound proposition. They scooped and burrowed a deep pit, made Mary lie down, and snuggled close against her warm flanks, embracing her firmly. Mary had been for some time hankering after a chance to rest her long legs and chew her cud, so she was in no way loath. With head uplifted above her reclining partners, she lay there very contentedly, ears alert and eyes half closed. The only sound on the intense stillness was the slow grind of her ruminating jaws and the deep breathing of the two exhausted men.

Both men slept. But, though Mary's vital warmth was abounding and inexhaustible, the still ferocity of the cold made it perilous for them to sleep long. In a half-hour Brannigan's vigilant subconsciousness woke him up with a start. He roused Jackson with some difficulty. They shook themselves and started on again, considerably refreshed, but ravenously hungry. [Pg 279]

"Whatever would we have done without Mary?" commented Brannigan.

"Ay, ay!" agreed Jackson.

All the interminable day they pushed on stoically through the soft, implacable snow-depths, but stopping ever more and more frequently to rest, as the cold and the toil together devoured their forces.

At night they decided that one of the precious matches must be used. They *must* have a real fire and a real sleep, if they were to have any chance of winning through to Conroy's Camp. They made their preparations with meticulous care, taking no risk. After the deep trench was dug, they made a sound foundation for their fire at one end of it. They gathered birch bark and withered pine shavings and kindlings of dead wood, and gathered a store of branches, cursing grimly over their lack of an axe. Then Jackson scratched one match cautiously. It lit: the dry bark curled, cracked, caught; the clear young flame climbed lithely through the shavings and twigs. Just then an owl, astonished, flew hurriedly through the branches far overhead. He stirred a branch heavily snow-laden. With a soft swish a tiny avalanche slid down, fell upon the fire, and blotted it out. Indignantly the two men pounced upon it and cleared it off, hoping to find a few sparks still surviving. But it was as dead as a last year's mullein stalk.

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Comment was superfluous, discussion unnecessary. Fire, that night, they must have. They scooped a new trench, clear in the open. They used the last match, and they built a fire so generous that for a while they could hardly endure its company in the trench. Mary, indeed, could not endure it, so she stayed outside. They smoked and they talked a little, not of their chances of making Conroy's Camp, but of baked pork and beans, fried steak and onions, and enormous boiled puddings smothered in butter and brown sugar. Then they slept for some hours. When the fire died down Mary came floundering in and lay down, beside them, so they did not feel the growing cold as soon as they should.

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When they woke, they were half frozen and savage with hunger. There were still red coals under the ashes, so they revived the fire, smoked, and got themselves thoroughly warm. Then, with belts deeply drawn in, they resumed their journey in dogged silence. According to the silent calculation of each, the camp was still so far ahead that the odds were all against their gaining it. But they did not trouble to compare their calculations or their hopes. Toward evening Long Jackson began to go to pieces badly. He had a great frame, and immense muscular power, but, being gaunt and stringy, he had no reserves of fat in his hard tissues to draw upon in such an emergency as this. In warm weather his endurance would have been, no doubt, equal to Brannigan's. Now the need of fuel for the inner fire was destroying him. The enforced rests became more and more frequent. At last he grunted—

"I'm the lame duck o' this here outfit, Tom. Ye'd better push on, bein' so much fresher'n me, an' git the boys from the camp to come back for me."

[Pg 282]

Brannigan laughed derisively.

"An' find ye in cold storage, Long! Ye'd be no manner o' use to yer friends *that* way. Ye wouldn't be worth comin' back fer." Jackson chuckled feebly and dropped the subject, knowing he was a fool to have raised it. He felt it was good of Brannigan not to have resented the suggestion as an insult.

"Reach me a bunch o' them birch twigs o' Mary's," he said. Having chewed a few mouthfuls and spat them out, he got up out of the snow and plunged on with a burst of new determination.

"That's where Mary's got the bulge on us," remarked Brannigan. "Ef we could live on birch-browse, now, I'd be so proud I wouldn't call the King my uncle."

"If Mary wasn't our pard, now," said Jackson, "we'd be all right. I'm that hungry I'd eat her as she stands, hair an' all."

Responding to a certain yearning note in Jackson's voice, Mary rubbed her long muzzle against him affectionately and nibbled softly at his sleeve.

Brannigan flushed. He was angry because his partner had voiced a thought which he had been at pains to banish from his own consciousness.

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"Ef it hadn't a' been fer Mary, we wouldn't be alive now," said he sternly. "She's kep' us from freezin'."

"Oh, ye needn't git crusty over what I've said, Tom," replied Jackson, rubbing the long brown ears tenderly. "Mary's jest as much my pardner as she is yourn, an' I ain't no cannibal. We'll see this thing through with Mary, on the square, you bet. *But*—ef 'twasn't *Mary*—that's all I say!"

"Right ye are, Long," said Brannigan, quite mollified. But later in the day, as he glanced at his partner's drawn, sallow-white face, Brannigan's heart misgave him. He loved the confiding Mary quite absurdly; but, after all, as he reminded himself, she was only a little cow moose, while Long Jackson was a Christian and his partner. His perspective straightened itself out.

At last, with a heavy heart, he returned to the subject.

"Ye was right, Long," said he. "Ef we don't make Conroy's Camp purty soon, we'll hev to—well, it'll be up to Mary! Poor Mary! But, after all, she's only a little moose cow. An' I'm sure she'd be proud, ef she could understand!"

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But Jackson was indignant, as he went laboring on, leaning upon Mary's powerful shoulder.

"Not much," he snorted feebly. "Ther' ain't goin' to be no killin' of Mary on my account, an' don't ye forgit it! 'Twouldn't do good, fer I wouldn't tech a sliver of her, not ef I was dyin'. An' it would jest be on-pleasant fer Mary."

Brannigan drew a breath of relief, for this meant at least a postponement of the unhappy hour. "Jest as ye like, Long!" he grunted. But he clenched his teeth on the resolution that, the moment his partner should become too weak for effective protest, Mary should come promptly to the rescue. After all, whatever Mary's own opinion on the subject, it would be an end altogether worthy of her. He drove a whole rabble of whimsical fancies through his mind, as he labored resolutely onward through the snow. But his mittened hand went out continuously to caress Mary's ears, pleading pardon for the treason which it planned. [Pg 285]

The midwinter dark fell early, and fell with peculiar blackness on Jackson's half-fainting eyes. He was leaning now on Mary's shoulders with a heaviness which that young person began to find irksome. She grunted complainingly at times, and made good-natured attempts to shake him off. But she had been well trained, and Brannigan's voice from time to time kept her from revolt. Brannigan was now watching his partner narrowly in the gloom, noting his movements and the droop of his head, since he could no longer make much of his face. He was beginning to feel, with a heavy heart, that the end of poor Mary's simple and blameless career was very close at hand.

He was busily hardening his heart with forced frivolities. He felt his long knife. He slipped his mittens into his pocket that his stroke might be sure, swift, and painless, but his fingers shook a little with strong distaste. Then his eyes, glancing ahead, caught a gleam of yellow light through the tree-trunks. He looked again, to assure himself, and calmly pulled on his mittens. [Pg 286]

"Mary," said he, "you've lost the chance o' yer life. Ye ain't goin' to be no hero, after all!"

"What're ye gruntin' about, Tom?" demanded Jackson dully, aroused by the ring in his partner's voice.

"There's Conroy's Camp right ahead!" cried Brannigan. Then he fell to shouting and yelling for help. Jackson straightened himself, opened his eyes wide, saw the light, and the sudden increase of it as the camp door was flung open, heard answering shouts, and collapsed sprawling on Mary's back. He had kept going for the last few hours on his naked nerve.

It was food Long Jackson wanted—food and sleep. And on the following day he was himself again. At dinner, beside the long plank table built down the middle of the Camp, he and Brannigan devoured boiled beans and salt pork and stewed dried apples, gulped down tins of black tea, and jointly narrated their experience to the interested choppers and teamsters, while Mary, shut up in the stables, munched hay comfortably and wondered what had become of her partners. They were big-boned, big-hearted children, these men of the New Brunswick lumber camps, quick in quarrel, quick in sentiment, but cool and close-lipped in the face of emergency. The "boss" of the camp, however, was of a different type—a driving, hard-eyed Westerner, accustomed to the control of lumber gangs of mixed races, and his heart was as rough as his tongue. In a lull in the talk he said suddenly to the visitors— [Pg 287]

"We're about sick o' salt pork in this camp, mates, an' the fresh beef ain't been sent out from the Settlement yit. Coin's been too heavy. That fat young moose critter o' yourn'll come in mighty handy jest now. What d'ye want fer her as she stands?"

Long Jackson set down his tin of tea with a bump and looked at the speaker curiously. But Brannigan thought it was a joke, and laughed.

"Cow-moose comes high in New Brunswick, Mr. Clancy," said he pleasantly, "as ye must a' been here long enough to know."

"Oh, that's all right," answered the boss; "but there ain't a game-warden within a hundred miles o' this camp, an' I'd risk it if there was. What'll ye take?" [Pg 288]

Brannigan saw that the proposal was a serious one, and his face stiffened.

"Where Mary's concerned," said he, speaking with slow precision, "I guess me an' my pardner here's all the game-wardens that's required. It's close season all year round fer Mary, an' she ain't fer sale at any price."

There was a moment's silence, broken only by a shuffle of tin plates on the table. Then Long Jackson said—

"An' that's a fact, Mr. Clancy."

The boss made a noise of impatience between his teeth. He was not used to being opposed, but he could not instantly forget that these visitors were his guests.

"Well," said he, "there ain't no property right in a moose, anyhow!"

"*We* think ther' be," replied Brannigan, "an' we know that there little moose-cow's our'n an' *not* fer sale at no price, what-*so-ever!*"

The boss was beginning to get angry at this incomprehensible attitude of his guests. [Pg 289]

"Ther' ain't *no* property rights, I tell ye, in any wild critter o' these here woods. This critter's in my stables, an' I could jest *take* her, seein' as my hands needs her, without no talk o' payin' fer the privilege. But you two boys has been burnt out an' in hard luck, so I'll give ye the price o' good beef for the critter. Ye kin take it or leave it. But I'm going to kinder requisition the critter."

As he spoke he rose from his seat, as if to go and carry out his purpose on the instant. There had been already growls of protest from the men of the camp, who understood, as he could not, the sentiment of their guests; but he gave no heed to it. His seat was furthest from the door. But before he had taken two strides, Long Jackson was at the door, and had snatched up a heavy steel-shod "peevy." Having not yet quite recovered, he was still a bit excitable for a woodsman.

"Damn you, Jim Clancy, none o' yer butcherin'!" he shouted. Clancy sprang forward with an oath, but right in his path rose Brannigan, quiet and cold.

"Ye better hold on, Mr. Clancy," said he, "an' think it over. It's that little moose-critter what's jest seen us through, an' I guess we'll see her through, too, Jackson an' me!" [Pg 290]

His tone and manner were civility itself, but his big lean fist was clenched till the knuckles went white.

Clancy paused. He was entirely fearless, whether it were in a fight or a log-jam. But he was no fool, and his vocation forced him to think quickly. He realized suddenly that in the temper of his visitors was a resolution which would balk at nothing. It would do him no good to have killing in the camp, even if he were not himself the victim. All this he saw at one thought, in the fraction of a flash. He saw also that his men would be against him. He choked back his wrath and cast about for words to save his face. And here one of his choppers came tactfully to his aid.

"We ain't wantin' fresh meat so bad as all that, Mr. Clancy," he suggested, with a grin. "Guess we'd rather wait for the beef."

"Aye, aye!" chimed in several voices pacifically.

Clancy pulled himself together and spoke lightly. "I s'pose ye're right, lads, an' it was yer own feed I was thinking of. If ye're satisfied, I must be. An' I was wrong, o' course, to treat our visitors so rough, an' try force *any* kind o' a bargain on them. I ax their pardon." [Pg 291]

Taking the pardon for granted, he went back to his seat.

Brannigan, who had never lost grip of himself for a moment, sat down again with a good-natured grin. A murmur of satisfaction went round the table, and knives once more clattered on tin plates.

Long Jackson, by the door, hesitated and glared piercingly at the boss, who refrained from noticing.

At length he set down his weapon and came back to the table. In a minute or two his appetite returned, and he could resume his meal.

Out in the barn, in the smell of hay and horses, Mary lay tranquilly waving her ears, staring at her unfamiliar company, and chewing her comfortable cud, untroubled with any intuitions of the fate which had twice within the last few hours so narrowly passed her by.

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