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Bonnie Prince Fetlar: The Story of a Pony and His Friends
, by Marshall Saunders**

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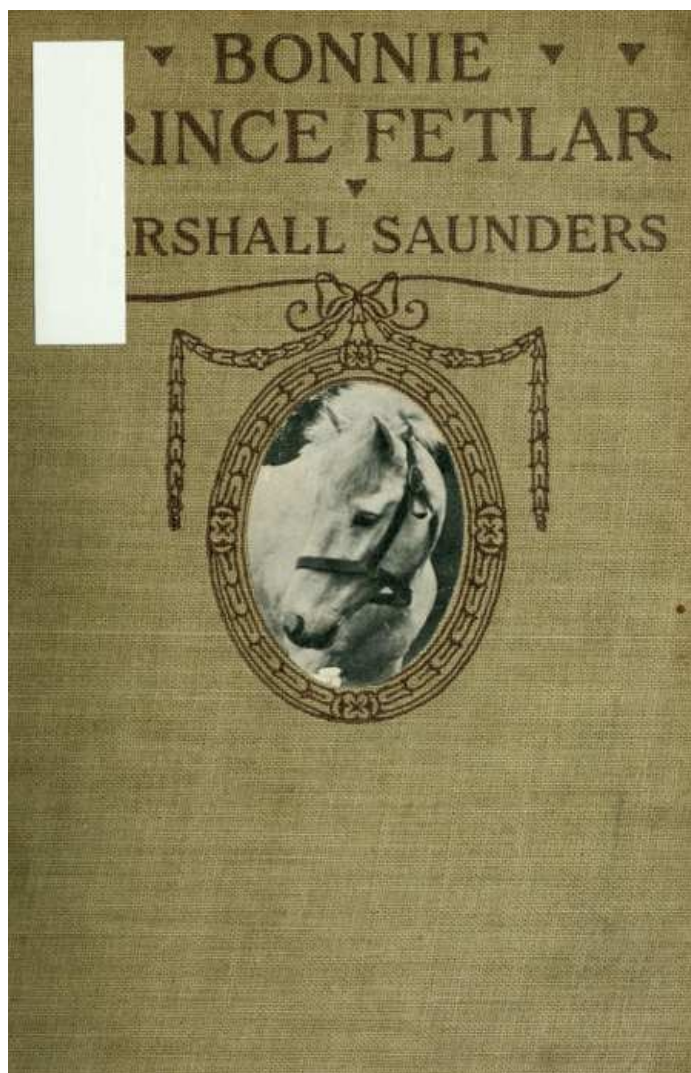
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Transcriber's Note:

Obvious typographic errors have been corrected.



BONNIE PRINCE FETLAR

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MARSHALL SAUNDERS

[Pg ii]

Come, walk the open road with us,
Far out beyond the town,
Where all the winds of Arcady
Go wandering up and down.
If problems vex, if cares perplex,
O leave them all behind.
Step lightly here, with vision clear,
And free, inquiring mind.

LILIAN LEVERIDGE.

BONNIE PRINCE FETLAR

[Pg iii]

THE STORY OF A PONY
AND HIS FRIENDS

BY
MARSHALL SAUNDERS
AUTHOR OF "BEAUTIFUL JOE," "THE
WANDERING DOG," ETC.



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BONNIE PRINCE FETLAR

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BONNIE PRINCE FETLAR

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CHAPTER I THE BOY WITH THE PALE EYES

One day early this last summer I was feeling rather puzzled and surprised.

I am a black Shetland pony brought up mostly in cities and lovely open country places, and here was I shut up in a wild hilly spot miles from any human being except a few settlers.

I wasn't worried. I am a middle-aged pony and have seen enough of life to know that it does not pay to get stirred up about mysteries for invariably time straightens them all out.

I was just curious and amused and a little bored. No one was going to hurt me. I was sure of that. I am worth a great deal of money, but why I had been toted from down South to New York, and from New York to a Canadian stock farm and from the stock farm away up here to this out-of-the-way place in the woods was a problem to me.

I didn't like being shut up this fine day, and I didn't understand the reason for it. In the distance were children, a whole flock of them giggling and carrying on and probably crazy to get on my back, but they were being kept away from me.

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"Well," I thought, "I'd better take a little nap while I'm waiting for this tangle to straighten itself out," and I was just turning my head to the wall of my log-house stable and drooping my head when there was a slight noise from the direction of the doorway.

At first I was not going to look round. I thought, "Oh! it's only one of the calves from the barnyard. They've been gaping at me ever since I came. What's the use of looking at them. Not one of them understands a Shetland pony."

However, I did at last turn my head. Anything to pass away the time in this dull place. To my surprise, it was not a calf but a boy that stood in the doorway, evidently a city boy for he was smartly dressed and not clad in overalls like the children in the distance, or poor clothes like the children in the few log cabins we had passed on the way to this lonely place.

He was a white-faced lad with light brown hair and pale eyes. I never saw such eyes before except in the head of a cat. They were greenish in hue and they grew bigger and darker as he stared at me. He seemed to be looking right through me at something in the background, and, if I hadn't known there wasn't a thing in the cabin except a couple of deer mice that he couldn't possibly see, I would have looked behind me to find out what he was staring at.

His expression was all right. I divide boys into two classes—kind and cruel. This lad was good-hearted whatever else he might be, and he wouldn't hurt a pony.

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If he was from the city he spoke my language, and I advanced a bit toward him and stretched out

my neck agreeably.

To my amazement he gave a leap backward.

"Oh! excuse me," he stammered, "I'm a bit cut up. I've had a long trip—I didn't know but what you were going to bite."

I curled my lip in a pony smile. Who was he and where did he come from, not to know that a Shetland pony is the soul of good nature. How different he was from those brown-faced young ones outside who looked as if they feared neither man nor beast.

Well, I could do nothing more. It was for him to make the advances, and I examined him more carefully.

He was very much excited. His hands were clenched, his young breast was heaving, and he had red spots over his cheek bones. I believed that he had run up here because he thought he was going to cry.

I have had many young masters and my rôle is to keep quiet at first and see how they treat me. So I just took a nip of hay, and gave him time to get his nerves together for they seemed to be at pretty loose ends.

He was shuddering now. What was the trouble? I looked over my shoulder and saw that someone had been killing a sheep and had hung up its streaked skin on the logs. Well, men have to eat sheep and if they kill them mercifully I suppose there is no harm in it, but what a sensitive lad this must be. I rather liked this tenderness in him. It's hard to die, even if you're only a sheep.

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I whinnied sympathetically, and he said quite nicely and as if I were a person, "You have a very good place here."

I tried not to curl my lip again. If he could have seen the handsomely appointed quarters I had been used to—the paved floors and fine stalls! Poor lad! where had he been brought up to think this rough log cabin of some early backwoodsman a suitable place for a Shetland pony?

However I was not complaining. I was comfortable enough in the mild July weather. I have been used to roughing it in a nice way with some of my rich masters, but I certainly wouldn't like to put in a winter here with those daylight chinks between the big logs.

I wished the boy would let me out. What a stupid he was not to take me for a good gallop. Advancing very cautiously lest I should frighten him again, I pressed a shoulder against the half door of the cabin.

He understood. Very cautiously he lifted the bar, and creeping like a house mouse, not leaping like my deer mice, I placed myself beside him. Now he could see that I wasn't a lion or a tiger to eat him up.

"Pony-Boy," he said in a trembling voice, "what do you want?"

"I want exercise, you young snail," I tried to tell him by starting slowly up the gentle slope of the barnyard, and then turning to look round at him.

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The sheep were pasturing away up on the hill. I would lead him toward them for I guessed that he would not be afraid of them. Those lively children in the distance would probably jolly the life out of him.

His green eyes glistened. He understood me once more, and a most beautiful smile broke over his face. That smile was like the opening of a window in his boy soul. He was a queer acting lad, but he had—Oh! I'm only a pony and I can't describe it. Anyway it was something that makes us animals worship certain people. If he chose, he could be my master. I would certainly be his slave.

I tossed my head and acted quite frisky. "Come on, boy," I tried to say to him, "be a sport. Have a little run. 'Twill bring some color to your pale cheeks."

"Stop a minute," he called suddenly, "I want to get my bearings."

I stared at him as he stood—delicate, eager, his pale eyes glistening with some new emotion.

"We are on the borders of a long beautiful lake," he said, "which is shaped like an hour-glass."

I didn't know what an hour-glass was, but I guessed that it was like the egg-glasses I have seen cooks use when I've been looking in kitchen windows to watch them time the boiling of eggs.

"We are at the waist of the glass," he said, "and all round us are vast hills clad with forests. Here a clearing has been made, and someone has built a beautiful long low house with ivy-clad verandas."

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How nicely the boy talked and how prettily he waved his slender arm, and I kept on gazing at him in admiration.

"Also," he went on, "there is a smooth lawn about the house with flower beds and shrubbery, a driveway leading to the road along the lake and another driveway leading to a big barn painted red with a queer high round thing at the end."

That was a silo to store green food for the cattle, but I could not tell him.

"Beside the big red barn," he said, "is a little brown barn and a number of out-buildings. I don't know what they are. It is a fine place anyway, and must, I think, belong to my father's friend who invited me here—now let us go up to this wide pasture where you were leading me."

I gladly went ahead of him and he was following me quite nicely when suddenly he stopped.

"Pony-Boy," he said, "I hate these forests with their sour-faced trees."

This was a new thought to me and I turned it over in my mind.

"They've got brains in their tossing heads," he said. "They used to be wicked giants and some great power turned them into these wooden things with waving arms that beg us to come in and be choked to death."

What kind of a boy was this, I wondered. He talked something like a girl and something like a lad who had always had his nose in a story-book. Well, he wasn't dull anyway. I love to have boys talk to me. Some of them treat me as if I were an animated rocking-horse with no brains at all. So I stepped along quite happily while he went on talking to himself. [Pg 15]

"I wonder why my father let me come here. This bird of mystery has certainly flown to one queer place. The whole trip was owlish. After I left the cities there were forests like these, then lakes and rivers and more lakes and rivers. Then that awful drive in a democrat over rocks and rills and corduroy roads. My bones are most racked apart."

So that was why he didn't want to ride me, I thought. Poor lad! he was tired.

"Pony-Boy," he said, laying a timid finger on the tip of one of my ears, "I'm not afraid exactly, but I don't like spooky woods and queer silent waiting people. That old settler who drove me in wouldn't open his mouth and his name is Talker—what do you think of that?"

I was amused. This queer man had brought me in the evening before tied to the tail of his cart. He had taken me from a steamer that came to a big lake, and all the way in he had said nothing but "Get up" to his old grey mare, who had not deigned to pass the time of day with me. They were a pair—but I must listen to the boy who was speaking quite earnestly now.

"Why in the name of old King Log did my father send me to spend the summer in this eerie place? Is there no country air south of these wads of Canadian forest?" [Pg 16]

I shook my head. How could I tell anything about his father? I had never seen him. He must be a peculiar man though, if his son did not dare to ask him the reason for things.

The lad was venturing now to lay his hand on my head. "Pony-Boy, I've never had a pet as big as you. I live in a city, and my friends are small creatures like dogs and cats and mice and rats."

As if he thought I was wondering whether he had no boy friends he went on slowly, "My father says that human beings may go back on you, but an animal never does."

I pawed the grass thoughtfully. This boy had been brought up in a queer way. I'm sorry for boys and girls when they're puzzled and unhappy—boys especially because I've been more with them. What this lad wanted to do now was to get his mind off himself. He was travelling about right inside of his little home cage.

I cautiously touched my muzzle to his shoulder, then glanced at the sheep.

He was pretty quick to respond and broke into a nice boyish laugh, but a rather subdued one as if he had been hushed up a good bit.

"Isn't he a caution," he said, pointing to the old ram, who, after one terrified look at us two strangers, was leading the ewes in and out among the magnificent old trees scattered about the hillside.

"He's going to hide them in the forest back there," said the boy. "He doesn't trust us. Poor animals—they run no risks." [Pg 17]

I was delighted. This boy was a brother to us of the lower creation, but why had he been afraid of me? Possibly it was because he was not used to being with animals, though in his soul he loved them.

"I'm so tired," he said suddenly, and he flopped down on a big flat rock which was very pleasant and warm in the sunshine.

"*Squattez vous*, Pony," he said, and to be agreeable I lay down, for I have not the objection to doubling my legs under me that some members of the horse family have.

"I'm sure out of the world," he was murmuring as he gazed at the blue waters of the long lake spread out before us. "Of course I've seen mountains and hills in the distance before, but I never got right up among them. Pony-Boy, I'm the queerest kid you ever saw."

"You sure are," I thought, but of course I could say nothing.

His attention wandered from the lake to me. "I've often seen ponies like you in parks and on the streets, but I've never been so near one. Oh! I wish I had a pony of my own, but I suppose you

cost a good deal of money."

I certainly did, but there was no reason why he should know just how much. I don't like to hear a lad counting up the cost of everything.

"I shouldn't think a settler away up here could afford you," he said. "You look like A, number one stock." [Pg 18]

I twitched my ears backward and forward as I have a way of doing when I'm puzzled. Old Talker couldn't own this place. I had my suspicions that the whole thing was the fad of some rich man. My log cabin was the only rough thing on the place. The barns, hen-houses, ice-house, root-house, carriage-house and the flower garden in front and the vegetable garden at the back were as up-to-date as if they were right down in my original home in the State of New York.

These sheep running away from us were of standard stock, and the evening before I had seen a fine herd of Holstein cows and some of the best bred pigs I had ever come across.

Someone was trying an experiment up on these Highlands. Perhaps it was the tall man I had just seen coming out of the house and joining the children.

The boy did not see him. He was lying on the rock, his face propped on his hands.

"You're talking with your ears, Pony," he said. "I'll bet you want to know all about me—who I am, where I come from, and why in the mischief I came up here. Well, as I told you, I'm in a class by myself, for my father won't allow me to associate with anyone but himself and our two old servants, John and Margie. Ever since I was a little boy, someone has been trying to kidnap me. Now what do you think of that?"

CHAPTER II

THE MAN AND THE BOY

[Pg 19]

I examined the boy carefully. Now I thought of it, though he was stylish, he was not handsomely dressed. His clothes were of good, but not fine material, his shoes were well-worn, his blue belted coat had odd buttons on it. He did not look to me like a rich man's child. He seemed more like the son of some professional man only moderately well off—what did he mean by the kidnapping story?

His green eyes were flashing. "I don't know the reason for it, Pony-Boy, for my father never talks much to me, but he never lets me go out alone, and I'm not allowed to speak to strangers. He's a criminal lawyer you know, and perhaps some bad man he has sent to prison thinks he owes him a grudge."

I was a bit uneasy about this boy. Before this I had had young creatures tell me the story of their lives and it was always because they had no sympathetic human ear turned toward them. So now I took on a thoughtful air as this lad went on.

"Lend me your pony ears—I was born in the great big wonderful country of the United States of America and I'd lay down my life for Old Glory."

He scrambled to his feet as he spoke, saluted an imaginary flag and recited the pledge to it. [Pg 20]

I, too, got up pretty quick, for I am an American pony and have played many national games with children in which I always bow and scrape whenever the flag is mentioned.

As I stepped gaily round and round doing a march step and whinnying with feeling, the boy fell into an ecstasy.

"Do you mean to say you are a fellow-countryman," he cried, "an American pony citizen in this strange forest land?" and in his emotion he forgot his fear of me and throwing his arms round my neck gave me a good hug.

I was thunderstruck. In all my life before and with all my experience with boys I had never felt the wet tears of any of them against my smooth neck. Poor lad! What could be the matter with him?

He was crying in a queer way—quietly and as if he were afraid someone might hear him. Then in a flash he flung up his head and dashed the tears from his eyes.

"Excuse me, Pony-Boy. You'll find me an utter coward. Let's think of our country. Hurrah for the Stars and Stripes. Let's sing a verse." Then he opened his young mouth,

"My Country 'tis of thee
Sweet land of liberty
Of thee I sing."

In amazement, I stopped my processing round the rock. I never in my life had heard such a sweet even flow of song from the mouth of any living being, and I had once belonged to the son of a [Pg 21]

famous concert singer and had in her home heard many beautiful voices—why! it was like the lovely upward gush of a fountain—clear, pure and exquisite.

Even a catbird sitting near by in a maple put his head on one side to listen and then turned to a young goldfinch who was about to fly in terror from him and motioned him to remain. Cattie recognised the beauty of the boy's voice, and having no bird of his own kind near wanted to gossip with the goldfinch about it.

As I stood entranced, I noticed that the boy as he sang the whole of this one of our national songs kept looking over his shoulder as if he were afraid someone might interrupt him.

When he dropped on the rock again I went and stood over him.

"Pony-Boy," he said, "I'm not allowed to do that at home. I can only whistle."

Not allowed to sing with a voice like that, and I was just turning this over in my pony mind when my new friend sprang to his feet like a shot, his eyes wild and terrified.

"Pony-Boy—what is that awful sound?"

I rubbed my head against his shoulder. Poor lad! what nerves.

"I know it must be some kind of a bird," he went on, "for the sound came from the lake, but what a yell. You'd think a child was being murdered."

I knew loons, for I had seen and heard them on lakes in our own country. Probably the boy had never been in very lonely places. How I wished I could tell him that those were merely two old gossipy daddy loons accompanying their mates to their respective home bays on the lake. They were shrieking the news of the day to each other. Some fish ducks had been trying to settle near them and they had been biting at them and trying to drive them away. Then one Mrs. Loon had lost one of her downy young loonies. She blamed Mr. Red Fox from Merry-Tongue River—and what a blessing it was that there were so few campers about. Their beloved lake was really quite quiet with the settlers only.

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They liked solitude, they did, and they yelled till the boy was nearly crazy and whipped his fingers in his ears.

How queer! The average boy likes noise and he had better get his ears unstopped for the big man was coming up the hill.

I tried to warn the boy, but he did not understand me and had to fly into another spasm of fright when the big man touched him on the shoulder.

He was a strapping middle-aged man in corduroys and cowboy hat with holes punched in it. His face was brown and kind and his eyes were black and piercing.

These eyes were fixed on the boy in an extraordinary manner. That boy meant something to him in a heart way. His eyes did not falter, but his mouth trembled slightly. Suddenly he held out both hands, "Welcome to Devering Farm, my lad."

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My pale-eyed boy put both his slim white hands into the man's big brown ones. "You're Mr. Devering, of course—my father's friend."

"And you are Dallas Duff—my boy, I have longed for this day."

"That's very kind in you, Sir," said young Dallas, but the man had turned suddenly to me.

His eyes were quite misty now and I am sure he could not see me very well, though he said feelingly, "And you, Pony, welcome too. I haven't seen you since the day of the Cobourgh Races."

Now I knew who he was—the kind man who had felt me all over and stroked me so kindly. So he had remembered me and had had me sent to this lovely cool summer place.

I nuzzled his coat buttons, then I followed his gaze, which was riveted on the boy.

"Sir," our young lad was saying excitedly, "my father told me I could tell you anything. That's the first time he ever said that to me about any living person."

"I appreciate his confidence," said the big man, wrinkling his eyebrows in an amused way.

"First of all, sir, please tell me why my father sent me here. I've never been allowed to leave home before unless John or Margie went with me."

"Suppose you ask him when he comes up here later."

The boy almost shouted. "Is my father coming here?"

"I hope so. He needs a rest. He sticks too closely to work."

[Pg 24]

"That's so, sir. He often falls asleep when I'm sitting in the library with him evenings. He's a wonderful man."

"Indeed he is—I knew him before you did."

"Did you, sir—where?"

"In Toronto—when he went there as a young man to study Canadian law."

"So he's coming here," said the boy musingly. "Will John and Margie come, too?"

"I dare say."

"I don't think he could get on without them. He likes Margie's cooking and John looks after his clothes."

"Well, I hope you'll see them all before autumn— Now tell me how you used to amuse yourself in that big dreary town house of yours."

"Of course I had my studies, sir."

"Did you find them interesting?"

"Some of them. I had a fine young tutor all these years—a girl tutor."

"Did you never go to school?"

"No, sir."

"Then you don't know much about boys."

"Not much—I know some on our street to nod to. Then John sometimes takes me to ball games, only when it is warm. When it's cold, he takes me to the movies."

The big man frowned, then he asked, "Had you any pets?"

"I always had a dog."

"Why didn't you bring him?"

[Pg 25]

"My old Toby died last week."

The boy's voice broke and the man changed the subject quickly. "You'll find it cooler here than in Boston."

"Oh, very much. I'm almost shivering in this suit. Margie thought it would be warm enough. She's been like my mother, sir, since my own died."

The man smiled. I thought this a strange thing when the boy spoke of such a sad thing as losing his mother, but later on I had an explanation.

"Margie watches me as a cat would a mouse," said the boy. "She doesn't want that kidnapper to get me."

The boy spoke proudly, and Mr. Devering said almost irritably, "Oh! forget that, my boy. There's nothing in it now."

The boy looked surprised. "And may I go out alone now and speak to strangers?"

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Devering hurriedly.

"Then why," began Dallas, but Mr. Devering interrupted him. "All that is over. Nobody wants to carry you off. Please put it out of your mind. You are of no consequence to anyone except your family."

The boy's face fell, and I saw that he was a bit disappointed. He had been making a little hero of himself. Now he had found out that he wasn't worth carrying away.

I was sorry for him, and I saw that there was some mystery here to be explained in the future. I have lived in many interesting families and I love mysteries and histories. I had something now to turn over in my pony mind. This place would be no longer dull to me, but I must listen to Mr. Devering, who was speaking again. "You have had a peculiar life up to this, but I think it will be more normal in future and I may say that I have for a long time wished you to come here."

[Pg 26]

"Do you live here all the time?" asked the boy.

"Yes, this is our home, though we travel a good deal. How do you like it?"

The boy seemed to find it hard to answer. At last he said, "Do you wish me to speak politely or truthfully?"

"Truthfully, by all means."

"Well, sir—I find it ghostly and lonely."

Mr. Devering repeated the words, "Ghostly and lonely." Then he broke into a hearty laugh. "And I'm lonely only when I'm in cities pushing my way among crowds of weary people who don't care a rap whether I'm dead or alive."

"Do you love the trees, sir?" asked Dallas, "these startling green monsters?"

"I worship them, boy. They come next the animals with me. This one here is Little Sister," and he threw his arm round a slender silver birch. "And that maple," said Mr. Devering, pointing to the one where the catbird was still sitting. "Doesn't it look like a slender young living thing swaying

there in the wind? See how it bends its pretty head and waves its green arms toward us. Can't you throw it a pleasant glance, boy?" [Pg 27]

I was amused with the play of the boy's brown eyebrows. "I might love a maple," he said, "but those big pines and stiff spruces——" and he shivered.

"My soldier brothers," said Mr. Devering, "so straight and sturdy, guarding my property and reaching up their heads to heaven. Do you know what they are begging for, boy?"

"No, sir."

"Rain, rain and always more rain. Have you been told what happens in countries like China where foolish people have been allowed to cut down the trees?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said the boy. "I remember now. My teacher used to tell me trees keep the soil moist and attract rainfalls. Oh! I don't mind a few, sir, but these endless forests appal me."

"You'll get over that. I'll soon have you a regular backwoodsman. Come up Deer Trail with me now and help me look for a missing lamb."

I had heard the boy say that he was lame from his long drive, but he did not tell this to the man, and prepared to follow him quite bravely.

"May this little beastie go too, sir?" he asked, pointing to me.

"Certainly, the more beasts the merrier for me."

CHAPTER III

THREE FRIENDS ON DEER TRAIL

[Pg 28]

I trotted after them and the boy looking over his shoulder at me said, "Is he yours, sir?"

"Yes, I got him as a present for a boy."

"One of your boys, sir—that is, if those children over there belong to you."

Mr. Devering fell behind Dallas and made a forbidding gesture with his hand toward the children. I guessed that he was keeping them back so that he might for some reason or other have this lad to himself for awhile.

"Yes," he said, catching up to Dallas, "those are my children."

"How many, sir?"

"Six."

"And they have a mother?"

"Oh! yes."

The boy's head was drooping thoughtfully. "There is a big brick house next door to us in the city," he said. "Every night I look across the lane and see the children going to bed. The maid undresses them and then the mother comes in and takes them in her arms and rocks and sings to them. So whenever I think of my mother there is a lovely sound of singing in my ears. Was she a fine singer, sir?"

"She was," said the man softly. Then he asked, "Does your father never speak of her, nor those faithful servants John and Margie?" [Pg 29]

"Never, sir; I used to ask questions about her, but they looked so sad that I gave it up. I fear her death had something painful about it."

Mr. Devering turned his eyes away from the boy toward me, they looked very troubled. Then he spoke quietly, "Some day I will take it upon myself to tell you all about your dear mother."

"You knew her?" cried the boy.

"Very well."

Dallas stopped short. His wonderful pale eyes were blazing. "You—knew—my—mother," he said in a low trembling voice.

"I have said so," remarked Mr. Devering quietly.

"I am glad I came," he said slowly. "Some boys have mothers, some have not. Some boys miss their mothers, some do not. I tell you, sir, it is a sore in my soul, a dreadful painful sore that I have no mother. If she had lived I would be like other boys."

The man put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "My lad," he said, "a great deal lies between you and me, but this is not the time to thrash things out. A day will come—later on."

It went to my heart to see the young lip tremble. Boys do not like to wait. "I hope—I hope," he

muttered to himself, "that the day will soon come. If a boy has had a mother, he should know about her. I—I have not even a little picture of my dear mother, who of course was beautiful and good and loved her boy as no one else does."

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Mr. Devering looked at him anxiously, then he said, "To come back to the pony—he is not for one of my boys, he is for a guest."

"Oh, indeed," said Dallas absently. "So you expect another boy."

"Not this summer—the pony is for your use."

"For me!" he exclaimed. "Is this a joke?"

"Decidedly not. My children all have ponies. I wished you to have one."

"For my very own," he gasped, "this wonderful creature," and he suddenly threw his arm over my back as I pulled up closer to him, feeling oh! so glad that this gentle lad was to be my master.

"For your own if you treat him properly. I never give an animal outright till I see how it is used. If you neglect Pony, I shall take him back. If you are good to him, he belongs to you."

The boy was so excited that he could scarcely breathe. One trembling hand remained on my back, the other clutched his crumpled shirt front. "You are a prince among men," he said at last in a choked voice.

"I wish I were," said Mr. Devering humbly. "I am only a commoner."

The boy flung up his handsome head and looked at the blue sky. "Margie is most religious. She said Providence was guiding my steps here."

"Let us hope so," said Mr. Devering reverently; "I, too, believe in Providence, which is another name for God."

"Margie goes much to church and sings many hymns," said the boy.

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"I heard you singing just now," observed Mr. Devering.

My master looked frightened. "Did you mind?"

"Not a bit—why should I?"

"My father never allows me to sing at home."

Again a dark look came over the man's face. He might like my young master's father, but he evidently did not approve of all he did.

"You may sing just as much as you wish here," he said; "singing is the cry of the soul, and I hope you will teach my youngsters to warble half as well as you do—see, they are running up a flag for you," and he pointed to a flagpole on the lawn in front of the house.

"Old Glory!" cried the boy, and taking off his cap he waved it in the air; "but what is that flag they are putting above it?"

"The Union Jack—you are in the British Empire now."

"So I am—I forgot it, for you Canadians are so much like us Americans. We're great friends, sir, in our two countries now, aren't we?"

"Rather, especially since the war, though there are bad men who are trying to drive a wedge between English speaking nations."

"Why a wedge, sir?"

"To split us apart."

"Oh! I see—united we stand, divided we fall."

"And if Great Britain and America fall apart, lad, with us go the weaker peoples of the earth."

"I shall always be against the wedge, sir," said the boy earnestly. "I like the good old Union Jack, also I like the Lion of Old England. He's a noble beast."

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"Isn't he, and can't he roar when anyone touches any of his cubs? You must not forget to pay tribute to him, boy."

"Now in what way have I offended the Lion?" asked the boy, and for the first time I heard his whimsical laugh, which was the one finishing touch needed to brighten his thoughtful, almost sad, young personality.

"You sang one of your own national songs, boy," he exclaimed, "and never piped a note for the country offering you hospitality."

"A thousand pardons, Sir Lion," cried the boy, "here goes for the Empire," and from his beautiful lips came the strains of "God Save the King."

"A sweet apology," exclaimed the man; "boy, that goes to my heart. Once years ago I knew a

young singer—oh! you take me back."

"The young singer being my mother," said the boy quickly.

The man bit his lip. Then he nodded his head and walked on. Presently he said in quite a matter-of-fact voice, "This pasture back of the house is for the sheep. They nibble closer than cows."

"And the grass is slippery," said the boy, "and I am sliding about on it."

"I will get you some proper country boots with nails," said Mr. Devering.

"Thank you, sir," said Dallas gratefully.

"You call me sir," said Mr. Devering quite wistfully. "Do you then find me so old?"

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"Oh, no, no, I feel as if you were a big brother very much older and wiser than I am."

I had never heard a boy talk like this before, but it seemed to please the man, for he grew quite red and happy.

"It would gratify me very much," he said, "if you and I could be chums as your Dad and I were."

"Let's be pals," said the boy; "you seem quite young in your ways."

"Do I seem younger than your dad?"

"My father is magnificent," said the boy seriously, "quite magnificent, but he says he can't call back his youth. It's slipped away from him. I remember when he said it. We were in his library. He sank 'way down in his big chair, his face was pale, his eyes were closed, I thought he had gone to sleep. Then he rose up and called out, 'Son, I'd give all my books if I could remember what I was thinking about when I was your age. It's all gone.'"

Mr. Devering looked serious. "You boys don't know how much we men sympathise with you and long to get down to your level, but the big world catches us and life is strenuous, and——"

His voice trailed off into silence and young Dallas said eagerly, "Let's have this wonderful pony for a pal too, and let's have some fancy names. Do you like baseball, sir, and football?"

"Immensely."

Dallas was enchanted. I saw he was one of those pale faced boys that light up suddenly. "Let's have some nicknames just for ourselves," he cried, "like boys in books."

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"All right."

"You'll be Captain 'cause you know so much more about things than I do. I'll be Sub, and what will Pony be?"

"Babe," suggested Mr. Devering, "after Babe King, the great home-run hitter."

"Fine!" cried Dallas, "Captain, Sub and Babe"; then he flourished his arm, "Three cheers for Captain, Sub and Babe, hip, hip, hooray. We're the pals of—— What's the name of this lake?" and he stopped his shouting, which was quiet and unboyish, and turned inquiringly to Mr. Devering.

"Fawn Lake."

"We're the pals of Fawn Lake—three good pals and true."

I loved my nickname, which was flattering to my middle-age, and I stepped more quickly after the man and the boy.

"Hurry up, Sub," Mr. Devering was saying. "I thought we'd be half way up the trail by this time."

The boy's heart was so full of happiness and he had so thoroughly forgotten his fatigue that he suddenly broke out into song.

"Sing out, sing out," said Mr. Devering, "no one will chide you here."

So my young master kept on singing,

"Gamarra is a dainty steed
Strong, black, and of a noble breed,
Full of fire and full of bone,
With all his line of fathers known."

until he sang himself right into a snake fence.

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"Gee!" he exclaimed, "what am I to do now?"

Mr. Devering smiled, put out his two powerful hands and swung him over.

"Splendiferous!" cried Dallas, "but how will Babe get over?"

How Mr. Devering laughed at him. "Boy," he said, "allow me to introduce you to Bonnie Prince Fetlar of Cobourg Park."

"Now what do you mean by that, Captain?"

"Wait and see."

Of course I took the fence like a bird, then I stood still and waited for the boy to hear my story.

"Sometimes," said Mr. Devering, "it is the jockey that wins the race and sometimes the horse wins the race without the jockey. Two ponies were entered in the pony race at a fair I attended a few weeks ago. Both riders rode bareback. Half way round the track the lad who was riding this demure beast went over his head. Pony went calmly on minus his rider. He stayed with the race like a little man, overhauled all the other ponies and passed the judges' stand a two lengths winner.

"The grand stand went mad—'First money for the riderless pony!' they roared, but the judges judged otherwise, and the race had to be run over again.

"Once more it began, and once more the boy jockey was unhorsed and went flying over the animal's head. Again pony galloped ahead of his leading rival and took first place. The other jockey was determined to win, and neck and neck the two ponies drew near the line. Then didn't our riderless friend here sprint and win the race by a length."

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Young Dallas was almost beside himself with admiration and interest. "Of course," he cried, "our brave little lad got first money."

"The grand stand was with you, pal, but the judges awarded the money to the pony that came second with its rider."

"Foul play, foul play," cried my young master, "my beauty, my pride," and throwing his arms round my neck he hugged me for the second time that afternoon. "I'm proud of you, my handsome young prince—Why has he such an odd name as Fetlar, Captain?"

"Because Fetlar is the island in the Shetlands where Arabian ponies have been crossed with the native breed. Look at this little fellow. He is a wonderful combination of his gentle Scottish forbears and the fine Arabian stock. Note his brilliant prominent eyes, his wise air, refined bearing and short, strong neck."

"Arabian blood," repeated the boy, and he began to repeat in a dreamy voice, the lines of "The Arab to His Favourite Steed."

"My beautiful! my beautiful! that standest meekly by
With thy proudly arched and glossy neck and dark and fiery eye."

Mr. Devering with a deeply gratified air listened to the boy as he repeated the whole of the touching poem, then he turned on his heel and led us to the smooth wide road running along the edge of the lake.

Dallas was staring at his retreating back in a strange way, and suddenly he ran after him.

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"I have a queer feeling about you, sir. You don't seem a stranger to me. You call up something that happened when I was a little boy."

"What was it?" asked Mr. Devering over his shoulder.

"I was walking with Margie on the Common in Boston. A big man came up to us. He sat down on a park bench and took me on his knee. He had toys in his pocket for me. Were you the man, sir?"

"I was," said Mr. Devering, "and that was only one of many visits, but come on, lad, we are losing time."

Dallas shook his young head with a puzzled air and followed him.

I trotted gaily after, my heart as gay as a lark's. After two long months with a horse dealer, I was once more in a family with boys and girls that I love so dearly. What fun I should have watching them and wondering why they do the queer things they do.

"Oh! you hurry-upper," my boy was saying now, "you beat this Sub."

He was addressing Mr. Devering, whose broad back was just visible in the dim green distance, and suddenly picking up his young heels he ran after him.

Of course I ran after the boy, and as I ran I looked about me.

This was a peculiar trail we were on. We had left the nice wide road and had branched off toward the western hills and the afternoon sun. At first there had been grand old maples and beeches standing in groups about pastures each side of us where the black and white Holstein cows were feeding. Now, however, the pastures had given place to dense evergreens which made my young master shudder. There were masses of them standing very close to each other and holding stiff arms across our trail. Precious little of the sun did we see, and it was necessary to keep one's eyes on the path which wound up and down into dark green hollows where beds of maidenhair fern flourished, or up to hilly spots where rock ferns grew in patches on enormous boulders.

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Little brownish streamlets ran across our track, and the boy was always jumping over or going on

stepping stones to keep his feet from getting wet.

Suddenly Mr. Devering paused. "Sub," he called back, "this used to be an old road leading up to a farm on Lonesome Hill. Mr. Talker, who brought you in, lived here. It was a mile from our main road and it was a great haul to get supplies in."

"Wasn't the lake savage enough for him?" asked the boy ruefully, rubbing his knee that he had just bruised against an outstanding rock.

"No," said Mr. Devering, "he adores the forest primeval. His wife was like you, and she struck at last and he had to move out to a house near mine. I bought this place from him and let it run into extra pasturing ground, but now the bears are bothering me and I won't keep any stock here till they get out."

CHAPTER IV THE WOLF AND THE LAMB

[Pg 39]

"Are there bears here?" asked Dallas in an awed voice; "real, live bears?"

"Not many usually, this time of year, but there have been bad bush fires over the mountain, and bears, wolves and foxes have been driven down earlier than usual. We always hear wolves howling about us in October, but you see this is only July."

"What did the bears do to you?" asked Dallas eagerly.

"Took six of my sheep."

"Killed them, do you mean?"

"Yes, and I drove the rest of the flock down to a pasture back of my house. Mr. Talker just told me there's a lamb missing and I thought I'd come up to look for him. His mother was one mangled by the bears, and Lammie was found standing by her carcass. He was taken down to the house, but his young nerves must have got a shock for he acted queer, then disappeared."

"Oh! I hope we'll find him," said Dallas.

"I hope so too, but I doubt it. His mother was a great pet with my children and he too has been much pampered."

My young master's face fell. What a tender heart he had, and what was he thinking about as he went nimbly along, his eyes glued to Mr. Devering's back in a way that soon caused him to fall flat on his face. In the city a boy does not need to watch his feet. In the country it is wise to look to your steps.

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His young mind was going hop, skip, jump like his feet, and presently he called out, "Captain, I've been wondering a lot lately what I'll do when I'm a man."

"What does your fancy run to?" Mr. Devering called back.

"Sometimes I think I'd like to be the greatest home-run king in the world, and then when I see those high jumpers galloping over the roofs of houses in the movies I think I'd like to be an actor."

"You like motion pictures."

"Yes, Captain—John's a regular fan, and when we go home from seeing them he tells me how he used to lay out boys when he was my age. Of course he never touched a small kid—always fellows as big as himself."

Mr. Devering looked thoughtful, but said nothing.

Young Dallas went on, "But now, I think I'd like a farm some place where there weren't so many trees, and I'd go after bad bears who kill sheep."

His tone was bold, but his eyes were timid. This was a boy who fought battles in his mind and kept his fists in his pockets.

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"My boy," Mr. Devering called out, "time will settle your doubts. I had a young cousin who wasn't sure whether he'd run a candy store or drive a locomotive when he grew up."

"And what did he do?" asked Dallas eagerly.

"Went into a bank, and is vice-president. You see, Sub, when we're young we don't know everything. We just have to wait. Get a good education and when you're fit for your life work it will bob up serenely in front of you."

"When you were a boy did you want to be a settler?" asked Dallas.

"Never—I wanted to practise medicine."

"And did you?"

"No, I took my course in my home University of Toronto and got my degree, but I never practised."

Young Dallas, who had a great thirst for information, said coaxingly, "I suppose you got ill and came here for your health."

"No, my lad, I wasn't ill, but I knew I would be if I didn't stop breathing dust."

"Street dust, Captain?"

"Different kinds of dust. I was one of a struggling ant-heap. There was system and order, but no beauty, and I love beauty."

"In my city," said the boy thoughtfully, "there was some dust and much loneliness—but it is a very fine place."

"Your life was abnormal. The boys in my city were rushing from one place to another. They could not keep their minds on their books, and here was this beautiful calm north country with air like wine and crying out for settlers." [Pg 42]

"Oh!" exclaimed my young master, "you are here to open up the country, but you are not poor. If you were, it would not be so agreeable."

"Why not? Of course money talks in the wilds as in cities, but our government helps men who wish to clear land. Boy!—it's a great life."

Dallas enveloped the big glowing figure of the man with a glance of warm admiration. "You are splendid, Captain."

Mr. Devering went on as if he did not hear him. "Some day I will tell you of our great clay belt further north. I am buying farms there for my boys. Then there is Hudson Bay with its iron ore, coal, silver and pulp wood almost untouched by man. I tell you, lad, this is a great country of ours."

Young Dallas grew solemn. "If I felt like that about the country, I should be happy."

"You will, you will," said the man eagerly. "I hope with my lads you will push on and——"

He checked himself suddenly, as if he were about to say too much.

"Captain," cried Dallas, "you sound like one of my adventure books. I believe you are younger than I am."

How Mr. Devering laughed. He even shouted, he was so much amused. Then he took off his hat and swung it in the air. Oh! he was a very jolly man. Then something caught his eye on the ground and he bent over. [Pg 43]

"Hello! Sub, look here."

Dallas went stepping over damp and mossy stones to stare at a layer of black mud in a hollow.

"Tracks," said Mr. Devering. "See if you can tell what they are."

"Sheep," said Dallas doubtfully.

"Right you are, and what else?"

"Deer?"

"Yes, there are lots of them about lately. I saw three of them this morning out back of the barn at my deer-lick."

"What's that, Captain?"

"A natural deer-lick is a salty spot of ground where deer go to nibble or lick the earth. I made mine, for I have a great fancy for giving pleasure to our elegant and graceful Virginian deer who come down here from our provincial Algonquin Park, which is close by."

"Are there many wild animals there, Captain?"

"Heaps of them—they're protected; except wolves. There's a bounty on their heads of twenty-five dollars."

"I'd love to visit that Park," said the boy.

"You shall—we'll take canoes and go up the Fawn River. There are three portages that will interest you—come on, boy, I see a fresh track that I think is Lammie's."

Dallas tore after him, very much excited about the danger threatening the lamb. He was talking to me quite boastfully. "I'd like to see a bear lay a paw on any lamb when I was near." [Pg 44]

I was uneasy. All the horse family hate bears. Even a big cart-horse will turn round when he meets one. I knew that some had lately passed by, and I felt that there might be wolves about too.

As if the boy understood me, he said gallantly, "Don't fret, Babe. If we find any wild beasts about here we'll make them chase themselves back to their dens," but as he spoke he gave me a queer look. Being unused to these solitudes and this wild life, he was frightened to death, and like a little dog out alone in the cold and darkness he was barking to keep his courage up.

Afraid of something I knew not what, I went on in this game of Follow my Leader down into a sombre little valley where scarcely a ray of light penetrated. The branches not only met overhead but absolutely languished together. There was not a sound from our footsteps for the trail was overgrown with a delicate ferny moss into which our feet sank noiselessly.

Not a bird peeped in this thicket. The most of my bird friends are like the boy and hate deep dark woods. They love fields with a few trees scattered here and there, or nice open groves, or best of all the neighbourhood of houses if cats and boys are not allowed to prey on them.

Suddenly I heard the boy draw a long breath. He saw the sunlight at the end of this long leafy tunnel. We were coming to the base of the abandoned farm on the hill. [Pg 45]

Oh! how thankful I was. We were out of the wood and climbing a faint little foot-path leading up over the grassy top of the hill.

What a curious place! I shuddered, for it was so sad. If we had come upon a sturdy backwoodsman and his wife with a nice family of children, I should have tossed my head and kicked up my heels a bit. As it was, I plodded slowly on, head down, tail drooping.

On our right as we went up the hill was an old grey barn and a desolate pasture. Here were many sheep tracks and Mr. Devering went into the lean-to hoping that the lamb might be there.

"If Lammie-noo is here," he said, "this is where he would pass his nights."

"Is that the lamb's name?" asked Dallas.

"Yes, my children named him that from a song I sing."

"Ba ba Lammie-noo
Cuddle doon tae mammie."

"Wouldn't bears come after him in this place with no door?" asked the boy with a shudder.

"Yes, they would if they were hungry, but Lammie-noo has probably not been here more than a couple of nights, and if the bears have been roaming in some other direction they would not get wind of the fact that there was a nice plump lamb on the old Lonesome Hill farm— Come up higher, and we'll spy the landscape o'er."

We walked beyond the discolored barn which was shedding its shingles as a pony sheds his hair, and came to a dull old orchard where some quite nice crab apple trees stood knee deep in selfish weeds that were taking the goodness out of the soil. [Pg 46]

"Poor patient trees," said Mr. Devering, "every year they give us some fruit for preserving. I've a great mind to build up this place again for some young settler."

"Oh! please do so, Captain," said young Dallas whose sensitive soul was quivering with the loneliness of his surroundings.

"Would you like it?" asked the man keenly.

"I—I don't know," stammered Dallas.

"Let old Mother Nature put her hand on your head, my boy, and listen to what she says; then you'll learn to love all her children, even the trees—I'll renew this offer later."

When we passed the orchard and came to the dreary house I thought, "There's no chance of this young lad ever coming to live here."

The building was like some old drunkard trying to stagger down hill. Its roof was gone, its window eyes were broken, its doors were flapping and the well beside it had half the curbstone broken down.

Mr. Devering looked into it. I suppose he thought Lammie-noo might have tumbled in, then he swung back the partly open front door, which at his touch groaned and fell down flat.

Dallas started back, then went bravely forward, only to fall back again and lay a trembling hand on my neck. "Oh! what is that dead thing?" he asked. [Pg 47]

I looked over his shoulder and saw a porcupine shedding his quills for the last time. The corner of the open door had been gnawed by him or some other creature. I knew what that meant. Many wild animals will dig and tear at anything the salty hand of man has passed over, and in the back part of the room I noticed an old table worried up and down its seams by the teeth probably of this little creature who had found food crumbs in the cracks.

Mr. Devering passed through the mournful little house. The bedrooms were deserted, the kitchen stove was lopping over, and the pots and pans were strewn about the floor. Chairs were broken and blinds tumbling from the windows.

"Mischievous boys or campers have been here," said Mr. Devering, "the Talkers left the house in good shape. Before I'm a month older, I'll have it cleared up. It gives me the blues to see a former neat place in this condition— Come outside, my lad."

"Ah! there is a view," he said a few minutes later when we stood under the blue sky and surveyed the ranges and ranges of green hills surrounding us on every side with here and there a glimpse of a distant lake. "The everlasting hills—the everlasting hills."

Young Dallas stood with the fresh wind blowing some color in his pale cheeks. He was smiling now as he asked, "What is that highest peak of all, Captain?" [Pg 48]

"Old Mount Terror."

"Why Terror?"

"So many persons have been lost there. The Indians have a legend about its being bewitched, and about a pre-historic monster much larger than a moose who haunts its forests. I'll tell you about it some day. In the meantime I'm watching Lammie-noo."

"You don't mean to say you've found him?"

"Yes, down there against the cat-tails of Lonesome Lake. Can't you pick out that patch of dull white?"

"Oh, yes—among the rushes. Has he gone there for a drink?"

"Possibly, though he doesn't drink much when he gets plenty of green feed. I daresay he's sick and feverish. Would you like to be lost up here away from your friends?"

"Good gracious! no, sir. To tell the truth, this place is a thousand times worse than your farm."

Mr. Devering was not offended. With a glance of unspeakable love and sympathy he laid a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Watch Lammie—he's probably coming up to the barn thinking he has to sleep all night with his lonely little head in a corner."

Poor Lammie-noo was turning round, and quite unaware of his good master so near at hand was wearily plodding up the hill. He went over everything. He was too tired to go round, and he breasted weed patches and climbed over the heaps of rocks left by men in clearing the fields. He had the waning courage of a little creature whose heart has all gone out of him. [Pg 49]

"Won't my young ones feast him to-night?" said Mr. Devering. "Won't he get a brimming pail of milk from our good cook!"

Dallas' face beamed. He and Mr. Devering were both intent on the lamb, but I with my lower animal instinct was terribly uneasy. The cool north wind brought us a wild gamy smell. Something lurked and crouched in that dreadful little hollow where the spruces grew so thickly. I could not see it, but I felt it. It was not a bear—it was something long and slinking.

I was nearly crazy. Ponies and horses rarely cry out, they die without a sound, but we Shetlands are more like dogs than ponies and I am more dog-like than most Shetlands, for from the time I was a baby foal I have been like a brother to various human beings. So now, just because I knew it would pain my nice lad to see the lamb injured, I resolved to warn poor Lammie-noo.

To get to the barn he had to pass the orchard, and to reach the orchard he had to skirt the spruce thicket where the wild creature waited for him.

I gave the loud shrill alarm snort of a wild pony just as the dark streak took the form of a long lean wolf who sprang with a sideways leap from the shelter of the spruces and caught one of the hind legs of the unsuspecting lamb.

Mr. Devering was a pretty clever man. He flashed one swift glance at my trembling form, then he gave the biggest yell I ever heard from human lips, and started leaping down hill so violently that if the wolf had been as slow as some animals Mr. Devering would have landed on his back. [Pg 50]

However, I have heard hunters say that the wolf is the cutest animal that roams the woods—cuter even than the fox. This fellow just had time for one crunching bite, then he was away like a shot.

Now that the lamb was all right, I turned my attention to my young master. Wasn't I sorry for him! I guessed that he had known nothing very much wilder than the peaceful stretches of Boston Common—and to come to this!

He was in a pitiable state of fright, and unable to plan for himself, he started to do as his Captain has done, namely run down the hill.

However, he didn't go very far. The ugly old house leering at him with its open doorway tempted him, and he whipped in. Of course I whipped in after him, for my place was with my master. I wasn't afraid of the wolf, for I knew there was no wolf there. He was legging it for home, the most surprised animal in the Highlands of Ontario.

My boy skipped past the dead porcupine and the broken chairs and dishes, and threw himself flat against a mildewed wall that he would have shrunk from had not his eyes been blinded by fear.

I nuzzled his neck with my soft lips. It was dreadful to see a boy suffer so much, and reaching out [Pg 51]

a hand he laid it gropingly on my head.

After he had gasped for a few seconds like a dying fish, he dragged himself to one of the broken windows.

Down there on the grass Mr. Devering was bending over the lamb. No wolf was in sight, and my young lad pulled himself together and cried in a relieved voice, "Come on, Babe," then he tore out of the house and down the hill.

When we got to Mr. Devering we saw that he had an open first-aid case on the grass beside him, and he was unwinding a roll of bandage.

"Is Lammie much hurt?" asked Dallas miserably.

"One nip—hind leg—it isn't bad. I'll take a few stitches. Hold his head and shoulders, will you?"

CHAPTER V A COWARD STANDS ALONE

[Pg 52]

Lammie's leg was soon bound up, and Mr. Devering said to Dallas, "Do you know that verse in the Bible—'The sheep follow him for they know his voice, and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers'?"

"Yes, Captain, Margie has read it to me."

"Well, we're going to start now, so you please stand back a bit. Lammie is eyeing you as if he thought you were another wolf—but why are you hanging your young head?"

"I'm a coward," said the boy brokenly.

"In what way?"

"I ran into the house when I saw the wolf."

"Were you afraid?"

"I was, sir."

"That the wolf would attack you?"

"Yes."

"Suppose he had attacked me, would you have come out to help me?"

"I don't know, sir, but I hope so."

"You're not sure."

"No, sir."

"And we're pals," said Mr. Devering. "I could have staked my worldly all on your standing by me—one can never tell." [Pg 53]

He looked thoughtfully down at the grass, and the poor lamb standing on three legs stared patiently up at him.

Mr. Devering had forgotten him for the minute. The boy's wound was of more importance than the lamb's.

"What kind of wolves have you read about?" he asked presently.

"Fierce wild wolves like the Russian ones who pursued the sledge, and the servant threw himself out to save his master."

Mr. Devering said nothing. He just stared and Dallas began to howl just like a human wolf, "Oh! I feel yellow—I should have stood by you," then he flung himself on the grass and began to kick and bite.

This was temper—poor lad! he had been so proud of himself with his boasting about what he would do if a wild animal appeared, and when it did come he had scuttled to the nearest shelter.

Mr. Devering came and stood over him. The boy was just raging now, and snapping out words. "I didn't think I'd run. I thought I'd make a stand. I didn't know I was a quitter."

"Did you ever see a wild animal before outside a Zoo?" Mr. Devering bawled at him, for the boy was making so much noise that an ordinary voice would not have pierced his ears.

"No, I never did—I wasn't on to him. I'm not acquainted with wolves and bears—I hate this place. I want to go back to my father and Margie and John." [Pg 54]

Mr. Devering spoke to me in a low voice as I stood gazing regretfully at my undignified young master. "A good time for a sermon, Prince Fetlar, but it will keep— Come on Lammie," and

turning to the suffering animal he walked slowly toward the trail, the lamb limping after him.

Of course I stayed by our angry young lad, and presently getting over his temper, he lifted his swollen face.

He was alone with me, and the wolf might still be lurking in the spruces. So he thought, and didn't he jump up and go stumbling over the grass, slipping, falling, getting up again, dashing the tears from his eyes, and muttering to himself.

But soon a very cheerful sound from far ahead floated back to him. Ah! that was one of the songs we used to hear in our own dear country when our boys went marching away to war.

"Put all your troubles in your old kit bag,
And smile, smile, smile!"

Certain tones in the man's hearty voice reminded me of the boy's sweet notes, and wasn't there a queer suggestion of each other when I stood near them? We Shetland ponies as I have said before are very close to human beings for our ancestors were literally brought up with the children in the crofters' huts, and my mother has often told me that her mother had many a lick at the family platter and many a time her soft muzzle was buried in the children's necks.... I had it—the man was some relation to the boy. That explained the man's patient interest in him, and the fascination that the man had for the boy. Blood is thicker than water every time.

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I was very pleased with myself. Now I would have to find out the exact relationship. That would be something to amuse me in these solitudes, and I pressed closer to my young master so that he might steady himself by laying a hand on my neck.

"Gee whiz!" he exclaimed with a sob, "if Captain isn't carrying that beast."

Sure enough, the good shepherd singing so easily in front of us, and stepping so firmly over the trail in his big leather hunting boots, had both hands up to his shoulders. Lammie-noo lay across his back like a pillow, his head wig-wagging, his manner content. He wasn't afraid. I suspected that he had been carried that way before.

"Captain," cried Dallas anxiously as he ran after him, "I'm here."

Mr. Devering stopped singing. "All right," he called, "I'm glad to hear you."

"You can't see me," said the boy, very anxious to make conversation, "but I'm here all the same."

"Good for you, Sub, we'll have a fine appetite for our supper."

"You don't dine in the evening then," said Dallas agreeably.

"No, sir—country hours—dine at twelve p.m. No afternoon tea except on occasions. Supper at six."

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"I like those hours for the country," said Dallas.

As he spoke a last sob broke his voice. "Captain," he called out, "will you tell your kids that I ran from the wolf?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Devering in tones of surprise. "Aren't we pals?"

Dallas winced terribly at this. "I'm going to tell them myself," he said; "I've got to rub it in or maybe I'll do it again. My father hates cowards. He'd kill me if he thought I'd grow up to be a white-heart."

"I'd scarcely go as far as that," said Mr. Devering with his jolly laugh. "You take things hard, boy."

"Was that wolf a dangerous beast?" asked Dallas sharply.

"Not at all—he'd have run like a deer if he'd scented us. The wind was off the lake."

"But I didn't know that," cried the boy.

Mr. Devering said nothing. He just stalked on with the lamb.

Young Dallas' shoulders drooped sadly. "If he had been a wild, wild wolf," he said at last, "he might have attacked you, and there was I safe in the house."

Mr. Devering stopped in his tracks, slid the lamb to a bed of moss, and said: "Let's rest a bit."

I knew he had paused to have a chat with the boy and ease his aching young heart. He was certainly a man who remembered that he had been a boy himself, and that the sorrows of youth are as painful as they are brief.

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When they were seated quietly side by side on a log, while Lammie-noo reached out for some stray sickly blades of grass that were just begging him to eat them and put them out of their misery, Mr. Devering said quite decidedly: "My lad, I know your ancestry. If any real danger should threaten me, you would rush to my rescue."

Such a wave of relief swept over Dallas' face. "How do you know? Oh, how do you know?" he

cried sharply.

"Because the Duffs and the Deverings have never bred a coward."

"The Duffs and the Deverings," repeated the boy slowly. "My father is a Duff, but was my mother a Devering?"

The big man bit his lip. "There! I have let that family cat out of the bag. That splendid man your Dad did not wish you to know till later, but I who hate mysteries about family affairs, am glad pussy jumped out."

"But my mother's name was not Devering," said Dallas.

"Yes it was, my boy. She was adopted in early life by our aunt Mrs. Beverly Ronald, who gave her her own name."

"And what relation are you to me?" asked Dallas springing to his feet.

"I am your uncle."

"My mother's brother."

"Her only brother."

"And I thought I had no relatives."

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The boy was in an ecstasy. He stood with eyes fixed on his new relative, his face going from red to white like a girl's. Then in a trice he had his arms round the neck of this good uncle, and was hugging him warmly.

"I love you!... I love you!" he cried.

"And I love you, my boy," said the man simply.

"I feel weak like that lamb," said Dallas, and his arms slipped down from the man's shoulders and he re-seated himself on the log close to his side. "I want something strong to hold on to."

Mr. Devering threw an impatient glance in the direction of Boston, and I knew that he was blessing the splendid, but peculiar man, the boy's father. Aloud he said: "Let us change the subject. I want to tell you a story about General Wolfe."

The boy was gazing deep into the wood interior, his eyes vacant and dreamy. With an effort he turned around, and said softly, "Uncle—that is even better than Captain. Uncle—I never had one before."

"Well, you'll never be without one now," remarked Mr. Devering, then he said again quite patiently, "Wolfe, the Conqueror of Quebec."

"The Conqueror of Quebec," repeated young Dallas like a parrot.

"This story is little known, but it is true," said Mr. Devering. "Now pull yourself together, boy,—imagine a dinner table, seated at it William Pitt, Lord Temple and General Wolfe. The next morning Wolfe was to sail from England for Canada. Pitt's eyes were on him. How was this young general going to acquit himself? Suddenly to his dismay, Wolfe got up, began to strut about the room, drew his sword, struck the table with it, and boasted about what this good sword was to do in Canada."

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"The two ministers were aghast, and when Wolfe's carriage was announced and he left the room, Pitt threw up his hands and said, 'To think that the fate of my country is in such hands!'"

My young master was still in his beautiful dream cloud about this nice man being his uncle, but he came out of it long enough to say quite calmly, and with no bitterness now, "Wolfe was like me—he boasted."

"Don't you wish to know why he acted so strangely?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"He was timid and nervous, and very often he acted in a way contrary to his real nature."

"You're trying to smooth things over for me," said Dallas sweetly, "but you do it because I'm your nephew. You can't fool me.... Please tell me another story about Wolfe. He is one of my heroes."

Mr. Devering was shaking with inward laughter. However he subdued it, for boys don't like to be laughed at, and went on: "The Duke of Newcastle told George III. that Pitt's new General Wolfe was a mad fool, and the old King said, 'If he is mad, I hope he will bite some of my generals.'"

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Dallas smiled absently, then he said, "We're sort of mixed up when we're young, aren't we?"

"Tadpoles, my boy, tadpoles. You don't know how you'll turn out. But young people mature. Think of Wolfe banging the dining-table with his sword, then turning into the sensitive young man of such deep feeling who recited to his officers 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave.'"

"And then," cried Dallas suddenly waking up, "Wolfe was the brave officer leading the attack on the enemy, wrapping his handkerchief around his wounded wrist and faithful to his motto, 'While

a man is able to do his duty and to stand and hold his arms it is infamous to retire'— What is infamous, my Uncle?"

"Odious, detestable— Well, Wolfe was almost too brave, for his bright uniform made him a target for the sharpshooters who finally got him."

"I know the rest," said Dallas excitedly, "I remember it in my Canadian history. 'Support me,' cried Wolfe, 'my brave soldiers must not see me fall.' Then they laid him on the grass in a hollow, but he said, 'I'm done for.' Those supporting him thought he was unconscious, but when they cried out, 'They run! they run!' Wolfe asked, 'Who run?'"

"The enemy, the enemy," said his soldiers, 'they give way everywhere.' Then he turned on his side, murmured, 'God be praised! I die happy,' and expired— Ah! sir, Wolfe stuck to his guns. I did not."

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Mr. Devering just roared with laughter. "You can't forget that, Sub. Well remember too that you're at the period of beating the dining-table. Come on, I want to get home," and shouldering Lammie he began to tramp along the trail whistling,

"When I was young, I went astray,
Went astray, went astray."

CHAPTER VI THE BELOVED LIAR

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When we got near the house, we heard the supper horn sounding cheerily in our direction.

Mr. Devering strode along more quickly than ever in the lovely late afternoon sunshine, and when we reached the snake fence he leaned over and put Lammie-noo on his own hoofs.

Then he and Dallas just howled with laughter. Wasn't that sick lamb legging it for one of the back doors of the house. I found out later that it was the woodshed door. He had seen a young Japanese come and look out and then disappear.

"Bingi gives Lammie-noo warm milk every night," said Mr. Devering. "Come and see him."

In a few seconds we too were at the woodshed door. Lammie-noo had gone through to the kitchen and stood by the big stove bleating pitifully and occasionally butting the good Bingi who was as patient as a lamb himself.

I had often seen Japanese servants before, but this one was particularly clean and intelligent, and I heard Mr. Devering tell Dallas in an undertone that he was a young man of good family, assistant editor of a Japanese newspaper and had come to Canada to perfect his English.

He was trying to pour some milk from a pail into a pot on the stove, but the lamb butted him so violently and persistently that he kept spilling the milk.

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"May I request you, honorable sir," he said to Mr. Devering, "to remove this quadruped for a season?"

Mr. Devering soon made Lammie-noo come back to the woodshed and closed the door on him.

Lammie immediately ran round to another door on the other side of the house.

Bingi smiled amiably and said, "Let him remain, I beg. His portion is about complete. He will then follow me. He is strangely fastidious about the warmth of it."

Two minutes later, the Jap ardently pursued by the lamb had carried a huge pan of milk outside.

Young Dallas' eyes grew big as he watched the hungry lamb sucking greedily at the milk and bobbing his funny tail with each mouthful.

When the young animal drew back at last with a satisfied air, some hens who had been waiting politely came forward, and leaning far over dipped their beaks in the pan to drink up Lammie-noo's leavings.

"Those hens," said Bingi amiably, "never forget their habitude of milk waiting and afterward drinking."

"Just like us, just like us," said Mr. Devering. "Don't we all run when the bugle or horn blows for meals—but we must go get ready for supper, nephew," and he took my young master away from me.

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To my delight, no one had said, "Go to your stable," so I made a discreet circle of the house, which was pretty well spread out over the ground instead of being built away up in the air.

I glanced in the different windows to see which ones belonged to the lad I was beginning to love so much.

I counted four boys and two girls, brushing, washing, and taking off their overalls in six different rooms. How nice for them each to have a place. Even an animal likes to have a corner of his very own. They all called out a greeting to me, but I did not linger with any of them as I wished to find my own boy.

He had a dear little room on the side of the house looking toward the barnyard and out-buildings. I was glad to see that for I could watch his light at night.

"Hello Babe," he said, "I wish you were a valet or John or Margie," and his eyes went to his big wardrobe trunk standing open against the wall. "I haven't time to unpack now. I'll just give my hands and face a lick and a promise," and he went up to a wash basin and turned on the water.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, "hot and cold water in the wilderness. Some farm this, Prince Fetlar."

Then after giving his young poll a good rubbing down with two military brushes that he took out of a hand-bag, he turned to the door where some one was knocking. "Come in, please."

Mr. Devering stood in the hall, and putting a hand on his nephew's shoulder he came right across the room with him and out through the open French window, smiling at me as I bolted away under some seringa bushes. [Pg 65]

The dining place was not in the house but out on one of the wide verandas. A long table was set with plates for nine people, and wishing to see what went on at it I crept quietly around to the back of a clump of lilacs while my young master was being shown round the garden.

"Well, if here isn't another beggar for crumbs," chattered an impudent little voice near me, and looking round I saw a chipmunk sitting on a sun dial and washing his face and paws for supper.

"Don't be afraid," I said mildly, "I am no beggar. I am here because I love to watch human beings when they eat. I belong to the new boy, and I beg that you will not call attention to me by any unnecessary chattering."

"All right," he said, winking a beautiful brown eye at me, "if you'll promise not to tease for scraps from the table. There are too many of us now. I'm always hungry, and there are about a dozen juncos, some hermit thrushes, a bluejay, a tame raccoon, a white rabbit, the cat and about a score of other creatures—we're the steadies but there are lots of chancers."

"What do you mean by chancers?"

"Ones who happen along like that Plymouth Rock hen there sneaking down from the hen-houses. She knows she's not allowed here—but to come back to you. Of course you won't hurt any of us?" [Pg 66]

"Hurt you, my dear chipmunk," I replied. "I believe in the rights of all creatures—even deer mice. I have an arrangement with two already that they may come in my stable, but if they bring any more in or if they run over my food I'll drive them out."

"You drive a mouse," he said. "A clumsy thing like you couldn't do it."

"Couldn't I?" I remarked sarcastically.

"How would you do it?" he asked.

"Quickly, my friend. You ought to see the fancy play of my hoofs."

"You think you're very smart," he said, and he hobbled slowly away to the veranda where he could be nearer the table.

I looked after him wondering what was the matter with his paws, and reflecting that although I don't dislike chipmunks, I find them very disrespectful.

Such a darling little junco called to me with his sharp kissing note. He was in the lilacs over me and he had been watching the chipmunk. "Chew, chew, Pony," he went on. "Supper's ready—I'm glad, aren't you?"

I stared up at him and said, "Junco with the grey head and white tail feathers, I like you."

"And I'll like you," he returned, "if you'll not get between me and the supper table. I'm hungry."

"What's wrong with that chipmunk's feet?" I asked the junco.

"He was a performing squirrel in a show. They used to make him dance by turning on a gas flame under his cage." [Pg 67]

"Why didn't he cling to the bars?" I asked.

"They were charged with electricity. Though I am only a country bird I have heard how cruelly animals are treated in cities."

"How did the chipmunk get here?" I inquired.

"Mr. Devering was at the show and rescued him. He had the showman fined heavily—but, Pony, here comes the human mother-bird."

Such a fine matronly young woman with a grave sweet face was coming out of the house.

Her hands were full of wild roses that she put in a bowl of water on the table.

"Good gracious!" I said to the junco, "what is that furry brown creature curled up and clinging to the skirt of her gown?"

"That is Black-Paws, the raccoon. He is a great pet of this house-mother's mother, a wee old lady who comes here in summer. When Grammie is not here, he follows her daughter about and slides along the floor holding on to her dress."

"Mrs. Devering must be a very kind lady," I said. "That fat raccoon is heavy."

"She is very patient with him, but see now she is shaking him off."

"Go away, Black-Paws," the lady was saying, "You tire me. Here take this piece of cake," and she went to a side table.

To my great amusement, the stout-bodied little creature with the funny black patches on his face held up his fore paws, took the cake, and when her back was turned began to wash it in one of the glasses of water on the table. [Pg 68]

"He's the cleanest animal on the place," said the junco. "He nearly washes his food away."

"If I had had that piece of cake," I said, "I should have eaten the icing instead of leaving it in the water. Junco, is this young looking woman the mother of all those children?"

"Yes, yes, and a good one too."

"But she looks so young, junco."

"Northland air is good for human beings and good for animals. Look at her skin—just like a cherry. I could bite it—chew, chew. Oh! where is my mate, my mate? She's late, she's late. Supper's ready, chew, chew."

"Here I be, dearie, dearie," and we heard another sweet twittering trill, and there was Mrs. Junco coming like the wind.

"Oh! my dearie dearie," he said, and putting their heads close together, they sat talking in low bird notes in such a comfortable way that it made me feel quite lonely.

I turned my head away, and saw two little gliding creatures slipping under the veranda steps.

"Hello!" I said; "do I see snakes?"

"Yes," said some one in a whisper close to me, and lowering my head I saw the Plymouth Rock hen right by my hoofs.

"Aren't those snakes cute?" she said. "I love to see them, darting their heads out and in. They're the children's pets and are waiting for worms— Pony-Boy, don't call attention to me. Being grey I don't show up much. I'm the biggest girl's pet, and she is the only one that knows I'm here. By and by she'll sneak me a bit of something. I'm not afraid of your hoofs. I'm very light on my feet." [Pg 69]

"Yes and light in the head too," said a contemptuous voice, and glancing up we saw a blue jay sitting solitary and looking rather ugly on a bough just near us.

"Nobody loves a jay," said Biddy in a hoarse whisper. "What about those eggs you broke yesterday? The master of the house will shoot you if he sees you."

"Hold your tongue," said the jay impudently, and Biddy, turning away from him, said to me, "You know ponies are not allowed down here at meal times. You'd better back up a bit. Get your head behind those long purple blossoms. Now you won't show so much— We were talking about snakes; those two pets belong to the younger of the two girls and she keeps a worm pit for them. She buries bones and meal, and these two come here every night for their after dinner feed. If you want to see lightning, just watch their tongues when they take the worms."

"Biddy," I said, "I'll keep my eye on them, but I must watch my young master who is coming to the table."

"I saw him walking about the garden," she said, "with the big master. Pony, I like your boy."

Mr. Devering was guiding Dallas to the table. "My wife," he said to the boy. Then he said to her, "Bretta, may I commend another young thing to your care?" [Pg 70]

He did not mention Dallas' name, but Mrs. Devering pronounced it very nicely when she took the boy's hand and gave him a long look.

"And what do you think of your new aunt?" asked Mr. Devering jokingly.

"She seems very young," said the boy slowly. "Margie is old."

Such a look of compassion came over the lady's face. "I am very glad to be your aunt," she said softly.

Dallas, with a gentle gesture, took the hand that was hanging by her side and raised it to his lips.

She blushed with pleasure at this grown-up caress, and taking a rose from the bowl she fastened

it in the lapel of the boy's coat.

"Pretty, pretty," I heard the juncos say.

"Very kind," observed Biddy, and then the whole family of boys and girls came trooping to the veranda.

"Family," said Mrs. Devering, "come here and be introduced."

I could see that their names made no impression on my young master. He was staring at their faces. These were his cousins, his real cousins, though they did not know it, and in spite of the cool wind blowing, a line of perspiration sprang to his upper lip. Would they like him, oh! would they like him?

They all looked very smart, the girls in thick white dresses, the boys in navy blue belted cloth suits like that of my young master. [Pg 71]

There was a family resemblance—I could see it, though these children were robust and rollicking, while my young master was refined and delicate in appearance.

Their table manners were very good, but they were so full of life that they had hard work to keep still.

It was a charming sight to see this happy, clean, and well-bred family sitting at this long table with no walls between them and the lovely lake that was shining and beautiful as the sides of the big silver soup tureen from which Mrs. Devering was ladling a delicious dark liquid that smelt like beans. I thought the Deverings' supper table was like a dinner table until I saw what a wonderful lot of things they gave those happy children to eat in the middle of the day.

The soup course did not interest the creatures of the second table. Not a bird peeped or stirred, except to glare at a big white rabbit who came loping easily down the hill from the wood, and went noiselessly under the veranda.

"Old Muffy," whispered Biddy hoarsely; "he has a bottomless appetite. We hate to see him come—there are the robins. They're late too."

Four plump fat birds had just settled themselves over us with much shaking of wings and flirting of tails, though they did not speak.

I looked back at the table. Everybody had finished their soup and to my surprise the eldest girl, who had heavy black hair and a straight nose like her mother's, got up and piling all the empty soup plates on a tea-waggon rolled them along the veranda toward the kitchen. [Pg 72]

On the way Bingi crossed her with a big roast of cold lamb on a platter.

Now there was a faint murmuring sound about me, and one of the boys called out, "Wait, robin babies, your turn will quickly come."

"That boy," said Biddy, who had asked permission to fly up to my back in order to get a better view of the table, "that nice boy makes a specialty of robins, and often brings them up by hand when the parents are killed. This is not a very good worm country as the soil is stony, so he buys worms from his sister's pit and makes worm hash."

"Worm hash," I repeated; "I never heard of such a thing."

"He never loses a young robin from crop trouble," said Biddy, "though they sometimes bathe themselves to death, being great water-lovers. He makes his hash of worms, bread, oatmeal and a few drops of milk. If he can't get worms he takes raw meat, but when his robins are grown they eat almost anything. Hush! don't cackle nor cluck. Here comes something for me."

"I'm not likely to do either," I said, then I eyed the black-haired girl who, before taking her seat at the table, had made a detour and with her left hand tossed Biddy a morsel of something.

"She sneaked that from the cake course," gurgled the hen from my back. "My! how good it tastes. It's raspberry shortcake. That Jap certainly knows how to cook. I hope I'll get something more." [Pg 73]

I paid little attention to Biddy, for I was eyeing Mr. Devering and grieving over something he had just said, "This is lamb, my boy. We are as bad as the wolf."

The nice man was biting his lip now. He remembered how terribly my young master had felt about his cowardice, but who can recall the spoken word?

Dallas was in a fine state of nerves. He had been so happy in coming to his own at last by being one of an interesting group of boys and girls. Now the charm was broken. He grew red and fussed about his seat, his appetite all gone.

The children were all speaking at once, "Wolf! what wolf, Dad?"

Mr. Devering struggled with the joint for a few seconds, then he said shortly, "Up Deer Trail."

"What were you up there for, Dad? Is that where you went with Dallas? I wish you'd taken us. We love that trail."

More questions and more remarks were showered upon the poor man, but he went on carving

silently.

My young master, instead of leaving matters to this clever man, was unfortunate enough to open his young mouth and put his foot in it. To please these dear cousins was his burning desire, therefore he thought he must create a sensation, so with a heightened color he announced solemnly, "We were after the lamb."

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Mr. Devering rolled his eyes at him, but said nothing, while the children just shrieked, "Not Lammie-noo. He isn't alive, is he? Dad, you said he must be dead."

"Sit down, sit down, children," said Mrs. Devering in a quiet voice. "Not another word, please, from anybody till every boy and girl is seated."

The children were on fire. Their eyes flashed, their tongues were going, but they obeyed their mother.

Biddy not liking my slippery back had shifted her position to a stick laid crosswise in the lilacs and she clucked in my ear, "Those children love their pets. They hate to see us go to the Good-Bye House."

Struck by the name, I asked, "What is that?"

"It's the place where hens walk in after tid-bits in somebody's hand and never walk out again. Nothing hurts them. They just stop eating and go to another poultry yard."

I thought this over a minute. Probably the Deverings had some very merciful way of killing their stock; then I listened to Mrs. Devering, who was saying, "Is everybody still? Now you may go on, Dallas."

However, Mr. Devering interrupted, "There's nothing much to tell. We found your Lammie-noo, bairns, and he is at present in the woodshed in his usual sleeping place."

Another rain of questions fell on his devoted head. "Where had he found Lammie-noo? Was he hungry? Why had he left the sheep?"

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"There you have me," said Mr. Devering with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "Why do human lambs and sheep and goats and kids do the queer things they do? He's home anyway—Mother, what have you been doing this afternoon?"

The children turned to Dallas. They didn't wish to talk about anything but the lamb, and my young master, whose cheeks had been getting redder and redder, and whose eyes had been devouring the faces of these lively children, burst now into a flood of talk.

Oh! how he wanted to impress them, and he certainly did. Their Dad was a second David. He had caught up a stick and half killed the wolf and wrenched his jaws from the trembling lamb. He, Dallas, had stood back in wonder at such heroism.

I saw the children's faces falling, falling while these fiery words just flew from between my young master's thin beautiful lips. What fairy tale was this, and what kind of a boy was this pale city lad?

"At last," cried Dallas, "the wolf ran away like a whipped cur."

Oh! how I wanted to help my young master, and thrusting my head out from my hiding place I neighed shrilly.

This brought young Dallas down from his high horse, and he stopped short, grew terribly pale, and his eyes ceased flashing and became dull.

He hadn't been lying as some children lie. He was a dreamer, and he really thought that what he was relating had taken place. He was trying to glorify this wonderful new relative of his—this dear, strong uncle.

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However, the children didn't understand this, and while the older ones were politely silent, the smallest boy of all piped up sweetly, while he pointed his cruel little fork at Dallas, "Wolfths don't bite peoplths, they runs."

Dallas, trembling on the edge of his chair, let his eyes run up and down the rows of faces. Mr. and Mrs. Devering understood and were sorry for him. The children did not understand, and had him branded as a liar.

His self-control was just giving way, when his uncle said kindly, "Look at that pony of yours—almost on the table. Suppose you take him up to his own quarters."

Wasn't my young master grateful! He sprang up and went like a shot to my log cabin, I trotting after him.

I imagined the grown people trying to keep the children from laughing at this queer way of taking a pony to a stable, then I forgot them all in my interest in my dear young master.

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CHAPTER VII

PRIZE PIGS AND THEIR DOG FRIENDS

He was sobbing his young soul out on a heap of straw.

"Oh! Pony, Pony, what a fool I am—my head was going round and round. What did I say?—What an awful day. I wish I were dead."

I had heard boys say this before, so I rubbed his shoulder consolingly with my soft lips. He was my own little master even if he did lie, but for his own sake I hoped he would learn to tell the truth at all times.

Suddenly he sprang up. "I've got to go back, I've got to face them—it's worse than the wolf. Where's my handkerchief? I've lost it," and he sniffed and snuffled and dried his face on my mane and with his coat sleeve. Then he started on a funeral march to the house.

Knowing that I was supposed to be tied up, I kept at a discreet distance from him, and skulked behind shrubs until I reached my old hiding-place under the lilacs.

Dinner was over now, and the pets were having their good time. The four fat young robins stood demurely round a plate of food on the lawn stuffing themselves and looking thankfully up toward the blue sky while their feathery vests swelled out more and more. [Pg 78]

Biddy was gorging herself behind a tree trunk, the juncos and thrushes were eating seeds and cake crumbs scattered over the lawn, while the rabbit with a bland air surveyed the pleasant scenery and regaled himself on juicy lettuce leaves.

The younger girl was bending affectionately over her pet garter-snakes, whose names I found out were Squamata and Flash-In-The-Pan.

The raccoon was under Mrs. Devering's chair and occasionally stuck out his black paws for tidbits that she handed to him.

Mr. Devering had moved to his wife's end of the table, and was drinking coffee with her. She motioned to Dallas to come beside her, and there was a plate of shortcake for him.

"Will you have some milk?" she asked, laying her hand on a pitcher. "We don't give our young people coffee here."

The boy was feverish, and drank three glasses. He was very happy to be with the grown people, and kept rolling his eyes doubtfully at the children.

The eldest girl was trundling the tea-waggon back and forth to the kitchen, occasionally speaking impatiently to the chipmunk, who would get in her way.

"Chippie Sore-Feet," she said, "your pouches are packed. Get out of this or I shall step on you."

Chippie chattered angrily, but went away.

"You little miser," she called after him. "Here it is only July, and you have enough winter stuff buried for ten chipmunks." [Pg 79]

He gave her an angry glance, and went to unload his booty in some safe hiding place.

When the table was all cleared, the black-haired girl who had been eyeing Dallas with much curiosity and a kind of serious interest, came to her father and said, "Mother thinks our guest would like to be shown round the place."

"With all respect for your mother's wishes," said Mr. Devering, "I think Dallas had better go to bed. He's fagged out. That's why he told you all that fairy tale about me and the wolf."

The girl still stood and Dallas said eagerly, "I am not too tired. I should love to go."

Poor lad! he did not want to go—he would rather have stayed with his uncle and aunt, but he did not want to hurt the girl's feelings.

I followed the two as they went along the veranda, and listened to the girl who was saying, "Let's call on Lammie-noo first. I had to finish my work, so I haven't seen him."

The lamb was reclining on a bed of straw in the wood-shed with the air of a patient young prince. The whole troop of children had joined us, and what pet names they did shower on the happy animal.

He was Angel darling, and Lovey dear, and Beauty lamb, and he took all their praise quite calmly as if it were his due.

The black-haired girl touched his bandaged leg with gentle fingers, but said nothing. She was much quieter than the others, though she could yell, too, at times, as I soon found out. [Pg 80]

The younger children were calling the wolf all manner of names, when suddenly the biggest boy of all turned on his heel and said, "Ah! hush up—he wants to know how you enjoyed your dinner to-night."

"We'll never eat Lammie-noo," said the younger girl indignantly, "Dad says so."

"Does the lamb always sleep here?" Dallas asked the black-haired girl.

"Yes, his mother was a pet before him, and this was her bed-place. I'm sorry the bears got her," and the girl looked very sad.

"What's that black stuff hanging under his chin?" asked Dallas. "It looks like beads."

"I must shave him again," said the girl soberly. "It's clotted milk on his wool. He sticks his head down in the pail to drink, and his wool gets messed up with the milk and then he lies down on the earth and it turns black. He's a great little boy to eat lying down—aren't you, Lammie-noo?" and she patted him.

The lamb winked at me. I was quite surprised, for I had fancied him rather stupid-looking. I should have known better. Any living thing has some brains.

Having finished with the lamb, the children gathered round me. My head, neck, throat, withers, chest, shoulders, knees, legs, feet, body and tail all came under discussion. They knew, the clever young ones, that a pony's points like a child's points should harmonise. Even the baby lifted one of my forefeet and peered at it knowingly, saying as he did so, "Healths open, frogths thound." [Pg 81]

After they took me to pieces, they put me together again by making me walk, trot and gallop. Then they pronounced me a well-shaped pony, but my chest was a trifle too wide and my fetlocks were too small. However, my action was fine.

Then each one of them took me for a ride, but such a short one that I wondered, until I remembered that their father had said they had ponies of their own, so I was no treat to them.

The black-haired girl was the only one who did not mount me, and as she stood a little aside Dallas said to her, "I wish you would tell me your names again. Not one of them has stuck in my memory."

"We're all named from Canadian history," she said. "I'm Jeanne Mance."

"I never heard of her," said Dallas.

"Of course not, being an American," said the eldest boy so patronisingly that I saw my young master wince. I foresaw that this boy, who was a big, sturdy fellow with a round bull-like head, would probably get on young Dallas' nerves.

"The real Jeanne," the girl went on, "was born in France in 1606. French people loved Canada then as now—she sailed for Quebec and spent her life in taking care of sick Indians and whites."

"And she died in the odor of sanctity," broke in the bull-headed boy, "but this one is nicknamed Cassowary and will probably be hanged." [Pg 82]

"Why Cassowary?" asked Dallas.

"Don't you know about the great big Cassowary in Timbuctoo," said the lad, "who ate up the missionary and his hymn-book too?"

"Never heard of him," said Dallas. "There are lots of things I don't know."

Poor little master—he felt very humble that beautiful July evening.

Jeanne laid her hand on the big boy's shoulder—"This is Tecumseh Hallowell Devering, and he is fourteen years old—by the way, how old are you, Dallas?"

"Thirteen."

"Just my age," she said.

"I know who Tecumseh was," said Dallas; "he was an Indian brave who fought against us Americans and you British made him a brigadier-general."

"That's so," said the big boy, his rather small eyes flashing, "and my nickname is Big Chief."

Dallas shrugged his shoulders. He didn't like Big Chief. The younger children were howling with laughter. Here were two boys barely introduced, and one of them was glowering at the other.

"All dressed up, and no one to fight," giggled the merry-eyed younger girl.

Big Chief scuffed his way behind the circle of children and Jeanne, or Cassowary, as they called her, drew Merry-Eyes to the front.

"This is Marguerite Bourgeoys Devering, and she is eleven and a half and is named for a young French girl who came to New France, built schools, cared for the sick and was called Sister Bourgeoys." [Pg 83]

"Now she ought to have a nice pet name," said Dallas smiling at the cheerful little girl.

"She has—she's called Dovey 'cause most people think doves are so dear, but we know they're the worst fighters in the lot, don't we, Dovey?" and Cassowary shook her sturdy young sister, who gave her a good thump on the back.

"Look at that," said Cassowary, "see her fists, she's just like a boy. Sleeping Dog, come here."

A fine up-standing boy with dark hair was trying to slip out of sight, but his elder sister dragged him forward.

"Samuel de Champlain," she said, "also nicknamed Champ. He's eleven and a half, too, 'cause he's Dovey's twin."

"I know de Champlain," said Dallas, "we have a lake named for him. Why is this brother called Sleeping Dog?"

"'Cause it's hard to rouse him," said Cassowary. "His eyes look sleepy, but they have a trick of lighting up and when they do, look out."

"So he's a fighter, too," said Dallas politely.

"Rather, but luckily for us he usually takes it out with the gloves. He's the only one in the family that Dad can get to box with any of the boys round here."

Champ made a quiet but very comical face at her, then caught a smaller boy by the shoulder and swung him forward.

"James Wolfe," said Cassowary, "ten years old and known as Sojer. 'Tention, Sojer. Hands out of pockets. Mother's going to sew them up. Eyes front." [Pg 84]

Dallas blushed. The name called back his wolf adventure, then he roared with laughter, for the freckled-faced fat pudgy little boy known as Sojer was doing a goose-step toward the flower beds.

"And last, but not least," said Cassowary, "is dear baby John Graves Simcoe, who already has shown himself rather snobbish and is called Little Big-Wig."

Dallas looked admiringly at the beautiful child, who was blue-eyed, golden-haired, and as straight as a reed. He promised to be graceful and slender like my young master, and Dallas impulsively stretched out a hand which the pretty young creature took and pressed between his own like the little gentleman he was.

"Would like to ride your pony," he said. "Big-Wigth's ponyth very under-bred."

"You shall," said Dallas heartily, then he turned to Cassowary. "A fellow would want a double-barrelled memory to keep all your names straight. Let's see if I can rattle them off—Cassowary, Big Chief, Champ or Sleeping Dog, Dovey, Sojer, Little Big-Wig."

"Good," cried Cassowary. "Now you'll know what to call us. Only Dad and Mother use our real names, and even they forget sometimes. Now what shall we call you? Dallas is too grand."

My young master pressed his lips together. He wanted to tell them that he was their cousin, but he felt that he did not dare to spring another sensation on them. They might not believe him. They would think he was crying wolf again. [Pg 85]

"Call him Stranger," said Dovey, "'cause he's new."

"No, that isn't polite," said Cassowary; "name him something friendly."

Her brothers suggested different names—Neighbour, Visitor, Crony, Chum, Pal, Mate, all but Big Chief, who stood aside smiling wickedly. Finally he shouted, "Let him swap nicknames with Sleeping Dog."

Only Cassowary and Dallas saw the point of this cruel joke.

My young master became so red that he was almost purple. What lively blood he had that it could so quickly surge to his face.

He felt already that I was his friend through thick and thin, and turning his head to me he muttered, "Let sleeping dogs lie."

These children, in spite of their politeness, had sized him up, judged him and condemned him in spite of their father's apology for him to Cassowary.

While they all stood staring at him, Cassowary did a very kind thing, as girls often do when boys have been unkind. She put her arm through Dallas' and said, "Don't mind him—he's an awful tease. You'll get something on him some day— Come on and see the pigs. They're coming home to roost."

This was such a queer statement that it distracted my young master's attention from himself. He gave a kind of stagger, and went along with Cassowary. [Pg 86]

"We'll call Dallas, Cousin," she suddenly screamed at the top of her young lungs. "That will make him feel at home."

As she said this we were all—children and pony—sweeping over the lawn toward the road. Mr. Devering was walking in the rose garden with his wife. He heard Cassowary's cheerful yell and he called, "Hooray! So you have found that out."

They didn't hear him—the wild young creatures. Cassowary was the wildest of all and a great runner. She just seemed to pick up her long legs and skim over the ground like her namesake,

who can out-distance a horse. We had a fine dash up the road in the direction of the head of the lake, and then they all came to a stop, not one winded but Dallas, who was breathing heavily.

Coming from the north was a grunting drove of creatures. Almost priceless Tamworth pigs I saw they were, and in prime condition. This wild country seemed to agree with pigs as well as with human beings. A yellowish brown old fellow was leading them, and Cassowary said to Dallas, "Another introduction—Sir Veteran Vere de Vere, and Lady Annabella Vere de Vere and all the little Vere de Vere piggie-wiggies—Yellow Boy, Saffron, Quince, Crocus, Jaundice, Topaz, Sulphur, London Fog, Sandy, Amberine, Tawny and their cousins and second cousins too numerous to mention. They salute our guest. Now watch Big Chief playing with them. They are his dearest pets."

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Big Chief was giving a series of peculiar howls, and every time he howled the pigs squealed and grunted.

"What is he saying to them?" asked Dallas; "he talks so fast I can't understand."

"He's telling them what lovely things they are going to have to eat. He'll soon have them dancing, tired as they are."

"Are they performing pigs?" asked Dallas.

"No, not really performing. We're not allowed to tease any animal by making it do unnatural tricks. They just do what they're inclined to. See—they're circling round him now trying to find out what he's got in his pockets."

"Latest dance," yelled Big Chief. "Pig-trot," and he twisted and turned, and the pigs followed him and really seemed to be enjoying themselves, for he kept throwing them popcorn, ends of cake, and candy, and as he pranced, he sang, "Golden Dollars Rolling Down the Road, Roll, Golden Dollars, Roll."

"That's his pig song," said Cassowary, "he made it up himself. He's very proud of it. Oh! I say, didn't Amberine do a fine fancy step then—threw out his hoofs just like a little man."

Big Chief kept moving toward the children and me, and seeing that my young master was half afraid of this drove of lusty pigs, I went toward him so that he could get on my back if he wished.

He understood—the clever lad, and looked at me wistfully, but alas! he did not know how to mount even a pony. Of course I am nearly twelve hands high—I am not a tiny Shetland.

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The pigs were most crazy, and Big Chief delighted in exciting them still more. "Rewards," he yelled, "rewards for my pets. Do you suppose this is a free show?" and every child had to dig into his pockets to see whether there was anything to eat there.

Soon the pigs were all round us. "Sir Vet," said Cassowary, giving him a loving tap, "you're not much like the overgrown fellow that came in here three years ago. Dad doesn't believe in keeping creatures shut up and soon fat old Sir Vet had become quite slim and my! couldn't he root. Now he's as strong as a moose. Come on, race me to the barn," and down the road they all went, children and pigs, young Dallas and I tagging after.

As we whirled along the road in front of the rose garden Mr. Devering called out, "Where are the dogs?" and Cassowary stopped short.

"Ah! my beloveds," she exclaimed, "I was forgetting them."

I looked up the road, and there were two tired looking collies lagging along side by side, their heads down, their tails drooping.

Cassowary held out her arms. "Did their trotties feel sore after guarding piggies all day? Come up to the house and Bingi will give us a foot-reviving supper for doggums."

She was down on her knees caressing the two beautiful animals who were responding somewhat wearily. Then she led them to the wood-shed, where the cook handed her two bowls of soup, some bones and dog biscuits.

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While Lammie-noo surveyed them benevolently, they ate and drank in a dainty well-bred fashion, then without offering to lie down turned their faces toward the barn.

"Don't they sleep here?" asked Dallas.

"Not much," said the girl. "Do you suppose anyone could wean them away from their precious pigs? They were brought up with them. As puppies they lay close to Lady Annabella's warm sides every night."

"And they watch the pigs through the day?"

"Yes, they are both splendid fighters, and no wild beast would dare to go near the Vere de Veres when they are about. Never a fox will take a piggie-wiggie. I can tell you a story about that. Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Well, one day this spring Mr. Talker had Lady Annabella up at his house. She had a litter of

young, and he wanted to keep her quiet. She was in a small yard and there was a hole in the fence. Mr. Talker was in his barn loft looking out the window. He saw a Mr. Fox come slyly down from the wood, and look through the hole longingly at the pigs. Mr. Talker was going to run down, then he stopped. He has a great admiration for Lady Annabella and he saw that she had got up and her little pig eyes were glued to the hole in the fence.

"Mr. Talker says Foxy, after staring at the piglets, picked up a stick about the length of one of them and jumped through the hole with it in his mouth. [Pg 90]

"Mr. Talker says undoubtedly he was measuring the hole. Finally he dropped the stick, went through the hole, seized a piggy and tried to go back through the hole with it. Piggy being no longer than the stick but much fatter, stuck in the hole and then there was Lady Annabella suddenly very much alive and crowding Mr. Fox so hard against the fence that he could scarcely breathe.

"He dropped his squealing burden, and hobbled away, so crushed in body and spirit that he could scarcely crawl back to the woods."

"And what did Mr. Talker do?" asked Dallas breathlessly.

"Ran down and gave Lady Annabella some milk and petted her, but come on—Guardie and Girlie are trotting up to the barn to put their pigs to bed."

"Where are the other kids?" asked Dallas as he and Cassowary loped along after the two collies, who were in a great hurry.

"I don't know—Oh! there they are down at the crib. The fire warden must be there, I see his red canoe."

"Is he the man to prevent forest fires?"

"Yes for this district. Then the government has a lovely big hydroplane. You'll see it soaring overhead. Big Wig calls it the fire-bird."

"And when there's a blaze anywhere in the forest the plane reports it?" asked Dallas. [Pg 91]

"Sure—Canada doesn't want her splendid settlers burnt up. And Dad says trees are so valuable now that all the governments in the world are protecting them."

"Do the pigs sleep under the barn?" asked Dallas as he looked ahead and saw the Tamworth procession filing in under the big barn, which was painted green like the house.

"Yes, in the cellar, though it's as airy as the barn floor. It's fun to see them make their beds. Hurry up. You're a slow boy."

"Are they fussy?" panted Dallas as he hurried along beside her. "I thought pigs liked dirt."

"Indeed they don't. You just watch them travelling round with their mouths full of clean straw. First, though, comes pig-wash."

As we stepped inside the cellar we saw the lines of pigs part. The big ones went to long troughs full of sour milk, the little fellows filed through a small door.

"Where are the young chappies going?" asked Dallas.

"To the pig cafeteria. There are self-feeders there. What in the name of common sense are they yelling about?" and she vaulted over a railing.

"It's that scamp Big Chief," she called presently. "He pretends to love his pigs, yet the little darlings haven't a morsel of food. I'll tell Dad on him," and she scuttled up a stairway to the barn floor.

Presently she came back with two pails of feed. [Pg 92]

Dallas watched her with wondering eyes. Then he put his fingers in his ears. The yells of the indignant small pigs were terrific. One would think they were being murdered.

"And no corn for the big pigs," said Cassowary presently. "I'll have to go to the grain-room again. Dad will dock Big Chief's weekly pocket money for this. I hope he won't leave him a cent."

"I'd hate to kill one of those feasting brown things," said Dallas. "They do seem to enjoy life so much."

"Kill them!" squealed Cassowary. "I'd like to see you try. They're never killed. They're sold to stockmen—good stockmen. Big Chief found one farmer was going to ring the snout of London Fog there, and he howled so that Dad had to call off the sale."

"Why ring the snout?" asked Dallas.

"To prevent their rooting. This farmer lived in a good fat farming country. Up here it's wild and poor land for farms. We use the pigs to clear fields for grain."

"How can pigs clear fields?"

"They root the soil from around stumps and rocks. The men either pile up the rocks or put them

in a crusher to make good roadbeds."

"That's a fine road along the lake," said Dallas.

"Yes, because Dad believes that good roads open up a country. He says he wishes his crusher would break enough rocks to make a highway to the North Pole."

"Your Dad is a perfectly splendid man," said Dallas enthusiastically.

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"Isn't he!" said the girl. Then she lowered her voice and put her head close to the boy's. "I cry myself to sleep some nights thinking what would I do if Dad died."

"This seems a safe sort of a place," said Dallas consolingly.

"It is and it isn't. One day he fell from a tree and hurt his back. He's too bold."

My young master's mind took a youthful skip. "I say," he observed, "you tell me you don't kill pigs, but you must kill sheep. I saw a skin."

"Mr. Talker did it. That was Mrs. Goodbody. We didn't eat her. She was sold. Dad gets our meat from across the lake. We couldn't eat our friends. Mrs. Goodbody didn't know what was happening to her. Mr. Talker held out some salt. She followed him to the little electric house. She licked the salt, then she just fell down peacefully. There's some new way of killing sheep. I don't know what it is."

"Of course," said Dallas uneasily, "we all have to die."

"Dad says to live well and not fuss about death and when our time comes he says he hopes we'll all go as comfortably as our animals do. It isn't the death that's bad, Cousin. It's the teasing and torturing before death."

Dallas shuddered. "It's awful to suffer."

"But sometimes you've got to suffer," said this sensible girl. "Then grin and bear it—Hello! What's the matter, Guardie?"

The collie was pulling her white frock with his teeth.

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Cassowary went over the railing again to a corner where a shoat lay on a heap of clean straw.

The other collie was licking his shoulder.

"Only a scratch, Guardie," said the girl "It's not worth washing."

But the dog persisted. I knew what he wished, but my young master asked Cassowary why he was behaving so peculiarly.

"Because young Jaundice has bruised his shoulder and Guardie wants some lotion put on it. Watch him take me to the medicine room. Lead on, my boy."

The good dog, looking over his shoulder, led the way to the barn floor, and presently the laughing girl came back with a basin and white cloth in her hand.

"It's all nonsense, you know, Guardie," she said. "Your old tongue is as good as this antiseptic; however, one must oblige a friend, if only a dog," and she washed the shoulder of the pig who took on great airs at having two dogs and a girl fussing over him while a pony and a boy looked on.

"Now let's go," said Cassowary. "I'll just shut the little pigs' bedroom door. They're old enough to sleep alone and if they run to their mammas sometimes they get rolled on. Good night, children," and with a motherly air she led us away from the barn cellar.

"Hello! what's the fuss about?" she cried when we got outside.

CHAPTER VIII A GREAT SECRET

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The children had all swept up to the nice clean barnyard.

"I say," cried Cassowary, pushing her way among them, "what's the trouble?"

Champ was speaking—"Dad said Drunkard wasn't to be let loose till dark and it's only dusk now."

"He didn't," yelled Big Chief, "he said in blindman's holiday."

"Well, blindman's holiday is black dark."

"It isn't," said the Chief, "it's betwixt and between."

Champ took hold of Cassowary's arm and drew her forward. "You talk to him. He's a nut-head."

"I'll attend to Drunkard myself," said the girl loftily. "Dad put him in my care. He said you two

boys were too jerky in your little attentions to the dear soul. I'm not so undependable," and she tossed her black head. "You didn't attend to the cafeteria to-night; Big Chief. I'm going to tell on you."

The two boys turned on her. "Undependable," sneered Champ. "I don't believe there's any such word," while Big Chief shook an irritated fist at her. "Look here, Miss Cassowary—you've just got to stop bossing me. I'm going to speak to mother about it."

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A pony hasn't any sleeve to laugh in, so I turned round and hid my smile in my mane. Children are the same the world over. Nothing made me feel as much at home as this bickering between these young Canadians. They were just like youthful undeveloped ponies, loving, teasing, rebelling, watching each other, and over them they knew was the wise whip hand of the parents. Well, I could tell them one thing if they asked my advice. If the parents didn't discipline them a bit, the bad old world would lick them into shape when they were full grown, which is a painful time to be educated.

Miss Cassowary was not too big to be naughty. She was in a corner about this accusation of bossing, so she stopped talking, and ran a saucy tongue out at her brothers, then turning to Dallas she said, "You don't know what they're talking about, Cousin. Come on and I'll introduce you to Drunkard."

With her I showed the discomfited boys two clean pairs of shoes, and ran round the corner of the big barn to the little barn where Mr. Talker was superintending the milking of the cows by patent milkers.

"Not so much noise, please," he said agreeably. "The cows can't hear the nightingale song."

To my amusement I saw that he was running a stable gramophone, which of course arrested my bright boy's attention.

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He stood stock still and said to Cassowary, "Well—I never thought before that cows would enjoy music, but why shouldn't they?"

"They give more milk when they hear sweet strains," said Cassowary. "It started when the men used to milk and shout out things to each other. The cows didn't like it, so Dad had this gramophone installed to keep the stable quiet while milking was going on. He took it out when we bought the milkers, but the cows fussed so that he had to put it back. Now here is Drunkard."

In front of the cow stable was a kennel with a running chain for a dog.

A deerhound was tearing up and down like mad, only stopping occasionally to go through all the motions of barking without uttering a sound. He knew better than to disturb the placid Holsteins who were sweetly chewing their cud.

He was a dreadfully nervous dog. The cows had no quieting effect on him, and when he saw us he pawed the air and almost wagged his ratty tail off.

"Angel Drunkard," said Cassowary, caressing his glossy head. "Is he longing for the night to come? Cassowary will let her boy loose," and taking a lead from the kennel, she fastened it to his collar.

Dallas was looking eagerly at him. "Why Drunkard?" he asked, "and why the chain?"

"'Cause he's just drunk about dogging deer in season and out of season. He hikes to the woods the minute he's free, and sometimes he goes 'way over the mountain."

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"Can't you break him of the habit?"

"Nohow," she said solemnly. "Dad has tried most everything. Nothing but chains and exile will do. Of course it isn't exile, but that sounds better. Chains and exile except at night. When it's really black dark he won't leave home one step for deer or anything."

"What about moonlight nights?" asked Dallas.

"Oh, night's night to him, light or dark. Besides, he's on guard then and feels solemn. Every evening before Dad goes to bed he says in a deep, deep voice, 'Drunkard, watch out, don't let the bears come and take our good cows and calves; don't let the foxes steal the chickens nor the wolves kill the lambs.' When Dad gets to the wolves, Drunkard is just squealing with excitement. He's very sensitive. Then Dad goes on, 'Nor skunks, nor woodchucks, nor porcupines, nor beavers' till he has all the animals of the woods. Drunkard just howls with anxiety. He couldn't go dogging deer with all that charge on his hound shoulders. So all night, if you're awake, you can see him tearing round the place, watching and spying, and spying and watching and stopping for a drink."

"Gee whizz!" exclaimed my young master, "but if he is only true to you at night, what does he do when daylight comes?"

"Runs through the French windows into Dad's room," said Cassowary. "Dad always sleeps with one hand hanging out of bed. Drunkard bumps into it. Dad has a chain and snap fastened to his bed leg. He only half wakes, fastens the snap to Drunkard's collar, then goes to sleep again. Drunkard sleeps, too, and after breakfast Dad brings him out here to spend the weary livelong day or else puts him near the kitchen door for Bingi, who loves him."

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"Well! I never heard of a dog like that," said Dallas.

"Lots of 'em up here," said Cassowary, "and in many places they're kept pretty well chained up except in the hunting season. That makes Dad furious. He hates to have Drunkard chained even for part of the time. He's just meditating some way to cure him. Come on, old boy, with all thy faults I love thee still."

"Is that for me or the dog?" asked Dallas comically.

"Dog," said Cassowary quite seriously.

"Where are you going now?" asked Dallas as he suppressed a yawn.

"The round of the cow stable to say good night to the Holsteins," and she actually went and patted each serious-eyed creature in their comfortable stalls.

I found her a very amusing girl and very active and boyish with her short skirts and long legs, but not tomboyish. There was quite a difference between her age and her young sisters', so I fancied that Cassowary was much with her brothers. [Pg 100]

"Do you want to see Daddy Single-Comb and his family?" she asked suddenly.

"I do just," said my young master, "though I don't know who Daddy Single-Comb is."

"He's my Daddy, he's my dear," said Cassowary, skipping out of the stable. "If you want to see him, come right here."

Trailing Drunkard behind her she flew south across the barnyard and brought him up with a round turn at the door of a very up-to-date hen house.

"Good evening, precious pets," she said in a sweet voice as she flung open the door.

Faint clucks and hen whispers reached my ears, but when she turned on some bright lights several of the hens spoke to her quite amiably and distinctly, while a finely feathered Plymouth Rock rooster got off his perch and shaking his big wings came to put his beak in her hand.

"Even your hens have lights," said Dallas.

"Yes—they prolong the daylight and make them lay better. You must go see the power house tomorrow. It's back of this barn. Then we must visit the Falls on the Merry-Tongue River that gives us energy to make things hum here—Look at Daddy cocking his eye at you. He knows you're strange. Pet him a bit. Ah! that's right. Tell him you adore roosters."

"I adore roosters," said Dallas obligingly; then he began to laugh so violently that old Daddy started, gave him a reproachful glance and flew back to his place on the roost between two of the fattest hens. [Pg 101]

"Who's calling me?" said the young girl as her pet left my young master.

From outside we could hear clear voices—"Cass—Cass—Cassowary!"

"Coming," she replied. "Dallas, you wait here, I want to show you the other hen houses," and she and the dog dashed away.

My young master stood in the doorway staring at the drowsy hens. Then his head began to droop. He leaned against the doorpost and little by little his young legs folded under him like tape, and he sank down, his head against the hard wood.

He was too sleepy to keep his eyes open any longer. When Cassowary came back she stared at him. "Upon my weary word, he's gone sleepy." Then she shook him. "Wake up and walk to bed."

He wouldn't budge and she looked round for help.

Her father was coming across the yard, and his eyes twinkled when he saw Dallas.

"Daughter," he said, "I warned you that the boy was dead tired."

"He's as sound as a drugged top," she replied.

Mr. Devering shook my young master slightly, then smiled as he heard a murmur from the half-open lips.

"What's he muttering in his sleep?" asked Cassowary.

"Over the mountain."

"Is he thinking of the wolf?"

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"Who knows—that active young brain of his goes leaping like a mountain stream. These words have a peculiar significance from him."

"What is it?" she asked.

"My daughter, there are some things I can not tell even you."

She was laughing at the antics of young Dallas, whom Mr. Devering was trying to set on his feet.

"Poor lamb," said this strong man, and he lifted my young master's limp body as easily as if he had been Lammie-noo.

Cassowary and her dog and I trotted alongside, as we went to the house. Her eyes were on Dallas' head bobbing over her father's shoulder.

"Fallen comrade," she said presently, "just rescued from under the guns."

I could see Mr. Devering's broad shoulders shaking with amusement in spite of the burden he carried.

"Cassowary," he said, "there's some truth in that statement of yours, only the guns are family and not enemy."

"He's a queer boy," she said. "Not like us."

"You're highland plants. He's a hot-house product. Be good to him, my daughter—promise me."

"He's an awful liar," she said bluntly.

"He has more imagination than all you young ones put together," said her father warmly. "He knows

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'How short the way to fairyland
Across the purple hill.'

He will go further than——" then he stopped.

"I know what you were going to say," she remarked shrewdly. "You think he'll go further than any of us."

"He will when he gets his horns out of the velvet. I see in him a leader of men. Don't you feel his strange fascination?"

"Not a bit. He's a nice boy, but he's not as much of a boy as Big Chief. This chap couldn't lick me. Big Chief can."

"You wait till he develops, you young thing," said Mr. Devering. "You're very much less gushing over strangers than most girls your age."

"I don't love people the way you do, Dad," she said. "You're a dear. Everyone likes you. I'm hard as nails."

"No, no, child, you have a tender heart."

"I love my animals," she said softly, "better I think than human beings."

"Don't say that," said her father; "don't say that, my daughter."

"Why not, Dad?"

"We come first. Love animals, but keep them second. Now I want you to promise to stand by this lad."

"I've kept him on the trot all the evening."

"You know what I mean. The boys may bully him. I depend on you to look out for him till he gets his footing here."

"Big Chief will beat him if he lies," she said calmly.

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"He must not. I won't have it. Don't you know he is of your own blood?"

"No, Dad—is he a relative?"

"Your own and only first cousin."

"What! Has Aunt Ranna a son?"

"She has, indeed."

"Why didn't we know before?"

"Family reasons."

"Why isn't he with his mother?"

Mr. Devering stopped short despite his burden, and didn't I pull up closer and prick up my pony ears. Now I was going to hear something interesting about my boy.

"I don't know whether to tell you or not," he said.

"Tell me, Dad," she begged softly. "You and I have lots of secrets and I never tell one. Mother doesn't dream that Grandmother is going to give her a lovely surprise by coming up soon."

"Well, girlie," said Mr. Devering as he walked on slowly, "I will confide in you. When my young

sister went as a girl to live with multi-millionaire Great-Aunt Beverly Ronald, our family virtually gave her up. The old lady took her to Europe, had her beautiful voice trained and made a wonderful singer of her. During one of their brief visits to Canada your aunt met my American chum, Douglas Duff, who was visiting me. They fell in love with each other and were married, despite great-aunt's protests. However, she consented to go and live with them in Boston, where she made their lives miserable with her complaints. She said the dull life of a hard-working attorney was killing her bright young niece and there was some truth in the statement. Douglas wished his wife to stay quietly at home and he never allowed her to sing in public. Finally her health gave way, and great-aunt rushed her off to Europe to consult a specialist. Her baby boy, this lad on my shoulder, was only a year old at the time. The two women never came back and Duff was so angry that he allowed the boy to grow up thinking that his mother was dead."

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"Case of temper," said Cassowary.

"Of three tempers. One was as bad as the others. Well, the boy suffered more particularly because the old aunt at intervals made silly attempts to kidnap him, thereby angering his father and making him keep the boy shut up with old servants."

"The old lady is dead now, isn't she?"

"Yes, and your aunt is coming back to America. I hope to have her meet her son here."

"You will be glad to see your only sister," said the girl gently.

"Tremendously glad—we were devoted to each other as children and we should never have been separated. The love of money, my child, is indeed the root of all evil."

"And she let her great-aunt boss her all these years?"

"She has a gentle, yielding disposition like her boy's."

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"They call her the Ronalda, don't they?"

"Yes, that is her stage name—her old aunt's choice. Now here we are at the house. Remember you are to speak of this to no one but your mother."

"Cross my heart, Dad—my! wouldn't I fret if I'd had no mother."

The man gave her a strange look that I had interpreted later. "And you promise to stand by your cousin," he went on.

"Sure, Dad."

She spoke with great conviction, yet in a few days this queer girl was beating my young master like a little fury.

Mr. Devering sauntered in to Dallas' room through the open French window and Cassowary turned to me.

CHAPTER IX CASSOWARY TRIES MY PACES

[Pg 107]

"The evening is young yet. Dad says you are a racing pony. Come, show me your paces," and in a jiffy this swift girl had Drunkard chained to a veranda post, and had seized a new riding bridle that someone had thrown on a chair.

Then she sprang on my back, and giving my neck a slap said, "Head of the Lake, racer."

I went slowly for a few paces to see what kind of a seat she had, but I soon found that she rode like a fearless boy and would stick on no matter if I went like the wind.

Now what about the road? I didn't want to break a leg and have to be shot.

There was no trouble here. It was as smooth as a table. Mr. Devering's crusher had been at work, so I pricked up my hoofs and showed her what an Arabian-Shetland can do when on its mettle.

"Prince Fetlar," said my rider as we galloped along, "you may be a winner, but so far you don't beat my Apache Girl, who is an Indian pony."

I pricked up my ears and she went on just as if she knew that I understood her, "Apache Girl is a dear and don't you dare to cross her. If you do, you'll reckon with me. She's up in the far pasture now with the other ponies, but she is soon coming home and you'll have a chance to get acquainted. Now away, away. I'm jockey number one and my colors are blue and white. Next us is a sorrel pony, his jockey is red and green, next him a white pony, colors black and gold. Beat them, Pony, beat them!" and she gave me a good whack.

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So this nice wild girl wanted me to beat those imaginary ponies, did she? Well, I could pretend to see them as distinctly as she could, and I entered on a pace that grew and grew till we seemed to be flying.

She had all she could do to hold on now, yet she screamed, "Go it! Go it!—We've overhauled blue and white, but red and green is three lengths ahead. Beat him, Pony, beat him!" and she thumped me well.

"There now!" she exclaimed presently, "the sound of his hoofs is getting fainter and fainter. He's fallen behind—we're it—we're it."

I had not been exercised for some days, and the road did feel good to my hoofs, while the keen sharp air seemed to cut open to let us through and to bathe us with wood scents as we passed.

There was the pungent odor of burning logs in the settlers' cottages that seemed to dance by us and the lovely scent of flowers and young leaves in the woodland patches between the houses. The air was like velvet to my nostrils. How different from the irritating city dust that made me sneeze and cough.

I stretched out my neck, and as for my tail it floated out so straight behind that I didn't seem to have any. My every stride was a little longer, a little faster. [Pg 109]

By and by we passed the last of the settlers' houses and the summer cottages, and now there were only the flying trees on one side and the cool gloom and pallor of the lake on the other.

Suddenly we came into shadow and partial darkness. We were rounding the head of the lake and high above us towered forbidding steep rock cliffs shorn of all greenness by a bush fire that had passed over and left them desolate.

I flashed by them like a streak of lightning, but just beyond them when we got into the neighbourhood of some gaunt pines fire-scorched but not burnt, my clatter over the bare hard road suddenly ceased. My rider had pulled me up.

"Bang!" she yelled, "over the line, over the line, first money for us," and flinging herself off my back, she threw her arms about my neck.

"There's your share," she said and she gave me a regular bear hug. Then she sprang on my back again. "Home, Prince Fetlar, home! Mother will be saying, 'Cassowary is as bad as the robins. She won't go to bed—she won't go to bed.'"

I hated to think of this nice girl being scolded, so I took her back as quickly as we had come, she clinging to my back like a crab and making as much noise as a loon.

She did wake the loons up, and afterward I learned that they knew her voice and loved her, for she was good to them and protected them. [Pg 110]

They were in full cry that night and answered every line of the victory song she howled as she clung to me with her bony young knees.

"I ran my pony in a race,
He leaped and bounded full of grace,
The loons they called, they called to me,
I answered them quite daft with glee."

"Not good poetry, Prince," she gasped, "but Dad says—he says when your heart is bursting, break into verse—any old verse. It's yours. Other fellow doesn't know your thoughts. I'll sing again—about you and Dallas. Echo! loonies," and she began to shout,

"With hoofs of gold and temper sweet,
A pony's come to our farm,
He brought a master trim and neat
And full of charm.

Alas! the master likes to lie,
He does not know that Satan waits,
And pitchforks boys to bye and bye,
Who wander out from Truth's dear gates."

I stopped short. I thought she was making too much fuss about my poor young master's pleasant stories—and what about her own made-up tales about the three other ponies in the race with us?

"What's the matter with you, boy?" she asked as she nearly plunged over my head. "Oh! you want me to go say good-night to Happy Harry—bright thought," and in a trice she was off my back and running up a path to a pretty red house. [Pg 111]

No pony could get ahead of this girl, and I watched her as she went into the Talker home. I could see the family through the windows. Mr. and Mrs. Talker were sitting each side of an open fire, and on a lounge between them was a young man who must be Happy Harry.

I looked back over the road we had come, and as I looked some electric lights suddenly flashed on, making the market road as beautiful as a dream.

On one side of us was the lake, on the other the narrow frontages of the cottages and a cute little

country store with a veranda to it. It was some distance behind us, but I could see men sitting tipped back on chairs on the veranda, and someone was playing on a concertina.

Tall Lombardy poplars that I found out afterward were the pride of Mr. Talker's life, lined the road, and their leaves glistened like silver in the bright light that evidently came from Mr. Devering's power house.

I thought I would go and look in the windows, to see what Miss Cassowary was doing, so I stepped softly up a path in the grass.

The girl was on the hearthrug standing quite still, and listening to the brown-faced boy on the lounge. He was talking in a very lively manner, and made frequent gestures with his hands. His poor legs were quite still under a rug. He had gone away to the war, and having lost his own feet had now artificial ones that often hurt him very much. However, his face was nice and brown, showing that he was out in the sunshine a good deal. [Pg 112]

His parents' eyes were glued to his face. He was the joy of their life, and they were so thankful not to have had him killed that they did not seem to mind his lameness.

He minded it, though, and many a time later on when he thought no one was looking, I saw him passing his hand over his eyes as if he wanted to shut out the sight of other young people dashing about on their own strong feet.

Mr. Talker looked quite gentlemanly in dark house clothes, for he had shed his working suit. I soon discovered that he was a clergyman, and the reason he hadn't talked to my young master in coming in from the Lake of Bays was on account of his always choosing the time of long drives for the composition of his sermons.

Just now he was holding a skein of wool for his wife to wind, but they were getting it all tangled because their eyes were on their boy.

Suddenly Cassowary began to speak, and I heard through the open window some nice praise about myself.

She was telling about our race and an old dog who was lying by the fire got up and came to growl at me.

"There's your intelligent wee beastie at the window," said Mrs. Talker.

"Invite him in, please Father," said the young man, lifting himself on his elbow.

Mr. Talker threw him an affectionate glance, then he came to the front door and politely asked me to come in. [Pg 113]

I am always sorry for young people who are not strong, and I have often been taken into their rooms to cheer them up.

Pausing in the doorway, I bowed my head to the company, then I went in, picking my steps carefully so as not to bump into chairs or tables.

Happy Harry had been in the artillery and was used to horses. He put his hand out, and I went and stood beside him.

"Fine of bone, and slender of body," he said; "some Arab in him, eh?"

"Lots," said Cassowary, "his grandfather came from Fetlar in the Shetlands."

"He's a good deal more than forty-six inches high," said the young man.

"Yes, for his parents were bred in the American corn belt."

"It's queer," said Happy Harry, "how the Old Country people run to a stocky, blocky pony. We like more refinement of shape."

"Yes," said Cassowary, "I've heard that the real Shetland type over there is like a tiny draft horse."

"This little fellow is a bit too high," said Harry. "He'd be disqualified in a pony show."

"He isn't going to be shown," said Cassowary, patting me, "he's just going to have a good time,—aren't you, Fetlar?"

I pawed the hardwood floor three times, and they all laughed heartily. [Pg 114]

"He's a beauty," said Happy Harry, and he grinned cheerfully. "Oh! to be a boy again and on a pony's back!—Can you shake hands, little fellow?"

I lifted my right fore-foot and he shook it heartily and then began to fumble in a basket of wool.

"He knits," said Cassowary to me. "Isn't he splendid! Dad is wearing some of his socks now."

The old dog began to growl again. He saw lumps of sugar coming out from among the balls of wool.

I didn't care. I ate all I wished from the kind palm of the brave young soldier man, then I made

one more bow to the company and backed toward the door.

They all clapped their hands. "I didn't know he could do tricks," said Cassowary delightedly. "I'll get Dad to put him through his amusement paces."

As I went out to the veranda the old dog followed me, and as soon as we were alone I gave him a gentle nip.

"What's that for?" he asked in an ugly way.

"To teach you manners," I said. "This was my first call, and you received me in a surly way."

He drooped his head so sadly that I said, "What's the matter with you?"

"I'm getting old," he said, "and I'm afraid Mr. Talker will shoot me."

"You don't want to die?"

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"No, I want to live. I like the Talkers and the feeding is good."

"Well, if you want to live," I said, "hold up your head and look cheerful. I'd shoot you on sight if you were my dog. You've such a disagreeable air."

He didn't care anything about my opinion. He was a very selfish old dog, but he snapped at my suggestion.

"Do you think it would make a difference?" he said eagerly.

"Don't I just! Toss up your head now, pretend you're a pup, and gambol down the road. Come on, I'll go with you."

He made a desperate little break for a few paces, then he stopped short. "My breath's gone."

"What's the matter with you?" I asked. "You haven't any wind at all. Don't you exercise every day?"

"No. I lie mostly by the fire. I'm old, I tell you."

"Oh! get out, old dog," I replied, "you only think you're old. Let me see your teeth."

He curled back his lips.

"You're lazy," I said. "That's all the trouble with you. Spruce up, and go trotting for a while, then run, then leap. Mr. Talker will say you've got your second wind and he'll spare you."

"But I might fall dead," he said.

"Suppose you did. There's another life for dogs, many good people say. You'll start afresh and live forever. No one could kill you if they tried."

"I like the sound of that," he said, putting his head on one side. "Perhaps I'd better just loaf along here and slip off as soon as I can."

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"No, no, that won't do," I said. "While you live, live, and work and play. Don't think about death. The old reaper will do your thinking for you."

"Who's he?" he asked.

"Now you just think that out," I returned. "Your dog mind is as rusty as your dog body. Good-night, here comes my young Missy," and I stepped down to the path.

However, Miss Cassowary did not get on my back. One never knew what that girl would do.

"Race me to the house, Prince Fetlar," she said and off she started on her own young hoofs.

Of course I let her beat me and kept behind watching her long black hair flapping up and down in the wind, for the ribbon had come off. However, I came in a close second when she pulled up in front of her own home.

A voice from the veranda said, "Late again, my daughter. No pocket money this week."

"Ah! Daddy," she said in a wheedling voice.

"Rules must be kept, and wild girls must be broken," he replied gaily, "and poor Dad must be sacrificed on the altar of family affection," and he laid a hand on her head.

"Oh! dear," she said quickly, then she repeated in a rapid voice, "every boy and every girl on coming home from a ride must give his or her mount a rub-down. Rule of the house number three. I'm sorry I'm so late, Dad."

"Go face your mother," he returned, "she's in a fine state about you. No girl must be outside the gates of Devering Farm after dark. Rule six—Come on your highness," and cheerily whistling he led the way to my log cabin.

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There was no light in my little home, so he hung up an electric torch, and when he found my brushes he asked me to come outside. The grounds were beautifully illuminated by globes on high poles and he whistled and rubbed till I was in a glow all over.

Here was a man that understood grooming a pony. Oh! there is such a difference in hands—tough hands, harsh hands, impatient hands and cruel hands, all affect a pony's temper. On the other hand if at the end of a hard day nice kind understanding hands smooth your body and comfort your pony soul, you go to bed so happy.

When he finished grooming me he smiled as I went in and nosed over the hay in my rack.

"Fuss-box, eh!" he said. "I thought so. What about some nice warm gruel?"

How I pricked up my ears and whinnied at this.

"Then come up to the barn kitchen," he said, and off we started.

He led the way round the big barn to a room in the carriage house. There was an electric stove here and he soon had water heating and was making me the nicest mess of oatmeal gruel I ever tasted. What a clever man he was! He could do anything, even to the making of good gruel, and I lifted my dripping muzzle from the basin and gave him a grateful look.

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"All right, Prince," he said, patting me, "you'd do as much for me if you could. Now go put yourself to bed. I must wash up. 'Leave pots and pans as you find them'—Rule 8, Devering Farm."

I made him a bow, which he did not see, as he was washing his dishes, then I paced thoughtfully to my cabin. This was a remarkable place. There was something in the air here that made a pony feel happy all the time. The master and mistress were kind, and though the children were a bit lively and quarrelsome, they were all right at bottom. I should like it here. I was glad I had been brought up to this wildwood place for this dear new young master, and I glanced toward the room where he was sleeping.

How amazed he would be when he found out that his mother was not dead. All young things love their mothers and cling to them. Even I, middle-aged pony, remember my mother's lovely care and how she would put her little body between me and danger.

Once an angry bull ran at us and gored her painfully before the men drove him away. She didn't care. She had saved my young skin. Mothers are certainly very comfortable things, and at this point in my thoughts I fell asleep and dreamed I was a foal again running beside this same dear wee mother over the fields of the beautiful estate on Long Island where I was brought up.

CHAPTER X EARLY MORNING ON DEVERING FARM

[Pg 119]

What a good sleep I had! Then—slowly, slowly I lifted my head, as I thought, from the warm pillow of my mother's side, but alas! it was only the warm pillow of my wheat straw.

I heaved a pony sigh, and staggered to my feet.

"My land! what a morning,
My land! what a morning!"

a young darky groom that I used to have down South would sing when he was passing his nice black paws over my skin after breakfast.

Then his master, who was a poet, would come and glance in the stable door and say, "Lift up your eyes, boys—there's gold in the sky," and the colored boys would look and wonder and wish the gold would roll down and then their master would laugh in his pleasant Southern way, and say, "Now it's on the water—now it's on the land. Watch it, boys."

The sunlight this morning was certainly a pure gold, but a cool calm northern gold. The lake was exquisite and I noted something that had not struck me the evening before. Nearly all the wooded points running out into the lake had wonderful silver birches on their tips. Their trunks were white and glistening and they stood like beautiful white ladies in front of the close masses of sturdy dark tree boles of the elms behind them. They certainly were the beauties of this northern wildwood.

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The dainty little breezes rippling the surface of the lake reminded me that I was thirsty and Mr. Talker, who was passing by with a covered milk pail in each hand, said, "Go down to the lake, boy. You are the only quadruped without running water in your stall."

I felt like a colt, and kicking up my hoofs, raced through the barnyard gates and across the road to the long strip of sandy shore in front of the farm.

While I was drinking and playing with the water by blowing it through my nostrils, a bullhead came, and stared at me, then a full-grown bass gave me a very friendly wink.

We ponies don't have much to say to fishes except by eye-talk. These fellows had some intelligence. They were shy and wild with the children I soon found out, because they fished for them most persistently. However, an old bass told me one day that they were very grateful to the

children for fishing with barbless hooks.

I once knew a mother fish on the Maine coast who deliberately gave her life for her little fishes. They were caught in a pool when the tide went out. She couldn't get them to follow her to deep water, so she stayed and perished beside them. When I said to her as she flopped about in the shallow water, "Leave them and call for them next tide," she rolled her dying eyes at me and said, "I can't—they're my little fishes."

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Therefore I have great respect for fish. Indeed, I find in my pony life that if you despise any created thing it surprises you.

After I got my nice long drink this morning, I galloped back to the farmyard.

"Go slow, go slow, be careful," someone clucked, and looking down I saw Bidy Pilgrim and a flock of Plymouth Rock hens.

She was quite excited, and began to talk to them about me.

"This is the new pony—he has a good eye. He's kind to hens. Don't put your heads on one side. He won't scare you. Come on. I like ponies. Horses are too big."

"Cut, cut, ca, da, dee," they all said, and I put my head down to them in a kind manner, for to tell the truth there is just a little jealousy between us little ponies and the bigger horses.

While we stood passing the time of day there was a great fuss and flutter and Daddy Single-Comb came rushing along, his wings going, his tail feathers sticking out.

"Oh, here you are, here you are," he gasped, while I thought how queer it is that nearly every winged creature says a thing, then says it over again. We quadrupeds say a thing, and it's over.

"My dears, my dears," cackled Daddy, "come down to the river hollow, come down, come down. The early worms are out. Soon they'll get in. Is it to be in the ground or in our crops? Heyday! Pony, how are you? I like ponies, but how can I stop to talk? I'm in a rush, a rush," and he spread his big wings, but kept on talking.

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"So many dears, so many cares; come on, my biddies, come on, come on. Follow me, follow me," and this time he did go with a spring and a flutter and they all chased after him, their hen minds on the worms.

He was very proud of his biddies, and I did not wonder. They were in prime condition, not too fat, not too lean, and not one with a pale head showing poor blood.

I heard him screaming after some wandering ones, "Not to the hill. No, no. Trust me. Cut cut cro! I know, I know. This way, dears. Quick, quick, such a worm—c-crack what a worm. Grab him quick. Bidy first, Bidy first."

I smiled at his jabber. Evidently he was the only rooster on the place, and he had his claws full with all those hens. Well, it was better to fuss than fight, as he would probably have done if there had been another rooster interfering with his route marches.

As I stood listening to their hen talk dying away in the hollow, the cows, led by Princess Pat, came from the little barn, their walk unhurried, for cows do hate a fuss and flutter.

Princess Pat paused beside Mr. Talker, who was returning from the house with empty pails.

"Near pasture, Pattie," he said and waved his hand up the hill.

The beautiful Holstein turned in her calm way and with her friends lagged up to the top of the hill and over to a low-lying field that would be green and fresh in spite of the slight drought they had been having.

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While I gazed admiringly after this fine herd a great yapping and snarling came from under the big barn.

I ran over and found Sir Veteran and Guardie were having a scrap. Oh! how provoked the good dog was, and how furious Sir Veteran was. Animals have their tempers just like human beings.

While Sir Vet and Guardie had their spat, Girlie was rounding the other pigs away from them.

I listened to the abuse.

"Down the lake," Guardie was growling.

"Up, up," grunted Sir Vet. "I say I won't go down."

"You shall," yapped Guardie, "the boss said so. Up work is done. The rocks are loose. We've got to clear burnt land by the dam."

"Up," snorted Sir Vet again. "Better feeding up. I'm boss. I hate down. I'm a prize boar. I cost a thousand dollars. Shut up, you cur."

Collies are high strung and Guardie just yelled at this insult. "My father was a show dog—and they refused ten thousand dollars for him at the Wissahickon Kennels in Pennsylvania. I never boasted before, but you make me, you runt of a pig," and he gave him a good nip on his loin.

That settled matters. Sir Vet squealed miserably, and bursting into pig sobs started down the road pretty quick.

"He's forever setting up his boar mind against Guardie," said Girlie in my ear as I put my head down to get her opinion of the quarrel. "I'll lick his wound a bit when we get settled down. He and Guardie really love each other, but they're always quarrelling—all right, boy, I'm ready." [Pg 124]

Guardie had given her a signal bark, and it was pretty to see her wheel about right and start her charges down the road after the snorting prize boar, who was pursuing his lonely short-legged way toward the dam on the Merry-Tongue River at the foot of the Lake.

"Everybody fights," I called after her, "ponies and pigs and everybody. Don't worry, just keep from fighting till you have to and forget your fight when it's over. A scrap clears the air."

"Right-O! bow wow," she barked back at me, then she ran on after her mate who was joyfully welcoming his drove of golden dollars rolling down the road in such fine style.

When they were out of sight, I was about to run to my young master's bed-room, but was arrested by an extraordinary sight.

A big dark man who was not very tall though his shoulders were as broad as a table came down from a bed-room over the carriage-house. Picking up a mowing machine that stood in the yard, he carried it quite easily into a shed where other machines stood.

I stopped and stared at him, and Mr. Talker who happened to be near smiled at me.

"Intelligent wee beastie," he said, "you know that is an odd sight." [Pg 125]

I moved closer to him—that strange man after putting down the machine was moving toward the barn cellar, a barrel under each arm. Then he came out with a small tractor on his back.

"He's Samp, short for Sampson," said Mr. Talker. "Mr. Devering rescued him from a situation as strong man in a theatre where bad air and long hours were killing him. He's made of iron, Pony, and carries pianos and chests of drawers as easily as I would chairs. He's half Macedonian and half Canadian. Come here, Samp."

The strong man grinned and coming to us picked me up and to my terror put me on his shoulder where I balanced, all four legs in the air, fearful that I might fall and break my back.

I have a voice and can use it, and I don't see why other ponies and horses don't do more of this calling out.

At my shrill protesting neigh Mr. Talker told him to put me on the ground and with a fearful glance over my shoulder I scampered away to the house, wondering what this strange creature was made of. I don't like unnatural beings.

However I soon forgot him in the pretty sight of all the kiddies sleeping out on the lower verandas. Their beds had evidently been drawn out through the French windows for there has been none in sight in the day time.

Big Chief was a sight, lying across his narrow bed, his pajama clad legs hanging down one side, his head the other. Every bit of bed clothing was on the floor. He was snorting and blowing in his sleep like old Sir Vet. What dreadful dreams he must be having. [Pg 126]

I picked up his bed covers in my strong teeth and dropped them neatly over him.

Champ, Sojer and Little Big-Wig were all sleeping nicely and in straight lines. The girls must be behind some high screens. I could hear their gentle breathing, but could not see them.

I went on very quiet shoes to the veranda outside my young master's window. He was sleeping inside his room but the windows were wide open. He was lying flat on his back, not a bit of color in his fine young face. The white covers were drawn up close to his chin. Oh! I did hope that he would soon get brown and ruddy like the other kiddies—my own dear little lad, and I ventured to take a step into the room and stretched my head out longingly toward him.

"Now, Pony—you're not a dog," said someone, and I got a slight slap behind.

I started—there was the young mother of the household looking like a girl in her pretty dark bathing suit and white rubber cap.

She was not cross with me, for she was smiling kindly, so I followed her along the veranda to the front of the house where she went lightly into the living room and began to tidy chairs, tables and sofas.

She glided about so quickly that she reminded me of Cassowary.

"These bathing suits are fine for housework, Pony-Boy," she said. "Long skirts should be for dress-up occasions only. Now let's start the fire," and dancing out through one of the open glass doors of the room she hurried to the back of the house. [Pg 127]

White-clad Bingi was bending over a cook book lying open on a glass-topped table, but occasionally he cast a glance at pots boiling merrily on the stove and sending out delicious odors. Oh! what a good breakfast the family was going to have.

It was the big wood stove instead of the gas one that was going this morning. It seemed to be shouting with glee. He had crammed it full of wood sticks happy to give up their lives for the dear human beings they were so fond of, for trees have much sentiment.

They were all telling the story of their lives in the forest, and telling it very quickly before they were overcome by their pleasant death in the warm embrace of the flames. Of course they weren't really going to die forever, for their ashes would be spread on the breast of Mother Earth who would make new young trees out of them.

"I was a white birch," I heard one shriek, "and it was under my branches the White Phantom stood while she drank from the haunted stream. Alas! the poor White Phantom. In a few days she will be lying in the ferns."

I pricked up my ears. What was this story? A few days later I heard the sequel, so I will not put it down here.

"And I was a beech," roared a deeper voice, "and for twenty years I shaded the sugaring-off place. Then a great wind blew me down and men cut me to pieces." [Pg 128]

"I was a tamarac," and "I an elm," I heard in other dying voices, but I had to follow Mrs. Devering who had seized a basket and was going to the woodshed.

Bingi looked at me strangely. There was something sympathetic in his narrow eyes. Did he too understand tree talk, I wondered? He was certainly kind to every living thing as far as I had observed him.

I was to have further proof of this for Lammie-noo suddenly appeared and tried the patience of his cook friend.

He stood looking at the stove in a way that showed he had morning as well as evening milk.

Sheep are usually very patient creatures, too patient perhaps, for if they asserted themselves a little more they would get better treatment. Lammie-noo being petted was not a typical sheep. He became impatient at Bingi's devotion to the book on the pastry table and deliberately going up to a stand of empty preserve jars he butted the whole thing over. Then he stood back to see what Bingi would say to him.

The little Oriental turned round gravely. Then he stared at the broken glass—and then he did not beat the lamb. "Of somewhat precipitousness thou," he said, "but thy stomach is thy god. Broken glass is my sin, for I tardied to feed," all of which meant that Lammie-noo was forgiven.

The creature even had the impudence to go up and say, "Ba-a-a!" meaning that he wished to be petted for being put to the trouble of losing his temper. [Pg 129]

Bingi was stroking him with one hand when I left, and heating his milk with the other.

Once I saw a man beating a lamb. It was a dreadful sight.

However in my ramblings I am forgetting the little house-mother who was building a great roaring fire in the living-room.

"Ah! Prince Fetlar," she said when I trotted in and stood warming myself. "I wondered why you stopped dogging or perhaps I should say ponying my footsteps— Now we'll play the rising tune," and going to the hall she took a bugle from a hook and began a lovely tune, first soft and low, then high and piercing.

Out on the verandas we heard calls and cries. "Mother don't— It's too early to get up— Please a little longer."

Oh! how the bugle shrilled at them—then she sang at the top of her lungs,

"I can't get 'em up,
I can't get 'em up,
I can't get 'em up in the morning.
The girls are right slow
The boys they are worse
And Daddy's the worst of all."

Then she listened. "Silence on the veranda, Pony. I'll try another song," and she chanted,

"Hot cakes for breakfast,
Maple sugar and cream,
Potatoes and bacon
And apples and eggs."

At this, there was a great sound of running and jumping, and I stepped to my young master's windows to find out whether all this noise had awakened him. [Pg 130]

It had. He was sitting up in bed, a bewildered look on his face as if to say, "Where am I?"

When he caught sight of me he cried, "Oh! my Bonnie Prince Fetlar—then this is not a dream," and springing out of bed he ran to caress me.

Someone opened his door and flung a bathing suit in. "You said you hadn't one," remarked Champ and he withdrew his tousled head.

"My Prince," said Dallas, "do you suppose those crazy kids are going in the water this cold day?"

I looked up and down the veranda. The children were certainly coming out in bathing suits. I had been taught to pull clothes off boys, so I nipped the back of his pajama jacket in my teeth. The button-holes must have been large, for it came off at once, and he laughed and put on the woollen suit.

"Are you ready, Cousin?" yelled Cassowary. "If so, come."

"Yes," and young Dallas' teeth chattered. He stepped out to the veranda and there was Cassowary dancing up and down and looking more like a bird than ever in her tight fitting suit with its bobbing tail.

"Are you really going in the lake this chilly morning?" asked Dallas.

"Shut up," she said good naturedly. "Don't let the other kids hear you say it's cold. It's only because you're not used to it."

"I—I thought you said there was a bathhouse," remarked poor Dallas, "with hot and cold water." [Pg 131]

"So there is," and she pointed to a little green house among the lilacs, "and bath-rooms in the house too."

Unfortunately Big Chief who had just come leaping out of his room heard these last remarks.

"Lots of bath-rooms," he cried, "for sissies and old women." Then he did cart-wheels down the drive to the road.

Dallas' face fell, but lightened when Mrs. Devering tapped him on the shoulder. "You wait for me," she said. "Cassowary, take the children down. Get the ball and have a game of water polo—Dad and I will follow."

Then she drew Dallas in to the big fire where he got nicely warmed by the blaze.

When Mr. Devering appeared—such a handsome lean brown-armed man in his blue bathing suit, the two good people took the boy between them, and raced down to the wharf.

"Go on, Mother," said Mr. Devering, "I'll keep the boy with me," and didn't she go diving off the end of the wharf and was soon playing water polo with her lively children.

What a sporty lot they were! In the boat-house beside a big launch there were canoes, racing skiffs, aqua-planes, life preservers, fishing tackle and many other things useful in life in the backwoods.

Dallas was entering the water very slowly, and holding tight to Mr. Devering's hand. [Pg 132]

"Have you never been in open water before?" asked my little lad's uncle.

"Once on a beach on a hot day with John and Margie, but usually only in a bath-tub," said the poor lad.

To encourage him, I ran before and did my water stunts.

He smiled when he saw me swimming and frisking and said, "The Prince is braver than I am."

"He's an old campaigner," said Mr. Devering. "That pony hasn't lived in vain. Come out deeper, boy. You won't find the water cold when you've been in a few minutes."

"It's simply freezing my heart," said the boy pitifully.

"Jump up and down with me—there that is better. Now may I splash you a bit? I hate to frighten newcomers in the water."

"Y-yes, Uncle, and I'll try to splash you."

The splashing was a failure for he fell down. Mr. Devering picked him up by the back as if he had been a puppy dog and said, "Tear up to the house—touch a match to the kindling in the box stove in your room and dress like sixty."

Dallas cast an apprehensive look over his shoulder.

"They're not paying any attention to you," said Mr. Devering. "Skedaddle," and he clapped his hands.

"And you, Prince Fetlar," he called after me, "run up and down the road to dry yourself—we're all too busy to give you a rub-down now." [Pg 133]

I ran along beside my master up to the house and found to my dismay that his eyes were full of tears. "I'm an awful baby, my Pony," he gulped, "but I can't help it."

I just tore up and down the fine piece of road in front of the house until my blood was like liquid fire. Then I went to see how young Dallas was getting on.

Poor chap—he had forgotten to light his fire, and he was blue with cold. Suddenly his door opened and Mr. Devering came in fully dressed, his face red and glowing.

He had his nephew's clothes all on in a trice, brushed his hair, fastened his tie, then took him to the living room.

"Mother," he called through the open doorway to the dining veranda, "may Dallas and I have our breakfast by the fire?"

She opened her eyes a bit, but her husband gave her a glance, and she said, "Certainly. Big Chief, set a wee table for two."

It was most unfortunate that it happened to be Big Chief's morning to wait on table. He gave Dallas a surly glance and very unwillingly took a little wheeled table out to the veranda, put knives and forks and spoons and plates on it and brought it back to a settle in the chimney corner.

Dallas shrank back against the seat, then to make matters worse a sudden terrible sound arose from the Lake that frightened even me—the old campaigner as Mr. Devering had called me.

CHAPTER XI ANOTHER LIE

[Pg 134]

I had hidden myself among the lilacs but I could see quite plainly across the veranda into the big living-room.

Dallas had sprung up and clutched the nearest person who happened to be Big Chief carrying a pile of plates in his hand.

Smash! went the plates on the floor, and whack went Big Chief's empty hands against Dallas' shoulders.

"What's the matter with you?" he exclaimed. "Are you crazy?"

"That yell," gasped Dallas. "Is someone drowning?"

"No, no," said Mr. Devering, "it's only Bolshy getting his bath."

White and ashamed, young Dallas had sunk back on the settle, and Mr. Devering turned to his son.

"Tecumseh, my boy," he said good-naturedly, "it seems to me you were laying rather violent hands on our guest."

His tone was not stern. I saw he was not a person to aggravate a boy into revolt; however when Big Chief scowled and came to stare out in my direction, both hands rammed sulkily into his pockets, his father stepped after him.

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"Your ugly humors are riding you to a fall," he said quietly. "Go apologise to your cousin."

Big Chief gave him a quick look, then he went to Dallas and said gruffly, "I hope I didn't hurt you, when I grabbed your shoulders."

"Not a bit," said Dallas; "but do tell me what that noise was."

I saw Big Chief's lips just forming a W that meant he was going to say "Wolf." Then he changed his mind, for his father stood near him.

"It's a Russian," he said. "He fought in France, was wounded, came to Canada as a stoker on a steamer, was arrested and put in a camp near here. The war over, he was released. He didn't want to go to Russia. He got lost in the woods. The game warden found him, and washes him and the Russian yells."

"The warden is trying to make a good Canadian citizen out of him," said Mr. Devering quietly.

By this time, the children were all standing by the table singing their pretty grace before meat. When they sat down Cassowary called out, "Dad, can't we take Cousin over to see the Russian? You'll like him, Dallas. He's all hairy like a dog."

"Thank you," said my young master politely; "if he isn't getting hurt, I should like to see him."

"We can take over the Russian blouse Mother is making for him," said the girl, "and you can see for yourself, Dallas, how kind the warden and his son are to him. But of course he must keep clean."

Dallas shuddered. He had great sympathy for anyone forced to go into the water that cold morning.

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"We'll go after breakfast," said Cassowary, "just the big kids."

At this, there was a howl from Sojer, Dovey and Big-Wig who were evidently the little kids. Up here in the Canadian backwoods it was just like the same old story as in cities—the big children were always trying to get away from the little ones.

Mrs. Devering gave her husband a helpless look. By this time the cereal had been put on the table by Big Chief and the children were busily eating it and pouring on plenty of rich wonderful cream. Oh! how I wished that some of the pale young children in cities could have such cream.

"Daddy," said Mrs. Devering, "what are we going to do with these noisy children? They are as full of sound as empty vessels."

"I don't know," said Mr. Devering. "I wonder whether it is because they are growing so fast. They never yelled like this before."

"We've got to do something about it," his wife went on. "If their grandmother should come up this summer, she would be deafened."

"It's nothing to worry about," he said, "only misdirected energy. The trouble with young things is that they can't remember to remember. What do they propose to do themselves about it?" and he glanced through the doorway at his children.

My dear young master was going on eating quite comfortably. For once this trouble was none of his. Whatever his faults might be he was no yeller. [Pg 137]

"Thpank the howlerths," cried little Big-Wig, who was the worst screamer of all.

"Gate them," said Cassowary in a high-pitched voice.

"Fine them," called Champ.

"Send them to bed," exclaimed Sojer.

"Take away their toys," shrieked Dovey.

"And you Big Chief," said Cassowary pertly, "you with the brassiest voice of all, what say you?"

He was finishing his oatmeal quickly, so he could get up and change the plates, and he said in a thick voice, "Cut their grub."

Mrs. Devering smiled quite contentedly. "I think this expression of opinion goes to prove that each child has mentioned the punishment most disliked. Therefore if you baby don't stop screaming we'll spank you; Jeanne will be put in bounds; Champlain fined, James sent to bed, Marguerite deprived of her dolls and Tecumseh put on bread and water."

The children all shrieked with laughter at the neat way in which their parents had trapped them, and I saw that there was good feeling in this family even in the matter of punishments. Big Chief was the only naughty one, and something would come to reform him I was sure, for he could not be a bad boy at heart—with such parents.

The children were careful to speak in very even polite tones as they ate their bacon and eggs and griddle cakes. I watched my young master's face and was delighted to see it growing redder as he sat by the fire and stuffed his young self with this good food. Soon he would be as hardy as these children. [Pg 138]

How he loved his uncle. He watched him as a cat would watch a mouse, and ate everything he ate and drank whatever he drank— No one had coffee or tea, they had milk, cocoa, buttermilk, and cold water, which latter the kiddies drank as if it had been something that would make them super-children.

As soon as breakfast was finished Mrs. Devering looked round at the squirming family and said, "Another reform—please get up quietly and push your chairs in to the table, but don't rise till I do. I'm hostess."

In two minutes there wasn't a child in sight. "Where have they gone?" asked Dallas.

"All have tasks," said Mr. Devering. "When I was a boy I thought as a boy who was a rich man's child. Servants waited on me. My children live in a new age. They must learn to wait on themselves."

I could see the children flying about the place. Cassowary was carrying food from the kitchen to the hen-house, Big Chief had gone to help clean the stables, Sojer was sweeping the verandas, Dovey was putting seeds and scraps on the wild bird tables about the lawn. It seems there weren't enough birds about to kill the insect pests, so Mr. Devering was giving extra food to attract more.

The curled darling Big-Wig was picking up scraps of paper and bits of litter from the drive, and grumbling to his little aristocratic self as he did so. He would be a regular small slave-driver with servants if he had his head. Just as well there was a check-rein. [Pg 139]

"And what shall I do?" asked Dallas eagerly.

"Come and see," said Mr. Devering, and to my delight he began to lead the way to my cabin, first

calling out, "Come from behind the lilacs, you sly-boots."

That was I, and I bowed my head a great many times to propitiate him as I joined them.

Oh! what a lesson he gave my young master on the proper way to take care of a pony.

"Horses are true friends of man," he said, as he led the way past my cabin and the barns up to the long horse stable on the hill. "Every boy should know how to take care of them. There are two classes of stables—town and country. We won't talk about the first to-day. This is supposed to be a model country stable. It is not in a barn where if the hay got on fire the horses might burn. It has a double row of stalls with doors opening outward—you see the ground is high, well-drained, and the stalls have an east and west exposure so all the horses can get a bit of sunshine."

"Is it of stone?" asked Dallas.

"No, concrete with a hollow centre for a dead air space."

We walked inside the nice fresh-smelling stable and Dallas looked round him. "Where are the horses?"

"Out to pasture—let us go down this main alleyway and I will explain the lay-out to you." [Pg 140]

My young master was intensely interested as his uncle talked to him about the width of stalls, the size of windows, the proper kind of concrete flooring which should have wooden stall racks, the ventilating flues and rolling doors.

"Why didn't you bring my Prince Fetlar up to this grand stable?" asked young Dallas, smiling at me as I thrust an inquiring muzzle over his shoulder.

"Because we never assign a stall till we find out a horse's disposition. If you went to boarding-school you wouldn't want to bed next a boy you disliked."

"Not I," said my sensitive young master with a shiver. "It makes me sick to be near people I don't care for."

"Well, ponies are almost as particular as boys. Now come over to this side of the stable where the ponies face west. Here's your pet's stall next Apache Girl's. She won't have every pony next her, but she will get on with his amiable highness."

This was a compliment for me, so I licked a bit of this nice man's shoulder in a caressing way, and he turned and gazed deep into what he called my "soft and soulful" eyes.

"So you are to come up here, Prince Fetlar," said Dallas, stroking me kindly. "Now I wonder what this big stall beyond yours is for. It looks as if you could put a dozen ponies in it."

"That's the hospital stall," said his uncle. "See, there is a bed above it for a man to sleep when a pony or horse requires to be watched at night. A button by his bed enables him to turn on the light." [Pg 141]

"I see you have lights all over the stable," said Dallas.

"Yes, the horse race likes cheerfulness as much as we do. Now let us groom the Prince."

Didn't I step forward with alacrity when I heard this.

"He knows every word we say," remarked Mr. Devering. "I'm mighty glad I chanced on so knowing a little fellow. Now, Dallas, a few words on grooming. Indians use the bare hand and arm—utensils in common stable use among us whites are the metal curry-combs, bristle body-brushes, corn-brushes, rub rags, sponges, whisks and hoof picks. Do you know why one grooms?"

"To keep horses clean, my Uncle."

"Exactly—horses shed particles of skin the way we do. One must remove them. To begin with I may say that I do not permit in my stables any metal curry-combs. Men are careless about filing the new ones and they worry a horse. I use no metal brushes. Now here is a brush for you—no, don't rub your Prince the right way of the hair—the reverse way to get out the dandruff and dry dirt. Here let me show you. The body brush is the one used to rub the hair the way it grows."

I stood quite still, very much amused at the feeble pawing little hand of my young master, such a contrast to the steady firm one of the man. Well, all young things have to learn. [Pg 142]

Mr. Devering showed the boy how to do my tail and mane and hand-pick the latter.

Young Dallas shone best on the use of the rub rag with which he gave me a fine polish. Then, as I am a racer, his uncle showed him how to massage me.

Dallas was delighted. "I never did this before for any animal," he said. "Why it almost makes my dear Pony human."

"Ah! lad," said his uncle, "when one thinks of the state of uncleanness in which animals are allowed to exist one is appalled."

"Don't nearly all our domestic animals come from wild ones?" asked Dallas.

"Yes, my boy—and in a wild state they keep themselves clean, but when domesticated they can't."

I think myself there is too much housing of dumb animals. Even in winter my creatures have their freedom for at least a part of the day."

"It's pretty cold here in winter, isn't it?" asked Dallas.

Mr. Devering's black eyes twinkled. "Forty and fifty below zero."

"Why how do you keep warm?"

"It's all a question of food supply. We eat nourishing things and dress warmly. You should see my children and animals disporting themselves in the snow and on the ice—often icicles hanging to them, their breath like steam. Nature provides them with coats of fat or extra hair."

"That is most interesting," said Dallas with a wise air, and putting his head on one side.

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Then he listened to his uncle who was singing four lines to him,

"And Nature, the old nurse, took
The child upon her knee
Saying, 'Here is a story book
Thy Father hath written for thee."

Dallas began to laugh merrily and said, "Uncle, I believe you are a magician. Already I feel myself beginning to like this place and even to look with a friendly eye upon the trees."

Mr. Devering showed every one of his strong white teeth in a pleased smile, then he said, "Come and see one of the most useful things on the farm."

"A vacuum cleaner for horses," exclaimed Dallas after we had crossed to the horses' side of the stable. "I never heard of such a thing."

"Let's try it on the Prince," said Mr. Devering. "I see by the look in the tail of his eye that he is acquainted with its use."

Then he passed over my back the soft rubber mouth with the high wind inside it.

I liked it and did not wince. Then I listened to Mr. Devering who was saying, "We use this cleaner for the work-horses only. I prefer that you children rub down your ponies. Now I see a man from the sawmill out there and you have had lesson enough for one morning. Let us go back to the house."

Arrived there, the children all swept young Dallas down to the wharf. I went along too, feeling as light as a feather after my good grooming and vacuum cleaning.

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"Have you ever been in a canoe?" Cassowary inquired of my young master.

"Oh! yes," he said quickly.

Poor little lad. I knew by his face that he was not telling the truth. Oh! why would he lie? In the first place a pony or a child who lies is usually found out, and if you're not found out you feel so like a little fool that you lose self-respect.

Cassowary was doubtful and said shrewdly, "Where were you ever in a canoe—not on the pond on Boston Common surely."

"On beaches," said Dallas boldly, "with John and Margie."

Now she had already found out that John and Margie were two elderly city servants. It was most unlikely that they would entrust their old bones to such skittish things as canoes. However she said nothing, but got out her slim blue canoe, put a paddle in it, and casting a glance at Big Chief, who was launching a larger canoe and calling out directions to the younger children, who after all had been permitted to come.

"Champ, go to the bow," he was roaring. "I'll take the stern myself. Sojer sit down. Dovey, if you wriggle, I'll pitch you out. No you shan't take Sideways."

I turned around. Who was Sideways? Of all things—a common tortoiseshell cat. Why in the name of cat sense would she want to go on the water?

Later on I found out all about her. One cat after another had been electrocuted on this farm for hunting birds, and this was a case of the survival of the fittest. She loved birds; she told me afterward; it was perfectly delicious to feel a little feathery ball wiggling between your claws, but she said, "I wanted to live, so I gave them up and as I just had to hunt something, I got after the things that even my masters hunt, namely fishes. I assure you I enjoy curling my claws in the water and catching little silly minnows, and I have learned to wade, so I have no fear of the water. I like sitting by a good fire and licking myself dry!"

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When I heard Cassowary speaking in a low voice to Dallas I turned from the cat. I think she dropped her voice so Big Chief would not hear. "You haven't been in a canoe before," she said. "You don't know how to get in. Give me your hand. Step in the middle of the road. Now fold yourself up like a jack-knife. So——"

Dallas looked confused, took her hand, stepped into the canoe, over-balanced and went ker-splash! into the water and down under the crib from which the canoes were being launched.

I waited two seconds, saw Cassowary drop like a loon after him, but she did not bring him up. Then I galloped to the beach and wading out swam carefully to the edge of the crib, thinking perhaps I could aid with teeth or tail, for one of my water stunts is to bring ashore children who pretend they are drowning.

Cassowary, who was almost as much at home under the water as on it, was plunging about like a seal, and just as I arrived had brought Dallas to the surface, and holding him by the collar with one hand and hanging on to the crib with the other she gravely watched Champ and Big Chief giving first aid to the drowning by putting my poor little master on his face and pressing the water out of his lungs.

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Mr. Devering came springing down the path like a boy, and when he saw his dear lad, his face went white and he said irritably, "What does this mean?"

Dallas by this time was sitting up and spitting out last mouthfuls of water, so his uncle saw he was in no danger.

"Come here, Dad, please," said Cassowary.

Mr. Devering bent over his young daughter as she swayed herself idly to and fro in the water, only her head and shoulders visible.

"Do you remember the picture," she said, "in the comic paper about the six boys and girls going gaily to pick mushrooms and it was labelled, 'They thought they knew mushrooms'?"

"Yes, I remember it," he said impatiently.

She went on, "Then there was another picture of six little funerals marked, 'But they didn't.'"

"Yes, I remember that too," he said. "Now do come out of the water and go put on dry overalls."

"Dallas thought he knew canoes, but he didn't," she said as she accepted her father's hand and climbed meekly out of the lake. Then she added, "And Mother calls these frilly ankled things 'overettes,' not 'overalls.'"

I heard a sound of sly laughter in my ears as I stood shaking myself and looking round saw Sideways the cat.

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"Girls are queer," she said. "Cassowary is jealous of the new boy. She has snubbed her father and praised her mother who does not pet the lad."

"You mind your own affairs," I said crossly. "There are too many animals and humans watching my young master."

As if he heard me Mr. Devering turned round. "You water-monkey," he said to me. "Champ, take him up to pony stall number 8 and dry and blanket him, and above all tie him."

Then he went on helping my young master walk slowly to the house.

So I was led away to my pony stall and Dallas was put in his room stall and kept there for some hours.

"Dad! Dad!" howled the younger children who were not at all impressed by this accident, "aren't we going to see Bolshy?"

"Another time," he called. "How would you like to have a picnic supper over there, and have Mother go?"

They made the welkin ring when they heard this proposal, and smiling kindly on the little flock this patient man went on his way up to the house.

I wondered what he would say to his nephew, but as it turned out he never mentioned the affair till days later. He just sat by the fire with Dallas, reading to him and trying to get his young mind off himself. The lesson came when they were both with me.

CHAPTER XII

THE DRIVE TO THE GAME WARDEN'S

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Mr. Devering kept Dallas quiet for several days. He saw that the boy had been under a great nervous strain in coming here and he had him lounge about the veranda while I was detained in my stall. It is not good for ponies and horses to be too much in cold water and I had had a chill.

I dozed and slept and had a fine petting from Cassowary, who was the one detailed to look after me. A friendship sprang up between us that will never die and often she would perch on my manger and talk to me at length about her beloved Indian pony Apache Girl.

This young girl was not much of a talker except in streaks. I saw she was not just like the other

children, and later on I found out the reason.

One lovely warm day when the afternoon was half over I stood looking out the big window before me and to my joy saw Mr. Devering and Dallas coming up to the stable.

They walked in, and Dallas after petting me affectionately said shyly to his uncle, "Seeing Prince Fetlar again reminds me that you have not yet spoken to me about the other morning. I know you wish to do so."

I too was nervous. Ponies that are well brought up always worry when their young masters worry. [Pg 149]

The man had an opportunity for a good lecture, but instead of beginning to scold he put us both at our ease by bursting into one of his ringing laughs.

It echoed all through the big empty stable where the western sun was streaming in on the pony stalls.

His laugh was the kind that makes one feel like joining in and soon young Dallas was giggling feebly. Then he too burst into a jolly peal. Tears ran down his cheeks. "Oh! Uncle," he said, getting out his handkerchief which was white and clean like a girl's, "I don't know what I'm laughing at."

"Neither do I," said his uncle, and then they both laughed harder than ever until at last I felt my own lips curling.

"You're such a funny lad," said the man after a time, wiping his eyes and then laying a hand kindly on the boy's head. "You take me back to the days of my youth when I used to play with your dear mother. There were just the two of us. Oh! you are like her, so much like her. Boy, she used to lie too in her young days, but never to me, only to persons she was afraid of."

"I don't lie to you," said Dallas seriously, "I don't want to."

"Are you afraid of my children that you tell stories to them?"

"N-no, not exactly. I want to please them."

"Oh!" said Mr. Devering, "that fatal wish to please. It has slain its millions."

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"I love to see boys and girls comfortable in their minds," said Dallas wistfully.

"And if they expect you to know how to do a thing you lie to gratify them—but when they find you out—then they're not happy."

Dallas said nothing and his uncle went on, "When I was a boy there was a weak-minded lad living near us. The children all picked at him. The grown-ups were always after us for it. Do you catch my meaning?"

Dallas hung his head. "Yes, my Uncle. The weak go to the wall. I've read that in history."

"Now my children know you have weak points. They'll play on them. We must stop them. You want to be a decent man, don't you?"

"Oh! yes, I do indeed."

"Well! what are you going to do about it?"

"I've got to get a grip on myself," said Dallas. "If you knew how queer it seems to me to be here with all these kids—"

"I can guess. You see, boy, the trouble is that the first five years of a child's life are the ones in which he gets his mould. You had seclusion and shyness stamped on you. We've got to get a new imprint—and don't be too humble. You're just as bright as my children. You're too meek when you think you must tell stories to over-awe them. Plain truth will save you, lad, and you can do some things that my children can't do. Just wait till they find out how well you can sing. Now let me hear you promise to stop this fairy story business."

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Dallas put up a slight hand, and said solemnly, "I promise to speak the truth and the truth only from this on."

Mr. Devering clapped him on the shoulder. Then he slipped his hand under my blanket, felt me to see whether I was warm, and folding the blanket backward drew it off in the proper way so as to leave my hair smooth.

Then he said, "Bonnie Prince Fetlar, I didn't understand your manoeuvres the other morning. I ask your pardon."

Fancy a man asking a pony's pardon! I just loved him for it and tucked my muzzle in the pocket of his corduroy jacket as we went out of the stable.

"Stop your tickling, Prince," he said; "here's a bit of sugar for you. Now keep your soft old nose to yourself—let's go get the deer-hound. He'd enjoy an afternoon out."

We all went up to the kennel by the cow stable where Drunkard welcomed us frantically.

Mr. Devering unchained him and led him toward the house.

When we got near the veranda and I saw the joyful group on it my heart died within me. Preparations for a picnic were going on. Probably they would go by water and I should be left at home. However I could have a little fun before they went, in watching them.

They were well-drilled children. A list was hung on a veranda post, and each child kept consulting it while packing baskets. So many knives, forks, spoons, napkins, cups and saucers and plates must go in, also a huge frying-pan, a big pot for coffee which they were allowed on picnics. Bingi brought bacon, cold potatoes, an egg salad, jelly, chicken sandwiches, a chocolate cake, ginger snaps, two cream pies and lots of spread bread and butter. Oh! it was going to be a picnic that would warm a pony's heart—and I do so enjoy a picnic with nice boys and girls.

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I stepped mournfully back under the lilacs and watched the closing of the baskets and the forming of the procession to the lake.

Everybody was smiling; even Big Chief who was a boy that was always cheered by the sight of food.

I paced slowly after the joyful children, my head drooping, my eyes on my young master who walked beside me, his gaze fixed apprehensively on the lake.

Suddenly that clever woman Mrs. Devering gave us an understanding glance over her shoulder.

"Daddy," she called in her clear voice to Mr. Devering, who was leading with the biggest baskets, "is this little pony broken to harness?"

"Oh! yes, he was for some years in Ohio, where one sees ponies hauling two or four persons in carts and small surreys."

"Good!" she exclaimed. "I'd like to drive to the warden's. It will be all right for me to put Pony in the small cart?"

"Certainly," he said. "Who will go with you?"

Childlike every boy and girl but Dallas cried out.

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"Dallas goes," she said. "He is the only one who was politely silent. My darlings—you must not run after invitations. Let them run after you." And so speaking she was just about to drop out of the procession when Cassowary said pleadingly, "Mother, let me drive Dallas. You'd have to handle the harness and you know you cut your hand this morning."

"Thank you, girlie," said her mother, "I believe I will resign in your favor. Show your cousin how to help you."

Cassowary, who was ahead with Drunkard, passed his lead to Champ and my young master and I joyfully followed her to the carriage-house, where she wheeled out a two-seated cart.

"I suppose you know nothing about harnessing," she said to Dallas.

"Oh! yes," he began, then he checked himself and said over again, "Oh! yes, you are right. I know nothing about attaching an animal to a carriage."

"Come to the harness room," she said, and there she gave young Dallas quite a nice talk about four and two-wheelers for passengers and also about the even more important waggons for carrying loads. Then she explained the difference between work harness and light harness.

Dallas had a good memory and when she gave him a brief examination she found he had forgotten nothing, but he stood staring at me.

"All very fine," he remarked. "I understand about the bridle, collar, traces, breeching, hip-strap and so on, but how do you get harness and cart together?"

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Cassowary did not smile. She was as sober as a judge.

"Back up, Pony," she said, and she showed Dallas how to lift the shafts and buckle straps until I and my smart tan harness were firmly attached to the cart.

"Now, jump in," she said, "box seat. Take the reins or as you, I suppose, would call them, the lines. Not that way. Here change your fingers—reins held in left hand, right free for take-back or whip."

"And would you whip this beautiful little creature?" asked Dallas in a shocked voice.

"Not I—I'm merely teaching you form—near rein over your forefinger, off rein between middle and ring fingers. Grip reins by edges, not by flat sides."

"Am I really driving?" asked Dallas in an astonished voice as I turned them smoothly out to the road.

"Looks like it," she said.

Happy in having no blinds I could cast a glance back toward the proud and delighted boy.

"Don't look so nervous," said Cassowary. "That pony could go it alone. Tighten your reins though."

If he were a stumbler down he would go. It's hard lines you couldn't have had this fun sooner. If I were Queen I'd give every boy and girl a pony and a dog." [Pg 155]

"I feel as if I were in heaven," said Dallas in an awed voice.

"Wait till you ride," said Cassowary, "then you'll be in the seventh heaven."

"Cousin," said Dallas, "it's mighty good in you to take so much trouble with an awkward boy like me."

"Dad told me," she said sheepishly. "Then I know everyone has to learn. Hello! there's Happy Harry—want to go to a picnic, Harry?"

The lame young man was going slowly on his crutches along the road under the poplars. "No, thank you," he said with a brilliant smile. "I'm going to walk over to Neighbour Detover's with Mother."

"Nice boy," she said as we spun along. "My! I'm glad I haven't lost my feet—look out, you're heading the Prince for those cows. Give them a bit of the road. Cows have rights."

The cows politely stepped into the bushes as we went by. Soon I could tell by the movement of the hand on the lines that my young master was getting calmer. By the time we reached the head of the lake Cassowary began to praise him.

"I'm glad you haven't too many impulses," she said.

"I don't know what that means," said Dallas.

"How are you telling Prince Fetlar the way to go?"

"By these lines, I suppose."

"Which lead to the bit in Pony's soft mouth. Your feelings run along the lines to the bit. Pony feels them and his mind and yours keep working together. This fellow is bright enough to do things himself. If you don't approve you will check him by flashing a counter order along the lines. You must always keep your animal in hand." [Pg 156]

"I wouldn't like to hurt his nice mouth," said Dallas.

"You'll never hurt him. You'll be too gentle probably."

"I'm glad we're meeting no one," said Dallas.

"We'll just pretend we are," she said promptly. "Now I'll show you how to turn out on a narrow road."

"Why do automobiles not come up here on this fine road?" asked Dallas.

"They do, but they can't come just now because the government is repairing the new road. It's a beauty, and where the big flat rocks are too dreadful overhead bridges are made. You came the old bad road."

"It was certainly bad," said Dallas feelingly.

"Dad is tremendously keen on road-making," said the girl. "He's never so happy as when he's laying out a new one. Roads spell progress he says."

"Ah! here we are at the top of the lake," said Dallas, "and entering quite thick deep woods. How lovely the air is. I can smell the nice damp earth and the breath of the pines—and there is a meadow in the distance," he went on.

"That is Beaver Meadow," said Cassowary, "and that lazy little river poking through it as if looking for the shortest way to the lake is Fawn River." [Pg 157]

"What pretty little islands those are at the river mouth," said Dallas.

"That's the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe—you've heard of her?"

"Oh! yes, quite often."

"Well! there she is on that biggest island which is shaped like a green shoe. See her head sticking up from behind that high rock."

"Do you mean the silver birch broken off short?" asked Dallas; "that one with the queer bunch on its head?"

"Yes, that's her bonnet," said Cassowary. "One day we paddled over and nailed a big coalscuttle bonnet on her. See those birds on that tiniest island of all. What are they?"

"You're a born school-teacher," said Dallas admiringly. Then he added, "They are gulls—herring gulls, I think."

"Yes, don't they look wise? They sit there and ponder, ponder, then they fly away and come back and ponder some more. They're not a bit afraid of us. Hear me call them," and she gave a very good gull yell, "Cack, cack, ker-ack, ker-ack, ker-ack."

"Cack, cack, hah, hah, hah!" came back from one of the gulls who raised himself on his brownish black wings and circled over our heads.

"If it isn't my dear old friend Buffy!" cried Cassowary, rising up in her seat in her excitement. [Pg 158]
"Where have you been, my angel gull?"

"Kay-auk, kay-ow," squawked the gull, then he gave a kind of groan.

"Been having adventures, my darling?" she shrieked up at him. "Come and tell your old girl all about them. Did you go to Cuba or Lower California last winter?"

"Cow-ow," he responded with a long deep harsh sob.

"This boy won't hurt you, my pet," she shrilled up in the air. "Quick, Dallas, tell him you wouldn't shoot a gull to save your life."

My young master not knowing what to do with one creature on earth and another in the air, tightened the reins until he nearly sawed my tender mouth in two, while he threw up his young head and cried in his sweet voice, "I wouldn't shoot a gull, for I'm frightened to death of a gun!"

The gull brayed like a donkey, "Ha, ha ha!"

"He doesn't trust you," said Cassowary; "hunters must have been shooting at him. Good-bye, my angel. Come play with me when I'm bathing in the morning. Bah! my neck aches," and she dropped down on the seat of the cart. "Drive on, boy! For mercy sake!—the Prince is most on his hind legs. Do you want to choke him?"

"Tell me about that gull, will you?" asked Dallas as he gave me more liberty. "He's following us."

"He'd be down on my lap if it weren't for you. When he was a baby gull a strange bad boy out in a boat on this lake shot at him and wounded his wing. I was out in my canoe Bluebird, and didn't I pick up that poor gull baby pretty quick as he lay flopping in the water, then I overhauled the boat, trounced the boy who was quite astonished to find that a girl had fists, swam to my canoe, paddled home, mothered Gullie who made his home with the hens, and revelled in bread and milk. When he grew old, he flew away to Old Woman's Islands but whenever I went in the water he came and played with me. He wouldn't go near the boys. He thinks you're all bad." [Pg 159]

"How would he play with you?" asked Dallas.

"Oh! he flaps round me in the water—strikes me with his wings. He's very rough but I give him as good as he gives me—slap for slap. He knows I like him. Hurry up, Prince, and don't try to listen to every word we say. The others will get there before us, although they have to go down the lake for fish."

"Does someone there get fish for them?" asked Dallas.

"Yes—the fire warden. He lives by the dam and catches fine big bass. Hush! Now, maybe well see Mr. Beaver."

"Who is he?" asked Dallas.

"Such a naughty little man. He and Mrs. Beaver are making a dam across the river and soon they'll have to be checked for they would stop up the water and make it so deep that the cows would drown when crossing from one meadow to another. Mr. Beaver is Dad's pet, though they don't have anything much to do with each other now. They just love each other apart." [Pg 160]

"Then how does your Dad pet him?"

"It was in the past. He got him in Toronto. You know we have two rivers down there, one each side of the city, the Humber and the dear dirty little Don which is not clear till you get out into the country. Well, on the banks of the Don is our Zoo. We youngsters never go to it now for we either get mad or cry when we see beloved wild animals cooped up in small quarters. I always used to pray hard for them all to drop dead. One night a couple of years ago Dad was walking through the park by the Zoo when he came to a huge bank of earth with a hole in it. One of the park men was staring at it and Dad asked what had happened. He said a water main had burst and had carried away a part of the bank and some animal cages. They had got every creature back but one beaver and goodness only knew where he was.

"Dad said he hoped Mr. Beaver had gone to his animal heaven, then he went on down the hill to the river. Just as he was going to cross one of the bridges he saw a poor forlorn little animal sitting looking at the muddy Don. Dad said it was queer to see a wild thing sitting there in the electric light of a city of half a million people.

"Dad went softly up to him and the poor little creature whose head had been hurt let him take him up.

"The river is too dirty to plunge into, eh!" said Dad. "Well! I know a river where clean waters flow, and the cardinal flowers grow. Come, weary little man, and we'll put you in it." [Pg 161]

"Then Dad took him to Aunt Laura Secord Hume's house in Rosedale and put him in his bath-room. Then he went to sleep.

"In the morning Aunt Laura came tapping along the hall with her cane and opened the bath-room

door to peep through and see if Dad was still sleeping. Then she saw the beaver and didn't she give a scream. The beaver skedaddled under Dad's bed, and he woke up very sorry to have Aunt Laura frightened but glad to see Mr. Beaver had recovered his faculties.

"He felt sober though when he saw the brushes in his bath-room and the wood work all bitten and gnawed. However Aunt Laura said, 'Never mind—he felt grateful and was trying to make a dam for you. The room has to be done over anyway.'

"Then Dad put Mr. Beaver in a box and brought him here and he chose him a mate and they're going to live happy ever after."

"Splendid for the beaver," said Dallas, "but what about the park people?"

"Oh! they didn't care—his mate had been killed. Dad paid them for him anyway."

"When your father goes to heaven," said Dallas, "I believe he'll have all his pet animals sitting round him."

Cassowary smiled in her sober way. "You're like mother. She says as soon as Saint Peter lets dear Dad through the pearly gates, a little junco will fly up and say, 'I've been waiting for you. Here are my young ones with me that you saved from the bad squirrels. I love you and am going to keep near you,' and a squirrel will say, 'You gave me nuts and kept me from eating the little birds,' and a fox will say, 'You caught me in a merciful trap that did not wound my tender paw but it killed me at once and sent me to a place where I learned how to be a better fox.' Then a deer will say, 'You found me in the woods alone where a cruel sportsman had taken my mother, and you brought me up and petted me,' and a nice black bear with a brown muzzle will say, 'Give us a paw, old man, you shot me through the brain, you didn't let me stagger away to die by inches.'" [Pg 162]

Dallas was delighted with this talk, and drew me up so that I stood quite still.

"Oh! get on, get on, you funny boy," said Cassowary; "but whist! Here we are at the dam. See Daddy Beaver beyond that point sticking out in the river? That's his dam. Hasn't he arranged the saplings and brushwood nicely? There he comes downstream trailing a baby tree. Can you see him? Mrs. Beaver is just selecting a billet of wood from that heap for afternoon tea, or is she going to take it down below to her water pantry?"

My young master was overjoyed. I don't think he had ever seen beavers before. He stood up, and with shining eyes fixed on the river listened breathlessly to Cassowary.

The beavers did not hear us. The road here was grassy and the cart had slipped along so noiselessly that it was some minutes before the beaver's roving eye caught sight of the alarming spectacle of a pony and a cart and two young persons. Then didn't he give the river a thwack with his broad tail as a signal to his wife, and down they both went. [Pg 163]

"Mr. Beaver! Mr. Beaver!" called Cassowary, "it's the Good Man's daughter. I wouldn't hurt you for a million dollars. I wouldn't wear a beaver skin coat. Come back and get your sapling. It's a dandy one, your favorite poplar, and it's floating down stream."

"He can't hear you," said Dallas.

She wagged her black head. "The fishes will tell him. You know fishes weren't always fishes."

"Now what new thing is that?" asked my young master.

"It's something some people believe in another Dominion of our Empire."

"What Dominion?"

"Australia—the blacks there say that one day when fishes lived on land they were all gathered together around a fire near a river. A dreadful wind arose and blew them and the fire into the water. The fire was a nice fire and went on burning and the fishes gathered round it and it never goes out. That's why you are always warmer under water on a cold day than you are on land."

"I believe it, I believe it," said my young master. "I believe anything about animals. I never think fish are stupid." [Pg 164]

"And speaking of winds," said Cassowary, "old Mrs. Petpeswick at the head of the lake had her flock of twenty-three geese blown off the land by a wild gale, and they came ashore on our beach, and we took them back to her, and she said, 'Praise the Lord. I just wanted to see some of you to borrow a little money. I was too ill to get down to you.' Now, cousin, let me take the reins, we are coming to a wild wild road that leads to a wild wild house."

It was a wild side road that led from this main one up to a slight hill above the river, and the tree branches brushed the cart as we went along it.

"The warden goes everywhere by canoe," said Cassowary, "or by skates and snowshoes in winter for everything here freezes over. That's his house on the crown of this hill. He calls it the Last House, because there isn't another one till you get 'way up the river past three sets of falls and into Algonquin Park. Now, Pony lamb, we'll not leave you here alone," and to my joy, she sprang out of the cart and began to take off all my harness.

"Don't throw it on the ground, Dallas," she said. "Put it in the cart, and hand me that halter under the seat. Now excelsior!"

We climbed the hill after her to the green cottage. "Not a soul about," she said. "Let's go in," and she dropped the halter shank and left me outside. [Pg 165]

As I had not been forbidden, I ventured to go carefully after them.

"What a jolly big fireplace," said Dallas, when we entered a small living-room with a fire all laid.

"The warden is as neat as a woman," said Cassowary. "Poor fellow! his wife is dead. He's here all alone in winter, and he reads a lot. See the books in those cases, and his nice reading lamp on the table. He's as snug as a wood-lice, he says."

Young Dallas touched admiringly a rack with guns and fishing rods.

"Come through to the kitchen," said Cassowary.

"Will he mind?" asked Dallas, tiptoeing after her.

"Oh! you green city boy," she said. "In the backwoods we're neighbours. We know who lives next door to us. Let's see what he's got in his cupboard. High bush cranberry jam! That's delicious! Let's have some on bread, and wouldn't a cup of tea be nice? We're on holiday. Here are lemons for it. He doesn't keep a cow."

"Some tea would be great," cried Dallas. "I'll help you make a fire in this nice clean kitchen stove," and he seized a big stick of wood from the box.

"Go get the water, you duffer," she said, handing him a pail. "Paper goes first, then kindling, in making a fire. I'll do it—spring is first turn to the left."

I followed my master to a lovely little spring gushing from a rock bed, and falling down so conveniently that all the boy had to do was to hold the pail under it. [Pg 166]

When we came back, Cassowary said, "Pony, you just step out-of-doors. Your hoofs are muddy. Dallas, go up and see the nice bed-rooms in the attic while I'm making the tea."

The lad ran up the flight of steps leading from the living room. Then he called to her to come and tell him what kind of a bird's nest that was under the eaves.

Hearing their fresh young voices exclaiming, I ventured to go up the stairway too.

There were several swallows' nests under the eaves with young ones in them, and Cassowary was calmly ruffling up the feathers of the fledglings.

"Parasites in their dear little ears," she said. "Here, hold this birdie, while I pick them out."

"Do wild birds have lice on them?" asked Dallas.

"Wild birds and wild animals, and tame birds and tame animals. You ought to see Grammie rubbing the fur of her pet raccoon the wrong way. Everything that lives gets dirty. You have to keep cleaning, cleaning. No use in making a fuss about it. There's nothing dirty about cleaning up — Bless my heart and soul! look at that little beast of yours."

She had seen my head appearing at the top of the stairway.

"No flies on him," she went on. "I believe that animal would walk a tight rope if you stretched it out before him. Back, back, my beauty—there's death on your track." [Pg 167]

Death wasn't on my track if I practised safety first, and feeling cautiously with my hoofs and minding my step I went down quite nicely.

When the children followed me, Cassowary found some white bread as well baked as if a woman had done it, and she and Dallas had quite a nice afternoon tea on the white scoured kitchen table. Then they washed the dishes and Cassowary handed me through the window all the bread and butter that was left. Finally she said, "Come down to the river—that is where the warden has his out-door sitting-room. Oh! isn't the air delicious!" and she sniffed energetically. "There are many spruces and balsam firs about here. I just feel 'intossicated', as Dovey says when she goes in the woods."

Stepping lightly along the narrow path, she went down to the road and across it, till we could see the pretty river shining through the tree branches ahead of us.

Suddenly she stopped and said, "There he is—Bolshy the Russian."

CHAPTER XIII BOLSHY THE RUSSIAN

[Pg 168]

My young master crouched his head down to stare through the underbrush, and I stared over his shoulders.

What a sitting room! Enormous elms were the door-posts, climbing bittersweet flinging itself from one lofty branch to another was the ceiling; fallen logs and twisted tree limbs were the arm-

chairs; delicate river grass cut short was the carpet, and a huge wisp of rushes hanging down into the river was the hearth-rug.

"I love this sitting-room, Prince," murmured my master in my ear. "Oh! how can boys play on dusty streets?"

"Ho, ho, my little master," I whispered back. "You are coming on. Soon you will be embracing these beloved trees."

But he did not understand me, and turned to gaze at the two men sitting on two of the rustic arm-chairs, and staring at the river highway with as much interest as if it had been a city street.

Opposite them was a wide green meadow where some red cows were grazing. A brown canoe was drawn up among the white water lilies, and a woman was feeding salt to some of the cows.

Occasionally ducks and big bluish cranes flew overhead, their funny feet sticking out behind, and once in a while a boat went gliding by. [Pg 169]

One of the men was a big heavy low-browed creature. I knew he must be the Russian. He was smoking stolidly, and sometimes took his pipe from his mouth and, wrinkling his brow like a monkey, looked as if he were thinking about something that puzzled him.

His companion was a slender dark young man in khaki-coloured knickerbockers, and a green woollen shirt, and he sat quite still, his eyes sad and dreamy, his hands on his knees.

"That's Denty, the warden's son," whispered Cassowary. "He was wounded at Vimy Ridge and has had shell-shock. His father has to be away from home a good deal, and one reason he keeps the Russian is to give Denty something to do."

"Is the warden French?" asked Dallas.

"Half—his mother was Ontario born, his father came from Quebec. His name is Dentais but we call his son Denty."

Like all woodsmen, the young man had good ears, and at this moment he turned his head, got up slowly and came to greet us.

His sad face became quite bright at sight of Cassowary, "Glad to see you, Mademoiselle," he said, taking off his cap, and holding it in his hand.

"How are you to-day?" she asked.

"Better—my head is almost all right now, thanks to him," and he pointed to the Russian who was staring at us.

"Is he much trouble now?" asked Cassowary in a low voice. [Pg 170]

"No, not now, he is getting into line—what's the matter, Bolshy?"

The Russian, pawing the air with one big hand, was shaking his loose cotton shirt with the other. "He's thanking you for it," said Denty.

"Oh! that's nothing," remarked Cassowary shyly. "I was glad to make it for him. I'm afraid the stitches are pretty big though. I hate to sew."

"He wouldn't notice that—but what's he doing?"

The Russian, after gazing intently at my young master, had begun to pace round him like a big bear.

He did not give me one glance. Evidently he did not care for ponies.

"Bolshy," said the soldier, "what's biting you?"

The Russian stopped short, made a most imploring noise in his throat, and seemed to fairly drink in the light from my young master's eyes.

I put myself between him and Dallas, for I felt that the boy was rather nervous about this big fellow tramping round him.

The Russian was moaning now, and putting his big feet down more and more heavily. He had dropped his pipe, and both hands were clutching his thatch of shaggy hair.

"He's thinking of his home," said Denty kindly.

"How well you understand him," observed Cassowary.

"We're together all day, and I've got so I can read his thoughts. At first I didn't know a word of Russian, but he's taught me a lot." [Pg 171]

"Do you ever have to shut him up?"

"Hardly ever. He made a bit of a fuss over his bath a few days ago, because I wanted him to learn to swim. I suppose you heard him howling. Hey! Bolshy, old top—what's got you?"

The Russian was plucking the soldier by the sleeve. He had straightened out something in his

bewildered brain, for his face was contented and he was clicking his teeth comfortably. The soldier watched his gestures. "He's seen someone with eyes like this boy's somewhere overseas."

"That reminds me," said Cassowary. "I didn't introduce my cousin. His name is Dallas Duff and he is visiting us."

The soldier nodded, then he turned again to the Russian. "He says he was very very sick in a hospital in France. He had been hurt in a great battle. He did not know what it was about. A beautiful woman nursed him. She had peculiar eyes like faint stars on a dark night, but they warmed one, and her hair was shining and very sleek and bound round her head in waves."

Cassowary's lips parted, and she fairly hung on the soldier's words.

Bolshy was now fumbling at his shirt that hung quite loose outside his trousers.

"He's going fishing," said the soldier. "I'll bet it's for some souvenir the lady gave him."

We all pressed forward. The Russian's big paw was trembling as he brought to light a dirty little bag on a dirty little string around his neck. Fumbling at it, he managed to extract an American nickel. [Pg 172]

We were all intensely interested in his movements, and the soldier remarked, "The lady was not French, he says, nor English, but everybody loved her. He wants to know whether the boy has a mother or an older sister."

Dallas shook his head sadly, but Cassowary said nothing.

The Russian snatched his treasure from the soldier who was examining it too closely to suit him. Then picking up his pipe he relighted it and smoked furiously for a few minutes. However, something was still worrying him, for every few seconds he turned to Dallas and wrinkled his heavy eye-brows.

"I believe," said the soldier, "that Bolshy is all mixed up in his mind. He was brought up to humble himself before rich people. Then men came who told him that his mud-walled hut and his starving wife and children were due to the rich who had taken his money. Finally his wife and children starved to death. He was angry, and went into the army, and tried to kill, kill, kill—but instead of killing he was nearly killed himself. Then the beautiful lady saved his life. And now he loves the boy because he has her eyes. But the beautiful lady could not read. He never saw her with a book in her hand—look at him."

Bolshy, snarling disagreeably, was making a face at his idol, and coming toward him in an ungainly way, pulled something from his pocket. [Pg 173]

The soldier's hand was on the Russian's wrist. He must have hurt him, for Bolshy cried out and dropped the little paper-covered volume.

"My riddle-book!" exclaimed Dallas. "I brought it to amuse the children."

The soldier returned it to him, and said, "Bolshy began to throw all our books in the river till I made him play water-dog and retrieve them—Bolshy, apologise to Miss Cassowary's cousin for your impudence."

The Russian became angry and with rude gestures threatened the soldier until he saw his hand go to his side.

There was a holster there, and Mr. Bolshy soon became civil and uttered some queer-sounding words that we all knew meant that he was not sorry but he said he was.

"Try kindness," said Cassowary softly. "Treat him as the beautiful lady did. You sing, don't you, Dallas? Do you know any French songs? They might appeal to him, for Russian society people use that language so much."

Dallas hesitated, then he said, "I will, if you wish it. I can sing a little sad song about a young man who was going to die and be buried in the cold ground, and he begged his dear young sweetheart to walk among the rustling leaves over his grave, and think about him."

Cassowary nodded encouragingly, and the boy threw back his young head and in his sweet pathetic voice begged and prayed some dear French girl to remember him. [Pg 174]

"*Rappelle-moi, rappelle-moi,*" he sang, and the sound was so sweet and piercing that it affected my ears sadly. I twitched and twitched them and finally had to rub them against the bark of a young elm. Ponies and dogs too can hear so much more acutely than human beings, that music is sometimes like needle points to our ears.

However, my emotion was nothing to the Russian's. He trembled on his strong legs, his mouth gaped, he took off his cap and threw it on the grass. When the boy's voice was at last still, the Russian lifted his head. Tears were running down his cheeks, and he poured out a lot of talk to the soldier, who smiled and said with an apologetic glance at the young girl,

"Bolshy thinks that the boy sings as well as a man—much better than the beautiful lady did, though she had a voice like a bird's."

"That's because they have men's singing only in the Greek churches," remarked Cassowary. "I

don't believe the boy would sing better than—" Then she stopped suddenly and pointed to Bolshy.

The big man was coming slowly over the grass, and reaching my young master he took the hem of his coat and pressed it to his lips.

"Glory be!" said the soldier. "That's what we've been working for. Something to break his crust. I'll bet he's thinking of home and mother."

Poor creature! he evidently was, for he was pointing away to the east, and pouring forth a most troubled account of something to Dallas, who nodded sympathetically. [Pg 175]

The soldier turned to Dallas. "You'll help me a lot if you tell him to trust me. I mean well by him."

My young master's face was lighted by a charming smile. He reached up, put his hand on the shaggy head of the subdued man, and patted it as if he had been a big dog, then he signed to him to follow, and leading him over to the soldier he said, "*Maitre!*"

At the French word, Bolshy trembled, and when Dallas began jabbering in that language he was in a transport of delight. He didn't understand a word of it, but the sound was comforting as he had heard it in his native land. He shook his head a great many times, and when Dallas finished he went and stood humbly in front of the soldier.

"Gee!" said the young man, "this is fine; sit down. Bolshy," and he pointed to a log.

The Russian did as he was told, and the soldier heaved a sigh. "Usually there's an argument about everything he's to do—thank you, young man," he said gratefully to Dallas.

Dallas was exploring his pockets, and after bringing out a bar of chocolate he went over and put it between Bolshy's teeth.

This capped the climax, and the poor Russian sat munching the sweet stuff and laughing with delight in a funny jerky way.

"Here comes the launch" exclaimed Cassowary, and we all turned to the water. [Pg 176]

Their big motor-boat, the Heron of Fawn Lake, was rounding the Old Woman's Islands, and came in with a flourish through a bed of yellow and white water lilies to the warden's crib.

Mr. Devering was running it, and smiling as he saw us, his white teeth gleaming against the brown of his skin.

As the Heron grazed the landing, the children swarmed ashore, dragging Drunkard after them. Like a flock of wild ducks they spread over the place, fluttering about the soldier and the Russian who surveyed them kindly, but not in the worshipful way in which he had greeted my young master. Not one of the children touched his fancy as Dallas did.

"We're starving—can't we have our picnic, Mother?" they cried, and Mrs. Devering said to her husband, "You've kept them too long on the lake; they're more quicksilver than ever."

"Who'll boss about the fire?" called Champ shrilly. "Speak, Mother, quick, please."

"Is thy servant a dog?" she asked good-naturedly, then she added, "Big Chief, with Cassowary for first assistant."

Didn't those children scurry about in search of firewood, though the soldier motioned them politely to his wood-pile!

Dallas and I trotted after them. The bush was full of broken branches and trees lying across each other.

"Oh! the poor people in the big cities," I thought, "if they could only have some of these nice dry sticks." [Pg 177]

Back of the green sitting-room was a huge rock with a kind of natural fireplace. Here Big Chief started the fire with birch bark and dry twigs, and soon there was a roaring blaze tearing up the stone chimney.

When the coals were nice and red, Big Chief sent Champ to dip in the river the sticks from which the water kettle was to be suspended, then Cassowary got out the frying-pan and began doing the bacon.

How it sizzled and snapped as she turned it with her long-handled fork! Her face got redder and redder, but she would yield her place to no one, although poor little Dovey begged humbly for permission to roast her young self.

"That's right, my daughter," said Mr. Devering to Cassowary, "stick to whatever you undertake, no matter how much smoke you breathe, but give Dovey a share. Great generals always leave details to subordinates."

"Set the two tables," ordered Cassowary full of importance. "You know how to put the food on one, and the dishes on the other. Let Sojer and Big Wig bring cushions and rugs from the boat and arrange in a semi-circle."

Dovey went away quite happy, and Cassowary and Big Chief, managing the fire-place, found when the food was all cooked that plates and cups and saucers were ready for it.

Bolshy was tremendously interested in this, evidently his first picnic in Canada, for as Mr. Devering said in a low voice to his wife, "Probably in the internment camp there were few diversions." [Pg 178]

The big fellow strolled about, his small eyes twinkling, his hands working nervously. The soldier grinning cheerfully had to keep tapping him with the end of a long stick to remind him to get out of the way of the hurrying children, and not to hang too lovingly over the tables.

Finally Mr. Devering gently pushed the poor fellow to a seat on a rug, and gave him a plate and knife and fork to hold.

Bolshy beat a tune with the fork on his plate, just like a happy hungry child, then when everybody sat down and he was offered bacon he grunted like a pig, saying, "No! No!" then pointing with his knife to the cold chicken flapped his arms like wings and said, "Yes! Yes!"

The children shrieked with laughter, and the soldier said, "Bolshy doesn't get much chicken here, for we don't keep them. I guess he's tired of bacon."

"He's like a child," said Mrs. Devering, "he wants a change of diet, and our dishes are new to him. Are you as good a cook as your Father, Denty?"

"No, ma'am," said the soldier, "not by a long shot—I say, Bolshy, stop stirring your coffee with that chicken leg. We use spoons in this country."

It was quite impossible to offend the beaming Bolshy, and cheerfully licking the chicken leg he threw it over his shoulder into the river, then getting up took his plate in both hands and going humbly to Mrs. Devering begged for more chicken, pointing to the breast of one that she was just beginning to carve. [Pg 179]

"Nothing modest about you, old bear," said Denty. "I say, come back—you've had enough," and he motioned to the rug.

This second plateful disappeared with the rapidity of the first, and as the children were so convulsed with Bolshy's antics that they could not eat, Mr. Devering got up, took a platter with two carcasses on it, and leading Bolshy to the bush, left him there crunching the bones and enjoying himself hugely.

The soldier did not eat much and Mr. and Mrs. Devering looked at him anxiously. Presently, blinking at the sun, he said, "It is most time for the White Phantom. If you'll excuse me, I'll go meet her."

How I pricked up my ears. Now I should learn who the creature was that had been mentioned in such affectionate dying tones by the expiring stick of wood.

CHAPTER XIV THE WHITE PHANTOM

[Pg 180]

"Who is the White Phantom?" asked my young master eagerly.

He sat on a rug beside Mrs. Devering. I was just behind under some alders and occasionally I thrust my head through the curtain of Virginia creeper and my young master handed me a bit of whatever he was eating.

"She is that rare thing, a white doe," said Mrs. Devering. "Hunters shot her mother, and the warden brought her up. She is like a beautiful dog and comes home every night. You must see the hurdles the warden taught her to jump over."

"Why can't the soldier stay here and finish his supper?" said Dallas. "Can't he hear her coming?"

Big Chief, who sat the other side of his mother, had his mouth stuffed with egg salad, but he managed to open it long enough to say scornfully, "Hear a deer!"

"No, he couldn't hear her," said Mrs. Devering. "Wild creatures, no matter how tame, don't care for strangers. She would not like our being here and would stay in the bush until we left."

My young master had given me so many tid-bits and also having nibbled some grass on my own account, I was no longer hungry, so I backed into the sweet green undergrowth and then slipped softly after the soldier when he went languidly up the path to the road and over it back of the house. [Pg 181]

He was whistling at intervals as he went. First a low musical chuck, then a liquid "Puit-puit," a song that was both flute-like and bell-like, and so natural that a hermit-thrush, thinking it was her mate, began to pipe back to him.

When we got on the hill back of the house, I saw a little brushwood shelter, and beyond it the warden's wide grass belt that in case of a forest fire would prevent the flames from reaching his

pretty house.

At intervals along the grassy clearing, were placed high movable frames made of interlaced twigs and sticks. This was evidently the doe's race-track. They were pretty high hurdles and absolutely beyond a Shetland-Arabian pony. How I wished I might see her take them.

I saw her attempt it, though the young man Denty did his best to turn me back.

He was not easily deceived, and hearing the slight rustling of branches as I came along behind him, he looked back and said irritably, "Return, Mr. Curiosity—I don't want you."

Then he turned his head quickly, for there was another rustling sound beyond him.

We both looked toward the spot where the sound had been made, and there, gazing at us from a wild raspberry thicket was the most beautiful animal I have ever seen. Only the head was visible. The eyes were soft and lovely, but clouded by a mist of suffering. She was in pain, but though I saw this plainly the soldier did not.

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"*Ma belle!*" he called as he pointed to the hurdles, "thy duty, then thy supper."

It seems the beautiful creature was usually addressed in French, which language I know a little, as so many of my owners have spoken it.

She came slowly, drawing her slender legs along and showing her exquisite white body stained alas! by red spots.

The soldier, his languor all gone, started forward in dismay, then he called, "Stop! my beauty. I did not know thy condition."

The beloved animal was actually trying to jump over the hurdles, but in a heavy and stupid manner, not with the usual graceful and bird-like agility of her family.

At his words she fell and could not rise.

He ran frantically to her, tore at his clothing, pulled off his green woollen shirt and taking off quite a nice fine white one under it, began to staunch the blood flow.

"Pony," he called to me over his shoulder, "*Va donc—cherche ton maître.*" I knew what he meant, and for once I sprang like a deer myself and dashing down that hill landed in the midst of the picnic party and had Mr. Devering by the coat sleeve.

He looked down at my teeth biting the cloth as I endeavoured to pull him along.

"I'm coming," he said, and he gave a bound to the motor-boat, then came springing up the hill after me.

[Pg 183]

It seems that whenever anyone called him in a hurry he sprang for his black bag. So many people die in the backwoods for lack of first aid.

All the children wished to sweep up the hill. I could hear them crying out, but Mrs. Devering kept them back.

Her clear voice rose above the clamour. "Wait till we are called. Your father will let us know if we are wanted."

However, she could not keep Bolshy back. It would have taken a squad of soldiers to do that. Snorting and blowing, he rushed like a tornado up the hill beside me as I led the way. He was afraid something had happened to his soldier friend.

When he saw it was only the doe he fell back beside me and, throwing his arm over my neck, caressed me. I remembered that caress later when he was in disgrace and needed a friend himself. A pony never forgets a blow nor a kind word.

Well! that splendid man, Mr. Devering, who had the quick deft fingers and active brain that would have made him a first-class surgeon if he had remained in the city, was handling that beautiful doe's wounds as delicately as if she had been a human being.

Bolshy and I could not see exactly what he and the soldier were doing as they bent so closely over the doe, but before I left I pressed forward and spoke to her in our animal language.

"Beautiful creature," I said as she lay on the grass very weak and exhausted, "I heard of you one morning after I came from a dying stick of birch wood. It was sorry for you."

[Pg 184]

Her glazed eyes brightened. "The trees of the wood are all good to me," she murmured, "they will mourn that I die. They were my play-fellows—the wild deer shunned me."

"You must not die, beautiful one," I said decidedly. "You will grieve the warden and his fine son."

"The cruel hunters," she gasped, "they hunted so long and so hard. Why did they not shoot and kill? I am so weary."

"Rouse yourself, dear one," I said. "Sleep and rest. Do not die, I beg of you. It would be wrong."

"I will try," she just breathed, and I was about to leave her to rest when something made me turn back.

"Oh, why," I said, "did you try to leap when you were so weary?"

"To please my master, whom I love. Could I die a better death?" she said, but so faintly that I could scarcely hear her.

Then I went on, "If you die, you will break the young Denty's heart. He will say that he killed you."

Some strength seemed to come to her at that.

"I will live then," she said quite distinctly, "I will, indeed. Thank you, little Pony friend." Then she laid her lovely white head on the green grass and closed her dim eyes.

"You are too beautiful to die," I whinnied ever so softly, then I looked at the human beings. They didn't know I had spoken a word to her. Bless their dear hearts!—clever, so clever, but some things they don't know. [Pg 185]

Mr. Devering and I were just leaving the doe, when a man suddenly stood beside us. I don't know whether he came from the east, west, north or south. He just seemed to drop down among us, and at his heels was an equally gliding bloodhound.

The warden was like his son, but more French. He was dark, slender, silent, and had short grizzled hair and black eyes more piercing even than Mr. Devering's.

He never said a word, he just bent down and touched the doe's head. She opened her eyes and fixed them on him with a wonderful expression. They were talking to each other without a word being said. Then she closed her eyes, and he rose.

"My Father," said Denty in French, "they've got her at last!"

The warden said nothing. He just stared at his son in such a painful way that it made me shudder.

I spoke to the dog, but he paid no attention to me whatever. He just pressed forward a little in front of his master, and in a tender way began licking the red spots from the doe's white coat. She was his playmate and friend.

"Father," said Denty again, "you have not been long away this time."

"I came," began the older man, then he stopped. "I came because I heard a shot," and he pointed to the doe. "Now I go again." [Pg 186]

"For what, Father?" asked the young man.

The man said a few ugly French words under his breath, then he spoke to the dog, "Come! Ravaud."

"But you will have something to eat?"

"I stop for nothing," said the father irritably.

"You are going after the poachers?" said Mr. Devering.

"Yes. I found the ashes of their last night's fire."

Mr. Devering never said a word. He went scampering down the hill like a boy, and I tore after him.

Didn't he break up that picnic party in the twinkling of an eye, and didn't his fine little wife help him! The slow eaters were just at the cake and pie stage of the affair. She bundled them into the boat, promising more good things on the water, and after them went rugs, cushions, baskets, pots and pans.

It wasn't five minutes before they were all seated, and when the warden came stepping down the bank in his quiet way and he and the hound prepared to get into the green canoe, Mr. Devering called out, "We'll give you a lift across the lake, Dentais. Here, sit by me. One of the boys will trail your canoe."

"Thank you, Monsieur," he said. "I trust my canoe to no one."

"I want him in the stern," cried Mrs. Devering. "I'm going to give him his supper," and the dear woman, as the Heron slowly started, was handing a cup of coffee to the saddened man, who took it in an absent way, while the children stuffed the dog with bread and meat, and Drunkard pressed closely beside him as if to say, "Be comforted. Your lovely doe is not going to die." [Pg 187]

We stood on the bank—Cassowary, my master and Bolshy. The soldier had stayed with the White Phantom.

On the clear air came back Mr. Devering's voice, heard even above the dreadful noise made by the engine, "Do you know what your Christmas present this year is to be, Dentais?"

Then without waiting for an answer, he bawled to the stern, "I'm going to install a wireless in the Last House. It would have saved you a long paddle to-night, for the next warden is nearer those fellows than you are—and you're going to have someone live with you this winter. I'll come myself if you don't get another man!"

I could see the warden flash him a glance almost of adoration, and then the boat swung round Old Woman's Islands, the evening breeze bringing to us the song the children suddenly began to sing to cheer their friend in his distress,

"Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre
Ri too tra la, Ri too tra la,
Malbrouck s'en va-t-en en guerre,
Ne sait quand reviendra, là-bas——"

As soon as they were out of sight Cassowary turned to my young master, "Oh! boy, we've got to hurry, but first let us call on the Phantom," and she ran up the hill to the fire belt where the doe lay with the soldier watching beside her. [Pg 188]

Bolshy followed us, putting his big hand out quite kindly to lay it on my hips, but I always kept a bit ahead of him.

When Cassowary and my young master stood peering through the trees at the white creature on the grass, Dallas broke down and began to cry.

"The brutes!" he said, "to chase a lovely thing like that. Why did they not spare her to brighten the woods? I'd like to shoot them."

"Naughty boy," said Cassowary. "You mustn't shoot even the pot-hunters. Fine 'em or put 'em in jail and educate 'em—Dad will see that they get some humane teaching."

Dallas dashed his tears away. "Do you think that the warden will get them?"

"He'll not sleep till he does. You don't know the warden. That doe is like a child to him. When she was a little fawn she used to run to him and hide her head in his bosom. He's all alone here in the winter, you know—won't he have those men fined to the limit of the law! Deer are out of season now."

"When can bad men shoot them?" asked Dallas.

"Not till November, and then only one deer a man, but it isn't always bad to shoot them, Cousin. The government had 700 shot last year for settlers. Meat was so dear."

"But they would shoot mercifully," said Dallas. [Pg 189]

"Oh! yes—when the Ontario Government shoots, it shoots to kill. It wouldn't torture man nor beast. Dad thinks deer should be shot every year if there is enough natural overflow from the parks. Precious as they are, hungry people are more precious. Now let's go home. We'll see if you remember my lesson about harnessing—Good night, Denty. Will you stay here till morning?"

He smiled cheerfully. "Why not? A couple of blankets on the grass, and the owls and the stars for company. It's Paradise compared with the trenches."

"Good boy," said Cassowary in a motherly way. "I might have known you wouldn't leave our wonderful Phantom alone in her suffering—*Au revoir*," and she went nimbly to the place where she had left the cart, and bossed Dallas unmercifully while he with active fingers harnessed me in what I thought was a very remarkable way for a boy who had had only one lesson.

"Room for improvement, Cousin," she said, "but you're doing fine."

Bolshy got in our way dreadfully. I did not like the manner in which he followed my young master about. He might be quite trustworthy, but when the soldier wasn't there to watch him he was too bold. He seemed perfectly fascinated by the boy, and Cassowary remarked that she thought the poor fellow in some way connected Dallas with his own dead children.

Now if there was any question of kidnapping, here was the person who would like to have my handsome little lad for his own charge. [Pg 190]

Poor creature! the last sound we heard as I trotted away from the Last House, was Bolshy's roar of disappointment at being deprived of his new-found treasure.

"Thank goodness!" I said to myself, "we've done with him,"—but it was only a few hours before the bewitched Bolshy was skulking about Devering Farm and taxing my pony wits to know how to manage him.

CHAPTER XV A NIGHT PROWLER

[Pg 191]

I was a very tired pony that night, but I did not get much sleep.

I knew something was going to try to happen to my dear young master, and I was to prevent it.

I don't know how animals—dogs and horses especially, have these warnings—I only know that we

just have them.

I had been put, not in pony stall number eight, for I fidgeted when Cassowary motioned me in there. I did not wish to be tied, so she gave me a loose box stall. This stall had a rolling door, always much better for a stable because a swinging door is apt to catch a pony or horse and give him a good whack. This was also better for my plans, for like those naughty people who can always get out of jail, I can nearly always find a way to open a door if it is not locked.

This night, all I had to do was to take hold of the metal handle with my teeth and pull the door back. I was the only pony on that side of the big stable—in fact there were only two horses on the other side. The other horses and ponies were still out to pasture.

These two Clydesdales had been working hard in the hay field and were so sleepy that they paid little attention to my movements. [Pg 192]

The entrance doors were wide open, so I slipped out and stood in the shadow and looked about me.

It was a beautiful moonlight night. A big round Lady Moon stared and stared down at Fawn Lake and the Devering Farm. The electric lights were out, but one scarcely missed them owing to this wonderfully bright bigger light in the sky.

Now what was I fussing about? Everything was calm and still. There was not a breath of wind. Drunkard, whose real name was Baywell, was travelling head down about the house and grounds like a swift fleet shadow-dog. Occasionally he looked up at the moon, but he did not make a sound that would wake anyone up.

Some owls hooted gently in the distance. How foolish I was to worry. This was a very safe region. No one ever heard of anyone being attacked or injured.

But something was going to happen. I just knew it, and nothing would satisfy me, but to keep near my young master, so I paced slowly toward the house.

Drunkard passed me on the dead run. "Smelling out trouble?" he asked me as he flashed by.

"Stop!" I said, and he pulled up.

"Do you feel anything in your bones?" I asked.

"Not a thing," he replied, "except a little rheumatism. All hunting dogs get it in time."

"Will you just keep your ears open, old fellow?" I said. "Something, or someone, is going to surprise us to-night." [Pg 193]

He didn't laugh at me. We animals have a great regard for each other's ability to smell, hear or feel things that often escape human beings.

"Is it the ghost?" he asked.

"No—whose ghost?"

"The old Highlander's. You know he was the first white man to come to this Lake. He traded with the Indians before they were all moved to the Reservation."

"Oh! is that why we see no Indians here—well, tell me about the Highlander."

Drunkard and I were by the garden as we talked, and the old dog settled down on the gravel walk and began to lick a sore place on his paw. Between whiles he told me about the Highlander who used to wear a rabbit cap and a coonskin coat, and who had the gift of second sight to a marked degree.

"I've often seen him," said Drunkard, "especially on moonlight nights like this. He goes all over the place—a kind of shadowy furry figure, and then he smiles and disappears in the log cabin. I think he sleeps in the loft."

"I believe I've seen that old coonskin coat," I said. "I once saw a kind of misty shape bending down from the wheat mow in the log cabin. It was hovering over me. He knew I was a stranger."

"Wait till you've been here long enough," said Drunkard. "You'll see him quite plainly. He's a nice, kind old fellow and he loves to know that the Deverings have this place. Did you know Mr. Devering had gone with the warden to catch the bad poachers who shot at the White Phantom?" [Pg 194]

"Yes," I said, "I watched them paddling up the Lake."

"I hate to have him away," said Drunkard gloomily. "Mrs. Devering sometimes forgets to tie me up when daylight comes."

"Can't you keep straight for one night?" I asked.

"No. I can't and there's an end of it. I have the dogging habit."

"I'll tie you up," I said. "I'm pretty good with my teeth if I have a rope."

"No you won't tie me up," he said hastily. "I enjoy a run in the woods. It's lovely to feel the springy moss underfoot and——"

"And you chase deer," I interrupted. "How can you?"

"I never run them down. I give them a gallop, then I switch off and try another lot. It's such fun to see the graceful creatures go bounding through the bush."

"Fun for you," I said, "but what about them?"

"I never dogged the White Phantom," he said.

"I wonder how she is now?" I remarked. "I do hope she won't die."

"She must not die," said Drunkard. "She is the pearl of the woods. It makes me feel quite moonstruck to look at her. Hark! the owls are giving the latest bulletin from her. One just flew across from Old Woman's Islands."

We listened to the low-pitched deep-toned, "Who, hoo, hoo, hoo," coming from the nearby tree tops. [Pg 195]

"Oh! that's good," exclaimed Drunkard. "The White Phantom is better, and has nibbled some maple tips from the hand of the soldier."

"Bless her," I said, "I scarcely know her, but it would grieve me if she died."

"Her eyes are like forest pools," said Drunkard. "Hist!—who goes there? Maybe it's your something."

We both listened. The night was solemnly quiet. It always takes me a little while to get used to the dead stillness of a backwoods night—so different from a night in the open farming country, where one can hear creatures calling to each other and enlivening the solitude.

Out of the great silence up the road came a faint pit-a-pat growing louder and louder.

"Human being," said Drunkard.

"I've got it!" I exclaimed. "I might have known. I'll wager anything it's that Russian coming to see my young master. Perhaps he'd like to coax him away from here. Let's go meet him, Drunkard. I wish we could drive him away. It would frighten the timid young Dallas to wake up and find that hairy creature bending over him."

"All right," said Drunkard, and we both went loping down the driveway to the road.

It was the Russian, and he was grinning along the moonlit way as if he were doing something very smart. The pale yellow light poured down on his tousled head. It was touching to see tightly clenched in his fist a little bouquet of wild flowers who were crying out that he was choking them to death, only the poor boor could not understand them. They were for the boy he admired. [Pg 196]

"We've got to obey the law of the road," growled Drunkard. "We can't touch him here, but the minute he tries to enter the farm gates we have a right to stop him."

Alas! Poor Drunkard. When he stood up to the Russian, growling horribly and showing his white teeth, all except the front one that Mr. Devering had taken out when he had toothache, the Russian just gave an extra grin at the good dog strutting up and down between the gateposts, and lifting him on the toe of his big boot sent him flying into the air.

The unfortunate dog came down so heavily that he was shunned, and lay perfectly still.

Bolshy stopped short and gazed at him quite sadly. He really was sorry that he had hurt him, and bent over him grunting in a sympathetic manner. Then he raised himself and took up his march to the house.

Learning a lesson from Drunkard's mishap, I took care not to be in the spot I had been a few minutes before, and I trotted to my young master's windows.

Bolshy was coming on and on. I knew he would not hurt my beloved Dallas. I guessed that he had come merely to feast his eyes on him, or to try to induce him to go away and live with him and the soldier and be their little boy. Well! I would have something to say to that. [Pg 197]

I could hear him plodding along the veranda, trying to go quietly, but in reality making quite a noise. However, the children were all fine sleepers and he woke no one up.

He bent over Big Chief, Champ, Sojer, and Big-Wig. No, they were not the dear one he sought. When he came to the part of the veranda where I stood, his face brightened, and brushing me aside as if I had been a fly he entered the room.

The moon showed him the beautiful face on the pillow, and he gave a snort of satisfaction, and stared as if he would never have enough of this interesting sight.

Now was my time to act. I hated to alarm Mrs. Devering, but my young master must be protected. I went on soft shoes to her room and passing Mr. Devering's empty bed nipped the black hair lying spread over the pillow.

My gentle pulling awoke her at once, and she said composedly, "Well, Pony—are you having nightmare?"

I whinnied entreatingly, and being a clever woman, she sat up, seized a warm gown hanging at

her bed-head, and taking a small shining thing from under her pillow, motioned me forward.

I took her to Bolshy, who at a word from her dropped his wild flowers pretty quick, and lifted both hands in the air.

"Now march——" she said, "go home—don't come again."

I ventured to place myself between her and Bolshy. I felt that the poor creature, standing there with tears running down his cheeks, was terribly distressed to think that she thought he would hurt anyone belonging to her when she had been so kind to him.

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At that moment, there was a queer sound from Bolshy. He had caught sight of a picture that I had seen Mr. Devering hanging on the wall very hurriedly before he went away with the warden.

Ponies and other animals, though they can enjoy natural scenery, do not get much out of flat pictures, but I heard the Deverings talking about this photograph afterward, so I found out what it was.

Mr. Devering wished the lad to find out that his mother was alive in some way that would not shock him, so he hung on the wall this large photograph of her in the costume of a Red Cross nurse. He hoped that Dallas would piece together her story from what Bolshy had said in the afternoon. However, as it turned out the boy had no chance to examine the picture.

The overjoyed Bolshy, forgetting all about keeping his hands up, sprang across the room, unhooked the picture, and hanging it round his neck began to hug it as if it had been a bag of gold.

Mrs. Devering smiled, then knowing that she could not get this man mountain out of the room herself, she stepped to the veranda and gave the Devering Farm yodel for help.

It rang out startlingly clear in the still night air, and in a jiffy Mr. Talker came tearing down the road, dressing as he came, and the Macedonian rolled heavily along from the carriage-house.

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Bolshy, paying no more attention to them than if they had been two more ponies, went on talking rapid Russian to the picture, not noticing Dallas, who was now wide awake, and curious, but not at all frightened, I was glad to see.

"Send him home, please," said Mrs. Devering. "Tell him the soldier will be angry with him."

The yodel had waked the children up, and they came staggering to the room sleepy but unafraid like true children of the wild.

Big Chief scowled and placed himself beside his mother, while Cassowary threw protecting arms about the little ones.

"Send him home," repeated Mrs. Devering. "Quick!"

"Go home, sir," said Mr. Talker with dignity.

Bolshy put his head on one side, and said something deep in his throat to the picture.

Mr. Talker nodded to Samp, and each man put a hand on Bolshy's shoulder, and tried to propel him toward the veranda.

Bolshy stood firm, whereupon the Macedonian promptly laid him on the floor.

Bolshy was astonished. Getting up, and holding his precious picture so that he would not break the glass, he stared at the Macedonian as if to say, "Who are you that you can throw me down?"

Then he began to jabber to him in Russian and Samp replied in some foreign gibberish that delighted Bolshy so completely that he patted him on the back and stroked his cheeks.

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The affair ended by Bolshy's insisting on shaking hands with Samp. Then he bowed deeply to everyone present, especially Mrs. Devering, and went up the road between the two men, talking most sociably to them.

"If you can, Mr. Talker," Mrs. Devering called after them, "make him understand that we do not care for midnight calls."

"And now, Mother," said Big Chief, "what's all this fuss about?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Nothing much, my son. The Russian had an impulse to call on us."

"On us?" asked Big Chief, "or on him," and he pointed an accusing finger at the sleepy blinking Dallas, who was sitting straight up in bed.

"On him, if you will," she said. "He has taken a fancy to your cousin."

"Did you know he was coming?" asked Big Chief solemnly of the bed.

My young master was not as sleepy as he looked, and rising up on his knees he made Big Chief a profound bow. "Yes, Sir Curiosity Box," he said in a ridiculous voice, "I had full knowledge of the honor in store for me. Pardon me for not informing your knightship."

The Deverings, who were always ready to laugh, burst into a howl of amusement at Big Chief's

confounded face. Then Mrs. Devering, checking her laughter, said, "Back to bed, children."

"I wanths to go theepy with you," said little Big Wig. "My beddieths cold."

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Big Chief turned on him in a hateful way and said, "'Fraid cat."

The baby gave him a good slap in the face, and the discomfited Big Chief, seeing that his brothers and sisters were again convulsed with amusement at his funny twisted features, took his cross self back to his bed.

"Feels his oats," said Champ. "Dad's away."

"Ah! children—we should not have laughed at him," said Mrs. Devering sweetly.

"Where's Drunkard?" asked Cassowary suddenly. "How did that Russian get by him?"

"Perhaps he's off to the bush," said Mrs. Devering.

"No, Mother, it isn't daylight yet," replied Cassowary. "He's hurt. I feel it."

"I'll go with you to look him up," said Champ.

"Everybody to bed but Cassowary and me," said a sudden voice.

CHAPTER XVI THE HIGHLANDER WALKS

[Pg 202]

Oh! how glad we all were to see Big Chief back again.

The lad was ashamed of himself. It was just as I thought. He had a good heart under all his follies.

"I wanths thomething to eat," cried Big Wig.

"All right, brother," said Big Chief kindly, "I'll get it for you."

"No, boy," said his mother and her eyes glistened as she gazed at him, "I will take them all to the pantry. You and Cassowary go after the hound."

He gave her an affectionate glance, then turned to me. "Mother says you gave the alarm to-night. Now if you know where Drunkard is, take us to him."

Of course I led them to the gates, where Drunkard lay moaning now.

"Leg's broken," said Big Chief, bending over him; "right fore-leg," and gathering the dog up in his arms he came back to the house.

Cassowary ran ahead, and turned on the light in her father's office.

Then putting Drunkard on a table, the two clever young ones set his leg.

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"You'll dog no more deer for a time, my boy," said Cassowary.

Drunkard could not talk to them, but he lifted his head and threw me a glance as I stood in the doorway. "I'm going to be lame, Prince Fetlar. This is my punishment for persecuting the deer. Mr. Devering will never have to tie me up again. I shall be able to hop about daytimes—that's one consolation."

"I'm glad Bolshy didn't break your neck," I said. Drunkard was licking the children's hands. How much he loved this dear boy and girl.

"Now a little milk for the patient," said Cassowary, and she flew away to the kitchen.

Big Chief lifted Drunkard to a sofa. "I shall spend the rest of the night beside you in this big chair, old man," he said. "I don't want that bandage disturbed."

Drunkard whined in embarrassed pleasure.

"It's all right," said Big Chief. "I don't mind. You're our dog and we're bound to look after you. Now, Miss Cassowary will stay here while I'm gone," and he turned to me.

Drunkard, in spite of his distress, grinned at me. The boy's grand air amused him.

I thought I'd better start for the stable, so I trotted quickly to my stall.

"Oh! boy," said Big Chief behind me when he saw the door rolled back. "So you can use your teeth as well as your brains. You're as clever as that bally master of yours. I do hope you will continue to do as you please. Perhaps you would like to take my bed and have me stay here?"

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I said nothing to this. I don't like to be made fun of.

"When I'm master," this queer boy went on, "I'll not drive with the loose rein Dad does. Too much liberty—too much given away. I'll show 'em what's what," and he waved his hand about the

stable, with the air of a master.

Then he stepped to the door and surveyed barnyard and out-buildings.

"I'm fourteen now, soon I'll be twenty-one. Dad's forty-five. Likely he'll live till he's sixty—maybe till seventy. Split the differ and say sixty-five. Then I'll be thirty-four—a long time to wait, but time passes, they say, as one gets older. I'll be married by that time, and have children of my own. Probably I'll build up this place into the best known stock farm in the province—but I shan't have twice the help Dad has. There's too much money spent here," and the young scamp had the audacity to look up at the calm Lady Moon, who stopped smiling as she heard his folly and drew a cloud of displeasure across her face.

Under pretence of nosing him affectionately, I stepped up and rubbed his shoulder. He had on a bath-robe over his pajamas, but it was quite easy for my strong teeth to give him a quiet little nip.

He drew off to hit me, but I wasn't there. Then he stopped and shivered.

I was delighted. A most beautiful thing was taking place. A wave of cool air swept over us, then I saw the old Highlander in his coon skin coat and rabbit cap coming slowly toward us. [Pg 205]

He was a cheerful old spirit, and I could tell by his misty face that he loved the boy and wished to help him.

Big Chief started to walk to the house. Three times the Highlander stood in front of him, pale, shadowy, smiling, but quite decided.

Three times the lad shuddered. He was no coward, but something more powerful than himself was making him feel lonely.

Suddenly he stopped short, and turned toward the lake.

A wind had sprung up. One of the sudden summer squalls was coming. The trees were sighing mournfully, and as they sighed the boy's better spirit rose gently within him.

"Dad!" he murmured, "Dad! where are you?—Suppose you never came back—God forgive me—what should I do without my father?" and throwing himself on the grass, he buried his face in his arms.

He got up when the Highlander willed him to, and went sadly toward the house, his head hanging.

"Highlander," I ventured to say, "you've done a good deed to-night."

Good and bad spirits never speak to human beings. They just hover over them, but they can speak to animals.

"Pony," said the good old man, "the boy is God's child. He will soon be God's man. You must respect him for you, too, are God's little animal—not as high as the boy, but still having rights." [Pg 206]

I listened quietly, and feeling very much happier watched the old man's cloud with its misty fur points melt into the gloom of the log cabin.

Then I went toward the barn cellar. I, too, had a little missionary work to do that night.

It was just as I expected. The pigs were snoring like thunderstorms and the two dogs were lying on the threshold as sound as tops.

They never stirred till my shoes struck the sill, then they were close to me, one on each side like wolves closing on a deer.

"Well! dogs," I said sarcastically, "I hope you are having pleasant dreams."

"Quite, thank you," said Guardie. "May I ask why you are at this hour of the night waking our charges from well-deserved slumbers?"

"Certainly," I said, listening to old Sir Vet who was snorting disagreeably as he raised his head from his fresh straw bed and Lady Annabella who was ejaculating, "Unk! Unk!—What's the row?"

"I merely called to tell you that we have had a night prowler who knocked poor Drunkard silly. Why weren't you on the alert? I've been keeping dog watch."

Guardie yawned. "Awfully sorry, old boy, but we've trained ourselves not to budge unless we hear someone approaching our pigs."

"Pretty selfish policy that," I said. "If you'd been more generous you might have saved Drunkard a broken leg." [Pg 207]

"Is that so!" both dogs exclaimed, "too bad!" and then I had to tell them about Bolshy.

While we were talking, old Sir Vet got up from his bed and pegged along toward us.

When I finished he turned his small but intelligent eyes on Guardie. "Do I understand Prince Fetlar to say that you are an insufficient protection for us at night?"

"No, I'm not—I'm a good guard," snarled the collie.

"But you said you only woke up when someone came near the barn cellar," pursued the boar. "Suppose there was a fire outside. We might be burned up."

"If there was a fire, I'd smell it, and bunch you all up and run you out pretty quick," said Guardie.

"You're too much taken up with yourself," said Sir Vet testily. "You think we can't live without you. I'd advise you to have eyes for something else beside us. Make yourself familiar with our environment. That Russian might have stood back from the doorway and shot me."

Girlie began to snicker at this, and Guardie looked so furious that I said, "Permit me, gentlemen—Sir Vet is right and Guardie is right. Each one must attend to his own business in this world, but it is right and it is also wise to have a thought for your neighbour. For pigs to prosper, all the animals on the farm must prosper. For pigs to sleep well, all the animals must sleep well. Therefore all dogs must be interested in all animals."

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"If you expect me to run this farm," said Guardie sulkily, "you're mistaken. I have enough to do to take care of these ungrateful creatures here," and he nodded toward the other pigs who were waking up and grunting irritably.

"You're not expected to run the farm, Guardie, dear," said Girlie. "You're merely expected to sleep with one ear open. You needn't do it if you don't want to. I will. I fear we have been selfish."

"You are never selfish, madam," said Sir Vet respectfully, "but your dog of a husband is."

"Now I'm going to bite you for that," said Guardie.

"Oh! no, you're not," I said putting myself between them, "and if you don't go lie down, Guardie, and sleep off your ill-humour, you'll wish you had been born an armadillo."

"So you can kick, can you," sneered Guardie. "You! gentle creature."

I just gave him a little curved one to stop his nonsense, and he drew back panting.

"Go to bed, handsome Prince Fetlar," said Girlie coaxingly. "Guardie isn't well. There was too much fat in his soup to-night. He has a delicate stomach."

"His stomach's all right," I said. "So are his legs. It's his temper that's sick," and I kept a wary eye on the hysterical collie, who was making a mad leap in the air at me.

Of course he didn't get me, but fell fair on Sir Vet's back. The old boar started to give him a dressing-down, and Lady Annabella came to help him. Girlie pitched in to assist her mate, and we were having a fine mix-up, when a cold shadow stepped in between us.

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The good old Highlander was walking again, and had sent his pet wolf cub to recall us to ourselves, and to remind us that fighting is not the chief end of life.

I stopped, just as I was about to give Guardie's hind leg a sly nip. An icy muzzle was touching my own. I shrank back from the wolf cub, and saw the Highlander standing in the moonlight by the doorway and smiling at us.

We had all been naughty—dogs, pigs and pony—and the human being was rebuking us. We all slunk slowly away to bed, our tails between our legs.

The wolf cub followed his master. He was a noble looking animal now.

"Can it be that beyond this life even wolves are made over?" I heard Girlie whisper as I left.

As I paced slowly to my stall I heard a great horned owl cry solemnly from the ridge-pole of the carriage house, "Whoo, hoo, hoo, the old man walks often lately. A good heart never dies. A kind body cannot lie still, hoo—hoo,—Lady Moon, I love you."

"I see the moon
The moon sees me,
God bless the moon,
God bless thee!"

CHAPTER XVII A MYSTERIOUS LAMB

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Of course Guardie and I made up our little difference. Before he took his pigs back on Deer Trail the next morning he came bounding toward me and apologised handsomely.

"I've thought the matter over," he said. "Selfishness doesn't pay in dog or man—I'll keep an ear open at night, and Girlie will, too, and we'll be on the lookout for strange scents. Of course we dogs don't depend much on our eyes."

"I was disagreeable, too," I said frankly. "Ponies have nerves, and I was tired."

"Barklo ought to come home" said Guardie.

"Who is Barklo?" I asked curiously.

"Children's dog—I haven't time to tell—ask someone else—pigs are wandering from trail," and off he dashed.

"Who is Barklo?" I repeated.

It was very early in the morning, and away up on the hillside where I was standing there wasn't a creature in sight, but Lammie-noo, who was lying down and eating grass in a sideways fashion. His leg was better, but he still put on great airs, for he liked the children to wait on him and pity him.

"Ba, ba," he said in his silly way, "Barklo's a dog—a Hairdale."

"Not Hairdale," I said, "Airedale."

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"Just as you like," he replied amiably; "he's very hairy. He's visiting now."

"Was he the watch-dog?" I asked.

"Yes, Pony Prince. Barklo lay on the children's beds, and if a stranger didn't went, he barked high."

"Not 'went,'" I corrected; "'Go,' Lammie-noo."

"All right, but what difference does it make?" he asked languidly. "You know what I mean."

"Even a lamb should talk properly," I replied.

"You're a snob," responded Lammie sweetly. "Every animal about the place says so."

I was stung to the quick, for I pride myself on my brotherhood to all creatures.

"My grandfather was a prize ram and mingled in the best society," babbled Lammie.

"Now who's the snob?" I asked.

"And I always go in the woodshed when it rains," pursued Lammie-noo. "I can't help it. The sheep say I'm stuck up, but I'm not. I was brought up that way. My mamma never cared to wet her fleece—and I can't associate with that whole flock all the time. I have favourites—I don't deny it. I admire to eat beside Roxy and Woxy and Daffy-Down-Dilly. Persimmon and Emma and Maximilian I detest, but they're always crowding up to me. Are you troubled with bores?"

"Very much," I said, glaring at him. "I see one before me at this present moment. You don't impress me at all. I think you're silly, eating in that nibbling way, and sticking your far from beautiful head on one side. Also your ideas are as crude as your mode of expressing yourself."

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"Don't go, my Prince," he said anxiously. "I really am pining for your acquaintance, but you have never noticed me since that day on Deer Trail when your darling young master looked so sweet. What eyes! What a manner—quite a young prince!"

I began to laugh. "Oh! Lammie-noo, what a goose was spoiled in you, but really I'm quite flattered that you wish to make my acquaintance. Have I snubbed you?"

"Very much," bleated Lammie touchingly, "and you know you are the leader in animal society on this farm."

"Am I?" I exclaimed. "I didn't know it."

"Quite easily *Princeps*," he said in a languishing way.

"*Princeps*! What's that?" I asked.

"I don't know, sir. It's foreign. I heard Mr. Devering use it—'Silly Princeps,' he said. I would guess that it is some elegance."

I tossed my head, then I said, "Lammie-noo, you remind me of young Pony Pale-Face I knew in years gone by. He used to stand leaning against walls and looking up at the sky. We never could make out whether he was a fool pony or a wise one—Now please tell me about Barklo."

"Well! Barklo's a nice kind dog, and he's lent to a nice kind widow woman."

"Lent," I repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Just loaned for a season, not guv away."

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"Given," I said, "but why send a good dog from home?"

"Widow's lonely
Son's away
Barklo goes there
Just to play."

"Oh! is he with that nice old widow who lives beyond the Talkers?"

"Yes—that's her."

"You should say, 'That's she,' Lammie-noo."

"Very well—that's she. I'd like to talk real elegant like you, Prince."

"Are you an American lamb?" I asked quickly.

"It's hard to say what I am," he replied mysteriously. "They call me the Wandering Lamb."

"Why 'Wandering'?"

"Cause I wander, wander. Legs wander, mind wanders, and sometimes I feel so old. The ancient ram," and he nodded toward the crown of the hill where Silver Hoof, King of Muskoka, stood calmly contemplating the landscape, "first called me that."

"Perhaps," I said, "you have lived before."

"I think I have," he replied in a dreamy voice, "cause sometimes I get up on my hind legs and try to walk. Perhaps I was a boy of some kind—maybe a prince."

"What do you dream about?" I asked.

"Oh! fighting, always fighting. I give dreadful whacks, but not with my noble brow."

"Then you don't fight the sheep way?"

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"No, sir—I don't like the forehead way. It gives me a headache. Now just see those two foolish ewes."

We both looked up the hill where two sheep having a difference about something were standing off from each other, then running and banging their heads together.

"So you dream about fighting," I went on.

"Oh! yes—horrible battles. The dead are piled high around me."

"What kind of dead?"

"Wolves mostly—sometimes bears and foxes."

"I wonder whether that will be your heaven?" I said musingly. "No—it couldn't be, for in a future life, you will lie down with the bears and wolves."

"I shall never sleep with a wolf," said Lammie-noo, decidedly. "Never!"

"Don't say you'll never do a thing," I replied. "I've heard many an animal say that, and the thing he'll never do is the thing he does do. You just have to give in sometime during your life."

"I shall never sleep with a wolf," said Lammie-noo, "never, never," and he said this so many times, and in such an imbecile fashion that I left him, and ran up to speak to the ram who was now cropping short grass most industriously.

Silver-Hoof was a beauty—calm, sure of himself, no fighter, yet able to cope with any difficulty among the ewes, or to meet any other ram who tried to impose on him.

"Good morning," I said. "I often see you at a distance, but we don't seem to have much to say to each other."

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"Ba-a-a-a!" he replied in his deep voice. "You are busy with your young master. I am occupied with my ewes and lambs. To each his duty, ram or pony."

"I've been talking to that pet down below," I said with a toss of my head toward the languishing Lammie-noo. "What do you make of him?"

The ram looked thoughtful. "I don't just know," he said. "Sometimes he acts like a foolish creature, sometimes like a wise one. He is a lamb with a past, but he can't recall it. Now my great-grandfather told my great-aunt's mother that——" and he went on with such a long story about old sheep who used to see things in the heaven and on the earth, and who acted strangely and waggled their heads, that I became most extremely bored. I backed and backed, and he kept on talking and staring out at the lake and not looking at me, until I finally got behind a clump of alders. Then I went discreetly toward the house, and he wandered on till he put himself to sleep and sank on the ground.

My young master had just waked up. I watched him running down to the lake with the other children. He did not seem to mind the cool air now. He was getting hardened. How much better this was for him than the great heat of some summer places I had been in.

Bingi was up in the kitchen garden pulling carrots, so I trotted up beside him and stepping carefully between the rows of vegetables took little carrots by the top, shook the earth off and dropped them in his basket.

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This pleased him so much that I ventured to draw one between my teeth instead of putting it in the basket.

This pleased him still more, and he laughed so heartily that Chippie Sore-Foot came hobbling over the ground, and sitting on his hind legs begged for one, too.

"Of need of it, thou hast not," said Bingi. "Merely jealous art thou."

"What a pretty picture!" called someone. "Bingi and Chippie and Bonnie Prince Fetlar bathing in this glorious August sunlight, and all looking so happy."

We all turned round, and there was Mrs. Devering with a pile of white linen that she was going to hang out to dry.

The Jap got up and bowed respectfully. "Good morning to Mistress of mansion, stoutful and strongful as a man, and in no wise fearsome of work."

Mrs. Devering smiled kindly, and turned to young Dovey, who had not gone in to bathe because she had cut her foot.

"Dovey, dear, tell Bingi the nice surprise we have for him. I wish him to hear it from you, because you were the first to suggest it."

Dear little Dovey, who was angelic when she was not naughty, came limping up to Bingi.

"Once, long, long ago, about five months, I said 'Daddy, Bingi has no little boy and no little girl, and I guess he's lonely.' Daddy said, 'Shouldn't wonder if he is,' and I said, 'He's got a little wife in Vancouver—I know 'cause he showed me her picture—Daddy, send for the little wee wife, please, to play with Bingi,' and Daddy he sent and she's coming next week, and you won't be lonely any more—and you're to live with her in that housie on the hill," and she pointed to a pretty green cottage that some carpenters were working at every day.

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The young Jap turned as pale as a ghost, and staring from her to her mother sank on the ground on his heels between the carrot rows.

"It's true, Bingi," said Mrs. Devering. "Your young O-Mayo-San is really coming."

The little man struggled to his feet, bowed and bowed again, tried to make one of his pretty speeches, failed, and hiding his face in his sleeve went trot, trotting in a funny way toward the kitchen, his carrots toppling from the basket as he ran.

Mrs. Devering's face was bright and shining. "Girlie," she said, "when you grow up to be a woman, you will never wear more beautiful jewels than those tears glistening in that little man's eyes."

The merry-eyed Dovey was very matter-of-fact. "Bingi's a good cook," she said. "I hope he's got something nice for breakfast—I'm starving. Can't we have it, Mummy? The kids are coming up from the water."

I stepped along to my young master's window. He was brushing his hair with his military brushes as if he would tear it all out, and singing as he did so,

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"Oh! the wild wild kiddies!
Oh! the wild wild kiddies!
They have made a wild boy of me!"

Then he danced along to the table on the veranda and set the electric toaster going, as that was his task.

"When's Dad coming?" Champ asked his mother. "I hate Big Chief's carving. He doesn't give me half enough."

So others saw this mean streak in the eldest boy, but no one had time to say a word, for young Sojer, who had as keen ears as a dog, gave a sudden shout, "The Fire-Bird."

They all looked up at the hydro-plane which had come over the mountain and was whizzing and pounding above us.

"A message, a message," called Cassowary. "Captain Johnson has his blue streamer out. Now watch sharp for it."

Sure enough, a white package came dropping down right over the house as the plane flew by.

It danced along the roof, and fell in the garden.

Champ ran to pick it up, while young Sojer, who was a great pet of Captain Johnson's—the returned soldier who was in the Fire-Bird—said in a disappointed voice, "Not a single stunt—no nose dives, no spirals. I think he's mean."

"Oh! no, no," exclaimed Mrs. Devering, who was reading a letter from her husband. "Captain Johnson is taking a very sick man to a hospital in Toronto. He says there was an accident in Algonquin Park—a young man had his leg crushed and must be operated on immediately."

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"Just like me," groaned poor Drunkard, who was reposing on a big cushion on the veranda.

"What a delicious way to go to a hospital," said Cassowary. "No bumps, no jolts."

"Where's the letter from?" asked Big Chief.

"Gull Lake." Then she turned to Dallas. "That is the air camp up north."

Big Chief looked disappointed. He wanted his father back, and I was glad to see that the good feelings of the night before were still uppermost.

"Have they caught the poachers?" asked Cassowary.

"Yes, and have had them fined heavily. Your father says they are men who have no respect for law, and the lesson will do them good. We have some very heedless persons in Canada and——"

Her sentence was never finished for young Sojer gave another shout.

"By the pricking in my ears!
I know I hear our pony dears!"

All the children leaped up and sat down again.

CHAPTER XVIII THE ARRIVAL OF THE PONIES

[Pg 220]

There was nothing soft about the way they were brought up, and they had had some good punishments lately for leaving the table without permission, and for noise-making at improper times.

Mrs. Devering gazed at them, and I thought to myself that I had never seen a prouder or more loving mother-look on a woman's face.

Finally she said in a low voice, "I forgive you—the provocation was great, all except Sojer. Come here, my boy."

The other children dashed away, and Sojer going fearlessly to her pressed close against her shoulder as she sat at the head of the table.

"My darling," she said, "can't you remember to lower your voice when you are conversing?"

"Mother!" he exclaimed with another shout, "I didn't know you had two dimples. There's a little weeny one 'way over here on your left cheek."

"Whisper that sentence," she said, holding up a finger as if he were a little dog.

Sojer's eyes twinkled and he began in husky tones,

"You're my Mummy, you're my dear,
I love your little dimple right, right here."

Then he threw his arms about her and hugged her.

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"Incorrigible!" she murmured, then her eye fell on my young master, who often lingered near her in fascination when she caressed her children.

"What do you think of these noisy cousins of yours, my boy?"

"I love them, Aunt Bretta," he said simply, "and I love you, too. I find you so—so comely."

She got up, and going to him put her arm round him, and kissed him very kindly.

Dallas shut his eyes. "I'm just imagining you are my own mother, Aunt Bretta."

"And I will be," she said earnestly, "until you have a mother of your own. Kiss me night and morning as my own children do, and come to me with all your little troubles."

Dallas stared at her in surprise, but she turned to Sojer. "Take him to see the ponies, laddie. It is really quite a sight when they come home from over the mountain."

I trotted after my master in great excitement. Oh! how would the king of the ponies treat me? He belonged to Big Chief, and I have often noticed that as is the master so is the pony. Should I still be leader of animal society on the farm as the silly Lammie-noo had said?

There they all came, sweeping down the road from the head of the lake, two fine saddle horses leading, and behind them the surging band of ponies, their eyes glowing with anticipation as they got near their pleasant home and beloved owners.

Astride the handsomer of the horses was a young man I had not seen before, but I soon found out that all these fine animals were his especial care.

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"Which is which, dear Cousin Cassowary?" Dallas was exclaiming excitedly. "First—that noble bay the young man is on."

"That's Patsie McSquirrel," she said, "Dad's horse. Isn't it delicious to see him getting over the ground in that running walk of his, and nodding his head and flapping his ears to keep time with his footfalls?"

"So that is what you call a running walk," said my young master.

"Yes, it's an all-day gait, easy alike to horse and rider. Dad is often away for a week or two at a time with his Patsie. That walk-trot-canter sorrel beside Patsie is Mother's Backwoods Beauty. He's a dear, too. Look at his style in the way he carries his head, and the arch of his neck and tail. His body is rounded and better turned than Patsie's, but he hasn't as strong a back."

"Just look at the kids," said Dallas.

It was a pretty sight to see each child running to his or her pet. Cassowary alone did not move. Her pony, Apache Girl, came stepping behind her, and thrust her head over her mistress' shoulder.

Cassowary's pony was as queer as she was. She merely put up her hand and rubbed the young animal's poll without turning round.

This Apache Girl was a tough looking, sporty pony, ewe-necked and appearing capable of any amount of hard work. I didn't like her eye. It showed spirit, but also a provoking temper. "One can't always tell what an Indian pony will do," I thought as I whinnied gently to her. [Pg 223]

She turned her head away, and never said a word, so I went on examining the other ponies.

Big Chief had sprung proudly to the back of his Hackney pony, who was an animal showing quality and finish, but who was also sensational and smart, and had a flashy way of going with head and tail carried high.

"That's Attaboy," said Cassowary to Dallas. "We call him 'Peacock Attaboy' when Big Chief isn't round. Doesn't he cut a dash?"

"Big Chief likes that," said Dallas softly. Then he burst into laughter.

Little Big Wig, both arms round the neck of his tiny sturdy miniature work-horse pony, was galloping down the road and would soon be out of sight.

I gazed after them, my heart in my mouth. That was the Master of Bressay—that little piebald creature with the pale blue eyes, and Bressay was the island that a little pony friend of mine had come from—a dear little friend who died. I recalled the many stories he had told me of his home island and decided that of all the ponies the Master of Bressay would be my favourite. My longing eyes followed him as he tore along, as safe as a table for the child, his fuzzy-wuzzy body looking like an Angora cat blown the wrong way by the wind. There was no Arabian blood in him. He was part Shetland and part Icelandic, and as little Big Wig had said, "Not very well-bred."

Flashing by us after Big Wig was Dovey on a donkey, and my young master just yelled with enjoyment. [Pg 224]

"I didn't notice it before," he cried. "Why hasn't she a pony? Oh! isn't he funny with his long ears and that queer tail with so little hair on it?"

"She wanted a donkey," said Cassowary, "and she got it. Dad said, 'Anything you like, children, in the shape of horseflesh.' She just loves her Jack Bray, and I tell you he has speed and endurance in that angular leggy body of his, and you just ought to see him rub her shoulder ever so gently with his creamy old muzzle. He loves her, and she is so good to him. Your Bonnie Prince Fetlar will have to fight for his carrots now," and she put out a hand and stroked me kindly.

"What's Sojer's pony's name, and what kind is he?" asked Dallas.

"He's an Exmoor—climbs banks and leaps ditches like a wild creature."

"What's his name, Cousin?"

"Exmoor Pendennis, but we call him Hendennis because last winter he let Bidy Pilgrim roost on his back all through the cold weather. She's pretty long-headed, and had found out he was a perpetual electric cushion. The men for fun let her sleep in the stable. Henny got to love his Plymouth Rock, and she will never be killed. 'Pon my word! she's running to meet him.'"

Ponies and horses all this time had been joyfully making their way toward their stable quarters, and Bidy, seeing them entering the farmyard, had singled out the Exmoor and was fluttering excitedly about him. [Pg 225]

"And some people say say hens have no sense," remarked Dallas.

"Just as much sense as anybody," said Cassowary, who never lost a chance to champion the cause of the lower creation. "Now isn't it pathetic to see Mrs. Bidy pecking the pony's hoofs so lovingly, and now he's putting his head down—he's glad to see her."

"Champ's pony is the only one you haven't introduced," said Dallas. "What's his name?"

"He's David Wales. I like him better than Big Chief's Hackney. Notice his snappy and free way and his good head and neck. I tell you he's a well-formed little fellow, and fine for rough districts. The Welsh ponies are always rugged and thrifty sort of creatures. I don't like them as well as other kinds for small children. Champ is just old enough to manage him."

"Is he vicious?" asked my young master.

"Not a bit, but he wants a firm hand. There's heaps of go in him. Come on, let's run up to the stable and have a crack wi' Jock. He's a University graduate and has dandy manners—son of an old friend of Dad's—came here for his health. Wait till you hear him play the violin.

"Let's all go mad!
Let's all go mad!"

and the young girl began to dance her way toward the stable yard, while Apache Girl zigzagged behind her.

My young master, not to be outdone by anyone, began to dance, too, and sing, and his beautiful voice soon drowned Cassowary's for he forgot all about her. [Pg 226]

"Here we go up to the stable, stable,"

he sang, for he, too was learning to make up doggerel as fast as his cousins.

"Here we go up to the stable, stable,
Just as fast as we're able, able,
Ponies and children and hens galore
Not any room for a critter more!"

Didn't I do my best steps to this jingle, and Apache Girl seeing me prance so well, began to look on me with more favor.

"Where do you come from?" she asked.

"The United States of America."

She neighed quite shrilly. "My ancestors were brought to America by the Spaniards."

"Indeed," I said gently. "They were a very high-class race."

"They were capable of very severe work under the saddle," she said, "and they got it."

"Well!" I replied, "Shetlands can do most anything. I'm not proud. I know my ancestors used to help the crofters with their work, notably in carrying panniers of peat."

"But you are very first-class," she said with a side glance at me from her queer eyes, "though you are a cross-breed."

"I'm valued pretty well," I said modestly, "though I stand a bit high—I hope we may be friends. I'm very devoted to your young mistress."

She tossed her head and said nothing, and I thought it wise to make no further advances, and trotted soberly beside her into the stable. [Pg 227]

Cassowary was running in from the supply room with a framed name in her hand—"Apache Girl," and many ribbons hanging from it.

"There, my beauty," she said, hanging it up in the stall. "Come in and have some oats."

Jock, or to give him his real name, Mr. John Alexander Macdonald, who had been chaffing the boys, came forward and took off his cap.

Cassowary shook hands with him in a sober way, but flashed her white teeth at him.

Oh! what a nice young man he was, and so devoted to his ponies and horses. He was not at all good-looking. His hair was sandy and his complexion freckled, but the kindness of his face and the charm of his manner made up for the absence of good looks.

He stood as straight as one of the stall posts, and talked about farm matters in as interested a way as if the place belonged to him.

"We missed you," said Cassowary. "Dad and Mother don't like to play without their second fiddle."

"And I missed you," he said. "It was often lonely over the mountain."

"But camping out is great fun," said Champ. "Me for the open."

"Dallas, come here," said Cassowary suddenly to my young master, who was in the background.

It pleased me immensely to see that the young man could not keep the admiration out of his eyes when he shook hands with my dear young master. [Pg 228]

"And he sings," exclaimed Cassowary. "Won't he be an addition to our choir!"

Big Chief, who was in a nearby stall picking the hoofs of his Hackney as he had got some small stones in them on his trip home, gave a kind of groan. He hated to hear anyone praise Dallas.

Cassowary was just going to snap at Big Chief when she caught sight of the fire warden's red canoe coming up the lake.

"He's got the mail, he's got the mail," she cried, and in two seconds there wasn't a child in the stable.

"Stop a bit, little fellow," said Mr. Macdonald to me. "I want to give you the once-over."

However, I was so impatient that he kindly let me go, after a preliminary canter only over my points.

I always loved to see the mail come in. The big leather bag was handed to Mrs. Devering, who sat on the veranda and opened it with as much ceremony as if it had been a Christmas parcel. There were always surprises in it, for the Deverings had many kind friends and relatives, many of whom thought they were banished in this attractive place.

To-day the mail was unusually heavy. So many letters and such nice books and magazines came tumbling out, and among them was a fat little package for Dallas.

He took it so joyfully, dear lad, and opened it speedily, not knowing that its sweet contents were to bring him much sorrow.

CHAPTER XIX CASSOWARY LOSES HER TEMPER ONCE

[Pg 229]

John and Margie had sent him six chocolate eggs stuffed with cream.

"It isn't Easter," squealed Dovey delightedly.

"No," said Dallas, "but John and Margie know that I love them."

"They're deliciouth," lisped little Big Wig, whereupon Dallas promptly gave him one.

Two of the others he shared with the bigger children, then he put the box under his arm.

He had scarcely tasted them himself, and I knew by his look that he was going to share these other three with someone who did not get as many dainties as these children. He was a most generous lad.

I saw his glance go toward the kitchen, then the lake. Ah! that meant Bingi and Bolshy—but the third one. Perhaps he would keep that for himself. I hoped he would and I followed him as he sauntered slowly toward the log cabin.

Arrived there he stared up at the wheat mow. Ah! I might have known. That third egg was for his Cousin Cassowary, who had been so kind in explaining things about the farm to him. She had a *cache* in the straw where she put things she did not wish her sister and brothers to see, and one day in a moment of confidence she had shown it to Dallas. [Pg 230]

The lad went cautiously up the ladder. I knew he was going to lay the egg among Cassowary's treasures. What a joyful surprise she would get when she found it, for it was a nice large egg just stuffed with the rich cream that I like myself.

Alas! She discovered him in the act. Her grandmother had sent her some nuts and she was coming in her swift stealthy way to hide them.

She saw me standing by the ladder and heard the tell-tale rustling above. Then like a flash she was up on the mow, and had my poor young master by the collar.

The children had a very naughty trick of stealing from each other, and she was so sure that she had caught a culprit that she gave him no chance for explanation.

I was furiously angry as I heard her, beating him and dragging him round on the straw, but also delighted that he uttered no cry for mercy.

Finally she sent him flying down the ladder, and he stood before me grinning sheepishly and trying to look as if he didn't mind the blood trickling from his poor nose.

The collar was torn from his shirt, and his coat was besmeared with chocolate.

"You're a gay looking guy," said someone from the doorway, and turning round we saw Big Chief.

"What you been doing?" he went on, and Dallas remarked cheerfully, "Trying to give a present to [Pg 231]"

a girl."

"You've crossed Cassowary," said Big Chief, "and she's a bad one to cross. Has she got her nest up there?"

Dallas shrugged his shoulders and did not reply.

Oh! how indignant I was with that naughty girl. I stamped and whinnied and looked up at the loft just to tease her, and Big Chief, with a knowing glance at me, began to climb the ladder, but very cautiously for he feared that he, too, might meet with a warm reception.

Cassowary had been cunning enough to keep quiet when she heard her brother's voice, but when she saw his head, she flew at him, and shouting with glee he beat a speedy retreat.

My young master, breathing painfully, sat down on a box, and put his hand to his side.

Suddenly there was a low cry from above, then a voice reading—"This chocolate egg is for my kind Cousin Cassowary."

"Oh! Oh!" said the girl coming down the ladder like a cat, and standing before Dallas. "Why didn't I look before I leaped?"

Dallas shook his head. "Lots of people don't, Cassowary."

"Oh! boy, boy," she cried, "I didn't dream you were giving me your lovely eggs, and now they're all smashed and my nuts have rolled in corners and I haven't anything. What an idiot I am!"

Dallas pressed his lips together. He was not going to tell her that she was to have only one of the eggs. However, she glanced at the paper in her hand and said, "Why you say 'egg'—for whom were the others?"

[Pg 232]

"Bolshy and Bingi."

"I'll have to give them something," she said. "Oh! what a wicked girl I am. I should not have been so quick—and your poor nose is bleeding again. Here, take my handkerchief. I don't know what Mother will say."

"Will you have to tell her?" asked Dallas in a choked voice.

Oh! how afraid I was that he would persuade her to keep the affair a secret. I wanted her punished. She had been too swift. She was too sure of herself anyway for a girl her age.

"Certainly," she sighed. "I'll go just as soon as your nose stops bleeding—what a mess you are in. I wonder whether Prince Pony would eat that chocolate?" and she made a sudden dash up the ladder and came back with some sticky brown stuff on a bit of the cardboard box.

I turned my head away. I was not going to help her clean up.

"Your Prince is indignant," she said. "He despises me. Oh! come away to the house. Maybe when I'm punished I'll feel better," and she dragged Dallas down to the veranda where her sensible mother sat quietly reading letters.

Mrs. Devering put up her eyebrows when she saw the state my dear young master was in, then she listened to Cassowary's mournful story.

Her arm was round the sobbing girl, for her dark eyes told her that the grinning cheerful Dallas did not need any sympathy.

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"I am glad that your father is away, dearie," she said to Cassowary. "This would have distressed him terribly. Dallas is your guest and your cousin. I wonder what we can do to these young hands to make them remember not to offend against the laws of hospitality?"

"M-m-make them sew," gurgled Cassowary. "They just hate it."

Mrs. Devering was slowly caressing the girl's long brown fingers. "Poor little hands," she said gently, "poor little hands."

"And bad brain," said Cassowary, "bad, bad brain that makes the hands act so shamefully."

"Dallas," said Mrs. Devering, "is there anything I can do for you?"

"No, thank you, Aunt Bretta. I'm all right. Please don't fuss."

"Kindly put on a fresh shirt," said Mrs. Devering, "and give this one to Cassowary to wash and mend, and you, Girlie, come to your room with me."

"I—I'm just like an Indian in the woods," said Cassowary with a last burst of contrition.

Mrs. Devering turned an almost frightened face to me as I trotted along the veranda beside them. Then her eyes went through an open door to a picture that hung on the wall in Cassowary's room. It was that of a favourite cousin of Mrs. Devering's, and I had often heard her tell the girl that she hoped she would grow up to be as good as this cousin.

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"My child," she said, "good Indians restrain their passions. Sit down there by the window and I will read to you."

After a time she left her daughter, and for the rest of the morning and part of the afternoon we could see the girl sitting sewing slowly, often breaking her thread and stopping to rub her sticky needle on her clothes.

Once when I was near I heard her muttering something she seemed to be learning from a book,

"Calm and serene my frame,
Calm and serene my frame."

Well! she needed considerably more calmness and serenity before she would make the woman her mother was. However she was young, poor girl—I must not be too hard on her, but before the day was over, I was wishing most earnestly that she had been sent to bed and kept there until her temper had really left her excitable young body.

Her father did not come home till the middle of the afternoon, but in the meantime the work of the farm went on as usual.

Mr. MacDonald was helping Mr. Talker experiment with a new machine that cut down trees close to the roots.

My young master was much interested in this small saw which was operated by a little motor. He followed the men for some time and saw them fell some old dead trees on the hill, then he watched the Macedonian and another man working in the hay field.

[Pg 235]

Finally he brought up beside Big Chief who was repairing a sheep rack back of the barn.

The younger children had all been on their ponies' backs scurrying up and down the road, finally turning their pets loose outside the gates where they moved about cropping the short sweet grass and clover by the foot paths or lifting their heads to look lovingly at their beloved owners.

Jack Gray had a very amusing manner, and a most original way of moving his long ears. He was always classed with the ponies as there was no other donkey about the place, and the little Master of Bressay had already whispered to me in confidence that it made Jack very angry to be called a donkey. He had been so much with ponies that he thought he was one.

Big Chief, flattered by his cousin's interest, jerked out remarks as he hammered and sawed.

"Best way to feed sheep is on ground—if ground is muddy, feed in racks. Sheep should get heads in racks. To prevent wool from being pulled from necks slats should be smooth and not too close together."

My young master became so interested that he got another hammer and began to nail too, and I, hearing Dovey calling to her younger brothers to come to the house, trotted over to see what they were going to do.

"Want to come, Prince?" she asked. "We're going to bring Barklo home."

[Pg 236]

I bowed my head and went gaily along beside her and Sojer and little Big-Wig.

Suddenly she stopped and pushing back her square cut hair from her forehead said, "I'm hot—I think Big Chief's mean."

"Was he told to come for Barklo?" asked Sojer.

"Yes, Mother asked him but he was lazy."

"You little goose," I thought. "Big Chief is working harder now than if he were sauntering along this lovely lake road."

"He's too bossy with us," said Sojer fiercely.

"Yeth" lisped little Big Wig, "I've a great mind to give him a thlap thome day."

Young Dovey, far from dreaming that she was to play the part of a firebrand and that she would be assisted by her big sister, gabbled on about Big Chief's tiresome ways until they came to the Widow Detover's small brown house set in a garden having an orchard behind it.

There was a whitewashed fence about the garden and opening the gate they all went up a brick walk to the open front door.

A thoroughbred Airedale came bounding out and almost ate them up.

Behind him appeared the funny fat little widow, who had an enormous chest and breathed with difficulty.

She called them "My dears," and invited them into a cool little parlour with old-fashioned furniture covered with horsehair and having a stuffed animal in each corner of the room.

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I looked in the window. I detest stuffed animals. They often have moths in them and usually smell queer, and I can't understand what pleasure deadly musty creatures can give to human beings.

The bear cub, fox, wildcat and raccoon all seemed to be staring at the strange sight of a good-sized lamb lying on a red blanket.

It was a soiled and wilted kind of a lamb who was terribly bored at being kept in the house this warm day.

"How is your poor animal?" inquired Dovey in a grown-up way.

"Some better," said the widow. "Cheer up, Constance, and look at your nice callers."

The lamb looked strangely at the children, then put her head down on the sofa cushion.

"It's bitters time, sweetheart," said the widow, and going to the mantel she took up a black bottle and holding back the lamb's lip poured some down her throat.

"What a pity you're thuch a gooth," said young Big Wig indignantly.

His sister and brother looked shocked, and the widow hopeless.

"What does he say?" she asked. "I can't understand his dear little gibberish."

Dovey didn't want to tell her that Big Wig had called her a goose, so she said falteringly, "I think Big Wig thinks that your three acre field was too much for the lamb."

Big Wig was going on, "My Daddy saith widowth mean to Conthanthy. She should have let me cut grath with my mower." [Pg 238]

"Did your father think I was wrong to ask the lamb to eat the grass in my field?" exclaimed the widow.

Dovey glanced at Sojer but he would not open his young mouth, so she said politely, "Dad thought Constance was pretty small, and the field was pretty big. She was lost in that grass—and Dad thinks she's lonely. Why don't you put her with our sheep?"

"She's not lonely with that dog," said the widow bristling up.

"But that dogth our dogth," broke in Big Wig, "and we ith going to take him home."

The widow broke into a wailing. The lamb would die without the dog and she was a lonely creature. Couldn't they spare her one animal out of their abundance?

Big Wig who was the only one not embarrassed said simply to Barklo, "Doth you want to sthay here?"

"Oh! no, no," barked the Airedale, "I'm dying of homesickness. This woman is a fat old fuss. She doesn't know how to take care of animals—Constance, get off that sofa and run to my lovely home with me."

Constance promptly did as she was bid, and the widow began to mourn. "You're all going to leave me. I won't stay here alone. I'll put on my bunnit and go along with you—Constance, I'm ashamed of you." [Pg 239]

The lamb who was just following the dog out the doorway turned round. "Ba-a-a, I'm tired of you. I hate this sofa and those stuffed animals and your grass made me sick. I want a change of diet and to live with my own kind."

"Mrs. Detover," said Dovey, "come and call on Mother. She is a great one to straighten things out."

The widow nodded, then as she came to the window to pull down the blind she said, "Why, drat that pony—he's on my lilies of the valley. Shoo! Pony."

I wasn't on her lilies, but I ran on beside Barklo and Constance who were talking to each other in low voices.

"Don't go back," said the dog. "She'll kill you. She means well but she's one of those persons who should never have an animal to bring up—Hello! Pony, I've heard of you. What do you think of that old woman?"

"I agree with Big Wig," I said drily.

"Mrs. Devering will settle her," said Barklo as we trudged along. "Oh! how glad I am to get home. How glad, how glad! No one knows how hard it is for a dog to do his duty."

"You'll appreciate your home all the more for having done your duty," I said.

Barklo didn't hear me. He was leaping to meet Champ who was coming up from the wharf carrying some rowlocks in his hand.

Champ embraced him, then turned to his sister and brothers who were alone now, the widow having gone trotting up to the veranda where she saw Mrs. Devering sitting; the lamb, after a glance at her, trailing happily after the dog. [Pg 240]

The boy was annoyed, and Dovey said, "What's fretting you?"

"Big Chief sent me for these," he said, jingling the rowlocks. "He promised them to Mr. Talker for his boat. Why didn't he get them himself? I'm not his slave!"

This was enough for the young ones, and they started another indignation meeting, finally

agreeing that they would not wait on their big brother any more. The next time he gave an order they would turn on him.

"He'll strike you," remarked Big Wig cheerfully.

"Let him strike," said Champ. "We'll strike back. He's getting too big for his boots. I wish Dad would lick him."

CHAPTER XX

CASSOWARY LOSES HER TEMPER TWICE

[Pg 241]

"Oh! the troubles of youth, the troubles of youth," I said to myself as I ran up to the barnyard. "They are as important to these growing creatures as the troubles of older years are to the grown-ups."

Young Dallas was not with Big Chief now. He was strolling gloomily to and fro, hands in pockets and occasionally kicking a pebble from his path.

What had happened? Big Chief was going on with his work whistling noisily and rudely. He must have done something to insult my young master. I had never before seen that angry frown on Dallas' pleasant face.

Presently the four younger children came slowly up and Champ threw the rowlocks down at Big Chief's feet. "There! Mr. Bully, the next time you want anything, you go yourself."

Big Chief stared angrily, then stepped forward.

"Would you hammer me?" asked Champ.

Big Chief promptly dropped the hammer, but his hand shot out and catching Champ by the collar he shook him.

He didn't hurt him. He was merely warning him. I was standing near and saw it all, but the cross tired little Dovey thought he was hurting her brother, and giving a squeal she threw herself on Big Chief's back.

As if this had been a signal Sojer caught Big Chief's arm, and little Big Wig clasped his tiny hands round one of his legs. [Pg 242]

It was amusing at first. Big Chief, who of course at heart loved his sister and brothers and did not want to hurt them, stood struggling with the four, and to make matters worse at this instant my young master attempted to take the part of the children.

It is always dangerous to interfere in a purely family row. We ponies used to notice that if we were having a scrap among ourselves and the horses stepped in, it always made more trouble than if we were let alone.

However my dear young master could not be expected to know as much about quarrelling as a pony of my age, so he gallantly tried to make Big Chief release Champ as he stood still holding him by the coat collar.

The worst stroke of all came now when Cassowary sent by her mother came flying up to tell the children that their father was coming.

Excited and repentant, and feeling very tender toward Dallas, she arrived just when Big Chief in trying to push away this fifth young one to attack him, had the misfortune to strike Dallas' nose still tender from Cassowary's beating.

It began to bleed, and Cassowary seeing this flew at her big brother and picking off his assailants as if they had been little leeches started to dress him down herself.

I heard afterward that the girl rarely lost complete control of herself, but when she did she was a perfect little fury. [Pg 243]

In the midst of her kicking and scratching, Mr. Macdonald came sauntering from the stable and interposing his sturdy arms between the children said, "Bless you, young ones—this is a sight I have never seen here before."

"It's all his fault," panted Cassowary, glaring at Big Chief; "he's getting uglier and uglier to the little ones. He's a beast."

"Come! Come!" said the young man soothingly. "Your brother is a fine lad. These are only growing spasms. He'll get over them. He's head of the house when your father is away. You should obey him."

Cassowary stamped her foot at him. "You, you Old Countryman," she said furiously, "with your law of primo—primo—"

"Primogeniture," he said, squinting up his eyes at her angry face.

"What does that mean?" whispered Barklo to me.

"Rule of the first-born," I said, "an Old Country idea."

"Cassowary looks as old as her brother," he said, "and acts older."

Cassowary was spluttering on, "We're Canadians—it's share and share alike here. The eldest brother isn't going to have everything."

"Easy now, Miss Cassowary," said Mr. Macdonald. "Shake hands and make up."

But she wouldn't shake hands and make up, and the young man, hearing Mr. Talker calling him, swung on his heel and went to the stable. [Pg 244]

Cassowary stepped up to her brother and said in a low ugly voice, "There's one in this family adopted—I heard the parents say so one day when they didn't know I was near. I'm sure it's you. You don't act like us and we all hate you."

This was such an alarming statement that we all gasped—all that were there. The four younger children seeing their father coming in the green canoe had run down to the house.

My young master, who was nursing his poor sore nose, dropped the hand holding the handkerchief. Big Chief was staring speechlessly at his sister and Dallas stammered, "Cassowary, d-don't jest. You're tormenting Big Chief. Say it's a joke."

Cassowary was not joking, I saw that, and she was no longer upset. She was mistress of herself now and very cool and collected.

"Can't you see that you don't look like us?" she went on. "Look at your round head, your stubby fingers, your small eyes. We have long heads, slender hands, and large eyes."

The bewildered Big Chief turned his hands over and stared at them. Then he put one of them up to his face.

"Oh! girl, girl, have mercy," I felt like pleading, but alas! I could not speak. I pushed myself forward a bit, but she, always such a lover of animals, gave me a calm slap that sent me back pretty quick from the circle of human beings. I must just sorrowfully submit.

The grief in Big Chief's eyes was dreadful. Scales seemed to have fallen from them. It did not occur to him evidently to doubt her statement. Oh! how could she make him suffer so, even if what she said were true. [Pg 245]

He turned and stared at Dallas as if begging him to help him.

"Cousin Cassowary," said Dallas, "you have always played the game as I have noticed you. On your word of honor, do you really believe that your brother is adopted?"

Such a strange cold unloving light glowed in her eyes. "On my word of honor," she said sulkily. "I have believed it for a long time, but I would never have said it if he had not been so disagreeable lately to the rest of us."

Alas! poor laddie, he had brought this trouble on himself, and Dallas turned to him in deep compassion. He longed to say or do something to comfort him, but how could he manage with a nose that would not behave itself. However after a few minutes of dreadful silence, he stepped close to Cassowary, and holding his handkerchief pressed close against his face, spoke in a loving indistinct way.

"Dear Cassowary, Big Chief was not hurting the children. They all flew at him. I see now that it would have been better for me not to have interfered."

Cassowary turned to him. "Big Chief has been perfectly nasty to you. Not one good word have you had from him since you came. You are better looking, better behaved, and you would make a better brother than Big Chief. I wish you were my elder brother. If he runs away and hides his disgrace as he should, for any day he could be turned out in the cold world, you, as our cousin, could take his place." [Pg 246]

Was the girl bewitched? Dallas was so shocked that for a moment he could not speak. Then he took Cassowary by the shoulder. "Cousin—you don't know what you're talking about. It's awful not to have a mother and a father. Don't take away your family from your adopted brother. Big Chief is all right—look at him," and he seized her hand as if to lead her to him.

She pulled it from him, and he said sadly, "Our good kind Cassowary has gone away. We shall have to wait till she comes back."

"She will never come back," said Cassowary coldly over her shoulder as she started to walk to the house. "I am grown up now. I have had so much trouble lately."

Big Chief sat with terrified eyes fixed on her retreating back, and when she was out of sight he got up and staggered to Dallas as if to say, "Don't you too leave me."

"Come on in out of sight," said my young master pityingly, and he led the boy to my stall.

They sat down on a box, and with his arm thrown over Big Chief's shoulder Dallas told wonderful stories he had heard of kind people adopting children and thinking as much of them as if they

were their own.

His talk floated to me as I stood in the doorway. I don't think the suffering boy heard a word he said, and when presently a voice was heard—"Dallas, Big Chief—where are you?" the boy exclaimed, "It's Dad—I can't meet him. You go, Dallas—I'll hide." [Pg 247]

By this time I had sauntered into my stall and was pretending to lick my revolving salt cake.

Big Chief darted in and hid behind me, and presently we two were all alone in the stable.

I had seen boys suffer but never like this, and in my pony mind I could not help comparing this lad with my young master, who in like circumstances would not have sorrowed without hope.

My master was spiritual and refined. This boy was of the earth earthy. I saw he had valued most his proud position as the eldest son of a rich man—now everything was swept from him. He knew what adopted children usually were—foundlings from the street. Probably he was a boy without a name, without a family, and these kind persons had adopted him and treated him with such kindness that it had spoiled him and he had in his pride turned the children of his benefactors into such active enemies that, as Cassowary said, they all hated him.

How did I know what was going through his mind?

By his disjointed sentences and suffering exclamations. He grovelled in a corner on my bedding, his hot face in his hands.

How I longed to comfort him, but I could do nothing, for when I put my head down to him he pushed it away.

What a pity that he was not more of a man! His trouble was serious, but it was not hopeless, and at last to my joy he got up, straightened his clothing, and going to a small looking glass on a post arranged his tie, then dipping his handkerchief in the running water in my stall mopped his flushed and swollen face with it. [Pg 248]

Then he came back and stared at me strangely. "I can't stand it—I shall run away. Shall I take this fellow or my own?— My own," he repeated.

"Oh! my heart," and he laid his head on his arm and sobbed like a baby. "I have nothing—I own nothing—I am a nobody."

Finally there was another call, "First-born, First-born—where are you?"

He trembled from head to foot. That was his father's very choicest pet name for him, bestowed only in moments of great affection. Springing to the harness-room, he hid himself in a closet while I paced slowly out and met Mr. Devering, who greeted me kindly and said, "What have you done with my lad, Bonnie Prince? They said he was with you."

I saw in a flash that Cassowary had either lied or was mistaken. No man could look like that when he spoke of a boy that was not his own. Oh! how could this boy doubt his father? However I could not honourably lead the way to the spot where the unhappy lad was hiding, so I stepped out beside Mr. Devering and went with him down to the house where I took my usual station under the lilacs, my ears turned forward to catch all that was going on.

The family was having afternoon tea in honour of Mr. Devering's arrival, and a table laden with cakes, bread and jam and hot muffins was set out on the veranda. Mrs. Devering was pouring tea and Champ and Mr. Macdonald passed the cups. [Pg 249]

At first they talked about the poachers, and then Mrs. Devering, with the children hanging on her words, told her husband all about Bolshy's midnight visit.

When anyone told Mr. Devering of anything wrong that had been done, this good man never showed temper. He always said, "Why did So-and-So do this naughty thing, and what can we do to help him?"

In case of the poachers, he had been for punishment. In the case of Bolshy, he said, "Our Russian friend is in the melting-pot, thanks to Denty and Dallas. Now what can the rest of us do to keep the home fires burning?"

The family discussed a number of plans, and it was Mrs. Devering who finally said, "He is a stranger in a strange land. Let us do something to remind him of home."

"Good!" said her husband. "Now, Jock, my lad, your turn."

"Show your Russian pictures in the school-house," said the young man, grinning cheerfully over his delicious cup of tea.

"Fine!" exclaimed Mr. Devering. "Now, children," and he turned to the younger ones.

Cassowary, who was eating a piece of sponge cake with the calm air of a saint who feels a halo round her head, said sweetly, "If I were a girl alone in Russia, I should think of my dear home and my loving mother, also my religion," and she rolled her eyes piously in the direction of the attractive white chapel up the road built for the settlement by Mrs. Devering's mother. [Pg 250]

"Oh! you naughty girl," I wanted to whinny, while her father said joyfully, "Right you are, girlie."

We'll practise some Russian chants and have a men's chorus behind a screen as they have in the Greek Church—but tell me everyone, where is my boy?" and he looked restlessly about.

Cassowary got up in a leisurely way and said, "I will get him. I think he has a toothache."

"Well! if you are not a masterpiece," I thought to myself, "and who is the story-teller now?" and I walked after her as she sauntered toward the stable.

"Prince Fetlar," she said flicking me gently in the face with her handkerchief, "seems to me you take a great interest in the personal affairs of this family. Go right back to your lilacs and don't forget that you are adopted too."

"You young witch!" I thought, as I turned and went confusedly back to stand in my shrubbery stall.

I don't know what she said to Big Chief, but she came back presently, stepping lightly beside him.

He was clothed and in his right mind, but both eyes were swollen and his face was flushed. He agreed with her little lie about his toothache, but I had a heartache as I saw him throw his arms about his father's neck and say, "Oh! Dad."

Mr. Devering drew back and stared at him. "Why, First-Born! what unusual effusion. I do believe you value your parent after all." [Pg 251]

Dear man! so good, but so blind just now. The boy thought he was taking a last farewell of the person he loved better than anyone else.

I was proud of him when he went to sit beside his mother. Never before had he waited on her so politely, though he ate nothing himself.

The expression in his eyes seemed to puzzle her. I watched her carefully as she examined him. I have seen a good many mothers and a good many children and I have seen a few adopted children. There is a difference. A mother looks at her own child in a peculiar way—a way a man does not.

The father had accepted the explanation of the toothache, the mother doubted it. The boy could not deceive her. She was too clever in mother sense.

After the tea table had been taken away, Mr. Devering called Big Chief to him and began to ask him questions about the ailing tooth.

Mrs. Devering however drew the boy to her. "I think, Daddy," she said, "that it is more headache than toothache. I am going to put him to bed and bathe his head."

Big Chief followed her with this same head hanging low.

I stepped along by the veranda until I came to his room. His bed was near the window. It would not be put out till later.

She made him lie down and seeing he was disinclined to talk, she sat by him till it was time for the other children to come in to supper. [Pg 252]

After supper the children were very quiet, and before they went to bed, every boy Jack and every girl Jill came to say good-night to their big brother.

Little Big Wig, who had evidently heard the older ones pitying the sick one, said as he reached up to kiss him, "We're thorry, boy, we'll not sthrike you again."

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Devering sharply. "Have you children been beating your brother?"

"Oh! rubbish," said Big Chief, "it's only the kid's fun. Good-night, young one," and I heard the sound of a hearty boyish kiss. Alas! poor lad, it was another farewell.

Cassowary did not kiss him. I heard her calmly wishing him a good sleep from the doorway.

Then Mr. Devering came, put his boy's bed outside and wishing him pleasant dreams went with his wife and Mr. Macdonald into the living room, where the three sang Canadian songs most cheerfully for an hour before going to bed.

The harmonious sound floated out of the house across the water and also up to the stables.

How animals love music when not too near them.

I could not stay long in my lilac quarters that night. My head was full of business and I fairly galloped to the Hackney pony's stall.

He must be told that his young master intended to run away from home that night, and he must be induced to concoct some plan with me by which we could keep him from carrying out his rash plan.

A FLIGHT BY NIGHT

"Attaboy," I said as I stood behind him in his stall, "may I come in? I wish to whisper something in your ear."

Now I knew quite well that he was jealous of me. He had got all the farm news from the other creatures since he came home, so I was not surprised when he turned his stylish head and showed me a cold eye.

The stable was as light as day. The sun had gone down but the electric lights were all on for Mr. Devering liked his animals to be cheerful.

My skin quivered as I felt that cold eye travelling up and down and across me.

At another time I might have yielded to this nervousness (for I hate any creature to dislike me) and run away. Now however there was too much at stake, and I tried to make myself feel as calm as an old pony for was I not working for my dear young master.

"I am not deaf," said Attaboy at last. "I can hear you from where you stand. You did well to speak. I should have kicked if you had come near me without warning."

"I am not as stupid as that," I said. "A horse's stall is his castle. No one should enter without speaking. Many a man gets kicked for that—from fright," I added hastily, as Attaboy glared at me. "Not through viciousness." [Pg 254]

"Well!" he said curtly, "go on—what do you want?"

"Your young master is going to run away from home to-night."

"Really," he said sarcastically, "and you suppose I know nothing of it?"

I saw there was no use in fencing with this fellow. He was in an ugly mood, so I would play up to him.

"Of course you know nothing of it," I said. "I stumbled on it by accident. I came here to plead with you to keep him at home."

"And what business is it of yours?" he asked, "if my master chooses to take a night ride?"

He whinnied so shrilly that all the ponies stopped eating and listened to what he was saying.

They were in a row beyond him. First came my stall, then Apache Girl's, then Attaboy's, the Exmoor's, David Wales', the Welsh pony's, the donkey's, and the dear little Master of Bressay's.

I stood in the alley way, and behind me and opposite the ponies were the stalls of Largs and Dalry, the two well set-up Clydesdales, and the saddle horses Patsie McSquirrel and Backwoods Beauty.

It was quite a congress of horseflesh, and I was just as well pleased to have everybody hear, for I might want some help before I got through with this stubborn Attaboy. [Pg 255]

"Your young master is in a desperate frame of mind," I said.

"Boys often run away from home," he replied indifferently, "it is a common thing for them to do when peevied."

"But this boy, I tell you, is in a terrible state. He thinks Mr. and Mrs. Devering are not his real parents."

Patsie McSquirrel put in a word there. "Sure there is one adopted child in the family. Prince Fetlar is right there, but I don't know which one it is."

"He haw! he haw!" brayed young Jack suddenly; "it isn't my little Dovey."

"Nor my cute little young master," shrilled out the small Bressay.

"Nor my Sojer," called out the Welsh pony, and he neighed irritably.

"And it's certainly not Master Champ," said the Exmoor haughtily. "He's the dead image of his father."

"And it's not my master either," said Attaboy fiercely, "I'll kick any horse who says so."

Apache Girl was the only one who did not lift her voice. She kept a proud silence, but we all knew what she thought. Her adored young mistress looked as much like her mother as a younger sister, although she certainly did not act like her.

"Attaboy," I said suddenly, "I believe you're right. I think young Big Chief is making a dreadful mistake, but it doesn't matter what we think, it's what he thinks. Upon my word, I'm afraid he might drown himself." [Pg 256]

"Well you may just save yourself that suspicion," said Attaboy disagreeably. "He has too much sense to do anything so idiotic. He may run away, but he'll never hurt that precious body of his."

"He went without his supper to-night," I said solemnly.

At that, there were sounds of general consternation in the stable, and for the first time they all believed that the matter was serious.

All the horse family knows the importance of food. This was sad news that a healthy growing boy should refuse to eat.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Attaboy shortly. "You've got some plan in your head. I feel that."

"When that lad comes up here to-night and saddles you," I said, "I want you to pretend to go lame."

"What for?" he asked in astonishment.

"So that he may take me. I'll be hanging round—he knows I'm a racer. He'll slip on my back and away we'll go."

"And then?" asked Attaboy angrily.

"I have a plan for bringing him home."

"And pray," asked Attaboy relapsing into his former cold manner, "why are you taking all this trouble for a boy that isn't your master?"

"Oh! Can't you see," I said earnestly, "at root it is for my dear master. Your boy is jealous of mine. If your boy disappears, my boy may be blamed. To tell the truth, one finger of my master's is dearer to me than the whole body of your queer-acting young master. I'm working for him—the boy that owns me. He's all the world to me. I don't want you all to die, but if I had to choose between him and you, I'd have to sorrowfully see all Devering Farm slip into Fawn Lake!"

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I heard a rustling among the bedding as the horses and ponies moved their limbs to help their minds digest my speech.

"Same here," said Attaboy. "You and your master can ride to Hudson Bay for aught I care. Seems to me you're a pair of snobs and bosses anyway."

"Shut up, you fool Hackney," said a sudden voice, and Largs the Clydesdale's heavy neigh filled the stable. "You're insulting this little fellow, who is one of the best bits of ponyflesh I ever saw. Here he is offering to take your master over a dark stretch of road not known to him as it is to you. He may break his leg and he knows it, and we all know what happens when a pony breaks his leg."

"I don't want the new pony shot," wailed a sad voice from the tiny Bressay's stall. "I don't care much about him, but my little Big Wig loves him. He told me so and made me jealous."

"Attaboy," called Apache Girl in her queer sudden voice, "my Cassowary won't want anything to happen to her brother. If you dare to oppose this new little beast, who is as conceited as he is smart, you'll have a mysterious trouble to-morrow that will land you in the hospital stall."

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This was a dreadful threat, and everybody kept still for a minute. Then Attaboy said in a would-be boastful voice, "You think you can hurt me. Just you try it."

"I shan't speak again," said Apache Girl. "You all know I speak seldom, but when I do I keep my word. I know some tricks handed down from my Spanish ancestors."

Attaboy was awed. Ponies, like human beings, are afraid of the mysterious. Apache Girl had a bad-tempered streak in her, and her threat really decided him to give in to me.

While he thought matters over, every horse and pony that had not spoken lifted up a voice for me, and when he still did not open his mouth, the enormous Largs addressed him again.

"Good for you, old fellow," I thought as I listened to Largs. "For sound, solid, common sense commend me to a faithful old work-horse."

This is what he said: "Attaboy, you're jealous of this pony, who is much smaller than you in body and much bigger in mind. Get over it, lad. He has more brains than you, he has more self-control. Have you watched him eat?—No?—then do so. He is dainty and particular. He never gobbles, and if his master calls, he leaves his food untouched. Now look at the paving stones in your food box showing that you hog your grain. A pony that has no rein on his appetite will never lead other ponies. You've got to take second place till this little man goes. I know it's hard, for you've tried to be boss of the ponies, but Apache Girl has really been the leader. Give in, give in, my pony. We're all against you. Do as Bonnie Prince Fetlar advises. If you don't, you'll have trouble with Dalry and me, eh! old man?" and he gave his mate an affectionate glance through the open partition between their stalls.

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Dalry gave a kind of horse roar. He always stood by his mate. "Attaboy lies down, cow fashion," he said, "and he bites his blanket. I've had my eye on him."

At the mention of these two horse sins, every animal in the stable laughed, and even the high-bred Patsie and Beauty, who usually kept pretty much to themselves, advised Attaboy not to go against the general opinion.

Thoroughly frightened now, he said to me, "Tell me what to do."

"Nothing but to go dead lame. I'll see to the rest."

"How soon am I to be lame?" he asked humbly.

"The minute your young master throws the saddle over you," I replied, and I stepped away from the stable and left the animals to talk things over, though I knew the affair was settled. Attaboy would not dare to go back on me.

I was most anxious to see what was going on down at the house, and I found that Mr. Devering and Mr. Macdonald had gone to their rooms, but Mrs. Devering, with a white wrap over her shoulders, was sitting by her boy's bed on the veranda. [Pg 260]

I knew the lad was pretending to sleep in order to get rid of his dear adopted mother as he supposed her to be. For two hours she sat there. Mothers are very patient. Then, with a sigh, she got up and went to her own room.

She had said "Boysie!" several times in a low voice and he had not answered, so knowing he did not wish her to stay she had left him.

Big Chief began to stir about his bed as soon as she went away. He raised his head and glanced at the adorable Lady Moon who was showing him a round disapproving face. Then he sat up in bed.

Hearing a noise, he snuggled down again under the bedclothes.

I stood for another half hour. Then he slipped quietly to his room, threw on his clothes and tiptoeing to the veranda cast a wistful eye toward his parents' room. He did not dare to look in, lest his watchful mother should see him.

I heard him choke back a sob as he stretched out a hand to pat the wondering Barklo, who raised his head from the foot of Big Wig's bed where he lay so comfortably, occasionally glancing at the lamb who slept on the lawn to be near him.

I forgot to say that Mrs. Devering had kindly invited the Widow Detover to visit her until her son came back from some mines in the north.

Now my place was in the stables, and I crept up cautiously by a roundabout way.

There was no Drunkard now careering about in his painstaking manner. His leg bones were slow in uniting and he was still confined to his quarters on the veranda. [Pg 261]

Girly however was on the lookout and as soon as she heard my wary footfalls outside the barn cellar she was beside me.

"All right, old girl," I said, "Barklo's watching. I'm just going to have a little race with old Father Time."

"He'll beat you, Prince," she said sleepily, "he always does," and she crept back to her place beside Guardie.

"Not to-night," I said as I stepped into the stable to see what Attaboy was doing.

To give the Hackney his due I must say that when he had made up his mind to be a pony gentleman, he was one.

As poor Big Chief flung the saddle over his back, Attaboy gave a groan and when the boy told him to follow him from the stable his limp was enough to make one's heart ache.

Big Chief was surprised and sorry, but in an absent-minded way. He stared at him, and then at me as I carelessly strolled near as if to say, "What is going on?"

Even in the midst of his trouble the lad took time to examine his pet hurriedly. Of course he found no cause for lameness and shaking his head he came back to me.

I stood right by the harness-room door. I knew how the boy's mind was working. I was swifter than any of the other ponies but I belonged to his cousin. [Pg 262]

He hesitated an instant. Then an ugly look came in his eyes and he seized me by my foretop.

"All right, my boy," I thought. "You'll be paid back for this treachery to my young master. I want you to take me, but you've no business to want to take me. You're going to get the surprise of your young life pretty soon."

He saddled me and bridled me and led me swiftly over the soft grass till we got well outside the farm gates. Then he sprang on my back and away we went.

The road was as familiar to him as the veranda floor, and it was over this same bit of smooth highway that my beloved young master had had his riding lessons from his uncle.

I got into my best stride and the boy knowing I was surefooted paid no attention to me.

His poor mind was busy with himself I guessed, as I heard unhappy, un-youthful groans coming from him. The boy was very young. It would have been better if he had been spared such a sad experience, and yet being such a bull-headed youth maybe he had to have a hard run before he could settle down to a good working gait.

In trotting to and fro on this road with Dallas, I had got to know it quite well, that is within a few miles of the house. My rider was planning to take me further than my acquaintance went, but I was not planning to be taken.

After a short open stretch with a magnificent view of the moonlit lake we entered on a long strip of woodland. Fine old hardwood trees bordered the roadside. The moon lighted this strip with difficulty and one tree looked pretty much like another. It would be hard for my rider to distinguish landmarks and here I intended to deceive him.

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So just as we were one mile deep in the hardwoods I had a dizzy spell. I flatter myself I did it quite nicely. I went round and round as if my head were reeling. Then I staggered.

Now love for animals was such second nature to these young Deverings that the lad forgot himself for a time. He sprang off my back, jerked up my head, pulled down an eyelid and looked at my wildly rolling eyes. Then he passed his hands all over me.

By this time I had quite recovered. I nuzzled him gratefully, and with quite an affectionate tap he mounted me again, his attention on me not on the road.

Didn't I gallop now! My sickness was all gone and the reassured lad did just as I wished him to—he fell right back again into his dismal reverie, never dreaming that his young face was set toward his nice warm bed on the veranda, and his back was toward the big cold world that is so unkind to homeless boys.

CHAPTER XXII

BACK TO THE HOME STABLE

[Pg 264]

Wasn't I a happy pony! but alas! what should I do when I was found out.

"I don't care, I don't care," I thought as I pounded along on shoes of joy. "If he flogs me, I'll have blind staggers fit to beat the band. Home and master! Home and young master! I've fooled you, laddie—my master's cousin isn't going to hurt himself when I'm round."

All too quickly, as I pursued my way feeling like a bird on free and careless wing, I tried to catch my bit in my teeth. I had had a frightful jerk. I was found out.

Then I heard a cry of dismay, "That's King of the Glen!"

Now these clever young ones had names for their favourite trees, and unhappily this lad had recognised this monarch of a beechwood grove who had been unkind enough to grow with one of his roots sticking out toward the road like a huge boot, thereby spoiling my otherwise perfect plan.

The boy was sawing my tender mouth and secure in the knowledge that he was alone with me with only wild animals or birds for listeners he was yelling, "Turn round, you little brute!"

I threw a terrible dizzy fit then I began to buck, having once for fun taken lessons from a western pony.

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The lad got his young toes out of the stirrups pretty quick, and stood watching me. His poor mount was staggering now, then grovelling in the dust.

He made a step forward, then retreated. How could he beat a pony that was on its back with four legs in the air?

"Pon my word, you little villain," he screamed, "you're shamming. I'd like to thrash the life out of you!"

"Would you!" I whinnied shrilly, and leaping to my feet I cut along toward home.

Wasn't he a mad boy! I was really sorry for him. Here he was in a forest in the dead of night, no one near but a naughty pony who had played him the mischievous trick of bringing him a mile nearer home than he thought he was.

He was done for now. He couldn't walk to the Lake of Bays. With a fast pony he could have made the daylight boat, and left for parts unknown. Now he could be caught and taken shamefully home, or—he glanced about him.

He could hide in the woods and tramp over the mountain to a railway back of it.

But what of me? He bawled at me to come back, and shook both fists at me as I stood roguishly eyeing him from a safe distance.

"You young demon!" he howled, "You're capable of playing bloodhound as well as fox. You'd lead a searching party right to me. I'd like to kill you," and he began fumbling about in the dust for a stone to throw at me.

[Pg 266]

It was too good a road to have stones. His father had seen to that, so he had to give up his

attempt to discipline me.

He flung himself down on a grassy bank under the pitying outstretched arms of the old King of the Glen who loved him.

Poor, poor lad! I was more and more sorry for him, but I kept my distance.

What was to be my next move? Ah! fortune favours the bold pony. I shut my eyes delightedly. Over my hot head blew the lovely cool spirit wind. The old Highlander was after the boy. He was cleverer than I. My care would be shifted to his furry shoulders.

The wolf cub was with him, racing along spirit-wise through his beloved forest, and hard on his heels came a living thing who paid no attention to me but threw himself on the suffering boy.

It was Guardie, the collie. How he licked his young master and prostrated himself before him as if to say, "Do return home with us. We all love you. Girlie would have come but she had to stay with our charges."

The boy could not help being touched by this display of affection, especially as the Highlander was bending over him and willing good thoughts into his mind.

He broke down and sobbed like a baby. "Mother! Dad!" he cried, and he stretched out his pleading arms toward his dear home. [Pg 267]

Hark! what was that coming on the night wind? Guardie pricked his ears, and the Highlander with his lovely Scotch smile waved a hand toward his wolf pet and away they went, melting into the shadows of the wood. The boy did not need them any longer.

"Pound! Pound! Gallop! Gallop!"—I heard it, I knew those gaits. Patsie McSquirrel and Backwoods Beauty were on the trail too and they were not alone.

Thank the stars that shine over erring boys, and the bright Lady Moon who had shone in the mother's face till she woke her up. The runaway would be royally escorted home.

Soon he too heard the sound of hoofs on the hard road and sprang up.

There he stood in a shaft of moonlight—a poor young bewildered boy figure looking distractedly up at the two dear parents bending down over him from their big horses.

He threw his hand in the air, and turning his back on them pressed his face against the trunk of the old King of the Glen.

Before Mr. Devering could spring from his horse his wife was beside her boy.

Her cry rang through the wood, "My darling, my darling, why did you run away from me?"

Then she pulled his head round and, brushing back his hair, stood looking deep into his eyes.

"Mother!" he stammered, "if you are my mother." [Pg 268]

She turned an alarmed face to her husband. "Jim—what madness is this?"

Mr. Devering shook his head. He stood with arms folded, looking in a most puzzled way at his child.

"I—I was told to-day," gulped poor Big Chief, "that I am an adopted child."

Mrs. Devering laughed shrilly. "Good gracious! am I dreaming?"

I took a few steps nearer. The little woman was terribly upset. I had never seen her lose self-control before. Not his mother? Why every drop of blood in her body proclaimed this boy to be her son.

The lad was completely bewildered. "Tell me," he cried, "am I, am I really your son? Is that my father?"

"If he is not your father than he is not my husband," she exclaimed.

"Tell me truly," begged the boy, "did you not pick me out of the gutter? Am I not a nobody?"

The two grown persons saw that the boy was in deadly earnest, and I think they were relieved for his running away had given them a terrible shock.

"What would convince you, my poor darling?" asked Mrs. Devering.

"Tell me whether you have an adopted child."

She looked at her husband. "Shall we tell him?"

He nodded his head.

"We have, my own darling, but not you, oh! not you, our first-born." [Pg 269]

"Who is it, Mother?"

She hesitated.

"Tell him," said Mr. Devering quietly.

"It's—it's," her head drooped. "We did not wish you to know. Oh! who could have been cruel enough to enlighten you?"

"Is it little Big Wig?" asked the boy.

"No, no," said his mother. "Not my baby."

"Is it Dovey?"

"No, not my little Dovey."

"Then it's Champ."

"My boy Champ—oh! never. My dear, he was born in his grandmother's house."

"Then it's Sojer."

The guesses were narrowing down. Mrs. Devering paused an instant, then she said in a low voice, "Sojer—the boy who is the image of my dead father. Oh! no, Sojer is your own brother."

"Then," said the boy, "if it's not me, it's Cassowary."

"Yes, yes," she said slowly, and nodding her head many times, "it's our dear Cassowary."

Big Chief gave a great cry, then he broke away from his mother and launched himself at his father so violently that he almost knocked the poor man over.

"Oh! Dad, Dad, I'm a happy boy. I was most dead. I thought I'd jump into the Lake of Bays if I missed the boat."

The tears were running down Mrs. Devering's cheeks too. She sat on the bank her head against the stout body of the old King of the Glen whose arms were waving happily, though there was not a breath of wind. Her eyes were closed, her lips moving. [Pg 270]

I have seen some touching scenes in my life but never anything that moved me more than this midnight meeting between the parents and their boy in this deep dark wood.

Mr. Devering stood saying nothing, his arms just wrapped round his son as if he would protect him for all time from a cruel world.

Mrs. Devering was the first to recover herself. She sprang up and came to her husband and child.

"Who has made you suffer like this?" she said sharply. "I want to know."

The boy would not tell her, but her husband said, "I know. I noticed signs of suffering about another child to-night."

"Who was it?" she asked. "Do tell me. I saw nothing."

The Lady Moon was now bathing us in soft and almost warm moonlight, and I could see Mr. Devering's eyebrows contract ever so little. "It was Cassowary," he said in a low voice.

"I assure you she was never more composed and quiet," said Mrs. Devering quickly. "She seemed perfectly happy."

Big Chief said nothing, but he gave his father a glance that meant they thought alike.

"Was it Cassowary that drove you from your home?" asked Mrs. Devering.

Big Chief, whose young face was as shining and contented as if he would never be sorry again, said, "No, she did not drive me. I came of my own accord." [Pg 271]

"But she was the one to tell you that she thought you were an adopted child?"

Big Chief said nothing, and his mother went on, "After all I have done for her!"

"She is only a child," said Mr. Devering, and he looked appealingly at his son.

Big Chief then did a beautiful thing. "Mother," he said, "I would not like a brother or sister of mine to go through what I've gone through to-night. Cassowary must never know."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Devering hastily. "I just wished to know who is responsible for this."

"Who is she?" asked Big Chief softly.

"The daughter of my first cousin who married in the West. After your birth, your Dad and I spent two years with her on her husband's ranch. My cousin was frantic with grief at having to die and leave her baby. She got me to take it and bring it up as my own, begging me never to let her know she was an adopted child until she came of age. Can't you see that she is different from the rest of you?"

The boy shook his head. "She looks like you, Mother."

"A family resemblance—but her actions, her walk and her manner—there is Indian blood in her veins, splendid blood too. Her great-grandmother was the daughter of a noted chief. Many Old [Pg 272]

Countrymen married squaws in early Canadian days."

"Oh!" said the boy, "so that is why she puts her foot down so straight."

His young voice was so comical as he said this, that both parents burst out laughing.

It broke the nervous strain, and Mrs. Devering said in a matter-of-fact voice, "I think we would better all get home."

I stirred a little as I stood beside the big horses, and Mr. Devering's eye fell on me.

"Boy," he said, "how did you happen to take this little fellow to-night?"

"He put himself in my way," said Big Chief, "and Attaboy had gone lame."

"He isn't lame now," said his father.

Big Chief put up a hand and ruffled his hair. "You know horses better than I do, Dad. Will you examine the little brute, and see if there is anything the matter with him?"

I demurely put up with a thorough examination carried on by aid of an electric torch and the moonlight.

Finally Mr. Devering said, "Sound in wind and limb, I should say—lead him past."

He watched me carefully as I went before him, then he said, "His stride is direct and rapid, and he displays boldness and courage. Now let him meet me."

The boy wheeled me round, then brought me back.

"He's been fooling you probably," said Mr. Devering. "He's clever enough for it. Just what did he do?" [Pg 273]

"Had colic or blind staggers, turned me right about face, ran toward home like an arrow, then when I pulled him he bucked and I 'most came a cropper."

Mr. Devering's jolly laugh rang through the silent woods. "Oh! my boy, you backed the wrong pony to-night."

Patsie and Beauty, who had taken part in this reunion most sympathetically, now took a few steps forward and placed themselves one on each side of me as if to say, "He's all right."

"You old rogue," said Mr. Devering to me, "this was a put-up job on your part, and I believe you talked it over with these horses. Some persons would say, 'Natural liking of a pony for his stable'—I say, 'Natural instinct of a petted creature to stand by his benefactors.'"

This was so pleasing to me that I walked to him and began to bite pleasantly at his coat buttons that were all in the wrong holes. What a hurry he must have been in when he dressed.

"Pony," said Mrs. Devering suddenly, "did you bring my boy back to me?"

I stared into her flushed face, then I pawed the dusty road very softly, once, twice, thrice.

"Y, E, S," she said, "You beauty!" and she threw her arms round my neck. "You'll never go out of this family as long as I live."

"But he's Dallas' pony," said Big Chief in some dismay.

"Then we'll adopt Dallas," she said good-humouredly. "Come home now, my boy. Oh! how happy I am!" and she sprang as gracefully to her saddle as a circus lady. [Pg 274]

Big Chief mounted me soberly.

This was a different boy from the one that had flung himself on my back so desperately an hour before. Oh! what a delighted pony I was, and how joyfully Guardie barked as he ran beside me.

Trot, trot, gallop, gallop, we all went along the road revelling in the lovely moonbeams sent down to us by the Gracious Lady in the sky.

The birds and the beasts could all go to sleep again, and what a good gossip they would have the next day about the doings of the Deverings in the beech-wood.

When we got to the farm, Mrs. Devering with her own hands made me one of the best mashes I ever tasted, and as I ate it gratefully I thought about my young master. Big Chief, after having had this shock of his young life, would probably settle down to be a good boy, but I did not want him to outshine my beloved Dallas.

These young Deverings all had headstrong pushing ways and clever brains, but not one of them could compare with my lad. Oh! for his star to rise and shine, and I nodded myself to sleep, and dreamed that on the back of my master I floated right up into the air to Lady Moon who said to him, "Welcome, best-beloved of Earth Children!"

CHAPTER XXIII

MY MASTER LOSES GROUND

All the next day Big Chief was very languid and quiet. No boy could go through such an experience as his of the night before and not feel after-effects.

Keeping close to his father or mother, he talked little, but the children all saw that something had happened to him, and eyed him curiously.

During the afternoon when he offered to help Big Wig mend his top, the child said in astonishment, "Big Chief, you ith nith to-day."

The big boy said nothing, but blushed furiously, and Cassowary, who was sitting reading near-by, put down her book and stared at him with narrowed eyes. She opened her mouth as if to speak, but at that instant Mrs. Devering and my young master come out of the house, their hands full of pictures.

"Old daguerreotypes and photographs," said Mrs. Devering, "Dallas has been helping me look over some treasures in the attic. Do you wish to see these—they're interesting?" and she tumbled the contents of her hands into Cassowary's lap.

The girl picked up the uppermost photograph, and Dallas looking over her shoulder said, "I just howled when I saw that, Cousin—it looks like a Big Chief of a hundred years ago." [Pg 276]

"Who is it?" asked Cassowary shortly.

"Your father's grandfather," said Mrs. Devering. "He was a stocky sturdy old man, wilful when a boy, but leading a fine life later on."

Big Chief eagerly examined the picture, then he gave Cassowary a strange glance.

The girl had remarkable self-control—at times.

"Big Chief," she said coolly, "it's you, even to the droop in the left eyelid."

"All the Deverings have that," said her mother quickly.

"But Big Chief doesn't show it as much outside the picture as in it," said Cassowary; "hold up your head, brother."

He did as she told him and she stared straight in his eyes. Then she turned to Mrs. Devering. "Mother, I was horrid to Big Chief yesterday."

"I know all about it," said the lady softly, "the main thing is—are you sorry?"

"I am," she said shortly.

"And I was rotten to Dallas," said Big Chief.

"And are you sorry?" asked Mrs. Devering.

"You bet I am," he replied feelingly.

"And you, Dallas, in this confession time," said Mrs. Devering, "have you anything to repent of?"

My young master hung his head too. "I told a lie," he said, "and I'd vowed solemnly that I'd never tell another."

"What kind of a lie?" asked his aunt.

"A dream lie—I was lying on the grass thinking of the awful mistake I'd made when we were target shooting—I 'most blew a hen's head off, you know——" [Pg 277]

"Indeed!"

"And Champ came running along and asked if I'd seen Uncle, and I said 'No,' and I had. He had passed me a few minutes before and in my dreaming I forgot it."

"But that is not serious," said Mrs. Devering.

"It might have been. It was just after that automobile accident in front of the Talkers, and the man was bleeding and they wanted Uncle quick. Suppose the man had died," and Dallas shuddered.

"My poor boy," said Mrs. Devering, "what are we going to do about you!"

Dallas smiled a queer little smile. "Aunt Bretta, I'm going to repeat some lines I found in a book on the table," and he began,

"To a Naughty Boy,
Thou liest once, thou liest twice,
Thou liest ten times o'er.
Thou'st launched thy bark upon a sea
That has no farthest shore."

"I think Cassowary wrote those lines about me," he said turning to her. "Did you?"

The girl was blushing. "I didn't intend you to see them, Cousin."

"They will do me good," he said, and folding them up he put them in his pocket.

While they all sat there looking very solemn, Mr. Devering came swinging down the hill, a small axe stuck in his belt. [Pg 278]

"Where have you been, Jim?" asked his wife.

"Clearing the trail to Merry-Tongue Lake. It's a bit grown over since last season. The Good Americans will soon be here. What's the matter with you all?"

"Been confessing our faults," said Cassowary gloomily.

"And now for penance," said her father. "*En-route* for the fire warden's. Horseback or ponyback. He has some Hearne's salmon for our supper, just come down from Hudson Bay by hydroplane."

"I can't go," said Mrs. Devering, "the Settlement Club meets here to sew."

"Then will you lend your Beauty to Dallas?" said her husband. "He has not been on horseback yet."

I got up from the lawn where I had been lying, and came toward the veranda.

Big Chief caressed me. "Don't you be jealous, you kid pony," he said. "No one can forget you. Come right up on the veranda. I'm going to give you the freedom of the house. Here, Mother, let me take those pictures. I'll carry them back to the attic for you. They have done their good work," he added in a low voice as he passed her.

Then this nice boy took me right upstairs, past the company bedrooms and into the attic.

"All that we have is yours, Prince," he said. "You rendered the House of Devering a great service last night. I'll never forget it." [Pg 279]

"Oh! the funny boy," and I curled my lip in amusement as I followed him downstairs. One thing was sure, he was going to be a better boy from this out.

My master was waiting for me, and took me with him to the stable, where I watched him mounting with some fear the tall horse who seemed like a giraffe compared with me.

Champ, Dovey and Sojer came racing down the hill and joined the merry riding party. The children all took to the woods at intervals through the day, making dashes up to Merry-Tongue River brawling over its stones, or sauntering along the cool green depths of the trails, or scrambling over the grassy pastures on the hillside after wild raspberries or gooseberries, and always with some pet creatures at their heels.

To-day it had been Drunkard going on three legs, Barklo scampering gaily along, and Constancy hiping after him for she had vowed to do everything her dog friend did.

They all began to follow the riding party and I trotted a little way down the road after them until I met Big Chief cantering back on Attaboy.

He passed me without speaking. His poor face was quite convulsed, and I felt sure, and honored the lad for it, that he could not without emotion pass the scene of his adventure last night. He was going back to help his mother pass cakes and tea to the score of women who gathered every week in the big living room to have a little social time together. [Pg 280]

Well, he would get over his trouble and be more of a help to his parents for it, and I thought happily about him as I trotted down the road to see how some of the neighbourhood boys were getting on with their baseball game. They were having a most exciting time, judging by their yells, and I was just about to cross the road and go up to watch them when I heard in a faint little voice, "Take care, brother."

I looked down and there was an old brownish backed toad all puffed out with fright as he painfully dragged himself along in the grass by the side of the road.

"What's the matter, brother?" I asked.

"You 'most stepped on me. I'm too tired to hop out of anybody's way."

"Why you're Hoppy Go-Slow, the children's pet," I said. "I know you by that scar on your rough skin. What's happened to you?"

He settled back on his hind legs and sighed heavily. "I was kidnapped!"

I couldn't help laughing. This matter of kidnapping seemed to be in the air of this place. But it was one thing to take away a handsome boy, and another to carry off a warty old toad.

"It was no laughing matter for me," said Hoppy crossly. "Suppose you lived in a snug hole away back of the big rocks in Mrs. Devering's fernery—would you like to be snatched away and taken to live in an ugly dirty place?"

"Indeed I wouldn't," I said. "I love a pretty home. I beg your pardon for laughing. Do tell me your adventures." [Pg 281]

"It was that lazy Joe Gentles that kidnapped me," he said; "by my warts! I'd like to punish him."

"Joe Gentles—the guide who lives in that lonely house near the dam?" I asked.

"Yes—what can you expect of a man that sticks his house away off from the rest of the settlement? He could have had land up here. I think he likes to be alone so he can loaf. Hardly anyone asks him to take them in the bush now."

"How did a brainy old toad like you happen to let a man like Gentles get ahead of you?"

"I came out of my snug home night before last for my supper. The best worms are up back of the barn——"

I began to laugh again. "Oh! excuse me, Hoppy, but I saw you the other evening with a long worm held in your jaws by the middle. It was curling itself frantically about your head. Then it disappeared like a streak of lightning. How can you swallow those crawly things?"

"They are very important things!" he said indignantly. "Worms are more necessary even than ponies to this old earth of ours. I have to eat them alive. I can't touch dead stuff. I try to kill them quickly, but sometimes they protest like the one you saw."

"Well!" I said, "What about Joe?"

"He came sauntering up to the barn, but none of the men were there to have a gossip. Then his eye fell on me and he popped me into his pocket, saying, 'Neighbour Devering has enough life on his farm. You come home and catch grubs in my garden.'" [Pg 282]

"What a mean thing to do," I said.

"Wasn't I mad!" continued Hoppy. "I caused acrid stuff to come out of the pores of my skin. I thought I'd make his pocket smelly."

"He wouldn't care," I said. "He's a dirty-looking fellow."

"He's the worst man in the settlement," said the toad, "and when he put me in his neglected garden I only waited for his back to be turned to go round to every creature on the place and tell them what I thought of him. Then I hopped 'way up here and I'm most dead."

"I never thought about toads loving their homes," I said, "but why shouldn't they?"

"My little home is so snug," he said feelingly. "When I go in every winter and draw the soft earth after me, I feel like a king. Toads have feelings as well as human beings. I'd just like to see that man's face when all his livestock leaves him. Only the old grey mare refused to come. She said, 'He's my master and though he's a bad one I can't run away.'"

"What a pity he is not as kind as the Deverings," I said.

"The Deverings are fine," said Hoppy, "except that they don't pet us toads quite enough."

"Hoppy," I said rebukingly, "I've seen the children tickling your back with a grass blade many times, and you shut your eyes with pleasure." [Pg 283]

"Mr. Devering never tickles me," he said complainingly.

"He's a busy man."

"I'd like to run a race with him at catching flies," he said. "I bet I would beat him."

"I bet you would," I said.

"And he never told me," Hoppy went on, "that he knows we toads have the homing instinct as strong as Mrs. Talker's pigeons have. Only our poor old toes can't go as fast as their wings even though some of them are half webbed."

"My young master knows about toads," I said: "I heard him telling little Big Wig all about your habits the other day."

"Your young master is beloved by every toad and frog on this farm," said Hoppy. "He never steps on us, he never chases us, he won't let any boy kill us."

"He has sense, that boy has," I replied in a gratified voice.

"He has a good heart," said Hoppy, "which is the most important thing in toad or man—— Good-bye, I'm going to bed," and he began to take his few last imperfect leaps in the direction of the fernery, while I feeling sleepy lay down and had a nap.

An hour later I ran on to the ball ground, and when I got near was shocked to hear a sound of quarrelling in a near-by potato field.

This was terrible and I did not understand it for my young master and Champ were usually the best of friends. Champ in his muddy blue overalls was just tramping away calling back insulting remarks to his cousin over his shoulder.

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My heart died within me as I heard the word "Liar!" Had Dallas been romancing again?

My young master was plunging about the sandy soil crushing potato tops under his angry feet. He never wore overalls and the neck of his coloured shirt was open, showing a chest quite nice and brown. His fists were clenched, and he was ejaculating furious words. He rarely cried now; he had toughened more in a few weeks than any boy I ever saw.

"It's all true," he shouted after Champ. "Don't I come from Boston? What do you know anyway up here in this back of beyond place?"

"You Yankee liar!" Champ yelled at him, then he ran like a fox for my infuriated young master was throwing clods of earth after him.

I guessed that the quarrel was Canada versus my own country and I pressed close to my master. We would have to stand together.

He picked up his hoe and put it over his shoulder. Then he sprang on my back and I trotted up the road.

Alas! Where were his dreams of keeping the two countries together?

"Prince Fetlar," he said as we jogged along, "I hate that Champ."

I playfully turned my head and made a nip at his muddy shoe.

"You're the best friend I have," he said affectionately. "You never pitch into me—I'd like to kill Champ."

[Pg 285]

Then he gave a cry and leaped to the road. The unfortunate Champ was sitting on the grass his face pale as death.

Their quarrel forgotten Dallas took him by the shoulder and shook him. "Open your eyes! What's the matter?"

Champ murmured something about gooseberries and milk and quietly fainted in his arms.

Was my young master happy? By no means. With his own face white he laid Champ on the grass, ran to the lake for water, dashed it on his cousin's forehead and was just about to give the farm call for help when Mr. Devering came up the road on Patsie.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Oh! Uncle—our dear Champ has fainted," said Dallas most anxiously.

Mr. Devering jumped down and took his son's hand in his. Then he turned to Dallas. "Did you notice how much dinner our dear Champ ate?"

"No, Uncle," said my master.

"Enough for two men," said Mr. Devering.

"And we've had wild gooseberries and cherries since," said Dallas, "and some pie a man gave us."

"And hoed in the sun," said Mr. Devering. "Hello! he's waking up. Hey! Champ, we'll put you on Prince Fetlar. You musn't walk after fainting. Poor old tummy, does it feel unhappy?"

Champ smiled feebly and put out a hand to Dallas.

[Pg 286]

Then wasn't I glad to hear my noble young master say firmly, "I told him a lie. I believe that upset him."

Mr. Devering shook his head. "Oh! you boys!" he said as he hoisted Champ on my back. "There's nothing to equal you except girls."

"I've got to have a talk with you, Uncle," said my young master in great agitation. "I vowed I wouldn't tell another story and I've told six in three days. What are we going to do—what are we going to do?"

"Don't fret, lad," said Mr. Devering quietly. "I've got a sure cure this time for you."

"Tell it to me, oh! please, Uncle, tell it to me," said the boy.

"Not now, Nephew. We must be alone. Come for a stroll after dinner to-morrow. Ride Patsie to the stable, will you? I'm going to walk beside Champ."

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CHAPTER XXIV THE MOTHER MYSTERY

What was Mr. Devering going to tell the boy I wondered. I kept close to the family during dinner the next day, and immediately afterward Dallas hurried to his uncle and the two went sauntering up the road, I, of course, in close attendance.

Mr. Devering seemed in no hurry to begin his communication. He strolled along looking at the lake and the sky and presently he said, "Those are fine Lombardy poplars in front of the Talkers."

"Yes, Uncle," said Dallas eagerly.

"Do you see that one with the queer curve in it?" asked Mr. Devering.

"Yes, I do."

"Someone struck it a cruel blow in youth," said Mr. Devering, "and it has given Mr. Talker more trouble than all the rest of the trees put together. 'Cut it down,' everybody said but me. 'Grapple with it,' I said, and he bandaged and propped and pulled until finally it had only that slight twist in it. He's quite proud of it and calls it his prodigal tree."

"Lots of things get hurt when they're young," said Dallas.

"Yes, boy, that's true."

"Bolshy is one, and I am another," said Dallas, going as easily along the mind path his uncle wished to lead him as his stout brown shoes went along the grassy path by the lake. "Uncle, can't you get the twist out of me? You're stronger than I am." [Pg 288]

"Lad," said Mr. Devering enthusiastically, "we're going to get that twist out without leaving a curve."

"How, Uncle Jim? Oh! how will you do it?"

"I'll give the young tree such a shock that it will toss up its head to the sky in order to know what is going to happen to it."

"Uncle, if you don't speak soon I think I'll go crazy," said my poor young master.

"Your mother loved trees," said Mr. Devering musingly. "I know she is glad that you have changed in your feeling toward them."

"They're green brothers and sisters," said Dallas, "and when winter comes they will be nice old grandmothers and grandfathers. Uncle, I belong to the wild things. I don't want to live in a city. What shall I do?"

"Keep on brothering the trees. Your father is like you. He, too, loves the country and God's free unpolluted air."

"My father loves the country," repeated the boy in amazement. "I never knew that."

"He never had time to tell you. He was too busy chasing the almighty dollar. Now he has lifted his eyes to the hills. He will never live in a city again."

Dallas stopped short. "Is my father coming to live here?" [Pg 289]

"No, lad—have you no woods and fields in your own country?"

The boy was intensely excited. "If my father lives in the country," he said slowly, "I can have Prince Fetlar with me all the time," and he threw his arm over my neck. "Also I can have a cow and hens and a dog or two. Oh! what a beautiful blow! Is that what is to shock me into telling the truth?"

"No, my boy—it is something about your mother."

"My mother, my mother," repeated the boy passionately. "Oh! if she had only lived. What could we not have done, my father and I?"

"Did you ever hear of departed ones coming back to earth?" asked Mr. Devering softly.

My young master wrinkled his eyebrows. "Sometimes," he said; "sometimes, Uncle, I think I see misty shapes in the clouds or in moonlight. It pleases me. I am not afraid. I have even imagined a lady in a long flowing cloak. Something stretches out like arms. I think it is my mother. Then I dream of her, always so pleasantly—Oh! how can boys ever be cross to their mothers?"

"My lad," said his uncle dreamily, "if you think of your mother in that way she is not dead. She may come back to you."

"What do you mean?" asked the boy in a puzzled voice.

"A great man has said that when we speak or think of our dead they live again. I believe that you will see your mother some day." [Pg 290]

"What is it you are trying to tell me?" asked the boy.

"Will you haunt these beloved woods between here and the Mountain?" asked Mr. Devering mysteriously. "Will you and Prince Fetlar haunt them, and at the end of a week tell me what you see? Say nothing to any other person. You must come alone. You will not be afraid?"

"Afraid, no," said the boy almost with scorn. "All that is past, but what shall I see and hear? Oh! tell me."

"I can tell you no more save this," said Mr. Devering, shaking his head. "You must not soil your lips by falsehood. Your mother told stories when a child. Later on with all her faults she grew to hate a lie. If you are ever to be happy in her presence you must speak the truth and nothing but the truth, and you must not dream, although you will be on a dream quest. Do you understand that, my boy?"

"If I can see my mother," said my young master earnestly, "I shall never tell a lie again. It would be too ungrateful. I am in earnest this time. I swear it."

Mr. Devering was satisfied now and his face glowed as he looked at the boy.

Then taking him by the arm, they both set their faces toward the sawmill in the woods.

I always liked to go there. The ripping and tearing of the wood and the strong smell of sawdust and the jolly young men, who were all trained singers brought from other places at quite an expense by Mr. Devering, made it seem like a visit to a concert hall in the woods. [Pg 291]

We heard a sweet tenor voice ringing out as we got near.

"Bite deep and wide, O Axe, the tree,
What doth thy bold voice promise me?"

and then a chorus of men's voices

""We build up nations—this my axe and I.""

These young men who worked in the mill and brought their logs down the river, which was our old friend the Merry-Tongue, lived in very comfortable log houses which could be occupied summer or winter. Consequently some of them were quite nicely furnished.

To my amusement, didn't I see my acquaintance, Black-Paws, the raccoon, just waking from a sound sleep under a bed in one of these log cabins.

"So this is where you go when you disappear from the Devering Farm," I said.

He looked me all over with his little cunning eyes. "Sometimes," he said. "I have many homes—they have a good cook in this camp," and approaching a quite nice looking bed he pulled back the covers and showed me a lump of orange layer cake under the pillow.

I couldn't help laughing as he tucked it back and patted it with his paws. "Whose bed is it?" I asked. [Pg 292]

"Cyril Green's—he's first violin."

"You're quite a musical animal, I suppose," I said.

"If music isn't too near, I am," he remarked. "Excuse me, I must go wash this piece of beef," and didn't he drag some steak from under a sofa cushion, and run to the river with it.

Then my master and his uncle came along, bringing the whole bunch of young men with them. They were knocking off work to go down to the Deverings' and have a good time.

It was Mr. Devering's mill, so he could do as he liked.

"Play must be played," he said earnestly to a red-haired young giant who seemed to be boss, and who looked doubtful about quitting work before five. "Aren't you old enough yet, Cyril, to know that Jack gets to be a very dull boy indeed if his mind is always on dollars and cents? Go dress up a bit, and put your fiddle under your arm."

"Is that your friend?" I asked Black-Paws, whose dark hands were glistening with water.

"Yes—he's a dandy. Temper sweet as maple sugar. Other chaps stone me if I hide my little treasures in their cabins."

I walked over to Mr. Green and he looked me up and down admiringly, and stood watching me as Dallas got on my back and asked his uncle's permission to hurry home.

Our lad was so excited about his mother that he wished to be alone to think over what his uncle had said. [Pg 293]

There was some mystery here which he did not quite understand.

Oh! how I longed to tell him that he would really see his beloved mother in the flesh, but alas! though I loved him so dearly and could communicate some of my feelings to him, this was one

thing that he would have to find out for himself.

All the way home he was singing, so I knew what thoughts were passing through his mind. The longing for his mother amounted to a passion. His childhood had been so repressed that now with the prospect of his mother's presence either in the body or out of it, and normal life with his father outside a city, he acted like a boy that had a joyous fountain of delight springing up inside him.

He took a song all these backwoodsmen sang about, "Over the Mountain," and changed it to suit his purpose.

Instead of a traveller on horseback, he was a boy on ponyback, and he was looking for his mother, stolen by wicked fairies.

I think he really knew at this time that his mother was not dead, but for the life of me I could not be sure of it.

Children are pretty clever at concealing their inner thoughts, and though I am reckoned a pretty wise pony, I never have fully understood all the workings of this young master's picturesque mind.

I loved him, though. That was enough for me, and I listened with deep pleasure to his gay singing until we reached the Farm. Arriving there, he jumped off my back and went soberly up to the veranda, where Big Chief was having a meeting of the Calf and Pig Club, composed of neighbourhood boys and girls. [Pg 294]

After they went away, there was a very jolly big supper party and later on some quaint folk dances on the lawn.

Then they had a bear dance. Mr. Devering and Mr. Macdonald dressed up in bearskins and frolicked about the grass in the electric light.

They were very amusing as Mother and Father Bear, but when my young master came on as a saucy cub who would not mind his parents, the fun became so fast and furious between the big bears and the little one that everybody shrieked with laughter.

Occasionally little bear cub glanced at the wrist watch on his paw and I knew that even in the midst of his gambolling he was keeping an eye on the time. He wished to be early to bed in order to be early to rise.

Finally, when the dancing was over and Mr. Devering proposed that they all go out in a motor-boat to take some cake and ice-cream to old Mrs. Petpeswick up by the head of the lake, Dallas slipped away to bed.

Big Chief caught him by the hand as he went by him.

"Come on, Cousin. It isn't late."

They were both out on the veranda and Dallas' eyes grew dark and mysterious. "I have a quest," he said, "like knights of old. Don't butt in, old boy." [Pg 295]

Big Chief nodded and ran after Cassowary and Champ, who were whistling "O Canada" together as they strolled down to the boat.

I watched my young master undressing and hanging his clothes over a chair back as neatly as a girl would do, then he kneeled down beside his bed and afterward hopped into it.

I trotted up to the stable and found a nice sleepy quiet prevailing there until I asked the news of the day, when I got a whole budget from the different animals.

"The Good American has come," announced Attaboy pompously, "the friend of my master's father."

"Indeed!" I said, "I am quite curious to see him."

"He is very good to everybody," Attaboy continued; "he is just like my master's father."

I was rather amused. Attaboy had been very nice to me ever since I stopped Big Chief from running away. He was so stubborn, however, that he always said Big Chief, being such a wonderful boy, would have come home without my interference.

"The Good American's wife and children arrived, too," said David Wales, the Welsh pony.

"And servants and guests," continued the Exmoor.

"You should have seen them driving in from the Lake of Bays," said Attaboy, "motor cars and waggons piled high with luggage." [Pg 296]

"They are very late this year," said Attaboy. "I hear there was a wedding in the family that delayed them."

I pricked up my ears when I heard the word guests. Was it possible that Dallas' mother was among them? Probably she was and that would explain Mr. Devering's eagerness to get the trail between the two houses in good condition before his American friends arrived.

Well! We ponies would see what we would see, and I listened sleepily to Apache Girl, who always had a talk with me now before I sank down on my straw bed.

She rarely lay down. She said she was afraid of mice getting up her nostrils, but I told her it was the wild blood in her. When horses roam in bands about a country they must be always on the alert against enemies who would creep on them.

Oh! what queer stories she used to tell me—queer uncanny stories of Spaniards and Americans that had been passed down to her by her ancestors.

I was delighted that she had thawed toward me, but finally nodded until I fell asleep just as a wild Inca chief with a spear in his hand was rushing at a Spaniard.

In my dreams the Inca spared the Spaniard, so I was quite relieved.

CHAPTER XXV WE HAUNT THE WOODS

[Pg 297]

It seemed to me only five minutes before I heard someone whistling, "Early one morning and while the dew was shining," and there was my young master brushed and dressed and biting deep into a huge slice of bread and butter with yellow sugar on it, a dainty that the children often got from Bingi.

"Come on, Pony Boy, my dearest joy," he said, giving me a generous piece of his bread. "The quest is on."

I stepped out beside him. I shall never forget that particular early morning. I had never before seen the lake so lovely.

My young master, too, was admiring it. "Isn't that water exquisite, my Pony Prince?" he said. "Just like a dreamy big emerald set in a forest of green. Upon my word, when I got down to it in my bathing suit it was so beautiful that I could not go in. I turned back. I didn't feel I was a good enough boy."

This pleased me very much. What fine feeling for a lad!

"Now, Prince Fetlar," he went on, "I'm sorry that on this first morning of our search we have to turn our backs on the lake, but so it must be. Mothers first, lakes second. Here we go up Deer Trail," and he sprang in his own graceful way to my back.

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He rode me until we got to the romantic sugaring-off place in a belt of maple bush.

Then he jumped off, looked reflectively at the enormous black pot hanging on the crane in the stone fire place and said, "Big Chief says I must be sure to come here next spring when they tap the trees. I should love to see the sap running. He has a hundred trees of his own and maple syrup is going to be marketed at five dollars a gallon."

I was very much amused. My young master was getting to be quite a little man of business.

Suddenly he turned to me, "What is sweeter than maple syrup, Fetlar?"

Of course I could do nothing but neigh excitedly, and he exclaimed, "Mothers! Come on, let's find mine," and he dashed down a steep side trail leading to the Merry Tongue River.

I followed him, picking my way carefully over soggy mats of dead leaves and round by enormous rocks and fallen trees. Oh! the firewood going to waste in this forest.

Something made me put my head down whenever we came to damp and marshy ground. I didn't know why I did it, but Dallas exclaimed when he turned round and saw me, "That's a Shetland trick. Your little ancestors used to smell out, or perhaps I should say feel, the safe places when they went to the peat bogs with the crofters to get fuel."

[Pg 299]

This was very interesting. How glad I was that my young master had brains and that he had become such an expert young woodsman, for without being able to see far ahead on account of the dense growth of trees he just seemed to choose easily the best way to get round obstacles.

There was a trail here, but so faint that we kept losing it. Nothing daunted the boy, and when he could not get on with two feet he fell on his hands and, imitating me, scrambled over steep rock faces where he would often pull up by the roots some young baby tree he was clinging to.

As he fell backward or sideways his concern was more for the uprooted thing than himself.

"I've killed it," he would say, "and it probably loves its home."

Then, if not too badly damaged, he would re-plant it, and by these delays our progress was rather slow.

Just before we got to the brawling little river that my master loved because it talked so sociably to its big brown stones as it dashed over them, we came to Poor Dog's Pool, so named on account

of a favourite setter of the Devering children who had once fallen in there in a fit and drowned.

"The setter is happy now," said Dallas as he looked thoughtfully into the depths of the velvety pool set in its bed of ferns. "He will never drown again, and he is waiting for the children."

Then he repeated to me in his sweet ringing voice a favourite poem of his cousins' written by a young Irish-Canadian friend of theirs called Norah Holland. [1] [Pg 300]

"High up in the courts of Heaven to-day,
A little dog-angel waits.
With the other angels he will not play,
But he sits alone at the gates;
'For I know that my master will come,' says he,
'And when he comes, he will call for me.'

"He sees the spirits that pass him by,
As they hasten towards the throne.
And he watches them with a wistful eye,
As he sits by the gates alone;
'But I know if I just wait patiently,
That some day my master will come,' says he.

"And his master, far on the earth below,
As he sits in his easy chair,
Forgets sometimes, and he whistles low,
For the dog that is not there;
And the little dog-angel cocks his ears,
And dreams that his master's call he hears.

"And I know when at length his master waits
Outside in the dark and cold,
For the hand of death to open the gates,
That lead to those courts of gold,
The little dog-angel's eager bark,
Will comfort his soul in the shivering dark."

When he finished the poem, I rubbed affectionately against the dark blue figure standing so straight and handsome in the depths of this green wood. With a boy's extravagance he had put on his very best suit of clothes to come and look for his mother, and a sad mess it was in. [Pg 301]

I was pleased that he had taken the trouble to recite to me, and he knew it, but in the midst of a remark to me he began to yawn sleepily.

"Prince Fetlar," he said, "I'm going to have forty winks. I scarcely slept a bit last night," and he stepped back among the old pines that had watched the pool and its dark doings for many a year.

It was said to be bottomless, and when my master lay down to sleep he chose a nice fragrant bed of pine needles at the foot of a moss-grown boulder and at a safe distance from the treacherous waters of the pool.

"Watch a few minutes, Prince," he said, "it will only be a cat nap."

"Bless him," I said to myself, "he's safe for a couple of hours," and I, not feeling at all sleepy, placed myself in a bed of brakes behind him and stood stock still planning to see what I could see.

As long as we had been moving we saw nothing but the still life of the woods. The breaking of branches and the sound of my master's voice had kept every shy wild thing from us. They were not afraid that we would kill them, for Mr. Devering and the Good American allowed no shooting on their timber limits. They were just naturally averse to the near presence of human beings, but I knew they were all peeping at us as we went by.

As soon as my young master fell asleep some timid wood birds who haunted this pool began to talk to each other about the abundance of food this year and the easiness of the task of bringing up young ones. [Pg 302]

Then a funny young Canadian bear came by, pad-padding along and stopping a few feet from me to sit down and leisurely scratch his ear. However, he caught our odour and away he went, he, too, looking for home and mother.

While I stood thinking what a lovely and pleasant thing it was that my young master and I, too, had no fear of these wild creatures about us now that we knew there was not one of them that would do us harm, I bent my head to rub off some little ants that were wandering about my fetlocks. There, almost nestling against my pastern, was a hen partridge, or perhaps I should say grouse.

She looked up at me with a bright and trusting eye, but decided she had better move along now that she was discovered. However, she made no haste about it and reminded me of some tame partridges in Maine whose backs a master I had then used to tickle with his fishing rod.

"Oh! how wild things would love man if he would not hunt them," and just as I was saying this to myself I lifted up my eyes and there at a little distance stood a beautiful white ghost among the pines.

"Good morning, comely one," I said when the White Phantom came gracefully near. "Pardon me for not going to meet you. My master sleeps and I am on guard."

"I know it," she said prettily. "A little chickadee told me. If he had been awake I would not have come near." [Pg 303]

"But he never hurts anything," I said.

"I know that, but I seek no human beings except my two loved masters. I have seen quite nice boys and men jump at wild things even when they did not shoot. They like to see us run."

"They do not know what timid hearts you wild things have," I said consolingly.

"You creatures called domestic know nothing of the fears of untamed creatures," she said. "Our lives are one long misery if thoughtless human beings control us."

"That is very sad," I replied.

"But not too sad," she went on, "for the Good Highlander tells us that we have another life, and such a long one that this life is only a dream compared with it. In that other life we shall be perfectly happy, for no one will hunt us."

"So you, too, know the Good Highlander," I exclaimed joyfully.

"Quite well, and he is so clear to me that the other animals tell me I must soon be going to join his band of happy creatures."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"That all the animals that ever lived in these woods are here still, though we do not see them."

"Can that be possible! Is this wonderful forest to be your deer heaven, lovely doe?"

"I hope so. I should like to keep near my masters and I feel that I will, for that wolf cub with the Highlander is one who once lived back of the mountain." [Pg 304]

"You recognise him?"

"Yes, for he hunted me cruelly. He was with his mother, the fiercest old wolf witch of this district. It was one day on the ice. I was crossing the lake to go home. Something told me they were coming. I was as fleet as the wind in those days, but they swept close to me, one on each side. I felt their hot breath——"

She paused an instant and I shuddered. I could see her in my mind's eye bounding up the frozen lake in her graceful manner, her heart pounding, her strength failing, the two fierce creatures about to leap on her and tear her to pieces.

"Do you know," she said quietly, "that just when I was about to sink to the ice something very strange happened."

"What was it?" I asked eagerly.

"It was the first time I saw the Highlander," she replied, "and then he was only the faintest mistiest shape to me, but he was there. He floated by me and the wolves fell dead."

"Had he killed them?" I asked.

"I do not know. My master suddenly appeared skating round the bend of the river, his gun on his shoulder. The Highlander was not there when he arrived and my master bent over the wolves' bodies, then lifted his puzzled face to me as I struggled toward home at a little distance from them."

"But it is astonishing!" he said. Then later he skinned the wolves, but that young one who is with the Good Highlander when he haunts these woods is the wicked cub who hunted me with his mother." [Pg 305]

"But he is a good cub now," I said.

"He has a heart of gold," she replied. "I have seen him beside a dying fawn."

"I'm puzzled," I said. "Wolves have to get their living in this world. Yet we blame them for killing creatures who wish to live. However, there's one thing sure, lovely Phantom—when we animals die many things will be explained that we do not understand now."

"Sometimes when I am very frightened I wish to go to the Good Highlander and live that life where I shall be as bold as a wolf," she replied dreamily, "and that reminds me—I have sought you out to-day to thank you for what you did that afternoon the poachers shot me."

"Oh! Phantom," I said, "I could not bear to see you die."

"I was quite willing," she said dreamily. "I seemed to be drifting into a safe, soft black forest, but

when you said my masters would be grieved I gladly came back."

"And you, dear one," I said, "be careful. Do not roam far from home in future. You court danger when you do so."

"I know it," she said, lowering her snowy head among the pines to touch something at her feet, "but I have a guard now."

"Who is it?" I asked.

"The good Ravaud, the warden's hound. Our master has told him to accompany me wherever I go. He is getting another dog to go on government trips." [Pg 306]

"Hello! old fellow," I said, "come out here and speak to me. You were very short the first day I saw you."

The long-eared hound came out from behind the doe, curling his lip in a dog smile.

"Duty first, Pony friend," he said. "That doe has been a sister to me. How could I speak to a stranger when I thought she lay dying?"

"You were quite right," I said. "Now you just keep your eye on her, for she doesn't seem to mind a bit the idea of stepping out of this old world, which is after all a pleasant place."

"Right you are," said Ravaud in his deep hollow voice, and he looked at her anxiously. Then he added, "She has quite a good appetite."

I burst out laughing. I could not help it and the offended doe turned to leave me.

"Beautiful one," I said, "I am delighted to hear that your appetite matches your perfect body, and now before you go please let me say something to you."

"Certainly, Pony friend," she replied, turning her mild eyes on me.

"It is about something a toad told me," I said, "old Hoppy Go-Slow. I suppose you don't know him."

"I don't care for reptiles," she said a little ungraciously, "nor any creature who can live either on land or in the water. They seem unnatural to me, and I have no acquaintances among them." [Pg 307]

"Now, graceful one," I said cautiously and admiringly, "I see you are sensitive, but please do not be offended with me. I just wish to ask you why you jump on snakes and destroy them."

She shuddered. "I can not tell. I hate them. Do you think I am wrong?"

"Snakes do much good to the farmer," I said. "Don't you know that they eat insect pests that are injurious to plant life?"

"I have heard that," she replied carelessly. "It did not impress me."

"A snake loves to live," I went on. "Why kill him?"

"Do they suffer?" she asked in a horrified tone. "Do they feel as I do when the hunters drive me through the bush?"

"Probably they do not suffer as much as you do, for you kill quickly, but they do suffer and flee from you, for they have complained to the toads about you."

"I have always stamped on them," she said. "I have cut them to pieces with the sharp hoofs of my fore-feet, little Pony. It did not take long."

"Ah! well, lovely one, in future leave in peace all the harmless green and brown gliding things. Kill only rattlesnakes."

"I will kill none at all," she said with sudden heat. "I see that life is sweet even to snakes."

I was about to tell her that it is necessary sometimes to kill quickly and mercifully lest we should have too much animal life on the earth, then I thought I would only mix her up, so I forbore. [Pg 308]

"Before I go, Pony Prince," she said, "I must tell you that your boy's mother is in the wood."

"Is she?" I said eagerly. "What is she like?"

The White Phantom spoke in a mysterious voice. "She is slender and youthful looking. Her dress is the color of green leaves and she has a veil wound round her head. Alas! she is beautiful."

"Why alas!" I asked.

"Because all things beautiful are hunted. They have no peace. I wish I had been born very, very ugly and warty like a toad. It is fatiguing to be so sought after."

"I never thought of that before," I said, "but I suppose it is true. Where is the boy's mother now?"

"Down by the river, but she is coming this way. She is slipping behind the tree trunks. She is hoping to see her son before he sees her."

"I dread the shock for him," I said, anxiously gazing toward the sleeping boy.

"The shock will not hurt him, Prince Pony, for it will be all joy. Her shock will be partly pain."

"But, but," I stammered, "she is his mother—he is her son."

"They have lived apart, Pony. She allowed her old aunt to coax her away from her boy."

"How do you know all this?" I asked wonderingly.

"Creatures of the wildwood are not shut off from knowledge of human beings. Birds of the air carry news, and do I not go into the house and eat bread from my master's table? Then your boy's uncle loves my master and often they sit by the river for hours talking of things that are in their minds while I am hidden in the willows nearby."

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"I didn't think the warden was a talker," I said.

"Dentais does not talk to the world, but only to his friend Mr. Devering, who once saved his life in a bad storm on a distant lake."

"Stop one instant," I said. "Is the beautiful lady staying with the Good Americans?"

"Yes—she is a child of the forest like her brother. They met last night in the shack by the river and he told her of her boy. She is weary of cities where she lost her lovely voice."

"Is her voice gone?" I asked in dismay.

"Yes, the cruel war hunted her as the poachers hunted me. She wore her life out over the wounded and her voice was frightened away. Then she ran to her husband."

"White Phantom!" I exclaimed, "what are you telling me? Is the boy's father also in this wood?"

"Husband and wife are always together now," said the doe gently. "She would be afraid without him. Now she is coming—the beautiful lady. Don't you hear the trees whispering? They are pleased that her gown is the same color as theirs, and they call her the Green Lady. Take good care of yourself, Pony friend, and run often round the lake to see me. For your sake I will kill no more snakes," and she glided away accompanied by a faint rustling that meant the close following of the faithful hound Ravaud.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] Quoted by permission of the publishers, J. M. Dent & Sons, Toronto.

CHAPTER XXVI THE GREEN LADY AND THE BROWN MAN

[Pg 310]

I stood stock still, scarcely daring to breathe. This was great news—that my boy would soon have both his parents—and there they were coming softly among the brakes that held out green inviting arms toward them.

The man was tall and slightly stooping, the woman much shorter and very slight. There was something about her that moved me strangely, though I could not see her face on account of the long veil wrapped about her head. Her figure was charming and the way in which she lifted her pretty hunting boots and put them down so as not to crush the brakes reminded me of her boy's care for every living thing.

She was all in green, as the doe had said. Even her dainty boots were green and a green stone flashed on the white hand clasping the veil.

What a picturesque lovely mother! I should have been sorry for the boy if his mother had not been a thoroughbred.

The man was not picturesque, but he was interesting. He was rather thin and careworn and had a crease in his forehead as if he were always puzzling over some difficult question.

"Fatigued in his chase for the dollar and old before his time," as Mr. Devering said.

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He was a brown man—clothes, hair, skin—though his skin was not the deep brown of Mr. Devering's, but rather a pale tan laid on over white, showing he had only been living the out-door life for a short time.

His teeth were big and strong and very white I saw, when he smiled to encourage his wife, who was holding back at sight of me.

"Ranna," he said, staring at her through his spectacles and holding out a hand to her, "you are surely not afraid of your brother's gift to your boy. What a superb pony! I see that, though my eyes are semi-blind to horseflesh."

The lady came forward holding tightly to his hand, her eager eyes going beyond me to the place where her boy lay.

Now I could see her face, for she was holding her veil aside. She was like the boy. Her eyes were of that strange pale hue that yet somehow warmed one's heart.

All my naughty feelings toward her died away. I had been annoyed with this runaway mother and jealous of her. Now that I saw her so timid and clinging and with that wonderful look in her eyes that makes a pony follow a human being to death if necessary, I was on her side. I did not care so much about the man. I suspected that if he had been one to hold the reins firmly the beautiful lady would never have run away.

I made a gentle nickering sound and stepped toward her. Oh! what a flashing smile she gave me. It lighted up her rather sad face, and stretching out one little hand, she said in sweet husky tones, "Pretty creature!"

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I touched her hand. Poor lady! What a thousand pities that she had lost her lovely voice.

She had forgotten me. Like one petrified, she stood gazing at the sleeping boy, who was certainly a picture as he lay on his fragrant couch, a smile on his lips, his arms crossed over his head, his face brown and handsome, for he had long ago lost the pallor that he had brought from his city home.

"Douglas!" she said, "Douglas!" and her tone was almost terrified.

Her husband was right beside her. "Compose yourself, Ranna. What is it?"

"He is so immense," she whispered. "My tiny baby is gone."

Her husband showed his big white teeth in a most amused smile. "What did you expect? You forget that twelve years have passed since you saw him—and you have seen his photographs. Why are you surprised?"

"I forgot," she said, and her head sank on her breast, "but hush! he is speaking."

Her lips parted, she leaned forward, her head on one side so that one of her delicate ears would be nearer the boy's lips.

Then she sank back into her husband's arms, and burst into tears. Most unfortunately our dear lad that I could have told her, if I had been able to speak, was in this wood solely on the mother quest, had in his dreams called out the name of the old servant who had been a mother to him when this young thing had run away.

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"Margie!" he had said quite clearly. "Margie! I want you."

Poor little woman! Her husband could not comfort her.

"He prefers my understudy," she said mournfully, and she wrapped her veil round her head.

Her husband made a gesture of despair. "Ranna, I wish you were not such a sensitive plant. Your brother has told you that the boy will be wild with delight when he sees you."

I was sorry for the lovely suffering woman, who reminded me of the White Phantom, and going very, very cautiously toward her I tried to look my sympathy.

"Pony," she whispered huskily, "Pony with the deep brown eyes, 'The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree I planted, they have torn me and I bleed. I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed.'"

"He is waking," said her husband suddenly.

She looked at the boy in a startled fashion, then she bent over him, kissed him quickly and lightly, and slipped back behind the huge tree looking down on his slumbers.

The man appearing more puzzled than ever, peered at the boy through his glasses, and taking off his cap threw it on the ground, and anxiously pushed back the wave of brown hair on his forehead.

A light wind rustled through the wood, bringing on its wings the urgent call of a bird for its mate.

[Pg 314]

Our boy woke up slowly, still muttering something about "Margie," and blinked at his father with sleepy eyes.

Finally he sprang to his feet with a joyful cry and threw himself on his father's neck.

"Oh! Where did you come from? How well you look!—Are you quite strong again?—Where are John and Margie?"

Mr. Duff was a very happy man. He beamed on his boy and said enjoyably, "One question at a time and don't break my glasses, you young bear. What a hug!"

"It's a three months' hug," said Dallas. "Oh! where are you staying, Father, and how did you get to Poor Dog's Pool? Did you follow me? Oh! I believe you are at the Good American's and came here by the Merry-Tongue river trail."

Mr. Duff nodded. "I came in with him yesterday."

"And have you seen Uncle Jim, and surely you are going to stay with us, or am I going with you?"

The tall man blushed a bit under his tan, and taking off his spectacles he began to rub them nervously with his handkerchief.

"Son," he said, squinting up his eyes as if the light hurt him, "we've got to have a talk."

"And you hate talking," said Dallas. "Never mind, Father, I'll find out from Uncle Jim."

"No, son," said Mr. Duff, putting on his glasses again, "I've left too many explanations to Uncle Jim. I'm going to take one load off his shoulders." [Pg 315]

"He's a wonder, isn't he," said our boy enthusiastically. "I wish I'd known him sooner."

Mr. Duff twisted his lips as if he were taking some medicine, then he said in quite a nice manly way, "It's a painful thing for a father to have to ask a son's pardon, but I've got to do it."

"For what, Father, dear Father?" said my generous-hearted master. "If you ever did anything wrong, I've forgotten it. I've not been a perfect boy myself. Many little tempers I've had that you didn't know anything about."

Mr. Duff leaned against the old lichen-covered boulder and laying one hand on it said, "Old rock, I confess to you, since my boy won't let me confess to him, that I've been forty-five years in the world learning how not to live."

"And you, too, love 'rocks and rills and wooded hills,'" exclaimed the boy in delight.

"I have always loved them," said the man. "The root of all evil does not flourish in Dame Nature's garden."

"Father! You're not mean, you're generous. You hadn't as much money as you wanted. You had to work for it."

"I wanted to make as much as your mother had. I was proud and foolish."

Dallas, who had been leaning up against his father, now broke away, and began to pace up and down the springy ground swinging his hands in eager boy fashion.

"My mother! My mother!" he cried. "Now at last we can talk about her. You must tell me everything. She is near me. I feel it. How shall I see her? Quick, please, tell me. Uncle Jim nearly drove me crazy." [Pg 316]

Mr. Duff became scarlet. "You will soon, very soon, see your mother," he said in a low voice.

"Don't tell me she is a dream mother or a ghost mother," exclaimed Dallas. "I want a real mother with hands that I can take and hold fast! Of course, my Father, she is quite alive?"

His tone was terribly anxious, and Mr. Duff hastened to say re-assuringly, "Oh! yes, she is alive, very much alive. You will soon see her."

My boy had both hands at his throat now as if he were suffocating with joy. The past was nothing to him. He thought only of the future.

"Where is she?" he breathed in a quick short voice. "Tell me, Father, at once, please."

"Quite near here," said Mr. Duff. "Calm yourself, my son."

Instead of calming himself young Dallas gave a cry. The wind seizing a fold of the green veil had blown it lightly in his face.

The boy sprang to the other side of the tree and we heard his call, "My Mother!—my own Mother!"

Mr. Duff took out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead, but I stepped the other side of the tree. I wanted to see this little woman's face.

There was nothing to see. She stood with head drooped like a woman who has come to the end of a long, long road and is satisfied.

Her boy's face was hidden in her veil while her arms were round him, and her cheek rested on his head. [Pg 317]

From time to time she made little murmuring sounds as she stroked him. They would never be parted again.

Presently she looked up and I saw her eyes shining like diamonds from the sky.

"Douglas!" she said, "Douglas!"

Her husband went to her, and she took his hand. They were together now, these three, and she was the uniting link of the chain.

Now she was triumphant, and with a flash of the Devering humour she exclaimed, "My husband and son, I ask your pardon for my long absence from home duties. They will be resumed at once!"

Mr. Duff's embarrassment fell from him and he began to laugh in a most relieved way. The thought of this meeting had evidently been a terrible strain on him—but why would not Dallas lift his head? He could not stand through life clasping his mother in that frantic fashion.

I had it—my boy was shy, and he was also in terror that if he released his hold this lovely vision would melt away.

Finally his mother gently pushed back his head. "My darling—are you ashamed of me?"

"Ashamed!" said the boy. "Oh, Mother!" then his eye fell on me. With his pony he was at home, and springing to me and blushing furiously he cried, "Fetlar, she's come—my beautiful mother has come. I don't know what I feel like——"

"But I do," said Mrs. Duff softly. "You are like a young tree that someone has seized by its stem and twisted round in the soil. You were facing the cold north, now you are toward the sunny south, and your roots will grow so deep that no one will ever be able to twist you again." [Pg 318]

The boy turned to me again. "But, Fetlar, my mother does not know that one of my roots is crooked."

How the beautiful lady laughed. "Face me, my child," she said. "I know all about the little stories, but we shall cure all that. Now to find this wonderful uncle who has done so much for us all. Do not be afraid of me, my child."

Dallas took her by her finger tips and edged toward me.

I knew what he wished and backed up carefully.

Then stretching out his arms he assisted his young mother to my back.

CHAPTER XXVII FATHER, MOTHER AND CHILD

[Pg 319]

The boy had taken off his coat and thrown it over me for a saddle cloth. At first I went very slowly, but I soon found that Mrs. Duff was an expert horse-woman. Riding without a saddle did not trouble her at all.

Her husband walked beside her, and Dallas led me. For a time the man, in his intense relief that this meeting had turned out so well, said nothing, but when the rough part of the trail was over he remarked, "You two look like brother and sister."

We were not going home by the way we had come. That trail would have been too hard on Mrs. Duff. Dallas was taking us along an old wood road by the Merry-Tongue, and at first he did not hear what his father had said, for the brawling noisy river was talking so much louder.

So Mr. Duff repeated his remark and then Dallas turned his head.

"Oh! parents—if you only knew how delicious it is to have your own family," then seeing tears springing to his mother's eyes he added quickly, "I do hope you'll both have good appetites for dinner. We get scrumptious things to eat here."

Both parents smiled, and Mrs. Duff said in a low voice, "I feel hungry for the first time in weeks."

Dallas in his joy broke into song. I felt that he did not just yet know how to handle this delicate young mother, so to keep his tongue out of trouble he gave it something else to do. [Pg 320]

He sang her a soothing song about a graceful Virginia deer who got lost in a strange wood and was rescued by a kindly wolf.

His gift for making up stories and singing them on the spur of the moment was wonderful, and it delighted him because it was a new game taught him by the Devering children.

His mother listened most attentively. She was plainly enchanted with his voice, and I thought what a good teacher she would make for him.

When he stopped for lack of breath, Mrs. Duff said, "Who taught you that?"

"No, one," said the boy.

I felt that husband and wife were exchanging looks in the way proud parents do. What a source of common interest this treasure of a boy would be to them.

When we got to the fields back of the farm Dallas said, "If I don't do something to get the jump out of my legs I'll never be able to sit still at dinner—can't I run ahead and proclaim you?"

They both laughed, the man in a hearty natural way, the woman with the low silvery trained laugh of the stage. She wasn't making it, though. I felt that she was really enjoying herself.

They laughed again when their boy took a flying leap over a rail fence, and she said, in her pathetic voice, "Douglas, I should like to walk the rest of the way."

He took her off my back, and when I saw that he knew where the gate was, I too went over the fence, and feeling that they were staring with great interest at me, I dashed after my boy. [Pg 321]

He was absolutely yelling at the back door, "Bingi! my mother and father are here," then he raced round the veranda shouting in every window, "My parents are here—Uncle Jim, Aunt Bretta, take notice, also Big Chief, Cassowary, Champ, Sojer, Dovey and little Big Wig. Oh! kids, one and all—I'm just like other boys. I've got a mother exactly like yours."

Joyful yells and cries answered him, and Mrs. Devering herself forgetting her anti-noise laws, put her head out of an upper window and gave a happy hail to the two dear persons coming down the hill.

"Squirrie Sore-Feet!" screamed Dallas to the chipmunk who came out of a hole in a tree, "no one will ever catch me and make me perform in public like poor you—my father wouldn't let them. Birds in the trees, sing with me—my mother is here, is here, is here. Barnyard and stable folk, I'll come up after dinner and give you the good word."

By this time, a gleeful procession of grown-ups and children was hurrying up the hill, Barklo shrieking at their heels, Constancy following him and Baywell limping behind them.

Mr. and Mrs. Devering gave the two parents the warmest greetings, then Mr. Devering took his pale-faced sister on his arm, walked down to the veranda with her and put her in a big rocking-chair.

There she held court, all the children gathering round her, and Bingi and O-Mayo-San bowing respectfully in the distance. [Pg 322]

There was nothing painful about the situation, and I saw young Mrs. Duff's anxious expression fade away. Those children and grown persons were not thinking about her family difficulties, so she settled back in her chair and made up her mind to be happy.

Mr. Macdonald, the nice Scotsman, was very much impressed by Mrs. Duff, and when she took her dinner from a tray he was the one who handed all the things to her from the big table where sat the laughing restless crew of children.

The little lady ate scarcely anything, although she had said she was hungry. That is from a pony's point of view. We eat a good deal and eat a good while. It is a very bad thing to hurry any of the horse family with their meals, for we are nervous creatures, and we should never be groomed when we are eating. Who would wash a boy while he was taking his dinner?

Instead of eating, Mrs. Duff kept her wonderful eyes going, going all round the table from one face to another. These were her relatives, and she had no other ones. I saw that she was pleased with the Devering children, but it was to her own boy that her glance came oftenest and lingered longest. The mother spirit had waked up, and when it once wakes in a soul like hers it never goes to sleep again.

As soon as the lively dinner was over, her husband, who was watching her carefully, said, "Ranna, you will rest a while, won't you?"

"Not inside," she said, shaking her brown head with the soft hair wound round and round it, "not inside. I could not breathe. Out here where I can see the children." [Pg 323]

"Heigh ho!" said Mr. Devering, who was standing nearby, and catching her up in his arms as if she had been a baby he ran round the house to the north veranda where the wind was not blowing. There he deposited her in a hammock swung outside his office.

"Lie here, my lady," he said, "and I will play you to sleep," and getting his violin he drove everybody away and sitting down beside her sang and played nice northern songs about good bears and little lost cubs, and nice Indians and squaw mothers and happy papooses.

Dallas and the children watching her from a distance, fell upon Mr. Duff and swept him up to the stables.

The man was delighted, but soon he became exhausted in his tour of the farm and said, "Mercy! dear children, I've been having nervous prostration. If you won't despise me too much I'll go lie down."

"There's a very good thpot under the treeths," said little Big Wig kindly.

"If it's quite the same to you," said his uncle, "I think I prefer a bed."

"Then take mine, thir," said Big Wig grandly.

"Or mine," said Big Chief.

"Mine! Mine!" called Sojer and Champ.

"He'll take his son's," said Dallas, stretching up to put his arm in his father's. "It's got dandy fir balsam pillows that will make him go to sleep, but I say, kids, after I put him to bed can't we have a gallop round the lake?" [Pg 324]

"You bet," said Big Chief, and the others shouted approbation.

Shaking with silent laughter, the tired man allowed Dallas to tuck him in bed, but out of the corner of my eye I saw him at the window when the merry troop of boys and girls swept by on the backs of their various pets.

I knew what my boy wanted. He was going to tell all the settlement this wonderful news about his mother. He certainly was the hero of this day.

However, first we were to have an adventure.

As we trotted slowly up the market road, for the children all wanted to talk, we saw Guardie and Girlie and the pigs coming down from the sawmill. They were getting home earlier than usual.

Dallas was beginning to shout to them when the animals, who were by this time abreast of the Widow Detover's, made a sudden and peculiar stop. I knew that something had alarmed them.

Then Guardie, after a word to Sir Vet, dashed into the Widow's lane and strange to say he was followed by Girlie.

"Well! I vow," exclaimed Cassowary, "that's something not in my notebook. Big Chief, did you ever see both dogs leave their pigs before and in the middle of the road too?"

"Never!" said Big Chief. "Get on, Attaboy—there's something wrong at the Widow's."

CHAPTER XXVIII THE FIRE AT WIDOW DETOVER'S

[Pg 325]

Being two lengths ahead of Attaboy, I didn't propose to let him catch up to me, so I was the first pony to land my rider at the Widow's back door, where the two dogs had disappeared.

It was easy enough to tell what the trouble was. We ponies had smelt it out a few seconds before the children did.

The kitchen was on fire and any backwoods animal knows what that means. Guardie and Girlie had been with the men of the settlement when they fought fires that wished to leap over the wide belt of cleared land that protected the properties on the lake.

Now they were trying to stamp out the flames that were spreading from the Widow's ironing table to the clean clothes hung about the room. They beat the blazing clothes with their paws and rolled on the sparks that fell on the floor.

My young master, who was bursting with a new-found courage to-day, seized one of the rag mats on the floor and sprang to assist the dogs.

Big Chief, with a second heavy mat, was right at his heels, and Cassowary ran in, and turning on the water in the sink threw dish-pans of it on the flames.

[Pg 326]

The fire was soon out and the two dogs and the children rushed from the smoky room. Their eyes were smarting and they were coughing violently.

Just as they got out in the yard the Widow and Joe Gentles, whom Mr. Devering had got her to take for a hired man, rushed down from the barn, where it seems they had been admiring a Tamworth shoat that Mr. Devering had given to Joe, on condition that he let the Widow feed it.

The Widow screamed like a gull. Her nice clean kitchen! and how had it happened? "My stars and garters!" she exclaimed, "I believe it's that miserable tool, Joe. Didn't you lay your pipe on my ironing table just now?" she shrieked at him.

With hanging head he confessed that he had.

"And might have burnt my house down," she said, "but for these sainted children!" and she went on holding poor Joe up to the scorn of the Deverings, the ponies and the pigs, who by this time had come along sociably to see what had happened.

Joe took his dressing-down like a man, and when at last the Widow stopped for lack of breath, he said humbly, "I'll pay for the damage."

"You'll pay," she cried furiously. "You lazy good-for-nothing fellow. You haven't a red cent to your name, and if you think I'm going to pay you for what you do here you're mightily mistaken. You're only working out your board."

Joe hung his head still lower and my young master stepped forward.

[Pg 327]

"Mrs. Detover," he said in his polite way, "I have great news for you—my father and mother have arrived. I am going to live with them in a beautiful home something like this. My father says I may buy some pets. Will you sell me your Constancy? I love her and will give her a good home. I am prepared to pay——"

Just here he stepped up to Big Chief and lowered his head to receive a whisper. He hadn't an idea what the lamb would be worth.

"Twenty dollars," said Big Chief in the waiting ear.

"Twenty dollars," repeated Dallas. "Will that be agreeable to you, Madam?"

"Quite so, my dear young lad," said the Widow, beaming like one of the sunflowers in her garden. "You will be a good master to my dear lamb, who did not thrive with me."

"Consthanthy ithn't going to leave my Barklo," cried young Big Wig suddenly. "He loveth her."

There might have been trouble about this question if the excited Widow had not suddenly yelled, "Those sinful pigs—look at them! My garden, oh! my garden. They're ruining it."

She did not know, but I did, that old Sir Vet, really anxious about Guardie and Girlie, had led his whole band of retainers by a short cut through the Widow's garden to the back door.

There was a great scene now of pushing and pulling and driving and calling—children and grown persons, dogs, ponies, and pigs all mixed up together, and above the clamour rose Cassowary's shrill voice, "My angel collies! they are burnt to death." [Pg 328]

They weren't burnt to death, but their paws were certainly sore and bleeding, and the hair was scorched all off their backs. They were trying to round up the pigs and get them off the Widow's hollyhocks, Bouncing Bets, sweet Williams and other old-fashioned flowers that she loved, but at every other step they fell down and rose with difficulty.

"Home! home!" cried Cassowary, and leaping on Apache Girl she held out her arm to Dallas, who put Guardie in front of her.

Big Chief took Girlie and we all scurried away from the Widow's to Devering Farm.

Dallas and I, who kept ahead, dashed up to the veranda, notified Mr. Devering, who was still sitting there, and he was in his office all ready to receive the suffering dogs by the time they arrived.

He put up a hand to stop the children's noise. Their aunt had fallen asleep and he did not wish her to be waked up.

After Mr. Devering had treated the burns with some oily substance and bound them up to keep the air out, he said to the children, "Take the collies to the barn cellar. They would be miserable away from the pigs."

Dallas watched with interest the erection of a kind of platform containing comfortable beds for the collies, and where the pigs could look at them but not touch them. Then he said, "What about our ride?" [Pg 329]

"Do you suppose we would leave this hero and heroine?" asked Cassowary indignantly.

Big Chief, who always stood up for Dallas now, and who understood him better than Cassowary did, said, "Come on, old boy—I'll go with you," so Attaboy and I, leaving Cassowary and the other children worshipping the dogs, started to go round the lake with our two young masters.

Passing the Widow's house and seeing Mr. and Mrs. Devering talking to her, but not finding out till later that she was having fresh trouble, we trotted on to the head of the lake and to the game warden's house.

Dentais was not at home, and the White Phantom, feeling shy at sight of Attaboy, whom she did not like, hid in the bush.

I whinnied to her, and then we all went down the further side of the lake to the fire warden's.

He was away too, but the object of the ride was accomplished. My young master had worked off some of his high spirits, and now he was wild to be at home and near his wonderful mother.

CHAPTER XXIX

A RUSSIAN PRINCESS

[Pg 330]

Mrs. Duff was awake by this time and Dallas, slipping off my back, went to sit down at a little distance from her and embraced her with adoring glances.

She smiled at him but said nothing and I went over to the fountain to get a drink.

When I came back she was asking him to please get her a handkerchief.

Oh! how delighted he was to have a mother to wait on. I followed along the grass by the veranda as he went to his room and fussed about a drawer to get the finest and whitest one he could for her.

He had found a dear gentle mother, but I guessed that he would have to wait on her. She was not active and stirring like Mrs. Devering and evidently had been accustomed to having everything done for her.

While the lad sat with eager eyes bent on the hammock and I stood discreetly among some seringas, I heard a step on the path behind me, and to my surprise saw another little woman, very much the type of Mrs. Duff.

This one was slight and graceful too, but much older than Mrs. Duff. She had a fine face and very grave sad eyes, and she was dressed in a severely plain walking suit. [Pg 331]

Who was this? Oh! I knew. It was some guest from the Good American's for she had come down the trail by the Merry-Tongue River.

She paused beside me and gave me a slow thoughtful stare as if recognising my right to some attention, then she went on to the veranda.

Dallas stood up when he saw her and smiled but did not speak. His mother, however, rose up in her hammock with a glad cry of recognition and said in French, "Marie, is it you?"

The stranger went up to her and replied quietly in the same language, "You did not appear for lunch so I walked to see you."

Mrs. Duff, holding her by one hand, said to Dallas, "This is my dear friend Madame de Valkonski."

The boy bowed and offered his seat to this little lady, who sat down and looked at him attentively.

"So this is thy son," she said. "Does he understand French?"

Mrs. Duff blushed and made a helpless gesture. "Alas! I know so little about him. My son, canst thou speak French?"

"Not very well," he said. "I can speak better than I can understand."

"But you must learn to understand," said the lady with a pretty air of authority. "Every boy and girl should know French, especially here in this wonderful Canada. In my country—but do you know what my country is?"

"No, Madame," said my master. [Pg 332]

"It is Russia—in that country we all learn French as children. If we speak to our parents in Russian they ask us to repeat the phrase in French."

The boy's face glowed. "Oh! Madame," he said, "if you are Russian will you speak to Bolshy?"

"And who is Bolshy?" asked the lady with an air of interest.

"His real name is Peter Glatzof, and he is a poor man who is very lonely, but he does not understand French."

A soft remark came from the hammock. "My amiable son, your Bolshy did not have a French governess when he was a child. Madame de Valkonski is a princess."

I held my breath, and my young master getting up made the newcomer a low bow. "A real live princess—how stunning! I've always wanted to see one."

She laughed a little queer short laugh. "Then go to Switzerland, young friend. Titles are as common as dust on the roads now that we are driven out of our homes—but tell me more about your Bolshy and tell me in French."

My master was pretty well puzzled, but he managed to give a stammering account of the Russian.

"Ah! this country of Canada is good to foreigners," said the strange lady in a slow way so that the lad might understand her. "It is better than any other country in the world. I have been looking into her laws—and has Madame, your Mother, told you about our experiment in your alluring mountains called Adirondacks?" [Pg 333]

"I began," said Mrs. Duff, "but did not finish. Will you continue, Marie, if you please?"

The princess, whose words fell from her lips like pearls, said very evenly and distinctly, "You, though a boy only, know what has been going on in my beloved Russia."

Young Dallas nodded his head.

"Dear big boy," said his mother, "you must not nod, you must speak."

How his face glowed. Now he was like other boys and had his own mother to reprove and correct him.

His manner became quite roguish, and getting up from the stool where he was sitting he made a low bow and said, "Madame, my Mother and Madame the Princess—or perhaps I should say 'your highness'?"

"I beg of you," and the newcomer made a pretty gesture with one of her gloved hands, "'Madame' is quite sufficient."

"I can not read newspapers here very much," Dallas went on, "for we are galloping about all day like happy ponies and fall into our beds at night very tired, but I have heard the grown people say that Russia is in a terrible state."

"Yes, that is true," said Madame de Valkonski. "The populace is building up with one hand and tearing down with the other. If one did not wish to be killed one had to flee. Not only intelligent ones, but many pauper persons go to foreign lands. If they are like the Bolshy you speak of, how [Pg 334]

can they know what kind of a country they have come to unless someone tells them?—That is what we do, your mother and I. We bring bewildered ones to the mountains, and when they see the wildness and the trees they exclaim, 'A second homeland!' We tell them that they are under a good government. If they obey the laws and work hard they will be happy. We keep agitators away from them, and we take pains to teach them the language of their new home."

"How splendid in you!" said the boy. "I should like to help. May I?" and he turned to his mother.

"Certainly—we can start a junior class for you, but what will you teach?"

He looked puzzled, then his roving eye fell on me. "All about ponies," he said, "and how good it is for boys and girls to live out-of-doors and love trees and animals."

His mother's sweet hoarse laugh rippled out over the veranda. "My son shall be professor of equitation."

"And for ponies shall we have rails from your fences?" asked the princess.

"No," said Mrs. Duff in rather a proud way. "If my son takes a real interest in the children of our immigrants, we shall have real ponies."

I whinnied excitedly and they all looked at me and smiled.

A dreamy expression came over the princess' face and I felt that she knew I understood.

Head of a pony school— Well! that was something to look forward to, and in my mind's eye I saw ahead of me years of usefulness in working for my country under my master's direction, for how could citizenship be better taught to young foreigners than by the aid of a patriotic pony school? [Pg 335]

Dallas' mind was aflame over the possibilities of this scheme. I felt that he was thinking of a life-work for others—a thing that appealed strongly to his generous heart, but he was suddenly brought from the clouds of imagination down to solid practical earth by an anxious remark from his mother.

"Marie, you are missing your tea. *Vous avez les yeux fatigués?*"

Young Dallas sprang up. "I know what that means, my Mother. The Princess has fatigued eyes. I know how to make tea. Come on, Prince Fetlar."

"So you have a prince here," said Madame de Valkonski, turning to me.

Didn't I step proudly forward, make my best bow, and do a Russian folk dance step that I had learned in New York.

The princess was delighted, and congratulated me most warmly, saying that it was a pleasure to meet so accomplished a pony.

I bowed again and again. It was a perfect delight to me to take something out of my little bag of tricks here, for I was never forced to do anything that I did not wish to. All the Devering family had a horror of the cruelties usually connected with the training of animals in tricks unnatural to them. [Pg 336]

While I stood scraping and bowing, I heard Mrs. Duff telling her friend that there were not skilled maids in this family as there were in the Good American's, but every child was taught how to do every bit of household work accomplished on the place.

The princess' weary face became interested, and when a few minutes later I returned, stepping carefully along the veranda, for I was harnessed to a tea-waggon, she indulged in a really hearty peal of laughter.

"But this is charming," she ejaculated, clapping her slender hands together. "Altogether charming!" and she took off her gloves.

Dallas had heaped the waggon high with every dainty he could find in the pantry, and the princess, who had evidently had little lunch, ate olives and honey and bread and chicken sandwiches and wound up with hot buttered toast from a plate that Bingi brought in.

He had heard us in the kitchen and had run down from the green cottage where he spent all his spare time with his pretty Japanese wife.

The princess poured the tea and she and Mrs. Duff drank theirs with lemon and sugar and no cream.

Dallas, with a hand shaking with excitement, gave his mother her cup and bending over the hammock murmured, "Funny little mother with her foreign ways."

She gave him a long deep glance. Ah! these two would never part again, and my pony heart was glad and not a bit jealous. I saw that a boy to be all-round and not lop-sided must have a mother and father too. [Pg 337]

When I was released from the tea-table and was having my own cake and bread and butter and jam out by the seringas the whole family came sweeping down from the Widow Detover's.

"Oh! what a joy to see a tea-pot," exclaimed Mrs. Devering, sinking down on the veranda edge. "I am done out—such excitement."

"Bretta!" said Mrs. Duff, rising up in her hammock, "this is my friend, Madame de Valkonski."

"Pardon, Madame," said Mrs. Devering, stepping up on the veranda, "I did not see you. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to our home. Jim, here is the princess," she said over her shoulder.

Mr. Devering took off his cap and held it in his hand, and Madame de Valkonski, slipping from the tea-table, went to sit down in a low chair that Mr. Devering placed beside the hammock.

I was amused at the thirsty Mrs. Devering, who was having the nice big black teapot drawn from her clinging hand.

"Nephew!" she said reproachfully to Dallas.

"My Aunt!" he exclaimed in his old-fashioned way. "Tannic acid has formed by this time. I would not injure you. I am going to make fresh tea."

Mrs. Devering was very fond of a joke, and rolled her eyes mischievously at the two other women. Then they all laughed, but I saw Mrs. Duff's eyes follow the retreating figure of the lad holding the tea-pot in his hand. Not only did she love him most fervently but what a treasure he would be to a woman who evidently did not care to wait on herself.

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"I don't see," remarked Mr. Devering with a very wise air and after he had bitten deep into a sandwich, "why boys and men should not help women with household tasks. Big Chief here can make excellent pancakes, but he is rather ashamed of it. Come here, lad, and make your bow to the princess."

Big Chief, with quite an air of composure, put his heels together and bowed low. Then he got rattled and ran after his pal Dallas.

The other children were then brought up on the veranda and introduced to this stranger, who looked at each one attentively and kindly but with a face like a white mask. When they had all settled down and had begun to eat bread and butter she took a macaroon from the table and walked toward me.

I was shocked at the terrible expression of her face. She held the cake out kindly. She did not know or care whether I got it. "Oh! my heart, my heart!" she murmured in an agonized voice. "They stood him against that wall—they shot him, my Paul, my beloved boy."

I did not find out till later what she meant. She had been caught by the Reds in Russia with her nephew Paul. All the rest of the family had escaped. She was spared because she was a *propriétaire* who had years before given away half her estate to her peasants, but they shot the boy in her sight and these children reminded her of him.

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Oh! how glad I was when I found this out, that my young master and his cousins lived in a free and happy land where no one shot poor innocent children.

When the princess returned to her seat the others were talking of the further excitement up at Widow Detover's. It seemed that Joe Gentles was so overcome by her upbraiding that he fainted dead away at her feet.

Then the Widow was sorry and screamed for Mr. Devering. He found her overcome because she had made Joe faint and Joe was overcome because he had set her kitchen on fire.

The Widow was crying and finally she said that it was too bad to require Mr. Devering to look after all the lame ducks in the settlement. Joe might bring his wife and child to live with her lonely self and she would pay him wages.

Mr. and Mrs. Devering were much pleased with this arrangement and Madame de Valkonski listened attentively to this interesting backwoods story.

Mrs. Duff had fallen asleep, and seeing this Mrs. Devering came over to the merry group of children and said in a low voice, "Please take your tea and cakes out on the lawn. Your aunt and the princess have not our steady backwoods nerves."

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I kept one ear pricked toward the boys and girls and the other toward the grown-ups. The latter were on the Bolshy subject and I heard Mrs. Devering begging Madame de Valkonski to stay all night so that she would see him at the chapel in the morning.

The children did not listen to this conversation. They began to dance on the lawn and finally danced themselves up to the stable and throwing themselves on their ponies had a good gallop down the lake which lasted till supper time.

Dallas did not go with them. He and I remained near his mother, who slept till the bugle sounded for supper.

"I wonder," said my boy in a low voice, "I wonder how poor Bolshy will take all this. I imagine that he will be flabbergasted at the sight of this little bit of Russia," and he glanced admiringly at his mother's friend.

CHAPTER XXX

AN END AND A BEGINNING

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Now that my boy has found his mother and we are going home, it seems as if I ought to bring my story to a close, though I hate to stop talking.

I will just let him give a few word pictures of our last week, for his mother, not being able to travel, spent several days in the hammock, the little Russian lady always by her side.

Both were very quiet and both smiled when Dallas, racing up and down the lake shore with his cousins in the high September winds, would spring off my back to come and give them the latest news.

The first day it was the arrival of the teacher and Dallas exclaimed, "Mother! we heard a gentle purring in the sky and the children said it was Miss Jazzamine arriving in her new silent plane."

"What do you call her?" asked Mrs. Duff.

"Her real name is Miss Jessamine Venn, but the children call her Miss Jazzamine because she is so lively. The plane dipped and dipped and then she came down in a parachute and she had funny harness on something like Fetlar's. The children almost ate her up and she told us she wasn't a bit afraid. There's nothing in heaven or earth to be afraid of, and she had on a big fur coat and she took it off and slapped her arms to get warm. Then she rode Fetlar to the school-house. She has rooms there, you know, and there are no desks, only tables and chairs, and back of the school-house is a fine little hospital where the government dentist stays when he comes to fill teeth. Miss Venn always has two girl scouts living with her and she teaches them housekeeping."

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"Marie," said Mrs. Duff, "we shall get some suggestions here for our colony."

"And the teacher has a little square face," Dallas went on, "and eyes the colour of the steel in your bead bag, Mother, and Cassowary says she has lots of classes out-of-doors. I've been up History Trail where the big trees are kings and queens, and the tiny ones courtiers and common people. Sometimes she takes the children over to those four sandy islands in the lake that are called Europe, Asia, Africa and America, and they lay out countries and cities. Oh! I forgot to tell you the reason she came down in the parachute was because the plane was in a hurry to get to a fire down south. The pilot, who was "a scarlet rider of the sky," had chemicals to put the fire out."

"And what is a scarlet rider?" asked Madame de Valkonski, whereupon my master explained to her about the Dominion Mounted Police Force whose members ride about keeping order in this big Northland.

The next day Dallas told them about the school—how children came driving in from the north and the south in two big vans and met in a joyous crowd at the school-house door, many of them with musical instruments under their arms.

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"I have heard of the music here," said Mrs. Duff.

"Uncle Jim and Miss Jazzamine make up a lot of it," said Dallas enthusiastically. "First you hear the noise of waggons creaking as settlers drive in, then the sound of axes biting into the trees. At last the house is built, and men, women and children cry for joy. Then there is a feast and dancing and Miss Jazzamine led a procession all round the school-room. It was great, Mother. Can't we have something like this in our home? The music is pretty loud, but there was a deaf man cured by it."

"Gladly, my child," said Mrs. Duff. "We are borrowing many plans from here."

"And they're going to have a concert to-night," said Dallas. "To-morrow night it will be a picnic supper."

"I like that," said Madame de Valkonski. "It keeps the families together."

"And now I must go," said Dallas. "Mr. Macdonald has a stable class at four, and at five Miss Jazzamine shows us how to judge corn."

"Does she never rest—this wonderful teacher?" asked Mrs. Duff.

"She is very strong," said Dallas. "She says when one has good food, good water, good air, and good times one does not need to be ill. *Au revoir*," and he kissed his mother and bowed to Madame de Valkonski, then hurried away.

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The next afternoon he had a wonderful story to tell them about the turkey-farmer's baby who had run away from home and was found under Miss Jazzamine's bed, saying that she had come to the play-house where her brothers and sisters had such good fun.

"She was under there with the cat," said Dallas, "and a squirrel that Sideways had stolen from the woods, and she was lapping water out of Sideways' dish and Miss Jazzamine said to let her stay. She could go into Cassowary's kindergarten class."

How Mrs. Duff laughed at this, while her boy went on, "And the turkey-farmer said he was going

to send down six of his best turks, for Miss Jazzamine had fitted his boy for the university and he had done nothing for her."

"May I ask what a turkey-farmer is?" inquired Madame de Valkonski.

"He has hundreds and hundreds of turkeys," said Dallas, "and they run on the barrens and eat grasshoppers, and the farmer's dogs keep the wolves away, and he's promised me a pup, and may I have it, Mother?"

The boy felt no shyness now when he was with his mother, and perhaps sometimes he asked too much of her; however she gladly consented to let him have the pup.

The day before we left he had a very tragic story to tell them and they had to question him to get the particulars.

Of course I knew all about it as I had been one of the principal actors, and my heart was heavy, too, as my master paced up to the veranda and perched on its edge. [Pg 345]

His mother lifted her head from the hammock cushions and looked at him anxiously, then she asked, "What has all that shouting been about?"

"The children were singing," said Dallas.

"But what unhappy music," remarked Madame de Valkonski.

"Dallas," said Mrs. Duff, "are you ill?"

He sprang up and went to her. "Not at all, my Mother. I am sad, but I will tell you. The blue-eyed Bressay who is my Fetlar's friend was playing with us on the hillside when he got his foot in a hole and broke his leg. We managed to get him to his stall, and Mr. Talker said he would have to be shot. Big Wig took a stick to him, but one of the scouts pulled it away. Then Mr. Talker said as Uncle Jim and Aunt Bretta are away to-day we must do as he said."

"I hope you were not rebellious," said Mrs. Duff.

"Oh! no—the boys and girls were fine, and just then Miss Jazzamine came running to the stable and she spread out that red cloak of hers, Mother, just like nice hen wings. Big Wig was sobbing just dreadfully, then Miss Jazzamine said, 'I have an idea,' and what do you think it was?"

Mrs. Duff said she did not know and Dallas went on. "Uncle Jim had ordered a plane all fitted up to take Harry Talker to the hospital, and he couldn't go to-day, so Miss Venn put on her flying suit and Mr. Talker and Mr. Macdonald steadied Bressay in a light waggon and we all went down to the landing place where the men are building a hangar and airdrome." [Pg 346]

"Ah!" said Mrs. Duff. "I have heard of that. It is for cross country aviators. Is it possible that you put a pony in an airplane?"

"Indeed we did," said Dallas, "and poor Bressay looked frightened to death, but Miss Jazzamine told him she knew a veterinary in Toronto who put wooden legs on ponies and he would come back and be the hero of the country side just like a soldier. Then Zip! Roar! the plane was off and we formed a procession home with Big Wig at the head of it on Fetlar, and we sang,

"And shall our Bressay die?
Then 'bout a million Fawn Lake kids
Will know the reason why."

Mrs. Duff and her friend were convulsed with amusement, but they did not laugh until Dallas had run down to the wharf to meet his dear father, who had gone fishing and to please his boy had taken barbless hooks instead of barbed ones.

I stayed to watch Black Paws the raccoon, who was slyly hiding something behind the books in the living-room. When I found it was blueberry pie I told him he ought to be ashamed of himself, but he paid no attention to me.

That was the afternoon before we left and as Dallas and his father came to the house Madame de Valkonski said to Mrs. Duff, "I shall go to the school-house this evening." [Pg 347]

She did go, and fortunately, too, for when Mr. Macdonald flashed some pictures of Russia on the screen and Bolshy saw some soldiers beating an old woman he sprang to the platform. He was about to tear the screen to pieces when an order in Russian from Madame de Valkonski stopped him.

She stepped up beside him, asked questions, then said to the audience, "I pray you, my friends, pardon this poor man. That is his mother in the picture and the soldiers are his former companions who have turned into monsters. He says he is sorry to cause confusion for now he is against disorder. You may be pleased to know that I shall send for this poor mother to come and live in this tranquil place where you yet have so many pleasures."

The room rang with applause as the little lady stepped back to her seat beside Dallas and the now radiant Bolshy faced the audience and made his first speech in English.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, stretching out his long arms toward Russia, "Canada good!—Come!"

The house went wild, for Bolshy, who was working like a horse at helping Samp with farm work, was becoming a great favourite with the community.

After the pictures were over the people came pouring out of the school-room and my master paused outside the building to listen to the lovely sound of singing on the lake and the roads.

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"Canada, fair Canada,
God's blessing rest on thee."

came from a group of people up by the Talkers' and canoes on the lake answered,

"May His right hand protect our land
And guard her liberty."

Then Dallas went quickly to the farm-home where his parents were packing.

Seeing his mother standing before his wardrobe trunk he went into a quiet ecstasy.

"A mother—to pack one's trunk—but it is too much. I will finish. What are all these packages?"

"Presents for my boy from the kindly folk here."

"I don't deserve them," he said humbly. Then he added, "Mother, my dear, may I send a big bundle of nice things for their community Christmas tree?"

"Certainly," she said, "and, my boy, I have good news for you. Madame de Valkonski has discovered that the back of your head is shaped like her Paul's. Now she will love you like a second mother."

Dallas put his two hands on her arms. "Mother-my-love, I can have two mothers, three mothers, or a dozen mothers, but there will never be one like my very own."

Mrs. Duff was quite tired, but I could see as I looked in her boy's window that his words put new strength in her.

She straightened herself and said in her sweet though always husky voice, "Together, my boy, we shall see what we can do for the world. There is much unhappiness."

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Dallas put his arm round her and escorted her to her room upstairs, then he came out on the veranda and looked long and lovingly at the lake, smiling as he listened to the screaming gossip of the beloved loons about their approaching winter journey to southern climes.

Glancing behind him I saw Mr. Devering coming out of his office. The man was pained at the thought of parting from this dearly loved boy who had been such a care to him for so many years.

He was glad to give him up to his own parents, yet he wished to have a few last words with him.

However as he stepped round the north corner of the house Big Chief and Cassowary came round the south one, and as often happens the light step of youth got ahead of the slower one of middle age.

Both boy and girl pounced on their cousin standing there in the moonlight.

"I say!" exclaimed Big Chief, "come for a walk."

As the three went down the steps a disappointed expression came over Mr. Devering's face. When our dear lad came to Fawn Lake it was his uncle he sought. Now in his more normal outlook on life he chose companions of his own age.

Then, being a good man Mr. Devering's face became resigned.

"Pony," he said, coming over to me, "when I am dead and gone those three young creatures—bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, will carry on my work—God bless them!"

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Big Chief at that instant looked over his shoulder and called out, "Oh! Dad—you know where we're going. We won't be long. Fetlar—come too."

I had thought of going to my stable for I knew we would start on a long journey the next day. However a pony's duty is to obey and I travelled after the three.

Arm in arm they wandered along the road till they got to the beech-wood. Ah! Now I understood.

Big Chief pulled up under old King of the Glen.

"Dallas," he said, "I want to say good-bye to you here on this spot where your Pony stopped me from doing a fool thing that I would have been ashamed of all my life."

Dallas looked uncomfortable, and Big Chief went on, "I'm going to miss you like poison, and I've been thinking that you and I have got to see each other often. Will you promise to come back?"

"Rather," said Dallas, "and you must come to visit me."

At this instant Cassowary interposed. "I'm only a girl, but I think you might take me in."

Dallas flashed round on her, "Only a girl!" he said. "Some day you'll be a woman. Do you know what my mother says?"

"What?" asked Cassowary.

"She says that though your dad is her own brother, it's your mother that's behind most of the good work carried on in this place. She goes round among the women and finds out what is most needed then whispers in your Dad's ear—and don't you remember what Miss Jazzamine was reading to us yesterday?"

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"A mother is a mother still
The holiest thing alive."

Cassowary's face shone in the moonlight. "Mother is a wonder. I've always thought so."

Then she became sentimental. "If you two boys approve," she said, "I think it would be nice to have a covenant."

They both stared at her, and her black eyes grew mysterious.

"I knew two girls about to part. They pricked their arms with a pin and took a little, just a little blood out. Then they signed their names on paper—in red."

The two boys looked at each other trying not to smile.

Then Dallas said, "Have you got a match about you, Big Chief?"

"No sir," he said seriously, "Dad won't let me smoke."

"Because," said Dallas in his polite way, "you couldn't use a pin before you passed it through a flame on account of germs."

"I never thought of that," said Cassowary.

"I guess our word is good enough," said Big Chief. "We three cousins promise to stand by each other and look out for the little kids. Let's shake hands on it—King of the Glen and Fetlar witnesses."

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They shook hands solemnly, then Cassowary leaped on my back and the boys raced her home.

That was only last night, and now we—that is Mr. and Mrs. Duff, Madame de Valkonski, Dallas, Constancy the lamb, the pup, and I, are on a steamer going swiftly through a chain of lakes.

I am not afraid or lonely as I was when I came to this lovely Northland, for my master stands beside me and he says that we shall never be separated.

Would that every boy in the world had a pony, and every pony had as good a master as I have!

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BONNIE PRINCE FETLAR: THE STORY OF A PONY AND HIS FRIENDS ***

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