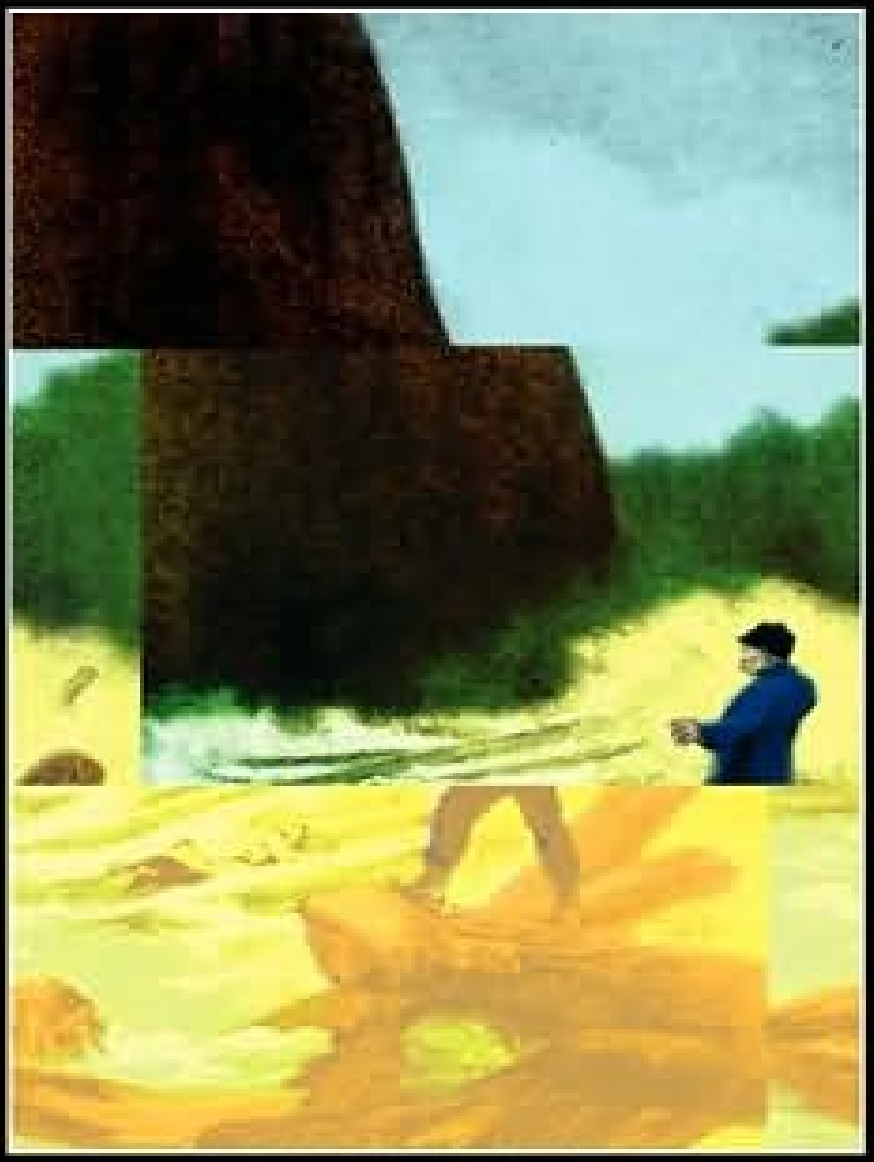

# The Backwoodsmen

## Illustrated Edition

**Charles G. D. Roberts**

DODO PRESS

Title: The Backwoodsmen

Author: Charles G. D. Roberts

Release Date: May 24, 2009 [EBook #28960]

Language: English



# THE BACKWOODSMEN


THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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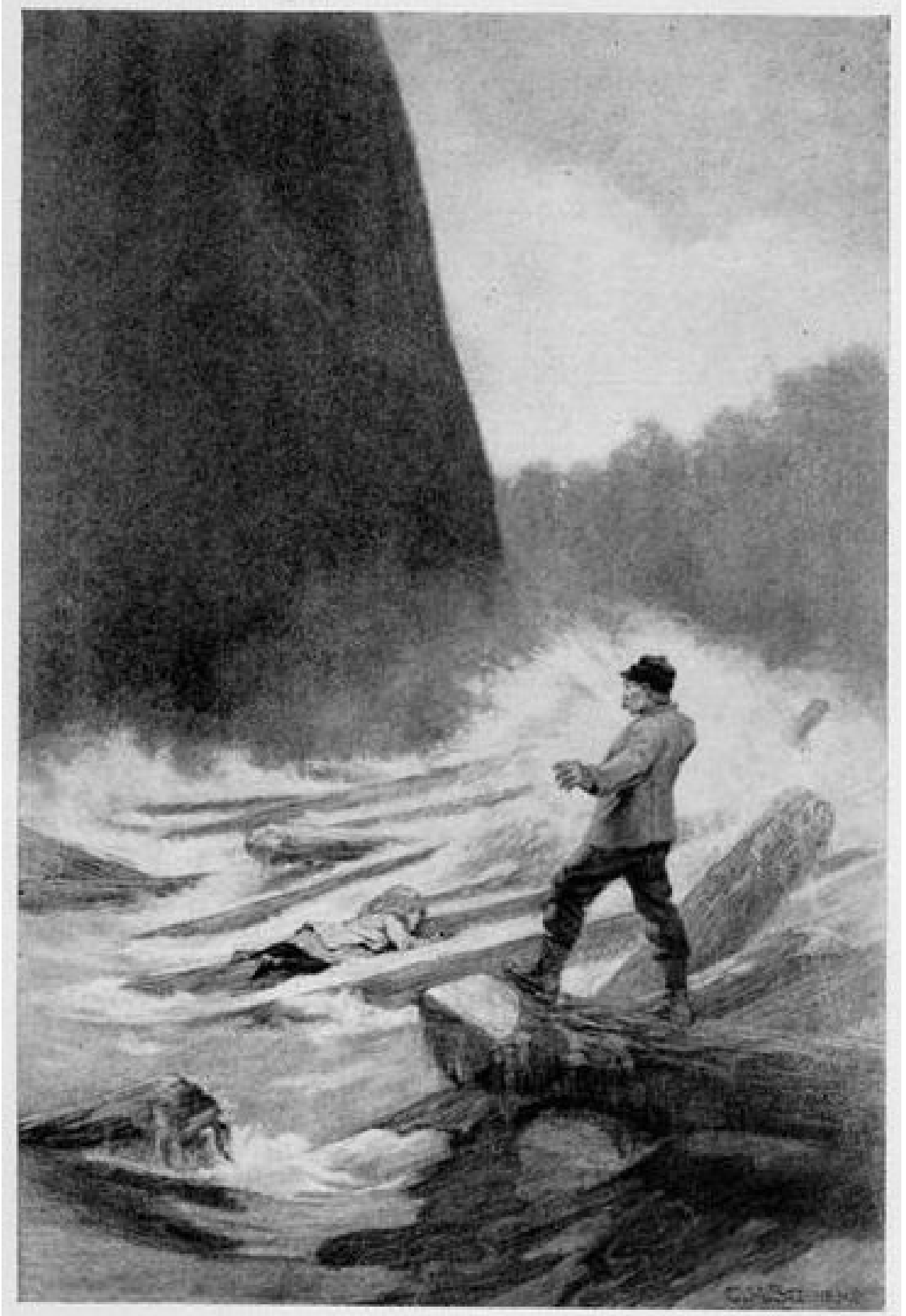

"Red McWha's big form shot past." *(See page 136)*

# THE

# BACKWOODSMEN

BY


## CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF "THE KINDRED OF THE WILD," "THE HOUSE IN THE WATER," "THE HEART OF THE ANCIENT WOOD," ETC.


ILLUSTRATED


New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1909

Norwood Press
J. S. Gushing Co.—Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

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# The Vagrants of the Barren

With thick smoke in his throat and the roar of flame in his ears, Pete Noël awoke, shaking as if in the grip of a nightmare. He sat straight up in his bunk. Instantly he felt his face scorching. The whole cabin was ablaze. Leaping from his bunk, and dragging the blankets with him, he sprang to the door, tore it open, and rushed out into the snow.

But being a woodsman, and alert in every sense like the creatures of the wild themselves, his wits were awake almost before his body was, and his instincts were even quicker than his wits. The desolation and the savage cold of the wilderness had admonished him even in that terrifying moment. As he leaped out in desperate flight, he had snatched with him not only the blankets, but his rifle and cartridge-belt from where they stood by the head of the bunk, and also his larrigans and great blanket coat from where they lay by its foot. He had been sleeping, according to custom, almost fully clothed.

Outside in the snow he stood, blinking through scorched and smarting lids at the destruction of his shack. For a second or two he stared down at the things he clutched in his arms, and wondered how he had come to think of them in time. Then, realizing with a pang that he needed something more than clothes and a rifle, he flung them down on the snow and made a dash for the cabin, in the hope of rescuing a hunk of bacon or a loaf of his substantial woodsman's bread. But before he could reach the door a licking flame shot out and hurled him back, half blinded. Grabbing up a double handful of snow, he buried his face in it to ease the smart. Then he shook himself, coolly carried the treasures he had saved back to a safe distance from the flames, and sat down on the blankets to put on his larrigans.

His feet, clothed only in a single pair of thick socks, were almost frozen, while the rest of his body was roasting in the fierce heat of the conflagration. It wanted about two hours of dawn. There was not a breath of air stirring, and the flames shot straight up, murky red and clear yellow intertwisting, with here and there a sudden leaping tongue of violet white. Outside the radius of the heat the tall woods snapped sharply in the intense cold. It was so cold, indeed, that as the man stood watching the ruin of his little, lonely home, shielding his face from the blaze now with one hand then with the other, his back seemed turning to ice.

The man who lives alone in the great solitude of the forest has every chance to become a philosopher. Pete Noël was a philosopher. Instead of dwelling upon the misfortunes which had smitten him, he chose to consider his good luck in having got out of the shack alive. Putting on his coat, he noted with satisfaction that its spacious pockets contained matches, tobacco, his pipe, his heavy clasp-knife, and his mittens. He was a hundred miles from the nearest settlement, fifty or sixty from the nearest lumber-camp. He had no food. The snow was four feet deep, and soft. And his trusty snowshoes, which would have made these distances and these difficulties of small account to him, were helping feed the blaze. Nevertheless, he thought, things might have been much worse. What if he had escaped in his bare feet? This thought reminded him of how cold his feet were at this moment. Well, the old shack had been a good one, and sheltered him well enough. Now that it would shelter him no longer, it should at least be made to contribute something more to his comfort. Piling his blankets carefully under the shelter of a broad stump, he sat down upon them. Then he filled and lighted his pipe, leaned back luxuriously, and stretched out his feet to the blaze. It would be time enough for him to “get a move on” when the shack was quite burned down. The shack was home as long as it lasted.

When the first mystic greyness, hard like steel and transparent like

glass, began to reveal strange vistas among the ancient trees, the fire died down. The shack was a heap of ashes and pulsating, scarlet embers, with here and there a flickering, half-burned timber, and the red-hot wreck of the tiny stove sticking up in the ruins. As soon as the ruins were cool enough to approach, Pete picked up a green pole, and began poking earnestly among them. He had all sorts of vague hopes. He particularly wanted his axe, a tin kettle, and something to eat. The axe was nowhere to be found, at least in such a search as could then be made. The tins, obviously, had all gone to pieces or melted. But he did, at least, scratch out a black, charred lump about the size of his fist, which gave forth an appetizing smell. When the burnt outside had been carefully scraped off, it proved to be the remnant of a side of bacon. Pete fell to his breakfast with about as much ceremony as might have sufficed a hungry wolf, the deprivation of a roof-tree having already taken him back appreciably nearer to the elemental brute. Having devoured his burnt bacon, and quenched his thirst by squeezing some half-melted snow into a cup of birch-bark, he rolled his blankets into a handy pack, squared his shoulders, and took the trail for Conroy's Camp, fifty miles southwestward.

It was now that Pete Noël began to realize the perils that confronted him. Without his snowshoes, he found himself almost helpless. Along the trail the snow was from three to four feet deep, and soft. There had been no thaws and no hard winds to pack it down. After floundering ahead for four or five hundred yards he would have to stop and rest, half reclining. In spite of the ferocious cold, he was soon drenched with sweat. After a couple of hours of such work, he found himself consumed with thirst. He had nothing to melt the snow in; and, needless to say, he knew better than to ease his need by eating the snow itself. But he hit upon a plan which filled him with self-gratulation. Lighting a tiny fire beside the trail, under the shelter of a huge hemlock, he took off his red cotton neckerchief, filled it with snow, and held it to the flames. As the snow began to melt, he squeezed the water from it in a liberal stream. But, alas! the stream was of a colour

that was not enticing. He realized, with a little qualm, that it had not occurred to him to wash that handkerchief since—well, he was unwilling to say when. For all the insistence of his thirst, therefore, he continued melting the snow and squeezing it out, till the resulting stream ran reasonably clear. Then patiently he drank, and afterward smoked three pipefuls of his rank, black tobacco as substitute for the square meal which his stomach was craving.

All through the biting silent day he floundered resolutely on, every now and then drawing his belt a little tighter, and all the while keeping a hungry watch for game of some kind. What he hoped for was rabbit, partridge, or even a fat porcupine; but he would have made a shift to stomach even the wiry muscles of a mink, and count himself fortunate. By sunset he came out on the edge of a vast barren, glorious in washes of thin gold and desolate purple under the touch of the fading west. Along to eastward ran a low ridge, years ago licked by fire, and now crested with a sparse line of ghostly rampikes, their lean, naked tops appealing to the inexorable sky. This was the head of the Big Barren. With deep disgust, and something like a qualm of apprehension, Pete Noël reflected that he had made only fifteen miles in that long day of effort. And he was ravenously hungry. Well, he was too tired to go farther that night; and in default of a meal, the best thing he could do was sleep. First, however, he unlaced his larrigans, and with the thongs made shift to set a clumsy snare in a rabbit track a few paces back among the spruces. Then, close under the lee of a black wall of fir-trees standing out beyond the forest skirts, he clawed himself a deep trench in the snow. In one end of this trench he built a little fire, of broken deadwood and green birch saplings laboriously hacked into short lengths with his clasp-knife. A supply of this firewood, dry and green mixed, he piled beside the trench within reach. The bottom of the trench, to within a couple of feet of the fire, he lined six inches deep with spruce-boughs, making a dry, elastic bed.

By the time these preparations were completed, the sharp-starred winter night had settled down upon the solitude. In all the vast there was no sound but the occasional snap, hollow and startling, of some great tree overstrung by the frost, and the intimate little whisper and hiss of Pete's fire down in the trench. Disposing a good bunch of boughs under his head, Pete lighted his pipe, rolled himself in his blankets, and lay down with his feet to the fire.

There at the bottom of his trench, comforted by pipe and fire, hidden away from the emptiness of the enormous, voiceless world outside, Pete Noël looked up at the icy stars, and at the top of the frowning black rampart of the fir-trees, touched grimly with red flashes from his fire. He knew well—none better than he—the savage and implacable sternness of the wild. He knew how dreadful the silent adversary against whom he had been called, all unprepared, to pit his craft. There was no blinking the imminence of his peril. Hitherto he had always managed to work, more or less, *with* nature, and so had come to regard the elemental forces as friendly. Now they had turned upon him altogether and without warning. His anger rose as he realized that he was at bay. The indomitable man-spirit awoke with the anger. Sitting up suddenly, over the edge of the trench his deep eyes looked out upon the shadowy spaces of the night with challenge and defiance. Against whatever odds, he declared to himself, he was master. Having made his proclamation in that look, Pete Noël lay down again and went to sleep.

After the fashion of winter campers and of woodsmen generally, he awoke every hour or so to replenish the fire; but toward morning he sank into the heavy sleep of fatigue. When he aroused himself from this, the fire was stone grey, the sky overhead was whitish, flecked with pink streamers, and rose-pink lights flushed delicately the green wall of the fir-trees leaning above him. The edges of the blankets around his face were rigid and thick with ice from his breathing. Breaking them away roughly, he sat up, cursed himself for having let

the fire out, then, with his eyes just above the edge of the trench, peered forth across the shining waste. As he did so, he instinctively shrank back into concealment. An eager light flamed into his eyes, and he blessed his luck that the fire had gone out. Along the crest of the ridge, among the rampikes, silhouetted dark and large against the sunrise, moved a great herd of caribou, feeding as they went.

Crouching low in his trench, Pete hurriedly did up his blankets, fixed the pack on his back, then crawled through the snow into the shelter of the fir-woods. As soon as he was out of sight, he arose, recovered the thongs of his larrigans from the futile snare, and made his way back on the trail as fast as he could flounder. That one glance over the edge of his trench had told his trained eye all he needed to know about the situation.

The caribou, most restless, capricious, and far-wandering of all the wilderness kindreds, were drifting south on one of their apparently aimless migrations. They were travelling on the ridge, because, as Pete instantly inferred, the snow there had been partly blown away, partly packed, by the unbroken winds. They were far out of gunshot. But he was going to trail them down even through that deep snow. By tireless persistence and craft he would do it, if he had to do it on his hands and knees.

Such wind as there was, a light but bitter air drawing irregularly down out of the north-west, blew directly from the man to the herd, which was too far off, however, to catch the ominous taint and take alarm. Pete's first care was to work around behind the herd till this danger should be quite eliminated. For a time his hunger was forgotten in the interest of the hunt; but presently, as he toiled his slow way through the deep of the forest, it grew too insistent to be ignored. He paused to strip bark from such seedlings of balsam fir as he chanced upon, scraping off and devouring the thin, sweetish pulp that lies between the bark and the mature wood. He gathered, also, the spicy tips of the birch-buds, chewing them up by handfuls and spitting out the residue

of hard husks. And in this way he managed at least to soothe down his appetite from angry protest to a kind of doubtful expectancy.

At last, after a couple of hours' hard floundering, the woods thinned, the ground sloped upward, and he came out upon the flank of the ridge, a long way behind the herd, indeed, but well around the wind. In the trail of the herd the snow was broken up, and not more than a foot and a half in depth. On a likely-looking hillock he scraped it away carefully with his feet, till he reached the ground; and here he found what he expected—a few crimson berries of the wintergreen, frozen, but plump and sweet-fleshed. Half a handful of these served for the moment to cajole his hunger, and he pressed briskly but warily along the ridge, availing himself of the shelter of every rampike in his path. At last, catching sight of the hindmost stragglers of the herd, still far out of range, he crouched like a cat, and crossed over the crest of the ridge for better concealment.

On the eastern slope the ridge carried numerous thickets of underbrush. From one to another of these Pete crept swiftly, at a rate which should bring him, in perhaps an hour, abreast of the leisurely moving herd. In an hour, then, he crawled up to the crest again, under cover of a low patch of juniper scrub. Confidently he peered through the scrub, his rifle ready. But his face grew black with bitter disappointment. The capricious beasts had gone. Seized by one of their incomprehensible vagaries—Pete was certain that he had not alarmed them—they were now far out on the white level, labouring heavily southward.

Pete set his jaws resolutely. Hunger and cold, each the mightier from their alliance, were now assailing him savagely. His first impulse was to throw off all concealment and rush straight down the broad-trodden trail. But on second thought he decided that he would lose more than he would gain by such tactics. Hampered though they were by the deep, soft snow, he knew that, once frightened, they could travel through it much faster than they were now moving, and very much

faster than he could hope to follow. Assuredly, patience was his game. Slipping furtively from rampike to rampike, now creeping, now worming his way like a snake, he made good time down to the very edge of the level. Then, concealment no more possible, and the rear of the herd still beyond gunshot, he emerged boldly from the covert of a clump of saplings and started in pursuit. At the sight of him, every antlered head went up in the air for one moment of wondering alarm; then, through a rolling white cloud the herd fled onward at a speed which Pete, with all his knowledge of their powers, had not imagined possible in such a state of the snow. Sullen, but not discouraged, he plodded after them.

Noël was now fairly obsessed with the one idea of overtaking the herd. Every other thought, sense, or faculty was dully occupied with his hunger and his effort to keep from thinking of it. Hour after hour he plodded on, following the wide, chaotic trail across the white silence of the barren. There was nothing to lift his eyes for, so he kept them automatically occupied in saving his strength by picking the easiest steps through the ploughed snow. He did not notice at all that the sun no longer sparkled over the waste. He did not notice that the sky had turned from hard blue to ghostly pallor. He did not notice that the wind, now blowing in his teeth, had greatly increased in force. Suddenly, however, he was aroused by a swirl of fine snow driven so fiercely that it crossed his face like a lash. Lifting his eyes from the trail, he saw that the plain all about him was blotted from sight by a streaming rout of snow-clouds. The wind was already whining its strange derisive menace in his face. The blizzard had him.

As the full fury of the storm swooped upon him, enwrapping him, and clutching at his breath, for an instant Pete Noël quailed. This was a new adversary, with whom he had not braced his nerves to grapple. But it was for an instant only. Then his weary spirit lifted itself, and he looked grimly into the eye of the storm. The cold, the storm, the hunger, he would face them all down, and win out yet. Lowering his

head, and pulling a flap of his blanket coat across his mouth to make breathing easier, he plunged straight forward with what seemed like a new lease of vigour.

Had the woods been near, or had he taken note of the weather in time, Pete would have made for the shelter of the forest at once. But he knew that, when last he looked, the track of the herd had been straight down the middle of the ever-widening barren. By now he must be a good two miles from the nearest cover; and he knew well enough that, in the bewilderment of the storm, which blunted even such woodcraft as his, and blurred not only his vision, but every other sense as well, he could never find his way. His only hope was to keep to the trail of the caribou. The beasts would either lie down or circle to the woods. In such a storm as this, as he knew well enough, no animal but man himself could hunt, or follow up the trail. There was no one but man who could confront such a storm undaunted. The caribou would forget both their cunning and the knowledge that they were being hunted. He would come upon them, or they would lead him to shelter. With an obstinate pride in his superiority to the other creatures of the wilderness, he scowled defiantly at the storm, and because he was overwrought with hunger and fatigue, he muttered to himself as he went, cursing the elements that assailed him so relentlessly.

For hours he floundered on doggedly, keeping the trail by feeling rather than by sight, so thick were the cutting swirls of snow. As the drift heaped denser and denser about his legs, the terrible effort, so long sustained, began to tell on him, till his progress became only a snail's pace. Little by little, in the obstinate effort to conserve strength and vitality, his faculties all withdrew into themselves, and concentrated themselves upon the one purpose—to keep going onward. He began to feel the lure of just giving up. He began to think of the warmth and rest he could get, the release from the mad chaos of the wind, by the simple expedient of burrowing deep into the deep snow. He knew well enough that simple trick of the partridge, when

frost and storm grow too ferocious for it. But his wiser spirit would not let him delude himself. Had he had a full stomach, and food in his pockets, he might, perhaps, safely have emulated this cunning trick of the partridge. But now, starving, weary, his vitality at the last ebb, he knew that if he should yield to the lure of the snow, he would be seen no more till the spring sun should reveal him, a thing of horror to the returning vireos and blackbirds, on the open, greening face of the barren. No, he would not burrow to escape the wind. He laughed aloud as he thought upon the madness of it; and went butting and plunging on into the storm, indomitable.

Suddenly, however, he stopped short, with a great sinking at his heart. He felt cautiously this way and that, first with his feet, fumbling through the deep snow, and then with his hands. At last he turned his back abruptly to the wind, cowered down with his head between his arms to shut out the devilish whistling and whining, and tried to think how or when it had happened. He had lost the trail of the herd!

All his faculties stung to keen wakefulness by this appalling knowledge, he understood how it happened, but not where. The drifts had filled the trail, till it was utterly blotted off the face of the plain; then he had kept straight on, guided by the pressure of the wind. But the caribou, meanwhile, had swerved, and moved off in another direction. Which direction? He had to acknowledge to himself that he had no clue to judge by, so whimsical were these antlered vagrants of the barren. Well, he thought doggedly, let them go! He would get along without them. Staggering to his feet, he faced the gale again, and thought hard, striving to remember what the direction of the wind had been when last he observed it, and at the same time to recall the lay of the heavy-timbered forest that skirted this barren on two sides.

At length he made up his mind where the nearest point of woods must be. He saw it in his mind's eye, a great promontory of black firs jutting out into the waste. He turned, calculating warily, till the wind came whipping full upon his left cheek. Sure that he was now facing his one

possible refuge, he again struggled forward. And as he went, he pictured to himself the whole caribou herd, now half foundered in the drift, labouring toward the same retreat. Once more, crushing back hunger and faintness, he summoned up his spirit, and vowed that if the beasts could fight their way to cover, he could. Then his woodcraft should force the forest to render him something in the way of food that would suffice to keep life in his veins.

For perhaps half an hour this defiant and unvanquishable spirit kept Pete Noël going. But as the brief northern day began to wane, and a shadow to darken behind the thick, white gloom of the storm, his forces, his tough, corded muscles and his tempered nerves, again began to falter. He caught himself stumbling, and seeking excuse for delay in getting up. In spite of every effort of his will, he saw visions—thick, protecting woods close at one side or the other, or a snug log camp, half buried in the drifts, but with warm light flooding from its windows. Indignantly he would shake himself back into sanity, and the delectable visions would vanish. But while they lasted they were confusing, and presently when he aroused himself from one that was of particularly heart-breaking vividness, he found that he had let his rifle drop! It was gone hopelessly. The shock steadied him for some minutes. Well, he had his knife. After all, that was the more important of the two. He ploughed onward, once more keenly awake, and grappling with his fate.

The shadows thickened rapidly; and at last, bending with the insane riot of the storm, began to make strange, monstrous shapes. Unravelling these illusions, and exorcising them, kept Pete Noël occupied. But suddenly one of these monstrous shapes neglected to vanish. He was just about to throw himself upon it, in half delirious antagonism, when it lurched upward with a snort, and struggled away from him. In an instant Pete was alive in every faculty, stung with an ecstasy of hope. Leaping, floundering, squirming, he followed, open knife in hand. Again and yet again the foundered beast, a big caribou

bull, buried halfway up the flank, eluded him. Then, as his savage scramble at last overtook it, the bull managed to turn half about, and thrust him violently in the left shoulder with an antler-point. Unheeding the hurt, Noël clutched the antler with his left hand, and forced it inexorably back. The next moment his knife was drawn with practised skill across the beast's throat.

Like most of our eastern woodsmen, Pete Noël was even finicky about his food, and took all his meat cooked to a brown. He loathed underdone flesh. Now, however, he was an elemental creature, battling with the elements for his life. And he knew, moreover, that of all possible restoratives, the best was at his hand. He drove his blade again, this time to the bull's heart. As the wild life sighed itself out, and vanished, Pete crouched down like an animal, and drank the warm, red fluid streaming from the victim's throat. As he did so, the ebbed tide of warmth, power, and mastery flooded back into his own veins. He drank his fill; then, burrowing half beneath the massive body, he lay down close against it to rest and consider.

Assured now of food to sustain him on the journey, assured of his own ability to master all other obstacles that might seek to withstand him, Pete Noël made up his mind to sleep, wrapping himself in his blankets under the shelter of the dead bull. Then the old hunter's instinct began to stir. All about him, in every momentary lull of the wind, were snortings and heavy breathings. He had wandered into the midst of the exhausted herd. Here was a chance to recoup himself, in some small part, for the loss of his cabin and supplies. He could kill a few of the helpless animals, hide them in the snow, and take the bearings of the spot as soon as the weather cleared. By and by he could get a team from the nearest settlement, and haul out the frozen meat for private sale when the game warden chanced to have his eyes shut.

"One of these monstrous shapes neglected to vanish."

Getting out his knife again, he crept stealthily toward the nearest heavy breathing. Before he could detect the beast in that tumultuous gloom, he was upon it. His outstretched left hand fell upon a wildly heaving flank. The frightened animal arose with a gasping snort, and

tried to escape; but utterly exhausted, it sank down again almost immediately, resigned to this unknown doom which stole upon it out of the tempest and the dark. Pete's hand was on it again the moment it was still. He felt it quiver and shrink beneath his touch. Instinctively he began to stroke and rub the stiff hair as he slipped his treacherous hand forward along the heaving flank. The heavings grew quieter, the frightened snortings ceased. The exhausted animal seemed to feel a reassurance in that strong, quiet touch.

When Pete's hand had reached the unresisting beast's neck, he began to feel a qualm of misgiving. His knife was in the other hand, ready for use there in the howling dark; but somehow he could not at once bring himself to use it. It would be a betrayal. Yet he had suffered a grievous loss, and here, given into his grasp by fate, was the compensation. He hesitated, arguing with himself impatiently. But even as he did so, he kept stroking that firm, warm, living neck; and through the contact there in the savage darkness, a sympathy passed between the man and the beast. He could not help it. The poor beasts and he were in the same predicament, together holding the battlements of life against the blind and brutal madness of storm. Moreover, the herd had saved him. The debt was on his side. The caress which had been so traitorous grew honest and kind. With a shamefaced grin Pete shut his knife, and slipped it back into his pocket.

With both hands, now, he stroked the tranquil caribou, rubbing it behind the ears and at the base of the antlers, which seemed to give it satisfaction. Once when his hand strayed down the long muzzle, the animal gave a terrified start and snort at the dreaded man smell so violently invading its nostrils. But Pete kept on soothingly and firmly; and again the beast grew calm. At length Pete decided that his best place for the night, or until the storm should lift, would be by the warmth of this imprisoned and peaceable animal. Digging down into the snow beyond the clutches of the wind, he rolled himself in his

blankets, crouched close against the caribou's flank, and went confidently to sleep.

Aware of living companionship, Noël slept soundly through the clamour of the storm. At last a movement against his side disturbed him. He woke to feel that his strange bedfellow had struggled up and withdrawn. The storm was over. The sky above his upturned face was sharp with stars. All about him was laboured movement, with heavy shuffling, coughing, and snorting. Forgetful of their customary noiselessness, the caribou were breaking gladly from their imprisonment. Presently Pete was alone. The cold was still and of snapping intensity; but he, deep in his hollow, and wrapped in his blankets, was warm. Still drowsy, he muffled his face and went to sleep again for another hour.

When he roused himself a second time he was wide awake and refreshed. It was just past the edge of dawn. The cold gripped like a vice. Faint mystic hues seemed frozen for ever into the ineffable crystal of the air. Pete stood up, and looked eastward along the tumbled trail of the herd. Not half a mile away stood the forest, black and vast, the trail leading straight into it. Then, a little farther down toward the right he saw something that made his heart leap exultantly. Rising straight up, a lavender and silver lily against the pallid saffron of the east, soared a slender smoke. That smoke, his trained eyes told him, came from a camp chimney; and he realized that the lumbermen had moved up to him from the far-off head of the Ottanoonsis.

# MacPhairrson's Happy Family

## I

It was over a little footbridge one had to pass to visit MacPhairrson and his family, a little, lofty, curiously constructed footbridge, spanning a narrow but very furious torrent. At the middle of the bridge was a gate—or, rather, a door—of close and strong wire mesh; and at this point, door and bridge together were encircled by a *chevaux-de-frise* of woodwork with sharp, radiating points of heavy telegraph wire. With the gate shut, nothing less than a pair of wings in good working order could carry one over to the steep little island in mid-torrent which was MacPhairrson's home and citadel.

Carried caressingly in the hollow of his left arm, the Boy held a brown burlap bag, which wriggled violently at times and had to be soothed into quiescence. When the Boy arrived at the door in the bridge, which he found locked, he was met by two strange hosts who peered at him wisely through the meshes of the door. One of these was a large black and tan dog, with the long body, wavy hair, drooping silken ears, and richly feathered tail of a Gordon setter, most grotesquely supported, at a height of not more than eight inches from the ground, by the little bow-legs of a dachshund. This freakish and sinister-looking animal gazed at the visitor with eyes of sagacious welcome, tongue hanging amiably half out, and tail gently waving. He approved of this particular Boy, though boys in general he regarded as nuisances to be tolerated rather than encouraged. The other host, standing close beside the dog as if on guard, and scrutinizing the visitor with little, pale, shrewdly non-committal eyes, was a half-grown black and white pig.

Through the gate the Boy murmured familiar greetings to its warders while he pulled a wooden handle which set an old brown cow-bell above the door jangling hoarsely. The summer air was full to brimming over with sound—with the roar of the furious little torrent beneath, with the thunder of the sheet of cream and amber water falling over the face of the dam some fifty yards above, with the hiss and shriek of the saws in the big sawmill perched beside the dam. Yet through all the interwoven tissue of noise the note of the cow-bell made itself heard in the cabin. From behind the cabin arose a sonorous cry of *hong-ka, honk-a-honk*, and the snaky black head of a big Canada goose appeared inquiringly around the corner. On one end of the hewn log which served as doorstep a preternaturally large and fat woodchuck sat bolt upright and stared to see who was coming. A red fox, which had been curled up asleep under MacPhairrson's one rose bush, awoke, and superciliously withdrew to the other side of the island, out of sight, disapproving of all visitors on principle. From the shade of a thick spruce bush near the bridge-end a moose calf lumbered lazily to her feet, and stood staring, her head low down and her big ears waving in sleepy interrogation. From within the cabin came a series of harsh screeches mixed with discordant laughter and cries of "Ebenezer! Ebenezer! Oh, by Gee! Hullo!" Then the cabin door swung wide, and in the doorway appeared MacPhairrson, leaning on his crutches, a green parrot on his shoulder, and beside his crippled feet two big white cats.

MacPhairrson, the parrot, and the cats, all together stared hard at the door on the bridge, striving to make out through the meshes who the visitor might be. The parrot, scrutinizing fiercely with her sinister black and orange eyes, was the first to discover. She proclaimed at once her discovery and her approval by screeching, "Boy! Boy! Oh, by Gee! Hullo!" and clambering head-first down the front of MacPhairrson's coat. As MacPhairrson hobbled hastily forward to admit the welcome guest, the parrot, reaching out with beak and claw,

transferred herself to the moving crutch, whence she made a futile snap at one of the white cats. Foiled in this amiable attempt, she climbed hurriedly up the crutch again and resumed MacPhairrson's shoulder, in time to greet the Boy's entrance with a cordial "Oh, by Gee! Hullo!"

MacPhairrson (he spelled his name scrupulously MacPherson, but, like all the other dwellers in the Settlement, pronounced it MacPhairrson, with a punctilious rolling of the r) was an old lumberman. Rheumatism, brought on by years of toiling thigh-deep in the icy waters when the logs were running in the freshets, had gripped him so relentlessly that one of his legs was twisted to almost utter uselessness. With his crutches, however, he could get about after his fashion; and being handy with his fingers and versatile of wit, he managed to make a living well enough at the little odd jobs of mechanical repairing which the Settlement folk, and the mill hands in particular, brought to his cabin. His cabin, which was practically a citadel, stood on a steep cone of rock, upthrust from the bed of the wild little river which worked the mill. On the summit of a rock a few square rods of soil gave room for the cabin, half a dozen bushes, and some sandy, sun-warmed turf. In this retreat, within fifty yards of the busy mill, but fenced about by the foaming torrent and quite inaccessible except by the footbridge, MacPhairrson lived with the motley group of companions which men called his Happy Family.

Happy, no doubt, they were, in spite of the strait confines of their prison, for MacPhairrson ruled them by the joint forces of authority and love. He had, moreover, the mystic understanding which is essential if one would be really intimate with the kindreds we carelessly call dumb. So it was that he achieved a fair degree of concord in his Family. All the creatures were amiable towards him, because they loved him; and because they wholesomely feared him, they were amiable in the main towards each other. There were certain members of the Family who might be described as perennial. They

were of the nature of established institutions. Such were Stumpy, the freak-legged dachshund-setter; James Edward, the wild gander; Butters, the woodchuck; Melindy and Jim, the two white cats; Bones, the brown owl, who sat all day on the edge of a box in the darkest corner of the cabin; and Ananias-and-Sapphira, the green parrot, so named, as MacPhairrson was wont to explain, because she was so human and he never could quite make her out. Ebenezer, the pig, was still too young to be promoted to permanence; but he had already shown such character, intelligence, and self-respecting individuality that MacPhairrson had vowed he should never deteriorate into pork. Ebenezer should stay, even though he should grow so big as to be inconvenient.

But with Susan, the moose calf, and Carrots, the unsociable young fox, it was different. MacPhairrson realized that when Susan should come to her full heritage of stature, he would hardly have room for her on the island. He would then send to the Game Commissioner at Fredericton for a permit, and sell the good soul to the agent for some Zoölogical Garden, where she would be appreciated and cared for. As for Carrots, his conduct was irreproachable, absolutely without blot or blemish, but MacPhairrson knew that he was quite unregenerate at heart. The astute little beast understood well enough the fundamental law of the Family, “Live and let live,” and he knew that if he should break that law, doom would descend upon him in an eye-wink. But into his narrowed, inscrutable eyes, as he lay with muzzle on dainty, outstretched black paws and watched the movements of James Edward, the gander, or Butters, the fat woodchuck, a savage glint would come, which MacPhairrson unerringly interpreted. Moreover, while his demeanour was impeccable, his reserve was impenetrable, and even the tolerant and kindly MacPhairrson could find nothing in him to love. The decree, therefore, had gone forth; that is, it had been announced by MacPhairrson himself, and apparently approved by the ever attentive Stumpy and Ebenezer, that Carrots should be sold into exile at the very first opportunity.

When the Boy came through the little bridge gate, the greetings between him and MacPhairrson were brief and quiet. They were fellows both in the taciturn brotherhood of the woods. To Stumpy and Ebenezer, who nosed affectionately at his legs, he paid no attention beyond a careless touch of caress. Even to Ananias-and-Sapphira, who had hurriedly clambered from MacPhairrson's shoulder to his and begun softly nipping at his ear with her dreaded beak, he gave no heed whatever. He knew that the evil-tempered bird loved him as she loved his master and would be scrupulously careful not to pinch too hard.

As the little procession moved gravely and silently up from the bridge to the cabin, their silence was in no way conspicuous, for the whole air throbbed with the rising and falling shriek of the saws, the trampling of the falls, and the obscurely rhythmic rush of the torrent around the island base. They were presently joined by Susan, shambling on her ungainly legs, wagging her big ears, and stretching out her long, ugly, flexible, overhanging nose to sniff inquiringly at the Boy's jacket. A comparatively new member of MacPhairrson's family, she was still full of curiosity about every one and everything, and obviously considered it her mission in life to acquire knowledge. It was her firm conviction that the only way to know a thing was to smell it.

A few steps from the door James Edward, the wild gander, came forward with dignity, slightly bowing his long, graceful black neck and narrow snaky head as he moved. Had the Boy been a stranger, he would now have met the first touch of hostility. Not all MacPhairrson's manifest favour would have prevented the uncompromising and dauntless gander from greeting the visitor with a savage hiss and uplifted wings of defiance. But towards the Boy, whom he knew well, his dark, sagacious eye expressed only tolerance, which from him was no small condescension.

On the doorstep, as austerely ungracious in his welcome as James

Edward himself, sat Butters, the woodchuck, nursing some secret grudge against the world in general, or, possibly, against Ananias-and-Sapphira in particular, with whom he was on terms of vigilant neutrality. When the procession approached, he forsook the doorstep, turned his fat, brown back upon the visitor, and became engrossed in gnawing a big cabbage stalk. He was afraid that if he should seem good-natured and friendly, he might be called upon to show off some of the tricks which MacPhairrson, with inexhaustible patience, had taught him. He was not going to turn somersaults, or roll over backward, or walk like a dancing bear, for any Boy alive!

This ill humour of Butters, however, attracted no notice. It was accepted by both MacPhairrson and his visitor as a thing of course. Moreover, there were matters of more moment afoot. That lively, squirming bag which the Boy carried so carefully in the hollow of his left arm was exciting the old woodsman's curiosity. The lumbermen and mill hands, as well as the farmer-folk of the Settlement for miles about, were given to bringing MacPhairrson all kinds of wild creatures as candidates for admission to his Happy Family. So whenever any one came with something alive in a bag, MacPhairrson would regard the bag with that hopeful and eager anticipation with which a child regards its Christmas stocking.

When the two had entered the cabin and seated themselves, the Boy in the big barrel chair by the window, and MacPhairrson on the edge of his bunk, not three feet away, the rest of the company gathered in a semicircle of expectation in the middle of the floor. That is, Stumpy and Ebenezer and the two white cats did so, their keen noses as well as their inquisitive eyes having been busied about the bundle. Even James Edward came a few steps inside the door, and with a fine assumption of unconcern kept himself in touch with the proceedings. Only Susan was really indifferent, lying down outside the door—Susan, and that big bunch of fluffy brown feathers on the barrel in the corner of the cabin.

The air fairly thrilled with expectation as the boy took the wriggling bag on his knee and started to open it. The moment there was an opening, out came a sharp little black nose pushing and twisting eagerly for freedom. The nose was followed in an instant by a pair of dark, intelligent, mischievous eyes. Then a long-tailed young raccoon squirmed forth, clambered up to the Boy's shoulder, and turned to eye the assemblage with bright defiance. Never before in his young life had he seen such a remarkable assemblage; which, after all, was not strange, as there was surely not another like it in the world.

The new-comer's reception, on the whole, was not unfriendly. The two white cats, to be sure, fluffed their tails a little, drew back from the circle, and went off to curl up in the sun and sleep off their aversion to a stranger. James Edward, too, his curiosity satisfied, haughtily withdrew. But Stumpy, as acknowledged dean of the Family, wagged his tail, hung out his pink tongue as far as it would go, and panted a welcome so obvious that a much less intelligent animal than the young raccoon could not have failed to understand it. Ebenezer was less demonstrative, but his little eyes twinkled with unmistakable good-will. Ananias-and-Sapphira was extraordinarily interested. In a tremendous hurry she scrambled down MacPhairrson's arm, down his leg, across the floor, and up the Boy's trousers. The Boy was a little anxious.

"Will she bite him?" he asked, preparing to defend his pet.

"I reckon she won't," answered MacPhairrson, observing that the capricious bird's plumage was not ruffled, but pressed down so hard and smooth and close to her body that she looked much less than her usual size. "Generally she ain't ugly when she looks that way. But she's powerful interested, I tell you!"

The little raccoon was crouching on the Boy's right shoulder. Ananias-and-Sapphira, using beak and claws, scrambled nimbly to the other shoulder. Then, reaching far around past the Boy's face, she fixed the stranger piercingly with her unwinking gaze, and emitted an ear-

splitting shriek of laughter. The little coon's nerves were not prepared for such a strain. In his panic he fairly tumbled from his perch to the floor, and straightway fled for refuge to the broad back of the surprised and flattered pig.

"The little critter's all right!" declared MacPhairrson, when he and the Boy were done laughing. "Ananias-an'-Sapphira won't hurt him. She likes all the critters she kin bully an' skeer. An' Stumpy an' that comical cuss of a Ebenezer, they be goin' to look out fer him."

## II

About a week after this admission of the little raccoon to his Family, MacPhairrson met with an accident. Coming down the long, sloping platform of the mill, the point of one of his crutches caught in a crack, and he plunged headlong, striking his head on a link of heavy "snaking" chain. He was picked up unconscious and carried to the nearest cabin. For several days his stupor was unbroken, and the doctor hardly expected him to pull through. Then he recovered consciousness—but he was no longer MacPhairrson. His mind was a sort of amiable blank. He had to be fed and cared for like a very young child. The doctor decided at last that there was some pressure of bone on the brain, and that operations quite beyond his skill would be required. At his suggestion a purse was made up among the mill hands and the Settlement folk, and MacPhairrson, smiling with infantile enjoyment, was packed off down river on the little tri-weekly steamer to the hospital in the city.

As soon as it was known around the mill—which stood amidst its shanties a little apart from the Settlement—that MacPhairrson was to be laid up for a long time, the question arose: "What's to become of the Family?" It was morning when the accident happened, and in the afternoon the Boy had come up to look after the animals. After that, when the mill stopped work at sundown, there was a council held,

amid the suddenly silent saws.

“What’s to be done about the orphants?” was the way Jimmy Wright put the problem.

Black Angus MacAllister, the Boss—so called to distinguish him from Red Angus, one of the gang of log-drivers—had his ideas already pretty well formed on the subject, and intended that his ideas should go. He did not really care much about any one else’s ideas except the Boy’s, which he respected as second only to those of MacPhairrson where the wild kindreds were concerned. Black Angus was a huge, big-handed, black-bearded, bull-voiced man, whose orders and imprecations made themselves heard above the most piercing crescendos of the saws. When his intolerant eyes fixed a man, what he had to say usually went, no matter what different views on the subject his hearer might secretly cling to. But he had a tender, somewhat sentimental streak in his character, which expressed itself in a fondness for all animals. The horses and oxen working around the mill were all well cared for and showed it in their condition; and the Boss was always ready to beat a man half to death for some very slight ill-usage of an animal.

“A man kin take keer o’ himself,” he would say in explanation, “an’ the dumb critters can’t. It’s our place to take keer of ’em.”

“Boys,” said he, his great voice not yet toned down to the quiet, “I say, let’s divvy up the critters among us, jest us mill hands an’ the Boy here, an’ look out fer ’em the best we know how till MacPhairrson gits well!”

He looked interrogatively at the Boy, and the Boy, proud of the importance thus attached to him, answered modestly—

“That’s just what I was hoping you’d suggest, Mr. MacAllister. You know, of course, they can’t stay on together there alone. They wouldn’t be a Happy Family long. They’d get to fighting in no time, and about half of ’em would get killed quick.”

There was a moment of deliberative silence. No smoking was allowed in the mill, but the hands all chewed. Jimmy Wright, marking the bright face of a freshly sawed deal about eight feet away, spat unerringly upon its exact centre, then giving a hitch to his trousers, he remarked—

"Let the Boss an' the Boy settle it. They onderstand it the best."

"That's right, Jimmy! We'll fix it!" said Black Angus. "Now, for mine, I've got a fancy for the parrot an' the pig. That there Ananias-and-Sapphira, she's a bird an' no mistake. An' the pig—MacPhairrson calls him Ebenezer—he's that smart ye'd jest kill yerself laffin' to see him. An', moreover, he's that clean—he's clean as a lady. I'd like to have them two around my shanty. An' I'm ready to take one more if necessary."

"Then I think you'll have to take the coon too, Mr. MacAllister," said the Boy. "He and Ebenezer just love each other, an' they wouldn't be happy separated."

"All right. The coon fer me!" responded the Boss. "Which of the critters will you take yerself?"

"I'll wait and see which the rest of the boys want," replied the Boy. "I like them all, and they all know me pretty well. I'll take what's left."

"Well, then," said Jimmy Wright, "me for Susan. That blame moose calf's the only one of the critters that I could ever git along with. She's a kind of a fool, an' seems to like me!" And he decorated the bright deal once more.

"Me an' my missus, we'll be proud to take them two white cats!" put in grey old Billy Smith. "She sez, sez she, they be the han'somest cats in two counties. Mebbe they won't be so lonesome with us as they'd be somewheres else, bein's as our shanty's so nigh MacPhairrson's bridge they kin see for themselves all the time there ain't no one on to the island any more!"

“Stumpy’s not spoken for!” reminded the Boy. The dog was popular, and half a dozen volunteered for him at once.

“Mike gits the dawg!” decided the Boss, to head off arguments.

“Then I’ll take the big gander,” spoke up Baldy Pallen, one of the disappointed applicants for Stumpy. “He knows as much as any dawg ever lived.”

“Yes, I reckon he kin teach ye a heap, Baldy!” agreed the Boss. A laugh went round at Baldy’s expense. Then for a few seconds there were no more applications.

“No one seems to want poor Butters and Bones!” laughed the Boy. “They’re neither of them what you’d call sociable. But Bones has his good points. He can see in the dark; and he’s a great one for minding his own business. Butters has a heap of sense; but he’s too cross to show it, except for MacPhairrson himself. Guess *I’d* better take them both, as I understand their infirmities.”

“An’ ain’t there a young fox?” inquired the Boss.

“Oh, Carrots; he can just stay on the island,” answered the Boy. “If some of you’ll throw him a bite to eat every day, he’ll be all right. He can’t get into any mischief. And he can’t get away. He stands on his dignity so, nobody’d get any fun out of having *him!*”

These points decided, the council broke up and adjourned to MacPhairrson’s island, carrying several pieces of rope, a halter, and a couple of oat-bags. The members of the Family, vaguely upset over the long absence of their master, nearly all came down to the bridge in their curiosity to see who was coming—all, indeed, but the fox, who slunk off behind the cabin; Butters, who retired to his box; and Bones, who remained scornfully indifferent in his corner. The rest eyed the crowd uneasily, but were reassured by seeing the Boy with them. In fact, they all crowded around him, as close as they could, except Stumpy, who went about greeting his acquaintances, and James

Edward, who drew back with lifted wings and a haughty hiss, resolved to suffer no familiarities.

Jimmy Wright made the first move. He had cunningly brought some salt in his pocket. With the casual remark that he wasn't going to put it on her tail, he offered a handful to the non-committal Susan. The ungainly creature blew most of it away with a windy snort, then changed her mind and greedily licked up the few remaining grains. Deciding that Jimmy was an agreeable person with advantages, she allowed him to slip the halter on her neck and lead her unprotesting over the bridge.

Then Black Angus made overtures to Ebenezer, who carried the little raccoon on his back. Ebenezer received them with a mixture of dignity and doubt, but refused to stir an inch from the Boy's side. Black Angus scratched his head in perplexity.

"'Tain't no use tryn' to lead him, I reckon!" he muttered.

"No, you'll have to carry him in your arms, Mr. MacAllister," laughed the Boy. "Good thing he ain't very big yet. But here, take Ananias-and-Sapphira first. If *she'll* be friends with you, that'll mean a lot to Ebenezer." And he deftly transferred the parrot from his own shoulder, where she had taken refuge at once on his arrival, to the lofty shoulder of the Boss.

The bird was disconcerted for an instant. She "slicked" down her feathers till she looked small and demure, and stretched herself far out as if to try a jump for her old perch. But, one wing being clipped, she did not dare the attempt. She had had enough experience of those sickening, flopping somersaults which took the place of flight when only one wing was in commission. Turning from the Boy, she eyed MacAllister's nose with her evil, unwinking stare. Possibly she intended to bite it. But at this moment MacAllister reached up his huge hand fearlessly to stroke her head, just as fearlessly as if she were not armed with a beak that could bite through a boot. Greatly

impressed by this daring, she gurgled in her throat, and took the great thumb delicately between her mandibles with a daintiness that would not have marred a rose-petal. Yes, she concluded at once, this was a man after her own heart, with a smell to his hands like that of MacPhairrson himself. Dropping the thumb with a little scream of satisfaction, she sidled briskly up and down MacAllister's shoulder, making herself quite at home.

"My, but she's taken a shine to you, Mr. MacAllister!" exclaimed the Boy. "I never saw her do like that before."

The Boss grinned proudly.

"Ananias-an'-Sapphira be of the female sect, bain't she?" inquired Baldy Pallen, with a sly look over the company.

"Sure, she's a she!" replied the Boy. "MacPhairrson says so!"

"That accounts fer it!" said Baldy. "It's a way all shes have with the Boss. Jest look at her now!"

"Now for Ebenezer!" interrupted the Boss, to change the subject. "*You* better hand him to me, an' maybe he'll take it as an introduction."

Solemnly the Boy stooped, shoving the little raccoon aside, and picked the pig up in his arms. Ebenezer was amazed, having never before been treated as a lap-dog, but he made no resistance beyond stiffening out all his legs in a way that made him most awkward to handle. Placed in the Boss's great arms, he lifted his snout straight up in the air and emitted one shrill squeal; but the sight of Ananias-and-Sapphira, perched coolly beneath his captor's ear, in a measure reassured him, and he made no further protest. He could not, however, appear reconciled to the inexplicable and altogether undignified situation, so he held his snout rigidly as high aloft as he could and shut his little eyes tight, as if anticipating some further stroke of fate.

Black Angus was satisfied so far. He felt that the tolerance of

Ebenezer and the acceptance of Ananias-and-Sapphira added distinctly to his prestige.

“Now for the little coon!” said he, jocularly. But the words were hardly out of his mouth when he felt sharp claws go up his leg with a rush, and the next instant the little raccoon was on his shoulder, reaching out its long, black nose to sniff solicitously at Ebenezer’s legs and assure itself that everything was all right.

“Jumping Jiminy! Oh, by Gee!” squealed Ananias-and-Sapphira, startled at the sudden onset, and nipped the intruder smartly on the leg till he squalled and whipped around to the other shoulder.

“Now you’ve got all that’s coming to you, I guess, Mr. MacAllister,” laughed the Boy.

“Then I reckon I’d better be lightin’ out fer home with it!” answered Black Angus, hugely elated. Turning gently, so as not to dislodge the passengers on his shoulder, he strode off over the bridge and up the sawdust-muffled street towards his clapboard cottage, Ebenezer’s snout still held rigidly up in air, his eyes shut in heroic resignation, while Ananias-and-Sapphira, tremendously excited by this excursion into the outer world, kept shrieking at the top of her voice: “Ebenezer, Ebenezer, Ebenezer! Oh, by Gee! I want Pa!”

As soon as the noisy and picturesque recessional of Black Angus had vanished, Baldy Pallen set out confidently to capture the wild gander, James Edward. He seemed to expect to tuck him under his arm and walk off with him at his ease. Observing this, the Boy looked around with a solemn wink. Old Billy Smith and the half-dozen onlookers who had no responsibility in the affair grinned and waited. As Baldy approached, holding out a hand of placation, and “chucking” persuasively as if he thought James Edward was a hen, the latter reared his snaky black head and stared in haughty surprise. Then he gave vent to a strident hiss of warning. Could it be possible that this impudent stranger contemplated meddling with him? Yes, plainly it

was possible. It was certain, in fact. The instant he realized this, James Edward lowered his long neck, darted it out parallel with the ground, spread his splendid wings, and rushed at Baldy's legs with a hiss like escaping steam. Baldy was startled and bewildered. His legs tweaked savagely by the bird's strong, hard bill, and thumped painfully by the great, battering, windy wings, he sputtered: "Jumpin' Judas!" in an embarrassed tone, and retreated behind Billy Smith and the Boy.

A roar of delighted laughter arose as James Edward backed away in haughty triumph, and strolled carelessly up towards the cabin. There were cries of "Ketch him quick, Baldy!" "Try a leetle coaxin'!" "Don't be so rough with the gosling, Baldy!" "Jest whistle to him, an' he'll folly ye!" But, ignoring these pleasantries, Baldy rubbed his legs and turned to the Boy for guidance.

"Are you sure you want him now?" inquired the latter.

"Course I want him!" returned Baldy with a sheepish grin. "I'll coax him round an' make friends with him all right when I git him home. But how'm I goin' to git him? I'm afeared o' hurtin' him, he seems that delicate, and his feelin's so sensitive like!"

"We'll have to surround him, kind of. Just wait, boys!" said the Boy. And running into the cabin, past the deliberate James Edward, he reappeared with a heavy blanket.

The great gander eyed his approach with contemptuous indifference. He had come to regard the Boy as quite harmless. When, therefore, the encumbering folds of the blanket descended, it was too late to resist. In a moment he was rolled over in the dark, bundled securely, picked up, and ignominiously tucked under Baldy Pallen's arm.

"Now you've got him, don't let go o' him!" admonished the Boy, and amid encouraging jeers Baldy departed, carrying the bundle victoriously. He had not more than crossed the bridge, however, when the watchers on the island saw a slender black head wriggle out from

one end of the bundle, dart upward behind his left arm, and seize the man viciously by the ear. With a yell Baldy grabbed the head, and held it securely in his great fist till the Boy ran to his rescue. When James Edward's bill was removed from Baldy's bleeding ear, his darting, furious head tucked back into the blanket, the Boy said—

"Now, Baldy, that was just your own fault for not keeping tight hold. You can't blame James Edward for biting you!"

"Sure, no!" responded Baldy, cheerfully. "I don't blame him a mite. I brag on the spunk of him. Him an' me'll git on all right."

James Edward gone, the excitement was over. The Boy picked up the two big white cats, Melindy and Jim, and placed them in the arms of old Billy Smith, where they settled themselves, looking about with an air of sleepy wisdom. From smallest kittenhood the smell of a homespun shirt had stood to them for every kind of gentleness and shelter, so they saw no reason to find fault with the arms of Billy Smith. By this time old Butters, the woodchuck, disturbed at the scattering of the Family, had retired in a huff to the depths of his little barrel by the doorstep. The Boy clapped an oat-bag over the end of the barrel, and tied it down. Then he went into the cabin and slipped another bag over the head of the unsuspecting Bones, who fluffed all his feathers and snapped his fierce beak like castanets. In two minutes he was tied up so that he could neither bite nor claw.

"That was slick!" remarked Red Angus, who had hitherto taken no part in the proceedings. He and the rest of the hands had followed in hope of further excitement.

"Well, then, Angus, will you help me home? Will you take the barrel, and see that Butters doesn't gnaw out on the way?"

Red Angus picked up the barrel and carried it carefully in front of him, head up, that the sly old woodchuck might not steal a march on him. Then the Boy picked up Bones in his oat-bag, and closed the cabin door. As the party left the island with loud tramping of feet on the little

bridge, the young fox crept slyly from behind the cabin, and eyed them through cunningly narrowed slits of eyes. At last he was going to have the island all to himself; and he set himself to dig a burrow directly under the doorstep, where that meddlesome MacPhairrson had never permitted him to dig.

## III

It was in the green zenith of June when MacPhairrson went away. When he returned, hobbling up with his tiny bundle, the backwoods world was rioting in the scarlet and gold of young October. He was quite cured. He felt singularly well. But a desperate loneliness saddened his home-coming. He knew his cabin would be just as he had left it, there on its steep little foam-ringed island; and he knew the Boy would be there, with the key, to admit him over the bridge and welcome him home. But what would the island be without the Family? The Boy, doubtless, had done what he could. He had probably taken care of Stumpy, and perhaps of Ananias-and-Sapphira. But the rest of the Family must inevitably be scattered to the four winds. Tears came into his eyes as he thought of himself and Stumpy and the parrot, the poor lonely three, there amid the sleepless clamour of the rapids, lamenting their vanished comrades. A chill that was more than the approaching autumn twilight could account for settled upon his heart.

Arriving at the little bridge, however, his heart warmed again, for there was the Boy waving at him, and hurrying down to the gate to let him in. And there at the Boy's heels was Stumpy, sure enough. MacPhairrson shouted, and Stumpy, at the sound of the loud voice, went wild, trying to tear his way through the gate. When the gate opened, he had to brace himself against the frame, before he could grasp the Boy's hand, so extravagant and overwhelming were the yelping Stumpy's caresses. Gladly he suffered them, letting the excited dog lick his hands and even his face; for, after all, Stumpy

was the best and dearest member of the Family. Then, to steady him, he gave him his bundle to carry up to the cabin, and proudly Stumpy trotted on ahead with it. MacPhairrson's voice trembled as he tried to thank the Boy for bringing Stumpy back to him—trembled and choked.

"I can't help it!" he explained apologetically as soon as he got his voice again. "I love Stumpy best, of course! You kept the best fer me! But, Jiminy Christmas, Boy, how I miss the rest on 'em!"

"I didn't keep Stumpy!" explained the Boy as the two went up the path. "It was Mike Sweeny took care of him for you. He brought him round this morning because he had to get off to the woods cruising. I took care of Bones—we'll find him on his box inside—and of cross old Butters. Thunder, how Butters has missed you, MacPhairrson! He's bit me twice, just because I wasn't you. There he is, poking his nose out of his barrel."

The old woodchuck thought he had heard MacPhairrson's voice, but he was not sure. He came out and sat up on his fat haunches, his nostrils quivering with expectation. Then he caught sight of the familiar limping form. With a little squeal of joy he scurried forward and fell to clutching and clawing at his master's legs till MacPhairrson picked him up. Whereupon he expressed his delight by striving to crowd his nose into MacPhairrson's neck. At this moment the fox appeared from hiding behind the cabin, and sat up, with ears cocked shrewdly and head to one side, to take note of his master's return.

"Lord, how Carrots has growed!" exclaimed MacPhairrson, lovingly, and called him to come. But the fox yawned in his face, got up lazily, and trotted off to the other side of the island. MacPhairrson's face fell.

"He's got no kind of a heart at all," said the Boy, soothing his disappointment.

"He ain't no use to nobody," said MacPhairrson. "I reckon we'd better let him go." Then he hobbled into the cabin to greet Bones, who

ruffled up his feathers at his approach, but recognized him and submitted to being stroked.

Presently MacPhairrson straightened up on his crutches, turned, and gulped down a lump in his throat.

“I reckon we’ll be mighty contented here,” said he, “me an’ Stumpy, an’ Butters, an’ Bones. But I *wisht* as how I might git to have Ananias-an’-Sapphira back along with us. I’m goin’ to miss that there bird a lot, fer all she was so ridiculous an’ cantankerous. I s’pose, now, you don’t happen to know who’s got her, do you?”

“I know she’s got a good home!” answered the Boy, truthfully. “But I don’t know that I could tell you just where she is!”

At just this minute, however, there came a jangling of the gate bell, and screeches of—

“Oh, by Gee! Jumpin’ Jiminy! Oh, Boy! I want Pa!”

MacPhairrson’s gaunt and grizzled face grew radiant. Nimbly he hobbled to the door, to see the Boy already on the bridge, opening the gate. To his amazement, in strode Black Angus the Boss, with the bright green glitter of Ananias-and-Sapphira on his shoulder screeching varied profanities—and whom at his heels but Ebenezer and the little ring-tailed raccoon. In his excitement the old woodsman dropped one of his crutches. Therefore, instead of going to meet his visitors, he plumped down on the bench outside his door and just waited. A moment later the quaint procession arrived. MacPhairrson found Black Angus shaking him hugely by the hand, Ebenezer, much grown up, rooting at his knees with a happy little squeal, and Ananias-and-Sapphira, as of old, clambering excitedly up his shirt-front.

“There, there, easy now, old pard,” he murmured to the pig, fondling the animal’s ears with one hand, while he gave the other to the bird, to be nibbled and nipped ecstatically, the raccoon meanwhile looking on with bright-eyed, non-committal interest.

“Angus,” said the old woodsman presently, by way of an attempt at thanks, “ye’re a wonderful hand with the dumb critters—not that one could rightly call Ananias-an’-Sapphira dumb, o’ course—’n’ I swear *I* couldn’t never have kep’ ’em lookin’ so fine and slick all through the summer. I reckon——”

But he never finished that reckoning. Down to his bridge was coming another and a larger procession than that of Black Angus. First, and even now entering through the gate, he saw Jimmy Wright leading a lank young moose cow, whom he recognized as Susan. Close behind was old Billy Smith with the two white cats, Melindy and Jim, in his arms; and then Baldy Fallen, with a long blanket bundle under his arm. Behind them came the rest of the mill hands, their faces beaming welcome. MacPhairrson, shaking all over, with big tears in his eyes, reached for his fallen crutch and stood up. When the visitors arrived and gave him their hearty greetings, he could find no words to answer. Baldy laid his bundle gently on the ground and respectfully unrolled it. Out stepped the lordly James Edward and lifted head and wings with a troubled *honk-a, honka.* As soon as he saw MacPhairrson, he came up and stood close beside him, which was as much enthusiasm as the haughty gander could bring himself to show. The cats meanwhile were rubbing and purring against their old master’s legs, while Susan sniffed at him with a noisy, approving snort. MacPhairrson’s throat, and then his whole face, began to work. How different was this home-coming from what he had expected! Here, wonder of wonders, was his beloved Family all gathered about him! How good the boys were! He must try to thank them all. Bracing himself with one crutch, he strove to express to them his immeasurable gratitude and gladness. In vain, for some seconds, he struggled to down the lump in his throat. Then, with a titanic effort, he blurted out: “Oh, hell, boys!” and sat down, and hid his wet eyes in Stumpy’s shaggy hair.

# On Big Lonely

It was no doubt partly pride, in having for once succeeded in evading her grandmother's all-seeing eye, that enabled Mandy Ann to carry, at a trot, a basket almost as big as herself—to carry it all the way down the hill to the river, without once stumbling or stopping to take breath. The basket was not only large, but uneasy, seeming to be troubled by internal convulsions, which made it tip and lurch in a way that from time to time threatened to upset Mandy Ann's unstable equilibrium. But being a young person of character, she kept right on, ignoring the fact that the stones on the shore were very sharp to her little bare feet.

At last she reached the sunshiny cove, with shoals of minnows flickering about its amber shallows, which was the goal of her flight. Here, tethered to a stake on the bank, lay the high-sided old bateau, which Mandy Ann had long coveted as a perfectly ideal play-house. Its high prow lightly aground, its stern afloat, it swung lazily in the occasional puffs of lazy air. Mandy Ann was only four years old, and her red cotton skirt just came to her dimpled grimy little knees, but with that unfailing instinct of her sex she gathered up the skirt and clutched it securely between her breast and the rim of the basket. Then she stepped into the water, waded to the edge of the old bateau and climbed aboard.

The old craft was quite dry inside, and filled with a clean pungent scent of warm tar. Mandy Ann shook out her red skirt and her yellow curls, and set down the big covered basket on the bottom of the bateau. The basket continued to move tempestuously.

"Oh, naughty! naughty!" she exclaimed, shaking her chubby finger at it. "Jest a minute, jest a teenty minute, an' we'll see!"

Peering over the bow, Mandy Ann satisfied herself that the bateau, though its bottom grated on the pebbles, was completely surrounded by water. Then sitting down on the bottom, she assured herself that she was hidden by the boat's high flaring sides from the sight of all interfering domestic eyes on shore. She felt sure that even the eyes of her grandmother, in the little grey cottage back on the green hill, could not reach her in this unguessed retreat. With a sigh of unutterable content she made her way back into the extreme stern of the bateau, lugging the tempestuous basket with her. Sitting down flat, she took the basket in her lap and loosened the cover, crooning softly as she did so. Instantly a whiskered, brown snub-nose, sniffing and twitching with interrogation, appeared at the edge. A round brown head, with little round ears and fearless bright dark eyes, immediately popped over the edge. With a squeak of satisfaction a fat young woodchuck, nearly full-grown, clambered forth and ran up on Mandy Ann's shoulder. The bateau, under the influence of the sudden weight in the stern, floated clear of the gravel and swung softly at the end of its rope.

Observing that the bateau was afloat, Mandy Ann was delighted. She felt doubly secure, now, from pursuit. Pulling a muddy carrot from her pocket she held it up to the woodchuck, which was nuzzling affectionately at her curls. But the smell of the fresh earth reminded the little animal of something which he loved even better than Mandy Ann—even better, indeed, than a juicy carrot. He longed to get away, for a little while, from the loving but sometimes too assiduous attention with which his little mistress surrounded him—to get away and burrow to his heart's content in the cool brown earth, full of grass-roots. Ignoring the carrot, he clambered down in his soft, loose-jointed fashion, from Mandy Ann's shoulder, and ran along the gunwale to the bow. When he saw that he could not reach shore without getting into the water, which he loathed, he grumbled squeakingly, and kept bobbing his round head up and down, as if he contemplated making a jump for it.

At these symptoms Mandy Ann, who had been eyeing him, called to him severely. “Naughty!” she cried. “Come back this very instant, sir! You’d jes’ go an’ tell Granny on me! Come right back to your muzzer this instant!” At the sound of her voice the little animal seemed to think better of his rashness. The flashing and rippling of the water daunted him. He returned to Mandy Ann’s side and fell to gnawing philosophically at the carrot which she thrust under his nose.

This care removed, Mandy Ann took an irregular bundle out of the basket. It was tied up in a blue-and-white handkerchief. Untying it with extreme care, as if the contents were peculiarly precious, she displayed a collection of fragments of many-coloured glass and gay-painted china. Gloating happily over these treasures, which flashed like jewels in the sun, she began to sort them out and arrange them with care along the nearest thwart of the bateau. Mandy Ann was making what the children of the Settlement knew and esteemed as a “Chaney House.” There was keen rivalry among the children as to both location and furnishing of these admired creations; and to Mandy Ann’s daring imagination it had appeared that a “Chaney House” in the old bateau would be something surpassing dreams.

For an hour or more Mandy Ann was utterly absorbed in her enchanting task. So quiet she was over it that every now and then a yellow-bird or a fly-catcher would alight upon the edge of the bateau to bounce away again with a startled and indignant twitter. The woodchuck, having eaten his carrot, curled up in the sun and went to sleep.

Mandy Ann’s collection was really a rich assortment of colour. Every piece in it was a treasure in her eyes. But much as she loved the bits of painted china, she loved the glass better. There were red bits, and green of many shades, and blue, yellow, amber, purple and opal. Each piece, before arranging it in its allotted place on the thwart, she would lift to her eyes and survey the world through it. Some near treetops, and the blue sky piled with white fleeces of summer clouds,

were all of the world she could see from her retreat; but viewed through different bits of glass these took on an infinite variety of wonder and delight. So engrossed she was, it quite escaped her notice that the old bateau was less steady in its movements than it had been when first she boarded it. She did not even observe the fact that there were no longer any treetops in her fairy-tinted pictures. At last there sounded under the keel a strange gurgle, and the bateau gave a swinging lurch which sent half the treasures of the “Chaney House” clattering upon the bottom or into Mandy Ann’s lap. The woodchuck woke up frightened and scrambled into the shelter of its mistress’s arms.

Much surprised, Mandy Ann knelt upright and looked out over the edge of the bateau. She was no longer in the little sheltered cove, but far out on the river. The shores, slipping smoothly and swiftly past, looked unfamiliar to her. Where she expected to see the scattered cottages of the Settlement, a huge bank covered with trees, cut off the view. While she was so engrossed with her coloured glass, a puff of wind, catching the high sides of the bateau, had caused it to tug at its tether. The rope, carelessly fastened by some impatient boy, had slipped its hold; and the bateau had been swept smoothly out into the hurrying current. Half a mile below, the river rounded a woody point, and the drifting bateau was hidden from the sight of any one who might have hurried to recover it.

At the moment, Mandy Ann was not frightened. Her blue eyes danced with excitement as she tossed back her tousled curls. The river, flowing swiftly but smoothly, flashed and rippled in the noon sun in a friendly fashion, and it was most interesting to see how fast the shores slipped by. There was no suggestion of danger; and probably, at the back of her little brain, Mandy Ann felt that the beautiful river, which she had always loved and never been allowed to play with, would bring her back to her Granny as gently and unexpectedly as it had carried her away. Meanwhile, she felt only the thrilling and utterly

novel excitement of the situation. As the bateau swung in an occasional oily eddy she laughed gaily at the motion, and felt as proud as if she were doing it herself. And the woodchuck, which had been very nervous at first, feeling that something was wrong, was so reassured by its mistress's evident satisfaction that it curled up again on the bottom and hastened to resume its slumber.

In a little while the river curved again, sweeping back to its original course. Suddenly, in the distance, the bright spire of the Settlement church came into view, and then the familiar cottages. Mandy Ann's laughing face grew grave, as she saw how very, very far away they looked. They took on, also, from the distance, a certain strangeness which smote her heart. This wonderful adventure of hers ceased to have any charm for her. She wanted to go back at once. Then her grandmother's little grey house on the slope came into view. Oh, how terribly little and queer and far away it looked. And it was getting farther and farther away every minute. A frightened cry of "Granny! Granny! Take me home!" broke from her lips. She stood up, and made her way hurriedly to the other end of the bateau, which, being upstream, was nearer home. As her weight reached the bow, putting it deeper into the grip of the current, the bateau slowly swung around till it headed the other way. Mandy Ann turned and hurried again to the point nearest home. Whereupon the bateau calmly repeated its disconcerting manœuvre. All at once the whole truth of the situation burst upon Mandy Ann's comprehension. She was lost. She was being carried away so far that she would never, never get back. She was being swept out into the terrible wilds that she had heard stories about. Her knees gave away in her terror. Crouching, a little red tumbled heap, on the bottom of the bateau, she lifted up her voice in shrill wailings, which so frightened the woodchuck that he came and crept under her skirt.

Below the Settlement the river ran for miles through a country of ever-deepening desolation, without cabin or clearing near its shores, till it

emptied itself into the yet more desolate lake known as “Big Lonely,” a body of forsaken water about ten miles long, surrounded by swamps and burnt-lands. From the foot of Big Lonely the river raged away over a mile of thundering ledges, through a chasm known to the lumbermen as “The Devil’s Trough.” The fury of this madness having spent itself between the black walls of the canyon, the river continued rather sluggishly its long course toward the sea. A few miles below the Settlement the river began to get hurried and turbulent, chafing white through rocky rapids. When the bateau plunged into the first of these, Mandy Ann’s wailing and sobbing stopped abruptly. The clamour of the white waves and the sight of their lashing wrath fairly stupefied her. She sat up on the middle thwart, with the shivering woodchuck clutched to her breast, and stared about with wild eyes. On every side the waves leaped up, black, white, and amber, jumping at the staggering bateau. But appalling as they looked to Mandy Ann, they were not particularly dangerous to the sturdy, high-sided craft which carried her. The old bateau had been built to navigate just such waters. Nothing could upset it, and on account of its high, flaring sides, no ordinary rapids could swamp it. It rode the loud chutes triumphantly, now dipping its lofty nose, now bumping and reeling, but always making the passage without serious mishap. All through the rapids Mandy Ann would sit silent, motionless, fascinated with horror. But in the long, comparatively smooth reaches she would recover herself enough to cry softly upon the woodchuck’s soft brown fur, till that prudent little animal, exasperated at the damp of her caresses, wriggled away and crawled into his hated basket.

At last, when the bateau had run a dozen of these noisy “rips,” Mandy Ann grew surfeited with terror, and thought to comfort herself. Sitting down again upon the bottom of the bateau, she sadly sought to revive her interest in the “Chaney House.” She would finger the choicest bits of painted porcelain, and tell herself how pretty they were. She would choose a fragment of scarlet or purple glass, hold it up to her pathetic, tear-stained face, and try to interest herself in the coloured landscape

that filed by. But it was no use. Even the amber glass had lost its power to interest her. And at length, exhausted by her terror and her loneliness, she sank down and fell asleep.

It was late afternoon when Mandy Ann fell asleep, and her sleep was the heavy semi-torpor coming after unrelieved grief and fear. It was unjarred by the pitching of the fiercer rapids which the bateau presently encountered. The last mile of the river's course before joining the lake consisted of deep, smooth "dead-water"; but, a strong wind from the north-west having sprung up toward the end of the day, the bateau drove on with undiminished speed. On the edge of the evening, when the sun was just sinking into the naked tops of the rampikes along the western shore, the bateau swept out upon the desolate reaches of Big Lonely, and in the clutch of the wind hastened down mid-lake to seek the roaring chutes and shrieking vortices of the "Devil's Trough."

Out in the middle of the lake, where the heavy wind had full sweep, the pitching and thumping of the big waves terrified the poor little woodchuck almost to madness; but they made no impression on the wearied child, where she lay sobbing tremulously in her sleep. They made a great impression, however, on a light birch canoe, which was creeping up alongshore in the teeth of the wind, urged by two paddles. The paddlers were a couple of lumbermen, returning from the mouth of the river. All the spring and early summer they had been away from the Settlement, working on "the drive" of the winter's logging, and now, hungry for home, they were fighting their way doggedly against wind and wave. There was hardly a decent camping-ground on all the swamp-cursed shores of Big Lonely, except at the very head of the lake, where the river came in, and this spot the voyagers were determined to make before dark. They would then have clear poling ahead of them next day, to get them home to the Settlement in time for supper.

The man in the bow, a black-bearded, sturdy figure in a red shirt, paddled with slow, unvarying strokes, dipping his big maple paddle deep and bending his back to it, paying no heed whatever to the heavy black waves which lurched at him every other second and threatened to overwhelm the bow of his frail craft. He had none of the responsibility. His part was simply to supply power, steady, unwavering power, to make head against the relentless wind. The man in the stern, on the other hand, had to think and watch and meet every assault, as well as thrust the canoe forward into the tumult. He was a gaunt, long-armed young giant, bareheaded, with shaggy brown hair blown back from his red-tanned face. His keen grey eyes noted and measured every capricious lake-wave as it lunged at him, and his wrist, cunning and powerful, delicately varied each stroke to meet each instant's need. It was not enough that the canoe should be kept from broaching-to and swamping or upsetting. He was anxious that it should not ship water, and wet certain treasures which they were taking home to the backwoods from the shops of the little city down by the sea. And while his eyes seemed to be so engrossingly occupied in the battle with the waves of Big Lonely, they were all the time refreshing themselves with a vision—the vision of a grey house on a sunny hill-top, where his mother was waiting for him, and where a little yellow-haired girl would scream "*Dad*die, oh, Dad*die*!" when she saw him coming up the road.

The dogged voyagers were within perhaps two miles of the head of the lake, with the sun gone down behind the desolate rampikes, and strange tints of violet and rose and amber, beautiful and lonely, touching the angry turbulence of the waves, when the man in the bow, whose eyes were free to wander, caught sight of the drifting bateau. It was a little ahead of them, but farther out in the lake.

"Ain't that old Joe's bateau out yonder, Chris?" he queried, his trained woodsman's eye recognizing the craft by some minute detail of build or blemish.

“I reckon it be!” answered Chris, after a moment’s scrutiny. “He’s let her git adrift. Water must be raisin’ sudden!”

“She’ll be a fine quality o’ kindlin’ wood in another hour, the rate she’s travelling” commented the other with mild interest. But the young giant in the stern was more concerned. He was sorry that old Joe should lose his boat.

“Darned old fool, not to tie her!” he growled. “Ef ’twarn’t fer this wind ag’in’ us, we could ketch it an’ tow it ashore fer him. But we can’t.”

“Wouldn’t stop fer it ef ’t had a bag o’ gold into it!” grunted the other, slogging on his paddle with renewed vigour as he looked forward to the camp-ground still so far ahead. He was hungry and tired, and couldn’t even take time to fill his pipe in that hurly-burly.

Meanwhile the bateau had swept down swiftly, and passed them at a distance of not more than a hundred yards. It was with a qualm of regret that Chris saw it go by, to be ground to splinters in the yelling madness of the Devil’s Trough. After it had passed, riding the waves bravely like the good old craft that it was, he glanced back after it in half-humorous regret. As he did so, his eye caught something that made him look again. A little furry brown creature was peering over the gunwale at the canoe. The gunwale tipped toward him at that instant and he saw it distinctly. Yes, it was a woodchuck, and no mistake. And it seemed to be making mute appeal to him to come and save it from a dreadful doom. Chris hesitated, looking doubtfully at his companion’s heaving back. It looked an unresponsive back. Moreover, Chris felt half ashamed of his own compassionate impulse. He knew that he was considered foolishly softhearted about animals and children and women, though few men cared to express such an opinion to him too frankly. He suspected that, in the present case, his companion would have a right to complain of him. But he could not stand the idea of letting the little beast—which had so evidently appealed to him for succour—go down into the horrors of the Devil’s

Trough. His mind was made up.

“Mart,” he exclaimed, “I’m goin’ to turn. There’s somethin’ aboard that there old bateau that I want.” And he put the head of the canoe straight up into a big wave.

“The devil there is!” cried the other, taking in his paddle and looking around in angry protest. “What is it?”

“Paddle, ye loon! Paddle hard!” ordered Chris. “I’ll tell ye when we git her ’round.”

Thus commanded, and the man at the stern paddle being supreme in a canoe, the backwoodsman obeyed with a curse. It was no time to argue, while getting the canoe around in that sea. But as soon as the canoe was turned, and scudding with frightened swoops down the waves in pursuit of the fleeing bateau, he saw, and understood.

“Confound you, Chris McKeen, if ’tain’t nothin’ but a blankety blank woodchuck!” he shouted, making as if to back water and try to turn the canoe again.

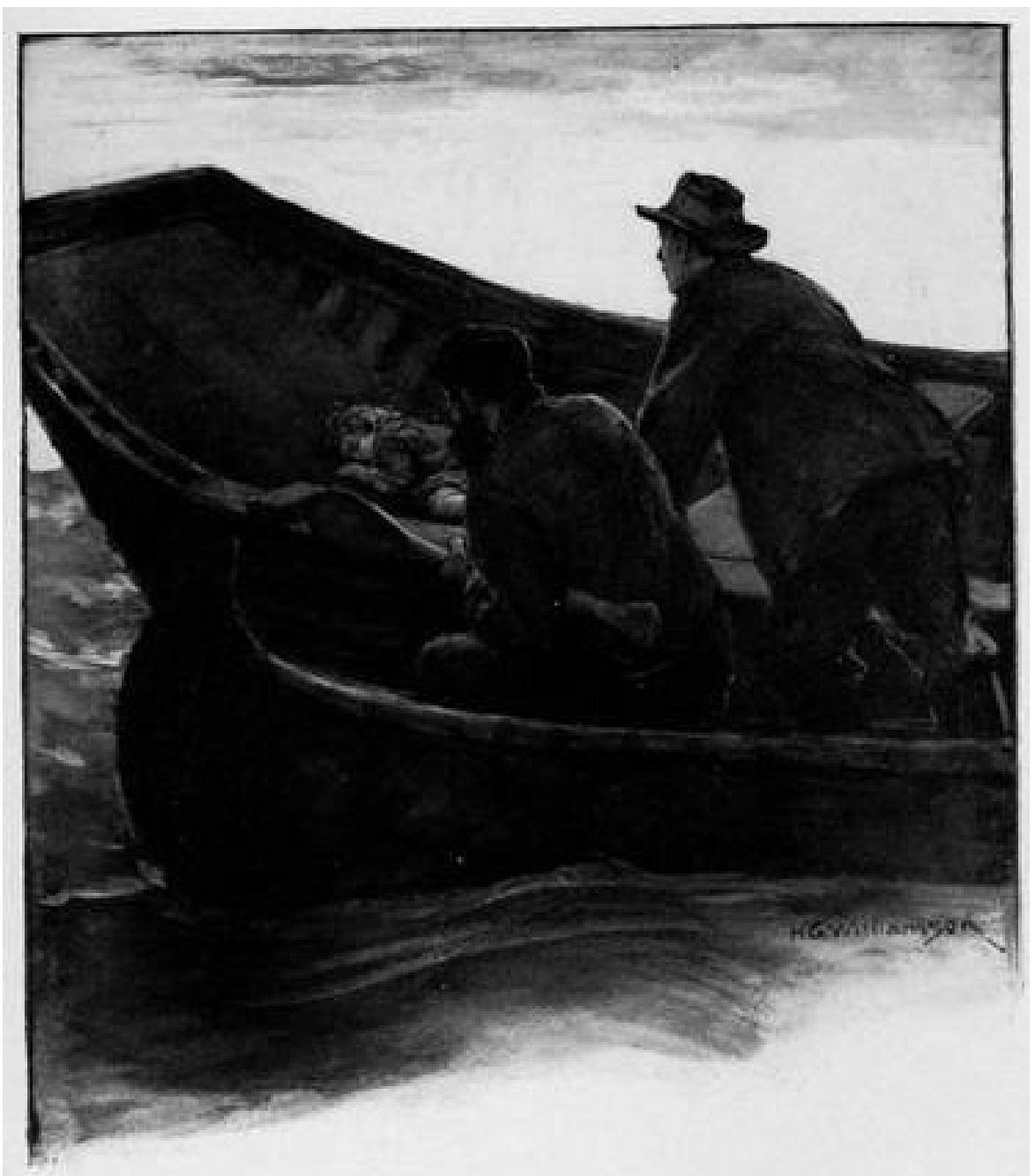
Chris’s grey eyes hardened. “Look a’ here, Mart Babcock,” he shouted, “don’t you be up to no foolishness. Ye kin cuss all ye like—but either paddle as I tell ye or take in yer paddle an’ set quiet. *I’m* runnin’ this ’ere canoe.”

Babcock took in his paddle, cursing bitterly.

“A woodchuck! A measly woodchuck!” he shouted, with unutterable contempt expressed in every word. “I know’d ye was a fool, Chris McKeen, but I didn’t know ye was so many kinds of a mush-head of a fool!”

“Course it’s a woodchuck!” agreed Chris, surging on his paddle. “Do ye think I’d let the leetle critter go down the ‘Trough,’ jest so’s ye could git your bacon an’ tea an hour sooner? I always did like woodchucks, anyways.”

“I’ll take it out o’ yer hide fer this when we git ashore; you wait!” stormed Babcock, courageously. He knew it would be some time before they could get ashore, and so he would have a chance to forget his threat.



“‘It’s—Mandy Ann!’”

“That’s all right, Mart!” assented McKeen. “My hide’ll be all here waitin’ on ye. But fer now you jest git ready to do ez I tell ye, an’ don’t

let the canoe bump ez we come up alongside the bateau. It's goin' to be a mite resky, in this sea, gittin' hold of the leetle critter. I'm goin' to take it home for Mandy Ann."

As the canoe swept down upon the swooping and staggering bateau, Babcock put out his paddle in readiness to fend or catch as he might be directed. A moment later Chris ran the canoe past and brought her up dexterously under the lee of the high-walled craft. Babcock caught her with a firm grip, at the same time holding her off with the paddle, and glanced in, while Chris's eyes were still occupied. His dark face went white as cotton.

"My God, Chris! Forgive me! I didn't know!" he groaned.

"It's—Mandy Ann!" exclaimed her father, in a hushed voice, climbing into the bateau and catching the child into his arms.

# From Buck to Bear and Back

The sunny, weather-beaten, comfortable little house, with its grey sheds and low grey barn half enclosing its bright, untidy farmyard, stood on the top of the open hill, where every sweet forest wind could blow over it night and day.

Fields of oats, buckwheat, and potatoes came up all about it over the slopes of the hill; and its only garden was a spacious patch of cabbages and “garden sass” three or four hundred yards down toward the edge of the forest, where a pocket of rich black loam had specially invited an experiment in horticulture.

Like most backwoods farmers, Sam Coxen had been wont to look with large scorn on such petty interests as gardening; but a county show down at the Settlement had converted him, and now his cabbage patch was the chief object of his solicitude. He had proud dreams of prizes to be won at the next show—now not three weeks ahead.

It was his habit, whenever he harnessed up the team for a drive into the Settlement, to turn his head the last thing before leaving and cast a long, gratified look down over the cabbage patch, its cool, clear green standing out sharply against the yellow-brown of the surrounding fields. On this particular morning he did not turn for that look till he had jumped into the wagon and gathered up the reins. Then, as he gazed, a wave of indignation passed over his good-natured face.

There, in the middle of the precious cabbages, biting with a sort of dainty eagerness at first one and then another, and wantonly tearing open the crisp heads with impatient strokes of his knife-edged fore

hoofs, was a tall wide-antlered buck.

Sam Coxen dropped the reins, sprang from the wagon, and rushed to the bars which led from the yard to the back field; and the horses—for the sake of his dignity he always drove the pair when he went into the Settlement—fell to cropping the short, fine grass that grew behind the well. In spite of having grown up in the backwoods, Sam was lacking in backwoods lore. He was no hunter, and he cared as little as he knew, about the wild kindreds of the forest. He had a vague, general idea that all deer were “skeery critters”; and if any one had told him that the buck, in mating season, was not unlikely to develop a fine militant spirit, he would have laughed with scorn.

Climbing upon the bars, he yelled furiously at the marauder, expecting to see him vanish like a red streak. But the buck merely raised his beautiful head and stared in mild surprise at the strange, noisy figure on the fence. Then he coolly slashed open another plump cabbage, and nibbled at the firm white heart.

Very angry, Coxen yelled again with all the power of healthy lungs, and waved his arms wildly over his head. But the vaunted authority of the human voice seemed in some inexplicable way to miss a connexion with the buck’s consciousness. The waving of those angry arms, however, made an impression upon him. He appeared to take it as a challenge, for he shook his beautiful antlers and stamped his forefeet defiantly—and shattered yet another precious cabbage.

Wrath struggled with astonishment in Sam Coxen’s primitive soul. Then he concluded that what he wanted was not only vengeance, but a supply of deer’s meat to compensate for the lost cabbages.

Rushing into the house, he snatched down his old muzzle-loader from the pegs where it hung on the kitchen wall. After the backwoods fashion, the gun was kept loaded with a general utility charge of buckshot and slugs, such as might come handy in case a bear should try to steal the pig. Being no sportsman, Coxen did not even take the

trouble to change the old percussion-cap, which had been on the tube for six months. It was enough for him that the weapon was loaded.

Down the other slope of the hill, where the buck could not see him, Coxen hurried at a run, and gained the cover of the thick woods. Then, still running, he skirted the fields till the cabbage patch came once more in sight, with the marauder still enjoying himself in the midst of it.

At this point the long-dormant instinct of the hunter began to awake in Sam Coxen. Everything that he had ever heard about stalking big game flashed into his mind, and he wanted to apply it all at once. He noted the direction of the wind, and was delighted to find that it came to his nostrils straight from the cabbage patch.

He went stealthily, lifting and setting down his heavy-booted feet with a softness of which he had never guessed himself capable. He began to forget his indignation and think only of the prospect of bagging the game—so easily do the primeval instincts spring to life in a man's brain. Presently, when within about a hundred yards of the place where he hoped to get a fair shot, Coxen redoubled his caution. He went crouching, keeping behind the densest cover. Then, growing still more crafty, he got down and began to advance on all fours.

Now it chanced that Sam Coxen's eyes were not the only ones which had found interest in the red buck's proceedings. A large black bear, wandering just within the shelter of the forest, had spied the buck in the open, and being curious, after the fashion of his kind, had sat down in a thicket to watch the demolition of the cabbages.

He had no serious thought of hunting the big buck, knowing that he would be hard to catch and troublesome if caught. But he was in that investigating, pugnacious, meddlesome mood which is apt to seize an old male bear in the autumn.

When the bear caught sight of Sam Coxen's crawling, stealthy figure, not two paces from his hiding-place, his first impulse was to vanish, to

melt away like a big, portentous shadow into the silent deeps of the wood. His next, due to the season, was to rush upon the man and smite him.

Then he realized that he himself was not the object of the man's stealthy approach. He saw that what the hunter was intent upon was that buck out in the field. Thereupon he sank back on his great black haunches to watch the course of events. Little did Sam Coxen guess of those cunning red eyes that followed him as he crawled by.

At the point where the cover came nearest to the cabbage patch, Coxen found himself still out of range. Cocking his gun, he strode some twenty paces into the open, paused, and took a long, deliberate aim.

Catching sight of him the moment he emerged, the buck stood for some moments eyeing him with sheer curiosity. Was this a harmless passer-by, or a would-be trespasser on his new domain of cabbages? On second glance, he decided that it looked like the noisy figure which had waved defiance from the top of the fence. Realizing this, a red gleam came into the buck's eye. He wheeled, stamped, and shook his antlers in challenge.

At this moment, having got a good aim, Coxen pulled the trigger. The cap refused to explode. Angrily he lowered the gun, removed the cap and examined it. It looked all right, and there was plenty of priming in the tube. He turned the cap round, and again took careful aim.

Now these actions seemed to the buck nothing less than a plain invitation to mortal combat. He was in just the mood to accept such an invitation. In two bounds he cleared the cabbages and came mincingly down to the fray.

This unexpected turn of affairs so flustered the inexperienced hunter that he altogether forgot to cock his gun. Twice he pulled desperately on the trigger, but with no result. Then, smitten with a sense of impotence, he hurled the gun at the enemy and fled.

Over the fence he went almost at a bound, and darted for the nearest tree that looked easy to climb. As his ill luck would have it, this tree stood just on the edge of the thicket wherein the much-interested bear was keeping watch.

A wild animal knows when a man is running away, and rarely loses a chance to show its appreciation of the fact. As Sam Coxen sprang for the lowest branch and swung himself up, the bear lumbered out from his thicket and reared himself menacingly against the trunk.

The buck, who had just cleared the fence, stopped short. It was clearly his turn now to play the part of spectator.

When Coxen looked down and saw his new foe his heart swelled with a sense of injury. Were the creatures of the wilderness allied against him? He was no coward, but he began to feel distinctly worried. The thought that flashed across his mind was: “What’ll happen to the team if I don’t get back to unharness them?” But meanwhile he was climbing higher and higher, and looking out for a way of escape.

About halfway up the tree a long branch thrust itself forth till it fairly overhung a thick young spruce. Out along this branch Coxen worked his way carefully. By the time the bear had climbed to one end of the branch, Coxen had reached the other. Here he paused, dreading to let himself drop.

The bear came on cautiously; and the great branch bent low under his weight, till Coxen was not more than a couple of feet from the top of the young fir. Then, nervously letting go, he dropped, caught the thick branches in his desperate clutch, and clung secure.

The big branch, thus suddenly freed of Coxen’s substantial weight, sprang back with such violence that the bear almost lost his hold. Growling angrily, he scrambled back to the main trunk, down which he began to lower himself, tail foremost.

From the business-like alacrity of the bear’s movements, Coxen

realized that his respite was to be only temporary. He was not more than twelve feet from the ground, and could easily have made his escape while the bear was descending the other tree. But there below was the buck, keeping an eye of alert interest on both bear and man. Coxen had no mind to face those keen antlers and trampling hoofs. He preferred to stay where he was and hope for some unexpected intervention of fate. Like most backwoodsmen, he had a dry sense of the ridiculous, and the gravity of his situation could not quite blind him to the humour of it.

While Coxen was running over in his mind every conceivable scheme for getting out of his dilemma, the last thing he would have thought of actually happened. The buck lost interest in the man, and turned all his attention to the bear, which was just now about seven or eight feet from the ground, hugging the great trunk and letting himself down carefully, like a small boy afraid of tearing his trousers.

It is possible that that particular buck may have had some old score against the bears. If so, this must have seemed an excellent chance to collect a little on account. The bear's awkward position and unprotected hind quarters evidently appealed to him. He ambled forward, reared half playfully, half vindictively, and gave the bear a savage prodding with the keen tips of his antlers. Then he bounded back some eight or ten paces, and waited, while the bear slid abruptly to the ground with a flat grunt of fury.

Sam Coxen, twisting with silent laughter, nearly fell out of his fir-tree.

The bear had now no room left for any remembrance of the man. He was in a perfect ecstasy of rage at the insolence of the buck, and rushed upon him like a cyclone. Against that irresistible charge the buck had no thought of making stand. Just in the nick of time he sprang aside in a bound that carried him a full thirty feet. Another such, another and another, and then he went capering off frivolously down the woody aisles, while the bear lumbered impotently after him.

Before they were out of sight Sam Coxen slid down from his tree and made all haste over the fence. In the open field he felt more at ease, knowing he could outrun the bear, in case of need. But he stopped long enough to pick up the gun.

Then, with one pathetic glance at the ruined cabbages, he strode hastily on up the hill, glancing backward from time to time to assure himself that neither of his late antagonists was returning to the attack.

# In the Deep of the Snow

## I

Around the little log cabin in the clearing the snow lay nearly four feet deep. It loaded the roof. It buried the low, broad, log barn almost to the eaves. It whitely fenced in the trodden, chip-littered, straw-strewn space of the yard which lay between the barn and the cabin. It heaped itself fantastically, in mounds and domes and pillars, over the stumps that dotted the raw, young clearing. It clung densely on the drooping branches of the fir and spruce and hemlock. It mantled in a kind of breathless, expectant silence the solitude of the wilderness world.

Dave Patton, pushing down the blankets and the many-coloured patchwork quilt, lifted himself on one elbow and looked at the pale face of his young wife. She was sleeping. He slipped noiselessly out of the bunk, lightly pulled up the coverings again, and hurriedly drew on two pairs of heavy, home-knit socks of rough wool. The cabin was filled with the grey light of earliest dawn, and with a biting cold that made the woodsman's hardy fingers ache. Stepping softly as a cat over the rude plank floor, he made haste to pile the cooking-stove with birch-bark, kindling, and split sticks of dry, hard wood. At the touch of the match the birch-bark caught and curled with a crisp crackling, and with a roar in the strong draught the cunningly piled mass burst into blaze. Dave Patton straightened, and his grey eyes turned to a little, low bunk with high sides in the farther corner of the cabin.

Peering over the edge of the bunk with big, eager, blue eyes, was a round little face framed in a tousled mop of yellow hair. A red glare

from the open draught of the stove caught the child's face. The moment she saw her father looking at her she started to climb out of the bunk; but Dave was instantly at her side, kissing her and tucking her down again into the blankets.

"You mustn't git out o' bed, sweetie," he whispered, "till the house gits warmed up a bit. An' don't wake mother yet."

The child's eyes danced with eagerness, but she restrained her voice as she replied.

"I thought mebbe 'twas Christmis, popsie!" she whispered, catching his fingers. "'T first, I thought mebbe you was Sandy Claus, popsie. Oh, I wish Christmis 'ld hurry up!"

A look of pain passed over Dave Patton's face.

"Christmas won't be along fer 'most a week yit, sweetie!" he answered, in the soft undertone that took heed of his wife's slumbers. "An' anyways, how do you s'pose Sandy Claus is goin' to find his way, 'way out into these great woods, through all this snow?"

"Oh, *popsie!*" cried the child, excitedly. Then, remembering, she lowered her voice again to a whisper. "Don't you know Sandy Claus kin go *any*wheres? Snow, an' cold, an' the—the—the big, black woods—they don't bother *him* one little, teenty mite. He knows where to find me out here, jest's easy's in at the Settlements, popsie!"

The mother stirred in her bunk, wakened by the little one's voice. She sat up, shivering, and pulled a red shawl about her shoulders. Her eyes sought Dave's significantly and sympathetically.

"Mother's girl must try an' not think so much about Sandy Claus," she pleaded. "I don't want her to go an' be disappointed. Sandy Claus lives in at the Settlements, an' you know right well, girlie, he couldn't git 'way out here, Christmas Eve, without neglecting all the little boys an' girls at the Settlements. You wouldn't want *them all* disappointed, just so's he could come to our little girl 'way off here in the woods,

what's got her father an' mother anyways!"

The child sat up straight in her bunk, her eyes grew very wide and filled with tears, and her lips quivered. This was the first really effective blow that her faith in Christmas and in Santa Claus had ever received. But instantly her faith recovered itself. The eager light returned to her face, and she shook her yellow head obstinately.

"He won't *have to* 'lect the children in the Settlements, will he, popsie?" she cried. And without waiting for an answer, she went on: "He kin be everywheres to oncet, Sandy Claus can. He's so good an' kind, he won't forget *one* of the little boys an' girls in the Settlements, nor me, out here in the woods. Oh, mumsie, I wisht it was to-night was Christmas Eve!" And in her happy anticipation she bounced up and down in the bunk, a figure of fairy joy in her blue flannel nightgown.

Dave turned away with a heavy heart and jammed more wood into the stove. Then, pulling on his thick cowhide "larrigans," coat and woollen mittens, he went out to fodder the cattle. With that joyous roar of fresh flame in the stove the cabin was already warming up, but outside the door, which Dave closed quickly behind him, the cold had a kind of still savagery, edged and instant like a knife. To a strong man, however, it was a tonic, an honest challenging to resistance. In spite of his sad preoccupation, Dave responded to the cold air instinctively, pausing outside the door to fill his deep lungs and to glance at the thrilling mystery of the sunrise before him.

The cabin stood at the top of the clearing against a background of dense spruce forest which sheltered it on the north and north-east. Across the yard, on the western side of the cabin, the log barn and the "lean-to" thrust up their laden roofs from the surrounding snow. In front, the cleared ground sloped away gently to the woods below, a snow-swathed, mystically glimmering expanse, its surface tumbled by the upthrust of the muffled stumps. From the eastern corner of the clearing, directly opposite the doorway before which Dave was

standing, the Settlements trail led straight away, a lane of miraculous glory, into the very focus of the sunrise.

For miles upon miles the slow slope of the wilderness was towards the east, so that the trail was like an open gate into the great space of earth and sky. The sky, from the eastern horizon to the zenith—and that was all that Dave Patton had eyes for—was filled with a celestial rabble of rose-pink vapours, thin aërial wisps of almost unimaginable colour. Except the horizon! The horizon, just where the magic portals of the trail revealed it, was an unfathomable radiance of intense, transparent, orange-crimson flame, so thrilling in its strangeness that Dave seemed to feel his spirit striving to draw it in as his lungs were drawing in the vital air. From that fount of living light rushed innumerable streams of thin colour, making threads and stains and patches of mystical red among the tops of the lower forest, and dyeing the snowy surface of the clearing with the tints of mother-of-pearl and opal. Dave turned his head to glance at the cabin, the barn, and the woods behind them. All were bathed in that transfiguring rush of glory. The beauty of it gave him a curious pang, which turned instantly, by some association too obscure for him to trace, into an ache of grief at the disappointment that was hanging over his little one's gaily trusting heart. The fairylike quality of the scene before him made him think, by a mingling of sympathy and far-off, dim remembrance, of the fairy glamour and unreal radiance of beauty that Christmas tree and Christmas toys stood for in the child's bright anticipations. He reminded himself of the glittering delights with which, during the past three Christmases, Lidey's kinsfolk in the Settlement had lovingly surrounded her. Now he, her father, could do nothing to make her Christmas different from all these other days of whose shut-in monotony she was wearying. Hope, now, and excited wonder were giving the little one new life. Dave Patton cringed within at the thought of the awakening, the disillusionment, the desolation of sorrow that would come to the baby heart with the dawn of Christmas. He was overwhelmed with self-reproach, because he had not realized

all this in time to make provision, before the deep snow had blocked the trail to the Settlement. Now, what *could* he do?

Heavily Dave strode across the yard to the door of the barn. At the sound of his feet crunching the trodden and brittle snow, there came low mooings of eagerness from the expectant cattle in the barn. As he lifted the massive wooden latch and opened the door, the horse whinnied to him from the innermost stall, there was a welcoming shuffle of hoofs, and a comfortable warmth puffed steamily out in his face. From the horse's stall, from the stanchions of the cattle, big, soft eyes all turned to him. As he bundled the scented hay into the mangers, and listened to the contented snortings and puffings as soft muzzles tossed the fodder, he thought how happy these creatures were in their warm security. He thought how happy he was, and his wife, reunited to him after three years of forced and almost continuous separation. For him, and for the young wife, now recovering health in the tonic air of the spruce land after years of invalidism, this had promised to be a Christmas of unalloyed gladness. To one only, to the little one whose happiness was his continual thought, the day would be dark with the shattering of cherished hopes. The more he thought of it, the more he felt that it was not to be borne. Faint but piteous memories from his own childhood stirred in his brain, and he realized how irremediable, how final and desperate, seem a child's small sorrows. A sudden resolve took hold upon him. This bitterness, at least, his little one should not know. He jammed the pitchfork energetically back into the mow and left the barn with the quick step of an assured purpose.

Three years before this, Dave Patton, after a series of misfortunes in the Settlement, which had reduced him to sharp poverty, had been forced to leave his wife and three-years-old baby with her own people, while he betook himself into the remotest wilderness to carve out a new home for them on a tract of forest land which was all that remained of his possessions. The land was fertile and carried good

timber, and he had begun to prosper. But his wife's ill-health had long made it impossible for her to face the hardships and risks of a pioneer's life two days' journey from the nearest civilization. Not till the preceding spring had Dave dared to bring his family out to the wilderness home that he had so long been making ready for them. Then, however, it had proved a success. In that high and healing air he had seen the colour slowly come back to his wife's pale cheeks; and as for the child, until the great snows came and cut her off from this novel and interesting world, she had been absorbingly happy in the fellowship of the wilderness.

When Dave re-entered the cabin, he found the table set over by the window, and his wife beating up the batter for the buckwheat pancakes that she was about to griddle for breakfast. Lidey, still in her little blue flannel nightgown, but with beaded deerskin moccasins on her tiny feet, and the golden wilfulness of her hair tied back demurely with a blue ribbon, was seated at one end of the table, her eager face half buried in a sheet of paper. She was laboriously inditing, for perhaps the twentieth time, an epistle to "Sandy Claus," telling him what she hoped he would bring her.

If anything had been needed to confirm Dave Patton in his resolve, it was this. From the rapt child his eyes turned and met his wife's inquiring glance.

"I reckon I've got to go, Mary!" he said quietly. "Think you two kin git along all right fer four or five days? We ain't likely to have no more snow this moon."

The woman let a little sigh escape her, but the look she gave her husband was one of cheerful acquiescence.

"I guess you're right, dear! I'll have to let you go, though five days seems an awful long time to be alone here. I've been thinkin' it over," she continued, guarding her words so that Lidey should not understand—"an' I just couldn't bear to see it, Dave!"

“That’s so!” assented the man. “I’ll leave heaps o’ wood an’ kindlin’ cut, an’ you’ll jest have to milk an’ look after the beasts, dear. Long’s you’re not *scairt* to be alone, it’s all right, I reckon!”

“When’ll you start?” asked the wife, turning to pour the batter in little, sputtering, grey-white circles on to the hot, greased griddle.

“First thing to-morrow mornin’!” answered Dave, seating himself at the table as the appetizing smell of the browning pancakes filled the room. “Snow’s jest right for snowshoein’, an’ I’ll git back easy Christmas Eve.”

“You sure won’t be late, popsie?” interrupted the child, looking up with apprehension in her round eyes. “I jest wouldn’t care one mite for Sandy Claus if you weren’t here too!”

“Mebbe I’ll git him to give me a lift in his little sleigh! Anyways, I’ll be back!” laughed Dave, gaily.

## II

After Dave had gone, setting out at daybreak on his moose-hide snowshoes, which crunched musically on the hard snow, things went very well for a while at the lonely clearing. It was not so lonely, either, during the bright hours about midday, when the sunshine managed to accumulate something almost like warmth in the sheltered yard. About noon the two red and white cows and the yoke of wide-horned red oxen would stand basking in front of the lean-to, near the well, contentedly chewing their cuds. At this time the hens, too, yellow and black and speckled, would come out and scratch in the litter, perennially undiscouraged by the fact that the only thing they found beneath it was the snow. The vivid crossbills, red and black and white, would come to the yard in flocks, and the quaker-coloured snow-buntings, and the big, trustful, childlike, pine grosbeaks, with the growing stain of rose-purple over their heads and necks. These kept

Lidey interested, helping to pass the days that now, to her excited anticipations, seemed so long. Perhaps half a dozen times a day she would print a difficult communication to Santa Claus with some new idea, some new suggestion. These missives were mailed to the good Saint of Children by the swift medium of the roaring kitchen fire; and as the draught whisked their scorching fragments upwards, Lidey was satisfied that they went straight to their destination. The child's joy in her anticipations was now the more complete because, since her father's departure, her mother had ceased to discourage her hopes.

On the day before Christmas Eve, however, the mother felt symptoms of a return of her old sickness. Immediately she grew anxious, realizing how necessary it was that she should keep well. This nervous apprehension hastened the result that she most dreaded. Her pain and her weakness grew worse hour by hour. Mastered by her memories of what she had been through before, she was in no mood to throw off the attack. That evening, crawling to the barn with difficulty, she amazed the horse and the cattle by coaxing them to drink again, then piled their mangers with a two-days' store of hay, and scattered buckwheat recklessly for the hens. The next morning she could barely drag herself out of bed to light the fire; and Lidey had to make her breakfast—which she did contentedly enough—on bread and butter and unlimited molasses.

It was a weary day for the little one, in spite of her responsibilities. Muffled up and mittened, she was able, under her mother's directions, to carry a little water to the stock in a small tin kettle, making many journeys. And she was able to keep the fire going. But the hours crept slowly, and she was so consumed with impatience that all her usual amusements lost their savour. Not even the rare delight of being allowed to cut pictures out of some old illustrated papers could divert her mind from its dazzling anticipations. But before Christmas could come, must come her father; and from noon onward she would keep running to the door every few minutes to peer expectantly down the

trail. She was certain that, at the worst, he could not by any possibility be delayed beyond supper-time, for he was needed to get supper—or, rather, as Lidey expressed it, to help her get supper for mother! Lidey was not hungry, to be sure, but she was getting mortally tired of unmitigated bread and butter and molasses.

Supper-time, however, came and went, and no sign of Dave's return. On the verge of tears, Lidey munched a little of the now distasteful food. Her mother, worn out with the pain, which had at last relaxed its grip, fell into a heavy sleep. There was no light in the cabin except the red glow from the open draught of the stove, and the intense, blue-white moonlight streaming in through the front window. The child's impatience became intolerable.

Flinging open the door for the hundredth time, she gazed out eagerly across the moonlit snow and down the trail. The cloudless moon, floating directly above it, transfigured that narrow and lonely road into a path to wonderland. In the mystic radiance—blue-white, but shot with faint, half-imagined flashes of emerald and violet—Lidey could see no loneliness whatever. The monstrous solitude became to her eyes a garden of silver and crystal. As she gazed, it lured her irresistibly.

With a sudden resolve she noiselessly closed the door, lit the lamp, and began to put on her wraps, stealing about on tiptoe that she might not awaken her mother. She was quite positive that, by this time, her father must be almost home. As her little brain dwelt upon this idea, she presently brought herself to see him, striding swiftly along in the moonlight just beyond the turn of the trail. If she hurried, she could meet him before he came out upon the clearing. The thought possessed her. Stealing a cautious glance at her mother's face to be sure her sleep was sound, she slipped out into the shine. A moment more and her tiny figure, hooded and muffled and mittened, was dancing on moccasined feet across the snow.

At the entrance to the trail, Lidey felt the first qualm of misgiving. The

path of light, to be sure, with all its fairy-book enticement, lay straight before her. But the solemn woods, on either side of the path, were filled with great shadows and a terrible stillness. At this point Lidey had half a mind to turn back. But she was already a young person of positive ideas, not lightly to be swerved from a purpose; and her too vivid imagination still persisted in showing her that picture of her father, speeding towards her just beyond the turn of the trail. She even thought that she could hear his steps upon the daunting stillness. With her heart quivering, yet uplifted by an exaltation of hope, she ran on, not daring to glance again into the woods. To sustain her courage she kept thinking of the look of gay astonishment that would flash into her father's face as he met her running towards him—just around the turn of the trail!

The turn was nearly a quarter of a mile distant, but the child reached it at last. With a little cry of confident relief she rushed forward. The long trail—now half in shadow from the slight change in its direction—stretched out empty before her. In the excess of her disappointment she burst into tears and sat down on the snow irresolutely.

Her first impulse—after she had cried for a minute, and wiped her eyes with the little mittens, which promptly stiffened in the stinging frost—was to face about and run for home as fast as she could. But when she turned and glanced behind her, the backward path appeared quite different. When she no longer faced the moonlight, the world took on an unfriendly, sinister look. There were unknown terrors all along that implacable blue-white way through the dread blackness of the woods. Sobbing with desolation, she turned again towards the moon. Ahead, for all her fears, the trail still held something of the glamour and the dazzle. Ahead, too, as she reminded herself, was surely her father, hastening to meet her, only not quite so near as she had imagined. Summoning back her courage, and comforting her lonely spirit with thoughts of what Santa Claus was going to bring her, she picked herself up and continued

her journey at a hurried little walk.

She had not gone more than a few steps, when a strange, high sound, from somewhere far behind her, sent her heart into her throat and quickened her pace to a run.

Again came that high, long-drawn, quavering sound; and the child's heart almost stopped beating. If only she could see her father coming! She had never heard any sound just like that; it was not savage, nor very loud, but somehow it seemed to carry a kind of horror on its floating cadence. It reminded her, very faintly, of the howling of some dogs that she had heard in the Settlement. She was not afraid of dogs. But she knew there were no dogs in the forest.

Just as she was beginning to lose her breath and slacken her pace, that terrible cry came wavering again through the trees, much louder now and nearer. It lent new strength to her tired little feet, and she fled on faster than ever, her red lips open and her eyes wide. Another slight turn of the trail, and it ran once more directly towards the moon, stretching on and on till it narrowed from sight. And nowhere in the shining track was Dave to be seen. Lidey had now, however, but one thought in her quivering brain, and that was to keep running and get to her father before those dreadful voices could overtake her. She knew they were coming up swiftly. They sounded terribly near. When she had gone about two hundred yards beyond the last bend of the trail, she noticed, a few steps ahead of her, a tiny clearing, and at its farther edge the gable of a little hut rising a couple of feet above the snow. She knew the place. She had played in it that summer, while Dave was cutting the coarse hay on the clearing. It was a place that had been occupied by lonely trappers and lumber prospectors. Being a work of men's hands, it gave the child a momentary sense of comfort, of companionship in the dreadful wild. She paused, uncertain whether to continue along the trail or to seek the shelter of the empty hut.

When the crunching of her own little footsteps stopped, however, she

was instantly aware of the padding of other feet behind her. Looking back, she saw a pack of grey beasts just coming around the turn. They were something like dogs. But Lidey knew they were not dogs. She had seen pictures of them—awful pictures. She had read stories of them which had frozen her blood as she read. Now, her very bones seemed to melt within her. They were wolves! For a moment her throat could form no sound. Then—"Father!" she screamed despairingly, and rushed for the hut.

As she reached it, the wolves were hardly a dozen paces behind. The door stood half open, but drifted full of snow to within little more than a foot of the top. Into the low opening the child dived head first, like a rabbit, crept behind the door, and fell upon the snow, gasping, too horror-stricken to make any outcry.

A step from the hut door the wolves halted abruptly. The half-buried hut, and the dark hole leading into it—these were things they did not understand, except that they recognized them as belonging to man. Anything belonging to man was dangerous. In that dark hole they suspected a trap. The leader went up to it, and almost poked his nose into it, sniffing. But he backed away sharply as if he had met with a blow on the snout, and his nostrils wrinkled in savage enmity. The man smell was strong in the hut. It seemed very like a trap.

Lying flat on her stomach behind the door, Lidey stared out through the narrow crack with eyes that seemed starting from her head. Out there in the clear glitter of the moonlight she saw the wolves go prowling savagely to and fro, and heard their steps as they cautiously circled the hut, seeking another entrance. They kept about five or six feet distant from it at first, so suspicious were they of that man smell that had greeted the leader's first attempt at investigation. When they had prowled about the hut for several minutes, they all sat down on their haunches before the door and seemed to deliberate. The child felt their dreadful eyes piercing her through and through, as they searched her out through the crack and penetrated her vain hiding.

Suddenly, while the eyes of all the pack were flaming upon her, she saw the leader come swiftly forward and thrust his fierce snout right against the crack of the door. In a sort of madness she struck at it with her little, mittened hand. The wolf, apparently still disconcerted by the man smell that greeted his nostrils, sprang back warily. Then the whole pack drew a foot or two closer to the open doorway. Ravenous though they were, they were not yet assured that the hut was not a trap. They were not yet quite ready to crawl in and secure their prey. But gradually they were edging nearer. A few moments more and the leader, no less crafty than savage, would creep in. Already he had accustomed himself to the menace of that scent. Now, he did creep in, as far as the middle of his body, investigating. His red jaws and long, white teeth appeared around the edge of the door. At the sight Lidey's voice returned to her. Shrinking back against the farthest wall, she gave shriek after shriek that seemed to tear the dreadful stillness. In the madness of her terror she hardly noticed that the wolf's head was suddenly withdrawn.

## III

When Dave Patton set out for the Settlement, he found the snow-shoeing so good, the biting air so bracing, and his own heart so light with hope and health, that he was able to make the journey in something less than a day and a half. Out of this time he had allowed himself four hours for sleep, in an old lumber camp beside the trail. At the Settlement, which boasted several miscellaneous stores, where anything from a baby's rattle to a bag of fertilizer or a bedroom suite could be purchased, he had no difficulty in gathering such gay-coloured trifles, together with more lasting gifts, as he thought would meet Lidey's anticipations. When he went to his wife's people, he found that all had something to add to his Santa Claus pack, for Mary as well as for the little one; and he hugged himself with elation at the thought of what a Christmas there was going to be in the lonely

wilderness cabin. He had bought two or three things for his wife; and when he shouldered his pack, slinging it high and strapping it close that it might not flop with his rapid stride, he found the burden no light one. But the lightness of his heart made compensation.

That night he took but two hours' sleep in the old lumber camp, aiming to reach home soon after noon. In the morning, however, things began to go wrong. First the pack, as packs sometimes will for no visible reason, developed a kink that galled his shoulders obstinately. Again and again he paused and tried to readjust it. But in vain. Finally he had to stop, undo the bundle, and rearrange every article in it, before he could induce it to "carry" smoothly.

Half an hour later, as he turned a step off the trail to get a drink at a bubbling spring, that kept open all through the bitterest winter, he caught his snowshoe on a buried branch and fell forward, breaking the frame. In his angry impatience he attempted no more than a temporary repair of the damage, such as he thought might see him to the end of his journey. But the poor makeshift broke down before he had gone a mile. There was nothing for him to do but to stop long enough to make a good job of it, which he did by chopping out a piece of ash, whittling down a couple of thin but tough strips, and splicing the break securely with the strong "salmon twine" that he always carried. Even so, he realized that to avoid further delay he would have to go cautiously and humour the mend. And soon he had to acknowledge to himself that it would be long after supper-time, long after Lidey's bed-time, before he could get home.

As the moon rose, he was accompanied by his shadow, a gigantic and grotesque figure that danced fantastically along the snow before him. As the moon climbed the icy heaven, the shadow shortened and acquired more sobriety of demeanour. Plodding doggedly onward, too tired to think, Dave amused himself with the antics of the shadow, which seemed responsible for a portion of the crisp music that came from his snowshoes.

From this careless reverie Dave was suddenly aroused by a ghost of sound that drifted towards him through the trees. It was a long, wailing cry, which somehow stirred the roots of his hair. He did not recognize it. But he felt that it was nothing human. It came from somewhere between himself and home, however; and he instinctively quickened his steps, thinking with satisfaction of the snug and well-warmed cabin that sheltered his dear ones.


“Where anything from a baby’s rattle to a bag of fertilizer could be purchased.”

Presently the long cry sounded again, nearer and clearer now, and

tremulous. Dave had heard wolves before, in Labrador and in the West. Had he not been quite sure that wolves were unknown in this part of the country, he would have sworn that the sound was the hunting cry of a wolf-pack. But the idea was impossible. He had no sooner made up his mind to this, however, than the cry was repeated once more. Thereupon Dave reluctantly changed his mind. That the sound meant wolves was not only possible, but certain. It filled him with resentment to think that those ravening marauders had come into the country.

It was soon manifest to Dave's initiated ears that the wolves were coming directly towards him. But he gathered, too, that they were in pursuit of some quarry. Dave had the eastern woodsman's contempt for wolves, unless in a very large pack; and he soon decided that this pack was a small one. He did not think that it would dare to face him. Nevertheless, he recognized the remote possibility of their being so hungry as to forget their dread of man. That in such case his axe would be an all-sufficient defence he did not doubt. But he was in a fierce hurry to get home. He did not want to be stopped and forced into any fight. For a moment he thought of turning off through the woods and giving these night foragers a wide berth. Then he remembered his uncertain snowshoes. The snow would be very soft off the trail, and there would be the chance of breaking the shoe again. Who was he, to be turned out of his path by a bunch of wild curs? It was the snow-shoe that settled it. He set his jaws grimly, unslung his axe, and pressed forward. The clamour of the pack was now so near and loud that it quite drowned one single, piercing cry of "Father!" that would otherwise have reached his ears. There was a new note in the howling, too, which Dave's ear interpreted as meaning that the quarry was in sight. Then the noise stopped abruptly, save for an impatient yelp or two.

"Whatever it be they're after, it's took to cover," said Dave to himself. "An' in the old shanty, too!" he added, as he saw the little patch of clearing open before him.

Realizing that the wolves had something to occupy fully their attention, he now crept noiselessly forward just within the edge of the wood. Peering forth from behind the cover of a drooping hemlock branch, he saw the roof of the hut, the half-open doorway nearly choked with snow, and the wolves prowling and sniffing around it, but keeping a couple of yards away.

"Scairt of a trap!" he thought to himself with a grin, and cursed his luck that he had not his rifle with him.

"A couple o' them thick, grey pelts," he thought—"what a coat they'd make for the little one!"

There were six wolves, and big ones—enough to make things look pretty ugly for one man with only an axe. Dave was glad they had something to keep them from turning their attention to him. He watched them for a few moments, then decided to go around by the other side of the clearing and avoid trouble.

He drew back as silently as a lynx. Where the woods overhead were thick, the snow was soft, with no crispness on the surface; and instead of the crunching that his steps made on the trail, here the snow made no sound under his feet but a sort of thick sigh.

Dave had taken several paces in retreat, when an idea flashed up that arrested him. *Why* were the wolves so wary about entering the hut, when their quarry was certainly inside? Their dread of a trap was not, of itself, quite enough to explain their caution. The thought gave him a qualm of uneasiness. He would return and have another look at them! Then his impatience got the better of him. Mary and the little one were waiting and watching for him at home. He retreated another pace or two. What should he be doing, wasting his time over a parcel of wolves that had got a fox cornered in the old shanty? Dave felt sure it was a fox. But no! He could not escape the conviction—much as he wished to—that if the fugitive were a fox, or any other animal of the north-eastern woods, it would not take six hungry wolves much more than six seconds to get over their suspicions and go in after him.

What if it should be some half-starved old Indian, working his way into the Settlement after bad luck with his hunting and his trapping! Whoever it was, he had no gun, or there would have been shooting before this. Dave saw that he must go back and look into the matter. But he was angry at this new delay. Cursing the wolves, and the Indian who didn't know enough to take care of himself, Dave stole back to his covert behind the hemlock branch, and peered forth once more, no longer interested, but aggrieved.

The wolves were now sitting on their haunches around the hut door. Their unusual behaviour convinced him that there was a man inside. Well, there was no getting around the fact that he was in for a fight. He only hoped that the chap inside was some good, and would have "somethin' to say fer himself, darn him!" Dave gently lowered the bundle from his back, and threw off his thick coat to allow his arms freer play.

It was at this moment that the leader of the pack made up his mind to crawl into the hut.

As the wolf's head entered the low opening, Dave gripped his axe, thrust aside the hemlock branch, and silently darted forth into the clearing. He did not shout, for he wanted to take his enemies, as far as possible, unawares. He had but a score of yards to go. So intent were they upon their leader's movements that Dave was almost upon them ere they heeded the sound of his coming. Then they looked around. Three shrank back, startled at the tall and threatening shape. But two sprang at his throat with snapping jaws. The first met the full sweep of his axe, in the chest and dropped in a heap. The second dodged a short blow and warily drew back again. Then, from within the darkness of the hut, came those screams of the madness of terror.

For one beat Dave's heart stopped. He knew the voice!

The big wolf was just backing out. He turned, jerking himself around like a loosed spring, as he saw Dave towering over him. But he was

not in time. The axe descended, sheering his haunches across, and he stretched out, working his great jaws convulsively. Dave saw that the jaws had no blood upon them, and his own blood returned to his heart. He had come in time. The screams within the hut died into piteous sobs.

Across Dave's mind flamed a vision of the agony of horror that Lidey had been suffering since first those howlings fell upon his ears. His heart-break transformed itself into a mad rage of vengeance. As he turned, with a hoarse shout, upon the rest of the pack, he felt a hot breath on his neck, and bare fangs snapped savagely within an inch of his throat. His assailant sprang back in time to escape the deadly sweep of the axe, but at the same instant the other three were leaping in. One of these caught a glancing blow, which drove him off, snarling. But the other two were so close that there was no time for Dave to recover. Instinctively he jabbed a short back-stroke with the end of the axe-handle, and caught one of his assailants in the belly. Sickened, and daunted by this unexpected form of reprisal, the brute hunched itself with a startled yelp and ran off with its tail between its legs. At the same moment, dropping the axe, Dave caught the other wolf fairly by the throat. The gripping hand was a kind of weapon that the beast had never learned to guard against, and it was taken at a disadvantage. With a grunt of fury and of effort Dave closed his grip inexorably, braced himself, and swung the heavy brute off its feet. Whirling it clear around his head, he let go. The animal flew sprawling and twisting through the air, and came down on its back ten feet away. When it landed, there was no more fight left in it. Before Dave could reach it with his axe it was up and away in a panic after its two remaining fellows.

Breathing heavily from his effort and from the storm of emotion still surging in his breast, Dave turned to the hut door and called—

"Lidey! Lidey! Are you there?"

"Popsie! Oh, popsie, *dear!* I thought you weren't goin' to come!" cried

a quivering little voice. And the child crept out into the moonlight.

“Oh, popsie!” she sobbed, hiding her eyes in his neck as he crushed her to his heart, “they were goin’ to eat me up, an’ I thought you wouldn’t ever come!”

## IV

With the bundle on his back and Lidey in his arms, Dave strode homeward, his weariness forgotten. His first anxiety about his wife was somewhat eased when he learned that Lidey had left her asleep; for he remembered that a heavy sleep always marked the end of one of her attacks. He only hoped that the sleep would hold her until they got home, for his heart sank at the thought of her terror if she should wake and find Lidey gone. As they came out on the edge of the clearing, and saw that all was quiet in the cabin, Dave said—

“We won’t tell mother nothin’ about the wolves to-night, sweetie, eh? It ’ld jest git her all worked up, an’ she couldn’t stand it when she’s sick. We won’t say nothin’ about that till to-morrow!”

“Yes!” murmured Lidey, “she’d be awful scairt!”

They were then about halfway up the slope, when from the cabin came a frightened cry of “Lidey! Lidey!” The door was flung open, the lamplight streamed out in futile contest with the moonlight, and Mrs. Patton appeared. Her face was white with fear. As she saw Dave and the little one hurrying towards her, both hands went to her heart in the extremity of her relief, and she sank back into a chair before the door.

Dave kicked off his snow-shoes with a dexterous twist, stepped inside, slammed the door, and with a laugh and a kiss deposited Lidey in her mother’s lap.

“She jest run down to meet me!” explained Dave, truthfully but deceptively.

“Oh, girlie, how you frightened me!” cried the woman, divided

between tears and smiles. “I woke up, Dave, an’ found her gone; an’ bein’ kind o’ bewildered, I couldn’t understand it!”

She clung to his hand, while he looked tenderly down into her face.

“Poor little woman!” he murmured, “you’ve had a bad turn ag’in, Lidey tells me. Better now, eh?”

“I’m plumb all right ag’in, Dave, now you’re back,” she answered, squeezing his hand hard. “But land’s sakes, Dave, how ever did you git all that blood on your pants?”

“Oh,” said the man, lightly, “that’s nothin.’ Tell you about it bime-by. I’m jest starvin’ now. Let’s have supper quick, and then give old Mr. Sandy Claus a chance. Tomorrow we’re going to have the greatest Christmas ever was, us three!”

# The Gentling of Red McWha

## I

It was heavy sledding on the Upper Ottanoonsis trail. The two lumbermen were nearing the close of the third day of the hard four days' haul in from the Settlements to the camp. At the head of the first team, his broad jaw set and his small grey eyes angry with fatigue, trudged the big figure of Red McWha, choosing and breaking a way through the deep snow. With his fiery red head and his large red face, he was the only one of his colouring in a large family so dark that they were known as the "Black McWhas," and his temper seemed to have been chronically soured by the singularity of his type. But he was a good woodsman and a good teamster, and his horses followed confidently at his heels like dogs. The second team was led by a tall, gaunt-jawed, one-eyed lumberman named Jim Johnson, but invariably known as "Walley." From the fact that his blind eye was of a peculiar blankness, like whitish porcelain, he had been nicknamed "Wall-Eye"; but, owing to his general popularity, combined with the emphatic views he held on that particular subject, the name had been mitigated to Walley.

The two were hauling in supplies for Conroy's Camp, on Little Ottanoonsis Lake. Silently, but for the clank and creak of the harness, and the soft "thut, thut" of the trodden snow, the little procession toiled on through the soundless desolation. Between the trees—naked birches and scattered, black-green firs—filtered the lonely, yellowish-violet light of the fading winter afternoon. When the light had died into ghostly grey along the corridors of the forest, the teams rounded a turn of the trail, and began to descend the steep slope which led down

to Joe Godding's solitary cabin on the edge of Burnt Brook Meadows. Presently the dark outline of the cabin came into view against the pallor of the open clearing.

But there was no light in the window. No homely pungency of wood-smoke breathed welcome on the bitter air. The cabin looked startlingly deserted.

"Whoa!" commanded McWha, sharply, and glanced round at Johnson with an angry misgiving in his eyes. The teams came to a stop with a shiver of all their bells.

Then, upon the sudden stillness, arose the faint sound of a child's voice, crying hopelessly.

"Something wrong down yonder!" growled McWha, his expectations of a hot supper crumbling into dust.

As he spoke, Walley Johnson sprang past him and went loping down the hill with long, loose strides like a moose.

Red McWha followed very deliberately with the teams. He resented anything emotional. And he was prepared to feel himself aggrieved.

When he reached the cabin door the sound of weeping had stopped. Inside he found Walley Johnson on his knees before the stove, hurriedly lighting a fire. Wrapped in his coat, and clutching his arm as if afraid he might leave her, stood a tiny, flaxen-haired child, perhaps five years old. The cabin was cold, almost as cold as the snapping night outside. Along the middle of the floor, with bedclothes from the bunk heaped awkwardly upon it in the little one's efforts to warm it back to responsive life, sprawled rigidly the lank body of Joe Godding.

Red McWha stared for a moment in silence, then stooped, examined the dead man's face, and felt his breast.

"Deader'n a herring!" he muttered.

"Yes! the poor old shike-poke!" answered Johnson, without looking up

from his task.

“Heart?” queried McWha, laconically.

Johnson made no reply till the flame caught the kindling and rushed inwards from the open draught with a cordial roar. Then he stood up.

“Don’ know about that,” said he. “But he’s been dead these hours and hours! An’ the fire out! An’ the kid most froze! A sick man like he was, to’ve kept the kid alone here with him that way!” And he glanced down at the dead figure with severe reprobation.

“Never was much good, that Joe Godding!” muttered McWha, always critical.

As the two woodsmen discussed the situation, the child, a delicate-featured, blue-eyed girl, was gazing up from under her mop of bright hair, first at one, then at the other. Walley Johnson was the one who had come in answer to her long wailing, who had hugged her close, and wrapped her up, and crooned over her in his pity, and driven away the terrors. But she did not like to look at him, though his gaunt, sallow face was strong and kind.

People are apt to talk easy generalities about the intuition of children! As a matter of fact, the little ones are not above judging quite as superficially and falsely as their elders. The child looked at her protector’s sightless eye, then turned away and sidled over to McWha with one hand coaxingly outstretched. McWha’s mouth twisted sourly. Without appearing to see the tiny hand, he deftly evaded it. Stooping over the dead man, he picked him up, straightened him out decently on his bunk, and covered him away from sight with the blankets.

“Ye needn’t be so crusty to the kid, when she wants to make up to ye!” protested Walley, as the little one turned back to him with a puzzled look in her tearful blue eyes.

“It’s all alike they be, six, or sixteen, or sixty-six!” remarked McWha, sarcastically, stepping to the door. “I don’t want none of ’em! Ye kin look out for ’er! I’m for the horses.”

“Don’t talk out so loud,” admonished the little one. “You’ll wake Daddy. Poor Daddy’s sick!”

“Poor lamb!” murmured Johnson, folding her to his great breast with a pang of pity. “No; we won’t wake daddy. Now tell me, what’s yer name?”

“Daddy called me Rosy-Lilly!” answered the child, playing with a button on Johnson’s vest. “Is he gettin’ warmer now? He was so cold, and he wouldn’t speak to Rosy-Lilly.”

“Rosy-Lilly it be!” agreed Johnson. “Now we jest won’t bother daddy, him bein’ so sick! You an’ me’ll git supper.”

The cabin was warm now, and on tiptoe Johnson and Rosy-Lilly went about their work, setting the table, “bilin’ the tea,” and frying the bacon. When Red McWha came in from the barn, and stamped the snow from his feet, Rosy-Lilly said “Hush!” laid her finger on her lip, and glanced meaningly at the moveless shape in the bunk.

“We mus’ let ’im sleep, Rosy-Lilly says,” decreed Johnson, with an emphasis which penetrated McWha’s unsympathetic consciousness, and elicited a non-committal grunt.

When supper was ready, Rosy-Lilly hung around him for a minute or two before dragging her chair up to the table. She evidently purposed paying him the compliment of sitting close beside him and letting him cut her bacon for her. But finding that he would not even glance at her, she fetched a deep sigh, and took her place beside Johnson. When the meal was over and the dishes had been washed up, she let Johnson put her to bed in her little bunk behind the stove. She wanted to kiss her father for good-night, as usual; but when Johnson insisted that to do so might wake him up, and be bad for him, she yielded tearfully; and they heard her sobbing herself to sleep.

For nearly an hour the two men smoked in silence, their steaming feet under the stove, their backs turned towards the long, unstirring shape in the big bunk. At last Johnson stood up and shook himself.

“Well,” he drawled, “I s’pose we mus’ be doin’ the best we kin fer poor old Joe.”

“He ain’t left us no ch’ice!” snapped McWha.

“We can’t leave him here in the house,” continued Johnson, irresolutely.

“No, no!” answered McWha. “He’d ha’nt it, an’ us, too, ever after, like as not. We got to give ’im lumberman’s shift, till the Boss kin send and take ’im back to the Settlement for the parson to do ’im up right an’ proper.”

So they rolled poor Joe Godding up in one of the tarpaulins which covered the sleds, and buried him deep in the snow, under the big elm behind the cabin, and piled a monument of cordwood above him, so that the foxes and wild cats could not disturb his lonely sleep, and surmounted the pile with a rude cross to signify its character. Then, with lighter hearts, they went back to the cabin fire, which seemed to burn more freely now that the grim presence of its former master had been removed.

“Now what’s to be done with the kid—with Rosy-Lilly?” began Johnson.

Red McWha took his pipe from his mouth, and spat accurately into the crack of the grate to signify that he had no opinion on that important subject.

“They do say in the Settlements as how Joe Godding hain’t kith nor kin in the world, savin’ an’ exceptin’ the kid only,” continued Johnson.

McWha nodded indifferently.

“Well,” went on Johnson, “we can’t do nawthin’ but take her on to the camp now. Mebbe the Boss’ll decide she’s got to go back to the Settlement, along o’ the fun’ral. But mebbe he’ll let the hands keep her, to kinder chipper up the camp when things gits dull. I reckon when the boys sees her sweet face they’ll all be wantin’ to be guardeens to

her."

McWha again spat accurately into the crack of the grate.

"I ain't got no fancy for young 'uns in camp, but ye kin do ez ye like, Walley Johnson," he answered grudgingly. "Only I want it understood, right now, I ain't no guardeen, an' won't be, to nawthin' that walks in petticoats! What I'm thinkin' of is the old cow out yonder, an' them hens o' Joe's what I seen a-roostin' over the cowstall."

"Them's all Rosy-Lilly's, an' goes with us an' her to camp to-morrer," answered Johnson with decision. "We'll tell the kid as how her daddy had to be took away in the night because he was so sick, an' couldn't speak to nobody, an' we was goin' to take keer o' her till he gits back! An' that's the truth," he added, with a sudden passion of tenderness and pity in his tone.

At this hint of emotion McWha laughed sarcastically. Then knocking out his pipe, he proceeded to fill the stove for the night, and spread his blanket on the floor beside it.

"If ye wants to make the camp a baby-farm," he growled, "don't mind me!"

## II

Under the dominion of Rosy-Lilly fell Conroy's camp at sight, capitulating unconditionally to the first appeal of her tearful blue eyes, and little, hurt red mouth. Dan Logan, the Boss, happened to know just how utterly alone the death of her father had left the child, and he was the first to propose that the camp should adopt her. Fully bearing out the faith which Walley Johnson had so confidently expressed back in the dead man's cabin, Jimmy Brackett, the cook, on whom would necessarily devolve the chief care of this new member of his family, jumped to the proposal of the Boss with enthusiastic support.

"We'll every mother's son o' us be guardeen to her!" he declared, with

the finality appropriate to his office as autocrat second only to the Boss himself. Every man in camp assented noisily, saving only Red McWha; and he, as was expected of him, sat back and grinned.

From the first, Rosy-Lilly made herself at home in the camp. For a few days she fretted after her father, whenever she was left for a moment to her own devices; but Jimmy Brackett was ever on hand to divert her mind with astounding fairy-tales during the hours when the rest of the hands were away chopping and hauling. Long after she had forgotten to fret, she would have little "cryin' spells" at night, remembering her father's good-night kiss. But a baby's sorrow, happily, is shorter than its remembrance; and Rosy-Lilly soon learned to repeat her phrase: "Poor Daddy had to go 'way-'way-off," without the quivering lip and wistful look which made the big woodsmen's hearts tighten so painfully beneath their homespun shirts. Conroy's Camp was a spacious, oblong cabin of "chinked" logs, with a big stove in the middle. The bunks were arranged in a double tier along one wall, and a plank table (rude, but massive) along the other. Built on at one end, beside the door, was the kitchen, or cookhouse, crowded, but clean and orderly, and bright with shining tins. At the inner end of the main room a corner was boarded off to make a tiny bedroom, no bigger than a cupboard. This was the Boss's private apartment. It contained two narrow bunks—one for the Boss himself, who looked much too big for it; and one for the only guest whom the camp ever expected to entertain, the devoted missionary-priest, who, on his snowshoes, was wont to make the round of the widely scattered camps once or twice in a winter. This guest-bunk the Boss at once allotted to Rosy-Lilly, but on the strict condition that Johnson should continue to act as nurse and superintend Rosy-Lilly's nightly toilet.

Rosy-Lilly had not been in the camp a week before McWha's "ugliness" to her had aroused even the Boss's resentment, and the Boss was a just man. Of course, it was generally recognized that McWha was not bound, by any law or obligation, to take any notice of

the child, still less to "make a fuss over her," with the rest of the camp. But Jimmy Brackett expressed the popular sentiment when he growled, looking sourly at the back of McWha's unconscious red head bowed ravenously over his plate of beans—

"If only he'd *do* something, so's we c'ld *lick* some decency inter 'im!"

There was absolutely nothing to be done about it, however; for Red McWha was utterly within his rights.

Rosy-Lilly, as we have seen, was not yet five years old; but certain of the characteristics of her sex were already well developed within her. The adulation of the rest of the camp, poured out at her tiny feet, she took graciously enough, but rather as a matter of course. It was all her due. But what she wanted was that that big, ugly, red-headed man, with the cross grey eyes and loud voice, should be nice to her. She wanted *him* to pick her up, and set her on his knee, and whittle wonderful wooden dogs and dolls and boats and boxes for her with his jack-knife, as Walley Johnson and the others did. With Walley she would hardly condescend to coquet, so sure she was of his abject slavery to her whims; and, moreover, as must be confessed with regret, so unforgiving was she in her heart toward his blank eye. She merely consented to make him useful, much as she might a convenient and altogether doting but uninteresting grandmother. To all the other members of the camp—except the Boss, whom she regarded with some awe—she would make baby-love impartially and carelessly. But it was Red McWha whose notice she craved.

When supper was over, and pipes filled and lighted, some one would strike up a "chantey"—one of those interminable, monotonous ballad-songs which are peculiar to the lumber camps.

These "chanteys," however robust their wordings or their incidents, are always sung in a plaintive minor which goes oddly with the large-moulded virility of the singers. Some are sentimental, or religious, to the last degree, while others reek with an indecency of speech that would shroud the Tenderloin in blushes. Both kinds are equally

popular in the camps, and both are of the most astounding *naïveté*. Of the worst of them, even, the simple-minded woodsmen are not in the least ashamed. They seem unconscious of their enormity. Nevertheless, it came about that, without a word said by any one, from the hour of Rosy-Lilly's arrival in camp, all the indecent "chanteys" were dropped, as if into oblivion, from the woodsmen's repertoire.

During the songs, the smoking, and the lazy fun, Rosy-Lilly would slip from one big woodsman to another, an inconspicuous little figure in the smoke-gloomed light of the two oil-lamps. Man after man would snatch her up to his knee, lay by his pipe, twist her silky, yellow curls about his great blunt fingers, and whisper wood-folk tales or baby nonsense into her pink little ear. She would listen solemnly for a minute or two, then wriggle down and move on to another of her admirers. But before long she would be standing by the bench on which sat Red McWha, with one big knee usually hooked high above the other, and his broad back reclined against the edge of a bunk. For a few minutes the child would stand there smiling with a perennial confidence, waiting to be noticed. Then she would come closer, without a word from her usually nimble little tongue, lean against McWha's knee, and look up coaxingly into his face. If McWha chanced to be singing, for he was a "chanter" of some note, he would appear so utterly absorbed that Rosy-Lilly would at last slip away, with a look of hurt surprise in her face, to be comforted by one of her faithful. But if McWha were not engrossed in song, it would soon become impossible for him to ignore her. He would suddenly look down at her with his fierce eyes, knit his shaggy red brows, and demand harshly: "Well, Yaller Top, an' what d'*you* want?"

From the loud voice and angry eye the child would retreat in haste, clear to the other end of the room, and sometimes a big tear would track its way down either cheek. After such an experiment she would usually seek Jimmy Brackett, who would console her with some sticky sweetmeat, and strive to wither McWha with envenomed glances.

McWha would reply with a grin, as if proud of having routed the little adventurer so easily. He had discovered that the name “Yaller Top” was an infallible weapon of rebuff, as Rosy-Lilly considered it a term of indignity. To his evil humour there was something amusing in abashing Rosy-Lilly with the title she most disliked. Moreover, it was an indirect rebuke to the “saft” way the others acted about her.

If Rosy-Lilly felt rebuffed for the moment by McWha’s rudeness, she seemed always to forget it the next time she saw him. Night after night she would sidle up to his knee, and sue for his notice; and night after night she would retire discomfited. But on one occasion the discomfiture was McWha’s. She had elicited the customary rough demand—

“Well, Yaller Top, what d’*you* want?”

But this time she held her ground, though with quivering lips.

“Yaller Top ain’t my name ’tall,” she explained with baby politeness. “It’s Rosy-Lilly; ’n’ I jes’ thought you *might* want me to sit on yer knee a little, teeny minit.”

Much taken aback, McWha glanced about the room with a loutish grin. Then he flushed angrily, as he felt the demand of the sudden silence. Looking down again, with a scowl, at the expectant little face of Rosy-Lilly, he growled: “Well, not as I knows of!” and rose to his feet, thrusting her brusquely aside.

“Ain’t he uglier’n hell?” murmured Bird Pigeon to Walley Johnson, spitting indignantly on the stove-leg. “He’d ’a’ cuffed the kid ef he da’st, he glared at her that ugly!”

“Like to see ’im try it!” responded Johnson through his teeth, with a look to which his blank eye lent mysterious menace.

The time soon came, however, when McWha resumed his old seat and his old attitude on the bench. Rosy-Lilly avoided him for two evenings, but on the third the old fascination got the better of her pique. McWha saw her coming, and, growing self-conscious, he

hurriedly started up a song with the full strength of his big voice.

The song was a well-known one, and nothing in it to redden the ear of a maiden; but it was profane with that rich, ingenious amplitude of profanity which seems almost instinctive among the lumbermen—a sort of second mother-tongue to them. Had it been any one but McWha who started it, nothing would have been said; but, as it was, Walley Johnson took alarm on the instant. To his supersensitive watchfulness, McWha was singing that song "jest a purpose to be ugly to the kid." The fact that "the kid" would hardly understand a word of it, did not occur to him. Rising up from his bench behind the stove he shouted out across the smoky room: "Shet up that, Red!"

The song stopped. Every one looked inquiringly at Johnson. For several moments there was silence, broken only by an uneasy shuffling of feet. Then McWha got up slowly, his eyebrows bristling, his angry eyes little pin-points. First he addressed himself to Johnson.

"What the —— business is't o' yourn what I sing?" he demanded, opening and shutting his big fingers.

"I'll show ye what," began Johnson, in a tense voice. But the Boss interrupted. Dave Logan was a quiet man, but he ruled his camp. Moreover, he was a just man, and Johnson had begun the dispute.

"Chuck that, Walley!" he snapped, sharp as a whip. "If there's to be any row in this here camp, I'll make it myself, an' don't none o' you boys forgit it!"

McWha turned upon him in angry appeal.

"You're Boss, Dave Logan, an' what you sez goes, fer's I'm concerned," said he. "But I ax you, *as* Boss, be this here camp a *camp*, er a camp-meetin'? Walley Johnson kin go straight to hell; but ef *you* sez we 'ain't to sing nawthin' but hymns, why, o' course, it's hymns for me—till I kin git away to a camp where the hands is men, an' not wet-nurses!"

"That's all right, Red!" said the Boss. "I kin make allowances for yer gittin' riled, considerin' the jolt Walley's rude interruption give ye! He hadn't no right to interrupt, nor no call to. This ain't no camp-meetin'. The boys have a right to swear all they like. Why, 'twouldn't be noways natural in camp ef the boys couldn't swear! somethin'd hev to bust before long. An' the boys can't be expected to go a-tiptoe and talk prunes an' prisms, all along o' a little yaller-haired kid what's come to brighten up the old camp fer us. That wouldn't be sense! But all we've got to mind is jest this—*nothin' vile!* That's all, boys. We'll worry along without that!"

When the Boss spoke, he liked to explain himself rather fully. When he ceased, no one had a word to say. Every one was satisfied but Johnson; and he was constrained to seem so. There was an oppressive silence for some seconds. It was broken by the soft treble of Rosy-Lilly, who had been standing before the Boss and gazing up into his face with awed attention throughout the harangue.

"What did you say, Dave?" she piped, her hands clasped behind her back.

"Somethin' as shall never tech you, Rosy-Lilly!" declared Johnson, snatching up the child and bearing her off to bed, amid a roar of laughter which saved Dave Logan the embarrassment of a reply.

For a time, now, Rosy-Lilly left McWha alone, so markedly that it looked as if Walley Johnson or Jimmy Brackett had admonished her on the subject. She continued, indeed, to cast at him eyes of pleading reproach, but always from a distance, and such appeals rolled off McWha's crude perception like water off a musk rat's fur. He had nothing "agin her," as he would have put it, if only she would keep out of his way. But Rosy-Lilly, true to her sex, was not vanquished by any means, or even discouraged. She was only biding her time. Bird Pigeon, who was something of a beau in the Settlements, understood this, and stirred the loyal wrath of Walley Johnson by saying so.

"There ain't nawthin' about Red McWha to make Rosy-Lilly keer

shucks fer 'im, savin' an' except that she can't git him!" said Bird. "She's that nigh bein' a woman a'ready, if she *be* but five year old!"

Johnson fixed him with his disconcerting eye, and retorted witheringly—

"Ye thinks ye knows a pile about women, Bird Pigeon. But the kind ye knows about ain't the kind Rosy-Lilly's agoin' to be!"

Nearly a week went by before Rosy-Lilly saw another chance to assail McWha's forbidding defences. This time she made what her innocent heart conceived to be a tremendous bid for the bad-tempered woodsman's favour. Incidentally, too, she revealed a secret which the Boss and Walley Johnson had been guarding with guilty solicitude ever since her coming to the camp.

It chanced that the Boss and Johnson together were kept away from camp one night till next morning, laying out a new "landing" over on Fork's Brook. When it came time for Rosy-Lilly to be put to bed, the honour fell, as a matter of course, to Jimmy Brackett. Rosy-Lilly went with him willingly enough, but not till after a moment of hesitation, in which her eyes wandered involuntarily to the broad, red face of McWha behind its cloud of smoke.

As a nursemaid, Jimmy Brackett flattered himself that he was a success—till the moment came when Rosy-Lilly was to be tucked into her bunk. Then she stood and eyed him with solemn question.

"What's wrong, me honey-bug?" asked Brackett, anxiously.

"You hain't heard me my prayers!" replied Rosy-Lilly, with a touch of severity in her voice.

"Eh? What's that?" stammered Brackett, startled quite out of his wonted composure.

"Don't you know little girls has to say their prayers afore they goes to bed?" she demanded.

"No!" admitted Brackett, truthfully, wondering how he was going to get

out of the unexpected situation.

“Walley Johnson hears me mine!” continued the child, her eyes very wide open as she weighed Brackett’s qualifications in her merciless little balance.

Here, Brackett was misguided enough to grin, bethinking him that now he “had the laugh” on the Boss and Walley. That grin settled it.

“I dess you don’t know how to hear me say ’em, Jimmy!” she announced inexorably. And picking up the skirt of her blue homespun “nightie,” so that she showed her little red woollen socks and white deer-hide moccasins, she tripped forth into the big, noisy room.

At the bright picture she made, her flax-gold hair tied in a knob on top of her head that it might not get tangled, the room fell silent instantly, and every eye was turned upon her. Nothing abashed by the scrutiny, she made her way sedately down the room and across to McWha’s bench. Unable to ignore her, and angry at the consciousness that he was embarrassed, McWha eyed her with a grim stare. But Rosy-Lilly put out her hands to him confidingly.

“I’m goin’ to let you hear me my prayers,” she said, her clear, baby voice carrying every syllable to the furthest corner of the room.

An ugly light flamed into McWha’s eyes, and he sprang to his feet, brushing the child rudely aside.

“That’s some o’ Jimmy Brackett’s work!” he shouted. “It’s him put ’er up to it, curse him!”

The whole room burst into a roar of laughter at the sight of his wrath. Snatching his cap from its peg, he strode furiously out to the stable, slamming the door behind him.

In their delight over McWha’s discomfiture the woodsmen quite forgot the feelings of Rosy-Lilly. For a second or two she stood motionless, her lips and eyes wide open with amazement. Then, hurt as much by the laughter of the room as by McWha’s rebuff, she burst into tears,

and stood hiding her face with both hands, the picture of desolation.

When the men realized that she thought they were laughing at her, they shut their mouths with amazing promptitude, and crowded about her. One after another picked her up, striving to console her with caresses and extravagant promises. She would not uncover her eyes, however, for any one, and her heart-broken wailing was not hushed till Brackett thrust his way through the crowd, growling inarticulate blasphemies at them all, and bore her back to her room. When he emerged twenty minutes later no one asked him about Rosy-Lilly's prayers. As for Rosy-Lilly, her feelings were this time so outraged that she would no longer look at McWha.

## III

The long backwoods winter was now drawing near its end, and the snow in the open spaces was getting so soft at midday as to slump heavily and hinder the work of the teams. Every one was working with feverish haste to get the logs all out to the "landings," on the river banks before the hauling should go to pieces. At night the tired lumbermen would tumble into their bunks as soon as supper was over, too greedy of sleep to think of songs or yarns. And Rosy-Lilly began to feel a little aggrieved at the inadequate attention which she was now receiving from all but Jimmy Brackett and the ever-faithful Johnson. She began to forgive McWha, and once more to try her baby wiles upon him. But McWha was as coldly unconscious as a stone.

One day, however, Fate concluded to range herself on Rosy-Lilly's side. A dead branch, hurled through the air by the impact of a falling tree, struck Red McWha on the head, and he was carried home to the cabin unconscious, bleeding from a long gash in his scalp. The Boss, something of a surgeon in his rough and ready way, as bosses need to be, washed the wound and sewed it up. Then he handed over his own bunk to the wounded man, declaring optimistically that McWha

would come round all right, his breed being hard to kill.

It was hours later when McWha began to recover consciousness, and just then, as it happened, there was no one near him but Rosy-Lilly. Smitten with pity, the child was standing beside the bunk, murmuring: “Poor! poor! I so sorry!” and slowly shaking her head and lightly patting the big, limp hand where it lay outside the blanket.

McWha half opened his eyes, and their faint glance fell on the top of Rosy-Lilly’s head as she bent over his hand. With a wry smile he shut them again, but to his surprise, he felt rather gratified. Then Jimmy Brackett came in and whisked the child away. “’S if he thought I’d bite ’er!” mused McWha, somewhat inconsistently.

For a long time he lay wondering confusedly. At last he opened his eyes wide, felt his bandaged head, and called for a drink of water in a voice which he vainly strove to make sound natural. To his surprise he was answered by Rosy-Lilly, so promptly that it was as if she had been listening for his voice. She came carrying the tin of water in both little hands, and, lifting it very carefully, she tried to hold it to his lips. Neither she nor McWha was quite successful in this, however. While they were fumbling over it, Jimmy Brackett hurried in, followed by the Boss, and Rosy-Lilly’s nursing was superseded. The Boss had to hold him up so that he could drink; and when he had feverishly gulped about a quart, he lay back on his pillow with a huge sigh, declaring weakly that he was all right.

“Ye got off mighty easy, Red,” said the Boss, cheerfully, “considerin’ the heft o’ the knot ’at hit ye. But you McWhas was always hard to kill.”

McWha’s hand was drooping loosely over the edge of the bunk. He felt the child’s tiny fingers brushing it again softly and tenderly. Then he felt her lips upon it, and the sensation was so novel that he quite forgot to reply to the Boss’s pleasantry.

That night McWha was so much better that when he insisted on being removed to his own bunk on the plea that he “didn’t feel at home in a

cupboard like," the Boss consented. Next day he wanted to go back to work, but the Boss was derisively inexorable, and for two days McWha was kept a prisoner.

During this time Jimmy Brackett, with severe and detailed admonition, kept Rosy-Lilly from again obtruding upon the patient's leisure; and McWha had nothing to do but smoke and whittle. He whittled diligently, but let no one see what he was making. Then, borrowing a small tin cup from the cook, he fussed over the stove with some dark, smelly decoction of tobacco-juice and ink. Rosy-Lilly was consumed with curiosity, especially when she saw him apparently digging beads off an Indian tobacco-pouch which he always carried. But she did not go near enough to get enlightened as to his mysterious occupation.

On the following day McWha went to work again, but not till after breakfast, when the others had long departed. Rosy-Lilly, with one hand twisted in her little apron, was standing in the doorway as he passed out. She glanced up at him with the most coaxing smile in her whole armoury of allurements. McWha would not look at her, and his face was as sullenly harsh as ever; but as he passed he slipped something into her hand. To her speechless delight, it proved to be a little dark-brown wooden doll, daintily carved, and with two white beads, with black centres, cunningly set into its face for eyes.

Rosy-Lilly hugged the treasure to her breast. Her first proud impulse was to run to Jimmy Brackett with it. But a subtler instinct withheld her. The gift had been bestowed in such a surreptitious way that she felt it to be somehow a kind of secret. She carried it away and hid it in her bunk, where she would go and look at it from time to time throughout the day. That night she brought it forth, but with several other treasures, so that it quite escaped comment. She said nothing about it to McWha, but she played with it when he could not help seeing it. And thereafter her "nigger-baby" was always in her arms.

This compliment, however, was apparently all lost on McWha, who

had again grown unconscious of her existence. And Rosy-Lilly, on her part, no longer strove to win his attention. She was content either with the victory she had won, or with the secret understanding which, perforce, now existed between them. And things went on smoothly in the camp, with every one now too occupied to do more than mind his own business.

It chanced this year that the spring thaws were early and unusually swift, warm rains alternating with hot, searching sunshine which withered and devoured the snow. The ice went out with a rush in the rapidly rising Ottanoonsis; and from every brookside “landing” the logs came down in black, tumbling swarms. Just below Conroy’s Camp the river wallowed round a narrow bend, tangled with slate ledges. It was a nasty place enough at low water, but in freshet a roaring terror to all the river-men. When the logs were running in any numbers, the bend had to be watched with vigilance lest a jam should form, and the waters be dammed back, and the lumber get “hung up” all over the swamps of the upper reaches.

And here, now, in spite of the frantic efforts of Dave Logan and his crew, the logs suddenly began to jam. Pitching downward as if propelled by a pile-driver, certain great timbers drove their ends between the upstanding strata of the slate, and held against the torrent till others came and wedged them securely. The jam began between two ledges in midstream, where no one could get near it. In a few minutes the interlocked mass stretched from bank to bank, with the torrent spurting and spouting through it in furious milk-white jets. Log after log was chopped free by the axemen along the shore, but the mass remained unshaken. Meanwhile the logs were gathering swiftly behind, ramming down and solidifying the whole structure, and damming back the flood till its heavy thunder diminished to the querulous rattling of a mill-race. In a short time the river was packed solid from shore to shore for several hundred yards above the brow of the jam; and above that again the waters were rising at a rate which threatened in a few hours to flood the valley and sweep away the

camp itself.

At this stage of affairs the Boss, axe in hand, picked his way across the monstrous tangle of the face of the jam between the great white jets, till he gained the centre of the structure. Here his practised eye, with the aid of a perilous axe-stroke here and there,—strokes which might possibly bring the whole looming mass down upon him in a moment,—presently located the timbers which held the structure firm, "the key-logs," as the men call them. These he marked with his axe. Then, returning to the shore, he called for two volunteers to dare the task of cutting these key-logs away.

Such a task is the most perilous that a lumberman, in all his daring career, can be called upon to perform. So perilous is it that it is always left to volunteers. Dave Logan had some brilliant feats of jam-breaking to his credit, from the days before he was made a Boss; and now, when he called for volunteers, every unmarried man in camp responded, with the exception, of course, of Walley Johnson, whose limited vision unfitted him for such a venture. The Boss chose Bird Pigeon and Andy White, because they were not only "smart" axemen, but also adepts in the river-men's games of "running logs."

With a jaunty air the two young men spat on their hands, gripped their axes, and sprang out along the base of the jam. Every eye in camp was fixed upon them with a fearful interest as they plied their heavy blades. It was heroic, of a magnificence of valour seldom equalled on any field, the work of these two, chopping coolly out there in the daunting tumult, under that colossal front of death. Their duty was nothing less than to bring the toppling brow of the jam down upon them, yet cheat Fate at the last instant, if possible, by leaping to shore before the chaos quite overwhelmed them.

Suddenly, while the two key-logs were not yet half cut through, the trained eye of the Boss detected a settling near the top of the jam. His yell of warning tore through the clamour of the waters. At the instant came a vast grumbling, like underground thunder, not loud apparently,

yet dulling all other sounds. The two choppers sprang wildly for shore, as the whole face of the jam seemed to crumble in a breath.

At this moment a scream of terror was heard—and every heart stopped. Some thirty yards or so upstream, and a dozen, perhaps, from shore, stood Rosy-Lilly, on a log. While none were observing her she had gleefully clambered out over the solid mass, looking for spruce-gums. But now, when the logs moved, she was so terror-stricken that she could not even try to get ashore. She just fell down upon her log, and clung to it, screaming.

A groan of horror went up. The awful grinding of the break-up was already under way. To every trained eye it was evident that there was no human possibility of reaching the child, much less of saving her. To attempt it would be such a madness as to jump into the hopper of a mill. The crowd surged to the edge—and sprang back as the nearest logs bounded up at them. Except Walley Johnson. He leaped wildly out upon the nearest logs, fell headforemost, and was dragged back, fighting furiously, by a dozen inexorable hands.

Just as Johnson went down, there arose a great bellowing cry of rage and anguish; then Red McWha's big form shot past, leaping far out upon the logs. Over the sickening upheaval he bounded this way and that, with miraculous sure-footedness. He reached the pitching log whereon Rosy-Lilly still clung. He clutched her by the frock. He tucked her under one arm like a rag-baby. Then he turned, balancing himself for an instant, and came leaping back towards shore.

A great shout of wonder and joy went up—to be hushed in a second as a log reared high in McWha's path and hurled him backwards. Right down into the whirl of the dreadful grist he sank. But with a strength that seemed more than human he recovered himself, climbed forth dripping, and came on again with those great, unerring leaps. This time there was no shout. The men waited with dry throats. They saw that his ruddy face had gone white as chalk. Within two feet of shore a log toward which he had jumped was jerked aside just

before he reached it, and, turning in the air as he fell, so as to save the child, he came down across it on his side with stunning violence. As he fell the Boss and Brackett and two of the others sprang out to meet him. They reached him somehow, and covered with bruises which they did not feel, succeeded in dragging him, with his precious burden, up from the grinding hell to safety. When his feet touched solid ground he sank unconscious, but with his arm so securely gripped about the child that they had difficulty in loosing his hold.

Rosy-Lilly, when they picked her up, was quivering with terror, but unharmed. When she saw McWha stretched out upon the bank motionless, with his eyes shut and his white lips half open, she fought savagely to be put down. She ran and flung herself down beside her rescuer, caught his big white face between her tiny hands, and fell to kissing him. Presently McWha opened his eyes, and with a mighty effort rose upon one elbow. A look of embarrassment passed over his face as he glanced at the men standing about him. Then he looked down at Rosy-Lilly, grinned with a shamefaced tenderness, and pulled her gently towards him.

“I’m right—glad—ye—” he began with painful effort. But before he could complete the sentence his eyes changed, and he fell back with a clicking gasp.

Jimmy Brackett, heedless of her wailing protests, snatched up Rosy-Lilly, and carried her back to the camp.

# Melindy and the Lynxes

The deep, slow-gathering snows of mid-February had buried away every stump in the pasture lot and muffled from sight all the zigzag fences of the little lonely clearing. The Settlement road was simply smoothed out of existence. The log cabin, with its low roof and one chimney, seemed half sunken in the snow which piled itself over the lower panes of its three tiny windows.

The log barn, and the lean-to, which served as wood-shed and wagon-house, showed little more than the black edges of their snow-covered roofs over the glittering and gently billowing white expanse.

In the middle of the yard the little well-house, shaped like the top of a “grandfather’s clock,” carried a thick, white, crusted cap, and was encircled with a streaky, irregular mass of ice, which had gradually accumulated almost up to the brim of the watering-trough. From the cabin door to the door of the barn, and over most of the yard space, but particularly in front of the sunward-facing lean-to, the snow was trodden down and littered with chips and straw.

Here in the mocking sunshine huddled four white sheep, while half a dozen hens and a red Shanghai cock scratched in the litter beside them. The low door of the barn was tightly closed to protect the cow and horse from the bitter cold—which the sheep, with their great fleeces, did not seem to mind.

Inside the cabin, where an old-fashioned, high-ovened kitchen stove, heated to the point where a dull red glow began to show itself in spots, kept the close air at summer temperature, a slim girl with fluffy, light hair and pale complexion stood by the table, vigorously mixing a batter of buckwheat flour for pancakes. Her slender young arms were streaked with flour, as was her forehead also, from her frequent

efforts to brush her hair out of her eyes by quick upward dashes of her forearm.

On the other side of the stove, so close to it that her rugged face was reddened by the heat, sat a massive old woman in a heavy rocking-chair, knitting. She knitted impetuously, impatiently, as if resenting the employment of her vigorous old fingers upon so mild a task.

Through a clear space in one pane of the window beside her—a space where the heat within had triumphed over the frost without—she cast restless, keen eyes out across the yard to the place where the road, the one link between the cabin and the settlement, lay smothered from sight.

“It’s one week to-day, Melindy,” she announced in a voice of accusing indignation, “since there’s been a team got through; and it’s going to be another before they’ll get the road broke out!”

“Like as not, Granny,” responded the girl, beating the batter with an impatience that belied the cheerfulness of her tone. “But what does it matter, anyway? We’re all right here for a month!”

As she spoke, however, her eyes, too, gazed out wistfully over the buried road. She was wearying for the sound of bells and for a drive into the Settlement.

Meanwhile, from the edge of the woods on the other side of the cabin, hidden from the keen eyes within by the roofs of the barn and the shed, came two great, grey, catlike beasts, creeping belly to the snow.

Their broad, soft-padded paws were like snow shoes, bearing them up on the wind-packed surface. Their tufted ears stood straight up, alert for any unwonted sound. Their absurd stub tails, not four inches long, and looking as if they had been bitten off, twitched with eagerness. Their big round eyes, of a pale greenish yellow, and with the pupils narrowed to upright, threadlike black slits by the blinding glare, glanced warily from side to side with every step they took.

The lynxes had the keenest dislike to crossing the open pasture in this broad daylight, but they had been driven by hunger to the point where the customs and cautions of their wary kind are recklessly thrown aside. Hunger had driven the pair to hunt together, in the hope of together pulling down game too powerful for one to master alone. Hunger had overcome their savage aversion to the neighbourhood of man, and brought them out in the dark of night to prowl about the barn and sniff longingly the warm smell of the sheep, steaming through the cracks of the clumsy door.

Watching from under the snow-draped branches, they had observed that only in the daytime were the sheep let out from their safe shelter behind the clumsy door. And now, forgetting everything but the fierce pangs that urged them, the two savage beasts came straight down the rolling slope of the pasture towards the barn.

A few minutes later there came from the yard a wild screeching and cackling of the hens, followed by a trampling rush and agonized bleating. The old woman half rose from her chair, but sank back instantly, her face creased with a spasm of pain, for she was crippled by rheumatism. The girl dropped her big wooden spoon on the floor and rushed to the window that looked out upon the yard. Her pale face went paler with horror, then flushed with wrath and pity; and a fierce light flashed into her wide blue eyes.

“It’s lynxes!” she cried, snatching up the wooden spoon and darting for the door. “And they’ve got one of the sheep! Oh, oh, they’re tearing it!”

“Melindy!” shouted the old woman, in a voice of strident command—such a compelling voice that the girl stopped short in spite of herself. “Drop that fool spoon and get the gun!”

The girl dropped the spoon as if it had burned her fingers, and looked irresolutely at the big duck-gun hanging on the log wall. “I can’t fire it!” she exclaimed, shaking her head. “I’d be scared to death of it!”

But even as the words left her mouth, there came another outburst of

trampling and frantic clamour from the yard. She snatched up the little, long-handled axe which leaned beside the door-post, threw the door wide open, and with a pitying cry of “Oh! oh!” flew forth to the rescue of her beloved sheep.

“Did you ever see the like of that?” muttered the old woman, her harsh face working with excitement and high approbation. “Scairt to death of a gun—and goes out to fight lynxes all by herself!”

And with painful effort she began hitching herself and the big chair across the floor, seeking a position where she could both reach the gun and command a view through the wide-open door.

When Melindy, her heart aflame with pity for the helpless ewes, rushed out into the yard, she saw one woolly victim down, kicking silently on the bloodstained snow, while a big lynx, crouched upon its body, turned upon her a pair of pale eyes that blazed with fury at the interruption to his feast.

The other sheep were foundered helplessly in the deep snow back of the well—except one. This one, which had evidently been headed off from the flock, and driven round to the near side of the watering-trough before its savage enemy overtook it, was not half a dozen paces from the cabin door. It was just stumbling forward upon its nose, with a despairing *baa-a-a!* while the second and larger lynx, clinging upon its back, clutched hungrily for its throat through the thick, protecting wool.

On ordinary occasions the girl was as timid as her small, pale face and gentle blue eyes made her look. At this crisis, however, a sort of fury of compassion swept all fear from her heart.

Like the swoop of some strange bird, her skirts streaming behind her, she flung herself upon the great cat, and aimed a lightning blow at his head with her axe. In her frail grip the axe turned, so that the brute caught the flat of it instead of the edge.

Half-stunned, he lost his hold and fell with a startled *pfiff* on the snow,

while his victim, bleeding, but not mortally hurt, ran bleating towards the rest of the flock, where they floundered, stupidly helpless, in three feet of soft snow.

The next moment the baffled lynx recovered himself, and faced the girl with so menacing a snarl that she hesitated to follow up her advantage, but paused, holding the axe in readiness to repel attack.

For a few seconds they faced each other so, the girl and the beast. Then the pale, beast eyes shifted under the steady, dominating gaze of the blue human ones; and at last, with a spitting growl, which ended in a hoarse screech of rage, the big cat bounded aside and whisked behind the well-house. The next moment it was again among the sheep, where they huddled incapable of a struggle.

Again the girl sprang to the rescue; and now, because of that one flash of fear which had deprived her of her first advantage, her avenging wrath was fiercer and more resolute than before. This time, as she darted upon the enemy, she gave an involuntary cry of rage, piercing and unnatural. At this unexpected sound the lynx, desperate though he was with rage and hunger, lost his courage.

Seeing the girl towering almost over him, he doubled back with a mighty leap, just avoiding the vengeful sweep of the axe, and darted back to the front of the shed, where his mate was now ravenously feasting on her easy prey.

Although the first victim was now past all suffering, being no more a motive for heroism than so much mutton, the girl's blood was too hot with triumphant indignation to let her think of such an unimportant point as that. She was victor. She had outfaced and routed the foe. She had saved one victim. She would avenge the other.

With the high audacity of those who have overcome fear, she now, with a hysterical cry of menace, ran at the two lynxes, to drive them from their prey.

The situation which she now confronted, however, was altogether

changed from what had gone before. The two lynxes were together, strong in that alliance which they had formed for purpose of battle. They were fairly mad with famine—or, indeed, they would never have ventured on the perilous domains of man.

Moreover, they were in possession of what they held to be their lawful prey—a position in defence of which all the hunting tribes of the wild will fight against almost any odds. As they saw their strange adversary approaching, the hair stood straight up along their backs, their little tails puffed to bottle brushes, their ears lay flat back on their heads, and they screeched defiance in harsh unison. Then, as if by one impulse, they turned from their prey and crept stealthily towards her.

They did not like that steady light in her blue eyes, but they felt by some instinct that she was young and unstable of nerve. At this unexpected move on their part the girl stopped short, suddenly undecided whether to fight or flee.

At once the lynxes stopped also, and crouched flat, tensely watching, their claws dug deep into the hard-trodden snow so as to give them purchase for an instant, powerful spring in any direction.

In the meantime, however, the crippled old woman within doors had not been idle. Great of spirit, and still mighty of sinew for all her ailment, she had managed to work the weight of the heavy chair and her own solid bulk all the way across the cabin floor. Being straight in front of the door, she had seen almost all that happened; and her brave old berserk heart was bursting with pride in the courage of this frail child, whom she had hitherto regarded with a kind of affectionate scorn.

The Griffises of Nackawick and Little River had always been sizable men, men of sinew and bulk, and women tall and ruddy; and this small, blue-eyed girl had seemed to her, in a way, to wrong the stock. But she was quick to understand that the stature of the spirit is what counts most of all.

Now, in this moment of breathless suspense, when she saw Melindy and the two great beasts thus holding each other eye to eye in a life and death struggle of wills, her heart was convulsed with a wild fear. In the spasm of it she succeeded in lifting herself almost erect, and so gained possession of the big duck-gun, which her son Jake, now away in the lumber woods, always kept loaded and ready for use. As she cocked it and settled back into her chair, she called in a piercing voice—

"Don't stir one step, Melindy! I'm going to shoot!"

The girl never stirred a muscle, although she turned pale with terror of the loud noise which was about to shock her ears. The two lynxes, however, turned their heads, and fixed the pale glare of their eyes upon the figure seated in the doorway.

The next moment came a spurt of red flame, a belch of smoke, a tremendous report that seemed as if it must have shattered every pane of glass in the cabin windows. The bigger of the two lynxes turned straight over backward and lay without a quiver, smashed by the heavy charge of buckshot with which Jake had loaded the gun. The other, grazed by a scattering pellet, sprang into the air with a screech, then turned and ran for her life across the snow, stretching out like a terrified cat.

With a proud smile the old woman stood the smoking gun against the wall and straightened her cap. For perhaps half a minute Melindy stood rigid, staring at the dead lynx. Then, dropping her axe, she fled to the cabin, flung herself down with her face in her grandmother's lap, and broke into a storm of sobs.

The old woman gazed down upon her with some surprise, and stroked the fair, fluffy head lovingly as she murmured: "There, there! There's nothing to take on about! Though you be such a little mite of a towhead, you've got the grit, you've got the grit, Melindy Griffis. It's proud of you I am, and it's proud your father'll be when I tell him about it."

Then, as the girl's weeping continued, and her slender shoulders continued to twist with her sobs, the rugged old face that bent above her grew tenderly solicitous.

"There, there!" she murmured again. "'Tain't good for you to take on so, deary. Hadn't you better finish beating up the pancakes before the batter spiles?"

Thus potently adjured, although she knew as well as her grandmother that there was no immediate danger of the batter spoiling, the girl got up, dashed the back of her hand across her eyes with a little laugh, closed the door, got out another spoon from the table drawer, and cheerfully resumed her interrupted task of mixing pancakes. And the sheep, having slowly extricated themselves from the deep snow behind the well-house, huddled together, with heads down, in the middle of the yard, fearfully eyeing the limp body which lay before the shed.

# Mrs. Gammit's Pig

"I've come to borry yer gun!" said Mrs. Gammit, appearing suddenly, a self-reliant figure, at the open door of the barn where Joe Barron sat mending his harness. She wore a short cotton homespun petticoat and a dingy waist; while a limp pink cotton sunbonnet, pushed far back from her perspiring forehead, released unmanageable tufts of her stiff, iron-grey hair.

"What be *you* awantin' of a gun, Mrs. Gammit?" inquired the backwoodsman, looking up without surprise. He had not seen Mrs. Gammit, to be sure, for three months; but he had known all the time that she was there, on the other side of the ridge, one of his nearest neighbours, and not more than seven or eight miles away as the crow flies.

"It's the bears!" she explained. "They do be gittin' jest a leetle mite *too* sassy, down to my place. There ain't no livin' with 'em. They come rootin' round in the garden, nights. An' they've et up the white top-knot hen, with the whole settin' of eggs, that was to hev' hatched out next Monday. An' they've took the duck. An' last night they come after the pig."

"They didn't git *him*, did they?" inquired Joe Barron sympathetically.

"No, siree!" responded Mrs. Gammit with decision. "An' they ain't agoin' to! They scairt him though, snuffin' round outside the pen, trying to find the way in.—I've hearn tell they was powerful fond of pork.—He set up sich a squealin' it woke me; an' I yelled at 'em out of the winder. I seen one big black chap lopin' off behind the barn. I hadn't nothin' but the broom fer a weapon, so he got away from me. I'll git him to-night, though, I reckon, if I kin have the loan of your gun."

“Sartain,” assented the woodsman, laying down the breech-strap he was mending. “Did you ever fire a gun?” he inquired suddenly, as he was starting across the yard to fetch the weapon from his cabin.

“I can’t rightly say I hev’,” answered Mrs. Gammit, with a slight note of scorn in her voice. “But from the kind of men I’ve seen as *kin*, I reckon it ain’t no great trick to larn.”

Joe Barron laughed, and went for the weapon. He had plenty of confidence in his visitor’s ability to look out for herself, and felt reasonably sure that the bears would be sorry for having presumed upon her unprotected state. When he returned with the gun—an old, muzzle-loading duck-gun, with a huge bore—she accepted it with careless ease and held it as if it were a broom. But when he offered her the powder-horn and a little bag of buckshot, she hesitated.

“What be *them* for?” she inquired.

Joe Barren looked serious.

“Mrs. Gammit,” said he, “I know you kin do most anything a man kin do—an’ do it better, maybe! A woman like you don’t have to apologize for nothin’. But you was not *brung up* in the woods, an’ you can’t expect to know all about a gun jest by *heftin’* it. Folks that’s been brung up in town, like you, have to be *told* how to handle a gun. This here gun ain’t *loaded*. And them ’ere’s the powder an’ buckshot to load her with. An’ here’s caps,” he added, producing a small, brown tin box of percussion caps from his trousers pocket.

Mrs. Gammit felt abashed at her ignorance, but gratified, at the same time, by the reproach of metropolitanism. This implication of town-bred incompetency was most flattering to the seven frame houses and one corner store of Burd Settlement, whence she hailed.

“I reckon you’d better show me how to load the thing, Mr. Barron,” she agreed quite humbly. And her keen grey eyes took in every detail, as the woodsman rammed home the powder hard, wadded down the charge of buckshot lightly, and pointed out where she must put the

percussion cap when she should be ready to call upon the weapon for its services.

“Then,” said he in conclusion, as he lifted the gun to his shoulder and squinted along the barrel, “of course you know all the rest. Jest shet one eye, an’ git the bead on him fair, an’ let him have it—a leetle back of the fore-shoulder, fer choice! An’ *that* b’ar ain’t agoin’ to worry about no more pork, nor garden sass. An’ recollect, Mrs. Gammit, at this time of year, when he’s fat on blueberries, he’ll make right prime pork himself, ef he ain’t *too* old and rank.”

As Mrs. Gammit strode homeward through the hot, silent woods with the gun—still carrying it as if it were a broom—she had no misgivings as to her fitness to confront and master the most redoubtable of all the forest kindreds. She believed in herself—and not only her native Burd Settlement, but the backwoods generally held that she had cause to. A busy woman always, she had somehow never found time to indulge in the luxury of a husband; but the honorary title of “Mrs.” had early been conferred upon her, in recognition of her abundant and confident personality and her all-round capacity for taking care of herself. To have called her “Miss” would have been an insult to the fitness of things. When, at the age of sixty, she inherited from an only, and strictly bachelor, brother a little farm in the heart of the wilderness, some forty miles in from the Settlement, no one doubted her ability to fill the rôle of backwoodsman and pioneer. It was vaguely felt that if the backwoods and Mrs. Gammit should fail to agree on any important point, so much the worse for the backwoods.

And indeed, for nearly two years and a half everything had gone swimmingly. The solitude had never troubled Mrs. Gammit, to whom her own company was always congenial—and, as she felt, the only company that one could depend upon. Then she had her two young steers, well broken to the yoke; the spotted cow, with one horn turned up and the other down; the grey and yellow cat, with whom she lived on terms of mutual tolerance; a turkey-cock and two turkey hens, of whom she expected much; an assortment of fowls, brown, black,

white, red, and speckled; one fat duck, which had so far been nothing but a disappointment to her; and the white pig, which was her pride. No wonder she was never lonely, with all these good acquaintances to talk to. Moreover, the forces of the wild, seeming to recognize that she was a woman who would have her way, had from the first easily deferred to her. The capricious and incomprehensible early frosts of the forest region had spared her precious garden patch; cut-worm and caterpillar had gone by the other way; the pip had overlooked her early chickens; and as for the customary onslaughts of wildcat, weasel, fox, and skunk, she had met them all with such triumphant success that she began to mistake her mere good luck for the quintessence of woodcraft. In fact, nothing had happened to challenge her infallibility, nothing whatever, until she found that the bears were beginning to concern themselves about her.

To be sure, there was only one bear mixed up in the matter; but he chanced to be so diligent, interested, and resourceful, that it was no wonder he had got himself multiplied many times over in Mrs. Gammit's indignant imagination. When she told Joe Barron "that the bears was gittin' so sassy there wasn't no livin' with 'em," she had little notion that what she referred to was just one, solitary, rusty, somewhat moth-eaten animal, crafty with experience and years. This bear, as it chanced, had had advantages in the way of education not often shared by his fellow-roamers of the wilderness. He had passed several seasons in captivity in one of the settlements far south of the Quah-Davic Valley. Afterwards, he had served an unpleasant term in a flea-ridden travelling menagerie, from which a railway smash-up had given him release at the moderate cost of the loss of one eye. During his captivity he had acquired a profound respect for men, as creatures who had a tendency to beat him over the nose and hurt him terribly if he failed to do as they wished, and who held in eye and voice the uncomprehended but irresistible authority of fate. For women, however, he had learned to entertain a casual scorn. They screamed when he growled, and ran away if he stretched out a paw at them. When, therefore, he had found himself once more in the vast

responsible freedom of the forest, and reviving with some difficulty the half-forgotten art of shifting for himself, he had given a wide berth to the hunters' shacks and the cabins of lumbermen and pioneers. But when, on the other hand, he had come upon Mrs. Gammit's clearing, and realized, after long and cautious investigations, that its presiding genius was nothing more formidable than one of those petticoated creatures who trembled at his growl, he had licked his chops with pleasant anticipation. Here, at last, was his opportunity,—the flesh-pots of servitude, with freedom.

Nevertheless, the old bear was prudent. He would not presume too quickly, or too far, upon the harmlessness of a petticoat, and—as he had observed from a dense blackberry thicket on the other side of the fence, while she was at work hoeing her potatoes—there was an air about Mrs. Gammit which seemed to give her petticoats the lie. He had watched her for some time before he could quite satisfy himself that she was a mere woman. Then he had tried some nocturnal experiments on the garden, sampling the young squashes which were Mrs. Gammit's peculiar pride, and finding them so good that he had thought surely something would happen. Nothing did happen, however, because Mrs. Gammit slept heavily; and her indignation in the morning he had not been privileged to view.

After this he had grown bolder—though always under cover of night. He had sampled everything in the garden—the abundance of his foot-prints convincing Mrs. Gammit that there was also an abundance of bears. From the garden, at length, he had ventured to the yard and the barn. In a half-barrel, in a corner of the shed, he had stumbled upon the ill-fated white top-knot hen, faithfully brooding her eggs. Undeterred by her heroic scolding, and by the trifling annoyance of her feathers sticking in his teeth, he had made a very pleasant meal of her. And still he had heard nothing from Mrs. Gammit, who, for all her indignation, could not depart from her custom of sound sleeping. If he had taken the trouble to return in the morning, he might have perceived that the good lady was far from pleased, and that there was

likely to be something doing before long if he continued to take such liberties with her. And then, as we have seen, he had found the duck—but *her* loss Mrs. Gammit had taken calmly enough, declaring it to be nothing more than a good riddance to bad rubbish.

It was not until the return of moonlight nights that the bear had discovered the white pig, and thus come face to face, at last, with a thoroughly aroused Mrs. Gammit. True to his kind, he did like pork; but absorbed in the easier adventures of the garden and the shed, he had not at first noted the rich possibilities of the pig-pen, which occupied one corner of the barn, under the loft. Suspicious of traps, he would not, at first, enter the narrow opening of the stable door, the wide main doors being shut. He had preferred rather to sniff around outside at the corner of the barn, under the ragged birch-tree in which the big turkey-cock had his perch. The wakeful and wary old bird, peering down upon him with suspicion, had uttered a sharp *qwit, qwit*, by way of warning to whom it might concern; while the white pig, puzzled and worried, had sat up in the dark interior of the pen and stared out at him in silence through the cracks between the boards. At last, growing impatient, the bear had caught the edge of a board with his claws, and tried to tear it off. Nothing had come except some big splinters; but the effort, and the terrifying sound that accompanied it, had proved too much for the self-control of the white pig. An ear-splitting succession of squeals had issued from the dark interior of the pen, and the bear had backed off in amazement.

Before he could recover himself and renew his assault, the window of the cabin had gone up with a skittering slam. The white pig's appeal for help had penetrated Mrs. Gammit's solid slumbers, and she had understood the situation. "Scat! you brute!" she had yelled frantically, thrusting head and shoulders so far out through the window that she almost lost her balance in the effort to shake both fists at once.

The bear, not understanding the terms of her invective, had sat up on his haunches and turned his one eye mildly upon the bristling tufts of grey hair which formed a sort of halo around Mrs. Gammit's virginal

nightcap. Then Mrs. Gammit, realizing that the time for action was come, had rushed downstairs to the kitchen, seized the first weapon she could lay hands upon—which chanced to be the broom—flung open the kitchen door, and dashed across the yard, screaming with indignation.

It was certainly an unusual figure that she made in the radiant moonlight, her sturdy, naked legs revolving energetically beneath her sparse nightgown, and the broom whirling vehemently around her head. For a moment the bear had contemplated her with wonder. Then his nerves had failed him. Doubtless, this was a woman—but not quite like the ordinary kind. It was better, perhaps, to be careful. With a reluctant grunt he had turned and fled, indifferent to his dignity. And he had thought best not to stop until he found himself quite beyond the range of Mrs. Gammit's disconcerting accents, which rang harsh triumph across the solemn, silvered stillness of the forest.

It was, of course, this imminent peril to the pig which had roused Mrs. Gammit to action and sent her on that long tramp over the ridges to borrow Joe Barron's gun. In spite of her easy victory in this particular instance, she had appreciated the inches of that bear, and realized that in case of any further unpleasantnesses with him a broom might not prove to be the most efficient of weapons. With the gun, however, and her distinct remembrance of Joe Barron's directions for its use, she felt equal to the routing of any number of bears—provided, of course, they would not all come on together. As the idea flashed across her mind that there might be a pack of bears to face, she felt uneasy for a second, and even thought of bringing the pig into the house for the night, and conducting her campaign from the bedroom window. Then she remembered she had never heard of bears hunting in packs, and her little apprehension vanished. In fact, she now grew quite eager for night to bring the fray.

It was a favourite saw of Mrs. Gammit's that "a watched pot takes long to bile"; and her experience that night exemplified it. With the kitchen door ajar, she sat a little back from the window. Herself

hidden, she had a clear view across the bright yard. Very slowly the round moon climbed the pallid summer sky, changing the patterns of the shadows as she rose. But the bear came not. Mrs. Gammit began to think, even to fear, that her impetuosity of the night before had frightened him away. At last her reveries grew confused. She sat up very straight, and blinked very hard, to make sure that she was quite awake. Just as she had got herself most perfectly reassured on this point, her head sank gently forward upon the window-sill, and she slept deeply, with her cheek against the cold, brown barrel of the gun.

Yes, the bear had hesitated long that night. And he came late. The moon had swung past her zenith, and was pointing her black shadows across the yard in quite another direction when he came. By this time he had recovered confidence and made up his mind that Mrs. Gammit *was* only a woman. After sniffing once more at the cracks to assure himself that the pig was still there, he went around to the stable door and crept cautiously in.

As his clumsy black shape appeared in the bright opening, the pig saw it. It filled his heart with a quite justifiable horror, which found instant poignant expression. Within those four walls the noise was so startlingly loud that, in spite of himself, the bear drew back—not intending to retreat, indeed, but only to consider. As it chanced, however, seeing out of only one eye, he backed upon the handle of a hay rake which was leaning against the wall. The rake very properly resented this. It fell upon him and clutched at his fur like a live thing. Startled quite out of his self-possession, he retreated hurriedly into the moonlight, for further consideration of these unexpected phenomena. And as he did so, across the yard the kitchen door was flung open, and Mrs. Gammit, with the gun, rushed forth.

The bear had intended to retire behind the barn for a few moments, the better to weigh the situation. But at the sight of Mrs. Gammit's fluttering petticoat he began to feel annoyed. It seemed to him that he was being thwarted unnecessarily. At the corner of the barn, just under the jutting limb of the birch-tree, he stopped, turned, and sat up

on his haunches with a growl. The old turkey-cock, stretching his lean neck, glared down upon him with a terse *qwit! qwit!* of disapproval.

When the bear stopped, in that resolute and threatening attitude, Mrs. Gammit instinctively stopped too. Not, as she would have explained had there been any one to explain to, that she was "one mite scairt," but that she wanted to try Joe Barren's gun. Raising the gun to her shoulder, she shut one eye, looked carefully at the point of the barrel with the other, and pulled the trigger. Nothing whatever happened. Lowering the weapon from her shoulder she eyed it severely, and perceived that she had forgotten to cock it. At this a shade of embarrassment passed over her face, and she glanced sharply at the bear to see if he had noticed her mistake. Apparently, he had not. He was still sitting there, regarding her unpleasantly with his one small eye.

"Ye needn't think ye're agoin to git off, jest because I made a leetle mistake like that!" muttered Mrs. Gammit, shutting her teeth with a snap, and cocking the gun as she raised it once more to her shoulder.

Now, as it chanced, Joe Barren had neglected to tell her which eye to shut, so, not unnaturally, Mrs. Gammit shut the one nearest to the gun—nearest to the cap which was about to go off. She also neglected to consider the hind-sight. It was enough for her that the muzzle of the gun seemed to cover the bear. Under these conditions she got a very good line on her target, but her elevation was somewhat at fault. She pulled the trigger.

This time it was all right. There was a terrific, roaring explosion, and she staggered backwards under the savage kick of the recoil. Recovering herself instantly, and proud of the great noise she had made, she peered through the smoke, expecting to see the bear topple over upon his nose, extinguished. Instead of that, however, she observed a convulsive flopping of wings in the birch-tree above the bear's head. Then, with one reproachful "gobble" which rang loud in Mrs. Gammit's ears, the old turkey-cock fell heavily to the ground. He

would have fallen straight upon the bear, but that the latter, his nerves completely upset by so much disturbance, was making off at fine speed through the bushes.

The elation on Mrs. Gammit's face gave way to consternation. Then she reddened to the ears with wrath, dashed the offending gun to the ground, and stamped on it. She had done her part, that she knew, but the wretched weapon had played her false. Well, she had never thought much of guns, anyway. Henceforth she would depend on herself.

The unfortunate turkey-cock now lay quite still. Mrs. Gammit crossed the yard and bent over the sprawling body in deep regret. She had had a certain affection for the noisy and self-sufficient old bird, who had been "company" for her as he strutted "gobbling" about the yard with stiff-trailed wings while his hens were away brooding their chicks. "Too bad!" she muttered over him, by way of requiem; "too bad ye had to go an' git in the road o' that blame gun!" Then, suddenly bethinking herself that a fowl was more easily plucked while yet warm, she carried the limp corpse, head downward, across the yard, fetched a basket from the kitchen, sat down on the doorstep in the moonlight, and began sadly stripping the victim of his feathers. He was a fine, heavy bird. As she surveyed his ample proportions Mrs. Gammit murmured thoughtfully: "I reckon as how I'm goin' to feel kinder sick o' turkey afore I git this all et up!"

On the following day Mrs. Gammit carefully polished the gun with a duster, removing all trace of the indignities she had put upon it, and stood it away behind the dresser. She had resolved to conduct the rest of the campaign against the bears in her own way and with her own weapons. The way and the weapons she now proceeded to think out with utmost care.

Being a true woman and a true housewife, it was perhaps inevitable that she should think first, and, after due consideration given to everything else, including pitchforks and cayenne pepper, that she

should think last and finally, of the unlimited potentialities of boiling water. To have it actually boiling, at the critical moment, would of course be impracticable; but with a grim smile she concluded that she could manage to have it hot enough for her purpose. She had observed that this bear which was after the pig had learned the way into the pen. She felt sure that, having found from experience that loud noises did not produce bodily injuries, he would again come seeking the pig, and this time with more confidence than ever.

On this point, thanks to her ignorance of bears in general, she was right. Most bears would have been discouraged. But this bear in particular had learned that when men started out to be disagreeable to bears, they succeeded only too well. He had realized clearly that Mrs. Gammit had intended to be disagreeable to him. There was no mistaking her intentions. But she had not succeeded. Ergo, she was not, as he had almost feared, a man, but really and truly a woman. He came back the next night fully determined that no squeals, or brooms, or flying petticoats, or explosions, should divert him from his purpose and his pork. He came early; but not, as it chanced, too early for Mrs. Gammit, who seemed somehow to have divined his plans and so taken time by the forelock.

The pen of the white pig, as we have already noted, was in a corner of the barn, and under one end of the loft. Immediately above the point where the bear would have to climb over, in order to get into the pen, Mrs. Gammit removed several of the loose boards which formed the flooring of the loft. Beside this opening, at an early hour, she had ensconced herself in secure ambuscade, with three pails of the hottest possible hot water close beside her. The pails were well swathed in blankets, quilts, and hay, to keep up the temperature of their contents. And she had also a pitchfork “layin’ handy,” wherewith to push the enemy down in case he should resent her attack and climb up to expostulate.

Mrs. Gammit had not time to grow sleepy, or even impatient, so early did the bear arrive. The white pig, disturbed and puzzled by the

unwonted goings-on above his head, had refused to go to bed. He was wandering restlessly up and down the pen, when, through the cracks, he saw an awful black shadow darken the stable door. He lost not a second, but lifted his voice at once in one of those ear-piercing appeals which had now twice proved themselves so effective.

The bear paused but for a moment, to cast his solitary eye over the situation. Mrs. Gammit fairly held her breath. Then, almost before she could realize what he was doing, he was straight beneath her, and clambering into the pen. The white pig's squeals redoubled, electrifying her to action. She snatched a steaming bucket from its wrappings, and dashed it down upon the vaguely heaving form below.

On the instant there arose a strange, confused, terrific uproar, from which the squeals of the white pig stood out thin and pathetic. Without waiting to see what she had accomplished, Mrs. Gammit snatched up the second bucket, and leaned forward to deliver a second stroke. Through a cloud of steam she saw the bear reaching wildly for the wall of the pen, clawing frantically in his eagerness to climb over and get away. She had given him a lesson, that was clear; but she was resolved to give him a good one while she was about it. Swinging far forward, she launched her terrible missile straight upon his huge hind-quarters just as they went over the wall. But at the same moment she lost her balance. With an indignant yell she plunged downward into the pen.

It was like Mrs. Gammit, however, that even in this dark moment her luck should serve her. She landed squarely on the back of the pig. This broke her fall, and, strangely enough, did not break the pig. The latter, quite frenzied by the accumulation of horrors heaped upon him, bounced frantically from beneath her indiscreet petticoats, and dashed himself from one side of the pen to the other with a violence that threatened to wreck both pig and pen.

Somewhat breathless, but proudly conscious that she had won a splendid victory, Mrs. Gammit picked herself up and shook herself

together. The bear had vanished. She eyed with amazement the continued gyrations of the pig.

“Poor dear!” she muttered presently, “some o’ the bilin’ water must ’ave slopped on to him! Oh, well, I reckon he’ll git over it bime-by. Anyhow, it’s a sight better’n being all clawed an’ et up by a bear, I reckon!”

Mrs. Gammit now felt satisfied that this particular bear would trouble her no more, and she had high hopes that his experience with hot water would serve as a lesson to all the other bears with whom she imagined herself involved. The sequel fulfilled her utmost expectations. The bear, smarting from his scalds and with all his preconceived ideas about women overthrown, betook himself in haste to another and remoter hunting-ground. A good deal of his hair came off, in patches, and for a long time he had a rather poor opinion of himself.

When, for over a week, there had been no more raids upon barn or chicken-roost, and no more bear-tracks about the garden, Mrs. Gammit knew that her victory had been final, and she felt so elated that she was even able to enjoy her continuing diet of cold turkey. Then, one pleasant morning when a fresh, sweet-smelling wind made tumult in the forest, she took the gun home to Joe Barren.

“What luck did ye hev, Mrs. Gammit?” inquired the woodsman with interest.

“I settled them bears, Mr. Barren!” she replied. “But it wasn’t the gun as done it. It was bilin’ water. I’ve found ye kin always depend on bilin’ water!”

“I hope the gun acted right by you, however!” said the woodsman.

Mrs. Gammit’s voice took on a tone of reserve.

“Well, Mr. Barren, I thank ye kindly for the loan of the weepon. Ye *meant* right. But it’s on my mind to warn ye. Don’t ye go for to trust that gun, or ye’ll live to regret it. *It don’t hit what it’s aimed at.*”

# The Blackwater Pot

The lesson of fear was one which Henderson learned late. He learned it well, however, when the time came. And it was Blackwater Pot that taught him.

Sluggishly, reluctantly, impotently, the spruce logs followed one another round and round the circuit of the great stone pot. The circling water within the pot was smooth and deep and black, but streaked with foam. At one side a gash in the rocky rim opened upon the sluicing current of the river, which rushed on, quivering and seething, to plunge with a roar into the terrific cauldron of the falls. Out of that thunderous cauldron, filled with huge tramplings and the shriek of tortured torrents, rose a white curtain of spray, which every now and then swayed upward and drenched the green birches which grew about the rim of the pot. For the break in the rim, which caught at the passing current and sucked it into the slow swirls of Blackwater Pot, was not a dozen feet from the lip of the falls.

Henderson sat at the foot of a ragged white birch which leaned from the upper rim of the pot. He held his pipe unlighted, while he watched the logs with a half-fascinated stare. Outside, in the river, he saw them in a clumsy panic haste, wallowing down the white rapids to their awful plunge. When a log came close along shore its fate hung for a second or two in doubt. It might shoot straight on, over the lip, into the wavering curtain of spray and vanish into the horror of the cauldron. Or, at the last moment, the eddy might reach out stealthily and drag it into the sullen wheeling procession within the pot. All that it gained here, however, was a terrible kind of respite, a breathing-space of agonized suspense. As it circled around, and came again to the opening by which it had entered, it might continue on another eventless revolution, or it might, according to the whim of the eddy, be

cast forth once more, irretrievably, into the clutch of the awful sluice. Sometimes two logs, after a pause in what seemed like a secret death-struggle, would crowd each other out and go over the falls together. And sometimes, on the other hand, all would make the circuit safely again and again. But always, at the cleft in the rim of the pot, there was the moment of suspense, the shuddering, terrible panic.

It was this recurring moment that seemed to fasten itself balefully upon Henderson's imagination, so that he forgot to smoke. He had looked into the Blackwater before, but never when there were any logs in the pot. Moreover, on this particular morning, he was overwrought with weariness. For a little short of three days he had been at the utmost tension of body, brain, and nerve, in hot but wary pursuit of a desperado whom it was his duty, as deputy-sheriff of his county, to capture and bring to justice.

This outlaw, a French half-breed, known through the length and breadth of the wild backwoods county as "Red Pichot," was the last but one—and accounted the most dangerous—of a band which Henderson had undertaken to break up. Henderson had been deputy for two years, and owed his appointment primarily to his pre-eminent fitness for this very task. Unacquainted with fear, he was at the same time unrivalled through the backwoods counties for his subtle woodcraft, his sleepless endurance, and his cunning.

It was two years now since he had set his hand to the business. One of the gang had been hanged. Two were in the penitentiary, on life sentence. Henderson had justified his appointment to every one except himself. But while Pichot and his gross-witted tool, "Bug" Mitchell, went unhanged, he felt himself on probation, if not shamed. Mitchell he despised. But Pichot, the brains of the gang, he honoured with a personal hatred that held a streak of rivalry. For Pichot, though a beast for cruelty and treachery, and with the murder of a woman on his black record—which placed him, according to Henderson's ideas, in a different category from a mere killer of men—was at the

same time a born leader and of a courage none could question. Some chance dash of Scotch Highland blood in his mixed veins had set a mop of hot red hair above his black, implacable eyes and cruel, dark face. It had touched his villainies, too, with an imagination which made them the more atrocious. And Henderson's hate for him as a man was mixed with respect for the adversary worthy of his powers.

Reaching the falls, Henderson had been forced to acknowledge that, once again, Pichot had outwitted him on the trail. Satisfied that his quarry was by this time far out of reach among the tangled ravines on the other side of Two Mountains, he dismissed the two tired river-men who constituted his posse, bidding them go on down the river to Greensville and wait for him. It was his plan to hunt alone for a couple of days in the hope of catching his adversary off guard. He had an ally, unsuspected and invaluable, in a long-legged, half-wild youngster of a girl, who lived alone with her father in a clearing about a mile below the falls, and regarded Henderson with a childlike hero-worship. This shy little savage, whom all the Settlement knew as "Baisley's Sis," had an intuitive knowledge of the wilderness and the trails which rivalled even Henderson's accomplished woodcraft; and the indomitable deputy "set great store," as he would have put it, by her friendship. He would go down presently to the clearing and ask some questions of the child. But first he wanted to do a bit of thinking. To think the better, the better to collect his tired and scattered wits, he had stood his Winchester carefully upright between two spruce saplings, filled his pipe, lighted it with relish, and seated himself under the old birch where he could look straight down upon the wheeling logs in Blackwater Pot.

It was while he was looking down into the terrible eddy that his efforts to think failed him and his pipe went out, and his interest in the fortunes of the captive logs gradually took the hold of a nightmare upon his overwrought imagination. One after one he would mark, snatched in by the capricious eddy and held back a little while from its doom. One after one he would see crowded out again, by

inexplicable whim, and hurled on into the raging horror of the falls. He fell to personifying this captive log or that, endowing it with sentience, and imagining its emotions each time it circled shuddering past the cleft in the rim, once more precariously reprieved.

At last, either because he was more deeply exhausted than he knew, or because he had fairly dropped asleep with his eyes open and his fantastic imaginings had slipped into a veritable dream, he felt himself suddenly become identified with one of the logs. It was one which was just drawing around to the fateful cleft. Would it win past once more? No; it was too far out! It felt the grasp of the outward suction, soft and insidious at first, then resistless as the falling of a mountain. With straining nerves and pounding heart Henderson strove to hold it back by sheer will and the wrestling of his eyes. But it was no use. Slowly the head of the log turned outward from its circling fellows, quivered for a moment in the cleft, then shot smoothly forth into the sluice. With a groan Henderson came to his senses, starting up and catching instinctively at the butt of the heavy Colt in his belt. At the same instant the coil of a rope settled over his shoulders, pinioning his arms to his sides, and he was jerked backwards with a violence that fairly lifted him over the projecting root of the birch. As he fell his head struck a stump; and he knew nothing more.

When Henderson came to his senses he found himself in a most bewildering position. He was lying face downwards along a log, his mouth pressed upon the rough bark. His arms and legs were in the water, on either side of the log. Other logs moved past him sluggishly. For a moment he thought himself still in the grip of his nightmare, and he struggled to wake himself. The struggle revealed to him that he was bound fast upon the log. At this his wits cleared up, with a pang that was more near despair than anything he had ever known. Then his nerve steadied itself back into its wonted control.

He realized what had befallen him. His enemies had back-trailed him and caught him off his guard. He was just where, in his awful dream, he had imagined himself as being. He was bound to one of the logs

down in the great stone pot of Blackwater Eddy.

For a second or two the blood in his veins ran ice, as he braced himself to feel the log lurch out into the sluice and plunge into the trampling of the abyss. Then he observed that the other logs were overtaking and passing him. His log, indeed, was not moving at all. Evidently, then, it was being held by some one. He tried to look around, but found himself so fettered that he could only lift his face a few inches from the log. This enabled him to see the whole surface of the eddy and the fateful cleft, and out across the raving torrents into the white curtain that swayed above the cauldron. But he could not, with the utmost twisting and stretching of his neck, see more than a couple of feet up the smooth stone sides of the pot.

As he strained on his bonds he heard a harsh chuckle behind him; and the log, suddenly loosed with a jerk which showed him it had been held by a pike-pole, began to move. A moment later the sharp, steel-armed end of the pike-pole came down smartly on the forward end of the log, within a dozen inches of Henderson's head, biting a secure hold. The log again came to a stop. Slowly, under pressure from the other end of the pike-pole, it rolled outward, submerging Henderson's right shoulder, and turning his face till he could see all the way up the sides of the pot.

What he saw, on a ledge about three feet above the water, was Red Pichot, holding the pike-pole and smiling down upon him smoothly. On the rim above squatted Bug Mitchell, scowling, and gripping his knife as if he thirsted to settle up all scores on the instant. Imagination was lacking in Mitchell's make-up; and he was impatient—so far as he dared to be—of Pichot's fantastic procrastinatings.

When Henderson's eyes met the evil, smiling glance of his enemy they were steady and cold as steel. To Henderson, who had always, in every situation, felt himself master, there remained now no mastery but that of his own will, his own spirit. In his estimation there could be no death so dreadful but that to let his spirit cower before his

adversary would be tenfold worse. Helpless though he was, in a position that was ignominiously and grotesquely horrible, and with the imminence of an appalling doom close before his eyes, his nerve never failed him. With cool contempt and defiance he met Red Pichot's smile.

"I've always had an idee," said the half-breed, presently, in a smooth voice that penetrated the mighty vibrations of the falls, "ez how a chap on a log could paddle roun' this yere eddy fer a deuce of a while afore he'd hev to git sucked out into the sluice!"

As a theory this was undoubtedly interesting. But Henderson made no answer.

"I've held that idee," continued Pichot, after a civil pause, "though I hain't never yet found a man, nor a woman nuther, as was willin' to give it a fair trial. But I feel sure ye're the man to oblige me. I've left yer arms kinder free, leastways from the elbows down, an' yer legs also, more or less, so's ye'll be able to paddle easy-like. The walls of the pot's all worn so smooth, below high-water mark, there's nothin' to ketch on to, so there'll be nothin' to take off yer attention. I'm hopin' ye'll give the matter a right fair trial. But ef ye gits tired an' feels like givin' up, why, don't consider my feelin's. There's the falls awaitin'. An' I ain't agoin' to bear no grudge ef ye don't quite come up to my expectations of ye."

As Pichot ceased his measured harangue he jerked his pike-pole loose. Instantly the log began to forge forward, joining the reluctant procession. For a few moments Henderson felt like shutting his eyes and his teeth and letting himself go on with all speed to the inevitable doom. Then, with scorn of the weak impulse, he changed his mind. To the last gasp he would maintain his hold on life, and give fortune a chance to save him. When he could no longer resist, then it would be Fate's responsibility, not his. The better to fight the awful fight that was before him, he put clear out of his mind the picture of Red Pichot and Mitchell perched on the brink above, smoking, and grinning down

upon the writhings of their victim. In a moment, as his log drew near the cleft, he had forgotten them. There was room now in all his faculties for but one impulse, one consideration.

The log to which he was bound was on the extreme outer edge of the procession, and Henderson realized that there was every probability of its being at once crowded out the moment it came to the exit. With a desperate effort he succeeded in catching the log nearest to him, pushing it ahead, and at last, just as they came opposite the cleft, steering his own log into its place. The next second it shot quivering forth into the sluice, and Henderson, with a sudden cold sweat jumping out all over him, circled slowly past the awful cleft. A shout of ironical congratulation came to him from the watchers on the brink above. But he hardly heard it, and heeded it not at all. He was striving frantically, paddling forward with one hand and backward with the other, to steer his sluggish, deep-floating log from the outer to the inner circle. He had already observed that to be on the outer edge would mean instant doom for him, because the outward suction was stronger underneath than on the surface, and his weighted log caught its force before the others did. His arms were so bound that only from the elbows down could he move them freely. He did, however, by a struggle which left him gasping, succeed in working in behind another log—just in time to see that log, too, sucked out into the abyss, and himself once more on the deadly outer flank of the circling procession.

This time Henderson did not know whether the watchers on the brink laughed or not as he won past the cleft. He was scheming desperately to devise some less exhausting tactics. Steadily and rhythmically, but with his utmost force, he back-paddled with both hands and feet, till the progress of his log was almost stopped. Then he succeeded in catching yet another log as it passed and manœuvring in behind it. By this time he was halfway around the pot again. Yet again, by his desperate back-paddling, he checked his progress, and presently, by most cunning manipulation, managed to edge in behind yet another log, so that when he again came round to

the cleft there were two logs between him and doom. The outermost of these, however, was dragged instantly forth into the fury of the sluice, thrust forward, as it was, by the grip of the suction upon Henderson's own deep log. Feeling himself on the point of utter exhaustion, he nevertheless continued back-paddling, and steering and working inward, till he had succeeded in getting three files of logs between himself and the outer edge. Then, almost blind and with the blood roaring so loud in his ears that he could hardly hear the trampling of the falls, he hung on his log, praying that strength might flow back speedily into his veins and nerves.

Not till he had twice more made the circuit of the pot, and twice more seen a log sucked out from his very elbow to leap into the white horror of the abyss, did Henderson stir. The brief stillness, controlled by his will, had rested him for the moment. He was cool now, keen to plan, cunning to husband his forces. Up to the very last second that he could he would maintain his hold on life, counting always on the chance of the unexpected.

With now just one log remaining between himself and death, he let himself go past the cleft, and saw that one log go out. Then, being close to the wall of the pot, he tried to delay his progress by clutching at the stone with his left hand and by dragging upon it with his foot. But the stone surface was worn so smooth by the age-long polishing of the eddy that these efforts availed him little. Before he realized it he was almost round again, and only by the most desperate struggle did he succeed in saving himself. There was no other log near by this time for him to seize and thrust forward in his place. It was simply a question of his restricted paddling, with hands and feet, against the outward draught of the current. For nearly a minute the log hung in doubt just before the opening, the current sucking at its head to turn it outward, and Henderson paddling against it not only with hands and feet, but with every ounce of will and nerve that his body contained. At last, inch by inch, he conquered. His log moved past the gate of death; and dimly, again, that ironical voice came down to him,

piercing the roar.

Once past, Henderson fell to back-paddling again—not so violently now—till other logs came by within his reach and he could work himself into temporary safety behind them. He was soon forced to the conviction that if he strove at just a shade under his utmost he was able to hold his own and keep one log always between himself and the opening. But what was now his utmost, he realized, would very soon be far beyond his powers. Well, there was nothing to do but to keep on trying. Around and around, and again and again around the terrible, smooth, deliberate circuit he went, sparing himself every ounce of effort that he could, and always shutting his eyes as the log beside him plunged out into the sluice. Gradually, then, he felt himself becoming stupefied by the ceaselessly recurring horror, with the prolonged suspense between. He must sting himself back to the full possession of his faculties by another burst of fierce effort. Fiercely he caught at log after log, without a let-up, till, luck having favoured him for once, he found himself on the inner instead of the outer edge of the procession. Then an idea flashed into his fast-clouding brain, and he cursed himself for not having thought of it before. At the very centre of the eddy, of course, there must be a sort of core of stillness. By a vehement struggle he attained it and avoided crossing it. Working gently and warily he kept the log right across the axis of the eddy, where huddled a crowd of chips and sticks. Here the log turned slowly, very slowly, on its own centre; and for a few seconds of exquisite relief Henderson let himself sink into a sort of lethargy. He was roused by a sudden shot, and the spat of a heavy bullet into the log about three inches before his head. Even through the shaking thunder of the cataract he thought he recognized the voice of his own heavy Colt; and the idea of that tried weapon being turned against himself filled him with childish rage. Without lifting his head he lay and cursed, grinding his teeth impotently. A few seconds later came another shot, and this time the ball went into the log just before his right arm. Then he understood, and woke up. Pichot was a dead shot. This was his intimation that Henderson must get out into the

procession again. At the centre of the eddy he was not sufficiently entertaining to his executioners. The idea of being shot in the head had not greatly disturbed him—he had felt as if it would be rather restful, on the whole. But the thought of getting a bullet in his arm, which would merely disable him and deliver him over helpless to the outdraught, shook him with something near a panic. He fell to paddling with all his remaining strength, and drove his log once more into the horrible circuit. The commendatory remarks with which Pichot greeted this move went past his ears unheard.

Up to this time there had been a strong sun shining down into the pot, and the trees about its rim had stood unstirred by any wind. Now, however, a sudden darkness settled over everything, and sharp, fitful gusts drew in through the cleft, helping to push the logs back. Henderson was by this time so near fainting from exhaustion that his wits were losing their clearness. Only his horror of the fatal exit, the raving sluice, the swaying white spray-curtain, retained its keenness. As to all else he was growing so confused that he hardly realized the way those great indrawing gusts, laden with spray, were helping him. He was paddling and steering and manœuvring for the inner circuit almost mechanically now. When suddenly the blackness about him was lit with a blue glare, and the thunder crashed over the echoing pot with an explosion that outroared the falls, he hardly noted it. When the skies seemed to open, letting down the rain in torrents, with a wind that almost blew it level, it made no difference to him. He went on paddling dully, indifferent to the bumping of the logs against his shoulders.


"He was roused by a sudden shot."

But to this fierce storm, which almost bent double the trees around the rim of the pot, Red Pichot and Mitchell were by no means so indifferent. About sixty or seventy yards below the falls they had a snug retreat which was also an outlook. It was a cabin built in a recess of the wall of the gorge, and to be reached only by a narrow pathway easy of defence. When the storm broke in its fury Pichot sprang to his feet.

"Let's git back to the Hole," he cried to his companion, knocking the fire out of his pipe. "We kin watch just as well from there, an' see the beauty slide over when his time comes."

Pichot led the way off through the straining and hissing trees, and Mitchell followed, growling but obedient. And Henderson, faint upon his log in the raving tumult, knew nothing of their going.

They had not been gone more than two minutes when a drenched little

dark face, with black hair plastered over it in wisps, peered out from among the lashing birches and gazed down anxiously into the pot. At the sight of Henderson on his log, lying quite close to the edge, and far back from the dreadful cleft, the terror in the wild eyes gave way to inexpressible relief. The face drew back; and an instant later a bare-legged child appeared, carrying the pike-pole which Pichot had tossed into the bushes. Heedless of the sheeting volleys of the rain and the fierce gusts which whipped her dripping homespun petticoat about her knees, she clambered skilfully down the rock wall to the ledge whereon Pichot had stood. Bracing herself carefully, she reached out with the pike-pole, which, child though she was, she evidently knew how to use.

Henderson was just beginning to recover from his daze, and to notice the madness of the storm, when he felt something strike sharply on the log behind him. He knew it was the impact of a pike pole, and he wondered, with a kind of scornful disgust, what Pichot could be wanting of him now. He felt the log being dragged backwards, then held close against the smooth wall of the pot. A moment more and his bonds were being cut—but laboriously, as if with a small knife and by weak hands. Then he caught sight of the hands, which were little and brown and rough, and realized, with a great burst of wonder and tenderness, that old Baisley's "Sis," by some miracle of miracles, had come to his rescue. In a few seconds the ropes fell apart, and he lifted himself, to see the child stooping down with anxious adoration in her eyes.

"Sis!" he cried. "You!"

"Oh, Mr. Henderson, come quick!" she panted. "They may git back any minit." And clutching him by the shoulder, she tried to pull him up by main strength. But Henderson needed no urging. Life, with the return of hope, had surged back into nerve and muscle; and in hardly more time than it takes to tell it, the two had clambered side by side to the rim of the pot and darted into the covert of the tossing trees.

No sooner were they in hiding than Henderson remembered his rifle and slipped back to get it His enemies had not discovered it. It had fallen into the moss, but the well-oiled, perfect-fitting chamber had kept its cartridges dry. With that weapon in his hands Henderson felt himself once more master of the situation. Weariness and apprehension together slipped from him, and one purpose took complete possession of him. He would settle with Red Pichot right there, on the spot where he had been taught the terrible lesson of fear. He felt that he could not really feel himself a man again unless he could settle the whole score before the sun of that day should set.

The rain and wind were diminishing now; the lightning was a mere shuddering gleam over the hill-tops beyond the river; and the thunder no longer made itself heard above the trampling of the falls. Henderson's plans were soon laid. Then he turned to Sis, who stood silent and motionless close at his side, her big, alert, shy eyes watching like a hunted deer's the trail by which Red Pichot might return. She was trembling in her heart at every moment that Henderson lingered within that zone of peril. But she would not presume to suggest any move.

Suddenly Henderson turned to her and laid an arm about her little shoulders.

"You saved my life, kid!" he said, softly. "How ever did you know I was down there in that hell?"

"I jest *knowed* it was you, when I seen Red Pichot an' Bug Mitchell a-trackin' some one," answered the child, still keeping her eyes on the trail, as if it was her part to see that Henderson was not again taken unawares. "I *knowed* it was you, Mister Henderson, an' I followed 'em; an' oh, I seen it all, I seen it all, an' I most died because I hadn't no gun. But I'd 'ave killed 'em both, some day, sure, ef—ef they hadn't went away! But they'll be back now right quick."

Henderson bent and kissed her wet black head, saying, "Bless you, kid! You an' me'll always be pals, I reckon!"

At the kiss the child's face flushed, and, for one second forgetting to watch the trail, she lifted glowing eyes to his. But he was already looking away.

"Come on," he muttered. "This ain't no place for you an' me *yet*."

Making a careful circuit through the thick undergrowth, swiftly but silently as two wildcats, the strange pair gained a covert close beside the trail by which Pichot and Mitchell would return to the rim of the pot. Safely ambuscaded, Henderson laid a hand firmly on the child's arm, resting it there for two or three seconds, as a sign of silence.

Minute after minute went by in the intense stillness. At last the child, whose ears were even keener than Henderson's, caught her breath with a little indrawing gasp and looked up at her companion's face. Henderson understood; and every muscle stiffened. A moment later and he, too, heard the oncoming tread of hurried footsteps. Then Pichot went by at a swinging stride, with Mitchell skulking obediently at his heels.

Henderson half raised his rifle, and his face turned grey and cold like steel. But it was no part of his plan to shoot even Red Pichot in the back. From the manner of the two ruffians it was plain that they had no suspicion of the turn which affairs had taken. To them it was as sure as two and two make four that Henderson was still on his log in the pot, if he had not already gone over into the cauldron. As they reached the rim Henderson stepped out into the trail behind them, his gun balanced ready like a trapshooter's.

As Pichot, on the very brink, looked down into the pot and saw that his victim was no longer there, he turned to Mitchell with a smile of mingled triumph and disappointment.

But, on the instant, the smile froze on his face. It was as if he had felt the cold, grey gaze of Henderson on the back of his neck. Some warning, certainly, was flashed to that mysterious sixth sense which the people of the wild, man or beast, seem sometimes to be

endowed with. He wheeled like lightning, his revolver seeming to leap up from his belt with the same motion. But in the same fraction of a second that his eyes met Henderson's they met the white flame-spurt of Henderson's rifle—and then, the dark.

As Pichot's body collapsed, it toppled over the rim into Blackwater Pot and fell across two moving logs. Mitchell had thrown up his hands straight above his head when Pichot fell, knowing instantly that that was his only hope of escaping the same fate as his leader's.

One look at Henderson's face, however, satisfied him that he was not going to be dealt with on the spot, and he set his thick jaw stolidly. Then his eyes wandered down into the pot, following the leader whom, in his way, he had loved if ever he had loved any one or anything. Fascinated, his stare followed the two logs as they journeyed around, with Pichot's limp form, face upwards, sprawled across them. They reached the cleft, turned, and shot forth into the raving of the sluice, and a groan of horror burst from "Bug's" lips. By this Henderson knew what had happened, and, to his immeasurable self-scorn, a qualm of remembered fear caught sickeningly at his heart. But nothing of this betrayed itself in his face or voice.

"Come on, Mitchell!" he said, briskly. "I'm in a hurry. You jest step along in front, an' see ye keep both hands well up over yer head, or ye'll be savin' the county the cost o' yer rope. Step out, now."

He stood aside, with Sis at his elbow, to make room. As Mitchell passed, his hands held high, a mad light flamed up into his sullen eyes, and he was on the point of springing, like a wolf, at his captor's throat. But Henderson's look was cool and steady, and his gun held low. The impulse flickered out in the brute's dull veins. But as he glanced at Sis he suddenly understood that it was she who had brought all this to pass. His black face snarled upon her like a wolf's at bay, with an inarticulate curse more horrible than any words could make it. With a shiver the child slipped behind Henderson's back and hid her face.

“Don’t be skeered o’ him, kid, not one little mite,” said Henderson, gently. “He ain’t agoin’ to trouble this earth no more. An’ I’m goin’ to g e t yer father a job, helpin’ me, down somewheres near Greensville—because I couldn’t sleep nights knowin’ ye was runnin’ round anywheres near that hell-hole yonder!”

# The Iron Edge of Winter

The glory of the leaves was gone; the glory of the snow was not yet come; and the world, smitten with bitter frost, was grey like steel. The ice was black and clear and vitreous on the forest pools. The clods on the ploughed field, the broken hillocks in the pasture, the ruts of the winding backwoods road, were hard as iron and rang under the travelling hoof. The silent, naked woods, moved only by the bleak wind drawing through them from the north, seemed as if life had forgotten them.

Suddenly there came a light thud, thud, thud, with a pattering of brittle leaves; and a leisurely rabbit hopped by, apparently on no special errand. At the first of the sounds, a small, ruddy head with bulging, big, bright eyes had appeared at the mouth of a hole under the roots of an ancient maple. The bright eyes noted the rabbit at once, and peered about anxiously to see if any enemy were following. There was no danger in sight.

Within two or three feet of the hole under the maple the rabbit stopped, sat up as if begging, waved its great ears to and fro, and glanced around inquiringly with its protruding, foolish eyes. As it sat up, it felt beneath its whitey fluff of a tail something hard which was not a stone, and promptly dropped down again on all fours to investigate. Poking its nose among the leaves and scratching with its fore-paws, it uncovered a pile of beech-nuts, at which it began to sniff. The next instant, with a shrill, chattering torrent of invective, a red squirrel whisked out from the hole under the maple, and made as if to fly in the face of the big, good-natured trespasser. Startled and abashed by this noisy assault, the rabbit went bounding away over the dead leaves and disappeared among the desolate grey arches.

The silence was effectually dispelled. Shrieking and scolding hysterically, flicking his long tail in spasmodic jerks, and calling the dead solitudes to witness that the imbecile intruder had uncovered one of his treasure-heaps, the angry squirrel ran up and down the trunk for at least two minutes. Then, his feelings somewhat relieved by this violent outburst, he set himself to gathering the scattered nuts and bestowing them in new and safer hiding-places.

In this task he had little regard for convenience, and time appeared to be no object whatever. Some of the nuts he took over to a big elm fifty paces distant, and jammed them one by one, solidly and conscientiously, into the crevices of the bark. Others he carried in the opposite direction, to the edge of the open where the road ran by. These he hid under a stone, where the passing wayfarer might step over them, indeed, but would never think of looking for them. While he was thus occupied, an old countryman slouched by, his heavy boots making a noise on the frozen ruts, his nose red with the harsh, unmitigated cold. The squirrel, mounted on a fence stake, greeted him with a flood of whistling and shrieking abuse; and he, not versed in the squirrel tongue, muttered to himself half enviously: “Queer how them squur’ls can keep so cheerful in this weather.” The tireless little animal followed him along the fence rails for perhaps a hundred yards, seeing him off the premises and advising him not to return, then went back in high feather to his task. When all the nuts were once more safely hidden but two or three, these latter he carried to the top of a stump close beside the hole in the maple, and proceeded to make a meal. The stump commanded a view on all sides; and as he sat up with a nut between his little, hand-like, clever fore-paws, his shining eyes kept watch on every path by which an enemy might approach.

Having finished the nuts, and scratched his ears, and jumped twice around on the stump as if he were full of erratically acting springs, he uttered his satisfaction in a long, vibrant chir-r-r-r, and started to re-enter his hole in the maple-roots. Just at the door, however, he

changed his mind. For no apparent reason he whisked about, scurried across the ground to the big elm, ran straight up the tall trunk, and disappeared within what looked like a mass of sticks perched among the topmost branches.

The mass of sticks was a deserted crow's nest, which the squirrel, not content with one dwelling, had made over to suit his own personal needs. He had greatly improved upon the architecture of the crows, giving the nest a tight roof of twigs and moss, and lining the snug interior with fine dry grass and soft fibres of cedar-bark. In this secure and softly swaying refuge, far above the reach of prowling foxes, he curled himself up for a nap after his toil.

He slept well, but not long; for the red squirrel has always something on his mind to see to. In less than half an hour he whisked out again in great excitement, jumped from branch to branch till he was many yards from his own tree, and then burst forth into vehement chatter. He must have dreamed that some one was rifling his hoards, for he ran eagerly from one hiding-place to another and examined them all suspiciously. As he had at least two-score to inspect, it took him some time; but not till he had looked at every one did he seem satisfied. Then he grew very angry, and scolded and chirruped, as if he thought some one had made a fool of him. That he had made a fool of himself probably never entered his confident and self-sufficient little head.

While indulging this noisy volubility he was seated on the top of his dining-stump. Suddenly he caught sight of something that smote him into silence and for the space of a second turned him to stone. A few paces away was a weasel, gliding toward him like a streak of baleful light. For one second only he crouched. Then his faculties returned, and launching himself through the air he landed on the trunk of the maple and darted up among the branches.

No less swiftly the weasel followed, hungry, bloodthirsty, relentless on the trail. Terrified into folly by the suddenness and deadliness of this

peril, the squirrel ran too far up the tree and was almost cornered. Where the branches were small there was no chance to swing to another tree. Perceiving this mistake, he gave a squeak of terror, then bounded madly right over his enemy's head, and was lucky enough to catch foothold far out on a lower branch. Recovering himself in an instant, he shot into the next tree, and thence to the next and the next. Then, breathless from panic rather than from exhaustion, he crouched trembling behind a branch and waited.

The weasel pursued more slowly, but inexorably as doom itself. He was not so clever at branch-jumping as his intended prey, but he was not to be shaken off. In less than a minute he was following the scent up the tree wherein the squirrel was hiding; and again the squirrel dashed off in his desperate flight. Twice more was this repeated, the squirrel each time more panic-stricken and with less power in nerve or muscle. Then wisdom forsook his brain utterly. He fled straight to his elm and darted into his nest in the swaying top. The weasel, running lithely up the ragged trunk, knew that the chase was at an end. From this cul de sac the squirrel had no escape.

But Fate is whimsical in dealing with the wild kindreds. She seems to delight in unlooked-for interventions. While the squirrel trembled in his dark nest, and the weasel, intent upon the first taste of warm blood in his throat, ran heedlessly up a bare stretch of the trunk, there came the chance which a foraging hawk had been waiting for. The hawk, too, had been following this breathless chase, but ever baffled by intervening branches. Now he swooped and struck. His talons had the grip of steel. The weasel, plucked irresistibly from his foothold, was carried off writhing to make the great bird's feast. And the squirrel, realizing at last that the expected doom had been somehow turned aside, came out and chattered feebly of his triumph.

# The Grip in Deep Hole

The roar of the falls, the lighter and shriller raging of the rapids, had at last died out behind the thick masses of the forest, as Barnes worked his way down the valley. The heat in the windless underbrush, alive with insects, was stifling. He decided to make once more for the bank of the stream, in the hope that its character might by this time have changed, so as to afford him an easier and more open path. Pressing aside to his left, he presently saw the green gloom lighten before him. Blue sky and golden light came low through the thinning trees, and then a gleam of unruffled water. He was nearing the edge now; and because the underbrush was so thick about him he began to go cautiously.

All at once, he felt his feet sinking; and the screen of thick bushes before him leaned away as if bowed by a heavy gust. Desperately he clutched with both hands at the undergrowth and saplings on either side; but they all gave way with him. In a smother of leafage and blinding, lashing branches he sank downwards—at first, as it seemed, slowly, for he had time to think many things while his heart was jumping in his throat. Then, shooting through the lighter bushy companions of his fall, and still clutching convulsively at those upon which he had been able to lay his grasp, he plunged feet first into a dark water.

The water was deep and cold. Barnes went down straight, and clear under, with a strangled gasp. His feet struck, with some force, upon a tangled, yielding mass, from which he rose again with a spring. His head shot up above the surface, above the swirl of foam, leafage, and débris; and splutteringly he gulped his lungs full of air. But before he could clear his eyes or his nostrils, or recover his self-possession, he

was stealthily dragged down again. And with a pang of horror he realized that he was caught by the foot.

A powerful swimmer, Barnes struck out mightily with his arms and came to the surface again at once, rising beyond the shoulders. But by so much the more was he violently snatched back again, strangling and desperate, before he had time to empty his lungs and catch breath. This time the shock sobered him, flashing the full peril of the situation before his startled consciousness. With a tremendous effort of will he stopped his struggling, and contented himself with a gentle paddling to keep upright. This time he came more softly to the surface, clear beyond the chin. The foam and débris and turbulence of little waves seethed about his lips, and the sunlight danced confusingly in his streaming eyes; but he gulped a fresh lungful before he again went under.


"He realized that he was caught by the foot."

Paddling warily now, he emerged again at once, and, with arms outspread, brought himself to a precarious equilibrium, his mouth just above the surface so long as he held his head well back. Keeping very still, he let his bewildered wits clear, and the agitated surface settle to quiet.

He was in a deep, tranquil cove, hardly stirred by an eddy. Some ten paces farther out from shore the main current swirled past sullenly, as if weary from the riot of falls and rapids. Across the current a little space of sand-beach, jutting out from the leafy shore, shone golden in the sun. Up and down the stream, as far as his extremely restricted vision would suffer him to see, nothing but thick, overhanging branches, and the sullen current. Very cautiously he turned his head—though to do so brought the water over his lips—and saw behind him just what he expected. The high, almost perpendicular bank was scarred by a gash of bright, raw, reddish earth, where the brink had slipped away beneath his weight.

Just within reach of his hand lay, half submerged, the thick, leafy top of a fallen poplar sapling, its roots apparently still clinging to the bank. Gently he laid hold of it, testing it, in the hope that it might prove solid enough to enable him to haul himself out. But it came away instantly in his grasp. And once more, in this slight disturbance of his equilibrium, his head went under.

Barnes was disappointed, but he was now absolutely master of his self-possession. In a moment he had regained the only position in which he could breathe comfortably. Then, because the sun was beating down too fiercely on the top of his head, he carefully drew the bushy top of the poplar sapling into such a position that it gave him shade. As its roots were still aground, it showed no tendency to float off and forsake him in his plight.

A very little consideration, accompanied by a cautious investigation with his free foot, speedily convinced Barnes, who was a practical woodsman, that the trap in which he found himself caught could be

nothing else than a couple of interlaced, twisted branches, or roots, of some tree which had fallen into the pool in a former caving-in of the bank. In that dark deep wherein his foot was held fast, his mind's eye could see it all well enough—the water-soaked, brown-green, slimy, inexorable coil, which had yielded to admit the unlucky member, then closed upon the ankle like the jaws of an otter trap. He could feel that grip—not severe, but uncompromisingly firm, clutching the joint. As he considered, he began to draw comfort, however, from the fact that his invisible captor had displayed a certain amount of give and take. This elasticity meant either that it was a couple of branches slight enough to be flexible that held him, or that the submerged tree itself was a small one, not too steadfastly anchored down. He would free himself easily enough, he thought, as soon as he should set himself about it coolly and systematically.

Taking a long breath he sank his head under the surface, and peered downward through the amber-brown but transparent gloom. Little gleams of brighter light came twisting and quivering in from the swirls of the outer current. Barnes could not discern the bottom of the pool, which was evidently very deep; but he could see quite clearly the portion of the sunken tree in whose interwoven branches he was held. A shimmering golden ray fell just on the spot where his foot vanished to the ankle between two stout curves of what looked like slimy brown cable or sections of a tense snake body.

It was, beyond question, a nasty-looking trap; and Barnes could not blink the fact that he was in a tight place. He lifted his face above the surface, steadied himself carefully, and breathed deeply and quietly for a couple of minutes, gathering strength for a swift and vigorous effort. Then, filling his lungs very moderately, the better to endure a strain, he stooped suddenly downward, deep into the yellow gloom, and began wrenching with all his force at those oozy curves, striving to drag them apart. They gave a little, but not enough to release the imprisoned foot. Another moment, and he had to lift his head again for breath.

After some minutes of rest, he repeated the choking struggle, but, as before, in vain. He could move the jaws of the trap just enough to encourage him a little, but not enough to gain his release. Again and again he tried it, again and again to fail just as he imagined himself on the verge of success; till at last he was forced, for the moment, to acknowledge defeat, finding himself so exhausted that he could hardly keep his mouth above water. Drawing down a stiffish branch of the sapling, he gripped it between his teeth and so held himself upright while he rested his arms. This was a relief to nerves as well as muscles, because it made his balance, on which he depended for the chance to breathe, so much the less precarious.

As he hung there pondering, held but a bare half-inch above drowning, the desperateness of the situation presented itself to him in appalling clearness. How sunny and warm and safe, to his woods-familiar eyes, looked the green forest world about him. No sound broke the mild tranquillity of the solitude, except, now and then, an elfish gurgle of the slow current, or the sweetly cheerful *tsic-a-dee-dee* of an unseen chicadee, or, from the intense blue overhead, the abrupt, thin whistle of a soaring fish-hawk. To Barnes it all seemed such a safe, friendly world, his well-understood intimate since small boyhood. Yet here it was, apparently, turned smooth traitor at last, and about to destroy him as pitilessly as might the most scorching desert or blizzard-scourged ice-field. A silent rage burned suddenly through all his veins—–which was well, since the cold of that spring-fed river had already begun to finger stealthily about his heart. A delicate little pale-blue butterfly, like a periwinkle-petal come to life, fluttered over Barnes's grim, upturned face, and went dancing gaily out across the shining water, joyous in the sun. In its dancing it chanced to dip a hair's-breadth too low. The treacherous, bright surface caught it, held it; and away it swept, struggling in helpless consternation against this unexpected doom. Before it passed out of Barnes's vision a great trout rose and gulped it down. Its swift fate, to Barnes's haggard eyes,

seemed an analogue in little to his own.

But it was not in the woodsman's fibre to acknowledge himself actually beaten, either by man or fate, so long as there remained a spark in his brain to keep his will alive. He presently began searching with his eyes among the branches of the poplar sapling for one stout enough to serve him as a lever. With the right kind of a stick in his hand, he told himself, he might manage to pry apart the jaws of the trap and get his foot free. At last his choice settled upon a branch that he thought would serve his turn. He was just about to reach up and break it off, when a slight crackling in the underbrush across the stream caught his ear.

His woodsman's instinct kept him motionless as he turned his eyes to the spot. In the thick leafage there was a swaying, which moved down along the bank, but he could not see what was causing it. Softly he drew over a leafy branch of the sapling till it made him a perfect screen, then he peered up the channel to find out what the unseen wayfarer was following.

A huge salmon, battered and gashed from a vain struggle to leap the falls, was floating, belly-upward, down the current, close to Barnes's side of the stream. A gentle eddy caught it, and drew it into the pool. Sluggishly it came drifting down toward Barnes's hidden face. In the twigs of the poplar sapling it came to a halt, its great scarlet gills barely moving as the last of life flickered out of it.

Barnes now understood quite well that unseen commotion which had followed, along shore, the course of the dying salmon. It was no surprise to him whatever when he saw a huge black bear emerge upon the yellow sandspit and stand staring across the current. Apparently, it was staring straight at Barnes's face, upturned upon the surface of the water. But Barnes knew it was staring at the dead salmon. His heart jumped sickeningly with sudden hope, as an extravagant notion flashed into his brain. Here was his rescuer—a perilous one, to be sure—vouchsafed to him by some whim of the

inscrutable forest-fates.

He drew down another branchy twig before his face, fearful lest his concealment should not be adequate. But in his excitement he disturbed his balance, and with the effort of his recovery the water swirled noticeably all about him. His heart sank. Assuredly, the bear would take alarm at this and be afraid to come for the fish.

But to his surprise the great beast, which had seemed to hesitate, plunged impetuously into the stream. Nothing, according to a bear's knowledge of life, could have made that sudden disturbance in the pool but some fish-loving otter or mink, intent upon seizing the booty. Indignant at the prospect of being forestalled by any such furtive marauder, the bear hurled himself forward with such force that the spray flew high into the branches, and the noise of his splashing was a clear notification that trespassers and meddlers had better keep off. That salmon was his, by right of discovery; and he was going to have it.

The bear, for all the seeming clumsiness of his bulk, was a redoubtable swimmer; and almost before Barnes had decided clearly on his proper course of action those heavy, grunting snorts and vast expulsions of breath were at his ear. Enormously loud they sounded, shot thus close along the surface of the water. Perforce, Barnes made up his mind on the instant.

The bunch of twigs which had arrested the progress of the floating salmon lay just about an arm's length from Barnes's face. Swimming high, his mighty shoulders thrusting up a wave before him which buried Barnes's head safely from view, the bear reached the salmon. Grabbing it triumphantly in his jaws, he turned to make for shore again.

This was Barnes's moment. Both arms shot out before him. Through the suffocating confusion his clutching fingers encountered the bear's haunches. Sinking into the long fur, they closed upon it with a grip of

steel. Then, instinctively, Barnes shut his eyes and clenched his teeth, and waited for the shock, while his lungs felt as if they would burst in another moment.

But it was no long time he had to wait—perhaps two seconds, while amazement in the bear's brain translated itself through panic into action. Utterly horrified by this inexplicable attack, from the rear and from the depths, the bear threw himself shoulder high from the water, and hurled himself forward with all his strength. Barnes felt those tremendous haunches heaving irresistibly beneath his clutching fingers. He felt himself drawn out straight, and dragged ahead till he thought his ankle would snap. Almost he came to letting go, to save the ankle. But he held, on, as much with his will as with his grip. Then, the slimy thing in the depths gave way. He felt himself being jerked through the water—free. His fingers relaxed their clutch on the bear's fur—and he came to the surface, gasping, blinking, and coughing.

For a moment or two he paddled softly, recovering his breath and shaking the water from nostrils and eyes. He had an instant of apprehensiveness, lest the bear should turn upon him and attack him at a disadvantage; and by way of precaution he gave forth the most savage and piercing yell that his labouring lungs were capable of. But he saw at once that on this score he had nothing to fear. It was a well-frightened bear, there swimming frantically for the sandspit; while the dead salmon, quite forgotten, was drifting slowly away on the sullen current.

Barnes's foot was hurting fiercely, but his heart was light. Swimming at leisure, so as to just keep head against the stream, he watched the bear scuttle out upon the sand. Once safe on dry land, the great beast turned and glanced back with a timid air to see what manner of being it was that had so astoundingly assailed him. Man he had seen before—but never man swimming like an otter; and the sight was nothing to reassure him. One longing look he cast upon the salmon, now floating some distance away; but that, to his startled mind, was

just a lure of this same terrifying and perfidious creature whose bright grey eyes were staring at him so steadily from the surface of the water. He turned quickly and made off into the woods, followed by a loud, daunting laugh which spurred his pace to a panicky gallop.

When he was gone, Barnes swam to the sandspit. There he wrung out his dripping clothes, and lay down in the hot sand to let the sun soak deep into his chilled veins.

# The Nest of the Mallard

When the spring freshet went down, and the rushes sprang green all about the edges of the shallow, marshy lagoons, a pair of mallards took possession of a tiny, bushy island in the centre of the broadest pond. Moved by one of those inexplicable caprices which keep most of the wild kindreds from too perilous an enslavement to routine, this pair had been attracted by the vast, empty levels of marsh and mere, and had dropped out from the ranks of their northward-journeying comrades. Why should they beat on through the raw, blustering spring winds to Labrador, when here below them was such a nesting-place as they desired, with solitude and security and plenty. The flock went on, obeying an ancestral summons. With heads straight out before, and rigid, level necks—with web feet folded like fans and stretched straight out behind, rigid and level—they sped through the air on short, powerful, swift-beating wings at the rate of sixty or seventy miles an hour. Their flight, indeed, and their terrific speed were not unlike those of some strange missile. The pair who had dropped behind paid no heed to their going; and in two minutes they had faded out against the pale saffron morning sky.

These two were the only mallards in this whole wide expanse of grass and water. Other kinds of ducks there were, in plenty, but the mallards at this season kept to themselves. The little island which they selected for their peculiar domain was so small that no other mating couples intruded upon its privacy. It was only about ten feet across; but it bore a favourable thicket of osier-willow, and all around it the sedge and bulrush reared an impenetrable screen. Its highest point was about two feet above average water level; and on this highest point the mallard duck established her nest.

The nest was a mere shallow pile of dead leaves and twigs and dry sedges, scraped carelessly together. But the inside was not careless. It was a round smooth hollow, most softly lined with down from the duck's own breast. When the first pale, greenish-tinted egg was laid in the nest, there was only a little of this down; but the delicate and warm lining accumulated as the pale green eggs increased in number.

In the construction of the nest and the accumulation of the eggs no interest whatever was displayed by the splendid drake. He never, unless by chance, went near it. But as a lover the lordly fellow was most gallant and ardent. While his mate was on the nest laying, he was usually to be seen floating on the open mere beyond the reed-fringe, pruning his plumage in the cold pink rays of the first of the sunrise.

It was plumage well worth pruning, this of his, and fully justified his pride in it. The shining, silken, iridescent dark green of the head and neck; the snowy, sharply defined, narrow collar of white, dividing the green of the neck from the brownish ash of the back and the gorgeous chestnut of the breast; the delicate pure grey of the belly finely pencilled with black lines; the rich, glossy purple of the broad wing-bars shot with green reflections; the jaunty, recurved black feathers of the tail; the smart, citron-yellow of the bill and feet;—all these charms were ample excuse for his coxcombry and continual posings. They were ample excuse, too, for the admiration bestowed upon him by his mottled brown mate, whose colours were obviously designed not for show but for concealment. When sitting on her nest, she was practically indistinguishable from the twigs and dead leaves that surrounded her.

Having laid her egg, the brown duck would cover the precious contents of the nest with twigs and leaves, that they might not be betrayed by their conspicuous colour. Then she would steal, silently as a shadow, through the willow stems to the water's edge, and

paddle cautiously out through the rushes to the open water. On reaching her mate all this caution would be laid aside, and the two would set up an animated and confidential quacking. They would sometimes sail around each other slowly in circles, with much arching of necks and quaint stiff bowing of heads; and sometimes they would chase each other in scurrying, napping rushes along the bright surface of the water. Both before and after these gay exercises they would feed quietly in the shallows, pulling up water-weed sprouts and tender roots, or sifting insects and little shellfish from the mud by means of the sensitive tips and guttered edges of their bills. The mallard pair had few enemies to dread, their island being so far from shore that no four-footed marauder, not even the semi-amphibious mink himself, ever visited it. And the region was one too remote for the visits of the pot-hunter. In fact, there was only one foe against whom it behoved them to be on ceaseless guard. This was that bloodthirsty and tireless slayer, the goshawk, or great grey henhawk. Where that grim peril was concerned, the brown duck would take no risks. For the sake of those eggs among the willow stems, she held her life very dear, never flying more than a short circle around the island to stretch her wings, never swimming or feeding any distance from the safe covert of the rushes.

But with the glowing drake it was different. High spirited, bold for all his wariness, and magnificently strong of wing, from sheer restlessness he occasionally flew high above the ponds. And one day, when some distance from home, the great hawk saw him and swooped down upon him from aërial heights.

The impending doom caught the drake’s eye in time for him to avoid the stroke of that irresistible descent. His short wings, with their muscles of steel, winnowed the air with sudden, tremendous force, and he shot ahead at a speed which must have reached the rate of a hundred miles an hour. When the swooping hawk had rushed down to his level, he was nearly fifty yards in the lead.

In such a case most of the larger hawks would have given up the chase, and soared again to abide the chance for a more fortunate swoop. But not so the implacable goshawk. His great pinions were capable not only of soaring and sailing and swooping, but of the rapid and violent flapping of the short-winged birds; and he had at his command a speed even greater than that of the rushing fugitive. As he pursued, his wings tore the air with a strident, hissing noise; and the speed of the drake seemed as nothing before that savage, inescapable onrush. Had the drake been above open water, he would have hurled himself straight downward, and seized the one chance of escape by diving; but beneath him at this moment there was nothing but naked swamp and sloppy flats. In less than two minutes the hiss of the pursuing wings was close behind him. He gave a hoarse squawk, as he realized that doom had overtaken him. Then one set of piercing talons clutched his outstretched neck, cutting clean through his wind-pipe; and another set bit deep into the glossy chestnut of his breast.

For several days the widowed duck kept calling loudly up and down the edges of the reeds—but at a safe distance from the nest. When she went to lay, she stayed ever longer and longer on the eggs, brooding them. Three more eggs she laid after the disappearance of her mate, and then, having nine in the nest, she began to sit; and the open water beyond the reed fringes saw her no more.

At first she would slip off the nest for a few minutes every day, very stealthily, to feed and stretch and take a noiseless dip in the shallow water among the reeds; but as time went on she left the eggs only once in two days. Twice a day she would turn the eggs over carefully, and at the same time change their respective positions in the nest, so that those which had been for some hours in the centre, close to her hot and almost naked breast, might take their turn in the cooler space just under her wings. By this means each egg got its fair share of heat, properly distributed, and the little life taking shape within escaped the distortion which might have been caused by lying too long in one position. Whenever the wary brown mother left the nest,

she covered the eggs with down, now, which kept the warmth in better than leaves could. And whenever she came back from her brief swim, her dripping feathers supplied the eggs with needed moisture.

It is a general law that the older an egg is the longer it takes to hatch. The eggs of the mallard mother, of course, varied in age from fifteen days to one before she began to sit. This being the case, at the end of the long month of incubation they would have hatched at intervals covering in all, perhaps, a full day and a half; and complications would have arisen. But the wise mother had counteracted the working of the law by sitting a little while every day. Therefore, as a matter of fact, the older eggs got the larger share of the brooding, in exact proportion; and the building of the little lives within the shells went on with almost perfect uniformity.

During the long, silent month of her patient brooding, spring had wandered away and summer had spread thick green and yellow lily blooms all over the lonely meres. A bland but heavy heat came down through the willow tops, so that the brown duck sometimes panted at her task, and sat with open bill, or with wings half raised from the eggs. Then, one night, she heard faint tappings and peepings beneath her. Sturdy young bills began chipping at the inside of the shells, speedily breaking them. Each duckling, as he chipped the shell just before the tip of his beak, would turn a little way around in his narrow quarters; till presently the shell would fall apart, neatly divided into halves; and the wet duckling, tumbling forth, would snuggle up against the mother's hot breast and thighs to dry. Whenever this happened, the wise mother would reach her head beneath, and fit the two halves of shell one within the other, or else thrust them out of the nest entirely, lest they should get slipped over another egg and smother the occupant. Sometimes she fitted several sets of the empty shells together, that they might take up less room; and altogether she showed that she perfectly understood her business. Then, late in the morning, when the green world among the willows and rushes was still

and warm and sweet, she led her fluffy, sturdy brood straight down to the water, and taught them to feed on the insects that clung to the bulrush stalks.

# Mrs. Gammit and the Porcupines

“I hain’t come to borry yer gun, Mr. Barron, but to ax yer advice.”

Mrs. Gammit’s rare appearances were always abrupt, like her speech; and it was without surprise—though he had not seen her for a month or more—that Joe Barron turned to greet her.

“It’s at yer sarvice, jest as the gun would be ef ye wanted it, Mrs. Gammit—*an’* welcome! But come in an’ set down an’ git cooled off a mite. ’Tain’t no place to talk, out here in the bilin’ sun.”

Mrs. Gammit seated herself on the end of the bench, just inside the kitchen door, twitched off her limp, pink cotton sunbonnet, and wiped her flushed face with the sleeve of her calico waist. Quite unsubdued by the heat and moisture of the noonday sun, under which she had tramped nine miles through the forest, her short, stiff, grey hair stood up in irregular tufts above her weather-beaten forehead. Her host, sitting sidewise on the edge of the table so that he could swing one leg freely and spit cleanly through the open window, bit off a contemplative quid of “blackjack” tobacco, and waited for her to unfold the problems that troubled her.

Mrs. Gammit’s rugged features were modelled to fit an expression of vigorous, if not belligerent, self-confidence. She knew her capabilities, well-tried in some sixty odd years of unprotected spinsterhood. Merit alone, not matrimony, it was, that had crowned this unsullied spinsterhood with the honorary title of “Mrs.” Her massive and energetic nose was usually carried somewhat high, in a not unjustifiable scorn of such foolish circumstance as might seek to thwart her will.

But to-day these strenuous features found themselves surprised by an

expression of doubt, of bewilderment, almost one might say of humility. At her little clearing in the heart of the great wilderness things had been happening which, to her amazement, she could not understand. Hitherto she had found an explanation, clear at least to herself, for everything that befell her in these silent backwoods which other folks seemed to find so absurdly mysterious. Armed with her self-confidence she had been able, hitherto, to deal with every situation that had challenged her, and in a manner quite satisfactory to herself, however the eternal verities may have smiled at it. But now, at last, she was finding herself baffled.

Joe Barron waited with the patience of the backwoodsman and the Indian, to whom, as to Nature herself, time seems no object, though they always somehow manage to be on time. Mrs. Gammit continued to fan her hot face with her sunbonnet, and to ponder her problems, while the lines deepened between her eyes. A big black and yellow wasp buzzed angrily against the window-pane, bewildered because it could not get through the transparent barrier. A little grey hen, with large, drooping comb vividly scarlet, hopped on to the doorsill, eyed Mrs. Gammit with surprise and disapprobation, and ran away to warn the rest of the flock that there was a woman round the place. That, as they all knew by inheritance from the "shooings" which their forefathers had suffered, meant that they would no longer be allowed in the kitchen to pick up crumbs.

At last Mrs. Gammit spoke—but with difficulty, for it came hard to her to ask advice of any one.

"I sp'ose now, mebbe, Mr. Barron, you know more about the woods critters'n what I do?" she inquired, hopefully but doubtfully.

The woodsman lifted his eyebrows in some surprise at the question.

"Well, now, if I don't I'd *oughter*," said he, "seein' as how I've kinder lived round amongst 'em all my life. If I know *anything*, it's the backwoods an' all what pertains to that same!"

"Yes, you'd *oughter* know more about them than I do!" assented Mrs. Gammit, with a touch of severity which seemed to add "and see that you do!" Then she shut her mouth firmly and fell to fanning herself again, her thoughts apparently far away.

"I hope 'tain't no *serious* trouble ye're in!" ventured her host presently, with the amiable intention of helping her to deliver her soul of its burden.

But, manlike, he struck the wrong note.

"Do you suppose," snapped Mrs. Gammit, "I'd be traipsin' over here nine mile thro' the hot woods to ax yer advice, Mr. Barron, if 'twarn't serious?" And she began to regret that she had come. Men never did understand anything, anyway.

At this sudden acerbity the woodsman stroked his chin with his hand, to hide the ghost of a smile which flickered over his lean mouth.

"Jest like a woman, to git riled over nawthin'!" he thought. "Sounds kinder nice an' homey, too!" But aloud, being always patient with the sex, he said coaxingly—

"Then it's right proud I am that ye should come to me about it, Mrs. Gammit. I reckon I kin help you out, mebbe. What's wrong?"

With a burst of relief Mrs. Gammit declared her sorrow.

"It's the aigs," said she, passionately. "Fer nigh on to a month, now, I've been alosin' of 'em as fast as the hens kin git 'em laid. An' all I kin do, I cain't find out what's atakin' 'em."

Having reached the point of asking advice, an expression of pathetic hopefulness came into her weather-beaten face. Under quite other conditions it might almost have been possible for Mrs. Gammit to learn to lean on a man, if he were careful not to disagree with her.

"Oh! Aigs!" said the woodsman, relaxing slightly the tension of his sympathy. "Well, now, let's try an' git right to the root of the trouble. Air

ye plumb sure, in the first place, that the hens is really *layin'* them aigs what ye don't git?"

Mrs. Gammit stiffened.

"Do I look like an eejut?" she demanded.

"Not one leetle mite, you don't!" assented her host, promptly and cordially.

"I was beginning to think mebbe I did!" persisted the injured lady.

"Everybody knows," protested the woodsman, "as how what you don't know, Mrs. Gammit, ain't hardly wuth knowin'."

"O' course, that's puttin' it a leetle too strong, Mr. Barron," she answered, much mollified. "But I do reckon as how I've got *some* horse sense. Well, I *thought* as how them 'ere hens *might* 'ave stopped layin' on the suddint; so I up an' watched 'em. Land's sakes, but they was alayin' fine. Whenever I kin take time to stan' right by an' *watch* 'em lay, I git all the aigs I know what to do with. But when I *don't* watch 'em, *clost*—nary an aig. Ye ain't agoin' to persuade me a hen kin jest quit layin' when she's a mind ter, waitin' tell ye pass her the compliment o' holdin' out yer hand fer the aig!"

"There's lots o' hens that pervarted they'll turn round an' *eat* their own aigs!" suggested the woodsman, spitting thoughtfully through the open window. The cat, coiled in the sun on a log outside, sprang up angrily, glared with green eyes at the offending window, and scurried away to cleanse her defiled coat.

"Them's not *my* poultry!" said Mrs. Gammit with decision. "I thought o' that, too. An' I watched 'em on the sly. But they hain't a one of 'em got no sech onnateral tricks. When they're through layin', they jest hop off an' run away acacklin', as they should." And she shook her head heavily, as one almost despairing of enlightenment. "No, ef ye ain't got no more idees to suggest than that, I might as well be goin'."

“Oh, I was jest kinder clearin’ out the underbrush, so’s to git a square good look at the situation,” explained Barron. “Now, I kin till ye somethin’ about it. Firstly, it’s a weasel, bein’ so sly, an’ quick, an’ audashus! Ten to one, it’s a weasel; an’ ye’ve got to trap it. Secondly, if ’tain’t a weasel, it’s a fox, an’ a *mighty* cute fox, as ye’re goin’ to have some trouble in aketchin’. An’ thirdly—an’ lastly—if ’tain’t neither weasel nor fox, it’s jest bound to be an extra cunnin’ skunk, what’s takin’ the trouble to be keerful. Generally speakin’, skunks ain’t keerful, because they don’t have to be, nobody wantin’ much to fool with ’em. But onc’t in a while ye’ll come across’t one that’s as sly as a weasel.”

“Oh, ’tain’t none o’ them!” said Mrs. Gammit, in a tone which conveyed a poor opinion of her host’s sagacity and woodcraft. “I’ve suspicioned the weasels, an’ the foxes, an’ the woodchucks, but hain’t found a sign o’ any one of ’em round the place. An’ *as* fer *skunks*—well, I reckon, I’ve got a nose on my face.” And to emphasize the fact, she sniffed scornfully.

“To be sure! An’ a fine, handsome nose it is, Mrs. Gammit!” replied the woodsman, diplomatically. “But what you *don’t* appear to know about skunks is that when they’re up to mischief is jest the time when you don’t smell ’em. Ye got to bear that in mind!”

Mrs. Gammit looked at him with suspicion.

“Be that reelly so?” demanded she, sternly.

“True’s gospel!” answered Barron. “A skunk ain’t got no smell unless he’s a mind to.”

“Well,” said she, “I guess it ain’t no skunk, anyhow. I kind o’ feel it in my bones ’tain’t no skunk, smell or no smell.”

The woodsman looked puzzled. He had not imagined her capable of such unreasoning obstinacy. He began to wonder if he had overrated her intelligence.

“Then I give it up, Mrs. Gammit,” said he, with an air of having lost all interest in the problem.

But that did not suit his visitor at all. Her manner became more conciliatory. Leaning forward, with an almost coaxing look on her face, she murmured—

“I’ve had an *idee* as how it *might* be—mind, I don’t say it is, but jest it *might* be——” and she paused dramatically.

“Might be what?” inquired Barron, with reviving interest.

“Porkypines!” propounded Mrs. Gammit, with a sudden smile of triumph.

Joe Barron neither spoke nor smiled. But in his silence there was something that made Mrs. Gammit uneasy.

“Why *not* porkypines?” she demanded, her face once more growing severe.

“It *might* be porkypines as took them aigs o’ yourn, Mrs. Gammit, an’ it *might be bumbly-bees*!” responded Barron. “But ’tain’t likely!”

Mrs. Gammit snorted at the sarcasm.

“Mebbe,” she sneered, “ye kin tell me *why* it’s so impossible it could be porkypines. I seen a big porkypine back o’ the barn, only yestiddy. An’ that’s more’n kin be said o’ yer weasels, an’ foxes, an’ skunks, what ye’re so sure about, Mr. Barron.”

“A porkypine ain’t necessarily after aigs jest because he’s back of a barn,” said the woodsman. “An’ anyways, a porkypine don’t eat aigs. He hain’t got the right kind o’ teeth fer them kind o’ vittles. He’s *got* to have something he kin gnaw on, somethin’ substantial an’ solid—the which he prefers a young branch o’ good tough spruce, though it *do* make his meat kinder strong. No, Mrs. Gammit, it ain’t no porkypine what’s stealin’ yer aigs, take my word fer it. An’ the more I think o’ it the surer I be that it’s a weasel. When a weasel learns to suck aigs,

he gits powerful cute. Ye'll have to be right smart, I'm telling ye, to trap him."

During this argument of Barron's his obstinate and offended listener had become quite convinced of the justice of her own conclusions. The sarcasm had settled it. She *knew*, now, that she had been right all along in her suspicion of the porcupines. And with this certainty her indignation suddenly disappeared. It is *such* a comfort to be certain. So now, instead of flinging his ignorance in his face, she pretended to be convinced—remembering that she needed his advice as to how to trap the presumptuous porcupine.

"Well, Mr. Barron," said she, with the air of one who would take defeat gracefully, "supposin' ye're right—an' ye'd *oughter* know—how would ye go about *ketchin'* them weasels?"

Pleased at this sudden return to sweet reasonableness, the woodsman once more grew interested.

"I reckon we kin fix *that*!" said he, confidently and cordially. "I'll give ye three of my little mink traps. There's holes, I reckon, under the back an' sides o' the shed, or barn, or wherever it is that the hens have their nests?"

"Nat'rally!" responded Mrs. Gammit. "The thieves ain't agoin' to come in by the front doors, right under my nose, be they?"

"Of course," assented the woodsman. "Well, you jest set them 'ere traps in three o' them holes, well under the sills an' out o' the way. Don't go fer to bait'em, mind, or Mr. Weasel'll git to suspicionin' somethin', right off. Jest sprinkle bits of straw, an' hayseed, an' sech rubbish over 'em, so it all looks no ways out o' the ordinary. You do this right, Mrs. Gammit; an' first thing ye know ye'll have yer thief. I'll git the traps right now, an' show ye how to set 'em."

And as Mrs. Gammit walked away with the three steel traps under her arm, she muttered to herself—

“Yes, Joe Barron, an’ I’ll show ye the thief. An’ he’ll have quills on him, sech as no *weasel* ain’t never had on him, I reckon.”

On her return, Mrs. Gammit was greeted by the sound of high excitement among the poultry. They were all cackling wildly, and craning their necks to stare into the shed as if they had just seen a ghost there. Mrs. Gammit ran in to discover what all the fuss was about. The place was empty; but a smashed egg lay just outside one of the nests, and a generous tuft of fresh feathers showed her that there had been a tussle of some kind. Indignant but curious, Mrs. Gammit picked up the feathers, and examined them with discriminating eyes to see which hen had suffered the loss.

“Lands sakes!” she exclaimed presently, “ef ’tain’t the old rooster! He’s made a fight fer that ’ere aig! Lucky he didn’t git stuck full o’ quills!”

Then, for perhaps the hundredth time, she ran fiercely and noisily behind the barn, in the hope of surprising the enemy. Of course she surprised nothing which Nature had endowed with even the merest apology for eyes and ears; and a cat-bird in the choke-cherry bushes squawked at her derisively. Stealth was one of the things which Mrs. Gammit did not easily achieve. Staring defiantly about her, her eyes fell upon a dark, bunchy creature in the top of an old hemlock at the other side of the fence. Seemingly quite indifferent to her vehement existence, and engrossed in its own affairs, it was crawling out upon a high branch and gnawing, in a casual way, at the young twigs as it went.

“Ah, ha! What did I tell ye? I knowed all along as how it was a porkypine!” exclaimed Mrs. Gammit, triumphantly, as if Joe Barron could hear her across eight miles of woods. Then, as she eyed the imperturbable animal on the limb above her, her face flushed with quick rage, and snatching up a stone about the size of her fist she hurled it at him with all her strength.

In a calmer moment she would never have done this—not because it was rude, but because she had a conviction, based on her own experience, that a stone would hit anything rather than what it was aimed at. And in the present instance she found no reason to change her views on the subject. The stone did not hit the porcupine. It did not, even for one moment, distract his attention from the hemlock twigs. Instead of that, it struck a low branch, on the other side of the tree, and bounced back briskly upon Mrs. Gammit's toes.

With a hoarse squeak of surprise and pain the good lady jumped backwards, and hopped for some seconds on one foot while she gripped the other with both hands. It was a sharp and disconcerting blow. As the pain subsided a concentrated fury took its place. The porcupine was now staring down at her, in mild wonder at her inexplicable gyrations. She glared up at him, and the tufts of grey hair about her sunbonnet seemed to rise and stand rigid.

"Ye think ye're smart!" she muttered through her set teeth. "But I'll fix ye fer that! Jest you wait!" And turning on her heel she stalked back to the house. The big, brown teapot was on the back of the stove, where it had stood since breakfast, with a brew rust-red and bitter-strong enough to tan a moose-hide. Not until she had reheated it and consumed five cups, sweetened with molasses, did she recover any measure of self-complacency.

That same evening, when the last of the sunset was fading in pale violet over the stump pasture and her two cow-bells were *tonk-tonking* softly along the edge of the dim alder swamp, Mrs. Gammit stealthily placed the traps according to the woodsman's directions. Between the massive logs which formed the foundations of the barn and shed, there were openings numerous enough, and some of them spacious enough, almost, to admit a bear—a very small, emaciated bear. Selecting three of these, which somehow seemed to her fancy particularly adapted to catch a porcupine's taste, she set the traps, tied them, and covered them lightly with fine rubbish so that, as she

murmured to herself when all was done, “everythin’ looked as nat’ral as nawthin’.” Then, when her evening chores were finished, she betook herself to her slumbers, in calm confidence that in the morning she would find one or more porcupines in the trap.

Having a clear conscience and a fine appetite, in spite of the potency of her tea Mrs. Gammit slept soundly. Nevertheless, along toward dawn, in that hour when dream and fact confuse themselves, her nightcapped ears became aware of a strange sound in the yard. She snorted impatiently and sat up in bed. Could some beneficent creature of the night be out there sawing wood for her? It sounded like it. But she rejected the idea at once. Rubbing her eyes with both fists, she crept to the window and looked out.

There was a round moon in the sky, shining over the roof of the barn, and the yard was full of a white, witchy radiance. In the middle of it crouched two big porcupines, gnawing assiduously at a small wooden tub. The noise of their busy teeth on the hard wood rang loud upon the stillness, and a low *tonk-a-tonk* of cow-bells came from the pasture as the cows lifted their heads to listen.

The tub was a perfectly good tub, and Mrs. Gammit was indignant at seeing it eaten. It had contained salt herrings; and she intended, after getting the flavour of fish scoured out of it, to use it for packing her winter’s butter. She did not know that it was for the sake of its salty flavour that the porcupines were gnawing at it, but leaped to the conclusion that their sole object was to annoy and persecute herself.

“Shoo! Shoo!” she cried, snatching off her nightcap and flapping it at them frantically. But the animals were too busy to even look up at her. The only sign they gave of having heard her was to raise their quills straight on end so that their size apparently doubled itself all at once.

Mrs. Gammit felt herself wronged. As she turned and ran downstairs she muttered, “First it’s me aigs—an’ now it’s me little tub—an’ Lordy knows what it’s goin’ to be next!” Then her dauntless spirit flamed up

again, and she snapped, “But there ain’t agoin’ to be no next!” and cast her eyes about her for the broom.

Of course, at this moment, when it was most needed, that usually exemplary article was not where it ought to have been––standing beside the dresser. Having no time to look for it, Mrs. Gammit snatched up the potato-masher, and rushed forth into the moonlight with a gurgling yell, resolved to save the tub.

She was a formidable figure as she charged down the yard, and at ordinary times the porcupines might have given way. But when a porcupine has found something it really likes to eat, its courage is superb. These two porcupines found the herring-tub delicious beyond anything they had ever tasted. Reluctantly they stopped gnawing for a moment, and turned their little twinkling eyes upon Mrs. Gammit in sullen defiance.

Now this was by no means what she had expected, and the ferocity of her attack slackened. Had it been a lynx, or even a bear, her courage would probably not have failed her. Had it been a man, a desperado with knife in hand and murder in his eyes, she would have flown upon him in contemptuous fury. But porcupines were different. They were mysterious to her. She believed firmly that they could shoot their quills, like arrows, to a distance of ten feet. She had a swift vision of herself stuck full of quills, like a pincushion. At a distance of eleven feet she stopped abruptly, and hurled the potato-masher with a deadly energy which carried it clean over the barn. Then the porcupines resumed their feasting, while she stared at them helplessly. Two large tears of rage brimmed her eyes, and rolled down her battered cheeks; and backing off a few paces she sat down upon the saw-horse to consider the situation.

But never would Mrs. Gammit have been what she was had she been capable of acknowledging defeat. In a very few moments her resourceful wits reasserted themselves.

“Queer!” she mused. “One don’t never kinder seem to hit what one aims at! But one always hits *somethin’*! Leastways, I do! If I jest fling enough things, an’ keep on aflingin’, I might hit a porkypine jest as well as anything else. There ain’t nawthin’ onnateral about a porkypine, to keep one from hitt’n’ him, I reckon.”

The wood-pile was close by; and the wood, which she had sawed and split for the kitchen stove, was of just the handy size. She was careful, now, not to take aim, but imagined herself anxious to establish a new wood-pile, in haste, just about where that sound of insolent gnawing was disturbing the night. In a moment a shower of sizable firewood was dropping all about the herring-tub.

The effect was instantaneous. The gnawing stopped, and the porcupines glanced about uneasily. A stick fell plump upon the bottom of the tub, staving it in. The porcupines backed away and eyed it with grieved suspicion. Another stick struck it on the side, so that it bounced like a jumping, live thing, and hit one of the porcupines sharply, rolling him over on his back. Instantly his valiant quills went down quite flat; and as he wriggled to his feet with a squeak of alarm, he looked all at once little and lean and dark, like a wet hen. Mrs. Gammit smiled grimly.

“Ye ain’t feelin’ quite so sassy now, be ye?” she muttered; and the sticks flew the faster from her energetic hands. Not many of them, to be sure, went at all in the direction she wished, but enough were dropping about the herring-tub to make the porcupines remember that they had business elsewhere. The one that had been struck had no longer any regard for his dignity, but made himself as small as possible and scurried off like a scared rat. The other, unvanquished but indignant, withdrew slowly, with every quill on end. The sticks fell all about him; but Mrs. Gammit, in the excitement of her triumph, was now forgetting herself so far as to take aim, therefore never a missile touched him. And presently, without haste, he disappeared behind the barn.

With something almost like admiration Mrs. Gammit eyed his departure.

“Well, seein’ as I hain’t scairt ye *much*,” she muttered dryly, “mebbe ye’ll obleege me by coming back an’ gittin’ into my trap. But ye ain’t agoin’ to hev no more o’ my good herrin’-tub, ye ain’t.” And she strode down the yard to get the tub. It was no longer a good tub, for the porcupines had gnawed two big holes in the sides, and Mrs. Gammit’s own missiles had broken in the bottom. But she obstinately bore the poor relics into the kitchen. Firewood they might become, but not food for the enemy.

No more that night was the good woman’s sleep disturbed, and she slept later than usual. As she was getting up, conscience-stricken at the sound of the cows in the pasture lowing to be milked, she heard a squawking and fluttering under the barn, and rushed out half dressed to see what was the matter. She had no doubt that one of the audacious porcupines had got himself into a trap.

But no, it was neither porcupine, fox, nor weasel. To her consternation, it was her old red top-knot hen, which now lay flat upon the trap, with outstretched wings, exhausted by its convulsive floppings. She picked it up, loosed the deadly grip upon its leg, and slammed the offending trap across the barn with such violence that it bounced up and fell into the swill-barrel. Her feelings thus a little relieved, she examined Red Top-knot’s leg with care. It was hopelessly shattered and mangled.

“Ye cain’t never scratch with *that* ag’in, ye cain’t!” muttered Mrs. Gammit, compassionately. “Poor dear, ther ain’t nawthin’ fer it but to make vittles of ye now! Too bad! Too bad! Ye was always sech a fine layer an’ a right smart setter!” And carrying the victim to the block on which she was wont to split kindling wood, she gently but firmly chopped her head off.

Half an hour later, as Mrs. Gammit returned from the pasture with a

brimming pail of milk, again she heard a commotion under the barn. But she would not hurry, lest she should spill the milk. “Whatever it be, it’ll be there when I git there!” she muttered philosophically; and kept on to the cool cellar with her milk. But as soon as she had deposited the pail she turned and fairly ran in her eagerness. The speckled hen was cackling vain-gloriously; and as Mrs. Gammit passed the row of nests in the shed she saw a white egg shining. But she did not stop to secure it.

As she entered the barn, a little yellowish brown animal, with a sharp, triangular nose and savage eyes like drops of fire, ran at her with such fury that for an instant she drew back. Then, with a roar of indignation at its audacity, she rushed forward and kicked at it. The kick struck empty air; but the substantial dimensions of the foot seemed to daunt the daring little beast, and it slipped away like a darting flame beneath the sill of the barn. The next moment, as she stooped to look at the nearest of the two traps, another slim yellow creature, larger than the first, leaped up, with a vicious cry, and almost reached her face. But, fortunately for her, it was held fast by both hind legs in the trap, and fell back impotent.

Startled and enraged, Mrs. Gammit kicked at it, where it lay darting and twisting like a snake. Naturally, she missed it; but it did not miss her. With unerring aim it caught the toe of her heavy cowhide shoe, and fixed its teeth in the tough leather. Utterly taken by surprise, Mrs. Gammit tried to jump backwards. But instead of that, she fell flat on her back, with a yell. Her sturdy heels flew up in the air, while her petticoats flopped back in her face, bewildering her. The weasel, however, had maintained his dogged grip upon the toe of her shoe; so something *had* to give. That something was the cord which anchored the trap. It broke under the sudden strain. Trap and weasel together went flying over Mrs. Gammit’s prostrate head. They brought up with a stupefying slam against the wall of the pig-pen, making the pig squeal apprehensively.

Disconcerted and mortified, Mrs. Gammit scrambled to her feet, shook her petticoats into shape, and glanced about to see if the wilderness in general had observed her indiscretion. Apparently, nothing had noticed it. Then, with an air of relief, she glanced down at her vicious little antagonist. The weasel lay stunned, apparently dead. But she was not going to trust appearances. Picking trap and victim up together, on the end of a pitchfork, she carried them out and dropped them into the barrel of rain water at the corner of the house. Half-revived by the shock, the yellow body wriggled for a moment or two at the bottom of the barrel. As she watched it, a doubt passed through Mrs. Gammit's mind. Could Joe Barron have been right? *Was* it weasels, after all, that were taking her eggs? But she dismissed the idea at once. Joe Barron didn't know everything! And there, indisputably, were the porcupines, bothering her all the time, with unheard-of impudence. Weasels, indeed!

"'Twa'n't *you* I was after," she muttered obstinately, apostrophizing the now motionless form in the rain-barrel. "It was them dratted porkypines, as comes after my aigs. But *ye're* a bad lot, too, an' I'm right glad to have got ye where ye won't be up to no mischief."

All athrill with excitement, Mrs. Gammit hurried through her morning's chores, and allowed herself no breakfast except half a dozen violent cups of tea "with sweetenin'." Then, satisfied that the weasel in the rain-barrel was by this time securely and permanently dead, she fished it out, and reset the trap in its place under the barn. The other trap she discovered in the swill-barrel, after a long search. Relieved to find it unbroken, she cleaned it carefully and put it away to be returned, in due time, to its owner. She would not set it again—and, indeed, she would have liked to smash it to bits, as a sacrifice to the memory of poor Red Top-knot.

"I hain't got no manner o' use fer a porkypine trap what'll go out o' its way to ketch hens," she grumbled.

The silent summer forenoon, after this, wore away without event. Mrs.

Gammit, working in her garden behind the house, with the hot, sweet scent of the flowering buckwheat-field in her nostrils and the drowsy hum of bees in her ears, would throw down her hoe about once in every half-hour and run into the barn to look hopefully at the traps. But nothing came to disturb them. Neither did anything come to disturb the hens, who attended so well to business that at noon Mrs. Gammit had seven fresh eggs to carry in. When night came, and neither weasels nor porcupines had given any further sign of their existence, Mrs. Gammit was puzzled. She was one of those impetuous women who expect everything to happen all at once. When milking was over, and her solitary, congenial supper, she sat down on the kitchen doorstep and considered the situation very carefully.

What she had set herself out to do, after the interview with Joe Barron, was to catch a porcupine in one of his traps, and thus, according to her peculiar method of reasoning, convince the confident woodsman that porcupines *did* eat eggs! As for the episode of the weasel, she resolved that she would not say anything to him about it, lest he should twist it into a confirmation of his own views. As for those seven eggs, so happily spared to her, she argued that the capture of the weasel, with all its attendant excitement, had served as a warning to the porcupines and put them on their guard. Well, she would give them something else to think about. She was now all impatience, and felt unwilling to await the developments of the morrow, which, after all, might refuse to develop! With a sudden resolution she arose, fetched the gnawed and battered remains of the herring-tub from their concealment behind the kitchen door, and propped them up against the side of the house, directly beneath her bedroom window.

At first her purpose in this was not quite clear to herself. But the memory of her triumph of the previous night was tingling in her veins, and she only knew she wanted to lure the porcupines back, that she might do *something* to them. And first, being a woman, that

something occurred to her in connexion with hot water. How conclusive it would be to wait till the porcupines were absorbed in their consumption of the herring-tub, and then pour scalding water down upon them. After all, it was more important that she should vanquish her enemies than prove to a mere man that they really were her enemies. What did she care, anyway, what that Joe Barron thought? Then, once more, a doubt assailed her. What if he were right? Not that she would admit it, for one moment. But just supposing! Was she going to pour hot water on those porcupines, and scald all the bristles off their backs, if they really *didn't* come after her eggs? Mrs. Gammit was essentially just and kind-hearted, and she came to the conclusion that the scheme might be too cruel.

"Ef it be you uns as takes the aigs," she murmured thoughtfully, "a kittle o' bilin' water to yer backs ain't none too bad fer ye! But ef it be *only* my old herrin'-tub ye're after, then bilin' water's too ha'sh!"

In the end, the weapon she decided upon was the big tin pepper-pot, well loaded.

Through the twilight, while the yard was all in shadow, Mrs. Gammit sat patient and motionless beside her open window. The moon rose, seeming to climb with effort out of the tangle of far-off treetops. The faint, rhythmic breathing of the wilderness, which, to the sensitive ear, never ceases even in the most profound calm, took on the night change, the whisper of mystery, the furtive suggestion of menace which the daylight lacks. Sitting there in ambush, Mrs. Gammit felt it all, and her eager face grew still and pale and solemn like a statue's. The moonlight crept down the roofs of the barn and shed and house, then down the walls, till only the ground was in shadow. And at last, through this lower stratum of obscurity, Mrs. Gammit saw two squat, sturdy shapes approaching leisurely from behind the barn.

She held her breath. Yes, it was undoubtedly the porcupines. Undaunted by the memory of their previous discomfiture, they came straight across the yard, and up to the house, and fell at once to their

feasting on the herring-tub. The noise of their enthusiastic gnawing echoed strangely across the attentive air.

Very gently, with almost imperceptible motion, Mrs. Gammit slid her right hand, armed with the pepper-pot, over the edge of the window-sill. The porcupines, enraptured with the flavour of the herring-tub, never looked up. Mrs. Gammit was just about to turn the pepper-pot over, when she saw a third dim shape approaching, and stayed her hand. It was bigger than a porcupine. She kept very still, breathing noiselessly through parted lips. Then the moonlight reached the ground, the shadows vanished, and she saw a big wildcat stealing up to find out what the porcupines were eating.

Seeing the feasters so confident and noisy, yet undisturbed, the usually cautious wildcat seemed to think there could be no danger near. Had Mrs. Gammit stirred a muscle, he would have marked her; but in her movelessness her head and hand passed for some harmless natural phenomenon. The wildcat crept softly up, and as he drew near, the porcupines raised their quills threateningly, till nothing could be seen of their bodies but their blunt snouts still busy on the herring-tub. At a distance of about six feet the big cat stopped, and crouched, glaring with wide, pale eyes, and sniffing eagerly. Mrs. Gammit was amazed that the porcupines did not at once discharge a volley at him and fill him full of quills for his intrusion.

The wildcat knew too much about porcupines to dream of attacking them. It was what they were eating that interested him. They seemed to enjoy it so much. He crept a few inches nearer, and caught a whiff of the herring-tub. Yes, it was certainly fish. A true cat, he doted on fish, even salt fish. He made another cautious advance, hoping that the porcupines might retire discreetly. But instead of that they merely stopped gnawing, put their noses between their forelegs, squatted flat, and presented an unbroken array of needle points to his dangerous approach.

The big cat stopped, quite baffled, his little short tail, not more than

three inches long, twitching with anger. He could not see that the tub was empty; but he could smell it, and he drew in his breath with noisy sniffling. It filled him with rage to be so baffled; for he knew it would be fatal to go any nearer, and so expose himself to a deadly slap from the armed tails of the porcupines.

Just what he would have attempted, however, in his eagerness, will never be known. For at this point, Mrs. Gammit's impatience overcame her curiosity. With a gentle motion of her wrist she turned the pepper-pot over, and softly shook it. The eyes of the wildcat were fixed upon that wonderful, unattainable herring-tub, and he saw nothing else. But Mrs. Gammit in the vivid moonlight saw a fine cloud of pepper sinking downwards slowly on the moveless air.

Suddenly the wildcat pawed at his nose, drew back, and grew rigid with what seemed an effort to restrain some deep emotion. The next moment he gave vent to a loud, convulsive sneeze, and began to spit savagely. He appeared to be not only very angry, but surprised as well. When he fell to clawing frantically at his eyes and nose with both paws, Mrs. Gammit almost strangled with the effort to keep from laughing. But she held herself in, and continued to shake down the pungent shower. A moment more, and the wildcat, after an explosion of sneezes which almost made him stand on his head, gave utterance to a yowl of consternation, and turned to flee. As he bounded across the yard he evidently did not see just where he was going, for he ran head first into the wheelbarrow, which straightway upset and kicked him. For an instant he clawed at it wildly, mistaking it for a living assailant. Then he recovered his wits a little, and scurried away across the pasture, sneezing and spitting as he went.

Meanwhile the porcupines, with their noses to the ground and their eyes covered, had been escaping the insidious attack of the pepper. But at last it reached them. Mrs. Gammit saw a curious shiver pass over the array of quills.

Now it was contrary to all the most rigid laws of the porcupine kind to

uncoil themselves in the face of danger. At the same time, it was impossible to sneeze in so constrained an attitude. Their effort was heroic, but self-control at last gave way. As it were with a snap, one of the globes of quills straightened itself out, and sneezed and sneezed and sneezed. Then the other went through the same spasmodic process, while Mrs. Gammit, leaning halfway out of the window, squealed and choked with delight. But the porcupines were obstinate, and would not run away. Very slowly they turned and retired down the yard, halting every few feet to sneeze. With tears streaming down her cheeks Mrs. Gammit watched their retreat, till suddenly some of the vagrant pepper was wafted back to her own nostrils, and she herself was shaken with a mighty sneeze. This checked her mirth on the instant. Her face grew grave, and drawing back with a mortified air she slammed the window down.

“Might ’a’ knowed I’d be aketchin’ cold,” she muttered, “settin’ in a draught this time o’ night.”

Not until she had thoroughly mastered the tickling in her nostrils did she glance forth again. Then the porcupines were gone, and not even an echo of their far-off sneezes reached her ears.

In the days that followed, neither weasel, wildcat, nor porcupine came to Mrs. Gammit’s clearing, and the daily harvest of strictly fresh eggs was unfailing. At the end of a week, the good lady felt justified in returning the traps to Joe Barron, and letting him know how mistaken he had been.

“There, Mr. Barron,” said she, handing him the three traps, “I’m obleeged to you, an’ there’s yer traps. But there’s one of ’em ain’t no good.”

“Which one be it?” asked the woodsman as he took them.

“I’ve marked it with a bit of string,” replied Mrs. Gammit.

“What’s the matter with it? I don’t see nawthin’ wrong with it!” said

Barron, examining it critically.

“Tain’t no good! You take my word fer it! That’s all I’ve got to say!” persisted Mrs. Gammit.

“Oh, well, seem’ as it’s you sez so, Mrs. Gammit, that’s enough,” agreed the woodsman, civilly. “But the other is all right, eh? What did they ketch?”

“Well, they ketched a big weasel!” said Mrs. Gammit, eyeing him with challenge.

A broad smile went over Barron’s face.

“I knowed it,” he exclaimed. “I knowed as how it was a weasel.”

“An’ *I* knowed as how ye’d say jest them very words,” retorted Mrs. Gammit. “But ye don’t know everythin’, Joe Barron. It wa’n’t no weasel as was takin’ them there aigs!”

“What were it then?” demanded the woodsman, incredulously.

“It was two big porkypines an’ a monstrous big wildcat,” answered Mrs. Gammit in triumph.

“Did ye ketch ’em at it?” asked the woodsman, with a faint note of sarcasm in his voice. But the sarcasm glanced off Mrs. Gammit’s armour. She regarded the question as a quite legitimate one.

“No, I kain’t say as I did, *exackly*,” she replied. “But they come anosin’ round, an’ to teach ’em a lesson to keep ther noses out o’ other people’s hens’ nests I shook a little pepper over ’em. I tell ye, they took to the woods, asneezin’ that bad I thought ye might ’a’ heard ’em all the way over here. Ye’d ’ave bust yerself laffin’, ef ye could ’a’ seed ’em rootin’. An’ since then, Mr. Barron, I git all the aigs I want. Don’t ye talk to me o’ *weasels*—the skinny little rats. *They* ain’t wuth noticin’, no more’n a chipmunk.”

# The Battle in the Mist

In the silver-grey between dawn and sunrise the river was filled with mist from bank to bank. It coiled and writhed and rolled, here thinning, there thickening, as if breathed upon irregularly by innumerable unseen mouths. But there was no wind astir; and the brown-black, glistening current beneath the white folds was glassy smooth save where the occasional big swirls boiled up with a swishing gurgle, or the running wave broke musically around an upthrust shoulder of rock or a weedy snag. The river was not wide—not more than fifty yards from bank to bank; but from the birch canoe slipping quietly down along one shore, just outside the fringe of alder branches, the opposite shore was absolutely hidden. There was nothing to indicate that an opposite shore existed, save that now and again the dark top of a soaring pine or elm would show dimly for a moment, seeming to float above the ghostly gulfs of mist.

The canoe kept close along the shore for guidance, as one feels one's way along a wall in the dark. The channel, moreover, was deep and clear in shore; while out under the mist the soft noises of ripples proclaimed to the ears of the two canoeists the presence of frequent rock and snag and shallow. Lest they should run upon unseen dangers ahead, the canoeists were travelling very slowly, the bow-man resting with his paddle across the gunwales before him, while the stern-man, his paddle noiselessly waving like the fin of a trout, did no more than keep his craft to her course and let her run with the current.

Down along the shore, keeping just behind the canoe and close to the water's edge, followed a small, dark, sinuous creature, its piercing eyes, bead-black with a glint of red behind them, fixed in savage

curiosity upon the canoemen. It was about two feet in length, with extremely short legs, and a sharp, triangular head. As it ran—and its movements were as soundless and effortless as those of a snake—it humped its long, lithe body in a way that suggested a snake's coils. It seemed to be following the canoe out of sheer curiosity—a curiosity, however, which was probably well mixed with malevolence, seeing that it was the curiosity of a mink. These two strange creatures moving on the water were, of course, too large and formidable for the big mink to dream of attacking them; but he could wonder at them and hate them—and who could say that some chance to do them a hurt might not arise? Stealthy, wary, and bold, he kept his distance about eight or ten feet from the canoe; and because he was behind he imagined himself unseen. As a matter of fact, however, the steersman of the canoe, wiser in woodcraft and cunninger even than he, had detected him and was watching him with interest from the corner of his eye. So large a mink, and one so daring in curiosity, was a phenomenon to be watched and studied with care. The canoeist did not take his comrade in the bow into his confidence for some minutes, lest the sound of the human voice should daunt the animal. But presently, in a monotonous, rhythmic murmur which carried no alarm to the mink's ear but only heightened its interest, he called the situation to his companion's notice; and the latter, without seeming to see, kept watch through half-closed lids.

A little way down the shore, close to the water's edge, something round and white caught the mink's eye. Against the soft browns and dark greys of the wet soil, the object fairly shone in its whiteness, and seemed absurdly out of place. It was a hen's egg, either dropped there by a careless hen from the pioneer's cabin near by, or left by a musk-rat disturbed in his poaching. However it had got there, it was an egg; and the canoeists saw that they no longer held the mink's undivided attention. Gently the steersman sheered out a few feet farther from the bank, and at the same time checked the canoe's headway. He wanted to see how the mink would manipulate the egg

when he got to it.

The egg lay at the foot of a little path which led down the bushy bank to the water—a path evidently trodden by the pioneer's cattle. Down this path, stepping daintily and turning his long inquisitive nose and big, bright, mischievous eyes from side to side, came a raccoon. He was a small raccoon, a little shorter than the mink, but looking heavier by reason of his more stocky build and bushier, looser fur. His purpose was to fish or hunt frogs in the pool at the foot of the path; but when he saw the egg gleaming through the misty air, his eyes sparkled with satisfaction. A long summer passed in proximity to the pioneer's cabin had enabled him to find out that eggs were good. He hastened his steps, and with a sliding scramble, which attracted the attention of the men in the canoe, he arrived at the water's edge. But to his indignant astonishment he was not the first to arrive.

The mink was just ahead. He reached the egg, laid one paw upon it in possession, and turned with a snarl of defiance as the raccoon came down the bank. The latter paused to note the threatening fangs and malign eyes of his slim rival. Then, with that brisk gaiety which the raccoon carries into the most serious affairs of his life, and particularly into his battles, he ran to the encounter. The men in the canoe, eagerly interested, stole nearer to referee the match.

Quick as the raccoon was, his snake-like adversary was quicker. Doubling back upon himself, the mink avoided that confident and dangerous rush, and with a lightning snap fixed hold upon his enemy's neck. But it was not, by half an inch, the hold he wanted; and his long, deadly teeth sank not, as he had planned, into the foe's throat, but into the great tough muscles a little higher up. He dared not let go to try for the deadlier hold, but locked his jaws and whipped his long body over the other's back, hoping to evade his antagonist's teeth.

The raccoon had lost the first point, and his large eyes blazed with pain and anger. But his dauntless spirit was not in the least dismayed. Shaking the long, black body from his back, he swung himself half

round and caught his enemy's slim loins between his jaws. It was a cruelly punishing grip, and under the stress of it the mink lashed out so violently that the two, still holding on with locked jaws, rolled over into the water, smashing the egg as they fell. The canoe, now close beside them, they heeded not at all.

"Two to one on the mink!" whispered the traveller in the bow of the canoe, delightedly. But the steersman smiled, and said "Wait!"

To be in the water suited the mink well enough. A hunter of fish in their holes, he was almost as much at home in the water as a fish. But the raccoon it did not suit at all. With a splutter he relinquished his hold on the mink's loins; and the latter, perceiving the advantage, let go and snapped again for the throat. But again he miscalculated the alertness of the raccoon's sturdy muscles. The latter had turned his head the instant that the mink's jaws relaxed, and the two gnashed teeth in each other's faces, neither securing a hold. The next moment the raccoon had leaped back to dry land, turning in threatening readiness as he did so.

Though there was no longer anything to fight about, the mink's blood was up. His eyes glowed like red coals, his long, black shape looked very fit and dangerous, and his whole appearance was that of vindictive fury. The raccoon, on the other hand, though bedraggled from his ducking, maintained his gay, casual air, as if enjoying the whole affair too much to be thoroughly enraged. When the mink darted upon him, straight as a snake strikes, he met the attack with a curious little pirouette; and the next instant the two were once more locked in a death grapple.

It was some moments before the breathless watchers in the canoe could make out which was getting the advantage, so closely were the grey body and the black intertwined. Then it was seen that the raccoon was using his flexible, hand-like paws as a bear might, to hold his foe down to the punishment. Both contestants were much cut, and bleeding freely; but the mink was now getting slow, while the

raccoon was as cheerfully alert as ever. At length the mink tore loose and made one more desperate reach for his favourite throat-hold. But this time it was the raccoon who avoided. He danced aside, flashed back, and caught the mink fairly under the jaw. Then, bracing himself, he shook his foe as a terrier might. And in a minute or two the long, black shape straightened out limply amid the sand and dead leaves.

When the body was quite still the raccoon let go and stood over it expectantly for some minutes. He bit it several times, and seeing that this treatment elicited no retort, suffered himself to feel assured of his victory. Highly pleased, he skipped back and forth over the body, playfully seized it with his fore-paws, and bundled it up into a heap. Then seeming to remember the origin of the quarrel, he sniffed regretfully at the crumbled fragments of egg-shell. His expression of disappointment was so ludicrous that in spite of themselves the men in the canoe exploded with laughter.

As the harsh, incongruous sound startled the white stillnesses, in the lifting of an eyelid the little conqueror vanished. One of the canoeists stepped ashore, picked up the body of the slain mink, and threw it into the canoe. As the two resumed their paddles and slipped away into the mist, they knew that from some hiding-place on the bank two bright, indignant eyes were peering after them in wonder.

# Melindy and the Spring Bear

Soft, wet and tender, with a faint green filming the sodden pasture field, and a rose-pink veil covering the maples, and blue-grey catkins tinting the dark alders, spring had come to the lonely little clearing in the backwoods. From the swampy meadow along the brook's edge, across the road from the cabin and the straw-littered barn-yard, came toward evening that music which is the distinctive note of the northern spring—the thrilling, mellow, inexpressibly wistful fluting of the frogs.

The sun was just withdrawing his uppermost rim behind the far-off black horizon line of fir-tops. The cabin door stood wide open to admit the sweet air and the sweet sound. Just inside the door sat old Mrs. Griffis, rocking heavily, while the woollen sock which she was knitting lay forgotten in her lap. She was a strong-featured, muscular woman, still full of vigour, whom rheumatism had met and halted in the busy path of life. Her keen and restless eyes were following eagerly every movement of a slender, light-haired girl in a blue cotton waist and grey homespun skirt, who was busy at the other side of the yard, getting her little flock of sheep penned up for the night for fear of wild prowlers.

Presently the girl slammed the pen door, jammed the hardwood peg into the staple, ran her fingers nervously through the pale fluff of her hair, and came hurrying across the yard to the door with a smile on her delicate young face.

"*There*, Granny!" she exclaimed, with the air of one who has just got a number of troublesome little duties accomplished, "I guess no lynxes, or nothing, 'll get the sheep to-night, anyways. Now, I must go an' hunt up old 'Spotty' afore it gets too dark. I don't see what's made her

wander off to-day. She always sticks around the barn close as a burr!"

The old woman smiled, knowing that the survival of a wild instinct in the cow had led her to seek some hiding-place, near home but secluded, wherein to secrete her new-born calf.

"I guess old 'Spotty' knows enough to come home when she gets ready, Child!" she answered. "She's been kept that close all winter, the snow bein' so deep, I don't wonder she wants to roam a bit now she can git 'round. Land sakes, I wish't *I* could roam a bit, 'stead er sittin', sittin', an' knittin', knittin', mornin', noon an' night, all along of these 'ere useless old legs of mine!"

"Poor Granny!" murmured the girl, softly, tears coming into her eyes. "I wish't we could get 'round, the two of us, in these sweet-smellin' spring woods, an' get the first Mayflowers together! Couldn't you just try now, Granny? I believe you are goin' to walk all right again some day, just as well as any of us. Do try!"

Thus adjured, the old woman grasped the arms of her chair sturdily, set her jaw, and lifted herself quite upright. But a groan forced itself from her lips, and she sank back heavily, her face creased with pain. Recovering herself with a resolute effort, however, she smiled rather ruefully.

"Some day, mebbe, if the good Lord wills!" said she, shaking her head. "But 'tain't this day, Melindy! You'll be the death o' me yet, Child, you're so set on me gittin' 'round ag'in!"

"Why, Granny, you did splendid!" cried the girl. "That was the best yet, the best you've ever done since I come to you. You stood just as straight as anybody for a minute. Now, I'll go an' hunt old 'Spotty.'" And she turned toward the tiny path that led across the pasture to the burnt-woods.

But Mrs. Griffis's voice detained her.

"What's the good o' botherin' about old 'Spotty' to-night, Melindy? Let

her have her fling. Them frogs make me that lonesome to-night I can't bear to let ye a minnit out o' my sight, Child! Ther' ain't no other sound like it, to my way o' thinkin', for music nor for lonesomeness. It 'most breaks my heart with the sweetness of it, risin' an' fallin' on the wet twilight that way. But I just got to have somebody 'round when I listen to it!"

"Yes, Granny, I love it, too!" assented Melindy in a preoccupied tone, "when I ain't too bothered to listen. Just now, I'm thinkin' about old 'Spotty' out there alone in the woods, an' maybe some hungry lynxes watchin' for her to lie down an' go to sleep. You know how hungry the bears will be this spring, too, Granny, after the snow layin' deep so late. I just couldn't sleep, if I thought old 'Spotty' was out there in them queer, grey, empty woods all night. In summer it's different, an' then the woods are like home."

"Well," said her grandmother, seeing that the girl was bent upon her purpose, "if ye're skeered for old 'Spotty,' ye'd better be a little mite skeered for yerself, Child! Take along the gun. Mebbe ye might see a chipmunk a-bitin' the old cow jest awful!"

Heedless of her grandmother's gibe, Melindy, who had a very practical brain under her fluffy light hair, picked up the handy little axe which she used for chopping kindling.

"No guns for me, Granny, you know," she retorted. "This 'ere little axe's good enough for me!" And swinging it over her shoulder she went lightly up the path, her head to one side, her small mouth puckered in a vain effort to learn to whistle.

What Melindy and her grandmother called the "Burnt Lands" was a strip of country running back for miles from the clearing. The fire had gone over it years before, cutting a sharply defined, gradually widening path through the forest, and leaving behind it only a few scattered rampikes, or tall, naked trunks bleached to whiteness by the storms of many winters. Here and there amid these desolate spaces,

dense thickets of low growth had sprung up, making a secure hiding-place of every hollow where the soil had not had all the life scorched out of it.

Having crossed the pasture, Melindy presently detected those faint indications of a trail which the uninitiated eye finds it so impossible to see. Slight bendings and bruises of the blueberry and laurel scrub caught her notice. Then she found, in a bare spot, the unmistakable print of a cow's hoof. The trail was now quite clear to her; and it was clearly that of old "Spotty." Intent upon her quest she hurried on, heedless of the tender colours changing in the sky above her head, of the first swallows flitting and twittering across it, of the keen yet delicate fragrance escaping from every sap-swollen bud, and of the sweetly persuasive piping of the frogs from the water meadow. She had no thought at that moment but to find the truant cow and get her safely stabled before dark.

The trail led directly to a rocky hollow about a hundred yards from the edge of the pasture—perhaps a hundred and fifty yards from the doorway wherein Mrs. Griffis sat intently watching Melindy's progress. The hollow was thick with young spruce and white birch, clustered about a single tall and massive rampike.

Into this shadowy tangle the girl pushed fearlessly, peering ahead beneath the dark, balsam-scented branches. She could see, in a broken fashion, to the very foot of the rampike, across which lay a huge fallen trunk. But she could see nothing of old "Spotty," who, by reason of her vivid colouring of red and white splotches, would have been conspicuous against those dark surroundings.

There was something in the silence, combined with the absence of the cow whom she confidently expected to find, which sent a little chill to the girl's heart. She gripped her axe more tightly, and stood quite motionless, accustoming her eyes to the confused gloom; and presently she thought she could distinguish a small brownish shape lying on a mound of moss near the foot of the rampike. A moment

more and she could see that it was looking at her, with big, soft eyes. Then a pair of big ears moved. She realized that it was a calf she was looking at. Old “Spotty’s” truancy was accounted for.

But where was old “Spotty”? Melindy thought for a moment, and concluded very properly that the mother, considering the calf well-hidden, had slipped away to the spring for a drink. She was on the point of stepping forward to admire the little new-comer and see if it was yet strong enough to be led home to the barn, when a stealthy rustling at the farther side of the thicket arrested her.

Certainly that could not be the cow, who was anything but stealthy in her movements. But what could it be?

Melindy had a sudden prescience of peril. But her nerves stiffened to it, and she had no thought of retreat. It might be one of those savage lynxes, spying upon the calf in its mother’s absence. At this idea Melindy’s small mouth itself set very grimly, and she rejoiced that she had brought the axe along. The lynx, of all the wild creatures, she regarded with special antagonism.

The stealthy movements came nearer, nearer, then suddenly died out. A moment more and a dark bulk took shape noiselessly among the fir-branches, some ten or twelve feet beyond the spot where the helpless calf was lying.

For a second Melindy’s heart stood still. What was her little axe against a bear! Then she recalled the general backwoods faith that the biggest black bear would run from a human being, if only he had plenty of room to run. She looked at the helpless little one curled up on its mossy bed. She looked at the savage black shape gliding slowly forward to devour it. And her heart leaped with returning courage.

The bear, its fierce eyes glancing from side to side, was now within five or six feet of its intended prey. With a shrill cry of warning and defiance Melindy sprang forward, swinging her axe, and ordered the beast to “Git out!” She was greatly in hopes that the animal would

yield to the authority of the human voice, and retire abashed.

At any other season, it is probable that the bear would have done just as she hoped it would. But now, it had the courage of a rampant spring appetite. Startled it was, and disturbed, at the girl's sudden appearance and her shrill cry; and it half drew back, hesitating. But Melindy also hesitated; and the bear was quick to perceive her hesitation. For a few seconds he stood eyeing her, his head down and swinging from side to side. Then, seeming to conclude that she was not a formidable antagonist, he gave vent to a loud, grunting growl, and lurched forward upon the calf.

With a wild scream, half of fury, half of fear, Melindy also darted forward, trusting that the animal would not really face her onslaught. And the calf, terrified at the sudden outcry, staggered to its feet with a loud bleating.

The bear was just upon it, with great black paw uplifted for the fatal stroke that would have broken its back, when he saw Melindy's axe descending. With the speed of a skilled boxer he changed the direction of his stroke, and fended off the blow so cleverly that the axe almost flew from the girl's grasp. The fine edge, however, caught a partial hold, and cleft the paw to the bone.

Furious with the pain, and his fighting blood now thoroughly aroused, the bear forgot the calf and sprang at his daring assailant. Light-footed as a cat, the girl leapt aside, just in time, darted over the fallen trunk, and dodged around the base of the rampike. She realized that she had undertaken too much, and her only hope now was that either she would be able to outrun the bear, or that the latter would turn his attentions again to the calf and forget about her.

The bear, however, had no intention of letting her escape his vengeance. For all his bulk, he was amazingly nimble and was at her heels again in a second. Though she might have outstripped him in the open, he would probably have caught her in the hampering thicket;

but at this crucial moment there came a bellow and a crashing of branches close behind him, and he whirled about just in time to receive the raging charge of old “Spotty,” who had heard her youngster’s call.

The bear had no time to dodge or fend this onslaught, but only to brace himself. The cow’s horns, unfortunately, were short and wide-spreading. She caught him full in the chest, with the force of a battering-ram, and would have hurled him backwards but that his mighty claws and forearms, at the same instant, secured a deadly clutch upon her shoulders. She bore him backward against the trunk indeed, but there he recovered himself; and when she strove to withdraw for another battering charge, she could not tear herself free. Foiled in these tactics, she lunged forward with all her strength, again and again, bellowing madly, and endeavouring to crush out her enemy’s breath against the tree. And the bear, grunting, growling, and whining, held her fast while he tore at her with his deadly claws.

Too much excited to think any longer of flight, Melindy stood upon the fallen trunk and breathlessly watched the battle. In a few moments she realized that old “Spotty” was getting the worst of it; and upon this her courage once more returned. Running down the great log as close as she dared, she swung up her axe, and paused for an opening. She was just about to strike, when a well-known voice arrested her, and she jumped back.

“Git out of the way, Child,” it commanded, piercing the turmoil. “Git out of the way an’ let me shoot!”

The crippled old woman, too, had heard the cry of her young. When that scream of Melindy’s cleft the evening air, Mrs. Griffis had shot out of her chair as if she had never heard of rheumatism. She did not know anything hurt her. At the summons of this imperious need her old vigour all came back. Snatching up the big duck-gun from the corner, where it stood always loaded and ready, she went across the pasture and through the laurel patches at a pace almost worthy of

Melindy herself. When she plunged through the bushes into the hollow, and saw the situation, her iron will steadied her nerves to meet the crisis.

The instant Melindy had jumped out of the way Mrs. Griffis ran close up to the combatants. The bear was being kept too busy to spare her any attention whatever. Coolly setting the muzzle of the big gun (which was loaded with buckshot) close to the beast's side, just behind the fore-shoulder, she pulled the trigger. There was a roar that filled the hollow like the firing of a cannon, and the bear collapsed sprawling, with a great hole blown through his heart.

Old "Spotty" drew back astonished, snorted noisily, and rolled wild eyes upon her mistress. Then, unable to believe that her late foe was really no longer a menace to her precious calf, she fell once more upon the lifeless form and tried to beat it out of all likeness to a bear. The calf, who had been knocked over but not hurt in the bear's charge upon Melindy, had struggled to its feet again; and Mrs. Griffis pushed it forward to attract its mother's attention. This move proved successful; and presently, in the task of licking the little creature all over to make sure it was not hurt, "Spotty" forgot her noble rage. Then, slowly and patiently, by pushing, pulling, and coaxing, the two women got the calf up out of the hollow and along the homeward path, while the mother, heedless of her streaming wounds, crowded against them, mooing softly with satisfaction. She was craving now, for her little one, the safe shelter of the barn-yard.

At the well the quaint procession stopped, and the calf fell to nursing; while Melindy washed the cow's wounds, and Mrs. Griffis hunted up some tar to use as a salve upon them. As she moved briskly about the yard, Melindy broke into a peal of joyous but almost hysterical laughter.

"I declare to goodness, Granny," she cried, in response to the old woman's questioning look, "if you ain't just as spry as me. I've heard tell that bear's grease was a great medicine for rheumatism. It's plain

to be seen, Granny, that you've used up a whole bear for yours."

"It wasn't the bear, Child!" answered the old woman, gravely. "It was that ter'ble scream o' yours cured my rheumatiz! Old 'Spotty,' she come to her young one's call. Could I do less, Child, when I heerd my little one cry out fer me?"

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