

## A SKETCH.

### An Afternoon in the Deer-Hunter's Camp.

[WRITTEN FOR THE TRUE WITNESS.]

It had all along been understood that we were to go some day to the camp, and at last we are on the way,—my friend, Mrs. M—, her two children and myself. A servant attends us carrying a lunch-basket. Spot, one of the hounds, comes, too, for this morning after putting a deer into the water, he deserted his companion dogs, making for home, and Mrs. M— decided to bring him back. Sturdy little K— trudges along over the two miles of mountainous road, leading Spot, and occasionally having Spot lead him.

It is a rocky road path, rather, and we pick our steps carefully as we walk on between the tall slim poplars, on which a few tiny golden leaves are twinkling gaily, reckless of their approaching end. We hear only the occasional whizz of a partridge's wing, or the shrill chirrup of some merry little red squirrel, as it frolics up among the tree's branches.

At last, we have come to the top of a hill and between the almost bare branches of the trees, we catch glimpses of the bright waters of Lake Bouillon (on the Mattawa river) lying beneath, set in a rugged frame of dark mountains and gleaming jewel-like in the sunlight. Here the path goes down the hill with a quick descent, and is covered with little stones that slip and swirl under one's feet, almost making us take a quick descent as well. It terminates on a tiny landing-place, where a canoe has been left for us, and where the servant is to leave us, to return again in the evening. For a few minutes the getting across is a puzzling question, but finally we decide that Mrs. M— shall first take over the children and then return for me and Spot. Soon the canoe, under my friend's skilful guidance, is gliding easily away from the shore, and I am left alone, seated on a huge grey boulder on the edge of the lake. I gaze slowly around and try to realize the beauty of the place—the purple mountains—the bright blue waters of the lake, whose calmness the little canoe has disturbed, leaving behind it, as it glides on an ever widening expanse of dancing ripples, the soft murmuring of the water as it comes up and kisses the shore beneath my feet, and over all the golden haze of a most perfect day in the Indian summer. The air is filled with an "impalpable golden glory." Over the water comes the soft swishing sound of the paddle's strokes, mingled with the children's voices, and I spend a delicious quarter of an hour of *dolce far niente*. I watch dreamingly the shadows of the hills and the pine trees in the water and feel gratefully the soft caress of the breeze on my face—a delightful zephyr that must surely have stolen away from Aeolus, and, lured by the beauty of the day, wandered into chill October, bringing on its breath a sweet sense of summer. My brain is a confusion of sweet impressions, and my mind is only clean on one thing—how very, very fair nature is to-day. When a thought does strike me it is that the one thing needful to fill myself of enjoyment is, that the hounds, running somewhere on the opposite mountains, might come near enough for me to hear them "giving tongue," and perhaps see a nimble deer bounding down the hill-side to the lake. But now, my friend has returned, and not confident of our ability to keep Spot in the canoe, we leave him tied to the trunk of a tree.

The hunters are all out "watoning," Mrs. M— tells me, and a couple of weary hounds are in possession of the camp. As we pass swiftly over the water, we can feel its pulsing through the birchen sides of our canoe, and we think of how little there is between us and the bright smiling water. When we have landed and pulled up our little craft "high and dry," we proceed to the camp by a narrow winding path. We come upon it in a miniature glen—a delightfully sheltered spot with tall birches and cedars, and still taller pines on all sides.

There are their sleeping tents, the one for provisions and the one for the hounds, and in the centre, the fire-place—the heart of it all—with log seats on three sides. A massive blackened stump is the cupboard-in-chief for pots and

pane; a cleverly contrived shelf, built on the convenient trunks of two little birches, serves the same purpose. Piled up in a sort of order on one of the seats are the tin plates and cups, and up on the cupboard a high pot containing a few cold potatoes looks loftily down upon a lowly frying-pan, in which we are delighted to see a bit of deer's liver, firmly imbedded in the surrounding grease. This is a pleasant sight for us, as it foretells venison for our supper—something we had hardly dared hope for, as up to this they had not succeeded in taking down a deer, though out some days. We peeped into the hounds' tent, and Sport, thumping his tail joyously on the ground and clanking his chain, rolls over and over, quite delighted at our appearance. He turns his tired feet up to us, red and swollen from his long runs over the sharp rocks, and instantly we are all compassion, kneeling down to examine them. My friend spies a bottle of oil or ointment of some sort in a corner of the tent and we conclude that it is for rubbing the dogs' feet. We sniff at it and half decide on applying it to Sport's, but then it smells suspiciously like coal oil, so we content ourselves with rubbing them softly.

A pretty little brown partridge dog is chained up with tell-tale partridge feathers and the lovely crested head of a blue-jay before him.

But how shall we occupy ourselves until the hunter's return? We look on all sides and suddenly Mrs. M— decides that gathering fuel would be the most acceptable service we can make them, as there is not sufficient wood in to make a good blaze. We take the axe with us and cut little dry limbs and branches for kindling wood; growing more daring we attack a higher fallen cedar with an ardour that would be creditable even to Mr. Gladstone. We soon have quite a presentable pile and then we go up the slope behind the camp with its crowning grove of pines. We stray along the "run-a-ways" gathering such quantities of cones—for cones, great and small, of all the different shapes, are strewn thickly over the ground, and the calm air is filled with the balmy breath of the pines.

When we return we are rather silent, but presently our silence is broken, for in the distance away back of the pine-topped hill we hear the hounds "giving tongue." We remain perfectly still, almost holding our breath—perhaps the deer may come down near us! And loud and louder we hear the deep baying of the hounds. How thrilling it is! They are surely near the hill; it has become so distinct that prolonged "wooo, woo-o," and the ringing echo that the mountains send back. Now they are on the very brow of the hill, up among the pines, and soon we shall see the pretty panting creature come bounding past us to the water. But, alas, for human expectations! Just as our hopes have reached the highest pitch, as our imagination already sees the red sides and dainty head,—we become aware that the deer has swerved from its former path and struck off down the side of the lake. We listen until the last faint echo of the hound's baying has died away in the distance. But the silence in its intensity has become painful to the children; they look wistfully up, longing for us to break it, and so with a little shock of disappointment, we make ourselves talk and forget that perverse deer.

We wonder aimlessly around, gathering mosses and stray strips of birch bark. The sound of several shots fired in quick succession reaches us and we imagine them the death-knell of the deer that disappointed us so sorely. Soft foot-falls on the dead leaves announce someone's approach and in a few minutes my brother comes to us up the path from the landing. He is rather a weary-looking hunter, for he has seen nothing all day, and that last deer had quite disgusted him—he was so confident it was going to "take to the water" on his "watch" (the one nearest camp), but he consoled himself with the thought that some of the hunters on the lake below had "taken it down," as he also heard the shots. He had been detailed off to come in at four o'clock to get the night's wood and our little pile is quite a pleasant surprise for him. But to our great dismay, he coolly informs us that our treasured cedar is no good for it makes too many cinders, and "the lad don't care for that sort of flavouring." I think, somehow, he made the same mistake himself, and "the lads," perhaps, objected rather forcibly to it. But we

comforted ourselves, as anyway it will make a good blaze before the cooking commences.

He takes us down a path to a little clear spot and here suspended by two tiny hoofs, is a young deer, the result of the morning's sport. Its large glassy eyes looks reproachfully up at us from the pretty hanging head, but as we turn with lively anticipation to a climb-up the large mountain behind us, we quickly forget their reproach.

Our little cavalier remains with my brother to help (?) him; but our girlie comes with us.

We pass the hill with the pine grove, lingering for a little beneath the fragrant pines, and then strike bravely out for the next hill. A little steep climbing over rocks, and old brushwood and fallen logs, and we are on its summit. Before us is a patch of faded brown sweet-fern, brightened up here and there by some sturdy little willow-oak, whose red and brown leaves are glowing in the sun's rays. We tramp steadily on through it, but suddenly it ends—and several feet beneath us, between rugged gray walls, runs a little mountain stream. In its narrow course, the water comes swirling down, tumbling headlong over the small stones and running cheerily around the great ones, gurgling and babbling—the noisiest, maddest little brook I have ever seen. It is in a great rush, this merry little mountain-torrent, to swell the Mattawa with its diminutive volumes of water. But we must find some means of crossing it. A little lower down the stream, a fallen birch spans the chasms, and this natural bridge, when we have tested its soundness, serves us very nicely.

Three more hills lie ahead of us, and sheer on the top of the highest stands a tall dead pine, its dark withered branches stretched forlornly out against the bright blue sky. This is to be our goal. We stop on the next hill to look around.

On all sides the horizon is broken by the rounded outlines of the many mountains, and five lakes, five of our own bright Canadian lakes, nestle lovingly at the feet of their giant guardians. There is perfect silence everywhere in the sweet calm of the departing day. Over in the western sky, the sun is setting, and the lofty cloud-Alps are fringed and flecked with gold, that, each moment, grows deeper and richer, becoming at last glowing and fiery, with everywhere dashes of radiant crimson. In the East, phantom turrets and towers of a tender pink lie motionless on the violet sky, while the darkening waters of the lake reflect the West's glory and tremble and quiver in tiny golden ripples. Even the dark mountain sides put on a gayer front and become a burning gold-red as though streams of liquid fire had been poured over them. We are conscious of a faint realization of God's great glory and power, and we are silent, but beautiful, restful thoughts come surging in upon us, thoughts that for lack of means of expression must always remain unvoiced. A small white church stands on the brow of one of the smaller hills, and the sun's last rays linger lovingly on the bright cross that, thrown up against the glorious Eastern sky, mutely invites our thoughts heavenward.

We turn slowly away from the beautiful scene, for two hills yet remain and still the bare arms of the lonely old pine beckon to us. Our little woman looks somewhat tired, so we leave her standing at the edge of the belt of pines. Very often in our ascent we turn to look at her, the tiny figure in the bright red frock. Only six is our little woman, but she did not murmur when the sharp branches of the sweet-fern brushed roughly across her face, and she now waits fearlessly on the lonely hill-top. Brave little woman!

At last, the highest peak is reached; we pause for breath at the foot of the old pine. The sweet solemn afterglow has replaced the gorgeously-coloured cloud-banks; the mountains throw sombre black shadows on the gray lakes; the evening star shines out bright and clear—

"The hills grow dark;  
On purple peaks a deeper shade descending."

One last lingering look we take of the mountains, the lakes, the simple white church, and far beneath, at the tiny wreath of smoke curling up between the tree-tops; then we start down the mountain, for the smoke has made us think of the coming supper and our appetite for it. The little one awaits us, and down we all go merrily, at a much faster rate than when ascending—it is always so easy going down hill.

As we near the base of the mountain, we see a canoe swiftly crossing the lake; some one is going for Spot. When we reach the camp, we find my brother alone, getting pots and pans in readiness for the cooking. He tells us that Mr. M—, my friend's husband, and another have been in, but have gone across for Spot. They return in a few minutes with the dog, and as it is getting late, they must get up the meal themselves. The cook is not in yet; he is an experienced hunter and trapper, and a splendid cook, they say, and is quite an addition to the party.

One cuts the bacon that the venison is to be fried in; another gets some of the choicest steak; the tea and potatoes are got ready, and so they work, wondering what is keeping the other three. They hope that the bringing home of the deer is part of the cause for the delay, and then, perhaps, "Bob" is trying to collect the dogs. They have a particular desire to see "Bob" turn up, for they have not overmuch love for the trouble of clothing.

We, the guests, sit around on the log seats, watching the cones burn, and the bark curl up and blaze brightly. A torch is lighted and placed on a pole at one end of the camp, and Mrs. M— takes up a long strip of bark, lights it, and holds it over her head, still further brightening up the place. It is a pretty sight—the white tents, gleaming ghostly in the flickering light; the blazing, crackling fire throwing a red glow over us, and the dark figures of the men, as they move noiselessly around in their long red moccasins. The surrounding trees tower black and grim above us, their tops lost in the darkness of the night and their blackness and grimness heightened by the cheery scene below.

At last we hear a faint "hallo" and then a loud one, and we know the truants have returned. They answer from camp, and soon we hear the bustle of their arrival at the landing place.

Coming softly up, they exchange merry "Good-evenings" with us, put away rifles and shot bags and hounds, and seat themselves around to tell the story of the day. Quite exultingly Mr. M— tells about the deer that is lying down at the landing, and we are all very much interested as he lives his sport over again.

But we are all hungry, and the long-delayed meal is ready. What a jolly meal it is, and how well the venison tastes! Venison shall always be connected in my mind with this merry, unconventional meal around the bright camp fire.

With what gusto the tired hunters eat, and, shall I say it, how much we all eat! Little K— is like Tom Brown, after that memorable breakfast at the old inn, on his first trip to Rugby—"his skin was as tight as a drum."

Supper over, we collect our wraps and bid a regretful adieu to the pleasant camp and its occupants. By the gleam of the lantern we see the graceful deer lying with limbs stiffly out-stretched on its bed of fallen leaves, and then we get into the canoe, one of the gentleman accompanying us. A last good night and we stood out from the shore across the water. Very swiftly we glide along, skimming over the surface like some fleet swallow. It is very dark and we can with difficulty discern the outlines of the mountains that loom darkly on all sides. We do not talk much; silently and swiftly we move on, like something in a dream. It almost appears a dream to us; it is not like the every day life we live. One could almost imagine themselves back in the prehistoric days of this picturesque spot—it has changed so little—and as we try to image it up, the loud, shrill shriek of a locomotive breaks in on one's imaginings and spoils them all—they did not have "iron horses" in those days—and the mountains take up the shriek and repeat it, and fling it from peak to peak until the air appears to vibrate with the one mighty roar; then it grows fainter and fainter and at last dies softly out.

When we have landed the servant, who has been waiting, tells us, with a half-anxious glance over his shoulder into the darkness of the woods besides him: "I heard something rattle, a chain in there." He said it in such an awestruck tone, that I was in hopes of there turning up something weird, something out of the common, as a finale to our day's experiences. But Mr. D—'s voice dispels this idea. "O, Bob has a minx-trap set in there." ("Bob" is the trap-per over in the camp.) We all follow