

still living on the same farm, and it seems to me that he's turned his wife into so many dollars that he's got in the bank, and that are no more real use or good to him than his wife in the grave, for he's saving and laying up money every year. However, that isn't my story; we sat and talked, and laughed and told stories all the afternoon till it began to get a little dusk, and Em'ly wanted to go for home. Well, the others wouldn't hear of it, for the Dutchman had just got out his accordion, and Em'ly had been singing, with him a-playing and putting in the bass. Em'ly was a fine singer in those days, and they wouldn't let her go, besides, they hadn't had supper, and they wanted to have a game at cards and snap dragon, so as to have it look like Christmas. So she gave in, as she most always does, bless her, and the singing went on, and the Dutchman and his wife sang some songs about the Christ child, and so on, and it was very pleasant. I don't know how it is, but it seems to me that folks away in the woods get more fun out of such meetings than city people; perhaps it's because they're so scattered, and don't see each other so often, but maybe I'm wrong. Well, anyway we had the cards, and played with beech-nuts, for I don't believe in taking a man's money if I haven't given him something for it, and we had the snap dragon, and the women compared their babies (they all had babies) till it got to be ten o'clock, and when the clock struck a lot of wolves began to howl outside, and my wife jumps up and says, 'Oh, I wish I was home!' So they wanted her to stop all night, but she wouldn't do that, and I went out and put the horses to and drove the sled round to the door. Of course, the women talked and talked, and I had to call out to Em'ly, for I didn't like to leave the horses, it was such a stinging cold night, and they seemed so skeary.

I had driven up close to the door, so as she could step in easily, and as she got in she handed me a packet, and says, "Put this in your pocket, John." So says I, "What's this?" "Only some red pepper for the pickles that you said weren't hot enough." "All right," I says, and off we go. "Hold the baby safely," says I, "for we'll have some hard bumping; it's as much as I can do to hold the horses." Well, they did pull; I believe they were frightened by the wolves howling out in the bush. It was most too cold to talk, for when it's away below zero it's best to keep your mouth shut, and we rattled along; the horses knew well enough they were going home, and wanted to get into the stable again as soon as possible.

We'd gone maybe a third of the way when Em'ly pulls my arm. "John," she says, "there's something behind us," and sure enough there was. It was a moonlight night, and away back on the hill we'd come down, not more than a hundred yards behind, I could see near a dozen wolves galloping along after us, and gaining at every step. Now, some people will tell you about wolves howling away as they chase a deer; they don't do anything of the kind. When they're running they haven't any breath to spare for howling. No, sir, they just give their mind to running, and don't utter a sound. I whipped up the horses, while it was terrible to hear my poor wife, as she clutched convulsively at my arm, and said, in a hoarse voice, "Oh, hurry, John, hurry, they'll get the baby." I don't believe, even then, she once thought of herself. No need to tell me to hurry, the horses were doing their best, and the runners seemed to shriek as we flew over the hard snow, but they were rapidly gaining still. As I looked back I thought there was something dreadful and horrible in their very silence. I could see their eyes, now, and their tongues hanging out, whatever should I do? I had no gun; an axe we always carried in those days, to chop-out fallen trees, and I began to feel for it with one hand, while I held the reins with the other.

I had given the horses their heads, and they were galloping away as if they knew what was the matter; we had been going up-hill for a time, but now we began to descend towards the swale, where the logs were piled; we were nearing home, but they would catch us first, surely. While feeling for the axe my hand came in contact with the paper parcel my wife had given me. Red Pepper! Ah, if I could shake that in their faces, but no, it could not be done; two of them were in front of the rest, they were very close. I tore open the package and flung it at them; they fell back, or I thought so; but just at this time the sleigh jolted over those accursed logs, and we all bounced up in the air. I thought we should have been thrown out, and caught hold of my wife with my left hand; there was a rattle of falling logs, the whole pile seemed to have slipped into the road, started by the concussion; this frightened the horses still more, and they tore along, in another minute or two dashing into our yard, and bringing up at the very stable door, as if they wanted to get into shelter, where no wolves could reach them.

"Now, Em, we're home!" I cried, as I jumped out, "sit there a minute while I unhitch; I guess you're warm enough, aren't you?" She didn't answer, but I supposed she was too wrapped up to speak. In a minute I had the horses in the stable. "And now" says I, "I'll carry you in; come on, hold the baby tight, but when I went to catch hold of her she was lying back in the sleigh as if she was dead, she had fainted! I carried her in and laid her on the bed, and then went back for the baby. It wasn't there!! I couldn't believe it, I wouldn't believe it, I searched, I threw out the robes, no, it wasn't there! Now for the first time I lost my head; I rushed into the house and seized my revolver, and picking up the axe as I came out, I tore out on to the road and back to the swale as hard as I could run. I think I must ha' been mad for the time.

Wolves! I only longed to meet 'em; they might kill me and welcome if I could only get among 'em. It wasn't more'n a quarter of a mile from the house, and, as I came rushing down the hill, I could see three or four wolves sneaking across, and across the road they stood looking at me a minute; as I came nearer they began to go off, three or four more were pawing and smelling round the logs and I fired twice into the middle of them, then they got out of the way, and as I fired again they set off at a gallop, and as the sound of the pistol died away I heard, yes, I heard the sound of a baby's voice, crying; Ah! I never thought to be so glad to hear a child cry; I never thought to hear that baby cry again! By this time I was at the spot, and there it was somehow right under the logs, it had fallen down when the sleigh bumped and slid between two logs that were lying in the snow, and when the pile slipped down a big one had rolled over and rested on these two, so it was as safe as if it had been in bed. I tell you I did the biggest lifting that night I ever did in my life. I had to lift six logs off before I could get at her, but my blood was up and I think I had twice as much strength as usual. I got her out at last, and those cussed cowards of wolves were looking on in the distance all the time and came sneaking along behind me when I started for home. Twice I stopped for 'em to come up closer but they stopped too, they wouldn't come nearer than a hundred yards, and fell off altogether as I got within sight of the clearing.

The missis was just coming to when I come in, so I put a match to the fire and lit the lamp and made believe I'd just been carrying the baby to quiet it. She was so well wrapped up that she wasn't any the worse for her tumble, at least she don't look like it, for that's the young woman over there, the tall one with the curls, a-coming to call her old father to tea.