

sparingly wooded slope which stretched away to a big swamp below them. Here the sunshine on the snow seemed of dazzling brightness after the shadow of the spruces, and they could hardly keep their eyes open as they descended the slope.

A flock of grossbeaks feeding quietly among the sumacs on the hillside watched them with bright, round eyes as they passed—interested, but unafraid. And up from the swamp ahead floated the cheery "chick-a-dee-dee" of winter's little gray-coated scangster. Others were out in search for a Christmas dinner as well as they.

Down in the swamp bottom the growth was thicker. For the most part it consisted of alders and willows, with scattering cedars and tamaracks. But here and there were little bunches of spruces and fir balsams like those on the hill above, growing so thickly as to form an almost impenetrable screen from without.

"We ought to see a rabbit here," said Danny. "That would be better than nothing." They knew this to be a famous retreat for rabbits, for they had seen hunters from the village returning from the swamp well laden with dead "bunnies." But they had always had hounds with them. "If we only had a dog," lamented Jim.

They saw tracks on every side, but not a single rabbit showed himself, though they walked as quietly as they could, stopping every little way to look carefully about them. Probably the little long-ears were snugly ensconced in their nests this frosty morning.

The boys were near the centre of the swamp and were passing one of the thick evergreen clumps when a sound from within it brought them to a quick halt. Listening intently they heard it again. It was a slight crunching of the snow, as if some animal was walking stealthily about. Creeping to the edge of the spruces they crouched low and looked beneath the bottom-most boughs. But just there the trees grew so thickly that they could see nothing.

A little to the right was a spot which looked more open and they started to crawl toward it on their hands and knees, Danny in front, dragging the gun after him. Suddenly he felt Jim clutch his ankle from behind. Turning, he saw the little fellow, motionless as a statue, looking into the copse, his eyes big with wonder at something he saw there.

Danny was beside him in an instant. "Look," whispered Jim, without once taking his eyes from the object of his gaze, whatever it was. At first Danny saw nothing. Then through a narrow opening in the trees he suddenly made out the thing that Jim saw and almost cried out in his surprise. Standing in a little open space among the spruces and looking uncertainly at them was a deer, its handsome head and half its body in plain view.

Danny had never seen a live, wild deer before, and for an instant he watched it, fascinated. Then of a sudden he remembered the gun which lay beside him on the snow. As quickly as he dared he raised it, drew back the hammer and took aim at that dark red shoulder. Surely it was sighted right this time, he thought, and pulled the trigger.

When the smoke cleared away the deer had disappeared, but there was a loud thrashing and thumping among the evergreens. Was it the sound of the creature running away, Danny wondered, with sickening heart. Quickly he and Jim leaped to their feet and ran around the clump. Half way around Danny stopped. "See," he said, pointing downward. "It was wounded before." Sure enough, there were the deer's tracks going in, and beside them a faint trail of blood.

No sound came from within and looking ahead they could see no marks of the animal having left the copse. "I'll bet you finished him," Jim cried, and dived into the clump. Danny was close behind. An instant later they raised a shout that would have done credit to two grown men.

Inside the screen of spruces was a hard, blood-soaked place in the snow, showing where the deer had rested

and close beside it, still slightly quivering, but quite dead, lay the deer itself. It was a buck, and its fine head and great antlers would have delighted the eyes of older sportsmen than Danny and his little brother Jim.

"Isn't he a dandy?" said Danny, when their youthful exuberance had partially spent itself. "The old gun did the business that time," he added, pointing to where the heavy charge, acting like a single slug at that distance, had crushed in the creature's shoulder.

A small hole in its flank, evidently made by a bullet, explained the bloody trail and blood-soaked space beside them. Jim was the first to see this wound, and showed it to Danny. "Somebody else came pretty near having you," he said, patting the buck's head. "But I guess they didn't need you as bad as we do."

"Won't mother be glad!" cried Danny. At that they whooped anew.

astonishment at the sight of the procession may well be imagined. At first she could hardly believe her eyes, but when the boys, both talking at once, had told the story, she accepted it as a fact that it was really their game. "Well," she laughed, you have certainly brought back a 'fat bird!'

Danny started at once to get Dick Purcell to dress the "bird," and by eleven o'clock Mrs. Harlow had a fat roast of venison in the big oven. The remainder of the meat, together with the skin, was hung up in the granary. Promising to come again next day and cut the meat into suitable pieces for freezing and packing, Dick went away, taking with him a liberal portion of venison for his own Christmas dinner. "I take a back seat to you youngsters," he had said; which remark, coming from him, had completed their happiness.

A few minutes after he went away, and while the boys were hovering

"It has been dressed," Danny said as they went in. "But you can see the head and skin. There it is."

The tall sportsman lifted the buck's head, which Dick had left attached to the skin, and looked at it with admiration. "By George, he is a beauty," he said, running his hands over the fine antlers.

His companion was intently examining the skin. "Look here!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Here's your bullet mark as sure as fate." He was pointing to the hole in the flank.

"I guess you are right," said the tall one. "That looks like my mark."

"Yes, it's our buck fast enough," replied the other.

Danny felt a sudden chill of fear. So these were the hunters who had wounded it first. And was it "their buck." They had come to take it, of course. His own buck! His own precious buck! And after Jim and he had worked so hard to get it home! A big lump came into his throat and he had to wink fast to keep back the tears. He looked at Jim. The little fellow had understood, too, and his face was as woeful as Danny's own. Slipping closely to Danny, he whispered, "Don't tell them about the piece in the oven."

Both sportsmen were now inspecting the buck's head. Presently the tall one turned to Danny.

"Well, young man," you certainly did a good job that time, and I congratulate you. There seems to be no doubt that this is the buck I wounded yesterday, and which we have been following since early this morning. He led us such a long chase that we gave him up and were returning to the village when we met your friend. Now I have a proposition to make to you. That is a grand head and I want it. What do you say to twenty-five dollars for it?"

Again Danny underwent a sudden revulsion of feeling. "B-but I don't understand," he stammered. "I thought it was your buck. You shot him first."

A light dawned upon the sportsman. "And you thought I had come to take him away from you," he said. "Not much! I shot him first, yes, but you shot last and best. Here is your money. Is it a trade?"

It was. Twenty-five dollars! Danny had never seen so much money at one time in all his life before. Ten minutes later, when the sportsmen had gone, taking the head with them, Mrs. Harlow was well-nigh run over by two breathless youngsters who burst in upon her like a small cyclone.

For the second time that day she received a surprise that brought joy to her heart and for a moment rendered her speechless. Twenty-five dollars was a large sum to her, and just now it meant a good deal. She could not restrain a few tears of thankfulness as she said, "God has given us a Merry Christmas indeed."

And what a Christmas dinner that was to which they sat down two hours later. First there was roast venison, stuffed with mealy potatoes, and turnips, and squash, and high-bush cranberry sauce. Then came raspberry pie and pumpkin pie, and pudding. And last of all there were butternuts and candy. How the boys did justice to it all after their morning's work!

At last Jim pushed back his chair, clasped both hands over his stomach, and said with a satisfied air, "I don't feel very poor now.—Field and Stream.



"ONCE, ON THEIR HOMEWARD WAY, A RABBIT HOPPED SLOWLY ACROSS IN FRONT OF THEM."

This raised the question of getting the animal home. For a moment both looked blank. "We'll have to drag him," said Danny, at last.

Immediately they set to work to get the body out of the copse. It was no small task, the trees were so thick, but at last by dint of much tugging and lifting they accomplished it. Once outside their task was easier, though even in the open swamp the big creature dragged hard. Soon, however, they came to an old logging road where the going was comparatively easy. Once on their homeward way, a rabbit hopped slowly across in front of them. Small heed they paid to him now. "Humph!" said Jim. "Who wants you?"

An hour later two small boys, tired but very much alive, and one large deer, very much dead, drew up before the Harlows' door. Mrs. Harlow's

about the kitchen watching their mother turn the roast, and feasting their noses on the many alluring smells that filled the air, there sounded a knock at the door.

Danny answered it promptly and found there two hunters—city sportsmen they seemed to be, judging from their natty outfits.

"Hulloa," said one, the taller of the two. "Are you the young Nimrod who shot a big buck this morning?"

"Yes, sir," said Danny, rather doubtfully. He wondered what a Nimrod was. Perhaps it had something to do with a ramrod, he thought.

"We heard about it from your neighbor whom we met down the road," said the other sportsman, "and called to see the buck if we may."

"Certainly," said Danny, and ran to get his cap. Jim went along, and they led the way to the granary.

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