

laying out more than one soft bodied victim; while his strong black wings beat others into confusion and panic.

But in the throng swarming over the dike at that point were many more of the marsh mice and the shrews, all savage in temper. They leaped upon the crow, ran over and bore down the buffeting wings, and tore vengefully at the hard iridescent armour of close laid feathers that shielded their foe from any fatal wounds. In spite of this advantage, they were wearing him out by sheer fury and weight of numbers, when the other crows came darkly to his assistance. In a moment he was liberated, and the dike top strewn with gashed, fury bodies. Bleeding and bedraggled, his eyes blazing with wrath, he sprang into the air and flapped away to the uplands to recover his composure in the seclusion of some dense pine top.

The brown marsh mouse, the cause of his discomfiture, darted out from under his wing as he rose, and slipped over the edge of the dike with no worse injury than a red gash across the haunches. Having scored such a triumph over so redoubtable an enemy as the crow, he was not troubled by his wound; but discretion led him to plunge instantly into the deep green shelter of the grass.

Here in the sweet meadow, where the timothy and clover stood much closer than did the coarse stalks of the broad-leaf grass in the salt meadow, the runways of the mice were not, as a rule, underground. They were made by gnawing off the stems close to the firm surface of the sod. The stems on each side, tending to be pressed together, formed a perfect roof to the narrow tunnels, which pierced the grass in every direction and formed a seemingly impassable labyrinth. The brown mouse, however, knew his way very well through the soft green light, flecked with specks and streaks of pollen-dusty sunshine. The tunnels were swarming with travellers; but, beyond nipping them on the haunches now and then to make them get out of his way or move faster, he paid no attention to them. At last he came to the edge of the stream, and to a burrow beneath the roots of a wild rose thicket which fringed the water.

This burrow the brown mouse had once inhabited. He felt it was his. Just now it was occupied by an irritable little mole shrew. But the brown mouse, strong in the sense of previous ownership, proceeded to take possession. The outraged shrew put up a bitter fight, but in vain. With squeaks and blood the eviction was accomplished, and the brown mouse settled himself complacently in the burrow.

AFTER a few days the southwest gales blew themselves out, the tides drew back within their ordinary summer bounds, and most of the refugees returned to their old haunts among the broad leaf. But the brown mouse elected to remain in his burrow beside the rose thicket. His taste had turned to the clover and timothy stalks, and the meadow was alive with brown crickets and toothsome big green grasshoppers. Moreover, in the heat of late July, he loved to swim in the bland waters of the stream, keeping close along shore, under the shadow of the long grass and the overhanging roses, and avoiding the dense patches of weed which might give shelter to some darting pike. His burrow was roomy, and gave accommodation to a silken furred brown mate, who set herself without delay to the duty of replenishing the diminished population of the marsh mice.

In spite of foraging hawks, foxes, weasels, and minks, in spite of calamities, swift and frequent, overtaking this, that, and another of their innumerable kindred, the summer hours passed benignly over the burrow by the rose thicket that housed the brown mouse and his mate.

THEN, one sultry scented morning, there came a change. The deep quiet of the meadow went to pieces in blatant clamour. Loud voiced men and snorting, trampling, clanking horses came to the edge of the grass, and with them two strange scarlet machines which clattered as they moved.

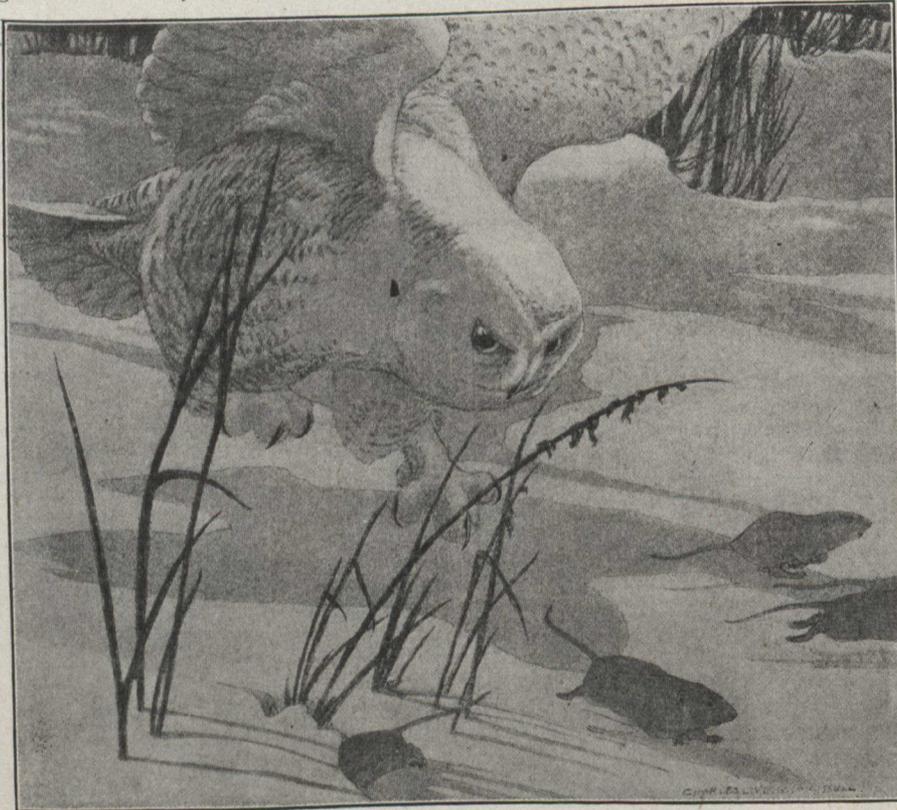
One of these scarlet monsters, dragged by horses, swerved off toward the farther side of the meadow. The other started straight down through the deep grass along the edge of the stream. Into the grass, belly deep, the big horses plunged, breasting it like the sea. Instantly the scarlet machine, which was ridden by a man, set up a new cry. It was a harsh,

strident, terrifying cry, as if a million twangling locusts had found one voice. Before it, to the amazed horror of all the furry, scurrying grass dwellers, the grass went down flat, in long ranks. The peril of the floods was as nothing to this loud, uncomprehended peril. Marsh mice, water voles, shrews, with here and there a foraging muskrat, here and there a murderous and ravaging weasel, all fled frantically before it. A few, a very few, fled too late. These never knew what happened to them; for great darting knives, dancing unseen through the grass, caught them and slew them.

The high cry of the deadly scarlet, thing, however, gave warning fair and sufficient. As the big brown marsh mouse heard it approaching, he dived straight to the bottom of his burrow and lay there trembling. His companion, on the other hand, holding different views as to the proper place of safety, darted from the burrow, wriggled through the thorny stems of the rose thicket and plunged into the water where she hid herself close under the opposite bank. The noise and the darting knives glided almost over the mouth of the burrow, and the thumping heart of the brown mouse almost burst itself with terror. But they passed. Slowly they passed on.

And when they had grown comparatively faint, far down at the foot of the meadow, the brown mouse, recovering himself, dared to peep forth. He was astonished to see a long breath of grass lying prostrate, with bewildered bumble-bees and grasshoppers striving to extricate themselves from the ruin. Having a valiant heart and a quick eye for opportunity, he sprang out of his hole and began pouncing on the confused and helpless insects. This, for a few minutes, was a profitable game, and a safe one too; for the cry of the machine, with the presence of the men and horses, had driven hawks and crows to a discreet distance. But presently the cry of the scarlet thing, which had turned at the dike and was moving straight up the middle of the meadow, began to grow loud again, and the brown mouse whisked back into his burrow.

All through the time of the haying the meadow folk lived in a turmoil of alarm and change. At first, under the heavy, prostrate ranks of the slain grass, they ran bewildered but secure; for their foes could not easily detect them. For another day they were comparatively safe under the long scented lines of the drying windrows, full of grasshoppers and wilted clover heads. When the windrows were tossed together into innumerable pointed hay cocks, they crowded beneath the ephemeral shelter—to be rudely bared, next day, to the blinding sun as the cocks were pitched into the rumbling hay carts.



The Giant Snowy Owls Were the Worst Peril by Far.

It was a day of horrors, this, for the meadow kindreds; for a yellow Irish terrier, following the haymakers, would run with wild yelpings under the lifted cocks and slay the little people by the hundred. But, as for the brown mouse, all this time he and his temporary mate dwelt secure, keeping to their burrow and to the tunnels they had driven amid the roots of the rose thicket.

When the hay was gone, the meadow dwellers had fallen on evil times. The naked meadows

—all bare, close stubble open to the eyes of hawk and crow by day and of the still more deadly owl by night—had become their worst foe. Some drew back to the fringes of the uplands. Some colonised along the winding edges of the stream. Some returned across the dike to the salt meadow, where the broad-leaf grass was not yet ripe for mowing, while the remnant huddled precariously under the bases of the stacks, an easy prey for every foraging weasel. In a little while, however, the short thick herbage of the aftermath thrust its heads above the stubble. Then new tunnels were run, and life for the scurrying and squeaking of the meadow folk once more began to offer its normal attractions. It was now more perilously insecure, however; for the herds of cattle turned to pasture on the aftermath kept it eaten down, and the shrewd crows learned that their beaks could pierce the fragile and too open roofs of the tunnels.

AT last winter came, enemy to almost all other kindred of the wild, but friendly to mouse folk. The snow, some two feet deep all over the meadows, over the dikes, and to the eating edges of the tides, gave them a perfect shelter, and was exactly suited to the driving of their tunnels. Food was abundant, because they could subsist very well on the nutritious root stalks of the grass. And none of their enemies could get at them except when they chose to seek the upper air. At night they would slip forth and play about the firm surface of the snow. It was then that they suffered; for, though the hawks were gone, and the crows asleep, the icy winter night was alive with owls, and foxes, weasels, and minks would come prowling hungrily down from the uplands. The owls were the worst peril by far—marsh owls, barn owls, the darting little Acadian owls, swift as the sparrowhawk—and now and then the terror of the winter wilds, the giant snowy owl of the North, driven down from his bleak Arctic wastes.

Through all these things, however, the brown marsh mouse went his way secure. He kept every exit of his tunnels perfectly hidden among the thorny tops of the wild rose bushes, which stood up some five or six inches above the surface of the snow. The successive families which were born and grew up in his safe burrow passed out into the maze to be merged in the precarious and passing legions. His first mate disappeared mysteriously—and as he had no facilities for pressing an inquiry among the hawks or weasels, he never knew the details of her disappearance. Her place was speedily filled.

It was along toward the end of the winter when the brown mouse met with his most dangerous adventure. Shunning, as he did so craftily, the games on the open snow, he was wont to amuse himself, and incidentally seek variations in his diet, beneath the ice of his threshold stream. An expert swimmer and diver, almost as swift as his cousin the muskrat or his hereditary enemy the mink, he would swim long distances under the water, finding fresh bits of lilyroot, tiny clams, water snails, half torpid beetles, and many kinds of larvæ. As the stream had been high at the time of freezing, and had afterward shrunk in its channel, letting the ice down with it, there were many air chambers along the brink, between ice roof and water surface, and slanting downward to the nearest of these he had dug himself a tunnel from the roots of his thicket.

Even here, to be sure, there were perils for him. There was one big mink which loved to hunt along these secret and dim lit air chambers, taking long swims beneath the ice; but he was an autocrat, and kept all rival minks away from his range; so the wise brown mouse knew that, as long as he kept a sharp enough lookout against that foe, he was secure in the air chambers. Then in the stream itself there was always the peril of the great pike, which had its lair at the bottom of the deep pool down by the sluiceway. The brown mouse had seen him only once—a long, straight, grey-green, shadowy shape in the distance—but that one sight gave him counsels of caution. He never forgot, when in the water, to keep watch for that great darting shadow.

One day when the brown mouse had swum far down stream and was hurrying back home, he was alarmed by loud sounds on the surface of the ice,