

stiff. The hot sun's rays burned into him. Still Billy stayed on.

At last Stubby Tail came cautiously to the surface. Coming up she stood beside the sandy mound. For a moment she stood thus before her eyes caught sight of Billy's motionless form. Simultaneously there was a sharp click. Stubby Tail hurled herself frightened into the depths.

A few days later Billy placed upon his bureau a neatly mounted picture of the little grey brown animal. As he looked at it a great pride swelled within him. This was a feat far superior to the mere trapping and snaring of animals as accomplished in the past. During the days that followed he exhibited the picture to many of his friends. It took supremacy even over his stuffed specimens and mats of hides.

Autumn came to the prairies. Stubby Tail made many trips to the nearby wheatfields. Returning, with cheek pouches stuffed to capacity, she unloaded the precious grain into her store-room. With the arrival of the raw days the nest was filled to overflowing with wheat and prairie flower seeds.

After the middle of October gophers do not go out a great deal. But one raw fall day near the end of the month Stubby Tail came out for a short run, nosing about for any stray edible that might have blown her way. But the prairie was bare, void of anything eatable, so after a little run she returned to the depths of her den.

In the growing dusk a little later a hungry weasel came nosing along. The hunting this last few days had been bad. The little white pirate had been forced to travel far from his usual range in search of food.

Coming to the mouth of Stubby Tail's den, he sniffed the ground. It still bore the fresh scent of her. The weasel entered the runway; started downward. As he went deeper, the warm smell of the living room came to his hungry nose. Hurrying, he passed the upward turn and plunged down again on the last lap of the runway that led to the nest. He thrust his sharp, inquisitive nose through the doorway. His eyes, trained to darkness, saw the form before him. He leaped. Stubby Tail turned and met the attack. They rolled over upon the floor. For a long moment they fought. But the gopher was no match for the stronger, heavier flesh-eating animal whose daily life was one of combat. The weasel got his desired grip. His long, white teeth sank into her throat. He drank deep of the warm, rich blood.

In the ghostly light of the gathering darkness some hours later the prairie pirate emerged from the mouth of the hole and went loping silently away into the darkness.

Protection in Plants

Plants need to protect themselves from their enemies just as much as animals and the methods followed in both animal and vegetable kingdoms are somewhat similar.

A plant's chief business in life is to produce seed and guard it in every way till it is ripe, and then so arrange for the dispersal of the seeds that each may have a chance to live.

A sick plant or one about to die will make every effort to bring its fruit to perfection that the species become not extinct.

The wild cucumber guards its seeds with formidable looking spines, for a cucumber is composed of 95 per cent of water and would be a tempting juicy mouthful to many animals. The spines warn all enemies to keep off and the plant has a chance to ripen its seeds.

These protective spines are used by a large number of plants. The spears arranged around the flwers of the thistle are there for the purpose of guarding the treasure house till the little downy seeds are ripe and ready to take their journey into the world.

The holly tree has developed protective spines on the leaves of the lower branches only, for it is there that an attack is made by animals. The top-most leaves do not need and, therefore, do not have these spines.

The cactus is another juicy plant found growing in the hottest and driest regions of the earth. Thirsty animals would soon clear the ground if the protective spines did not render the plant seed safe from attack. The spines of the cactus answer a twofold purpose. On entering the flesh the spear becomes a hook, and the segment of the plant is carried by the animal to a fresh location. This is one reason why cactus spears make such a wound when pulled from the flesh.

Imitation or mimicry is used by many plants. Some protect themselves by growing like other plants which have strong defensive powers. Not only do they imitate each other but also their natural surroundings. A South African plant has learnt to look just like

the stones amongst which it grows and so cattle pass it by and do not eat it.

In the case of the nettle protection is afforded by barbed stinging hairs. These are very brittle at the tip and when touched break off leaving a sharp jagged tube filled with poison sticking in the skin. Wooliness is a protection against snails and leaf eating insects and also lessens the loss of water by evaporation.

Many animals are protected by powerful scent glands and plants too avail themselves of this form of protection. Unripe fruit is always unpleasant to taste and until the "stone" or seed is ripe it is guarded by the bitter flesh around it.

Instances of animals refusing to eat

various leaves or grasses are common and it is safe to assume that some protective scent or taste is responsible for their actions.

The Prairie Thermopsis or Bean is one of the first to shoot out of the ground in spring and its juicy stems look very tempting. Yet on no account will animals eat, for it is protected by a bitter and even poisonous taste.

"Ef yo' had your choice, Liza, which would yo' rather do—live, or die and go to heaven?"

"Ah'd rather live."

"Why, Liza White, yo' scan'lous chile, Sunday school hain't done yo' no good 'tall!"

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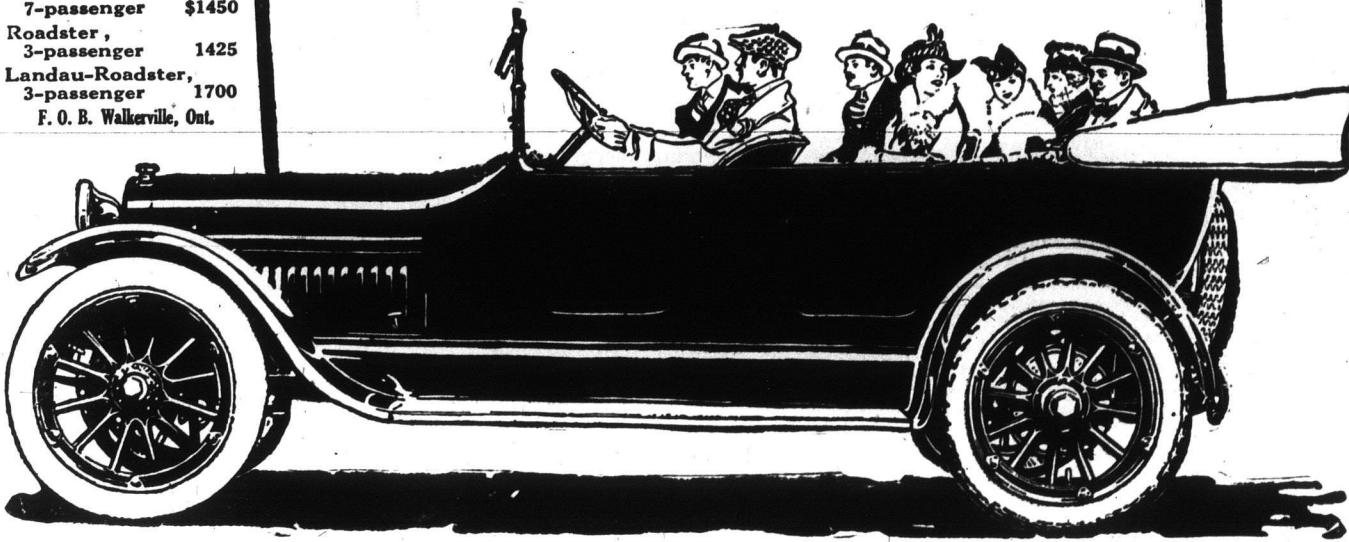
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