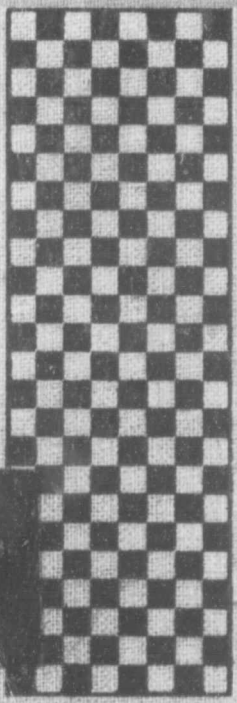
THE WHITE REINDEER AND OTHER STORIES

ERNEST THOMPSON SETON



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THE LEGEND OF THE WHITE REINDEER

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THE LEGEND OF THE WHITE REINDEER

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THE LEGEND OF THE WHITE REINDEER

ARNAUX. THE BOY AND THE LYNX

BY

ERNEST THOMPSON SETON

AUTHOR OF

"ROLF IN THE WOODS," "TWO LITTLE SAVAGES," "ANIMAL HEROES," "THE BOOK OF WOODCRAFT," ETC.

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THE LEGEND OF THE WHITE REINDEER

Skoal ! Skoal ! For Norway Skoal !
Sing ye the song of the Vand-dam troll.
When I am hiding
Norway's luck
On a White Storbuk
Comes riding, riding.

THE SETTING

BLEAK, black, deep, and cold is Utrovand, a long pocket of glacial water, a crack in the globe, a wrinkle in the high Norwegian mountains, blocked with another mountain, and flooded with a frigid flood, three thousand feet above its Mother Sea, and yet no closer to its Father Sun. Around its cheerless shore is a belt of stunted trees, that sends a long tail up the high valley, till it dwindles away to sticks and moss, as it also does some half-way up the granite hills that rise a thousand feet, encompassing the lake. This is the limit of trees, the end

of the growth of wood. The birch and willow are the last to drop out of the long fight with frost. Their miniature thickets are noisy with the cries of Fieldfare, Pipit, and Ptarmigan, but these are left behind on nearing the upper plateau, where shade of rock and sough of wind are all that take their place. The chilly Hoifjeld rolls away, a rugged, rocky plain, with great patches of snow in all the deeper hollows, and the distance blocked by snowy peaks that rise and roll and whiter gleam, till, dim and dazzling in the north, uplifts the Jötunheim, the home of spirits, of glaciers, and of the lasting snow.

The treeless stretch is one vast attest to the force of heat. Each failure of the sun by one degree is marked by a lower realm of life. The northern slope of each hollow is less boreal than its southern side. The pine and spruce have given out long ago; the mountain-ash went next; the birch and willow climbed up half the slope. Here, nothing grows but creeping plants and

moss. The plain itself is pale grayish green, one vast expanse of reindeer-moss, but warmed at spots into orange by great beds of polytrichum, and, in sunnier nooks, deepened to a herbal green. The rocks that are scattered everywhere are of a delicate lilac, but each is variegated with spreading frill-edged plasters of gray-green lichen or orange powder-streaks and beauty-spots of black. These rocks have great power to hold the heat, so that each of them is surrounded by a little belt of heat-loving plants that could not otherwise live so high. Dwarfed representatives of the birch and willow both are here, hugging the genial rock, as an old French *habitant* hugs his stove in winter-time, spreading their branches over it, instead of in the frigid air. A foot away is seen a chillier belt of heath, and farther off, colder, where none else can grow, is the omnipresent gray-green reindeer-moss that gives its colour to the upland. The hollows are still filled with snow, though now it is June. But each of

these white expanses is shrinking, spending itself in ice-cold streams that somehow reach the lake. These *snö-fläcks* show no sign of life, not even the "red-snow" tinge, and around each is a belt of barren earth, to testify that life and warmth can never be divorced.

Birdless and lifeless, the gray-green snow-pied waste extends over all the stretch that is here between the timber-line and the snow-line, above which winter never quits its hold. Farther north both come lower, till the timber-line is at the level of the sea; and all the land is in that treeless belt called Tundra in the Old World, and Barrens in the New, and that everywhere is the Home of the Reindeer—the Realm of the Reindeer moss.

I

In and out it flew, in and out, over the water and under, as the Varsimlé, the leader doe of the Reindeer herd, walked past on the vernal banks, and it sang:—

"*Skoal! Skoal! Gamle Norge Skoal!*" and more about "a White Reindeer and Norway's good luck," as though the singer were gifted with special insight.

When old Sveggum built the Vand-dam on the Lower Hoifjeld, just above the Utrovand, and set his *ribesten* a-going, he supposed that he was the owner of it all. But some one was there before him. And in and out of the spouting stream this some one dashed, and sang songs that he made up to fit the place and the time. He skipped from *skjæke* to *skjæke* of the wheel, and did many things which Sveggum could set down only to luck—whatever that is; and some said that Sveggum's luck was a Wheel-troll, a Water-fairy, with a brown coat and a white beard, one that lived on land or in water, as he pleased.

But most of Sveggum's neighbours saw only a Fossekal, the little Waterfall Bird that came each year and danced in the stream, or dived where the pool is deep. And maybe both were right, for some of the

very oldest peasants will tell you that a Fairy-troll may take the form of a man or the form of a bird. Only this bird lived a life no bird can live, and sang songs that men never had sung in Norway. Wonderful vision had he, and sights he saw that man never saw. For the Fieldfare would build before him, and the Lemming fed its brood under his very eyes. Eyes were they to see; for the dark speck on Suletind that man could barely glimpse was a Reindeer, with half-shed coat, to him; and the green slime on the Vandren was beautiful green pasture with a banquet spread.

Oh, Man is so blind, and makes himself so hated! But Fossekal harmed none, so none were afraid of him. Only he sang, and his songs were sometimes mixed with fun and prophecy, or perhaps a little scorn.

From the top of the tassel-birch he could mark the course of the Vand-dam stream past the Nystuen hamlet to lose itself in the gloomy waters of Utrovand; or by a

higher flight he could see across the barren upland that rolled to Jötunheim in the north.

The great awakening was on now. The springtime had already reached the woods; the valleys were a-throb with life; new birds coming from the south, winter sleepers reappearing, and the Reindeer that had wintered in the lower woods should soon again be seen on the uplands.

Not without a fight do the Frost Giants give up the place so long their own; a great battle was in progress; but the Sun was slowly, surely winning, and driving them back to the Jötunheim. At every hollow and shady place they made another stand, or sneaked back by night, only to suffer another defeat. Hard hitters these, as they are stubborn fighters; many a granite rock was split and shattered by their blows in reckless fight, so that its inner fleshy tints were shown and warmly gleamed among the gray-green rocks that dotted the plain, like the countless flocks of Thor.

More or less of these may be found at every place of battle-brunt, and straggled along the slope of Suletind was a host that reached for half a mile. But stay! these moved. Not rocks were they, but living creatures.

They drifted along erratically, yet one way, all up the wind. They swept out of sight in a hollow, to reappear on a ridge much nearer, and serried there against the sky, we marked their branching horns, and knew them for the Reindeer in their home.

The band came drifting our way, feeding like Sheep, grunting like only themselves. Each one found a grazing-spot, stood there till it was cleared off, then trotted on crackling hoofs to the front in search of another. So the band was ever changing in rank and form. But one there was that was always at or near the van—a large and well-favoured Simlé, or Hind. However much the band might change and spread, she was in the forefront, and the observant

would soon have seen signs that she had an influence over the general movement—that she, indeed, was the leader. Even the big Bucks, in their huge velvet-clad antlers, admitted this untitular control; and if one, in a spirit of independence, evinced a disposition to lead elsewhere, he soon found himself uncomfortably alone.

The Varsimlé, or leading Hind, had kept the band hovering, for the last week or two, along the timber-line, going higher each day to the baring uplands, where the snow was clearing and the deer-flies were blown away. As the pasture zone had climbed she had followed in her daily foraging, returning to the sheltered woods at sundown, for the wild things fear the cold night wind even as man does. But now the deer-flies were rife in the woods, and the rocky hillside nooks warm enough for the nightly bivouac, so the woodland was deserted.

Probably the leader of a band of animals does not consciously pride itself on leader-

ship, yet has an uncomfortable sensation when not followed. But there are times with all when solitude is sought. The Varsimlé had been fat and well through the winter, yet now was listless, and lingered with drooping head as the grazing herd moved past her.

Sometimes she stood gazing blankly while the unchewed bunch of moss hung from her mouth, then roused to go on to the front as before; but the spells of vacant stare and the hankering to be alone grew stronger. She turned downward to seek the birch woods, but the whole band turned with her. She stood stock-still, with head down. They grazed and grunted past, leaving her like a statue against the hillside. When all had gone on, she slunk quietly away; walked a few steps, looked about, made a pretence of grazing, snuffed the ground, looked after the herd, and scanned the hills; then downward fared toward the sheltering woods.

Once as she peered over a bank she sighted

another Simlé, a doe Reindeer, uneasily wandering by itself. But the Varsimlé wished not for company. She did not know why, but she felt that she must hide away somewhere.

She stood still until the other had passed on, then turned aside, and went with faster steps and less wavering, till she came in view of Utrovand, away down by the little stream that turns old Sveggum's ribesten. Up above the dam she waded across the limpid stream, for deep-laid and sure is the instinct of a wild animal to put running water between itself and those it shuns. Then, on the farther bank, now bare and slightly green, she turned, and passing in and out among the twisted trunks, she left the noisy Vand-dam. On the higher ground beyond she paused, looked this way and that, went on a little, but returned; and here, completely shut in by softly painted rocks, and birches wearing little springtime hangers, she seemed inclined to rest; yet not to rest, for she stood uneasily

this way and that, driving away the flies that settled on her legs, heeding not at all the growing grass, and thinking she was hid from all the world.

But nothing escapes the Fossekal. He had seen her leave the herd, and now he sat on a gorgeous rock that overhung, and sang as though he had waited for this and knew that the fate of the nation might turn on what passed in this far glen. He sang:

Skoal! Skoal! For Norway Skoal!
Sing ye the song of the Vand-dam troll.
When I am hiding
Norway's luck
On a White Storbuk
Comes riding, riding.

There are no Storks in Norway, and yet an hour later there was a wonderful little Reindeer lying beside the Varsimlé. She was brushing his coat, licking and mothering him, proud and happy as though this was the first little Renskalv ever born. There might be hundreds born in the herd that month, but probably no more like this one,

for he was snowy white, and the song of the singer on the painted rock was about

> Good luck, good luck,
> And a White Storbuk,

as though he foresaw clearly the part that the White Calf was to play when he grew to be a Storbuk.

But another wonder now came to pass. Before an hour, there was a second little Calf—a brown one this time. Strange things happen, and hard things are done when they needs must. Two hours later, when the Varsimlé led the White Calf away from the place, there was no Brown Calf, only some flattened rags with calf-hair on them.

The mother was wise: better one strongling than two weaklings. Within a few days the Simlé once more led the band, and running by her side was the White Calf. The Varsimlé considered him in all things, so that he really set the pace for the band, which suited very well all the mothers that

now had Calves with them. Big, strong, and wise was the Varsimlé, in the pride of her strength, and this White Calf was the flower of her prime. He often ran ahead of his mother as she led the herd, and Rol, coming on them one day, laughed aloud at the sight as they passed, old and young, fat Simlé and antlered Storbuk, a great brown herd, all led, as it seemed, by a little White Calf.

So they drifted away to the high mountains, to be gone all summer. "Gone to be taught by the spirits who dwell where the Black Loon laughs on the ice," said Lief of the Lower Dale; but Sveggum, who had always been among the Reindeer, said: "Their mothers are the teachers, even as ours are."

When the autumn came, old Sveggum saw a moving snö-fläck far off on the brown moorland; but the Troll saw a white yearling, a Nekbuk; and when they ranged alongside of Utrovand to drink, the still sheet seemed fully to reflect the White

One, though it barely sketched in the others, with the dark hills behind.

Many a little Calf had come that spring, and had drifted away on the moss-barrens, to come back no more; for some were weaklings and some were fools; some fell by the way, for that is law; and some would not learn the rules, and so died. But the White Calf was strongest of them all, and he was wise, so he learned of his mother, who was wisest of them all. He learned that the grass on the sun side of a rock is sweet, and though it looks the same in the dark hollows, it is there worthless. He learned that when his mother's hoofs crackled he must be up and moving, and when all the herd's hoofs crackled there was danger, and he must keep by his mother's side. For this crackling is like the whistling of a Whistler Duck's wings: it is to keep the kinds together. He learned that where the little Bomuldblomster hangs its cotton tufts is dangerous bog; that the harsh cackle of the Ptarmigan means that close

at hand are Eagles, as dangerous for Fawn as for Bird. He learned that the little troll-berries are deadly, that when the *verra*-flies come stinging he must take refuge on a snow-patch, and that of all animal smells only that of his mother was to be fully trusted. He learned that he was growing. His flat calf sides and big joints were changing to the full barrel and clean limbs of the Yearling, and the little bumps which began to show on his head when he was only a fortnight old were now sharp, hard spikes that could win in fight.

More than once they had smelt that dreaded destroyer of the north that men call the Gjerv or Wolverene; and one day, as this danger-scent came suddenly and in great strength, a huge blot of dark brown sprang rumbling from a rocky ledge, and straight for the foremost—the White Calf. His eye caught the flash of a whirling, shaggy mass, with gleaming teeth and eyes, hot-breathed and ferocious. Blank horror set his hair on end; his nostrils flared in

fear: but before he fled there rose within another feeling—one of anger at the breaker of his peace, a sense that swept all fear away, braced his legs, and set his horns at charge. The brown brute landed with a deep-chested growl, to be received on the young one's spikes. They pierced him deeply, but the shock was overmuch; it bore the White One down, and he might yet have been killed but that his mother, alert and ever near, now charged the attacking monster, and heavier, better armed, she hurled and speared him to the ground. And the White Calf, with a very demon glare in his once mild eyes, charged too; and even after the Wolverene was a mere hairy mass, and his mother had retired to feed, he came, snorting out his rage, to drive his spikes into the hateful thing, till his snowy head was stained with his adversary's blood.

Thus he showed that below the ox-like calm exterior was the fighting beast; that he was like the men of the north, rugged,

square-built, calm, slow to wrath, but when aroused "seeing red."

When they ranked together by the lake that fall, the Fossekal sang his old song:

> When I am hiding
> Norway's luck
> On a White Storbuk
> Comes riding, riding,

as though this was something he had awaited, then disappeared no one knew where. Old Sveggum had seen it flying through the stream, as birds fly through the air, walking in the bottom of a deep pond as a Ptarmigan walks on the rocks, living as no bird can live; and now the old man said it had simply gone southward for the winter. But old Sveggum could neither read nor write: how should he know?

II

EACH springtime when the Reindeer passed over Sveggum's mill-run, as they moved from the lowland woods to the bleaker shore of Utrovand, the Fossekal was there to sing about the White Storbuk, which each year became more truly the leader.

That first spring he stood little higher than a Hare. When he came to drink in the autumn, his back was above the rock where Sveggum's stream enters Utrovand. Next year he barely passed under the stunted birch, and the third year the Fossekal on the painted rock was looking up, not down, at him as he passed. This was the autumn when Rol and Sveggum sought the Hoifjeld to round up their half-wild herd and select some of the strongest for the sled. There was but one opinion about the Storbuk. Higher than the others, heavier, white as snow, with a mane that

swept the shallow drifts, breasted like a Horse and with horns like a storm-grown oak, he was king of the herd, and might easily be king of the road.

There are two kinds of deer-breakers, as there are two kinds of horse-breakers: one that tames and teaches the animal, and gets a spirited, friendly helper; one that aims to break its spirit, and gets only a sullen slave, ever ready to rebel and wreak its hate. Many a Lapp and many a Norsk has paid with his life for brutality to his Reindeer, and Rol's days were shortened by his own pulk-Ren. But Sveggum was of gentler sort. To him fell the training of the White Storbuk. It was slow, for the Buck resented all liberties from man, as he did from his brothers; but kindness, not fear, was the power that tamed him, and when he had learned to obey and glory in the sled race, it was a noble sight to see the great white mild-eyed beast striding down the long snow-stretch of Utrovand, the steam jetting from his nostrils, the snow

swirling up before like the curling waves on a steamer's bow, sled, driver, and Deer all dim in flying white.

Then came the Yule-tide Fair, with the races on the ice, and Utrovand for once was gay. The sullen hills about re-echoed with merry shouting. The Reindeer races were first, with many a mad mischance for laughter. Rol himself was there with his swiftest sled Deer, a tall, dark, five-year-old, in his primest prime. But over-eager, over-brutal, he harried the sullen, splendid slave till in mid-race—just when in a way to win—it turned at a cruel blow, and Rol took refuge under the upturned sled until it had vented its rage against the wood; and so he lost the race, and the winner was the young White Storbuk. Then he won the five-mile race around the lake; and for each triumph Sveggum hung a little silver bell on his harness, so that now he ran and won to merry music.

Then came the Horse races,—running races these; the Reindeer only trots,—and

when Balder, the victor Horse, received his ribbon and his owner the purse, came Sveggum with all his winnings in his hand, and said: "Ho, Lars, thine is a fine Horse, but mine is a better Storbuk; let us put our winnings together and race, each his beast, for all."

A Ren against a Race-horse—such a race was never seen till now. Off at the pistol-crack they flew. "Ho, Balder! (*cluck!*) Ho, hi, Balder!" Away shot the beautiful Racer, and the Storbuk, striding at a slower trot, was left behind.

"Ho, Balder!" "Hi, Storbuk!" How the people cheered as the Horse went bounding and gaining! But he had left the line at his top speed; the Storbuk's rose as he flew—faster—faster. The Pony ceased to gain. A mile whirled by; the gap began to close. The Pony had over-spurted at the start, but the Storbuk was warming to his work—striding evenly, swiftly, faster yet, as Sveggum cried in encouragement: "Ho, Storbuk! good Storbuk!" or talked to him

only with a gentle rein. At the turning-point the pair were neck and neck; then the Pony—though well driven and well shod—slipped on the ice, and thenceforth held back as though in fear, so the Storbuk steamed away. The Pony and his driver were far behind when a roar from every human throat in Filefjeld told that the Storbuk had passed the wire and won the race. And yet all this was before the White Ren had reached the years of his full strength and speed.

Once that day Rol essayed to drive the Storbuk. They set off at a good pace, the White Buk ready, responsive to the single rein, and his mild eyes veiled by his drooping lashes. But, without any reason other than the habit of brutality, Rol struck him. In a moment there was a change. The Racer's speed was checked, all four legs braced forward till he stood; the drooping lids were raised, the eyes rolled—there was a green light in them now. Three puffs of steam were jetted from each nostril. Rol

shouted, then, scenting danger, quickly upset the sled and hid beneath. The Storbuk turned to charge the sled, sniffing and tossing the snow with his foot; but little Knute, Sveggum's son, ran forward and put his arms around the Storbuk's neck; then the fierce look left the Reindeer's eye, and he suffered the child to lead him quietly back to the starting-point. Beware, O driver! the Reindeer, too, "sees red."

This was the coming of the White Storbuk for the folk of Filefjeld.

In the two years that followed he became famous throughout that country as Sveggum's Storbuk, and many a strange exploit was told of him. In twenty minutes he could carry old Sveggum round the six-mile rim of Utrovand. When the snow-slide buried all the village of Holaker, it was the Storbuk that brought the word for help to Opdalstole and returned again over the forty miles of deep snow in seven hours, to carry brandy, food, and promise of speedy aid.

When over-venturesome young Knute Sveggumsen broke through the new thin ice of Utrovand, his cry for help brought the Storbuk to the rescue; for he was the gentlest of his kind and always ready to come at call.

He brought the drowning boy in triumph to the shore, and as they crossed the Vanddam stream, there was the Troll-bird to sing:

> Good luck, good luck,
> With the White Storbuk.

After which he disappeared for months—doubtless dived into some subaqueous cave to feast and revel all winter; although Sveggum did not believe it was so.

III

How often is the fate of kingdoms given into child hands, or even committed to the care of Bird or Beast! A She-wolf nursed

the Roman Empire. A Wren pecking crumbs on a drum-head aroused the Orange army, it is said, and ended the Stuart reign in Britain. Little wonder, then, that to a noble Reindeer Buk should be committed the fate of Norway: that the Troll on the wheel should have reason in his rhyme.

These were troublous times in Scandinavia. Evil men, traitors at heart, were sowing dissension between the brothers Norway and Sweden. "Down with the Union!" was becoming the popular cry.

Oh, unwise peoples! If only you could have been by Sveggum's wheel to hear the Troll when he sang:

The Raven and the Lion
They held the Bear at bay;
But he picked the bones of both
When they quarrelled by the way.

Threats of civil war, of a fight for independence, were heard throughout Norway. Meetings were held more or less secretly, and at each of them was some one

with well-filled pockets and glib tongue, to enlarge on the country's wrongs, and promise assistance from an outside irresistible power as soon as they showed that they meant to strike for freedom. No one openly named the power. That was not necessary; it was everywhere felt and understood. Men who were real patriots began to believe in it. Their country was wronged. Here was one to set her right. Men whose honour was beyond question became secret agents of this power. The state was honeycombed and mined; society was a tangle of plots. The king was helpless, though his only wish was for the people's welfare. Honest and straightforward, what could he do against this far-reaching machination? The very advisers by his side were corrupted through mistaken patriotism. The idea that they were playing into the hands of the foreigner certainly never entered into the minds of these dupes—at least, not those of the rank and file. One or two, tried, selected, and bought by the arch-enemy,

knew the real object in view, and the chief of these was Borgrevinck, a former lansman of Nordlands. A man of unusual gifts, a member of the Storthing, a born leader, he might have been prime minister long ago, but for the distrust inspired by several unprincipled dealings. Soured by what he considered want of appreciation, balked in his ambition, he was a ready tool when the foreign agent sounded him. At first his patriotism had to be sopped, but that necessity disappeared as the game went on, and perhaps he alone, of the whole far-reaching conspiracy, was prepared to strike at the Union for the benefit of the foreigner.

Plans were being perfected,—army officers being secretly misled and won over by the specious talk of "their country's wrongs," and each move made Borgrevinck more surely the head of it all,—when a quarrel between himself and the "deliverer" occurred over the question of recompense. Wealth untold they were willing to furnish;

but regal power, never. The quarrel became more acute. Borgrevinck continued to attend all meetings, but was ever more careful to centre all power in himself, and even prepared to turn round to the king's party if necessary to further his ambition. The betrayal of his followers would purchase his own safety. But proofs he must have, and he set about getting signatures to a declaration of rights which was simply a veiled confession of treason. Many of the leaders he had deluded into signing this before the meeting at Laersdalsoren. Here they met in the early winter, some twenty of the patriots, some of them men of position, all of them men of brains and power. Here, in the close and stifling parlour, they planned, discussed, and questioned. Great hopes were expressed, great deeds were forecast, in that stove-hot room.

Outside, against the fence, in the winter night, was a Great White Reindeer, harnessed to a sled, but lying down with his

head doubled back on his side as he slept, calm, unthoughtful, ox-like. Which seemed likelier to decide the nation's fate, the earnest thinkers indoors, or the ox-like sleeper without? Which seemed more vital to Israel, the bearded council in King Saul's tent, or the light-hearted shepherd-boy hurling stones across the brook at Bethlehem? At Laersdalsoren it was as before: deluded by Borgrevinck's eloquent plausibility, all put their heads in the noose, their lives and country in his hands, seeing in this treacherous monster a very angel of self-sacrificing patriotism. All? No, not all. Old Sveggum was there. He could neither read nor write. That was his excuse for not signing. He could not read a letter in a book, but he could read something of the hearts of men. As the meeting broke up he whispered to Axel Tanberg: "Is his own name on that paper?" And Axel, starting at the thought, said: "No." Then said Sveggum: "I don't trust that man. They ought to know of this at

Nystuen." For there was to be the really important meeting. But how to let them know was the riddle. Borgrevinck was going there at once with his fast Horses.

Sveggum's eye twinkled as he nodded toward the Storbuk, standing tied to the fence. Borgrevinck leaped into his sleigh and went off at speed, for he was a man of energy.

Sveggum took the bells from the harness, untied the Reindeer, stepped into the pulk. He swung the single rein, clucked to the Storbuk, and also turned his head toward Nystuen. The fast Horses had a long start, but before they had climbed the eastward hill Sveggum needs must slack, so as not to overtake them. He held back till they came to the turn above the woods at Maristuen; then he quit the road, and up the river flat he sped the Buk, a farther way, but the only way to bring them there ahead.

Squeak, crack — squeak, crack — squeak, crack—at regular intervals from the great

spreading snow-shoes of the Storbuk, and the steady sough of his breath was like the *Nordland* as she passes up the Hardanger Fjord. High up, on the smooth road to the left, they could hear the jingle of the horse-bells and the shouting of Borgrevinck's driver, who, under orders, was speeding hard for Nystuen.

The highway was a short road and smooth, and the river valley was long and rough; but when, in four hours, Borgrevinck got to Nystuen, there in the throng was a face that he had just left at Laersdalsoren. He appeared not to notice, though nothing ever escaped him.

At Nystuen none of the men would sign. Some one had warned them. This was serious; might be fatal at such a critical point. As he thought it over, his suspicions turned more and more to Sveggum, the old fool that could not write his name at Laersdalsoren. But how did he get there before himself with his speedy Horses?

There was a dance at Nystuen that

night; the dance was necessary to mask the meeting; and during that Borgrevinck learned of the swift White Ren.

The Nystuen trip had failed, thanks to the speed of the White Buk. Borgrevinck must get to Bergen before word of this, or all would be lost. There was only one way, to be sure of getting there before any one else. Possibly word had already gone from Laersdalsoren. But even at that, Borgrevinck could get there and save himself, at the price of all Norway, if need be, provided he went with the White Storbuk. He would not be denied. He was not the man to give up a point, though it took all the influence he could bring to bear, this time, to get old Sveggum's leave.

The Storbuk was quietly sleeping in the corral when Sveggum came to bring him. He rose leisurely, hind legs first, stretched one, then the other, curling his tail tight on his back as he did so, shook the hay from the great antlers as though they were a bunch of twigs, and slowly followed Sveg-

gum at the end of the tight halter. He was so sleepy and slow that Borgrevinck impatiently gave him a kick, and got for response a short snort from the Buk, and from Sveggum an earnest warning, both of which were somewhat scornfully received. The tinkling bells on the harness had been replaced, but Borgrevinck wanted them removed. He wished to go in silence. Sveggum would not be left behind when his favourite Ren went forth, so he was given a seat in the horse-sleigh which was to follow, and the driver thereof received from his master a secret hint to delay.

Then, with papers on his person to death-doom a multitude of misguided men, with fiendish intentions in his heart as well as the power to carry them out, and with the fate of Norway in his hands, Borgrevinck was made secure in the sled, behind the White Storbuk, and sped at dawn on his errand of desolation.

At the word from Sveggum the White Ren set off with a couple of bounds that

threw Borgrevinck back in the pulk. This angered him, but he swallowed his wrath on seeing that it left the horse-sleigh behind. He shook the line, shouted, and the Buk settled down to a long, swinging trot. His broad hoofs clicked double at every stride. His nostrils, out level, puffed steady blasts of steam in the frosty morning as he settled to his pace. The pulk's prow cut two long shears of snow, that swirled up over man and sled till all were white. And the great ox-eyes of the King Ren blazed joyously in the delight of motion, and of conquest too, as the sound of the horse-bells faded far behind.

Even masterful Borgrevinck could not but mark with pleasure the noble creature that had balked him last night and now was lending its speed to his purpose; for it was his intention to arrive hours before the horse-sleigh, if possible.

Up the rising road they sped as though downhill, and the driver's spirits rose with the exhilarating speed. The snow groaned

ceaselessly under the prow of the pulk, and the frosty creaking under the hoofs of the flying Ren was like the gritting of mighty teeth. Then came the level stretch from Nystuen's hill to Dalecarl's, and as they whirled by in the early day, little Carl chanced to peep from a window, and got sight of the Great White Ren in a white pulk with a white driver, just as it is in the stories of the Giants, and clapped his hands, and cried, "Good, good!"

But his grandfather, when *he* caught a glimpse of the white wonder that went without even sound of bells, felt a cold chill in his scalp, and went back to light a candle that he kept at the window till the sun was high, for surely this was the Storbuk of Jötunheim.

But the Ren whirled on, and the driver shook the reins and thought only of Bergen. He struck the White Steed with the loose end of the rope. The Buk gave three great snorts and three great bounds, then faster went, and as they passed by Dyrskaur,

where the Giant sits on the edge, his head was muffled in scud, which means that a storm is coming. The Storbuk knew it. He sniffed, and eyed the sky with anxious look, and even slacked a little; but Borgrevinck yelled at the speeding beast, though going yet as none but he could go, and struck him once, twice, and thrice, and harder yet. So the pulk was whirled along like a skiff in a steamer's wake; but there was blood in the Storbuk's eye now; and Borgrevinck was hard put to balance the sled. The miles flashed by like roods till Sveggum's bridge appeared. The storm-wind now was blowing, but there was the Troll. Whence came he now, none knew, but there he was, hopping on the keystone and singing of

> Norway's fate and Norway's luck,
> Of the hiding Troll and the riding Buk.

Down the winding highway they came, curving inward as they swung around the corner. At the voice on the bridge the

Deer threw back his ears and slackened his pace. Borgrevinck, not knowing whence it came, struck savagely at the Ren. The red light gleamed in those ox-like eyes. He snorted in anger and shook the great horns, but he did not stop to avenge the blow. For him was a vaster vengeance still. He onward sped as before, but from that time Borgrevinck had lost all control. The one voice that the Ren would hear had been left behind. They whirled aside, off the road, before the bridge was reached. The pulk turned over, but righted itself, and Borgrevinck would have been thrown out and killed but for the straps. It was not to be so; it seemed rather as though the every curse of Norway had been gathered into the sled for a purpose. Bruised and battered, he reappeared. The Troll from the bridge leaped lightly to the Storbuk's head, and held on to the horns as he danced and sang his ancient song, and a new song, too :

Ha ! at last ! Oh, lucky day,
Norway's curse to wipe away !

Borgrevinck was terrified and furious. He struck harder at the Storbuk as he bounded over the rougher snow, and vainly tried to control him. He lost his head in fear. He got out his knife, at last, to strike at the wild Buk's hamstrings, but a blow from the hoof sent it flying from his hand. Their speed on the road was slow to that they now made: no longer striding at the trot, but bounding madly, great five-stride bounds, the wretched Borgrevinck strapped in the sled, alone and helpless through his own contriving, screaming, cursing, and praying. The Storbuk with bloodshot eyes, madly steaming, careered up the rugged ascent, up to the broken, stormy Hoifjeld; mounting the hills as a Petrel mounts the rollers, skimming the flats as a Fulmar skims the shore, he followed the trail where his mother had first led his tottering steps, up from the Vand-dam nook. He followed the old familiar route that he had followed for five years, where the white-winged Rype flies aside, where the black rock mountains,

shining white, come near and block the sky, "where the Reindeer find their mysterie."

On like the little snow-wreath that the storm-wind sends dancing before the storm, on like a whirlwind over the shoulder of Suletind, over the knees of Torholmenbræ—the Giants that sit at the gateway. Faster than man or beast could follow, up—up—up—and on; and no one saw them go, but a Raven that swooped behind, and flew as Raven never flew, and the Troll, the same old Troll that sang by the Vand-dam, and now danced and sang between the antlers:

> Good luck, good luck for Norway
> With the White Storbuk comes riding.

Over Tvindehoug they faded like flying scud on the moorlands, on to the gloomy distance, away toward Jötunheim, the home of the Evil Spirits, the Land of the Lasting Snow. Their every sign and trail was wiped away by the drifting storm, and the end of them no man knows.

The Norse folk awoke as from a horrid nightmare. Their national ruin was averted; there were no deaths, for there were no proofs; and the talebearer's strife was ended.

The one earthly sign remaining from that drive is the string of silver bells that Sveggum had taken from the Storbuk's neck—the victory bells, each the record of a triumph won; and when the old man came to understand, he sighed, and hung to the string a final bell, the largest of them all.

Nothing more was ever seen or heard of the creature who so nearly sold his country, or of the White Storbuk who balked him. Yet those who live near Jötunheim say that on stormy nights, when the snow is flying and the wind is raving in the woods, there sometimes passes, at frightful speed, an enormous White Reindeer with fiery eyes, drawing a snow-white pulk, in which is a screaming wretch in white, and on the head of the Deer, balancing by the horns, is a

brown-clad, white-bearded Troll, bowing and grinning pleasantly at him, and singing

> Of Norway's luck
> And a White Storbuk—

the same, they say, as the one that with prophetic vision sang by Sveggum's Vanddam on a bygone day when the birches wore their springtime hangers, and a great mild-eyed Varsimlé came alone, to go away with a little white Renskalv walking slowly, demurely, by her side.

ARNAUX

THE CHRONICLE OF A HOMING PIGEON

I

We passed through the side door of a big stable on West Nineteenth Street. The mild smell of the well-kept stalls was lost in the sweet odour of hay, as we mounted a ladder and entered the long garret. The south end was walled off, and the familiar "Coo-oo, cooooo-oo, ruk-at-a-coo," varied with the "whirr, whirr, whirr" of wings, informed us that we were at the pigeon-loft.

This was the home of a famous lot of birds, and to-day there was to be a race among fifty of the youngsters. The owner of the loft had asked me, as an unprejudiced outsider, to be judge in the contest.

It was a training race of the young birds. They had been taken out for short dis-

tances with their parents once or twice, then set free to return to the loft. Now for the first time they were to be flown without the old ones. The point of start, Elizabeth, N.J., was a long journey for their first unaided attempt. "But then," the trainer remarked, "that's how we weed out the fools; only the best birds make it, and that's all we want back."

There was another side to the flight. It was to be a race among those that did return. Each of the men about the loft as well as several neighbouring fanciers were interested in one or other of the Homers. They made up a purse for the winner, and on me was to devolve the important duty of deciding which should take the stakes. Not the first bird *back*, but the first bird *into the loft*, was to win, for one that returns to his neighbourhood merely, without immediately reporting at home, is of little use as a letter-carrier.

The Homing Pigeon used to be called the Carrier because it carried messages,

but here I found that name restricted to the show bird, the creature with absurdly developed wattles; the one that carries the messages is now called the Homer, or Homing Pigeon—the bird that always comes home. These Pigeons are not of any special colour, nor have they any of the fancy adornments of the kind that figure in Bird shows. They are not bred for style, but for speed and for their mental gifts. They must be true to their home, able to return to it without fail. The sense of direction is now believed to be located in the bony labyrinth of the ear. There is no creature with finer sense of locality and direction than a good Homer, and the only visible proofs of it are the great bulge on each side of the head over the ears, and the superb wings that complete his equipment to obey the noble impulse of home-love. Now the mental and physical equipments of the last lot of young birds were to be put to test.

Although there were plenty of witnesses,

I thought it best to close all but one of the pigeon-doors and stand ready to shut that behind the first arrival.

I shall never forget the sensations of that day. I had been warned: "They start at 12; they should be here at 12.30; but look out, they come like a whirlwind. You hardly see them till they're in."

We were ranged along the inside of the loft, each with an eye to a crack or a partly closed pigeon-door, anxiously scanning the south-western horizon, when one shouted: "Look out—here they come!" Like a white cloud they burst into view, low skimming over the city roofs, around a great chimney pile, and in two seconds after first being seen they were back. The flash of white, the rush of pinions, were all so sudden, so short, that, though preparing, I was unprepared. I was at the only open door. A whistling arrow of blue shot in, lashed my face with its pinions, and passed. I had hardly time to drop

the little door, as a yell burst from the men, "Arnaux! Arnaux! I told you he would. Oh, he's a darling; only three months old and a winner—he's a little darling!" and Arnaux's owner danced, more for joy in his bird than in the purse he had won.

The men sat or kneeled and watched him in positive reverence as he gulped a quantity of water, then turned to the food-trough.

"Look at that eye, those wings, and did you ever see such a breast? Oh, but he's the real grit!" so his owner prattled to the silent ones whose birds had been defeated.

That was the first of Arnaux's exploits. Best of fifty birds from a good loft, his future was bright with promise.

He was invested with the silver anklet of the Sacred Order of the High Homer. It bore his number, 2590 C, a number which to-day means much to all men in the world of the Homing Pigeon.

In that trial flight from Elizabeth only forty birds had returned. It is usually so. Some were weak and got left behind, some were foolish and strayed. By this simple process of flight selection the pigeon-owners keep improving their stock. Of the ten, five were seen no more, but five returned later that day, not all at once, but straggling in; the last of the loiterers was a big, lubberly Blue Pigeon. The man in the loft at the time called: "Here comes that old sap-headed Blue that Jakey was betting on. I didn't suppose he would come back, and I didn't care, neither, for it's my belief he has a streak of Pouter."

The Big Blue, also called "Corner-box" from the nest where he was hatched, had shown remarkable vigour from the first. Though all were about the same age, he had grown faster, was bigger, and incidentally handsomer, though the fanciers cared little for that. He seemed fully aware of his importance, and early showed a

disposition to bully his smaller cousins. His owner prophesied great things of him, but Billy, the stable-man, had grave doubts over the length of his neck, the bigness of his crop, his carriage, and his over-size. "A bird can't make time pushing a bag of wind ahead of him. Them long legs is dead weight, an' a neck like that ain't got no gimp in it," Billy would grunt disparagingly as he cleaned out the loft of a morning.

II

The training of the birds went on after this at regular times. The distance from home, of the start, was "jumped" twenty-five or thirty miles farther each day, and its direction changed till the Homers knew the country for one hundred and fifty miles around New York. The original fifty birds dwindled to twenty, for the

rigid process weeds out not only the weak and ill-equipped, but those also who may have temporary ailments or accidents, or who may make the mistake of over-eating at the start. There were many fine birds in that flight, broad-breasted, bright-eyed, long-winged creatures, formed for swiftest flight, for high unconscious emprise, for these were destined to be messengers in the service of man in times of serious need. Their colours were mostly white, blue, or brown. They wore no uniform, but each and all of the chosen remnant had the brilliant eye and the bulging ears of the finest Homer blood; and, best and choicest of all, nearly always first among them was little Arnaux. He had not much to distinguish him when at rest, for now all of the band had the silver anklet, but in the air it was that Arnaux showed his make, and when the opening of the hamper gave the order "Start," it was Arnaux that first got under way, soared

to the height deemed needful to exclude all local influence, divined the road to home, and took it, pausing not for food, drink, or company.

Notwithstanding Billy's evil forecasts, the Big Blue of the Corner-box was one of the chosen twenty. Often he was late in returning; he never was first, and sometimes when he came back hours behind the rest, it was plain that he was neither hungry nor thirsty, sure signs that he was a loiterer by the way. Still he had come back; and now he wore on his ankle, like the rest, the sacred badge and a number from the roll of possible fame. Billy despised him, set him in poor contrast with Arnaux, but his owner would reply: "Give him a chance; 'soon ripe, soon rotten,' an' I always notice the best bird is the slowest to show up at first."

Before a year little Arnaux had made a record. The hardest of all work is over the sea, for there is no chance of aid from

landmarks; and the hardest of all times at sea is in fog, for then even the sun is blotted out and there is nothing whatever for guidance. With memory, sight, and hearing unavailable, the Homer has one thing left, and herein is his great strength, the inborn sense of direction. There is only one thing that can destroy this, and that is *fear*, hence the necessity of a stout little heart between those noble wings.

Arnaux, with two of his order, in course of training, had been shipped on an ocean steamer bound for Europe. They were to be released out of sight of land, but a heavy fog set in and forbade the start. The steamer took them onward, the intention being to send them back with the next vessel. When ten hours out the engine broke down, the fog settled dense over the sea, and the vessel was adrift and helpless as a log. She could only whistle for assistance, and so far as results

were concerned, the captain might as well have wigwagged. Then the Pigeons were thought of. Starback, 2592 C, was first selected. A message for help was written on waterproof paper, rolled up, and lashed to his tail-feathers on the under side. He was thrown into the air and disappeared. Half an hour later, a second, the Big Blue Corner-box, 2600 C, was freighted with a letter. He flew up, but almost immediately returned and alighted on the rigging. He was a picture of pigeon fear; nothing could induce him to leave the ship. He was so terrorized that he was easily caught and ignominiously thrust back into the coop.

Now the third was brought out, a small, chunky bird. The shipmen did not know him, but they noted down from his anklet his name and number, Arnaux, 2590 C. It meant nothing to them. But the officer who held him noted that his heart did not beat so wildly as that of the last bird. The

message was taken from the Big Blue. It ran:

10 A.M., Tuesday.

We broke our shaft two hundred and ten miles out from New York; we are drifting helplessly in the fog. Send out a tug as soon as possible. We are whistling one long, followed at once by one short, every sixty seconds.

(Signed) THE CAPTAIN.

This was rolled up, wrapped in waterproof film, addressed to the Steamship Company, and lashed to the under side of Arnaux's middle tail-feather.

When thrown into the air, he circled round the ship, then round again higher, then again higher in a wider circle, and he was lost to view; and still higher till quite out of sight and feeling of the ship. Shut out from the use of all his senses now but one, he gave himself up to that. Strong in him it was, and untrammelled of that murderous despot *Fear*. True as a needle to the Pole went Arnaux now, no hesitation, no doubts; within one

minute of leaving the coop he was speeding straight as a ray of light for the loft where he was born, the only place on earth where he could be made content.

That afternoon Billy was on duty when the whistle of fast wings was heard; a blue Flyer flashed into the loft and made for the water-trough. He was gulping down mouthful after mouthful, when Billy gasped: "Why, Arnaux, it's you, you beauty." Then, with the quick habit of the pigeon-man, he pulled out his watch and marked the time, 2.40 P.M. A glance showed the tie string on the tail. He shut the door and dropped the catching-net quickly over Arnaux's head. A moment later he had the roll in his hand; in two minutes he was speeding to the office of the Company, for there was a fat tip in view. There he learned that Arnaux had made the two hundred and ten miles in fog, over sea, in four hours and forty minutes, and within one hour the needful

help had set out for the unfortunate steamer.

Two hundred and ten miles in fog over sea in four hours and forty minutes! This was a noble record. It was duly inscribed in the rolls of the Homing Club. Arnaux was held while the secretary, with rubber stamp and indelible ink, printed on a snowy primary of his right wing the record of the feat, with the date and reference number.

Starback, the second bird, never was heard of again. No doubt he perished at sea.

Blue Corner-box came back on the tug.

III

That was Arnaux's first public record; but others came fast, and several curious scenes were enacted in that old pigeon-loft with Arnaux as the central figure.

One day a carriage drove up to the stable; a white-haired gentleman got out, climbed the dusty stairs, and sat all morning in the loft with Billy. Peering from his gold-rimmed glasses, first at a lot of papers, next across the roofs of the city, waiting, watching, for what? News from a little place not forty miles away—news of greatest weight to him, tidings that would make or break him, tidings that must reach him before it could be telegraphed: a telegram meant at least an hour's delay at each end. What was faster than that for forty miles? In those days there was but one thing—a high-class Homer. Money would count for nothing if he could win. The best, the very best at any price he must have, and Arnaux, with seven indelible records on his pinions, was the chosen messenger. An hour went by, another, and a third was begun, when with whistle of wings, the blue meteor flashed into the loft. Billy slammed the door and caught

him. Deftly he snipped the threads and handed the roll to the banker. The old man turned deathly pale, fumbled it open, then his colour came back. "Thank God!" he gasped, and then went speeding to his Board meeting, master of the situation. Little Arnaux had saved him.

The banker wanted to buy the Homer, feeling in a vague way that he ought to honour and cherish him; but Billy was very clear about it. "What's the good? You can't buy a Homer's heart. You could keep him a prisoner, that's all; but nothing on earth could make him forsake the old loft where he was hatched." So Arnaux stayed at 211 West Nineteenth Street. But the banker did not forget.

There is in our country a class of miscreants who think a flying Pigeon is fair game, because it is probably far from home, or they shoot him because it is hard to fix the crime. Many a noble Homer, speeding with a life or death message, has

been shot down by one of these wretches and remorselessly made into a pot-pie.

Arnaux's brother Arnolf, with three fine records on his wings, was thus murdered in the act of bearing a hasty summons for the doctor. As he fell dying at the gunner's feet, his superb wings spread out displayed his list of victories. The silver badge on his leg was there, and the gunner was smitten with remorse. He had the message sent on; he returned the dead bird to the Homing Club, saying that he "found it." The owner came to see him; the gunner broke down under cross-examination, and was forced to admit that he himself had shot the Homer, but did so in behalf of a poor sick neighbour who craved a pigeon-pie.

There were tears in the wrath of the pigeon-man. "My bird, my beautiful Arnolf, twenty times has he brought vital messages, three times has he made records, twice has he saved human lives, and you'd

shoot him for a pot-pie. I could punish you under the law, but I have no heart for such a poor revenge. I only ask you this, if ever again you have a sick neighbour who wants a pigeon-pie, come, we'll freely supply him with pie-breed squabs; but if you have a trace of manhood about you, you will never, never again shoot, or allow others to shoot, our noble and priceless messengers."

This took place while the banker was in touch with the loft, while his heart was warm for the Pigeons. He was a man of influence, and the Pigeon Protective legislation at Albany was the immediate fruit of Arnaux's exploit.

IV

Billy had never liked the Corner-box Blue (2600 C); notwithstanding the fact that he still continued in the ranks of the

Silver Badge, Billy believed he was poor stuff. The steamer incident seemed to prove him a coward; he certainly was a bully.

One morning when Billy went in there was a row, two Pigeons, a large and a small, alternately clinching and sparring all over the floor, feathers flying, dust and commotion everywhere. As soon as they were separated Billy found that the little one was Arnaux and the big one was the Corner-box Blue. Arnaux had made a good fight, but was overmatched, for the Big Blue was half as heavy again.

Soon it was very clear what they had fought over—a pretty little lady Pigeon of the bluest Homing blood. The Big Blue cock had kept up a state of bad feeling by his bullying, but it was the Little Lady that had made them close in mortal combat. Billy had no authority to wring the Big Blue's neck, but he interfered as far as he could in behalf of his favourite Arnaux.

Pigeon marriages are arranged somewhat like those of mankind. Propinquity is the first thing: force the pair together for a time and let nature take its course. So Billy locked Arnaux and the Little Lady up together in a separate apartment for two weeks, and to make doubly sure he locked Big Blue up with an Available Lady in another apartment for two weeks.

Things turned out just as was expected. The Little Lady surrendered to Arnaux and the Available Lady to the Big Blue. Two nests were begun and everything shaped for a "lived happily ever after." But the Big Blue was very big and handsome. He could blow out his crop and strut in the sun and make rainbows all round his neck in a way that might turn the heart of the staidest Homerine.

Arnaux, though sturdily built, was small and except for his brilliant eyes, not especially good-looking. Moreover, he was often away on important business,

and the Big Blue had nothing to do but stay around the loft and display his unlettered wings.

It is the custom of moralists to point to the lower animals, and especially to the Pigeon, for examples of love and constancy, and properly so, but, alas! there are exceptions. Vice is not by any means limited to the human race.

Arnaux's wife had been deeply impressed with the Big Blue, at the outset, and at length while her spouse was absent the dreadful thing took place.

Arnaux returned from Boston one day to find that the Big Blue, while he retained his own Available Lady in the corner-box, had also annexed the box and wife that belonged to himself, and a desperate battle followed. The only spectators were the two wives, but they maintained an indifferent aloofness. Arnaux fought with his famous wings, but they were none the better weapons because they now bore twenty records. His

beak and feet were small, as became his blood, and his stout little heart could not make up for his lack of weight. The battle went against him. His wife sat unconcernedly in the nest, as though it were not her affair, and Arnaux might have been killed but for the timely arrival of Billy. He was angry enough to wring the Blue bird's neck, but the bully escaped from the loft in time. Billy took tender care of Arnaux for a few days. At the end of a week he was well again, and in ten days he was once more on the road. Meanwhile he had evidently forgiven his faithless wife, for, without any apparent feeling, he took up his nesting as before. That month he made two new records. He brought a message ten miles in eight minutes, and he came from Boston in four hours. Every moment of the way he had been impelled by the master-passion of home-love. But it was a poor home-coming if his wife figured at all in his thoughts, for he found her

again flirting with the Big Blue cock. Tired as he was, the duel was renewed, and again would have been to a finish but for Billy's interference. He separated the fighters, then shut the Blue cock up in a coop, determined to get rid of him in some way. Meanwhile the "Any Age Sweepstakes" handicap from Chicago to New York was on, a race of nine hundred miles. Arnaux had been entered six months before. His forfeit-money was up, and notwithstanding his domestic complications, his friends felt that he must not fail to appear.

The birds were sent by train to Chicago, to be liberated at intervals there according to their handicap, and last of the start was Arnaux. They lost no time, and outside of Chicago several of these prime Flyers joined by common impulse into a racing flock that went through air on the same invisible track. A Homer may make a straight line when following his general sense of direction, but when following a

familiar back track he sticks to the well-remembered landmarks. Most of the birds had been trained by way of Columbus and Buffalo. Arnaux knew the Columbus route, but also he knew that by Detroit, and after leaving Lake Michigan, he took the straight line for Detroit. Thus he caught up on his handicap and had the advantage of many miles. Detroit, Buffalo, Rochester, with their familiar towers and chimneys, faded behind him, and Syracuse was near at hand. It was now late afternoon; six hundred miles in twelve hours he had flown and was undoubtedly leading the race; but the usual thirst of the Flyer had attacked him. Skimming over the city roofs, he saw a loft of Pigeons, and descending from his high course in two or three great circles, he followed the ingoing Birds to the loft and drank greedily at the water-trough, as he had often done before, and as every pigeon-lover hospitably expects the messengers to do. The owner of the

loft was there and noted the strange Bird. He stepped quietly to where he could inspect him. One of his own Pigeons made momentary opposition to the stranger, and Arnaux, sparring sidewise with an open wing in Pigeon style, displayed the long array of printed records. The man was a fancier. His interest was aroused; he pulled the string that shut the flying door, and in a few minutes Arnaux was his prisoner.

The robber spread the much-inscribed wings, read record after record, and glancing at the silver badge—it should have been gold—he read his name—Arnaux; then exclaimed: "Arnaux! Arnaux! Oh, I've heard of you, you little beauty, and it's glad I am to trap you." He snipped the message from his tail, unrolled it, and read: "Arnaux left Chicago this morning at 4 A.M., scratched in the Any Age Sweepstakes for New York."

"Six hundred miles in twelve hours! By the powers, that's a record-breaker." And

the pigeon-stealer gently, almost reverently, put the fluttering Bird safely into a padded cage. "Well," he added, "I know it's no use trying to make you stay, but I can breed from you and have some of your strain."

So Arnaux was shut up in a large and comfortable loft with several other prisoners. The man, though a thief, was a lover of Homers; he gave his captive everything that could insure his comfort and safety. For three months he left him in that loft. At first Arnaux did nothing all day but walk up and down the wire screen, looking high and low for means of escape; but in the fourth month he seemed to have abandoned the attempt, and the watchful jailer began the second part of his scheme. He introduced a coy young lady Pigeon. But it did not seem to answer; Arnaux was not even civil to her. After a time the jailer removed the female, and Arnaux was left in solitary confinement for a month.

Now a different female was brought in, but with no better luck; and thus it went on—for a year different charmers were introduced. Arnaux either violently repelled them or was scornfully indifferent, and at times the old longing to get away, came back with twofold power, so that he darted up and down the wire front or dashed with all his force against it.

When the storied feathers of his wings began their annual moult, his jailer saved them as precious things, and as each new feather came he reproduced on it the record of its owner's fame.

Two years went slowly by, and the jailer had put Arnaux in a new loft and brought in another lady Pigeon. By chance she closely resembled the faithless one at home. Arnaux actually heeded the newcomer. Once the jailer thought he saw his famous prisoner paying some slight attention to the charmer, and, yes, he surely saw her preparing a nest. Then assuming that they

had reached a full understanding, the jailer, for the first time, opened the outlet, and Arnaux was free. Did he hang around in doubt? Did he hesitate? No, not for one moment. As soon as the drop of the door left open the way, he shot through, he spread those wonderful blazoned wings, and, with no second thought for the latest Circe, sprang from the hated prison loft—away and away.

V

We have no means of looking into the Pigeon's mind; we may go wrong in conjuring up for it deep thoughts of love and welcome home; but we are safe in this, we cannot too strongly paint, we cannot too highly praise and glorify that wonderful God-implanted, mankind-fostered home-love that glows unquenchably in this noble bird. Call it what you like, a mere instinct

deliberately constructed by man for his selfish ends, explain it away if you will, dissect it, misname it, and it still is there, in overwhelming, imperishable master-power, as long as the brave little heart and wings can beat.

Home, home, sweet home! Never had mankind a stronger love of home than Arnaux. The trials and sorrows of the old pigeon-loft were forgotten in that all-dominating force of his nature. Not years of prison bars, not later loves, nor fear of death, could down its power; and Arnaux, had the gift of song been his, must surely have sung as sings a hero in his highest joy, when sprang he from the 'lighting board, up-circling free, soaring, drawn by the only impulse that those glorious wings would honour,—up, up, in widening, heightening circles of ashy blue in the blue, flashing those many-lettered wings of white, till they seemed like jets of fire—up and on, driven by that home-love, faithful to his

only home and to his faithless mate; closing his eyes, they say; closing his ears, they tell; shutting his mind,—we all believe,—to nearer things, to two years of his life, to one half of his prime, but soaring in the blue, retiring, as a saint might do, into his inner self, giving himself up to that inmost guide. He was the captain of the ship, but the pilot, the chart and compass, all, were that deep-implanted instinct. One thousand feet above the trees the inscrutable whisper came, and Arnaux in arrowy swiftness now was pointing for the south-south-east. The little flashes of white fire on each side were lost in the low sky, and the reverent robber of Syracuse saw Arnaux nevermore.

The fast express was steaming down the valley. It was far ahead, but Arnaux overtook and passed it, as the flying wild Duck passes the swimming Muskrat. High in the valleys he went, low over the hills of Chenango, where the pines were combing the breezes.

Out from his oak-tree eyrie a Hawk came wheeling and sailing, silent, for he had marked the Flyer, and meant him for his prey. Arnaux turned neither right nor left, nor raised nor lowered his flight, nor lost a wing-beat. The Hawk was in waiting in the gap ahead, and Arnaux passed him, even as a Deer in his prime may pass by a Bear in his pathway. Home! home! was the only burning thought, the blinding impulse.

Beat, beat, beat, those flashing pinions went with speed unslacked on the now familiar road. In an hour the Catskills were at hand. In two hours he was passing over them. Old friendly places, swiftly coming now, lent more force to his wings. Home! home! was the silent song that his heart was singing. Like the traveller dying of thirst, that sees the palm-trees far ahead, his brilliant eyes took in the distant smoke of Manhattan.

Out from the crest of the Catskills there launched a Falcon. Swiftest of the race of

rapine, proud of his strength, proud of his wings, he rejoiced in a worthy prey. Many and many a Pigeon had been borne to his nest, and riding the wind he came, swooping, reserving his strength, awaiting the proper time. Oh, how well he knew the very moment! Down, down like a flashing javelin; no wild Duck, no Hawk could elude him, for this was a Falcon. Turn back now, O Homer, and save yourself; go round the dangerous hills. Did he turn? Not a whit! for this was Arnaux. Home! home! home! was his only thought. To meet the danger, he merely added to his speed; and the Peregrine stooped; stooped at what?—a flashing of colour, a twinkling of whiteness—and went back empty. While Arnaux cleft the air of the valley as a stone from a sling, to be lost—a white-winged bird—a spot with flashing halo—and, quickly, a speck in the offing. On down the dear valley of Hudson, the well-known highway; for two years he had not seen it!

Now he dropped low as the noon breeze came north and ruffled the river below him. Home! home! home! and the towers of a city are coming in view! Home! home! past the great spider-bridge of Poughkeepsie, skimming, skirting the river-banks. Low now by the bank as the wind arose. Low, alas! too low! What fiend was it tempted a gunner in June to lurk on that hill by the margin? what devil directed his gaze to the twinkling of white that came from the blue to the northward? Oh, Arnaux, Arnaux, skimming low, forget not the gunner of old! Too low, too low you are clearing that hill. Too low—*too late!* Flash—bang! and the death-hail has reached him; reached, maimed, but not downed him. Out of the flashing pinions broken feathers printed with records went fluttering earthward. The "naught" of his sea record was gone. Not two hundred and ten, but twenty-one miles it now read. Oh, shameful pillage!

A dark stain appeared on his bosom, but Arnaux kept on. Home, home, homeward bound. The danger was past in an instant. Home, homeward he steered straight as before, but the wonderful speed was diminished; not a mile a minute now; and the wind made undue sounds in his tattered pinions. The stain in his breast told of broken force; but on, straight on, he flew. Home, home was in sight, and the pain in his breast was forgotten. The tall towers of the city were in clear view of his far-seeing eye as he skimmed by the high, cliffs of Jersey. On, on—the pinion might flag, the eye might darken, but the home-love was stronger and stronger.

Under the tall Palisades, to be screened from the wind, he passed, over the sparkling water, over the trees, under the Peregrines' eyrie, under the pirates' castle where the great grim Peregrines sat; peering like black-masked highwaymen they marked the on-coming Pigeon. Arnaux knew them

of old. Many a message was lying undelivered in that nest, many a record-bearing plume had fluttered away from its fastness. But Arnaux had faced them before, and now he came as before—on, onward, swift, but not as he had been; the deadly gun had sapped his force, had lowered his speed. On, on; and the Peregrines, biding their time, went forth like two bow-bolts; strong and lightning-swift they went against one weak and wearied.

Why tell of the race that followed? Why paint the despair of a brave little heart in sight of the home he had craved in vain? In a minute all was over. The Peregrines screeched in their triumph. Screeching and sailing, they swung to their eyrie, and the prey in their claws was the body, the last of the bright little Arnaux. There on the rocks the beaks and claws of the bandits were red with the life of the hero. Torn asunder were those matchless wings, and their records were scattered unnoticed. In

sun and in storm they lay till the killers themselves were killed and their stronghold rifled. And none knew the fate of the peerless Bird till deep in the dust and rubbish of that pirate-nest the avenger found, among others of its kind, a silver ring, the sacred badge of the High Homer, and read upon it the pregnant inscription:

" ARNAUX, 2590 C."

THE BOY AND THE LYNX

I

THE BOY

He was barely fifteen, a lover of sport and uncommonly keen, even for a beginner. Flocks of Wild Pigeons had been coming all day across the blue Lake of Caygeonull, and perching in lines on the dead limbs of the great rampikes that stood as monuments of fire, around the little clearing in the forest, they afforded tempting marks; but he followed them for hours in vain. They seemed to know the exact range of the old-fashioned shotgun and rose on noisy wings each time before he was near enough to fire. At length a small flock scattered among the low green trees that grew about the spring, near the log shanty, and taking advantage of the cover, Thorburn went in gently. He caught sight of a single Pigeon close to

him, took a long aim and fired. A sharp crack resounded at almost the same time and the bird fell dead. Thorburn rushed to seize the prize just as a tall young man stepped into view and picked it up.

"Hello, Corney! you got my bird!"

"Your burrud! Sure yours flew away thayre. I saw them settle hayer and thought I'd make sure of wan with the rifle."

A careful examination showed that a rifle-ball as well as a charge of shot had struck the Pigeon. The gunners had fired on the same bird. Both enjoyed the joke, though it had its serious side, for food as well as ammunition was scarce in that back-woods home.

Corney, a superb specimen of a six-foot Irish-Canadian in early manhood, now led away to the log shanty where the very scarcity of luxuries and the roughness of their lives were sources of merriment. For the Colts, though born and bred in the

backwoods of Canada, had lost nothing of the spirit that makes the Irish blood a world-wide synonym of heartiness and wit.

Corney was the eldest son of a large family. The old folks lived at Petersay, twenty-five miles to the southward. He had taken up a " claim " to carve his own home out of the woods at Fenebonk, and his grown sisters, Margat, staid and reliable, and Loo, bright and witty, were keeping house for him. Thorburn Alder was visiting them. He had just recovered from a severe illness and had been sent to rough it in the woods in hope of winning some of the vigour of his hosts. Their home was of unhewn logs, unfloored, and roofed with sods, which bore a luxuriant crop of grass and weeds. The primitive woods around were broken in two places: one where the roughest of roads led southward to Petersay; the other where the sparkling lake rolled on a pebbly shore and gave a glimpse

of their nearest neighbour's house—four miles across the water.

Their daily round had little change. Corney was up at daybreak to light the fire, call his sisters, and feed the horses while they prepared breakfast. At six the meal was over and Corney went to his work. At noon, which Margat knew by the shadow of a certain rampike falling on the spring, a clear notification to draw fresh water for the table, Loo would hang a white rag on a pole, and Corney, seeing the signal, would return from summer fallow or hay-field, grimy, swarthy, and ruddy, a picture of manly vigour and honest toil. Thor might be away all day, but at night, when they again assembled at the table, he would come from lake or distant ridge and eat a supper like the dinner and breakfast, for meals as well as days were exact repeats: pork, bread, potatoes, and tea, with occasionally eggs supplied by a dozen hens around the little log stable, with, rarely,

a variation of wild meat, for Thor was not a hunter and Corney had little time for anything but the farm.

II

THE LYNX

A HUGE four-foot basswood had gone the way of all trees. Death had been generous —had sent the three warnings: it was the biggest of its kind, its children were grown up, it was hollow. The wintry blast that sent it down had broken it across and revealed a great hole where should have been its heart. A long wooden cavern in the middle of a sunny opening, it now lay, and presented an ideal home for a Lynx when she sought a sheltered nesting-place for her coming brood.

Old was she and gaunt, for this was a year of hard times for the Lynxes. A Rabbit

plague the autumn before had swept away their main support; a winter of deep snow and sudden crusts had killed off nearly all the Partridges; a long wet spring had destroyed the few growing coveys and had kept the ponds and streams so full that Fish and Frogs were safe from their armed paws, and this mother Lynx fared no better than her kind.

The little ones—half starved before they came—were a double drain, for they took the time she might have spent in hunting.

The Northern Hare is the favourite food of the Lynx and in some years she could have killed fifty in one day, but never one did she see this season. The plague had done its work too well.

One day she caught a Red-squirrel which had run into a hollow log that proved a trap. Another day a fetid Blacksnake was her only food. A day was missed, and the little ones whined piteously for their natural food and failing drink. One day she saw

a large black animal of unpleasant but familiar smell. Swiftly and silently she sprang to make attack. She struck it once on the nose, but the Porcupine doubled his head under, his tail flew up, and the mother Lynx was speared in a dozen places with the little stinging javelins. She drew them all with her teeth, for she had "learned Porcupine" years before, and only the hard push of want would have made her strike one now.

A Frog was all she caught that day. On the next, as she ranged the farthest woods in a long, hard hunt, she heard a singular calling voice. It was new to her. She approached it cautiously, up wind, got many new odours and some more strange sounds in coming. The loud, clear, rolling call was repeated as the mother Lynx came to an opening in the forest. In the middle of it were two enormous muskrat or beaver-houses, far bigger than the biggest she ever before had seen. They were made partly

of logs and situated, not in a pond, but on a dry knoll. Walking about them were a number of Partridges, that is, birds like Partridges, only larger and of various colours, red, yellow, and white.

She quivered with the excitement that in a man would have been called buck-fever. Food—food—abundance of food, and the old huntress sank to earth. Her breast was on the ground, her elbows above her back, as she made stalk, her shrewdest, subtlest stalk; one of those Partridges she must have at any price; no trick now must go untried, no error in this hunt; if it took hours—all day—she must approach with certainty to win before the quarry took to flight.

Only a few bounds it was from wood shelter to the great rat-house, but she was an hour in crawling that small space. From stump to brush, from log to bunch of grass she sneaked, a flattened form, and the Partridges saw her not. They fed

about, the biggest uttering the ringing call that first had fallen on her ear. Once they seemed to sense their peril, but a long await dispelled the fear. Now they were almost in reach, and she trembled with all the eagerness of the hunting heart and the hungry maw. Her eye centred on a white one not quite the nearest, but the colour seemed to hold her gaze.

There was an open space around the rat-house; outside that were tall weeds, and stumps were scattered everywhere. The white bird wandered behind these weeds, the red one of the loud voice flew to the top of the rat-mound and sang as before. The mother Lynx sank lower yet. It seemed an alarm note; but no, the white one still was there; she could see its feathers gleaming through the weeds. An open space now lay about. The huntress, flattened like an empty skin, trailed slow and silent on the ground behind a log no thicker than her neck; if she could reach that tuft of brush

she could get unseen to the weeds and then would be near enough to spring. She could smell them now—the rich and potent smell of life, of flesh and blood, that set her limbs a-tingle and her eyes a-glow.

The Partridges still scratched and fed; another flew to the high top, but the white one remained. Five more slow-gliding, silent steps, and the Lynx was behind the weeds, the white bird shining through; she gauged the distance, tried the footing, swung her hind legs to clear some fallen brush, then *leaped* direct with all her force, and the white one never knew the death it died, for the fateful gray shadow dropped, the swift and deadly did their work, and before the other birds could realize the foe or fly, the Lynx was gone, with the white bird squirming in her jaws.

Uttering an unnecessary growl of inborn ferocity and joy she bounded into the forest, and bee-like sped for home. The last quiver had gone from the warm body

of the victim when she heard the sound of heavy feet ahead. She leaped on a log. The wings of her prey were muffling her eyes, so she laid the bird down and held it safely with one paw. The sound drew nearer, the bushes bent, and a Boy stepped into view. The old Lynx knew and hated his kind. She had watched them at night, had followed them, had been hunted and hurt by them. For a moment they stood face to face. The huntress growled a warning that was also a challenge and a defiance, picked up the bird and bounded from the log into the sheltering bushes. It was a mile or two to the den, but she stayed not to eat till the sunlit opening and the big basswood came to view; then a low "prr—prr" called forth the little ones to revel with their mother in a plenteous meal of the choicest food.

III

THE HOME OF THE LYNX

At first Thor, being town-bred, was timid about venturing into the woods beyond the sound of Corney's axe; but day by day he went farther, guiding himself, not by unreliable moss on trees, but by sun, compass, and landscape features. His purpose was to learn about the wild animals rather than to kill them; but the naturalist is close kin to the sportsman, and the gun was his constant companion. In the clearing, the only animal of any size was a fat Woodchuck; it had a hole under a stump some hundred yards from the shanty. On sunny mornings it used to lie basking on the stump, but eternal vigilance is the price of every good thing in the woods. The Woodchuck was always alert and Thor tried in vain to shoot or even to trap him.

"Hyar," said Corney one morning,

" time we had some fresh meat." He took down his rifle, an old-fashioned brass-mounted small-bore, and loading with care that showed the true rifleman, he steadied the weapon against the door-jamb and fired. The Woodchuck fell backward and lay still. Thor raced to the place and returned in triumph with the animal, shouting: " Plumb through the head—one hundred and twenty yards."

Corney controlled the gratified smile that wrestled with the corners of his mouth, but his bright eyes shone a trifle brighter for the moment.

It was no mere killing for killing's sake, for the Woodchuck was spreading a belt of destruction in the crop around his den. Its flesh supplied the family with more than one good meal and Corney showed Thor how to use the skin. First the pelt was wrapped in hardwood ashes for twenty-four hours. This brought the hair off. Then the skin was soaked for three days in soft

soap and worked by hand, as it dried, till it came out a white strong leather.

Thor's wanderings extended farther in search of the things which always came as surprises however much he was looking for them. Many days were blanks and others would be crowded with incidents, for unexpectedness is above all the peculiar feature of hunting, and its lasting charm. One day he had gone far beyond the ridge in a new direction and passed through an open glade where lay the broken trunk of a huge basswood. The size impressed it on his memory. He swung past the glade to make for the lake, a mile to the west, and twenty minutes later he started back as his eye rested on a huge black animal in the crotch of a hemlock, some thirty feet from the ground. A Bear! At last, this was the test of nerve he had half expected all summer; had been wondering how that mystery "himself" would act under this very trial. He stood still; his right hand

dived into his pocket and, bringing out three or four buckshot, which he carried for emergency, he dropped them on top of the birdshot already in the gun, then rammed a wad to hold them down.

The Bear had not moved and the boy could not see its head, but now he studied it carefully. It was not such a large one—no, it was a small one, yes, very small—a cub. A cub! That meant a mother Bear at hand, and Thor looked about with some fear, but seeing no signs of any except the little one, he levelled the gun and fired.

Then to his surprise down crashed the animal quite dead; it was not a Bear, but a large Porcupine. As it lay there he examined it with wonder and regret, for he had no wish to kill such a harmless creature. On its grotesque face he found two or three long scratches which proved that he had not been its only enemy. As he turned away he noticed some blood on his trousers, then saw that his left hand was bleeding.

He had wounded himself quite severely on the quills of the animal without knowing it. He was sorry to leave the specimen there, and Loo, when she learned of it, said it was a shame not to skin it when she "needed a fur-lined cape for the winter."

On another day Thor had gone without a gun, as he meant only to gather some curious plants he had seen. They were close to the clearing; he knew the place by a fallen elm. As he came to it he heard a peculiar sound. Then on the log his eye caught two moving things. He lifted a bough and got a clear view. They were the head and tail of an enormous Lynx. It had seen him and was glaring and grumbling; and under its foot on the log was a white bird that a second glance showed to be one of their own precious hens. How fierce and cruel the brute looked! How Thor hated it! and fairly gnashed his teeth with disgust that now, when his greatest chance was come, he for

once was without his gun. He was in not a little fear, too, and stood wondering what to do. The Lynx growled louder; its stumpy tail twitched viciously for a minute, then it picked up its victim, and leaping from the log was lost to view.

As it was a very rainy summer, the ground was soft everywhere, and the young hunter was led to follow tracks that would have defied an expert in dryer times. One day he came on pig-like footprints in the woods. He followed them with little difficulty, for they were new, and a heavy rain two hours before had washed out all other trails. After about half a mile they led him to an open ravine, and as he reached its brow he saw across it a flash of white; then his keen young eyes made out the forms of a Deer and a spotted Fawn gazing at him curiously. Though on their trail he was not a little startled. He gazed at them open-mouthed. The mother turned and raised the danger flag, her white tail,

and bounded lightly away, to be followed by the youngster, clearing low trunks with an effortless leap, or bending down with cat-like suppleness when they came to a log upraised so that they might pass below.

He never again got a chance to shoot at them, though more than once he saw the same two tracks, or believed they were the same, as for some cause never yet explained, Deer were scarcer in that unbroken forest than they were in later years when clearings spread around.

He never again saw *them;* but he saw the mother once—he thought it was the same—she was searching the woods with her nose, trying the ground for trails; she was nervous and anxious, evidently seeking. Thor remembered a trick that Corney had told him. He gently stooped, took up a broad blade of grass, laid it between the edges of his thumbs, then blowing through this simple squeaker he made a short, shrill bleat, a fair imitation of a Fawn's cry for

the mother, and the Deer, though a long way off, came bounding toward him. He snatched his gun, meaning to kill her, but the movement caught her eye. She stopped. Her mane bristled a little; she sniffed and looked inquiringly at him. Her big soft eyes touched his heart, held back his hand; she took a cautious step nearer, got a full whiff of her mortal enemy, bounded behind a big tree and away before his merciful impulse was gone. "Poor thing," said Thor, "I believe she has lost her little one."

Yet once more the Boy met a Lynx in the woods. Half an hour after seeing the lonely Deer he crossed the long ridge that lay some miles north of the shanty. He had passed the glade where the great basswood lay when a creature like a big bob-tailed Kitten appeared and looked innocently at him. His gun went up, as usual, but the Kitten merely cocked its head on one side and fearlessly surveyed him. Then a second one that he had not noticed before

began to play with the first, pawing at its tail and inviting its brother to tussle.

Thor's first thought to shoot was stayed as he watched their gambols, but the remembrance of his feud with their race came back. He had almost raised the gun when a fierce rumble close at hand gave him a start, and there, not ten feet from him, stood the old one, looking big and fierce as a Tigress. It was surely folly to shoot at the young ones now. The boy nervously dropped some buckshot on the charge while the snarling growl rose and fell, but before he was ready to shoot at her the old one had picked up something that was by her feet; the boy got a glimpse of rich brown with white spots—the limp form of a newly killed Fawn. Then she passed out of sight. The Kittens followed, and he saw her no more until the time when, life against life, they were weighed in the balance together.

IV

THE TERROR OF THE WOODS

SIX weeks had passed in daily routine when one day the young giant seemed unusually quiet as he went about. His handsome face was very sober and he sang not at all that morning.

He and Thor slept on a hay-bunk in one corner of the main room, and that night the Boy awakened more than once to hear his companion groaning and tossing in his sleep.

Corney arose as usual in the morning and fed the horses, but lay down again while the sisters got breakfast. He roused himself by an effort and went back to work, but came home early. He was trembling from head to foot. It was hot summer weather, but he could not be kept warm. After several hours a reaction set in and Corney was in a high fever. The family knew well

now that he had the dreaded chills and fever of the backwoods. Margat went out and gathered a lapful of pipsissewa to make tea, of which Corney was encouraged to drink copiously.

But in spite of all their herbs and nursing the young man got worse. At the end of ten days he was greatly reduced in flesh and incapable of work, so on one of the "well days" that are usual in the course of the disease he said:

"Say, gurruls, I can't stand it no longer. Guess I better go home. I'm well enough to drive to-day, for a while anyway; if I'm took down I'll lay in the wagon, and the horses will fetch me home. Mother'll have me all right in a week or so. If you run out of grub before I come back take the canoe to Ellerton's."

So the girls harnessed the horses; the wagon was partly filled with hay, and Corney, weak and white-faced, drove away on the long rough road, and left them feeling much as though they were on a desert island

and their only boat had been taken from them.

Half a week had scarcely gone before all three of them, Margat, Loo, and Thor, were taken down with a yet more virulent form of chills and fever.

Corney had had every other a "well day," but with these three there were no "well days" and the house became an abode of misery.

Seven days passed, and now Margat could not leave her bed and Loo was barely able to walk around the house. She was a brave girl with a fund of drollery which did much toward keeping up all their spirits, but her merriest jokes fell ghastly from her wan, pinched face. Thor, though weak and ill, was the strongest and did for the others, cooking and serving each day a simple meal, for they could eat very little, fortunately, perhaps, as there was very little, and Corney could not return for another week.

Soon Thor was the only one able to rise, and one morning when he dragged himself

to cut the little usual slice of their treasured bacon he found, to his horror, that the whole piece was gone. It had been stolen, doubtless by some wild animal, from the little box on the shady side of the house, where it was kept safe from flies. Now they were down to flour and tea. He was in despair, when his eye lighted on the Chickens about the stable; but what's the use? In his feeble state he might as well try to catch a Deer or a Hawk. Suddenly he remembered his gun and very soon was preparing a fat Hen for the pot. He boiled it whole as the easiest way to cook it, and the broth was the first really tempting food they had had for some time.

They kept alive for three wretched days on that Chicken, and when it was finished Thor again took down his gun—it seemed a much heavier gun now. He crawled to the barn, but he was so weak and shaky that he missed several times before he brought down a fowl. Corney had taken the rifle away with him and three charges

of gun ammunition were all that now remained.

Thor was surprised to see how few Hens there were now, only three or four. There used to be over a dozen. Three days later he made another raid. He saw but one Hen and he used up his last ammunition to get that.

His daily routine now was a monotony of horror. In the morning, which was his "well time," he prepared a little food for the household and got ready for the night of raging fever by putting a bucket of water on a block at the head of each bunk. About one o'clock, with fearful regularity, the chills would come on, with trembling from head to foot and chattering teeth, and cold, cold, within and without. Nothing seemed to give any warmth—fire seemed to have lost its power. There was nothing to do but to lie and shake and suffer all the slow torture of freezing to death and shaking to pieces. For six hours it would keep up, and to the torture, nausea lent its horrid

aid throughout; then about seven or eight o'clock in the evening a change would come; a burning fever set in; no ice could have seemed cool to him then; water—water—was all he craved, and drank and drank until three or four in the morning, when the fever would abate, and a sleep of total exhaustion followed.

"If you run out of food take the canoe to Ellerton's," was the brother's last word. Who was to take the canoe?

There was but half a Chicken now between them and starvation, and no sign of Corney.

For three interminable weeks the deadly programme dragged along. It went on the same yet worse, as the sufferers grew weaker —a few days more and the Boy also would be unable to leave his couch. Then what?

Despair was on the house and the silent cry of each was, "Oh, God! will Corney never come?"

V

THE HOME OF THE BOY

On the day of that last Chicken, Thor was all morning carrying water enough for the coming three fevers. The chill attacked him sooner than it was due and his fever was worse than ever before.

He drank deeply and often from the bucket at his head. He had filled it, and it was nearly emptied when about two in the morning the fever left him and he fell asleep.

In the gray dawn he was awakened by a curious sound not far away—a splashing of water. He turned his head to see two glaring eyes within a foot of his face—a great Beast lapping the water in the bucket by his bed.

Thor gazed in horror for a moment, then closed his eyes, sure that he was dreaming, certain that this was a nightmare of India with a Tiger by his couch; but the lapping

continued. He looked up; yes, it still was there. He tried to find his voice but uttered only a gurgle. The great furry head quivered, a sniff came from below the shining eyeballs, and the creature, whatever it was, dropped to its front feet and went across the hut under the table. Thor was fully awake now; he rose slowly on his elbow and feebly shouted "Sssh-hi," at which the shining eyes reappeared under the table and the gray form came forth. Calmly it walked across the ground and glided under the lowest log at a place where an old potato-pit left an opening and disappeared.

What was it? The sick boy hardly knew —some savage Beast of prey, undoubtedly. He was totally unnerved. He shook with fear and a sense of helplessness, and the night passed in fitful sleep and sudden starts awake to search the gloom again for those fearful eyes and the great gray gliding form. In the morning he did not know whether it were not all a delirium, yet he

made a feeble effort to close the old cellar hole with some firewood.

The three had little appetite, but even that they restrained since now they were down to part of a Chicken, and Corney, evidently he supposed they had been to Ellerton's and got all the food they needed.

Again that night, when the fever left him weak and dozing, Thor was awakened by a noise in the room, a sound of crunching bones. He looked around to see dimly outlined against the little window, the form of a large animal on the table. Thor shouted; he tried to hurl his boot at the intruder. It leaped lightly to the ground and passed out of the hole, again wide open.

It was no dream this time, he knew, and the women knew it, too; not only had they heard the creature, but the Chicken, the last of their food, was wholly gone.

Poor Thor barely left his couch that day. It needed all the querulous complaints of the sick women to drive him forth. Down by the spring he found a few berries and

divided them with the others. He made his usual preparations for the chills and the thirst, but he added this—by the side of his couch he put an old fish-spear—the only weapon he could find, now the gun was useless—a pine-root candle and some matches. He knew the Beast was coming back again —was coming hungry. It would find no food; what more natural, he thought, than take the living prey lying there so helpless? And a vision came of the limp brown form of the little Fawn, borne off in those same cruel jaws.

Once again he barricaded the hole with firewood, and the night passed as usual, but without any fierce visitor. Their food that day was flour and water, and to cook it Thor was forced to use some of his barricade. Loo attempted some feeble joke, guessed she was light enough to fly now and tried to rise, but she got no farther than the edge of the bunk. The same preparations were made, and the night wore on, but early in the morning, Thor was again

awakened rudely by the sound of lapping water by his bed, and there, as before, were the glowing eyeballs, the great head, the gray form relieved by the dim light from the dawning window.

Thor put all his strength into what was meant for a bold shout, but it was merely a feeble screech. He rose slowly and called out: "Loo, Margat! The Lynx—here's the Lynx again!"

"May God help ye, for we can't," was the answer.

"Sssh-hi!" Thor tried again to drive the Beast away. It leaped on to the table by the window and stood up growling under the useless gun. Thor thought it was going to leap through the glass as it faced the window a moment; but it turned and glared toward the Boy, for he could see both eyes shining. He rose slowly to the side of his bunk and he prayed for help, for he felt it was kill or be killed. He struck a match and lighted his pine-root candle, held that in his left hand and in his right took the

old fish-spear, meaning to fight, but he was so weak he had to use the fish-spear as a crutch. The great Beast stood on the table still, but was crouching a little as though for a spring. Its eyes glowed red in the torchlight. Its short tail was switching from side to side and its growling took a higher pitch. Thor's knees were smiting together, but he levelled the spear and made a feeble lunge toward the brute. It sprang at the same moment, not at him, as he first thought—the torch and the boy's bold front had had effect—it went over his head to drop on the ground beyond and at once to slink under the bunk.

This was only a temporary repulse. Thor set the torch on a ledge of the logs, then took the spear in both hands. He was fighting for his life, and he knew it. He heard the voices of the women feebly praying. He saw only the glowing eyes under the bed and heard the growling in higher pitch as the Beast was nearing action. He steadied himself by a great effort and

plunged the spear with all the force he could give it.

It struck something softer than the logs: a hideous snarl came forth. The boy threw all his weight on the weapon; the Beast was struggling to get at him; he felt its teeth and claws grating on the handle, and in spite of himself it was coming on; its powerful arms and claws were reaching for him now; he could not hold out long. He put on all his force, just a little more it was than before; the Beast lurched, there was a growling, a crack, and a sudden yielding; the rotten old spear-head had broken off, the Beast sprang out—at him—past him—never touched him, but across through the hole and away, to be seen no more.

Thor fell on the bed and lost all consciousness.

He lay there he knew not how long, but was awakened in broad daylight by a loud, cheery voice:

"Hello! Hello!—are ye all dead? Loo! Thor! Margat!"

He had no strength to answer, but there was a trampling of horses outside, a heavy step, the door was forced open, and in strode Corney, handsome and hearty as ever. But what a flash of horror and pain came over his face on entering the silent shanty!

"Dead?" he gasped. "Who's dead—where are you? Thor?" Then, "Who is it? Loo? Margat?"

"Corney—Corney," came feebly from the bunk. "They're in there. They're awful sick. We have nothing to eat."

"Oh, what a fool I be!" said Corney again and again. "I made sure ye'd go to Ellerton's and get all ye wanted."

"We had no chance, Corney; we were all three brought down at once, right after you left. Then the Lynx came and cleared up the Hens, and all in the house, too."

"Well, ye got even with her," and Corney

pointed to the trail of blood across the mud floor and out under the logs.

Good food, nursing, and medicine restored them all.

A month or two later, when the women wanted a new leaching-barrel, Thor said: "I know where there is a hollow basswood as big as a hogshead."

He and Corney went to the place, and when they cut off what they needed, they found in the far end of it the dried-up bodies of two little Lynxes with that of the mother, and in the side of the old one was the head of a fish-spear broken from the handle.

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