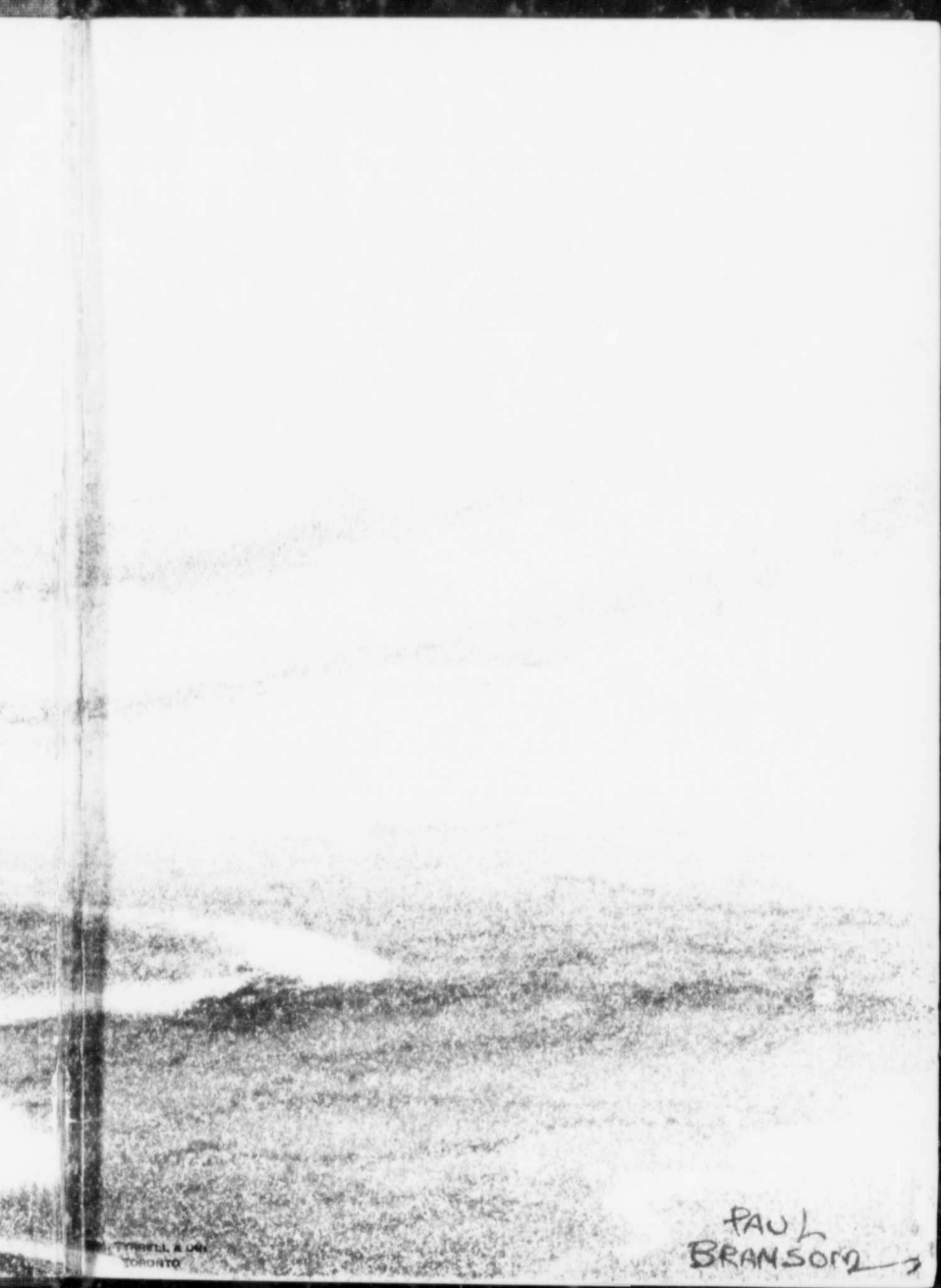
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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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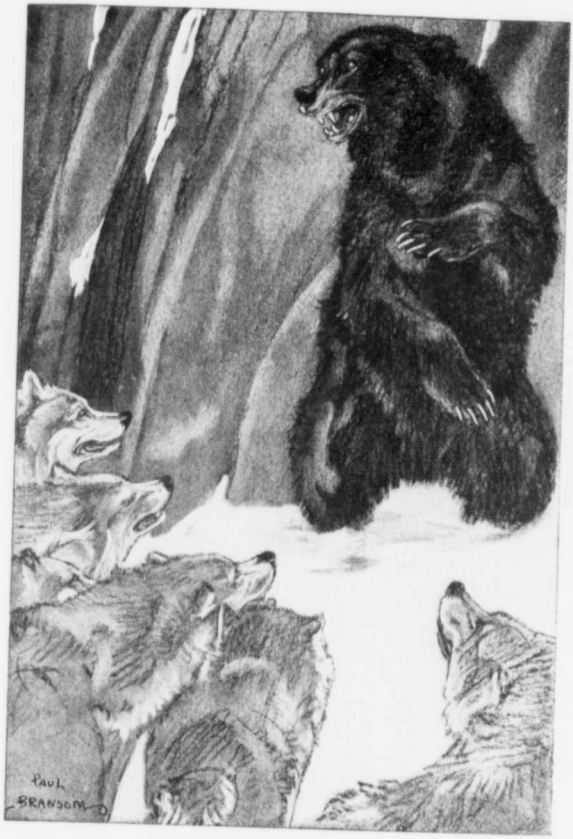
THE FEET OF THE FURTIVE



"Rose to a squatting posture of contained readiness . . . and faced his pursuers in silence." (Page 193.)

The Feet of the Furtive] [*Frontispiece*

THE FEET OF THE FURTIVE

By

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

Author of "More Kindred of the Wild," "The Backwoodsmen," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BRANSOM

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King of Beasts

THE water being almost as warm as milk to his naked body, and buoyant by reason of its heavy percentage of salt, Johns felt that he could keep himself afloat in it indefinitely. A swimmer strong and accomplished, he had nothing to do but keep swimming straight ahead, at his leisure, till either he should chance upon land or hunger and thirst should do for him. To be sure, there were other perils—for these tropic waters were the home of shark, sawfish and killer. But the unpleasant possibility of such an encounter he resolutely dismissed from his calculations, as one of those hazards of the game which he could not hope to affect by taking thought.

The insane fury of the hurricane having blown itself out some hours earlier, before the wallowing hulk which had carried him went down, Johns now found himself in a

comparative quiet. On the crests of the tremendous rollers there was still wind enough to whip off the foam, and to lash him disconcertingly; but in the vast, rocking valleys all was delicious peace. He manœuvred cleverly to keep himself in this peace, while he rested and recovered himself from that strangling struggle in the vortex where the hulk had gone down. From time to time he drove himself head and shoulders above water, glancing about eagerly under the starlight to see if there were any others of the ship's company left alive. But thinking how hardly he himself, with all his strength and watercraft, and his forethought in stripping naked for the final ordeal, had won back to the air out of that appalling vortex, he was not surprised to find himself alone.

At first all his life-energies were absorbed in the effort to recover from that literal and material descent into hell. There was no room in him for emotion—for anything but the purpose to live. Then, as he felt himself swimming strongly, and breathing once more with comfort in the smooth, deep hollows of the sea, and looking up clear-eyed

at the great stars hung low in the velvet sky, a horror of loneliness gripped him. He had touched solitude before, and gently shrunk from it. He had imagined it, magnified a thousandfold, and quailed at the vision. But now, for the first time, he knew it; and for a moment it was as if a gauntlet of ice had cupped itself stealthily under his heart.

It seemed to him that if he had had a plank or a spar, a bit of railing to lay his hand on, or if he had retained some tiniest rag of a garment, the solitude would have been less monstrous. But he was just one naked spark of human life amid the immeasurable, endless succession of the seas, under the still sky. The dead seemed less unfriended, swaying together blindly and silently in those unimaginable depths beneath him.

Most men, in his situation, would have thrown up their arms and gone down, cowed by the thought that they had the whole ocean for adversary. But to give up was not in the breed of this man Johns. It was not even, for the fraction of a second, a conscious impulse. He could not imagine himself giving up a battle, however hopeless,

as long as a single faculty was left him with which to give expression to his will. His doctrine was that the time for a man to give in is not till he's quite dead and knows it.

The question to which he now set his reviving faculties was the direction in which he should swim. The night was still young, the long-battered hulk having gone down about two hours after sunset. Coolly weighing all the probabilities—a vague enough business, seeing that for two days at least no one on the ship had had any sure notion as to their latitude or longitude—he made up his mind to swim due west. That course seemed to offer him the best hope of making land—a fair enough hope, indeed, whatever direction he might take in this sea of a myriad islands. The prime essential was to take one course and stick to it, lest he should wear out his energies by swimming in a circle. He had the stars to shape his course by; and being a roving journalist by profession, and his head stuffed with diversified, though not always exact, knowledge, he knew his stars well enough for the purpose. His great hope was to make land before full day—before the sun, blazing

down upon him from a sky of brass, should set his brains seething in his unsheltered skull, and drive him mad with thirst. He knew that any land he might hope to reach in these seas was bound to be a land of savage beasts or yet more savage men. But the problem of what he should do on reaching the said land was one that, with all his dogged optimism, did not seem to press for immediate solution. If ever he should be permitted to confront it, he would then give it his best attention.

With a leisurely, strength-conserving stroke Johns swam onward, on his side. As he neared the crest of each long wave, and felt the lash of wind and spindrift, he would put on a spurt, and dive through the topmost smother, in order to regain as soon as possible the comparative quiet of the lower slopes. But the wind, as if satisfied with its accomplishment, was now falling rapidly, and soon even the crests ceased to give him any trouble. The gale fell to a breeze, and then, very gradually, died down altogether, except for an occasional panting puff, like a deep breath drawn sobbingly after a paroxysm of excitement.

As Johns swam on, the dark, heaving surfaces about him fell smooth in oily patches, which broke into swirls of milky, phosphorescent flame, seeded with star-dust, around the surging of his stroke. This intense phosphorescence of the tropic waters was a long familiar sight to him, but now, as he swam, he took note of it more minutely than ever before, merely to occupy his mind. The tiny sparks of sharp, instantaneous light appearing and disappearing in the filmy, eddying glow seemed to him like eyes, derisive and vindictive, taking observation of his course and laughing to think how it would end. Well, he cared little for their mockery, but he would disappoint their malignant expectations. Throughout the interminable night he amused himself with this fancy, till at last the stars began to pale hurriedly, and then the precipitate tropic dawn flared up along the tumbling horizon.

It flared upon a low reef, scourged by breakers, some half-dozen miles away, with a fringe of palms beyond it, and a humped hill, purple-green, crouching a league or so inland.

The man gave a low laugh of exultation,

changed his course to the right, and swam straight for the reef. But he swam very slowly now, husbanding his strength for the final struggle with the breakers.

When, at last, he came within a few hundred yards of the thundering and shattering line of breakers, now hurling their cataracts clean across the reef, he saw that a landing at this point would be impossible, even for an expert surf-rider like himself. But he saw also that the land at this point seemed to be a sort of promontory, thrust out into the sea upon his right. He turned yet again to the right, therefore, and swam on patiently in a line parallel with the roaring surf. After another couple of hours—the sun by this time having turned to molten brass, and forcing him to keep his head continually drenched—he rounded the promontory, and came at length, as he had hoped, to a place where the surf, under the lee of the land, was less unmanageable. Selecting a massive roller, whose breaking point he thought he could calculate, he raced shoreward with its rush, keeping well behind its gathering crest, and dropping back, at the last, to avoid its shattering fall. In its

shuddering collapse his feet found bottom, and, hurling himself forward, he plunged into the lagoon before the next breaker could overtake him.

A mile away, across still waters, lay a white-gold beach, ablaze in the sun, with a shallow rivulet threading its way across it.

Instantly wary, Johns swam slowly toward shore, scanning every tree and mass of jungle for sign of dangerous life. Some parrakeets, chattering and screaming sociably together in the tree-tops near the brook, presently served to assure him that there were no human beings or marauding beasts astir in the immediate neighbourhood. He did not know what to expect in this unknown land—which he suspected to be some island—because he had no means of judging whether it was an outlying member of the New Guinea group or part of the Sumatran system. He knew that if it belonged to the New Guinea group it would have no wild animals more formidable than a pig, except, of course, for the snakes. If, on the other hand, this was an outpost of the Sumatran system, he knew he might expect to find here all the fiercest beasts of the Malay

Peninsula. On the whole, however, he hoped for the latter alternative, for there were no wild animals on the surface of the round green earth which he dreaded as he did the wild men of the New Guinea jungles.

Wading ashore at the mouth of the stream, Johns threw himself down and drank deeply of the sweet and pure though almost tepid water. Then, seeking the nearest shade, he sat down with his back to a tree and his eyes on the thickets, to rest himself and take stock of his chances. He was desperately sleepy after the all-night swim and the days of strain and suspense which had preceded it, but he was unwilling to sleep till he had done some hard thinking. Thinking, however, soon grew impossible. Finding his eyelids dropping together in spite of himself, and fantastic visions chasing through his brain between one eyewink and another, he climbed high into the tree, interlaced a couple of neighbouring branches to make him a support, and promptly and heartily fell asleep.

For some hours, through the heavy heat of midday and well on into the afternoon,

he slept the heavy sleep of exhaustion, but was awakened at last by hunger and by the pains of his cramped and intolerable resting-place. He rubbed his stiffened limbs back to life, and then, recognizing that this tree was well suited to be his refuge for the present, being one that he could swing himself into rapidly, he broke off a number of branches and wove himself a fairly secure platform, whereon he spread smaller branches and foliage till he had made a passable bed. This gave him a reassuring animal sense of possession. He had a lair—something standing for a home. Then he clambered to the ground and went looking for something to eat.

He soon saw that the food supply, of sorts, was not going to cause him much worry. He had no more to do than reach out of his own tree into the branches of its next neighbour to have all the ripe mangosteens that he could desire. Not a hundred paces away was a grove of wild plantains. He felt sure he would find the nourishing durian not far off, and plenty of succulent shell-fish in the waters of the lagoon. Having satisfied his hunger

discreetly on mangosteens and plantains, he broke off and trimmed a slender but heavy branch to make himself a club, and then, as naked as the first man who came down out of the tree-tops to challenge the supremacy of his four-footed rivals, he emerged from the shade and strode almost haughtily down the beach to the waterside. Strong and lithe, and in perfect form, instead of being daunted by his utter nakedness and defencelessness his spirit rose all the more resolutely to meet the perils which he knew must lie before him.

The beach he now observed to be quite liberally strewn with driftwood and wreckage. Among this, after much picking and choosing, he found a fragment with a spike in one end of it, which made a far more effective weapon than his rough branch. Finding it handy and well-balanced, he swept a challenging glance along the dense banks of foliage with all their unknown menace, then set himself to gathering the choicest shell-fish for his supper. He took them up to his tree, and there, sitting with his back against the trunk, he made a hearty meal before climbing to his retreat in the branches.

So far he had seen no sign of life but a

few monkeys, many parrakeets and cockatoos, and a flight of rosy flamingoes. From the unrifled wreckage on the beach, much of it of a character that could not fail to interest any intelligent savages, he concluded that this neighbourhood was not inhabited or frequented by man. If it was the haunt of any of the larger beasts, he felt sure the fact would manifest itself around sunset, when they would probably come down to drink at the sweet-water stream.

For proof of the justice of his reasoning he had not long to wait. While the sunset was yet striking level through the trees, and the sky yet aglow with pale colour, there was a heavy trampling amid the undergrowth, and a herd of wild buffalo came rolling down to the brook. They were some couple of hundred yards upstream from Johns's tree, but near enough for him to recognize their type.

"If those chaps are here," he muttered discontentedly, "I'm in for leopards, and possibly even a tiger or two. I'll have to be keeping my eyes peeled."

And he made up his mind to equip himself, on the morrow, with more weapons,

particularly with something in the way of a lance or spear, that he might do battle at longer range than his club would suffice for. He mused with longing on his repeating rifle and his brace of handy thirty-eights gone down with the ship. From these futile regrets he moderated his dreams to the craving for a good bow and arrows, with which he could soon supply himself if only he had a knife. But this was as vain a dream as that of the rifle and the revolvers. He pulled himself together with a little soundless laugh, squared his shoulders, examined critically his long, sinewy hands and the muscles of his naked body, and thrilling suddenly to the thought that he had got down to the bare bed-rock of unaided manhood, he vowed he would prove himself, against all assailants, a more efficient animal than the best of them.

As the chance of the wilds would have it, he had not long to wait before putting his resolution to the test. The stream rippling beneath the tree, muddied by the visit of the buffalo, had not had more than time to run clear, when a couple of small deer came down to drink at it. Wary of ambush, they

sought its banks in the open, well below Johns's tree, and they drank timorously, lifting their heads alternately every other second to keep watch. For all their vigilance, they could not see the enemy which was stealthily trailing them. It was a slender, vividly-spotted ocelot, which came stealing after them as noiselessly as a shadow, keeping well behind the screen of Johns's tree. Arriving at the base of the trunk, the great cat flattened herself to the ground and peered around cautiously, apparently in doubt as to whether she was near enough to make a successful rush upon the quarry.

Before she could make up her mind, the long vigilant ears of the deer seemed to catch some sound of menace back in the jungle. For just a fraction of a second the two stood rigid, ears, eyes and noses directed toward the sound. Then, with a bound so light that it seemed as if they were lifted by a breath, they cleared the brook and fled away down the beach. The ocelot, baring her long white teeth in her disappointment, darted up into the tree, and peered back over her tracks to see what had given her quarry the alarm. Detecting

nothing, she started to climb higher, as if to secure a better view—and was confronted by the steady eyes of the man, staring down upon her over the edge of his platform.

Shrinking back with a startled snarl, and ears flattened to her skull, she crouched on her branch and glared upwards into the man's eyes. But Johns did not regard an ocelot as worth taking seriously. She was nothing more to him than a superior kind of wild cat. But he did not want her or her kind trespassing upon his tree. "Skat!" he ordered sharply, and clapped his hands. The astonished animal, with tail rigid and enlarged, dropped out of the haunted tree and scurried into the jungle.

"That's good enough for the likes of you," chuckled the man, and set himself to arrange his bed more comfortably.

As the twilight fell swiftly into a starlit dark, Johns became unable to distinguish the forms which sought the waterside. They kept close to the edge of the jungle, nothing more than indeterminate moving shadows, which did little more than touch the water and vanish. But occasional heavy tramplings and splashings revealed to him that some of

the visitors, whatever their character, were of considerable bulk. Once, some little distance back in the jungle, there was an agonized, bleating scream, followed by a brief threshing among the undergrowth, and Johns inferred that some creature of the deer or goat tribe had fallen prey to the ocelot. The sound was followed by an unseen but noisy stampede from the brook-side. Then fell a stillness that was intensified rather than broken by the booming of the surf on the outer reefs.

The warm, sea-scented air was like an opiate bath, and Johns now felt himself overpowered with drowsiness. He began to persuade himself that here on his platform he might safely go to sleep, in spite of all the marauding life now astir throughout the jungle. He knew well enough, at the back of his brain, that it would be madness, but he was just beginning to yield, to slip away into visions, when a honey-coloured light flooding in from sea aroused him. The moon was just rising. He stared out at it, his heart smitten with a sudden sense of infinite and eternal desolation. Then a faint sound behind him caught his ear, and

he turned his head. There by the edge of the stream, his spots clear in the level light, his flat, cruel head uplifted to eye the moon, stood an enormous leopard.

Johns knew that a leopard could climb a tree as nimbly as the ocelot. Without a sound he reached for his little club, and felt the spike in the end of it to see that it was secure. He wished that he had had the forethought to provide himself with a spear. But his spirit rose confidently, and his sinews tightened, to the doubtful encounter that seemed to lie before him.

Presently the leopard began to sniff the air as if he detected a smell that puzzled him. That it was a smell which excited his hostility was plain to be seen from the flattening back of his ears and the twitching of his tail. But apparently this man smell was not familiar to him. He crept about stealthily till he came upon the man's footprints. On the instant he stiffened into vigilant preparedness. Here was something unknown and dangerous. Very circumspectly he followed the trail to the tree, sniffed at the trunk, and lifted his head to stare up among the branches.

The man looked down coolly into that pale, cruel glare.

The tree being now penetrated everywhere by the level rays, Johns knew that his light skin must make him very clearly visible to the foe. He slightly turned his head so that the moon would illuminate his face, and gazed down into the brute's uplifted eyes. Then he began to talk.

"You clear out of this!" he ordered, very slowly, syllable by syllable, in a voice of iron. "You mind your own affairs, and keep your nose out of mine!"

The beast seemed to hesitate. His eyes shifted once or twice, to return instantly to those of the man. That steady, commanding gaze told him clearly enough that here was no trembling prey, but an adversary, ready for him and unafraid. How dangerous an adversary it might be, that pale-coloured being with the unswerving eyes, he was unable to judge. It looked to be as big as himself, and it was certainly of a most remarkable and unheard-of appearance. Then the sounds it was making. They were not loud, but there was an incomprehensible menace in them. Savage and blood-thirsty

as he was, the leopard was not really seeking a fight for its own sake. He was accustomed to seeing panic terror in eyes that met his. It was a victim, not an antagonist, that he was in search of. He recognized, of course, that there *were* creatures more formidable than himself. The tiger, for instance, he gave the widest possible berth to. And to the old bull buffalo he discreetly yielded way if they met in the forest trails. Could it be that this creature in the tree was also his master ?

" This is my tree," continued the cold voice above him, slow word by word. " You keep yourself out of it. Get ! "

There was a confidence, a decisiveness in the tones that the puzzled beast found very disconcerting. Gradually he seemed to conclude that he had no particular quarrel with this self-assured stranger staring down upon him from the branches. He turned away his head and pretended, for a few seconds, to forget the stranger's existence. Then he wheeled about and went padding off, without haste, into the jungle.

Though Johns thrilled with exultation at this significant victory, he drew a deep

breath of relief when the leopard had vanished. For he knew that, with his slight weapon and his insecure foothold in the tree, the contest, had it been forced upon him, must have been a doubtful one. He realized that he must not let himself sleep, except during full day. He spent the rest of the night devising schemes for making his retreat in the tree more secure, and for equipping himself with more and better weapons. Throughout the night, at intervals, others of the jungle-dwellers came down to the stream to drink, mostly varieties of the deer tribe, a few more buffalo, some small animals which he did not recognize, another ocelot or two, and once again a leopard, or, perhaps, as he concluded, the same one. About sunrise these visits came to an end. Then for a couple of hours he slept heavily.

He awoke with a start, and a conviction that the leopard was climbing the tree to attack him. He gripped his club and leaned over the edge of his platform, wide awake and ready for the battle. But there was nothing in sight more threatening than a big rose-crested cockatoo, which hung head downward from a neighbouring branch,

erected its gorgeous top-knot, and eyed him with a kind of solemn malevolence. He burst into laughter, and the bird flew off with an outraged squawk. Then Johns swung down alertly out of his tree, took a plunge in the salt sparkle of the lagoon, and set himself to his breakfast of plantains and mangosteens. He was content to dispense with the shell-fish for the present, promising himself that he would tackle the problem of making fire by friction after he had dealt with the more pressing ones of weapons and safe lodging.

After a deal of searching the drift-wood down the beach, he found a strip of light hand-rail attached to a support. In wrenching it free, which proved a laborious task, and bade fair to drown him in his own sweat, he split the end of it to a sharp and jagged point. He recognized the wood for a piece of ash, hard-grained and not too brittle; and he was satisfied that here was a fairly effective javelin with which to stab downward upon an enemy striving to climb to his platform. But searching all the morning, with a thatch of wet leaves on head and shoulders, failed to show him a club so

effective as the one which he already carried. With its heavy iron spike projecting on one side of the head to form a picking beak, it had little fault but its lightness. He decided that he would have to compensate for that by putting the more muscle into his stroke.

Intent upon his search, Johns had for a time forgotten the possible perils lurking behind the green jungle wall along the top of the beach. Suddenly a heavy, grunting breath, close behind him, made him whip about with a sensation of the hair rising on his scalp.

Not more than a dozen paces away stood an old bull buffalo, eyeing him malignly.

Johns recovered himself on the instant. It was the mysteriousness of the sound that had startled him. The moment he understood it his nerves came back to hand. Knowing himself quick on his feet, he felt certain that he could dodge the brute's charge, and escape him, if necessary, by plunging into the lagoon. But he did not want to run away, if he could avoid it. He stood his ground, poised and ready, and met the beast's stare calmly.

At first the bull seemed inclined to attack,

as if resenting the man's mere presence. He pawed the sand, angry but irresolute. He snorted, and took a couple of steps nearer. But the man's utter immobility, together with his calm gaze, seemed to act upon the great animal like a cooling douche. His angry tail began to droop. He glanced aside as if remembering an appointment. And, finally, after a sullen rumbling in his throat, he turned away and lumbered off toward the stream. Once or twice he paused and looked back defiantly, as if he half expected the man to pursue him. But Johns remained where he was, leaning on his lance, till the buffalo had wallowed across to the opposite bank. Then, muttering to himself, " I'd better be getting another forty winks, if I'm going to keep awake all night," he betook himself to his tree, and went up into the branches as lightly and neatly as a chimpanzee.

Having slept heavily through the midday heat, Johns devoted the rest of the daylight to strengthening his position. He lugged up into the tree a number of suitable fragments of wreckage, with a lot of long, trailing fragments of a tough-fibred wild vine.

Using the vine as lashing, he constructed a fairly solid platform, with a raised edge to keep him from falling off in his sleep. Here he felt that he could be comfortable enough, for a castaway, if the leopards would leave him alone. If they wouldn't, he thought that he could now manage to give them a salutary lesson.

Just before sunset he brought a big bunch of plantains up into the tree, with a bit of dry spruce which he had found among the wreckage, and half-a-dozen hard, sharp-edged shells. He proposed to occupy his enforced vigil with the business of scraping a store of fine, fluffy fibre, to serve as tinder when he should undertake to start a fire. But he was not to enjoy any such quietly domestic evening as he anticipated. He had not yet sounded the capacities of the jungle.

From far back in the forest came a heavy roar which sent a thrill of apprehension down his spine. It was such an utterance as no leopard was capable of. He knew at once that only a lion or a tiger could so proclaim himself. This was not the latitude or longitude for lions. What could he do, with his poor weapons, against a tiger? For

a few minutes his heart went down to where his boots would have been had he had any; and he saw himself going hourly in trembling watchfulness, ready on the instant to flee into his tree-top like a frightened monkey. Then, like a flood of warmth through all his veins, came surging back his old faith in man as the master animal. He himself, he told himself, all solitary and naked and an alien in the land, was nevertheless lord of all these brutes, supreme so long as will and courage failed him not. He had read how naked savages, in several lost corners of earth, were wont to hunt the tiger or the jaguar, alone and with no weapon but a sharpened stake. He would teach the tiger, when the time came, to give way before him even as the leopard and the buffalo had done. In the dusk he sat scraping with a shell at his jagged lance-tip, till the hard point was almost needle fine.

After that roar there had been no more sounds of visitors coming down through the dusk to drink at the stream. The long silence grew ominous, and the man found himself straining his ears so intently that he began to imagine sounds that did not

exist. He thought he heard heavy, padded footsteps under his tree, but peering down he was able to see clearly that there was nothing there.

At last the moon rose. It was no more than half-way above the sea-line—a red, distorted, swollen segment of a disc—when some hundred yards away the tiger emerged from the thickets, walking straight down into the eye of it. It was evident that he had some inkling of the man's presence, for he sniffed with menacing inquiry and came on straight toward the tree.

Johns was assured that tigers, in general, were not given to tree-climbing. He also knew that many wild beasts, at a pinch, would defy the accepted dicta of natural history. He was ready, however, to back his own alertness among the branches against that of any tiger. When the striped and venomous-looking brute came under the tree, and lifted dreadful eyes to his, he cursed him scornfully and threw down a stick of driftwood.

As luck would have it, the missile caught the tiger fair across the muzzle. He snarled with surprise and rage, drew back, crouched,

and launched himself in a magnificent spring for the lowermost branch, where it jutted out at right angles to the main trunk. He made good his hold with his great forepaws in the crotch, and hung there for a second or two, clawing with his hinder-paws at the trunk below, before he could draw himself fully up.

This was just what Johns had hoped and planned for; and he was ready, lying outstretched on his platform, spear in hand. Jabbing downward sharply, but not too heavily—for fear of breaking his point—he struck the beast in the face twice, and slashed him straight across one eye, quite destroying it. The tiger roared with pain, got one hind-paw up on to the branch, and stretched his head far aside to avoid the stabbing strokes at his face. This attitude exposed his neck and throat.

And now, risking his point, the man stabbed savagely. The point went true, entering just behind the brute's jaw; and with all the strength of both arms the man drove his stroke home. The harsh-edged ash tore its way clean through; and with a choked screech the tiger, stiffening

backwards convulsively, fell to the ground, carrying the spear with him. For a time he whirled himself around and around, clawing and coughing, and blowing out great clots of bloody froth. Then at last he sank down, and lay still.

"Curse him, he's broken my spear!" grumbled Johns, dissembling the exultation which swelled his heart. Then, rightly arguing that the presence of that dread form beneath the tree would effectually discourage other visitors, he settled himself to sleep.

Next day Johns was in doubt, for a time, what to do with the tiger's body. He longed to skin it, that he might dry the hide in the sun and keep it for a trophy and a couch. But with no skinning knife except a shell, he shrank from the task. Finally he decided that the dead beast should serve as an object-lesson, a notice to all the wilderness marauders that the dweller in the tree was not to be trifled with. He dragged the body several hundred yards down the wind, and left it on the beach, some yards out from the jungle edge, where all eyes might consider it carefully. He felt confident

that word of the tiger-slayer would spread quickly through the forest, and he would be no more troubled.

In this conclusion Johns was doubtless right, for among the wild kindreds no less than among men is prestige a potent influence. He had proved himself master of the monarch of the jungle, therefore he himself was monarch. Even the elephant, sagacious and a respecter of junglelaw, would have avoided trespassing on the masterful tree-dweller's range. But Johns's luck was following him, and he was not to be put to the test of exercising for long the sovereignty which he had so swiftly established.

On the second day after the affair with the tiger a Dutch trading schooner hove to under the lee of the promontory, just outside the reef, and sent a boat ashore for water, the quality of Johns's stream being known to certain craft in the island trade. A mile or two further down the reef was a narrow entrance feasible for a long-boat or a cutter, and Johns soon found himself celebrating his happy abdication in trousers a thought too broad in the beam for his build and a glass of pungent schnapps. His story for a

moment taxed the faith of his sturdy rescuers, but an examination of the dead beast's carcase, with the improvised spear through its throat, proved convincing evidence; and Johns was able to carry his prestige with him to the polished decks of the schooner. It was a light luggage, but one precious in his eyes.

In the World of the Ghost-Lights

AT that tremendous depth, half a mile straight down from the windy green-and-purple and the cream-white racing foam of the ocean surface, such a thing as the light of day was never even guessed at. The strange dwellers in those deeps could never mount far toward the sunlit tides and live to know about it; for in passing upward from the terrific pressures under which they had their existence, their framework would be fatally distorted, or their stomachs would turn inside out, or their eyes would bulge from the sockets, or their frail tissues fall apart. So they passed their lives with no knowledge or suspicion of the sun, in a quiet which the maddest hurricane could never hope to jar.

Yet these deeps were not plunged in an utter and eternal darkness. Here and there a floating colony of tiny beings, infusoria,

akin to those which illuminate the surface seas at night, made a patch of nebulous glimmer. Here and there a faint, elusive pallor, fading every other moment to extinction and reviving as if softly breathed upon, came from spreading groups of those curious plant-like creatures known as sea-lilies. And the broad undulations of the silt-strewn ocean floor gave forth an attenuated phosphorescence which made them not utterly invisible. For eyes sufficiently sensitive, therefore, to grasp its feeble vibrations, there was something approaching a spectral twilight, at least in spots, over the deep-sea bed.

Besides this diffused glimmer, which seemed ever ready to die of sheer faintness, from time to time what seemed like a cluster of glow-worms would flash softly into view under some ledge or some cluster of lilies, to be extinguished, usually, a moment later. Very often a pair of tiny lamps, so to speak, of bluish or violet flame would be waved delicately to this side and that, as if the unseen bearer were seeking something in the mystic gloom. On every side pale wisps and eyes of light would appear and dart and vanish. And sometimes what looked like

the spectre of a fish, with two long streamers of light trailing back from its nose, its fins outlined in vaporous radiance and a double row of softly-glowing spots down its sides, would go darting across the obscurity. Perhaps it would be followed by a larger shape, ghost-pale, with an enormous head and long, wavering body, and would plunge for refuge in among the tough foot-stalks of the sea-lilies. In one way or another, in one phantasmal form or another, the ghost-lights flickered everywhere throughout this soundless gloom.

In one spot, some two feet above what looked like an immense flat stone, hung a tiny tuft of violet flame. From the core of tender light floated a sort of down, an aureole of faintly luminous filaments. From this soft radiance it could be made out that the flame flower was hung from the tip of a slender, reed-like support, which swayed lightly from time to time, although there was no disturbance in the surrounding water. The supporting reed appeared to grow out of one end of the flat rock, whose blackish hue melted into the shadowy undulations of the surrounding silt. The beautiful little flame

sometimes trembled, sometimes nodded on its support, sometimes faded almost to invisibility only to burst into a brighter glow, and altogether conducted itself with a caprice for which no cause or reason was apparent.

Presently one of those ghost-like fish forms, with the double row of glow-worm points down its sides, and enormous whitish eyes, caught sight of the trembling flame and sailed up to investigate it. The visitor was small—not more than a foot in length—and therefore seemed to exercise a becoming discretion. As he drew near, however, it appeared to him that the little violet light was something not only good to eat, but safe to appropriate. He hurried, lest some other hungry wayfarer should forestall him. Except for his curious illuminations, he looked quite like an ordinary fish of the upper waters; but as he darted up to the wisp of flame, he opened an amazing spread of jaw. In fact, his mouth was cut back to the very base of his long head.

The little flame, as if it had eyes of its own, slipped aside and dipped fairly to the floor, skilfully eluding the attack. And in

the same instant an amazing thing happened. The flat black stone which had been supporting the flame heaved upwards and opened. The opening was a cavern, set about with long teeth, all slanting inwards. The darting ghost-fish was engulfed. The cavern closed with a snap, and on either side of where it had been, glimmered lambently two pale, cold, death-like eyes. Their phosphorescence lasted but for a second or two. Then the black stone looked as inanimately slab-like as before, the eyes becoming mere dull excrescences; and the little violet flame, slowly rising, once more trembled and nodded invitingly above it.

Suddenly the flame went out, dead out. A series of massive concussions had disturbed the heavy water. All the other definite lights in the neighbourhood—the glow-worm clusters, the gliding points and stars, the sliding eyes and spectral streamers, and even the pallid display of the imperturbable sea-lilies—extinguished themselves abruptly, and there was nothing to be seen but the nebulous patches of the infusoria and the elusive glimmer of the ooze-beds. Somewhere in the obscurity, too far off to be

visible, but near enough to make itself startlingly felt, a battle of monsters was going on. For all lesser beings of the underworld it was a case of "Lights out and lie hid!" Even that great stone slab of a creature, though some seven or eight feet long and a good two feet across at the place where the cavernous mouth had opened, had no wish to attract the notice of those fighters. He kept his dainty violet lure safely concealed, and was content to be the most unconsidered of rock slabs that ever gathered silt on the ocean bottom.

Presently the disturbance died away, and once more the water lay in heavy stillness. The first of the deep-sea dwellers to recover confidence were the sea-lilies, which slowly relit the glow in their pale lilac and pinkish petals. The glow was an irresistible attraction to all sorts of tiny living organisms, which swam or floated towards it, to be captured by the carnivorous, ever-hungry blooms. Then other cautious beings began to let their ghost-lights glimmer again as they resumed their prowling, their swimming, or their crawling—fish, shrimps, star-fish, crabs, monstrous sea-urchins, and huge black-purple

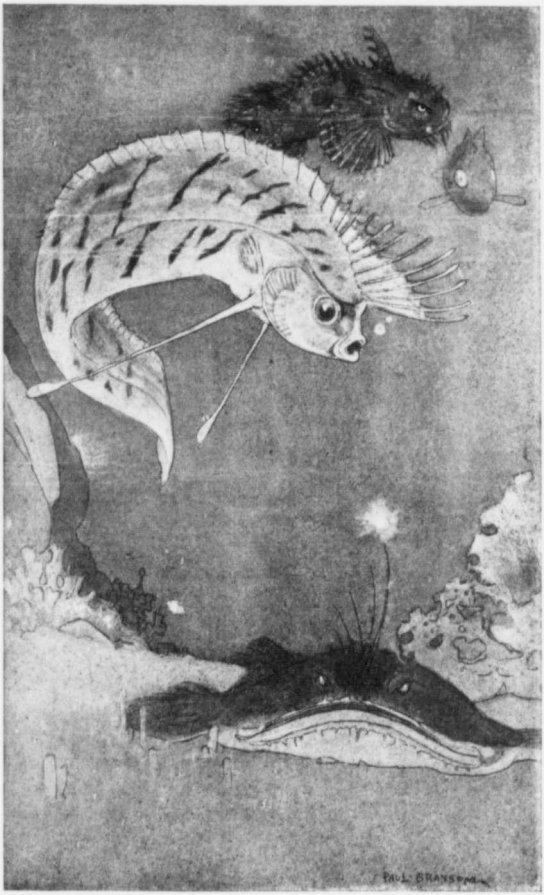
trepangs. And, last of all, that monstrous lyer-in-wait, the deep-sea angler, hung out once more the lovely violet death-lamp above the hidden cavern of his jaws.

These spectral deeps were not by any means lonely—at least, not in this particular section of them. Mysterious, busy, almost invisible life swarmed everywhere, hunting and being hunted. But for a few moments nothing more came near the fluttering lure. The monster grew impatient. His appetite was huge, and he lived only to satisfy it. But as, with all his strength, he had no speed for the pursuit and capture of his prey, there was nothing for him to do but wait, sinking ever deeper into the silt to make his ambush the more secure. The only sign of his impatience was an added activity and persuasiveness in the noddings and wavings of the little violet flame on its slender tentacle.

And presently its activity was rewarded. It caught the notice of a most grotesque-looking, crab-like creature, with a small, circular, rose-coloured body mounted on immensely long, jointed, stilt-like stalks of legs. Its jaws were almost as big as its

body, and it waved from its head two slim, whip-like antennæ, or feelers, even more ludicrously elongated than its legs. It may have been by some delicate perception in these feelers that it noticed the trembling violet light; for where its eyes should have been were merely two pin-points of black, a mere rudimentary suggestion of what may have been eyes in some remote shoal-water ancestor. However that may be, the stork-like crab certainly perceived the lure. He came sidling towards it awkwardly but swiftly, his great jaws working with eagerness.

But another prowler had also caught sight of the enticing wisp of violet. An immense scarlet shrimp, as big as a lobster, came swimming at it backwards. *He* could see well enough, having a pair of extravagantly large eyes, each with a bright white bull's-eye lamp glowing beside it. He saw not only the lure, but the sidling approach of his long-legged rival, and he shot down in jealous haste. The two arrived together. The little flame eluded their rush and sank. They followed, clashing against each other, and plunged into a black cavern which



" It was an immense serpentine ' oar fish.' "

opened and rose to meet them. The cavern gave a sucking gulp and closed again with a snap. For a second or two those veiled, pale eyes on either side of it glowed faintly green, and then were extinguished again. And once more the little violet flame lifted its lure above the silted slab.

The next passer-by to heed the flame was so formidable-looking that one would have thought the lyer-in-wait would take alarm and withdraw the lure. It was an immense serpentine "oar-fish," a good eighteen feet in length, with two long, slender fins, like a pair of oars, spreading from the sides of its head. Its body was extraordinarily slender for its length, being little more than a foot in diameter, and carried a back fin running all the way from the tail to the top of the head. At the top of the head this fin was enlarged by several huge spines, perhaps two feet long, which slanted forward imposingly and threateningly over the owner's snout. The body was silvery in hue, and carried a uniform faint-green phosphorescence.

In a leisurely fashion the oar-fish swam up toward the quivering violet lure. Formidable as he looked, it awaited his approach.

At last he lunged at it, opening a smallish and not very dangerous mouth as he did so. The lure, of course, vanished. The cavern yawned beneath him, lurched upwards, and closed upon his body just behind the gill covers.

For a few moments the long tail lashed the water desperately, till all the surrounding lights were extinguished in terror. But the captive, for all his length and strength, was utterly helpless in the grip of those terrific jaws and long, rending fangs. In a very few seconds he was bitten clean in two, and the head, with its protecting spines, rolled to one side. The broad, ungainly figure of the angler flopped clear of the silt and snapped voraciously at the quivering body, biting off two-foot lengths of it and gulping them almost without effort. His stomach swelled and swelled, but he kept cramming the banquet down, till not more than three or four feet of the tail end of the victim remained. Then he settled back into his lair, fanned his fins cleverly till his swollen form was once more veiled in silt, and proceeded to digest his gigantic meal. Having no more use for food at the moment, he

refrained from hanging out the violet lure.

As soon as the turmoil had subsided, and the ghost-lights had begun to reappear, the news went about in some strange way that a feast was spread beside the big stone. In a very few minutes the two remaining fragments of the dead oar-fish—the tail and the armoured head—were centres of voracious, struggling life and of a strange confusion of lights. Blood-red, deep-sea crayfish, monstrous and distorted crabs, fish that were all head and jaws, with long, whip-like tails, fish that were all stomach and rending, parrot-like beak, creatures that were eyeless, but with long, groping antennæ, and creatures whose immense staring eyes were out of all proportion to their bodies, tore frantically at the two unresisting lumps of flesh, or at each other if that seemed more convenient. Their tinted lights crossed and interwove, till each fragment of the victim was a mass of writhing, pulsating glow.

As all these furious banqueters were of more or less insignificant size—the biggest of the fish forms not being much more than a foot in length—there was, for a time, no wholesale calamity among the feasters. But

at last three curious-looking strangers came sailing up to see what was going on. They were black, short-bodied fish, about two feet in length, with an ungainly, drooping pouch to their bellies, heads almost half the length of their bodies, and mouths cut back to the gills. They swam up without haste, took in the situation, and opened their mouths.

So wide were these amazing mouths of theirs, that their own bodies might have been easily pulled through them by the tails. The creatures themselves became insignificant beside those gaping traps.

The visitors began to feed, but with no great haste. It was just a matter of scooping in and gulping down violently the pre-occupied victims. Once between those jaws, there was only one way to go, for the jaws were lined with long, sharp teeth, all pointing inward to the capacious and slippery gullet. Fish, shrimps, crabs, they were all scooped in impartially and vehemently gulped down into the huge, elastic stomachs, where they writhed together in a packed mass till the swift corrosion of the powerful digestive juices stilled them. In a very few minutes each of the three strangers carried beneath

him a stomach much larger than all the rest of his organism put together. Then, heavily and reluctantly, they sailed off to seek the seclusion of some deep anemone thicket where they might digest in peace. And the scant remnants of the feasters went on with their banquet as if nothing whatever had happened to damp the revelry.

In the stomachs of these deep-sea dwellers, digestion is a process which goes on with appalling rapidity. After an hour or two of quiescence, the swollen body of the gorged lyer-in-wait had subsided to something almost approaching his normal flatness. With this subsidence his appetite reawoke, and suddenly there was the little, fluffy violet flame once more nodding and quivering on the bent tip of its tentacle above the silted slab.

This time it had not long to wait, for the success of the late banquet had made this once-neglected spot a popular corner of the world. An incredibly monstrous and fantastic shape came swimming slowly past. With huge, blank eyes it took note of the violet lure, and turned to investigate it.

The new arrival, obscurely visible in its

own green-silvery illumination, was a sort of double-decker in appearance. About five feet in length, its head and the hinder third of its body were not unlike those of an immensely fat and large-mouthed eel. It was, indeed, a peculiarly distorted member of the eel family. Its distortion was a matter of its stomach, which, distended till its membranes were almost as transparent as glass, hung longitudinally below its body in something the shape of a dirigible balloon. Into this amazing receptacle was neatly packed, lengthwise, a stout blackish fish of not less than two feet and a half in length, together with a mass of little vermilion shrimps.

Even with this enormous mawful, however, the fantastic creature had still a lively appetite. Possibly he thought the beautiful little violet light would serve as a piquant digestive. He opened his jaws wide and sailed up to take it in. Its glow was almost tickling the tip of his lower jaw before it whirled lightly aside and eluded him. At the same time that pendulous cylinder of his gorged stomach almost grazed the rock below. The rock opened and

lazily, without effort, absorbed it, with all its half-digested contents. The rock-like jaws closed implacably, and with a convulsive lashing of its tail, the swimmer, reduced now to something like the normal proportions of an eel, darted away, leaving a ghastly trail of blood and phosphorescence behind it. For several minutes it tore along in a blind circle, heedless no less of enemies than of victims for which it could have no further use. Then, having no longer anything to live for, it turned on its side and sank to the bottom, to be seized upon, before its squirmings were still, by a colony of fantastic little lemon-yellow crabs without eyes.

The yellow crabs would have had a varied and numerous assortment of uninvited guests to their banquet within the next five minutes, but that something now turned all attention toward the upper waters. Directly overhead a bulky glow appeared, enlarging and brightening as it descended. As it drew nearer, the pale-greenish glow was seen to be shot with darting lights of white and yellow, blue and lilac. Then it resolved itself into a turning mass of furiously struggling life. At last it settled slowly

upon the colony of sea-lilies, and revealed itself as the almost naked skeleton of a whale, swarming inside and out with every species of deep-sea scavenger. No wonder the little lemon-yellow crabs were left to finish their insignificant meal in peace.

The whale was one which had been harpooned at the surface by the whale-fishers, stripped of its blubber, and cast loose. As the red carcase sank, first the hordes of sharks had flung themselves upon it ravenously, rending away the flesh in huge triangular masses. When it reached a depth where the sharks could no longer endure the pressure, the gigantic framework was almost bare. The sharks were succeeded, in ever-increasing numbers, by the myriad voracious inhabitants of the depths, of every family and kind except the crawling echinoderms and crustaceans, which could not travel far from the bottom, and of every size, from terrible pike-like creatures twelve and fifteen feet long, whose fanged jaws might teach prudence to the mightiest of the sharks, down to little, black, purse-like fish not bigger than one's hand, all jaws and stomach, without fin-power to tear off the juicy

morsels into which they had sunk their ravening teeth. During the slow, revolving descent of the great structure—growing ever slower as the pressure increased—the smaller forms kept as far as possible on the inside of the framework, more or less out of the way of their larger and more voracious fellow-banqueters. But whether outside or within the skeleton, the feast was an incessant and implacable warfare, the guests devouring each other with a large and frank impartiality.

As soon as the skeleton with its seething glow had settled upon the bed of sea-lilies, then all the crawlers from a mile about—crayfish and shrimps, crabs and stars, mostly eyeless, but all armed with long antennæ of marvellous delicacy—came thronging up for their share. The giant carcase fairly boiled with light and strife. In the course of an hour the bones were picked so clean that there was nothing left except for those tiny creatures armed with drills in their heads, which could bore into the solid bone and suck its juices. Then little by little the revellers dropped away, either gorged themselves or helping to gorge their bigger

fellows; and the lights began to fade from the great arching ribs and caverneus skull of the skeleton.

During all this time the lyer-in-wait, whose place of ambush was perhaps fifty feet distant from the bed of sea-lilies, had not been faring altogether to his own satisfaction. It was contrary to all his methods to emerge from the silt and flop over to take a hand in the great scramble. All he could do was to hang out his wavering violet lamp and try to tempt some of the discontented outsiders from the feast. A few small fry were caught in this way, but not more than enough to excite him. In his excitement he allowed his terrible veiled eyes to emit a pallid glimmer, as they rolled about in the search for likely prey, while the violet lure fairly danced up and down in its desire to please.

All at once, however, those glimmering eyes detected something which made their light fade in an instant and the violet flame go out as if clapped under an extinguisher. With a stealthy side movement, the lyer-in-wait sank himself deeper into the silt. He had seen a long, sickly-white, twisting feeler

—yards and yards of it—sliding over the ribs of the skeleton. It was followed by several more, equally inquisitive. But the lyer-in-wait had not stopped to look at them. He wanted as much silt over him as possible, even over his eyes, as long as those python-like feelers were investigating in that neighbourhood.

It chanced that one of those colossal white squid, or deep-sea devil-fish, which herded by the hundred on a congenial slope some miles away, had strayed beyond his customary limits. He had probably been stirred up and terrified and set to wandering by the attack of some troop of sperm-whales. His vast, all-embracing eyes had caught sight of that luminous descent of the carcase, and he had come to see what was going on. His progress had been slow, because, unless in case of special urgency, he travels by dragging his unwieldy bulk along the bottom, instead of swimming backwards, like the little squid of the surface waters. By the time he reached the scene, therefore, there was nothing left of the feast to console his raging appetite.

This white and sluggish wanderer was by

no means one of the largest of his awful kind. Yet the sprawling sac of his body, with the squat, parrot-beaked head, was little under forty feet in length, while the ten writhing tentacles, each as thick at the base as a man's thigh, which sprouted in a bunch from the head like leaf-stalks from the crown of a carrot, added another twenty feet. The tentacles, which were armed all along their under-sides with powerful suction discs, were as sensitive, especially toward the tips, as a delicate finger; and they were all ceaselessly in motion, with a stealthy, questing, writhing movement, like so many pale and hungry snakes. But the most thoroughly nightmarish feature about the whole unspeakable monster was the eyes. They were two vast concave lenses of inky blackness, bulging, and so high that their upper rims almost met at the top of the head. Absolutely lidless, utterly immobile and of an unfathomable malignancy, they looked as if nothing could be hidden from their awful gaze.

All over the naked bones of the giant skeleton those ghastly tentacles went groping, picking off every tiny creature which still

clung there, and conveying the paltry spoil down to the horrid, gnashing beak. A few fish which had been imprudent enough to linger about the scene were pounced upon with a dreadful precision and swiftness ; and some crabs and crayfish which were trying to hide among the crushed wrecks of the sea-lilies found themselves snatched up and thrust into the parrot beak. But such small fry merely served as appetisers. In a rage, the pale monster dragged himself completely up on to the top of the skeleton, perched there for a few moments, sprawling all over it, and then let himself down clumsily on the other side. His inescapable gaze had detected something unusual in that neighbouring rock-slab. Promptly two twisting feelers travelled over to investigate. On the instant they took hold, with a grip which bit deep into the hider's leathery flesh.

The lyer-in-wait, finding himself thus discovered and hopeless of escape, instead of collapsing in a panic, flew into a despairing rage. He was of a grim and battling breed. His eyes burst into green flames, and his cavernous jaws snapped madly. The spread of those jaws was not much under a couple

of feet. They caught a tentacle where it was four or five inches thick, and, tough though it was, shore it through without an effort. But in the same moment four more tentacles secured a hold upon his body—such a hold that, double and spring and snap as he might, he was quite unable to inflict any further punishment on his captor. Then, not swiftly but inexorably, he was lifted from his lair and dragged down into the squirming nest of tentacles. Those vast, inky eyes glared at him without expression. Then the parrot beak opened wide, and the lyer-in-wait, crammed into it head first, was swallowed in one long, strangling gulp.

Contented for the moment with this fairly substantial meal, the white monster backed his unprotected body up against and partly into the skeleton of the whale. Then, curling his tentacles carelessly in front of him, he appeared to go to sleep with eyes open. Upon the return of quiet, the glow-worm clusters relit themselves, with the crawling stars of rose or green, and all the darting, interweaving, half-indistinguishable ghost-lights, trailing phosphorescence through the heavy water. Only the beautiful,

filmy, delicate flame of violet nodded and coaxed no more above its anchoring slab there in the deep, five hundred fathoms down.

The Feud

THE dog was a handsome, heavily-built nondescript, a mongrel, but a mongrel of distinguished blends. Muzzle and ears and the aristocratic dome of the skull showed the large strain of hound in his ancestry. The wavy, red-gold coat and feathering of tail and legs told of the Irish setter in his line, while the bowed and shortened legs, the massiveness of chest and shoulder, were eloquent of the incongruous dash of bull. With such warring elements in his blood, his temper, as may be imagined, was none too certain; but his intelligence kept him from letting it get him into serious trouble, while his fidelity and courage, as well as his striking appearance, led the farmer who owned him to set great store by him. As a watch-dog he was the terror of the tramps, who, after vain efforts to cajole him into complaisance or lure him with poisoned

tit-bits, came to give his neighbourhood a wide berth.

But in spite of his duties as a watch-dog, he was by no means always to be found at his post. The farmer had taken no pains to train him to stay at home. He had been brought up quite as casually as he had been bred, and, being an independent backwoods dog, he had no idea at all that his duties required him to be always lounging about the farmyard. Moreover, the strain of Irish setter in his veins made him restless and curious. He was given to ranging the open, hillocky, upland pastures where the surly woodchucks had their holes, or exploring the deep woods down the valley in search of adventure. He was capable of making an adventure out of very insignificant material—a mouse-hole under a root would often suffice to keep him digging frantically for an hour, as if convinced that something wonderful and new lay hidden at the bottom. But his real desire was an adversary that would give him a good fight—something to satisfy the vague but fiery craving in his great jaws and mighty muscles and emulously pugnacious heart.

Driven by this desire, he would follow up the trails of bear and lynx with hopeful and misguided enthusiasm ; but, happily for him, the bears and the ripping-clawed Canada lynxes scrupulously kept out of his way. A bear would have made short work of him ; and as for the lynx, though he might have come off victorious in the battle, he would have been so ripped by the great cat's eviscerating claws that he would probably have bled to death on the triumphal journey home. But both bears and lynxes eyed him with too much suspicion to think of risking an encounter with him. They had seen him in the company of the farmer and the farmer's gun. Therefore they were always sure that, whenever they saw him alone, the farmer and the farmer's gun must be lurking somewhere in the neighbourhood, ready to pounce out upon them if ever they should be so rash as to attack him.

Of course, both in the woods and in the upland pastures there were other adversaries on whom the dog might have vented his longing for a fight. There were the porcupines, and there were the skunks. But the dog knew too much to want to get himself

stuck full of quills like a pin-cushion full of pins, and his nostrils were too sensitive for him to tolerate the idea of coming to close quarters with a skunk. So, when he encountered either of these indolent and arrogant little prowlers, he gave them the path without shame, and took every care not to ruffle their feelings.

It happened on a certain spring morning, while the green of the birches was still tender and diaphanous, that the vain pursuit of a rabbit led him much further over the uplands than he had been wont to range. He lost the trail at last, turned aside in ill-humour, ran softly over a low, sunny ridge, and came plump among a litter of young foxes playing about their hole.

Three whisking reddish streaks vanished into the hole. But the fourth cub was yawning, with his eyes closed, at the instant of the dog's arrival, and lost precious seconds. He jumped like a loosed spring, but he was just too late. A pair of inexorable jaws closed upon the ruddy brush of his tail, and held him fast.

Baby though he was, he was game, and he curled back to snap savagely at his huge

captor. Another moment, and his neck would have been crushed between the dog's great jaws; but in that same moment the red vixen, his mother, came to his rescue. With a shrill yelp of rage, she hurled herself upon the adversary, and her narrow jaws slashed him deeply in the neck.

Startled at the swift fury of this attack, the dog dropped his prize and turned with a deep growl upon his fiery little assailant. She tried to evade him, but he was too quick for her, and caught her in his grip, while the released cub crept trembling into the hole.

The fatal misfortune for the brave little mother was the strain of bull in her antagonist's pedigree. Had he once let go in order to take a new hold or to bite again in some more deadly part, with her incredible quickness and wiriness she would have twisted free and mockingly eluded him. But he never let go. He simply went on biting and chewing deeper, deeper, and ever deeper. The vixen tore and slashed valiantly, till the dog's rich coat was crimsoned with his blood. But as she was gripped, her fine jaws could not reach him in any vital spot, nor could they bite deep

enough to really divert him. Suddenly her mouth opened wide in a harsh yelp, ending in a gurgle, and her head fell to one side limply. Growling deeply, the victor shook her a little, to make sure she was not shamming. Then dropping her indifferently, he went and sniffed at the hole, and finally trotted away toward home.

It had not been enough of a fight to get his bull blood thoroughly aroused, but out of it were to follow consequences which he little anticipated.

Some ten minutes later the father fox came trotting up to his den. At sight of the body of his mate, sprawled limp before the entrance, he stopped and stood rigid, eyes and ears and nostrils wide with startled question. After perhaps half a minute, he stole forward and sniffed the body over minutely. Then he sniffed at the dog's tracks, while the stiff hair rose on his neck. Lastly, he slipped into the hole and assured himself as to the safety of the young ones. Emerging a minute or two later, he returned to the body of his mate, gave it a hasty, compassionate lick, and started off on the trail of the dog.

II

THE dog lay just outside the farmyard fence, licking his wounds. They were not deep, the jaws of the brave vixen having had so poor an opportunity of doing themselves justice, but they were smarting cuts and numerous, and the dog was feeling very ill-tempered over them.

All was quiet about the farmyard, the men being away at work in the fields, the women-folk busy in the house. Nothing stirred but a few chickens scratching in the straw far at the other side of the yard. Presently the dog, tired of licking his bites, laid his head between his paws and went to sleep. Just as he did so, a large red fox, with a magnificent plumy brush, appeared around the fence corner some forty or fifty feet away, and stood, with one fore-paw uplifted, to eye the dog.

In the narrowed, gleaming eyes of the new-comer there was a look of cold fury, of a set, considering hate that was not going to baulk itself by haste. Yet here, it seemed,

was the instant opportunity. The dog's head faced the other way, and he was obviously asleep. The avenger glanced all about him carefully, to assure himself that he was in no danger of being taken by surprise. Then he crept forward, noiseless as thistle-down, on his light and tufted pads.

The avenger was no rash hot-head, ready to sacrifice himself in the uncertain hope of achieving his vengeance. It was his foe alone that he would punish, not himself and the motherless whelps in his den on the uplands. He knew that in a fight he was no match for the dog, who was more than thrice his weight and of fighting breed. Moreover, he understood the dog's method of fighting—that implacable grip that would never let go while life lasted. He had no intention of letting that grip once close upon him. His trust for the vengeance which he was set upon lay in his ingenuity, his keen and far-seeing craft. He did not underrate the dog's intelligence, but he was confident in pitting his own against it.

Within a couple of yards of the dog's hindquarters he paused, gathered his legs beneath him, and then pounced forward like

lightning. His hope was to hamstring his enemy by one lucky slash of his keen jaws. But in the very instant of his leap, the dog moved—perhaps warned by some subtle admonition to ear or nostril—and the assailant's teeth merely ripped a red gash down over his haunch. With a startled snarl, he whipped about to grapple with this unlooked-for assailant. But the fox had leaped back as lightly as he had come, and was now a dozen feet away, staring at him with baleful eyes of challenge.

With a deep growl, the dog gave chase. And the fox fled away before him, not towards the den in the uplands, but straight back towards the forest.

For his weight and build, the dog ran well enough, having sound wind and tireless muscles. But his light and wiry adversary could have left him out of sight in five minutes. This, however, was no part of the fox's plan. With consummate craft, he ran heavily, as if it took all his best effort to keep ahead; and the dog, being too angry to see through this play-acting, was encouraged to imagine himself on the point of catching and punishing the insolent creature

who had dared to attack him on his own threshold.

In leading his enemy toward the forest, no doubt the fox had some sinister purpose in view, but in this instance he failed to develop it. As the dog ran on, his anger gradually cooled down. As he found himself, after fifteen minutes or so of very tiresome effort, apparently no nearer to overtaking the brush-tailed fugitive, he remembered things he wanted to do at home. There was a bone to dig up, and another one to bury. After all, he had, as yet, no deep grudge against this fox, whom it had not occurred to him to associate with that hurried little affair at the burrow on the uplands.

As for a bite, *that* was no indelible insult. His pace slackened. The fugitive tried to feign lameness, but it had no effect. All at once the dog stopped short, smelled carefully at a bush, as if finding some delightfully interesting scent upon it, then turned his back and coolly trotted off homewards. The fox stared at him irresolutely for a few moments, and then, apparently deciding to postpone his vengeance or think out a more

effective plan for it, took his own way, along the skirts of the wood, to his den in the uplands.

Having the whole care of the motherless litter on his shoulders, in spite of the burning urgency of his hate the fox had no time, during the next few days, to journey to the farm and seek the dog again. At last, the youngsters having been removed to another and more secluded burrow, and left with a whole rabbit to tear at in his absence, he went, late one night, to find his adversary He found everything quiet at the farm, asleep under the soft spring moonlight; but the dog was absent, probably chasing rabbits in the pasture fields. With bitter contempt, the fox defiled his enemy's kennel and his food-dish, together with several buried bones which he dug up and scattered. Then, leaving the hen-roost and the duck-pen untouched, lest he should draw down upon himself the dangerous attention of the farmer, he trotted away, confident that his enemy would understand the enormity of the insults thus heaped upon him.

In this confidence he was not astray. The dog, returning tired and dew-drenched in

the grey of the dawn, flew into a paroxysm of rage. His keen scent told him that his insulter was the same hardy animal who had so recently attacked him on his threshold, and then led him so futile a chase. And he began to realize that there was some more than ordinary grudge behind these virulent demonstrations. His anger burned itself down to a steady, dangerous glow; and, after sniffing out all his enemy's performances till the situation was pretty clear to him, he picked up the trail and started resolutely in pursuit. The feud was now fairly and reciprocally on, and he was no longer in a temper to be diverted from his purpose. He, too, was set on vengeance.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the farmstead the fox's trail was nearly an hour old, but before long it grew fresher. Hoping to be followed, the fox had lingered by the way, catching a few belated mice, and beetles yet torpid with the morning chill, and a brooding ground-sparrow asleep upon her eggs. At last, looking back from the top of a little knoll, he saw his pursuer labouring doggedly along his trail. He waited motionless till the dog caught sight

"Looking back from the top of a little knoll, he saw his pursuer."

of him and gave tongue savagely. Then he ran on, keeping a lead of less than a hundred feet.

At first, it looked as if the crafty fugitive's object was merely to wear out his heavy pursuer, and so diminish the odds of weight and muscle against him. For well over an hour he led the chase hither and thither over the roughest and most difficult ground, where his lightness and his knowledge of the faint trails enabled him to spare himself to the utmost. But he seemed at the point of exhaustion; he looked as if he were being slowly but surely overtaken. His pursuer, panting heavily, and with streaming tongue far out, was hardly more than a dozen yards behind.

At length the fugitive, as if pressed beyond endurance and about to seek retreat in some hole in the rocks, turned and ran straight, in what seemed to be a last, frantic burst of speed, up a naked slope, the crest of a little rocky ridge. Reaching the crest, he vanished over it without a pause. The dog came racing up, but instead of following on over, as the fox had evidently expected him to do, he checked himself abruptly before reaching

the brink, and went and peered down with a prudence which showed that he was not so easily to be entrapped.

The other side of the ridge was a perpendicular drop of some forty or fifty feet into a raging torrent.

Had he not stopped himself when he did, he would have inevitably plunged over headlong, and the affair would have been settled conclusively. But, fortunately for him, he knew the place. It did not occur to him, even, that his enemy could have expected him to fall over. He merely thought that the fox had a hiding-place in the crevices under the brink, and what concerned him was to find that hiding-place.

Presently he made out the merest shadow of a ledge descending for a few feet and vanishing under a jutting overhang. The scent of the fugitive was strong on this slender and perilous track. Only a creature of marvellous sure-footedness and lightness could have taken it securely. For the dog it was utterly impossible. He sniffed at it with disgust, and then, realizing that the brink itself was showing a tendency to crumble under his weight, he drew back, sat down

on his haunches, lifted his muzzle toward the sky, and howled his wrathful discomfiture. In the middle of this outburst he chanced to turn his head. There, on the very edge of the steep, not twenty paces distant, sat the fox, eyeing him from narrowed lids, inscrutably.

The dog felt all at once that he was being mocked. It was a new and humiliating experience to him. Almost blind with rage, he darted once more in pursuit.

This time the fox ran off in a new direction, up a long, broken slope traversed by bare ledges. The chase led at length through a shallow cleft, which narrowed gradually till the rocks met overhead, forming a flat, arched tunnel perhaps a foot and a half in height. Here, along the dry fissures, protected alike from the rain and from the attacks of the honey-loving bears, a runaway swarm of bees had established itself and multiplied to an enormous colony. At this hour of the morning the bees were just beginning to stir themselves and get ready for the day's work in the sun, gathering the perfumed spring pollen.

The fox knew well this perilous passage,

having surveyed it shrewdly from the sides, though, of course, he had never ventured to pass through it. Now he lingered, as if cornered, till the dog was within a dozen yards of him. Then, putting on a tremendous burst of speed, he dashed through the tunnel, elongating himself till he was flat to earth, but managing to flick the swarming combs with his brush as he sped beneath them. With no worse punishment than two or three stings and a few bees clinging in his fur, he passed safely through, and dashed into a dense mass of bushes to scrape off his assailants. But he left the bees thoroughly aroused, and buzzing with anger.

Into this scorching vortex of live flame the dog plunged blindly. In a second he realized the situation. Yelping with the sudden torture, he backed out, covered with bees from head to foot, and went leaping convulsively down the slope, the air black and humming behind him.

By sheer good luck—for he did not see at all where he was going—he crashed through a fringe of scrub and fell into a deep, icy pool. The relief was instantaneous, and the shock brought back his wits. The bees

which clung to him were drowned out, washed off, and chilled to instant harmlessness. When he came to the surface, certain members of the following hosts pounced down at him, but, for the most part, the furious insects could not make out how he had vanished. They hung humming over the bushes and over the pool, but they seemed apprehensive about descending too close to the sunken surface of the water, repelled, no doubt, by the darkness and the chill. The dog thrust his head under a thick tuft of wet weeds, where it was well protected, and waited there for the insects to get tired of looking for him. By the time this arrived, he was half dead with cold ; but, dragging himself out cautiously and slinking away under the thickets, he gained a place where he could lie and warm himself in the sun. Then, with eyes and nostrils swollen and burning, and his whole hide smarting with the poison that had been pumped into it in that awful half minute, he made his way dejectedly homeward.

Now, though the dog was very far from guessing that his astute antagonist had deliberately led him into the citadel of the

bees, his rage, nevertheless, burned with sevenfold heat because of that agonizing discomfiture. The next time the fox came to the farm to taunt him, he took up the pursuit with such a fiery vigour that the fugitive was for a while somewhat put to it to keep ahead. This time the chase led away in quite another direction, down the valley toward the dark tamarack swamps which the dog had never been tempted to explore.

There was now no playing on the part of the fox. Disappointed in his former schemes for vengeance, and almost daunted at last by the deadly pertinacity of his foe, he was beginning to grow uneasy, and to want the affair off his shoulders. While the dog's rage was growing daily, his own craving for vengeance was beginning to cool as his grief for his slain mate moderated. Life was full of interest, and he wanted to think of other things than this feud. He was none the less resolved, however, that his enemy should be punished. So to-day he ran straight to his purpose, with the grim pursuer close on his heels.

In a secret place in the swamp, some

twenty-four hours earlier, a bear cub had been born. The place was hard to come at, over narrow causeways of twisted roots and fallen, slippery trunks, but, when reached, it was little more than a shallow recess under a boulder, with a big cedar slanting in front of it. The mother bear lay here on a bed of dry moss, nursing her baby, and from time to time glaring jealously about the sombre shades as if she expected something to come and try to snatch the little one from her embrace.

At the moment when the fox appeared, running noiselessly, the bear was not looking. Her great black head was bent down while she licked and snuggled the cub. A ruddy shape touched the moss close beside her, and was gone even before she could lift her head, leaving a taint on the heavy air. In a blaze of anger and alarm, she thrust the whimpering little one behind her and sat up on her haunches just as the dog, with a startled yelp, brought up sharply within two feet of her. He had barely saved himself from jumping square on top of her.

With all his courage and his craving for a fight, the dog had no wish to tackle a mother

bear suckling her cub. He sprang aside, striving to retreat the way he came. But the bear, hurling her massive bulk forward with amazing agility, had instantly cut off that retreat. Doubling on himself, he leaped for another prostrate trunk which offered a way over the ooze-pit. He gained it, but it was slippery with ancient slime, and he missed his foothold, his hindquarters dropping back into the black mud. Shrinking small and hunching his back desperately, he clawed at the hard trunk and strove to draw himself clear of the impending doom. But even as he strove, with open mouth and protruding tongue and frightened, staring eyes, a great black paw descended upon him, smashing his back. The bull blood in him, asserting itself at this supreme moment, forbade him to cry out, and, writhing himself about, he locked his jaws upon that shattering paw. The next second he was twitched forth upon the moss, and crushed out of all resemblance to a dog. And as the bear, in her mother rage, mauled and tore the lifeless body, the fox, sitting on his haunches some forty feet away, looked on and licked his chaps, content at last with his vengeance.

The Invaders

THE lake was set in the high barrens. Its wide surface, as smooth as glass under the unobstructed sunset, was of an intense yet faintly smoky orange, shading into green in the deep, reflected zenith. Its far-off, western shore-line, fringed with a low growth of firs, was toothed and black against the sky. The eastern shore, but vaguely to be marked in the lone, pervasive glow, was flat, and naked except for a thicket of willow and poplar about the mouth of an inflowing stream. The flooding, tranquil colour, the low remoteness of the encircling horizon rim, the apparent convexity of the lake surface, which seemed to bosom upwards toward the impending dome of air, agreed together in an unutterable beauty of desolation.

Presently a black speck—no, two black specks—appeared upon the sheen of the

perfect mirror, detaching themselves from the dark edge of the western shore. Pushing out swiftly across the radiance, side by side, they broke it with long, smooth, diverging ripples, which gleamed changefully behind them as they drew their trail straight out toward the centre of the lake. Under the lonely glow the black specks revealed themselves as the heads of two swimming moose, a cow and a bull.

They swam completely submerged except for their dark, uncouth but splendid heads, their long, prehensile muzzles outstretched and cleaving the surface. The huge antlers of the bull, massive and broadly palmated, lay back flat on the surface behind him, above the turmoil of his unseen, powerfully labouring shoulders. In the eyes of the pair there was a questioning fear, a certain wildness as of panic. It was a strange look for these tall lords of the wilderness to be wearing at this time of year, when the gigantic bulls front all creation arrogantly in their lust of battle. But the one terror that could daunt them had come upon them suddenly—the terror of the unknown.

The pair had been on the open strip of

beach between the fir forest wherein they roamed and the waterside where they were accustomed to wallow and pull lily roots, when the terror came upon them in full force, and drove them out across the orange mirror of the lake to seek refuge in the barrens of the further shore. And neither knew what it was that they were fleeing from. For several days the cow had been uneasy, the bull angry and suspicious. The sense of some vague, uncomprehended peril, approaching but still impalpable, was in the air. From the wonder and fear and amazement of other and feebler kindreds of the wild, it had come by some obscure telepathy to trouble the nerves of the great, imperturbable moose.

But in the chill glory of this October sunset the mystery had come nearer—had grown more tangible without becoming any the less a mystery. As the cow stood alone by the waterside, calling her mate, she had felt oppressed with a dim apprehension that something other than her mate might come in response to the uncouth passion of her appeal. And her mate had come suddenly, watchfully, noiselessly, as if in half expectation of being intercepted or ambushed. His

tall, black shape was at her side, like a shadow, while her first calls were yet hoarsely thrilling the stillness.

Even as they stood conferring with sensitive, intimate muzzles, a red buck had gone leaping by, manifestly terrified, yet with an air of irresolution curiously unlike the usual whole-heartedness of his flight. Their ardour was chilled for a moment by the impression of his inexplicable fear, and they stared after him apprehensively, as if the familiar sight of a running buck had suddenly become a portent.

The strange terror of the buck was hardly more than well forgotten when a fox emerged hastily from the bushes. Seeing the pair of moose absorbed in each other, and standing there black and conspicuous by the waterside, careless of what eyes might mark them, he came stepping delicately down the beach and seated himself on his haunches not a dozen feet away. His shrewd eyes scanned them with intense inquiry, as if wondering if their careless confidence represented a strength under which he might shelter himself. At other times the lordly pair of lovers would have resented his in-

trusion and driven him off; but to-day they simply stared at him with anxious inquiry. The look in their eyes seemed to satisfy the fox that there was no help here to be relied upon. He glanced uneasily over his shoulder toward the dark fringes of fir whence he had come, rose slowly to his feet, stepped past them superciliously, and went trotting on down the edge of the lake. Their keen eyes, following him closely, saw him lengthen out into the gallop of desperate flight the moment he reached the cover of an osier thicket. The sight of that sudden desperation, in a beast so wise as the fox, unnerved them in spite of themselves. They had seen many foxes, but never before a fox who acted so peculiarly. What had he wanted of them? Why had he so searchingly looked them over? And then why had he fled? They shivered, drew closer together, wheeled their dark bulks about till their sterns were toward the shining water, and stared intensely into the dense mass of the forest where the fox had gazed so curiously. Those sombre masses of spruce and fir were their home, their secure and familiar covert, but now they questioned them, distrusted them.

What treachery could the silent shades be preparing ?

The eyes of the moose, though keen, discovered nothing. But presently their big ears, thrust forward and rigid with interrogation, caught the ghost of a sound across the immense silence. It might almost be the padding of many feet. Then here and there, from the depths of certain spots of blacker shadow, flashed a greenish gleam, points of pale fire, which might be eyes. At last a breath of air, an exhalation of the forest so light as not even to stir the long fringes of hair pendant from the bull's throat, came to their distended nostrils. It was a scent unknown to them, but indescribably sinister. Its menance daunted them. Indignant and appalled, they backed down slowly, side by side, into the water, still keeping their eyes fixed upon the forest. Then, wheeling suddenly, they swam out into the orange radiance, straining toward the refuge of the far-off opposite shore.

II

THERE were eight gigantic wolves in the pack, and one much smaller and slenderer, who seemed, none the less, to wield a certain influence over her fellows. The eight were such portentous figures as one would never expect to see in the eastern wilderness, being of the most formidable breed of Alaskan timber wolf, long of jaw and flank, broad of skull, massive of shoulder, deep of chest, and each powerful enough to slash the throat of a caribou cow at one snap and to pull her down in her run. Yet, with one exception, they had never seen Alaska, or a running caribou, or the wild rivers rolling north, or the peaks of endless snow. They had been born south of the St. Lawrence, in the limited and half-tamed forests of Northern Vermont, and they had come sweeping north-eastward in the search for more spacious solitudes.

The establishing of so great and fierce a company in the ordered east had come about in this way. Some years earlier, at a village in Northern Vermont, a splendid timber wolf

had made his escape from the caravan of a travelling menagerie. He had been hunted, with abundant hue and cry, for several days. But he was sagacious. He did not halt in his long, untiring gallop till he had put safe leagues between himself and his pursuers, and found a forest wild enough to hide in. He had hunted, with wise discretion, deer and hare and other wild creatures only, and had strictly withheld himself from all quarry that he thought to be under the protection of man. Thanks to this prudence, no man suspected his existence. After a while, meeting in the neighbourhood of a village a long-jawed, wolfish-looking mongrel with huskie and deerhound in her veins, he had easily induced her to leave her master and take to the wild life for which she had always had a dim craving. She had hunted beside him faithfully, and given him two litters—big-boned whelps, which grew up as huge and savage as their sire, but far less sagacious than he, and of more evil temper, as is apt to be the case in such a cross. They obeyed their sire and leader because they feared him and felt his dominance, and they had a respect for

the virulent and sudden flame of their slim mother's wrath. But as time went on, and wild game grew scarce, they could not be withheld from foraging near the villages, and so they presently drew to themselves the notice of men. When a few stray heifers had been done away with, and many sheep devoured, and several innocent dogs shot on suspicion, then the wise old leader pulled the pack sternly together and lead it eastward.

The eastward march was long and surrounded with many perils. Sometimes there was little game, and the pack went long hungry. Sometimes it was hard to find wooded country to conceal their journeying, and sometimes, forced to take toll of the flocks of some village, the settlers swarmed out after them with a tumult of dogs and guns and curses, which by and by taught caution to the most turbulent of the whelps. Several carried shot-pellets under their hides, to teach them that their leader's prudence had reason in it. And by the time they reached those wild regions of spruce forest, lakes, and tangled watercourses where the boundaries of Maine impinge on those of New Brunswick and Quebec, they had

acquired discipline and caution. It was an invasion formidable beyond anything the wilderness had conceived in its worst dreams that now swept on through the high solitudes to northward of the Upsalquitch and Ottanoonsis.

Among the furred and feathered dwellers of these eastern wilds there was no tradition of any such scourge as this swift, ravening pack. Of wolves there was, indeed, a sort of dim, inherited memory, but it had to do with the small eastern or "cloudy" wolf, courageous enough in its way, but not worth having nightmares about. No bear or moose had ever paid much attention to the cloudy wolf, which had been practically unknown in these parts for upwards of half a century. But rumours of the new scourge carried a chill to hearts which had hitherto had little acquaintance with fear, and a sort of obscure panic heralded the invasion all down the wild rivers and the desolate plateau lakes. So it fell that, of the ruling tribes of the region, none for a time crossed the path of the invaders. The swarming rabbits and the abundant deer kept the pack in fair hunting,

and at the same time, in their astonished retreat, led it on ever eastward.

But this which they were now come to was a country of bears, and it was inevitable that the pack should fall foul of them. One day, as the eight swept noiselessly on the hot trail of a deer—noiselessly because the wise leader had taught them the need of silence in the dangerous forests of their birth, and they seldom gave tongue except when the urge of the full moon was too overpowering to be resisted—they almost ran into a huge black beast which stood directly across the trail, clawing at a rotten stump. They stopped short, spread out into a half-circle, and stood on tiptoes, the hair on their ridged necks and shoulders bristling stiffly.

The bear was equally surprised. An old, solitary, and bad-tempered individual of his highly individual race, he had neither heard of nor sensed the invasion of the terrible hybrids, nor would he have paid much attention had he sensed it ever so clearly. He was not a subject for panics. Whirling about to face the intruders, he sat back on his haunches, grumbled deeply in his throat,

lifted one great paw, with its long, curved claws projecting, and, with lowered head, eyed his opponents fearlessly. He was ready for a fight, without regard to consequences. At the same time he was equally ready for peace, on condition that he was left severely alone. He was too interested in grubs and berries and rotten logs to think of seeking a fight for its own sake.

The wolves were not hungry, and they felt that the bear would prove no easy prey. In an irresolute expectancy, they waited till their leader should give signal for attack. Their leader, however, who sat on his haunches, with lolling tongue, just before the centre of the half-circle, was in no hurry to begin. He was studying the foe, and also waiting for a move. As befitted so wary a leader, he had the gift of patience.

It was a gift the bear had not. Presently, appearing to make up his mind that the gaunt strangers had no wish to interfere with his pursuits of wood-grubs, he turned once more to the stump and tore out the whole side of it at one wrench of his great forearm.

In that same instant the fiery little mongrel

darted forward like a snake and snapped at his hindquarters, hoping to hamstring him. With such lightning swiftness, however, did he whirl about and strike at her, that she got no more than a mouthful of fur in her teeth, and only escaped that eviscerating stroke by hurling herself clean over, like a loosed spring. A long red weal on her flank showed that she had not escaped completely.

Following in a second upon her rash attack, the rest of the pack had surged forward; but, seeing that his mate had cleared herself, the leader halted abruptly, and with a savage yelp tried to check his followers. They obeyed, for they saw what sort of a foe they had to deal with. But one, the most headlong, had gone too far. A sweeping buffet caught him fair high up on the chest. It hurled him clean back among his fellows, his neck broken and his throat torn out by the rake of those iron claws. As he lay, twitching and slavering, the leader surveyed him critically and came to a quick decision. It was no use risking, perhaps breaking, the pack upon so mighty an adversary, when their proper quarry was just ahead, and there was no desperate famine

to drive them. Summoning the pack sternly to order, he led it aside at a gallop, picked up the trail of the deer again, a hundred yards further on, and left the body of the victim to whatever fate might befall it. The bear glared after them, mumbling angrily, till they were out of sight. Then he slouched over to the body, sniffed at it, turned it over with his paw, and went calmly back to his stump to look for grubs. He had no appetite for either wolf or dog.

The pack meanwhile, raging and amazed, went on, and in due time made its kill. Feasting on the warm venison, it got over its discomfiture, and its lost member was easily forgotten. But it had learned a useful lesson.

It was two days after this that the wolves came to the lake of the barrens, and from the dark covert of the fir woods stared forth wonderingly upon the first moose which they had ever seen.

Two days earlier the wolves would have regarded these two tall, ungainly shapes on the beach, black against the water, as but a kind of exaggerated deer, and would have flown at them without hesitation. But now

"Gazed fixedly after the fugitives for some moments."

they remembered the bear. They did not quite trust the colour of these two high - shouldered, long - muzzled strangers, with their wide splay hooves and indifferent air. They waited for the signal of their wary leader, and that signal, again, the wary leader was in no hurry to give. He was uncertain what prowess, what unexpected energies, might lurk in these bulks that seemed so like and yet so unlike deer. But when at last the two moose, daunted by the unknown, suddenly plunged into the water and swam off through the orange glow, he concluded they were a quarry to be hunted. Alone he stalked forth upon the open beach, gazed fixedly after the fugitives for some moments, till he made sure where they were bound for, and then stared appraisingly up and down the shores, as if calculating the circuit of the water. Having apparently decided which would be the shortest way around, he stalked back into the shadows. A moment later the pack was under way at full run, making for the head of the lake, some seven or eight miles distant.

The pair of moose, in the meantime, gained the opposite shore and stalked up,

black and dripping, beside the willows. But they did not stop there. The fever of change was upon them, and when a moose gets going, he is liable to go far. With their long, shambling trot, which seems so effortless, yet so inexorably eats up the miles, they followed along the stream till the orange gleam was left far behind, and the bushy levels of the barren began to lift into low, rounded uplands, sparsely wooded. They had but one purpose—to put themselves as far as possible from those flitting green eyes and padding footfalls of the black fir woods by the lake.

They little guessed that the path of their indignant flight was converging toward that of the green eyes and padding feet.

III

It was a night of early moonrise, and the moon near the full. Far back among the low uplands the stream broadened out into a series of wide, still reaches that formed practically a sort of winding lake. At an abrupt elbow of this lake-like expansion,

where a clump of tall water-ash, poplar, and elderberry thicket made a little island in a space of open wild meadow, lay hidden two hunters. They had come up from the coast to eastward, crossed over the height of land, and made their way down into this remote valley, looking for moose.

Both men carried rifles. One, a gigantic figure of a man, and from his dress obviously the guide, carried also a light axe and a long roll of birch bark shaped something like a trumpet. This was the season for moose-calling.

Seating themselves with their backs to the trunk of a big water-ash, and in such a position that they were fairly hidden, while commanding a free view of all approaches to their ambush, the two made themselves as comfortable as possible for a long, motionless wait. After some ten or fifteen minutes of a stillness which would strain the nerves of any one not trained to it, Adam Moore, the giant guide, lifted the birch-bark tube to his lips and sounded through it the strange call of the cow moose, harsh and formless, but indescribably wild and lonely—the very voice, as it seemed, of the untamed solitudes.

It came lingeringly from the guide's cunning lips.

"Faith, Adam," murmured Rawson, "but you've got a fetching note!"

Moore allowed himself a faint grin of acknowledgment, for this lean, hard-bitten, cool-eyed Englishman, who had hunted big game in every corner of the earth, was one of the very few sportsmen whose commendation he cared a farthing for. After a few moments' pause, he sounded his appeal again, with added poignancy. Then he lowered the birchen tube, laid it across his knees, and waited.

There was not a breath of air. The unstirring, soundless wilderness seemed as if it had been enchanted into glass under the spell of the blue-white moon. But suddenly there came a far-off sound of crashing branches. It drew nearer swiftly.

"I *thought* that would fetch him, Adam," murmured Rawson, no louder than a breath of air in the poplar leaves. He lifted his rifle and rose softly to one knee.

A moment later Moore laid a great hand softly on his arm.

"Queer, that," he whispered—"there's *two* coming!"

Then from the thick growths across the meadow, perhaps three hundred yards away, burst the two fugitives. Even at that distance one could see that they were sore pressed and spent. The cow, in particular, staggered as she came on. The antlers of the bull were magnificent, but Rawson saw only the splendid beast's distress, and lowered his gun involuntarily.

"I can't make it out," muttered the guide, rising cautiously to his feet behind the elder bushes.

The fugitives came straight on, making for the refuge of the water-ash grove, heedless of what perils it might hold for them in their terror of the unknown menace that pursued. Half-way across the meadow lay a fallen trunk, carried there and stranded by some past freshet. The tall bull took it in his stride, but the cow, apparently half blind with exhaustion, stumbled over it, fell forward on her muzzle with a bleating groan, and lay as if she no longer cared what Fate might bring her.

Finding his mate no longer at his side, the

bull halted abruptly, swung back, lowered his huge head and sniffed at her solicitously. He pushed her with his muzzle; he even struck her smartly with the sharp points of his antlers, striving to force her to further effort. Then, apparently making up his mind that his efforts were vain, he stood over her and stared back along the trail by which they had come.

"He's game, all right!" muttered Rawson, his eyes aglow with admiration.

The next moment the undergrowth across the meadow parted with a rush, and gaunt forms came leaping into the moonlight.

"Wolves! *Timber* wolves!" exclaimed Moore in a startled voice. He had been west, and knew the breed. Eight of them! He flung down his birch-bark horn and snatched up his rifle.

Mad from their long chase, the wolves did not hesitate a second, but sprang straight on their quarry, their grey leader half a length to the front. As they came, their bared white fangs and cold eyes gleaming in the moonlight, the waiting bull never flinched. At the instant when the leader sprang for his throat, he reared, towering colossal over

the onslaught, and struck out furiously with his knife-edged hooves. Unprepared for this novel defence, the leader, in mid-spring, caught that pile-driver blow full in the face. He went down under it, with his whole head crushed in.

The next second came the crash of Rawson's rifle. Another wolf dropped. But the rest were already leaping upon the gallant bull's flank and shoulders, striving to pull him down. Raging at the sight, the Englishman rushed forward to his defence, firing once more, with what effect he did not stop to notice, and then swinging his rifle like a club. Moore, unable to shoot lest he should strike Rawson, dropped his rifle, swung his axe, and followed with huge, leaping strides.

Rawson was bringing his butt down across the back of the nearest wolf, erect and tearing at the bull's neck, when from the tail of his eye he saw a smaller, slimmer beast darting at him from the side. Instinctively he shouted "Down! Down!" and delivered a spasmodic kick at his assailant, catching it under the jaw. Had he been less fully occupied with what was going on before him, he would have been much astonished to see this one of

his adversaries drop its tail between its legs with a yelp, slink around behind him, and stand staring in bewildered submission. The mongrel had been recalled suddenly to her ancient allegiance by the command in a master's voice.

The hybrids, with no longer their wise pack-leader to teach them prudence, and maddened by this unlooked-for interference with their kill, now turned a portion of their fury upon their new opponents. For a moment Rawson had his hands full to defend himself against the leaps of a flaming-eyed beast, whom he could only fight off with short, desperate jabs, having no room for a conclusive blow. At the same time, however, at the other side of the *mêlée*, the giant guide was swinging his axe with swift effect, and the invaders were reduced to three. The bull, his neck and shoulders streaming with blood, but suddenly freed from close pressure, was lashing out once more with his battering fore-hooves in a blind fashion that made him a peril to friend and foe alike. As luck would have it, however, he grazed the haunches of Rawson's adversary, causing the brute to whirl upon him with a snarl. The

diversion gave Rawson a chance for a full, swinging blow, ending that quarrel. Of the remaining two wolves, one, springing up sideways at the guide's face, was met by a low sweep of the axe, which shore clean through his loins. At the sound of his dying yelp, the survivor leaped backwards, wheeled, and fled from the lost battle. As he ran, lengthening himself out belly to earth, Moore swung his axe again. Launched with the unerring aim of the expert backwoodsman, it hurtled through the air, swooped, and clove the fugitive's haunches. The guide strode calmly forward, recovered his weapon, and with a tap on the crown put the writhing beast out of its misery.

By this time the cow, having somewhat recovered from her exhaustion, was struggling to her feet. Seeing this, the bull turned threateningly upon his rescuers. Rawson jumped away just in time to avoid a savage thrust.

"It's evident we're not wanted here any longer," he laughed, turning to go back to the grove. As he did so, the mongrel, hitherto unnoticed because she had made herself so discreetly inconspicuous, ranged up along-

side him with a confiding humility that was unmistakable. The Englishman eyed her for a second or two in amazement, then remembered and understood.

"You get out of this, and be thankful you get out with a whole skin!" he ordered coldly. "You're a turncoat!" He was about to enforce his command with the butt of his gun, but the guide, coming up at that moment, intervened.

"No," said he decisively, "don't drive her away. I'm glad you've refused her. I'll keep her myself. She'll be worth a dozen of your ordinary brutes that have never had the spunk to kick over the traces. I reckon she's learnt her lesson, an' she won't run wild again."

The Leader of the Run

HE was a magnificent fish, by far the finest in the pool—all shining silver and the blue of damascened steel, fine in the head, massive in the shoulder, trim in the base of the tail, broad in the flukes, clean to the last scale, fresh run from the sea.

The pool, deep and spacious, was full of clear amber light; for the river was one of those northern New Brunswick streams whose waters, though of an exquisite transparency, are tinged with the colouring of a brown topaz. Through the centre of the pool swept the current in strong, slow swirls, streaked here and there with fine threads of foam from the wild rapids above. But at either side the water lay tranquilly shimmering over slopes of bright sand.

The splendid fish was not alone, for a good run of his kindred had come up with him from the gulf, and they were all resting

a while in this favoured pool before essaying the long stretch of rapids and heavy water which lay immediately before them. But not one of them could compare with their leader for size, vigour, swift alertness, or the purity of the points of colour underlying the sheen of his iridescent sides.

It was a leased water, this lone and remote branch of the Little North-West; and because it was reputed one of the best salmon streams in the province, the price came high in spite of its remoteness, and much care was given to the protection of it. In spite of wardens and watchmen, however, there were poachers not a few who managed to find their way to the teeming pools. And the salmon, energetic from their long sojourn in the vivifying waters of the sea, and fiery with the urge of spring in their blood, had no care to hide their coming. No sooner had they arrived in the pool than they began to advertise their presence fearlessly, leaping half their length above the surface, flashing an instant all silver in the sun, and falling back with a heavy splash which was nothing less than a summons to all their enemies within remotest earshot.

It was not long before that summons brought a response.

From the foamy mouth of a brook which emptied into the lower part of a pool to the right, emerged a dark, lithe beast of perhaps four feet in length. His long, sinuous, muscular body, with its very short legs and powerful, tapering tail, had much of the fish-like suggestion of the seal. His head was short and heavy-jawed, his eyes luminous and intelligent. Dripping from the foam of the noisy brook, he climbed a sloping rock and poised himself rigid as the rock itself while he watched the pool till he had seen two salmon leap. Then he slipped back into the water as smoothly as if he had been oiled.

The otter was, in fact, as much at home in the water as any fish, except for his need of coming to the surface every now and then to breathe. In the matter of speed, he was able to fairly run down and overtake the slower fish, such as the heavy, pig-like sucker and the fat mud chub; but now it was salmon he wanted, and he knew that, in this case, he must call all his cunning to his aid. Taking advantage of some rocks,

and then a long patch of weeds, he crept up the edge of the pool, making no disturbance in the water, till he was above the cluster of salmon, which lay all with their heads up-stream. Then, singling the one conspicuous fish for his prey, with a sudden, tremendous screw-like motion, he darted into the shoal.

The king salmon, as if warned of his deadly selection, had moved uneasily at the very instant of the otter's rush. He had the inestimable advantage, therefore, of being already started. Almost bending his body double in the violence of his spring, he shot aside, evading the doom. But he did not go quite free. The otter's jaws closed with a snap upon the thick part of his shoulder, just behind the gill-covers. But they caught him slantingly. Had he been a lesser fish, even so they would have held him. But with his great weight, and that all muscle and electric energy, he tore himself free, bearing a great red gash in his side. In a flash he was at the head of the pool, in the white smother at the bottom of the rapid. The otter, too wise to attempt pursuit, doubled back like an eel, and snapped up another

"Almost bending his body double in the violence of his spring, he shot aside, evading the doom."

smaller fish which, in its panic, had dashed almost into his jaws.

At first the deeply-wounded salmon left a trail of blood behind him. But, dreadful as was the hurt, it seemed to have no effect upon his vigour, and the icy water quickly checked the drain, astringing the edges of the cut arteries. At first he was too startled and shocked to choose his course, and drove on upwards straight through the smother. Here, of course, where the water was creamed with the foam packed down into it, and, therefore, full of air, there was less grip for the thrust of his tail and fins, and much of his power was wasted. In a very few seconds, however, he took hold of his wits again, and chose his way with more discretion.

The rapids were long, steep, and much broken—a succession of diagonal ledges and chutes and sluicing troughs, extending with hardly a break for several miles. To the river-men it was a place for portaging, only passable in canoes, under certain specially favourable conditions, and dreaded as "bad water" at the best of times. The salmon took it where the rush was strongest but least broken—where the solid sweep of the current,

no matter what its velocity, gave him the hold he wanted, the purchase on which to exert his tremendous thrust. In such swimming as this, it must be remembered, his mere fins, in themselves, played a comparatively small part, except the great fins or flukes of his tail. His whole body, being one corded bundle of muscle and nervous energy, became now, for all practical purposes, but an extension of the tail, all screw and engine from flukes to gill-case. If one had been looking down from straight overhead, so as to avoid the baffling reflections of the water, one might have seen him go up, a straight, darting shadow, through the most terrific chutes and sluices without apparent effort.

But it took effort, all the same, for all its appearance of ease. Coming at length—through the pounding thunder, the choking smother of the foam strips, and the dizzying confusion of broken, whirling lights—to a sort of little cauldron under the lip of a ledge in mid-river, he was glad to rest for a while. Here the current was slackened down by the depth of the cauldron and by the meeting of a strong eddy which cancelled a portion of its violence. And here, though the current

was torn and boiling, he was able to find a nook of comparatively slack water, and renew his strength for the next stage. But here also, surrounded by the thunder and the trampling of the mighty currents, certain tiny freshwater parasites had found precarious refuge. They hailed with delight the arrival of the great salmon, and fastened themselves greedily upon the edges of his raw wound. All unaware of their presence, he carried them with him when he pushed out once more into the current and resumed his strenuous journey.

Through the rest of the rapids the great salmon found no more places where he could halt. There was no let-up to the quivering, determined rushes with which he drove his way through roaring trough and rolling chute, till at last, worn and bruised, he gained the reaches of tranquil dead water which formed the next stage of his journey. In the first pool where the bottom was clean —for he hated mud and stranded refuse—he halted, and hung resting, head upstream and fins fanning gently, a few inches above the bright, sandy bottom. And here, in the course of the next hour or so, he was joined

by the majority of his fellows whom he had quitted so abruptly in the lower pool. They were all too tired for play, and they had no inclination to feed, being seldom hungry on their return to fresh water; so they all lay side by side in the quiet pool, as sluggish as so many fat suckers.

That night was still and moonless, with large stars and a blue-black sky reflected in the long reaches of unruffled water. At times a pale winged moth would drop on the glassy surface, and disturb it a little with its feeble fluttering. Presently a big brook trout would rise lazily and suck the insect in with an oily gurgle, or slap it under with a loud, contemptuous flop of the tail before condescending to mouth and swallow it. But the salmon paid no attention either to moths or trout. For some unknown reason—weariness after the ascent of the rapids hardly seemed enough to account for it—it was not their custom to rise or jump while sojourning in this pool; and the salmon seems to be a great stickler for custom.

By and by there came a strange, lurid glare striking down through the water and

illuminating the pool in a confused, distorted fashion. Never before had the salmon seen such a light suffusing the waters, even under the rosiest sunrises of their ocean home. This light was near, and violent, and of a smoky orange, and it threw black, twisting shadows. They all turned their eyes upward, and swam slowly towards it, disquieted but fascinated. Behind the glare, which was moving very slowly upstream, came a long, narrow, dark shape, which at every other second or two made a deep swirl in the water near its hinder end. These fresh-run fish had never before seen a canoe, and in the sea they had learned to distrust all long, dark, moving shapes. But they were too much hypnotized just now by that mysterious glare to have any thought of danger.

In the canoe there were two men, squatters, and incidentally, during the run of the salmon, poachers. Owning—by mere right of occupation, to be sure—two little newly-cleared farms on the bank of the stream near by, they held obstinately that they had a right to all the fish they wanted out of these waters, lease or no lease, Government or no Government. And they held with

equal obstinacy that they had a right to take them in any way they found convenient, law or no law. So, chancing to know that the warden of that section was twenty miles away upstream, they had come out for a little of that strictly prohibited sport, salmon-spearing by torchlight.

The man kneeling in the stern of the canoe wielded his short, broad-bladed maple paddle very subtly, so as not to jar the water by any splashing or concussion. The man in the bow stood behind the flaring torch of rolled birch-bark, his eyes shaded from the glare by the brim of his slouch hat, his knees slightly bent for balance and for readiness, and his long two-pronged salmon spear held poised over the side. It was really more of a fork than a spear, this weapon, the two prongs being of springy ash, and barbed, with a long slender point of steel between them, and so disguised that, when the prongs should be driven down on the victim's back with sufficient strength, they would be forced apart, to enclose and grip the writhing body while the steel transfixed its spine.

Among the fish drawn up to his dazzling lure, the man in the bow marked the great

leader, a foot longer than any of its fellows, and his dark eyes sparkled with eagerness. The spear shaft rose erect in his tense grip, his knees bent, and his whole body assumed the lines of a beast about to spring. The immense fish came almost under the canoe. The spear darted downwards, the man seeming to throw his whole weight upon it, yet without losing his balance or too violently rocking the light craft under his feet. The next instant he recovered himself with a loud grunt, and stood erect, cursing eloquently through clenched teeth, and glaring at his spear as if he would make kindling wood of it. He had missed his stroke, and he the most expert spearsman on the river. He couldn't understand it. His comrade in the stern looked at him with quizzical surprise.

"Best git down to Fredericton, an' buy yerself a pair o' specs, Bill," he suggested amiably.

Bill told him earnestly of another place, where *he* could go to, warmer than Fredericton. And the canoe was allowed to drift away, that the occupants of the pool might get over their alarm and settle down.

The cause of the spearsman's discomfiture

was this. The big salmon was not tranquil, like his companions. He was fretted by his wound, which was sapping his strength. Other greedy parasites had fastened upon it, and they caused a burning fever, which set his nerves all on edge. Attracted by the glare of the torch, he came at it with a restless eagerness. He knew not why, but he wanted it, and he wanted it at once. When he found another fish, as he imagined, barring his way, he flew into a most unsalmonly rage, and darted at the intruder, to root him aside with his horny, projecting lower jaw. That ill-tempered rush it was that saved him, for at that same instant the man in the canoe had made his lunge with the deadly fish-spear. The salmon felt a numbing blow near his tail, where one of the prongs struck him and ploughed another deep gash. Startled, and quite cured of his infatuation for the fatal flame, he tore away upstream, and never paused till he had put several miles between himself and this inexplicable experience.

He felt himself now astonishingly weary, out of all proportion to the short though violent run which he had just made. He did not understand how the old wound, with its

gnawing parasites, and the new wound, with its shock and loss of blood, were draining his forces. But just because his vitality was being so sapped, Nature, ever careful for the continuance of the species, was urging him on all the more fiercely toward the breeding-grounds at the head of the river. Tired though he was, after a few minutes' halt, he continued his journey, leaving the rest of the run as far behind in the feverishness of his haste.

All that night he travelled, and on into the afternoon of the following day, and came at length to the great basin at the foot of the falls. Here, at any other time, he would have halted long enough to thoroughly refresh himself before attempting the difficult leap. These falls were by far the most troublesome obstacle on the whole river—a barrier so effective indeed that none but the most vigorous and dauntless fish of the run ever succeeded in passing it. But the wounded salmon was too driven by the urge of his fevered blood to take any time for recuperation. From the middle of the basin he thrust head and shoulders once above water, as if to reconnoitre the roaring wall of

white and amber before him. Then, with a tremendous rush, he threw himself some eight or ten feet clean into the air, struck the face of the cataract several feet from its crest, and, with that mighty screw-like thrust of tail and body, shot straight on upward through the perpendicular column of water. But he had miscalculated his strength. Under the very lip of the fall, where the downward rush was of clear topaz, and so swift as to seem almost at rest, he faltered. The next instant, he was hurled back and trampled down through the smother to the boiling bottom of the basin.

Half stunned, he made his way to the deep, still water at one side of the pool, and lay quietly under the ledge, seeking to recover his strength. But he could not rest effectually by reason of the ache of his wounds, the fret of the greedy freshwater parasites, and that insistent fever in his blood. When the doom of the wild has once snatched at its prey, and, in part, missed its grip, the unhappy victim seems marked for every stroke of Fate. So, long before the great salmon was sufficiently recovered to properly renew his venture, the sting within him urged him

forth again. Once more he lifted head and shoulders above water, from the centre of the basin, and eyed the cataract through the rainbow spanning it, to assure himself that he had chosen the best path. As he did so, he saw a smaller fish flash up into the sunlight, shine for a moment like a crescent of burnished silver against the creamy front of the fall, take the clear flood of solid amber above the foam with strong precision, and dart triumphantly on over the gleaming lip.

The sight was too much for his prudence. With a splendid rage, he rushed forward to the foot of the fall, and hurled himself into the air through the iridescent quivering of the light and the whipping shreds of the spray.

It was a superb leap, two feet further than he had made in his first attempt, and a good foot beyond the mark of his triumphant predecessor. But, alas, it was a blind leap, and it went untrue because of that wound at the base of his tail. He struck the base of the fall to one side of the amber column, where the sheet of water was too thin and broken to give him any hold. Convulsively

he thrust and lashed, but the treacherous element yielded instead of giving him the firm resistance which he required. He was swept aside, jammed against a projecting horn of rock, and dashed once more to the bottom.

This time he was not half, but completely stunned. For some seconds, unresisting as a clod, he was rolled over and trampled upon by the falling flood. Then the uprush carried him clear, and he went drifting with the slow swirls, belly upward, across the sunlit basin. Presently he came a little to his senses, righted himself, and with a feeble stroke of his tail made toward the quieter water inshore. Dimly he felt that he must recover himself as quickly as possible for another effort. Dimly the vision of those far spawning-beds of white gravel, bathed with icy springs, kept luring him through the darkness of his stupor.

He should have sought deep water for security; but just now his senses were so gone astray that instinct itself failed him, his doom being upon him. He swam blindly and feebly straight ahead, found the water getting shoal, turned irresolutely, and all at once felt a clutching weight fasten itself

upon his back, and keen teeth burning deep into the base of his brain.

With a mighty convulsion he threw off his assailant, but the effort spent the last of his force. The same convulsion threw him forward into the shallows. With a heavy, splashing flop he lay over on his side, half out of the water, the angry gash in his shoulder turned up to the sun. The next moment his assailant—a slim, dark-brown mink, with pointed muzzle and bright, savage eyes—was upon him again, and tearing at his throat. But he lay quivering, and knew nothing of it.

The mink, presently satisfied that his prey was quite dead, strove to drag the body ashore. Here on the open beach, in the full sun, it was impossible to make his meal with comfort. He did not like being so conspicuously in the public eye. He was a marvel of strength, to be sure, for his size and weight, his lithe body a mere bundle of whipcord muscles. But the dead salmon was heavy. Tugging doggedly, he succeeded in dragging it, by jerks, fairly clear of the water. But to get it up the beach and under the shadow of the bushes was quite beyond his present powers. Wisely he set

himself to the task of reducing its weight, and at the same time refreshing his energy, by eating as much of it as possible, all the while keeping a furtive, malignant eye upon the thickets, lest some bear or lynx should appear to snatch the prize from his jaws.

High overhead in the unclouded blue, a dark shape was wheeling slowly, peering down upon earth with hard, glassy eyes of black and gold. That slow wheeling on motionless wings came to a stop. The splendid spread of pinion drew together, the gleaming white head and dark wing-elbows pitched grandly forward, and the huge bird dropped from heaven like a wedge. The wind hissed in the tense web of his feathers.

At the sound of that strident hissing, the mink looked up with a snarl of defiance. He made the mistake, for a fraction of a second, of thinking he had to do with a hawk; and in defence of his lawful booty he was prepared, being a dauntless little marauder, to make stand against any hawk. Too late he saw his error. With a cry of rage, he bent himself double and sprang back. But he seemed to spring straight up into the eagle's talons.

Game to the last gasp, he bit vainly into the hard, thick-feathered thigh above him. He got but a mouthful of fluff. Then the talons of steel contracted inexorably, and the life passed out of him with a whimpering gasp. The splendid bird opened his claws and tossed the limp brown body aside, scorning to feed upon such rank and stringy flesh.

With lifted wings he alighted beside the salmon, one foot planted arrogantly upon it in sign that it was his. For a few seconds he stared about him, his piercing, implacable eyes seeming to challenge any one who might care to question his claim to the booty. As no one came, he presently fell to his meal, tearing the delicate flesh with his beak and gulping it in big mouthfuls. From time to time he would raise his beautiful, savage white head, now streaked with blood, and gaze curiously at the sudden silver crescent of some salmon leaping the falls. To him this seemed a useless and inexplicable performance. When he had devoured a good half of the prize, he clutched the remnant in his talons, rose into the air with a laborious flapping, and flew off, over the

white roar of the falls and the dark masses of the hemlock forest beyond, to the lonely granite peak in whose cleft summit he had his eyrie.

The Spotted Stranger

HE looked curiously out of place in these austere, dark-green, brown-carpeted northern woods of spruce and fir. His bright golden-tawny coat, sown with vivid black spots, made him very conspicuous in the shadowy glooms.

And he felt quite as out of place as he looked. He had never before seen anything like these northern woods. In his native Indian jungle, where the air steamed and quivered, reeking with heavy scents, there was always a riot of hot colour, much golden-yellow of stem and leaf and burnt bamboo mingling with the rank greens and glowing blossoms, and all splashed with thick blotchy shadows under the intense sun. Into such surroundings his own hot colouring had ever blended to a marvel, so that it had been hard for the most vigilant

of eyes to detect him as he went prowling noiselessly in search of his prey. But here he felt himself naked to every observer. Half angry, half afraid, his powerful tail lashed jerkily from side to side as he crept along, belly to earth, his fierce eyes glancing this way and that in search of either a quarry or a hiding-place.

He was hungry, this lean Indian leopard; but a place wherein to conceal himself and rest, while taking stock, so to speak, of his new surroundings, was even more important to him than food. His nerves were still quivering from the shouts and screams, the choking smoke, the blinding glare, the flames that had seemed to pounce and lick hungrily after him, and all the maddening uproar of the fire which had destroyed the circus and set him free. He did not know that he owed his escape to a kindly attendant who had opened his cage in the turmoil, only to be knocked down and terribly clawed in his wild plunge for safety. He hardly knew, or he remembered but confusedly, how in his flight through the settled country he had been shot at, chased by yelping dogs, charged by a herd of angry and curious cattle, and

all but run down by a roaring locomotive whose speed he had perilously misjudged. All that he quite realized just now was the cool solitude and the silence, and, very keenly, the strange vistas of the tree-trunks, which seemed to be always opening out from him in every direction. They kept him glancing ceaselessly every way at once, in a fashion most exhausting to the nerves. He grew as anxious as a cornered rat for a hole. What he wanted was a place that he could back into, and thence stare out with some sense of security upon this altogether novel and uncomprehended species of world. Savage, crafty, powerful, and confident in his powers, he had little fear of what he knew and understood. But like most highly-organized creatures, with some development of the imagination, he feared the unknown. He wanted to make sure of a fair chance to observe it before undertaking to cope with it.

Yet what seemed to him a solitude was in reality populous enough, had his eyes but been initiated to it. The tiny, grey-brown, elfin shapes of the wood-mice stared at him an instant, then fell back with thin squeaks

of amazement into their burrows under the fir roots. From behind a stump a yellow-brown weasel, of the same hue as the carpet of dead fir needles, glared at him with eyes as wild as his own and far more savagely malignant. Little black-and-white woodpeckers, running up the hemlock trunks, peered around at him curiously, keeping their bodies well out of the range of his baleful stare. The chickadees stopped hunting insects under the bark, and wondered at him as he passed, then flew on ahead, with a fine-drawn *tsic-a-dee-dee-dee*, to get another look at so novel a visitor to the fir forests. And a big porcupine, hanging sleepily in a hemlock branch, glanced down upon him with eyes of supreme indifference.

At last, however, a red squirrel chanced to catch sight of the bright-spotted stranger. Frisking nearer, from branch to branch, he ran half-way down a big trunk, spread legs and tail wide, scrutinized the leopard with his great, luminous, unspeakably insolent eyes, and set up a chatter so shrill that the quiet aisles of the forest rang with it.

Thoroughly startled, the leopard crouched in his tracks and shrank as if some one had

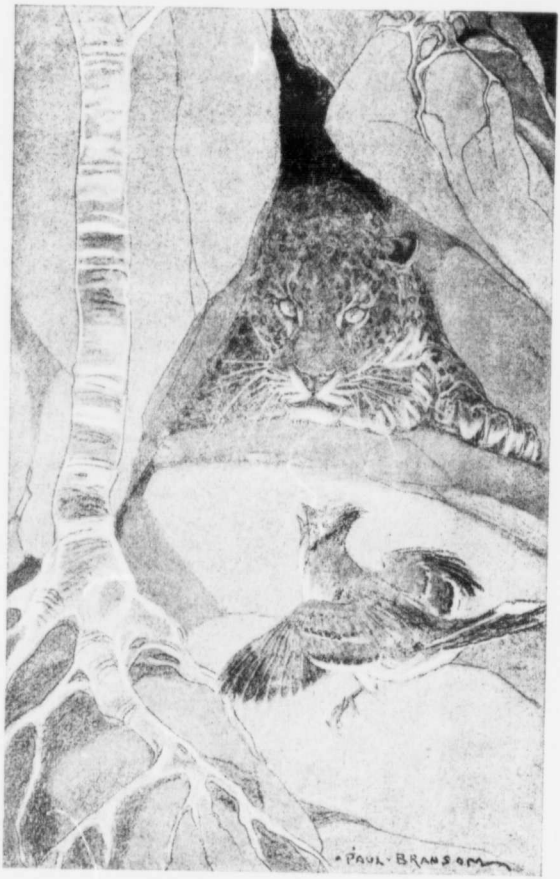
flicked a whip in his face. Then in a rage he pounced at the impudent little reviler. Of course, the latter was gone in an eye-wink, and his loud mockery shrilled out from the top of the tree. Up went the leopard after him, agile and swift. But almost in the same instant the squirrel was shrieking his insults from the next tree and the next.

Much disgusted, the leopard came down again and resumed his journey. His insulter, he decided, was much too insignificant to be noticed, either as a prey or as a foe. But in this he was mistaken. The noisy abuse of the little red imp brought several more of his kind, equally eloquent; and to swell the clamour came presently some half-dozen blue jays and whisky-jacks, who fluttered and whistled and squealed about the brilliant stranger till his heart was ready to burst with the sheer cold impotence of his rage. To be sure, he had known something not unlike this before, when, in his own jungle, he had been baited and reviled by a throng of gibbering monkeys. In that case he had at last succeeded in catching one of his revilers and eating him—a most consoling form of vengeance. But his present tor-

mentors were so little and so elusive that he could indulge himself in no such hope.

At last, however, he came to a sort of tangle of rock overgrown with brambles, bracken, and birch saplings, and therein he presently found a crevice which almost amounted to a cave. Crawling into it, he turned around and lay down with a vast sense of relief. The retreat was so small that his head came out to the very entrance, making his concealment somewhat incomplete. But at least no mysterious enemy could now come upon him from the rear. His front he would make shift to defend against all comers.

As soon as he was settled, he curled his great paws demurely under his chin, shut his eyes to the narrowest thread-like slits, and appeared to sleep. Encouraged by this indifference, his tormentors flocked down among the bracken, almost under his nose. He took no notice. The jays became particularly audacious, screaming and hopping up with lifted wings, and cocking their bright eyes at him in unmeasured derision. At last one alighted within a couple of feet of his very muzzle. For a fraction of a



"At last one alighted within a couple of feet of his very muzzle."

second the rash bird saw a pair of immense pale eyes that opened suddenly upon her. Then a spotted paw shot forth, swift as light, and she was but a flattened bunch of bright blue feathers under it.

With an outburst of hysterical shrieks, the whole mob, squirrels and all, took themselves off. The stranger, blinking with satisfaction, devoured the meagre prize, and wiped the feathers from his chaps with both paws.

The clamour of jay and squirrel having died away, the stranger lay looking out quietly upon his new domain. For a long time nothing stirred. But the forest soon forgets. In a little while the leopard marked a curious figure prowling between the trunks some forty or fifty paces from his hiding-place. He saw at once that it was some kind of a cat, but with strange, high, humped hindquarters, a mere stub of a tail, and a very large round face, fiercely ruffed and whiskered. It was not as large as himself, by any means; but, all the same, it was so formidable-looking that he thought best not to go out and try conclusions with it—at least, not till he should come to feel a little better acquainted. Such an enterprise

as that could wait. Even as he was coming to this conclusion the lynx picked up his trail. At that great footprint and menacing, unknown scent, the grim prowler stopped short. For a moment he sniffed at the trail inquiringly, the long hair lifting slowly along his back. Then with pale, wide eyes he swept an apprehensive glare about him, and went off with huge, noiseless leaps through the grey trunks.

The leopard blinked again, and opened and shut his great claws like a gratified cat. He was beginning to stand less in awe of this strange northern world.

The lynx had not been more than five minutes gone when a brown rabbit came leaping excitedly through the bracken. It appeared to be fleeing from some pursuer. Just in front of the cave it halted, sat up on its haunches, and glanced back nervously, its immense ears apprehensively erect. With one bound the leopard shot from his doorway and fell upon it. This was a kill worth making, and he cared little what other hunter had been trying for it. As he lay making his meal, a lithe, tawny little shape darted from the bracken, snarled venomously in his

very face, and flashed away before he could put his paw upon it.

After this repast the stranger slept comfortably for an hour or so, and woke up feeling considerably at home with his novel surroundings. It seemed pretty evident that he was going to find good hunting, and he had as yet seen no sign of any creature strong enough or daring enough to challenge his right to it. The forest was now dim with the first purples of the twilight, and he felt himself called to the chase. No longer a nervous fugitive, but master of a snug lair and lord of an apparently limitless range, he stalked forth, stretched himself luxuriously, and wandered off to look for water.

Only a couple of hundred yards beyond his retreat he found it—a low-shored, glassy lake, now glimmering with amber and violet under the last of the sunset. Crouching at the water's edge, he stared up and down the lonely shores as he drank, and then quickly shrank back among the fir trees. He had caught sight of many fine hoof-tracks leading down to the white beach, and realized that there were deer about. The deer were his favourite quarry. He licked his lips and

climbed hastily into a big hemlock conveniently near the trails.

From the deeps of violet sky straight overhead came the long, twanging note of a swooping night-hawk. It was a strange sound to the wanderer from the tropics, and he peered upwards curiously through the branches, unable to make it out. Then his attention was diverted by a sound of footfalls coming down the trail. They were heavy footfalls, which made the dry twigs crackle heedlessly, as if the wayfarer did not care who knew of his comings or his goings. The leopard curled his lips back from his fangs at this manifestation of self-confidence, and drew himself together for a tremendous spring. From the nature of the footfalls his experienced ear told him that it was no pad-footed creature that was approaching, but a hoofed beast of some sort, and he expected a heavy buck, upon whose neck he would fall and tear his throat.

But at sight of the shape which came stalking into his view he changed his mind for the moment. This was not a beast to be challenged lightly.

It was a bull moose, tall and black and im-

posing. His immense and humped shoulders, short, thick neck, and massive, long-snouted head proclaimed the strength of a buffalo; while the fierce, little twinkling eyes, which disdained to keep a look-out for enemies, showed a spirit which would know how to use that strength. His broad, palmated antlers, of vast spread and apparently enormous weight, were such a weapon as the leopard had never before contemplated, and they made a great impression upon him. He could not know, of course, that at this season the antlers were not yet fully developed, but spongy and tender and altogether useless.

The moose strode on down to the water's edge, waded out belly deep, and with noisy splashings began pulling the tough-rooted water-lily stems. The lake was shallow, and he was so far out from shore that the leopard could not observe him very well. Consumed with curiosity, he came down out of his tree, crept to the waterside, and there crouched staring.

Presently the moose, catching sight of that spotted, sinuous form on the beach, stopped pulling lilies and stared haughtily

in return. The longer he stared, the less he seemed to like the stranger's looks. First he snorted his distaste, loudly and unmistakably; then he came splashing heavily shoreward to give more forcible expression to his dislike. For a moment or two the leopard stood his ground, as if ready to try conclusions at once with this formidable rival; then, thinking better of it, he withdrew slowly up the beach. The moose, quite unimpressed either by his dignity or by his look of dangerous power, came ashore with a rush and charged after him, all dripping.

With a harsh snarl, the leopard wheeled and crouched to spring. To his amazement, the great black beast, instead of coming at him head down as he expected, danced forward, striking out swiftly with great battering fore-hooves, whose edges would cut like steel. Confounded by such an unheard-of mode of attack, which he did not know how to meet, the leopard sprang lithely aside and ran up his hemlock tree. Apparently much surprised at this performance, the moose stopped short and stood for some moments staring and snorting. Then he shook himself long and well, turned his

back, wriggled his meagre little tail contemptuously, and loitered off into the woods, browsing as he went.

In a very ugly mood after this discomfiture, the leopard dropped presently from his perch and crept stealthily homeward. He would wait till later in the night for his deer-hunting. In his breast rankled a savage hate for the big black beast which had so outfaced him, and he studied for his revenge. It was in this unconsidering frame of mind that he encountered a little black-and-white creature, hardly so big as a rabbit, which crossed his path and paused to look at him with leisurely curiosity.

Had he been cooler, the mere fact that a creature so tiny did not seem to fear him would have been enough in itself to make him pause and investigate. There was something altogether unnatural in such an attitude; but instead of taking warning, he was only the more enraged by what seemed to him an unparalleled piece of impudence. He pounced with a snarl. At the same instant something terrible struck him full in the face. It was blinding, suffocating, indescribable. With a strangling cry he jerked

himself backwards; and the little striped thing, slipping out unhurt from almost between his paws, strolled off calmly among the bushes. It was a great piece of bad luck for the spotted stranger from India that he had never been taught anything about skunks.

With that strangling horror in his eyes and nostrils—viscous, clinging, all-pervasive—it was some seconds before the leopard could draw breath. Then he went into a paroxysm, pawing frantically at his face and rolling in the moss and ferns. The pawing did no good, so at last he took to rooting deep through the moss and down into the cool, moist mould beneath. Instinctively he had found his way to Nature's own remedy for his trouble. Fresh earth is the best antidote and the best cleanser for it. In a few minutes he could draw his breath fairly, and make shift to see; but to get himself clean, that was another matter. And, oh, how he hated himself! As soon as he could see clearly enough, he went racing through the woods in a crazy effort to escape from that overpowering smell. He was fairly exhausted before he came to realize that he was carrying

it with him. Then, returning somewhat to his senses, he scratched a big hole in the moist earth, and fell to rolling, burrowing, and wallowing in it. When that wallow was too thoroughly infected to be of any use, he went on and dug himself another, and yet again another. By the time the first of the dawn had begun to steal coldly through the forest, he had reached the conclusion that there was nothing more to be done. Thereupon he made an elaborate toilet, pawing and licking himself like a cat, till at last he managed to persuade himself that he was once more clean. As a matter of fact, however, he still carried upon his fur—as he would for days—a pungent and sickening reminder of his insignificant-looking but terrible little foe.

Bitter as had been the experience, the leopard forthwith began to reap a certain substantial benefit from it. His own scent, which most of the wild creatures found so terrifying, was for the time thoroughly disguised. The rabbits, always curious, would not allow him to come quite within leaping distance before taking alarm. Because he smelled like a skunk, they stupidly concluded

that he could leap no further than a skunk. The deer, too—it was surprising how easy they were to stalk, so long as they were not allowed to catch sight of him. If they saw him, of course they did not stop to investigate. They knew nothing of leopards, these Canadian deer, but they had an ominous tradition of panthers in the family; and they had wit enough to know that what looked like a panther with spots was not improbably quite as dangerous as one without that adornment.

Full fed on rabbit and deer meat, and his nostrils at length somewhat blunted to the unsavoury scent which everywhere accompanied him, during the next four or five days the leopard grew very well content with his surroundings. The one fly in his ointment was the great bull moose. Day after day, from some secure concealment, he observed the arrogantly indifferent black monster, and bared fang and claw with impotent rage. But never could he quite make up his mind to provoke the perilous encounter. He felt that he might perhaps win by dropping upon the bull's neck from some convenient branch. But then, again,

he felt that he might lose. And the idea of being slashed and stamped down by those great splay hooves, which sometimes clacked so strangely as their owner went by, filled him with discretion. He wisely concluded that the time was not yet ripe for that adventure.

And while he was nursing this grudge, came the day of his great mistake.

Overlooking the lake was a slope of mountain-side covered with patches of blueberry barren, and rising suddenly to a half naked upthrust of grey granite. Thinking perhaps to enlarge the bounds of his range, and perhaps to vary his diet a little with unknown game, the leopard started to explore the nearer slopes.

The blueberries were in their prime here in this high, cold, late-summered region. They clung thick-massed all over the low bushes, bright as globules of lapis-lazuli under the downpour of the sparkling sunlight. Shoulder deep among them the leopard marked a small, glossy-black, chubby animal, who was stripping and gulping down the juicy fruit with loud gulps of satisfaction. Sometimes, as if unable to absorb them fast enough by any other

process, he would sit up on his plump little haunches, grasp the whole top of a loaded bush in his forearms, and fairly wallow his face in it till the purple juices daubed him to the very ears.

The leopard knew at once that this droll and greedy little beast was a bear cub, rolling in fat and exceedingly good to eat. As it happened, he was acquainted with only two kinds of bear—the little, humorous black bear of the Himalayas, courageous enough, but feeble, and the sluggish, inoffensive ant-bear. He was quite ignorant of the temper and the capabilities of the black bear of Eastern Canada. And ignorance is one of those faults which Nature, sternest of parents, is apt at times to punish with the most implacable severity. It is not all her children who are fortunate enough to survive her harsh lessons.

The leopard crouched for a few minutes, watching with narrowed lids the riotous feasting of the cub. Then his appetite and his ferocity overcame him. The cub seemed to be alone, and he had nothing to fear, in any case, from such bears as he knew anything about. Like a great missile of spotted

gold, he hurled himself through the air, fell upon the merry cub, and bit through its neck with one crunch of his powerful jaws. Then, not liking the glare and exposure of the open, he lifted the limp little body and turned to carry it in under the fir trees.

Even as he turned, a great shadow came between him and the sun. Instinctively he bounded aside. But in the very instant that his tense limbs left the ground, a gigantic bulk fell upon him, crushing him back again. With a screech of startled fury, he writhed from under it, one flank flayed to the ribs by the impact of the mother bear's avenging paw. She strove to hold him down with her great weight. But his muscles, lithe as whipcord, had the knit strength of steel, together with a well-nigh unbelievable store of elastic nervous energy. The explosive violence of his contortions almost succeeded in throwing her off —almost, but not quite. Foiled in his effort to break from her deadly clutch, he twisted his body around so that he could bite at her throat and bring his claws into action. Very gladly would he have made his escape

and fled without shame, for this was no such bear as had ever before come within his range of imagination. But, finding escape impossible, he was going to show this monster his mettle. Sinking his foreclaws deep into his assailant's neck, he arched his long, flexible back like a strung bow, and raked her flank and belly with the terrible, eviscerating weapons of his hinder paws.

Breaking for the first time the silence of her avenging rage, the bear gave vent to a loud *wah-ah* of pain and consternation. Such a hideous method of fighting was new to her. Savagely she strove to pluck the spotted beast off, that she might hold him at arm's length and smash him. But he clung like blazing oil. Finding it impossible to fling him off, she changed her tactics, and hugged him to her chest with her tremendous forearms. For a moment or two his tense muscles withstood the terrific pressure, while he continued to rip her with his hind claws. Then, with a gasping screech, he collapsed. Those inexorable arms crushed, constricted, annihilated, till the last breath went out of his lungs, the last pulse of life from his heart, and his lank

hindquarters trailed from that embrace limp as a dead rabbit's.

As she felt the straining body relax in her grip, and the round, flat head fell back with eyes bulging, the bear tore out the exposed throat with her teeth as if to make quite sure of her victory. Then, letting the body drop, she fell on all fours and sniffed and whimpered over the form of her dead little one. Speedily satisfying herself that it was indeed quite dead, she dragged herself away with her shocking wounds to the gloom of some deep thicket, there in solitude to die or to recover as the fates of the wilderness might decree.

The brilliant skin of the dead leopard, spotted with black and splashed thick with crimson, lying there exposed beside the black body of the cub, caught the eye of a white-headed eagle soaring high above the bare granite peak. In wide spirals, on all but motionless wings, he sank lower and lower, till at length he passed close above the bodies, peering down at them with outstretched snowy neck and hard, glassy, black-and-golden eyes. But he did not care to alight, for the spotted stranger looked dangerous to him even in death. Presently he winged away again

beyond the peak, as if to say it was no affair of his. And then, in the stillness and the warmth, came swarming the flies, shining like jewels, and fearing no dead thing, however strange.

Red Dandy and MacTavish

THE first of the dawn lay pink and dewy chill along the naked, tilted crest of the Ridge. Slowly it crept down the scarred rocks, washed softly over the tangled thickets, and at last shot its thin, aërial rays of light and colour down the glades and under the branches of the ash, chestnut, and maples, just filming with their earliest spring green.

Into a deep little hollow last it came—a hollow carpeted with dry twigs, half choked with vine and bramble, and overhung by the branches of two enormous chestnuts. It was so secret a hollow that the long, pink fingers of light felt their way in with difficulty, and seemed to grope for a while before finding anything to reveal. At, last, however, they did find something, and immediately, as if pleased at the discovery, they lit up the hollow with a sudden flush of pale rose-amber.

What the delicate light revealed was a young fawn, whose immense, mild, liquid eyes met it wonderingly. Curled up under a bush, his red-tawny coat, mottled with cream yellow, made him, as a rule, almost indistinguishable from his bed of mottled brown leaves. But that peculiar, crystalline yet tinted light of earliest dawn made him suddenly conspicuous. After a moment or two of wonder, he seemed to become aware that he was no longer invisible. He dropped his baby head between his hooves, and appeared to shrink into a guarded immobility. It was almost as if by sheer unconscious volition his colours became less bright, and he began to fade, through mere stillness, back into his surroundings.

But that instant's motion, the lowering of his head, had been enough to make trouble. It had caught the attention of a pair of vigilant and cruel eyes at the upper edge of the hollow. A prowling, shadowy-grey shape, as noiseless as the motion of the dawn itself, crouched suddenly flat to earth and glared down with terrible intentness at the ruddy, mottled little form beneath the bush. A second shadowy shape, with similar pale,

"Curled up under a bush, his red-tawny coat, mottled with cream yellow, made him as a rule almost indistinguishable from his bed of mottled brown leaves"

piercing, moon-like eyes, stole up and crouched beside the first.

They were sinister-looking beasts, the two lynxes, each nearly forty pounds in weight, with immense, panther-like paws, and muscles like steel moving swiftly under their loose, long fur. Their hindquarters were of exaggerated size and power as compared with the fore-quarters, and their hind legs were gathered under them, ready for an instant spring, in such a fashion as to suggest some monstrous and predatory hare. Their tales were mere thick stubs, apparently quite futile as far as concerned all customary uses of a tail. Their round, malign faces were fiercely whiskered, surrounded by a sort of ruff of long fur curling forward from beneath the jaws, and their ears were tipped with long, stiff tufts. In colour they were of a light grey, powdered vaguely with a pale yellow-brown—a colouring which made them all but invisible in the shadowed woods, except for the startling brilliancy of their wide pale eyes.

Both lynxes stared unwinkingly for a few long seconds at the unconscious fawn, whose mild eyes were turned in another direction,

watching anxiously for his mother's return. All at once, though not a sound, a whisper, had come to his ears, some subtle warning thrilled his baby nerves, and he turned his head to glance behind him.

Two dim, grey things, with dreadful eyes fixed upon his, were creeping down into the hollow.

The fawn was not many hours old. He had so far learned nothing, either of lynxes or of death. But he needed no learning to know that those two dim shapes meant doom. Opening wide his narrow muzzle, he cried out for his mother—a strange, strident cry, half bleat, half yelp, but quite unmistakable in its terror and its appeal.

The cry was answered instantly by a clear belling from close at hand, and almost in the next second the mother doe arrived, coming in one tremendous leap clean over the nearest bushes. It was not by any means her customary way of coming home. On other occasions she would drift in silently, not so much as snapping a twig. But when danger threatened her little one, she threw prudence to the breezes and came by the shortest road

With a soft little murmur of reassurance, the red mother nosed her fawn, sniffing it all over as if to ask what ailed it. It was shivering, and after a few moments she looked up, glancing about to see what had so frightened it.

At the sudden, vehement appearance of the doe, both lynxes had stopped abruptly, crouching in readiness for whatever might take place. When they saw the mother's head bent low, and all her attention absorbed in the little one, they again stole forward. But now they separated, one creeping to the right, the other to the left. They knew that a mother deer, in the protection of her young, was an antagonist too formidable for one lynx alone to engage; but, by attacking her on both flanks at once, they trusted to confuse her, and so avoid the lightning strokes of her dangerous, knife-edged hooves.

When the doe lifted her head to look around, she saw the implacable eyes of the male lynx, not fifteen feet away, just gathering himself for the spring. Experienced in battle, she did not wait for that deadly pounce, but, with a shrill snort of defiance, she leaped to meet it, prancing forward with

indescribable lightness, her polished, pointed hooves, hard as steel, striking out savagely before her.

With a snarl, the lynx jumped backwards, not daring to face the strokes. Instinctively the doe glanced behind her, to see that the little one was still safe. The she lynx was in the very motion of springing upon her. She was not in time to evade the spring, but she was in time to meet it ineffectually with one short, cutting stroke. Such a stroke could not stop the great cat's pounce, already launched, but it ripped a long red gash down the grey flank, and so diverted the attack that the assailant's claws were sunk into the shoulders of their prey, instead of into the throat.

With a sharp belling, the doe leaped into the air, striving to shake her assailant off. Finding this effort vain, she darted under a branch, hoping to scrape the fatal rider from her place. In this she was successful; but before she could turn and defend herself again, the male lynx had her by the throat, strangling her. The next moment the female was again upon her shoulders, tearing at her neck and ripping her flank with those evisce-

rating hinder claws. She belled chokingly, and struggled with desperate, plunging leaps. But in a couple of minutes the lynxes had borne her down, and in a few seconds more her life-blood was flooding forth scarlet and hot upon the withered leaves.

II

MACTAVISH sat on the very peak of the Ridge, and stared with calm eyes into the spreading miracle of the dawn. In the crook of his left arm rested his handy ·303, its blued barrel gleaming in the clean, thin radiance. His big right hand fingered his red beard complacently. That sunrise seemed to him just as it should be. The faint rose tints, the amber, the gold, of a transparency altogether inexplicable and almost unbelievable, played along his rugged but fine-strung nerves like the long, slow notes of a fiddle beside a still water under a mid-summer moon.

Scotch, Welsh, and English in his veins, MacTavish was a mixture more or less enigmatic even to himself. He shrank from

hurting anything, yet he was a keen hunter, and he loved a good fight. On his way from his cabin in to the Settlement, twenty miles away across the valley, he had started up the western slope a half-hour earlier than was necessary—quite in the dark, in fact—just in order to see the first of the sunrise from the crest of the Ridge, its celestial flood breaking over the wide valley below him. But he would not acknowledge to himself that this was his reason for coming up so early. He had several other reasons ready, but he knew in his heart that they had no weight at all. They only served to veil to himself this guilty passion of his for sunrises and sunsets, and other beautiful but practically useless affairs.

Never, thought MacTavish, tugging at his red beard with slow intensity of enjoyment, had he seen that great view from the Ridge more entrancing, never a sunrise that was more perfect in its sorcery. He hardly dared to breathe, lest it should change in a flash to some other and less lovely a combination of tones. The stillness was almost terrible in its perfection—as it were of an infinite bubble blown to its utmost limit and colouring by a miracle.

And then it broke. From the hollow below came a medley of furious sounds—snarls, cries, strugglings—the unmistakable utterance of a life-and-death encounter. The mystic light upon the rocks, the thickets, the greening trees, suddenly changed, became more familiar, more ordinary, something almost in the line of the day's routine return. MacTavish drew a long breath, as of one released from a strong spell. He snatched up his rifle, and darted swiftly but quietly down the slope to the bushy hollow where the sounds seemed to come from.

The faithful mother had ceased struggling, and the lynxes, not yet quite assured of their victory, were both tearing ferociously at her throat when MacTavish appeared. With harsh snarls—enraged beyond all discretion at this interference in the hour of victory—they turned and confronted him, as if almost minded to try conclusions with him. Up went MacTavish's handy gun, and the male lynx sprang straight into the air, with all four legs stretched rigid, to fall back, relaxed and sprawling, across the neck of his victim. Before he was fairly down, the female was gone—simply vanishing, as if the report of

the rifle had blown her away. MacTavish saw no more of her than an instant's drift of grey between one thicket and another.

MacTavish picked up his trophy, appraised it with skilled eye as a good pelt, then flung it down carelessly, a little chagrined at not having been quick enough to secure both the grey marauders. He examined the doe to make sure she was quite dead, produced a few yards of stout cord from his capacious pocket, and strung the body up by the hind legs to a branch overhead, out of the way of the foxes. Then he turned to the fawn.

The little animal had been watching, from its place, with immense blank eyes of stupefaction. So many sudden horrors had left it numb in its utter incomprehension. When MacTavish gently went up to it, holding out his hand, it hardly even shrank away. But when he indiscreetly laid his hand upon its muzzle, the dreaded man-smell shocked it, and it struggled to its feet, repeating that strident and piteous cry of appeal to the mother who was now so deaf to it. Feebly it strove to get away. But MacTavish had it fast. He held it firmly, but he stroked it gently, rubbing its back and its neck. And

presently, puzzled, but in part reassured by the smell of its mother, which blended so curiously with the man-smell on MacTavish's clothes, it stopped its strange cries and lay still in the hunter's arms, looking at him with eyes of anxious inquiry.

"Poor wee beastie!" murmured MacTavish, holding it as tenderly as if it had been a human baby. And then, remembering his beloved Burns: "'Wee sleekit, quiverin', timorous beastie!"

For a few moments he stood hesitating. He had set out to pay a visit to the Settlement, and he was not one to lightly change his plans. But the needs of the little animal were a peremptory demand on his understanding heart. Another day would do for the trip to the Settlement. He slung the dead lynx over his shoulder, settled the fawn more or less comfortably in his left arm, and started back for his cabin, on the other side of the Ridge.

III

In MacTavish's snug cabin, tended and petted, the fawn speedily forgot the horrors which had surrounded its first appearance

on the stage of life. It learned at once to drink warm cow's milk, and a little later to browse, not only on the grass of MacTavish's pasture-clearing, but also on the choicest vegetable products of his little garden. MacTavish spoiled it shockingly, but it rewarded him with a dog-like devotion that might almost at times have seemed a nuisance. It was for ever at his heels, and as it seemed constitutionally incapable of learning obedience, whenever he did not wish to be followed he had to shut it up securely in the barn, and turn a deaf ear to its terrible penetrating appeals.

In course of months the little one's coat lost its creamy spots and became all a rich, tawny red, shading to pale buff on the under-parts, and he grew up into a particularly handsome and high-stepping young buck. It was then that his name was changed from "Beastie" to "Red Dandy." Gradually now he got to be on fair terms, not friendly, but condescendingly tolerant terms, with the black-and-white cow, the yearling calf, and the two big, sleepy, carrot-coloured oxen who did MacTavish's ploughing and hauling. When his first horns began to sprout,

he gradually established an uncontested supremacy over all these easy-going folk of the farmyard. In spite of his slimness and his small stature, he had them at a complete disadvantage, for he could always prod them where he liked, or buffet them cruelly with his fore-hooves, and then evade their resentment with scornful ease. So, to save themselves trouble, they gave way to his tyranny until it became a habit with them. This domination, no doubt, was rendered easier for him to secure by reason of the terms of favour on which he lived with MacTavish. Spending half his time in the cabin, trotting at MacTavish's heels, or at his side with MacTavish's arm over his back, the other animals easily came to regard him as sharing some small measure of MacTavish's authority. It was perhaps a fortunate thing for all concerned that there was no dog or cat about the place to divide MacTavish's affections, for Red Dandy was as jealous as a Spanish gipsy.

Red Dandy, as he developed into a full-sized, high-antlered buck, developed also two antipathies — towards the pig and towards all snakes. For the first there was

no apparent reason, and, whenever he was caught manifesting it, he got a sharp horse-whipping from MacTavish, which would send him off snorting to sulk for perhaps ten minutes behind the barn. He used to stand beside the pen and thrust at the unoffending grunter through the cracks. To avoid accidents, MacTavish ran the walls of the sty to a discouraging height, and nailed up the cracks between the boards.

When this was done, Red Dandy appeared to forget the existence of pigs. But for snakes he was always hunting, stealing up to sunny hillocks in the effort to surprise them basking, or beating the coverts of "snake-brake" with his antlers to frighten them forth into the open, where he might trample them with his sharp and nimble hooves. In this antipathy he had his master's heartfelt co-operation, for, to MacTavish's somewhat child-like eyes, all snakes, the bright, harmless little garter-snakes no less than the deadly moccasin or copper-head, were children of the devil. This seemed to be exactly the point of view of Red Dandy as well. He would pursue a tiny, innocent, pale-green grass-snake, eight or

ten inches long, with the same gay, dancing fury that he devoted to the destruction of a six-foot black-snake or blue-racer. But when it came to either an adder or a copper-head, then he was as cool and wary as a trained fencer. He knew—who shall say how, since MacTavish never taught him?—very well the difference between the snakes whose bite meant death and those which bore no poison-fangs in their jaws.

It happened that the southward slopes of the Ridge, being sheltered from all the harsher winds and full of sun-steeped ledges, were a favourite haunt of the copper-head, which nowhere else managed to maintain itself so far north. From time to time, when some one got bitten, there would be a move among the scattered settlers in both valleys toward a concerted campaign for the extermination of the virulent pests. But, for the most part, the copper-heads kept to the out-of-the-way ledges and inaccessible ravines, and so avoided making themselves conspicuous. They did not court notoriety, and therefore they were apt to be forgotten.

MacTavish, as a rule, never thought of them. But he thought of them abruptly on

the morning when the rocky lip where he was standing to drink in the view suddenly scaled off beneath his weight, and he felt himself falling down the bare, terrific incline. The incline was almost perpendicular, and he fell swiftly, amid a whirl of dusty stones and a bright, hot glow, into the very face of the landscape. He scraped over a narrow ledge, clutched wildly at a bush which grew upon it, and was greeted with a savage hiss which seemed to him just in his ear. His hair rose, and he let go of the bush, and felt for the moment an actual relief in the fact that he kept right on falling. Then his head struck a projecting root, he bounced from a second ledge, lost consciousness, fell more expeditiously, and rolled to the bottom with a broken leg and a pattering company of stones of assorted sizes.

He knew nothing about it, of course, but those almost too attentive stones were his bodyguard, and for the moment an effective one. Hissing and rattling indignantly, a basking family of copper-heads scattered and scurried away, routed by the shower of stony missiles. In a few seconds the dust settled, and the last of the stones lay still. And so

did MacTavish, for he had been well battered in that unceremonious descent, and the knock on his skull had been a shrewd one.

At the time of MacTavish's fall, Red Dandy had been close behind, nosing with fine velvet muzzle at his master's pocket to see if it held anything for him. He jumped back with a snort at MacTavish's amazing disappearance, and drew off resentfully. He was not accustomed to seeing his master behave with such abruptness, or go away without giving him time to follow. For several minutes he stalked back and forth, with head held very high and a puzzled look in his eyes. Then, beginning to get lonely, he went to the brink of the steep and cautiously peered over. His feet displaced some small stones, which went rattling down and struck MacTavish smartly. The buck expected to see him jump up and get angry at this. But instead of that he lay perfectly still.

Red Dandy grew troubled. He went close to the edge, pushed a few more stones down upon MacTavish, and seemed to dally for a moment with the notion of trying to slide down after them himself. No doubt he

would have succeeded in sliding down, but a doubt as to how he would arrive gave him pause. He snorted uneasily, drew back from the brink, stood fretting for a moment or two, and then started along the crest of the Ridge in search of an easier way down.

When all had been quiet for some time at the foot of the steep, several of the copperheads, shining with a dull glow in the sun, came gliding warily back towards their basking-place. The patriarch of the tribe, a thick-bodied, beautifully-patterned fellow, nearly six feet long, led the way. He came to within a few feet of the unconscious MacTavish, gave a warning rattle, and coiled himself to strike. His followers withdrew with petulant hissings, cheerfully leaving all the glory to him.

As MacTavish did not move, the snake did not strike. He waited, the picture of readiness, his flat, opaque eyes fixed on the mysterious object which had arrived so mysteriously among them. He waited for possibly ten minutes. Then, satisfied that the object was not alive, and not dangerous, he uncoiled and started to wriggle away.

At this moment MacTavish partially

came to. He moved an arm. He tried to move his right leg. A groan came from his throat. The great snake recoiled himself in a flash, and rattled his loud warning like the gentlemanly fighter that he was.

At that ominous sound, MacTavish came to completely, with all his wits about him. He did not move a muscle, except to open his eyes slowly and peer about him. He did not have to peer about much, for there was the great copper-head straight in front of his face, with head gently swaying, within range and ready to strike.

MacTavish thought hard. He knew that his enemy would not strike so long as he kept perfectly still. But he knew also that the snake now knew he was alive, and therefore might wait rather indefinitely. How long would he be able to keep still? His broken leg was beginning to torture him savagely. Other snakes would presently come out of their hidings. How would he ever be able to drag himself away without bringing them upon him. The cold sweat jumped out all over his body. Then he felt his head swim again, and his wits again beginning to slip away. In an icy terror, he

clutched them back to their duty, horrified lest he should move in his unconsciousness. But, weak as he was, he began to contemplate futile schemes, such as clutching up a handful of stones and pelting the enemy away, though he knew very well that the enemy could strike at least three or four times as fast as he could move his arm.

The agony and suspense and confusion in his head were beginning to overcome him once more, when he caught a sound of light hooves behind him. He dared not turn his head to look, but he felt who it was, and his brain cleared again. He saw the coiled snake shift his head so as to give another focus to the curve of its swing.

A moment more, and Red Dandy came mincing into view, dancing that delicate war-dance with which he was wont to challenge the unresponsive pig. He swerved off to one side, drawing the copper-head's attention away from MacTavish. Then he warily presented the tips of his antlers, just within reach. The snake struck like lightning twice, spilling his venom harmlessly over the impenetrable horn. Teased by that exasperating antler, he struck again

and again, till at last not a drop more venom came. Then, realizing suddenly that his fighting powers were gone till he could secure them time to recuperate, he swiftly uncoiled and darted for shelter.

But, quick as he was, the buck was too quick for him. A keen-edged hoof, slicing downwards with vindictive force, struck him on the back of the neck just where it ran into the skull. That stroke severed the tough scales and shore the vertebral column clean through.

The deadly head dropped forward, utterly powerless, but the body, packed with vitality and force, writhed itself up in hideous, lashing coils. With one more stroke, Red Dandy smashed the impotent head. Then he stamped and trampled down the writhing coils, till they were chopped into bits, and his trim fetlocks streamed with blood. Not while there was anything left to writhe, would he give up his performance or accept his victory as complete.

MacTavish, feeling quite safe now as far as snakes were concerned, let himself go for a little. When he came to again, he felt better, and Red Dandy was standing beside

him, sniffing at his face. He fondled the narrow, soft muzzle for a minute or two, expressing his unqualified admiration for his rescuer's courage and craft ; and then, setting his teeth grimly, he started on the slow and agonizing crawl down to the nearest farmstead.

With His Back to the Wall

IT was a savage winter, the cruellest he had ever known; and, for a bear, he had known a good many. It had begun early, with frosts that bit to the bone, and cracked the trees surprised with too much sap yet in their branches, and sealed away the moist earth, with its grubs and roots and tubers, under an armour-plating of steel. Then had come storm on storm, with no assuaging of the frost, with hard, dry snow like white sand, which drove blindingly and would not pack, and gathered so deep that even the long-legged, snow-shoe-hoofed moose floundered in it belly deep. Even the depths of the ancient fir forests afforded scant shelter from the fury of the blizzards, whose cold ate its way to the heart of the densest thickets and froze the starving wild-cats in their lairs.

In his amiable and comfortable youth, the great black bear had been wont to keep

in mind his mother's lesson, and "hole up" for the winter. Well stuffed with blueberries and other autumn fruits, with honey, and starchy roots, and all the plump and teeming small fry of late summer, his store of fat had always made him grow drowsy at the approach of the cold, and, in some deep hollow under rock or pine-root, he had curled up to sleep and let the great snows cover him away till spring. But growing restless and morose with age, and more addicted to flesh blood than to the bloodless diet of his youth, he had lost the happy knack of hibernating. While the females and the sleek young males of his kindred were sleeping away the bitter, inimical months of storm, he was roaming the desolation restlessly, wide awake with hunger, hunting with all his craft, and capturing barely enough of the long-legged rabbits to keep an ounce of flesh on his gaunt flanks.

About mid-February, when all the predatory beasts native to the range—bears, lynxes, foxes, fishers, and sables—were already in the grip of famine, there came a rush of ravenous new claimants upon the game. Sweeping down out of the north in packs

came the great grey timber wolves, which for the last half-century had been no more than a tradition in this corner of the world. Since his cubhood the old black bear had never known what it was to be afraid; but now, when he heard that wailing and terrible pack-cry quavering over the snow, under the still moon, his heart quailed. And when, chancing upon the trail of one of the packs, he noted the number of the alien footprints, the hair rose stiffly along his neck with dread and fierce aversion. He felt that he could handle half a dozen at a time of these pale-eyed, ravaging intruders, and therefore he concluded that they would hardly presume to seek a quarrel with himself. But he decided that it would be prudent for him to avoid crossing their trail.

The chosen resort of the bear was a spacious stretch of the fir forest, where the dense coverts favoured his stalking and afforded some poor shelter from the wind. But one day, in savage disgust over the scarcity of anything to stalk, he started out across a reach of barrens to try his luck in the broken country of mixed woods along the fringe of the uplands. The barrens were

flat and open, but dotted with innumerable clumps of bush growth, wherein he felt that he might find grouse squatting, or big snowshoe rabbits nibbling at the poplar twigs. Far across the open he could make out a black upthrust of rock, with a tumble of boulders trailing off to one side, and toward this he directed his course, with the idea that its recesses might hold some likely den, more impervious to the wind than his fir thickets. If the den should prove to be already occupied, so much the better. That would mean for him a lair and a stocked larder, all in one.

Out across the grey-white levels, under the low arch of blank, whitish sky, he laboured slowly, his black bulk sharply conspicuous as he went. The plains, in their savage, white desolation, had the suggestion of naked granite, their scattered and half-buried thickets showing here and there thin lines and blotches and tips of dark grey. A wide-winged white hawk-owl, swooping low over the drift-wrinkles, followed the trail of a weasel which was itself hungrily trailing a panic-stricken mouse. Hunger, desperation, and the implacable cold possessed the scene.

For some little time, as he moved across the emptiness, the bear had been vaguely conscious of a far-off, wavering pack-cry in his ears. Intent upon his own needs, he had paid no attention to it, beyond vaguely but angrily envying the hunters the quarry that they hunted—a caribou, perhaps, or a giant bull-moose, which would give them a long chase, indeed, but a satisfying meal at the end of it. He plodded on, his hungry eyes searching the snow. At last he came upon the fresh tracks of a rabbit, leading toward a deeply-buried thicket some hundred yards to the right. His faculties sharpened to their utmost, he crouched flat till he was almost out of sight in the deep snow, and began to worm his way noiselessly along the trail. It was amazing how small and inconspicuous he managed to make himself.

But now, his faculties being all at once so keenly awake, he became conscious of an unusual note in that many-throated cry far behind him. It was not quite the same as when the pack followed easy quarry. There was a ring of hate in it, a deadly challenge and defiance. Moreover, it was nearer at hand; it was undoubtedly approaching.

Suddenly the bear stood up straight in his tracks, and with a low growl stared behind him. His heart gave a bound of rage, and then for an instant stood still. It was he himself, this time, that was the quarry.

For several seconds, being a fighter to the last claw, he contemplated holding his ground and giving battle where he was to the insolent invaders of his range. He even glanced around at the thicket wherein the rabbit lay hidden, thinking, perhaps, to capture it and ease his hunger before the wailing pack should come up. But just then he caught sight of the pack emerging from the edge of the fir forest and sweeping down along his trail without an instant's hesitation. What a horde they were! The sight decided him. He would be surrounded, and would have no chance to put up a fight. He turned once more and started at a long, rolling gallop for that upthrust of rock. If he could reach it, he could there find some vantage ground and fight a less uneven battle.

In spite of his bulk and his look of heaviness, the bear's pace was swift. His great strength enabled him to overcome, for a time, the cumbering softness of the snow, which,

indeed, hampered his pursuers as sorely as himself. Gaunt and hard, his wind was good, and his will to gain the rock was invincible. The pack, running now in a grim silence that was more menacing even than their marrow-chilling chorus, came up rapidly, but the start of the fugitive had been sufficient. They were within two score paces of him when he reached the rock.

The face of the rock at this point was perpendicular and absolutely smooth. Even for the bear, an expert climber, there was no such thing as scaling it. But it gave him what he was looking for above all—the guarantee against being overwhelmed from behind. He wheeled like a flash, thrust his back against the rock, rose to a squatting posture of contained readiness, lifted both his armed fore-paws, and faced his pursuers in silence, with lips curled back from his yellow fangs, and his little deep-set eyes flaming blue-green.

The wolves, digging their fore-feet deep into the snow, brought up short at a distance of less than a dozen feet. This was a quarry such as they had never hunted before. They spread themselves out in a half-circle before

him, some prowling restlessly back and forth, some sitting up on their haunches, but all keeping their dreadful eyes centred upon him. Their leader, a little to the front, stood considering; and the bear, swinging his great head slowly from side to side, waited.

II

Dreadful as was that winter to all the wild kindreds of the forest, to Job Thatch, the trapper, in his half-buried cabin behind the upthrust of rock, its menace, at the first, was of small concern. His cabin was snug, he had abundant firewood stacked about it, and he had "packed" in from the settlements a certain amount of flour, bacon, tea, and molasses, to supplement the fresh meat which his rifle could be counted on to provide him. The growing scarcity of game mattered less to him than to any other foragers of the wilderness, for none of the furred four-footed hunters could compare with him in efficiency at their own craft. In all but the sense of smell, he was a better hunting animal than the best of them. He could hear as well as the listening moose.

He could see as far as the lynx, and with a more discriminating vision. On his snow-shoes he could run lightly and tirelessly when they floundered in the drifts, and with his rifle he could kill at such a distance that the wariest quarry whose trail he followed had no warning of his pursuit till the soft-nose bullet dropped it in its tracks. Recognizing this supremacy, many of the lesser prowlers, in spite of their fear and hate of him, took to following him secretly that they might feast upon the remnants of his kills.

But the price of Job Thatch's confident efficiency was that he never thought to provide himself against ill-chance. He killed for fresh meat only as the need arose, and only such game as came his way while making the daily round of his wide-lying traps. And so, when the ill-chance befell him, laying him up a prisoner in his cabin, he had only the last scant half of a haunch of caribou and a brace of skinny rabbits in his primitive cold storage.

And this was the way in which the sombre powers of the wild, over which he had always imagined himself so securely master, turned

suddenly upon him, and smote him down. While running lightly over the snow along the edge of a gully, a buried sliver caught at his snow-shoe and threw him. With a twisting jerk, he went headlong down the petty steep. As he fell, a pang of horror and anguish went through him, and he heard the bone of his right leg go with a dull, sickening snap.

For a second or two it seemed to him that this was the end. He knew so well just what it meant, for he knew so well the implacable powers of the wild which had thus turned upon him and got him at so hopeless a disadvantage. The shooting anguish for a moment numbed his will, and it seemed to him best to lie where he was and let the deadly cold do its work as quickly as possible. With the temperature at the point where the mercury grows solid in the bulb, it would not be long before the anguish would pass softly and he would slip into the endless sleep.

Then his brain cleared, and the old mastery awoke in his will. The White Death which he had so long and confidently foiled should not fool him and finish him

now. The furred prowlers whom he had hunted and trapped should not now come feasting upon his flesh and pulling his bones apart. By sheer resolve he sent the blood surging once more valiantly through his veins, and laughed out loud, hoarsely, at the anguish in his leg. Then he set himself to drag his way back to the cabin.

First, he had to go directly away from it, seeking the mouth of the ravine, whose steep sides he was quite unable to scale. His snow-shoes he used now on his hands instead of on his feet, beating himself down a track by which to worm his way slowly along. It was a battle, every inch, but his will was unfaltering, his wind like a wolf's, and his muscles as untiring as the corded sinews of a weasel. The frost sank down and closed in upon him in vain, for his struggle kept him in a glow, and the grind of the broken bone at every movement kept stabbing him to a fury of effort. And after seven hours of this gigantic wrestle against death, he gained the door of his cabin, lifted himself on the snow-shoes, as crutches, to pull the latch-string, and fell across the threshold.

Now, for a moment, having won, he stood to lose all. Drunk with exhaustion, he told himself he was safe, and was just falling asleep with the door half open. Had he done so, the fire would soon have died, the White Death would have crept in upon him where he lay, and afterwards would have come the prowlers to the unlooked-for feast. But something cried out a sharp warning in the depths of his brain, and he woke up. He shut the door, piled wood upon the coals in the stove, saw the fire well alight, closed the draught, and then slept for an hour on the floor. When he woke up, he brewed himself a kettle of strong tea, and felt that he was once more master of his fate.

His immediate fear was that, if the broken leg were not set, he would be for the rest of his life a cripple. It was little enough he knew about surgery, but the competent woodsman is nothing if not versatile. Summoning up to his aid every fragment of memory or knowledge or suggestion or hearsay on the subject of broken bones—and he found there were a good many such fragments scattered through his brain—he proceeded to make himself a set of rude splints from

the bark and light wood which he kept for kindling his fire. Then, tying the foot of the broken leg solidly to one post of his bunk, he laid the splints and lashings loosely in place about it, and proceeded to pull the ends of the fracture into place. It took a huge effort. At the agony of it the sweat jumped out upon his grey-white forehead, and the breath hissed between his set teeth. At last, with a nauseating, muffled click, the ends came into place. With iron resolution he tightened the splints and lashed them so there could be no slipping. Then, for a little while, consciousness went from him.

For a week or two the prisoner had nothing more to trouble about than the fierce, shooting pains in his leg-bone, the slow laboriousness of wriggling himself about the cabin without disturbing the splints, and the deadly monotony of this still, restricted life when his veins throbbed with energy. He had all the time there was, and in his horror at the thought of going through life with a useless limb it seemed to him a small thing to occupy two hours in getting four sticks of wood into the stove.

But all the while he had to eat, and he

found his appetite not greatly affected by his strenuous inactivity. When his tiny store of fresh meat was all gone, for a few days he fared well enough on his bacon and flour cakes. Then, with a shock that was almost panic, he realized that his supply of these was shrinking with dreadful rapidity.

Straightway he put himself on strictly limited rations. Then he calculated how many weeks he had provision for. His heart went chasing the thermometer into the depths as he realized that he had not more than enough to keep the life shivering in his body for a matter of three weeks and two or three days. He had no idea how long it would take his leg to get well, but he felt very sure that three weeks and three days would not suffice for the cure.

Here was the Silent Adversary at him again, and this time not with the rush and thrust of assault, but with the slow siege and implacable patience which he recognized as the more dangerous form of attack. He was not daunted, but he began to feel that he had his back to the wall.

It was happy for him that his supply of fuel was practically inexhaustible, for he now

burned it recklessly, lying in the open doorway with his rifle till almost frozen, in the hope of some deer or caribou passing within range. After days of disappointment in this hope, he ventured to writhe himself forth into the snow, and with almost inconceivable labour set a few traps behind the cabin. But, for all his woodcraft, he was unable to quite cover his hopelessly unwieldy trail, and all the wild things, timely warned, made a mock of such futile snares. One rabbit only was his catch in two weeks' trapping, and that he was barely in time to save from the jaws of a hungry wolverine.

Presently it was borne in upon him that there was a special reason, outside the severity of the winter, for this unwonted scarcity of game. Understanding came to him when there was borne to his ears, across the stupendous stillness of the moonlit night, that long, high, quavering chorus which he had not heard since the days when he did his trapping on the Mackenzie. "Timber wolves!" he muttered. And, dragging himself laboriously to the window, he looked out in time to see the pack, running close and well-ordered, sweep by far out on the shining level.

After that he made up his mind that it was wolves he would lie in wait for in his doorway. If he could get a shot at one, and save the carcass from the rest of the pack, he would have something little to his taste, indeed, but sufficing to keep the life in his veins.

For several days after this resolve, nothing came within sight or sound of the cabin, not even a foraging hawk-owl; and with only three days' scant rations left on his shelves, Job Thatch began to tell himself it was time to take thought for the emergencies that might confront his spirit on the other side of Beyond. Casting up accounts with himself, he came to the conclusion that, as he had never funked in this life, it was not likely he would meet with anything that could make him funk in the next. He further decided that, as in this life he had always done his best to be square in his dealings with his fellow-men, that Unseen Power whom he had half-consciously recognized and reverenced would surely see to it that he got a square deal in the next. A square deal was all that he asked for, and he would rely upon himself to play his hand.

In the midst of these stoical but bracing reflections, he was aroused by the approaching clamour of the wolf-pack. Snatching his rifle, he dragged himself to the door.

There was nothing in sight. The wolves were behind the great rock. In a few seconds his trained ear told him that, though still far off, they were approaching on a course which would take them away along the broken ground to the right, and not bring them within range or even view of the cabin at all.

For a moment he hesitated. The baleful chorus told him that the pack was a very large one, and he himself, dragging a useless and encumbering leg, was hardly in shape to do battle. But his decision was prompt. Better die fighting than die freezing, in any case. He glanced at his rifle—a repeater—to see that the chamber was full, snatched up a belt of cartridges and his axe, and hitched his way eagerly around the shoulder of the rock to a point where he could view the situation.

He saw the huge, gaunt figure of the bear, a hundred yards away, straining toward the rock. He saw the ravening wolf-pack close

behind. His first impulse was to shoot the bear instantly, bear's meat being good. But he knew that, if he did so, he would taste never a shred of that meat, for the wolves would have it out of sight in no time. He noted the numbers of the pack. He noted, far behind, another and larger pack racing up to claim a share of the spoil. He saw what a hopeless venture he had let himself into; and grimly resolving that the price of his life, in wolves, should be a stiff one, he hoisted himself into a niche where he could brace himself upright and have free play, at the last, for his axe.

As he did so, he saw the bear reach the rock, whip round, and grimly face the horde of his pursuers.

"Good for you, old pard!" muttered Thatch. "I'm right glad I didn't shoot!"

III

For some moments the bear sat there on his haunches, eyeing his dreadful adversaries. They were precious moments to him, for they enabled him to recover his wind; but this

the wolves, tireless of sinew and with lungs of leather, never thought of. There was no apparent consultation between them, nor, as far as either the bear or the watcher in the rocks could discern, did any communication pass between the leader and the rest of the pack. Yet all at once, as if on a given signal, the leader hurled himself forward, and the whole pack with him, in silence.

The leader was in front, but he was leader not by virtue of his superior stature and strength alone. His was the superior craft. He knew what must inevitably happen to the first in that encounter. At the last instant he swerved and sank downward. His nearest follower came to the front, and was met by a right-arm cuff from the bear which smashed his head clean back into his shoulders and hurled the lifeless mass clear out over the backs of the pack, where it was straightway seized and torn by those wolves which could not force their way into the fight.

Though the leader of the pack had evaded that fatal stroke, he was no shirker ; the leader of a wolf-pack cannot afford to be. At the instant when the stroke was delivered,

he sprang in under the bear's uplifted paw and slashed the tender, exposed flank murderously. With his tremendous length and strength of jaw, it was a savage wound. But the audacity of it was promptly punished. Before he could spring back, his adversary's left descended upon him—a quick, chopping blow with all claws outstretched—and, with a shattered spine, he dropped beneath the feet of his fellows.

As he disappeared, the black bulk of the bear himself also disappeared, literally overflooded by the wave of wolves. But the next instant the wave heaved, broke, and rolled back. Several wolves, with feet in air and bowed backs like puppies, were hurled flying as if from an explosion, and the bear re-emerged, his eyes blazing, his jaws and shoulders streaming with blood not all his own.

"Bully fer you, pardner!" yelled Thatch, forgetting everything in his excitement over so fine a fight.

This enthusiastic encouragement was apparently lost on the bear, whose whole attention was now occupied in beating back, with lightning strokes, the returning surge of his assailants. But the wolves heard it—

the more or less unoccupied prowlers on the fringe of the battle. The narrow green flames of their eyes all turned upon the figure of the man who had shouted. Then they launched themselves upon him, to the number of perhaps twenty. Job Thatch did not take time to count them accurately, for he noted that the second pack was arriving upon the scene.

The rifle began to speak, almost as fast as he could pull the trigger, and the foremost wolves went down. Most of the others, too ravenous to think of anything but the mad craving in their bellies, stopped to feast on the meat thus provided for them, but three kept straight on. One of these was fairly blown from the muzzle of Thatch's gun, but the other two were upon him before he could get them covered. One he dashed aside from the butt with a smashed fore-shoulder, but the other seized him by the leg. It was the broken leg, and Job Thatch laughed, for those terrible fangs wasted their fury on the splints. His axe struck side-ways. A fountain of scarlet followed it, and the wolf fell backward writhing into the hideous scuffle below.

Palpitating from his triumph, Thatch looked across to see how the bear was faring. The battle still went on. Still rose the black but bloodied head, dauntless and furious, over the snapping pack, still thrashed the mighty flails of those ponderous fore-arms. But the new-comers were now sweeping up to the reinforcement of their discouraged kin, and Thatch saw that the fierce old fighter would soon be downed. Snatching up his rifle again, he hurriedly refilled the chamber, and began pumping lead into the new arrivals, the foremost of whom had already halted to devour their wounded kin.

The effect was almost immediate, as far as the bear was concerned. His most pressing assailants, already wavering, were daunted by the sounds of the rifle-shots, and drew off sullenly, lingering, as they went, to tear a mouthful or two from a dying comrade. The bear, suddenly realizing himself victorious, clutched the last of his retiring assailants in a death-grip and fell to biting at him with mingled rage and hunger.

The new arrivals, utterly engrossed in assuaging their famine, did not seem to notice for a few minutes how death was

being dealt among them. But, as their pangs ceased to torment them, they once more became alive to other considerations. One, just nicked by a bullet, yelped and bit at the wound. Then on a sudden all the survivors seemed to take note together of the fact that their fellows were dropping about them, some to instant stillness, some into kicking and writhing paroxysms. Their ears turned towards the shattering rifle-shots; their eyes all stared with sudden fear at the figure of the man erect in his niche. Then their grey, feathered tails curled down between their haunches, they ran quickly together as if herded by a threatening voice, and all swept off along the base of the broken ground, not pausing to look back.

The bear, the fiercest pangs of his hunger satisfied, lifted his gaunt and bleeding head and stared defiantly at Job Thatch. If this was another enemy—well, he was ready for another fight. Thatch slowly lifted his rifle.

"Bear meat's a sight better eatin' than wolf," he muttered.

Then he lowered the weapon again.

"No, old pardner," he continued, speaking

aloud and directly towards the doubtful-looking beast, "that would be a low-down trick to play on ye, seein' as how we've fought shoulder to shoulder, so to speak. An' a right slick fight ye've put up! Here's my best wishes, an' may ye keep clear of my traps!"

The bear, as if uneasy at the sound of the human voice, moved off slowly, dragging one of the dead wolves, and looking for a retreat in the rocks where he could be out of range of the man's disquieting eye. Then Thatch came down from his post of vantage. He picked out three of the youngest and least skinny of the carcases, tied them together by the legs, and started laboriously to drag them to the cabin, planning to come back for more after he had set a dinner on to boil. He felt a little ashamed of his weakness in having let the bear go free, but, after some consideration, he managed to justify himself.

"That bear was nawthin' but a bag o' bones," he murmured. "He was old an' *tough*, an' what there was of him would 'ave been mighty rank eatin'. But young wolf, well boiled, can't be no worse'n dawg!"

He hitched himself slowly into the cabin with his trophies, his grim face aglow with triumph. In his vague but mystical imagination he could perceive the vast, silent, unseen powers of the wild, which had so treacherously conspired against him, drawing back in grave defeat.

A Digger of Tubes

FORCED out of his old dwelling, which had been both commodious and retired, Hackee, the striped chipmunk, moved indignantly over to the next hillside, and chose a site for his new home near the south face of the dilapidated stone wall which separated the beech wood from the upland pasture.

He had had a peculiarly exasperating experience. Quite by accident, an ill-conditioned but obstinate mongrel terrier from the farm down in the valley had found the narrow entrance to his underground abode, and had started to dig him out. This, of course, was a vain undertaking for any dog, for not only was the entrance tube several yards in length and leading a good three feet below the surface, but the central chamber, or dwelling proper, had another exit, yards away, by which Hackee had come out at his leisure, to perch on a near-by

fence-rail and shriek chattering curses at the foolish dog. Having a strain of dachshund among the many which went to his pedigree, the terrier had really done a fine piece of burrowing before he realized the futility of his efforts, and backed out of the hole, with eyes and fur full of dirt, to give ear to Hackee's shrill insults, and trot off with assumed indifference in search of some more advantageous enterprise.

This had been late in the afternoon. On the edge of evening, a family of skunks had come by, and had at once adopted the roomy burrow which the terrier had excavated for them. Lazy burrowers themselves, the skunks were no fools. They knew how to profit by a good thing when it came their way. They had continued the work of the dog till they reached Hackee's central chamber. To Hackee's voluble and stuttering wrath, they had taken possession of it at once, enlarging it to suit their dimensions. They were certainly no company for a chipmunk. There was nothing for it but to yield place to these lazy but formidable invaders. Hackee and his whole family had taken themselves off, stealing through the

violet dusk with a silent diffidence quite unlike their chattering daylight audacity. They knew that the dusk was peculiarly dangerous for them; so they had scattered at once, seeking refuge in the burrows of friendly neighbours, or in nooks which their daylight wanderings had revealed to them. It had been a nerve-trying night for Hackee, trembling in a hastily-enlarged mouse-hole dangerously near the fox-and-weasel-haunted surface. As soon as the full pink tide of sunrise had driven the night prowlers to their dens, he had set himself to the securing of new quarters. For none knew better than he that, to a ground-squirrel with no underground retreat, this sunny hillside, these cheerful, tranquil beech woods, these open pastures with their calm-eyed cattle, were a region of imminent and deadly hazard.

Pending a decision as to the exact spot where he would begin to sink his tunnel, Hackee kept along the old stone wall, because, with its chinks and crannies, it was more likely than any other path to offer him a hiding-place in case of emergency. In the early sunshine there were many other chipmunks abroad, out for their morning

sip of dew. They were playing or foraging among the leaves, racing in utter abandon of mirth up and down the old wall, or sitting up alertly to chirp and chatter to each other their satisfaction at the promise of a fine day. But Hackee felt himself quite alone among them. He knew that each of them had a safe burrow close at hand. He had no chattering or chirping to do. He was a thing apart, a chipmunk without a hole. And all his wits were anxiously, concentratedly, on the alert against the perils which he knew might assail him from earth or sky at any instant.

He was not even hungry, for the moment, because his anxiety was so absorbing. Therefore it was that he, being the most vigilant, was first to catch sight of a pigeon-hawk which came stealthily through the branches of a great birch tree near the wall, and dropped like a fly-catcher in the hope of capturing one of the morning revellers. But Hackee's piercing chirrup of alarm, ere he whisked into a crevice, had been enough. Every chipmunk heard, and dodged with a celerity which even that swift hawk could not match. The alarm cry passed the length of

the wall. The hawk pounced this way and that, zigzagging with a speed to confuse the eye. But not a chipmunk could he catch; and presently, in the sulks, he sailed off to try his luck with less nimble game.

When he was gone, Hackee whisked out from between the stones, ran on some fifty feet further, and stopped to peer about him carefully. This seemed a likely spot for his purpose, and it was not overcrowded. On the pasture side of the wall a big chipmunk came out from a hole about three feet distant, whisked up the stones, and scolded insolently at the stranger. But Hackee was not insulted. He *was* a stranger, and he knew he must take the consequences. He proposed to get over being a stranger just as quickly as possible, and to this end he decided to establish himself just opposite his insulter, on the other side of the stone wall. Here the beech trees were scattered, and the sward was close and firm, such as he loved, and the autumn sunlight lay warm under the wall.

Some three or four feet from the wall he marked a spreading, prickly bush of juniper, under which, as he calculated, he might

begin his digging operations without much fear of interruption. All seemed secure. No hawk or fox was to be seen. The red squirrels and the blue-jays wrangled merrily and carelessly in the trees—a sure sign that there was no marauder about. Along the wall and on the close, gossamery turf at either side, other chipmunks gambolled or foraged or scratched at the sod with their clever little hand-like paws. And a soft, irregular *tonk-tink, tonka-tink, tonkle* came from the line of red-and-white cows loitering up to the pasture from the milking-shed.

Hackee gave a chirrup of satisfaction, and was on the very point of jumping down from the wall, when a piercing chirr of alarm stiffened him to stone. Everywhere, on the instant, he saw chipmunk after chipmunk flash frantically to its hole, shrieking the great danger signal as it vanished.

For half a second Hackee's heart stood still, for this, according to the signals, was one of the most dreaded enemies of his tribe—a weasel. From this enemy, a swift pursuer and a tireless, implacable tracker, there was but one safe refuge—the chipmunk's hole, too narrow at the entrance for a weasel to

squeeze himself into. And Hackee had no hole to take refuge in. He knew that he would be smelt out immediately if he tried to hide in some cranny of the wall. For some precious moments he stood there alone in the perilous world, his sharp stripes of black and cream vivid on the foxy red of his cheeks and sides. Suddenly the weasel slipped into view, emerging upon the top of the wall, a long, low, sinuous, deadly apparition, with a vicious, pointed face and cruel eyes. He was not more than ten feet away.

Hackee came to himself. He bounded into the air as if galvanized, came down on the pasture side of the wall, and slipped like an eel down into the burrow of the stranger chipmunk. The weasel was so close at his twinkling heels that Hackee heard the snap of jaws just behind the tip of his tail.

Exasperated at this escape when he had felt sure of an easy kill, the weasel strove, with a snarl, to force his triangular head down the narrow entrance. As he knew, however, from many a previous effort, this was a waste of time. He presently gave it up, and darted off on the trail of a rabbit

which was unlucky enough to go hopping by at that moment.

Hackee knew well enough that, as a stranger to the burrow, and especially as an invader from another colony, he need by no means look for a welcome in his forced refuge. He kept near the entrance, therefore, trembling and making himself small, and hoping that the proprietor would not appear. But it was a vain hope. Within a half minute the proprietor did appear, and rushed at Hackee open-mouthed with a most inhospitable squeal. Hackee understood very well that etiquette required him to withdraw from that hole at once. But etiquette was of little concern for him so long as he thought the weasel might be waiting outside. He met the attack with the courage of necessity, and for a few seconds the narrow confines of the tube were filled with chirrups and squeals and flying foxy fur.

Suddenly the proprietor, indignant at this refusal of Hackee's to go out and feed the foe, withdrew to seek reinforcements. Hackee understood what his withdrawal meant. He had no wish to fight the whole family. Slipping back to the entrance, he

"For a little he waited there, half in and half out."

stuck the very tip of his nose out and sniffed. The taint of weasel was on the air, but it was certainly disappearing. Very cautiously he put his whole head out and peered around with keen, wary eyes. The weasel was nowhere in sight. For a little he waited there, half in and half out. Then came a scurrying of feet behind him in the depths of the burrow. He darted forth discreetly and whisked into a hole in the wall. The next moment the inhospitable household came forth one by one, and began chattering uncomplimentary things about him which he did not think it worth his while replying to. Slyly peering forth with one eye from his hiding-place, he noticed that all this chatter failed to bring back the weasel. This being proof enough that the coast was now clear, he whisked out, jumped over the wall, and under the shelter of the juniper bush where he proposed to have his front door.

He began by digging a round hole, perhaps three-quarters of an inch in diameter. With sharp, jerky motions he packed the edges hard and firm, till the diameter was enlarged to a full inch. The earth, every

morsel of it, he carried off in his capacious cheek pouches—which stretched far back under the loose skin of his neck—to empty it under another bush half a dozen yards away. He was much too wary to leave the fresh earth, to betray him, on the grass beside the entrance; and, moreover, he was too cunning to leave any trail between this dumping-ground and his place of operations. He made the journey to and fro by great leaps, swerving erratically now to one side, now to the other.

The entrance looked hardly wide enough to admit his head. But that, he knew, was sufficient; for where his head could go through, there could go through also his whole lithe body, which, for all its strength, was as supple almost as a glove. At a depth of less than an inch, however, he began to enlarge the shaft gradually. He worked with a nervous, jerky vehemence. Every half minute he would back out and lift his head—whiskers, forehead and ears covered with earth—to take a swift look about and assure himself that no enemies were approaching. And his trips to the other bush, his dumping-ground, took place

with amazing frequency, so resolute was he that not a grain of new soil should remain beside his doorway.

The shaft which Hackee was digging so assiduously led straight downward. At a depth of four or five inches its diameter was sufficient for him to turn around in it comfortably. At this diameter he kept it. He could now work with more security and satisfaction, because, being completely hidden, he was not compelled to look about him for enemies every half minute. Turning himself round and round, he packed the walls of the shaft hard as he went, and so reduced considerably the number of his trips to the dumping-ground.

Straight downward the strenuous digger sank his shaft through the light soil to a depth of nearly four feet. Then he turned at an abrupt angle, and began running his tube diagonally, with a gentle upward slope, towards the stone wall. But by this time he had done so much excavation that he felt the need of finding a new dumping-ground, it being against his doctrine to make any of his operations too conspicuous. Moreover, having now a refuge, a place that he could

call his own, however unfinished, he began to realize that he was hungry. Such a bundle of energy and fiery nerves as a chipmunk cannot go long without feeding his forces.

Whisking forth from his hole, he sprang to the wall, ran up it, and perched himself on its highest stone to look about. He sat up now with a confident flirt of his tail, chattered a defiant proclamation of proprietorship, and proceeded to make a hasty but necessary toilet, combing the earth from his ears and fur. Several other chipmunks, belonging to the immediate neighbourhood, eyed him doubtfully, as if half inclined to combine and drive him away. But his assured air had its effect, and he was not interfered with.

His toilet accomplished, he sprang down again from the wall and began rummaging for nuts among the leaves beneath the nearest tree. But this was ground that had evidently been well gone over. He went on deeper into the grove. It was a pleasant place for his foraging. The bland autumn sunlight came sifting down through the browning leaves. There was no wind,

but the branches were gay with screaming blue-jays and chirring, jibing red-squirrels; and from time to time two or three nuts would come pattering down, either dropping of their own ripeness, or jarred off by the tree-top revellers. Hackee was not long in making his meal; and then, being ever a provident soul, he began to cram his cheek-pouches.

While he was thus occupied, a trim moose-bird bounced down hard upon the leaves a few feet ahead of him, scrutinized him with bright, impudent eyes, squawked harshly, and finally made a rush at him with open beak and lifted wings. But Hackee knew the moose-bird for a mischievous bluffer and practical joker, and he carelessly went on gathering nuts.

For a few seconds the fantastic bird danced about him, getting more and more excited at finding herself ignored. It looked as if she might almost work herself up to the supreme audacity of tweaking the busy forager's tail. But suddenly there came a scream of warning from the sentinel blue-jay in a near-by tree-top. It was taken up on the instant by a chorus of shrill voices.

The moose-bird flew up to a convenient branch, and Hackee, thinking it might be a hawk that was coming, whisked under a root and peered forth anxiously.

There was no sign of a hawk; but presently he made out two blue-jays, in the next tree, peering and scolding down at something on the ground. Their accents told him it was a fox. If so, this hiding under the root was no place for him. Slipping around the trunk, in the hope of putting it between himself and the enemy's eye, he made a dart for the wall. But the fox saw him and gave chase.

It was a desperate race, but Hackee won. He whisked down into his hole just as the fox arrived. At the foot of the shaft, however, he crouched trembling. He had forgotten till now that the unfinished tube might not be a refuge, but a trap. He knew that the fox was a good digger. His heart thumped wildly, and he crowded himself into the beginning of the level gallery, fearing lest the fox should look down and perceive his predicament.

If the fox had been young and ignorant, or excitable enough to indulge in apparently

futile effort, Hackee's career would have come to an end at this point. But, happily for him, this fox was a wise one. He knew that chipmunks not only had deep and elaborate burrows, but also that they always dug them with more than one exit. How was he to guess that this case was the one exception in a thousand instances? He blinked shrewdly, threw a quick, sharp glance about to see if he might not snap up the fugitive in the act of emerging from some back-door, and then went trotting off indifferently down along the wall, pouncing on the fat locusts as he went.

As soon as Hackee had recovered his composure, he fell again to his digging, and soon had his level tube advanced a couple of feet. According to the plan which he was carrying in his capable little brain, the central chamber, or main habitation, was to come directly under the wall; and then, for the better baffling of all kinds of enemies, the second entrance was to be on the other side of the wall, in the pasture field. But by this time he was once more hungry. And now he remembered the stores which had been left behind in the old burrow. Some

of them, doubtless, being in narrow side galleries, would be well away from the intruding skunks, who had no interest, moreover, in the nuts and grains and roots which make up chipmunks' hoard. He hoped to be able to come at these treasures, by a little tunnelling, without being brought into contact with the objectionable usurpers.

Reaching the old home and slipping in by the back door, he found that several other members of his household had anticipated him. They had stopped up the back exit a little way from the central chamber, thus cutting themselves off from the skunk family, and they were now busily engaged in feasting on the accumulated stores. Hackee followed their example till his own hunger was satisfied, and then lured them back, each with crammed pouches, to the new home beside the stone wall, where they all fell to with a zest at the work of excavating.

In two or three days the new home was finished, and all the accessible stores from the old place safely removed to it. The main tube, from the original entrance shaft, ran on a gentle upward slope for a distance of some seven or eight feet to the central

chamber, the real dwelling of the family. This chamber, perhaps a couple of feet in length, but considerably less in width, and nearly a foot high to the centre of its arched ceiling, was spread with a thick layer of the finest and silkiest of dry grasses. It lay exactly beneath the stone wall. Off it led several short storage galleries, to be enlarged or duplicated as the accumulation of stores might call for. Another tube, five or six feet long and slanting slightly downward, was run from the rear of the living-room, and terminated in a second perpendicular shaft similar to the first. The top of this shaft was in the open pasture on the other side of the wall, and depended for its privacy on the short grasses fringing its tiny entrance.

Thus comfortably established, Hackee and his diminished household—for several of the family had meanwhile settled themselves elsewhere—slipped without further difficulty into the life of their new neighbourhood. The chipmunks being a friendly folk, there was no more hostility shown to the newcomers, who now took their part as a matter of course in the gambols among the dry leaves and in the chattering conversations

which sometimes went on interminably through the long, drowsy afternoons. Nuts were abundant that autumn, so the supplies in the storage galleries increased till there was no fear of a winter scarcity. And to vary the diet there was a neglected apple orchard a little way down the hillside, while big brown locusts and late grasshoppers were still abundant.

But Hackee, having once been singled out by the wild wood Fates for discipline, was not to be suffered to slip into his peaceful winter sleep without further trials. One day two boys and a dog appeared, with apparently nothing better to do than throw stones at chipmunks. In spite of this, the boys, not having guns, were regarded as harmless, it being a poor chipmunk that couldn't dodge a stone. But the dog—that was another matter. Dogs might dig and damage good front doors. There was a general chorus of alarm signals, and most of the chipmunks, including Hackee himself, disappeared into their burrows.

The two boys sat on the wall and began to munch the apples with which their pockets were stuffed. The dog, stumbling by chance

upon Hackee's front door beneath the juniper bush, sniffed at it long and interestedly, and then began to bark. The boys jumped down from the wall and "sicked" him on eagerly. But this dog was not one of the digging tribe. He knew he couldn't be expected to crawl down such a hole as that, so, having no idea what *was* expected of him, he nearly went wild with excitement and anxiety.

Seeing that the dog was not going to dig, the boys conceived the idea of imprisoning Hackee in his own home. It was not exactly cruelty on their part, but rather an impulse toward vague experimenting. Here was a mysterious hole, with something alive in it. What more natural than to try and kill that something, and see what would happen? They got a long stake and jammed it into the hole, while the dog jumped around them, yelping his admiration of their prowess. To their amazement, the stake went down with the greatest ease to a distance of nearly four feet before it stopped with a jerk.

"Gee," remarked one boy, "but that fellow likes a deep hole all right!" And he ground the stake home vigorously.

"S'pose we got him?" queried the other boy, his eyes glued to the stake.

"Of course!" yelped the dog in an ecstasy.

The first boy cautiously pulled up the stake, the dog scrambling in as if he expected the unknown hole-dweller to follow it forth. The boy examined the point of the stake. There was no blood on it. Every one looked disappointed, and the dog drooped his tail in dejection.

"No! Missed him, I guess," decided the boy. "But we'll stop up his hole for him, the beggar!" And he proceeded to drive the stake home once more.

Hackee, meanwhile, filled with curiosity and wrath, had come out by his back door to see what the strangers were up to, and was now sitting on the wall, not a dozen feet away, expressing his feelings with explosive vehemence.

"Darn that chipmunk!" remarked one of the boys, flinging an apple-core at him. "He's making fun of us!"

But in this he was mistaken. For Hackee was not making fun. He was cursing them with all the maledictions in which the lan-

guage of squirrel and chipmunk appears to be so rich.

Of course, it was Hackee's business to dig a new front door without delay. He did, indeed, begin one promptly—from within—as soon as the troublesome visitors were out of sight. But he and the whole household were already beginning to grow a little indolent, in premonition of the long winter's sleep which was soon to come upon them, and after nearly three days the new shaft was yet uncompleted.

Just at this critical moment came the most to be dreaded of all the chipmunk's enemies, and caught Hackee unready. A black snake, alert in the warm noonday sun, and himself on the look-out for winter quarters, chanced upon Hackee's back door there in the open pasture. Being a snake of prompt decisions, he whipped in instantly and made for the central chamber, feeling sure that he would find some of the family at home.

They *were* at home—Hackee and three others. As that dreadful black form, noiseless and lithe and but dimly visible, came gliding into the chamber, Hackee and two of his companions darted criss-cross up and

over the ceiling in a mad whirl of desperation. But the fourth, an inexperienced young female of the season, was unlucky enough to catch the snake's set, malignant eye. She crouched for half a second, paralysed. Then, recovering herself with a violent effort, she darted down the old tube leading to the closed front shaft. The snake darted after her at once, and as his tail vanished into the tube, Hackee and the others dropped shuddering from the ceiling behind him.

When the unhappy little fugitive reached the foot of the blocked shaft, she turned at bay. At the same instant the snake arrived. Striking before she had time to put up any defence, he drove his long, back-set fangs deep into her muzzle. Being not a venomous snake, but one of the constrictor family, his impulse was to wind her in his coils and crush her to a pulp before devouring her; and therefore he wished to drag her back to the chamber. But though she was dazed by the blow on the nose, she was not completely stunned by it, because her assailant had had no room to strike with effective force. Spreading herself flat, and digging in her claws, she

resisted the snake's efforts to pull her back. Finding the task so difficult, and his appetite unusually insistent, he wasted no more time, but simply began to swallow her, head first, as she was.

It was a slow process, especially in the beginning. But as the victim was engorged, and her breath finally cut off, her struggles ceased; and in two or three minutes her shoulders, too, had vanished down that distended and writhing throat

Meanwhile, the other two members of the family, convulsed with panic, had fled out and hidden themselves in the crannies of the wall. But Hackee himself, being a veteran of many battles, always courageous, and charged with responsibility as head of the household, had pulled himself quickly together and remained in the burrow. He knew well enough that it was all over with his little companion. He understood the ways of the black snakes also, and he could tell by the sounds that came from the depths of the tube just how this ghastly business of the swallowing progressed. As he listened, his rage grew hotter and hotter, till presently, judging that by this time the

assassin would have the victim so far swallowed as to be incapable of quickly disgorging it, he darted into the tube and bit clean through the snake's backbone just at the base of the tail.

The long, trailing body writhed and lashed, but there in the narrow tube it had no room to coil itself. Hackee raced nimbly along it, heedless of the jamming and buffeting he received, and fell furiously upon the tight-stretched skin at the back of the reptile's head. Flattening himself down upon the body, he clung so tightly that the maddest lashings could not dislodge him, and, of course, the hideously-distended jaw was powerless to seize him. With his keen teeth he bit and bit, now gnawing like a rat, now worrying like a terrier, till presently he succeeded in severing the spinal cord.

The convulsive lashings and twistings dropped to a strong, quivering motion; but for a while Hackee, in his rage, continued to bite and worry his now impotent enemy, till at last, realizing that his victory was complete, he withdrew and ran out into the sun to make his toilet and proclaim his triumph. When he had informed the

whole neighbourhood of it, and even convinced his trembling household, he returned to the burrow, and proceeded to wall up the old tube firmly to a depth of a good eighteen inches, thus securing to a certainty that the entombed slain should cause no more annoyance to chipmunks.

The Sleeper in the Snow

WITH a jar and a grumble and a wheezy grunt, the ramshackle train came to a stop at the bleak backwoods station of Tin Kettle, heaped about with snow-drifts.

There was no passenger for Tin Kettle except Melissa Eliot—a slim, fair-haired, violet-eyed girl, with a dark-blue tam-o'-shanter on her head, her decided little chin buried in a long-furred grey lynx boa, and both hands full of bags and bundles. She hesitated at the icy steps, till two young men, who had been eagerly looking for her at the other end of the car, rushed forward and helped her alight. Each had tried to get ahead of the other, and to monopolise the privilege, but Melissa had managed so tactfully, that each got just one of her elbows to support, and at the same time his fair share of her impedimenta to keep him out of mischief. The brakesman tumbled her brown trunk out on to the plat-

form with an impartial bang. The conductor called "All aboard," although there was plainly no one but himself to heed his injunction. And slowly, with grinding of wheels and mighty belching of black smoke (for it was a stiff up-grade at Tin Kettle), the dingy train drew out. The station—and the station-master—seemed to stare after it wistfully; for there was only one train a day, each way, at Tin Kettle; and there was nothing to be seen from the station but straight charred trunks rising here and there through the snow, and behind these a ragged fringe of fir-forest, and the narrow line of shiny metals leading away through the wilderness to the far-off, busy world. The village of Tin Kettle, a raw little saw-mill settlement, lay nearly a mile away from the station, down in the river-valley, hidden behind that ragged fir-forest.

Although there was only one passenger, there were two conveyances drawn up beside the station platform. Walter Bird had brought his glossy bay mare, smartly harnessed to a light rakish sleigh. Jimmy Wright, on the other hand, had brought one of his big grey team-horses, harnessed between the shafts

of a sturdy "pung," the low and serviceable box-sleigh of the countryside. Both young men had been attending every down train for the past week, knowing that Melissa would assuredly be coming home for Christmas, and neither daring to risk yielding the slightest advantage to the other.

Boyishly proud of the superior smartness of his equipage, Walter, holding his share of bundles on high as a trophy, essayed to draw Melissa straight to his sleigh.

"Come on and see my new cutter, Melissy!" he urged with naïve diplomacy. "I've had it a whole month, an' I haven't had nary a girl out ridin' in it yet. I've been keepin' it fresh for you!"

Jimmy Wright's keen and deep-set grey eyes, under their level brows, had brightened, triumphantly at sight of the substantial brown trunk, standing in majestic solitude on the platform. He had felt a sick mistrust at the fascinations of the dashing little sleigh. But his practical eye had noted at once that the sleigh was too small to carry the trunk. Relinquishing Melissa's arm without a protest, he strode over to the trunk, and swung it, as lightly as if it had been a band-box, into

his pung. He had a shrewd suspicion that a lady and her luggage are not easily parted.

"I thought as how you'd be having a trunk with you, Melissy," said he quietly, "so I brought along the pung, 'stead o' the old sleigh. I hope you won't mind ridin' in a pung, now you've been so long in Fredericton."

Melissa looked hesitatingly from one expectant face to the other. Her frank blue eyes showed nothing but friendliness and a certain girlish content in the flattering situation.

"It was just dear of you *both* to come for me!" she exclaimed presently, "and I *do* wish I could ride with both at once. Now, if only I'd been brought up in a circus, perhaps I could manage it." She laughed softly, and clasped her small, white-mittened hands in mock despair.

"Jim's got your trunk!" urged Bird. "He's got his share. You come along with me!"

Jim Wright's jaw thrust itself forward obstinately at this suggestion, but being a man of slow speech he had no retort ready. The very intensity of his desire to seize, and enfold, and carry off this slim, tantalizing

figure before him, made him even more silent than usual. His silence served him better than speech, however, for it made Melissa, for an instant, his ally.

"Oh, Walter," she protested, "if you think *that's* a fair division, I'm sure Jim will give you the trunk and take me! Who would have thought that an old brown trunk, no matter *what* there might be in it, would ever be considered a fair exchange for *me!*"

Bird looked crestfallen; and to add to his chagrin Jimmy found words to say just the right thing—the thing *he* ought to have said.

"But it isn't *a* trunk, Melissy," said he. "It's *your* trunk. An' there's just all the difference in the world."

Melissa gave him a gay glance of approval. But in the next instant her heart melted at the dejection in Walter's usually buoyant and self-confident face.

"There's just one way to manage it," she said decidedly. "And if either one of you does not agree to it, then I will go with the other one. If you are both willing, I will drive half the way with one, and half-way with the other. And I'll go first with you, Walter!" she added hastily, seeing that Bird, who was

a little spoiled, looked as though he were going to raise an objection. Without realizing it herself, she had an underlying confidence in Jim Wright's level-headedness, and so, womanlike, was not inapt to put him to the severer tests.

"That's fair, Melissy! You always did like playing fair!" agreed Jim heartily. "I'll follow on as far as the corner of Boyle's Road, and then you'll come in the pung with me. Boyle's Road's just half-way between the station an' the post-office."

Bird was already tucking Melissa's feet under the robes of his well-provided sleigh.

"The bay mare's a leetle mite hard in the mouth now an' then," he remarked over his shoulder. "When she knows she's going home, it isn't goin' to be easy to stop her at Boyle's Road, Jimmy."

Melissa's white young forehead contracted almost perceptibly. Jim Wright had spoken truly when he said that she always played fair.

"I'll change at Boyle's Road, Jim," said she decisively. And Bird felt that she would do it whether the bay mare stopped or not. He yielded the point discreetly.

"Oh, I can hold her all right," he exclaimed reassuringly, "no matter how she's feeling her oats. I just said that to try an' git a rise out of Jimmy."

"Of course, Walter, I knew that," agreed Melissa, in a voice that made Walter tell himself that she was the only girl who really understood him. Triumphantly he lifted the reins, and the bay mare started off at a pace which seemed to justify what he had said of her. Then he remembered how short a distance it was to Boyle's Road, and abruptly reined her in. The mare, for all her mettle, obeyed willingly enough, for the going was very heavy. Jim Wright's big grey came jogging close behind. And the station master, who had been watching the comedy with a dry grin, waved an impartial farewell from the door of his overheated little office.

At first Walter was elated at having got hold of Melissa first. Then it suddenly occurred to him that to his rival would fall the honour of driving the prize into the village, while he, following behind with the empty sleigh, would look to all the world as if he had been given the mitten. His face went so

blank that Melissa's kindly heart smote her, and she made herself so nice to him that Jim's face, in the pung behind, also grew clouded. The situation, indeed, was one so difficult that it would have required a much more sophisticated girl than Melissa to handle it with complete success. Gradually her own happy cheer began to feel itself beaten down by the conflict of emotions about her. She grew conscious that her feet were cold, that the sharp frost in the air was making her fingers tingle. By the time the corner of Boyle's Road came in sight, she felt inclined to be angry with both her cavaliers. She was the more aggrieved because she knew she had done her best to be fair to both. Such being the case, she felt that they had no right to make her uncomfortable.

Bird had brought the bay mare's down to a snail's pace—but the corner was reached at last.

"Here we are!" said Melissa, a little crisply. And Bird obediently, if sulkily, reined in. Instantly, though the drifts were deep on either side of the road, Jim forced his big horse floundering through them, and brought the pung up close alongside the sleigh in

order that Melissa might be able to step straight into it.

"Better hand over the rest of the traps, Walter," suggested Wright, a little unkindly.

Bird's face flushed indignantly, but before he could reply Melissa exclaimed—

"Of course not, unless he wants to. We are going right along together!"

Somewhat comforted by this prompt intervention, Bird leaned over from his seat to help tuck Melissa into the pung.

"And where are we goin' to?" he asked. "I suppose you'll stop at the hotel, as the stage doesn't go out your way till to-morrow night."

"No," said Melissa, "I'm not going to the hotel. Please drive me straight to Mr. Parker's, Jim. I always get a rig from him. I know all three of his horses, and they know me, and that old red pung of his will stand any kind of going. Do you think I'm going to stop over a night and a day in Tin Kettle when I'm only twenty miles from home, and to-morrow Christmas Eve? I'm off for County Line just as soon as I've had a bit to eat. The going will be heavy, and I mustn't lose any time."

Jim Wright had been just on the point of bidding his horse, "Git along, Bill." But as Melissa's intentions declared themselves he lowered the reins and looked at Bird in consternation. A glance of understanding passed between the two young men, and for the moment they became allies.

"Lands alive!" exclaimed Walter Bird, remembering just in time that Melissa disapproved of swearing, and striving to put vigour into an expletive which he knew was quite unequal to the occasion. "*Lands* alive, Melissy, but you can't ever be thinkin' of tryin' to git through to County Line. It's out of the question. You'll have to wait for the stage!"

Walter was tied to his business, so that he could not possibly get away. And he was trembling lest Melissa should decide to let Jim go with her.

"Walter's right," declared Jim emphatically. "There hasn't been a team through from County Line since the last snow-fall, an' it's drifted a lot since then. The stage itself is goin' to have all it can do to get through to-morrow. An' it isn't no sort of a journey for a girl like you to make alone anyways."

"Now you're just getting silly, both of you!" said Melissa sharply. "As if I hadn't done it already, *hundreds* of times." She tossed her fair little head scornfully, annoyed at both of them, and feeling that, although there was no one else to see or hear, it must look very foolish to be sitting there with the two teams side by side in the snow, arguing her private affairs. "I don't think there'd be any of this fuss if—if Tilly Smithers, for instance, wanted to get through to County Line this afternoon, to see her daddy, and her mother, and her little sick sister."

Walter Bird laughed disparagingly.

"Tilly Smithers!" he exclaimed. "They say it's got to be a new looking-glass every time she gets her face in front of one."

Melissa stared at him coldly for this rude speech.

"Is that any reason that she shouldn't be helped or taken care of?" she demanded.

"Tilly Smithers is very well able to take care of herself," remarked Jim drily

"And so am I," said Melissa, setting her small white teeth with decision. "You two boys have been awfully dear and thoughtful, coming to meet me this way. But you must

not, either one of you, try to tell me what I am or am not going to do. My plans are quite decided. Now please drive on, right to Mr. Parker's, Jim. I'm getting frozen, sitting here."

"Well," said Jim, "if you're so set on not waiting for the stage, I'll take you myself, Melissy. I reckon my old grey horse'll pull you through snow-drifts that not one of Parker's horses could negotiate."

"I said I was going *alone!*" retorted Melissa, the discussion beginning to get somewhat on her nerves. Then she relented, and repented of her incivility. "I beg your pardon, Jim," she went on. "I didn't mean to speak so crossly. It's ever and ever so kind of you to offer to come all that long way with me. And it would be lovely for me to have your company. But I just can't let you. For one thing, it would look silly to mother and dad, who know that I have travelled that road alone so often, winter and summer. They'd think the city had surely made another girl of me, or that I had forgotten I was a backwoods girl and was putting on airs. And, for another thing, if you came out so far with me they *couldn't* let you come back. They'd

have to make you stay over. And it's Christmas-time, Jim!" she added in a more appealing voice, as if begging him not to misunderstand or feel hurt. "I've been away from them for nearly six months. And I want them all to myself, don't you see?"

Jim's tanned jaw, brown under his sun-bleached, straw-coloured moustache, had been set doggedly during Melissa's speech, but at the closing words it softened. His big frame held a heart that was sensitive and quick to comprehend. And he understood her desire the better because he knew how *he* hungered to have *her* all to himself. He yielded the point promptly, but with a certain reservation at the back of his brain which he was careful not to let the girl suspect.

"I reckon we'll have to let you go, Melissy," he laughed. "You always were a great one for havin' your own way."

"Well," cried Bird, his feelings divided between anxiety at the thought of Melissa making the trip alone and exultation at her refusal to let Jim Wright accompany her. "All I can say is, if *I* was free I wouldn't give in so easy, Jim. It isn't fitting she should

go alone. I've a mind to let all my Christmas business go hang an' take her myself."

Melissa was about to turn on him with a keen retort, but changed her mind.

"I know you'd let your business go, Walter," she said gently, "if I really *needed* you to. But I would never on any account let you leave your old mother at Christmas-time. Now don't let's talk any more nonsense about it. You know Fredericton hasn't changed a thing about me, but my clothes. I'm the same backwoods girl I always was."

II

It was a little before one o'clock in the afternoon when Melissa, with the old red pung and Parker's sturdy sorrel, got away from Tin Kettle. The weather was snapping cold, but clear and settled; and though every one had warned her she would have trouble with the drifted and unbroken roads, she was not at all disturbed. She knew that the moon would be up soon after sunset, so there would be no darkness to complicate the journey.

And she did not care how late it might be when she arrived. Her one thought was to arrive. She had hot bricks, well wrapped up, in the bottom of the pung to keep her feet from getting chilled, and she had changed her city foot-gear for two pairs of home-knit woollen stockings, and soft moccasins, of moose-hide, flexible as gloves. With two lap-rugs and a heavy lined bearskin she had nothing to fear from the cold, and the clear young blood raced warm and confident in her veins. In her trunk and her bundles were many interesting things for her father and mother, and for the patient little sister, Meg, who had not been out of bed for over a year. She was consumed with eagerness to see Meg's tired grey eyes sparkle once more, the pinched little face grow bright with interest over the untying of the parcels. Melissa had tied every single thing up separately and securely, and in order to prolong the excitement, she planned to strictly prohibit the use of scissors.

Beguiled by such homely-sweet anticipations, Melissa found the first five miles of her journey very short, although the going *was* so heavy that they took up an hour and a half of the brief winter afternoon. Thus

far there had been something of a track, for here and there a sled or pung or a load of firewood had come in from some side-road. But where the road crossed Ford's Brook, five miles from the village, these tracks all disappeared. Between the two half-buried lines of fence-stakes, the road ran on unbroken, the snow smooth and level, in other spots heaped in curling drifts or wavelike windrows. Melissa had to come out of her dreams and drove with vigilant care, now giving head to the patient sorrel, now lifting him firmly as he floundered through a drift which there was no avoiding. Her eyes were snow-wise, and by picking her way sometimes to the right of the buried track, sometimes far to the left of it, she was able to escape the two disasters which she had to fear—an upset, or getting stuck fast in a drift. But her progress was so slow, so laborious, that she soon began to congratulate herself on having brought a packet of sandwiches with her. Plainly, it would be well on in the night before she could get to County Line.

Melissa was a skilled driver and knew how to spare her horse's strength. From time to time she would halt and give the faithful

beast a breathing time. Once, when he was sweating heavily, she got out and blanketed him, and gave him a good ten minutes' rest. Her journey was proving more difficult than she had expected, to be sure ; but, instead of feeling daunted by it, her resolute young spirit rose to it with a joyous zest.

As the brief winter afternoon faded out in ineffable cold lavenders and ambers and violets over the soundless solitudes, Melissa caught sight of a human figure floundering through the drift far ahead of her. It was a man—and a man nearly spent, as she quickly perceived. He had evidently come into the road from a narrow cross trail which she was just passing. Yes, there were his tracks. Exhaustion was plainly visible in the heave and droop of his shoulders as he struggled on ; and Melissa's quick sympathies went out to him without thought of self. He never showed a sign of being aware of her approach, till she had come close up behind him. Then she called out to him—

"Come along and get in, sir, and I'll give you a lift. I see you are terribly tired."

At the sound of her voice the man turned

his head. At the sight of his face Melissa's heart tightened with a pang of dread. There was something terrible—something she did not understand—in the look he flashed upon her. But her courage was of pure metal, and she forced herself to notice only that the face was haggard and drawn, the eyes sunken back in their sockets with fatigue. The man made no reply, except to stagger aside, lay a desperate grip upon the edge of the pung,and half drag himself, half fall into the interior. Missing the seat, he collapsed in a huddled heap upon the bottom beside Melissa's feet. Melissa tucked a portion of the wraps about him, as if he had been a child, and drove on, worrried, but secure in the consciousness that she had done the only right thing.

After perhaps half an hour, when the moonlight was beginning to throw long black shadows across the white way, the man suddenly drew himself up upon the seat beside Melissa, and dashed the shaggy wisps of hair from his eyes and forehead. At first he peered around him and far ahead, as if seeking for some landmark, and paid no more attention to Melissa than if she had been a wooden image. At last he turned upon her

with a suddenness that made her heart jump, and demanded hoarsely—

"Have you any liquor?"

For an instant she did not reply for fear her voice might not be quite steady. Then she said gently—

"Oh, I ought to have offered you something before, because you are so *dreadfully* exhausted. No, I haven't any *liquor*—a girl doesn't usually carry it!" And she laughed pleasantly. "But I have a bottle of coffee that *used* to be hot, and some good big sandwiches."

As she pulled up her lunch-basket from under the wraps the man seized the bottle greedily, drained its contents to the last drop, and threw it away. Then he fell to devouring the sandwiches like a wolf.

A certain scorn came to the aid of Melissa's courage.

"I think you had better leave a little of that for me!" she said severely. "We have still a long way to go, and it is quite possible that I might be hungry myself. You had better pull yourself together and try to act like a decent man."

The fellow stopped eating for a moment and stared at her surlily. She felt his stare,

but her attention was apparently absorbed in guiding the horse through a troublesome drift. Presently the fellow resumed his meal, still in silence, and ate more slowly till there were only three sandwiches left. Then he carefully wrapped these up, and thrust the package into his own pocket.

Melissa caught this action from the corner of her eye, and indignation surged hotly in her heart. She was just about to make a sharp protest, when the fellow leaned over suddenly, growled with a snarl, " Ye'll have to git along faster 'n this ! " and snatched the reins. Instinctively she held on to them with all her strength, which was not by any means contemptible. But with one hand—a huge, bony hand, with a grip like iron—he twisted both her wrists so mercilessly that her fingers opened out of themselves.

Melissa had opened her lips to scream, but her resolute will asserted itself in time. Without a word she hid her hands under the bearskin, and chafed her wrists, and boiled within. Her heart was almost bursting with resentment, at the thought of how her care had cherished this monster back into strength. At the same time, she was horribly afraid.

There was a dreadful mystery about the situation which made her feel cold at the roots of her heart. But one thought she kept tight hold upon, and it kept her nerves steady. She had had much to do with animals all her life until she went to the city, and she had learned the vital lesson that one must *never* show fear—that to show fear is always to invite disaster. Very bitterly she reproached herself for not having allowed Jim Wright to come with her. She realized that only Jim would have seemed to her able to cope with the situation. With Jim she would have felt safe.

Sitting back rigid in her seat she studied the fellow's face, and presently made up her mind that at least it was not a madman that she had to do with. It was a desperate and savage face, brutal indeed, but not without intelligence. There was a hunted look in the deep-set and blood-shot eyes.

"What has he done?" she found herself wondering. And then her anger leapt up hot once more as he fell to lashing the horse, forcing the brave beast forward at a rate which would bring it down exhausted in the next drift.

"You are a fool as well as a brute," she said with cold contempt. "If you are in such a hurry, don't you know enough to save the horse? The way *you* drive, the beast will be all in before you've gone another mile. Then you'll be just where you were when I took pity on you half an hour back."

The fellow glared at her, with a snarl on his lips that showed his long, discoloured, crooked teeth. She met his eyes steadily, her rage quite stamping out her dread.

"Ye're a cool one! But you keep yer mouth shut. I got enough to think about without any more jaw," he ordered concisely. At the same time he recognized the justice of her criticism, and ceased to harass the horse. In fact, as his excitement cooled down he began to drive with a skill quite equal to Melissa's own. From his readiness to spare the horse Melissa began to realize that it was his purpose to go far. "Well," she thought to herself, grinding her small white teeth, "when we can get to where dad can hear me, I'll fix him."

For the next couple of miles there was not a word spoken. The moon was now high above the jagged fir-tops, shining down steel-

blue and deadly cold on the unbroken snow of roadway. They came to a point where another road branched off to the left, leading to the American boundary line some twenty miles distant. The stranger turned the sorrel's head to the left.

"Stop!" cried Melissa peremptorily. "I'm going to County Line."

The fellow laughed. And that laugh, icy and merciless, daunted Melissa's courage more effectually than anything else in all the hateful adventure.

"I was forgettin' all about yeh!" he said. "Yes, of course, *ye're* goin' to County Line. *I'm* goin' across into Maine, an' as much furder as I kin go, for my health. An' I don't want no petticoats along. Out yeh git now, quick! I haven't got no time to lose!" And he began to toss her packages out into the snow.

Melissa's courage failed at last.

"You *can't* do such a thing," she wailed, wringing her hands in terror. "And I was so good to you! I'll die here. I'll freeze to death."

"'Tisn't more'n six or seven miles now to County Line," said the fellow, hoisting out Melissa's trunk. "I reckon ye kin make it

afore mornin'. Ye *did* use me white, an' that's why I'm leavin' yeh all yer things."

Then, seeing that Melissa still sat there in despair, he turned on her ferociously and stuck his face almost into hers.

"Thet's why I'm letting ye go," he hissed, "to give the alarm an' set them on my trail! Ye don't know when ye're in luck! Now git! Before I change my mind. I'm a fool not to fix ye right now, so ye wouldn't never have a chance to set them on to me!"

Sick with horror, Melissa recoiled from the dreadful face, put one hand over her eyes, and sprang quivering from the pung. The fellow threw the bearskin robe after her and drove off.

III

WHERE Melissa stood the snow came above her knees. The bearskin robe was close beside her, and she sank down upon it quivering. There, standing on end in the snow, was her trunk, with her bundles, half buried, scattered all about her. She stared at

them helplessly for several minutes, and the pung disappeared around a bend of the road. A few seconds later the sound of the bells died away, and there was not a sound except the occasional snap of a tree cracking in the intense frost.

But it was only for a few minutes that Melissa allowed herself to be overwhelmed. Then her resolute and resourceful spirit re-asserted itself. Yes, surely she could make those few miles on foot before fatigue and cold could conquer her. Of course she could. She *would*. Nothing should prevent her. And she would do it quickly, too, and give the alarm, and set the constables on the trail. And, anyhow, it was better to be here than in the pung with that scoundrel—a murderer, clearly enough. Once more her righteous indignation stood her in good stead, warming and bracing her. She pinned her skirts up to the knee, snatched up the bearskin robe, cast a reluctant look upon the trunk and the precious bundles, and started bravely up the blank white way that led to County Line.

In the first burst of her energy she made good progress, labouring ahead through drifts often waist deep, and pausing every hundred

yards or so for breath. She had gone a good half mile, indeed, before she fully realized the perils of the situation. Her pauses for breath grew more and more frequent, her struggles with the endless drifts less and less triumphantly successful. She thought of dropping the heavy bearskin which so handicapped her progress; but it occurred to her that it was her only hope, in case she should have to halt and rest for any length of time, so she clung to it desperately. Whenever she paused for breath she flung it down and sat upon it, prudently husbanding all her forces.

At first her exertions kept her warm. But at last exhaustion began to tell upon her, and immediately she began to feel conscious of the intensity of the cold. The very moonlight seemed to vibrate with it, like a string tightened to snapping. For the first time the truth struck her fairly in the face—that perhaps she really could *not* make County Line. She refused to entertain the thought, but in spite of all her determination it slipped under the defences of her resolution, and weakened her. Then she let her thoughts go back to Jim, and found new courage, new

warmth at her heart. Perhaps, in spite of her refusal, he would follow her! Walter was only a sweet boy, whom she could manage. But Jim was a man, all through. She thought of his strong face.

Hitherto there had been no wind. The thick woods had kept it off completely. But at last, on turning a sharp bend of the road, it struck her full in the face. It snatched at her failing breath, and doubled the insidious assault of the cold. After battling with it for ten or fifteen minutes she felt that she *must* rest. But at the same time she felt conscious of a great desire for sleep. This frightened her. It startled her into wakefulness and fresh effort; for she knew that to yield would be the end. She would sleep and never wake again.

At last, however, coming to an immense fallen pine, whose roots, snow-swathed, stood high in the air, she realized that she must get out of the wind for a few minutes to escape its numbing and confusing effect upon brain and will. The upturned roots, at a distance of some forty paces from the road, stood in such a position as to afford a perfect wind-break. She made for it, resolving to *stand*

behind it for a few minutes, in order to breathe and get a fresh grip upon her wits, but on no account to lie down. A vision of the warm, safe home, of her father and mother and little sister happily sleeping—with dreams, perhaps, of her arrival on the morrow, or perhaps still waiting up, before the cheerful fire, on the chance of her coming that same night—this vision swept across her brain, and an aching self-pity swelled in her heart. But still resolute and still brave, though conscious of a strange confusion in her thought, she banished the weakening vision. She knew that all her will must be concentrated on the struggle.

With the bearskin robe clutched tightly about her, she floundered and staggered around behind the roots of the great pine. The escape from the wind was an exquisite relief. Instinctively she pressed up closer to the blessed shelter. As she did so, she felt the snow growing suddenly deeper. With a startled cry she strove to throw herself backward. But in the same instant it was as if the solid earth gave way beneath her feet. She sank, clutching frantically, through a blind smother of snow.

It was only for a fraction of a second that

she fell—or perhaps a complete second—the distance being all of six or seven feet! But to Melissa's bewildered brain it seemed a long time, and she vaguely expected to alight with a destroying crash. Instead of that she alighted softly and rolled.

Grasping with both hands to steady herself, she clutched an immense, warm, furry something, which moved and grumbled.

Her heart stood stock still, and the cry of terror froze on her lips. She tried to shrink away, but there was no space. She tried to rise to her feet, but she had fallen flat on her side, and her legs refused to act. She lay quite still, paralysed with horror, close against the flank of the bear into whose winter den she had fallen.

The huge form heaved gently, shifted a little, grumbled and whimpered, as if complaining at having been so rudely disturbed in its deep winter sleep. Melissa felt a great paw pushed against her, as if demanding more room. A gigantic muzzle nosed at her legs, and finally settled itself upon them, as if finding that they made a comfortable cushion.

For a few seconds, Melissa wondered why she did not die of sheer fright. She re-

membered that people did sometimes so die, and she thought that this, surely, was the time for such a thing to happen, if ever. She cringed in every nerve, expecting each instant to feel the bear's teeth crunching into her flesh.

But as the slow seconds passed, and nothing happened, it became clear to her that the animal had gone comfortably asleep again, adopting her as a bed-fellow. For a few minutes it took all her strength of will to keep from bursting into wild, hysterical laughter. She shook so that the bear began to whimper and grumble again, as if disappointed in his bed-fellow. This frightened her back to her senses. She lay perfectly still, and thought hard as to how she should get out of this unheard-of situation. She remembered an old Indian having once told her that during his winter sleep—especially during the early part of it, when still fat and luxurious—a bear was as good-natured as a well-fed pussy, so that one could go into his den and half wake him up, and stroke him and scratch him without any danger whatever. This long-forgotten information came up in her mind now to comfort her. While she was thinking

it over, and assuring herself that it must be true, the warmth of that great body close beside her and the heavy smell of his fur at once drowned out fear and will alike. She knew only that she was comfortable, safe from the implacable cold overhead, and sleepy—oh, so unutterably sleepy. Nerves and muscles relaxing together, without realizing what she was doing she snuggled closer up against the great beast's flank—and went to sleep.

As if from a tremendous distance a voice came to her—mysterious, through hours and leagues of dreams—calling her name. With a great effort she woke up, cried "Jim!" and opened her eyes. There above her, clear in the moonlight, was the face of Jim Wright. He was furiously clearing away the snow from the mouth of the hole.

"Oh, girl! Are you alive? Are you all right? I'm comin' down to ye as soon as I kin see what I'm doin', so as I won't fall on to ye!"

At the ringing tones the bear stirred slightly, and whimpered.

"H'sh-sh!" said Melissa warningly. "Yes, I'm *quite* all right, but awful sleepy. *Don't*

come down, Jim. He's asleep. Just *reach* down and help me climb out!"

"Good gracious!" burst from Jim's lips, as his eyes made out the huge shape at Melissa's side—which he had at first mistaken for the fur robe. Only the swift thought that he must come down straight upon Melissa's body saved him from plunging in beside her to get between her and that terrible form. But he was a lumberman, a woodsman, a riverman, and trained to think quickly in emergencies. Flinging himself flat on his face he reached down, seized Melissa under the arms, and half dragged, half swung her clear out into the moonlit snow. From that position it was a difficult feat, even for his great strength.

"Run!" he panted. "Run for the sleigh. I've got my gun here!" And he whipped out a heavy Colts from his belt.

But Melissa caught his arm with both hands and hung to it.

"Don't *dare* to hurt him, Jim!" she gasped. "He's saved my life! If it hadn't been for him I'd have been dead now. When I fell in—right on top of him with all my weight, he woke up, and I thought he was going to eat me. But he just grumbled a

little, sniffed at me, and laid his big warm head down on me and went right to sleep again. He seemed to like having me there."

Jim Wright's face relaxed, and a happy grin went over it as he thrust the revolver back into his belt.

"I always knew a bear wasn't anybody's fool!" he remarked, in a tone that brought back a tinge of rose to Melissa's pale cheeks.

"And now we must cover him up warm again!" cried Melissa, turning her head away. "And you mustn't tell any one about this part of the story, or they'd come and find the poor fellow and kill him in his sleep."

"If anybody troubles *this* here bear, Melissy," answered Jim, energetically thrusting back the snow into place, "*I'll* trouble *him!* An' what's more, for what this old chap's done, I'll never kill or harm another bear as long as I live!"

Melissa gave him a look which seemed to him ample thanks. It somehow conveyed him the impression that this was just what she would expect of him.

When they reached the road, where the

big grey horse was stolidly awaiting them, Jim helped Melissa into the pung and bundled her up warmly.

"The *first* thing, Melissy, I reckon," said he, "is to git you home to bed, afore daylight. I'll go back for your trunk an' things as soon as I see you safe with your mother. Meg'll have her Santy Claus all right, never you fear!"

With a sigh of relief and content Melissa snuggled down into the wraps and turned grateful eyes upon him.

"How thoughtful you are, Jim! And how you always seem to understand!" she murmured. And then, a little shyly—"Do you know, I somehow *thought* you might come after, in spite of what I said!"

"That there thought shows that you understand me, Melissy," he responded gravely. "And now, if you ain't *too* tired, what does it all mean? It was a knock-out to me, girl, when I come to the cross road an' see what had happened, an' your things all there in the snow, an' your poor little trail strugglin' on toward County Line. I don't want ever to feel like that again."

Pretending not to notice the way his voice

shook with emotion, Melissa made haste to tell the story.

"And, after all," she concluded, "he *might* have killed me to make more sure of getting off, Jim! We must give him credit for that. So I really want him to get a good start. I don't want to feel that he lost anything by letting me go."

Jim laughed.

"You certainly do like to play fair, Melissy! Well, the only way is for you to be too sleepy to tell about it when you get home. An' I'll promise not to report till I git back again with the trunk an' things. That'll give him more of a start. An' that's about all we kin do for him, I reckon."

With the big grey ploughing massively through the drifts homeward, Melissy felt so happy that she presently went to sleep again. Seeing that she swayed at every motion of the pung, Jim put his left arm around her and drew her down against his side, and felt that the journey would be all too soon at an end. Melissa slept for an hour. Then, as dawn was beginning to streak the sky ahead, and the forest fell away at the first outlying clearings of County Line Settlement, she woke up.

Perceiving the way she had slept, she sat up very straight, and turned away her face, till Jim could just make out the deep flush spreading up into her temples.

"Oh, but you didn't mind the bear!" he protested pleadingly. "You're not cross at me for holding you, Melissy, are you? I *had* to hold you, or you'd have fallen out o' the pung. An' I do so want to take care o' you *always*, Melissy, girl! You're not cross at me, are you?"

Melissa kept her face turned away; but presently she answered in a very low voice—

"No, Jim, I—don't think I mind at all. Oh, we're almost home! How can I ever thank you?"

"I reckon you know how, little girl!" he answered. "There's just one way for me, an' I reckon you've known it this long while."

Melissa said nothing at all for several minutes, pretending, even to herself, that she was thinking. As a matter of fact she was not thinking at all, but simply feeling—feeling wildly and inexplicably happy. At last she said, in a hesitating voice—

"If mother or father asks you to come and

visit us *after* Christmas, Jim, I—I wish you'd come. Just as soon after Christmas as you want to."

"It'll be the next day, Melissy!" answered Jim. And with a triumphant jingle of bells they drove into the Eliots' spacious barnyard.