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WISDOM OF THE WILDERNESS

BY

MAJOR CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

HOOF AND CLAW
THE SECRET TRAILS
KINGS IN EXILE
NEIGHBORS UNKNOWN
CHILDREN OF THE WILD
THE BACKWOODSMEN
THE FLEET OF THE FURTIVE
JIM: THE STORY OF A BACKWOODS
POLICE DOG

WISDOM OF THE WILDERNESS

BY

MAJOR CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1923

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Set up and electrotyped. Published February, 1923.

FERRIS PRINTING COMPANY
NEW YORK

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WISDOM OF THE WILDERNESS

The Little Homeless One

THE icy rain of a belated Northern spring drove down steadily through the dark branches of the fir thicket, and the litter of young "snowshoe rabbits," shivering beneath the insufficient shelter, huddled themselves together, for warmth, into a reddish-brown ball of the same color as the dead fir needles which formed their bed. Their long-eared mother, after nursing them all through the harsh daylight and shielding them as best she could with her furry body, had slipped away to forage for her evening meal under cover of the gathering dusk, leaving her litter, perforce, to the chances of the wild.

Concealment being their only defense against their many prowling and hungry foes, the compact cluster of long-eared babies made no tiniest whimper of protest against their discomfort, lest the sound should betray them to some hunting fox or weasel. Had they kept still, as they should have done, they would have been invisible to the keenest passing eye; but just for the moment the cluster was convulsed by a silent strug-

gle. One of the litter, chancing to have been left on the outer surface of the bunch, came to the conclusion that he would be more comfortable at the center, and set himself to force his way in. Being the biggest and strongest of the litter he presently succeeded, in spite of the resistance of his weaker brothers and sisters. And so, since he was the one least in need of warmth, he managed to get the most of it. For it is written in the Law of the Wilderness that to him that hath shall be given.

Fortunately for the defenseless litter no hungry prowler came by during the commotion, and the struggle was soon over. The ousted ones resigned themselves to the inevitable and settled themselves quietly on the cold exterior of the bunch. Some fifteen or twenty minutes later the mother returned, well stuffed with sprouting grasses and the aromatic leaf buds of the birch saplings. Through the gathering dark and the rain she came hopping in soundlessly on her broad furry pads. She slipped under the low-hanging branches of the thicket, curled herself about the shivering cluster of her little ones, and drew them close against her warm, wet body, where at once they fell to nursing greedily.

Soon the whole litter was sound asleep, so well warmed by their mother's abundant milk

that the bitter rain lashing down upon them through the branches disturbed them not at all. The night was black and full of strange, subdued noises, the swish of sudden rain gusts, the occasional scraping of great branches against each other, and always, high overhead the sealike rush and muffled roar of the wind in the straining tops of the firs and hemlocks. While the little ones slept soundly, careless of the storm and unconscious of all danger, the mother's sleep was hardly sleep at all. While her eyes closed drowsily in the darkness, some portion of her senses was always on the alert, always standing sentry, ready to arouse her to instant and complete wakefulness. Her ears, attuned to catch the faintest doubtful sound, were never asleep, never quite at rest; her sensitive nostrils were always quiveringly attentive. If a twig snapped and was blown to earth her eyes opened wide at once, and both ears stood up in anxious interrogation. Once, through the hushed tumult, those vigilant ears caught a sound of light feet stealing past the edge of the thicket. Instantly they stiffened to a rigid stillness, as if frozen. But the menacing sound—so faint that few ears save hers could have detected it—passed on. The rigid ears relaxed; the round, bulging, anxious eyes of the furry mother closed again.

That night of rain and cold few of the hungry hunting beasts were on the prowl, and no further peril came near the shelterless family in the fir thicket. But had a fox or a weasel chanced upon them, the timorous mother would have been no protection to her young. With no defense against her swarming foes except her obscure coloring and her speed in flight, she would have had to choose between staying to die with the helpless litter or leaving them to their fate and escaping, if she could, to bear another litter in their place. And there is no doubt as to which course she would have chosen. She loved her young ones; but she loved life better. She had but one life; and she had had, and with luck could go on having, many young. She would have run away, careering with mighty bounds through the stormy darkness to hide at last, with pounding heart and panting lungs in some other thicket.

And the nurslings would have made a succulent meal for the lucky prowler.

Fortunately, however, for this little story, the timorous mother was not to be faced by any such harsh alternative. For in this particular litter of hers, as we have seen, there was one youngster so much stronger than his fellows as to have been singled out, apparently, for the special favor of

the Unseen Powers of the Wilderness. To him fell more than his due share of the family warmth, the family nourishment, to the end that he should grow up a peculiarly fine, vigorous, and prepotent specimen of his race, and reproduce himself abundantly, to the advantage, not only of the whole tribe of the snowshoe rabbits, but of all the hunting beasts and birds of the wilderness, who chiefly depend upon that prolific and defenseless tribe for their prey. Hence it came about that, though death in many furred and feathered forms prowled about them or hovered over them by night and by day, this particular mother and her young escaped discovery. No dreadful, peering eyes chanced to penetrate their screen of drooping fir branches. And the mother, on her perilous foragings in the twilight or the rose-grey dawn, was never pounced upon or trailed. For that one sturdy youngling's sake, it would seem, the spirits of the wild had decreed it so.

Presently, the harsh season relented. The rain ceased except for an occasional warm, vitalizing shower; the wilderness was steeped in caressing sunshine; the leaf buds of the birch and poplar burst into a flood of tenderest green; and in every open glade the Painted Trillium unfolded its fairy blooms of white and carmine.

Spring, in haste to make up for lost time, rushed forward glowing to meet the summer. The litter of young "snowshoes" had been, for a week or more, browsing upon the tender herbage on the skirts of the thicket, and depending daily less and less upon their mother's milk for their subsistence. Suddenly, on one of those rich days, warm yet tonic, when life runs sweetly in the veins of all the wilderness, the hitherto devoted mother looked coldly on her young and refused them her breasts. Her biggest and most favored son, unused to rebuffs, persisted obstinately. She fetched him a kick from her powerful hinder paws which sent him rolling over and over on the brown carpet of fir needles, whisked about impatiently, and went hopping off through the bushes to seek other interests and make ready to rear another family. The kicked one, recovering from his astonishment, scratched the needles from his ears with his hind paws, stared indignantly at his brothers and sisters as if he thought that they had done it, and hopped away, in the opposite direction to that which his unsympathetic mother had taken. He browsed upon the young grasses till his appetite was satisfied, then took cover beneath a thick low juniper bush and settled himself to sleep, his independent spirit refusing to be daunted by the unaccustomed loneli-

ness. The rest of the litter, less venturesome, peered forth timorously from the edge of their shelter, nibbled the herbage that was within easy reach, and finally huddled down together, for comfort, on the old nest. That same night, while they slept in a furry bunch, a weasel came that way and took it into his triangular head to explore the thicket. He was not hungry, but after the manner of his bloodthirsty tribe he loved killing for its own sake—which most of the other hunting folk of the wilderness do not. He savagely dispatched the whole litter, drank the blood of a couple, devoured the brains of another, tossed the mangled carcasses wantonly about, and left them to the next prowler that might come by. A few minutes later a big "fisher" arrived, maliciously pursuing the weasel's trail, and did not disdain the easy repast that had been left for him.

During the sunlit, spring-scented weeks that followed, while the young snowshoe rabbit was growing swiftly to maturity, the favor of the Fates continued to shield him. If a prowling fox chanced to peer, sniffing hungrily, beneath the bush which formed his bivouac (for he knew no home, no specially preferred abiding place), it always happened that some caprice, perhaps some

dim premonition of peril, would arouse him from his half slumber and send him off noiselessly through the shadows a few moments before the arrival of the foe, who would be left to smell angrily at the still warm couch. If, as he hopped buoyantly across some moonlit glade, the terrible horned owl, that scourge of the wilderness night, dropped down on him on soundless wings, it always happened that some great branch would magically interpose itself, just in time, and the clutching talons would be diverted from their aim. Such experiences — and they were many — served only to sharpen his vigilance and drive home upon his narrow brain the lesson, more vital to a snowshoe rabbit than all others put together, that destruction lay in wait for him every hour.

Thus well schooled by that rough but most efficient teacher, the wilderness, and well nourished by the abundance of the growing season, young Snowshoe came swiftly to his full stature. Though universally called a rabbit, and, more definitely, a "snowshoe" rabbit by reason of his great, spreading, furry feet, he was in reality a true hare, larger than the rabbits, much longer and more powerful in the hind legs, incomparably swifter in flight, but quite incapable of making himself a home by burrowing in the earth.

He was of the tribe of the homeless ones, who knew no shelters but the overhanging branches of bush or thicket, no snug lairs in which to hide from storm or cold, no nests save such dead leafage as they might find to crouch upon. In color he was of a rusty reddish brown above and pure white underneath, and he had the long, alert ears, narrow skull, and protruding, guileless eyes of all the hare family.

And now the Unseen Powers, taking stock of their favorite, perceived that he was bigger, stronger, fleeter, and more alert in all his senses, than any other buck snowshoe in the whole wide basin of the Ottanoosis Stream. Thereupon they decided to leave him to his own resources. And straightway life grew even more eventful for him than it had been hitherto.

It was high summer in the Ottanoosis Valley. The air, hot but wholesome, and sweet with faint, wild smells of moss and balsam fir and juniper, breathed softly through the dense, dark patches of evergreens, and rustled lightly among the birches and poplars which clothed the tumbled rocky ridges. The river, shrunken in its channel, here brawled musically over its shallow rapids, there widened out into still reaches where the great black moose would wade belly-deep as they fed upon the roots of the water lilies. Here and

there a tract of dark cedar swamps gave shelter to the bears. The Valley, an epitome of the wilderness, was the congenial home of foxes, lynxes, fishers, minks, weasels, skunks, and porcupines; and every single one of these, the blameless vegetarian porcupine excepted, was a tireless and implacable hunter of the snowshoe rabbits. Moreover, in the deeper recesses of the fir and hemlock woods several pairs of the murderous giant-horned owls had their retreats; and in the high ravines of the hills that rimmed the valley were the nests of the white-headed eagles and of the great, blue goshawks, those swiftest and most relentless of all the marauders of the air, who also looked upon the long-eared tribe as their most natural prey and easiest quarry. It would seem that, in the game of life as played in the Ottanoonsis Valley, the dice were heavily loaded against the Homeless One.

It was a sultry, drowsy afternoon, and the Homeless One, crouched beneath a thick juniper bush, was more nearly asleep than was at all usual with him. Indeed, it was the safest time of the day, when most of the hunting beasts were apt to be curled up in their lairs, when the giant owl slumbered in the depths of the hemlock glooms, when few enemies were abroad except the soaring eagles and the long-winged, tireless

goshawks. But it is the exceptions rather than the rules which make the life of the wilderness exciting. Just as young Snowshoe, who had browsed comfortably, was in his deepest drowse, his quivering nostrils, which never slept, signalled to his brain — "DEATH!" In that same lightning fraction of a second all his powers were wide awake, and, resting as he did in the position of a coiled spring, he shot into the air through the thin fringes of his shelter just as the slender, yellow shape of a hungry weasel alighted on the spot where he had been lying. His great furry hind paws, as they left the ground, just brushed the weasel's pointed nose.

The weasel's narrow mouth opened in a snarl of savage disappointment. Never before, in all his sanguinary experience of snowshoe rabbits, had he missed what seemed to him so sure and easy a kill. But it was not in the weasel nature to be discouraged, as one of the cat tribe might have been, by the failure of his first spring. Though his intended victim was already many feet away, lengthening out in great bounds which propelled him through the bushes at an amazing pace, the weasel darted after him confidently, trusting to his endurance and tenacity of purpose to win in the end against his quarry's greater speed. In a few seconds the fugitive was lost

to sight among the leafage, but the relentless pursuer followed the trail by scent for several hundred yards. Then, because he knew it was the habit of the snowshoe tribe to circle back so as to regain the familiar feeding grounds and coverts, this craftiest of hunters left the trail and cut a chord to the circle, expecting to intercept his quarry's flight. Had he been dealing with an ordinary, average snowshoe, things would have fallen out something after this fashion. He would have shown himself suddenly right in the fugitive's path and jumped at him with a terrifying snarl. The fugitive, panic-stricken to find himself thus confronted by the foe whom he had thought left far behind, would have cowered down trembling in his tracks and yielded up his life with a scream of anguish.

But in this case the weasel found his calculations all astray. This quarry's flight was so unexpectedly swift that the pursuer reached the point of interception too late to lie in ambush. He arrived just as young Snowshoe came by with a wild rush. He sprang, of course, but from too great a distance for his spring to be effective. Snowshoe, catching sight of him just in time, was not panic-stricken, but, without swerving from his course, went clean over him in one tremendous bound, and at the same time, as luck

would have it, fetched him a convulsive kick on the side of the head with one powerful hind paw as he passed. The weasel went sprawling, with a startled squeak. And the fugitive, tearing on, had vanished before he could recover himself. Refusing to be discouraged, however, and blazing with fury at his discomfiture, he settled himself down again doggedly to the pursuit. He had now a more just appreciation of his quarry's pace and powers; so he drew a longer chord to the circle, determined that this time he would get well ahead and make certain of his prey.

But unfortunately for his enemy's designs, the Homeless One was no slave to the traditions of his tribe. He was now thoroughly frightened. He changed his mind about running in a circle. He lost all desire to get back to his familiar haunts. Untiring and swift he kept straight on; and the weasel, after waiting in vain for many minutes at the point where, by all the rules of rabbit hunting, the prey should have been intercepted and pulled down, gave up the chase in disgust and fell furiously to hunting wood mice. But his brain retained a vindictive memory of the great snowshoe who had so outwitted him.

The Homeless One, meanwhile, had reached a part of the valley which wore a novel air to him. This section had been chopped over by the

lumbermen some seven or eight years before, and cleared of nearly all of the heavy timber. There were few trees of any size; and most of the ground was covered with dense thickets of birch, poplar, Indian pear, wild cherry, and mountain ash, with here and there a patch of young balsam firs, darkly but richly green and giving forth an aromatic perfume in the heat. All the thickets were traversed by the runways of the snowshoe rabbits — narrow, well-trodden trails frequented by all the tribe.

The Homeless One, by this time, had got over his fright. Having a conveniently short memory, he had forgotten why he was frightened. And also, which was altogether unusual, he had forgotten the haunts of his past life, a mile or so away. A sleek young doe met him in the runway, and waved long ears of admiration at his comely stature and length of limb. He stopped to touch noses and exchange compliments with her. Coyly she hopped away, leading him into a cool, green-shadowed covert of sumach scrub.

The Homeless One was well content with his new feeding grounds. The strange does all received him with frank approval. He found the bucks, to be sure, by no means so friendly; but this was of small concern to him. If any of them tried to drive him away he bowled them

over with a careless rush, or treated them to a scornful kick, of such vigor as to bring them promptly to their manners. Being a philosophic folk they accepted his society forthwith and forgot that he was a stranger and an interloper.

As was the custom of the snowshoe tribe, the Homeless One was in the habit of passing most of the hours of full daylight crouched in a half doze in some dim covert. When hungry, or in the mood for diversion, he would slip forth, after assuring himself that there was no danger in the air, and either go leaping along the runways in playful pursuit of his acquaintances or fall to browsing upon the wild grasses and tender herbage.

One afternoon as he was hopping lazily after a pair of does who were merely pretending, by way of sport, to evade him, he was amazed and startled by the sight of a big goshawk shuffling at an awkward gait along the runway behind him. The runway was narrow, and densely overarched by low branches, so it was impossible that the great hawk could have seen him from the upper air. Obviously, the enterprising bird had entered the runway at its outlet on a little glade some forty or fifty yards back; and here he was now foolishly undertaking to hunt the fleet snowshoes on their own domain.

The first impulse of the Homeless One, naturally, was flight. He knew that terrible long-winged hawk, swiftest and most valiant of all the marauders of the air. With one bound he cleared the two does and raced on for a score of yards. Then curiosity overcame his fear. He stopped short and turned to stare at his pursuer; and the frightened does, blundering against him as they fled past, nearly knocked him over.

Paying no attention to the does he sat up on his hind quarters, ears erect and eyes bulging, and watched the hawk's approach with mingled wonder and contempt. The beautiful, fierce-eyed bird was not at home upon the level earth. His deadly talons were not made for walking, but for perching and for slaying. His realm was the free spaces of the air, and here in the runway he could not spread his wings. His progress was so slow, laborious, and clumsy that, but for the glare of his level, piercing eyes he would have seemed grotesque. The Homeless One, deeply puzzled, kept hopping away along the runway as the clumsy bird approached, preserving a safe distance of ten or a dozen yards, and ready to make an instantaneous dart into the underbrush on either side if the enemy should show the slightest sign of rising into the air. The two does, meanwhile, reassured by their companion's

boldness, had ventured back to peer at the strange intruder from farther up the runway.

Apparently undiscouraged by his failure to overtake the mocking fugitives, the great hawk shuffled steadily on, the three rabbits giving way rather contemptuously and at their leisure before him. This went on for a distance of perhaps a hundred yards, till the runway came to an end in a patch of grassy open. As the foremost of the two does hopped forth into the sunlight there came a rush of wings overhead and a bright form, sweeping from just above the green birch-tops, struck her down. Her scream of terror was strangled in her throat as the talons of a second hawk, larger and more powerful than the first, clutched her life out in an instant. The other doe and the Homeless One, horrified out of their complacence, shot off in opposite directions through the densest of the underbrush. And the victor, standing erect and trim with one foot upon her still quivering prey, stared about her with hard, bright eyes like jewels, waiting for her mate, who had so cleverly driven the runway for her, to emerge from the shadows and join her in the feast.

After this adventure the Homeless One, who was gifted beyond his fellows with the power of learning from experience, was always a little sus-

picious of the tribal runways. He used them, for his convenience and for his amusement, as much as ever, but he had gained a dim notion of the advantages which they offered to his enemies. One evening, on the violet edge of dusk, when he was gambolling with another buck and several frisky does, a red fox came racing down the runway without making any attempt to disguise his approach. Swift as he was the swifter snowshoes easily outstripped him as they fled from his terrifying attack. Toward the other end of the runway they darted pell-mell, to be met by another fox, who, leaping among them and slashing from side to side with his long white fangs, brought down two of the panic-stricken fugitives before they could scatter across the open, while the original pursuer was able to seize a third in the momentary confusion. But the Homeless One was not there. At the first appearance of the red-furred enemy he had darted aside from the runway and slipped off like a ghost through the gloom of the underbrush. He was not badly frightened, so he only ran a dozen yards or so. Then he stopped and complacently fell to browsing, quite careless as to the fate of his companions. A snowshoe rabbit has enough to think of in guarding his own skin, and it had never

occurred to him to try and warn his fellows of the trap they were running into.

It was through such experiences, such hair-breadth adventures and escapes, that the Homeless One, always in hourly peril of his life but not without distractions and joys of his own to make that life sweet to him, saw the hot, bright summer pass into the crisp, exhilarating autumn, with its glories of scarlet on the maple leaves, dull crimson on the sumachs, aërial gold on the birches and poplars, and vivid, waxy vermilion on the heavy fruit clusters of the mountain ash trees overhanging the amber eddies of the Ottanoosis Stream. The patches of barren, clothed only with a bushy scrub not more than a foot and a half in height, were tinged to a rich cobalt by the crowded masses of the blueberries. These luscious berries gave the snowshoes a pleasant variation to their diet, and the matted scrub was traversed abundantly by their runways. The black bears of the Ottanoosis, also, would come to these blueberry patches and squat upon their plump haunches to feast greedily on the juicy harvest. The Homeless One, rejoicing in his swiftness of foot, regarded these huge, black, cunning-eyed beasts with scorn, because they were so slow and lumbering in their movements. One day he saw a bear apparently asleep, its rusty-

black snout all purple-streaked with the juices of the berries it had been devouring. Yes, it was clear the bear was sleeping soundly, well stuffed with food and well content with the warm sun. The Homeless One had never before enjoyed such a chance to examine a bear at close quarters. It almost looked to him as if that bear was dead. A shrewd blue jay in a neighboring bush shrieked a note of warning. It was ignored. The Homeless One hopped closer and closer, investigating the monster with eyes and nose alike intensely interested. All at once, a huge, black paw, armed with mighty claws, swept down upon him with the speed of a trained boxer's fist. But the Homeless One was no such fool as the blue jay had taken him to be. When that murderous paw descended he was no longer just there but some seven or eight feet away and waving his long ears innocently. The bear, trying to look unconcerned, fell to munching blueberries again; and the Homeless One hopped off with his curiosity quite satisfied.

It was not until November came, with its biting sleet showers, its snows that fell, rested a few days, and vanished, its spells of sharp frost and sudden, bone-reaching cold, that the Homeless One began really to suffer the penalties of his inherited incapacity to make or find himself a

home. The comfortable leafage had fallen from all the trees and bushes except the evergreens, the firs and pines, hemlocks and cedars. It was dreary work to crouch beneath a dripping bush while the icy winds scourged the high valley of the Ottanoosis. Nevertheless, he kept heart to play with his furry companions; and life grew more eventful day by day as his enemies grew more and more hungry and persistent in their hunting. It was about this time, when the snow began to linger upon the ground in glaring patches, that his coat began to change in color in order to make him less conspicuous. He was moulting his rusty-colored summer fur, and the new fur, as it came in, was pure white. By the time the snow had come to stay for the winter his clean, new, snowy coat was in readiness to match it, so that when he crouched motionless, his ears laid back and his nose between his paws, the keenest and hungriest of eyes would usually fail to distinguish him.

One windless, biting afternoon about sunset, when the shadows were stretching long and blue across the snow, the Homeless One was just stirring from his chilly couch to go and feed when from behind his sheltering bush a lean weasel darted upon him. Thanks to his amazing alertness—and his luck—he shot aside in time.

But just in time. It was the narrowest shave he had ever had; and he left a tantalizing mouthful of fur in the weasel's jaws.

As it happened, this was the same big weasel, swift and cunning, whom he had balked so ignominiously in the early part of the summer; and by some freak of chance the incident — and possibly some peculiarity in the scent of this huge snowshoe—now revived in the weasel's memory, and he took up the pursuit with a special fury. The snow lay thin and hard, so that the Homeless One was deprived of the advantage which his wide, furry feet would have given him had the snow been soft and deep. To make matters worse he was feeling slack and tired that day, and so fell short of his accustomed speed. As was his rule when pursued, he neither followed the runways nor fled in a circle, but raced straight off through the thickets, dodging erratically and traversing whatever obstacles he thought most likely to embarrass his pursuer. But to his horror he found that pursuer still close upon his heels. The shock of this discovery almost brought upon him that fatal panic which so often overtakes a hunted rabbit and makes him yield himself suddenly as an easy prey. But the Homeless One was of sterner stuff, and that moment's panic only stung him to fiercer effort.

Nevertheless, for the weasel's endurance was greater than his, the Homeless One's career would have come to an end in this last desperate adventure, but for the fact that the Unseen Powers once more woke up and took a whimsical hand in the affair. Just as he was darting, stretched out to his limit, beneath the shelter of a snowy bush, a great owl swooped and made a clutch at him. But the owl had miscalculated the speed which the Homeless One was displaying. She missed him; and she was just in time to seize his pursuer instead. Infuriated at this disappointment — for she would have greatly preferred tender rabbit to tough weasel — her talons closed like steel jaws upon the weasel's neck and loins. Rising noiselessly into the air she swept away into the shadows with her writhing victim. And the Homeless One, presently realizing that he was no longer pursued, hid himself in the deepest thicket he could find, with his heart nearly bursting between his ribs.

When winter had finally closed down upon the Ottanoonsis Valley, with snow four and five feet deep on the levels and a cold that made the trees snap like gunshots in the stillness, the Homeless One, though with no lair to hide in, was in reality less uncomfortable than he had been in the variable weather. The cold, though so intense,

was of a sparkling dryness; and every snow-covered bush was ready to afford him a secluded shelter. For him and his tribe—more fortunate in this hard season than their enemies—food was fairly abundant, for the depth of the snow enabled them to reach the tender twigs of the birches and willows and poplars. Moreover, alone among the kindreds of the wild, these weak, defenseless, homeless tribes of the snowshoes managed to find heart for gaiety and play amid the white desolation. When the full moon flooded the wastes with her sinister, icy-blue light, the snowshoes would hop forth from their coverts and gather in the open glades. There they would amuse themselves for hours with a strange game, leaping over each other, and chasing each other till their tracks made curious patterns on the snow almost as if they were performing some wild quadrille. But during these gaieties they were never unmindful of their caution. They could not afford to be, in that world of prowling death. At every entrance to the glade there would be stationed a sentinel, erect upon his hind quarters, long ears waving warily, every sense at utmost tension, ready to give the alarm by a loud pounding with his hind feet at the faintest sign of peril.

It was during one such moonlit revel that the Homeless One stood sentry at the post of chief danger, where a dense growth of hemlocks overhung the edge of the glade. He had been some time on duty, and was just about to give up his post to one of the revelers, who was even then hopping over to relieve him, when he caught sound of a stealthy movement close behind the screen of branches. He gave three frantic thumps with his powerful hind feet, and the revelers vanished as if wiped out by a giant breath. In the next instant he leapt for his life, desperately.

But he was too late — by just the moment it had taken him to give the warning signal. Even as he sprang a shape of shadowy grey, like a huge cat with pale moon-eyes and tufted ears, launching itself through the branches, fell upon him and bore him down; and long fangs reached his throat. With a snarl of triumph the famished lynx tore at the warm prey between his paws, and a dark stain spread upon the trampled snow. The Homeless One, as truly as many a hero of history and song, had died for the safety of his tribe.

The Black Fisherman

ALONG the grim cliffs that guard, on the north, the gates of tide-vevt Fundy, the green seas foamed and sobbed beneath the surge of the tremendous flood. There was no wind; and out from shore the slow swells, unfrothed by rock or shoal, heaved gently, smooth as glass. The sky, of that intensely pure, vibrant blue which seems to hold sparks of sharp light enmeshed in it, carried but two or three small clouds, floating far and high, clean-edged, and white as new snow.

Close above the water, and closely followed by his shadow, flew slowly a large and sinister-looking black bird, about midway in size between a duck and a goose, but very unlike either in shape and mien. Its head, neck, breast, and underbody, and lower part of the back, next the tail, were glossy black, with a sharp iridescence flashing green and jewelled in the sun. Its short, square, rigid tail was ink black, as were its legs and strong, webbed feet. Ink black, too, was its long, straight, hook-tipped beak—even longer

than the sharp, savage head, which was strangely adorned by a thin, backward-sweeping black crest on either side. At the base of the beak and on the throat just beneath it was a splash of orange; and the piercing eyes, hard as a hawk's, were surrounded each by a vivid orange patch of naked skin. In somber contrast to this impressive coloring, the back and wings were brown, the feathers trimly laced with black.

As the dark shape flew, almost skimming the transparent swells, its fierce, flame-circled eyes peered downward, taking note of the fish that swam at varying depths. These fruitful waters of Fundy teemed with fish, of many varieties and sizes, and the great cormorant, for all his insatiable appetite, could afford to pick and choose among them those most convenient to handle. As far as his taste was concerned there was little to choose, for quantity, rather than quality, was what appealed to him in fish.

Suddenly he made his choice. His tail went up, his head went down, his wings closed tight to his body, and he shot beneath the beryl surface. At first, he missed his quarry. But that was nothing to him. More fish than bird himself, now, he gave chase to it, at a depth of several feet below the water. Propelled by the drive of his powerful thighs and broad webs, by the screwing

twist of his stern and his stiff tail, he darted through the alien element at a speed which very few of its natives could pretend to rival. From his wake a few bright bubbles escaped and flew upwards, to break in flashes of sharp light upon the silvery mirror of the under surface. The quarry, a gleaming and nimble "gaspereau," doubled frantically this way and that, its round, fixed eyes astare as if painted. But it could not shake off its implacable pursuer. In a dozen seconds or so it was overtaken. That long, hook-tipped beak snapped upon it inexorably, and paralyzed its writhings.

Shooting forth upon the surface, the cormorant sat motionless for a few moments, carrying his prize crosswise in his beak. Then with a sudden jerk tossing it in the air, he caught it dexterously head first as it fell, and gulped it down—but not all the way down. The black fisherman's stomach was, as it chanced, already full. The present capture, therefore, was lodged in the sac of loose skin below his throat, where its size and shape were clearly revealed.

For a short while—for a very few minutes, indeed, since the cormorant's digestion is swift and indefatigable, and has no objection to working overtime—the black fisherman sat floating complacently on the swells. Then suddenly, with

a convulsive movement that to an onlooker would have seemed agonizing, but which to him was a satisfying delight, he swallowed the prize in his gullet, stretching up and straightening his neck, till its trim outlines were quite restored. Immediately the hunting light flamed again into his savage eyes. With a heavy flapping rush along the surface he rose into the air and fell once more to quartering the liquid field for a new prey.

Meanwhile, from far up in the blinding blue where he wheeled slowly on wide, motionless wings, a white-headed eagle, most splendid and most shameless of robbers, had been watching the insatiable fisherman. Now he dropped swiftly to a lower level, where he again hung poised, his gem-bright, implacable eyes peering downward expectantly. It was not often that he interfered with the cormorants, whom he regarded as obstinate, ill-tempered birds, with an insistent regard for their rights and remarkable precision in the use of their long beaks. But hunting had been bad that day, and he was hungry. The complacent success of the black fisherman was galling to watch while his own appetite was so unsatisfied.

The cormorant, absorbed in his quest, and never dreaming of any interference, did not notice the long-winged shape circling high overhead.

He marked a fine whiting—rather bigger than he usually troubled with, but too tempting to resist. He dived, pursued it hither and thither for a breathless minute or more, captured it, and shot to the surface again triumphantly, with the captive still squirming between his deadly mandibles. In the same instant, before he had time to dive or dodge, there was a hissing rush, the air above his head was buffeted by tremendous wings; and great talons, closing like a trap on one half of the fish projecting from his beak, strove to snatch it from him. Startled and furious, he hung on like a bulldog, stiffening his broad tail and backing water with his powerful webs. He was almost lifted clear of the surface, but his weight, and his passionate resistance, were too much for even those mighty pinions to overcome. The fish was torn in half, and the eagle sprang upwards with his spoils. The cormorant swallowed the remaining fragment in fierce haste, blinking with the effort, and then sat and glared at the kingly marauder beating upwards into the blue.

After a few minutes of sullen meditation—and swift digestion—the untiring but still angry fisherman resumed his game. This time, however, he did not rise into the air, but swam slowly onward, searching the crystal tide beneath him till

he marked a likely prey. Then once more he dived, once more he chased the quarry through its native element, and captured it. But now, instead of shooting out boldly upon the surface, he rose cautiously and showed only his head above the water. There was his foe, already swooping again to the attack, but still high in air. In a lightning gulp he swallowed his prey, down into the halfway-house of his throat sac, and dived again, disappearing just as the robber, dropping like a thunderbolt, spread sudden wing and struck angrily at the spot where he had vanished.

As the eagle hovered for a moment, giving vent to his feelings in a sharp yelp of disappointment, the black fisherman reappeared some twenty or thirty paces away, and sat there eyeing his enemy with mingled triumph and defiance. He held his vicious-looking head slightly down between the shoulders, ready for a lightning stroke; and his long, efficient beak was half open. His sturdy spirit was not going to be browbeaten even by the king of the air.

The eagle, with snowy head stretched downwards, eyes gleaming bright as glass, and great talons menacingly outstretched, sailed backwards and forwards over him several times at a height of not more than four or five feet, hoping to

frighten him into disgorging the prey. Had the royal robber cared to push matters to a conclusion, he would certainly have been more than a match for the cormorant, but he knew well enough that he would not emerge without scars from the encounter; and he was not ready to pay any such price for a mouthful of fish. Presently, realizing that the surly fisherman was not going to be bluffed, he slanted aloft disdainfully, and went winnowing away over the cliffs to seek less troublesome hunting.

A few minutes later the cormorant, well pleased with himself, flew up to rejoin his nesting mate, on a grassy ledge just below the crest of the cliff.

Arriving at the nest he alighted close beside it, and immediately sat up, supported by his stiff, square tail, as rigidly erect as a penquin. His vigilant gaze scanning rock and sky and sea, the polished, black armor of his hard plumage radiant in the sunlight, he looked a formidable sentinel. His dark mate, hungry and weary after long brooding, slipped from the nest and plunged downward to refresh herself in the fruitful gleaming pastures of the tide, leaving the nest and eggs to his guardianship.

It was a crude affair, this nest—a haphazard, messy structure of dry, black seaweed and last

year's grey mullein stalks. Within the nest were four big eggs of a dirty pale-green color, partly covered with a whitish, limey film. These treasures the black fisherman watched proudly, ready to do battle for them against any would-be thief that might approach.

In truth the nest was in a somewhat exposed position. At this point the ledge was only about four feet wide, and just behind the nest the cliff face was so crumbled away that any sure-footed marauder might easily make his way down from the cliff top, some thirty feet above. In front of the nest, on the other hand, the cliff face dropped a sheer three hundred feet to the surges that seethed and crashed along its base. Some twenty paces to the right the ledge widened to a tiny plateau, carpeted with close, light-green turf and dotted with half a dozen dark juniper bushes. A most desirable nesting place, this, but already occupied to the last available inch of space by the earlier arrivals of the cormorant migration. The black fisherman and his spouse, tardy in their wooing and their mating, had lingered overlong in the warm waters of the south and been obliged to content themselves with such accommodation as was left to them. To their courageous and rather unsociable spirits, however, this was a matter of small concern. They had the com-

panionship of their kind—but not too close, not too intimate; just where they wanted it, in fact. They were well fitted to hold the post of danger—to guard the gateway to the cormorant colony. Few other birds there were in that colony who would have had the mettle, bold as they were, to face the eagle as the black fisherman had done.

Those dirty-green eggs in the slovenly nest were now near their time of hatching, so the mother hurried back from the sea as soon as possible, to cover them with her hot and dripping breast, setting her mate free to pursue his one engrossing pastime. A day or two later, however, when faint cries and the sound of tapping beaks began to be heard within the shells, then the devoted mother would not leave the nest even for a moment, so the black fisherman had to fish for her as well as for himself. His pastime now became a heavy task, made doubly hard by the fact that the eagle returned from time to time to harass him. His method of foraging, at first, was to fill his own stomach, then his neck pouch till it would hold no more, and then fly home with a big fish held crosswise in his beak. This was the eagle's opportunity. When the cormorant was in mid-air, half way between cliff and sea, and flying heavily with his load, the crafty robber would swoop down and catch him

at a hopeless disadvantage. Unable either to strike back or to resist, and mindful of his responsibilities, he would relinquish the prize and fly back home to feed his mate on what he could disgorge from his crop. After two experiences of this sort he gave up attempting to carry anything home in his beak and contented himself with what his pouch would hold. Thereupon the eagle, no longer tempted by the sight of an actually visible prey and marking the long, black beak all in readiness to strike, gave up molesting him. But the rest of the colony, less wary and quick-witted than the black fisherman, were continually being forced to pay tribute to the robber king. When their eggs were hatched, both parents were kept busy, the four youngsters being voracious beyond even the usual voracity of nestlings. At first they were but blind, stark-naked, ink-black, sprawling bundles of skin and bone, their great beaks ever wide open in demand for more, more, more. Their tireless parents had not only to catch, but also to half digest their food for them, pumping it into their throats from their own stomachs, which were thus kept working at high pressure.

As the nestlings grew—which they did with great rapidity—their appetites increased in proportion and when their eyes opened there was

an added emphasis to the demand of their ever open beaks. The father and mother began to grow thin with their exertions. Then one day the fickle Fates of the Sea came very near to closing the mother's career and throwing the whole responsibility upon the black fisherman's shoulders. The mother was down, far down below the surface, chasing a nimble sprat through the green transparency, when a swift and hungry dogfish with jaws like those of his great cousin, the shark, came darting in her wake. Fortunately for her the sprat dodged—and she, in turning to pursue, caught sight of her own terrible pursuer. Straight as an arrow she shot to the surface; and then, with sure instinct, she flashed aside at right angles, thus evading, though only by a hair's breadth, her enemy's upward rush. Flapping desperately along the water for a few feet she sprang into the air with a frantic effort; and the jaws of the dogfish snapped just below her vanishing feet. Somewhat shaken she started homeward. But before she had gone halfway she regained her self-possession. She would not return empty to her nestlings, confessing defeat. Whirling abruptly she flew off far to the left, and resumed her fishing in a deep cove where that particular dogfish, at least, was not likely to pursue her. But the adventure had warned her

to keep her eyes open, and on her return to the nest she managed to convey to her mate the news that dogfish were about. It was information which that wary bird was not likely to forget.

Shortly after this incident the overworked parents were afforded a certain measure of relief, but in a form which was very bitter to them. One morning when they were both absent from the nest, and the nestlings, full-fed for the moment, sprawled comfortably in the sun, a slender, long-tailed, grey-and-buff chicken hawk came slanting down over the crest of the cliff. Its swift, darting flight carried it low above the crowded nests of the cormorant colony, but, audacious slaughterer though it was, discretion kept it from coming within reach of the menacing beaks uplifted to receive it. The lonely nest of the black fisherman, however, left unguarded for the moment, caught its eye. It pounced like lightning, struck its talons into the tender body of one of the nestlings, despatched it with a single blow, dragged it forth upon the edge of the nest, and fell to tearing it greedily. A moment more and another of the nestlings would have been served in the same fashion; but just in the nick of time the black fisherman himself arrived. The hawk saw his ominous form shoot up over the rim of the ledge. With one thrust of its fine pinions it

sprang into the air, evading the onslaught by a splendid side sweep far out over the depths. Then it beat upwards and over the crest of the cliff, its bleeding victim dangling from its talons. With a croak of fury the cormorant gave chase. For half a mile in over the downs he followed, lusting for vengeance. But his heavy flight, though strong and straight, was no match for the speed of that beautiful and graceful slayer. The hawk presently vanished with its prey among the dark tree tops of an inland valley, and the black fisherman flapped back sullenly to his nest.

The three remaining nestlings throve all the better for the loss of their companion. They were nearly half feathered before any further misadventure befell the nest. Then it came in an unexpected guise.

A wandering fox, far out of his accustomed range, came to the crest of the cliff and stood staring curiously out into the vast space of air and sea. There was a wind that day, and his bushy, red brush of a tail was blown almost over his back. The cormorant colony was just below him. At the sight of it his eyes narrowed cunningly. Sinking flat in the grass he thrust his sharp face over the edge, in the shelter of an overhanging rosebush, and peered down upon the novel scene. What a lot of nests! What a

tempting array of plump younglings! His lean jaws slavered with greed.

The fox knew nothing about cormorants. But he could see the black, fine-plumaged guardians of the nests were very hefty, self-confident birds, with bold, fierce eyes and extraordinarily efficient-looking beaks. He speedily came to the conclusion that the immediate vicinity of those beaks would be bad for his health. Decidedly those grapes were sour. Being a sagacious beast and not given to wasting effort on the unattainable, he was just about to curb his appetite and turn away when his glance fell upon the black fisherman's nest, lying far apart and solitary. To be sure, both parents were beside the nest at the moment. But they were only two; and after all they were only birds. This looked more promising. He crept nearer, and waited, it being his wise custom to look before he leaped.

Both parents were busy feeding the gaping mouths of their young, and the fox watched with interest the unusual process. It seemed to him absurd, and unnecessary; and his respect for the great, black birds began to diminish. Presently the larger of the two, the black fisherman himself, having disgorged all the food he could spare, plunged downward from the ledge and disappeared.

This was the red watcher's opportunity. With a rushing leap down the steep slope he sprang upon the nest. Never dreaming that the one lone guardian would dare to face him, and craving the tender flesh of the young rather than the tough adult, he made the mistake of ignoring the mother bird. He seized one of the nestlings and crushed the life out of it in a single snap of his jaws. But at the same instant the stab of a steel-hard mandible struck him full in one eye, simply obliterating it, and a mighty buffeting of wings forced him off the nest.

With a yelp of rage and anguish the fox turned upon his assailant, and seized her by one wing, high up and close to the body. As his fangs ground through the bone the dauntless mother raked his flank with her stabbing beak and threw herself backwards, frantically struggling, toward the lip of the ledge. Her instinctive purpose was twofold—first, to drag the fox from the precious nest; second to seek escape from this land enemy in either the air or the water, where she would be more at home. The fox, his one remaining eye for the moment veiled by his opponent's feathers, could not see his peril, but resisted instinctively whatever she seemed trying to do.

From the first moment of the battle the mother

bird had sent out her harsh cries for help. And now, while the unequal combat went on at the very brink of the abyss, the black fisherman arrived. With a mighty shock he landed on the fox's back, striking and stabbing madly. Bewildered, and half stunned, the fox jerked up his head to seize his new antagonist; but, met by a demoralizing thrust fair on the snout, he missed his aim, and caught the throat of the mother bird instead. The next instant, in a mad confusion of pounding wings and yelpings and black feathers and red fur, the three went over the brink together in an awful plunge.

Immediately the black fisherman, who was unhurt, flew clear. He could do nothing but follow the other two downwards, as they fell rolling over each other in the death grip. Half way down they crashed upon a jutting point of rock, and fell apart as they bounced off. With two tremendous splashes they struck the water. The body of the fox sank from sight, whirled away by an undercurrent and probably caught in some deep crevice, there to be devoured by the crabs and other sea scavengers. The dead cormorant, supported by her feathers and her hollow bones, lay floating, belly upward, with sprawled wings, on the surface. Her mate, alighting beside her, swam around her several times, eyeing her with

an intense gaze. Then, realizing that she was dead, he slowly swam away to take up the double duties now thrust upon him. After all, as there were now but two mouths left in the nest to feed, there was no doubt but that he would be equal to the task.

Starnose of the Under Ways

HE was in a darkness that was dense, absolute, palpable. And his eyes were shut tight—though it made no difference, under the circumstances, whether they were shut or open. But if his sense of sight was for the moment off duty, its absence was more than compensated for by the extreme alertness of his other senses. To his supersensitive nostrils the black, peaty soil surrounding him was full of distinct and varying scents. His ears could detect and locate the wriggling of a fat grub, the unctuous withdrawal of a startled earthworm. Above all, his sense of touch—that was so extraordinarily developed that it might have served him for eyes, ears, and nostrils all in one. And so it came about that, there in the blackness of his close and narrow tunnel, deep in the black soil of the swamp, he was not imprisoned, but free and at large as the swift hares gamboling overhead—far freer, indeed, because secure from the menace of prowling and swooping foes.

Starnose was a mole. But he was not an

ordinary mole of the dry uplands and well-drained meadows, by any means, or he would not have been running his deep tunnel here in the cool, almost swampy soil within a few yards of the meandering channel of the Lost Water. In shape and color he was not unlike the common mole—with his thick, powerful neck of about the same size as his body, his great, long-clawed, immensely strong, handlike forefeet, and his mellow, velvety, shadowy, gray-brown fur. But his tail was much longer, and thicker at the base, than that of his plebeian cousin of the lawns. And his nose—*that* was something of a distinction which no other beast in the world, great or small, could boast of. From all round its tip radiated a fringe of feelers, no less than twenty-two in number, naked, flexible, miraculously sensitive, each one a little nailless, interrogating finger. It entitled him, beyond question, to the unique title of Starnose.

This tireless worker in the dark was driving a new tunnel—partly, no doubt, for the sake of worms, grubs, and *pupae* which he might find on the way, and partly for purposes known only to himself. At the lever where he was digging, a scant foot below the surface, the mould, though damp, was fairly light and workable, owing to the abundance of fine roots and decayed leaf-

age mixed through it; and his progress was astonishingly rapid.

His method of driving his tunnel was practical and effective. With back arched so as to throw the full force of it into his foreshoulders, with his hind feet wide apart and drawn well up beneath him, he dug mightily into the damp soil straight before his nose with the long, penetrating claws of his exaggerated and powerful forepaws. In great, swift, handfuls (for his forepaws were more like hands than feet), the loosened earth was thrown behind him, passing under his body and out between his roomily straddling hind legs. And as he dug he worked in a circle, enlarging the tunnel head to a diameter of about two and a half inches, at the same time pressing the walls firm and hard with his body, so that they should not cave in upon him. This compacting process further enlarged the tunnel to about three inches, which was the space he felt he needed for quick and free movement. When he had accumulated behind him as much loose earth as he could comfortably handle, he turned round, and with his head and chest and forearms pushed the mass before him along the tunnel to the foot of his last dump hole—an abrupt shaft leading to the upper air. Up this shaft he would thrust his burden, and heave it forth among the

grass and weeds, a conspicuous and contemptuous challenge to would-be pursuers. He did not care how many of his enemies might thus be notified of his address, for he knew he could always change it with baffling celerity, blocking up his tunnels behind him as he went.

And now, finding that at his present depth the meadow soil, at this point, was not well stocked with such game—grubs and worms—as he chose to hunt, he slanted his tunnel slightly upward to get among the grass roots near the surface. Almost immediately he was rewarded. He cut into a pipelike canal of a large earthworm just in time to intercept its desperate retreat. It was one of those stout, dark-purplish lobworms that feed in rich soil, and to him the most toothsome of morsels. In spite of the eagerness of his appetite he drew it forth most delicately and gradually from its canal, lest it should break in two and the half of it escape him. Dragging it back into his tunnel he held it with his big, inexorable “hands,” and felt it over gleefully with that restless star of fingers which adorned the tip of his nose. Then he tore it into short pieces, bolted it hurriedly, and fell to work again upon his tunneling. But now, having come among the grass roots, he was in a good hunting ground and his work was con-

tinually interrupted by feasting. At one moment it would be a huge, fat, white grub as thick as a man's little finger, with a hard, light-copper-colored head; at the next a heavy, liver-colored lobworm. His appetite seemed insatiable; but at last he felt he had enough, for the moment. He stopped tunneling, turned back a few inches, drove a short shaft to the surface as a new exit, and heaved forth a mighty load of débris.

In the outer world it was high morning, and the strong sunlight glowed softly down through the tangled grasses of the water meadow. The eyes of Starnose were but two tiny, black beads almost hidden in fur, but after he had blinked them for a second or two in the sudden light he could see quite effectively—much better, indeed, than his cousin, the common mole of the uplands. Though by far the greater part of his strenuous life was spent in the palpable darkness of his tunnels in the underworld, daylight, none the less, was by no means distasteful to him, and he was not averse to a few minutes of basking in the tempered sun. As he sat stroking his fine fur with those restless fingers of his nose, and scratching himself luxuriously with his capable claws, a big grasshopper, dropping from one of its aimless leaps, fell close beside him, bearing down with it a long blade of grass which it had clutched

at in its descent. Starnose seized the unlucky hopper in a flash, tore off its hard inedible legs, and started to eat it. At that instant, however, a faint swish of wings caught his ear and a swift shadow passed over him. At the touch of that shadow—as if it had been solid and released an oiled spring within his mechanism—he dived back into his hole; and the swooping marsh hawk, after a savage but futile clutch at the vanishing tip of his tail, wheeled off with a yelp of disappointment.

It was certainly a narrow shave; and for perhaps a whole half minute Starnose, with his heart thumping, crouched in his refuge. Then, remembering the toothsome prize which he had been forced to abandon, he put forth his head warily to reconnoiter. The hawk was gone; but the dead grasshopper was still there, green and glistening in the sun, and a burly bluebottle had just alighted upon it. Starnose crept forth cautiously to retrieve his prey.

Now at this same moment, as luck would have it, gliding along one of the tiny runways of the meadow mice, came a foraging mole shrew, a pugnacious cousin of the starnose tribe. The mole shrew was distinctly smaller than Starnose, and handicapped with such defective vision that he had to do all his hunting by scent and

sound and touch. He smelt the dead grasshopper at once, and came straight for it, heedless of whatever might stand in the way.

Under the circumstances Starnose might have carelessly stood aside, not through lack of courage, but because he had no special love of fighting for its own sake. And he knew that his cousin, though so much smaller and lighter than himself, was much to be respected as an opponent by reason of his blind ferocity and dauntless tenacity. But he was no weakling, to let himself be robbed of his lawful prey. He whipped out of his hole, flung himself upon the prize, and lifted his head just in time to receive the furious spring of his assailant.

Between two such fighters there was no fencing. The mole shrew secured a grip upon the side of the immensely thick and muscular neck of his antagonist, and immediately began to worry and tear like a terrier. But Starnose, flexible as an eel, set his deadly teeth into the side of his assailant's head, a little behind the ear, and worked in deeper and deeper, after the manner of a bulldog. For a few seconds, in that death grapple, the two rolled over and over, thrashing the grass stems. Then the long teeth of Starnose bit in to the brain; and the mole shrew's

body, after a convulsive stiffening, went suddenly limp.

But the disturbance in the grass—there being no wind that golden morning—had not escaped the eyes of the foraging marsh hawk. She came winnowing back to learn the cause of it. The sun being behind her, however, her ominous shadow swept over the grass before her, and Starnose, unflinchingly vigilant even in the moment of victory, caught sight of it coming. He loosened his hold on his dead adversary and plunged for the hole. At least, he tried to plunge for it. But the plunge was little more than a crawl, for the teeth of the mole shrew, set deep in his neck, had locked themselves fast in death, and all that Starnose could do was to drag the body with him. This however, he succeeded in doing, so effectively that he was in time to back down into the hole, out of reach, just as the hawk swooped and struck.

The clutching talons of the great bird fixed themselves firmly in the protruding hind quarters of the mole shrew, and she attempted to rise with her capture. But to her amazed indignation the prize resisted. Starnose was holding on to the walls of his tunnel with all the strength of his powerful claws, while at the same time struggling desperately to tear himself loose from the grip of those dead teeth in his neck. The contest, how-

ever, was but momentary. The strength of Starnose was a small thing against the furious beating of those great wings; and in two or three seconds, unable either to hold on or to free himself from the fatal incubus of his victim, he was dragged forth ignominiously and swept into the air, squirming and dangling at the tip of the dead mole shrew's snout.

Starnose was vaguely conscious of a chill rush of air, of a sudden, dazzling glare of gold and blue, as the victorious hawk flapped off toward the nearest tree top with her prize. Then suddenly, the grip of the dead jaws relaxed and he felt himself falling. Fortunately for him the hawk had not risen to any great height—for the marsh hawk, hunter of meadow mice and such secretive quarry, does not, as a rule, fly high. He felt himself turn over and over in the air, dizzily, and then landed, with a stupefying swish, in a dense bed of wild parsnips. He crashed right through, of course, but the strong stems broke his fall and he was little the worse for the stupendous adventure. For a few moments he lay half stunned. Then, pulling himself together, he fell to digging with all his might, caring only to escape from a glaring outer world which seemed so full of tumultuous and altogether bewildering perils. He made the earth fly in a shower, and

in an unbelievably brief space of time he had buried himself till even the tip of his tail was out of sight. But even then he was not content. He dug on frantically, till he was a good foot beneath the surface and perhaps a couple of feet more from the entrance. Then, leaving the passage safely blocked behind him, he enlarged the tunnel to a small chamber, and curled himself up to lick his wounds and recover from his fright.

It was perhaps half an hour before Starnose completely regained his composure and his appetite. His appetite—that was the first consideration. And second to that, a poor second, was his need of tunneling back into his familiar maze of underground passages. Resuming his digging with full vigor, he first ran a new dump shaft to the surface, gathering in several fat grubs in his progress through the grass roots. Then, at about six inches below the surface—a depth at which he could count upon the best foraging—he began to drive his tunnel. His sense of direction was unerring, which was the more inexplicable as there in the thick dark he could have no landmarks to guide him. He headed straight for the point which would, by the shortest distance, join him up with his own under ways.

It happened, however, that in that terrible

journey of his through the upper air the swift flight of the hawk had carried him some distance, and across the course of a sluggish meadow brook, a tributary of the Lost Water. Suddenly and unexpectedly his vigorous tunneling brought him to this obstacle. The darkness before him gave way to a glimmer of light. He hesitated, and then burrowed on more cautiously. A screen of matted grass roots confronted him, stabbed through with needles of sharp gold which quivered dazzlingly. Warily he dug through the screen, thrust forth his nose, and found himself looking down upon a shimmering glare of quiet water, about a foot below him.

Glancing upward to see if there were any terrible wings in the air above, Starnose perceived, to his deep satisfaction, that the steep bank was overhung by a mat of pink-blossomed wild roses, humming drowsily with bees. The concealment, from directly overhead, was perfect. Reassured upon this point he crawled forth, intending to swim the bright channel and continue his tunnel upon the other side. The water itself was no obstacle to him, for he could swim and dive like a muskrat. He was just about to plunge in, when under his very nose popped up a black, triangular, furry head with fiercely bright, hard eyes and lips curled back hungrily from long and

keen white fangs. With amazing dexterity he doubled back upon himself straight up the slope and dived into his burrow; and the mink, springing after him, was just in time to snap vainly at the vanishing tip of his tail.

The mink was both hungry and bad-tempered, having just missed a fish which he was hunting amid the tangle of water weeds along the muddy bottom of the stream. Angrily he jammed his sharp snout into the mouth of the tunnel, but the passage was much too small for him and Starnose was well out of reach. He himself could dig a burrow when put to it, but he knew that in this art he was no match for the expert little fugitive. Moreover, keen though was his appetite, he was not overanxious to allay it with the rank and stringy flesh of the Underground One. He shook his head with a sniff and a snarl, brushed the earth from his muzzle, and slipped off swiftly and soundlessly to seek more succulent prey.

It was ten or fifteen minutes before Starnose again ventured forth into the perilous daylight. His last adventure had not in the least upset him—for to his way of thinking a miss was as good as a mile. But he was hungry, as usual, and he had found good hunting in the warm light soil just under the roots of the wild rosebushes along the bank. At length his desires once more turned

toward the home tunnels. He poked his starry nose out through the hole in the bank, made sure that there were no enemies in sight, slipped down to the water's edge, and glided in as noiselessly as if he had been oiled. He had no mind to make a splash, lest he should advertise his movements to some voracious pike which might be lurking beneath that green patch of water-lily leaves a little further upstream.

Deep below the shining surface he swam, straight and strong through a world of shimmering and pellucid gold, roofed by a close, flat, white sky of diaphanous silver, upon which every fallen rose petal or drowning fly or moth was shown with amazing clearness. As he reached the opposite shore and clambered nimbly up through that flat, silver sky he glanced back, and saw a long, gray shadow, with terrible jaws and staring, round eyes, dart past the spot from which he had just emerged. The great pike beneath the lily pads had caught sight of him, after all—but too late! Starnose shook himself, and sat basking for a few moments in the comfortable warmth, complacently combing his face with his nimble forepaws. He had an easy contempt for the pike, because it could not leave the water to pursue him.

Some fifty yards away, on the side of the brook from which Starnose had just come,

beside a tiny pool in the deeps of the grass stood an immense bird of a pale bluish-gray color, motionless as a stone, on the watch for unwary frogs. Though the rich grasses were about two feet in height, the blue heron towered another clear two feet above them. He was all length—long stiltlike legs, long snakelike neck, long daggerlike bill, and a firm, arrogant crest of long, slim, delicate plumes. All about him spread the warm and sun-steeped sea of the meadow grass—starred thick with blooms of purple vetch and crimson clover and sultry orange lilies—droning sleepily with bees and flies, steaming with summer scents and liquidly musical with the songs of the fluttering, black-and-white bobolinks, like tangled peals of tiny, silver bells. But nothing of this intoxicating beauty did the great heron heed. Rigid and decorative as if he had just stepped down from a Japanese screen, his fierce, unwinking, jewel-bright eyes were intent upon the pool at his feet. His whole statuesque being was concentrated upon the subject of frogs.

But the frogs in that particular pool had taken warning. Not one would show himself so long as that inexorable blue shape of death remained in sight. Nor did a single meadow mouse stir amid the grass roots for yards about the pool; for word of the watching doom had gone abroad.

And presently the great heron, grown tired of such poor hunting, lifted his broad wings, sprang lazily into the air, and went flapping away slowly over the grass tops, trailing his long legs stiffly behind him. He headed for the other side of the brook and fresh hunting grounds.

At the first lift of those great, pale wings Starnose had detected this new and appalling peril. By good luck he was sitting on a patch of bare earth, where the overhanging turf had given way some days before. Frantically he began to dig himself in. The soft earth flew from under his desperate paws. The piercing eyes of the heron detected the curious disturbance, and he winged swiftly for the spot.

But Starnose, in his vigilance, had gained a good start. In about as much time as it takes to tell it, he was already buried to his own length. And then, to his terror, he came plump upon an impenetrable obstacle—an old mooring stake driven deep into the soil. In a sweat of panic he swerved off to the left and tunneled madly almost at right angles to the entrance.

And just this it was—a part of his wonderful luck on this eventful day—that turned to his salvation. Dropping swiftly to the entrance of the all too shallow tunnel, the great heron, his head bent sideways, peered into the hole with one

implacable eye. Then drawing back his neck till it was like a coiled spring, he darted his murderous bill deep into the hole.

Had it not been for the old mooring stake, which compelled him to change directions, Starnose would have been neatly impaled, plucked forth, hammered to death, and devoured. As it was, the dreadful weapon merely grazed the top of his rump—scoring, indeed, a crimson gash—and struck with a terrifying thud upon the hard wood of the stake. The impact gave the heron a nasty jar. He drew his head back abruptly and shook it hard in his indignant surprise. Then, trying to look as if nothing unusual had happened, he stepped down into the water with lofty deliberation and composed himself to watch for fish. At this moment the big pike came swimming past again, hoping for another chance at the elusive Starnose. He was much too heavy a fish for the heron to manage, of course; but the heron, in his wrath, stabbed down upon him vindictively. There was a moment's struggle which made the quiet water boil. Then the frightened fish tore himself free and darted off, with a great red wound in his silver-gray side, to hide and sulk under the lily pads.

In the meantime Starnose, though smarting from that raw but superficial gash upon his hind

quarters, was burrowing away with concentrated zeal. He had once more changed directions, and was heading, as true as if by compass, for the nearest point of the home galleries. He was not even taking time to drive dump shafts at the customary intervals, but was letting the tunnel fill up behind him, as if sure he was going to have no further use for it. He just wanted to get home. Of course he might have traveled much faster above ground; but the too exciting events of the past few hours had convinced him that, for this particular day at least, the upper world of sun and air was not exactly a health resort for a dweller in the under ways. Through all his excitement, however, and all his eagerness for the safe home burrows, his unquenchable appetite remained with him; and, running his tunnel as close to the surface as he could without actually emerging, he picked up plenty of worms and grubs and fat, helpless *pupae* as he went.

It was past noon, and the strong sunshine, beating straight down through the grass and soaking through the matted roots, was making a close but sweet and earthy-scented warmth in the tunnel, when at last Starnose broke through into one of his familiar passages, well trodden by the feet of his tribe. Not by sight, of course—for the darkness was black as pitch—but by the

comfortable smell he knew exactly where he was. Without hesitation he turned to the left and scurried along as fast as he could, for the big, central burrow, or lodge, where his tribe had their headquarters and their nests. The path forked and re-forked continually, but he was never for one instant at a loss. Here and there he passed little, short side galleries ending in shallow pockets, which served for the sanitation of the tribe. Here and there a ray of green-and-gold light flashed down upon him as he ran past one of the exit shafts. And then, his heart beating with his haste and his joy he came forth into a roomy, lightless chamber, thick with warmth and musky smells, and filled with the pleasant rustlings and small, contented squealings of his own gregarious tribe.

The Winged Scourge of the Dark

OPPRESSORS, DEVOURERS OF THE WEAK, ARE NOT CONFINED TO
HUMANITY

THE windless, gray-violet dusk, soft as a mole's fur, brooded low over the bushy upland pasture. In the shallow valley below, a gleam of yellow lamplight shone steadily from the kitchen window of the little backwoods farmhouse. Faint, comfortable sounds floated up on the still air from the low-roofed barn, where the two horses, resting after a hard day's work, reveled in their generous feed of oats. There was a soft creaking, a rattle, and a splash, as the farmer's wife, a dim, gray figure, drew a bucket of water from the deep well in the center of the farmyard. From a patch of alder swamp beyond the brook which threaded the valley a bullfrog uttered his hoarsely mellow croak, repeating it several times with subtle variations as if trying to improve the note. Twilight and the dewfall hushed the world to peace.

In the rough, upland pasture, among the scattered stumps and patches of juniper and young fir

seedlings, some five or six brown rabbits were at play in the sheltering dusk like carefree children. They went leaping softly this way and that, passing and repassing each other in what looked almost like the set figures of a dance. At intervals one of the furry little players would stop short and thump heavily with his strong hind paws upon the firm, close-cropped turf, producing a curious, dully resonant sound. At the signal all the other players would turn about, as if on drill, and continue the game with what looked like a new figure.

In the midst of this furry merrymaking, from the dark woods which overhung the back and northern side of the pasture, came a strange and ominous voice. *Whuh-who-o-o*,—*Whuh-who-o-o*,—deep-toned, long-drawn, sonorous, and thrilling with an indescribable menace, it sounded, twice, across the quiet dusk.

At the first note the play of the rabbits stopped short, as if all the players had been smitten instantaneously into stone. In the next half second the majority of them darted frantically into the shelter of the nearest bushes, with a momentary flicker of white tail fluffs as they vanished. The rest, as if too panic-stricken to move, or else fearing the revelation of movement, simply crouched flat where they were, motionless save for the

wild pounding of their frightened hearts. Their shadowy fur melting perfectly into the dusk and the shadowy turf, so long as they kept still they were as invisible as their companions who had found refuge under the bushes. And they kept still, as if frozen.

It was perhaps half a minute later when a great, dim form, as noiseless as the passing of a cloud shadow, came winnowing low, on downy wings, over the bushes of the silent pasture. It seemed but a fragment of denser dusk come alive—except for its dreadful eyes. These eyes—great, round, palely shining globes—searched the thickets and the open spaces with deadly intentness, as their owner swept hither and thither with his head stooped low, on the watch for any slightest motion or sign of life. But nothing stirred.

Then, just as the dim shape drifted over the open space where the rabbits were crouching, it opened its sickle-shaped beak and gave forth a sudden, piercing cry, terrible and startling. This was too much for the overstrung nerves of the crouching rabbits. They sprang into the air as if shot, and leaped frantically for the bushes. The dim form swooped, struck; and the nearest fugitive felt himself clutched in neck and back by knife-edged talons, hard as steel. He gave one

short scream of terror, strangled on the instant. Then he was swept into the air, kicking spasmodically. And the dim shape bore him off into the deeps of the woods, to the hollow where its fierce mate and savage nestlings had their home.

The great horned owl alighted with his prey on a stout, naked branch which stood out conveniently beside the spacious hole in the ancient, half-dead maple tree which formed his dwelling. He laid the limp body of the rabbit across the edge of the nest, half in the hole and half out of it, and with a curious, formal bobbing of his fiercely tufted head he sidled up close to his mate, softly snapping his hooked beak by way of greeting, and giving utterance to a low, twittering sound that seemed ridiculously unsuitable to such a ferocious countenance as his. His mate, larger than he and even more savage-looking, had herself just returned from a successful hunt, laden with a luckless duck from some backwoods farmyard. Her two owlets, nearly half-grown but still downy, were tearing greedily at the duck and bolting huge mouthfuls of it, feathers and all. She herself had already satisfied her appetite—having probably gulped down two or three mice and small birds, captured on the edge of twilight, before bringing home the duck to her brood. She was not so unselfish as her mate, who, blood-

thirsty and insatiable marauder though he was, could boast, nevertheless, of no small domestic virtue. A model spouse and father, he seldom consulted his own needs till he was sure that his mate and his young were fed. Now, having assured himself that all were supplied, he turned again to his prey. Holding it down with both feet, securely, he tore the skull apart with his sharp and powerful beak, and devoured first the head, which he considered the choicest morsel, bolting it bones and all. In the meantime his mate, moved purely by the hunting lust, had sailed noiselessly from her perch and winnowed off between the dark and silent tree trunks to seek for other prey.

Having swiftly and voraciously satisfied his appetite, the great owl wiped his crimsoned beak on the edge of the nest, sat up very erect, and for a few moments solemnly watched his youngsters still tearing at the carcass of the duck. He was massively built, broad-breasted, and about two feet in length from the tip of his short, broad tail to the crown of his big, round head with its two fierce, hornlike ear tufts. In color he was a mixture of soft browns, grays, and fawns, above, distributed irregularly in vague bars and splashes, while below he was of a creamy buff, delicately barred with deep chocolate. The wide, circular

discs of flat feathering which surrounded his eyes were cream-white, shading into fawn, and between them came down a frowning, pointed brow of darker feathers. His eyes, extraordinarily bright and cruel, were enormous, as round as full moons, of a gemlike yellow with great, staring pupils of jetty black. They were fixed in their sockets—as with all owls—so that when he wished to turn them he had to turn his whole head with them. His look was always a full-faced stare, challenging and tamelessly savage. His legs and feet were thickly and softly feathered in white, right down to those inexorable horn-colored talons whose clutch could throttle a full-grown goose in a few seconds.

To ordinary ears, of man or beast, the silence of the forest, at this hour, was absolute. But to the great owl's supersensitive eardrums—veritable microphones, they were—the darkness was filled with innumerable furtive sounds. A far-off beech leaf, suddenly unburdening itself of a gathering load of dew, spoke loudly, though without significance, to him. He caught the infinitesimal whisper of crowded young twigs as they occasionally stretched themselves in their growth. Down in the thick earth-darkness close to the ground, perhaps fifty feet away, he detected the stealthy, padded footfalls of a prowling

ing lynx, so light as to be scarcely audible to their owner himself. Without moving his body he turned his head in the direction of the sound, and stared intently. The lynx, a brilliant tree climber, was one of the very few wild creatures whom he feared; and he held himself in tense readiness to signal for his absent mate to do battle, if necessary, for his nest and young. But the sinister footfalls crept off in another direction, and he knew that his home—which was well concealed from the ground by a bushy growth of Indian pea and wild viburnum—had not been discovered.

A minute or two later the grim listener on his high listening post detected a fairy rustling which was not of stretching twigs or dew-laden leaves. It came from under a fir thicket some fifty or sixty yards away; and so faint it was that other ears than his could scarce have caught it at a distance of ten paces. But he knew it at once for the scurrying of the shy little wood mice over the floor of the dead and crisp fir needles. On downy wings he dropped from his perch and sailed, swift and soundless as thought, straight in beneath the overhanging fir branches. His outstretched talons struck, like lightning, in two directions at once—and in one successfully. In that annihilating clutch a furry little life went

out, without time for even a squeak of protest. The unerring hunter swept on without a pause, and rose to the nearest convenient limb. Settling himself there for a moment he lifted his tiny victim in one claw—like a parrot eating a biscuit—bit off its head daintily and swallowed it with an air of one appreciating a titbit, and then bolted the body at one careless gulp. A few seconds later he was back again upon his home perch, sitting upright as stiffly as a sentry at salute, his great eyes flaming spectrally through the dark.

And now thin pencils of pale light began to penetrate the uppermost branches of the trees, giving an ink-black edge to the shadow below. As the first slender ray reached him the great owl opened his beak and ruffled up the feathers about his neck.

Whuh-whoo-oo, Whuh-whoo-oo-oo, he called, a hollow, long-drawn cry all on one deep note, which seemed to come from several different quarters of the darkness at once. It was impossible, indeed, for any of the timid lurkers in the coverts, who listened to it with quivering hearts, to make out just where it did come from. But his far-off mate heard it, and knew. And from somewhere away beyond the other side of the pasture, came the response, muffled by dis-

tance and ghostly dim—*Whuh-whoo-oo-oo*. It signified to him that she was on her way back to the nest. He waited motionless perhaps half a minute, glanced at the two owlets who sat solemnly in the doorway of the nest digesting their heavy meal, and then sailed off through the silvery tree tops to hunt fresh victims about the pasture lands and clearings.

As he emerged into the open country, his soundless passing, through the strange, distorting light of the low moon, was like that of a specter—but unlike a specter he swept along with him a twisting and writhing shadow which gave warning of his approach. Mice, rabbits, chipmunks, even the dauntless and furious weasels, slipped to cover. The field was as empty as a desert, except for one big, black-and-white striped skunk which glanced up at him, unconcernedly, and went on digging up a mouse net. Tyrant and assassin though he was, and audacious as he was murderous, and more than a match in beak and talons for several skunks at once, he had no inclination to come to close quarters with this self-assured little creature which carried such an armory of choking poison under its tail. He swerved sullenly off to the edge of the woods again, and continued his flight along beneath their shadow till he reached the edge of the

brook which flowed behind the farmyard. Here he dropped upon a momentarily unwary frog which was sitting, half-submerged, at the water's edge. He carried it to a near-by stump, and swallowed it whole. Then his ears caught a soft, sleepy twittering from among the branches of a straggling thorn bush some twenty or thirty yards downstream. A sudden ray from the moon, just rising over the hill, had awakened a sleeping song sparrow, and he had murmured some drowsy endearments to his mate who sat brooding her half-fledged nestlings close beside him. The next instant a monstrous, shadowy form with blazing eyes had burst in upon them. Both tiny parents were clutched simultaneously and squeezed to death before they had time to realize what doom had overtaken them. They were promptly gulped down, in quick succession; and then, sitting erect and solemn close beside the nest, the grim marauder proceeded to pick the half-naked nestlings from the nest one by one and to swallow them with deliberation. Though so small, they were the tastiest morsels he had sampled for a long time—since the nestful of partridge eggs, just beginning to hatch, which he had ravaged some weeks earlier in the season.

Up to this point, knowing that his greedy family was well supplied, the great owl had had no

thought but for his own feasting. Now, however, he felt it was time to hunt for bigger game—for something substantial to carry home to the nest. He winged swiftly across to the farmstead, where the barn and house and woodshed stood black against the low moon. No living thing was astir in the farmyard, except a big, white cat prowling for mice along the edge of the barn. Though she was dangerous game he swooped at her without a moment's hesitation. But the cat had seen him, just in time; and with an indignant spitting she whisked in under the barn. He snapped his beak angrily, made a tour of the buildings, and found the window of the chicken house. But it was closed with wire netting. Glaring in through the wide meshes he saw the hens all asleep on their perches, some with half-grown chickens beside them. But the vigilant red cock was awake and, eyeing him defiantly, gave utterance to a sharp *kut-ee-ee-ee* of warning. The marauder tore savagely at the meshes with his mighty talons; but the wire was too strong for him, and in an instant the place was in an uproar of frightened squawks and cacklings. The kitchen door flew open with a bang. A stream of yellow lamp-light flooded across the shadowy yard. The farmer ran out, shouting and swearing fluently, and the would-be assassin, furious at being barred

from such a luxury of slaughter, flew off to seek some less well-guarded prey.

About a quarter of a mile farther down the valley lay another little backwoods farm, whose owner, when clearing the land, had had the good taste to leave several fine elms standing beside the house and barns. The valley was by this time full-flooded with moonlight, and the great owl, to avoid observation, flew low beside the willow and alder bushes which fringed the brook. Across the open meadow that divided the barns from the brook he skimmed, almost brushing the grass tops, then rose noiselessly into the deep shadows which clung among the branches of the thick-leaved elms. And here, as luck would have it, he found two turkey hens, roosting upon one of the topmost boughs.

The turkeys, being light sleepers, detected him at once; but all they did was to stretch out their long necks inquiringly and cry *Kwit-kwit*, *kwit-kwit*. They were acquainted with the harmless, little, mouse-hunting barn owl, but this great bird was something they had never seen before; and they were full of curiosity. In one moment he had risen above them. In the next he had fallen upon the nearest, clutched her by the neck, and choked her foolish noise. Beating her wings convulsively, she toppled off her perch. Her captor

strove to bear her up and fly off with her, but she was too heavy a burden for him, and with a mighty flapping the two came slowly to the ground.

This was not exactly what the marauder wanted, but he was not one to lose any opportunity for destruction. He bit and tore with that deadly sickle of his beak till he had decapitated his massive prize; and though he was by no means hungry, he broke up and swallowed most of the head, for the sake of the brains. In the meantime the other turkey, still resting on her perch, had kept on uttering her foolish *Kwit-kwit*, *kwit-kwit*, as if begging to know what all the excitement meant. She all too soon found out. Glancing up from his sanguinary meal, as if angered by her stupid noise, the great owl fixed her for a second or two with his glassy stare. Then he shot up through the gloom till he was a few feet above the anxious chatterer, pounced upon her vindictively, and swept her, strangled and futilely fluttering, from her perch. Her life promptly went out through her gaping beak; but she, too, proved too heavy for her destroyer's wing power; and despite his determined flapping, he was borne slowly to the ground. He tore off her silly head, in sheer wantonness of destruction. Then, wiping his beak on her still quivering body, he

bounced into the air and flew away to seek other quarry, sailing close to the ground to avoid making himself conspicuous, and glaring fiercely under every bush as he passed.

It chanced that an indiscreet hen, impatient of the safe nests in the barn and fowl house where, in return for security, her precious eggs were always taken from her, had found a secret spot under a clump of lilacs at the back of the garden. Here she had accumulated a clutch of eggs, which she had now been happily brooding for close upon the allotted three weeks. The chicks within were stirring, and just beginning to tap with tiny bills at the walls of their shell prisons. The proud mother was answering these taps with low, crooning sounds of encouragement and content.

It was those soft utterances of mother love that betrayed her to her doom. She saw a pair of wide, dreadful eyes glaring in upon her through the leafage. With a shrill screech of defiance she ruffled up all her feathers, threw back her head, and faced the enemy with threatening, wide-open beak. But of scant avail was all her devoted courage against such a foe as this. In a moment she was gripped by irresistible talons, jerked, valiantly battling, from her nest, strangled, and tossed aside, a heap of feebly-kicking feathers. And the slaughterer fell to gorging himself with

the just-hatching eggs. Full-fed though he was, such supreme delicacies as these could not be left behind; and he managed somehow to put away the whole nestful. Then he grasped the body of the mother in his claws, hopped awkwardly out of the bushes with it, bore it somewhat heavily into the air, and headed his flight direct for the hollow tree in the woods.

He flew high now, having no care to conceal his coming, and the backwoods world of forest and scattered farms, rough, stump-strewn pastures and raw, new clearings, with the silver coils of the slow brook brightly threading them, lay outspread sharp-edged below him in the white flood of the moonlight. The robber flew more slowly than was his wont, his limp booty being a massive-bodied Brahma of some six or seven pounds dead weight, and he himself somewhat sluggish from his overhearty feast. But there was no need for haste; so he did not exert himself, but winnowed on through the blue-silver night, well satisfied with his list of slain.

Suddenly, from far over the tree tops came a hollow call. *Whuh-who; whuh-whuh, whuh-whu*—not long-drawn, but staccato, hurried, urgent. It was his mate's voice, summoning him, crying for help. He woke instantly from his lethargy, dropped his booty, answered with one

sonorous *Whoo-oo-oo*, and shot homeward with the utmost speed.

During his absence that prowling lynx, which had caused him apprehension an hour before, had crept back on the trail of a rabbit, to the neighborhood of the hollow tree. She had missed the rabbit; but happening to glance upward, with cruel eyes as round and moonlike as those of the great owl himself, she had detected the big, black hole in the age-whitened trunk. Such a hole, she knew well enough, would be sure to be occupied by something—most probably by something young and defenseless, and good to eat. She was hungry; and, moreover, she had a pair of sturdy kittens to feed at home in her own well-hidden lair. She ran nimbly up the huge, gnarled trunk to investigate.

At the first rattling sound of her claws upon the bark, the mother owl, who had been snuggling her owlets, shot forth angrily from the hole to see what creature was so bold as to invade her realm. But at the sight of the lynx—a gigantic, tuft-eared cat as big as a fox hound—her wrath changed to frantic terror for her young, who were not yet sufficiently fledged for effective flight. Though even more bloodthirsty and wastefully murderous than her mate, her courage was of the finest, and she knew no such

thing as shirking where the defense of her round-eyed nestlings was concerned. With that one sharp cry for help—which her homing mate had heard—she swooped from her branch and struck the lynx heavily in the face with wing and claw.

Taken by surprise, the lynx was almost jolted from her hold. With a harsh spitting she cowered, and shielded her face between her paws, while the frantic mother raked her back savagely. Then, furious at being so handled by an adversary whom she despised, the lynx scrambled on upward, and gained the branch beside the nest. From this vantage point she struck out like lightning with her great, armed paw, just as the desperate mother was swooping upon her again. Had the blow got fairly home it would have been final; but the agile bird swerved backward in time, and it struck her but glancingly, with its force half spent, on the breast. Her dense, elastic armor of feathers saved her; but a shower of feathers flew, and she was hurled halfway to the ground before she could recover from the shock.

Imagining that her adversary was disposed of, the lynx thrust her head into the hole. The hardy owlets bit and clawed her face valiantly, but she snatched one in her jaws, crunched its neck, and plucked it forth upon the branch. Holding it

comfortably between her huge forepaws she lay flat along the branch and proceeded to devour it. As she did so the desperate mother, shaken but undaunted, returned to the attack and struck her again in the face with rending talons.

Holding her prey firmly with one paw the lynx, with an ear-splitting yowl of pain and rage, lashed out again at her resolute assailant, but missed her aim completely. And at this juncture the male bird arrived.

In silence he shot downward and struck at the great, gray beast. The latter had caught sight of him as he swooped. She let go of the dead owlet—which dropped to the ground—and rose slightly on her hind quarters in order to meet this new attack with the full armory of her foreclaws. By a fortunate stroke she caught him by one wing; and the next moment her long fangs were buried in his thigh. Held thus at close quarters he pounded madly with his wings, and tore in a frenzy at his enemy's face with his beak and his free talons. He was pulled down, however, and borne backward, for all his indomitable struggles; and getting her claws set into one wing, near the shoulder, the lynx fairly tore it from its socket. But undaunted even in that hopeless strait, he went on fighting to the death.

The mother owl, meanwhile, had been tearing and clawing viciously at the lynx's neck, from above. Unable any longer to endure this torment, the latter tried to double back upon the narrow branch and defend herself. The male bird heaved up valiantly beneath, and with a last effort fixed his beak in the side of her throat. She lost her balance, and the two toppled off into space together. Over and over they turned, closed locked, and then fell apart. The owl, all but dead and with one wing hanging useless from its tendons, continued to roll over and over in his descent, and landed with a thud which finished him. The lynx, on the other hand, turning herself right-side up and spreading all four legs apart so as to make a sort of parachute of herself, landed lightly on the powerful, elastic springs of her paws. The mother owl had been on top of her all the way down, and was still frantically tearing at her back. But the lynx had had enough. With a screech of panic she darted under some low branches, scraping off her assailant, and sped away, belly to earth like a terrified cat, through the densest thickets she could find.

The victorious mother owl did not pursue. She circled twice, very slowly, above the sprawled bodies of her mate and her nestling, staring down

upon them with wide, unwinking, expressionless eyes. Then she winnowed soundlessly up to her perch, and hurried into the nest to see if her other fledgling had escaped unharmed.

Quills the Indifferent

AN ADVENTURE STORY WHICH INTERPRETS ANIMAL LIFE

QUILLS was born in a capacious hole in the heart of a huge and ancient red maple near the banks of the Tobique River, in New Brunswick.

The hole had to be capacious; for Quills's mother was a fine porcupine, in her prime, fully two and a half feet in length, massive in build, and a good twenty pounds in weight; and moreover, her armament of long, bristling spines made it essential that she should not be unduly crowded in her nest. But the entrance was only large enough for her to squeeze through it without discomfort, so the dusky interior was sheltered, warm and dry. It was also safe; for in all the wilderness there was no savage marauder reckless enough to invade a porcupine's nest while the owner was at home.

In proportion to the size of his mother, Quills, like all young porcupines, was an amazingly big baby. His length was about eleven inches, his weight a shade over two pounds—and this when

he was not yet twenty-four hours old. He was richly clothed with long, dark fur, almost black, under which lay hidden his sprouting armament of spines, already formidable though only about half an inch in length. Born with the insatiable appetite of his tribe, he lay stretched out between his mother's stumpy forelegs nursing greedily, with an incessant accompaniment of tiny squeaks and squeals of satisfaction. The sounds were loud enough to attract the notice of two little black-and-white woodpeckers who had just alighted on the trunk near the hole. With sleek heads cocked alertly and bright eyes keen with interrogation they listened to the curious noises inside the tree. Then they clambered on up the trunk to a safer height, wondering no doubt that any youngling should be guilty of such an indiscretion as to thus betray the secret of its hiding place. They could not know that the porcupine baby, almost alone among the babes of the wild, was exempted, through the reputation of his spines, from the law of silence as the price of life.

It was spring; and spring comes late to the high valley of the Tobique River. The ancient red maple, still full of vigorous life in the sapwood of its outer shell, was mantled over every branch and twig with a glowing veil of tiny, rose-red blooms, though the green of its leaf buds was

hardly yet showing through the brown sheaths. The ice had broken up and been swept away in tumbling masses, and the current of the swift river, swollen with the spring freshet, filled the air about the porcupine's nest with a pleasant, softly thunderous roar. From all the open glades the snow was gone, though masses of it, shrunken and grayish, still lingered in the fir thickets and the deeper hollows. On the drier hillocks and about the old rotting stumps a carpet of round, flat, yellowish-green and bronzy leaves shielded the lurking pink-and-white blossoms and haunting perfumes of the Mayflower, or Trailing Arbutus, the shy darling of the Northern spring. The fairy fragrance came and went elusively across the pervading scent of moist earth and spicy balsam tips, as the mild breeze pulsed vaguely through the forest.

It was midafternoon of the second day of Quills's life. Pleasantly fatigued from his double duty of nursing and growing, he fell into a sound sleep. Then his mother, spurred by the now insistent demands of her own appetite, gently disentangled herself from the clutch of his baby claws in her fur, crawled from the hole, and descended the trunk to seek a hasty meal.

But what was haste for a porcupine would have been regarded as the extreme of lazy loiter-

ing in any other creature of the wild. At the foot of the old maple she stood for some moments loudly sniffing the air with her blunt nostrils. Then, as if making up her mind that it was hemlock she wanted, she ambled off with heavy deliberation to the nearest hemlock tree, climbed it with a noisy rattling of claws, settled herself comfortably in the first crotch, and fell to gnawing the rough bark. When she had taken the edge off her appetite with this fare—which no stomach but a porcupine's could ever digest—she crawled out along a branch, as far as it would bear her weight, and gathering a lot of the slender twigs between her forepaws, made a hearty dessert of the dark-green, glossy frondage. Other hemlocks, standing at a greater distance from her nest, already bore the conspicuous marks of her foraging; but this one she had hitherto left untouched, against the day when she would be wanting to take her meals near home.

While his mother was away feeding, Quills had slept, soundly and silently, for perhaps an hour or more. Then he woke up—hungry, of course, as befitted a healthy young porcupine. Finding no warm mother to snuggle him and feed him, he at once set up his small but earnest complaint of whines and squeals and grumbles, all indifferent as to who or what might overhear him.

As it chanced at this moment, a hungry weasel—the most insatiably bloodthirsty of all the wilderness prowlers—was just approaching the root of the old maple, nosing out the somewhat stale trail of a rabbit. As his keen ear caught these telltale sounds from within the tree, he stopped short, and his malignant little eyes began to blaze. Then he glided around the great trunk, halted just below the hole, and sniffed discriminatingly at the strong, fresh scent upon the bark. But at this point he hesitated—and it is not usual for a hungry weasel to hesitate. The scent was porcupine; and a grown-up porcupine was a proposition which not even his audacity was prepared to tackle. The sound from within that tempting hole, to be sure, was the voice of a baby porcupine. But was the baby alone—or was the mother with it? In the latter case, he would as soon have jumped into the jaws of a lynx as enter that hole. The fresh scent on the bark offered no solution to the problem. Was it made in coming out or going in? He sniffed at it again, growing fiercer and more hungry every moment.

Suddenly he heard behind him a dry rattling of quills, and a confused noise of squeals and chattering grunts. The mother porcupine was hurrying across the moist turf, gnashing her jaws, and looking twice her natural size with every

quill on end. In her rage and anxiety she was making remarkable speed, for a porcupine. The weasel, his long white fangs bared, and his eyes red with disappointed fury, whipped about and stood facing her till she was within three or four feet of him. But for all his rage he was no fool. For her gnashing yellow teeth he had no respect whatever. But those deadly, poisonous, needle-sharp spines of hers! He had no wish to interview them too closely. With eleventh-hour discretion he slipped aside to make way for her, and glided off to pick up again the trail of the rabbit.

The mother porcupine never even turned her head to see where the enemy had gone. Wild with anxiety she scrambled up the trunk and into her nest. Her experienced nose, however, at once assured her that the weasel had not been inside. Instantly appeased she stretched herself on her side, drew the complaining youngster to her breast, licked and nosed him for a few moments, and settled into a comfortable dose.

Having this hearty mother's attention all to himself—an exceptional advantage, as a porcupine baby has generally one brother or sister if not more, to share the maternal supply—young Quills grew and throve amazingly. And his armor of spines throve with him. In a few weeks he was out of the hole and following his mother

up into the hemlock trees, where he speedily learned to feed on the glossy, green tips of the frondage. From this diet he passed quickly to the stronger fare of the harsh and bitter bark, the gnawing of which was a delight to his powerful, chisel-like teeth.

By the time the full flush of the Tobique summer, ardent and swift, had crowded the rich-soiled valley with greenery and bloom, Quills's mother had grown altogether indifferent to him. She had long ago refused him her breasts, of which, indeed, he had no further need. But she still permitted him to follow her about, if he wanted companionship, so long as he did not trouble her. And in this way he learned the few things—astonishingly few, it would seem—that a porcupine needs to know in order to hold his own in the struggle for existence. He learned, among other things, that nearly all the green stuff that the forest produced was more or less fit for his food—that there were other trees besides the hemlock whose bark was tasty and nourishing and pleasantly resistant to his teeth, and that in a broad, sunny backwater of the river there grew a profusion of great, round, flat leaves, the pads of the water lily, which were peculiarly thrilling to his palate. In fact, most of his learning had to do with food, which was what he ap-

peared to live for. His enemies were few, and seldom enthusiastic. And he never troubled his head about avoiding them. With an indifference nothing less than colossal he left it to them to avoid him, if they wished; and they did so wish, ninety-nine times out of the hundred.

Along toward the latter part of August, Quills found that his mother was no longer indifferent. She had grown actually unfriendly. Whenever he came near her she grunted and chattered at him in such an irritable fashion that it was obvious, even to a not oversensitive spirit like his, that his companionship was resented. This attitude neither grieved nor angered him, however. She was no longer of any importance to him. He simply quit following her, went his own way, and forgot her. Striking off on his own, and impelled by instinct to seek a fresh range for himself, he plunged into the still warm tide of the sunny backwater and swam, with much splashing and little speed, to the opposite bank. Swimming was no task to him, for his coat of hollow quills made it impossible for him to sink. The backwater was not more than thirty or forty yards in width; but when he had crossed it, and crawled forth upon the opposite bank, he felt that he had found a new world, and owned it.

He ambled joyously along the bank to a point

where he had marked a bed of bright green arrow weed, and gorged himself to his great content on the shapely, pointed leaves and stout, succulent stalks. Then he climbed a big poplar and curled up to sleep, self-sufficient and pleased to be alone.

Quills was by this time more than half grown up; and moreover, thanks to his ample nourishment when a baby, he was as big and strong as many a less favored porcupine at maturity. In color he was of a very dark brown, verging on black, and peppered with a dingy, yellowish white, his long fur being dark with light tips, and his spines cream-colored with black tips. The spines on his body ranged from two to four inches in length, and when he was not angry they were partly concealed by the fur, which was considerably longer. The quills on his head and the sides of his face were about an inch in length. His short, blunt muzzle was free from spines, but closely furred to the lips, and conspicuously adorned by his large and prominent front teeth, his gnawing teeth, which were of a vivid dark-yellow color. His legs, and all the under parts of his body, were clothed in dense, soft fur, entirely without spines. His tail, about five inches in length, was very thick and powerful, and heavily armed with spines to the tip. The spines on his

body were for his protection, but this armed tail was his one weapon of offense—a weapon with which, at a single stroke, he could fill an enemy's mouth or paws with a hundred barbed and poisonous needles. And the peculiar deadliness of these needles, large and small alike, lay in their power of swift and inexorable burrowing. Once their subtle points penetrated the skin their innumerable microscopic, scalelike barbs would begin working them inward through the muscles, setting up violent inflammations as they went, till they would reach some vital part and put their wretched victim out of his misery.

So far in his career young Quills had had no occasion to test the efficiency of that formidable tail of his, as a weapon, though from time to time he would stretch himself elaborately, leg after leg and claw after claw, ruffle up all his spines as if to see that they were in working order, and lash out alarmingly with the aforesaid tail by way of keeping it efficient and ready for action. And now, as luck would have it, the first enemy he was to encounter was the very one against whom his best defenses were of least avail—namely, man himself. But fortunately for young Quills, and for this, his brief biography, the man in question was neither in need of meat (least of all, of such harsh meat as porcupine!)

nor was he of a destructive disposition. He was magnanimous—and Quills never knew that he held on to his little lease of life by favor.

The man had come up the Tobique in a canoe, partly for the fishing, partly to refresh his spirit with the clean airs of the wilderness. He left his guide frying bacon and trout for the mid-day meal, and strolled up the backwater to cast a fly and see if there were any big fish lurking in the shade of the lily pads. He forgot about his fishing, however, when he caught sight of Quills, looking somewhat like a big, dilapidated bird's nest, curled up asleep in the crotch of a young poplar. Being interested in all the kindred of the wild, the man reeled in his line, stood the rod carefully in a bush, and went and shook the tree as hard as he could, to see what Quills would do.

Quills woke up with a startled squeak, dug his claws into the bark to secure himself, and peered down to see what was the matter. At sight of this wanton disturber of his dreams he grew very angry. He chattered, and grunted, and clashed his big yellow teeth loudly, and ruffled up his deadly spines as a clear warning to the intruder to keep off.

The man laughed, as if pleased at this bold defiance. He looked about for a long pole, think-

ing to pole Quill from his perch so as to observe him a little nearer at hand. But poles for poking porcupines do not lie about the Tobique wilderness—as he presently realized. He decided to climb the poplar, for a closer—but not *too* close—investigation. But the moment he began to climb, Quills, boiling with indignation, started down to meet the danger halfway. He came down backward, with his tail lashing savagely. And he came down so astonishingly fast that the man had barely time to drop to the ground and jump out of the way, chuckling at the speedy success of his experiment.

“Half a jiffy and the beggar would have made my face look like a pincushion,” he muttered, approvingly.

Reaching the ground Quills stopped, and stood chattering his defiance. The man, some paces distant, eyed him humorously for a few seconds, then went and got his fishing rod out of the bush. With a bit of string from his jacket pocket he tied his cloth cap over the butt of the rod; and then, like a fencer with a button on his foil, with this weapon of courtesy he came and made a gentle thrust at Quills’s blunt nose. Quick as a flash Quills whisked around, and lashed at the impertinent weapon with his tail. The man at once withdrew it, and examined his cap. It was

stuck full, at the one slashing blow, with beautiful, polished, black-tipped, white quills.

"Thanks, awfully, old chap," said he. "They are lovely specimens, so I won't tease you any more," and carrying his prize carefully before him he turned back to the canoe. Quills glared after him till his long form had vanished through the trees. Then his anger cooled, and exultation at his easy and signal triumph took its place. His spines went down till they were hidden beneath the dark fur and he seemed to have shrunk to half his size.

The stress of his emotions having made him hungry—*anything* will do to make a porcupine hungry—he crawled down to the edge of the water and fell to feasting in a patch of arrow weed.

Autumn on the Tobique passed swiftly, in a blaze of color. A few sudden touches of frost in the night—and then the maples stood glorious in scarlet and crimson, the birches and poplars shimmered in pale gold, the ash trees smouldered in dull purple, and the rowans flaunted their great bunches of waxy, orange-vermilion berries against the solid, dark-green background of hemlock and spruce. The partridge coveys whirred on strong wings across the glowing corridors of the forest, under a sky of sharp cobalt. For a day or two

every tree top was elusively vocal with the thin-drawn, single notes of the migrating cedar wax-wings—notes which were mere tiny beads of sound. The ice which formed each night along the edges of the shallow pools floated away each morning before the unclouded sun was two hours high. And the air, stirred with light breezes, sparkling and rich with earth scents, was like wine in the veins of every creature alive. One night came a light sifting of snow, in gossamer flakes which vanished at the first touch of the sun. Then the breezes died away; the air, losing its crisp tang, grew balmy and languorous; the sharp blue of the sky veiled itself in a tender, opaline haze; the wilderness seemed to fall asleep, its silence broken only by the whispers of the falling leaves—and, once in a while, the startling *chirr-rr-rr* of a red squirrel. Life, for the moment, had taken on the tissue of a dream. It was the magic Indian Summer.

It passed, as it had come, in a night. Day broke steel-gray and menacing, with a bitter wind cutting down out of the North; and in a few hours everything was rigid with frost. Quills, though the cold in reality had small terror for his hardy and warm-clad frame, had been disturbed and annoyed by the sudden change. It occurred to him that a warm and sheltered re-

treat, like his dimly remembered nest in the old maple, would be a better sleeping place than the draughty branches of a hemlock or a spruce. In this frame of mind he thought of a tempting looking hole which he had noticed, under a big boulder some fifty yards or so up the backwater. He knew that the hole belonged to an old dog fox, but the fact did not trouble him. His brain had only room for one idea at a time. He set out straight for that hole.

He had no idea whether the owner was at home or not, but he made no attempt to find out. By way of precaution, however, he turned round before entering and backed in, slashing vigorously with his spiked tail as he did so. The fox was not at home. Quills found the retreat dry and warm. So, having well breakfasted before leaving his tree, he settled down with his hind quarters to the entrance, and unconcernedly went to sleep.

Presently the fox came trotting home, intent on getting out of the wind and having a nap in his snug den. But just before the threshold he stopped short, the fur on his neck stood up, and his eyes went green. He had scented the trail of Quills—and it led straight into his lair. Stealthily he tiptoed forward, peered in—and saw confronting him that spiny tail and rump.

His blood boiled at the intruder's insolence. But he was a wise old beast; and in his rash youth he had once been lame for a month, through having tried to interfere with a most insignificant-looking porcupine. Curbing his righteous wrath—as there was nothing else to do—he turned about and with his scratching hind paws insultingly sent a shower of earth in upon the slumbering Quills. Then he trotted off. Quills, thus rudely awakened, crawled forth, chattering indignantly, and shook out the defilement from his long coat. But as the fox was nowhere in sight he promptly forgot his wrath, and turned into the den again to resume his nap.

Gradually, but inexorably, winter now closed down upon the valley of the Tobique. And it was a hard winter—for all the hunting beasts and birds, a desperate winter. The rabbits, that autumn, had been smitten with one of their periodical epidemics, and died off like flies. This did not trouble Quills directly—a strict vegetarian, he was assured of plenty so long as the forest stood. But indirectly it made a vital difference to him. All the prowling and pouncing kindred—the great horned owls and the eagles, the lynxes, foxes, martens, and minks soon found themselves goaded by such hunger as might at any moment drive them to take unwonted risks.

Quills little guessed how often, as he was gnawing complacently at his meal of hemlock bark, he would be watched longingly by savage and hungry eyes. But had he guessed it his indifference would have remained quite unruffled. He had all he could eat, and a warm hole to sleep in; and why should he borrow trouble?

But one biting December afternoon, Quills's complacency got something of a shock. Just as he was crawling luxuriously into his den, one of those great horned owls which are the feathered Apaches of the wilderness, came winnowing low overhead on wings as silent as sleep. His round, staring eyes caught sight of Quills's hind quarters, just vanishing into the hole. There was no time to note exactly what it was, and hunger had made the great bird rash even beyond his wont. He swooped instantly, and struck his terrible talons into the tail and haunch.

With a loud hiss, like that of an angry cat, he let go precipitately, and fairly bounced up into the air again, both murderous talons struck deep with spines which seemed to burn into his sinews. He flew in haste to the nearest branch, and set himself to the painful task of plucking out the torments with his beak, holding up first one claw and then the other. With some of the spines he was successful, but others he merely managed

to nip off close to the skin. For several weeks he could do no hunting for the fiery anguish in them, but could only sit moping in his hollow tree, where he would soon have starved but for the food brought to him by his faithful mate.

As for Quills, this was his first experience of physical pain. And it was his first taste of fear. Whining and squealing and grunting all at once, he shrank into his den, and carefully parting the spines and fur with his nose, strove to lick the wounds made by those steel-sharp talons. For a day or two he had no appetite and stayed sulking in the den. But the healthy flesh, being unpoisoned, soon healed, and Quills was himself again, except for a certain unaccustomed watchfulness. Even a malevolent—but to him harmless—little weasel, or a scouting mink, he would honor with his suspicions; and one day when a gigantic bull moose came and stood beneath the tree in which he was feeding, he arrayed all his defenses as if expecting immediate attack. But the huge, black beast did not even trouble to look at him, so his fears were soon allayed.

A porcupine's memory, however, seems to be extraordinarily short; and Quills's was no exception to the rule. When his wounds no longer pricked him to remembrance, he forgot all about the affair and recovered his old indifference. One

day when he was returning to his den for a doze—right into his pathway, with a noiseless pounce, dropped a great, gray, furry beast, with tufted ears, and long, white, snarling teeth, and huge pads of paws. It crouched before him, its stub of a tail twitching, and glared upon him with pale, cruel, moonlike eyes. Up went Quills's spines at once, and he ducked his nose between his forepaws, but he was determined to get to his den, so he came right on. Seeing, however, that the intruder showed no sign of getting out of the way, Quills suddenly turned around and came on backward, lashing out fiercely with his tail. The lynx was wild with hunger, but not to the pitch of suicidal recklessness. He ached intolerably for the well-nourished flesh that he knew lay hidden beneath those bristling spines; but he knew the price that he would have to pay for it. With a screech of disappointed rage he slipped from the path, and Quills disappeared into his hole.

As the long and bitter winter drew on, Quills had many more or less similar encounters with the lynxes, and two with a surly old black bear. Paradoxical as the statement may appear, he usually faced the enemy with his tail. And the result was always the same. No prowler was prepared to pay the price which Quills would

have exacted for his carcass. But along in March, when the snow had begun to settle heavily under a week of thaw, Quills was confronted by a new enemy before whom his indifference melted more swiftly than the snow.

Very early one morning, when the first ghost-gray light of dawn was beginning to glimmer through the windless forest, Quills had just come down out of an old hemlock when he caught sight of a strange beast gliding over the snow. The stranger, dark brown in color, with a bushy tail, long and low-set body, weasel-shaped head, and grizzly-gray face with black snout, was somewhat under three feet in length. It was distinctly smaller, and at first glance less dangerous-looking, than a lynx. But some inherited instinct told Quills at once that this was an enemy far more to be dreaded than the fiercest of lynxes. He had never seen a fisher before. Fortunately for the porcupine tribe, fishers were very scarce in the Valley of the Tobique. But a chill of ancestral fear struck to Quills's heart.

The fisher, catching sight of him, whirled in his tracks, and darted at him with a deadly intensity of purpose very different from the hesitating attitude of Quills's other foes. And Quills's tactics were now different. Jutting from the snow was a heavy windfall, its top supported

in the lower branches of a neighboring beech tree. Under this protection Quills thrust his nose and head, clear to the shoulders, leaving only his armed back and fiercely slashing tail exposed to the assault. He was no more in this position ere the enemy was upon him.

Now in nine cases out of ten—perhaps even in ninety-nine out of a hundred—the fight between a porcupine and a fisher has but one result. The fisher eats the porcupine. He is incomparably the stronger. He is, taking it all in all, the most savage, swift, and crafty of all the marauders of the wilderness. And above all else, the porcupine's quills, so deadly to others, have for him comparatively few terrors. They do not poison or inflame his flesh, which seems to possess the faculty of soon casting them forth again through the skin. All he has to do is to flip the victim over on its back—annexing as few spines as possible in the act—and he has the unprotected throat and belly at the mercy of his fangs.

In the present case, however, the too confident fisher had an exceptional porcupine to deal with. Quills was not only unusually large and vigorous, but, for a porcupine, sagacious. He had settled himself down solidly into the snow; and when the fisher, dodging a blow of his tail, and accepting

a sharp dose of spines in the shoulder, tried to turn him over with a twist of the paw, Quills resisted successfully, and with a timely swing of his haunches stabbed his assailant's whole flank full of spines.

The fisher had expected some resistance, some more or less futile defence, but this was attack. Always short in temper, he flew into a blind rage at the pain and the surprise of it. He stood back a few inches to gain impetus for the next effort, and this was his mistake—this, and underrating his opponent. At that very instant he got a full, flailing stroke across his face from Quills's tail. It filled his nose and mouth with spines—that was to be expected. But—for the blow had surely been guided by the patron spirit of all the porcupines—it also filled both his eyes.

With a screech of anguish he flung himself full on Quills's back and strove to bite down through the armor of the spines. But he was now totally blind. And his jaws were stuck so full of spines as to be practically powerless. Meanwhile his mad struggles were simply driving deeper and deeper into all his tender under parts those terrible four-inch spikes. All at once the agony grew too appalling for even his indomitable spirit. He lurched off, and dragged himself away, stumbling and staggering, till he

reached a thicket which he felt to be dense enough to hide his defeat. And here death came to him, none too soon.

For some minutes after his defeated foe had gone, Quills remained with his head thrust under the branch, chattering fierce defiance and lashing wildly with his tail. Then, very cautiously, he backed off and looked about him. His spines and fur were disheveled, and he was bleeding from some deep scratches where his assailant's claws had gone home. But he was not seriously the worse for his encounter—and he had beaten, overwhelmingly, the terrible killer of porcupines! His somber and solitary spirit glowed with triumph. Rather hurriedly he crawled on to his lair, and there set himself to a much-needed toilet. And outside his retreat the first long, level rays of the sunrise crept across the snow, touching the trunks of the birches and the poplars to a mystical rose-pink and saffron.

The Watchers in the Swamp

ANIMALS THAT ARE MORE INTERESTING THAN MANY HUMANS

UNDER the first pale lilac wash of evening, just where the slow stream of the Lost Water slipped placidly from the open meadows into the osier and bulrush tangles of the swamp, a hermit thrush, perched in the topmost spray of a young elm tree, was fluting out his lonely and tranquil ecstasy to the last of the sunset. *Spherical—spherical—oh—holy—holy—clear* — he sang; and stopped abruptly, as if to let the brief, unfinished, but matchlessly pure and poignant cadence sink unjarred into the heart of the evening stillness. One minute—two minutes—went by; and the spaces of windless air were like a crystal tinged with faint violet. And then this most reticent of singers loosed again his few links of flawless sound—a strain which, more than any other bird song on this earth, leaves the listener's heart aching exquisitely for its completion. *Spherical—spherical—oh—holy—holy* — but this time, as if seeking by further condensation to

make his attar of song still more rare and precious, he cut off the final note, that haunting, ethereal—*clear*.

Again the tranced stillness. But now, as if too far above reality to be permitted to endure, after a few seconds it was rudely broken. From somewhere in the mysterious and misty depths of the swamp came a great booming and yet strangulated voice, so dominant that the ineffable colors of the evening seemed to fade and the twilight to deepen suddenly under its somber vibrations. Three times it sounded—*Klunk-er-glunk . . . Klunk-er-glunk . . . Klunk-er-glunk . . .* an uncouth, mysterious sound, sonorous, and at the same time half-muffled, as if pumped with effort through obstructing waters. It was the late cry of the bittern, proclaiming that the day was done.

The hermit thrush, on his tree top against the pale sky, sang no more, but dropped noiselessly to his mate on her nest in the thickets. Two bats flickered and zigzagged hither and thither above the glimmering stream. And the leaf-scented dusk gathered down broodingly, with the dew, over the wide solitudes of Lost Water Swamp.

It was high morning in the heart of the swamp. From a sky of purest cobalt flecked sparsely with silver-white wisps of cloud, the sun glowed down

with tempered, fruitful warmth upon the tender green of the half-grown rushes and already rank water grasses—the young leafage of the alder and willow thickets—the wide pools and narrow, linking lanes of unruffled water already mantling in spots with lily pad and arrow weed. A few big red-and-black butterflies wavered aimlessly above the reed tops. Here and there, with a faint, elfin clashing of transparent wings, a dragon fly, a gleam of emerald and amethyst fire, flashed low over the water. From every thicket came a soft chatter of the nesting red-shouldered black-birds.

And just in the watery fringe of the reeds, as brown and erect and motionless as a mooring stake, stood the bittern.

Not far short of three feet in length, from the tip of his long and powerful, dagger-pointed bill to the end of his short, rounded tail, with his fierce, unblinking eyes, round, bright, and hard, with his snaky head and long, muscular neck, he looked, as he was, the formidable master of the swamp. In coloring he was a streaked and freckled mixture of slaty greys and browns and ochres above, with a freckled, whitish throat and dull buff breast and belly—a mixture which would have made him conspicuous amid the cool, light green of the sedges but that it harmonized so

perfectly with the earth and the roots. Indeed, moveless as he stood, to the indiscriminating eye he might have passed for a decaying stump by the waterside. His long legs were of a dull olive which blended with the shadowy tones of the water.

For perhaps ten minutes the great bird stood there without the movement of so much as a feather, apparently unconcerned while the small inhabitants of the swamp made merry in the streaming sunshine. But his full, round eyes took in, without stirring in their sockets, all that went on about him, in air or sedge or water. Suddenly, and so swiftly that it seemed one motion, his neck uncoiled and his snaky head darted downward into the water near his feet, to rise again with an eight-inch chub partly transfixed and partly gripped between the twin daggers of his half-opened bill. Squirring, and shining silverly, it was held aloft, while its captor stalked solemnly in through the sedges to a bit of higher and drier turf. Here he proceeded to hammer his prize into stillness upon an old, half-buried log. Then, tossing it into the air, he caught it adroitly by the head, and swallowed it, his fierce eyes blinking with the effort as he slowly forced it down his capacious gullet. It was a satisfying meal, even for such a healthy appetite as his, and

he felt no immediate impulse to continue his fishing. Remaining where he was beside the old log, thigh deep in the young grasses and luxuriously soaking in the sunshine, he fell once more into a position of rigid movelessness. But his attitude was now quite different from that which he had affected when his mind was set on fish. His neck was coiled backward till the back of his head rested on his shoulders, and his bill pointed skyward, as if the only peril he had to consider seriously during his time of repose might come, if at all, from that direction. And though he rested, and every nerve and muscle seemed to sleep, his gemlike eyes were sleeplessly vigilant. Only at long intervals a thin, whitish membrane flickered down across them for a fraction of an instant, to cleanse and lubricate them and keep their piercing brightness undimmed.

Once a brown marsh hawk, questing for water rats, winnowed past, only ten or a dozen feet above his head. But he never stirred a muscle. He knew it would be a much more formidable and daring marauder than the marsh hawk that would risk conclusions with the uplifted dagger of his bill.

In about half an hour—so swift is the digestion of these masters of the swamp—the bittern began to think about a return to his easy and

pleasant hunting. But, always deliberate, except when there was need for instant action, at first he did no more than uncoil his long neck, lower his bill to a level, and stand motionlessly staring over the sedge tops. One of the big red-and-black butterflies came wavering near, perhaps under the fatal delusion that that rigid yellow bill would be a good perch for him to alight on. A lightning swift dart of the snaky head, and those gay wings, after curiously adorning for a moment the tip of the yellow bill, were deftly gathered in and swallowed—an unsubstantial morsel, but not to be ignored when one is blest with a bittern's appetite.

After a few minutes more of statuesque deliberation, having detected nothing in the landscape particularly demanding his attention, the bittern lazily lifted his broad wings and flapped in slow flight, his long legs almost brushing the sedge tops, back to the post of vantage where he had captured the chub. As soon as he alighted he stiffened himself erect, and stared about as if to see whether his flight had been noticed. Then, presently, he seemed to remember something of importance. This was the season of mating joys and cares. It was time he signalled his brown mate. First he began snapping his bill sharply, and then he went through a number of contor-

tions with his throat and neck, as if he were trying to gulp down vast quantities of air, and finding the effort most difficult. At length, however, the painful-looking struggle was crowned with achievement. Once more, as on the preceding evening, that great call boomed forth across the swamp, sonorous yet strangulated, uncouth yet thrilling and haunting, the very voice of solitude and mystery—*Klunk-er-glungk . . . Klunk-er-glungk . . . Klunk-er-glungk*.

Almost immediately came an acknowledgment of this untuneful love song—a single hoarse *guaw-awk*, and another snaky, brown head and yellow dagger bill were raised above the tops of the sedges. The hen bittern, in response to her mate's cry, had just come off her nest.

For some tranquil moments the two eyed each other without stirring, and it almost seemed as if their very immobility was a mode of expression, a secret code for communication between them. The result, if so, appeared to be satisfactory. The hen came stalking solemnly through the grass and sedges toward the water's edge, only pausing on the way to transfix and gulp down a luckless frog. And the stately male, once more spreading his spacious vans, flapped slowly over and dropped again into the grass some ten or a dozen feet from the nest.

The nest was a rather casual structure of dry grass and weeds, in a hollow of the turf, and more or less concealed by leaning tufts of swamp grass. It contained three large eggs of a dull greenish buff, clouded with darker tones, and blending elusively with the soft colorings of the nest. These precious eggs the male bittern was to stand guard over with jealous vigilance, while his mate was away foraging. The sun was softly warm upon them through the thin shadows of the grass blades, and he knew they would not chill during her brief absence. He took his post just near enough to keep his eye upon the nest, without unduly drawing attention to its hiding place.

This patch of water meadow, perhaps a half acre in extent, on which the bitterns had their nest, was one of many such tiny islands scattered amid the interlacing channels of Lost Water Swamp. It formed a congenial refuge for all that small life of the wilderness which loves to be near water without being in it. It was particularly beloved of the meadow mice, because the surrounding watercourses and morasses were an effectual barrier to some of their worst enemies, such as foxes, skunks, and weasels; and they throve here amazingly. To be sure the bittern would take toll of them when they came his way, but he did not deliberately hunt them, rather pre-

ferring a diet of frogs and fish; and moreover his depredations upon the mice were more than counterbalanced by his eager hostility to their dreaded foes, the snakes. So, on the whole, he might have been regarded by the mouse community as a benefactor, though a rather costly one.

Even now, as he stood there apparently thinking of nothing but his guardianship of the nest, he gave a telling example of his beneficence in this regard. There was a tiny, frightened squeak, a desperate small rustling in the grass stems, and a terrified mouse scurried by, with a two-foot black snake at its tail. The bittern's head flashed down, unerringly, and rose again, more slowly, with the snake gripped by the middle, held high in air, as if on exhibition, between the knife-edge tips of that deadly, yellow bill. The victim writhed and twisted, coiling itself convulsively around its captor's head and neck. But with two or three sharp jerks it was drawn further back, toward the base of the mandibles; and then, with an inexorable pressure, bitten clean in two; the halves uncoiled and fell to the ground, still wriggling spasmodically. With grave deliberation the bittern planted one foot upon the head half, and demolished the vicious head with a tap of his bill. This done, he swallowed it with

determined and strenuous gulpings. Then he eyed the other half doubtfully, and decided that he was not yet ready for it. So, placing one foot upon it with a precise air, he lifted his head again and resumed his motionless guarding of the nest.

A little later in the morning—perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes after the incident of the snake—the mice found yet another potent reason for congratulating themselves on the presence of their expensive champion. The hen bittern, apparently, had not been very successful in her foraging. She had shown as yet no sign of returning to the nest. The male was just beginning to get impatient. He even went so far as to move his head, though ever so slightly. Indeed, he was on the very point of beginning those grotesque snappings of the bill and gulpings of air which would be followed by his booming triple call when he caught sight of a dark form moving through the grass, beyond the nest. Instantly he stiffened again into rigidity. Only, very slowly, the long, slender feathers which crowned his head and lay along his neck began to rise.

The dark form gliding stealthily among the grasses was that of an animal about two feet in length, low on the legs, slender, sinuous, quick-darting. The bittern had never chanced to observe a mink before, but he needed no one to tell

him that this creature was dangerous. Ferocity and efficiency were written all over the savage, triangular head and lithe, swift body. But the intruder had evidently not yet discovered the precious nest. He was half a dozen paces away from it, and not moving directly toward it. In the very next moment he pounced upon a mouse, which he tore and devoured with an eagerness which showed him to be hungry. The bittern waited, and hoped anxiously that the nest might escape discovery.

The mink was not at the moment thinking of any such luxury as eggs. He had entered the swamp in the hope of finding just such a happy hunting ground as this bit of mouse-thronged meadow. He had just arrived, and he was now full of bloodthirsty excitement over the success of his venture. His nose sniffed greedily the subtle, warm, mousy smells. His ears detected the innumerable, elusive, mousy squeaks and rustlings. His eyes, lit now with the red spark of the blood lust, were less fortunate than his ears and nose, because word of a new and dreadful foe had gone abroad among the mouse folk, and concealment was the order of the day. But already, he had made one kill—and that so easily that he knew the quarry here was not much hunted.

He was preparing to follow a very distinct mouse trail, when a chance puff of air bore him a scent which instantly caught his attention. The scent of the bittern was new to him, as it chanced. He knew it for the scent of a bird, a water bird of some kind—probably, from its abundance, a large bird, and certainly, therefore, a bird worth his hunting.

Curious and inquiring, he rose straight up on his hind quarters in order to get a good view, and peered searchingly over the grass tops. He saw nothing but the green and sun-steeped meadow with the red-and-black butterflies wavering over it, the gleam of the unruffled water, and the osier thickets beyond. He looked directly at, and *past*, the guardian bittern, probably mistaking that rigid, vigilant shape for an old brown stump. For the mink's eyes, like those of many other animals, were less unerring than his ears and nostrils, and much quicker to discern motion than fixed form. Had the bittern stirred by so much as a hair's breadth, the mink would have detected him at once. But the mink looked at him and saw him not; nor saw another similar form, un-stirring, tensely watchful, over by the waterside.

Having failed to detect the source of that strange, intriguing smell, the mink concluded that it must come from a brooding mother, hiding on

a nest in the grass. Nothing could be more satisfactory. His eyes blazed blood-red at the prospect of slaughter. Dropping down again upon all fours, he darted forward up the trail of the scent, and came full upon the nest with its three unsheltered eggs. Instantly seizing the nearest one between his agile forepaws, he crunched the shell and began greedily sucking up the contents.

But the savor of the feast had hardly thrilled his palate when it seemed as if the skies had fallen upon him. A scalding anguish stabbed his shoulders, a smother of buffeting wings enveloped him, and he was borne backward from the nest, the broken eggshell still clinging to his nose.

At the moment when he had darted forward toward the nest, all the immobility of the watching bittern had vanished. His long crest standing straight up in his fury, he had launched himself to the attack, covering the intervening distance with two tremendous thrusts of his powerful wings, and fallen like a cyclone upon the violator of his home. The dagger of his bill had struck deeply, and the impetus of his charge had carried him clear of his foe and a couple of paces past, but he turned adroitly in the air and landed facing about, ready for the inevitable counterattack.

Amazed and startled though he was, and handled with a roughness quite new to his experi-

ence, the mink was in no way daunted. Rather he was so boiling with rage that his wonted wariness forsook him completely. With a snarl he sprang straight at the long, exposed, inviting throat of his adversary. His leap was swift, true, deadly. But equally true, and more swift, was the counterstroke. He was met, and stopped in mid-air by a thrust of the bittern's bill, which, had he not twisted his head just in time, would have split his skull. As it was, it laid open one side of his snarling face, and brought him heavily to the ground. Even under this punishment, however, he would not acknowledge defeat. Springing aside, with a lightning, zigzag movement to confuse the aim of that terrific bill, he darted low and made a leap at his antagonist's long, vulnerable legs. He missed only by a hair's breadth, as the bittern leapt nimbly aside and balked him with a stiff wing stroke. He seized the baffling wing and strove to pull his tall adversary down. But two great pinion feathers came away in his jaws, and the next moment he got another terrible, driving stab from the dagger beak, well forward on the flank. It was a slanting thrust, or it would have pierced his lungs; but it nearly knocked the wind out of him, and ploughed a deep, red gash in his glossy coat.

Screeching furiously, he doubled on himself like a snake to meet this attack. But at the same moment he cringed under another excruciating stab in the haunch; and looking up, he saw himself enveloped in a cloud of blinding wings. The hen bittern had arrived to join in the defense of her nest.

Now, bloodthirsty and merciless marauder though he was, the mink's courage was a thing beyond dispute; and terribly though the fight had so far gone against him, with a single foe to confront he would probably have held on to the death. But for all his fury he was not quite mad; and this reinforcement of the enemy was too much for him. Suddenly straightening himself out long and narrow like an eel, he slipped from under the terrifying storm of wings and stabs, and made off through the grass at the best speed he had ever attained. He made for the water, which he felt would be his safest refuge. The angry bitterns were after him on the instant, flying as low as possible and stabbing down at him. But his cunning and slippery zigzags enabled him to dodge most of their thrusts; and in their eagerness they got in each other's way—which probably saved him his bare life. At length streaming with blood, and leaving behind him a red trail he reached the water and dived in. Without daring

to come to the surface he swam across the channel and cautiously raised his head behind a screen of overhanging weeds. He saw his two pursuers standing, motionless and erect, on the opposite bank, watching with fierce eyes for him to reappear. Submerging himself again, he swam on downstream till he had rounded a sharp bend of the channel. When he thought it prudent to show himself once more, he was sheltered by a dense screen of alder and willows. He hurried through the thicket, and on down the bank till he found an ancient muskrat hole. Into this he crept eagerly, and lay down in the grateful dark to nurse his wounds and his humiliation.

After the disappearance of the mink the hen bittern soon returned to her nest. But the male stayed where he was. From time to time he would spear a passing frog or chub or sucker. But always his indignant heart was hoping that the mink would return. After an hour or two, however, his wrath died down and he began to forget.

Later in the day, when the osiers were beginning to throw long shadows across the water, and the red-and-black butterflies had grown too indolent to dance, the great bittern, full-fed and at ease with life, flapped languidly up from the waterside and dropped close beside the nest. His

brooding mate lifted her head, as if in greeting, and laid it back at once between her shoulders, with her yellow bill pointed skyward as was her vigilant custom.

Soon the first warm tints of sunset began to stain the edges of the clouds above the far fringes of the swamp. Motionless and erect beside his mate, the bittern watched the oncoming of the enchantment as his day drew to its quiet close. Suddenly the colored quiet of the air was disturbed by the throbbing of hurried wings. He glanced upward, without moving. A mallard drake, in frantic flight, whirred past, making for the water. Close after the fugitive, and swiftly overhauling him with long tremendous thrusts of his mighty wings, came that most dreaded cut-throat of the air, a great, blue goshawk. Had the water been two feet farther away the fate of the glossy drake would have been sealed. He would have been overtaken, his throat torn out in mid-air, his body carried off to the nearest tree top to be plucked and devoured. But this time the inscrutable Fates of the wilderness, too seldom so lenient to the weak, decided to favor him. With a heavy sounding splash he shot down into the blessed water, and disappeared into safety.

The destroying talons of the great hawk

clutched convulsively at the dandy curled tips of his tail as he vanished.

With his arrowy speed, his precision of stroke, his audacity and fiery spirit, the blue goshawk was little accustomed to the experience of being balked of his prey. With a sharp yelp of wrath he swept up from the water on a long, graceful curve, and sailed back low above the bittern's island seeking other prey. And his piercing gaze fell upon the bittern, standing rigid beside the nest.

His swoop was instantaneous, straight and swift as a bolt from a crossbow. But that coiled steel spring of the bittern's neck was even swifter; and as his talons struck downward, the bittern's dagger thrust caught him in the very center of the impending claw, splitting the foot fairly and disabling it. Nevertheless, by the shock of the attack, the bittern was borne downward, and would have been caught in the breast or throat by the other talon, but at the same instant his watchful mate, who had half risen on the nest that her eggs might not be crushed in the *mêlée*, delivered her thrust. It went true. It caught the goshawk full in the base of the neck, pierced clean through, and severed the spine. And in a wild confusion of sprawled legs and pounding wings, the three great birds fell in a heap in the grass, just beyond the nest.

The two bitterns nimbly extricated themselves, stabbing savagely at the unresisting body of the hawk. Presently, as if by one impulse, they both stood up, erect and still as images, their yellow bills dripping with blood. The male had a bleeding gash along the side of his head. But this concerned him little. His heart swelled with triumph. He was forced to give it utterance. He snapped his bill sharply, gulped a few mouthfuls of air, and then sent forth his booming challenge across the swamp—*Klunk-er-glungk . . . Klunk-er-glungk . . . Klunk-er-glungk*.

His mate spread her broad wings, shook herself till her ruffled plumage fell into place, wiped her conquering bill on the grass, stepped delicately back into the nest, and softly settled herself down upon her two eggs, so miraculously preserved.

Silence fell on Lost Water Swamp. The air became gradually transfused with amethyst and pale rose. And then, far and faint, tranquil and poignant, came the entrancing cadence—*Oh—spherical, spherical, Oh holy, holy—spherical*—the silver vesper ecstasy of the hermit thrush, in his tree top against the pellucid sky.

Mustela of the Lone Hand

THE STORY OF A FRIENDLESS CITIZEN OF THE WILDERNESS

IT was in the very heart of the ancient wood—the forest primeval of the north, gloomy with the dark-green, crowded ranks of fir and spruce and hemlock, and tangled with the huge windfalls of countless storm-torn winters. But now, at high noon of the glowing northern summer, the gloom was pierced to its depths with shafts of radiant sun; the barred and checkered transparent brown shadows hummed with dancing flies; the warm air was alive with the small, thin notes of chick-a-dee and nuthatch, varied now and then by the impertinent scolding of the Canada jay; and the drowsing tree tops steamed up an incense of balsamy fragrance in the heat. The ancient wildness dreamed, stretched itself all open to the sun, and seemed to sigh with immeasurable content.

High up in the grey trunk of a half-dead forest giant was a round hole, the entrance to what had been the nest of a pair of big, red-headed, golden-

winged woodpeckers, or "yellow hammers." The big woodpeckers had long since been dispossessed—the female, probably, caught and devoured, with her eggs, upon the nest. The dispossessor, and present tenant, was *Mustela*.

Framed in the blackness of the round hole was a sharp-muzzled, triangular, golden-brown face with high, pointed ears, looking out upon the world below with keen eyes in which a savage wildness and an alert curiosity were incongruously mingled. Nothing that went on upon the dim ground far below, among the tangled trunks and windfalls, or in the sun-drenched tree tops, escaped that restless and piercing gaze. But *Mustela* had fed well and felt lazy, and this hour of noon was not his hunting hour; so the most unsuspecting red squirrel, gathering cones in a neighboring pine, was insufficient to lure him from his rest, and the plumpest hare, waving its long, suspicious ears down among ground shadows, only made him lick his lips and think what he would do later on in the afternoon, when he felt like it.

Presently, however, a figure came into view at sight of which *Mustela*'s expression changed. His thin, black lips wrinkled back in a soundless snarl, displaying the full length of his long, snow-white, deadly sharp canines, and a red spark of hate

smoldered in his bright eyes. But no less than his hate was his curiosity—a curiosity which is the most dangerous weakness of all Mustela's tribe. Mustela's pointed head stretched itself clear of the hole, in order to get a better look at the man who was passing below his tree.

A man was a rare sight in that remote and inaccessible section of the northern wilderness. This particular man—a woodsman, a "timber cruiser," seeking out new and profitable areas for the work of the lumbermen—wore a flaming red-and-orange handkerchief loosely knotted about his brawny neck, and carried over his shoulder an axe whose bright blade flashed sharply whenever a ray of sunlight struck it. It was this flashing axe, and the blazing color of the scarlet-and-orange kerchief, that excited Mustela's curiosity—so excited it, indeed, that he came clean out of the hole and circled the great trunk, clinging close and wide-legged like a squirrel, in order to keep the woodsman in view as he passed by.

Engrossed though he was in the interesting figure of the man, Mustela's vigilance was still unsleeping. His amazingly quick ears, at this moment, caught a hushed hissing of wings in the air above his head. He did not stop to look up and investigate. Like a streak of ruddy light he flashed around the trunk and whisked back into

his hole—and just as he vanished a magnificent, long-winged goshawk, the king of all the falcons, swooping down from the blue, struck savagely with his clutching talons at the edge of the hole.

The quickness of *Mustela* was miraculous. Moreover, he was not content with escape. He wanted vengeance. Even in his lightning dive into his refuge he had managed to turn about, doubling on himself like an eel. And now, as those terrible talons gripped and clung for half a second to the edge of the hole, he snapped his teeth securely into the last joint of the longest talon, and dragged it in an inch or two.

With a yelp of fury and surprise the great falcon strove to lift himself into the air, pounding madly with his splendid wings, and twisting himself about, and thrusting mightily with his free foot against the side of the hole. But he found himself held fast, as in a trap. Sagging back with all his weight, *Mustela* braced himself securely with all four feet and hung on, his whipcord sinews set like steel. He knew that if he let go for an instant to secure a better mouthful his enemy would escape; so he just worried and chewed at the joint of the huge talon, satisfied with the punishment he was inflicting.

Meanwhile the woodsman, his attention drawn

by that one sudden yelp of the falcon and by the prolonged and violent buffeting of wings, had turned back to see what was going on. Pausing at the foot of Mustela's tree he peered upward with narrowed eyes. A slow smile wrinkled his weather-beaten face. He did not like hawks. For a moment or two he stood wondering what it was in the hole that could hold so powerful a bird. Whatever it was, he stood for it.

Being a dead shot with the revolver, he seldom troubled to carry a rifle in his "cruisings." Drawing his long barreled "Smith and Wesson" from his belt he took careful aim, and fired. At the sound of the shot the thing in the hole was startled, and let go; and the great bird, turning once over slowly in the air, dropped to his feet with a feathery thud, its talons still contracting shudderingly. The woodsman glanced up—and there, framed in the dark of the hole, was the little, yellow face of Mustela, insatiably curious, snarling down upon him viciously.

"Gee," muttered the woodsman, "I might hev' knowed it was one o' them bloody martens! Nobody else o' *that* size 'ud hev' the gall to tackle a duck hawk!"

Now the fur of Mustela, the pine marten or American sable, is a fur of price. But the woodsman—subject, like most of his kind, to unexpected

attacks of sentiment and imagination—felt that to shoot the defiant fighter would be like an act of treachery to an ally.

“Ye’re a pretty fighter, Sonny,” said he, with a whimsical grin, “an’ ye may keep that yellow pelt o’ yourn, for all o’ me!”

Then he picked up the dead falcon, tied its claws together, slung it upon his axe, and strode off through the trees. He wanted to keep those splendid wings as a present for his girl at the settlements.

Highly satisfied with his victory over the mighty falcon—for which he took the full credit to himself—Mustela now retired to the bottom of his comfortable, moss-lined nest, and curled himself up to sleep away the heat of the day. As the heat grew sultrier and drowsier through the still hours of early afternoon, there fell upon the forest a heavy silence, deepened rather than broken by the faint hum of the heat-loving flies. And the spicy scents of pine and spruce and tamarack steamed forth richly upon the moveless air.

When the shadows of the trunks began to lengthen, Mustela woke up. And he woke up hungry. Slipping out of his hole he ran a little way down the trunk and then leaped, lightly and nimbly as a squirrel, into the branches of a big hemlock which grew close to his own tree. Here,

in a crotch from which he commanded a good view beneath the foliage, he halted and stood motionless, peering about him for some sign of a likely quarry.

Poised thus, tense, erect, and vigilant, *Mustela* was a picture of beauty, swift and fierce. In color he was of a rich golden brown, with a patch of brilliant yellow covering throat and chest. His tail was long and bushy, to serve him as a balance in his long, squirrel-like leaps from tree to tree. His pointed ears were large and alert, to catch all the faint, elusive, forest sounds. In length, being a specially fine specimen of his kind, he was perhaps a couple of inches over two feet. His body had all the lithe grace of a weasel, with something of the strength of his great cousin and most dreaded foe, the fisher.

For a time nothing stirred. Then from a distance, came faint but shrill the *chirr-r-r-r* of a red squirrel. *Mustela's* discriminating ear located the sound at once. All energy on the instant, he darted toward it springing from branch to branch with amazing speed and noiselessness.

The squirrel, noisy and imprudent after the manner of his tribe, was chattering fussily and bouncing about on his branch, excited over something best known to himself, when a darting, gold-brown shape of doom landed upon the end of the

branch, not half a dozen feet from him. With a screech of warning and terror he bounded into the air, alighted on the trunk, and raced up it, with *Mustela* close upon his heels. Swift as he was—and everyone who has seen a red squirrel in a hurry knows how he can move—*Mustela* was swifter; and in about five seconds the little chatterer's fate would have been sealed. But he knew what he was about. This was his own tree. Had it been otherwise, he would have sprung into another and directed his desperate flight over the slenderest branches, where his enemy's greater weight would be a hindrance. As it was, he managed to gain his hole—just in time. And all that *Mustela* got was a little mouthful of fur from the tip of that vanishing red tail.

Very angry and disappointed, and hissing like a cat, *Mustela* jammed his savage face into the hole. He could see the squirrel crouched, with pounding heart and panic-stricken eyes, a few inches below him, just out of his reach. The hole was too small to admit his head. In a rage he tore at the edges with his powerful claws, but the wood was too hard for him to make any impression on it; and after half a minute of futile scratching he gave up in disgust and raced off down the tree. A moment later the squirrel

poked his head out and shrieked an effectual warning to every creature within earshot.

With that loud alarm shrilling in his ears, *Mustela* knew there would be no successful hunting for him till he could put himself beyond range of it. He raced on, therefore, abashed by his failure, till the taunting sound faded in the distance. Then his bushy, brown brush went up in the air again, and his wonted look of insolent self-confidence returned. As it did not seem to be his lucky day for squirrels, he descended to earth and began quartering the ground for the fresh trail of a rabbit.

In that section of the forest where *Mustela* now found himself the dark and scented tangle of spruce and balsam fir was broken by patches of stony barren, clothed unevenly by thickets of stunted white birch, and silver-leafed, quaking aspen, and wild sumach with its massive tufts of acrid, dark-crimson bloom. Here the rabbit trails were abundant, and *Mustela* was not long in finding one fresh enough to offer him the prospect of a speedy kill. Swiftly and silently, nose to earth, he set himself to follow its intricate and apparently aimless windings, sure that he would come upon a rabbit at the end of it.

As it chanced, however, he never came to the end of that particular trail or set his teeth in the

throat of that particular rabbit. In gliding past a bushy, young fir tree he happened to glance beneath it, and marked another of his tribe tearing the feathers from a newly slain grouse. The stranger was smaller and slighter than himself, a young female—quite possibly, indeed, his mate of a few months earlier in the season. Such considerations were less than nothing to Mustela, whose ferocious spirit knew neither gallantry, chivalry, nor mercy. With what seemed a single flashing leap he was upon her. Or *almost*—for the slim female was no longer there. She had bounded away as lightly and instantaneously as if blown by the wind of his coming. She knew Mustela—and she knew it would be death to stay and do battle for her kill. Spitting with rage and fear she fled from the spot, terrified lest he should pursue her and find the nest where her six precious kittens were concealed.

But Mustela was too hungry to be interested, just then, in mere slaughter for its own sake. He was feeling serious and practical. The grouse was a full-grown cock, plump and juicy, and when Mustela had devoured it his appetite was sated. But not so his blood lust. After a hasty toilet he set out again, looking for something to kill.

Crossing the belt of rocky ground he emerged upon a flat tract of treeless barren covered with

a dense growth of blueberry bushes about a foot in height. The bushes at this season were loaded with ripe fruit, of a bright blue color; and squatting among them was a big, black bear, enjoying the banquet at his ease. Gathering the berries together wholesale with his great, furry paws he was cramming them into his mouth greedily, with little grunts and gurgles of delight; and the juicy fragments with which his snout and jaws were smeared gave his formidable face an absurdly childish look. To *Mustela*—when that insolent little animal flashed before him—he vouchsafed no more than a glance of good-natured contempt. For the rank and stringy flesh of a pine marten he had no use at any time of year, least of all in the season when the blueberries were ripe.

Mustela, however, was too discreet to pass within reach of one of those huge but nimble paws, lest the happy bear should grow playful under the stimulus of the blueberry juice. He turned aside to a judicious distance; and there, sitting up on his hind quarters like a rabbit, he proceeded to nibble, rather superciliously, a few of the choicest berries. He was not enthusiastic over vegetable food. But, just as a cat will now and then eat grass, he liked at times a little change in his unvarying diet of flesh.

Having soon had enough of the blueberry patch, Mustela left it to the bear, and turned back toward the deep of the forest, where he felt most at home. He went stealthily, following up the wind in order that his scent might not give warning of his approach. It was getting near sunset by this time, and floods of pinky gold, washing across the open barrens, poured in along the ancient corridors of the forest, touching the somber trunks with stains of tenderest rose. In this glowing color Mustela, with his ruddy fur, moved almost invisible.

And so moving, he came plump upon a big buck rabbit, squatting half asleep in the center of a clump of pale-green fern.

The rabbit bounded straight into the air, his big, childish eyes popping from his head with horror. Mustela's leap was equally instantaneous. And it was unerring. He struck his victim in mid-air, and his fangs met deep in the rabbit's throat. With a scream the rabbit fell backward and came down with a muffled thump upon the ferns, with Mustela on top of him. There was a brief, thrashing struggle; and then Mustela, his forepaws upon the breast of his still-quivering prey (several times larger and heavier than himself), lifted his blood-stained face and stared about him savagely, as if defying all the other prowlers of

the forest to come and try to rob him of his prize.

Having eaten his fill, Mustela dragged the remnants of the carcass under a thick bush, defiled it so as to make it distasteful to other eaters of flesh, and scratched a lot of dead leaves and twigs over it till it was effectually hidden. As game was abundant at this season, and as he always preferred a fresh kill, he was not likely to want any more of that victim; but he hated the thought of any rival profiting from his prowess.

Mustela now turned his steps homeward, traveling more lazily, but with eyes, nose, and ears ever on the alert for fresh quarry. Though his appetite was sated for some hours, he was as eager as ever for the hunt, for the fierce joy of killing and taste of the hot blood. But the Unseen Powers of the Wilderness, ironic and impartial, decided just then that it was time for Mustela to be hunted in his turn.

If there was one creature above all others who could strike the fear of death into Mustela's merciless soul it was his great cousin, the ferocious and implacable fisher. Of twice his weight and thrice his strength, and his full peer in swiftness and cunning, the fisher was Mustela's nightmare, from whom there was no escape except in the depth of some hole too narrow for the fisher's

powerful shoulders to get into. And at this moment—there was the fisher's grinning, black-muzzled mask crouched in the path before him, eyeing him with the sneer of certain triumph.

Mustela's heart jumped into his throat, as he flashed about and fled for his life—straight away, alas, from his safe hole in the tree top. And with the lightning dart of a striking rattler the fisher was after him.

Mustela had a start of perhaps twenty paces, and for a time he held his own. He dared no tricks, lest he should lose ground, for he knew his foe was as swift and as cunning as himself. But he knew himself stronger and more enduring than most of his tribe, and therefore he put his hope, for the most part, in his endurance. Moreover, there was always a chance that he might come upon some hole or crevice too narrow for his pursuer. Indeed, to a tough and indomitable spirit like Mustela's, until his enemy's fangs should finally lock themselves in his throat, there would always seem to be a chance. On and on he raced, therefore, tearing madly up or down the long, sloping trunks of ancient windfalls, springing in great, airy leaps from trunk to rock, from rock to overhanging branch, in silence; and ever at his heels followed the relentless, grinning shape of his pursuer, gaining a little in the long

leaps, but losing a little in the denser thickets, and so just about keeping his distance.

For all *Mustela's* endurance, the end of that race, in all probability, would have been for him but one swift, screeching fight, and then the dark. But at this juncture the Fates woke up and remembered some grudge against the fisher.

A moment later *Mustela*, just launching himself on a desperate leap, beheld in his path a huge hornets' nest suspended from a branch near the ground. Well he knew, and respected, that terrible insect, the great, black hornet with the cream-white stripes about its body. But it was too late to turn aside. He crashed against the grey, papery sphere, tearing it from its cables, and flashed on, with half a dozen white-hot stings in his hind quarters. Swerving slightly he dashed through a dense thicket hoping not only to scrape his fiery tormentors off but at the same time to gain a little on his big pursuer.

The fisher was at this stage not more than a dozen paces in the rear. He arrived, to his undoing, just as the outraged hornets poured out in a furiously humming swarm from their overturned nest. With deadly unanimity they pounced upon the fisher.

With a startled screech the fisher bounced aside and plunged for shelter. But he was too late.

The great hornets were all over him. His ears and nostrils were black with them. His eyes, shut tight, were already a flaming anguish with the corroding poison of their stings. Frantically he burrowed his face into the moist earth; and madly he clawed at his ears, crushing scores of his tormentors. But he could not crush out the venom which their long stings had injected. Finding it hopeless to free himself from their swarms he tore madly through the underbrush—but blindly, crashing into trunks and rocks, heedless of everything but the fiery torture which enveloped him. Gradually the hornets fell away from him as he went, knowing that their vengeance was accomplished. At last, groping his way blindly into a crevice between two rocks, he thrust his head down into the moss; and there, a few days later, his swollen body was found by a foraging lynx. The lynx was hungry, but she only sniffed at the carcass and turned away with a growl of disappointment and suspicion.

Mustela became aware, after some minutes, that he was no longer pursued. Incredulous at first, he at length came to the conclusion that the fisher had been discouraged by his superior speed and endurance. His heart swelled with triumph. By way of precaution he made a long detour to come back to his nest, ran up his tree and slipped

comfortably into his hole, and curled up to sleep with the feeling of a day well spent. He had fed full, he had robbed his fellows successfully, he had drunk the blood of his victims, he had outwitted or eluded his enemies.

Now as the summer waned, and the first keen touch of autumn set the wilderness aflame with the scarlet of maple and sumach, Mustela, for all his abounding health and prosperous hunting, grew restless with a discontent which he could not understand. Of the coming winter he had no dread. He had passed through several winters, faring well and finding that deep nest of his in the old tree a snug refuge from the fiercest storms. But now, he knew not why, the nest grew irksome to him, and his familiar hunting grounds distasteful. Even the eager hunt, the triumphant kill itself, had lost their zest. He forgot to kill except when he was hungry. A strange fever was in his blood, a lust for wandering. And so, one wistful, softly glowing day of Indian summer, when the violet light that bathed the forest was full of mystery and allure-ment, he set off on a journey. He had no thought of why he was going, or whither. When hungry, he stopped to hunt and kill and feed. But he no longer cared to conceal the remnants of his kills, for he dimly realized that he would not

be returning. If running waters crossed his path, he swam them. If broad lakes intervened, he skirted them.

From time to time he became aware that others of his kind were moving with him—but each one furtive, silent, solitary, self-sufficing, like himself. He heeded them not, nor they him; but all, impelled by one urge which could but be blindly obeyed, kept drifting onward toward the west and north. At length, when the first snows began, Mustela stopped, in a forest not greatly different from that which he had left, but even wilder, denser, more unvisited by the foot of man. And here, the wanderlust having suddenly left his blood, he found himself a new hole, lined it warm with moss and dry grasses, and resumed his hunting with all the ancient zest.

Back in Mustela's old hunting grounds a lonely trapper, finding no more golden sable in his snares, but only mink and lynx and fox, grumbled regretfully:

"The martens hev quit. We'll see no more of 'em round these parts for another ten year."

But he had no notion why they had quit; nor had anyone else—not even Mustela himself.

Fishers of the Air

A VALIANT PAIR TASTE DEEP OF STRUGGLE AND OF VICTORY

THE lake lay in a deep and sun-soaked valley, facing south, sheltered from the sea winds by a high hogback of dark green spruce and hemlock forest, broken sharply here and there by outcroppings of white granite.

Beyond the hogback, some three or four miles away, the green sea screamed and thundered in sleepless turmoil against the towering black cliffs, clamorous with sea gulls. But over the lake brooded a blue and glittering silence, broken only, at long intervals, by the long-drawn, wistful flute cry of the Canada white-throat from some solitary tree top—*Lean—lean—lean-to-me—lean-to-me—lean-to-me*—of all bird voices the one most poignant with loneliness and longing.

On the side of the lake nearest to the hogback the dark green of the forest came down to within forty or fifty paces of the water's edge, and was fringed by a narrow ribbon of very light, tender green—a dense, low growth of Indian willow, elder shrub, and withewood, tangled with white

clematis and starred with wild convolvulus. From the sharply defined edge of this gracious tangle a beach of clean sand, dazzlingly white, sloped down to, and slid beneath, the transparent golden lip of the amber-tinted water. The sand, both below and above the water's edge, was of an amazing radiance. Being formed by the infinitely slow breaking down of the ancient granite, through ages of alternating suns and rains and heats and frosts, it consisted purely of the indestructible, coarse, white crystals of the quartz, whose facets caught the sun like a drift of diamonds.

The opposite shores of the lake were low and swampy, studded here and there with tall, naked, weather-bleached "rampikes"—the trunks of ancient fir trees blasted and stripped by some long-past forest fire. These melancholy ghosts of trees rose from a riotously gold-green carpet of rank marsh grasses, sweeping around in an interminable, unbroken curve to the foot of the lake, where, through the cool shadows of water ash and balsam poplar, the trout-haunted outlet stream rippled away musically to join the sea some seven or eight miles farther on. All along the golden-green sweep of the marsh grass spread acre upon acre of the flat leaves of the water lily, starred with broad, white, golden-hearted, ex-

quisitely perfumed blooms, the paradise of the wild bees and honey-loving summer flies.

Over this vast crystal bowl of green and amber solitude domed a sky of cloudless blue; and high in the blue hung a great bird, slowly wheeling. From his height he held in view the intense sparkling of the sea beyond the hogback, the creaming of the surf about the outer rocks, and the sudden upspringing of the gulls, like a puff of blown petals, as some wave, higher and more impetuous than its predecessors, drove them from their perches. But the aërial watcher had heed only for the lake below him, lying windless and unshadowed in the sun. His piercing eyes, jewel-bright, and with an amazing range of vision, could penetrate to all the varying depths of the lake, and detect the movements of its finny hordes. The great, sluggish lake trout, or "togue," usually lurking in the obscurest deeps; the shining, active, vermilion-spotted brook trout, foraging voraciously nearer the shore and the surface; the fat, mud-loving "suckers," rooting the oozy bottom like pigs among the roots of the water lilies; the silvery chub and the green-and-gold, fiercely spined perch haunting the weedy feeding grounds down toward the outlet—all these he observed, and differentiated with an expert's eye, attempting to foresee which ones, in their feeding or their

play, were likely soonest to approach the surface of their glimmering, golden world.

Suddenly he paused in his slow wheeling, dipped forward, and dropped, with narrowed wings, down, down from his dizzy height to within something like fifty yards of the water. Here he stopped, with wings widespread, and hovered, almost motionless, slowly sinking like a waft of thistle down when the breeze has died away. He had seen a fair-sized trout rise lightly and suck in a fly which had fallen on the bright surface. The ringed ripples of the rise had hardly smoothed away when the trout rose again. As it gulped its tiny, half-drowned prey the poised bird shot downward again—urged by a powerful surge of his wings before he closed them—this time with terrific speed. He struck the water with a resounding splash, disappeared beneath it, and rose again two or three yards beyond with the trout securely gripped in his talons. Shaking the bright drops in a shower from his wings he flapped hurriedly away with his capture to his nest on the steep slope of the hogback. He flew with eager haste, as fast as his broad wings could carry him; for he feared lest his one dreaded foe, the great, white-headed eagle, should swoop down out of space on hissing pinions and rob him of his prize.

The nest of the osprey was built in the crotch of an old, lightning-blasted pine which rose from a fissure in the granite about fifty feet above the lake. As the osprey had practically no foes to be dreaded except that tyrannical robber, the great, white-headed eagle—which, indeed, only cared to rob him of his fish and never dared drive him to extremities by appearing to threaten his precious nestlings—the nest was built without any pretense of concealment, or, indeed, any attempt at inaccessibility, save such as was afforded by the high, smooth, naked trunk which supported it. An immense, gray, weather-beaten structure, conspicuous for miles, it looked like a loose cartload of rubbish, but in reality the sticks and dried rushes and mud and strips of shredded bark of which it was built were so solidly and cunningly interwoven as to withstand the wildest of winter gales. It was his permanent summer home, to which he and his handsome, daring mate were wont to return each spring from their winter sojourn in the sun lands of the south. A little tidying up, a little patching with sticks and mud, a relining with feathers and soft, winter-withered grasses, and the old nest was quickly ready to receive the eggs of his mate—beautiful and precious eggs, two, three, or four in number, and

usually of the rich color of old ivory very thickly splashed with a warm purplish brown.

This summer there were four nestlings in the great, untidy nest; and they kept both their devoted parents busy, catching, and tearing up into convenient morsels, fish enough to satisfy their vigorous appetites. At the moment when the father osprey returned from the lake with the trout which he had just caught they were full-fed and fast asleep, their downy heads and half-feathered, scrawny necks comfortably resting across one another's pulsing bodies. The mother bird, who had recently fed them, was away fishing in the long, green-gray seas beyond the hog-back. The father, seeing them thus satisfied, tore up the trout and swallowed it, with dignified deliberation, himself. Food was plentiful, and he was not overhungry. Then, having scrupulously wiped his beak and preened his feathers, he settled himself upright on the edge of the nest and became apparently lost in contemplation of the spacious and tranquil scene outspread beneath him. A pair of bustling little crow-blackbirds, who had made their own small home among the outer sticks of the gigantic nest, flew backward and forward diligently, bringing insects in their bills for their naked, newly hatched brood. Their metallic, black plumage shone iridescently, purple

and green and radiant blue, in the unclouded sunlight; and from time to time the great osprey rolled his eyes upon them with a mild and casual interest. Neither he nor his mate had the slightest objection to their presence, being amicably disposed toward all living creatures except fish and possible assailants of the nest. And the black-birds dwelt in security under that powerful, though involuntary, protection.

The osprey, the great fish hawk or fish eagle of Eastern North America, was the most attractive, in character, of all the predatory tribes of the hawks and eagles. Of dauntless courage without being quarrelsome or tyrannical, he strictly minded his own business, which was that of catching fish; and none of the wild folk of the forest, whether furred or feathered, had cause to fear him so long as they threatened no peril to his home or young. On account of this well-known good reputation, he was highly respected by the hunters and lumbermen and scattered settlers of the backwoods, and it was held a gross breach of the etiquette of the wilderness to molest him or disturb his nest. Even the fish he took—and he was a most tireless and successful fisherman—were not greatly grudged to him; for his chief depredations were upon the coarse-fleshed and always superabundant chub

and suckers, which no human fisherman would take the trouble to catch.

With all this good character to his credit, he was at the same time one of the handsomest of the great hawks. About two feet in length, he was of sturdy build, with immensely powerful wings whose tips reached to the end of his tail. All his upper parts were of a soft dark brown, laced delicately and sparsely with white; and the crown of his broad-skulled, intelligent head was heavily splashed with white. All his under parts were pure white except the tail, which was crossed with five or six even bars of pale umber. His long and masterful beak, curved like a sickle and nearly as sharp, was black; while his formidable talons, able to pierce to the vitals of their prey at the first clutch, were of a clean gray-blue. His eyes, large and full-orbed, with a beautiful ruby-tinted iris encircling the intense black pupil, were gemlike in their brilliance but lacked the implacable ferocity of the eyes of the eagle and the goshawk.

Presently, flying low over the crest of the hog-back with a gleaming mackerel in her talons, appeared his mate. Arriving swiftly at the nest, and finding the nestlings still asleep, she deposited the mackerel in a niche among the sticks, where it lay flashing back the sun from its blue-barred

sides, and set herself to preening her feathers still wet from her briny plunge. The male osprey, after a glance at the prize, seemed to think it was up to him to go her one better. With a high-pitched, musical, staccato cry of *Pip-pip—pip—pip*—very small and childish to come from so formidable a beak—he launched himself majestically from the edge of the nest, and sailed off over the hot green tops of the spruce and fir to the lake.

Instead of soaring to his “watchtower in the blue” he flew now quite low, not more than fifty feet or so above the water; for a swarm of small flies was over the lake and the fish were rising to them freely.

In every direction he saw the little, widening rings of ripples, each of which meant a fish, large or small, feeding at the surface. His wide, all-discerning eyes could pick and choose. Whimsically ignoring a number of tempting quarry, he winnowed slowly to the farther side of the lake; and then, pausing to hover just above the line where the water lilies ended, he dropped suddenly, struck the water with a heavy splash, half submerging himself, and rose at once, his wings beating the spray, with a big, silver chub in his claws. He had his prey gripped near the tail, so that it hung, twisting and writhing with in-

convenient violence, head downward. At about twenty-five or thirty feet above the water he let it go, and swooping after it caught it again dexterously in mid-air, close to the head, as he wanted it. In this position the inexorable clutch of his needle-tipped talons pierced the life out of it, and its troublesome squirming ceased.

Flying slowly with his solid burden, he had just about reached the center of the lake, when an ominous hissing in the air above him warned him that his mighty foe, from far up in the blue dome, had marked his capture and was swooping down upon him to rob him of the prize. He swerved sharply; and in the next second the eagle, a wide-winged, silvery-headed bird of twice his size, shot downward past him with a strident scream and a rustle of stiff-set plumes, swept under him in a splendid curve, and came back at him with wide-open beak and huge talons outspread. He was too heavily laden either to fight or dodge, so he discreetly dropped the fish. With a lightning swoop his tormentor caught it before it could reach the water, and flew off with it to his eyrie in a high, inaccessible ravine at the farthest end of the hogback, several miles down the outlet stream. The osprey, taking quite philosophically a discomfiture which he had suffered so many times before, stared after the magnificent pirate

angrily for a few seconds, then circled away to seek another quarry. He knew that he would be left in peace to enjoy what he might take.

But this time, in his exasperated anxiety to more than make good his loss, his ambition somewhat overreached itself. To borrow the pithy phrase of the backwoodsman, he "bit off more than he could chew."

One of these big, gray lake trout, or "togue," which as a rule lurk obstinately in the utmost depths, rose slowly to investigate the floating body of a dead swallow. Pausing a few inches below the surface, he considered as to whether he should gulp down the morsel or not. Deciding, through some fishy caprice, to leave it alone (possibly he had once been hooked, and broken himself free with a painful gullet!), he was just turning away to sink lazily back into the depths, when something like a thunderbolt crashed down upon the water just above him and fiery pincers of horn fixed themselves deep into his massive back.

With a convulsive surge of his broad-fluked, muscular tail he tried to dive, and for a second drew his assailant clean under. But in the next moment the osprey, with a mighty beating of wings which threshed the water into foam, forced him to the surface, and lifted him clear. But he

was too heavy for his captor, and almost immediately he found himself partly back in his own element, sufficiently submerged to make mighty play with his lashing tail. For all his frantic struggles, however, he could not again get clear under, so as to make full use of his strength; and neither could his adversary, for all his tremendous flapping, succeed in holding him in the air for more than a second or two at a time.

And so the furious struggle, half upon and half above the surface, went on between these two so evenly matched opponents, while the tormented water boiled and foamed, and showers of bright spray leaped into the air. But the osprey was fighting with brains as well as with wings and talons. He was slowly but surely urging his adversary over toward that white beach below the hogback, where, in the shallows, he would have him at his mercy, and be able to end the duel with a stroke or two of his rending beak. If his strength could hold out till he gained the beach he would be sure of victory. But the strain, as unusual as it was tremendous, was already beginning to tell upon him, and he was yet some way from shore.

His mate, in the meantime, had been watching everything from her high perch on the edge of the nest. At sight of the robber eagle's attack

and his theft of the chub her crest feathers had lifted angrily, but she had made no vain move to interfere. She knew that such an episode was all in the day's fishing, and might be counted a cheap way of purchasing immunity for the time. When her gallant partner first lifted the big lake trout into the air her bright eyes flamed with fierce approval. But when she saw that he was in difficulties her whole expression changed. Her eyes narrowed and she leaned forward intently with half-raised wings. A moment more and she was darting with swift, short wing beats to his help.

By the time she arrived the desperate combatants were nearing the shore, though the big fish was still resisting with undiminished vigor, while his captor, though undaunted, was beginning to show signs of distress. With excited cries of *Pip-pip, pip-pip*, she hovered close above her mate, seeking to strike her eager talons into his opponent's head. But his threshing wings impeded her and it was some moments before she could accomplish it without hampering his struggles. At last she saw her opportunity, and with a lightning pounce fixed her talons upon the fish's head. They bit deep, and through and through. On the instant his struggles grew feeble, then died away. The exhausted male let go his hold and

rose a few yards into the air on heavy wings; while his victorious mate flapped onward to the beach half carrying her prey, half dragging it through the water. With a mighty effort she threw it clear up on the silver sand. Then she dropped it and alighted beside it, with one foot firmly clutching it in sign of victory. Her mate promptly landed beside her; whereupon she withdrew her grip in acknowledgment that the kill was truly his.

After a few minutes' rest, during which the male bird shook and preened his ruffled plumage into order, the pair fell to at their feast, tearing off great fragments of their prey and devouring them hastily lest the eagle should return, or the eagle's yet more savage mate, and snatch the booty from them. Their object was to reduce it to a size that could be carried home conveniently to the nest. In this they were making swift progress, when the banquet was interrupted. A long-limbed woodsman in grey homespun, with a grizzled beard and twinkling, grey-blue eyes, and a rifle over his shoulder, came suddenly into close view around a bend of the shore.

The two ospreys left their feast and flapped up into the top of a near-by pine tree. They knew the man, and knew him unoffending as far as they were concerned. He had been a near neighbor

ever since their arrival from the south that spring, for his rough shack, roofed with sheets of whitish yellow birch bark, stood in full view of their nest and hardly two hundred paces from it. Furthermore, they were well accustomed to the sight of him in his canoe on the lake, where he was scarcely less assiduous a fisherman than themselves. But they were shy of him, nevertheless, and would not let him watch them at their feeding. They preferred to watch him instead, unafraid and quite unresentful but mildly curious, as he strolled up to the mangled body of the fish and turned it over with the toe of his moccasined foot.

"Jee-hoshaphat!" he muttered admiringly, "Who'd ever a' thought them there fish hawks could a' handled a 'togue' ez big ez that! Some birds!"

He waved a lean and hairy brown hand approvingly at the two ospreys in the pine top, and then moved on with his loose-jointed stride up through the trees toward his shack. The birds sat watching him impassively, unwilling to resume their feast till he should be out of sight. And the big fish lay glittering in the sun, a startlingly conspicuous object on the empty beach.

But other eyes meanwhile—shrewd, savage, greedy eyes—had marked and coveted the allur-

ing prize. The moment the woodsman disappeared around the nearest clump of firs an immense black bear burst out through the underbrush and came slouching down the beach toward the dead fish. He did not hurry, for who among the wild kindred would be so bold as to interfere with him, the monarch of the wild?

He was within five or six feet of the prey. Then, there was a sudden rush of wind above his head—harsh, rigid wings brushed confusingly across his face—and the torn body of the fish, snatched from under his very nose, was swept into the air. With a squeal of disappointed fury he made a lunge for it; but it was too late. The female osprey, fresher than her mate, had again intervened in time to save the prize, and lifted it beyond his reach.

Now under ordinary circumstances the bear had no grudge against the ospreys. But this was an insult not to be borne. The fish had been left upon the beach, and he regarded it as his. To be robbed of his prey was the most intolerable of affronts; and there is no beast more tenacious than the bear in avenging any wrong to his personal dignity.

The osprey, weighed down by her heavy burden, flew low and slowly toward the nest. Her mate flew just above her, encouraging her with

soft cries of *Pip-pip-pip, pip-pip-pip, pip-pip-pip*; while the bear galloped lumberingly beneath, his heart swelling with vindictive wrath. Hasten as he would, however, he soon lost sight of them; but he knew very well where the nest was, having seen it many times in his prowlings, so he kept on, chewing his plans for vengeance. He would teach the presumptuous birds that his overlordship of the forest was not lightly to be flouted.

After four or five minutes of clambering over a tangle of rocks and windfalls he arrived at the foot of the naked pine trunk which bore the huge nest in its crotch, nearly fifty feet above the ground. He paused for a moment to glare up at it with wicked eyes. The two ospreys, apparently heedless of his presence and its dreadful menace, were busily tearing fragments of the fish into fine shreds and feeding their hungry nestlings. *His* fish the bear told himself, raging at their insolent self-confidence. He would claw the nest to pieces from beneath, and devour both the nestlings themselves and the prey which had been snatched from him. He reared himself against the trunk and began to climb, laboriously, because the trunk was too huge for a good grip, and with a loud rattling of claws upon the dry, resonant wood.

At that first ominous sound the ospreys took alarm. Peering both together over the edge of the nest they realized at once the appalling peril, a peril beyond anything they had ever dreamed of. With sharp cries of rage and despair they swooped downward and dashed madly upon their monstrous foe. First one and then the other, and sometimes both together, they struck him, buffetting him about the face with their wings, stabbing at him in a frenzy with beak and talons. He could not strike back at them; but, on the other hand, they could make little impression upon his tough hide under its dense mat of fur. The utmost they could do was to hamper and delay his progress a little. He shut his eyes and climbed on doggedly, intent upon his vengeance.

The woodsman, approaching his shack, was struck by that chorus of shrill cries, with a note in them which he had never heard before. From where he stood he could see the nest, but not the trunk below it. "Somethin' wrong there!" he muttered, and hurried forward to get a better view. Pushing through a curtain of fir trees he saw the huge, black form of the bear, now half-way up the trunk, and the devoted ospreys fighting madly but in vain to drive him back. His eyes twinkled with appreciation, and for half a minute or so he stood watching, while that shaggy

shape of doom crept slowly upward. "Some birds, sure, them fish hawks," he muttered finally; and raised his rifle.

As the flat crash of the heavy Winchester .38 startled the forest the bear gave a grunting squawl, hung clawing for a moment, slithered downward a few feet, then fell clear out from the trunk and dropped with a thud upon the rock below. The frantic birds darted down after him, heedless of the sound of the rifle, and struck at him again and again. But in a moment or two they perceived that he was no longer anything more than a harmless mass of dead flesh and fur. Alighting beside him they examined him curiously, as if wondering how they had done it. Then, filled with exultation over their victory, they both flew back to the nest and went on feeding their young.

THE CITADEL IN THE GRASS

IN a sunny fence corner at the foot of the pasture, partly overhung by a pink-blossomed bush of wild rose and palisaded by a thin fringe of slender, pallid grass stems, lay the ants' nest. In outward appearance it was a shallow, flattened, tawny-colored mound, this citadel in the grass, about a foot and a half across and eight or ten inches high, its whole surface covered with particles of dry earth mixed with and lightened by bitten fragments of dead grass and spruce needles, and pitted irregularly with round black holes from an eighth to a quarter of an inch in diameter. These were the easily guarded gateways to the tunnels leading to the dark and mysterious interior of the citadel. For some feet all around the base of the mound the grass roots were threaded by faint trails, made by the ants in bringing home supplies and booty to the nest.

On this bland blue morning of early summer, when the unclouded sunshine was not too hot to be gracious and stimulating, the tawny dome of the citadel was alive with workers. They were

a sturdy species of ant, this tribe, somewhere about a half inch in length, with powerful mandibles and broad heads, the head and thorax of a rusty-red color and the abdomen blackish brown. Some were busy opening up the tunnel entrances, which had been closed during the night, and letting fresh air into the interior. They carefully removed the pellets of dry earth and bits of dead grass which had formed the stoppers, and seemed to give themselves much unnecessary work by carrying their burdens about in their jaws before making up their minds just where to lay them down. Others ran around aimlessly, as if they had lost something and had no idea of where to look for it. Possibly these had been on night duty in the deep underground nurseries, and were merely taking the air before getting back to their helpless charges. But the majority acted quite differently. On emerging to the light they would pause and wave their antennæ for a few seconds, as if signaling, and would then hurry straight ahead, with an air of set purpose, down the steep of the citadel and out through a forest of grass stems. They were the foragers and hunters, seeking their booty or their prey in the weedy wilderness along the fence.

In a few minutes certain of these began to straggle back, early successful in their quest and

carrying their prizes; perhaps a small dead fly, or a tiny grub still squirming inconvenient protest against his fate, or the head or leg or wing of some victim so bulky as only to be dealt with piecemeal; while here and there some triumphant forager would come struggling homeward inch by slow inch, dragging a prize many times bigger and heavier than herself—perhaps a fat spider or a sprawling little dead grasshopper—which she had feared to dissect for transport lest the pieces should be stolen in her absence. Working her way backwards and tugging the prize along by the head or leg or wing, held up for minutes at a time by the obstacle of a root or a pebble, she would drag and pull and worry like a terrier on a rope, till at last the precious burden was brought to the foot of the mound, where it could safely be cut up at leisure.

Among these eager foragers was one whom, as typical of her species, we may distinguish by the name *Formica*. A strenuous and experienced worker in the prime of her powers, on leaving the nest she had speedily struck off aside from the trails of her fellows, desirous of fresh hunting grounds in the miniature jungle of grass and weeds. Having come across a head of red-clover bloom trodden down and crushed by the pasturing cattle, she was now filling herself greedily

with honey from the bottom of the broken flower tubes. This red-clover honey was a delicacy which, though she might sniff its perfume longingly, she could never hope to taste except by lucky accident; for at the base of those deep, narrow-tubed blossoms it was beyond the reach of all despoilers but the long-tongued bumblebees. Now, in the golden warmth, hummed over by tiny, envious flies who were careful not to come within reach of her mandibles, she was lapping up the nectar and enjoying herself as if she had not a duty or responsibility in the world.

But Formica, though much more independent, more conscious of her individual rights than, for instance, that communistic automaton, the bee, was a most responsible little personage, aware of all her duties to the state. When she had absorbed all the clover honey she could hold she climbed down from the ruined blossom and glanced about, waving her antennæ, in the hope of finding something worth taking home to the state larder. At this moment there was a rustling among the grass stems, and a tiny, grayish-brown shrewmouse, looking to Formica as huge as an elephant, came scurrying by with a shining bluebottle fly gripped in his jaws. As he crossed the open space where the clover was trodden down there came a fierce rush of wind that nearly swept Formica from her

feet; and a sparrow hawk, who had been watching from her perch on the nearest fence stake, swooped down upon the luckless shrew and bore him off. As he opened his jaws in a squeak of anguish the bluebottle dropped from them and fell beside Formica.

Though almost overwhelmed by that gust from the sparrow hawk's wings, Formica pounced instantly upon the rich and unexpected prize. The bluebottle was not quite dead. It was on its back and too severely wounded to turn over, but it could still kick and move its wings with an embarrassing degree of vigor. The great, many-faceted eyes of the crippled insect glared upon its assailant with shifting, many-colored flame; but Formica was herself well equipped in the way of eyes and refused to be impressed. Forcing herself in between the waving legs, she sank her mandibles deep into the victim's thorax; and then, arching her body to bring the tip of her abdomen well beneath, like the attitude of a wasp in stinging, she injected into the wound a dose of formic acid from the poison glands which served her in place of a sting. Whether by good luck or intuitive knowledge, she had struck upon a great nerve center for her injection, and the dose worked swiftly. The twitching wings and waving legs grew still. The unfortunate fly was not

yet dead, for it could still move its head, and the opalescent fires still flamed and fleeted in its great eyes. But as long as it could not struggle Formica was satisfied, and she set herself valiantly to the task of dragging her booty home.

The distance from the crushed clover bloom to the citadel in the grass was only about fifteen feet, but it took Formica a full hour of furious effort to accomplish it. For a good half the distance the jungle was dense and trackless; and the captive, though utterly unresisting, had a way of getting its wings tangled up with the grass roots or of wedging itself between a couple of stiff stems that would drive Formica frantic with exasperation. Under these circumstances she would always waste many minutes and a vast amount of energy in striving to master the obstacle by main force before she could bring herself to take a new grip and try an easier path.

When at last she had come to the frequented trail and was continually meeting her friends, she never demanded help and seldom received any offer of it; and this was just as well, seeing that whenever a passer-by paused to lend a hand—or a mandible—the result was only confusion. The newcomer was pretty sure to go about the job in a casual, absent-minded fashion, and as often as not to pull in quite the wrong direction,

till Formica, in a rage, would rush at her and unceremoniously hustle her away.

Arrived at last safely at the citadel with her splendid trophy, Formica seemed to consider her labors for the moment at an end. That gleaming blue bulk was much too heavy for her to drag it up the slope of the dome. She handed it over, with a hasty waving of antennæ, to a knot of her comrades, and wandered up the steep slope with the air of one who has earned a bit of leisure but does not quite know what to do with it. She made a tour of the top of the mound, occasionally wandering into one of the entrances, but always coming out again in a few seconds. And every now and then she would stop to touch antennæ with an acquaintance. Presently she came face to face with a disheveled friend who was evidently just home from a rough-and-tumble fight of some sort. Weary, wounded, and covered with dirt, the newcomer seemed to convey some sorry tale to Formica, who straightway fell to stroking and cleansing her with every mark of sympathy.

The ant hill, as we have seen at the beginning of this narrative, was partly overhung by the branches of a wild rosebush which grew against the fence. The rosebush at this season was in full bloom, and the pale-pink, golden-centered

blossoms were thronged with pollen hunters and hummed about with innumerable wings. Sober brown bees dusted over with the lemon-colored rose pollen, darting iridescent flies, irresponsible yellow butterflies and black-and-yellow wasps, swift and fiercely intent on their hunting—all found the glowing rosebush their focus of interest or of fate.

A black-and-white dog from the farmhouse on the hillside above the pasture came trotting up to the fence sniffing for rabbit tracks, and as he passed the rosebush one of the busy wasps buzzed close at his ear. Thoughtlessly—mistaking it, in his absorption, for a big fly—he snapped at it and caught it. With a yelp of surprise he spat it out again violently and began to paw at his smarting muzzle. Finding this quite ineffective to allay the fiery torment in his tongue, he raced off, whimpering, with his tail between his legs, to plunge his mouth into the soothing chill of the horse trough in the farmyard.

The wasp, meanwhile, her wings disabled and daubed with saliva, but still very much alive and furiously angry, had fallen upon the very center of the teeming ant hill, and almost, so to speak, under Formica's nose. Formica, with a courage and a self-sacrifice beyond all praise, instantly seized the dreadful monster by a wing. Her

career would have come to an end there and then, but that, in the same lightning fraction of a second, three other ants, equally brave and reckless of destruction, flung themselves into the struggle. The wasp had fallen on her back. Now, curving her muscular black-and-yellow body nearly double, she brought into play her long, terrible sting—a bitter red flame which flickered in and out, this way and that, like a lightning flash, and whose least touch meant death. Two of her small assailants dropped instantly, stiffened out as if struck by a thunderbolt; but in the next moment she was literally covered. Fighting not only with that fatal sting but also with her feet, like a boxer, and with her powerful jaws, like a terrier, she was presently surrounded by a ring of dead or crippled foes; but for every one that fell there were a dozen more eager to rush in, till she was almost buried from view.

Formica, by worrying at her like a bulldog, having succeeded in biting off the wing which she had first seized, now drew away for a moment to consider. An experienced and resourceful fighter, she liked to spend herself to the best advantage. Suddenly she darted in and secured a grip upon the slender but powerful tubelike joint which connected the wasp's abdomen with her thorax. Here, though almost crushed by her victim's

frantic lashings, she bit and sawed with her tireless mandibles till she succeeded in dividing the great trunk nerve. Instantly the abdomen lost its rigid curve, ceased its lashing, and straightened out. Formica continued her operation, however, till the whole tube was severed; and the disjointed abdomen rolled aside, its sting still flickering in and out, but no longer directed, and dangerous only to those who were careless enough to get in its way.

The battle being now over, certain of the ants set themselves to dragging the spoils down into the nest by one of the larger tunnels, while others began to clear up the field, carrying the bodies of the slain away from the citadel and dropping them among the grass roots. Yet others fell to caring for the wounded, carrying them into the cool, dark passages and cleansing them and tenderly licking their wounds. But Formica, feeling that she had done enough for the moment, left all these duties to the others and betook herself into the interior of the citadel in search of rest and refreshment.

About an inch below the surface the narrow passage by which she had entered made a sharp turn, almost doubling upon itself; and immediately she was in what would have seemed to our human eyes thick darkness. But to her, with

her highly complex and many-faceted organs of vision, it was only a cool gloom, very soothing to her sensitive nerves after the glare of the outside world. Still descending—and passing on the way, with a touch of the antennæ, many acquaintances and comrades—she came to the doorway of a wide but low-roofed chamber, with a watchful guard at the entrance. Here were about a hundred of the whitish so-called ant eggs—in reality pupæ, almost mature, in their frail cocoons—all ranged carefully in the center of the chamber and with a couple of guardians walking about among them. They had been brought up from the safe depths of the citadel to absorb the tempered but vitalizing warmth in this apartment near the surface, and were being watched with special solicitude because they were very near the time for their emergence as full-grown ants.

Formica merely glanced in upon them, exchanging greetings with the guards, and continued her way down to the cooler and moister depths. Here she turned into another spacious chamber, its low ceiling supported by several irregular columns of compacted earth. Here and there about the center of the chamber were little clusters of the ant grubs, or larvæ, sorted carefully according to their age and size, each cluster attended by several diligent nurses who were kept

busy feeding the hungry but legless and quite helpless young. To all these Formica paid no attention whatever. One of the older, more highly experienced members of the community, she had long ago graduated from the simple routine duties of the nurseries. These fell, for the most part, upon the very young ants, or upon a few smaller, blackish ants of another race which the community kept as slaves.

Around the walls of the chamber were a number of little, chubby, squat-built insects, each placidly pasturing on the tips of grass roots which had penetrated the foundations of the citadel. It was these tiny creatures—a species of aphid, or plant louse, carefully kept and tended by the ants as we keep our herds of cows—that Formica was now seeking in her desire for refreshment. Going up to one of them, she began to stroke and caress it coaxingly with her antennæ, till presently the little creature, in response, exuded a sticky drop of honeydew, which Formica lapped up greedily. From one to another she passed, getting always a sweet contribution, except from such as had already been milked, until her appetite was satisfied. Then she made a hasty inspection of the rest of the flock, as if to assure herself that all were duly supplied with provender. This done, she ran across to one of the slaves and tapped her

gently with her antennæ; whereupon the latter, dutifully and with the utmost good will, set herself to the task of making her mistress' toilet, licking and polishing her from head to foot, and ending up by feeding her with a drop of honey just as she would have fed one of the helpless larvæ.

Thoroughly refreshed, Formica now passed gayly through several galleries and presently entered the great central chamber of the citadel—an apartment some five or six inches across, nearly circular, and supported by half a dozen stout pillars. This chamber was thronged. It was the life center of the citadel. Every here and there were clusters of eggs, or groups of larvæ and pupæ, surrounded by their guards. Active little pallid-colored wood lice, the scavengers of the nest, scurried busily hither and thither, as completely ignored as the street cleaners are in the thoroughfares of a busy human city.

At the very center of the chamber was the great queen mother of the tribe, a huge ant more than double the size of any of her subjects. She was surrounded by a dense crowd of attendants, all with their heads turned toward her as if in respectful homage, waiting to feed her or cleanse her or carry away her eggs whenever she saw fit to lay them, or to perform eagerly any service

which she might require. Three or four idle males, gentlemen of leisure, much smaller and slenderer than the queen, strolled about among the busy throng, occasionally caressing a complaisant worker or a slave, and generally receiving a taste of honey in return.

Formica went straight up to the crowd surrounding the queen mother and stood there for perhaps a half minute, waving her antennæ and paying her respects. It would seem, however, that some sort of a council was being held at the moment, presumably under the guidance of the queen, and that decisions of importance to the tribe were being reached. For all at once there was a great stir and shifting, and a number of the ants, hurriedly extricating themselves from the press, formed themselves in an orderly file and hastened from the chamber. Among the foremost of these, already recovered and prepared for adventure in spite of her strenuous morning, was Formica.

As it started from the state chamber the detachment was a small one, of not more than eighty or a hundred; but as it went it was swelled by fresh adherents flocking out from every gallery, for word had gone all through the citadel that a slave-raiding expedition was afoot. Filing forth upon the surface of the dome, the detach-

ment was joined by squads from other tunnel exits; and when it formed up into a compact column and marched off down the side of the nest it was perhaps from five to six hundred strong.

It was obvious that this expedition had been fully prepared for in advance and all necessary scouting carried out. Prudent forethought and a fine directing intelligence, as distinguished from mere instinct, or what the scientists call reflex action, were most unmistakably stamped upon it. The little army knew where it was going and why it was going. The line of march had been selected, and the leaders knew the route; and there was no hesitation or delay. In spite of obstacles, for there was no clear trail, the column kept its array in most disciplined fashion, and there were no stragglers.

Fully a hundred feet away from the citadel, in the grass, on the other side of the fence, and just upon the open fringe of the forest, stood another ant hill, upreared from the short turf between the roots of an old weather-bleached stump. This nest was occupied by a strong tribe of blackish-brown ants, similar to the slaves in Formica's community. Though slightly smaller than Formica, they were a sturdy, industrious, intelligent race, making the best of slaves; and

Formica's people had decided that they must have a fresh supply of them. Hence this warlike and altogether unprovoked invasion. Whatever the virtues to be observed in the world of the ant folk, a regard for the rights of strangers is not among them. The ants' morality begins and ends with the interests of their own community.

The approach of the enemy was observed by the dark ants while the hostile column was yet several feet away, or possibly the alarm had been given by terrified scouts. However that may be, a swarm of defenders gathered swiftly on the summit of the threatened nest. They rushed down the slope and hurled themselves desperately upon the invaders. Their courage and devotion were beyond reproach; but in strength, in the effectiveness of their weapons, and in military skill they were no match for Formica and her fellows. After five minutes or less of furious *mêlée* they were routed and fled back into the depths of their nest, leaving half their number dead or mortally stricken on the field, while the casualties among the invading ranks were hardly worth mentioning.

The battle once decided, the victors were not vindictive. They had come not to slaughter needlessly but to procure slaves. For this purpose adult captives were of no use to them. They wanted

the larvæ and pupæ of the vanquished, whom they could rear in captivity and who—knowing no other state and not regarding their captors as foes—would be contented and unaware of their bondage. At the doorway to each tunnel guards were placed, while strong parties dashed down through all the galleries. At the narrow entrances to the nurseries and to the great central chamber there were brief but sharp struggles with the guards, who all died on the spot rather than betray their trusts.

But, entrance once gained, there was practically no more fighting, as the thoroughly beaten black army had disappeared into the underground passages beneath the stump.

The actions of the invaders within the nest were deliberate, disciplined, and swift. To the big black queen, whom they regarded less as an enemy than as a potential mother of a future supply of slaves, they paid no heed whatever. The scattered piles of eggs, too, they ignored, though they would have been glad to devour such succulent fare had there been time. But for some reason the order had gone forth that there was to be no delay and no divergence from the one supreme object of the expedition.

In the main chamber and the several subsidiary nurseries there were almost enough pupæ to bur-

den the whole army of the invaders. The remainder had to content themselves with larvæ, who, being able to wriggle, were less convenient to carry, especially as they had to be gripped without wounding their delicate skins. As soon as each marauder had secured her prize she hastened with it to the surface of the nest. There the column again formed up, but this time rather loosely and irregularly, as there was no longer any fear of attack; and the triumphant red warriors, each bearing aloft in her mandibles, very tenderly and without apparent effort, a captive as big and heavy as herself, were soon streaming back homeward in long procession through the grass roots.

This expedition, however, hitherto so triumphantly successful, was not destined to reach home without a measure of ill luck to dull the brightness of its triumph. A sharp-eyed, sharp-nosed animal, about the size of a cat, of a glossy black color, with a white stripe down each side of its back and waving a long, fluffy, handsome tail, chanced to be nosing along the fence in search of mice, beetles, or grasshoppers. His sharp eyes detected the richly laden procession of the ants just as the head of the column reached the fence.

The skunk was not particularly partial to full-grown ants as an article of diet, because the

formic acid in their poison sacks was rather pungent for his taste. But their young, whether in the form of larvæ or of pupæ, he regarded as a delicacy.

Standing astride the procession, he began hastily licking up as many as he could, munching and gulping down captives and captors together with huge satisfaction. Formica, with her burden, just evaded this horrid fate. Alert and observant as always, she slipped under the edge of a pebble as the long red tongue of the skunk was descending upon her. But the hot breath of the devouring monster filled her with wholesome fear. Still clinging to her precious burden, she crept aside from the crippled column, taking a path of her own, and rejoined it only under the shelter of the fence.

When the remnants of the rear guard had escaped him the skunk climbed through the fence, hoping to find the procession again on the other side. In this, however, though he searched diligently, he was disappointed, for the line of march lay for several yards along beneath the bottom rail before emerging again into the open. The skunk, stumbling upon a mouse nest in the grass, forgot all about the ants. And the expedition, diminished by fully a third of its number, made its way back to the citadel without further misad-

venture, the survivors still clinging doggedly to their booty.

As Formica was one of the wisest, most efficient and most courageous citizens of the community, she was usually hunting and foraging farther afield than most of her comrades.

Sometimes, she being inveterately hostile to all other ants except those of her own tribe, she got into savage duels, from which she always came off victorious, though frequently not without scars. Once in a while, moreover, she was rash enough to tackle a quarry too powerful and pugnacious for her—a nimble hunting spider or a savage little bronze scavenger beetle with jaws as destructive as her own. When she made a mistake of this sort she was driven to using the pungent venom at the tip of her abdomen in order to confuse the foe and enable her to escape.

Being thus endowed beyond her fellows with wisdom and quick perception to direct her courage, Formica would probably have lived to follow the fortunes of her tribe through several eventful summers had it not been for her restless and intrepid curiosity. She was of the stuff of which explorers are made. One day, adventuring through a patch of blueberry scrub many yards upon the forest side of the fence, she came

upon a strange plant, quite unlike any she had ever seen before. There was no main stalk; but a cluster of stout stems, arising from the crown of the root, bore each one leaf, some three or four inches in length, shaped like a broad-lipped water jug. The leaves were of a lucent, tender green, veined and striped with vivid crimson, and gave forth a subtle odor, perceptible to none but the most delicate senses, which seemed to suggest honeydew. What reasonable ant could resist the lure of honeydew? *Formica* could not.

But if she had known that this was the terrible carnivorous pitcher plant, the relentless devourer of insects, she would have fled in horror.

Instead of fleeing, however, she eagerly ran up the nearest stem, and up the cool, translucent, red-veined globe of the lower leaf, delighted to find that the firm hairs which covered stem and leaf alike all pointed upwards instead of downwards, and so offered no obstacle to her progress. Gaining the rim of the pitcher, she peered inside, looking for the source of that honeydew fragrance. Beneath her she saw a fairylike interior, filled with cool green light, and about half full of water. In the water, to be sure, there floated the drowned bodies of a wasp, a spider, and several small flies. But this fact conveyed no warning to

Formica. Rather it suggested to her the hope of easy prey after she should have found the honey-dew which she was seeking.

The broad lip of the pitcher offered her an easy path; and she was gratified to find that those fine hairs, which on the outside all slanted upwards, were now, most conveniently, all slanting downwards. The slope grew steeper and steeper, till presently, when she saw the water just beneath, she found the hairs so slippery that she had great difficulty in keeping her foothold. At this point she became apprehensive. Deciding to seek a safer path, she turned to retrace her steps. But now those treacherous hairs, which had so sweetly aided her progress, turned hostile. They became an array of sharp needle points, leveled in her face. She tried to thrust them aside, to penetrate them; but in vain. In a sudden panic she forced herself against them desperately. For an instant they yielded; and then, with savage recoil, they hurled her, kicking and sprawling, into the watery abyss.

A few hours later a young girl, a summer visitor at the farmhouse on the hillside, chanced to be wandering along the edge of the woods, looking for wild flowers. Overjoyed to find so fine a specimen of the *Sarracenia*, she dug it up care-

fully by the roots to take it home. But first, of course, she emptied the lovely, pale-green, ruby-veined pitchers, pouring forth upon the moss, among other victims, the bodies of a wasp, a spider, several small flies—and Formica.

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