FOREST FRIENDS

BY ROYAL DIXON

FOREST FRIENDS

BY ROYAL DIXON

AUTHOR OF "THE HUMAN SIDE OF PLANTS"

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY ROBERT SHEPARD McCOURT

CONTENTS

FOREST FRIENDS

I

MRS. ELEPHANT'S MOONLIGHT DANCE

It was a beautiful evening in the forest, and under the moonlight there was a great gathering of friends. Mr. and Mrs. Elephant, and the Kangaroos, the Foxes, and the handsome Leopards, even sprightly little Miss Lynx, and a number of the aristocratic jungle Deer were seated, all in a great circle, around the pleasant pool which shone in the moonlight, and displayed the loveliest of lilies afloat upon its surface.

"Then, it is decided," said the venerable Mr. Tapir. "We are, my friends, going to contest for a dancing prize. It is felt that such an entertainment will relieve the rather tedious monotony of our evenings in this lovely spot.

"One week from to-night there will be the finest party we have ever given. No expense is to be spared. Music will be supplied by the celebrated company of Baboons and Macaws; and the ladies will adjourn, forthwith, as a committee on refreshments."

Mr. Tapir went on at great length, for all the animals loved to hear him talk, and he loved to hear himself. He had been to London. He knew how things ought to be done. So he said it all over several times, but he always ended with, "and the ladies will adjourn forthwith," which beautiful words struck the animals as the finest they had ever heard.

"What oratory! Such a flow of London speech!" they whispered. And the lovely Miss Giraffe broke down and cried. Such is the power of eloquence.

Great jealousies ensued, however, for Mrs. Kangaroo let it be known straightway that the prize was hers for sure. No one could dance as she could. She had only to straighten her waist, lift her chin, and give a leap. It was her specialty.

"When it comes to grace and speed," Mrs. Leopard remarked, "there is something in my motion which is utterly lacking to the rest of you."

Now, Mrs. Elephant kept quiet. She knew what they thought of her. She was always referred to as "that good, solid, easy-going person" unless her friends were spiteful, when they did not hesitate to call her "that ungainly old cow of an elephant." She knew their ways and spite.

"But I shall get that prize," she grunted, as she trudged to her handsome, roomy home under the chocolate trees. Nor did she feel less determined in the cool bright morning, when, as a rule, the resolutions of the night before grow pale. Immediately she put her housekeeping into the hands of her sister-in-law, who was young and willing.

"I have much to do," she said.

Then she set out to find her friends, the bull-frogs. They would pipe their tunes all day in the shade, and she would practise her steps.

It was hard at first, but soon she devised a wonderful dance. Up and down and around she went all day, and most all night. But she kept her doings a secret; and it was well she did, for all the animals would only have laughed at her had they seen her flopping around on the edge of the bull-frogs' pond.

The night of the dance came. The elegance of the costumes and the abundance of the refreshments were a delight.

It was a little game of sly Mrs. Fox's to urge everybody to eat as much as possible, and this she would do with the sweetest smile.

"Oh, do eat another bunch of bananas," she would say to Mrs. Elephant; for she wanted everybody to overeat except herself. Then they could not dance, she knew, and she would get the prize if she showed only her wonderful walking steps.

But the animals guessed her scheme. They only thanked her, and stroked their dresses or went off into corners to try their steps.

It was a brave show, and after a few had risen to the floor and danced their steps, favor was plainly directed to the lithe and lovely Mrs. Leopard.

"Just wait for Mrs. Kangaroo," was whispered from one to another. "She's wonderful, you know."

Then Mrs. Kangaroo came forth. Yes, it was marvelous what she could accomplish. First she strutted high and proud, then she bounded up and down, and finally made a great leap; but it was a leap before she looked, for what did she do but jump right into the lily pond, *ker-splash*!

Great embarrassment seized the company, and the less polite, such as the monkeys, simply yelled in derision.

"Mrs. Elephant! Mrs. Elephant!" was now the cry.

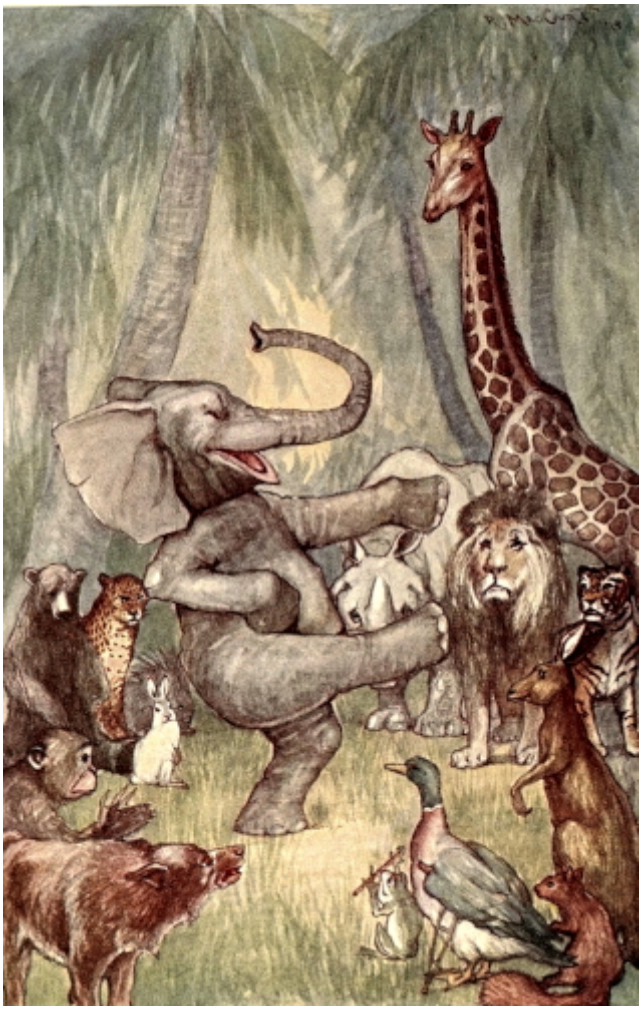
"Yes, yes, Mrs. Elephant!" came from all sides; for the animals, already amused by Mrs. Kangaroo's unfortunate conclusion, were ready to be boisterous. They could roar at Mrs. Elephant if they wanted to; she was so thick-skinned, as they thought, that you could never hurt her feelings anyway.

But Mrs. Elephant was very modest, and a trifle grand. Besides, she was all polished and trimmed in a manner most affecting. All that afternoon her sister-in-law had stood in the water with her, smoothing down her dress and rubbing her head; and two simple palm leaves behind her ears, with a little rope of moon-flowers garlanded over her placid forehead gave her a regal aspect which the animals were surprised and delighted to note.

"How thin she's grown! How do you suppose she did it?" they gasped.

Then Mrs. Elephant danced.

At her special request, Mr. Frog played for her, not too fast, on his elegant flute. But scarcely had she taken her first two steps when the orchestra struck up that grand old march, *Tigers Bold and Monkeys Gay*, which, as you know, would set anybody a-marching even if they had nowhere to go.



"AT HER SPECIAL REQUEST, MR. FROG PLAYED FOR HER, NOT TOO FAST, ON HIS ELEGANT FLUTE"

Waving her splendid arms to the sky, and making the most wonderful bows, flapping her ears and curling and pointing her trunk, all to the tune of the music, she was, as the eloquent Mrs. Tapir was moved to say, "as majestic as the night."

At her signal, when she knew she had captivated the audience, the music changed, and she came tripping toward them with open arms and the pinkest, biggest smile the world has ever seen. She begged them all to strike up the chorus; and suddenly, without knowing what they were about (for such is the way with an audience, once the hard-worked artist has enraptured his fellow-beings), they were all shouting the stirring words:

I'm the jungle dandy, O,
You're the zebra's daughter,
Come an' kiss me, handy, O,
Nuts and orange water.

Of course she took the prize. And all she would say, or all, indeed, that can be got out of her to this day, about it is:

"Practise, my dears, practise. No, I have never done it since, nor would I think of trying. I only wished to feel in my old age that I had accomplished something. The race, as wise men have said, is not to the swift. Determination and careful, unremitting practise: that's what is wanted."

II

OLD LADY WILDCAT'S FEAST

Sister Alligator and Miss Mud-Turtle had always been exceedingly good friends, and always helped each other out of trouble. One day Miss Mud-Turtle flopped over to Sister Alligator in great excitement.

"Look here, my friend, I'm going to have a picnic over on the other side of your big pond, and I want you to help me!" she said.

"Well, I'm right here to do what I can for you. Just tell me of what service I may be," replied Sister Alligator, as she lazily opened her sleepy eyes.

"You are a wonderfully good neighbor," declared Miss Mud-Turtle, "and I was just wondering if you would mind carrying all my young friends, the swamp

turtles, across the pond on your big back? It would take you only a minute to swim us across, and if we tried to go around the pond, I am afraid Old Lady Wildcat might catch us on the way. You know she is always trying to get the best of us mud-turtles."

Sister Alligator's sleepy eyes opened wider.

"I have the very idea!" she exclaimed. "Just send Old Lady Wildcat an invitation to come to the picnic. Then I'll swim out into the pond and dive under and drown her, for all of you mud-turtles can swim."

Miss Mud-Turtle laughed so hard she had to wipe the tears from her eyes.

"Sister Alligator, your sleepy old head is not on your body for nothing! You surely have some brains! That is the very idea for disposing of Old Lady Wildcat! I'll make a carpet out of her soft hide for my young friends to play on before the sun goes down."

So Miss Mud-Turtle sent an invitation to Old Lady Wildcat, all written on a grape leaf in grand style. It told of the big dinner they were to have, and where it was to be, and that Sister Alligator would carry them all across the pond on her back.

When Old Lady Wildcat got the invitation she mewed to Mr. 'Possum, who had brought it, that she would be there all right, but that they must be very careful when they carried her over the pond, as her rheumatism was bad.

Then, when Mr. 'Possum went to take her message to Miss Mud-Turtle, Old Lady Wildcat laughed so loudly she had to hide her face with her paws for fear Miss Mud-Turtle would hear her. She was just planning how to get the best of Miss Mud-Turtle.

"Whenever I dine with low-down mud-turtles and alligators it is time for me to lose this fine coat of mine. I suppose they forget who I am! Ha! What would all my grandchildren think of their grandmother dining with mud-turtles!"

Then she began laughing again, and her grandchildren, who were sleeping away up in the branches of a big pine-tree, came down to see what had tickled her so.

Old Lady Wildcat was holding her sides and dancing about in glee.

"Oh, children," she laughed, "we're going to have some fun! Old Miss Mud-Turtle is trying to get your grandmother to dine with her across the pond. Get yourselves ready for the big feast, and I'll start over on Sister Alligator's back, while you all go on ahead and eat up the dinner."

"Hooray!" cried the young wildcats. "We'll slip along behind to see how you get started, and then we'll run around the pond and get the dinner before Miss Mud-Turtle and Sister Alligator can come."

So Old Lady Wildcat loped down to the pond, and there were Miss Mud-Turtle and Sister Alligator. All the little mud-turtles climbed on the alligator raft.

"Be very careful, Mrs. Wildcat," Sister Alligator cautioned, "not to wet your feet. You might take cold."

Old Lady Wildcat smiled pleasantly and jumped; and then away swam Sister Alligator.

It was fine riding till they got to about the middle of the pond. Then Sister Alligator stopped.

"I'm very sorry," she said politely, "but I have the cramps, *ooh! ooh!* I must drop to the bottom of the pond."

And down she dived.

But Old Lady Wildcat was too quick for her. She sprang up into the air and

caught a grapevine, climbed up on it, and finally got to land. Then she ran through the woods to where her grandchildren were, and there they had the greatest feast you ever saw.

Finally, just as Sister Alligator and Miss Mud-Turtle with all the children came in sight, Old Lady Wildcat climbed up into a tree and laughed and mewed at them.

And this is what she said:

"Never try to fool folks, Sister Alligator and Miss Mud-Turtle, by plotting against them, for you'll find that you are only fooling yourselves!"

III

MRS. FROG CHANGES HER DRESS

"Also, it is said that ages and ages ago Mrs. Frog and her family dwelt at the bottom of the sea."

"In the ocean?" queried surprised little Kingfisher, who was listening to all that Professor Crane could tell him.

"Yes, in the great salt water," replied Professor Crane, as he shifted his position and stood on the other leg. "Far deeper it was, too, than this pond."

For the learned Crane and little Kingfisher were spending a quiet hour under the shade of the wild orange trees, on the shores of a narrow lagoon. It was a hot, still day, and they were each of them resting after a morning's exertion. Professor Crane was always a talker after dinner, for he knew much and was sociable. He could discourse by the hour if any one would listen; and if nobody was disposed to heed him, he would meditate by himself. But just now he had an alert and inquisitive companion, for if Kingfisher loved two things in the world, one was to hear all the scandal, and the other was to pick feathers out of the back of a crow as he flew.

But apparently Professor Crane had decided to tell no more, for he rested his long bill on his breast, and let his eyes close to a narrow slit. This made him look infinitely wiser than he really was; but like a good many talkative persons he knew the value of waiting to be asked.

Kingfisher eyed his friend earnestly and opened his mouth several times to speak, but shut it again. Finally, however, thinking that Professor Crane had forgotten what he was saying, he piped out:

"How strange!"

And that stirred the venerable scholar to resume his narrative.

"Yes, strange indeed; yet nothing so wonderful after all. Nothing is past belief if you have studied long enough, and I have had signal advantages. It was, you may be pleased to know, a relative of mine, a Doctor Stork, who had perched all his life on the chimney of a great university in Belgium, who told me the truth about the frog. Of course, that is nothing to you, as you are not versed in the universities. But that's not your fault. At any rate, as I was saying, Mrs. Frog lived in the sea and had a palace of coral and pearl. She was very much larger than she is now, and was of a totally different color. She was red as the reddest coral, and her legs were as yellow as gold. Very striking, she was; and her voice was a deep contralto. But she was never content with her home, and couldn't decide whether she wanted to be in or out of the water. That's the way with all inferior characters. Men, you observe, are given to such traits of indecision, never being content where they are.

"Mrs. Frog, for all the pleasures of her coral hall, found it pleasant to sit on the rocks and stare at the land. And the more she stared, the more she wished to go ashore. But she was built for swimming, you know, and, for the life of her, she couldn't get over the sands."

"How on earth did she learn?" put in Kingfisher.

"Necessity and, as I might say, emergency," Professor Crane replied. "One day

she let the waves carry her high and dry on the beach, trusting to another wave to take her back. But the other wave never came. She had come on the very last roller of the high tide. By and by she saw two eyes glaring at her from under the grass. It was probably a snake that was after her. Then, because she had to, she got back to the water. That's the way, you know. What folks have to do they generally accomplish, but until they're frightened into it they generally stand still."

"True, true," Kingfisher agreed. "I was afraid to fly when I was a baby. The last to leave the nest was myself, and finally my father pushed me out. I flew, of course, and never knew how I learned."

"Same with Mrs. Frog," added Professor Crane. "She got there. But the knowledge that she could hop if she wanted to was her undoing. She was never at home when she was wanted, and if Mr. Bullfrog had not watched the eggs in her place, there would have been no more frogs to talk about. At last he grew as neglectful as she was, however, and all the frogs caught the madness. That's when they took to tying their eggs up in packages and leaving them to care for themselves."

"How careless!" Kingfisher thought, as he recalled the hours that his wife spent sitting on hers, and what enemies would get them if he did not perch on guard.

"But the frogs got all the dry land they wanted. The sea turned itself into one great wave and spilled all over the mountains, you know. Yes, that was the time the moon changed from a golden dish to a silver platter. Some say it was from a pumpkin to a green cheese. But the weight of authority, the preponderance of learning is on the side of the silver platter."

"The preponderance of what?" interrupted Kingfisher. For although he knew what Professor Crane meant, he felt it was a compliment to him to ask for a repetition of these handsome words.

But Professor Crane went right on, which is the proper thing to do.

"And when the water went back where it belonged, it went farther than ever before. Half of the earth was high and dry that formerly had been under water. And Mrs. Frog was on that half."

"How terrible!" his listener exclaimed. "And how uncomfortable she must have been!"

"I should say she was!" Professor Crane agreed. "It was hotter, too, than fire. In fact she was destined to spend a long time regretting her previous state, while she sweltered, high and dry.

"The desert, you know, is the home of competition."

Professor Crane waited for this observation to sink in, for he felt that it was one of the best he had ever made.

"I mean that it is the worst place to live because everybody else wants you to die. That's what competition is, my friend Kingfisher. And on the sandy desert it is that way.

"There wasn't drinking water enough to go around, and the plants and trees, because they could burrow down and find a few drops, had the best of it. They stored it up, too, inside of themselves, and then, to keep people from breaking in for a drink, they threw out every kind of needle and thorn you can think of.

"But they grew beautiful flowers, and Mrs. Frog said that these reminded her of corals. The cactus flowers were indeed her only consolation, and she would sit under them all day. She didn't dare to hop out on the sands, for the birds were sure to see her and eat her, and so she took to running her tongue out and catching what she could in that way."

"Very convenient, I'm sure," Kingfisher observed. "I wish I could do it myself. It would save me much gadding about."

"Yes, my young friend, it would; but you'd never be patient enough. And Mrs. Frog is just so much patience on a lily pad. It's her whole life.

"She learned patience, you may be sure, on that desert, and her enemies were so many that she feared for her life every time she ventured out from under the cactus blossom. So she only went out at night and was, even then, careful about getting into the moonshine.

"Poor thing; she nearly starved to death, and grew thinner and thinner until her beautiful figure was gone. Then her skin shriveled into creases, and she finally got the leathery look that she has to-day."

"And how did she change her color?" Kingfisher begged to know.

"I don't think I care to tell you," said Professor Crane, with a sudden change in his voice.

This produced great surprise in little Mr. Kingfisher, for he never knew the Professor to withhold anything. Usually he was only too eager to load you with facts. So the small bird kept silence very respectfully, not knowing just what to say.

"You are yourself very saucy, and full of your foolishness," the wise Crane finally observed, "and you are not likely to believe what I tell you. But you can make what you choose of it, and it may do you good to know."

Professor Crane cleared his throat, and wagged his long bill up and down several times, much as a truly bearded professor strokes his chin in delivering the hardest part of his lecture. Then he coughed, for that is effective, too, and changed from his left foot to his right.

"Well," he resumed, "she prayed to the Man in the Moon, as that was the only thing that she knew to do, and begged him to give her a bog.

"'Just a bog, or a piece of a swamp, Mr. Moon,' she kept saying, 'even a few inches of water will do,' and after she had done this to every full moon for a year, and nothing had come of it, she changed her tune."

Kingfisher looked startled. He had personally the greatest respect for the Moon. He had heard much evil about it, however, and was not a little cautious of expressing his views on the subject.

"What did she beg of the Moon after that?" was all he could say.

"She had concluded that the Man in the Moon was unable to give her a bog, even if he wanted to, so she decided to start out and find one. That was the beginning of the end of her troubles. She begged Mr. Moon to show her how to get there, when she came to the point of starting, and she only added, 'Give me a green dress, Mr. Moon, Mr. Moon!' And that's exactly what the Man in the Moon did for her. The frogs made their journey in a body, on the darkest night of the year. But there was just one Moonbeam and it was on duty for this one thing, to show the frogs how to go."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Kingfisher. "Wonderful! But which night of the year was it?" Mr. Kingfisher thought of several things he might do, if he knew which night was the blackest.

"The darkest night of all, my dear friend, is the one when you change the color of your life."

This silenced Mr. Kingfisher; and Professor Crane, perceiving that the words had taken effect, concluded his story.

"That single Moonbeam Angel was very beautiful and powerful. For, just as the frogs came at last to the valleys and found a deep swamp where they could forever be happy, with water or land as they wanted, Moonbeam touched them farewell, and their dresses turned to russet and green."

There were no remarks to be made, for Professor Crane clapped his bill together exactly as though he brought the book of history together with a bang; and he ruffled his wings as if he were about to fly off.

So little Kingfisher, not knowing just how to thank the great bird, said something about going home to supper.

"Just so, just so," clacked Professor Crane.

And the two birds flew up and away, Kingfisher to his nest in the tree-top, and the learned Professor to his books and studies.

IV

MR. MOCKING-BIRD AND HIS PRIZE SONG

A very little squirrel, who was but a month old, was looking out across an orchard from the top of a high tree. It was early morning and the sun had just risen, so that everything was sparkling with dew, and the air was cool and sweet to breathe.

He rubbed his fat cheeks with his paws and sat very straight on his haunches, looking his best and trying to sing, for he wanted very much to say something by way of letting the world know what he thought of it. Feeling as he did, so exceedingly happy, he wished to join the lovely sounds around him, for birds were singing everywhere, and even the river at the foot of the orchard had a song.

So the little squirrel made all the noise he could, which is just what the children do when they have all day to play and the sky is blue and clear above the fields.

But just as he paused for breath he heard his words repeated from another tree. Somebody was mocking him, word for word, and making a very ridiculous thing of his happy little song. His tail bristled with anger, and he ran higher in the tree to get a better view of his neighbor. He would teach another squirrel to mock him!

No living creature could he see, but he heard a bluebird call, and then, as if to insult him, came again his own exultant *chirp, chirp-chee, chee, chee, chee*, and after it a perfect flood of laughter, just like the silly notes of the little owl who sits up all night to laugh at the moon.

Indeed, the squirrel was more puzzled than angry now, and he rushed home to his mother in the highest branches of the walnut-tree, and as fast as he could chatter he told her all about it. She was a very busy woman, Mrs. Squirrel, and she was too much engaged in her sweeping and making of beds to stop and talk with her little son. Moreover, she did not know exactly what to say; so she told him to find the wise old woodchuck under the hill, who was lazy and good-natured and fond of company, and to inquire of him just why the mocking-bird should repeat everything that was said or sung.

So off to the foot of the orchard and the old rail-fence the little squirrel scampered, and, as he expected, the good old woodchuck was lounging by his door-step, blinking at the sunlight and munching clover.

"There's nothing here for you," the woodchuck muttered with his mouth full. "You've come to the wrong house for breakfast."

"No, no," the squirrel hastened to say. "You do not know my errand. I've come to ask you why the mocking-bird is so fond of mocking. Has he no song of his own? And why should he laugh at me?"

Poor little squirrel was so full of anger, as he spoke his mind, that he puffed and bristled mightily, and the fat woodchuck burst out laughing.

"So he jeered at you, did he? Why, that's his business; but you mustn't mind the things he says. He's really a very fine fellow, Mr. Mocking-bird, and everybody loves him."

Then the woodchuck brushed the clover aside and came out a little farther into the sun to warm his back, for he was very wise, and he knew that the sun on the back was good for the shoulder-blades.

"Mr. Mocking-bird," he began, "is a great artist. That's why he can say what he thinks and do what he wants to do. And once, in the long ago, he taught all the songs in the world to the birds. You see it was this way:

"The thrush and the robin and the catbird fell to disputing about their songs. And all the noisy blackbirds and the little wrens, even the crows with their ugly notes, entered the discussion, with results which I can't describe. Oh, it lasted years and years, and every bird thought he was the best singer in the world and tried to sing everything he ever heard, whether it was his own song or not; and at last the confusion was so terrible that if the robin flew North, everybody thought he was a finch, and when he came back, he made a noise like a wild goose."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the squirrel.

"Not at all. That's the way with singers the world over, until they are sharply taught where they belong. Few people are content with their own talents. My own family is the only modest and unassuming one that I know of. We are content to dig and eat and sit in the sun. We have never trained our voices or gone in for dancing. Very different from your family, young Mr. Squirrel, which is frivolous and noisy. But you must pardon that—it was a mere observation. As I was saying, the only way to decide the business and restore order was to hold a meeting of all the birds, with a few good judges of music on hand to decide the question once for all.

"The adder, being deaf, was the chairman. Deafness, they say, is the prime requirement in a critic, for it allows him time to think. And the buzzard, also, was there to award the prizes. A peculiar choice, you might say, but he has a horrid way of putting things and he wears a cut-away coat.

"So the day came. The woods and the orchards were full of birds, singing and calling and screaming and whistling. Everybody was too much excited to think of eating, and every bush held a crowd of contestants. It was orderly enough, however, when the contest began.

"The wood dove began the concert. Very soft and sweet. It always makes me think of my giddy youth and my first wife to hear the wood dove. She's really a

little bit too sad.

"Then they came on, each one in turn. It was a fine cherry-tree where they sang, and it was so full of blossoms that you could hardly see the performers. Poor little Miss Wren was scared to death. She tried to sing, but all she could say was, *Tie me up, tie me up*, and she fell off the branch with fright. One redbird, and the tanager, and that whole gay family of buntings—what a brilliant, showy lot! But they were very clear and high and full of little scraps of tune in their singing. More suited to the hedgerow, however, than the concert room.

"The best, to my thinking, was the thrush. You can hear him any evening down there in the alder bushes. He's very retiring and elegant. They say he sings of India and the lotus flowers. It's something sad and far away that he just remembers. I'm not much of a hand at poetry myself, and I personally have a great fondness for the crows. Good, sharp, business men, the crows, and although they are not strictly musical, they appeal to me. You see, we have a great deal in common, the crows and myself, by way of looking after the young corn. We meet, as you might say, in a business way.

"Well, the contest was long and lively. The bluebird and rice-birds, and even the orioles performed in wonderful fashion; and at last, when it was all over, the prize was never given at all. For right out of the clear sky came the mocking-bird, who had kept himself out of the contest until the end, and after he lighted on a branch of that cherry-tree and began his song, there was simply nothing to be said. It dawned on the whole lot of them that they had sung their notes wrong! Yes, young Mr. Squirrel, fine and noisy as it all had been, not one of these birds had sung the tune his father had taught him! Just by trying to outsing each other all those years, their own sweet notes were injured. And only the mocking-bird could remember every lovely song as it should be done. Even the thrush had to admit as much. The adder crawled off in disgust, and the buzzard grew positively insulting in his remarks. He said he had been detained for nothing.

"'Listen, listen, listen,' said the mocking-bird, and straightway he sang like the nonpareil, and then you would have thought him the oriole. It was enough to break your heart, for it was just the lovely old songs that the birds used to sing.

"'Listen, Listen, Listen,' Said the Mocking-bird"

"And what do you suppose came of it all?" added the worthy woodchuck after he had wiped a tear from his eyes, for thoughts of the old days made him sad.

"What do you suppose the other birds agreed upon? They decided never to raise the burning question again, and they begged the mocking-bird to teach them their songs once more. That's why the robins fly South in the fall of the year, along with the other songsters. They want their children to hear the mocking-bird. Yes, Mr. Squirrel, I have that on authority. There's nothing so fine for the singer as a good start and a good teacher. And even the robin, who is full of conceit, has admitted to me that he feels at times the need of a little correction. He hates to go North without a few lessons from that wonderful teacher, the mocking-bird."

With all this, little Mr. Squirrel was greatly entertained and was at a loss how to

thank Mr. Woodchuck; but he was spared the necessity of it, for the good warm sun and the sound of his own voice had induced Mr. Woodchuck into a pleasant sleep, and he was already snoring on his door-step. Little Squirrel tiptoed away and ran home in glee. He felt that he had learned all that there was to learn in the wide world.

Anyway, he had learned what he wanted to know, and that is the best of learning.

V

MR. RACCOON'S OYSTER SUPPER

It was the loveliest of moonlight nights in the early autumn when word was carried from house to house that Mrs. Raccoon would give an oyster supper.

There was Mrs. Coon herself, the present Mr. Coon, and four little Coons. At the upper farm lived several branches of the family—uncles and aunts and their respective children. For the Coons, as a lot, lived mainly on the farmsteads, or near to them; for, as Mrs. Ringtail Coon, the oldest of them, always declared: "It is altogether wiser to keep in touch with civilization." By which she meant it was wise to live as near as possible to the orchards and the corn-fields, and the good things which farmers keep planting every year, apparently for the especial benefit of just such persons as Mr. Coon and Mr. Crow.

"And it is wonderful what a variety of good things you can find to eat if you can run and climb trees and dig in the ground," Mr. Coon would add, "especially if you live where they are very generous in the gathering, and you can have the best of apples and pears and the sweet corn to add to your table."

So it was altogether best to stick as close to the haunts of mankind as possible, if you could do so without foregoing the pleasures of the river and the woodland.

The great river, be it said, which was sluggish and muddy, contained a thousand things which the Coons declared in rather snobbish fashion were not to their taste. They wouldn't go fishing if they could. But the fat mussels which lived in

the mud-banks were exactly to Mr. and Mrs. Coon's liking. And to open them is not difficult for a Coon who has once learned the trick.

"That's what your wonderful, black fingernails are for," Mr. Coon always told the children when he taught them to open oysters. "You need only give the joint of the thing a sharp bite, and pull out that tough bit of meat at the end, and then with your nails you can pry the shell right open."

The ability to do this was a matter of pride to the Coons, for they knew of no one else who could open oysters. Like many people who may excel in a particular art, they fancied that they were the only adepts in the world.

"But there's where they are mistaken," Mr. Fox would laugh, whenever he heard of the Coons and their oyster suppers. For he knew of some one else who could get the juicy meat out of those shells, although it was not himself.

"I really pity their ignorance," he would say. "If they ever went abroad in the daytime they'd see a thing or two, and maybe they'd learn that there are wiser folks in the world than themselves."

This was an unfair thrust at the Coons, for their habit of sleeping most of the day should not be laid against them. The world is wisely divided into day workers and night workers anyway, and Mr. Coon, for his part, always put down such criticism by asking what on earth would happen if everybody rushed to his meals at the same identical moment.

And in this Mr. Coon revealed the gentility of his nature, for he was a person of manners, and believed not only in a six o'clock dinner, but kept his clothes in the neatest fashion and was constantly washing his face between his two fore legs, brushing his hair and attending to his ears after the accepted fashion of the cat. And the cat, as all the world knows, is the cleanest of beasts.

"Your Fox is a shaggy creature," he would say. "Almost as unkempt as the farm Dog, whom I despise."

So it is not to be wondered that Mrs. Coon, if she were going to have an oyster supper, would have an elegant one.

Elegance in the matter of suppers is simply a question of due preparation, and of this Mrs. Coon was thoroughly aware. Nothing would please her husband more, she knew, than to have the party go off without a hitch.

"We'll spend to-night getting ready," she planned. "I can't bear to see people digging in the mud and eating at the same time. It is not nice. Perhaps it is well enough on a merely family picnic to let everybody shift for himself, and I know the children rather enjoy getting dirty. I did when I was a little girl. But my ideal of the thing, done as it should be, is to have a great lot of oysters already dug, and arranged in an appetizing pile. It saves time, too, and makes the guests feel better. I never liked these parties where you go digging for your own victuals."

How could an elegant gentleman have a wife more in accord with his desires than that? Immediately Mr. Coon embraced Mrs. Coon in a loving clasp, for he felt that she was responding to his best and most refined impulses.

For two nights, then, while the October moon rode serenely overhead, Ringtail Coon and Mother Coon, with little Grayfur and Brownie, and the two boys, Broadhead and Fuzzy Muzzle, went from their home in the sweet-gum tree, through the wood to the farm road, under the fence to the orchard, back of the orchard to the corn-field, and then downhill to the steep clay banks of the river. At that point they let themselves tumble over the edge, for there were only bushes to fall into, and Mr. Coon did not approve of sliding down mud-banks.

"It's hard on the seat of your trousers," he said; "and Mother has all the washing she can do."

And then they lost no time digging, but scampered here and there, nosing out the great black shells, which they scratched and worried out of the wet soil, sometimes venturing into the water to get a particularly fat and enticing one.

"We'll store them here in a hole under this cornel bush," Ringtail decided; "and

if we cover them well, putting back all this driftwood and rubbish on top, no one will guess what's been done."

And no one, indeed, but sly old Mr. Fox would ever have known what had happened. The tempting collection of oysters, pecks of them, was not, however, to remain unmolested. But as the Coons increased their provisions, and worked mightily until the moon went down, they foresaw no accident, and only entertained themselves with happy visions of the remarks and exclamations which their cousins would be sure to make when they beheld such stunning abundance.

"Dear me, Ringtail, there's only one thing that troubles me. I feel that we ought to invite the 'Possums. You know how generous they were in that matter of the persimmons. No one would ever have guessed that there was such a tree in the whole State; and it was, after all, an invitation that they gave us, even if you did threaten Mr. 'Possum in a business way."

"I guess I did," laughed Ringtail as he put another handful of oysters into the hole and stamped them down; "I told Wooly 'Possum not to be hiding his assets that way or I'd bite his tail off. But go ahead and invite them, if you want to. It'll show that we're not snobbish anyway. And the 'Possums are as likely to appreciate all this as anybody. You'll have to open their oysters for them, you know."

"Surely, my dear. I will do so gladly. A hostess never gets any of her own party anyway. I don't expect to do anything but watch other people eat. That's the way of receptions and such."

For Mrs. Coon had arrived at that stage of excitement in which a hostess feels herself elevated and ennobled above humanity in general by virtue of the toiling she has gone through in order to make the rest of the world happy.

By this time they had to stop and take a bite themselves, for day was beginning to break, and the children, at least, must have something to eat. Then, having arranged the top of their secret store with the greatest care, and very loath to leave it, they scrambled up the bank and set out for home. Tired they were and a

little cross, so that the youngsters quarreled a good deal, and Mr. Coon, slightly worried, was not so pleasant as when he set out.

"Oh, nothing," he replied to his wife's inquiry as to why he was so glum. "Only I'm a bit anxious about those oysters. It's just possible that somebody may find them."

"Oh, pshaw!" was all she would say. "Nobody's going near that spot. And if anybody did and went and sat right down on top of them, he'd never guess what was under all those sticks."

But somebody did exactly this. For the Coons were all fast asleep in the sweet-gum tree, not even dreaming of their party, when Mr. Fox edged along the river shore, greatly elated at discovering so many little foot-prints in the mud. It was plain who had been there. And as the dainty tracks centered under the cornel bush, it took no wits at all, and only a little brisk pawing, to discover the secret.

Mr. Fox laughed as though he would give up. For that is a trait of all foxy natures to go into fits of laughter when the possibility of turning a mean trick presents itself.

"Well, of all things!" he finally gasped, as he held his sides. "How mighty kind of them!" Then, licking his chops, and fairly choking with humor, he set off just as fast as he could go. Up the shore and through the woods he ran; and at a certain tree where a great sentinel crow sat eying the farmers in a distant field, he barked out one short, sharp message.

He had to say nothing more. Before he could get back to the spot where the delicious supper was stored, the crows were coming, one and two at a time, then three and four, and finally a small flock of them.

Mr. Fox got very little for his pains, for the crows were as quick as lightning in their motions. Up in the air they flew with an oyster in their beaks, and over the rocks and bowlders which jutted from the shore they would pause but a second to drop their burden. Down it would come, breaking to pieces as it fell on the rock,

and then the crow would come down almost as fast as the oyster, to tear out the meat and swallow it. Mr. Fox played around the edges, as it were; for too many crows had come, and they fought him off when he tried to snap up his share.

"Oh, well, I don't care much for oysters anyway," he muttered, trying to console himself. But he was in reality bitterly tantalized, and he was truly in tears of disgust when the great black crowd of noisy birds flew at him in a body and drove him off. They benefited by his confidence, but they were utterly selfish, and he suddenly felt wickedly put upon.

What he had done to the Coons never occurred to him.

Mr. Coon never recovered from the mortification of that evening. The guests had assembled in a body; all of his brother's family and their dependents, and the little 'Possums, who were so set up at the invitation that they fairly beamed. Such toilets had been performed and such preparation of pleasant remarks had gone on, that everybody was in the finest of party feeling.

The walk through the corn-field, the ease and happy expectancy! Getting down the mud-bank was not altogether a formal ceremony, for some slid, and some just plunged headlong; but at the bottom everybody brushed his clothes, and the little Coons and the little 'Possums danced in glee.

Then, lo and behold, there was no supper at all! The work that the crows had done was apparent enough. But how they ever knew where to find the banquet was an unsolved mystery to Mr. Coon.

Never again did Ringtail or his wife try to be fashionable. "Dig and swallow," became the rule at all the oyster suppers; and even at this one, after the disaster had bestowed its first stunning blow, the guests and the company as a whole fell to digging as hard as they could, and ate with might and main.

Mrs. Coon, having urged the 'Possums to come, had to open oysters until her thumbs were sore; but she did it with a good grace, and after everybody got to going, there was all the laughter and happiness the heart could wish.

"Yes, it was a merry party, after all," Mr. Coon admitted several hours later. He was curling up in his sweet-gum tree bedroom, ready for another day's sleep. "But it was a free for all, a regular guzzling. What's the use of trying to be nice when all the world's made up of crows?"

But in this query, Mr. Ringtail Coon was only a bit petulant. The best of it is that he does not know the ignorance of the world. For scarcely anybody appreciates or even guesses the true elegance and the dainty ways of Mr. and Mrs. Raccoon.

VI

MRS. GOOSE AND HER SWAMP COUSINS

It was a beautiful morning, very early, with the dew on the grass and the mists lifting from the sea, when Mrs. Goose with her seven little goslings walked through the farm gate, down the path to the road, and then waddled under the fence into the pasture.

"You are well along now, my children," she was saying, "and your travels should begin."

"And what are our travels?" the little geese piped as they stepped along beside their stately parent.

"Your travels, my dears, are those excursions away from the cramping and monotonous surroundings of the farmyard. That's what your travels are. None of your family are given to staying always and forever at home."

"Oh, no," the goslings all quacked in chorus. "We don't want to stay around that farmyard all our days. That's what the chickens do, and the guinea-hens. But where are we going now, Mother?"

For the beautiful Mrs. Goose was heading straight for the swamp at the foot of the great pasture, and already she was taking them through the tufted grass and

the low bushes, through which they could not easily descry her stately form. They were quite out of breath, and bore along behind her, being very careful to keep exactly in her foot-prints.

"We are going to the great salt river, and the marshes," she called back to them. "That is where your cousins live and we shall spend a lovely day with them. But we must hurry through these bushes. I never feel safe until I am well out of them."

She explained no more than this, for she was a bird well versed in the bringing up of children, and she did not wish to frighten them. But, truth to tell, this bushy part of the path to her favorite haunts was always full of its terrors for her.

"It looks so very much like the spot where my first husband was attacked by a fox," she confided to one of her friends. "He was never seen again, of course, and although I was not long a widow, still I have never been consoled for his taking off."

Naturally, then, she had for the rest of her days a distrust of bushy paths, and it was with a great quack of relief that she emerged with all her little ones on the banks of the deep, narrow stream which was a part of the great marsh.

Off she swam on the water, paddling with a majestic ease, and down they hopped and splashed and paddled beside her, the seven of them, highly excited over the prospect of a day's adventure.

The stream was narrow and deep, much unlike the shallow duck-pond in the farmyard, and it gave the goslings an exhilarating sensation to be thus abroad on a real stream.

"How good it is," Mrs. Goose quacked, "to feel the clear, cool water, and to know that you are not paddling across a mere mud-puddle!

"And there are no tin cans and other rubbish here," she went on. "Very different,

all this, from the rather common surroundings of the duck-pond. You must realize that your family is a superior one, and that while the ducks on the farm do very well for neighbors, they are not the aristocrats that we are. And I am taking you purposely, my children, to visit my most exclusive friends."

The old goose was indeed a haughty personage, as any one could tell by the way she held her head. For she swam as a soldier marches, with eyes to the front and a splendid air.

Soon they came to where the narrow inlet of the marsh widened into a broad expanse of water banked by low, wide areas of reeds and rushes. Many channels and enticing little bays made off into the depths of shady and inviting spots where there were cedars and alders and dense, tangled vines. There were delicious odors in the air, and this made the goslings suddenly very hungry. They begged their mother to let them run through the grasses to pluck the tender and inviting things which their eyes caught sight of. But she shook her downy head and kept them paddling along beside her, cautioning them very wisely:

"Never go browsing by yourself until you know the ways of the country. Where there are others feeding it is safe for goslings. But to go into those tall grasses, tempting as they are, is to walk right into danger. You have never met Mr. Blacksnake, and I hope you never will until you are too big to tempt him!"

Immediately, of course, they clamored for the details about this dreadful creature, but their mother spared them any unhappy visions of the sort.

"You must not dwell on such uncomfortable things," she would say. "All you need think of when you are out with me are the bright sky and the good green world. But here we are, almost at Mrs. Bittern's gate. And there is Grandpa Bittern waiting for us at the door."

As she spoke, the goslings all craned their necks; but they were not big enough to see over the top of things as their mother could, and they were totally in doubt as to who the Bitterns were, or where they lived.

Suddenly there was a great quacking and flapping of wings on the part of their mother, and they found themselves touching bottom in a beautiful shallow where the black earth and the mosses grew over the very water. Here all was shaded and hidden by the overhanging bushes, and great tree-trunks rose close at hand, with clinging vines and innumerable strands of leaf and tendril swaying in the clear air.

Never had they dreamed of such a beautiful spot. But they were not to realize how lovely it was all at once, for they were to get acquainted with it only after the greetings of the visit were over.

Their cousin, Mrs. Bittern, who was so slim and brown, with black trimmings to her wings, and a bit of gray lace at her bosom, and the stately gentleman who stood guard by her nest, were quite enough to overpower the little goslings. They couldn't remember their own names and they stammered with embarrassment; and in the nest was a solitary youngster, with a very long bill, and big, frightened eyes, whom they were cautious in approaching. His only greeting was a vicious poking at them with his little head, and they noted that his neck was very strong.

"Billy isn't used to children yet," Mrs. Bittern hastened to apologize. "But he'll soon get used to them. Just hand him a bit of fish, Father, and a few of those small crabs. Oh, a very small one, Father. You nearly choked him to death with that big one you gave him at breakfast."

True enough, little Billy Bittern was in a better humor when something more had gone down his throat; and while the two mothers fell into an immediate discussion of the stupidity of fathers and uncles, the baby Bittern and the little goslings were quacking and playing around the nest in the noisiest fashion.

"So this, my dears, is a true country home," their mother said as she turned to them. "This is the kind of thing that your father and I have always wanted; a little place of our own in the swamp!"

"Oh, Mother dear, wouldn't it be lovely!" they all burst out, really transported with joy at the thought of living forever where it was all like this, so free and open and sweet.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the tall owner of the charming retreat. "That is what you farm people always say when you get here. But you know very well you'll be glad to get back to what you call the conveniences and elegance of life."

By this he meant the cracked corn, and the snug quarters, and the rest of the good things in the farmer's yard.

But Mrs. Goose pretended not to understand him at all, and was helping Mrs. Bittern to put the nest to rights as they all prepared to go out for a walk. For that is always the first thing to do when you visit your country cousins.

Such precautions as the Bitterns took when they left the house! It was cover the nest here and put a stick there, and finally, to effect a complete disguise, they raked a lot of straw over the top. Why, you never would have guessed it was a house at all!

Then through the grasses and the deep, black mud, and over innumerable tufts of green, where there were great wild cabbages and tempting bunches of mallow and flag, they went in happy procession. The goslings nibbled and tasted and feasted, wherever their mother was sure it was wise, and little Billy with his sharp beak poked incessantly in the mud for the things he liked best in the way of tadpoles and beetles.

Almost all day they picnicked in this delightful place, and only stopped in their leisurely stroll when they came to a grassy knoll where the mother birds thought it well to let the children rest.

All the gossip of the year was gone over by their elders. Mrs. Bittern told of her winter sojourn far to the South.

"We stayed much of the time with the Herons and the Spoonbills. Theirs is such an attractive rookery, you know, and I delight in Southern society. We came North with your first cousin, Mrs. Hudson Goose. A noble family, your great Northern relatives, my dear Fluffy. But they fly a little too fast for us Bitterns. We parted after a few days. Longbill, you know, likes to take it easy when he travels."

But the children observed that Mrs. Bittern was moved to tears when their mother alluded to her late half-brother and another relative, uniting these names with a reference to Christmas dinner. But they did not understand the connection, and it puzzled them when Cousin Bittern answered:

"Never mind, dear Fluffy Goose, there's little danger for you. You know you're getting tough. Let's see, you're twenty now, are you not?"

And they were still more surprised when their mother bridled at this and said that surely Mrs. Bittern was mistaken. No, she was only eighteen, and if her neck was spared it was not at all because she was tough. It was because she possessed the ability to lay the most and largest eggs, and to rear the finest families.

Mrs. Bittern was only too eager to agree with her companion. Not for the world would she have her words taken amiss; so the little family quarrel was passed over, and Mr. Bittern merely observed that the ladies were getting a little tired, and he thought that they had all better go home.

But if he had been very quiet, this dignified Mr. Bittern, he was, like a good many modest people, none the less able to distinguish himself, for after they reached the welcome door-yard, and Mrs. Goose and her family were about to depart for home, he supplied the treat of the whole day.

"Surely, Cousin Longbill," Mrs. Goose had remarked, "you are going to boom for us before we go. I wouldn't have the babies miss it for anything."

Whereat, to their dismay, Mr. Bittern began making the most frightful sound they had ever heard. It was his great feat, that for which his family was renowned, and it was not like anything ever known on sea or land. To do it he filled himself so full of air that he was like to burst. And he was very red in the face when he got through, like a good many famous singers.

"Isn't it wonderful!" said his wife. "I never knew one to sing the national anthem better."

For, to her simple soul, her husband's song was of course the one and only song. It must consequently be very important.

Scarcely could Mrs. Goose praise her cousin enough, and the goslings all begged him to do it again. But once was enough, he reminded them, and they discreetly forbore from disagreeing with him.

By this time they must hurry to get home, and their farewells were hasty. Like many return journeys, the way back was the shortest; and before they knew it, the goslings were trailing through the bushes at the foot of their own pasture. And somehow the little hill and the pair of bars and the bit of road, even the farmyard strewn with straw and pleasingly disordered, suddenly looked better to them than the lonely home of the Bitterns far out in the great swamp.

"Ah, my dears," their mother said, as they waddled up to their home under the burdocks and the currant bushes, "that's what a day away from home does for you. It makes you glad for what you have."

And indeed they were happy to nestle under her ample wings, as the stars came out and the house dog bayed at the moon. And they were very happy to have heard their Cousin Bittern do his booming, and hoped, as many people hope after a great performance, that they would never have to hear it again!

VII

MRS. FOX STEALS ONE EGG TOO MANY

Once upon a time, long, long ago, Mrs. Rabbit lived down by the sea on a great sand-hill. She was a very kind neighbor and disturbed no one. She was poor, but she owned a great gray goose who laid wonderful big eggs.

The goose had come to her in the strangest way, years and years ago. For it happened one day that just as Mrs. Rabbit was locking up her house to go and visit her cousins, she heard a sad voice in the bushes cry, "Oh, Mrs. Rabbit, Mrs. Rabbit, please do help me in. I have broken my wing and fallen here, and all the

other geese that were flying with me are gone. They left me where I fell."

At that Mrs. Rabbit gave up her intended visit, and took poor Downy Goose into the house, sent for Dr. 'Possum, and did her best to comfort her.

When Dr. 'Possum came, he took one look at the afflicted goose, shook his head, and declared he could do nothing for her. Mrs. Rabbit thereupon told the unfortunate wayfarer that she must live there always.

"You must make your home with me," she said, "and we will make the best of things. Even with your poor broken wing you can manage to get along, for there is a fine swamp below the ridge of this hill and near it is the best of green grass and shady bushes."

Poor Downy Goose was overcome with happiness. She could only dry her streaming eyes with a plantain leaf, while she kept saying:

"You are so kind, so very kind, dear Mrs. Rabbit! I shall do my best to lay an egg every day for you—omitting Sundays, of course, and the Fourth of July."

At this Mrs. Rabbit threw her arms around poor Downy's neck and they wept with joy. And from that day to this they have been the closest friends.

Nor did the good gray goose fail in her promise. Indeed, she did her best; and always by noon, while Mrs. Rabbit would be dusting and sweeping, or getting the boiled grass ready for dinner, the lady goose would sit in the door-yard mending socks or reading poetry, when suddenly she would lay an egg, and then, calling to her dear friend to bring the basket, they would put the egg away on the pantry shelf. Then they would betake themselves for the rest of the day to the field and the edge of the swamp where Mrs. Rabbit would nibble the tender grass, and Downy Goose would wade in the soft, cool mud.

Now, it was soon known among all the neighbors that Mrs. Rabbit and the strange goose were living together. Also it was soon told abroad that the goose was

paying her board in eggs—big eggs—that she paid it every day, and that Mr. and Mrs. Rabbit were faring on the finest food. They had scrambled eggs, and omelettes and pound cake at every meal—and all this for merely taking in the poor, afflicted goose!

You would think that all who heard it would have been glad to know how happy the rabbits were, and they ought to have pitied the poor goose who could never fly again; but that is not the way of the world. Instead of saying nice things, they said ugly ones, and behind Mrs. Rabbit's back, the neighbors, Mrs. Fox in particular, expressed the bitterest jealousy.

Mrs. Fox, indeed, grew so envious of these big goose eggs that at last she could stand it no longer, and resolved upon a plan for stealing them. She put all her wits to work, for, to get such big eggs and carry them without breaking them open was a thing which only the cleverest thief in the world could do. Nevertheless, every day for five days, an egg disappeared from Mrs. Rabbit's pantry.

Mrs. Rabbit was greatly disturbed, but she never dreamed who was stealing the eggs. Finally she decided to watch the nest all the time; and to her surprise found that the thieves were her neighbors—Mr. and Mrs. Fox.

How cleverly they managed! Mr. Fox lay on his back and held the big egg while Mrs. Fox pulled him over the hill by means of a rope tied to his tail. In this way they got the egg home.

But Mrs. Rabbit laughed as she thought of how poor Mr. Fox's back would be skinned, and how she would get revenge.

Nor was it long before a way was opened for her to recover the lost eggs, and to put Mrs. Fox to confusion. For who should come walking in one morning but Mr. Bear, to say that invitations were out for a wonderful feast of goose eggs at Mrs. Fox's home on the following Saturday night. And he asked Mrs. Rabbit if she were going.

That was enough! Mrs. Rabbit determined to get back the eggs. But she would

have to be very clever to fool Mrs. Fox.

Mrs. Rabbit knew that Mrs. Fox would come for the last goose egg soon. So she bored a hole in this egg at each end, and blew in at one end till the contents all flew out at the other and the shell was empty. Then she slipped inside, and Mr. Rabbit pasted small pieces of white paper over the openings.

And here Mrs. Rabbit waited for the thieves to come, while Mr. Rabbit hid behind a tree near by.

Soon they came, and after much effort the big egg was carried into Mrs. Fox's home. Mrs. Rabbit chuckled to herself as she saw the other five big eggs through a tiny peephole in the paper.

While the gay old foxes were in the next room, entertaining their guests, Mrs. Rabbit broke the paper at one end and slipped out. Then she called softly to her husband to bring the wheel-barrow; and they piled in all the eggs and carried them away.

"While the Gay Old Foxes Were in the Next Room, Mrs. Rabbit Slipped Out"

Nor were they more pleased to recover their lost property than was the obliging goose when she learned of all that had been going on.

"To think," she exclaimed, "that I have been laying eggs for those dreadful foxes!"

And Mr. and Mrs. Fox wonder to this day who stole the goose eggs.

VIII

WHY MRS. FROG MUST LIVE IN THE SWAMPS

Long, long ago Mrs. Frog lived on the hillsides. She was a goddess worshiped by all the fairies because she ruled the sunshine and the rain, and she was a friend to them all, being generous and dutiful.

With her seventy daughters, she spent the days in spinning the most beautiful cloth of gold for the fairies to wear, and the flax which she spun was as yellow as the biggest and ripest pumpkin you ever saw.

All the years that she served the fairies by her industry, and was dutiful in calling down the rains to refresh the earth, she was in great favor with the world, and no one was so much beloved by all the animals as Mrs. Frog.

But the seventy daughters who were so handsome, and who spun such miles of yellow thread, grew restless, and kept begging their mother for a holiday. She, too, owned to being a little weary, and would often remark with a yawn that it wasn't the spinning, nor yet the weaving, which tired her, but the lack of diversion.

"And think, dear Mother," they would say, "think of our lazy brothers, who do nothing but admire their shapely legs all day, and spend the whole night dancing and singing and eating suppers. It isn't fair!"

On speaking thus the daughters were very artful. For if there was one thing which angered Mrs. Frog, it was the laziness of her sons. Years and years ago she had given up trying to get them to do a single useful thing. And it was no consolation to observe that they got along in the world somehow, whether they did anything or not.

"Look at their awful stomachs," she would exclaim. "The lazy creatures, always eating and singing. What a life!"

It was thus that the seventy daughters played upon her feelings of disgust, urging

her to adopt a change and give up spinning. Each one spoke to her alone, seven times a week, when she would reply:

"Yes, my daughter, I am listening, and I don't know but what you are quite right."

And then, when all the whole seventy spoke together, as they made a point of doing when they knew she was tired out and had the headache, she could only clasp her hands to her ears and flee to her bedroom.

At last the daughters won and Mrs. Frog began her holiday. She meant to take but a single evening and a day, hoping to get back to work there-after, rested and refreshed. But alas! once she began her career of dancing, and feasting, and staying up till morning to sing and laugh and watch the sun come up, the day never came that she was willing to spin the yellow flax.

Forty of the lovely daughters danced themselves to death within a week, but Mrs. Frog was so busy waltzing and marching and singing that in each instance, as the sad news came to her that another daughter was dead, she was too gay to care or even to ask, "Which one?"

Terrible disaster began to come upon the land. All the birds and plants were dying for water. Clouds passed by, but Mrs. Frog was too lazy to make the rain fall. If she wasn't dancing, she was sleeping, and so no time remained for her duties.

One day the animals from the forest came to call on Mrs. Frog, to plead for rain. The mother rabbits came from long distances to tell Mrs. Frog how their babies were perishing for water and for tender bits of green grass.

But Mrs. Frog had become hardened and told them to leave her alone.

"Please give us rain! Please give us rain!" the birds all pleaded; but Mrs. Frog only frowned at having been awakened.

Then came all the bees and the butterflies from the hillsides, tired, hot, and dusty.

"We are your neighbors and friends," they cried. "Do give us rain! The flowers are all dead and we have no honey to eat!"

"Go away!" croaked Mrs. Frog. "I must sleep during the day, and I have no time to worry with you! If you don't like the way I manage this hillside, go to the swamp lands!"

Next came the fairies for their yellow dresses, which Mrs. Frog was to have spun from the yellow flax. Mrs. Frog was fast asleep, but when they called and called her she awoke. She rubbed her sleepy eyes and awakened all the family to help her spin the flax; but the sun shone down on the hot, dry earth so burningly that all her spinning-wheels caught on fire and everything in her house was burned up.

"Oh, for a drop of water!" the birds and the animals were calling. "Help us, Mrs. Frog! Do help us!"

But it was too late. Even Mrs. Frog's wand, with which she called forth the rain from the clouds, was burned up. And Mrs. Frog was so terribly hot and thirsty that she didn't know what to do.

As a last resort she started for the swamp lands, thirty of her exhausted daughters trailing after her. They were all so tired they could no longer walk, and finally, being faint and bent over to the ground, they took to hopping.

Down, down, down, through the hills they hopped until at last they reached the dark, damp swamp. The daughters had become as lazy as the sons; and Mrs. Frog herself desired nothing in the world but a cool, muddy bed at night, and a good log or a lily pad to sit on throughout the livelong day.

But in her muddy bed she doesn't sleep; for all night long one may hear her calling: "More rain! More rain! More rain!"

While Mr. Frog croaks: "Knee deep! Knee deep! Knee deep!"

And all the little frogs: "Wade in! Wade in! Wade in!"

IX

THE SCARE-MAN TREE

There was a time when the world was mostly forest. There were plains, to be sure, and rich valleys, but the trees were everywhere, so that even the towns and farms were hidden by them; and there were no great cities at all.

It was then that the animals lived in peace, and they were not driven to hide themselves, nor to be always moving farther and farther away to find new shelters.

But the days came when the forests were cut away. A little at a time, and always along the edges of the woods, men began to hack and to chop and to saw, until one by one the great trees came down. With them as they crashed to the earth came the birds' nests; and where the trees had stood, the mosses and the grass dried up and died, for the hot sun poured in where once it had been shady and cool.

In the days when this began it distressed the animals; so that the poor creatures at last resorted to a wonderful plan. To them the woods were very dear, and never were they frightened at what they saw or heard; although the depths of the forest were so full of terrors to foolish men.

News was spread through the glens and across the mountains that something was going to be done to save the woods. The birds and the swift, scampering little weasels, and the soft-footed wildcat, who can cover many miles and never be seen or heard, took the messages far and away. Time was allowed; for the beaver and the mud-turtle were necessary to the plan, and even at her best Mrs. Beaver is slow in her motions. It was none other than crafty old Major Wolf who had conceived the plan by which they would teach the wood-cutters a lesson.

"Such simple and foolish creatures they are!" he remarked. "We've only to frighten them out of their wits, by some device or other, and if we scare them enough they'll keep away from these woods forever!"

With that he snapped his terrible jaws and turned his great yellow eyes on the company. Before him and around him were all the animals of the forest. The deer, who could think of nothing to do but to run, the fox, who knew every possible way of deceiving his enemies, the bear and the panther and many of the small creatures, down to the sleek little mole, were all talking at once.

The bear and the wildcat were very impatient. They were all for fighting outright.

"You hug and I'll scratch," said the lynx to the bear.

"We can do up an army of choppers if we get the chance," added the panther; but he was lost in the debate, for the wisest of all, the great gray wolf, reminded them that if the men with their axes so much as caught sight of the animals, they would go away only to come back with their guns and to fill the forest with every conceivable trap.

Then he pointed to a great, dead tree which stood alone and on the brow of the hill. The animals looked and tried to get his meaning. Some of them yawned, such as the hedgehog, whose wits are slow; but the quick Mrs. Fox jumped and cried, "That's it, that's it! We'll make that tree into a giant to guard the path to our woods."

Then Major Wolf exclaimed that the sagacious fox had guessed his plan.

The wind and the frost had bent and broken the tree until it was like nothing in the world so much as a giant. Its arms were there and its shoulders; and its terrible body, as high as the church steeple, was bent forward as if to fall on any one so rash as to come near it. But it needed a great deal of what the heron called "touching up"; for the heron is an artist, and goes every year, they say, to study the sculptures of Egypt.

"It needs a mouth and two eyes, as any one can see for himself," the lynx remarked; and the mole and the hedgehog suggested that the feet might be improved. Here was the task for the beavers; for carving and cabinet work is their specialty. And to chisel great holes for the eyes and the mouth was exactly what the woodpeckers and the squirrels could do.

The work was so briskly done, that it was indeed completed before the admiring circle could gasp out its astonishment. While the chips and the saw-dust were flying, Major Wolf was moved to observe in the most pious tones:

"How marvelous that these poor little cousins of ours, these smaller, gnawing creatures (if I may call them such without hurting their feelings) should alone be able to serve the purposes of us more noble beasts."

And he waved his paw to include the bear and the panther in the nobility.

But the gentle Mrs. Deer knew what a terrible hypocrite Major Wolf was. And she moved with her children to the other side of the meeting; for she had watched his mouth water even as he spoke such wonderful sentiments.

The squirrel was boring away at the great giant's limbs, carving and cutting; and even the slow old turtle, with his powerful nippers, was pruning the tangle of vines from the feet.

But the morning was close at hand. The wood creatures had barely enough time to complete their work and scamper off. They crouched in the bushes to await the effect of their scheme. And even though they knew the giant was no giant at all, but just a great, dead tree, they were awestruck at the result of their work.

As if to add to the strength of their purpose, the sun was rising in a terrible glory of red, with the blackest of clouds all round.

It was terrible. The red light of the morning, through the gaping mouth and awful eyes, the waving arms and the immensity of the giant were frightful.

The wood-cutters came. But only one of them got as far as the tree. With a howl of fear, he turned and fled, dropping his ax as he ran. He told of the awful giant with eyes and mouth of fire, and the others refused to come near.

The animals were greatly elated; but the wisest of them knew that some day the foolish wood-cutters would find out the truth. And such was the case; although it was a long, long time, and the great giant which the animals made warded off their enemies for many a year.

X

MRS. FOX AND THE EIDER-DUCK EGGS

Once upon a time the animals who live away up North, in the cold Arctic regions, came together for a feast in celebration of their blessings. The bears, the wolves, the minks, the sables, even the big, spluttery seals that swim in the icy water, were all on hand to make a great noise, singing and shouting and devouring the things that they all loved to eat.

All were there except Mrs. Fox, and why she was not invited no one knew. Maybe Mr. Penguin, who wrote the invitations, was responsible for the omission, but at any rate it is a fact that the fox family was left out in the cold.

Of course, Mrs. Fox felt herself sorely slighted. She and her six children came near enough, however, to learn that after the celebration and the dance, which was to be held on the ice floor of the Bear palace, there was to be a great supper in Mrs. Bear's kitchen. It was to be a feast of the eggs of the eider-duck. A supper, needless to say, that any bear or fox would travel night and day to enjoy.

On the night of the feast Mrs. Fox crept quietly up to the bears' house.

Mrs. Bear and all the ladies were in the bedroom, brushing down their rich winter suits, and prinking away to look their best before going down to meet the other guests. And, of all things, they were gossiping about Mrs. Fox! Just because she wasn't there (as they thought), they were speaking of her in the most slighting

terms. It seemed as if they were all talking at once; but Mrs. Fox, whose ear was close to the chimney, could hear Mrs. Wolf's deep voice distinctly.

"That old coat of Mrs. Fox's is the shabbiest I have ever seen," she was saying in her severest tone. "One would think that a woman of her build, slinky and queer as it is, would put on white every winter. I would wear white myself if I didn't think this handsome gray of mine an elegant thing the year round."

They all agreed that Mrs. Wolf was indeed very elegant, and that Mrs. Fox was very shabby. Little Miss Ermine, who, as all the world knows, has the finest white coat in the world, piped up shrill and cross:

"Right you are, Mrs. Wolf. White's the thing in winter, but only for those adapted to it. It scarcely becomes every one."

At this she made a great showing of her own dainty figure, cutting several merry dance figures before the mirror.

Mrs. Fox had heard enough. She waited for the ladies to go downstairs to the great room where all the gentlemen sat about. She knew what they would do. There would be wonderful speeches by the biggest and oldest bears, about the midnight sun and other blessings; the walrus would make a long speech, too, mostly about seaweed and fish; and then, after a dance or two, they would all come trooping out to the kitchen. Old Uncle Penguin would make a very long prayer, and everybody would eat until he could eat no more.

Mrs. Fox was very angry. She resolved that there should be no supper for her mean, back-biting friends.

Cautiously she felt her way down the sides of the cliff which was the outside of Mrs. Bear's great house. As she expected, the eider-duck eggs were in a basket suspended from the pantry window. Quick as a flash she ran back for her children, and in another minute they were all beside her on the roof of Mrs. Bear's kitchen.

"Old Mrs. Sloth, who cooks for Mrs. Bear, is sound asleep by the fire. Don't wake her up. And do just what I tell you to," whispered Mother Fox.

The little foxes held their breath.

"Stand in a line! Now each one of you take hold of the next one's tail. Each of you except little Fuzzypaw. He's the quickest and the lightest and he is going to run up and down the ladder which the rest of you will make, and bring me those eggs, one by one. Just grip each other's tails as tight as you can, and don't make a sound!"

It was no sooner said than done. One after another the eggs were brought up to the edge of the roof by the little fox, who ran up and down the ladder as nimbly as a weasel. Mrs. Fox stowed the eggs away carefully in a brand-new basket she had brought with her, and in a few minutes the basket by Mrs. Bear's pantry window was quite empty.

Then off through the big woods the little foxes trotted gaily behind their mother.

"Off Through the Big Woods the Little Foxes Trotted Gaily Behind Their Mother"

What happened when the supper party found that it had no supper, Mrs. Fox never knew. For while Mrs. Bear and her guests were reduced to confusion and disappointment, the foxes were at home roasting eggs by the fire, and sitting up to all hours in the jolliest fashion.

The next year Mrs. Fox was invited. Old Mr. Wolf, who knew a thing or two, thought it would be the wisest thing to ask her. So all the other animals agreed; and Mrs. Fox never found society in the Arctic Circle more cordial than after the season it ignored her and she stole the eggs of the eider-duck from Mrs. Bear.

XI

SUNNY GOURD AND LADY TRUMPET-VINE

Very much out of the beaten track—in fact, only to be approached by an old road that had long fallen into disuse—stood a neglected cabin, a poor weather-beaten thing with sunken roof and decaying timbers.

Its door-yard had already begun to grow the young pine trees which come up in great plumes of long, green needles; and the little garden plot, which used to boast its vegetables, had become a mass of brambles and nettles.

"How sad this all is," the poor little cabin used to sigh. "Although I suppose it is better to be harboring rabbits and squirrels, and to have my beams plastered up with nests, than to have no living thing enjoy my shelter. Still, I wish spring when it comes would bring people to unlock my door and children to fill these poor little rooms with their laughter."

For the cabin could remember many children that had lived there, and sometimes it seemed to him that he heard them again, playing in the nearby woods, or running and calling down the road.

Sometimes he did hear such voices, for people often passed the cabin on the way to a distant plantation, and children were as likely to be among them as not.

But the squirrels and the rabbits had it pretty much their own way with the deserted cabin, running in and out beneath the underpinning; and the only noise around the place was that of Mrs. Yellowhammer when she came pounding at the roof for what the decayed old shingles might conceal.

"I declare, you poor old house!" the energetic bird would say. "It's terrible how the worms are eating at your timbers and shingles." Whereat she would fall to and nearly pound the life out of the poor old cabin, in her determination to get all there was.

But Mrs. Yellowhammer and the rabbits that danced in the moonlight were not

the only visitors, for often in the summer time came the humming-birds to visit the trumpet-vine which covered nearly all of one end of the structure.

"I am the saving grace, the chief beauty of this establishment," the Lady Trumpet would say. "And I know it."

"Of course you are," Mrs. Yellowhammer would reply. "And it was a great mistake that you were ever planted here. A lady of your elegance, among such weeds and common things, and at the very edge of nowhere!"

"Oh, I don't mind it much, although we have little company now. But who's this coming this very minute?"

Sure enough, a man was passing. And he came through the old door-yard straight up to the cabin steps and stood there a minute, and then was gone. But not before he had thrown something over his shoulder which lighted with a dry rattle, like that of corn, in at the base of the old chimney.

"What a queer thing to do!" thought Lady Trumpet-Vine, thereby speaking her own mind and that of the cabin as well.

"Not at all," suddenly spoke up Mr. Rabbit. "That man is throwing seed over his left shoulder for his luck. I've seen it done before. And I'm glad he doesn't want my left hind foot, or whatever it is that such people like to carry in their pockets for good luck."

Immediately Mrs. Yellowhammer, who had been screaming to her friend, Red-necked Woodpecker, to come and enjoy this mystery, flew down to inspect the seeds which lay on the soil at the foot of the chimney. And Mr. Rabbit scampered to get to the spot also.

They looked long and hard at the little brown things; then Mr. Rabbit tried biting one of them.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "Bitter as poison!"

"I never taste things I am in doubt about," Mrs. Yellowhammer declared; "but I'm not a seed-eater anyway. What does Mr. Bob-White think they are?"

For a dapper little partridge was on the scene now, turning his head this way and that as he squinted at the mysterious seeds.

"Gourds!" he finally pronounced them. "Gourd seed. No good for eating. Even a sparrow wouldn't touch them."

Then the birds flew off and Mr. Rabbit skipped rope with himself all around the yard, for he wanted to restore his spirits; this curious incident having for a second clouded his buoyant nature.

This happened in the very early spring, before even a leaf was showing on Lady Trumpet-Vine, and before even a purple wood violet had shown herself in the borders of the deserted garden. Rains came; long ones that drenched the earth and gullied the roads. The eaves of the cabin dripped and dripped night and day, and it was not long before great puddles lay by the sunken door-step, and were soaking down into the roots of everything.

"What a pity there's nothing but weeds and those low-down gourd seeds to be benefited by all this!" sighed the Lady Trumpet. "I shall probably flower generously this year. But what's the use?"

Then she would grow very sad as the rain increased and out of the dark skies came the heavy south winds.

But when the sky cleared, the gourd seeds had sunk out of sight. That was good luck for them. Deeper down they went and at last their first little roots were feeling the rich soil that no plant had enjoyed in many a year. Then two bright green leaves, laden with halves of the old seed coverings, came up.

The glistening earth was trying to dry itself in the sunshine, and the jolly Woodpecker was looking out of his window in the trunk of the old cherry-tree.

"Well, I'm a crow!" he exclaimed, "or there are those gourd seeds up and out of bed so soon!"

He was so delighted with this that he told his wife; and soon all the other people around the poor neglected place were flying and running to take a look.

The little fellows, very sturdy and determined, were holding their leaves out exactly as if they were spreading their palms upward to catch the sunlight in their hands.

Time went on and the seeds became vines. The old chimney, built of sticks and mud, and very unsightly, was revived to new feelings.

"Not since my supper fires went out have I felt so much alive," it moaned as though it would like to be really pleased.

"If only I could smoke again, I should feel completely contented."

Soon the chimney and the eaves were green with gourd vine. Summer was underway, with its long hot mornings and its wonderful nights. Lady Trumpet-Vine was covered with buds, and she was already telling of how she would be visited by all the most beautiful creatures in the world.

"But nobody'll visit your flowers," she said to the gourd vine. "Nobody wants to. You're a bitter, ugly, common vine. That's what you are."

"I have some very respectable relatives, just the same," sang out Sunny Gourd, determined not to be utterly demeaned. "There's Mr. Watermelon and Mr. Cucumber. They are very well esteemed, you know. I think they are appreciated perhaps almost as much as you are."

"But not for their beauty, my dear," was the retort. "I am loved by all the world for my magnificence. Birds and men know beauty when they see it. Trust me in that."

Then, almost in anger, such was her queenly pride, Lady Trumpet burst a few of her buds. The full open flowers were wonderful, and a perfume exhaled from them which made her neighbor dizzy.

"It's no use," Sunny Gourd sighed. "I can't do that. My flowers are merely little no-account white things. No perfume to speak of. But I don't care, I've reached the roof anyway, and I can look up at the sky and watch the birds in these trees, and have a good time to myself. And I can look at you, too, Mrs. Trumpet."

The stately vine waved her tendrils and fanned herself gently. She couldn't help seeing that this gourd person was at least polite.

But the hardest thing in the world to bear is the idea that you are of no use to anybody. And it was this which hurt the robust gourd vine. Not a bird came for honey, and yet they hovered in ecstasy over Lady Trumpet. Humming-birds, as brilliant as flashing gems, came whirring like rays from a diamond shot from the sky. They would plunge their long beaks deep into the flowers to get the nectar, and then dart away, only to return again for more. Other beautiful creatures came to the deserted garden and sang madly with delight, simply trying to make their melody as intoxicating as Lady Trumpet's perfume.

But they studiously avoided Sunny Gourd. His leaves, big and green and very rough, and his sinewy stems, his modest flowers and the bitter juice of them, were odious to everybody. Yet he was green as emerald, and he had made a picture of his end of the cabin.

"But the birds, how I love them!" he kept saying to himself. "And they will have none of me!"

At last, however, to his great consolation, there came a little green bee to visit him.

"Well, well!" it buzzed. "Here you are! Just what I want!"

And the little visitor tried to hang in every flower. His visits lasted all day.

"Yes, I'm only a low ground bee," he remarked, after Sunny Gourd had confided in him. "Those aristocratic honey-bees don't recognize me at all. But I don't care. And you mustn't care. The birds will be mightily obliged to you yet."

And without a word more, he was off. Nor would this handsome little fellow ever explain what he meant. He would only say: "You just wait!"

Nor were there many weeks of waiting. For the autumn came, and the pinch of cold nights with it. Things began to shrivel, but the wonderful fruit of the gourd vine turned from green to yellow; lovely as gold. Sunny Gourd had produced a hundred dippers: some with handles curled and long, some straight as rulers, and some that were short and thick. They hung in yellow companies from the eaves trough, or they clustered over the roof. The best of them grew against the chimney, and yet all were as gourds should be, stout of shell and beautifully rounded.

"Very strange!" Lady Trumpet remarked. "Almost impressive. But I'm glad I don't have to do it. My seed pods are elegance itself, and yet they do not obtrude themselves that way. I call it vulgar."

But others thought differently. People began to go that way just to see the house that was covered with gourds, and in the last days, as the sap was drying in the vines, Sunny Gourd found that he was attracting much attention.

Yet he was not to guess just the thing that was to happen.

One day the man who had thrown the seeds for luck, returned. And he took but one delighted look.

Soon there was much going on and the old cabin came back to life again. And, just as the chimney hoped, it was smoking once more. There were children running around the weedy garden, and voices and laughter brought back the happiness so long gone. The blue-jays and the yellowhammers greeted the newcomers with delight, and Lady Trumpet could only wish that they had seen her in her July glory. But to Sunny Gourd happened the best of it all; for the man cut many of the gourds into bird houses and hung them to a pole which he planted by the door.

Then came the martins to build, losing no time at all. The beautiful yellow gourds hung high and happy, their hollow shells sheltering a dozen beautiful birds. And the best of the gourds, the one with the longest handle, which had swung clear of the door lintel all summer long, and had ripened to a magnificent color, was hung by the well. It made a dipper fit for a king; that is, if the king were a very good man.

Sunny Gourd knew no words for his happiness. And it was joy, not the cold of the winter nights, to which he at last succumbed.

"That's the way with this wonderful world," said Mr. Mocking-bird. "And I thought he was beautiful all along."

"And think what he did for me," the cabin kept saying.

So that even the proud Lady Trumpet knew her place at last, and she honestly hoped the dear Sunny Gourd would come back in the spring.

XII

THE END OF THE TIMBER WOLF

Far away to the North, where the great rocky capes point out through the sea toward the land where it is always snow and ice, there lived two shepherds whose little huts were almost the only habitations in many and many a mile of trackless forest. To be sure, they were within traveling distance of a market town. For had

there been no place for trading the wonderful white wool which they sheared every spring from their sheep, there would have been no object in their living in a place so uncouth where year in and year out there were only the grandeurs of earth and sky and the thunderous roar of the seas to keep them company.

But the shepherds and their families were not unhappy, and the chances are that if you took them southward over sea and land to the great cities they would only have longed to go back to their own cloudy skies, to their wind-swept pastures, and the steep cliffs where the sea-gulls nest. And it is certainly true that their little boys and girls would never have been content to have stayed away very long from the faithful dogs, who are the most important members in a shepherd home. And it is of these dogs and what they did to the last of the wolves that the shepherds were always telling. For the memory of a brave act is slow to die; and when you add sagacity to bravery, putting wits with strength, you have something which men love to relate.

One of the dogs was Dan, and that was a suitable name, for he was what his master called "long-headed." The other was Denmark, for he was so great and powerful and possessed of so wonderful a voice and appetite, that both by power and dignity he resembled his people, the noble Danes, and no name in the world could fit him better than that of his native land.

Denmark had come to this far-away settlement when a ship from the Danish ports had gone to pieces in a storm below the cliffs. And the shepherds had taken him home. A dog that could swim ashore in such a storm as that had been, when the waves turned to ice as they dashed against the rocks, was a dog worth keeping.

But Denmark was not a shepherd dog. His shiny coat of black, his heavy build, with a neck as powerful as a young bull's, and his great square jaws made him at first sight a dog to be feared. But he was gentle and wanted to play and sport like any puppy, as soon as he had recovered from the shock of shipwreck and his icy hour in the water. But there was no one to play with in the family of the fisherman who had first rescued him from the water. And that worthy man, who was a brave and silent sort, was gone from home so long at a time that he was not sorry when the great Dane betook himself to another home.

Some children were passing the fisherman's hut one morning in early spring, on

their way to gather wild flowers which grew in the crevices and little sheltered nooks of the headlands. They were laughing and chasing one another and singing. That was all the great dog wanted to hear, for he had lived a solemn and uneventful life during these weeks that he had lain around the fisherman's place. And the fisherman had not dreamed of entertaining his guest. He had not played tag in sixty years and you may be sure he was not going to begin again for the sake of a great overgrown dog.

Denmark introduced himself to the children in what he thought was a playful way; but his voice was so terrible that the children were at first terror-stricken. They had never seen any dogs except the beautiful Scottish kind which the shepherds keep. They screamed and ran in fear, taking up stones as if to throw them. But Denmark was not discouraged. At first he kept his distance, but he followed; and, once they were out on the green pastures that sloped and curved down to the steep shore, he began his most enticing efforts to please.

The children forgot all about their wild flowers then, and they romped and played for hours with the dog. Of course they took him home.

In this new home Denmark was a neighbor of Dan, the wise shepherd dog, who came to be his lifelong friend; for the shepherds did not live very far apart, and it was easy for the dogs to get together, as they always did at odd times of night and very early in the morning, when they would go far afield in a mad chase for rabbits or on the trail of a fox.

Every one had thought the two would fight when they met, but the shepherd dog only stood off on his dignity a few seconds, and then he spoke to the great Dane in the most courteous tones, which the Scotch can always employ to such effect. He well knew that he was no match for the gigantic stranger and he saw no necessity for making a fool of himself; besides he really was more than glad to find such a companion.

The comradeship of these two lasted long and only came near to its end when they cornered the great timber wolf in the sheep pen. This was Dan's crowning achievement, and no one was more proud of him than was the brave and courteous Denmark, who always gave to the shepherd dog the full credit of having planned the whole thing. To rid the countryside of this last wolf had been

Dan's great desire. No one but he was really sure of the wolf's existence. The time had passed when the terrible packs of wolves descended on the sheep, and when the belated traveler over the snowy roads was in peril of his life from these stalking, famished enemies. But the shepherds were by no means sure that the wolves were entirely gone, and when they sat by the fireside telling stories of the dangers and hardships of the old days, they would always end by admitting that not yet were the terrible marauders hunted down.

Dan's back would bristle as he lay by the fire, and he would pound his tail up and down on the hearth as if he entirely agreed. Could he have spoken, he would have told them that often he had smelt the track of something that was not a bear nor a fox. Then his blood would freeze in his veins when the shepherds, talking in their slow way between sips of ale, told how powerful and ferocious the wolf can be. They knew of wolves that had snapped a dog's head nearly clean off the body with just one flash of their terrible jaws. And they agreed that a wolf could not be overpowered by any dog alone.

Dan always came to one conclusion in these recitals. If ever he could find the wolf, and could employ his friend Denmark to help him, they would show their masters that two dogs, at any rate, could get the best of the timber wolf.

It came about at last that a long, heavy winter drove the wolf to bolder and more risky operations among the sheepfolds. He ventured from the dark, forest lairs closer and closer to the sheep pens and the shepherd huts. The dogs knew this. But in the daytime the wolf was gone far beyond the barriers of the steep cliffs of the mountains. And at night the dogs could never venture far afield, for it was their duty to stay close by the barns and the pens where the sheep were sheltered.

With the coming of spring, Dan's master had to spend many a night at a pen some distance from the home. Down close to the shore he kept another flock and in it were many little lambs that were sick. For in the spring it is a common thing for the lambs that are winter-born to be stricken with a sickness which only the best shepherds can cure. Dan's master was up and about at all hours of the night, and poor Dan was greatly concerned in his efforts to keep guard over two folds. But if his dear master would take no sleep, Dan would take none. He was as wakeful and anxious as though he owned the sick lambs himself.

It was well past midnight and the air was full of the wet odors which denote the melting snows and the first coming of spring. As Dan was trotting up the path from the lower fold, a whiff of that strange and terrible odor which he knew to be the scent of the wolf, came to his sensitive nostrils. He stood still. He snuffed the ground around him, but he found no track. The wolf was near, but where?

Then a thought came to him. First, he must get Denmark. It would take him but a few moments to run across to the neighboring farm, and now was the time to put his plan into execution. He was much disturbed in his mind, however, for he had never before left his master at night. But the necessity was a pressing one.

Down the path and across the fields he ran, and came to Denmark's home. The great dog was lying by the barn door, under a little shelter which formed a kennel. He was wide awake and felt very much alert. He confessed to Dan that he felt particularly nervous about something. Yes, he was sure he could scent the wolf on the stagnant, heavy air.

Back they ran, their tails lowered, and their noses to the ground, for this was no hour to play. Once they were in sight of the hut where the shepherd and the little lambs were housed, Dan explained his plan.

"My master will presently go into that tiny room just beyond the pen where the ewes and the sick lambs are. He will lie down, and unless the lambs bleat again before morning, he will not wake up, for he is dead tired. He knows that I am close and on guard, and so he does not trouble himself about that shaky old door to the fold. The wolf could nose it open and not half try. But the wolf won't come here unless he thinks I am watching up at the big pen. So I shall go up there. You climb the steep steps that lead to the loft over the straw beds where the sick lambs are. Go softly, and wait. I will follow the wolf down here if he comes. And if he gets inside the pen, you spring down on him from the loft."

All this the canny shepherd dog had schemed and perfected as he was running after his friend. It was too good to be true, he felt, that here at last was the chance he had hoped for. And if he had ever feared the wolf, he did not fear him now, but was only afraid that the terrible creature would not appear.

Dan hid beneath his master's barn. From a corner in the heavy stone underpinning he could look down the yard to the lower pen. Nothing could approach that point without his seeing it, unless it came from the rocky shore. He waited long and the silence was unbroken save for the dripping of the water where the snow was melting on the barn roof and little rills of it spattered from the eaves.

Suddenly, so suddenly that his heart stood still, he saw two great yellow eyes staring out of the darkness. The wolf was in the yard and not ten feet from where Dan lay! Then the gleaming eyes turned and a great shadowy form hulked past. It was so huge that Dan trembled. It made no noise and moved slowly and with great caution.

Dan straightened himself out, full length, and crawled low in the mud, picking his foothold in such a way as to let no twig or pebble move under his weight. Any smallest noise would be fatal. His heart beat so fast that he could not breathe, but he stalked the terrible shadow step by step.

Suddenly he realized that if the wolf should turn, there would be no chance to escape. Perhaps the great jaws would kill him before he could even cry out, and Denmark would never know about it until too late.

The wolf's half-defined form suddenly vanished. He had made a great, silent spring into the center of the sheep pen. For such was the surpassing cunning of the wolf that he was into the pen and had seized one of the lambs all in a single leap.

There was a roar such as Dan had never heard. For Denmark had never spoken in such voice before. Then came sounds that woke up every one on the two farms and brought everybody running to the scene with lanterns and guns.

Denmark had come down on the wolf's back, and had gripped his throat. Dan rushed in and helped in pulling him down. But the damage to the dogs was frightful, for the terrible fangs of the wolf, hampered as the creature was, had ripped and torn his opponents. The three desperate animals rolled and tossed and flung themselves in such a frantic battle that the shepherd was many times

thrown down in his attempts to get near them. He was afraid that he would stab the dogs instead of the wolf. But when the lights came, and the guns were pointed, there was no need of either knives or shot. The two dogs lay bleeding on the floor of the hut and the great timber wolf was twitching in death.

It was the greatest thing that the shepherds had ever heard of in their lives. They told of it for years, and Dan and Denmark became known for miles and were justly happy in their fame.

XIII

THE TRAVELS OF PRINCE FLAMINGO

The wonderful adventures and the long, beneficent reign of Prince Flamingo are matters which would be lost to the world were it not for the venerable Mrs. Leatherback.

For Mrs. Leatherback is not only the oldest and the largest of the great turtles, but she is by all odds the most distinguished, and is gifted with the most accurate power of memory. And her adventures in the five hundred years of her life have been many. She swims the great Gulf from coast to coast, she knows the islands —every one of them—she has been far up the rivers which pour their floods into the tropic seas, and every bay and lagoon knows her presence. And there is no one whose arrival is more eagerly welcomed by the little people of the lagoons and the coral coves than she. For with her vast knowledge goes a power of recital which charms her auditors; and if she chances to spend a moonlight evening by some quiet swamp, or beneath a pleasant sand dune where the breeze is good and the outlook charming, you may be sure that the intelligent and conservative members of society, such as the Cranes, the Terrapins, the Black Swans, and perhaps one of the wise Foxes, will be gathered around the distinguished visitor.

And her stories, notably that of Prince Flamingo, have gone far inland, even to the remote North; for the Heron is himself a great traveler, and it is, indeed, as he has presented the story, rather than in the words of Mrs. Leatherback, that it is generally related. Perhaps it has gained something in its travels, for time and distance lend a charm, and the coral islands are beautiful in perspective. To put it simply, you remember what the wise old Mr. Rat said as he nibbled the Dutch

cheese: "The best things come from a long way off."

So it is from a remote past, and from the most lonely and most beautiful of the tropic islands that the romance of the beautiful white flamingo has traveled down to us.

There is a great lagoon or inlet of the sea which widens itself into a vast marsh on the southernmost extremity of an island. Ships could never enter its shallow waters, and it is protected on the land side by miles of dense reeds and water growth. No place in the world could be safer for the city of the flamingoes. And of all birds, the great, pink flamingoes need a secret place to build their nests and rear their young.

Their wonderful city was populous with thousands of their kind on the beautiful morning when this particular little flamingo was born. For never had a hunter penetrated to their home, and their natural enemies were few.

Great flocks of flamingoes were wheeling in long, curving lines overhead. And they were so pink against the early morning sky that you would have thought them the reflection of the rosy dawn itself. And almost as far across the lagoon as one could see, they were standing by their nests feeding their babies, or preparing for flight to the distant feeding grounds. You could see nothing but their tall, red forms, thousands of curving necks, and wide, beautiful wings.

Everybody was talking, and the confusion would have been terrible except for the fact that no one seemed to pay any attention to anybody else, and each beautiful flamingo seemed to know exactly what he was about. Hundreds of other babies were being hatched that morning, and so little White Wing (as they called him at first) attracted no attention. His mother was in a great state of delight over him, of course, and his stately father eyed him with approval. But hundreds of other parents were in the same state of mind over their young, and congratulations had long gone out of fashion.

"His Mother Was in a Great State of Delight over Him, of Course, and His Stately Father Eyed Him with Approval"

The beautiful young father had just arrived from the distant shore and was the first to feed the pretty youngster. He curved his graceful neck downward and when he kissed the baby, as you might say, it was to put into his tiny mouth the wonderful juice of the shell fish which the great bird had been eating. While he did this the mother preened her feathers, and took a few stately steps to stretch her legs, for she had been all night on the nest, and then she wheeled in a wonderful circle over the lagoon, mounting higher and higher until at last she was in line with many flamingoes who were heading with tilted wings against the wind, on their way to the beaches and sand-bars.

The sun grew very hot and the wind died away. The waters of the lagoon flashed in the burning light, and the heat was terrible. But over the nests where the babies lay the tall birds threw their shadows, and again and again little White

Wing was turned over in his bed, and he was given innumerable feedings. So at last, when the sun went down and the air grew cool, he was surprisingly different from what he had been in the morning. He was already larger, and his wings and his feet were getting strength enough so that he could move, and he had found a little voice of his own.

With successive days he grew apace, and at last he tumbled himself out of the nest and began to walk. The nest was a mound of mud and sand, for all the world like a basket of sticks and moss reposing on an inverted flower-pot, and not so high but what White Wing could struggle back into it when the heat of the day came and his watchful father took his post by the side of the little home to throw the shadow of his stately figure over it.

At first White Wing was just like the other little flamingoes, and with them he began to play on the sandy floor of the flamingo city, and with them he very soon learned to take short flights as his wings developed. But just as a hundred or so of cousins began to shed their white down and to grow very brown and fuzzy, he began to get whiter and whiter. In a few weeks they were beginning to shed their brown clothes for the beautiful pink feathers which are the proper thing for the flamingo.

Little White Wing was somewhat distressed when his playmates began to jeer at him, and it was perplexing to note a lack of affection on the part of his beautiful father and mother. For his elders were greatly embarrassed. Nothing like this had ever happened in their family. And, so far as the handsome father could learn by inquiry among the oldest birds of Flamingotown, no one had ever heard of a white flamingo. But when the neighbors cast aspersions, and hinted that there must be some common blood in that family, then the father grew angry and the gentle mother had all she could do to keep him from killing little White Wing.

Every night the little fellow would bury his head close to his beautiful mother's ear, and say:

"Don't you think, perhaps, dear mother, that I'll be pink in the morning?"

And she would tell him to hush and be quiet and go to sleep.

But when morning came he would be as white as ever, and his long sad day would begin. No one would play with him and he was soon shifting for himself. Somehow he picked up a living of tiny fish in the long pools of tide-water that the waves left in the soggy lagoon, and when all his playmates had gone to bed and it was safe to come among them, he would step home, picking his way between the nests, and trying to reach his own without calling attention to himself.

All this was hard, but it speedily grew worse. The King of the flamingoes said that the white offspring must die.

"Begone, my child, begone!" the mother whispered to him, for she had heard that little White Wing was to die. "Go away, as far as you can. Sometime it will be all right. Remember that your mother loves you."

So that ended White Wing's childhood. Even before the first streak of dawn, the beautiful young bird flew out and away. Across the lagoon, miles and miles to the westward, over a wide stretch of sea he flew until his wings could hardly bear him up. Then he sighted land, and he strained every nerve to reach it. When at last he wheeled down to the sands in the shade of a great mangrove tree, his first day's flight was finished and he was a lonely, famished bird on a strange shore.

But a deep, sweet voice suddenly came to him. At first he could not place it. Then he saw to his astonishment a huge turtle only a few yards below him on the beach.

"Ah, ha!" she was saying in her most affectionate way. "So there you are! I've heard of you. They drove you out, did they? Didn't want any variety in the family. Well, well, Sonny, cheer up."

Then this large and hearty creature pawed her way heavily up the sands, and continued her remarks:

"Funny creatures, you birds. Now look at me and consider the difference. I don't care a clam what my children look like. I'm on my way up to that sand dune this very blessed minute to lay about nine pecks of eggs. And I hope they hatch and the young ones won't get eaten up. But they can come out of that shell any color

they please, for all I care. We turtles don't worry. We just float along easy. That's the way to live."

Then she gave a hearty laugh and settled down to digging a pit in the white sands.

"S'pose you run along, Sonny, and pick up your supper. I rather like my own company when I'm laying eggs. But just come back a little later and I'll tell your fortune."

No one had ever called him Sonny before, and never had he dreamed that such high good humor existed anywhere. The good old turtle and her cheerful ways had suddenly made life worth living. And poor White Wing, on coming to himself, realized that he was very hungry. He feasted, indeed, ravenously on fiddler crabs, which he otherwise would have despised, and the moon was high and he was heavy with sleep when Mrs. Turtle, after hours of scratching and pawing, had patiently buried her eggs, and was ready to talk. What she had to say was brief, but it cast the life of White Wing in strange places, and it was on her words that he made his great journey.

"You're bound to be somebody," she began. "Probably a king. But this is no place for you around here. You must go where you are wanted. And that is a long ways from this quiet spot. There's a great Emperor who has a palace by the smoking mountains. He's been wishing for a white flamingo all his life. If you can get there, why, your fortune is made. If you fly with your feet to the sunrise until you come to the great river mouth, and if you follow that river long enough, you'll see the mountains with the fiery tops. That's the place. And you want to walk right in as though you owned the kingdom. Don't be scared when you get there. Just forget about those saucy cousins of yours back home and be as grand as you know how."

Poor White Wing was almost dizzy at this unexpected vision of good things. He did not reckon on what the journey meant. But the motherly old turtle was particular to tell him of the many islands he must pass, and the dangers that he would encounter. Then she bade him God-speed, and began her toilsome way down the sands, for she was intent upon reaching deep water again.

"I have a long way to go," she said; and added that sometime they would be sure to meet again.

The second morning found White Wing far out at sea once more, straining his eyes for the island where he was to get food and water, and cherishing to himself but one idea—to reach the great Emperor who wanted a white flamingo.

After many days and nights of lonely travel, he came to a mountain solid green and black, with palms and forest trees; where there were no white shores, but a heavy marshy line of wonderful vegetation. And from the height at which he flew he could discern the muddy strip of river water which stained the blue sapphire of the ocean. This, then, was the river, and far up its course must be the mountains and the city of the great Emperor.

He was right in his conjectures. For a black bird, with a yellow bill as big as a cleaver, greeted him with familiar and jovial laughter, and told him that he was indeed on the right path. This bird was a toucan and he told many things of his family to White Wing, adding much good advice. He was distressed that the beautiful stranger would not eat bananas, and explained that he owed his good health to an exclusive fruit diet.

"But then," he admitted with a noisy laugh, "somebody must eat the fish, I'm sure. And I'm glad if you like them."

Also this happy-go-lucky toucan volunteered to guide White Wing on his flight up the valley. But, like so many guides, he fell out before he accomplished all that he had promised. For scarcely had the two traveled a day's journey when they came upon a prodigious growth of wild figs, and the greedy toucan would go no farther.

Those were hard hours for poor White Wing. The river valley was dark and hot, and in the night he was perpetually wakened by the startling sounds around him. Such noisy parrots he had never dreamed of, nor such millions of burning insects that flashed and flashed their lanterns till the heavy vines and palm leaves seemed afire with them. And the screams of terror that rose from the dark depths of the forest when the great cats or the powerful snakes seized their prey, chilled his blood.

But the days brought him at last to higher ground, and finally to a wonderful plain where it all seemed but so many miles of lawn and clear smooth waters. He took heart. Suddenly the mountains came in sight. Yes, and one of them was sending out a thin stream of smoke into the cloudless sky. Another day, possibly that very night, he would reach the city of the Emperor.

Very wisely he waited for the dawn. He had seen the high walls, and the housetops, and the glittering armaments of the palace as they glowed in the sunset, and he had heard strange music, a sweet confusion of lovely sounds. But from the cliffs above the river he watched and waited and preened his beautiful white suit.

When morning came, just as the mountains were pink and the city was cool and gray, a grand procession mounted a great rock above the Emperor's palace. Trains of slaves and priests there were, the sounds of drums, and a heavy, solemn chanting. The Emperor was to greet the sun and they were all to worship the great light, for it was their deity.

Then White Wing soared high above them all. His great white form was suddenly thrown against the rising sun, and it was beautiful beyond comparison. No living bird had ever seemed so lovely. He could see the crowds of men and women and the ranks of priests start back in one motion of surprise. Then he floated down, slowly and with great calm, alighting on the stone altar where the Emperor was staring upward in amaze.

From that hour, after the court had recovered from its surprise, White Wing was almost an emperor himself. A park was made for him and slaves were in attendance. The tenderest of tiny fish and juicy snails were given him to eat, and he was a familiar of that barbaric household whose slightest inclination was taken to be law, and whose smallest preferences were translated into royal commands. He was ceremoniously tethered with a golden chain and a clasp of blue jewels to his thin leg, but even such a regal restraint was abandoned and the jewels and the beaten gold and the turquoise were made into a neck chain which he wore with great dignity.

Never could the Emperor enter into his councils and audiences without the Prince of the Dawn, as he was called; and White Wing was a sage and judicial counselor.

He would stand for hours on one leg, his jewels flashing upon his breast, his head turned at a knowing angle, as if in the profoundest thought, a very embodiment of wisdom beside the throne. In reality he was sound asleep, a condition wherein he set an immortal example for ministers of state.

For years he dwelt in splendor and acquired great wisdom. And for the little princes and princesses, who were many and lovely, he had great affection.

But of his love for one princess in particular and of the jealousies which grew up so that his life was plotted against and he was at last to be undone, there is another story which the wonderful Mrs. Leatherback is always slow to relate.

She has been known to depart and pursue her business in foreign lands, returning at her leisure, before she will be induced to relate the rest of the story of Prince Flamingo.

XIV

PRINCE FLAMINGO'S TRIUMPHANT RETURN

In the gorgeous court of the Emperor, where White Wing had come into such great good fortune, the one person whom everybody feared was the splendid ruler himself. For rulers have been notable in history for their fickle ways and shifting affections, and this emperor was no exception to the rule. First it was one favorite who fell into disfavor, and then another, and even the priests and the councilors, who were the closest to him, were as unsafe as the meanest slave. For while an underling could be made away with quickly and at a word, the Emperor was no less willing to let his anger smolder through a long and carefully plotted revenge in the case of some person who might be next to him in rank. So there were mysterious things happening in the great stone palace, and White Wing observed soon after he came there that nobody seemed really to enjoy the wonderful splendors of the court itself but, on the contrary, they seemed always anxious to be in the parks or the city, or even out on the lonely plains around it, rather than in the vast rooms of stone and silver.

Nevertheless, White Wing had nothing to fear from the stalwart and imperious

ruler, for the bird was truly his most treasured possession; and if he were in an evil mood, the Emperor would often betake himself to White Wing's splendid garden, and there he would toy with the bird, asking him many questions, and seeming always content to find his answer in the flamingo's sagacious looks, or a chance nod of the creature's head.

There were the troops of lovely children, too, whose quarters were a whole part of the palace itself, and these were a delight to White Wing, for they were gentle with him and fed him all sorts of dainties from their little brown hands.

Among these was a lovely little girl who grew to be a favorite of the Emperor's and was deeply attached to White Wing.

One day, to the latter's great distress, he saw traces of tears on the child's face as she came hurrying across the enclosed garden to the sunken pool where White Wing was looking down into the water at the gold fish. There happened to be no one in the great courtyard at that moment but the child and the stately bird. She looked around first, to be sure that what she was about to say would not be overheard.

"Oh, Prince of the Dawn, dear Prince," she began, "do you know what has happened? I have run away from the others just to tell you. It's the saddest thing in the world. The Emperor is sending all the children away to the farthermost corner of the land to keep them in hiding. And only the soldiers and the priests are to live here now. There is only one hour left, for down below the great walls there are thousands of bearers and mules laden with everything, and a whole army of escorts. Maybe we shall never come back."

Then she threw herself at White Wing's feet and clutched the flowers on the border of the fountain as she cried.

But this was only the beginning of the troubles in that great palace. What the princess had told White Wing explained much that he had observed, but what the child did not know, and what the Emperor feared the most, was the plotting that went on against his own life and the rivalries among his generals. The kingdom was being attacked to the eastward. Up that same valley that White Wing had

followed in his flight, a terrible army was marching against the capital of this realm. It was an army of men from the other side of the world. Such conquerors they were as even the Emperor himself had never dreamed of.

But now excited slaves came rushing in and bore the child off. She had scarcely time to say farewell, and poor White Wing heard her sobs as they died away through the courtyards and arched corridors. Yes, his palace was being deserted, and he could walk through empty rooms and suddenly stilled hallways without meeting a soul. Everybody was in the lower courtyard watching the departure of the household.

But just as White Wing, much depressed and filled with wonder, came to a little doorway in a corner of the great upper hall, he heard voices. They were the Emperor's councilors, he knew, but why they should be there now when everybody was so busy elsewhere, he wondered. They were not talking as usual, but whispering, and a great curtain had been drawn across the doorway.

White Wing knew that the chamber was lighted by a window that opened to a tiny courtyard of its own. To reach this court without passing through the room was impossible to any one but such as White Wing. He could mount the walls by a short flight from the garden, and descend within the secret yard.

This he did, for he was bound to learn what the priests and councilors were up to. The Emperor was not with them, and he felt sure that it was something treacherous that they were doing.

He was just in time as he settled down on the stone copings outside the great window. First he looked to make sure that his shadow was not visible across the pavement. He was assured of his safety, and knew that his arrival there had not been betrayed by so much as a ruffle of his beautiful wings.

The voices were deciding the fate of the Emperor and of White Wing too. The priests were to tell the Emperor that he must sacrifice the thing that he loved the most and that he must do it with his own hand. And it was to be arranged that as he knelt at the great altar of black stone to kill the bird, an arrow should be sent from a secret place on the walls, so that the Emperor with his back turned to the

court should perish then and there.

White Wing's blood ran cold. This, then, was why his great master had always been fearful and morose, and often cruel. His own house was full of men that hated him and were yet his own brothers. They were ready now, just as the kingdom was rallying to save itself, to seize it all into their own hands. They would be rid of him, and his mysterious bird too, for they feared in a childish way that White Wing had been sent to the Emperor by some divine agent, and they hated the innocent creature because they were both fearful and jealous of him.

They were now deciding which one of them should let fly the arrow which should kill the Emperor. White Wing could hear them rattling the jeweled discs or dice with which he had often seen them playing. Evidently the process of making the decision was a complicated one, for he heard the little carved discs rattling in their box a number of times. Then there was silence and a voice which he knew was that of the Emperor's half-brother spoke in clear tones:

"I am glad that it has fallen on me!"

Suddenly the sound of drums and horns and a great deal of shouting broke the silence. The Emperor had said farewell to his household, and in great clamor the slaves and the favorites and the troops of beautiful children were departing from the city. The Emperor's heralds were calling his councilors to the great audience chamber. White Wing heard the treacherous creatures scuttle from the little room in haste, and he heard the dice which they had been using rattle to the floor as they upset a table in their hurry to get out. Slowly and cautiously, he looked into the room. It was deserted. Then he went in and looked around him and picked up one of the little dice. It was a small, black jewel, curiously engraven. He tucked it under his wing and stalked quietly through the curtained doorway, and down the long corridor with its shadowy arches until it brought him to the sunny courts that bounded his own walled garden.

What he achieved by this simple act of sagacity is quickly told. The Emperor, who had known nothing of the secret council, guessed immediately that it had taken place when White Wing dropped the black counter at his feet. They were alone in the garden, and it was late in the evening. The bird little knew that this was not one of the gaming dice at all, but the sacred dice used to settle life and death

decisions in the Emperor's secret debates with his court.

Puzzled as the Emperor was at first, he was not long in establishing his conclusions. He had just been told by the priests that he must sacrifice the white flamingo, and his half-brother had been alarmingly affectionate, having even caressed his shoulder as he thanked the great ruler for having placed him at the head of certain troops which were of the greatest importance in the forthcoming battles.

Then the Emperor knew what to do. He said nothing but was exceedingly watchful. Coming early in the morning to White Wing he bade the great bird good-by.

"You must fly over to your own people, dear bird," he said. "My enemies will eventually kill you if you do not go. And perhaps, when these great invaders have taken my city, I shall be reduced to slavery. You have been my greatest pleasure, and you have served here all that you were intended to. You have saved my life, for the scheme to kill me while I was to be offering you in sacrifice has all come out. I drew confession from certain of the councilors when I had them in the dungeons but an hour ago. Never would I have suspected them but for your wonderful means of warning me."

Then, in the earliest dawn, before the blazing sun had blanched the palace walls, White Wing soared slowly into the air, leaving the great Emperor standing alone by the deserted altar. There were no cheering crowds as there had been when he came to that terrible city, and in their stead were camps and tents and all the sights of preparing war upon the plains. But the Emperor's hands were upraised and his face was very splendid as he gazed off into the heavens whither his wonderful white flamingo was disappearing.

All that consoled the bird in the sorrow of leaving his master was the thought of having saved the great man's life. But for that, he would have died from misery, believing that he should have stayed there until his own life was taken. He little knew that thousands of his own kind were waiting for him. But such was the case, and he soon learned as he flew toward the setting sun, retracing his journey, that he was already the prince of birds. Whole flocks of beautiful parrots, and great orioles, and tropic thrushes would greet him and fly in hosts ahead of him. From

the great city down through the wide valley and the dark forests to the coast, he traveled with couriers to tell all the birds of his coming. And as he passed, at last, out over the ocean to find the island whence he had come, there were flocks and flocks of flamingoes overtaking and surrounding him.

One strange thing he saw, and that was a fleet of ships with sails greater than ever he had dreamed of. These were galleons of the conquerors, come to destroy the city of barbaric splendors where White Wing had been a courtier. But he did not know this, and only marveled at the sight.

At last, when his escort had grown to such numbers that, flying as they did in single file, the line of birds seemed to arch the sky from east to west, he came to the coast which he knew to be his own. Then to the selfsame stretch of coral beach, where the palms were leaning over the dunes exactly as he had left them. With slackened speed and flying lower and lower until he caught the scent of the old familiar earth, he skimmed above the lagoon and was suddenly over his home! White Wing flew straight to his mother.

The thousand relatives and as many new ones were there too, and with the arrival of White Wing's friends, who had glided in, one after another, the confusion of greetings in Flamingotown was deafening.

From then until his death, which was not to be for many, many years, White Wing, whose adventures had become known until they were household words, was the ruler of all flamingoes everywhere.

That he was beneficent, you may be sure. And for one thing, quite the greatest thing in his life, he instituted a change in family life by decreeing that all the gentlemen should take their turn in helping the lady birds to hatch their eggs. It is from his reign that this admirable custom dates, as Mrs. Leatherback will assure you.

As for that generous lady, she came to have her part in the history of the times. For the great explorers who came to ravish the kingdom where White Wing received such honors, happened to take Mrs. Leatherback captive on one of the islands. They took her aboard ship and were all for taking her back with them to

the great court of Spain. But even after they had branded her with the arms of the court of Castile and Aragon, and had secured her to the deck of the galleon, she eluded them and fell into the sea. Consequently she has lived these hundreds of years a member, as she is pleased to think, of the greatest court in Europe. She soon came in the round of her journeys to White Wing's island and there she visited him a long time. So they could recount their adventures; and he has never ceased to love her for the cheer she gave him that first night of his lonely journey. For her part, she is only too proud of her Prince Flamingo, as she calls him, thereby disputing honors with the gentle mother bird, who has always been too happy to talk much about her little White Wing.

So all the above is just as the Heron tells it. And he is the one who knows Mrs. Leatherback the best, and he has had it from her many times. Moreover, he always ends with the wish that in some way that old turtle could have the last desire of her life fulfilled. Strange as it may seem, she has never seen the wonderful device of the Spanish Arms which was branded and carved upon her back. It gives her a wry neck to attempt it and she has given up trying. So she always lives in hope of finding a looking-glass some day at the bottom of the sea.

But meanwhile she contents herself with getting her friends to tell her how it looks, and it is because the Heron is very particular to do this, and do it well, thereby making the old lady feel comfortable, that he can always get her to relate the story of Prince Flamingo.

XV

MOTHER FOX'S HOSPITAL

Virginia was a very little girl when she visited the home of the animals under the garnet hill. She was the only person who had ever been there, as the good Mrs. Fox assured her, and the only way, indeed, that she can prove that she had actually been there at all is to ask her pet cat, who accompanied her, whether it is all true or not. Always the cat blinks his eyes with the most knowing air, and nods his head. So that is proof enough.

Virginia was gathering blueberries and she had strayed farther and farther away from the farm house until she suddenly found that she could no longer see the top

of the red chimney, nor the peak of the barn. Never had her little feet carried her so far into the pastures as this. To make it worse, she could not seem to find her way back. The low birch trees and the sweet fern seemed taller, and the light beneath them was not so warm and bright.

Virginia started to run, but she had taken only a few steps when she tripped and fell. It almost seemed that the briary vine in the grass had reached out and entangled her. But she was a brave little girl and would sooner do anything than cry out. It was discouraging to have all the berries in her pail spilled over the ground, but she set to work picking them out of the moss and leaves, while she kept wishing that somebody would come to help her.

Then she pricked her finger on a thorn. It was then, she knows, that she began to hear lovely voices; for no sooner had she felt the sharp scratch than she heard a sweet sighing song all around her.

Of all the wishes in her life the greatest was to know what the trees and the birds were saying. Now she knew.

For on all sides the voices were as sweet as music. "What pretty blue eyes she has!" and "How lovely her cheeks are!" and "Just see her golden hair!" were remarks she caught between the sounds of silvery laughter.

She jumped up, leaving her berries on the ground, and started again to run. For she was suddenly afraid of these voices, even though they were so sweet.

A familiar *Me-ew* greeted her. It was her pet cat, Tiger, who then began talking to her as plainly as though he had been to school and could read and write.

"How fine this is!" he exclaimed. "To think you can hear at last!" and he went on explaining that no one had ever understood what he was saying before.

"How often," he purred, "have I followed you into the pasture, hoping that you would prick your finger on the right sort of thorn, so that at last we could talk

things over! My, but won't all the world be glad to know of this!" he added. "Why, it doesn't happen once in a thousand years!"

With that the beautiful gray cat ran off into the woods, only to return accompanied by troops and troops of beautiful little creatures: the field mice, who didn't seem to object to the cat at all, and the squirrels, even the shiny moles, and some very excited birds, who flew round and round the little girl, calling her name, and telling her how they loved her.

Why she should have followed the cat into the woods, Virginia did not know, but he ran ahead and bade her follow, and she seemed only too willing to do so. The trees spoke so pleasantly as she passed them that it was impossible not to go on.

"How she does resemble her great-grandmother!" said one of the trees. It was an aged oak who had known Virginia's family ever since it had settled in those parts. She felt that she must stop and return the greetings, for she was always carefully polite to old people.

"Why, it was my little brother," the tree continued, "who was ordained to the ministry in your grandfather's church. Your grandfather did the preaching, and my brother held the floor up. He also was cut by the builders to carry the major load of the roof. You see I have known your family a long while. I am the oldest white oak in this woodland."

But before he could say another word, a beautiful red fox jumped out of the bushes and told the tree to stop talking.

"Don't weary that little girl with all your memories," Red Fox said. "If you get started, you'll never stop. And she has an invitation to Mother Fox's Hospital. She must come immediately."

All this was very strange. Virginia wished to talk to the good old oak some more, but Red Fox gave her a knowing look and held out his hand in such a cordial way, and so urgently, that she bade the venerable tree good-afternoon and ran to catch up with her new friend, who was already beckoning to her from some distance

ahead. Bounding along the path beside her came Tiger Kitty, whom Virginia was indeed glad to have with her.

She was no longer on familiar ground. The woods were dense, and she felt that she was running a long way from home.

But suddenly Red Fox stopped. They had come to what appeared a jagged and moss-grown rock. It was the side of an old pit that had been dug into the shoulder of the hill, and at any other time Virginia would have remembered it as the old quarry where once she had been taken by her brothers and sisters on a picnic. But now she saw that it concealed in reality a doorway. Moss-grown and dark, the door was hardly discoverable, but it opened easily enough when Red Fox applied his key. And standing there to greet Virginia and Tiger Kitty was a wonderful old fox, with spectacles and a frilled bonnet and the kindliest face in the world.

"This is my mother," said Red Fox; "she's the matron."

"Yes," the good old soul admitted, "I am Mother Fox, and this charitable home for the destitute of the field and forest is named after me."

Virginia was embarrassed, but only for a minute, for sweet old Mother Fox invited her into the parlor and then, after she had been offered the most delicious of cakes, and the creamiest of milk, and had eaten a refreshing supper, she was shown through the home.

Living there was every poor animal that Virginia had ever known. And they were all in such supreme comfort and having such a good time that she was sure she had never seen so many people so happy all at once, never in her whole life.

"Our only discontented inmate is Mr. Wolf," said the matronly Mrs. Fox. "Would you like to see him?"

She led the way down a long hall to where Mr. Wolf was seated in a little room of his own, gnawing and snapping at his nurses, who were none other than the

hedgehog and the big snapping turtle.

"Two rather sharp people for nurses," Red Fox remarked, almost in apology; "but you see it takes some one with a good deal of character to handle him."

In a great room which was a dining-hall, with high tables for the big animals, and low ones for the little folk, she saw the animals that were privileged to be there eating the most tempting dishes. There was lettuce salad for the rabbits, and corn-bread for the field mice, and blackberry pudding for the whole partridge family, and persimmon jam for the 'possums, and even lily roots creamed and on toast for the poor old muskrats.

"All charity," said Red Fox. "All charity! Out in the world every one of these poor animals was cruelly hurt, or starved. Of course, we're hunted and stoned, and chased, and shot at. That's all men want—a chance to kill us. Here's where we take care of our cripples and paupers."

Virginia was wonderstruck and was about to ask a question, when a lame but beautiful lady tapped Mother Fox's shoulder and asked her to introduce the visitor.

"Oh, surely! Pardon me, Lady Orchid."

Lady Orchid put the sweetest, tenderest hand into Virginia's, and the little girl looked into the loveliest flower face in the world.

"I'm Lady Arethusa," the wonderful creature breathed, as she curtsied very low to the little girl. "You see I'm crippled. I was pulled up by the roots in such a careless way. You did it yourself, if you remember, only the other day."

The little girl wanted to cry, but the lovely orchid repented having come too close to the truth, and quickly added:

"No; it was your brother, possibly. At any rate, I beg you never to pull any of us out in that violent way again. I am sure we all love you too much. We Arethusas have lived on your place a great many years. The small white violets, by the way, that live by the door-step at your home, tell me that they can't get close enough to you and your sweet mother, they love you so. And there is a lovely begonia living here whom your mother lost, despite her care. Some one neglected it, and it died of thirst. Your mother was visiting at the time, I believe."

"Yes," said Mother Fox; "that is so often the case. Fathers and brothers are very careless in such matters. They are not so tender as a rule with their plant cousins under their roof."

Then, as they left the dining-room, where the animals were just reaching the dessert, who should come flying up to Virginia but a beautiful oriole. He too, it seems, knew the little girl.

"Yes, indeed, dear child," he sang out to her; "I have known you a long time. I live in the elm-tree. And I want to thank you for those lovely threads that you put out on the lawn for me when I was refurnishing my house. I am here to call on some relatives, but I will sing to you by your window in the morning."

Then Virginia remembered that a ball of beautiful worsted had been missing from her mother's work-basket after it had been left on the porch. This explained it all. She was astonished, but the gray cat laughed out merrily:

"Yes, he stole it; but the dear bird thinks you left it there for him. If you look out of the attic window when we get home you can see his nest in the elm. It's mostly blue worsted."

"Why didn't you tell me before, if you knew it?" Virginia asked, really grieved at Tiger Kitty's lack of confidence.

"Why," repeated the cat, and then he only smiled very broadly, "because you were always deaf, my dear."

Presently, while they were walking down the corridor, the merriest music burst on Virginia's ear. In a room all to themselves, the rabbits were rehearsing for a minstrel show. They were dancing in the most giddy fashion, and she could not help laughing aloud as she watched them.

But as she laughed, something happened, and the cat, who had just opened his mouth to say something, closed it with a sudden look of disappointment.

"You see, she spilled the berries, and fell asleep while trying to pick them up."

It was a familiar voice. Virginia turned around. Her mother and big brother and little sister were kneeling beside her in the ferns. It was evening and she could hear the cows calling to be let through the farm gate.

"And I never said good-by to Mr. Red Fox!" she exclaimed. Then she rubbed her eyes and smiled, for they were all kissing her, and big brother was putting her on his shoulder.

Her strange experience she kept to herself for a long time. But she talked it all over with Tiger Kitty, and he seemed to understand it, every word. Most of all when she climbed the attic stairs and looked at the bird's nest, it was of blue worsted, as plain as plain could be.

And she was sure then and for the rest of her life that the birds and the flowers loved the old home with its trees and its gardens as much as she did.

And she always thought of sweet Lady Orchid when she gathered wild flowers.

XVI

WHY MRS. CROW IS BLACK

It was the dead of night. Old Mr. Fox left his cozy den and went to call on his

friend, the wise old Mrs. Owl. For many years it had been his custom to do this, for he found her the most engaging company. Her home was in a hollow tree and she was always obliging enough to put her head out the window and inquire who was there, if any of her friends knocked hard and long at the basement door. It was useless to call in the daytime: she was always asleep while the sun shone, and in the early evening she would be abroad hunting her supper. But after the cocks crew at midnight, and people in their beds were turning over to get their best sleep, Mrs. Owl would come flying through the woods and across the river, and up the hill to her own great tree, having eaten heartily of whatever she may have found. Then she was ready to sit on her window ledge for a visit with her friends.

So it was very late, and the woods was still as death, when *patter, patter*, through the underbrush came Mr. Fox to call on Mrs. Owl. Arriving at the bridge across the river, he jumped nimbly to the hand-rail and trotted on that narrow board as easily as a cat walks over the fence. For he was sure some dog would pass that way, come morning, but no dog would ever scent the wise fox who walks the rail.

"Always sniffing at the ground, these foolish dogs," thought Mr. Fox; and he laughed to himself as he jumped down into the bushes and ran on to the hill and the great cottonwood tree, whither Mrs. Owl herself had just returned.

With a big stick he hit the tree a hard blow. Then he barked politely and sat down to wait.

Way up in the top of the dead tree the window was open. Two great eyes looked out.

"Who's there? Who's there?" came in the most dreadful tones.

"Only your friend, a brother thief," laughed Mr. Fox; for in the company of Mrs. Owl he could afford this slanderous admission.

"Ha, ha!" screamed Mrs. Owl, who didn't mind being called a thief at all. In fact, she laughed so hard and long that every living being asleep in those woods awoke and shivered with a sudden terror. For it was the laughter of Mrs. Owl, you know,

that made the blacksnake's blood run cold, and never has he been able to warm it up again, even by lying all day in the sun.

She scratched her ear and leaned a little farther out. After controlling her mirth, she grew very solemn and whispered down to Mr. Fox that she had discovered but an hour ago a certain roost with the most enticing hole in the roof.

"Easy and safe, you know," she giggled. "Two broilers and a fowl I've had this very night." Then she laughed again, "Ha, ha! Hoo, hoo!"

But Mr. Fox knew she was lying. She was only trying to get him into trouble.

"Thanks for the hint," he barked; "but it is easier to get in by the roof than out by the roof, you know, unless one is gifted as you are with wings, Mrs. Owl."

"True, true," she said, in her wisest tones.

"And I really came, dear Mrs. Owl, to ask a question of you. Can you tell me why the crows are black?"

There was a long silence, for Mrs. Owl must have time to think. All things were known to her, but she revealed her knowledge only with the greatest deliberation.

First she looked all around, then she laughed again, this time so loud and long that Mr. Fox thought she never would have done, and at last she exclaimed:

"Why, Mr. Fox, the crows are black for just the same reason that you ought to be black and I ought to be black too."

At this Mr. Fox was puzzled, but as Mrs. Owl seemed to think it such a joke he joined in her laughter, and between them they made the most distressing noise.

"You see," she said at last, while she held her sides and caught her breath. "You see, the whole miserable lot of them, the crows, used to be as bright and giddy as overgrown humming-birds. Red, white, and blue, they were. They would have been the national bird, I'm told, but the eagle always takes that honor by his overbearing ways. For my part, such honors are doubtful. I'd rather stand for wisdom than for politics. But, be that as it may, the crows were once the gayest of the birds. It was their mad career of theft and murder which brought the change."

At this they both screamed with laughter again, and it was a long time before Mrs. Owl could resume her story.

"Complaints against the crows came from everywhere. The robins—bless their souls—the larks, the pigeons, and every family you ever heard of, were determined to do something to the crows for snatching their young ones and stealing their eggs.

"Of course, you know, similar complaints have been lodged against me," she added; "but the point is, my family was never caught. Besides, the crows get corn and such to eat, and the whole world felt that the crow was stepping out of his class, you know, when he took to eating birds and eggs and frogs. It was the greediness of an upstart family. That's what it was."

The very thought of this aspect of the case made Mrs. Owl so indignant that she screamed and hooted loud and long.

"It was all long, long ago," she said. "The birds met in a great meeting. Something had to be done, and it was thought that war would be declared and the crows would all be killed or driven to live on a lonely island. But somebody, Mrs. Yellowhammer, I think it was, put in a word in their favor. She was a tender-hearted fool and recalled something decent the crows had done. She said that they had left her a lot of acorns one cold winter, and she felt so much obliged to them. The crows would have been done to death except for what she said. There were two doves on the jury, too; and they're a weak and sentimental lot, you know. At any rate, the sentence which the judge, a wonderful old owl, pronounced, was to the effect that the crows must forever go in black. They had to fly all the way to Egypt, where the little people live, to get their clothes changed.

"The Birds Met in a Great Meeting. Something Had to Be Done"

"Oh, it was hard for them. Poor Mrs. Crow could think of nothing to say but *Caught! Caught! Caught!* and that grew to be *Caw! Caw! Caw!* after a while. Sometimes I feel a little sorry for her and her family; but, as you know, they are very much down on me. I can't imagine why."

She winked a long green wink at Mr. Fox. For she knew, and he knew, that Mrs. Owl had that very night eaten all the little crows she could steal from their nests. And he knew that Mrs. Owl would never dare to fly abroad in daylight for the crows. Then both of them made the woods fairly shiver with their laughter.

But it was growing light, and Mrs. Owl and Mr. Fox both felt that a night well spent deserved a long day of sleep, so they parted and Mr. Fox went to his home,

greatly pleased to know why the crows are black, and why they must forever say, "Caught! Caught! Caught!"

XVII

MRS. MUSKRAT'S POOR RELATIONS

Mrs. Muskrat owned a beautiful home of her own on the edge of the mill-pond. She had built the house years ago, and had kept it in the best of repair. It was cleverly concealed at a point where tufts of grass and overhanging bushes afforded protection, and at the same time it was well out in the pond, quite inaccessible to Mrs. Muskrat's enemies.

The roof rose like an inverted bowl over a circular wall of mud and sticks; and so neatly were the straws and sticks matted over the top that the house seemed at first glance to be but an accidental confusion of dried leaves and old branches. This was as it should be, for Mrs. Muskrat, like many persons of good taste, preferred to have a home of interior elegance and ease to one with merely a showy exterior.

It was autumn and Mrs. Muskrat was congratulating herself upon her well filled larder and the prospects of a comfortable winter.

"I am always glad," she would say to the neighbor that happened in, "I am always glad that I moved down here from that upper pond when I did. It was a poor place to live and one was in constant danger of the water's being drawn off. Those farmers are so inconsiderate you can never tell when they will take it into their heads to drain the meadows, and then it is all up with us poor creatures."

She would then continue her narrative, after the manner of many people who take interest in no affairs but their own, and would probably burden her caller with the full account of how she had prevailed upon her husband, the young Dr. Muskrat, to leave the shallows of the upper home and set up for himself on the edges of the deep and permanent mill-pond.

"And," she would always conclude, "a mill-pond is so very much more aristocratic—not to mention a much better growth of provisions. Personally, I love deep water, and the sound of the mill-wheel is dear to my heart. No; I shall never go back to the upper pond."

Always the neighbors knew that Mrs. Muskrat, in alluding to the elegance of the mill-pond society, was, in point of fact, repudiating her poor relations, who had gone on living in the distant meadows. For, like many people who move to the town and prosper, waxing fat and successful, she was given to a feeling of pity that sounded a good deal like contempt for the poor relatives back in the country.

Little did she realize what the winter was to bring forth as she swam in and out of her front door, crossing to the opposite shores and back, always bringing the tenderest roots and lily stalks for her winter provisions. She was very content with the world, although she regretted the departure of her best friend, Mrs. Thrush, whose nest was in the alders almost over her very head, and she was sorry that the turtles had found it necessary to retire into the deep mud for their winter's sleep.

The sun was bright, however, and cheerful sounds came from the fields where men were loading pumpkins into the farm wagon, and from the orchards came the laughter of merry boys gathering apples. This drew her attention to the old, neglected tree which grew on the bank of the pond. Its fruit was bright, and there was much of it, but it hung high.

"If only there comes a good brisk wind to-night," she thought, "those apples will blow to the ground; and I can think of nothing more to my taste than a bit of fresh fruit."

Hardly had she indulged these pleasant thoughts of good eating, when she was surprised to see a visitor approaching her house. It was none other than the leanest and poorest of her cousins from the upper pond. Something in his presence told her of trouble to come. And her first question was not at all too polite.

"Why, what on earth are you down here for?" exclaimed Mrs. Muskrat.

"Haven't you anything to do at home? I should think you would be busy putting in your own winter stores."

Before she could get any further, her lanky cousin interrupted her.

"Yes, yes; you would naturally think, Cousin Flattail, that we would be as busy as you are. But we have no longer any home to store things in, and we are at the edge of winter with starvation ahead of us. Farmer Jones drew the pond off yesterday. Already the shores of our poor meadow are drained of every drop. Our house is high and dry and we shall freeze to death if we stay in it."

With that they both looked up, for in the quiet society of the mill-pond a great confusion reigned.

All the poor relations were coming down from the upper meadows! Cousins, uncles, aunts, and brothers-in-law. It was an invasion—muskrats big and muskrats little.

Mrs. Muskrat gave one look and then bobbed down into the water and rushed through her house to lock the back door, scuttling again to the front to secure her main entrance by seating herself directly across it.

"There now!" she chattered angrily. "I'll watch any of you get into this house!"

For in the confusion of things people are often more distracted than need be, and Mrs. Muskrat was behaving very ugly and selfish because she hadn't taken time to think. All her neighbors behaved in much the same way at first; but when they saw the poor little baby cousins and reflected upon what this misfortune meant to the children, their hearts softened, and one by one the doors were opened, and the families invited in different ways to make the best of it. They must all live through the winter somehow.

But what they thought was going to be the season of the greatest hardship turned out to be the most brilliant winter that the muskrats had ever known, and the

cousins all concluded that they never before had really appreciated one another.

Most exceptional, indeed, was Mrs. Flattail Muskrat's good luck, for she chose to live with her the cleverest of her nephews, the lively little Skinny Muskrat, who proved to be a wonderful musician. Every evening of the long winter they had delightful parties and dances in the snug quarters of their homes. All about them would be solid ice, and overhead, around the roofs, the driven, packed snow; but within, where all was warm and snug, there was the greatest merriment.

Little Skinny Muskrat was in great demand. His aunt always went with him out to supper or to spend the evening. And it was surprising how much more she got out of her neighbors than ever she had enjoyed at their tables before the adoption of this charming nephew.

It was the usual thing to say after supper: "And now won't Skinny give us some music? He plays so beautifully on his toe-nails!"

So the obliging Skinny would blow through his nails and produce the scratchiest and most exciting dance tunes in the world.

So eagerly was his society sought, that Mrs. Muskrat at last hit upon the idea of inviting her neighbors in, but with the hint that they bring their suppers with them. This was the crowning achievement of her thrift, and she never ceased to congratulate herself upon having thought of it. For her house was full of food from top to bottom, and she became the most popular person in the happy group of Muskrat society.

But winter melted very slowly into spring. And the provisions for everybody were growing low. Day after day Muskratdom peeped out into the cold world that was still black and gray. Not a sign of anything green; not even a bluebird in the orchards. Little by little the muskrats grew thinner and it was harder to be gay. At last, just as they were wondering why they had ever eaten so merrily, and ever been so prodigal with what they had, and several of the muskrat elders were upbraiding them roundly in an effort to put the blame on some one, what should they hear but a robin! And in a few days the cowslips began to show the green tips of their leaves. Then at last the grass on the edge of the pond showed sweet

and green where it had lived all winter under the heavy snows.

Their hard times were over! And in all the general rejoicing, nothing gave them greater happiness than to think they had all weathered it together.

Nor was Mrs. Muskrat sorry to hear of the immediate marriage of her nephew Skinny with one of the prettiest little lady muskrats in the mill-pond. She was thereby able to congratulate herself again. This time as a matchmaker. And so long as Mrs. Muskrat could be thinking of how clever, or how thrifty, she was, her happiness was complete.

But you may judge of her neighbors' surprise when she left her snug house in the mill-pond and went back with Skinny and his wife, and many of the relatives who moved to the meadows. Something told her that the roots and the grasses and the tender bulbs would be engagingly delicious when the waters came back on the meadows; and she was a wise old muskrat, for those who went back lived a long summer on the fat of the land. Here again she felt the wisdom of her course, and she ventured to be truly hospitable by urging her adopted relatives to return with her, upon the approach of winter, to the deep, warm pond.

That is why there is both a winter and a summer residence in the highest society the world over. It is a sad lot for the muskrats who have not both a pond and an upper meadow to enjoy suitably and in season, as the good earth intends it to be enjoyed. But this last remark is a bit of wisdom from the mouth of Mr. Owl, and we must credit him with it.

XVIII

MR. WILD GOOSE AND MRS. GREBE

Far, far out on a great prairie there is a wide river which flows lazily between its banks, apparently going nowhere at all, but in reality bearing steadily toward the rising sun and the deep valley where another river rolls mightily to the southward and the ocean. The prairie is not level like a floor, but rises and falls in ridges that are sometimes miles apart, and between these rolling heights of the grassy land are unnumbered little lakes: bodies of sparkling water hidden in the folds of the

land.

It was over this vast stretch of plains that the great birds of the Arctic were winging their way one early morning in the late summer, for they had started to their winter quarters in good season.

"*Honk, honk!*" the leader of the birds kept calling; and as he trumpeted, those in the rear would answer him, for even as they flew they had much to talk of, and just now the whole flock of them were discussing the subject of breakfast.

For they had been flying ever since the peep of dawn, and had come through mists and the cold upper air, covering a hundred miles of their journey before the sun really bathed the plains in light, and they were looking for the spot which was familiar to them as a good one for breakfast.

Lower and lower they flew as the leader kept signaling to them, until at last the wedge-shaped formation in which they traveled came like a pointed kite in long, sliding descents to within a few hundred feet of the earth.

They could see, of course, all the lay of the land for many miles around; but they were particular geese, a trifle fussy as you might say, and by no means would any one of the many little lakes suit their fancy. They were flying toward one spot out of all others which could afford just what they wanted for a meal.

At last they apparently settled down to a definite direction for they ceased to describe the slanting circles, and in one long slide through the air, their wings stretched perfectly motionless, they coasted to the ground.

The deep grasses almost hid them from view, but the little people who lived there saw them, and it was with great surprise that their friends turned from their feeding and pluming and bathing to exclaim over this sudden arrival.

There were Mr. and Mrs. Wild Duck, and their beautiful brood of little ones, and there were many of Mrs. Prairie Chicken's family, as well as crowds and crowds

of little Redbirds and many of the handsome Kingfishers, all chattering at once over an ample breakfast table. For there was a solid growth of wild celery around this lake, a bed of plants so dense that it was for all the world like the heaviest moss. And of all things beloved by the wild fowl, this juicy and spicy celery is the favorite.

The leader of the newcomers looked about him. That was the first thing for him to do, under all circumstances; for he was the oldest and the wisest of the flock and as a watchman he was sagacious beyond all others in his family. While his mate and all the others fell to tearing at the tender shoots of celery, scarcely paying attention to anything but their voracious appetites, he was standing with head erect and eyes turning in all directions to be sure of no untoward sign. He could see and even scent danger a long way off.

Apparently he was satisfied for the moment, for he fell to and nibbled as the rest were doing, with his head almost buried in the rich tangle of celery. And as he progressed in his feasting, he came closer and closer to the edge of the lake, until suddenly he was just above a nest that lay almost entirely hidden from view.

It was the home of little Mrs. Grebe, the very handsomest and the shyest of the people dwelling here. She was right there by her nest of sticks, which literally floated on the water, and her shining neck of velvety feathers and her brown and silvery body were strikingly beautiful in contrast to the deep green of the rushes and reeds.

"Why, my dear friend!" the noble Wild Goose exclaimed. "How you surprised me! Though of course I knew you lived here. This is not the first year we have visited this place, by any means, and yet, when we flew North last spring and stopped here I do not remember seeing you."

"Oh, Mr. Goose," came in quick reply, "you can't imagine the misfortunes that have overtaken me; and it was on their account that I was not here in the early summer when you passed over."

With that Mrs. Grebe hung her dainty head, which was beautifully tufted about the ears, giving her the look of wearing a jaunty cap.

"I am the Widow Grebe," was all she could say.

Mr. Goose dried his eyes by rubbing them on his snowy breast. For, although he was a stern old gander, he had the most melting heart for the sad plight of widows and orphans.

And the fatherless ones were immediately discovered to view, for Mrs. Grebe moved ever so slightly and six tiny little Grebes twittered and chirped at her feet.

The sight was very moving, and the doughty old warrior commanded himself sufficiently to ask the particulars.

"Yes," the dainty little lady Grebe said. "We were a devoted pair, my husband and I. You know the Grebes, how they are like to die of broken heart if one or the other is killed. They're like the cooing dove, you know, very devoted. But my dear, beautiful mate was shot before my very eyes. Yes, the bullet was meant for me, because it is the mother Grebe's beautiful breast feathers that they are after. But it was he who was killed. We both dived, but when I came up from under the water after going as far as I could, I looked in vain for him. Men in a boat were reaching out for something, and it was my own mate they were lifting up from the water. When they saw it was not the mother bird, they threw his body back into the lake. After a while it sank and I knew that it was all hopeless."

Mr. Goose knew not what to say. But before he could even begin to express his feelings, the gentle Grebe added to her account of woes the fact that her first brood of the season had all perished, too.

"These little fellows are but just hatched," she went on. "They will never know their dear father; but what happened to the first brood of the season is the worst. We were, as you know, far south of here. Another lake where we go for the winter. No one knew that in that lake dwelt the worst of snapping turtles. But such was the fact. In one month our brood of dear little chicks was, every one of them, seized while swimming and dragged under by the great turtles!"

Then, like so many people who have suffered as much, Mrs. Grebe began to

apologize for telling her woes.

"It is only because you are so very traveled and wise, Mr. Goose, that I tell you all my afflictions. Nothing, of course, can amend the loss of my dear mate. But how I am to protect my children from all my enemies I cannot say. I am sorely troubled."

Mr. Goose all this time had only pretended to eat, for he was too much interested and too deeply concerned to do aught but attend to Mrs. Grebe's sad plight.

He thought for a long moment, and then said that he would give her two pieces of advice, but that she must wait a few moments until he had thought over his many observations and experiences.

"True," he said, "I have seen many ways of caring for children. And you are without assistance. Now my nest is built in almost inaccessible places, and Mrs. Goose has few enemies in the water to fear. Our chicks are too large to be pulled under the water by turtles, and our nest is too well defended by the sentry goose for us to fear the fox or the wolf. But you, poor Mrs. Grebe, you are indeed sorely put to it. You must do two things. First, I am sure, you must build farther out from the shore; and, second, you must take your children with you on your back when they first venture over the pond.

"And," he added slyly enough, "don't grieve too long. Perhaps you will fall in love again."

Just then, however, he seemed to be suddenly mindful of his own family. For a distant shot was heard in the air. Everybody stopped eating, and listened, but nothing more was to be heard. The hunters were far off, although their presence anywhere within hearing was full of alarm.

"Remember what I say," the splendid traveler called back, for he was marshaling his flock.

Mrs. Grebe could scarcely comprehend what was going on, for it seemed but a second before all the beautiful geese were in the air again, flying low over the plain. They would elude the hunters. That she knew. But she wished the wise captain of them all could have stayed just a little longer to explain what he meant. How could she carry her young ones with her? And how build on the water?

But it is long practise that works out in perfection; and Mrs. Grebe was soon able to teach her babies to climb on her back and to perch there with their beaks buried in her soft feathers, and their little toes digging ahold of her. And she began pushing her nest farther and farther out into the water until it seemed scarcely to have any connection with the land at all. Alone, and fearing to leave her nest unguarded, to this day she covers it with sticks and straw, and when she turns the eggs over that she is hatching, she smears them with mud until they are very hard indeed to find. For she is the most suspicious of birds.

But if she was indebted to Mr. Wild Goose for his advice, he, on his part, felt that he had only drawn on his learning as a great traveler. Had he not seen the tropic swans with their young riding upon their shoulders? And he knew what it was for. So he was only a generous and observant bird when he made the suggestion.

Later that season, however, when a great prairie fire swept the region and burned everything to the very edges of the lakes, Mrs. Grebe was thankful indeed that she could carry her babies with her to the center of the lake, and there ride in safety with them while the reeds and the grasses blazed on the margin.

And of this she told Mr. Goose the year after, when he came back. He had helped better than he knew. But of her second marriage she said very little, and he did not embarrass her with questions.

Oh, yes, there is much that the great Wild Goose knows and he is not too proud to draw upon his wisdom when it is a matter of helping even such little stay-at-home people as Mrs. Grebe.

XIX

BABY FOX AND MRS. BEAR

There is a great river which comes rushing through the mountains, where the cliffs are dark with trees, and the heavy snows are slow to melt, even when spring has made the valleys green and warm. Here, on a cliff, snug and warm beneath the roots of a great tree, lived Mrs. Bear and her family of cubs. Three baby bears there were; and in their fine black coats with dark brown edges they were very handsome.

For their playmate, however, there was a little stranger. Just a funny little fox, whose fur was the color of a flame of fire. He was a rare little fox, being of such a lovely color. Had the hunters in the valley dreamed that he was living on the mountain above their very farms, they would never have rested until they got him, for his skin would bring a fortune in the world of men and money.

But of this the little fox knew nothing, for ever since the day that good Mrs. Bear had found him, lost and weak and hungry, where he had fallen down to sleep in the snow, he had led the happiest of lives with the little baby bears. They could not run as fast as he could, nor could they bark as prettily, but they were wonderful at turning somersaults, and at playing leap-frog, and they were more than generous to him. They gave him the best place at dinner, and when they all went to sleep, they cuddled him up between them, while the big Mrs. Bear slept with her nose to the door. Blow the wind as it might, they were all as warm as toast.

But one fine day in early summer Mrs. Bear broke the news to her family that the foxes, one and all, were looking for their child. One way or another, the news had gone down from the mountain to the high pastures and fields at the edge of the farms, and it was joy to the heart of the fox mother, to learn that her beautiful Fireflame was alive.

Of course he must go back. And by an arrangement most agreeable to Mrs. Bear, she was to venture with her adopted baby as far as the blackberry patches and the great maple groves at the foot of the mountain. The foxes would meet her, and with sweet little Fireflame safe in the bosom of his family, all would be well.

Just as it was planned, the excursion was made; but all the way down the mountain Mrs. Bear kept finding more and more berries to eat.

"Here I must stop on my way back," she would say.

"And here is another wonderful patch! Such blueberries I have never seen in my whole life."

So it was late when at last she came to the clearing, and Fireflame kissed the motherly Mrs. Bear good-by. And it was night before that good lady could tear herself from the berry patches and trundle herself home to her family.

Alas! She had lingered too long. Stray dogs from the farms had scented her presence; and although she had followed a brook until she was well on her way to the cliff, and her footsteps were hard to follow, they had soon learned her whereabouts. Back to their masters they had gone, and it was scarcely morning when the hunters set out. The dogs were barking and their great tongues were lolling from their mouths. And the men with their rifles, and the knives for skinning the bear when they got her, were striding up the mountain, laughing and shouting as they went. No sooner were they near the woods, however, than their laughter ceased and the hounds grew deathly quiet; for that is the way of the hunter. He must be quiet and quick, for he is the companion of death, and that terrible creature walks abroad only with cruel men who have learned his craft.

The foxes took in the situation at once. But none of them dared to stir. To cross the path of those hunters was a terrible risk. They shivered and shook in their deep burrows to hear the hounds.

"It's lucky for us that the wind blows up the mountain," was all they could say.

"And what are they after?" cried poor little Fireflame. "Whom are they hunting?"

But then the truth dawned on him. Old Grandpa Fox and good Mother Fox were quiet, for they did not dare to tell Fireflame that it was dear Mrs. Bear who was being trailed. Besides, they were ashamed; for it was plain that something must be done, yet no one dared to move.

"She ought to have crossed and recrossed the river," said Grandpa Fox. "That's the way to do it. But I mistrust she was engaged too long with those tempting berries. She was not discreet."

"They'll get her and her young ones too!" wailed Mrs. Fox, who was nearly beside herself. For it is a terrible thing to know what you ought to do, but to be lacking in the courage to do it.

Little Fireflame could stand it no longer. In a bound he was out of the burrow. The whole Fox family screamed after him to come back; but he paid no heed. He was well up the pasture, and far into the woods before their voices ceased to ring in his ears.

It was a test of his wits, and he was very young. No dog could overtake him if he ran, and he had the start; but to catch up to the hunters and pass them, and so reach Mrs. Bear in time, was a task that would try the wits of the wisest fox.

Now a beautiful bird flew past, and although he never knew why he did it, the brave little Fireflame followed that bird. Over the brook and back again he went, always bearing upward to the crest of the mountain. It was not the path by which he had come the day before, but higher he went and higher, with the far, snowy peak in front of him.

The bird would vanish, but after Fireflame had gone as fast as his beautiful legs would carry him and when he was so tired that he could not see for the mist in his eyes, the silent wings would be beside him, then in front; and Fireflame would bend to his race as though it were just begun.

Soon he was on the narrow edge of the cliff. The sun lay full and bright upon the foaming river far below, and Fireflame recognized the spot. By a path that no one knew, he had come to the home of Mrs. Bear. There she was, the three little bears with her, playing under the fir tree.

He bounded in upon them, but not before the bird had brushed his cheek with its wings and then flown away, straight as an arrow, into the sun.

Fireflame gasped out his news in one breath.

"Fireflame Gasped Out His News in One Breath"

It was quick work that brought the Bear family to the edge of the river. There Mrs. Bear and her cubs began their journey to the fields of snow, and the caves that were safely beyond the reach of the hunters. She could not thank Fireflame at all. She could only look at him with tears of gratitude; while the three little bears, greatly confused, were as solemn as though they had never played tag in their lives.

"But you will visit us some day," the biggest baby bear said, clinging to Fireflame's paw, "and we will all play together again."

The hunters climbed up to the deserted cliff; but they never caught the trail of Mrs. Bear again. For the good river and the soft snows are friendly to the hunted people, and whatever they know they take with them to the great ocean, where it is of no use to any one.

Fireflame went home. He knew that he was safe, so he took his time.

But to the end of his days, he never knew what bird it was that showed him the way in the dark and unfamiliar woods.

XX

CHRISTMAS EVE

Tabby Green was alone in the snowy street. The wind which blew with gusts of the finest snow had nearly taken Tabby off her feet as she crept around the corner, and she was so cold and tired that she could hardly take another step. Just as she was preparing to make a final jump for the shelter of a flight of steps, a great white dog came trotting through the snow and, to her great alarm, they ran into each other.

"I beg your pardon," said the dog, in the politest way.

"My fault, I'm sure," said Tabby Green, for she was such a well-bred kitty that no dog, even if he had the finest manners in the world, could be more courteous than she.

Then, "Why, bless me!" she exclaimed. "Can it be you, dear Bobby Gordon? How glad I am to see you once again!"

And to show how pleased she was, poor Tabby rubbed her thin sides against the good dog's legs.

Together they crouched under the arch of the high stone steps, where, from a grating in the sidewalk, came a breath of good warm air. It was close to somebody's furnace room, and only such poor wandering creatures as the hungry cat and the dog who had known better days can appreciate the air from a warm cellar.

They sat close together and Tabby tried to purr, but she was nearly dead and purr she could not.

"There, there!" soothed Bobby Gordon, as he licked the snow from poor kitty's back in the gentlest way. "I wouldn't purr. It's very kind of you to try, but it's a bad thing to do in the open air. They say it hurts the voice."

"And I have no voice left these days," admitted Tabby sadly. "Really, if it were not for these warm cellar-ways and the few stray scraps of food that one finds in such shocking places, I wouldn't be alive."

"But," said Bob, "you're just a poor tramp cat, and no one's bound to kill you. I'm a dog without a collar, all alone and afraid to be seen. I can't let any one come near for fear they'll tell the officers about me. Once I had a collar—such a beauty, too! But it came off within a week of my great misfortune. You know my master went away, and the wicked people in the house were going to get rid of me. I knew it. I wasn't wanted any more. I had to go."

Great tears stood in Bobby Gordon's eyes but he brushed them away with his paw.

Tabby was overcome. In all her wanderings she had never met a case so sad.

"Poor Mr. Gordon!" was all she could say. "My poor, hunted friend!"

Then she thought of her own fireside, the cozy home that she had known. And simply to think of the saucers of cream, and the plates of dainty pieces from her mistress' table, made Tabby Green's poor mouth water.

"Ah, me!" she sighed, and was pretty near to crying when a thought flashed to her mind. "There's one more chance!" she suddenly exclaimed. "You have a fine strong voice, and you can make folks hear. Now just below this house, where that shoemaker's sign hangs out, is a little girl, and a boy whom I know to be her brother. They stopped and spoke to me but this very day. I felt that they were kind and understood my case. But, although I followed to their door, they didn't see me. And, call out as loudly as I could, my poor voice has grown so weak I know they didn't hear me."

"It's little use," was all the weary dog could say. "I've barked at a hundred doors."

Kitty waited and yielded to his discouragement. Of course it was no use, she thought. They must simply wait and wait until the cold and hunger did its work.

The wind howled, and the snow, which was piling higher and higher on the steps, was drifting around them.

"We Scotchmen die hard," said Bob at last. "The Gordons are a brave lot. I have to remember that."

"My mother purred away her life in song," cried Tabby Green. "She was mindful of her kittens to the last. She said almost in her dying breath: 'Remember, children! Never scratch, and always dry your tails when you come in out of the rain.'"

Suddenly a voice came through the cold night air. It was a child's voice, as sweet and clear as a bell.

"Kitty! Kitty! Come, Kitty, come!"

In an instant the poor, starved cat and the lame, hungry dog looked out and leaped into the drifting snow.

A shaft of lamp-light lay wide across the street. The door at the shoemaker's house was open. There stood a woman, and, with her, two little children, all wrapped in shawls and blankets. Their little feet were tucked in bed slippers and their eager faces peered into the night.

"It's no use, your calling," said the woman. "You were only dreaming. Any cat out in this storm is a dead cat now."

"Oh, but I know I heard a kitty."

"And I heard it, too," cried the little boy.

"Yes, and you made me get you out of bed to stand here and catch your death o' cold. I hope you are satisfied."

Scarcely had she spoken, and just as she was about to close the door, Bobby Gordon and Tabby Green came bounding past her feet into the hall.

"'Twas naught but the Christmas angels brought them here!" the woman said, when they had all seated themselves in the little parlor, which was the poor shoemaker's shop and kitchen too.

The Christmas night was turning into morning. Tabby and Bobby Gordon were sleeping by the stove, and in the bedroom, tucked deep and warm under their blankets, were the two children who had called the wanderers in.

Santa Claus was near, and thousands of lovely angels, drifting like the snowflakes, whispered to him and beckoned as they flew over the housetops.

"This way, this way," they kept singing. And Santa Claus came to the shoemaker's chimney with such a pack of toys as he takes only to the sweetest, kindest children in the world. For Santa Claus and all the good, sweet spirits know the children who love to keep the kitty warm and happy, and who would

never let the poor, deserted dog go friendless.

"And tell me," whispered Santa Claus to Tabby Green, "tell me every child that so much as said, 'Poor Kitty!' to you in your wanderings. I shall take them what they want the most for Christmas."

So Tabby Green, as fast as she could think, and the dog with the fine manners told all they knew of the children. And when they had finished, Santa told them that before another year was out they must have news of other good children, like the shoemaker's little boy and girl.

So there are many Tabby Greens and Bobby Gordons, forsaken and driven and chased by the cruel people of the world. But sometimes a little girl or boy stops to pet the straying animal, or even calls it home. And you may be very sure that Santa Claus hears of it.

XXI

MOTHER RABBIT'S ADVICE TO HER BABIES

Mother Rabbit and her five babies lived among the sand-hills down by the sea. Their cozy home was a small cave in the side of the hill, and it had two separate entrances, one at each end. These assured her escape in case a dog or a weasel should enter her home.

One evening, just as the moon was showing itself, big and round and yellow, over the tops of the pine trees, Mother Rabbit led her children out of their cozy home to the big out-of-doors, which they had only begun to know. Their education must begin, she felt, for they were nearly one month old and already able to jump and skip around as nimbly as Mrs. Fox's young sons. She feared that, if left in ignorance longer, they were likely to become overbold.

"It is, first of all, my dears, necessary to be cautious in life," she said. "You must follow me now very quietly to the edge of the wheat-field, where we will sit down to talk. There are things you must know."

So they bounded along behind their mother, so lightly that they made not a sound on the driest leaves of the woodland, and when they came to the edge of the field they took the first high jump of their lives, for the mother selected a place between the bars of the fence and leaped through it swift and clean.

"Do it that way," she said. "You must never run under anything in the dark if you can jump over it."

Once within the pleasant field, where there was so much green wheat that the little rabbits wondered how in the world all of it ever could be eaten, Mrs. Rabbit seated her family around her and began by telling the babies all about their noble father.

"Ah, my dears, your father was such a rabbit as one seldom sees. Such stout legs, and short, too, just as they ought to be! Such a long, graceful body—and what magnificent ears! They were like flowers, and stood up in such a taking fashion! Could you but see him, dancing in the moonlight, hitting his heels together in the air, and wagging those wonderful ears at the stars, his tail as white and fluffy as a full-blown rose, why, my children, you would burst with pride. I shall never see his like again."

"But where is Daddy Rabbit now?" the babies cried in one voice, fearing that their mother spoke with sadness. "He isn't dead, is he?"

"Dead? No, no, my dears," she replied. "He's traveling; you'll see him yet, I'm sure. He has a way of coming back.

"But in case he doesn't return, you must know how brave he is, and what he can do. For you must grow up to be as like him as you can.

"Any of the neighbors can tell you of his clever ways, and his bravery. He rid this field of a dreadful dog, once, and the history of these parts will always relate that exploit. It made him famous."

At this the little rabbits cocked their ears in wonder.

"You see," Mother Rabbit went on, "it was this way: Once he returned to his burrow below the hill over there and discovered, by means of his keen sense of smell, that a terrier dog was in the burrow. He immediately called for a friend, and together they closed up the entrance to the burrow and smothered the dog to death. That's what *I* call bravery. And that's the kind of father you had. The world will expect much of children of your parentage.

"Your father and I first met on the hillside one evening, and we liked each other at once. Every evening after, we would meet out there to play hide-and-seek in the grass and sand. Perhaps he will come to see you some day, and I want you to be smart and handsome, so that he will be proud of you.

"But I have said enough, dear Jacks, and now I must teach you some of the wise things he knew. He learned at an early age that each rabbit must procure his own food, and has many foes to shun. To do these things one must have a sharp wit.

"Always sleep during the day while other animals are prowling about, and come out only evenings when it is cool, to seek your food. Young wheat, fresh onions, lettuce and cabbages make splendid food for rabbits. Of course, it is rather dangerous to cultivate such expensive tastes, for lettuce and onions usually grow only in gardens and people are apt to set traps to catch you. So be careful never to go near a trap, or bite at anything that looks as though man had placed it there for you. It is said that your father prided himself on destroying traps.

"Our family is blessed by being both watchful and swift. Just watch me how I can run."

Mother Rabbit sprang to her feet, and over the field she sped like lightning. The children stared in wonderment, and then shouted for glee at their mother's rapidity. Finally Mrs. Rabbit returned as quickly as she had departed.

"Now, that is the way you must learn to run. And the next most necessary thing for you to acquire is the ability to stand on your hind legs like this."

To their amusement, Mother Rabbit stood up like a walking dog or a bear.

"An enemy can be seen at a long distance from such a position," she explained; "and it is well never to run until you have taken in the situation. Many rabbits have lost their lives by failing to observe that simple precaution. Once your Uncle Cotton heard a dog coming, and turned to run in the opposite direction without having stood up to survey the land. As a result, we found only his bones on the hillside the next day. It is supposed that he ran right into the jaws of another dog. Dogs are clever and often hunt together.

"But that's enough for the first lesson," she concluded. "Some evening we'll come again and I'll teach you to dance, and we'll play till the moon goes down in the West."

They jumped up, skimmed through the fence, and ran after their mother, who had them home and tucked them in bed almost before they knew it.

XXII

THE MICE AND BABY STORK

"I find it very hard," said the learned watchdog, "to speak well of the rats and the mice."

He was talking with his visitor, Professor Screech Owl, who perched on the peak of the kitchen roof and was engaged with him in a pleasant exchange of views and ideas. The moon was clear and everything was very still. All the world seemed asleep but the owl and the dog, and they were talking of many matters. For Professor Screech Owl was a knowing bird and he had, moreover, the most learned relatives.

"Of course, you know more than I do," Collie Dog hastened to add.

Professor Screech Owl nodded.

"And you may have heard in your travels of something which credits the mice with being other than thieves and rogues. But for my part, I am skeptical of all the good I hear of them."

"There are mice, and there are mice," said the Professor. For this is one of the best ways to open a subject and draw a distinction. "I have rarely inquired into their morals, preferring to take them as I find them. In the matter of one's living one must not be too squeamish. Probably I have eaten moral mice and immoral mice, with indifference. But I have heard that the mice in Belgium are the gentlest and sweetest of creatures. Have you heard of the Belgium mice, Mr. Dog?"

This was the point to which Collie Dog had drawn his visitor with intent. For no matter what subject you brought up, if you passed it over to Professor Screech Owl and showed him the respect and patience which is due to scholarly persons, he would refresh your mind with wonderful facts and you would be vastly improved and informed when he finished. So Collie Dog admitted that he was no book dog, and knew precious little about anything. This was not so, for he knew a great deal about sheep, the pasturing of cows, and the time for getting the mail, and he knew that the buggy meant business, and the surrey meant church, and he knew where his mistress kept the chocolate creams. Also he knew why the cook left, but he never told. But he pretended that blankness of mind which is a humility pleasing to superior students.

Screech Owl stared at the moon as though to recall what he could from his vast store of learning.

"The dates have escaped me," he began, "but it is the nature of the event, not the time which is important.

"Once long ago, as I was told by the great Arctic Owl, who is a sort of cousin of mine, the mice in the city of Ghent entered into a sort of league with the storks. Ghent, as you know, is in Belgium."

This was news to Collie Dog, but he wagged his tail as if to approve. He was glad to know that Ghent was in Belgium, and he wished to seem pleased.

"Don't wag your tail!" Screech Owl spat out at him. "I'm telling you history; I'm not asking you to have a bone. That's no way to act when I'm lecturing!"

Poor Collie Dog wished to laugh, but he only sat still and looked humbly at the conceited little owl on the peak of the barn.

Professor Screech Owl suddenly grew quite himself again, apologized for his agitation, and resumed:

"The storks are a noble lot, and have been renowned in Egypt and on the Continent. They dwell on the chimney-pots, I'm told, or build on the edges of steeples and such. Very proud they are, and given to the practise of medicine. The cranes in the country make great pretense of being cousins of the stork. But we all know the difference,—we who have traveled. Ha! Ha!"

Screech Owl screamed a terrible laugh. Collie Dog, to be polite, joined in; but he stopped short when Screech Owl's feathers began to ruffle up.

"In Ghent, long ago," the Professor went on, "the mice that lived in the barn of the mayor's place were many. They overran it and lived under the very eaves as well as in the cellars. And those nearest the roof became great friends of the storks who dwelt on the gables and chimneys.

"Now, so the story runs, the mayor's barn caught fire. The good lady stork had but just left her nest. The storks, you know, go far out into the country to get their food. I think it very foolish of them to live in the cities. But Mrs. Stork took her chances, as all mothers do when they leave their young ones for any length of time.

"Dr. Stork, the father of this particular family, was away on medical matters, and so the baby was alone. You can imagine what Mrs. Stork felt when she came flying toward the city and saw smoke pouring from the roof of the mayor's barn."

Collie Dog scented the drift of the story, and grew suddenly impatient for the slow

Professor to reach the point.

"And was the baby stork burned to death?" he interrupted.

Professor Screech Owl only looked down and cleared his throat.

"The mice," he said, "are credited with singular humanity. They scrambled all around and in and out of the nest, and at last they grabbed the baby stork and dragged him down to the edge of the roof."

"THEY GRABBED THE BABY STORK AND DRAGGED HIM DOWN TO THE EDGE OF THE ROOF"

"And then?" exclaimed Collie Dog, now really excited. "What then? Did he fall off and get killed after all?"

"The roofs of the houses in Ghent are not very high," came from Professor Screech Owl, in the deepest of tones, "but they are very steep. A plank was leaning against the wall and they slid him down on that, so that he reached the ground in safety.

"Since then the storks give all the feathers they can spare to the mice; and now these frisky creatures sleep on down. That is, the mice in Belgium do."

Professor Screech Owl came to a sudden stop and watched Collie Dog. Seeing his audience was profoundly impressed, he then went on:

"Those who were witnesses to this rescue say that Mrs. Stork's excitement was terrible. She went to Egypt for a year to recover her nerves—"

An unearthly screech pierced the night. The Professor and Collie Dog jumped in surprise. Old Tom Cat, who had listened to all this as he sat on the door-step in the dark, was trying to laugh. He was also making remarks about owls and mice in general. But just then the master of the house threw open the window and expressed *his* views.

Collie Dog retired quickly to his kennel to think over this wonderful chapter of history; and wise Professor Screech Owl flew silently from the peak of the barn to his nest in the hickory woods.

XXIII

MRS. BOB-WHITE AND THE HUNTING DOG

At the very peep of day Collie Dog and Setter Pup started out on a hunting trip of their own. Collie Dog called the place "my farm" and he had told his friend of all the wonderful sights there were to be seen on the place by a dog who could travel

alone and do as he wanted. It was his habit, he said, to be abroad very early; sometimes, indeed, he would run over the fields and along the shore, or back into the woodland, for miles and miles before breakfast.

"And what do you do that for?" Setter Pup asked. For this youngster was just from the city, and he was not used to these country ways. "We never get up until long after the man with the milk cans has gone by the door, and the postman has come and gone," he yawned. "That's the proper thing in town."

Collie Dog laughed in a courteous way.

"And we get up before the milk cans start for town," he said. "That is, some of us do. But they'll take you out early enough when the hunting begins. And you'll be pointing birds all day in the fields and the swamps."

Setter Pup waved his tail proudly, for he meant to be a great hunter. That was why they had him in the country now—to teach him all sorts of things about guns and what to do when he smelt a covey of birds.

But Collie Dog was no hunter, being more of a scholar and a poet. His master, at any rate, had read him a great deal of poetry. And much of the poetry had been of a nature to discourage hunting; which was just what the doggie's master liked to do. He was thoroughly in sympathy with his pet, who couldn't endure a gun, either the sight or the sound of it. But, much as the gentleman knew about the fields and the woods, he would have known more could he have understood what Collie Dog would have loved to tell him. For that gentle dog was on the best of terms with every living creature for miles around. His early morning expeditions were always but so many rounds of visits.

Consequently, the newcomer, this eager and noisy young setter, was to make many new acquaintances on this daybreak excursion with Collie Dog.

Down the lane from the barn to the pasture they romped, the dew drenching their flanks as they brushed the tall weeds and bushes. Setter Pup, with his ears flapping in excitement, was plunging heedlessly ahead when Collie Dog called him

back.

"Go easy here! We are sure to hear something," Collie Dog whispered.

And suddenly, while they walked almost on tip-toe, there came from the very edge of the field, a clear, ringing call:

"*Bob! Bob! Bob!*"

"Why, who can be down here in the hayfield at this time of the morning?" Setter Pup asked in surprise.

"Just wait!" laughed Collie Dog, delighted.

"*Bob, Bob, Bob-White!*"

The voice was as clear as a boy's.

"That's my best friend out here," Collie Dog explained. "It's little Mr. Partridge."

Then very quickly the beautiful, trim little Mr. Partridge hopped clear of the tangled grass and stood gaily on the fence-rail. He was speckled and shapely and his eyes were full of wonderful humor. But he caught sight of the strange dog, and was gone in a second. Then, to Setter Pup's great astonishment, there were many little voices, and wild scuttlings in the very path ahead of him. And two beautiful partridges, their wings apparently broken, were hobbling along almost before his very nose. They were dying, as it seemed.

Setter Pup was all for seizing them. Two such crippled creatures were easy prey. But his instincts were, after all, of another sort; for, although he had never done it before, he stood stock still and pointed his nose straight at the birds, his tail

stretched out like a long plume behind him.

Collie Dog shook with laughter.

"Well, that gun shooting master of yours would be proud of you if he could see you now," he said. "You're pointing straight as a weather vane. But we're not out hunting birds this morning. Come here, and I'll show you something."

Setter Pup dropped his tail and stepped back. Then Collie Dog came softly up to the little birds that were cowering in the path. They knew him well enough. Even if he was a dog, he was a friend; and if there is a creature who knows a friend and would be on terms of friendship with the whole world it is Mr. Bob-White.

They were even pleased to meet young Setter Pup, when they found out that he was staying at the farm. They could not believe that a personal friend of their wonderful Collie Dog could be ill-disposed to such as the partridge family.

And Mr. Bob-White talked about "our farm" exactly as though it were his own. He said that he and his family could surely keep down the potato bugs that year; and that if it could only be known what his intentions were in this matter of eating up the pests that canker and destroy, he was sure no one would want to kill him.

"You always say that, poor Mr. Bob-White, and how I pity you," the gentle Collie Dog replied. For he was as quick to weep as to laugh, being so refined a dog. "And it's a shame. My master reads to me all about you. And we get very indignant when we think of how you are the one thing that these farmers can depend upon to eat up more bugs than anybody else could ever devour. You're so much better than poison and all the rest of the truck they sprinkle around."

"Yes; the poison just washes off in the rain. My family, if only we could be let alone, would do it all. Didn't you tell me that my cousin down in Texas ate up all the boll weevils in a county full of cotton?"

"That's the truth," answered Collie Dog. "Master read it to me. But you're safe enough on this farm anyway. You know that. My friend Setter Pup is not going to hunt here at all."

"And I shall never hunt partridges—never!" declared Setter Pup, who was sadly distressed. "I wish I had never been born"—he was crying now—"if I have to hunt down such folks as Mr. Partridge." For poor Setter Pup had found that he possessed a heart; and that discovery is the most distressing one in the world.

"Oh, you'll get over that," Collie Dog comforted him. "You'll have to. Your master will attend to you. But I'm sorry for you. And just look at these baby partridges."

One by one, as Mrs. Partridge had clucked to them, in a little voice like the ticking of a tiny clock, they had crept up to her. Ten little chicks there were, of a light brown, and nothing but fluffy down and beady eyes. One of them hopped right out from in front of Setter Pup, where it had hidden under a leaf.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "There was that chicken, and I never saw it at all!"

"No," Collie Dog replied; "you would never guess where they go to when their mother gives the alarm. And then she runs off and tempts you to kill her. She hobbles and cries and lies down to die right at your feet. My own mother, who was a Scottish noblewoman, being an Argyle, used to say that she never saw such a wonderfully devoted mother as Mrs. Bob-White."

With a gay farewell to Mr. Partridge, the sprightly dog was off. And Setter Pup went racing after him. For there was much to see, and the sun was already clear and golden. The grass shone in waves of green, and as the dew dried there came the loveliest odors of wild honeysuckle and clover. It was a time to be gay, and Collie Dog did not want to have his young friend depressed. There were some wonderful mud-holes to visit, where they could get just as cool and as dirty as they pleased.

"And when the mud dries off," Collie Dog explained, as they plunged through the bushes, "your coat will shine as though it had been brushed."

It was a wonderful romp that they had in the mud-hole, deep in the swampy meadow, under the blackberry vines. And when they came out, disgracefully dirty, to dry themselves under a China-berry tree, they were rolling over and over on the grass, when a funny little voice called out from the branches overhead:

"Hello, Mr. Dog!"

Setter Pup jumped to his feet; but Collie Dog only looked up into the tree.

"'Morning, friend 'Possum; and how's your family to-day?"

"Oh, they're doing fine. Twelve of them and all getting plump. We like your turnip patch very much."

Then he laughed; a squeaky little laugh it was; and Collie Dog seemed to enjoy the joke too, for he sat up with a smile.

"Come on down and let's see you die," he requested. "My friend has never seen a 'possum play dead."

"No, indeed, Mr. Collie. I don't know your friend—and I don't think I care to. He's a hunting dog. But I'll die right here on this branch, if that will amuse you."

So Mr. 'Possum threw himself into a wonderful attitude and looked as dead as dead could be. His head hung over the branch and his mouth lolled open, and his little paws were all curled up.

"How queer!" Setter Pup exclaimed. "I suppose he's satisfied that nobody but a buzzard would touch him now. What a dandy trick!"

"It fools 'em, all right," said Collie Dog, who always delighted in this performance.

Then Mr. 'Possum winked a sly wink and slid like a big rat along the branch to a hollow place in the tree.

"He's gone in. Probably his wife wanted him."

And then Collie Dog was off again, bounding and racing across the field, with Setter Pup keeping beside him.

Miles they went, through the country. Young Setter Pup saw more than he ever had guessed could be seen. There was Mr. Blacksnake, who raced like mad over the leaves, making an astonishing noise. He carried his head very high and went such a zigzag course that the dogs lost sight of him.

"He's an ugly fellow, too, but he can't hurt you. He makes a funny noise with his tail, rattling it on the leaves if you corner him. He wants you to think he's a rattlesnake. But it's only a clever trick," said Collie Dog. "Sometimes on that sandy piece of road we've just passed, we'll come across Mr. Hognose. He's a queer little snake. He can scare you terribly by puffing and blowing, so that you would think he was very dangerous. But he can't bite at all, nor hurt you as much as a cat. He plays off at being dead too, just like Mr. 'Possum. But he never crawls out till the sun is high. He likes the heat. I've met him a great many times, but always when it was hot."

By this time it was a glorious morning, and as the two dogs trotted down the wood road and along the river bank, the birds were calling from every side.

"I like to come this way," Collie Dog went on. "There's a redbird, a very aristocratic cardinal, who flies ahead of me every time. He's had a whole story written about himself. Master's read it aloud to me. Does your master read aloud to you?"

Setter Pup was somewhat embarrassed.

"We read about guns and cartridges and Canadian guides, and fishing tackle," he admitted.

"H'm!" mused his companion. "Destructive, of course. Right in your line. But not my style. We prefer the other kind, my master and I. But not everybody can be a poet, of course."

Just then the cardinal-bird darted out of the honeysuckle and flew ahead of them, and in an instant a brilliant bluebird followed him.

"They fly together just that way. Master says they must like each other's color. Aren't they beautiful?"

And then, before they knew it, the birds were gone; and Setter Pup was surprised to see that this river path had been the way home, for they were almost at the farm door.

"If I could only go hunting with you instead of with those guides and guns," Setter Pup began; for evidently there was something on his mind and he wanted to talk.

But Collie Dog just wagged his tail. He understood. There was nothing to be said, for a dog owes everything to his master, and there are many kinds of masters. Besides, the door was open and there were voices upstairs. Setter Pup's owner was calling across the hall to his host.

"He ought to make a fine pointer. His mother was a prize bird dog, you know."

Poor Setter Pup looked wistfully at Collie Dog as they flopped down on the floor.

And Collie was truly distressed. But, then, as he often asked himself:

"What could a poor dog do?"

XXIV

MRS. POLAR BEAR'S ADVENTURE

The long, dark winter was on the wane. Months of cold starlight and terrific winds, with numberless storms of heavy snow, had gone by. Little by little the streak of light on the horizon, the thin shadows which it cast over the snowfields, and the gentler quality of the air increased; so that every one who lived in this far Arctic region stirred in his winter sleep and there was preparation for a short and very busy summer.

Some of the animals had been abroad, indeed, throughout the whole dark night of the polar winter; such of them for instance as the lovely white fox and the great polar bear. For it was not their custom to crawl away, as many did, into the deep snow-banks, there to sleep it out; for they knew that even this season of blackness and appalling cold had plenty of food for them, and they were always insatiably hungry.

But Mr. Bear's wife was of a different turn of mind, and although she knew that her husband would not provide for her quite as she would like to be fed, she was willing to go deep into the snow and dig out for herself a warm bed away beneath the surface. There she had stayed, never so much as venturing to the opening after the real night had set in.

And there her cubs were born. Two of them there were. The good Mrs. Bear was so delighted with their beauty that she was impatient for the warm days to come when she could take them out and show them to her relatives and friends.

"Perhaps, too, their father will be back by the time summer comes," she thought.

And then she was suddenly glad that he was not around just now; for he was very quick-tempered, and if the babies annoyed him at all, he would be pretty sure to cuff them. And one blow of Mr. Bear's paw would finish the career of any baby bear in the world.

So the two little creatures, clad in the whitest of fur from head to foot, their claws as black as ebony, and their wide eyes as yellow as amber, lay snuggled against the great warm body of their mother for all the weeks of the departing winter.

Suddenly, as they rolled over and looked upward through the snow cavern, they saw for the first time what seemed to them a great big eye staring down at them.

"That's only the hole in the roof," Mrs. Bear explained. "And pretty soon you will see that it is all blue and beautiful above that window—and then we will go out and away."

What that meant they did not know; for life so far as they had known it consisted of meals and sleep and endless playtime on the icy floor of their cavern. But they were to know more about it very soon. A white wing flashed by one morning, and a land voice called down the depths of their cave.

It was Mr. Burgomaster, the good-natured gull. He had come purposely to call on Mrs. Bear, for he had two stirring pieces of information to give her.

He perched by the edge of her skylight, and wasted no words in relating the news.

"There's a whale being driven ashore; and the mists have hidden the birds."

He was gone before Mrs. Bear could so much as thank him for coming; and she was, indeed, deeply obliged. No one but good Mr. Burgomaster would ever have taken such pains.

What he said sounded strange enough, but it meant everything to Mrs. Bear.

When a whale was disabled in the far depths of the sea, or had been caught in the currents and gales in such a way that he must surely drift to shore, he was as good as dead and devoured. For in shallow water he would be helpless and once his enormous bulk was stranded on the rocks or the jagged capes of ice he could only give himself up to his enemies.

Mrs. Bear, however, would have been very cautious about venturing to the scene of the banquet, if the great flocks of birds, which were sure to be on hand, were not hidden from view as they hovered above it. Clouds of excited gulls that came nearer and nearer to the shore were a signal of what was about to happen. And the bears, the foxes, and the wolves were not the only ones who knew it. Men, with their ferocious packs of dogs, their long lassos of walrus hide, and their terrible spears, knew well enough what the noisy birds were announcing.

But all would be well if the fogs hung low, and the gathering flocks of sea-birds were thereby hidden.

Mrs. Bear explained the situation to her cubs.

"Of course, your mother would not have built her nursery here," she ended, "if she thought those terrible creatures with the wolfish dogs and the ropes were within miles and miles of the spot. But you can never tell when they may turn up. They come with their dogs over endless tracks of snow and ice to find us, and they travel fast. You must lie as quietly as you can while I am gone. Amuse yourselves in only the quietest way. Don't call out at all; and go to sleep again, like good children."

With that Mrs. Bear rose to her hind feet and reached upward along the snow walls of her house. Then, balancing herself on a ridge of the ice which was for all the world like a side shelf, she made a ponderous leap through the opening into broad daylight. For at last it was the real day, and a glorious glimmer of sunlight behind the fogs showed that summer was coming.

It was good to breathe the free air, and Mrs. Bear shook herself violently to straighten out the creases of her heavy coat. She would have liked to roar, loud and long, but she was trained by experience never to speak in a fog.

"You can't tell who's hearing you," her own mother used to say.

So she only trundled her mighty bulk downward across the ice and snow, to its very edge, where it suddenly broke off and formed an embankment. Below this there was a narrow beach, or what appeared to be one—a strip of confused and tumbled blocks of ice and jagged rocks.

There was a sudden whizzing of wings above her head, and the wailing cries of a hundred little gulls and the many crowds of birds that were hurrying to eat of whale fat. Mrs. Bear broke off in their direction; and soon the sound of snarling voices, the yelps of the quarrelsome foxes, and the vicious bark of the wolves met her ears. Yes, she was none too early, for evidently the assemblage of animals, all as famished as herself, were fighting over the repast.

They were not so polite to Mrs. Bear as they might have been, for they begrudged her any share of the whale's body. But she paid little attention to any one, and went to work lustily on her first meal of the season.

After the first mouthfuls, however, she felt wonderfully good-humored; for such is the effect of a meal, and it is pleasant to stop and talk a bit when you know there is more to follow.

"I must thank you, Mr. Burgomaster," was her first remark. "You were kind to call me in time. This is a good beginning to the summer."

The white-winged gull, largest of all the birds that were present, and by far the best mannered, only begged Mrs. Bear to remember that they had been friends for many years.

"And I propose to name my children," Mrs. Bear announced, as this delicious dinner began to increase her fine spirits, "I propose to name the babies after you and your wife: *Odin* and *Olga*. That's what they shall be."

Mr. Burgomaster was at a loss how to express his gratitude for this compliment.

But he needed to say little, for such a generous tribute is not repaid in words.

Something he said later on, however, in which he quoted Dr. Penguin, brought forth her assent on the subject of eating too much, for she added, "True, true, it is not wise to overeat at your first meal of the year. A relative of mine did that once, and was unable to climb over the path to his door."

So, taking as goodly an amount of provender with her as she could carry away, Mrs. Bear went home to feed her babies. They were far more interested in this new and appetizing breakfast than in the names which she gave them, you may be sure; and from then until the whale was used up and only his bones were left to dry in the winds, Mrs. Bear was continually carrying meals to her cave.

By this time the winter was gone, and the roof of the snowhouse fell in. The melting drifts drenched every ledge and cranny of their home, and it was time to be wandering.

"You must do exactly as I tell you," Mrs. Bear kept saying, "and you must never stray from me a minute. For we are going to start on our journey, and there will be a great many dangers to guard against."

When little Odin and Olga trotted along beside their mother, with the whole world before them, and a keen appetite with them, they were as alert and excited as any two bears in the world could be.

The great rolling, blue water, the ice that floated on its surface and shone like white ivory in the sun, the patches of green grass on the sides of the hills, and the rocks black with snow water, made a dazzling scene.

Their long day began with a wonderful feat on the part of Mother Bear. After they had swum to a low, wide ice floe, which was a little way from shore, and Odin and Olga were just learning to use the hairy pads of their feet in climbing the sides of the small iceberg, Mrs. Bear gave a sudden plunge into the water, and disappeared from view. She swam far out, her nose barely coming to the surface, and the rest of her body entirely concealed. Then, rising to the surface, she

brought back with her a huge fish which she had stunned with a blow of her mighty paw.

"It's all in the way you slide into the water," she said; and then, as they ate greedily of this morsel, she told them of diving for sea-lions and of capturing them by coming up from under the prey.

"You will swim under water great distances, as soon as you learn to hunt," she said, "and you will learn to make no noise about it."

This was the truth, as not only the seals and the sea-lions, but plenty of the great fish, could bear witness.

But, as events of the day were to turn, little Odin and Olga were near to never growing up at all; for the very danger which their mother most dreaded was speedily approaching. While they were playing first on the ice cakes and then on the shore, and Mrs. Bear had about made up her mind that they would stay that night at a point not far distant, where she saw many sea-birds fluttering, and where, she reasoned, the fishing and seal hunting might be good, the hunters with their trained dogs were fast approaching the very spot.

For your Eskimos have their own way of reading the signs; and as many birds had been flocking in this direction, the men had steadily pursued the trail. Day after day they had traveled, and they felt sure that they were coming upon at least a herd of seals or of walruses. And they hoped, of course, to bag a great white bear.

But Odin's mother had assured herself that there was no danger, or it would have been revealed during the time that the whale had attracted such crowds of her brother animals. She did not perceive that her enemies knew exactly how prone the well-fed bear is to linger near the spot of her recent feedings.

"That is just the place to spend the night, out there," she said; "for on those points that reach out into the sea, you can escape by land or by water, as you have to. Remember that, too, children."

Little Olga stopped to rub her head at this. She was trying to remember so many things! Mrs. Bear told her it was nothing, and that learning things was the whole of life anyway.

When Mrs. Bear and her twins reached the icy point, there were the friendly Penguins to meet them and to exclaim over the children. They were having a fine visit when suddenly a dull roar far below them on the shore made every one sit up and listen.

It came again and lasted longer. It was a new sound to the children, but Mrs. Bear recognized it.

"That's an iceberg breaking up," she said at last. "Not a pleasing sound, but one you'll soon get used to."

Night came and they curled up, all three, in a snug corner under the ice shelves of the point. The wind was high and the sea was noisy, but they were too well tucked away to care.

And they little dreamed of what was going on around them.

For scarcely had the sun gone down, when the Eskimos with their teams of wolfish dogs were on the spot. Little by little they had crept to the end of the point, and one by one they stationed themselves at intervals to wait, like so many sentinels, for the morning.

Mrs. Bear would never reach the water alive; and escape back to the mainland was impossible. There were enough dogs and men on hand to cover the avenues of escape.

Before little Odin and Olga were awake sufficiently to see anything at all, Mrs. Bear had faced her first ambushed enemies. From where the cubs cowered in their corner, they saw their mother rear on her hind legs and then drop with a terrible force, hitting the dogs right and left as she landed among them. There

were thunderous noises, and her own mighty roars were almost drowned by the snarling of the dogs and the shouting of the men, who were fast closing in. She was bleeding already and several of the dogs were lying dead around her.

Mrs. Bear stood truly at bay. One man, more courageous than the rest, came running up with his pointed spear, ready to take aim. A terrific noise arrested him—a noise in which all else was nothing. The land seemed to reel and topple; the great ice shelves came crashing down.

Men and dogs ran for their lives; and to save themselves they plunged bodily into the sea. For the whole point of ice had broken from the mainland and, like a ship that is rocking and righting itself, it was sending up mighty waves and eddies on every side.

The motions were less gigantic after a while, and the new iceberg had found itself. Already it was moving forward, and the wind was driving it foot by foot into the outgoing tide.

Mrs. Bear knew precisely what to do. Twice in her life she had traveled on ice floes, though never on so large a one as this.

"Here we are, and here we stay," she said. "By and by we'll come to islands, or so close to shore that we can swim back to land. It will be a long time before we are carried out beyond this gulf, and we're sure to escape before then."

She was a little too cheerful, perhaps, for some of her own kin had gone that way so far into the great southerly current that they were never seen again. But Mrs. Bear was one of those happy beings who always look for the best, not the worst; and she was too joyous over this sudden deliverance to heed any new perplexity.

Long weeks afterward, when Mother Bear's wounds were healed, and Odin and Olga had indeed learned how to live by diving and hunting under water, they came to a narrow bay where the land was green on both sides. The distance from their iceberg was but little; and they plunged in, while Mr. Burgomaster circled over them excitedly. He was a wonderful mariner, Mr. Burgomaster, and, being

such a good friend, he had flown back and forth over land and sea, following them on their icy ship.

"You'll know where you are, Mrs. Bear, when this fog lifts," he said. "You will find that you have come to a beautiful shore where there are berries and all kinds of refreshing things that bears like. It was a good day that the iceberg started you on your trip."

"All things, Mr. Burgomaster," said wonderful Mother Bear, as she crawled out of the water and shook her shaggy fur, "all things happen for the best!"

THE END