

**FAWN IN THE  
FOREST AND OTHER  
WILD ANIMAL STORIES**

**by Jim Kjelgaard**

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# FAWN IN THE FOREST

AND OTHER WILD ANIMAL STORIES

# BOOKS BY JIM KJELGAARD

BIG RED

REBEL SIEGE

FOREST PATROL

BUCKSKIN BRIGADE

CHIP, THE DAM

BUILDER

FIRE HUNTER

IRISH RED

KALAK OF THE ICE

A NOSE FOR

TROUBLE

SNOW DOG

THE STORY OF

GERONIMO

STORMY

COCHISE, CHIEF OF

WARRIORS

TRAILING TROUBLE

THE EXPLORATIONS

OF PERE

THE COMING OF THE

MORMONS

LION HOUND

CRACKER BARREL

TROUBLE

SHOOTER

TRADING JEFF AND

HIS DOG

DESERT DOG

HAUNT FOX

THE OKLAHOMA

LAND RUN

DUCK-FOOTED

HOUND

DOUBLE

CHALLENGE

SWAMP CAT

THE LAND IS BRIGHT

RESCUE DOG OF THE

HIGH PASS

HI JOLLY!

WOLF BROTHER

WILDLIFE

CAMERAMAN

MARQUETTE  
THE SPELL OF THE  
WHITE STURGEON  
WILD TREK  
OUTLAW RED

THE LOST WAGON

ULYSSES AND HIS  
WOODLAND ZOO  
TIGRE  
FAWN IN THE  
FOREST AND  
OTHER WILD  
ANIMAL STORIES

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AND OTHER  
WILD ANIMAL STORIES

by Jim Kjelgaard

ILLUSTRATED BY SAM SAVITT

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TO JOHN AND BILLY KJELGAARD

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The characters and situations in this book are wholly fictional and imaginative: they do not portray and are not intended to portray any actual persons or parties.

# FAWN IN THE FOREST

AND OTHER WILD ANIMAL STORIES

# FAWN

## IN THE FOREST

ON THIS morning in late May, the four-year-old doe stood on the shore of the small lake near which she had passed the night. Mists blanketed the water and the doe watched them writhe and twist. The mists had been born with the dawn and would die when the just-rising sun became hot enough to burn them away.

A bass leaped out of the lake, arched its bronze body in the air and splashed back into the water. The doe flicked her long ears toward the ripples and watched them until they washed into nothingness. Ordinarily, she would have paid no attention to so commonplace a thing, but this morning she was enveloped in a cloak of nervousness. This morning she could afford to neglect nothing.

In spring and summer, the lake shore was favored by the doe above any other place. She came there to drink, to play, to eat the rich and succulent grasses that grew along the border of the lake; and on hot days she cooled herself in the water. Always, until last night, she had used this shore carelessly and freely.

The summer was not a dangerous time for her. Wolves ranged the spruce country in which she lived; but when spring came, the wolf packs broke up. Only when driven by winter hunger did they sometimes sweep through the lake country, running down and destroying whatever they could catch. The mink, marten and fisher that ranged all about were not feared by the doe. She did fear the wildcats that prowled through the spruces, but she could easily run away from cats.

Ever since the spring breakup the doe had sought the lake for frolicking, food and drink. When morning came, she always ambled back into the spruces to find a bed and sleep throughout the heat of the day. It had been a careless time, a gay and wonderful vacation from winter.

There was nothing lazy or carefree about her walk when she turned from the lake this morning, however. Her step was quick, furtive. She stopped every few feet to look all about, and she flicked her long ears back and forth to catch any sound that might be present. She moved into the wind so her nose would tell her what lay ahead. This morning, she had an extremely important mission, and she was not allowed even one mistake. She could choose but once. Her choice must be right.

At no time did she hurry, or increase her slow walk to that point where, by reason of haste, she might miss something which she must not miss. The doe raised her head and stared at a stand of aspens that had stolen a place in the spruce forest. They grew on a small knoll, and brush was scattered beneath them. The doe circled until she could approach the aspens from upwind, then she skulked into them. She went straight through the thicket, out the other side—and ran a little way.

Her nose had told her that the aspens were part of a weasel's regular hunting route, and she dared not ignore weasels. They were bloody little demons, able to kill creatures much larger than themselves, and they had no fear. The doe dropped back into her slow walk; she must see and know all.

Presently she came to a grove of hemlocks whose low-hanging limbs brushed the ground. She studied this, entered and came out the other side. She circled the hemlocks, her nose to the ground. There was no track, no sign of anything else. The doe re-entered the thicket and coursed it from end to end and from side to side. She inspected thoroughly every square inch of ground.

Presently, satisfied, she trampled a bed in some dry needles. Three times she lay down, got up—and finally she lay down a fourth time.

Twelve minutes from the fourth time she lay down, her fawn was born.

THE FAWN weighed seven pounds. He was twenty-six inches long from the tip of his black nose to the end of his tail bone. His tail was four inches long, his ear three and a quarter, and his leg about ten inches. His color was dark red, shading into white at the brisket. The little buck's underbelly was white, as was the under part of his tail, and there was a large white spot beneath his chin.

Two white lines, a quarter of an inch wide, ran from the base of his ear to the front of his shoulders. There they became dotted lines which spread about an inch apart along his back and seemed to melt into each other at the base of his tail. He had 306 very noticeable white spots which varied from a quarter to a half inch in diameter.

As soon as the fawn was born, he came under the rule of the mold, the forces which would shape him. How he grew and prospered depended entirely on how well he adapted himself to those forces.

Less than two minutes after he was born, the fawn spread his long, almost unbelievably delicate front legs on his leafy bed and raised the front part of his body. He was trying to get up, but he fell back. His legs would be miraculously strengthened in a



very short time, but as yet they were too new—too weak to support even his small weight. The fawn rested, tired by the tremendous effort of trying to get up, but his recovery was astonishing as strength flowed into his body. That was part of the mold, part of the plan. The fawn must have as great a chance to live as he had to die, and he could not live if he were unable to rise.

Five minutes after he was born, the fawn was on his feet. His long legs trembled, but they supported him, even though he had to spread them wide in order to make them do so. He took an unsteady step and stood still, as though overwhelmed by the fact that he could move. Then the moment was over. Another wild baby had learned how to get himself about, and this one knew exactly where he was going.

His feet braced to keep from falling, he fed, butting his mother's flank with an impatient head while he did so, as though that would somehow make the milk flow faster. As soon as his belly was filled, he dropped down into the leaves. He stared with fascinated eyes at the world into which he had been born.

His bed was almost under a thick hemlock. The tree's long, spreading branches formed a triangle that effectively prevented his seeing anything on the two

sides of the angle in which he lay; but on the other side, ten feet away, was another hemlock. The fawn looked across that dizzy space. When the hemlock's branches moved, revealing patches of sky and more trees beyond, he merely wondered what they were.

The fawn slept for fifteen minutes, then he awakened and rose on legs that were a bit steadier and stronger. He snuffled at a dangling hemlock bough, poked his inquisitive nose at a leaf and stood on braced legs to watch his anxious mother. He saw—without understanding the reason for it—that she was alert, fearful. The doe understood the fawn's complete helplessness. If any carnivorous prowler happened upon him, he would see her baby only as a tender and easily obtained meal. If the fawn was to live, the doe had to be keener and more alert than anything that intended to hurt him.

The fawn fed again. He wandered back to his bed, and, when the doe uttered a hoarse bark, he dropped instantly into it. The doe's bark had been a command. Lying so still that he did not so much as flick an ear or twitch a muscle, the little fawn watched his mother slink through the hemlocks and disappear.

Sunlight streamed through the hemlocks, and when the slight wind that had arisen ruffled the branches, shadows played along the forest floor. The

fawn was so perfect a copy of those dappled shadows that even a keen eye could not have discerned him where he lay. Nothing even sensed that he was there. A black bird flew down and lit on him. A red squirrel dug in the leaves less than two feet away, and still the fawn did not move. No creature except the doe knew that this thicket had become a nursery.

The fawn remained so quiet that he seemed a carved image rather than a living thing. He would have remained motionless in the face of anything that came including fire. . . . In about an hour he heard his mother's guttural bark. This time it had a slightly different note. It was not a warning, but a signal that the doe was coming back. Obeying that voice, and only that, the fawn rose. He was on his feet when she came into the thicket.

In the less than two hours since his birth, the change was miraculous. His legs were no longer unsteady, and he did not have to brace himself in order to stand. He walked over to his mother, fed, and, when the doe repeated the harsh bark, he dropped in his tracks.

He stretched flat on the ground, with his head extended, and the doe leaped over him. He heard her crashing through the thicket and her blasting snort of anger as she ran. He heard another deer, a yearling buck that had seen the doe enter the thicket and was

curious about her reason for doing so, run away. Five minutes later, his mother came back and the fawn finished his interrupted meal.

The doe moved ten feet away and lay down to chew her cud while the fawn basked in the morning sun. In the late afternoon she went forth to graze again, but she was back within a half hour.

AS DAYS passed, the fawn gained strength and spirit. Within a week he had visited and thoroughly explored the hemlock across from his bed. Before a month went by, he had traveled the fifty vast yards to the borders of the thicket and looked out on the great world beyond. He just stood quietly and did not venture farther; he was not yet ready for that world. He could walk, and even run; but he was still a baby whose only means of protection lay in silence and camouflage.

His life in the thicket had been one of peace and quiet. He remembered the curious buck, but, aside from this, he had no inkling so far that there were creatures other than himself, his mother, the black bird and the busy red squirrel in the world. The squirrel lived in one of the hemlocks but he often descended to the ground to look for food, and the fawn had spent fascinated hours watching him. The

self-important squirrel, finally realizing that the fawn also lived in the thicket, ignored him entirely.

The fawn discovered dramatically that there were other creatures in the world one early July day when, at last, he went outside the protecting thicket. He walked ahead, trembling, a little fearful, but fascinated by the bush-strewn clearing that lay between the thicket and the nearest spruces. Then a new scent, a heavy and strange odor, assailed his nostrils. He stretched his neck interestedly.

He heard his mother's warning, dropped to earth and lay quietly. The alien scent grew stronger, more pungent, as the beast from which it emanated came nearer. But, although the fawn was puzzled and very curious, he did not move. The little breeze that played about him did not even ruffle his soft hair. His head was flat on the ground, but his liquid eyes were wide open when the wolf from which the scent came passed within ten feet.

The fawn saw the beast and, although he had never encountered a wolf, deep within him he felt the first faint stirrings of fear. The wolf did not smell him because, until he was older and able to run or to defend himself from such threatening creatures, the fawn would have no scent.

He saw his mother facing away from him. Her head was high, her tail erect and flashing from side

to side. The fawn sensed faint vibrations when the doe tapped the earth with her front hoof, and he remained exactly where he was. When ordinary danger threatened, she merely uttered her bark. Now she was flashing her tail and stamping the earth, talking to her child in every way she could and warning him to stay still while she lured the wolf away.

The fawn saw the wolf turn, stand a moment, then rush his mother. She leaped away, bounding high but not running fast. She must herself accept whatever danger might threaten her baby, and she wanted to be certain that the wolf was on her trail before she would leave him.

More than two hours after the doe had left, she came back. The fawn rose, trotted to her and sniffed curiously at the blood that flowed from a minor wound in her leg—the wolf had come very near! The fawn fed, then he trailed at his mother's heels until they came out on the shore of the little lake.

The fawn stood, legs spread wide, blinking at the water. He crowded close to the doe and trembled, but he followed when she walked unconcernedly down to the lake and drank. The fawn touched the water with his muzzle, leaped back and stopped in his tracks.

Standing on the bank just above him was another doe with twin fawns. Their feet were braced, their ears extended, their heads slightly bent, and both were as astonished as the little buck. For a moment, the three young things faced each other. Then, hesitantly, they advanced and sniffed noses.

Suddenly they were away, racing up the lake shore, whirling to come together, head against head, rearing to paw at each other. They kicked, danced and played tag while their mothers fed. It appeared just baby play, but it had a purpose. When the fawns raced, leaped, danced, all but bent themselves double and executed every motion of which they were capable, they received exercise that would harden them and prepare them for a necessarily agile maturity.

As the days passed, the fawn gained weight. He became limber, swift-footed. His spots began to fade and he grew much more graceful. The tufts of white hair on the inside of each hind leg had flared out. He learned to eat leaves, clover, wild flowers and the aquatic plants which grew along the shore of the little lake. No longer did he flop into the leaves and lie motionless when the doe warned him with her guttural bark, or by flashing her tail, or by pounding the earth with her front hoof. He was able to run with the doe when she ran.

The fawn had become a strong thing, a healthy young animal that had at least an even chance of meeting the rigors of his life and of surviving them. He was rapidly fitting his niche in an age-old plan. The country in which he lived was a harsh and raw land where weaklings always died. The fawn was not weak.

With his mother, he ranged on one side of the lake and about a mile into the spruces. Frequently they went to an abandoned logging camp to eat the lush clover growing around the horse barns there and to lick salt from an old stump in which a block of this much desired delicacy had been placed. So many deer came to the salt lick that the earth for fifteen feet around was gouged and bare.

One late-summer evening, while the doe and the fawn were at the salt lick, an automobile came up the dirt road. Swiftly, as the summer progressed, the fawn had assimilated many things that he needed to know. He had learned never to go anywhere unless he was sure of where he was going. He had discovered that wolves and wildcats are better let alone, and, one sad day, when he thrust his nose too near a porcupine, he had discovered also that these creatures have painful stickers. The car was something new; something entirely strange.



It inspired such terror in the fawn that his pounding heart could have been heard two yards away. Finally finding his legs, he fled. The doe followed him. Like all adult female deer, the doe could run about thirty-five miles an hour for a short distance, and hold at thirty-two for at least two miles after that. The fawn could not match such speed; he ran ahead because the doe let him. As soon as he had run far enough so he could no longer hear the car, he stopped. To him, danger was a thing that poised, struck—and was forgotten if it missed.

As the season wore on, the fawn no longer received regular meals from the doe, for he had learned to feed himself. He liked ground hemlock, and, above all else, he preferred maple leaves, but he would taste almost anything. He even ate a fish that had been killed in battle with a bigger fish and had washed up on the shore of the little lake.

His spots were fading fast and his color was light red. His eyes were large and dark. On top of his head were two bumps that would become antlers. He weighed 60 pounds as compared to the doe's 125. The fawn had been born in the spring, and he had taken the fullest advantage of soft summer weather and abundant food. Few deer which were not strong and fat by the end of summer had any hope of surviving the winter.

October arrived. The long nights turned colder and the fawn was left to his own devices much of the time. Other bucks, with the swollen necks and polished antlers of maturity, were very much interested in the doe. Once in a while they lowered their antlers at the fawn, threatening him and warning him to keep his distance. He stayed away from them.

Frigid weather and the first of November came together. The lake acquired a sheath of ice and all the deciduous leaves were gone. One day, the doe ran off from the fawn. A moment later, she was followed by a five-year-old buck with massive antlers. In turn, he was followed by a smaller two-year-old buck and both kept track of the doe by smelling her trail. She could not hide herself. The fawn did not see his mother at all during the rest of that day, and only at intervals for the next week.

Another week passed, and a northeast wind blew hard, carrying snow in its teeth. At eveningtime, with six inches of snow on the ground, the storm ceased. That night the fawn was sleeping about a hundred yards from the lake shore, while the doe and the big buck napped a little distance from him, when the lights of an automobile stabbed the night. The car moved up the road to the abandoned logging camp. Another car came . . . and another. Deer hunters were

arriving at the camp. The fawn rose and walked over to the doe and the big buck. They stood in their beds and looked inquiringly toward the road. The three strolled farther back into the underbrush. As he went, the fawn took a mouthful of snow. He liked the taste.

A cloudless dawn arrived, and the sharp wind was cold. The fawn, the doe, a young doe with a doe fawn, and the five-year-old buck stood in a thicket of spruce, balsam and cedar. The old buck was first to see the two hunters coming down the trail that led from the lake, and he snorted. White tails flashing, the two does and the pair of fawns raced into some cutover. They were followed in a moment by the old buck.

A bullet whined overhead and thudded into a dead tree. Another was heard . . . and another. The old buck failed to come through. All that day the four remaining deer wandered, seeing several hunters and hearing many shots.

It was almost evening when the young two-year-old buck came toward them, limping in his left hind foot. A slug had hit him and broken the bone, just above the hock. A nice six-point, he now had the even set of antlers that indicated good health, but next year, due to his injured foot, he would carry a branched antler on his left side and a deformed stub on the right—the side opposite the wound.

THE INJURED buck moved on, but the does and fawns remained as a little herd throughout the deer season and afterward. The young buck's hair was gray now, as were the coats of all the other deer. The snow deepened, and the weather turned colder. There was food around the edges of the lake and in the spruces, but the deer needed protection from the bitter and almost ceaseless wind.

Soon after the first of January, just before a heavy snowfall which they seemed to sense was coming, the four deer went around to the other side of the lake, where a small stream flowed through a large spruce, cedar and balsam swamp. This swamp already contained many deer that had come down from the high country for miles around, and it was laced with so many beaten trails that walking to almost any point was easy. The fawn got his first taste of white cedar and liked it, although it was hard to reach, since deer had been yarding here for many years, and the white cedar was browsed in most places as high as a big deer could raise its head. The balsam and spruce were easier to reach, but the balsam was not as tasty as the cedar, and the fawn did not like spruce at all. However, some young shoots of black ash and the tops of viburnum were satisfying. When the fawn could find them, maple

shoots were a delicacy. Two days after he came to the swamp, the pair of buttons on top of his head loosened and fell off. New and bigger antlers would grow in place of the buttons.

The winter was severe, and the fawn dropped from eighty pounds in December to sixty-four in March. At that time, the strong mold in which he had been formed was apparent in all its aspects. He had been born in May, and he had had an entire summer in which to grow strong. The fawns born in late June, those which had been unable to fulfill the complete routine prescribed for them, died. Some were too small and weak to reach food. Others were unable to run from the occasional prowling wolf that came to the deer yard. Several died from pneumonia.

With the end of March and the melting of much of the snow, the young buck could make his way out to the side hills and feast on maple shoots. At night, he went back into the swamp to escape the harsh wind. Some days, such snow as remained froze with a hard crust upon which the deer could walk and reach food that had been beyond reach during the winter.

The middle of April came and all the snow melted.

The young buck, no longer properly a fawn, went back to his home on the other side of the lake. He

had doffed his gray winter coat in favor of red summer attire. Meeting other male deer his own age, he traveled with them. Sometimes, but not often, he ran with his mother. Now that there was an abundance of food, he gained weight fast, and there was a soft coating of very sensitive velvet over his new antlers. He was careful not to bump the velvet because doing so hurt. Blood which fed the growing antlers flowed through the velvet.

As the summer progressed, he noted that three older bucks living in the vicinity joined forces and were almost never seen apart. The same gregarious desire and an increasing wish for company stirred in the young buck. Therefore, the next time he met a yearling buck he fell in beside it, and that night they slept side by side. Later, two more yearlings joined them.

They ranged from the lake back into the woods, trespassing upon one another's home territory as often as they saw fit, but always avoiding does. Summer was their time, a season of preparation for fall and winter. They browsed, drank, played and found strength.

When September came, the young buck had a six-point, velvet-covered rack that was beginning to itch. He sought a two-inch sapling, bent his head against it and vigorously scraped and butted the little

tree with his antlers. At first the velvet was hard to rub off, and, because of remaining blood, it retained a pinkish under-color. The antlers also had a pink cast, but they were polished and the last shreds of velvet were removed by more rubbing on trees.

With his antlers clean and white, the young buck felt the first stirrings of an age-old impulse which urged him to declare his own supremacy. With no spirit of rancor, but strictly for fun, he challenged and fought the three other young bucks with which he had elected to run. One of the quartet bore short spikes that almost met at the points, and he could not fight well. Another lacked courage. The decisive fight was always between the young buck and another one which bore two points on each antler. Whichever one triumphed, leaving the other gasping and breathless, was the little herd's leader until another fight reversed their fortunes. When October came, with swollen necks—but not so swollen as they would be when, at the age of six or seven years, they reached their prime—the four went their separate ways.

Now, throughout the deer woods, there was always the sound of combat as the bucks battled each other for the does. The young buck witnessed a number of these fights, and he saw two bucks lock their antlers and become bound together, doomed to

death if they could not break the deadlock. He saw a number of fights in which neither buck was injured but one gave up and fled.

ONE BRIGHT moon-sprayed night, early in November, the young buck was on his way to the old logging camp when a doe came mincing down the trail. The young buck swaggered to her side. He pushed her with his muzzle and butted her with his bright new antlers. The doe turned to look over her shoulder and the young buck saw a bigger, heavier buck coming down the trail.

The two bucks met in the clearing and came together with a ringing clash of antlers. For a few minutes they pushed and heaved, then the superior weight of his antagonist forced the young buck backward. He freed himself and retreated a few yards. Again the two came together, making vicious swipes at each other's sides but meeting head-on. The young buck backed away.

He was tired and the enemy was bigger and stronger. His flanks were heaving, but there was no weakening of a will to fight.

The older buck charged viciously, and when he came, the young one slipped and fell to his knees. His chin almost touched the ground; his antlers pointed straight up instead of forward. Unable to



check himself, the old buck went on and up, over the youngster's back. With a terrific lunge, the young buck brought his antlers up. It was to have been a death blow, but the young buck missed the lethal thrust he aimed at his enemy's soft belly and inflicted a gaping wound in his side instead.

The older buck stood a moment. He was stronger than the young deer, heavier, more experienced, but he lacked heart and courage. His wound frightened him. He bounded down the trail and disappeared.

The young buck rose to his feet. His head was up. His eyes were blazing. He was able and strong. He would always win!

# THE RULE OF THE STORM

TWO WEEKS ago, icy winds had seethed across these rocky, above timberline pastures. Twice within four days, fresh snow had added an inch to deep drifts which never completely melted at this altitude. All creatures had been warned to get out of the heights into the sheltered valleys before winter struck in all its fury. But some beasts, for both sound and unsound reasons of their own, had not heeded the warning.

The mare with a colt at her heels had been part of a wild-horse herd. One night, wolves had scattered the animals, and the mare had not found her way back. Alone, with no stallion to defend her and her colt, she had not dared go down from the mountains when the big herds of grass-eating animals descended because she knew wolves flanked the migration. She was lingering in the heights until the wolves had gone.

The old mule-deer buck was an outcast. Past his prime, he had been defeated and savagely mauled by a vigorous young buck that wanted command of the herd he ruled. The old one had lain for a long while

near the battlefield, barely able to reach the grass surrounding it. He had received and correctly interpreted the warnings of deep snows to come, but, until recently, he had been unable to travel more than a few dozen feet. Even now, he could not travel fast, and he walked with a pronounced limp.

The little black bear, spending his first year away from his mother, had been having a wonderful time eating marmots, berries, tender grass and other foods provided so lavishly by the heights. He was too young and inexperienced to know that there were no good winter dens so high in the mountains and that he'd better go down below timberline.

The young mountain lamb had been born among the rocky crags. He had been with his mother on a night of terror when the same pack of wolves that had ravished the horse herd swept down on them. The ewe had turned to fight while the lamb skipped up onto a rocky ledge where wolves could not follow. All night long he had trembled there, and when he went back to look for his mother he found only what the wolves had left of her. The lamb had stayed in the vicinity, sure that somehow and some time his mother would come back to take care of him. He was too young to care for himself adequately.

These beasts were within a mile of each other when the first winter storm struck savagely.

The disturbance began as a rolling bank of clouds that gathered in a valley far below the crags. More clouds reinforced these—and still more until, from the crags, it looked as though the valley was solidly packed in a billowing mass over which one might safely and comfortably walk. Then the wind began to sing and the weaving carpet danced obediently to its tune.

The clouds lifted, rising like a surging ocean that would reach out and submerge the grim black peaks which reared gaunt heads out of the snow. More cloud masses rose from other valleys and, as though appalled at being so high, rolled fleecy arms forth to join and find the comfort of each other. The wind snarled. . . .

There was a temporary lull. A dusting of snowflakes fluttered out of the sky. They were blown into nothingness by the furious wind. Its advance guard dispersed, the storm brought up its main forces.

Streamers of snow, dropping from an inexhaustible reservoir, draped themselves across the highlands. In defiance of the wind, drifts piled up on the ground, bending the withered grasses. The patient bushes in this wild upland did as they had always

done; they bowed anew to burdens they must bear. Near one of the crags, a centuries-old tree, which throughout its entire life had been so constantly wind- and storm-battered that it was only two yards high, sighed wearily.

And the mare and her colt, the old buck, the little bear and the mountain lamb were trapped.

WITH THE colt beside her, the little brown mare had been resting in the lee of a crag when the storm struck. For days she had been uneasy, tense, because she had not trekked to the lowlands when the great herds went down. Now the storm's fury awakened her to the need for immediate action.

With her back to the wind and the colt crowding her heels, she plowed through snow that already reached her knees. Her ears were alert, her nostrils flared, and she turned her head from side to side as she sought any sign of the wolves which always followed grass-eating animals when they moved down the mountain.

She saw nothing except the snow and heard nothing but the raging wind. Driving snow pelted her back, lashing into her thick winter hair and remaining there so that, presently, she was coated with a blanket of half-melted snow. Nervous and cold, appalled by the tremendous forces that had

been loosed on its once tranquil home, the colt moved up to walk in the sheltering lee of his mother's body. He butted her flank with an impatient head.

She stopped, head bent and back still to the wind as she let the colt feed. Streamers of snow floated past her and draped themselves on the uneven drifts. The mare pulled roughly away from the feeding colt and went on until they came to a spirelike crag that offered shelter. The snow split on both sides of the soaring rock; the wind whisked around it. Driving snow had piled up on both sides to form a quiet eddy in this maelstrom. Sere grasses still showed.

The mare halted, momentarily subjugating the instinct for preservation that urged her on to the luxurious sensation of creature comfort. It was good to be out of the turmoil, not to feel the lashing wind. She bent her head to nibble the withered grasses. The colt came up beside her and stared, fascinated, at the storm. This was new; therefore it must be interesting. He was too young to recognize any danger.

The experienced mare understood, though, and she soon reacted accordingly. There had been no sign of wolves; therefore she need be in no immediate fear of them. But the storm was raging ever more fiercely, and, if she did not get down into the

lowlands, neither she nor her colt could live. She must not tarry here, tempting as it was.

In sudden panic, she sprang from the shelter and broke into a quick gallop that was cut short by the distressed voice of the colt. He could see no more than a few feet into the twisting white curtains that enveloped the top of the mountain, and his mother was gone! He raised his ridiculous whiskbroom of a tail over his back and galloped blindly. Running outside the protected circle in the lee of the crag, he blundered into a drift, tried to back out—and could not. His frantic call was a sound of sheer terror.

Out of the flying snow came a shape which at first glance he did not recognize, and, because wild instinct was active even in a creature so young, he tried to flee, only to bog himself more deeply in the drift. Then the familiar smell of his mother came to him. The brown mare snuffled her baby, nudged him with her soft muzzle and pushed his neck with her mouth. The colt stumbled out of the drift, already bellyhigh to him, and contentedly fell in behind his protector.

The mare went on, pressed by the knowledge of what would be in store if she did not take her baby out of the heights. She struck another drift, floundered through snow almost up to her neck . . . and stopped to breathe.

This was labor of the hardest sort, heavier work than she had ever done before. Had she been a domestic beast, she would have died with her colt in the drift, but she was of the wild. She possessed a tough vitality that is unknown in tame animals. Pawing with her front hoofs, she bucked six inches through the drift, then stopped to rest once more. Nervously she plowed on. Finally, she broke through the drift and the colt followed in the broad furrow she had left.

The mare came to the crest of the mountain and unhesitatingly plunged over it. Broken by the slope, the wind did not keep quite so sharply here. But the snow, lacking the wind that had heaped some places on top with drifts and left others almost bare, was almost of a uniform depth. It was very hard to break. Nevertheless, the mare plodded on. She was a hard and lean little wild horse, accustomed to every kind of physical hardship, but never had she known labor to be so difficult. Her legs were strained, heavy. Her head drooped.

But the mountain was not completely merciless. High in a grassy meadow, more than a half mile from the great forests that clothed the lower slopes, a bent little grove of evergreens had found and kept a roothold. The small trees bowed before the storm. They did not break, and their thick, needle-clothed



branches both tempered the wind and kept out most of the snow.

Wearily, the brown mare entered this haven and rested. The colt lay down and slept.

THE LITTLE bear had been within a hundred feet of the mountain lamb when the storm broke. For days previously, he had been disturbed by a racking restlessness. Before winter came in deadly earnest, he must find a suitable den for his long winter's sleep.

But the little bear had poked his inquisitive, brown-tipped muzzle into rock ledges, caves, fissures and even holes in the ground without finding a den that he would accept. There had been something inviting about each place explored, but also something grim and forbidding. Some inner, instinctive voice had warned him about every potential shelter. The hollow base of a stone spire seemed exactly the place he had been seeking, but the voice of instinct told him that, before spring, water would seep into the spire's many cracks and freeze there. Sooner or later, the stone would come crashing down. A hole in a crag had been similarly enticing, but it faced north and, when winter was at its height, it would feel twenty-five feet of drift over

it. The sheer weight of so much snow might crush whatever lay beneath it.

When the great storm began, the little bear was prowling along a rock ledge. He stopped, facing into the biting wind and running out a long tongue to lick away the snow that gathered on his muzzle. Stubbornly he went on, pursuing the same course and determined to accept no other. The den he sought must be somewhere along the ledge. Then he came face to face with the mountain lamb.

The little bear halted, watching the lamb that had climbed up a windswept upper shelf of the ledge and was looking back at him. Inquisitively, and eagerly, the little bear advanced. The summer had been a gay time, a bright and wonderful season, with much to make it fascinating. Now that this carefree season had passed and winter was about to clamp its raw grip on these forsaken heights, the little bear no longer found life an endless adventure. He was very lonely, and he went shyly forward because he sensed possible companionship in the lamb.

He stopped again, one paw lifted and nose thrust appeasingly forward, ready to run if circumstances indicated that retreat was in order. He sat down in the snow. A warm delight leaped within him, for the lamb was descending from its rocky perch.

The little bear rose and went softly forward, extending his moist nose to touch that of the lamb. No natural law had ever made enemies of these two, and now circumstance brought about a friendship. The little bear wriggled ecstatically, showing the delight he felt with every motion of his body.

He turned, responding to the instinct that bade animals desert these crag-marked uplands in winter as naturally as though he had done it dozens of times before. Now that he had a friend, no longer were a den and a winter's sleep his primary objectives. Meeting the lamb had brought a calming, a steadying influence into his sadly mismanaged life and, once he had decided to descend the mountain, he employed all a bear's cunning in accomplishing the task.

Three hundred yards away, seeping from beneath another rock ledge, there was a deep, clear spring. A tiny streamlet trickled from it and pursued a happily reckless course down the slope. The bear, with the unbounded confidence of every member of his species that he can go anywhere, any time, any way, followed along the lee sides of ledges and crags where the snow was not too deep. He came to the spring, for a second stared interestedly at his own reflection in the clear and as yet unfrozen water, then started down the streamlet's course. The banks were

as he had known they would be. The stream leaped over rocks and cast itself down a series of miniature cataracts that flung water back into the air and upon the banks. As a result, the stream banks were comparatively free of snow.

The bear walked down these, leaving his paw prints in the soft earth and turning from time to time, to see if the lamb followed him. Satisfied that he was not alone in a world that was otherwise given wholly to a raging storm, happy because he had company, the little bear went on.

He came to a high ledge where the stream pitched itself into space and was lost in the blinding storm. Supremely confident, clinging to tiny ledges and all the outjutting knobs he could find, he went over. He stopped, hanging onto a ledge with his front feet while his back paws rested on a knob, when his companion bleated. As soon as the lamb—one of the few hoofed creatures that could have descended such a place—caught up, the little bear continued his trek.

At the bottom of the waterfall, the pair came again into deep snow, and here the bear veered away from the friendly stream. From this point on, the water snarled through a deep gorge, pitched itself over a series of cataracts and raged on down to the valley. The little bear knew that he would be unable to follow the stream bed any more, but, again, his

innate instinct of the wild told him where he was going. He padded on, burrowing through deep drifts, and the lamb followed meekly.

Finally, they reached a grove of friendly evergreens, one of the very few clusters of trees that had managed to grow so high up, and walked out of the raging storm into the comparative peace and quiet of the trees. They laid down together. A little way from them, a wild mare and her colt had also found shelter in the trees, but there was room for all.

THE INJURED mule-deer buck was in a bad way. Old, wise, he had been fully aware of the significance of the first wintry blasts that swept across the crags and of the first light snows. With a mighty effort, calling upon every ounce of strength and will he possessed, he had tried to obey the law which said he must not be here when winter came. If he were, he knew he would die. Nothing could survive a winter on the mountain top.

Despite his prodigious efforts to respond to this inner warning and try to get off the mountain before it was too late, the buck's injuries were too severe to permit him to act decisively. He could move only a few dozen feet before he had to rest. Another factor held him back, too. There was rich browse near the place where he had fought and been defeated by the

younger buck, and the old mule deer needed that food to restore his hurt body and wasted strength. Since he had been a fawn he had summered in these heights. He knew everything about them, including the fact that the only feasible route to the valley must carry him over a half mile of rock-strewn ground whereon there was very little forage. He knew that, if he tried to cross that half mile in his exhausted state, he might not be able to manage it. If he fell down and could not move, it would not be possible for him to reach enough food to sustain life. Therefore, he lingered where he was, renewing his strength.

Nevertheless, he sensed the coming of the big storm, and a day and a half before it struck the law of the wild that urged him out of the heights became so demanding that he must heed it. He moved, limping and with his hurt hindquarters sagging. Five hundred feet from where he had been resting, he sank limply to the ground and rested again for almost two hours. He felt the need of strength-giving food, but was unable to reach any. However, he must go on. His became the strength of desperation. He got up, struggled another hundred feet—and rested. The buck got up again—and again, each time struggling as far as he could. He was goaded by the will to preserve his own life. Fourteen hours after he started, the old buck had finally crossed the barren stretch

and was in the good grazing area on the other side. For another ten hours he grazed and rested and built his strength up to the point where he could resume his journey.

A cold wind cut across the mountain; a flurry of snow obscured the crags. The lame buck went on. He knew that the first touch of real winter to visit the heights was not far off. He was almost to the first slope when the storm smashed with savage fury. It was like a live thing, a creature of many faces and many mouths that blew forth biting cold and helped scatter the sheets of snow. In spite of this, the lonely patriarch of the wild that had not surrendered his fierce will to live went on.

The storm howled and blasted about him, a ruthless tyrant that demanded a whole domain for the snowflakes that were its minions. Lesser things must go down into the valleys. They could have the tame places that were scorned by the storm.

The old buck accepted the challenges that the storm hurled at him as a wild thing would accept them. Every wild thing, regardless of odds, must fight as hard as it can against every enemy that opposes it. The buck's spirit and courage did not falter. His body alone was unequal to the task. Gleefully, the howling wind shrilled its laughter at having claimed another victim.

But, even though he felt he could not get down from the mountain, the old buck still tried. He was not wholly forsaken. Instincts of the wild guided him into the age-old game trail that led into the valleys, although it was deeply covered with snow. Generations of hoofed animals had used that trail. That is why the nearly spent old buck finally came to the place where the wild mare and her colt had gone down the mountain.

They were only ten seconds ahead of him, so their trail was not yet filled by snow. Gratefully, the old buck turned down the broken path. It was still very hard going for him, but he could travel, and he sensed the great necessity for moving as fast as possible before snow covered the path he followed.

The snow blew furiously. The wind roared. Limp and weak, the old buck stopped. Before long, however, he forced himself to go on, knowing that he would die in his tracks if he did not. A half minute after the wild mare and her colt, the weary buck limped out of the storm into the snug haven provided by the evergreen grove. He looked at them, and they looked at him.

The old buck lay down to rest.

UNTIL TWO hours after midnight the storm screamed the fact that it was now supreme monarch



in these snowbanked heights. Then, satisfied that its reign was so firmly established that nothing dared dispute it, the storm rested. The howling wind became sighing zephyrs that rustled the branches of the evergreens and played at scattering the snow.

But the storm king had tasted the first fruits of wild conquest, and it had merely exhausted itself temporarily. Cloud banks lingered in the sky. Beneath the zephyrs' sighing was a grim and terrible undertone, a savage voice that foretold stronger winds and much more snow. From now until the time when summer fought its way back up these rocky slopes, the storm would rule. Few days would pass without more wild winds and more snow. The storm's present cessation was only a truce in the battle it would wage to rule the mountain.

Because she was a wild thing, the little mare knew this. Snug in the evergreens, she stirred restlessly. The trees were a safe haven, the one place in all the uplands that was exempt from the rule of the storm, but she knew that she and her baby could not possibly stay here. She could eat evergreen branches and the smaller twigs for a while, but the grove was shared by the herbivorous buck, the mountain lamb and her colt. There was not enough forage to feed all four throughout the winter. The commandment of the wild plainly directed that she

and her colt must winter in some sheltered valley where there was both a snug resting place and plenty of shelter. Knowing this, the little mare resolutely led her colt into the drifted snow. She was aware that the old mule deer followed them.

The night was ebony dark. No star shone. No vestige of moonlight penetrated the bank of clouds that had complete possession of the sky. The night lacked even that half-unreal light which sometimes glows when star and moonlight fail.

In spite of the fact that she could see little, the wild mare stayed exactly in the ancient game trail that wound down the slope. That pathway had been laid out centuries ago by wild-animal engineers. It skirted dangerous precipices and canyons. It steered clear of those places where avalanches occurred regularly. Succeeding generations of wild creatures had varied their road to and from the heights to conform to the changes in geography. If an avalanche blocked the path, they went around it. If earth and rock slides made a new obstacle, that was taken into account. It was a good road, the easiest that could be laid in such a place, and the mare stayed on it because hers was the instinct of the wild.

The colt crowded close behind her, bumping her heels and nickering anxiously if he was left so much as a yard behind. Yesterday's lesson, when he had

become separated from his mother and was not able to find her, remained fresh in his memory. He would not take such a chance again.

The wild mare stopped, swinging her head about to assure herself of the colt's safety, and dimly behind him she saw the patient mule-deer buck. The mare nickered softly at her colt and the old buck came two steps forward. The mare went on, not caring whether or not the buck followed, as long as her colt was safe. A drift loomed. She broke through it. But a little later, when she came to another drift that was too deep to penetrate, she had to go around the end. At once, she swung back to the migration trail, however.

Hunger gnawed at her and there was nothing to eat, but the colt must eat. The mare stopped to let him draw milk, then continued down the mountain. When she reached a level bench from which the wind had blown most of the snow, she stopped to snatch a few mouthfuls of grass. As she grazed, she saw the old buck also lowering his head to eat. She looked curiously at him, not understanding the fact that he would not let his right rear hoof touch the ground if he could help it. Nor did she realize that the old buck was following her because he was unable to break trail for himself. She knew only that

she had to get her colt—and herself—down from the mountain.

The mare did not linger to eat much because of the great urgency, the need for haste, that goaded her. The storm would rule and she could not defy that rule. Plunging against a drift, she broke through and continued on down the trail, followed by her colt and the lame buck. . . .

Wan morning came, and, looking about her, the mare saw gnarled, storm-bent trees. They were not the sky-piercing trees of the lower valleys, but adventurers that had dared try for a place on the mountain. Like the evergreens farther up, they had paid the penalty. The wild mare looked to her left. Rocky crags rose there and a mountain ram with a curling spread of horns was watching her.

The mare stared back. Behind the ram were several ewes and lambs, but mountain sheep could winter here. The winds blew so furiously over the rocky crags that snow never lay deep upon them. The mountain sheep could walk on ledges scarcely wide enough for a rabbit, and they lived on lichens and moss when nothing else was available.

The mare went on. An hour later, the storm raged with redoubled fury. Snow fell so thick and fast that the mare could see the gnarled trees only when she

passed within a few feet of them. The heaped drifts grew visibly higher.

The weary mare still tried to obey the code of the wild that said she must get her colt into some safe valley. She remained aware of the old buck, who had placed all his trust in her, and who continued to follow the pathway she broke. The trail swung down into a little gulley, and she tried to break another great drift piled up there. She could not. A shiver played along her ribs. She was nearly spent.

The mare continued to paw at the drift, knowing she must break through or she and her colt would die here. She glanced at the old buck, who hovered in the background, watching anxiously.

He also knew.

THE MOUNTAIN lamb stood up and looked when the mare and her colt left the evergreens and the old buck followed. The lamb took two steps toward them. Baby though he was, he too felt the urge to get out of these heights while there still might be time. But he lacked both the mare's and the buck's experience-begotten wisdom. The urge to leave the mountain was not so strong within him as it was in the older animals, which knew what they would face if they did not leave. Besides, the lamb had formed a strong attachment for the little bear.

The lamb turned back to the bear, fast asleep in a hollow at the base of a tree. The snow that had sifted through the evergreens had fallen upon him and coated his black fur with white. The mountain lamb did not know that, eventually, snow would cover the snoozing animal, but that the bear's breath would melt an air vent through which he could breathe. The lamb knew only that he was worried, and agitated, because it seemed to him that they should be moving down the mountain as the other three animals were doing.

He nibbled a bit of moss that lay beneath the evergreens and raised his head with a long streamer of it dangling from the side of his mouth. Again, anxiously, he looked at the little bear. He went over and nervously nudged his friend with his muzzle. The bear moved in his bed, opened blank eyes that stared unseeingly—and went back to sleep. The lamb's pleading bleat trembled through the evergreens.

He whirled, assailed by a sudden small panic, and ran blindly through the trees. Twenty feet away from the hollow tree, he turned and looked back to see if his friend were following. The bear still slept. Returning, the lamb lowered his head and snuffled. The bear did not even twitch. The lamb could not

know that he was deep in his long winter's sleep and would not awaken until spring summoned him forth.

The lamb's restlessness and agitation increased. The heights were unsafe. He must find some place where winter forage was available. He could not possibly stay here.

The second time he ran, he did not stop or look back. His was the same instinct that had kept the wild mare and the lame old buck on the animal highway. He felt the same urgency that was proving such a powerful force within them. He had to get out of here. He had to find some place where the storm did not rule. The only safe place lay in the lower altitudes.

The lamb bucked through a drift that had blown over since the mare, the colt and the old buck had traveled this way. He emerged from it wild eyed and panting, but still guided truly. He stayed on the trek path. . . .

With a jerk that almost sent his hoofs flying from beneath him, the lamb suddenly drew up. The snow had started again. It was now falling in blinding sheets that obscured the gnarled trees among which he found himself. It was there that the lamb turned from the trek path.

Wearily, he staggered through snow that in places reached over his back, but he kept going. He was a

wild thing that would not give up. He had to fight as long as he could. He stopped in a deep drift, almost done. Then he called upon such strength as remained and plunged through the drift. His feet found a solid, snow-free surface, and, with the familiar feel of hard rock again under his hoofs, his spirit and courage were renewed. He climbed upward, leaping from ledge to ledge and teetering over dizzy spaces where anything else would have fallen.

As the lamb mounted the last ledge, he came face to face with the great ram that was wintering here. The big leader looked disinterestedly at him, and the lamb continued on past to the ewes and lambs that were lying on a bare, windswept ledge. He took his place among them, and the herd accepted his arrival as a natural thing.

An hour later, the storm cleared. The clouds broke. Sun shone through, and the lamb could look far down upon a forested valley. His were the telescopic eyes of a mountain sheep, so he saw even the smaller things. He saw clearly the wild mare, the colt and the old lame buck, still trying to pass through a drift.

The lamb saw more. A little distance up the same gulley, a herd of ten elk moved single file, black against the snow. They broke into a run, bobbing up and down. He watched them come near where the



wild mare, the colt and the old buck were struggling. A big bull elk lunged against the drift and smashed through it.

The last the lamb saw of the mare, the colt, the lame old buck—and the elk—they were far down in a sheltered valley.

Up on the mountain, the storm raged anew.

# NO RETREAT FOR A CAT

ON THE island, where a hundred creatures died violently every day, the big green rattlesnake was far and away the most deadly killer. Measuring six feet, eight inches from the tip of his ugly nose to the end of his last rattle, the snake's body was thick and sluggish. But his strike was lightning swift, and he carried enough venom in his poison sacs to kill a horse.

Now the rattlesnake was slithering along, inching his heavy body through wind-ruffled ferns toward a place where, his nose told him, a wild turkey hen and her brood were feeding. Reaching the edge of the ferns, the reptile lay still.

He had done this before, many times, and he never had to work it out because a knowledge of how to hunt had been born in him. He was as stealthy as the jaguars and ocelots that roamed the island, and much more ferocious. No creature, coming upon the green snake, would do other than give him a very wide berth.

His attention fixed on the hen and her brood, he did not move so much as a hundredth part of an inch. Sooner or later, the birds would eat their fill and, when they were satisfied, they were almost certain to

seek the shelter of the ferns. Because the snake was an expert hunter, he knew that they would pass him when they did.

After fifteen minutes, the hen turkey raised her head and clucked. Her barely feathered chicks clustered around her, and she led them toward the ferns.

The big snake had no need to tense himself, or to poise for the strike. Any inhabitant of the island that was not always poised and ready for what might come never lived long. The snake, unmoving, merely let the turkeys come toward him.

The hen he would let pass. She was too big to swallow, and even the snake never killed wantonly. But he would get one of the young.

The turkeys were within four feet of him, almost within striking range, when the hen sensed something wrong. She did not stop or try to find out what it was, for the turkey was very wise, too. Calling to her brood, she turned and ran as fast as she could in the opposite direction. The chicks followed.

Furious, the big green snake struck blindly at the hen and missed by a foot. He was so angry that his rattles beat out in crisp cadence the intensity of his rage.

The snake's anger did nothing to ease the hunger in his belly. He must hunt again. Within a few

seconds, although fury still seethed within him, he had started after new game—but not recklessly. He knew his strength, and his single weakness. The weakness lay in the vertebra just behind the head. There the thick body tapered down to a very slim neck, and even a very light blow at that place could kill him. He could whirl at lightning speed to face an enemy and so be ready to protect his neck.

The snake swerved suddenly, the scent of game again in his nostrils. Following his nose, he came upon two gray kittens and a single black one that snarled at him from an aperture in an uprising of the boulders.

The kittens were neither ocelot nor jaguar but true descendants of the common cat that lives in every American alley. A year before, when a furious tropical storm battered the area, three out of five of a wrecked ship's cats had ridden a bit of floating jetsam until, finally, they were cast up on the island. A big gray cat, the mother of the kittens, was the only survivor of the three that had landed.

She had lived because she possessed a quick native intelligence and an ability to adapt herself. For generations, the gray cat's ancestors, scattered in alleys all the way from Boston to San Diego, had fought a grim battle against overwhelming odds, and they had survived. It was this heritage that kept the

gray cat alive and, until a month ago when both of them were cornered and killed by a crocodile, she had also kept her comrades alive.

A born warrior, the gray cat had dodged or fought ocelots, jaguars, peccaries and numberless other creatures that would have liked to kill and eat her. Bearing three kittens, she had deposited them in the rock cleft because, on all the island, she knew no safer place.

The mother cat was away hunting when the green snake came, but she never went so far from her babies that she could not, in a moment or two, reassure herself that all was well with them. The cat stalked and missed a green parrot that had carelessly ventured too near the ground, then caught one of the young turkeys which the rattlesnake had hunted in vain. The chick in her mouth, the cat started toward the place where she had left her kittens. She was some distance away when she became aware of the green snake's presence.

Dropping the turkey, she raced at full speed toward the rock cleft.

The cat approached from the rear and, in one bound, left the steaming jungle to mount the four-foot elevation. The cleft had two arms of smooth rock, each about four feet high by six long. These arms sloped toward each other, leaving an opening

scarcely three feet wide, and the snake was already in this entranceway.

The kittens, knowing the snake was coming, were crouched against the rear end of their aperture. Their backs were arched and their mouths spitting as they awaited the sure death that was advancing upon them. They did not wait for it passively. These kittens too were born warriors.

All this the gray cat saw at a glance; then she leaped lightly down to interpose her own body between her babies and the green snake. She had left her young here primarily because of the nature of the place. It was protected on three sides and the fourth would be easy for her to defend. But now she saw her mistake. When she had chosen the nursery, she had never thought of anything as deadly as the green snake.

Fur fluffed, ready and willing to fight, the gray cat crept forward. The green snake stopped, but not because he was afraid. Fear was something he had never known, and fury still ruled him. He stopped because, if he could, he wanted to entice the gray cat within striking distance and kill her. Then the kittens would be helpless. But the mother cat would have died long before this if she had been stupid.

Although she always avoided them, she knew all about big green snakes. She was perfectly aware of

their deadly power, and their single weakness. Hers was a warrior's knowledge of enemies that were best avoided—but that might have to be faced.

The gray cat stopped her advance just short of the deadly serpent. After he struck, he needed the fleeting part of a second before he could be ready for a new strike. The cat wanted to tempt him to strike at her—and miss. She would spar for a killing thrust immediately after he struck. But the big green snake was too experienced and wise to strike unless he had a fair chance of making a kill. He hit blindly only when he was angry. He also was aware of this precise situation.

The kittens were trapped. Should any try to pass him, on either side, he could kill them as they did so. Although the gray cat could, the kittens were not able to jump over the rock wall. Sure of himself—and of a meal—the green snake slithered forward.

The gray cat was also sure that she could escape and the kittens could not. But she had no intention of fleeing. If the snake reached her babies, he would have to kill her first. She turned to look at the kittens. Ruffled, spitting, glaring their anger, they were backed against the rock. The two gray kittens were huddled together. Far more aggressive, in every respect his mother's son, the black one wanted to fight.

The gray cat turned to face the snake. She had gauged him and she knew him, down to the last tenth of an inch to which he could strike. The gray cat made a sudden lunge that carried her within a breath of that tenth of an inch, and she felt the green snake's head land near her.

She had tempted him to strike falsely. But the reptile recovered so incredibly fast that there was no chance for her to strike back.

The snake, knowing exactly what he must do, slid on. It was his task to pin the cat against the rock wall and kill her, or, at least, force her to jump over it and leave her babies to him. They would be easy game.

Again the gray cat, a fluffed ball of fur, flew at him. The green snake did not strike this time, for he knew now that she wanted to tease him into striking blindly. He refused to be misled. The next time he struck, if he did not make a kill, he would come very near making one.

The gray cat slid farther back. A great anger was fortified by a vast will. The fight was unequal, but she had not lost it yet—and her babies must live. The kittens moved to one side to give her room.

The gray cat went into a crazy dance. Her tail was fluffed to twice its normal size, and every hair



on her body was erect so that she seemed to be a huge thing.

She fainted, leaped back and fainted again. If she could only sink her claws into that weak point in the tapering neck, just behind the enemy's blunt head, she could kill him.

The snake gave her no opportunity. Every time she fainted, his head was erect to face her. He would kill her before she could come even close to his neck. The gray cat's battle was more than half lost. She was very near the end of the rock cleft. When the green snake advanced another two inches, she would be able to retreat no more. There was no place to go unless she wanted to abandon her kittens, and she would never do that. The green snake advanced another inch.

The gray cat spat and snarled and danced straight toward the green snake. A second time she tempted him to strike—and a little wave of air from his head ruffled her fur. The fangs found no mark, however.

For the thousandth part of a second, having expended his energy in the strike and not yet recovered, the snake lay motionless—then he became a writhing, twisting thing whose rattles beat the cadence of his own death spasm. He formed a mass of twisted coils and then straightened them. Finally, except for a spasmodic twitching, he lay still.

He had had only the wink of an eye in which to strike, but the black kitten came of a long line of dauntless warriors and he had inherited all his mother's wild lore. From the first, he had seen that part of her strategy which the snake had overlooked. When the opportunity came, the black kitten seized it. Beneath his extended front claws, he had felt the breaking of a whip-thin neck.

Neither the gray cat nor her kittens looked at their dead enemy as they left the rock cleft and sought the green jungle.

# THE TREE OF LIFE

THE BEECH tree was a hundred feet tall and two hundred years old. Two centuries past, to the exact day, it had been planted by a gray squirrel that had found and buried some beechnuts. Then he forgot where he cached his hoard and this giant of the forest had grown from one of the hidden nuts.

The parent tree, the one from which this one sprang, was gone now. More than a hundred years ago, long before the first white man's tread had disturbed this primeval forest which knew only wild men and wild animals, a freak storm had raged. Blue lightning had frolicked in the beech grove.

As a consequence, smoke had curled from the beech trees and for many weeks they had smoldered from hidden flame within their trunks. The next spring, they had borne few leaves and no fruit. Within the next decade, their branches were lifeless and naked. One by one, borne down by both high winds and their own weight, they had fallen.

Now they were only lichen-encrusted slabs that rotted on the ground. A thicket of scrub oaks had grown up where the beeches had been.

The great tree had escaped the lightning, possibly because its parent tree had been much taller and had taken the entire storm to itself, but more probably because of some freakish caprice in the storm itself. Over the years, it had continued to grow until it was even more massive than the tree from which it had sprung.

It marked the western boundary of a beech grove that extended for miles to the eastward. But to the west there was nothing except scrub oaks. There were various reasons for the failure of beech trees to take root where beeches once had been and again should be. Prevailing winds were always from west to east and the beechnuts that spattered down, as they were now dropping from the great tree, were wind-borne to the eastward. More important, the beech grove to the east offered better cover than the scrub oaks to the west, so nut-hoarding squirrels invariably concealed their caches among the beeches.

A cold wind blew over the beech grove, ruffling twigs and branches from which the dry leaves were already more than half stripped. In the dead leaves below, the sound of beechnuts falling was like the

patter of steady rain. The great beech shook forlorn branches.

Last night, frost had shriveled the extreme tips of the tenderest twigs and rimed the tree's smooth, skinlike bark. Tonight, thunderheads darkened the sky and there would be no frost. Twilight dimmed the beech grove.

In that brief interval before night descended, something moved among the scrub oaks. It was a big gray squirrel with a long, flaring tail and bright black eyes. When the food on his home range failed, this squirrel had set out to discover fresh stores.

He had tarried first in a wild apple orchard, but had been driven out by a pair of saucy chickarees, his red cousins, that had already taken possession of the apple trees. Then he had been similarly evicted from a hickory grove. Hurrying on, desperate for some place where he might find and store food before winter clamped down in deadly earnest, he had tried to establish a home in various other places. Always he had been driven away.

Finally, the wanderer had come to the scrub oaks. Since there was plenty of food in the beech grove, no other beast was particularly anxious to harvest the few acorns dropped by the oaks. The lonely squirrel found a home in a hollow branch and set to work gathering acorns. They were pitifully few, and winter

was coming fast! If he did not have enough food in his stores, he would starve before spring arrived. Therefore, he had made up his mind to snatch some food from the beech grove.

The gray squirrel came cautiously across the hundred and ten yards of relatively open space between his den tree and the beech grove. He was constantly alert. Death might strike from ground or air, so he took advantage of every speck of cover.

The raiding squirrel was within thirty feet of the beech grove's outer fringes when there was a tiny scraping of claws on smooth bark. A black squirrel whose home den was high in a beech tree, and who had marked the space around it as his, scampered down the tree and leaped from it.

He chattered a warning while he charged the trespassing gray squirrel. His tail jerked as he raced to battle. The gray turned and fled back to his home in the scrub oak's hollow limb.

Black night descended.

THE TOWERING beech was far from an inanimate thing. It was merely different from the warm-blooded creatures that scampered up and down its trunk or foraged beneath it. Although it must be eternally rooted in the same place and could move nowhere, it had been granted the gift of age. Because it had lived

twenty times as long as most animals, it had witnessed no lack of drama. Every scene, either of violence or peace, ever enacted in the wild had been carried out beneath its boughs, or within its branches, many times over.

The beech tree had lived so long and seen so much that it was like a very old and very wise human, who scorns even to waste time on the petty bickerings and minor affairs that are so vastly important to the lesser creatures.

But at no time was the tree scornful of the lesser creatures themselves. Squirrels might scamper about its branches and bears might climb it, and the tree never even bent. Although it was not flesh and blood, often it seemed that it must be. The tree alone seemed to understand the mutual interdependence of all life.

The beech began this, the first night of its two hundred and first year, as it had begun every other night since it had passed the seedling stage and left behind the dangers that beset such young growths. Its branches were spread. The smaller twigs moved gently as a south wind sighed through them. The tree was wholly in tune with the night.

Presently, far away, the baying of hounds arose near a little stream that made a trickling pathway through the beech forest. Almost as though it both

heard and understood, the great tree seemed to prepare itself. It was a tree of life; it had never inflicted death.

Their yelling a discordant symphony in the night, the hounds came nearer. But something ran ahead of the pack, a small and insignificant thing that courted death every time it ventured forth to find food or drink. It was a masked-faced raccoon that had gone down to a creek to hunt crawfish and frogs.

When the hounds jumped him, the raccoon, an old and wise one who knew exactly what to do, scorned all places of safety in its path until it came to the great tree. The hunted animal knew that men would be following the hounds. If he sought refuge in a small tree, the men would chop it down and kill him.

But they could not take him from the great tree, and when the raccoon reared against its smooth trunk his embrace was almost affectionate. He began to climb. Although he had been threatened with death, he had found life and he knew it. He finally stopped at a broad crotch more than sixty feet from the ground and settled in it.

Racing up, the hounds began to howl into the tree and to throw themselves against its trunk. They always fell down again, unable to find a hold to which they could cling. Frantic to overtake their



quarry, they could not. Lights gleamed in the black forest, made blacker by the cloudy sky. Bright beams shot upward. These either fell short or could not penetrate the maze of branches. The hunters looked uncertainly at the great tree's mighty girth and despaired of ever cutting through and toppling the beech, so they called their dogs off and went in search of easier game.

After two hours, the raccoon descended and went his own way.

The tree remained unruffled and undisturbed. A thousand nights it had played host to some harassed small thing that hoped to keep its life. The tree unfailingly offered sanctuary.

THE BEECH seemed to sleep, and to awake in the first gray light of early morning. The wind, from the south, drove before it a soft, warm rain whose sound as it fell on the dry leaves was oddly like the tinkle of far-off bells.

Deep within his hollow, thirty feet up the tree, the black squirrel thrust his snout forth, licked away the few drops of rain that pelted it—and withdrew back into his nest. No wind could disturb him there, nor could any rain reach him. With thrifty foresight, he had stored a great heap of the tree's own fruit in his hollow and he did not have to venture out for food.

Only when the gray squirrel from the scrub oaks again came and, hoping he was unseen, ventured toward the tree of life did the black squirrel fly out of his nest. In a great rage, he scampered down the tree and once more put the hapless gray squirrel to flight.

The tree had borne a rich crop of nuts, and, even though vast quantities had already fallen to the ground, many had yet to fall. There were far more than the black squirrel could eat, but to him food was a precious thing that must never be shared.

The morning light strengthened. The south wind continued to shake nuts from the tree's quivering branches and still countless numbers remained in their little, burred pods. Brown nuts continued to shower earthward as the tree gave unstintingly of its bounty.

The first creature that came to it this morning was another waif. A drenched, bedraggled and terrified fawn had been feeding with his mother last night when the same hound pack that had treed the raccoon swept down. The doe stood, drawing the hounds to her so the fawn might escape. He had run fast and far, but when he was finished with running he had been unable to find his mother again. All night he had wandered in the forest.

He came upon the giant beech very early in the morning and halted beside its trunk. For the first time

in hours, the rain did not pelt him and the wind did not ruffle his hair. He shuffled uncertain feet, as though he suspected an enemy; then he stepped nearer the tree. Here, at last, he seemed to understand.

The beech's mighty strength bolstered his own, but it was a gentle and comforting strength. The fawn curled up as near the trunk as he could get and went to sleep. No longer was he afraid. He did not have to wander any more.

Again the gray squirrel from the scrub oaks came to steal some of the fruit that the tree of life had scattered so lavishly on the earth. Again the officious black squirrel drove him away.

The gray squirrel flashed back to his home in the scrub oaks, entered the hollow in which he lived and lay shivering. He needed to store much more food than he already had and knew it, but he feared to trespass. He crept to the mouth of his den and lifted beseeching paws as he peered toward the beech, but he did not venture out again.

The great tree stood as it always stood, sheltering the black squirrel that had gone back to its hollow limb and the fawn that slept near its trunk. A doe minced up. The fawn sprang up with a glad cry and ran to meet her.

His mother had found him!

The doe had not gone to the giant tree for the express purpose of finding her fawn. When she left him, satisfied that the dogs were on her trail, she had been obliged to run. One by one, the hounds, trained to hunt raccoons, had left the chase. But there was one young dog that had never been properly taught or disciplined. He found the hot and heady scent of a deer far more alluring than the uncertain trail laid out by a dog-wise raccoon. The doe had run for hours before she finally shook the young hound from her scent.

The instant she knew the dogs no longer threatened, the doe started searching for her fawn. She had hunted him all the rest of the night. Sheer luck had finally brought mother and child together. Once they were united, however, anxiety might be put behind them and creature comforts heeded. The doe and fawn began to feed on the beechnuts that lay, covered by leaves, beneath the great tree.

High above them, the selfish black squirrel dashed frantically about and, at the top of his voice, protested this intrusion on property which he had marked as his own. He dared not offer direct battle to anything as big as the two deer, but, at least, he could compete with them, and he descended to gather more beechnuts. Cheeks loaded with booty, he scampered up the tree and hid the nuts he carried in another

hollow limb. When that hollow was filled to bursting, the greedy squirrel continued to hunt beechnuts at a furious pace and bury them in holes he scraped in the ground.

A blue jay fluttered out of the forest and alighted in the top branches of the great tree. He tilted there, a vibrant thing whose whole being sparkled with life. He watched the black squirrel dig another hole and hide some beechnuts in it.

As soon as the squirrel left this cache to start another, the blue jay seemed to chortle to himself. He flew down to the squirrel's hoard and uncovered it with a few vigorous strokes of his feet. Bent on mischief only, one by one the jay gathered up the nuts the squirrel had so painfully buried and flew off, dropping them along the way. For a very good reason, the blue jay always scattered its plunder in the beech forest.

A hawk swooped, struck with taloned feet at the jay—and missed! The intended victim flew screaming through the beeches. At the noise of the flight, the doe and fawn hoisted white flags over slim backs and bounded gracefully away.

The great tree's next visitor was a shuffling black bear, who poked among the leaves with his snout and impartially ate the nuts he uncovered, as well as any dirt and leaves that went with them.

Suddenly, a blast of thunder rocked the sky and even the black bear fled. He knew what would happen now, and he had no wish to be beneath this particular tree when it happened.

The old beech shook its branches and whispered reassuringly to the frightened black squirrel that had dived into his den and now shivered there. Then the tree bent its head toward one of its own children, a beech almost as tall, and with the gesture somehow seemed to bequeath a proud mantle that had been proudly worn.

Another thunder clap exploded and the accompanying flash of lightning brilliantly lighted the dark forest. The tree stood erect to meet the challenge, and, somehow, it was not a lonely old thing, even though it stood alone.

When the next bolt of lightning struck less than forty feet away and ricocheted into the tree, there was a change only in its physical appearance. It swayed and bent, but retained all its vast dignity. Finally it fell, toppling almost exactly toward the scrub oaks, and the spattering of the beechnuts it cast was louder than the drive of the rain.

Within the tree, although he remained safe in his hollow, the black squirrel was dazed by the shock. Then he was afraid. He curled up in his leafy nest and trembled.

But the gray squirrel that had been hopefully lingering in the scrub oaks came forth, even though the storm still raged. Frantically, he gathered beechnuts and carried them among the scrub oaks.

Some he cached in the oaks themselves; some he placed in holes scraped in the wet earth. Then, weary and spent but no longer fearful, he crawled back into his home nest. He had hidden more than enough food to last him throughout the winter. He would not eat all of it. That which he did not need would sprout and grow. For more than a hundred years there had been no beeches where the scrub oaks grew—but there would be some very soon.

# THE SHELTERING THICKET

THE THICKET was bounded on the north by a ragged, winding shelf of rock that protruded four inches above the grass. A stream curled around the east and west sides of it and spilled over into a sparkling waterfall. At some time in the past, lightning had started a fire, but the flames had failed to leap the stream or pass the rock. The blaze had burned itself out in a rough triangle formed by rock and water.

For a while, within that triangle, the ground had remained scarred and blackened. Then new life crept in. Tender shoots poked up through the desolate ash, and the fresh green growth survived and spread. In time, the thicket developed into a tangle of blackberry brambles, fast-growing aspens and scattered laurel, around the remains of trees that had fallen in the fire and the skeletons of trees still standing. By degrees, it came to harbor a teeming variety of life.



For the most part, those that made it a home were small and inoffensive animals desperately in need of the protection the dense growth gave. Mice born there lived their lives furtively and died, all within an area that a man might span in half a dozen strides. Chipmunks moved into the center of the thicket and raised families. An old woodchuck had its burrow just within the outlying brambles. An opossum dened in one of the dead trees, and a long-billed woodcock nested beside the same dead trunk. But most of the thicket's inhabitants were cottontail rabbits.

Tonight, one of those nose-wobbling animals nibbled grass at the base of three thick blackberry canes. She was large for a cottontail, yet there were rabbits in the thicket larger than she. What distinguished her from the others was a light, almost frosty, fur. A wedge-shaped chunk had been bitten out of her ear. She had never forgotten the black snake that had slithered into the nest where she was born and left this mark upon her. Very early in life, she had learned the grim touch of danger.

Suddenly, the cottontail ceased nibbling and became as tense as a stretched wire. Peril in the thicket was commonplace, but lately she of the frost-tinted coat had tripled her customary alertness. She would fight desperately for the young that would

soon be born to her, but she knew that there were enemies against which she had no hope of fighting successfully.

Whatever danger she had sensed passed, and she resumed her nibbling. . . . Again she became rigid, a bit of grass dangling from her mouth. With so few defenses, the frost-coat could only hope, when danger threatened, to attract no attention to herself. In the darkness, she resembled one of the light-colored patches of stone and grass scattered about the thicket.

The danger came on uncannily silent wings. A great horned owl flew through the night and all movement in the thicket ceased. Mice huddled in their burrows. Every cottontail froze where it was. Deep in their dens, the day-faring chipmunks cuddled their babies a little closer.

With dramatic suddenness, life was stirred to activity by a nervous rabbit that leaped into some nearby brambles. The owl, swooping, banked in time to keep his wings out of the entangling briars into which the small animal had escaped, but its nervous terror had transmitted itself to other cottontails. Another rabbit leaped toward the sheltering briars. This time, the owl swooped successfully and rose with the rash rabbit in its talons.

The frost-coat washed her face and hopped beside the ribbon of stone. Huge trees had once surrounded the thicket. When they had been harvested, before the fire, the cutting crews had fed clover hay to the horses that had hauled out the logs. Seed blown from the hay had found a rooting on both sides of the rock shelf, and the frost-coat dearly loved clover. For a moment, she nosed about for a stalk or two on her side of the stone, but found nothing. Dozens of cottontails foraged here and the choice clover was gone. Few rabbits cared to cross the stone to where the clover grew richly, and so openly expose themselves.

At length, gathering all her courage, the hungry frost-coat started across the stone barrier. She had to travel only ten feet, but every foot threatened peril. Her heart pounded. Although the far side was not a thicket, neither was it naked rock. There was some protection.

The frost-coat found a patch of sweet clover and feasted.

At one side of the thicket, a few hundred feet away, water trickled down a rock-ribbed gulley. Because the sides of the gulley were steep and it would have been difficult to get trees out of it, some tall evergreens had been left undisturbed by ax or saw. An accumulation of dropped needles had

formed a thick, spring pad and over this pad a game trail wound.

A wolf, small and scarred, appeared on the trail. An hour before sunset, he had left his daytime bed in a cluster of second-growth hemlocks and had come upon an elk calf in a thicket of ferns, left there by its mother, who had gone off to drink. The wolf was almost upon the calf when a blazing fury struck him with knife-edged hoofs. Usually a timid creature, the cow had forgotten her own fears when her calf was in danger. Battered and bruised, the wolf had fled.

Bad luck followed him. Shortly after the sun sank behind the western hills, he saw a wild turkey about to settle for the night on a low branch, but before he could spring the turkey went higher into the tree. Casting about for a ground-roosting mother grouse with her brood of young, he found only places where grouse had roosted last night. Morning was still five hours away when he struck out for the thicket. He was not fond of cottontails but he had to have food, and the thicket was the one place where he knew he would be sure to find it.

Soft-footed, careful not to disturb a single stone, he reached the head of the gulley. The ribbon of rock was plainly visible in the night and the life of the thicket reached his nostrils in a stream of intermingled odors. High above his head, out of

reach, another turkey was partly silhouetted against the night sky. The wolf's attention did not leave the thicket, however. In the past, when he had hunted here, he had been foiled by the burrows and the clusters of thick briars into which he could not follow, but he also knew of the tempting clover that grew close to the stone.

His nose told him that a weasel was invading the thicket, and he lifted his lips in a soundless snarl. The cottontails would be alarmed. Weasels, built much like animated lengths of rawhide whip, could worm into the smallest dens and crannies. However, the weasel's raid might have its advantages. The rabbits in the thicket, alert for this dreaded enemy, might be less inclined to watch for other raiders. After the weasel had made its kill, life in the thicket would breathe again and some of the cottontails would certainly look for clover near the ribbon of stone.

Slinking close to the ground, the wolf approached the rock shelf. When he crossed it, his crouch was so low that the hair on his underbelly brushed the stone. Edging along, he reached a dark, concealing patch of grass and hid himself in it. So completely motionless that not even his fur rippled, he waited.

He was not thoroughly satisfied with his position, however. Although there was considerable rabbit scent in the wind, the odor in his vicinity was old and stale. The cottontails in the thicket had not been feeding in this particular area lately. There was much fresh scent a dozen feet ahead, though.

The wolf moved his paws by fractions of inches and advanced a dozen feet. The scent here promised much. Again he crouched, satisfied.

On the other side of the stone ribbon, the frost-coat saw the wolf move. It was sheer luck that he had not already found her. The wind was blowing from the thicket and carrying her scent directly away from the wolf. She knew that, if she tried to cross back over the stone, he would probably have her before she could find safety. She must remain here, in scant cover. Even so, the wind might change at any second and make her presence known. If the enemy did find her, she would never be able to get away. And with her would die the young that were on the point of being born.

The frost-coat rabbit took her one desperate chance. Breaking her freeze, she hopped swiftly for twenty feet. If she had made the least error, that would doom her. The moment's peace, after she stopped, remained unbroken, however. Presently, she moved again, and because the greater danger had

been present the first time she stirred, this second journey carried her farther. When she finally halted, she was under the shelter of a bush, but a gnawing anxiety was within her. She had been born in the thicket and had spent her entire life there. It was the only safe place she knew, and never once had she willingly ventured more than twenty feet from some of its safe retreats. Now she found herself almost two hundred feet from any assured safety that she knew!

Those two hundred feet were a life's journey to her, a perilous and fear-ridden space of vast proportions. Nevertheless, until the wolf went away, getting back to the thicket was hopeless.

The frost-coat had just settled beneath the bush when something passed to one side. She remained frozen as a mottled wildcat slunk by and, not seeing her, padded on.

To the rabbit's sensitive ears came a faint scraping of claws on rough bark as the animal climbed the tree in which the turkey roosted. The roosting bird's startled cry rang harshly in the night. Then there was a rattle of wings as the turkey launched itself from its roost and beat away into the darkness.

With no further need for stealth, the wildcat came angrily down the tree, leaped to the ground and stalked toward the thicket. The sound of its progress

faded . . . and became only a half-sensed whisper as it again began to stalk.

The frost-coat remained frozen while another horned owl winged overhead. Anxiety mounted within her. Tonight, in permitting herself to get too far from an immediate and safe refuge, she had broken the primary law by which she lived, and now she was paying the penalty by being forced to remain away from safety. And tonight, especially, safety was paramount. Tonight was to see the beginning of new life for which she was responsible.

The frost-coat moved slightly and, in sudden terror, once more froze. The wildcat had heard or sensed her move and was padding back to investigate. Head up, ears cocked, yellow eyes alert, for five minutes he prowled and snuffled. A kindly wind, eddying, did not give him the rabbit's scent and the cat came no nearer than ten feet. Presently, he went away.

The frost-coat made a prodigious, convulsive leap that carried her six feet from the bush. She leaped again, then settled down to a swift run. Since she dared not run back to where the wolf and wildcat waited, she had to flee still farther from the thicket.

Almost too late, she saw the shadowy weasel slip toward her. Now she must think no more of freezing



but must take her chances and run, for this enemy had her scent.

ALTHOUGH SHE was capable of great speed for a short distance, the frost-coat rabbit was no endurance runner. Two hundred and fifty yards from the bush where she had started, she stopped, panting heavily. There was a dullness and ache in her long rear legs.

A velvet-antlered buck, moving in the brush ahead, snorted. In the overhanging trees, a family of screech owls made the night come alive with their weird calls. A flock of nighthawks swooped low over an open meadow, wheeling and dipping as they pursued swarming insects. A dull, stolid porcupine rattled his quills and complained to himself.

The frost-coat regained her spent breath. Tireless and keen scented, weasels trailed until their prey was run to exhaustion. Out of the wisdom of the wild given her, this the frost-coat knew.

She sensed rather than heard or saw the weasel's nearer approach and again she ran desperately. Less than three hundred yards from the bush that marked her starting point, she entered another thicket. The colony of cottontails that lived here was so far away from her home and across ground so dangerous that they were strangers to her, and the thicket in which they lived was almost another world. She panted past

a buck rabbit, which hopped to one side and sat tensely alert, aware of what was happening. The weasel had selected a victim, and he would not change to another and fresher scent when his nose told him the cottontail he already followed was tiring fast. He passed through the thicket with his nose to the frost-coat's trail, unerringly selecting the one he wanted from among the many offered there.

The tired frost-coat stopped again at the head of the gulley. Not for a second did she take her attention from her back trail. Although she knew her flight was futile, tonight she had the most compelling of reasons to struggle on anyhow. The weasel came near, and she was off again, running down the game trail and dodging aside to avoid a bear coming up it. The great animal lowered his head to smell the pine needles where she had passed. She heard the advancing weasel snarl at him.

The frost-coat, stumbling, fell down the side of a projecting root. She picked herself up. The weasel, still maintaining the same tireless pace at which he had started, was very close now. Not again would she dare stop to catch her breath.

Even so, rather than continue running downhill, she moved up the gulley's sloping side. She must return to her home thicket without delay, for only there could she be sure of a refuge. The weasel had

worn her down, so that she could no longer travel faster than he but must exert all her remaining strength just to maintain the distance between them.

The frost-coat entered a patch of small hemlocks whose lower branches brushed the ground, passing three grouse that opened their eyes and clucked drowsily as she went by them. The trio should have been high in the trees, beyond reach of ground-prowling predators.

Climbing wearily up the gulley's side, the frost-coat heard a rattle of frantic wings as two grouse blundered away into the night. The third had fallen to the weasel, who had not even had to turn aside for this kill.

The frost-coat mounted slowly to the gulley's rim. Even though the weasel, having found food, was no longer a threat, she still could not pause short of the thicket. The open, almost coverless space between the gulley's rim and the refuge she sought had to be dared. She crossed it and staggered into the thicket, just as another horned owl struck at her and missed.

She hopped down a little trail to the place she so wanted to reach safely. It lay deep in the thicket, a tangle of canes and briars which she had long ago marked for her own when this time came. She lay

down and pulled fur from her body to line a leafy bed.

An hour later, the miracle was complete. The frost-coat cottontail lay happily beside her five tiny babies.

# THE NOT-SO-TRANQUIL POOL

SHADED BY overhanging beech trees, the pool was tranquil. No visible threat of danger sent a shadow across its unbroken surface, no sound marred the silence. And yet the big brown trout, the king of the pool, heard the voice of approaching peril.

Whirling, he turned from the trickle of water purling into the head of the pool and swam toward the center. The surge of his six-pound body scattered the smaller trout and the chubs and minnows which shared the pool with him. The second largest trout, a sixteen-inch brown, moved into the place vacated by the king.

The big trout settled among sodden leaves in the two feet of water which was now the pool's deepest part. As his dark body eased to the bottom, the leaves stirred sluggishly. He lay motionless, waiting for more news of the danger he had sensed and troubled by the major disaster that had crept upon the pool and its inhabitants.

Wind-dried mud banks, speckled with pebbles and glittering bits of quartz, formed the borders of the pool. Measured across, the mud banks spanned twelve feet. A month ago, the pool had been six feet at its deepest and the trickle feeding it had been a

stream. Now the leaves of the overhanging beech trees were starting to curl, withered less by a burning sun than by a complete lack of water. This summer had brought the most severe drought since any living man could remember.

A telltale lace of tracks marked the mud banks. Nimble-pawed raccoons, bloodthirsty mink, clumsy bears, padding lynx, sleek otter, had all walked there and, in walking, had written the story of their passing. When the pool had started to dry, the creatures which eat fish had found the fishing much easier. The tracks high on the banks were sun-baked into hardened clay. The tracks near the water, the most recent of which had been imprinted within the hour, were soft because the mud there was still moist.

The danger sensed by the king trout approached as gently as a breeze in May. One second, there was only the dying stream, threading its way among bare rocks that thrust bleakly out of the water. The next second, a sinuous, snaky otter was framed at the head of the pool, his darting head seemingly mounted on oiled swivels as he saw everything at once.

The lesser fish, which had remained at the pool's upper end, surrendered to panic, darting into deeper water where they hoped to stumble onto a refuge which did not exist. One of the smaller trout splashed

in the riffles at the pool's lower end and, unable to struggle down them, fled wildly toward the mud bank. The rest swam with mob rule their only guide, each trusting that the fish directly ahead would know what to do. They followed any leader or anything that promised hope. They found only chaos.

The king, wiser than the rest, did not move. Motionless, he might escape notice.

Wet hair tight against his sleek body, the otter had already marked the sixteen-inch trout as his. He was in no hurry. He knew that the pool had become a prison.

The king, refusing to move, watched the smaller trout battle for his life. The otter, unwilling to exert himself, let his marked quarry rush about in futility. With a final desperate burst of speed, the brown flung himself at the despairing trickle that flowed out of the pool and attempted to thrust himself down the drying thread of water. As his back fin cut the shallow trickle, half his broad back was exposed. He tried to go on and could not. . . . The sleek otter bounded down the riffles, claimed his prize, climbed the mud bank and disappeared.

Rising slowly from his haven in the water-soaked leaves, the king swam back to the head of the pool. The other trout drifted with him, and the king made a savage rush at a foot-long brown that tried to move

in ahead of him. The rainbow scurried aside and took a respectful place behind the leader.

The pool's head was a favored spot. Fed by icy springs, the stream was always colder than the pool. And, even though it had become a trickle, it still washed down most of the food which the imprisoned fish must have. A yellow water cricket floated into sight, and the king opened his mouth and engulfed the squirming bug. He ate again when another cricket came along, but when some black midges drifted past, he let them go by to the fish behind him. The twelve-inch rainbow, which had been elevated to second in command when the otter caught the sixteen-inch brown, ate what he wanted. The lesser trout crowded in greedily to take a chance on what was left.

Hopefully, the chubs and shiners awaited their opportunity to feed. When none offered itself, they drifted back into the pool, to see if they might find food there. Plebeians among aristocrats, they ate last and least.

Still uneasy, the king turned and swam back into the pool. During his long life he had been sought by many enemies but he had always found some way to evade them. Now, however, there was no escape from this pool. It had become a trap, for it was impossible to travel either up or down stream. Nor



was there any mercy hereabouts. In this pool, the helpless were first to die.

A shadow floated over the surface of the water. A split second later, while most of the fish were fleeing to the uncertain safety of a deeper area, the osprey that had cast the shadow struck. He rose with an eight-inch trout in his talons, and, for a second time, the smaller fish scattered in wild panic. The king did not move. Too big and heavy to fear any danger that came from the air, he did not consider ospreys a source of peril.

There were, however, dangers which even he could not avoid. In the spring, when the pool was bank full, there had been a great many fish to share these risks with him, but, as the pool had diminished, the population had vanished by degrees. The lower the pool had fallen, the more swiftly the fish had disappeared.

The king warily watched a once-submerged log that slanted from the mud bank into the pool. A lynx crouched on the end of this log, so still that even his mottled fur did not ripple. One talon-tipped paw dangled almost listlessly over the side of his perch and paused just above the water's surface. The king kept away from the vicinity. He knew lynx and how they hunted! He moved slowly back to the bed of leaves and hovered upon them.

Where the water lapped the mud banks, a still wet belt extended four inches up the mud. It had not been there yesterday, and because the king trout always knew exactly the depth of the water in which he swam, he knew that the pool had dropped another four inches. He did not think in inches, but in terms of his own that were as precise as a mechanic's rule.

The pitiless sun burned, and the parched trees sighed for water. The king moved to the head of the pool and again scattered the smaller fish. The big trout was aware of time in the same sense that he was aware of the water's depth, and of the things surrounding the water, and of the enemies which came to hunt in the water. At this time of day he knew that a great many water crickets would wash into the pool.

They came, little, wriggling, zebra-striped bugs which, near the dawn of history, had surrendered their own potential minds and wills to the whim of the water. The king fed upon them as they washed down, and continued to feed until he had his fill. Then he went back into the pool, noting as he did so that one of the chubs was missing. The lynx had made a kill.

Once more, the king settled in the leaves. Night was coming on, and night brought five predators for

every one that hunted by day. The king knew better than to stay in shallow water during the night.

A yellow moon climbed into sight and, as though exhausted by its effort, stood still. Lazy summer stars glittered in the cloudless sky. From the bottom of the pool they seemed to be shimmering lights, winking off and on. The king remained hovering over his bed of leaves.

If the water had been deep enough to allow sufficient room to maneuver, it would have meant no risk to feed by night. In this drying pool, however, only the foolish moved—when they were unable to use all the senses at their command—and the foolish never lived very long.

The king did not leave deep water until after gray morning light was brightening to sunrise. Then he swam to the head of the pool, and, in the first moment of carelessness he had permitted himself for many years, he overlooked the bear that had come here to fish until a split second before it swiped at him. Turning, he fled.

He raced to the slanting log and sank under it. The bear sat down in the water and looked about him. Presently, he rose, splashed to the leaning log and probed beneath it with one immense paw. The king dashed away. . . .

At that moment, a black cloud floated over the burning sun. Reaching the lower end of the pool, the king turned away from the shallow ripples there and flashed back to deeper water. He awaited a renewal of the bear's attack, knowing that, this time, he was the marked victim.

A flash of lightning dazzled a summer morning grown ominously dark. Soon after came the following burst of thunder. Rain slashed the surface of the pool. The beeches bent, overawed by a high wind. Upstream, an overweighted dam of clouds had burst.

Seconds later, the sullen murmur that had presaged a disturbance upstream became a thunderous roar. A great wall of water—a flash flood—drowned the stark boulders, changed the feeble ripples into snarling rapids and swept everything before it!

A whirling log that rode the flood's crest spun dizzily and knocked the bear off his feet. He strove desperately toward the bank. Turning and tumbling helplessly, clawing frantically at anything that offered security, his weakening paws finally grasped a solidly rooted tree. With a tremendous effort, he pulled himself from the battering water, crawled a few feet and collapsed. Presently he rose and ran into the forest.

While the surface flood raged, the king sank into a quiet eddy behind an imbedded boulder. The inundation would spend itself and leave a filled pool behind it. Eventually, there would be another drought and another drying of the pool—but today there was water and water meant life.

The king trout relaxed.

# THE WILD SWAMP

THE CREEK was deep and sluggish. In the dark gray of early morning, a muskrat sat on the mud bank, shucking a mussel. The summer's green of the wild swamp had given way to autumn's brown, and the withered stalks of the blue starflowers were laden with downy seeds that floated away in dancing drifts on every breeze. But this morning there was no breeze; hoar frost lay thick on the weeds and shell ice reached brittle fingers out into the creek.

The muskrat ate his mussel, jumped into the creek and swam across, with the thin ice cracking before him.

Crouched in the very thickest of the weeds, deep down where the frost had not reached, the big cock pheasant heard the sound and interpreted it correctly. He lay perfectly motionless, knowing that there was nothing to fear—also that the slightest move would bring a shower of frost crystals raining into his snug retreat. The big cock had lived in this area five years, ever since he had chipped the egg beneath his mother's breast and first seen the light of day. He knew the swamp, all thousand acres of it, perfectly, and experience had taught him how to survive.

A little to the right, the weed stalks moved, and, without turning or moving his head, the big cock strained to catch the sound of what was moving them. There was a soft rustle, the barely audible *sluff* of fur on weeds, and the pheasant relaxed. It was Joab Gearin's cat, out hunting. A fox would have made more noise and a mink would have come more swiftly. The big cock did not fear a cat.

The sun rose red in the sky, cast its slanting beams across the wild swamp; and the weed stalks began to drip as the frost melted from them. The big pheasant rose in his bed and shook from his bronze back the few drops of water that had dripped upon it. He ate, satisfying his first hunger with seeds that grew on the stalks about his bed. When his appetite became more fastidious, he searched about for chill-numbered grasshoppers that clung to the weeds. From across the swamp came the raucous cackling of another cock . . . and still another answered it. The big cock continued to search for and pluck grasshoppers from their perches.

Having eaten his fill, he walked slowly down a tunnel in the weed stalks, erect and not trying to hide because the weeds overhung the tunnel and he knew that nothing could see him anyway. This was a ritual that he performed every day of his life, and, on occasion, many times a day.

He came to a dead tree, a withered stump from which the bark had rotted but whose smooth wood resisted decay. A tangle of skeleton twigs and branches rose into the air above the weed stalks, and for a long time the big cock stood beneath them listening. He stretched himself to his utmost height and peered through an aperture at the blue sky. No hawks circled above. There was no sound save the gentle murmur of the creek. The pheasant hopped into the air, caught and balanced on a dead limb. He stood very still, knowing that he was in a dangerous exposed place and trying to lessen that danger by remaining absolutely motionless.

He had sought this high place because it was the only vantage point in the entire swamp from which he could look across the creek. There was a little knoll there, and on it a weather-beaten shack from whose tin chimney blue smoke curled. Near it was a ramshackle coop about which a dozen varicolored chickens scratched. A small black-and-white dog lay in the sun, and a short, stocky man was splitting wood in the yard.

The pheasant stared long and hard, fixing every detail in his mind and placing everything exactly. The shack belonged to Joab Gearin, a swamp man and the big cock's most deadly enemy. For twenty years Joab had prowled the swamp with his shotgun



and dog, and the first year of his life the big cock had escaped them by luck alone. In succeeding years, he had matched wits with the stocky little swamp man and his dog and had eluded them by strategy. But he knew that he was never safe and could never relax so long as Joab and his dog were near.

THE PHEASANT hopped from the dead tree and ran through the tall weeds to a little open space, in the center of which was a sand-filled depression. He crawled into this, luxuriously working the sand into his feathers and out again. Another cock and a hen appeared at the edge of the opening and watched. The big cock, who had learned that it was always safest to travel alone, and who sought the company of hens only in the mating season and the company of cocks never, stalked back into the weeds. He came to and fed upon some skunk cabbage seeds, then wandered indolently away from them to a sun-warmed little mound. A willow tree rose above it, and the only intimate friend that the big cock permitted himself was hopping about its branches.

It was a tiny, black-headed, gray-feathered chickadee, and it chattered a cheerful welcome when the big cock came in sight. The pheasant lay down, stretching in the sun and pleasantly aware of the chickadee's antics in the tree.

The big cock spent a companionable hour, resting in the grass and watching the chickadee go about his endless but always cheerful task of pecking mites of food from the branches of the willow. Then he rose and strolled back into the swamp, hearing the chickadee's prattle die in his ears as he walked. He stopped in the tunnel that led to the dead tree, half-minded to go down it for another look at Joab Gearin. But nothing had disturbed the day's serenity in the swamp, there had not been the slightest indication of danger or unrest.

The big cock strode slowly on, toward a corner where the swamp ended and huge elms raised ambitious branches to the sky. He was not hungry, but he always welcomed a delicacy, and skunk cabbages grew profusely in the damp, cool shade of the elms. The pheasant crossed an open space, crouching down in four inches of grass and absolutely invisible as he crossed. Again in the weeds, he rose to walk and came to the edge of the swamp where he peered out at the elms. Nothing moved except a robin that was staying in the north far past his allotted time. There was no sound save his melancholy chirping. The big cock walked into the open.

Suddenly, he beat frantic wings and rose into the air, seeing too late what, until now, he had not

observed at all. Shotgun in hand, Joab Gearin stepped from behind a tree. The big cock soared toward the weeds. The shotgun boomed, and the pheasant felt a stinging pain in his left wing. He tipped sideways and caught himself as he dropped to earth. He heard Joab Gearin's satisfied, "Got him!" and the snappish bark of the little black-and-white dog.

As soon as his feet touched the earth, the big cock started to run. He chose another tunnel and ducked beneath the tangled weed stalks, where they were too thick to permit his passage. The dog yapped twice more, and the running pheasant swerved sharply to the left. He heard the smashing weeds and the tramp of feet as Joab Gearin followed his dog. The big cock hesitated, forcefully overcoming his first terror and falling back on the craft and guile that had saved him so many times.

He had blundered, and that blunder had all but cost him his life. Joab Gearin, knowing that the skunk cabbages grew beneath the elms and that pheasants would come a long way to feed on them, had plotted his ambush cunningly. Now, certain he had wounded a bird, he would hunt until he killed it.

But, although the big cock had been robbed of his ability to fly, he still had his marvelous feet and they had lost none of their speed. On a straightaway

stretch, with no obstacles, the dog might have caught him. But here in the swamp, the dog must battle tangled weeds and thickets through which the pheasant could run freely.

For a long way the wounded bird ran very straight and fast, his only thought to put distance between himself and the pursuing dog. His bill gaped wide and his right wing sagged. But, with a conscious effort, he clasped his broken left one very close against his side. Instinct told him that that wing must heal, and would not if it were permitted to drag. But it was very painful.

He came to a seepage of water out of which cattails thrust their fuzzy brown stalks and paused for a hasty drink. Far behind now, he could hear the weeds smashing as Joab Gearin plowed through them, and the dog yapped again.

The pheasant waded into the water, and when it rose above his feet he hopped to a grassy niggerhead and sat there, studying the cattails ahead of him. He could not go back the way he had come without the risk of meeting the dog, yet the deeper into the cattails he got, the deeper the water became. But there was a submerged and slimy log a yard and a half away. The pheasant studied it, trying to gauge the depth of the water that covered it. When he could not, he jumped anyway.

The water came up over his legs and wet the downy feathers on his thighs. With it, a chill crept through his body, and he clawed frantically for a hold on the slippery log. He found it and balanced himself. His long tail feathers touched the water, and little drops pattered from them back into the swamp as he walked up the log.

The big cock stepped into shallow water and struggled through it to the weeds. But a mud trail curled behind him, and mud clung to his feathers as he raced on. That slowed him, but he still ran as fast as he could because he knew the dog. Nondescript in appearance, it was anything but a nondescript hunter and, at best, the water would delay it for only a very few minutes.

A wind blew across the swamp, and a flight of seeds took to the air. The pheasant swerved, running back toward that place from which he had come.

He ran for a long while. But the wound had sapped his vitality and he was tiring fast. His swift run slowed . . . and still no friendly refuge offered itself. Two years ago, there had been a badger hole in the swamp. But Joab Gearin had dug out the family of badgers and, in the process, had filled up the hole. The big cock passed this and sped by into the weeds. The dog, barking intermittently, was scarcely a hundred yards away now. Joab Gearin, guiding

himself by the dog's noise and taking short cuts, was coming fast.

Then twilight came and darkness followed—and Joab Gearin called his dog home.

THE BIG cock lay panting where the pair had left him, his bill wide-stretched and his right wing sagging. But, just as he had forced himself to do throughout the exhausting run, he kept his broken left wing clamped tightly against his side. He might live for a long while without flying, but, sooner or later, his life would depend on his wings. The pheasant knew this. He knew also that, regardless of what might come, he must be both his own protector and his own nurse.

After a bit, the pheasant rose tiredly and walked to where the weed stalks grew more thickly. He shoved in among them, using his right side to push them away, and settled down in an old nest. Bits of crumbled shell, from which the chicks had long since gone, littered the edges of the nest. Decaying grasses lined it. The big cock thrust his head under his good wing and tried to sleep. But the wracking pain in his left side prevented that, and when a noisy screech owl scolded, he sprang hurriedly erect.

A three-quarters moon rose languidly over the swamp, and pale stars glowed wanly in the clear sky.

Frost crystals sparkled on the weed stalks. In one of the elm trees that sheltered the skunk cabbage, the forlorn robin chirped unhappily. The big cock shivered in his bed and settled down to try sleeping again.

All night he lay, wakeful most of the time. . . . When the first faint flush of morning showed in the sky, he rose. Frost had turned every weed stalk into a jeweled wand, and all bowed in obeisance to the wind that played across the swamp. It was very cold and the big cock did not want to move. But he must move.

During the night, the broken bone in his wing had set and was beginning to heal. It still pained, but the pain was not so sharp nor the ache so stinging as it had been yesterday. The big cock still held the wing very close to his body.

He walked through the weeds to the tunnel, but, instead of hopping up on the dead tree, he walked up a leaning branch. Once in the open, he paused, studying the sky for any of the swift-striking things that coursed it and the ground about for the stalking predators whose domain that was. When nothing threatened, he gave himself to studying Joab Gearin's shack. A thin trickle of smoke started from the chimney, and the dog came out to snuffle about. Shotgun in hand, Joab Gearin emerged from the

shanty and, with the dog beside him, started into the swamp. The big cock slipped from the tree back into the weeds.

He lingered there, setting no course of action and planning nothing until he knew what they were going to do. He heard them wade the creek, break into the swamp and approach the place where they had left his trail yesterday. For a half hour there was silence while the dog cast about. Then a sharp, frenzied bark announced that he had found the big cock's bed, and he barked again when he swung down the trail. Joab Gearin's encouraging shout sounded, "Get him, Spot!"

The big cock started to run through the weeds, straight toward the creek. He entered the tangle of willow, nettle and burdock brush that lined it and raced upstream. Rested and fresh, the dog was eager to hunt and Joab Gearin was cutting across into the creek's brush. The big cock heard him, saw him break out of the weeds and swerved back into the swamp.

His speed did not match that of yesterday, and he had been sickened by his wound and sleepless night. But a courageous heart beat in his gorgeously plumed body. He headed back to the seepage of water and the slimy log. The sun had not yet risen high enough to melt the thin sheet of ice across it, so



the big cock sped over on the ice. He heard the dog break through the ice and come barking on. His run scarcely started, the pheasant began to pant. There was no place to go where the dog could not follow, and he knew that he would not long be able to outrun it. But still he ran.

Another cock crowed, its harsh, cackling voice filling a gap when the dog was silent. The big cock turned to run toward the sound. The dog ceased barking, and, from far off, came the heavy sound of Joab Gearin's crashing progress as he sought to follow the hunt.

He yelled, "Spot!"

The dog's bark answered him, and Joab Gearin swerved toward it. The big cock stopped to catch his spent breath . . . and ran on. The weeds about him became a dimly seen brown mass, with no special shape or meaning, and his bill gaped wide open. Vaguely, he saw the cock that had crowed and ran past it. He stumbled, rolled over and struggled to his feet. The dog's excited bark announced a hot scent.

The big cock's run became a shambling trot. He struck toward a broken-down barbed-wire fence. For a few seconds he rested beside a leaning gray post, then ran on. But he could not run much longer, and he knew it.

Suddenly, there was a strident cackle and the rattle of wings. The dog went into a frenzy, and Joab Gearin's shotgun blasted. The little swamp man's triumphant, "This time you're down to stay!" rang through the swamp.

The big cock crawled into a snarl of weeds and rested. He shivered, not at all sure what had happened, but knowing that, once again, he had been chosen to live. The other cock had risen when the dog appeared.

But that was the way of the swamp.

# THE FISHERMAN OF CLAM CREEK

THE NIGHT lifted slowly, and the first vague light of dawn revealed the blanket of mist that hovered over Clam Creek. It reached to a uniform height of thirty feet, bulged to brush the dense forest that clothed both sides of the creek and caressed the cut bank that bordered a very swift stretch of white water. Then the sun rose over the eastern hills, and, for a little while, the mist fought for its right to exist, but it yielded finally and, slowly wafting higher in the air, drifted away. Bright sunlight spilled in a golden cascade down the sloping hills, drenching the creek and the valley through which it coursed.

From the top of a withered stub, a nesting flicker rattled its strident call. An impish little half-grown black bear cub, rambling down the creek bank for whatever it could find, raised on its haunches and looked curiously toward the sound. A muskrat left the bank where it had been digging roots and swam to its underwater den. But the sun had been up almost an hour before the kingfisher that was nesting in the cut bank left the four naked young that she had

been brooding throughout the chill night and walked six feet to the mouth of her burrow.

So silently and cautiously did she come that anything watching from the outside would have seen only the faintest flicker of motion. The creatures that lived on the creek—few men ever came there—existed in a world of violence: abrupt death and sudden erupting life. Unable to meet with force of her own any of the creek dwellers who would gladly have killed and eaten both herself and her young, the kingfisher's defense against them was eternal vigilance.

She studied the white water that foamed before the cut bank, noting everything about it and listening for what she could not see. The little bear appeared in the trees on the other side of the creek and slapped with his paw at a dragonfly that lit near him. The kingfisher held very still in the mouth of her den until the bear had gone by. She saw a small turtle, whose dull brain had somehow prompted him to leave the safe pool in which he had lived and journey up the creek, resting beside a brown rock. The turtle had plenty of time, and if it took him another year or so to travel another mile to a pool that suited him, at least he would see the sights along the way. The kingfisher left her burrow suddenly.

She launched herself straight over the white water, and immediately made a right angle turn to make it appear as though she had been flying downstream for some distance. Fifty yards down, she lit on a limb overhanging the creek and looked all around.

Seeing and hearing nothing that hinted of danger, she preened her feathers. She stretched cramped muscles and flexed her wings. Finished, she launched herself from the branch, and her reel-click voice announced to all that the kingfisher had come again to her fishing grounds.

Beneath her, as she flew, the creek revealed a story that she could read in every detail. For a half mile below the cut bank, the creek rushed in foaming white water, and such water held little promise for her. But her eyes pierced it. She saw trout lying behind rocks that thrust like bald heads above the current, waiting for whatever the creek brought. She watched a huge rainbow shoot like a rocket from beneath the bank, hurl himself upon and devour a six-inch brook trout, and then take the smaller trout's place behind such a rock. Over a tiny eddy the kingfisher poised and made ready to dive as a four-inch trout splashed up to take a fly from the surface. But the little trout went immediately back to the depths.

The kingfisher came at last to the end of the white water, and to another spruce that sent a straying limb out over the creek. She settled on it and bent her crested head with its overlong bill to study the pool beneath her.

It was a long pool, with gnarled and slimy stumps of trees lining it where it brushed against the forested bank. At that point it reached unknown depths, and, looking down from the top, the water seemed almost black. On the other side, a gently rising sandbar ascended into shallow water that lapped a treeless bank. A young buck, his antlers knobby in summer velvet, was grazing there. He raised his head to look at the kingfisher, took another mouthful of grass and chewed solemnly on it.

The kingfisher observed the sunny shallows and the schools of minnows and shiners that swam in them. But she made no attempt to catch any because she knew that this was a place of gravest danger. A week before, she had seen her mate dive to catch a chub. He had struck the water and been dragged beneath it by a wolf-jawed muskie. The kingfisher studied the bottom of the pool, her keen eyes following its contours and noting every stone, every pebble and every fish in it. But it took her almost thirty seconds to locate the muskie.

He lay just where the sun-dappled water blended with the black, so well camouflaged that he seemed almost a part of his surroundings. When the kingfisher launched herself from the branch and flew on down the creek, the muskie melted slowly back into the inky water. He had already fed sumptuously on chubs, but a feathered tidbit to top any meal off was always welcome.

The pool emptied into a slow riffle that became a snarling rapid. That, in its turn, was gentled by the easier slope of the creek bed and poured into another pool. The kingfisher stopped suddenly in her headlong flight. Her wings fluttered a moment. She plummeted. There was a little splash as she struck the water and closed her bill over a two-inch chub that had been sunning itself near the surface. But at the exact instant that she made her catch, she beat her wings frantically to rise again. While diving, she had seen and heard nothing unusual, but some sixth sense, some deep-seated instinct that most wild things possess, warned her that there was something present which had not been there when she dived. Clutching the chub, she rose in the air and looked down.

The little bear, loafing down the creek for the fun, mischief and food that he could find, had been sleeping beside the pool when she dived. Intrigued

by the splash, he had immediately rushed out to investigate and now stood shoulder-deep in the water. He raised his head to watch the kingfisher fly away, then reached down to lap a drink. Presently, he waded back to the bank and climbed up on it.

The kingfisher flew to the limb of a tree, hammered the fish she had caught up and down until it wriggled no more and started straight up the creek. She rose a little higher over the pool where the pike lived, but made no stops until she came to the cut bank. The little turtle still slept beside the rock, and a rabbit nibbled grass between two spruces. But there was nothing else.

The kingfisher swooped down and sideways, so suddenly that she almost seemed to have melted in the air, and ducked into the burrow. She walked six feet to where the hungry nestlings waited with bills agape. For a moment she stood over her young. Then she gave the fish to the smallest and hungriest and went back to the mouth of the burrow. As before, she crouched there long enough to look around . . . and flew back down the creek. Mechanically, she rose over the long pool that harbored the muskie and went on to catch another small fish in one of the lesser pools below.

Four times she went down the creek, and each time brought back a fish for one of the nestlings. But



her work was not ended. If they were to survive, her babies must grow fast. When ice sheathed the creek, no kingfisher could live on it. All must seek open water farther to the south. If the nestlings were to grow strong enough for such a trip, they must have food.

On her twelfth trip, the mother bird flew to a big gnarled pine that leaned over a deep pool where the creek made a right-angle bend and lit on one of its limbs. She stood there, resting her tired wings and looking farther down the creek. It was a long, straight stretch of enticing pools that marched between rows of spruces. The kingfisher rattled out her clicking song.

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, it was answered. There was a glint of sun on blue feathers and another kingfisher, a big male, came winging up the creek. He settled in a pine a short distance from the leaning tree. The little kingfisher from the cut banks looked again, and longingly, at the enticing pools. But she dared not go into them.

Fishing was an honorable trade—and one of the oldest. But, at best, it never afforded a bountiful living, and it must be kept honorable to produce any. This was the end of the little kingfisher's range, and of that portion of the creek which she and her mate

had marked out for themselves. If she went into the pools below, she would have to fight both the big male and his mate for the privilege of so doing.

She left the leaning pine, flew to the shallows on the opposite side of the pool it overhung and dived on a chub. Carrying it back to the pine, she killed it and swallowed it head first. It was the first food she had taken that day, and for three or four minutes she sat on the limb while the comfort and strength of it spread to her weary legs and wings. She launched herself, caught a small fish for the baby that had had only three and flew back up the creek. She dived into the burrow, fed her young and went back to the mouth of the hidden home, as though to make still another flight and bring more food to nestlings that never seemed to have enough.

But, since she had left the leaning pine, a change had come over the creek and over the sky above it. There was an ominous, fearful tension in the air, and the little turtle that had rested on the bank for hours thrust its head out of its shell and went back into the water. Since mid-day there had been little black clouds in the sky. Now these had joined forces to become threatening thunderheads. Daylight faded. Thunder grumbled, and lightning split the gathering darkness.

The kingfisher went into her burrow and brooded her sleepy young.

ALL NIGHT the storm raged. Rumbling thunder claps crashed like artillery barrages through the sky and faded away to subdued mutters. Streaks of orange lightning punctuated the thunder, for one brief second illuminating the creek and the creek valley, showing the tops of the mountains in bright relief, then plunging all into dense blackness. Eventually, the thunder and lightning died away and the rain arrived.

At first, a whispering patter of oversize drops borne on the wings of the wind, it became a steady fall that snarled itself into a cloudburst. Sheets of rain hurled themselves savagely at the cut bank and battered its muddy sides. Every crack became a miniature creek in itself, and every dry ditch a river. Millions of gallons of water spilled on earth that could not swallow it. Before morning, the white water had swollen enormously and was hurling itself down its bed with redoubled ferocity. The creek rose against the cut bank until it was barely a foot below the entrance to the kingfisher's burrow. Just before dawn, the furious downpour died away to a cold and unpleasant drizzle.

The kingfisher huddled on her nest until after the dreary morning had arrived. Water had seeped through the burrow and left a muddy puddle only twenty inches away. Tiny fingers of moisture pointed from it toward the burrow's mouth, and the subdued roar of the torrent filtered in. The kingfisher hugged her young very tightly, knowing what she would meet when she went out and fearing to go.

The nestlings stirred beneath her, growing restless as the eternal hunger which was the most powerful instinct they knew became more acute. One, bigger than the rest, struggled from beneath the little kingfisher's protecting body and stretched his bill wide. His mother knew she must go.

She crawled to the mouth of the burrow and looked into the rapids that foamed just beneath her. The steady, dismal rain poured into them and lost itself in the angry water. The little kingfisher stood up, peering around but not moving. The nestlings were safe for the present, nothing could swim the raging flood between the cut bank and the forested shore. But any creature marking the burrow could remember—and come back when the flood had subsided.

The kingfisher launched herself from the burrow's mouth, fluttered a moment in the air and flew down the creek. The white water roared beneath

her, snarling like a tiger. Mud from the cut bank stained it for a hundred yards down, where it faded to nothingness in the surging flood. The kingfisher flew to the spruce, preened her feathers. She looked into the raging water. There were no upthrust stones now, and no eddies. The swollen creek seemed intent on washing everything from its path, and the trout that had been so plainly visible yesterday were hiding wherever they could find a refuge. The kingfisher flew on to the long pool.

Water cut a swirling path for almost half its length. On the shallow side, the pool had risen until the weeds beside it were surrounded and even some of the grass was covered. Occasionally, the grass moved as the chubs and shiners, which dared not go into deep water where the muskie and lesser enemies dwelt, swam about. The kingfisher looked longingly at them, and at the rain-dappled surface of the pool. She shook her feathers and flew on down the creek.

Although the creek was roily only where mud had washed from the cut banks, the pools below were narrower than the long, deep one, and they had become miniature rapids, with swirling, tortured surfaces that hid all beneath them. The kingfisher flew down to the leaning pine. The slow rain stopped, and the sun strove valiantly to burn a hole through the cloud banks that commanded the sky.

With her wing tips almost brushing the surface, the kingfisher flew very low over the pool beside the pine.

Most of its bottom was soft mud, and some of this had washed up to color the pool. A few very tiny minnows swam near the surface, and the kingfisher dived to catch one. She flew back to the leaning pine, swallowed the morsel and again circled over the pool. This time she found nothing.

The big male kingfisher from the long pools rattled up the creek and took his sentry's stand in the other pine. A slanting sunbeam broke through the packed clouds. A wet little raccoon that had been resting in the tree's roots emerged and scooted into the forest. For quite a while the little kingfisher studied the long, straight stretch of creek below the leaning pine, then she looked at its protector. Finally, she left her pine and flew back up the creek.

She came to rest in the spruce that overhung the long, deep pool and teetered nervously. Over in the shallows, chubs and shiners were rippling the water as they gorged themselves on the lavish store of food that the flood had loosened. The kingfisher half-raised her wings, as though she would fly away—and settled back on the branch. She peered into the pool, trying to see the savage muskie whose domain it was.

Then she launched herself from the branch and flew over the shallows. Without hesitation, she dived to seize a chub.

Ten feet away, the water rippled. The muskie's long, striped body glided toward her, and half of his alligator-like jaws broke water as he rose. The kingfisher beat heavily into the air with her wriggling prize and bore it back to the burrow in the cut bank. Almost immediately, she was gone again. The nestlings must eat. That one fact was most important now. She flew back to the spruce that overhung the long pool.

Again she launched herself from it and swooped over the shallows. She saw the muskie, tiger striped and evil, lurking near the weeds. The kingfisher hesitated. She knew the ferocity and savagery contained in that body, and the incredible swiftness with which it could move. She knew also that he saw her. She poised over half a dozen minnows that were feeding in three inches of water . . . and dived.

The water swirled and splashed, and the weeds bent as the big muskie charged. His gleaming, broad back showed above the surface and, spreading little pools of mud, stained the shallows as he plowed through them. The kingfisher struggled to rise and was five inches above the water when the muskie arched his mighty back and struck her. She fluttered

dazedly, fell back into the shallows, and the chubs scattered as the muskie struggled toward her. He opened his mouth to gulp her down—

There came an interruption.

Yesterday, ten feet from the pool's edge, the little bear had found a rotten log that was packed with big, tender white grubs. He had eaten them all, then crawled into a hollow stump to sleep. This morning, with no mind to venture into the cold forest, he would stay in his bed until he was again hungry. The splashing in the pool drew his attention, and he padded out hastily to investigate it. He saw the kingfisher, and the muskie struggling toward her in water far too shallow for anything his size. With reckless enthusiasm, the little bear galloped into the pool. He slapped at the writhing pike with his front paw. When it tried to evade him, he caught it in his jaws and carried it into the forest. For a moment he toyed with it, then settled down contentedly to eat.

The kingfisher fluttered to land and shook the water from her bedraggled feathers. She flew erratically to the spruce, and for five minutes huddled on the limb. But, unless they are mortally wounded, all wild things recover swiftly. Before long, the mother bird flew from the spruce, circled over the shallows and dived to seize a fat chub.



Even as she seized it, something seemed to tell her that, from now on, the fishing would be very good indeed.

# WHITE

## SHADOW ON THE ICE

THE DULL eyes of the polar bear could discern only what was beneath his black nose. But his nose told him that the quest must continue. The cold wind that swept in from the north carried no scent of an open lead, and, as a result, there would be no seals. The polar bear sat down, bracing his huge body with his ponderous front paws, and looked about him.

Although it was high noon, the ice upon which he sat was revealed as a dim, almost gray sheet that here and there was broken by a tiny ridge. There was no sun, or light, except when the aurora borealis flashed its weird radiance. The polar bear was looking for his constant attendant and, for the past ten days, his partner in hunger. Presently he saw him.

The little white fox sat ten feet away. In the gloom, his eight-pound, thickly furred body was a warped image that seemed to shimmer into and out of the frozen background. The fox's bushy tail was curled about his hind legs, and the steady wind that whipped out of the north ruffled his fur. He lifted a front paw, held it against his body a moment and put

it back down on the ice. Then the fox warmed his other front paw.

The polar bear turned and took one step toward the tiny creature. Like a slithering ghost, the fox glided ten feet farther back and again sat down. For almost a month he had followed this bear, always maintaining his distance and proper respect.

The first day the fox had attached himself to his huge host, the bear had stalked a seal at an open lead. Crouching close to the ice, he had covered his black nose with his front paws and pushed himself forward with his hind ones. Absolute master of such hunting, the great creature had at no time looked like a bear, a killing machine without peer. So perfect was his camouflage that he had seemed another ice hummock, a pile of snow, a part of the frozen pack upon which he hunted. The basking seal had had one split second to know fear, then the bear's sledgehammer front paw crushed his back. After the successful hunter had eaten his fill, the fox had darted in to feast on what remained.

For fifteen days the pair had enjoyed such abundance. The bear had killed a seal every day, sometimes stalking the animals beside open leads and sometimes killing them in the water—and both he and the fox had eaten well. But in the following five days the bear had killed only one seal. Two days

afterward, he had backtracked forty miles to eat the frozen skin, flesh and bones that had not seemed worth eating before.

The fox's last meal, ten days ago, had been only the iron-hard chips of skin and bones that remained after the bear had fed. In that five days since their last single kill, the ice pack had shrieked and groaned. It was a tortured monster, moved by the wind and the slow-flowing but inexorable water. The leads had closed, and the seals were breaching through their blow holes beneath the ice. The land of plenty had become one of starvation.

The fox had followed the bear westward through a nightmarish place of weird shapes and shadows. It was neither land nor sea, but an endless desert of ice from which all life had fled. The polar bear, lord of the Arctic and master of all in it, was a puny thing when pitted against so vast a space.

And all the while the north wind blew over the pack. It was a cold and pitiless vagrant that had wandered throughout the earth's frozen tip and seen all the cruel grandeur of tremendous, unviolated nothingness. It understood the futility of these two creatures that had blundered into its domain—and it enraged the polar bear.

Had his belly been full, no wind could have disturbed him. But his belly was empty. Pinching

hunger was a thing with life, an invisible thing that walked on the ice beside him and mocked him with the wind's voice. The polar bear reared suddenly and whipped his paws about. But the wind merely split on either side and keened past.

Equally hungry, the little white fox was not equally desperate. The polar bear was a lone thing, a monstrous steel and whipcord creature whose strength was his only salvation. Dimly within himself he felt that that strength was pitted against something stronger, and he was frustrated because he was unable to combat it. But the fox was a little thing. In the wintertime, when the gulls had departed, there was nothing on the ice pack that he could kill, even if he encountered it. He had no strength of his own, so turned that of the bear to his own advantage. Bears always made kills and, eventually, this one would do so. So long as the bear walked before him, the fox knew that he would eat. He was not alone.

The bear rose to go on and the little fox padded after him.

The day did not pass. Rather, it blended into a deeper and thicker gloom, an undulating, velvet-like blackness that clung with smoky fingers to the ice pack. The arctic night was a substantial thing, an animal that fought desperately for its existence and seemed to find in its tenuous hold a hope of life

enduring. The bear and the fox moved through it. As living things, the continuance of the spark that actuated them depended on their ability to find and kill and eat other living things. But, except for themselves, there was no tangible life here in the vast frozen reaches.

Still the bear fought on, a ghostlike wraith in the Arctic gloom. His small head swung constantly, always in the wind, and his black nose moved as he snuffled about for the scent of that one thing which would be different from all the rest. His strength was a mighty factor, one that had never been defeated before. It must not be conquered this time because it was all powerful. He would continue until the scents that the wind carried to his questing nostrils became transformed. Sooner or later, he would have to smell the salty, flavorful tang of an open lead. Wherever there was open water there would be seals.

But the hunger that had assumed shape and form still walked beside him. It was much nearer than that other shadow, the Arctic fox. And it was terrifying because the bear knew that he could neither fight nor walk away from it. It had neither pity nor mercy.

Even if such qualities had existed, the bear would not have known how to accept either. Born in an ice-sheathed cave, twenty miles inland, he had drunk coldness and savagery with the milk he received

from his mother. He had lain in the cavern, a helpless, mewling thing, when the Arctic wolves had come. His mother had met the big, white, long-fanged things at the entrance, clubbed them with her paws and slashed them with her jaws until five lay dead about the cavern and four had fled fearfully into the snow-drifted barrens.

The bear arose and again slapped futilely at the howling wind. The gaunt and haggard specter that had emerged from his belly was very close beside him now, walking with long strides as he plowed through the Arctic night. He turned again to look at the little white fox.

Ever since, as a yearling cub, he had broken away from his mother, he had been followed by foxes. Within his ponderous brain there was no clear realization of what they meant or why they followed him. He knew only that they were there, and when he killed a seal to which he returned later, their scent was always about it. They had eaten of the seals that he had killed and left as carrion on the floes.

Many times they had been impudent, dashing in even while he fed, to snatch choice tidbits from his very jaws and make away with them. He had tried and failed to catch them. The little white foxes moved as swiftly and smoothly as the water itself.

His paws had always slapped down upon the places where they had been.

But the foxes were fashioned of flesh and warmed with blood. The bear's nose told him that, and the new awareness of the little white fox was slowly instilled into his brain. He had never eaten—save for his mother's milk—anything except seals, and until he had grown as hungry as he was now, it had never occurred to him that anything else was good to eat. But the new awakening to this other source of food set his mouth drooling and his tongue lolling.

Without breaking stride, the bear whirled and cast himself backward. Invariably, the little fox followed him on the left and about ten feet behind. The bear knew that, and when he lunged, both front paws slapped down on the fox's accustomed place.

But the fox was not there. There had been no time to think of the bear's lightning-swift pass, but inborn senses that a thousand generations of his ancestors had developed were razor keen. A split second before the bear's flashing paws cracked down upon the ice, he had rolled sideways. Now, with his tail curled about his legs, he sat twenty feet away. Like an inquisitive kitten, he watched his mighty host. He knew that the bear would have killed and eaten him. But that inspired neither fear nor



resentment because the fox understood such actions. He himself, if he were able, would gladly kill and eat anything. The spur of hunger was sharp and acid tipped.

The little fox barked, softly and appeasingly, and watched the bear with calculating eyes. Again, in their turn, he warmed both front paws against his breast and put them down on the ice. He was ready to spring from another charge if one came. But none did.

As though it was irresistibly attracted by some magnet set deep in the north, the bear's head swung that way. He turned his body and tensed every muscle as his black nose sought for more of the faint story he had scented. At a shuffling lope, he started off into the darkness.

A mile and a half to the north, Agtuk, the Eskimo, was walking across the ice pack. Twenty hours ago he had eaten. True, his meal had been only a few leathery shreds of seal skin. But they had stilled the gnawing pain in his shriveled stomach. Now he had nothing to eat and could look forward to nothing.

But he still had hope. It was not the soaring hope that had been his six months ago. The Arctic day had reigned then, and a few minutes of gray twilight at midnight had been the only symbol that there ever

was a night. Agtuk had started north with Einar Larsen, a great man and explorer who had conceived the vision of land lost somewhere in the Arctic sea. Agtuk had been very excited because no man had ever been where he was going. When he came back and told of the journey, he would be the greatest man of his village.

However, although the last faintly lit spark of hope refused to flicker out, Agtuk's reason told him that he was never going back. The first three months on the ice had been easy ones, marked by soft living. Einar Larsen had known things about the pack that even the Eskimos had never discovered. Hundreds of miles from land, where no seals were supposed to be, Larsen had been able to find many. The two men had eaten recklessly. Even the seven dogs, working hard and pulling the sledge every day, had grown fat.

Then, suddenly, there were no more seals. They had eaten the provisions on the sledge. Reluctantly, but of necessity, they had eaten the seven dogs and even the skin thongs with which the sledge runners were bound. For a month, Agtuk and Einar Larsen had been fighting their way out of the windswept desolation toward the shore and safety. They would have won their fight, too, but Einar Larsen had sickened. When the pair left what remained of the sledge, he had been able to walk only one mile a day.

During the last twenty-four hours he had walked less than a quarter of a mile—and Agtuk had carried him another five hundred yards before he awakened to the realization that he had a dead man on his back.

Agtuk had drawn the other man's parka close about his face and left him under the shelter of a towering pressure ridge. He had taken the .38 Magnum that Einar Larsen had worn in a holster at his belt and plodded on. The next morning, he had eaten the last handful of seal skin and sat for a long while in the shelter of a pressure ridge.

While sitting, he had taken the .38 from its holster and looked at it. It was a shiny gun, with a smoothly working cylinder that contained as many cartridges as could be put into a rifle. And it had all the power of a rifle. Agtuk himself had seen Einar Larsen shoot a basking seal with it, and when they came upon the seal, its back had been shattered. Most seals, when struck with even a rifle ball, would still slide into the water. But this one hadn't moved.

For a very long while, sitting with his back braced against a pillar of ice, Agtuk pondered the gun. It was a wonderful thing, a great and beautiful thing that he himself would have given a year's catch of furs to have as his own. Of course he knew he could not have it because it still belonged to Einar Larsen, and if he reached land, it must be given to

whichever of the dead explorer's friends could prove themselves most worthy of it. Agtuk thrust the gun back into its holster and went on.

He walked calmly, serenely, ignoring the pinch of hunger and the biting wind that drove freezing cold through the minute pores of his skin parka. A man must walk that way if he was to consider himself worthy of carrying such a gun. He must not be tormented by petty fears. Einar Larsen had walked in such a fashion, and it had been very painful for him to do so. He, too, had known that he would leave his dead body here among the floes, but his spirit had had noble clay from which to spring. The dark day merged into night, and Agtuk grinned.

The aurora borealis flickered across the ice pack, lighting it up like a pale moon. Agtuk staggered and sank down.

From the first, the bear had realized that he was on the trail of a man. He knew men. He had met them paddling their skin kayaks and seen them on their whaling ships, and he was positive that they were not nearly so agile or so hard to catch as were the little white foxes. When Agtuk fell, the bear was so near that even his dull eyes witnessed the act. Drooling, making impatient little whining noises, the huge beast hurried to the motionless man. He opened his great jaws.

Then there was a sudden roaring smash, not born of the eternal ice or the howling wind. The bear stiffened, as though in surprise, and all four legs grew taut. But he stood only for the barest fraction of a second. The bullet, shot into the roof of his mouth, had smashed his brain. Quietly, he collapsed.

Agtuk rose, gravely and deliberately, and knelt to lap up the hot blood that ran in little rivulets from the bear's smashed skull. It was surprising how food, any food, could recreate strength within a man. But he must hurry now, the bear would be frozen hard very soon. Still gravely, but swiftly, he cut from the hot carcass such strips of meat as he needed, then rose to go on. A man could meet death as a man should. But it was no part of a man's creed to die if dying was not necessary. Certainly, when the aurora flickered and revealed a bear twenty feet away, no one could condemn a man, or call him a weakling, because he fell on the ice and lured that bear to where it could be shot. Anyone would know that, in this Arctic desert, bears would be hungry enough to come to the lure. Agtuk walked serenely—and strongly—into the darkness.

As soon as he was gone, the little white fox came forward. It was all part of the plan. He had known that he would eat if he followed the polar bear far enough.

# THE RETURN OF THE COYOTE

EVERY TIME the pick thudded into the earth, its hammering jar vibrated to the innermost reaches of the den. The little she-coyote crouching there turned to look with desperate eyes at the cowering pup that trembled beside her.

He was tiny, the only pup the young coyote had borne, and his eyes were still the innocent baby-blue of infancy. His ears were sharp and so large that they gave the appearance of an over-balanced head. The pup's nose was blunt, his soft fur woolly as a lamb's.

The baby coyote looked at his mother and did not tremble quite so violently. Whatever was coming, she would know how to handle it. Nothing was too big or too bad for her. He would come to no harm as long as she was near.

The little she-coyote moved forward, disposing her slim body so that the baby was completely hidden, and experimentally scratched at the dirt wall of the interior den. It yielded slightly; a few flakes of dirt fell over herself and the cub. She stopped

digging, curved her tail into an S and turned her head to stare toward the sound of the thudding pick. There was some horrible fascination connected with that, something she was unable to resist. Doom was walking with heavy tread straight at her and she could not look away.

Behind her, the clumsy pup moved awkwardly and whined. The little she-coyote swung her head to nip him into silence, while she desperately racked her brain for some plan of escape from this blind trap into which she had allowed herself to be driven.

She had blundered seriously. The little coyote had been hunting ground squirrels with her mate when a rifle cracked. Her mate fell, kicked wildly, and lay still. Mother instinct had dominated her good sense. She should have run straight away, leading the man who had shot her mate as far as possible from the den and her baby. Instead, she had dived into the den—the copse of brush that hid its entrance was only fifteen yards from where the parents had been hunting—so she could protect her cub. Now there was no escape. She was young and her dead mate had been young. They had not known enough to provide a den with two entrances.

The steady, rhythmic, deadly pick thudded nearer; then there was a moment's lull while the man who was digging caught up a spade and removed the

dirt he had loosened. The little coyote crouched, moving her front paws nervously and continuing to shelter the cub's body with her own. The pick resumed thudding. She saw bright sun beam where only dim light had filtered around a curve in the winding burrow.

Even though she was frightened, she did not surrender to fear. Hers was a coyote's brain, one of the keenest in the wild. The great flocks of game birds and the vast herds of wild animals had gone down before greedy hunters and indiscriminate slaughter. Human beings had warred on coyotes with guns, traps, poisons, coursing dogs and every other destructive thing that human genius could conceive. The coyotes had not only held their own; they had increased in numbers and extended their range. Coyotes now howled in places where they had never ventured before white men set foot on their chosen ranges.

Instead of yielding to panic, the little coyote continued trying to think her way out of this. She saw the pick's sharp point bite into and chew off another section of her burrow; then a booted foot appeared behind the pick. Very gently, the little coyote turned to her cub. He flicked his tiny tongue out, licked her face and came to sit between her front paws. She opened her mouth and softly closed her



jaws over the loose skin on back of his neck. Now she had a plan.

The unprotesting cub dangling from her jaws, she stood up and turned toward the thudding pick. The man was digging with the spade now, in the narrowest part of the burrow—even the slim coyotes had to squeeze through here. The passageway had been fashioned like that for a good reason. If any four-footed enemy entered, one coyote could stand in that narrow part, defend the home, and nothing could pass.

Just beyond, the den widened, and the little she-coyote kept intent eyes on this wide part. Both the man's feet came in sight, and above his boots she saw the blue of his Levis. The pointed spade slithered into the burrow like the head of some massive serpent and picked up and carried away dirt that had been loosened. The man's feet advanced farther, but now there was space on either side of his boots.

The little she-coyote made her desperate bid for escape. With the pup dangling from her jaws, she dashed to the right, the widest opening. She did not look behind—and she ran straight into the net that the man had spread over the dug-out den. Its tangling cords twisted around her, but still she held the cub in her jaws while she struggled and threshed. Then she

dropped the cub and, snarling jaws spread, stood up to defend him.

Suddenly, she was jerked from her feet. The man, in pulling the net tight, had wound her so helplessly in it that she was scarcely able to move. He snatched the pup from beside her and put it into his pocket. Then he shouldered the trapped coyote and started away from the wrecked den.

THE LITTLE coyote held very still. Two miles from the den where she and her cub had been captured the man had come to a log cabin beside a river. There she was disentangled from the net and, along with the cub, dropped into a box with a wire cover. Besides the two coyotes, the box contained a few dried ferns for bedding and a tin can half-filled with water.

There was no escape from the box. The little coyote knew that because, as soon as darkness fell, she investigated thoroughly everything about it. The taut wire cover could not be moved, nor would it yield to her grinding teeth. There was no loose or weak spot in the box itself where she could get a purchase with her jaws and no possibility of digging a way out.

The pup rose to pad about. His was the overwhelming curiosity of all youngsters, and, as he

waddled around, he sniffed separately at each of the dried ferns. He slapped at them with playful paws, then caught one in his teeth and tried to throw it into the air. The sudden effort threw him off balance, so that he sat heavily down and rolled into his mother. Presently, remaining sublimely confident that no harm could possibly befall him as long as she was there, he curled up against her and went peacefully to sleep.

The little coyote composed herself on the dry ferns, looked through the wire top at cold stars and again sought comfort in the wisdom of her race. The tight net had bruised her. Other than that, she had not been hurt and her cub was not even bruised. There seemed to be no immediate danger and certainly there was nothing she could do right now. She went to sleep.

The bright stars faded. The cabin's windows became pale yellow squares as the man inside lit a lamp, and wood smoke tainted the air. As dawn broke, the man came out of the cabin to bring five pack horses from a meadow where they had been foraging. The little coyote threw her own body over her cub's when the man swung her box to a pack saddle. He roped it securely, and she glanced through the wire to see the slanting roof of the cabin where the man lived. She could distinguish nothing else

except some spruces, but she knew what made up the packs that were going on the horses.

Her nose told her that, on the other side of the same horse she rode, a box similar to hers contained a grizzly cub. The top pack was a caged otter. The horse ahead carried three cages in which were two mountain-lion cubs, a lynx and a surly wolverine. The man was a wild-animal trapper and his captives were destined for various places that had a use for live wild animals.

The pack train started, and at first the jolting gait of the horse was uncomfortable. Then the little coyote adjusted herself to the motion and washed her cub. Just before dark, the travelers stopped and the horses were unloaded. At dawn, they were gathered in and re-loaded. . . . In the middle of that afternoon, the little coyote's nose told her that they were entering a fair-sized town.

She shivered anxiously when the horses drew up beside the loading platform of the local depot, then bent to cuddle her cub. She lay down and felt a sickness that bit at her stomach when the snorting, puffing train arrived and the box was drowned in coal smoke. It was heavily nauseating stuff. The cub retched, whimpered and sought shelter between his mother's forepaws. The box was lifted into a car and the train puffed on.

The little coyote lay quietly in the bottom of her box, but remained aware of everything about her. When somebody came to peer into the cage, the cub insisted on sitting bolt upright and peering back, and the little coyote covered his body with hers. The man went away and the mother coyote was alone with her anxieties.

She had been born in the wilderness, sixty-eight miles from the town where she was loaded onto the train, and the roots of the mightiest pine in that wild country were no deeper than her own. Nor, if it were uprooted, would the pine suffer more than she did now. As the train sped through the night, the little coyote thought of the wilderness, of her den there, her mate and the cool streams where she had quenched her thirst. She rose and bumped about the box. A thousand voices were calling her back—and she could not heed them.

DAWN CAME. Still the train roared toward its destination. Dawn flowed evenly into morning . . . morning became high noon . . . and the long evening shadows fell upon the flat, treeless country across which the train was now traveling. . . . Night returned. Finally, the train rattled to a stop.

The little she-coyote crouched in the bottom of her cage and covered the cub with her muzzle. They

were in a city terminal, with its attendant noises, smells and sights. The coyote's cage was lifted from the train, piled with other boxes and parcels on a cart and wheeled into a store room. There the coyote and her cub remained all night. With morning, they were moved again, onto a rumbling truck. The truck threaded its way through the city, and when it stopped, the coyote knew she was among many animals. A number of them were strange, but, in the intermingling stream of odors, she found the familiar scents of deer, bears, caribou and wolves.

The coyote and her cub were taken from the truck, carried to a cage in an older part of the zoo and released.

THE ZOO cage consisted of a ten-foot-square run which was both sided and roofed with rusting steel wire. At the far end was a kennel, and, as soon as she was released, the little coyote caught her cub by the scruff of the neck and carried him into this sorry hiding place. She was hungry, thirsty and exhausted, but as long as daylight lasted she dared not venture from the kennel to drink or to eat the horse meat that an attendant threw into the wire run. Twice the cub tried to go out and each time she nipped him back. When night folded its black wings over the park, she slunk from the kennel.

Thirstily she lapped the cool water that flowed constantly into a drinking pan at one corner of the run and out through an overflow pipe. Then she ate hungrily of the horse meat, permitted the cub to eat a little and lay down so he could nurse. When his fat belly was filled to the bursting point, he crawled off to a corner and promptly went to sleep. The little coyote started exploring.

The fence enclosing the run was made of a mesh so close that she could barely shove her slim muzzle through, but she did that time after time. The little coyote traveled all about, thrusting her nose through every mesh she could reach, and when she could touch no more from the floor, she reared to investigate the higher ones. Finally, she sat down, staring perplexedly at the fence and listening to the grunting of some captive timber wolves in the next run.

Presently, the little coyote got up and tried to dig, but the floor was solid concrete. Again she sat down, cocking her head from side to side, and the next time she went to the fence, her upper jaw was through one mesh while her lower protruded through the one just beneath. Experimentally, she ground the intervening wire between her sharp teeth. Suddenly, she withdrew her muzzle and set to work on the next strand, for the wire had broken. Exposed to the

elements for years, rusted more than half through, it could not withstand the little coyote's shearing teeth. She worked patiently, needing more time on some strands than others, but slowly chewing a hole through which she could escape. She pushed against the severed strands and her head broke through, but her chest and shoulders would not follow. The little coyote worked to enlarge the break. . . . Finally, she was free!

Turning, she grasped the sleepily protesting cub by the scruff of his neck and stepped out of the wire run. For a moment she poised on a path where people walked. . . . When the dim form of an approaching watchman loomed in the distance, she slipped into the dark shelter of some ornamental shrubs. The watchman walked heavily on, cast a disinterested glance at the coyote's cage and faded into the night.

Carrying her cub, the little coyote fled across the zoo grounds. Far off, rearing its lighted head like a ghost's eye, a clock in the tower of a tall building chimed once. The coyote paused, cast a quick glance toward this unfamiliar sound and sped on. She came to a street flanking the zoo grounds, hesitated, then flashed across. When a late-faring taxi cruised by, she flattened herself on a lawn and waited until it was out of sight. She ran on, entering a side street



wherever she could, staying on the green grass between the sidewalk and the curb.

A pet dog, sleeping on a porch, rose to bark as she passed and then subsided, muttering to himself, while he wondered if he had really seen anything. The coyote was racing now, putting as much distance as she possibly could between herself and the hated cage. Tired of being carried so far, the petulant cub squirmed and wriggled. The coyote dodged suddenly.

Its warning light blinking on and off, its siren shrieking, a fire engine raced down the street. In wild panic, the little coyote dashed into an alley bordered by garbage cans. Something sputtered in front of her, and a tomcat that knew everything there was to know about garbage-can foraging stood challenging her over a fish head he had found. The big tomcat's back was arched, his tail fluffed to twice its normal size. He was ready for battle.

The little coyote dashed forward. When she was within a yard of the cat, she dropped her cub and dived in to attack. The cat snarled, threatened, and his raking claws flashed out. But he was not facing a familiar enemy now. The coyote was a wild thing. Her life had been shaped by an inflexible rule that those which are not swift will soon be dead. Her slicing teeth left a gaping wound on the tomcat's

shoulder. With an outraged yowl, the cat abandoned his fish head and sprang over a back-yard fence.

The little coyote grabbed her cub and ran on. When a man stood at an intersection of an alley and a street, she leaped a fence, ran through a yard and flashed across the street. A yapping cur, prowling for whatever it could find, came at her. The coyote ran away from it.

She was in the suburbs now. There were few large buildings. The houses were small, neat, farther apart. When the first faint streaks of daylight glowed in the sky, the little coyote ran across a green lawn, crept under a latticed porch and let her cub feed.

SHE BECAME nervous when, with full daylight, people started emerging from the house and walking heavily on the porch overhead. But she did not let nervousness overcome judgment, however, and finally the house sent forth all the people who had to spend the day elsewhere. The little coyote could still hear the housewife moving about and the occasional wail of a baby, but she detected no threat in those sounds. His belly filled, her own baby crawled into a leafy nest, covered his nose with his paws and went to sleep.

The little coyote stirred uneasily. She too was hungry, but this was a totally strange situation and

she did not know how to find food. Then the leaves rustled and her ears pricked up. She rose, moving with complete silence over the accumulation beneath the porch, and used her nose to investigate the cause of the sound. She licked up the fat white grub she uncovered and began a systematic hunt for more.

Her luck held. Outside, a warming sun had already baked the crust of the earth and sent most earthworms into depths that remained moist. But the porch overhead provided shade, and the dead leaves offered an insulation that retained dampness. Fat earthworms crawled just beneath the leaves, and the little coyote ate dozens. She would have preferred other food, if given a choice, but there was no choice.

Her hunger partly satisfied, she lay down near the cub. He awoke, fed sleepily, came fully awake and started to play. She watched with fond interest as he stalked a leaf, slinking so that his belly almost touched the ground and pushing himself along with his rear paws. When he was near enough, he sprang, catching up the leaf and uttering babyish growls as he worried it. Such mock hunting would prepare him for real hunting when he was ready.

Suddenly the little coyote glided to her cub, grasped him in her jaws and laid him back down on the bed he had chosen for himself. When he stirred

fretfully and would have risen, she nipped him. She sensed rather than saw approaching danger, but presently the fat white dog that had been waddling up the sidewalk came into view. He had heard the cub playing and now stood with his head pressed against the lattice. The little coyote lay motionless, ready to flee or fight, when the housewife came out on the porch to shake a broom at the fat white dog.

“Go on!” she commanded. “Get out of here!”

Reluctantly, casting backward glances over his shoulder, the white dog waddled back to the sidewalk and went his way. The little coyote relaxed, but in ten minutes she was restless again. She sat up, staring fixedly through the lattice, and, for a moment, every muscle was tense. She seemed to have had a hint of something familiar, and then lost the image. The little coyote recaptured it and her restlessness mounted. The thought of her home land, and its irresistible call, was disturbing her.

She dared not leave her refuge while daylight lasted, and even after dark there were many people and automobiles abroad. Finally, the street quieted. The little coyote caught up her pup and slipped from beneath the porch.

For a moment she stood in shadow, hesitant. Then she fled like a ghost across the street, under an arc light and into another driveway. There she felt

easier. Of all the places in the suburbs, she liked the driveways best. They were apt to be filled with shadows and hiding places, and if there was some risk of having to fight a way through, that was infinitely better than risking whatever might engulf her if she were seen in the more open spaces.

Coming to another lighted street intersection, the little coyote paused and reconnoitered. Then she dashed out. She was halfway across when the shrill blast of a police whistle cut through the other night sounds. The policeman who had blown ran heavily to the mouth of the driveway from which she had emerged, but the little coyote had taken to the back lawns. She raced across them, hurdling four-foot fences effortlessly and never making a misstep.

The houses were even farther apart now, and a back lawn which the little coyote was crossing ended abruptly at a grassy field. She slowed, trotted gratefully over the grass, and, when she came to a sluggish creek that wound through the field, she dropped her cub to drink. It was not the cold, untainted water of her own country, but long thirst made it taste good. She did not linger, however. Catching up her cub, she jumped the stream and continued on her way.

To the right, one of the great highways that fed a never ending stream of traffic into the city was alive

with the lights of cars and trucks. The little coyote stopped to study them. They seemed to contain no threat, but she had an instinctive distrust of them. Therefore, when she came to an intersecting highway that she must cross, she waited until it was free of cars before dashing over.

She was in farming country now—an endless succession of flat fields that were rich with growing crops. Comfortable houses and fat barns stood beside the highway, and the smell of horses, cattle, sheep and poultry drifted from the farmyards. Just before dawn, the little coyote swerved into a yard, guided by her nose and finding exactly what her nose had told her she would find.

Plump white broilers roosted sleepily on the top bar of a wooden fence, and the chickens on either side merely clucked when the coyote leaped to pluck an overgrown hen from between them. Carrying her catch, she trotted into a field of corn. The pup, certain that he would share this tempting meal, padded at her heels. They fed.

Then they lay down to sleep in the corn field.

FOR MORE than a week, the cub dangling from her jaws, the little coyote traveled through a richer and safer hunting country than she had ever known before or ever would know again. Big farms were all

about, and fat poultry clucked, gobbled and quacked in every barnyard. They were trusting, stupid creatures that never knew danger and therefore were never alert. Nor did the coyote's depredations rouse any alarm. Wild predators were unknown in this country. Those few farmers who even noticed a single fowl missing decided that a hawk, cat or prowling dog had caught it and determined to take action if there were more thefts. There never were. Although some nights she covered only a short distance, the little coyote always traveled and never raided the same farm twice.

In spite of the bonanza she had discovered, and the easy living she might enjoy if she remained, she was ceaselessly tormented by an overwhelming loneliness and a mighty longing. This country was very nice, but it was not home. The little coyote mounted every rise and knoll with the eager hope that, beyond it, she would see something familiar. She never saw it, but she never thought of turning back. She knew where she must go.

Not for an instant did she doubt that, eventually, she would get there. Within her was the same mysterious sense of orientation that is possessed by most animals—even domestic creatures. With utter faith in that guiding instinct, the little coyote kept going.

Her emergence from rich farmlands into backwoods was so gradual that it was scarcely noticeable. As she progressed, the farms became smaller, less wealthy, and there were more trees. It was still farmland, however, seldom visited by anything wilder than a cottontail rabbit, and a coyote had not traveled it for years. It occurred to nobody that there would be one now. Then one night the little coyote left gently rising land to enter true hills. As usual, she traveled most of the night and planned to hunt just before daylight.

She had to walk farther than usual to find a farm. This was forested country, covered with aspens and beeches that had sprung up when the mighty evergreens were cut. The main road was blacktop Macadam instead of concrete, and the feeder highways were dirt. The little coyote came from the forest onto a feeder highway, and, because it ran in the direction she wanted to go, she followed it.

She came to a farm with a tarpaper-covered house that squatted forlornly in a small clearing and a crazily leaning barn that was propped up with saplings. A thin horse and two cows cropped grass in a fenced enclosure. The coyote dropped her baby, and the cub gamboled happily under her nose while his tiny tail wagged. He had learned to look forward



to these nocturnal incursions. To the cub they meant the most important of all matters—a full belly.

The little coyote brushed past her cub. A rail fence pursued its zigzag course at one side of the field, and chickens were roosting on the fence. The coyote leaped, seized a scrawny rooster—and the night became bedlam!

She had made a false strike. Instead of seizing the rooster's neck and killing him with one clean bite, she had grasped his wing. The tough little bird set up a mighty flapping and squawking. The chickens on the fence began to cackle. A flock of guinea fowl started their unearthly shrieking. The mother coyote dropped the rooster, grabbed him by the neck when he started to run and trotted into the woods. The anxious cub crowded her heels, bumping into them frequently while he centered his whole attention on the rooster.

Ten seconds later, a yellow lamp glowed in the house. The door opened and shut. A bearded man with a shotgun in one hand and an electric torch in the other came out to sweep the beam around the barnyard. This was no fat lowland farm where a raiding coyote was never noticed, but a hill clearing owned by a hill man whose very survival depended on his ability to match wits with raiding beasts.

A long period of security had made the little coyote careless. Many times she had raided farms with complete safety; there was no reason to suppose there would be danger now. Five hundred yards from the barnyard she dropped the chicken, and the pup growled with mock ferocity as he sank baby teeth into it. The coyote tore a mouthful of feathers from the rooster and prepared to eat. Her head jerked erect.

Back at the farmyard a hound bayed thunderously. Without pausing to consider, the little coyote grabbed her cub and raced away. Behind her, the steadily baying hound awakened the night woods. The cub, grasped more tightly than usual, wriggled and whimpered. The mother coyote took a firmer hold, running with her head up. Within the next five hundred yards, she knew that she would be overtaken.

The hound, a long-legged and deep-chested dog, famous throughout the hill country for his speed, was coming very fast. The little coyote ran among some boulders, and at the base of the biggest one she dropped the cub and whirled to defend him. The hound roared up, charged her with mouth open and hackles bristling.

Five feet away, he stopped, growled once—and pretended to be interested in some pebbles scattered

on the ground. A male coyote would have been torn to pieces, but this was a female with young. She was akin to a dog. The hound would not molest her.

When the mother coyote caught up her baby and ran on, the hound did not follow.

THE LITTLE coyote was quick to learn. Thereafter, when she came to one of the scattered hill farms, she chose a wide and cautious way around it. That made food a great problem because she must take the cub with her when she hunted; in this strange country she dared not leave him alone. Not only was the cub an unskilled hunter, but a fair percentage of the time his blundering eagerness frightened game which might otherwise have been caught.

Now, because much time must be devoted to hunting, the little coyote could not travel as fast. It was necessary to stop long before morning and crouch beside a snowshoe-rabbit run until one of the big-footed mountain hares hopped by. Then there was a quick dash, a strike, and the pair had another meal. When she could catch no rabbits, the little coyote trotted among the evergreens with her nose elevated to catch the scent of grouse. Sometimes they roosted so low that she could leap up and pull them down.

When all other sources of food failed, she hunted mice. This was a wild and, to the cub, an exciting game, played in the moon-sprayed clearings. Ears pricked forward and head arched, the little coyote paced over the matted grass. Beneath it were countless mouse runways, and even mice rustled dry grasses as they scurried along on their tiny errands. When the coyote heard such a rustle she reared, brought stiff front paws down exactly on the sound and dug an imprisoned mouse from the tangled grass. The cub trotted behind, imitating her actions but invariably bringing his paws down on grass alone.

The cub received every mouse caught, if the hunting was poor. At all times, he had first choice and ate until his belly was full. Then he waddled off to sleep while his mother hunted mice for herself. It was at such a time that disaster struck.

The night before, mother and son had shared a single grouse, and the cub had eaten most of that. Then they had slept through the day. When night came, the coyote gave the cub such milk as she had, picked him up and went on.

An hour past midnight, she swerved from the line of march to hunt mice in a grassy meadow. She caught one, then another, and still another. Finally, the overfed cub waddled off to sleep. The little

coyote was hunting mice for herself when she heard him squall.

She whirled. Great wings beat against the moonlit sky. A rising snowy owl showed white in the darkness—and he had the cub in his talons! The little coyote launched her charge.

Five feet from the owl, she sprang. Her flying body soared upward. She snapped her jaws, felt them sink through feathers to flesh. The owl banked, trying to come about so he could flail her with his wings. She fell back, but the instant her paws touched the ground she sprang again. A second time her slashing fangs bit through feathers and, while she scarcely touched flesh, the owl dropped the cub.

The little coyote crouched over her baby, snarling, while the enraged owl flew across the meadow on silent wings. He turned to come back for another strike at the pup, but he could not face the furious mother. He flew away.

Gently, the little coyote licked her bleeding cub, then gathered him in her jaws and started off through the night. Not again would she dare leave him, or let him stray so much as ten feet from her side. In her own country she would know how to make him safe, but this was still an alien land.

She did not stop when morning finally broke but trotted on. Just before noon, she came to a river.

Unhesitatingly she plunged in to swim across, holding her head high to keep the cub out of water. She climbed the opposite bank, halted just long enough to shake her wet fur and trotted on.

There was a great eagerness within her now—and a great hope. Countless times she had expected to top the next rise and find her own land. Always up to now she had been disappointed, but this time she knew there would be no disappointment. Just before night fell, she paused briefly beside the den where she and her cub had been captured. A mile and a half beyond was another den, a rock-bound one with many entrances. The mother coyote deposited her cub in this. Then, heedless of her weariness and her sore feet, she went forth to hunt. Trifles could not matter now.

The little coyote had come home.

# JIM KJELGAARD

was born in New York City. Happily enough, he was still in the pre-school age when his father decided to move the family to the Pennsylvania mountains. There young Jim grew up among some of the best hunting and fishing in the United States. He commented: “If I had pursued my scholastic duties as diligently as I did deer, trout, grouse, squirrels, etc., I might have had better report cards!”

Jim Kjelgaard worked at various jobs—trapper, teamster, guide, surveyor, factory worker and laborer. When he was in his late twenties he decided to become a full-time writer. He succeeded in his wish. Several hundred of his short stories and articles and quite a few books for young people have been published.

He indicated his favorite hobbies as hunting, fishing, lifelong interest in conservation, dogs and questing for new stories. He has described some of these searches in this way: “Story hunts have led me from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Arctic Circle to Mexico City. Stories, like gold, are where you find them. You may discover one three thousand

miles from home or, as in *The Spell of the White Sturgeon* and *Hi Jolly!*, right on your own door step.”

THE END



# TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected.

Inconsistencies in punctuation have been maintained.

The illustrations can not be used as they are not in the public domain.

A cover was created for this eBook.

[The end of *Fawn in the Forest and Other Wild Animal Stories* by Jim Kjelgaard]