

Roberts Charles G. D. Sir

# The Backwoodsmen



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## Содержание

The Vagrants of the Barren	5
MacPhairrson's Happy Family	12
On Big Lonely	22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	26

# Charles G. D. Roberts

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### The Vagrants of the Barren

With thick smoke in his throat and the roar of flame in his ears, Pete Noël awoke, shaking as if in the grip of a nightmare. He sat straight up in his bunk. Instantly he felt his face scorching. The whole cabin was ablaze. Leaping from his bunk, and dragging the blankets with him, he sprang to the door, tore it open, and rushed out into the snow.

But being a woodsman, and alert in every sense like the creatures of the wild themselves, his wits were awake almost before his body was, and his instincts were even quicker than his wits. The desolation and the savage cold of the wilderness had admonished him even in that terrifying moment. As he leaped out in desperate flight, he had snatched with him not only the blankets, but his rifle and cartridge-belt from where they stood by the head of the bunk, and also his larrigans and great blanket coat from where they lay by its foot. He had been sleeping, according to custom, almost fully clothed.

Outside in the snow he stood, blinking through scorched and smarting lids at the destruction of his shack. For a second or two he stared down at the things he clutched in his arms, and wondered how he had come to think of them in time. Then, realizing with a pang that he needed something more than clothes and a rifle, he flung them down on the snow and made a dash for the cabin, in the hope of rescuing a hunk of bacon or a loaf of his substantial woodsman's bread. But before he could reach the door a licking flame shot out and hurled him back, half blinded. Grabbing up a double handful of snow, he buried his face in it to ease the smart. Then he shook himself, coolly carried the treasures he had saved back to a safe distance from the flames, and sat down on the blankets to put on his larrigans.

His feet, clothed only in a single pair of thick socks, were almost frozen, while the rest of his body was roasting in the fierce heat of the conflagration. It wanted about two hours of dawn. There was not a breath of air stirring, and the flames shot straight up, murky red and clear yellow intertwisting, with here and there a sudden leaping tongue of violet white. Outside the radius of the heat the tall woods snapped sharply in the intense cold. It was so cold, indeed, that as the man stood watching the ruin of his little, lonely home, shielding his face from the blaze now with one hand then with the other, his back seemed turning to ice.

The man who lives alone in the great solitude of the forest has every chance to become a philosopher. Pete Noël was a philosopher. Instead of dwelling upon the misfortunes which had smitten him, he chose to consider his good luck in having got out of the shack alive. Putting on his coat, he noted with satisfaction that its spacious pockets contained matches, tobacco, his pipe, his heavy clasp-knife, and his mittens. He was a hundred miles from the nearest settlement, fifty or sixty from the nearest lumber-camp. He had no food. The snow was four feet deep, and soft. And his trusty snowshoes, which would have made these distances and these difficulties of small account to him, were helping feed the blaze. Nevertheless, he thought, things might have been much worse. What if he had escaped in his bare feet? This thought reminded him of how cold his feet were at this moment. Well, the old shack had been a good one, and sheltered him well enough. Now that it would shelter him no longer, it should at least be made to contribute something more to his comfort. Piling his blankets carefully under the shelter of a broad stump, he sat down upon them. Then he filled and lighted his pipe, leaned back luxuriously, and stretched out his feet to the blaze. It would be time enough for him to "get a move on" when the shack was quite burned down. The shack was home as long as it lasted.

When the first mystic greyness, hard like steel and transparent like glass, began to reveal strange vistas among the ancient trees, the fire died down. The shack was a heap of ashes and pulsating,

scarlet embers, with here and there a flickering, half-burned timber, and the red-hot wreck of the tiny stove sticking up in the ruins. As soon as the ruins were cool enough to approach, Pete picked up a green pole, and began poking earnestly among them. He had all sorts of vague hopes. He particularly wanted his axe, a tin kettle, and something to eat. The axe was nowhere to be found, at least in such a search as could then be made. The tins, obviously, had all gone to pieces or melted. But he did, at least, scratch out a black, charred lump about the size of his fist, which gave forth an appetizing smell. When the burnt outside had been carefully scraped off, it proved to be the remnant of a side of bacon. Pete fell to his breakfast with about as much ceremony as might have sufficed a hungry wolf, the deprivation of a roof-tree having already taken him back appreciably nearer to the elemental brute. Having devoured his burnt bacon, and quenched his thirst by squeezing some half-melted snow into a cup of birch-bark, he rolled his blankets into a handy pack, squared his shoulders, and took the trail for Conroy's Camp, fifty miles southwestward.

It was now that Pete Noël began to realize the perils that confronted him. Without his snowshoes, he found himself almost helpless. Along the trail the snow was from three to four feet deep, and soft. There had been no thaws and no hard winds to pack it down. After floundering ahead for four or five hundred yards he would have to stop and rest, half reclining. In spite of the ferocious cold, he was soon drenched with sweat. After a couple of hours of such work, he found himself consumed with thirst. He had nothing to melt the snow in; and, needless to say, he knew better than to ease his need by eating the snow itself. But he hit upon a plan which filled him with self-gratulation. Lighting a tiny fire beside the trail, under the shelter of a huge hemlock, he took off his red cotton neckerchief, filled it with snow, and held it to the flames. As the snow began to melt, he squeezed the water from it in a liberal stream. But, alas! the stream was of a colour that was not enticing. He realized, with a little qualm, that it had not occurred to him to wash that handkerchief since—well, he was unwilling to say when. For all the insistence of his thirst, therefore, he continued melting the snow and squeezing it out, till the resulting stream ran reasonably clear. Then patiently he drank, and afterward smoked three pipefuls of his rank, black tobacco as substitute for the square meal which his stomach was craving.

All through the biting silent day he floundered resolutely on, every now and then drawing his belt a little tighter, and all the while keeping a hungry watch for game of some kind. What he hoped for was rabbit, partridge, or even a fat porcupine; but he would have made a shift to stomach even the wiry muscles of a mink, and count himself fortunate. By sunset he came out on the edge of a vast barren, glorious in washes of thin gold and desolate purple under the touch of the fading west. Along to eastward ran a low ridge, years ago licked by fire, and now crested with a sparse line of ghostly rampikes, their lean, naked tops appealing to the inexorable sky. This was the head of the Big Barren. With deep disgust, and something like a qualm of apprehension, Pete Noël reflected that he had made only fifteen miles in that long day of effort. And he was ravenously hungry. Well, he was too tired to go farther that night; and in default of a meal, the best thing he could do was sleep. First, however, he unlaced his larrigans, and with the thongs made shift to set a clumsy snare in a rabbit track a few paces back among the spruces. Then, close under the lee of a black wall of fir-trees standing out beyond the forest skirts, he clawed himself a deep trench in the snow. In one end of this trench he built a little fire, of broken deadwood and green birch saplings laboriously hacked into short lengths with his clasp-knife. A supply of this firewood, dry and green mixed, he piled beside the trench within reach. The bottom of the trench, to within a couple of feet of the fire, he lined six inches deep with spruce-boughs, making a dry, elastic bed.

By the time these preparations were completed, the sharp-starred winter night had settled down upon the solitude. In all the vast there was no sound but the occasional snap, hollow and startling, of some great tree overstrung by the frost, and the intimate little whisper and hiss of Pete's fire down in the trench. Disposing a good bunch of boughs under his head, Pete lighted his pipe, rolled himself in his blankets, and lay down with his feet to the fire.

There at the bottom of his trench, comforted by pipe and fire, hidden away from the emptiness of the enormous, voiceless world outside, Pete Noël looked up at the icy stars, and at the top of the frowning black rampart of the fir-trees, touched grimly with red flashes from his fire. He knew well—none better than he—the savage and implacable sternness of the wild. He knew how dreadful the silent adversary against whom he had been called, all unprepared, to pit his craft. There was no blinking the imminence of his peril. Hitherto he had always managed to work, more or less, *with* nature, and so had come to regard the elemental forces as friendly. Now they had turned upon him altogether and without warning. His anger rose as he realized that he was at bay. The indomitable man-spirit awoke with the anger. Sitting up suddenly, over the edge of the trench his deep eyes looked out upon the shadowy spaces of the night with challenge and defiance. Against whatever odds, he declared to himself, he was master. Having made his proclamation in that look, Pete Noël lay down again and went to sleep.

After the fashion of winter campers and of woodsmen generally, he awoke every hour or so to replenish the fire; but toward morning he sank into the heavy sleep of fatigue. When he aroused himself from this, the fire was stone grey, the sky overhead was whitish, flecked with pink streamers, and rose-pink lights flushed delicately the green wall of the fir-trees leaning above him. The edges of the blankets around his face were rigid and thick with ice from his breathing. Breaking them away roughly, he sat up, cursed himself for having let the fire out, then, with his eyes just above the edge of the trench, peered forth across the shining waste. As he did so, he instinctively shrank back into concealment. An eager light flamed into his eyes, and he blessed his luck that the fire had gone out. Along the crest of the ridge, among the rampikes, silhouetted dark and large against the sunrise, moved a great herd of caribou, feeding as they went.

Crouching low in his trench, Pete hurriedly did up his blankets, fixed the pack on his back, then crawled through the snow into the shelter of the fir-woods. As soon as he was out of sight, he arose, recovered the thongs of his larrigans from the futile snare, and made his way back on the trail as fast as he could flounder. That one glance over the edge of his trench had told his trained eye all he needed to know about the situation.

The caribou, most restless, capricious, and far-wandering of all the wilderness kindreds, were drifting south on one of their apparently aimless migrations. They were travelling on the ridge, because, as Pete instantly inferred, the snow there had been partly blown away, partly packed, by the unbroken winds. They were far out of gunshot. But he was going to trail them down even through that deep snow. By tireless persistence and craft he would do it, if he had to do it on his hands and knees.

Such wind as there was, a light but bitter air drawing irregularly down out of the north-west, blew directly from the man to the herd, which was too far off, however, to catch the ominous taint and take alarm. Pete's first care was to work around behind the herd till this danger should be quite eliminated. For a time his hunger was forgotten in the interest of the hunt; but presently, as he toiled his slow way through the deep of the forest, it grew too insistent to be ignored. He paused to strip bark from such seedlings of balsam fir as he chanced upon, scraping off and devouring the thin, sweetish pulp that lies between the bark and the mature wood. He gathered, also, the spicy tips of the birch-buds, chewing them up by handfuls and spitting out the residue of hard husks. And in this way he managed at least to soothe down his appetite from angry protest to a kind of doubtful expectancy.

At last, after a couple of hours' hard floundering, the woods thinned, the ground sloped upward, and he came out upon the flank of the ridge, a long way behind the herd, indeed, but well around the wind. In the trail of the herd the snow was broken up, and not more than a foot and a half in depth. On a likely-looking hillock he scraped it away carefully with his feet, till he reached the ground; and here he found what he expected—a few crimson berries of the wintergreen, frozen, but plump and sweet-fleshed. Half a handful of these served for the moment to cajole his hunger, and he pressed briskly but warily along the ridge, availing himself of the shelter of every rampike in his path. At last,

catching sight of the hindmost stragglers of the herd, still far out of range, he crouched like a cat, and crossed over the crest of the ridge for better concealment.

On the eastern slope the ridge carried numerous thickets of underbrush. From one to another of these Pete crept swiftly, at a rate which should bring him, in perhaps an hour, abreast of the leisurely moving herd. In an hour, then, he crawled up to the crest again, under cover of a low patch of juniper scrub. Confidently he peered through the scrub, his rifle ready. But his face grew black with bitter disappointment. The capricious beasts had gone. Seized by one of their incomprehensible vagaries—Pete was certain that he had not alarmed them—they were now far out on the white level, labouring heavily southward.

Pete set his jaws resolutely. Hunger and cold, each the mightier from their alliance, were now assailing him savagely. His first impulse was to throw off all concealment and rush straight down the broad-trodden trail. But on second thought he decided that he would lose more than he would gain by such tactics. Hampered though they were by the deep, soft snow, he knew that, once frightened, they could travel through it much faster than they were now moving, and very much faster than he could hope to follow. Assuredly, patience was his game. Slipping furtively from rampike to rampike, now creeping, now worming his way like a snake, he made good time down to the very edge of the level. Then, concealment no more possible, and the rear of the herd still beyond gunshot, he emerged boldly from the covert of a clump of saplings and started in pursuit. At the sight of him, every antlered head went up in the air for one moment of wondering alarm; then, through a rolling white cloud the herd fled onward at a speed which Pete, with all his knowledge of their powers, had not imagined possible in such a state of the snow. Sullen, but not discouraged, he plodded after them.

Noël was now fairly obsessed with the one idea of overtaking the herd. Every other thought, sense, or faculty was dully occupied with his hunger and his effort to keep from thinking of it. Hour after hour he plodded on, following the wide, chaotic trail across the white silence of the barren. There was nothing to lift his eyes for, so he kept them automatically occupied in saving his strength by picking the easiest steps through the ploughed snow. He did not notice at all that the sun no longer sparkled over the waste. He did not notice that the sky had turned from hard blue to ghostly pallor. He did not notice that the wind, now blowing in his teeth, had greatly increased in force. Suddenly, however, he was aroused by a swirl of fine snow driven so fiercely that it crossed his face like a lash. Lifting his eyes from the trail, he saw that the plain all about him was blotted from sight by a streaming rout of snow-clouds. The wind was already whining its strange derisive menace in his face. The blizzard had him.

As the full fury of the storm swooped upon him, enwrapping him, and clutching at his breath, for an instant Pete Noël quailed. This was a new adversary, with whom he had not braced his nerves to grapple. But it was for an instant only. Then his weary spirit lifted itself, and he looked grimly into the eye of the storm. The cold, the storm, the hunger, he would face them all down, and win out yet. Lowering his head, and pulling a flap of his blanket coat across his mouth to make breathing easier, he plunged straight forward with what seemed like a new lease of vigour.

Had the woods been near, or had he taken note of the weather in time, Pete would have made for the shelter of the forest at once. But he knew that, when last he looked, the track of the herd had been straight down the middle of the ever-widening barren. By now he must be a good two miles from the nearest cover; and he knew well enough that, in the bewilderment of the storm, which blunted even such woodcraft as his, and blurred not only his vision, but every other sense as well, he could never find his way. His only hope was to keep to the trail of the caribou. The beasts would either lie down or circle to the woods. In such a storm as this, as he knew well enough, no animal but man himself could hunt, or follow up the trail. There was no one but man who could confront such a storm undaunted. The caribou would forget both their cunning and the knowledge that they were being hunted. He would come upon them, or they would lead him to shelter. With an obstinate pride in his superiority to the other creatures of the wilderness, he scowled defiantly at the storm, and because he



was overwrought with hunger and fatigue, he muttered to himself as he went, cursing the elements that assailed him so relentlessly.

For hours he floundered on doggedly, keeping the trail by feeling rather than by sight, so thick were the cutting swirls of snow. As the drift heaped denser and denser about his legs, the terrible effort, so long sustained, began to tell on him, till his progress became only a snail's pace. Little by little, in the obstinate effort to conserve strength and vitality, his faculties all withdrew into themselves, and concentrated themselves upon the one purpose—to keep going onward. He began to feel the lure of just giving up. He began to think of the warmth and rest he could get, the release from the mad chaos of the wind, by the simple expedient of burrowing deep into the deep snow. He knew well enough that simple trick of the partridge, when frost and storm grow too ferocious for it. But his wiser spirit would not let him delude himself. Had he had a full stomach, and food in his pockets, he might, perhaps, safely have emulated this cunning trick of the partridge. But now, starving, weary, his vitality at the last ebb, he knew that if he should yield to the lure of the snow, he would be seen no more till the spring sun should reveal him, a thing of horror to the returning vireos and blackbirds, on the open, greening face of the barren. No, he would not burrow to escape the wind. He laughed aloud as he thought upon the madness of it; and went butting and plunging on into the storm, indomitable.

Suddenly, however, he stopped short, with a great sinking at his heart. He felt cautiously this way and that, first with his feet, fumbling through the deep snow, and then with his hands. At last he turned his back abruptly to the wind, cowered down with his head between his arms to shut out the devilish whistling and whining, and tried to think how or when it had happened. He had lost the trail of the herd!

All his faculties stung to keen wakefulness by this appalling knowledge, he understood how it happened, but not where. The drifts had filled the trail, till it was utterly blotted off the face of the plain; then he had kept straight on, guided by the pressure of the wind. But the caribou, meanwhile, had swerved, and moved off in another direction. Which direction? He had to acknowledge to himself that he had no clue to judge by, so whimsical were these antlered vagrants of the barren. Well, he thought doggedly, let them go! He would get along without them. Staggering to his feet, he faced the gale again, and thought hard, striving to remember what the direction of the wind had been when last he observed it, and at the same time to recall the lay of the heavy-timbered forest that skirted this barren on two sides.

At length he made up his mind where the nearest point of woods must be. He saw it in his mind's eye, a great promontory of black firs jutting out into the waste. He turned, calculating warily, till the wind came whipping full upon his left cheek. Sure that he was now facing his one possible refuge, he again struggled forward. And as he went, he pictured to himself the whole caribou herd, now half foundered in the drift, labouring toward the same retreat. Once more, crushing back hunger and faintness, he summoned up his spirit, and vowed that if the beasts could fight their way to cover, he could. Then his woodcraft should force the forest to render him something in the way of food that would suffice to keep life in his veins.

For perhaps half an hour this defiant and unvanquishable spirit kept Pete Noël going. But as the brief northern day began to wane, and a shadow to darken behind the thick, white gloom of the storm, his forces, his tough, corded muscles and his tempered nerves, again began to falter. He caught himself stumbling, and seeking excuse for delay in getting up. In spite of every effort of his will, he saw visions—thick, protecting woods close at one side or the other, or a snug log camp, half buried in the drifts, but with warm light flooding from its windows. Indignantly he would shake himself back into sanity, and the delectable visions would vanish. But while they lasted they were confusing, and presently when he aroused himself from one that was of particularly heart-breaking vividness, he found that he had let his rifle drop! It was gone hopelessly. The shock steadied him for some minutes. Well, he had his knife. After all, that was the more important of the two. He ploughed onward, once more keenly awake, and grappling with his fate.

The shadows thickened rapidly; and at last, bending with the insane riot of the storm, began to make strange, monstrous shapes. Unravelling these illusions, and exorcising them, kept Pete Noël occupied. But suddenly one of these monstrous shapes neglected to vanish. He was just about to throw himself upon it, in half delirious antagonism, when it lurched upward with a snort, and struggled away from him. In an instant Pete was alive in every faculty, stung with an ecstasy of hope. Leaping, floundering, squirming, he followed, open knife in hand. Again and yet again the foundered beast, a big caribou bull, buried halfway up the flank, eluded him. Then, as his savage scramble at last overtook it, the bull managed to turn half about, and thrust him violently in the left shoulder with an antler-point. Unheeding the hurt, Noël clutched the antler with his left hand, and forced it inexorably back. The next moment his knife was drawn with practised skill across the beast's throat.

Like most of our eastern woodsmen, Pete Noël was even finicky about his food, and took all his meat cooked to a brown. He loathed underdone flesh. Now, however, he was an elemental creature, battling with the elements for his life. And he knew, moreover, that of all possible restoratives, the best was at his hand. He drove his blade again, this time to the bull's heart. As the wild life sighed itself out, and vanished, Pete crouched down like an animal, and drank the warm, red fluid streaming from the victim's throat. As he did so, the ebb tide of warmth, power, and mastery flooded back into his own veins. He drank his fill; then, burrowing half beneath the massive body, he lay down close against it to rest and consider.

Assured now of food to sustain him on the journey, assured of his own ability to master all other obstacles that might seek to withstand him, Pete Noël made up his mind to sleep, wrapping himself in his blankets under the shelter of the dead bull. Then the old hunter's instinct began to stir. All about him, in every momentary lull of the wind, were snortings and heavy breathings. He had wandered into the midst of the exhausted herd. Here was a chance to recoup himself, in some small part, for the loss of his cabin and supplies. He could kill a few of the helpless animals, hide them in the snow, and take the bearings of the spot as soon as the weather cleared. By and by he could get a team from the nearest settlement, and haul out the frozen meat for private sale when the game warden chanced to have his eyes shut.

Getting out his knife again, he crept stealthily toward the nearest heavy breathing. Before he could detect the beast in that tumultuous gloom, he was upon it. His outstretched left hand fell upon a wildly heaving flank. The frightened animal arose with a gasping snort, and tried to escape; but utterly exhausted, it sank down again almost immediately, resigned to this unknown doom which stole upon it out of the tempest and the dark. Pete's hand was on it again the moment it was still. He felt it quiver and shrink beneath his touch. Instinctively he began to stroke and rub the stiff hair as he slipped his treacherous hand forward along the heaving flank. The heavings grew quieter, the frightened snortings ceased. The exhausted animal seemed to feel a reassurance in that strong, quiet touch.

When Pete's hand had reached the unresisting beast's neck, he began to feel a qualm of misgiving. His knife was in the other hand, ready for use there in the howling dark; but somehow he could not at once bring himself to use it. It would be a betrayal. Yet he had suffered a grievous loss, and here, given into his grasp by fate, was the compensation. He hesitated, arguing with himself impatiently. But even as he did so, he kept stroking that firm, warm, living neck; and through the contact there in the savage darkness, a sympathy passed between the man and the beast. He could not help it. The poor beasts and he were in the same predicament, together holding the battlements of life against the blind and brutal madness of storm. Moreover, the herd had saved him. The debt was on his side. The caress which had been so traitorous grew honest and kind. With a shamefaced grin Pete shut his knife, and slipped it back into his pocket.

With both hands, now, he stroked the tranquil caribou, rubbing it behind the ears and at the base of the antlers, which seemed to give it satisfaction. Once when his hand strayed down the long muzzle, the animal gave a terrified start and snort at the dreaded man smell so violently invading its nostrils. But Pete kept on soothingly and firmly; and again the beast grew calm. At length Pete decided that

his best place for the night, or until the storm should lift, would be by the warmth of this imprisoned and peaceable animal. Digging down into the snow beyond the clutches of the wind, he rolled himself in his blankets, crouched close against the caribou's flank, and went confidently to sleep.

Aware of living companionship, Noël slept soundly through the clamour of the storm. At last a movement against his side disturbed him. He woke to feel that his strange bedfellow had struggled up and withdrawn. The storm was over. The sky above his upturned face was sharp with stars. All about him was laboured movement, with heavy shuffling, coughing, and snorting. Forgetful of their customary noiselessness, the caribou were breaking gladly from their imprisonment. Presently Pete was alone. The cold was still and of snapping intensity; but he, deep in his hollow, and wrapped in his blankets, was warm. Still drowsy, he muffled his face and went to sleep again for another hour.

When he roused himself a second time he was wide awake and refreshed. It was just past the edge of dawn. The cold gripped like a vice. Faint mystic hues seemed frozen for ever into the ineffable crystal of the air. Pete stood up, and looked eastward along the tumbled trail of the herd. Not half a mile away stood the forest, black and vast, the trail leading straight into it. Then, a little farther down toward the right he saw something that made his heart leap exultantly. Rising straight up, a lavender and silver lily against the pallid saffron of the east, soared a slender smoke. That smoke, his trained eyes told him, came from a camp chimney; and he realized that the lumbermen had moved up to him from the far-off head of the Ottanoosis.

## MacPhairrson's Happy Family

### I

It was over a little footbridge one had to pass to visit MacPhairrson and his family, a little, lofty, curiously constructed footbridge, spanning a narrow but very furious torrent. At the middle of the bridge was a gate—or, rather, a door—of close and strong wire mesh; and at this point, door and bridge together were encircled by a *chevaux-de-frise* of woodwork with sharp, radiating points of heavy telegraph wire. With the gate shut, nothing less than a pair of wings in good working order could carry one over to the steep little island in mid-torrent which was MacPhairrson's home and citadel.

Carried caressingly in the hollow of his left arm, the Boy held a brown burlap bag, which wriggled violently at times and had to be soothed into quiescence. When the Boy arrived at the door in the bridge, which he found locked, he was met by two strange hosts who peered at him wisely through the meshes of the door. One of these was a large black and tan dog, with the long body, wavy hair, drooping silken ears, and richly feathered tail of a Gordon setter, most grotesquely supported, at a height of not more than eight inches from the ground, by the little bow-legs of a dachshund. This freakish and sinister-looking animal gazed at the visitor with eyes of sagacious welcome, tongue hanging amiably half out, and tail gently waving. He approved of this particular Boy, though boys in general he regarded as nuisances to be tolerated rather than encouraged. The other host, standing close beside the dog as if on guard, and scrutinizing the visitor with little, pale, shrewdly non-committal eyes, was a half-grown black and white pig.

Through the gate the Boy murmured familiar greetings to its warders while he pulled a wooden handle which set an old brown cow-bell above the door jangling hoarsely. The summer air was full to brimming over with sound—with the roar of the furious little torrent beneath, with the thunder of the sheet of cream and amber water falling over the face of the dam some fifty yards above, with the hiss and shriek of the saws in the big sawmill perched beside the dam. Yet through all the interwoven tissue of noise the note of the cow-bell made itself heard in the cabin. From behind the cabin arose a sonorous cry of *hong-ka, honk-a-honk*, and the snaky black head of a big Canada goose appeared inquiringly around the corner. On one end of the hewn log which served as doorstep a preternaturally large and fat woodchuck sat bolt upright and stared to see who was coming. A red fox, which had been curled up asleep under MacPhairrson's one rose bush, awoke, and superciliously withdrew to the other side of the island, out of sight, disapproving of all visitors on principle. From the shade of a thick spruce bush near the bridge-end a moose calf lumbered lazily to her feet, and stood staring, her head low down and her big ears waving in sleepy interrogation. From within the cabin came a series of harsh screeches mixed with discordant laughter and cries of "Ebenezer! Ebenezer! Oh, by Gee! Hullo!" Then the cabin door swung wide, and in the doorway appeared MacPhairrson, leaning on his crutches, a green parrot on his shoulder, and beside his crippled feet two big white cats.

MacPhairrson, the parrot, and the cats, all together stared hard at the door on the bridge, striving to make out through the meshes who the visitor might be. The parrot, scrutinizing fiercely with her sinister black and orange eyes, was the first to discover. She proclaimed at once her discovery and her approval by screeching, "Boy! Boy! Oh, by Gee! Hullo!" and clambering head-first down the front of MacPhairrson's coat. As MacPhairrson hobbled hastily forward to admit the welcome guest, the parrot, reaching out with beak and claw, transferred herself to the moving crutch, whence she made a futile snap at one of the white cats. Foiled in this amiable attempt, she climbed hurriedly up the crutch again and resumed MacPhairrson's shoulder, in time to greet the Boy's entrance with a cordial "Oh, by Gee! Hullo!"

MacPhairrrson (he spelled his name scrupulously MacPherson, but, like all the other dwellers in the Settlement, pronounced it MacPhairrrson, with a punctilious rolling of the r) was an old lumberman. Rheumatism, brought on by years of toiling thigh-deep in the icy waters when the logs were running in the freshets, had gripped him so relentlessly that one of his legs was twisted to almost utter uselessness. With his crutches, however, he could get about after his fashion; and being handy with his fingers and versatile of wit, he managed to make a living well enough at the little odd jobs of mechanical repairing which the Settlement folk, and the mill hands in particular, brought to his cabin. His cabin, which was practically a citadel, stood on a steep cone of rock, upthrust from the bed of the wild little river which worked the mill. On the summit of a rock a few square rods of soil gave room for the cabin, half a dozen bushes, and some sandy, sun-warmed turf. In this retreat, within fifty yards of the busy mill, but fenced about by the foaming torrent and quite inaccessible except by the footbridge, MacPhairrrson lived with the motley group of companions which men called his Happy Family.

Happy, no doubt, they were, in spite of the strait confines of their prison, for MacPhairrrson ruled them by the joint forces of authority and love. He had, moreover, the mystic understanding which is essential if one would be really intimate with the kindreds we carelessly call dumb. So it was that he achieved a fair degree of concord in his Family. All the creatures were amiable towards him, because they loved him; and because they wholesomely feared him, they were amiable in the main towards each other. There were certain members of the Family who might be described as perennial. They were of the nature of established institutions. Such were Stumpy, the freak-legged dachshund-setter; James Edward, the wild gander; Butters, the woodchuck; Melindy and Jim, the two white cats; Bones, the brown owl, who sat all day on the edge of a box in the darkest corner of the cabin; and Ananias-and-Sapphira, the green parrot, so named, as MacPhairrrson was wont to explain, because she was so human and he never could quite make her out. Ebenezer, the pig, was still too young to be promoted to permanence; but he had already shown such character, intelligence, and self-respecting individuality that MacPhairrrson had vowed he should never deteriorate into pork. Ebenezer should stay, even though he should grow so big as to be inconvenient.

But with Susan, the moose calf, and Carrots, the unsociable young fox, it was different. MacPhairrrson realized that when Susan should come to her full heritage of stature, he would hardly have room for her on the island. He would then send to the Game Commissioner at Fredericton for a permit, and sell the good soul to the agent for some Zoölogical Garden, where she would be appreciated and cared for. As for Carrots, his conduct was irreproachable, absolutely without blot or blemish, but MacPhairrrson knew that he was quite unregenerate at heart. The astute little beast understood well enough the fundamental law of the Family, "Live and let live," and he knew that if he should break that law, doom would descend upon him in an eye-wink. But into his narrowed, inscrutable eyes, as he lay with muzzle on dainty, outstretched black paws and watched the movements of James Edward, the gander, or Butters, the fat woodchuck, a savage glint would come, which MacPhairrrson unerringly interpreted. Moreover, while his demeanour was impeccable, his reserve was impenetrable, and even the tolerant and kindly MacPhairrrson could find nothing in him to love. The decree, therefore, had gone forth; that is, it had been announced by MacPhairrrson himself, and apparently approved by the ever attentive Stumpy and Ebenezer, that Carrots should be sold into exile at the very first opportunity.

When the Boy came through the little bridge gate, the greetings between him and MacPhairrrson were brief and quiet. They were fellows both in the taciturn brotherhood of the woods. To Stumpy and Ebenezer, who nosed affectionately at his legs, he paid no attention beyond a careless touch of caress. Even to Ananias-and-Sapphira, who had hurriedly clambered from MacPhairrrson's shoulder to his and begun softly nipping at his ear with her dreaded beak, he gave no heed whatever. He knew that the evil-tempered bird loved him as she loved his master and would be scrupulously careful not to pinch too hard.

As the little procession moved gravely and silently up from the bridge to the cabin, their silence was in no way conspicuous, for the whole air throbbed with the rising and falling shriek of the saws, the trampling of the falls, and the obscurely rhythmic rush of the torrent around the island base. They were presently joined by Susan, shambling on her ungainly legs, wagging her big ears, and stretching out her long, ugly, flexible, overhanging nose to sniff inquiringly at the Boy's jacket. A comparatively new member of MacPhairrson's family, she was still full of curiosity about every one and everything, and obviously considered it her mission in life to acquire knowledge. It was her firm conviction that the only way to know a thing was to smell it.

A few steps from the door James Edward, the wild gander, came forward with dignity, slightly bowing his long, graceful black neck and narrow snaky head as he moved. Had the Boy been a stranger, he would now have met the first touch of hostility. Not all MacPhairrson's manifest favour would have prevented the uncompromising and dauntless gander from greeting the visitor with a savage hiss and uplifted wings of defiance. But towards the Boy, whom he knew well, his dark, sagacious eye expressed only tolerance, which from him was no small condescension.

On the doorstep, as austere and ungracious in his welcome as James Edward himself, sat Butters, the woodchuck, nursing some secret grudge against the world in general, or, possibly, against Ananias-and-Sapphira in particular, with whom he was on terms of vigilant neutrality. When the procession approached, he forsook the doorstep, turned his fat, brown back upon the visitor, and became engrossed in gnawing a big cabbage stalk. He was afraid that if he should seem good-natured and friendly, he might be called upon to show off some of the tricks which MacPhairrson, with inexhaustible patience, had taught him. He was not going to turn somersaults, or roll over backward, or walk like a dancing bear, for any Boy alive!

This ill humour of Butters, however, attracted no notice. It was accepted by both MacPhairrson and his visitor as a thing of course. Moreover, there were matters of more moment afoot. That lively, squirming bag which the Boy carried so carefully in the hollow of his left arm was exciting the old woodsman's curiosity. The lumbermen and mill hands, as well as the farmer-folk of the Settlement for miles about, were given to bringing MacPhairrson all kinds of wild creatures as candidates for admission to his Happy Family. So whenever any one came with something alive in a bag, MacPhairrson would regard the bag with that hopeful and eager anticipation with which a child regards its Christmas stocking.

When the two had entered the cabin and seated themselves, the Boy in the big barrel chair by the window, and MacPhairrson on the edge of his bunk, not three feet away, the rest of the company gathered in a semicircle of expectation in the middle of the floor. That is, Stumpy and Ebenezer and the two white cats did so, their keen noses as well as their inquisitive eyes having been busied about the bundle. Even James Edward came a few steps inside the door, and with a fine assumption of unconcern kept himself in touch with the proceedings. Only Susan was really indifferent, lying down outside the door—Susan, and that big bunch of fluffy brown feathers on the barrel in the corner of the cabin.

The air fairly thrilled with expectation as the boy took the wriggling bag on his knee and started to open it. The moment there was an opening, out came a sharp little black nose pushing and twisting eagerly for freedom. The nose was followed in an instant by a pair of dark, intelligent, mischievous eyes. Then a long-tailed young raccoon squirmed forth, clambered up to the Boy's shoulder, and turned to eye the assemblage with bright defiance. Never before in his young life had he seen such a remarkable assemblage; which, after all, was not strange, as there was surely not another like it in the world.

The new-comer's reception, on the whole, was not unfriendly. The two white cats, to be sure, fluffed their tails a little, drew back from the circle, and went off to curl up in the sun and sleep off their aversion to a stranger. James Edward, too, his curiosity satisfied, haughtily withdrew. But Stumpy, as acknowledged dean of the Family, wagged his tail, hung out his pink tongue as far as it

would go, and panted a welcome so obvious that a much less intelligent animal than the young raccoon could not have failed to understand it. Ebenezer was less demonstrative, but his little eyes twinkled with unmistakable good-will. Ananias-and-Sapphira was extraordinarily interested. In a tremendous hurry she scrambled down MacPhairrson's arm, down his leg, across the floor, and up the Boy's trousers. The Boy was a little anxious.

"Will she bite him?" he asked, preparing to defend his pet.

"I reckon she won't," answered MacPhairrson, observing that the capricious bird's plumage was not ruffled, but pressed down so hard and smooth and close to her body that she looked much less than her usual size. "Generally she ain't ugly when she looks that way. But she's powerful interested, I tell you!"

The little raccoon was crouching on the Boy's right shoulder. Ananias-and-Sapphira, using beak and claws, scrambled nimbly to the other shoulder. Then, reaching far around past the Boy's face, she fixed the stranger piercingly with her unwinking gaze, and emitted an ear-splitting shriek of laughter. The little coon's nerves were not prepared for such a strain. In his panic he fairly tumbled from his perch to the floor, and straightway fled for refuge to the broad back of the surprised and flattered pig.

"The little critter's all right!" declared MacPhairrson, when he and the Boy were done laughing. "Ananias-an'-Sapphira won't hurt him. She likes all the critters she kin bully an' skeer. An' Stumpy an' that comical cuss of a Ebenezer, they be goin' to look out fer him."

## II

About a week after this admission of the little raccoon to his Family, MacPhairrson met with an accident. Coming down the long, sloping platform of the mill, the point of one of his crutches caught in a crack, and he plunged headlong, striking his head on a link of heavy "snaking" chain. He was picked up unconscious and carried to the nearest cabin. For several days his stupor was unbroken, and the doctor hardly expected him to pull through. Then he recovered consciousness—but he was no longer MacPhairrson. His mind was a sort of amiable blank. He had to be fed and cared for like a very young child. The doctor decided at last that there was some pressure of bone on the brain, and that operations quite beyond his skill would be required. At his suggestion a purse was made up among the mill hands and the Settlement folk, and MacPhairrson, smiling with infantile enjoyment, was packed off down river on the little tri-weekly steamer to the hospital in the city.

As soon as it was known around the mill—which stood amidst its shanties a little apart from the Settlement—that MacPhairrson was to be laid up for a long time, the question arose: "What's to become of the Family?" It was morning when the accident happened, and in the afternoon the Boy had come up to look after the animals. After that, when the mill stopped work at sundown, there was a council held, amid the suddenly silent saws.

"What's to be done about the orphans?" was the way Jimmy Wright put the problem.

Black Angus MacAllister, the Boss—so called to distinguish him from Red Angus, one of the gang of log-drivers—had his ideas already pretty well formed on the subject, and intended that his ideas should go. He did not really care much about any one else's ideas except the Boy's, which he respected as second only to those of MacPhairrson where the wild kindreds were concerned. Black Angus was a huge, big-handed, black-bearded, bull-voiced man, whose orders and imprecations made themselves heard above the most piercing crescendos of the saws. When his intolerant eyes fixed a man, what he had to say usually went, no matter what different views on the subject his hearer might secretly cling to. But he had a tender, somewhat sentimental streak in his character, which expressed itself in a fondness for all animals. The horses and oxen working around the mill were all well cared for and showed it in their condition; and the Boss was always ready to beat a man half to death for some very slight ill-usage of an animal.

“A man kin take keer o’ himself,” he would say in explanation, “an’ the dumb critters can’t. It’s our place to take keer of ’em.”

“Boys,” said he, his great voice not yet toned down to the quiet, “I say, let’s divvy up the critters among us, jest us mill hands an’ the Boy here, an’ look out fer ’em the best we know how till MacPhairrson gits well!”

He looked interrogatively at the Boy, and the Boy, proud of the importance thus attached to him, answered modestly—

“That’s just what I was hoping you’d suggest, Mr. MacAllister. You know, of course, they can’t stay on together there alone. They wouldn’t be a Happy Family long. They’d get to fighting in no time, and about half of ’em would get killed quick.”

There was a moment of deliberative silence. No smoking was allowed in the mill, but the hands all chewed. Jimmy Wright, marking the bright face of a freshly sawed deal about eight feet away, spat unerringly upon its exact centre, then giving a hitch to his trousers, he remarked—

“Let the Boss an’ the Boy settle it. They onderstand it the best.”

“That’s right, Jimmy! We’ll fix it!” said Black Angus. “Now, for mine, I’ve got a fancy for the parrot an’ the pig. That there Ananias-and-Sapphira, she’s a bird an’ no mistake. An’ the pig—MacPhairrson calls him Ebenezer—he’s that smart ye’d jest kill yerself laffin’ to see him. An’, moreover, he’s that clean—he’s clean as a lady. I’d like to have them two around my shanty. An’ I’m ready to take one more if necessary.”

“Then I think you’ll have to take the coon too, Mr. MacAllister,” said the Boy. “He and Ebenezer just love each other, an’ they wouldn’t be happy separated.”

“All right. The coon fer me!” responded the Boss. “Which of the critters will you take yerself?”

“I’ll wait and see which the rest of the boys want,” replied the Boy. “I like them all, and they all know me pretty well. I’ll take what’s left.”

“Well, then,” said Jimmy Wright, “me for Susan. That blame moose calf’s the only one of the critters that I could ever git along with. She’s a kind of a fool, an’ seems to like me!” And he decorated the bright deal once more.

“Me an’ my missus, we’ll be proud to take them two white cats!” put in grey old Billy Smith. “She sez, sez she, they be the han’somest cats in two counties. Mebbe they won’t be so lonesome with us as they’d be somewheres else, bein’s as our shanty’s so nigh MacPhairrson’s bridge they kin see for themselves all the time there ain’t no one on to the island any more!”

“Stumpy’s not spoken for!” reminded the Boy. The dog was popular, and half a dozen volunteered for him at once.

“Mike gits the dawg!” decided the Boss, to head off arguments.

“Then I’ll take the big gander,” spoke up Baldy Pallen, one of the disappointed applicants for Stumpy. “He knows as much as any dawg ever lived.”

“Yes, I reckon he kin teach ye a heap, Baldy!” agreed the Boss. A laugh went round at Baldy’s expense. Then for a few seconds there were no more applications.

“No one seems to want poor Butters and Bones!” laughed the Boy. “They’re neither of them what you’d call sociable. But Bones has his good points. He can see in the dark; and he’s a great one for minding his own business. Butters has a heap of sense; but he’s too cross to show it, except for MacPhairrson himself. Guess *I’d* better take them both, as I understand their infirmities.”

“An’ ain’t there a young fox?” inquired the Boss.

“Oh, Carrots; he can just stay on the island,” answered the Boy. “If some of you’ll throw him a bite to eat every day, he’ll be all right. He can’t get into any mischief. And he can’t get away. He stands on his dignity so, nobody’d get any fun out of having *him*!”

These points decided, the council broke up and adjourned to MacPhairrson’s island, carrying several pieces of rope, a halter, and a couple of oat-bags. The members of the Family, vaguely upset over the long absence of their master, nearly all came down to the bridge in their curiosity to see



who was coming—all, indeed, but the fox, who slunk off behind the cabin; Butters, who retired to his box; and Bones, who remained scornfully indifferent in his corner. The rest eyed the crowd uneasily, but were reassured by seeing the Boy with them. In fact, they all crowded around him, as close as they could, except Stumpy, who went about greeting his acquaintances, and James Edward, who drew back with lifted wings and a haughty hiss, resolved to suffer no familiarities.

Jimmy Wright made the first move. He had cunningly brought some salt in his pocket. With the casual remark that he wasn't going to put it on her tail, he offered a handful to the non-committal Susan. The ungainly creature blew most of it away with a windy snort, then changed her mind and greedily licked up the few remaining grains. Deciding that Jimmy was an agreeable person with advantages, she allowed him to slip the halter on her neck and lead her unprotesting over the bridge.

Then Black Angus made overtures to Ebenezer, who carried the little raccoon on his back. Ebenezer received them with a mixture of dignity and doubt, but refused to stir an inch from the Boy's side. Black Angus scratched his head in perplexity.

"Tain't no use tryin' to lead him, I reckon!" he muttered.

"No, you'll have to carry him in your arms, Mr. MacAllister," laughed the Boy. "Good thing he ain't very big yet. But here, take Ananias-and-Sapphira first. If *she'll* be friends with you, that'll mean a lot to Ebenezer." And he deftly transferred the parrot from his own shoulder, where she had taken refuge at once on his arrival, to the lofty shoulder of the Boss.

The bird was disconcerted for an instant. She "slicked" down her feathers till she looked small and demure, and stretched herself far out as if to try a jump for her old perch. But, one wing being clipped, she did not dare the attempt. She had had enough experience of those sickening, flopping somersaults which took the place of flight when only one wing was in commission. Turning from the Boy, she eyed MacAllister's nose with her evil, unwinking stare. Possibly she intended to bite it. But at this moment MacAllister reached up his huge hand fearlessly to stroke her head, just as fearlessly as if she were not armed with a beak that could bite through a boot. Greatly impressed by this daring, she gurgled in her throat, and took the great thumb delicately between her mandibles with a daintiness that would not have marred a rose-petal. Yes, she concluded at once, this was a man after her own heart, with a smell to his hands like that of MacPhairrson himself. Dropping the thumb with a little scream of satisfaction, she sidled briskly up and down MacAllister's shoulder, making herself quite at home.

"My, but she's taken a shine to you, Mr. MacAllister!" exclaimed the Boy. "I never saw her do like that before."

The Boss grinned proudly.

"Ananias-an'-Sapphira be of the female sect, bain't she?" inquired Baldy Pallen, with a sly look over the company.

"Sure, she's a she!" replied the Boy. "MacPhairrson says so!"

"That accounts fer it!" said Baldy. "It's a way all shes have with the Boss. Jest look at her now!"

"Now for Ebenezer!" interrupted the Boss, to change the subject. "*You* better hand him to me, an' maybe he'll take it as an introduction."

Solemnly the Boy stooped, shoving the little raccoon aside, and picked the pig up in his arms. Ebenezer was amazed, having never before been treated as a lap-dog, but he made no resistance beyond stiffening out all his legs in a way that made him most awkward to handle. Placed in the Boss's great arms, he lifted his snout straight up in the air and emitted one shrill squeal; but the sight of Ananias-and-Sapphira, perched coolly beneath his captor's ear, in a measure reassured him, and he made no further protest. He could not, however, appear reconciled to the inexplicable and altogether undignified situation, so he held his snout rigidly as high aloft as he could and shut his little eyes tight, as if anticipating some further stroke of fate.

Black Angus was satisfied so far. He felt that the tolerance of Ebenezer and the acceptance of Ananias-and-Sapphira added distinctly to his prestige.

“Now for the little coon!” said he, jocularly. But the words were hardly out of his mouth when he felt sharp claws go up his leg with a rush, and the next instant the little raccoon was on his shoulder, reaching out its long, black nose to sniff solicitously at Ebenezer’s legs and assure itself that everything was all right.

“Jumping Jiminy! Oh, by Gee!” squealed Ananias-and-Sapphira, startled at the sudden onset, and nipped the intruder smartly on the leg till he squalled and whipped around to the other shoulder.

“Now you’ve got all that’s coming to you, I guess, Mr. MacAllister,” laughed the Boy.

“Then I reckon I’d better be lightin’ out fer home with it!” answered Black Angus, hugely elated. Turning gently, so as not to dislodge the passengers on his shoulder, he strode off over the bridge and up the sawdust-muffled street towards his clapboard cottage, Ebenezer’s snout still held rigidly up in air, his eyes shut in heroic resignation, while Ananias-and-Sapphira, tremendously excited by this excursion into the outer world, kept shrieking at the top of her voice: “Ebenezer, Ebenezer, Ebenezer! Oh, by Gee! I want Pa!”

As soon as the noisy and picturesque recession of Black Angus had vanished, Baldy Pallen set out confidently to capture the wild gander, James Edward. He seemed to expect to tuck him under his arm and walk off with him at his ease. Observing this, the Boy looked around with a solemn wink. Old Billy Smith and the half-dozen onlookers who had no responsibility in the affair grinned and waited. As Baldy approached, holding out a hand of placation, and “chucking” persuasively as if he thought James Edward was a hen, the latter reared his snaky black head and stared in haughty surprise. Then he gave vent to a strident hiss of warning. Could it be possible that this impudent stranger contemplated meddling with him? Yes, plainly it was possible. It was certain, in fact. The instant he realized this, James Edward lowered his long neck, darted it out parallel with the ground, spread his splendid wings, and rushed at Baldy’s legs with a hiss like escaping steam. Baldy was startled and bewildered. His legs tweaked savagely by the bird’s strong, hard bill, and thumped painfully by the great, battering, windy wings, he sputtered: “Jumpin’ Judas!” in an embarrassed tone, and retreated behind Billy Smith and the Boy.

A roar of delighted laughter arose as James Edward backed away in haughty triumph, and strolled carelessly up towards the cabin. There were cries of “Ketch him quick, Baldy!” “Try a leetle coaxin’!” “Don’t be so rough with the gosling, Baldy!” “Jest whistle to him, an’ he’ll folly ye!” But, ignoring these pleasantries, Baldy rubbed his legs and turned to the Boy for guidance.

“Are you sure you want him now?” inquired the latter.

“Course I want him!” returned Baldy with a sheepish grin. “I’ll coax him round an’ make friends with him all right when I git him home. But how’m I goin’ to git him? I’m afeared o’ hurtin’ him, he seems that delicate, and his feelin’s so sensitive like!”

“We’ll have to surround him, kind of. Just wait, boys!” said the Boy. And running into the cabin, past the deliberate James Edward, he reappeared with a heavy blanket.

The great gander eyed his approach with contemptuous indifference. He had come to regard the Boy as quite harmless. When, therefore, the encumbering folds of the blanket descended, it was too late to resist. In a moment he was rolled over in the dark, bundled securely, picked up, and ignominiously tucked under Baldy Pallen’s arm.

“Now you’ve got him, don’t let go o’ him!” admonished the Boy, and amid encouraging jeers Baldy departed, carrying the bundle victoriously. He had not more than crossed the bridge, however, when the watchers on the island saw a slender black head wriggle out from one end of the bundle, dart upward behind his left arm, and seize the man viciously by the ear. With a yell Baldy grabbed the head, and held it securely in his great fist till the Boy ran to his rescue. When James Edward’s bill was removed from Baldy’s bleeding ear, his darting, furious head tucked back into the blanket, the Boy said—

“Now, Baldy, that was just your own fault for not keeping tight hold. You can’t blame James Edward for biting you!”

“Sure, no!” responded Baldy, cheerfully. “I don’t blame him a mite. I brag on the spunk of him. Him an’ me’ll git on all right.”

James Edward gone, the excitement was over. The Boy picked up the two big white cats, Melindy and Jim, and placed them in the arms of old Billy Smith, where they settled themselves, looking about with an air of sleepy wisdom. From smallest kittenhood the smell of a homespun shirt had stood to them for every kind of gentleness and shelter, so they saw no reason to find fault with the arms of Billy Smith. By this time old Butters, the woodchuck, disturbed at the scattering of the Family, had retired in a huff to the depths of his little barrel by the doorstep. The Boy clapped an oat-bag over the end of the barrel, and tied it down. Then he went into the cabin and slipped another bag over the head of the unsuspecting Bones, who fluffed all his feathers and snapped his fierce beak like castanets. In two minutes he was tied up so that he could neither bite nor claw.

“That was slick!” remarked Red Angus, who had hitherto taken no part in the proceedings. He and the rest of the hands had followed in hope of further excitement.

“Well, then, Angus, will you help me home? Will you take the barrel, and see that Butters doesn’t gnaw out on the way?”

Red Angus picked up the barrel and carried it carefully in front of him, head up, that the sly old woodchuck might not steal a march on him. Then the Boy picked up Bones in his oat-bag, and closed the cabin door. As the party left the island with loud tramping of feet on the little bridge, the young fox crept slyly from behind the cabin, and eyed them through cunningly narrowed slits of eyes. At last he was going to have the island all to himself; and he set himself to dig a burrow directly under the doorstep, where that meddlesome MacPhairrson had never permitted him to dig.

### III

It was in the green zenith of June when MacPhairrson went away. When he returned, hobbling up with his tiny bundle, the backwoods world was rioting in the scarlet and gold of young October. He was quite cured. He felt singularly well. But a desperate loneliness saddened his home-coming. He knew his cabin would be just as he had left it, there on its steep little foam-ringed island; and he knew the Boy would be there, with the key, to admit him over the bridge and welcome him home. But what would the island be without the Family? The Boy, doubtless, had done what he could. He had probably taken care of Stumpy, and perhaps of Ananias-and-Sapphira. But the rest of the Family must inevitably be scattered to the four winds. Tears came into his eyes as he thought of himself and Stumpy and the parrot, the poor lonely three, there amid the sleepless clamour of the rapids, lamenting their vanished comrades. A chill that was more than the approaching autumn twilight could account for settled upon his heart.

Arriving at the little bridge, however, his heart warmed again, for there was the Boy waving at him, and hurrying down to the gate to let him in. And there at the Boy’s heels was Stumpy, sure enough. MacPhairrson shouted, and Stumpy, at the sound of the loud voice, went wild, trying to tear his way through the gate. When the gate opened, he had to brace himself against the frame, before he could grasp the Boy’s hand, so extravagant and overwhelming were the yelping Stumpy’s caresses. Gladly he suffered them, letting the excited dog lick his hands and even his face; for, after all, Stumpy was the best and dearest member of the Family. Then, to steady him, he gave him his bundle to carry up to the cabin, and proudly Stumpy trotted on ahead with it. MacPhairrson’s voice trembled as he tried to thank the Boy for bringing Stumpy back to him—trembled and choked.

“I can’t help it!” he explained apologetically as soon as he got his voice again. “I love Stumpy best, of course! You kept the best fer me! But, Jiminy Christmas, Boy, how I miss the rest on ’em!”

“I didn’t keep Stumpy!” explained the Boy as the two went up the path. “It was Mike Sweeny took care of him for you. He brought him round this morning because he had to get off to the woods cruising. I took care of Bones—we’ll find him on his box inside—and of cross old Butters. Thunder,

how Butters has missed you, MacPhairrson! He's bit me twice, just because I wasn't you. There he is, poking his nose out of his barrel."

The old woodchuck thought he had heard MacPhairrson's voice, but he was not sure. He came out and sat up on his fat haunches, his nostrils quivering with expectation. Then he caught sight of the familiar limping form. With a little squeal of joy he scurried forward and fell to clutching and clawing at his master's legs till MacPhairrson picked him up. Whereupon he expressed his delight by striving to crowd his nose into MacPhairrson's neck. At this moment the fox appeared from hiding behind the cabin, and sat up, with ears cocked shrewdly and head to one side, to take note of his master's return.

"Lord, how Carrots has growed!" exclaimed MacPhairrson, lovingly, and called him to come. But the fox yawned in his face, got up lazily, and trotted off to the other side of the island. MacPhairrson's face fell.

"He's got no kind of a heart at all," said the Boy, soothing his disappointment.

"He ain't no use to nobody," said MacPhairrson. "I reckon we'd better let him go." Then he hobbled into the cabin to greet Bones, who ruffled up his feathers at his approach, but recognized him and submitted to being stroked.

Presently MacPhairrson straightened up on his crutches, turned, and gulped down a lump in his throat.

"I reckon we'll be mighty contented here," said he, "me an' Stumpy, an' Butters, an' Bones. But I *wisht* as how I might git to have Ananias-an'-Sapphira back along with us. I'm goin' to miss that there bird a lot, fer all she was so ridiculous an' cantankerous. I s'pose, now, you don't happen to know who's got her, do you?"

"I know she's got a good home!" answered the Boy, truthfully. "But I don't know that I could tell you just where she is!"

At just this minute, however, there came a jangling of the gate bell, and screeches of—

"Oh, by Gee! Jumpin' Jiminy! Oh, Boy! I want Pa!"

MacPhairrson's gaunt and grizzled face grew radiant. Nimbly he hobbled to the door, to see the Boy already on the bridge, opening the gate. To his amazement, in strode Black Angus the Boss, with the bright green glitter of Ananias-and-Sapphira on his shoulder screeching varied profanities—and whom at his heels but Ebenezer and the little ring-tailed raccoon. In his excitement the old woodsman dropped one of his crutches. Therefore, instead of going to meet his visitors, he plumped down on the bench outside his door and just waited. A moment later the quaint procession arrived. MacPhairrson found Black Angus shaking him hugely by the hand, Ebenezer, much grown up, rooting at his knees with a happy little squeal, and Ananias-and-Sapphira, as of old, clambering excitedly up his shirt-front.

"There, there, easy now, old pard," he murmured to the pig, fondling the animal's ears with one hand, while he gave the other to the bird, to be nibbled and nipped ecstatically, the raccoon meanwhile looking on with bright-eyed, non-committal interest.

"Angus," said the old woodsman presently, by way of an attempt at thanks, "ye're a wonderful hand with the dumb critters—not that one could rightly call Ananias-an'-Sapphira dumb, o' course—'n' I swear I couldn't never have kep' 'em lookin' so fine and slick all through the summer. I reckon—"

But he never finished that reckoning. Down to his bridge was coming another and a larger procession than that of Black Angus. First, and even now entering through the gate, he saw Jimmy Wright leading a lank young moose cow, whom he recognized as Susan. Close behind was old Billy Smith with the two white cats, Melindy and Jim, in his arms; and then Baldy Fallen, with a long blanket bundle under his arm. Behind them came the rest of the mill hands, their faces beaming welcome. MacPhairrson, shaking all over, with big tears in his eyes, reached for his fallen crutch and stood up. When the visitors arrived and gave him their hearty greetings, he could find no words to answer. Baldy laid his bundle gently on the ground and respectfully unrolled it. Out stepped the lordly James Edward and lifted head and wings with a troubled *honk-a, honka*. As soon as he saw

MacPhairrson, he came up and stood close beside him, which was as much enthusiasm as the haughty gander could bring himself to show. The cats meanwhile were rubbing and purring against their old master's legs, while Susan sniffed at him with a noisy, approving snort. MacPhairrson's throat, and then his whole face, began to work. How different was this home-coming from what he had expected! Here, wonder of wonders, was his beloved Family all gathered about him! How good the boys were! He must try to thank them all. Bracing himself with one crutch, he strove to express to them his immeasurable gratitude and gladness. In vain, for some seconds, he struggled to down the lump in his throat. Then, with a titanic effort, he blurted out: "Oh, hell, boys!" and sat down, and hid his wet eyes in Stumpy's shaggy hair.

## On Big Lonely

It was no doubt partly pride, in having for once succeeded in evading her grandmother's all-seeing eye, that enabled Mandy Ann to carry, at a trot, a basket almost as big as herself—to carry it all the way down the hill to the river, without once stumbling or stopping to take breath. The basket was not only large, but uneasy, seeming to be troubled by internal convulsions, which made it tip and lurch in a way that from time to time threatened to upset Mandy Ann's unstable equilibrium. But being a young person of character, she kept right on, ignoring the fact that the stones on the shore were very sharp to her little bare feet.

At last she reached the sunshiny cove, with shoals of minnows flickering about its amber shallows, which was the goal of her flight. Here, tethered to a stake on the bank, lay the high-sided old bateau, which Mandy Ann had long coveted as a perfectly ideal play-house. Its high prow lightly aground, its stern afloat, it swung lazily in the occasional puffs of lazy air. Mandy Ann was only four years old, and her red cotton skirt just came to her dimpled grimy little knees, but with that unfailing instinct of her sex she gathered up the skirt and clutched it securely between her breast and the rim of the basket. Then she stepped into the water, waded to the edge of the old bateau and climbed aboard.

The old craft was quite dry inside, and filled with a clean pungent scent of warm tar. Mandy Ann shook out her red skirt and her yellow curls, and set down the big covered basket on the bottom of the bateau. The basket continued to move tempestuously.

"Oh, naughty! naughty!" she exclaimed, shaking her chubby finger at it. "Jest a minute, jest a teenty minute, an' we'll see!"

Peering over the bow, Mandy Ann satisfied herself that the bateau, though its bottom grated on the pebbles, was completely surrounded by water. Then sitting down on the bottom, she assured herself that she was hidden by the boat's high flaring sides from the sight of all interfering domestic eyes on shore. She felt sure that even the eyes of her grandmother, in the little grey cottage back on the green hill, could not reach her in this unguessed retreat. With a sigh of unutterable content she made her way back into the extreme stern of the bateau, lugging the tempestuous basket with her. Sitting down flat, she took the basket in her lap and loosened the cover, crooning softly as she did so. Instantly a whiskered, brown snub-nose, sniffing and twitching with interrogation, appeared at the edge. A round brown head, with little round ears and fearless bright dark eyes, immediately popped over the edge. With a squeak of satisfaction a fat young woodchuck, nearly full-grown, clambered forth and ran up on Mandy Ann's shoulder. The bateau, under the influence of the sudden weight in the stern, floated clear of the gravel and swung softly at the end of its rope.

Observing that the bateau was afloat, Mandy Ann was delighted. She felt doubly secure, now, from pursuit. Pulling a muddy carrot from her pocket she held it up to the woodchuck, which was nuzzling affectionately at her curls. But the smell of the fresh earth reminded the little animal of something which he loved even better than Mandy Ann—even better, indeed, than a juicy carrot. He longed to get away, for a little while, from the loving but sometimes too assiduous attention with which his little mistress surrounded him—to get away and burrow to his heart's content in the cool brown earth, full of grass-roots. Ignoring the carrot, he clambered down in his soft, loose-jointed fashion, from Mandy Ann's shoulder, and ran along the gunwale to the bow. When he saw that he could not reach shore without getting into the water, which he loathed, he grumbled squeakingly, and kept bobbing his round head up and down, as if he contemplated making a jump for it.

At these symptoms Mandy Ann, who had been eyeing him, called to him severely. "Naughty!" she cried. "Come back this very instant, sir! You'd jes' go an' tell Granny on me! Come right back to your muzzer this instant!" At the sound of her voice the little animal seemed to think better of his rashness. The flashing and rippling of the water daunted him. He returned to Mandy Ann's side and fell to gnawing philosophically at the carrot which she thrust under his nose.

This care removed, Mandy Ann took an irregular bundle out of the basket. It was tied up in a blue-and-white handkerchief. Untying it with extreme care, as if the contents were peculiarly precious, she displayed a collection of fragments of many-coloured glass and gay-painted china. Gloating happily over these treasures, which flashed like jewels in the sun, she began to sort them out and arrange them with care along the nearest thwart of the bateau. Mandy Ann was making what the children of the Settlement knew and esteemed as a "Chaney House." There was keen rivalry among the children as to both location and furnishing of these admired creations; and to Mandy Ann's daring imagination it had appeared that a "Chaney House" in the old bateau would be something surpassing dreams.

For an hour or more Mandy Ann was utterly absorbed in her enchanting task. So quiet she was over it that every now and then a yellow-bird or a fly-catcher would alight upon the edge of the bateau to bounce away again with a startled and indignant twitter. The woodchuck, having eaten his carrot, curled up in the sun and went to sleep.

Mandy Ann's collection was really a rich assortment of colour. Every piece in it was a treasure in her eyes. But much as she loved the bits of painted china, she loved the glass better. There were red bits, and green of many shades, and blue, yellow, amber, purple and opal. Each piece, before arranging it in its allotted place on the thwart, she would lift to her eyes and survey the world through it. Some near treetops, and the blue sky piled with white fleeces of summer clouds, were all of the world she could see from her retreat; but viewed through different bits of glass these took on an infinite variety of wonder and delight. So engrossed she was, it quite escaped her notice that the old bateau was less steady in its movements than it had been when first she boarded it. She did not even observe the fact that there were no longer any treetops in her fairy-tinted pictures. At last there sounded under the keel a strange gurgle, and the bateau gave a swinging lurch which sent half the treasures of the "Chaney House" clattering upon the bottom or into Mandy Ann's lap. The woodchuck woke up frightened and scrambled into the shelter of its mistress's arms.

Much surprised, Mandy Ann knelt upright and looked out over the edge of the bateau. She was no longer in the little sheltered cove, but far out on the river. The shores, slipping smoothly and swiftly past, looked unfamiliar to her. Where she expected to see the scattered cottages of the Settlement, a huge bank covered with trees, cut off the view. While she was so engrossed with her coloured glass, a puff of wind, catching the high sides of the bateau, had caused it to tug at its tether. The rope, carelessly fastened by some impatient boy, had slipped its hold; and the bateau had been swept smoothly out into the hurrying current. Half a mile below, the river rounded a woody point, and the drifting bateau was hidden from the sight of any one who might have hurried to recover it.

At the moment, Mandy Ann was not frightened. Her blue eyes danced with excitement as she tossed back her tousled curls. The river, flowing swiftly but smoothly, flashed and rippled in the noon sun in a friendly fashion, and it was most interesting to see how fast the shores slipped by. There was no suggestion of danger; and probably, at the back of her little brain, Mandy Ann felt that the beautiful river, which she had always loved and never been allowed to play with, would bring her back to her Granny as gently and unexpectedly as it had carried her away. Meanwhile, she felt only the thrilling and utterly novel excitement of the situation. As the bateau swung in an occasional oily eddy she laughed gaily at the motion, and felt as proud as if she were doing it herself. And the woodchuck, which had been very nervous at first, feeling that something was wrong, was so reassured by its mistress's evident satisfaction that it curled up again on the bottom and hastened to resume its slumber.

In a little while the river curved again, sweeping back to its original course. Suddenly, in the distance, the bright spire of the Settlement church came into view, and then the familiar cottages. Mandy Ann's laughing face grew grave, as she saw how very, very far away they looked. They took on, also, from the distance, a certain strangeness which smote her heart. This wonderful adventure of hers ceased to have any charm for her. She wanted to go back at once. Then her grandmother's little

grey house on the slope came into view. Oh, how terribly little and queer and far away it looked. And it was getting farther and farther away every minute. A frightened cry of "Granny! Granny! Take me home!" broke from her lips. She stood up, and made her way hurriedly to the other end of the bateau, which, being upstream, was nearer home. As her weight reached the bow, putting it deeper into the grip of the current, the bateau slowly swung around till it headed the other way. Mandy Ann turned and hurried again to the point nearest home. Whereupon the bateau calmly repeated its disconcerting manoeuvre. All at once the whole truth of the situation burst upon Mandy Ann's comprehension. She was lost. She was being carried away so far that she would never, never get back. She was being swept out into the terrible wilds that she had heard stories about. Her knees gave away in her terror. Crouching, a little red tumbled heap, on the bottom of the bateau, she lifted up her voice in shrill wailings, which so frightened the woodchuck that he came and crept under her skirt.

Below the Settlement the river ran for miles through a country of ever-deepening desolation, without cabin or clearing near its shores, till it emptied itself into the yet more desolate lake known as "Big Lonely," a body of forsaken water about ten miles long, surrounded by swamps and burnt-lands. From the foot of Big Lonely the river raged away over a mile of thundering ledges, through a chasm known to the lumbermen as "The Devil's Trough." The fury of this madness having spent itself between the black walls of the canyon, the river continued rather sluggishly its long course toward the sea. A few miles below the Settlement the river began to get hurried and turbulent, chafing white through rocky rapids. When the bateau plunged into the first of these, Mandy Ann's wailing and sobbing stopped abruptly. The clamour of the white waves and the sight of their lashing wrath fairly stupefied her. She sat up on the middle thwart, with the shivering woodchuck clutched to her breast, and stared about with wild eyes. On every side the waves leaped up, black, white, and amber, jumping at the staggering bateau. But appalling as they looked to Mandy Ann, they were not particularly dangerous to the sturdy, high-sided craft which carried her. The old bateau had been built to navigate just such waters. Nothing could upset it, and on account of its high, flaring sides, no ordinary rapids could swamp it. It rode the loud chutes triumphantly, now dipping its lofty nose, now bumping and reeling, but always making the passage without serious mishap. All through the rapids Mandy Ann would sit silent, motionless, fascinated with horror. But in the long, comparatively smooth reaches she would recover herself enough to cry softly upon the woodchuck's soft brown fur, till that prudent little animal, exasperated at the damp of her caresses, wriggled away and crawled into his hated basket.

At last, when the bateau had run a dozen of these noisy "rips," Mandy Ann grew surfeited with terror, and thought to comfort herself. Sitting down again upon the bottom of the bateau, she sadly sought to revive her interest in the "Chaney House." She would finger the choicest bits of painted porcelain, and tell herself how pretty they were. She would choose a fragment of scarlet or purple glass, hold it up to her pathetic, tear-stained face, and try to interest herself in the coloured landscape that filed by. But it was no use. Even the amber glass had lost its power to interest her. And at length, exhausted by her terror and her loneliness, she sank down and fell asleep.

It was late afternoon when Mandy Ann fell asleep, and her sleep was the heavy semi-torpor coming after unrelieved grief and fear. It was unjarred by the pitching of the fiercer rapids which the bateau presently encountered. The last mile of the river's course before joining the lake consisted of deep, smooth "dead-water"; but, a strong wind from the north-west having sprung up toward the end of the day, the bateau drove on with undiminished speed. On the edge of the evening, when the sun was just sinking into the naked tops of the rampikes along the western shore, the bateau swept out upon the desolate reaches of Big Lonely, and in the clutch of the wind hastened down mid-lake to seek the roaring chutes and shrieking vortices of the "Devil's Trough."

Out in the middle of the lake, where the heavy wind had full sweep, the pitching and thumping of the big waves terrified the poor little woodchuck almost to madness; but they made no impression on the wearied child, where she lay sobbing tremulously in her sleep. They made a great impression, however, on a light birch canoe, which was creeping up alongshore in the teeth of the wind, urged



by two paddles. The paddlers were a couple of lumbermen, returning from the mouth of the river. All the spring and early summer they had been away from the Settlement, working on “the drive” of the winter’s logging, and now, hungry for home, they were fighting their way doggedly against wind and wave. There was hardly a decent camping-ground on all the swamp-cursed shores of Big Lonely, except at the very head of the lake, where the river came in, and this spot the voyagers were determined to make before dark. They would then have clear poling ahead of them next day, to get them home to the Settlement in time for supper.

The man in the bow, a black-bearded, sturdy figure in a red shirt, paddled with slow, unvarying strokes, dipping his big maple paddle deep and bending his back to it, paying no heed whatever to the heavy black waves which lurched at him every other second and threatened to overwhelm the bow of his frail craft. He had none of the responsibility. His part was simply to supply power, steady, unwavering power, to make head against the relentless wind. The man in the stern, on the other hand, had to think and watch and meet every assault, as well as thrust the canoe forward into the tumult. He was a gaunt, long-armed young giant, bareheaded, with shaggy brown hair blown back from his red-tanned face. His keen grey eyes noted and measured every capricious lake-wave as it lunged at him, and his wrist, cunning and powerful, delicately varied each stroke to meet each instant’s need. It was not enough that the canoe should be kept from broaching-to and swamping or upsetting. He was anxious that it should not ship water, and wet certain treasures which they were taking home to the backwoods from the shops of the little city down by the sea. And while his eyes seemed to be so engrossingly occupied in the battle with the waves of Big Lonely, they were all the time refreshing themselves with a vision—the vision of a grey house on a sunny hill-top, where his mother was waiting for him, and where a little yellow-haired girl would scream “*Daddie*, oh, *Daddie*!” when she saw him coming up the road.

The dogged voyagers were within perhaps two miles of the head of the lake, with the sun gone down behind the desolate rampikes, and strange tints of violet and rose and amber, beautiful and lonely, touching the angry turbulence of the waves, when the man in the bow, whose eyes were free to wander, caught sight of the drifting bateau. It was a little ahead of them, but farther out in the lake.

“Ain’t that old Joe’s bateau out yonder, Chris?” he queried, his trained woodsman’s eye recognizing the craft by some minute detail of build or blemish.

“I reckon it be!” answered Chris, after a moment’s scrutiny. “He’s let her git adrift. Water must be raisin’ sudden!”

“She’ll be a fine quality o’ kindlin’ wood in another hour, the rate she’s travelling” commented the other with mild interest. But the young giant in the stern was more concerned. He was sorry that old Joe should lose his boat.

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