THE GREAT MIGRATION

the huge reptiles. Aquatic birds, of a great number kinds, were equally busy in the pursuit of the fish. Huge pelicans  
stood up to their tibia in the water now and then immersing their long mandibles and tossing their finny victims high  
into the air. Cranes and herons too were there among others the tall Louisiana crane conspicuous among the smaller  
species snow white egrets, the wood ibis, and others of white and roseate hue the snake darter, with long pointed beak;  
and crouching serpent like neck the qua bird, of lugubrious note and melancholy aspect and fairest of all, the scarlet  
flamingo. Other birds besides those of aquatic habits took part in the odd spectacle. Hovering in the air were black  
vultures the carrion crow and the turkey buzzard and upon the tops of tall dead trees could be seen the king of the  
feathered multitude, the great white headed eagle. His congener, the osprey, soared craftily above at intervals swooping  
down, and striking his talons into the fish, which the alligators had tossed into the air thus robbing the reptiles of their  
prey. To be robbed in turn by his watchful cousin german upon the tree. The spectacle was far from being a silent one;  
on the contrary, the confused chorus of sounds was deafening to the ears of the spectators. The hoarse bellowing of the  
alligators the concussions made by their great tails striking the water the croaking of the pelicans, and the clattering of  
their huge mandibles the doleful screaming of the herons, cranes, and qua birds the shrieks of the osprey and the shrill  
maniac laughter of the white headed eagle, piercing through all other sounds formed a medley of voices as unearthly as  
inharmonious. A shot from the gun of ivan, that brought down a splendid specimen of the white headed eagle together  
with the appearance of the hunters by the edge of the water put a sudden termination to this grand drama of the  
wilderness. The birds flew up into the air, and went soaring off in different directions over the tops of the tall trees;  
while the huge reptiles , that had been taught by the alligator hunters to fear the presence of man, desisted for a while  
from their predatory prey, and retreated to the reeds upon the opposite shore. The spectacle was one well worthy of  
being seen, and one that cannot be witnessed every day even in the swamps of louisiana. Its occurrence at that time was  
accounted for by the drying up of the lake, which left the fish at the mercy of their numerous enemies. Having taken up  
the eagle which ivan had shot, the young hunters continued their excursion along the edge of the lagoon. They had not  
gone far when they came upon a bank of mud, that had formerly been covered with water. So recently had the water  
dried from it that, in spite of the hot sun shining down upon it, the mud was still soft. They had not gone many steps  
further, when they perceived upon its surface, what at first they supposed to be the tracks of man. On getting a little  
closer, however, they doubted this; and, now recollecting the resemblance which they had noticed in the snows of  
lapland between the footsteps of a human being and those of a bear it occurred to them that these might also be a bear  
tracks though they knew that the tracks of the american bear would be slightly different from those of his european  
cousin. To satisfy themselves, they hastened forward to examine the tracks; but their negro guide had anticipated them,  
and now called out with the whites of his eyes considerably enlarged golly, young mass’rs dat be tracks ob um ba a  
bear ya, ya, mass’rs a big ba dis child known um track see’d um many de time de ole coon he be arter de fish too all ob  
dem a doin a bit ob fishin dis mornin yaw, yaw, yaw and the darkey laughed at what he appeared to consider an excellent  
joke. On closely scrutinising the tracks, alexis and ivan saw that they were in reality the tracks of a bear though much  
smaller than those they had followed in Lapland. They were quite fresh in fact, so recently did they appear to have been  
made, that both at the same time, and by an involuntary impulse, raised their eyes from the ground and glanced around  
them; as if they expected to see the bear himself. No such animal was in sight, however. It was quite probable he had  
been on the ground, at their first coming up to the lake; but the report of ivan’s gun had alarmed him, and he had made  
off into the woods. This was quite probable. What a pity, reflected ivan, that i didn’t leave the eagle alone we might have  
got sight of master bruin, and given him the shot instead. And now, added he, what’s to be done there’s no snow,  
therefore we can’t track the brute. The mud bank ends here, and he’s gone off it, the way he came off course he wouldn’t  
be out yonder among those logs he wouldn’t have taken shelter there, would he as ivan spoke, he pointed to a little  
peninsula that jutted out into the lake, some of yards beyond the spot where they were standing. It was joined to the  
mainland by a narrow neck or isthmus of mud; but at the end towards the water there was a space of several yards  
covered with dead trees that had been floated thither in the floods, and now lay high and dry, piled irregularly upon one  
another. Alexis looked in the direction of this pile as ivan pointed it out. I’m not so sure of that he answered, after  
scrutinising the logs. It’s a likely enough place for an animal to lurk. He might be there let us go and see, then said ivan.

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