THE GREAT MIGRATION

Their form, however was very different from these; and from their pointed ears, long muzzles, and full bunching tails,  
alexis could think of nothing else to compare them to but wolves. The varied colours signified nothing: since in these   
northen lands there are wolves of many varieties from white to black; and wolves they really were only magnified by  
the mist into gigantic proportions. Alexis had not viewed them long before perceiving that they were not all wolves. In   
their midst was an animal of a very different kind much larger than any of them: but what sort of a creature it was the   
young hunter could not make out. Ivan, who had risen to his feet was aqually puzzled to tell it appeared as large as half  
a dozen of the wolves rolled up into one, and was whiter than the whitest of them; but it looked as if it had a hunch   
upon its back; and altogether more like a shapeless mass of white bristly hair than a regularly formed quadruped. It must  
be an animal, however, as its motions testified; for it was seen to be turning round and round and at intervals darting  
forward a pace or two, as if working its way in the direction of the river. Whatever the animal was, it soon became clear  
that it was battling with the wolves that surrounded it; and this accounted for the singular movements that these last  
were making, as well as for their fierce barking and growling that in confused chorus, filled the air. At intervals, and still  
louder, could be heard a different sort of cry shrill and plaintive. Like the hinny of a mule and evidently proceeding not  
from the wolves, but from the huge white animal which they were assailing, the voyageurs at once recognised the cry. A   
bear a sea bear exclaimed both together. One of them stood up, and looked over the plain. Yes, said he, confirming this  
first assertion. An old she it is, surrounded by wolves. Ha it’s her cubs they’re after voila, messieurs she’s got one of them  
on her back. Enfant de garce, how the old beldam keeps them at bay she’s fighting her way to the water guided by the  
words of the voyageur, our hunters now perceived clearly enough that the white object appearing over the backs of the   
wolves was neither more nor less than a large bear : and that which they had taken for a hunch upon its shoulders was   
another bear a young one, stretched out at full length along the back of its mother, and clinging there, with its forearms  
clasped around her neck, it was evident, also, as the voyageur had said , that the old she was endeavouring to work her   
way towards the river in hopes, no doubt, of retreating to the water, where she knew the wolves would not dare to   
follow her. This was evidently her design: for, while they stood watching, she advanced several yards of ground in the   
direction of the stream. Notwithstanding the fierce eagerness with which the wolves kept up the attack, they were  
observing considerable caution in the conflict. They had good reason: since before their eyes was an example of what  
they might expect, if they came to very close quarters. Upon the ground over which the fight had been raging, or of  
their number were seen lying apparently dead while others were limping around, or sneaked off with whining cries  
licking the wounds they had received from the long claws of their powerful adversary. It was rather an odd circumstance  
for the wolves to have thus attacked o polar bear an antagonist of which they stand in the utmost dread. The thing,  
however, was explained by one of the voyageurs : who said that the bear in question was a weak one half famished,  
perhaps, and feeble from having suckled her young; and it was the cubs, and not the old bear herself, that the wolves   
were after thinking to separate these from their mother, and so destroy and devour them. Perhaps one of them had been  
eaten up already: since only one could be seen; and there are always cubs in a litter. Our young hunters did not think of   
staying longer to watch the strange encounter. Their sole idea was to get possession of the bear and her cub: and with  
this intent they ordered the voyageurs to paddle close up to the shore and land them. As soon as the canoe touched the  
bank, both leaped out; and, followed by pouchskin, proceeded towards the scene of the conflict, the voyageurs remaining  
in the canoe. A whole family captured. The party had not gone more than a dozen steps from the water’s edge, when a   
new object coming under their eyes caused them to halt. This was another quadruped that at that moment was seen  
dashing out from the willows, and rushing onward toward the scene of the strife. There was no mistaking the character  
of the creature. Our hunters saw at a glance that it was a large white bear much larger than the one surrounded by the   
wolves. It was, in fact, the male; who, wandering in the thicket of willows or, more likely, lying there asleep had not till  
that moment been aware of what was going on, or that his wife and children were in such deadly danger. Perhaps it was  
the noise that had awaked him; and he was just in the act of hastening forward to the rescue. With a shuffling gallop he  
glided over the plain as fast as a horse could have gone; and in a few seconds he was close up to the scene conflict   
to which his presence put an end right on the instant. The wolves seeing him rush open mouthed tem, one   
and all bolted off; and ran at full speed over the plain, their long tails streaming out behind them. Those that were

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