# The Adventures of Fleetfoot and Her Fawns



Title: The Adventures of Fleetfoot and Her Fawns
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Release Date: April 01, 2011 [EBook #35749]
Language: English
Character set encoding: UTF-8



Produced by Roger Frank.

# THE ADVENTURES OF FLEET FOOT AND HER FAWNS

A True-to-Nature Story for
Children and Their Elders

BY
ALLEN CHAFFEE

Author of

"Twinkly Eyes," "The Little Black Bear," "Trail and Tree Top," and "Lost River, or The Adventures of Two Boys in the Big Woods"

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SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

Adventures of Fleet Foot
Bradley Quality Books for Children

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[image]

TO
POLLY
WHO IS A DEAR
HERSELF

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# CONTENTS

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# THE ADVENTURES OF FLEET FOOT AND HER FAWNS

# CHAPTER I.—THE SPOTTED FAWNS.

"Me-o-ow!" screamed Old Man Lynx, from the heart of the woods. The two spotted fawns heard the cry from their laurel copse on the rim of Lone Lake. But, though their big, soft eyes were round with terror, so perfectly had they been trained, they never so much as twitched an ear. Well did they know that the slightest movement might show to some prowler of the night just where they lay hidden.

Next morning, no sooner had the birds begun to chirp themselves awake, than Mother Fleet Foot fed the fawns as usual and ate her own light breakfast of lily pads, Then she lined up the two fawns before her.

"Children," she said, in deer language, "you have a great deal to learn before ever you can take care of yourselves in these woods. From now on we are going to have lessons."

"Yes, Mother," bleated the little ones, "but what are lessons."

"They are going to be as much like play as we can make them," said Fleet Foot. "You need practice in running, and we must play 'Follow the Leader' every day. Mother, of course, will be the leader. It will be lots of fun."

The fawns waggled their ears in delight.

"Now listen, both of you," said Fleet Foot. "*This* means danger! Follow me!" And she stamped her foot three times and whistled, as she leaped away through the bushes.

"Just watch my white flag, and you'll know where to follow," she called; and she showed them how, when she ran, she held the white lining of her tail straight up to show which way she had gone. This was because her brown back might not show between the tree-trunks.

"And when I give the danger signal, you must give it, too, to warn the others," she added, leaping back to their side.

"What others?" asked the tinier fawn.

"Any deer within ear-shot. That is how we help each other. And

remember—obey on the instant! It is the only safe way!"

Suddenly she gave the danger signal!

This time it was in real alarm, for she had spied a black snake wiggling toward them. The fawns bounded after her, just in time to escape the ugly fellow. And, because woods babies learn quickly they remembered to give their own tiny stamp and whistle, their own wee white flags wig-wagging behind them. Fleet Foot could have killed the snake with her sharp fore-hoof, but a deer's long legs are better suited to running away when danger is near.

The next day she taught them to leap exactly in her footprints. She took short steps, so that it would be easy for them. Great skill and experience is needed for a deer to know where and how to put his feet down when he makes those great leaps of his. He may land, now among the rocks, now in marshy ground, slipping over mosses and scrambling over tree-trunks. It would be only too easy to break one of those slender legs, and be at the mercy of his enemies.

By the time the fawns were six weeks old, they had learned just how to land without stumbling and hurting their frail ankles. Then, one day, young Frisky Fox, hiding at the edge of the clearing, saw a strange sight. In fact, he thought he had never seen anything quite so odd in all his life.

Down four little trails from the hill-top came four does, Fleet Foot among the number. And close behind each doe came her two fawns. Then a fifth mother came from the other side of the meadow. She had only one baby with her.

It was to be a sort of party. But the fawns were most unwilling to get acquainted, as their mothers intended them to do. The baby bucks made at each other with heads lowered, ready to fight. The infant does backed timidly away to the edge of the meadow. But their mothers insisted, with gentle shakings of their heads and shovings of their velvet noses.

They were pretty creatures, these baby deer, with their soft orange-brown coats spotted with white, and their great innocent brown eyes! Everything about them, from their slender legs to their swinging stride, was graceful.

Now the mothers formed in line, the little ones trailing along behind them. "Ah!" thought Frisky Fox, "a game of 'Follow the Leader'." He and his brothers had often played it with Father and Mother Red Fox.

At first the does ran slowly around the clearing, then they quickened their pace, the little ones trying their best to keep up.

Suddenly Fleet Foot, who was in the lead, leaped over a fallen log at the edge of the glade and off into the woodland. The other does followed. Then came Fleet Foot's youngest. This little scamp only ran around the log, while her brother crawled under.

But that was not what Fleet Foot wanted. She came back, stamping her foot for attention.

"Do just as I do!" she insisted. "Now come back and try it over again." And she trotted out into the glade, and circled around it, the tinier fawn close at her heels, till she came to the log again.

"Now!" she stamped, taking the leap once more. The fawn followed till she came to the log, then stopped short, with her nose against it. Fleet Foot hurdled back, and coming up behind, butted the youngster with her head till the fawn tried to jump. This time the little creature went over, as light as a bit of thistle-down—probably much to her own surprise.

Then Fleet Foot turned to the larger fawn. "Come, now, there's nothing like trying," she urged. But he only gave a ba-a-ah! and wriggled under the tree-trunk again.

"Follow me," his mother bade him. First she led him several times around the glade. "Now!" she stamped, leaping the log once more. This time he followed without stopping to think about it.

The other fawns behaved much the same way, but at last their mothers had them all in line. Then what a race they had! First around and around the opening, faster and faster and faster. Then, without warning, across the log and back again, till every infant buck and doe of them could do it perfectly.

"Um!" sniffed Frisky Fox. "Wouldn't one of those little fellows make good eating? I'd certainly like to try it!" For the smell of venison that blew to his nostrils on the breeze fairly made his mouth water.

But Frisky was too wise a pup to think for an instant he could catch one. And so he finally trotted off to stay his appetite with field mice. But he told Father Red Fox about it that night in the den on the hillside, and the older fox made up his mind that next day he would be the one to watch when the fawns came to the meadow. If he couldn't catch one, at least he liked to know all that went on in the woods. One never knew when an odd bit of knowledge might come in handy to a fellow that lives by his wits.

That day the fawns were being drilled to run around and around in circles. They made a track like a figure 8, only with three loops instead of two. Sometimes one of the little fellows would slip and stumble.

"I have it," Father Red Fox told himself. "The fawns are learning to make a quick turn. Because they'd break their legs if they were to stumble that way in the underbrush."

The old fox knew that he could never catch one by the usual methods. He did wonder, though, if he might not corner one by trickery. So, gliding from tree-trunk to tree-trunk, he crept nearer the unsuspecting little school, keeping always on the side where the wind could tell no tales!

[image]

# CHAPTER II.—A FOXY TRICK.

Now it was chiefly in a spirit of mischief that Father Red Fox decided to chase the fawns. To tell the truth, the old fellow was proud of his wits; and though he knew he could not hope to catch them and bring them down by a straightaway race, he thought he might use some trickery on them.

So, he watched and waited till he should find them alone. After an hour or more in the racing meadow, Fleet Foot called to her little ones with a "He-eu" and a stamp of her little fore-hoof, and led them back to Lone Lake, where they all waded out after their supper of lily pads. Every minute of the time Father Red Fox was right behind, but always with the wind in his face, so that she wouldn't catch his musky scent on the breeze with that wonderful nose of hers.

Now Father Red Fox knew one thing about Fleet Foot, the doe. He knew that when she heard a sound that alarmed her, she always ran straight away from the sound, without once stopping to see what made it. No sooner, therefore, was she neck-deep in Lone Lake, with her back to the shore, than he cracked a twig behind her.

The doe, hearing that, supposed of course it must be Old Man Lynx, at least, or perhaps a big black bear, as nothing so small and dainty as a fox ever made a sound like that.

She was terribly frightened, and whistling the fawns to follow, she swam straight across the Lake, never once stopping for breath till they scrambled up the opposite bank.

But Father Red Fox had raced around the upper end of the Lake, just far enough back in the woods so that she couldn't see him. And the instant the tired little family planted their hoofs on dry ground, Red Fox, hiding behind a boulder, cracked an even larger twig, and made them think there was another bear on that side of the Lake.

So she had to lead them back across the Lake again, to the third line of shore. But Father Red Fox was there before her and cracked another twig to make her think there was a bear on that side, too.

This time the fawns were fairly gasping for breath, their little spotted sides

heaving painfully and their big eyes round with fright. But there was no help for it; Fleet Foot had to make them swim back across the Lake to the fourth bank, where she hoped to get into the woods before the three bears could catch her. She was quite worn out, herself, by now, and it was only the fear of death that kept her in the race at all. But finally up the bank she stumbled, and on down a forest trail, her fawns following desperately.

Father Red Fox laughed as he ran around the Lake. They were all so worn out that it should be an easy matter to corner them. In fact, that wicked fellow had one of the meanest plans in his black heart that ever deserved the name of a foxy trick. And so far it had worked.

Fleet Foot, believing she had nothing less than a bear on her trail, raced on and on till her flanks dripped foam and her legs felt weak and wobbly—which was just what the old fox intended. On he raced after her, knowing she wouldn't stop even to turn her head.

Then, suddenly, he made a short cut in the trail and headed her straight toward a brush heap. The tired doe drew her trembling legs together for the leap that would carry her over in safety. But there was not quite enough spring left in those delicate hind quarters. She came down too soon, catching one of her slim feet in the brush. It broke her leg.

Ah, but Red Fox had hoped it would be one of the fawns. Fleet Foot he dared not approach, because she could strike him with her sharp fore-hoofs, and punish him severely. In fact, had she known it was only a fox behind her, she would have stopped to face him long ago.

The fawns—little rascals that they were—had not tried to leap the brush heap; they had left the trail and gone around it, hiding—when their mother fell—by crawling under a juniper bush. And there they waited, without so much as waggling an ear, till Red Fox had given up his quest in disgust and trotted away home.

But their troubles were not ended. For one thing, they were hungry. Besides, what was Fleet Foot to do, helpless there where a real bear might find her?

Just then they heard a cowbell.

Clover Blossom, the soft-eyed Jersey at the Valley Farm, must have found a broken place in the pasture fence, and wandered into the woods again. She loved to go exploring.

This time she gave the Boy a chase. Here it was, nearly dark! Straining his ears to catch the sound, he decided he must creep very softly upon her, or she would never let him catch her.

The Boy, however, was not the only one to hear the tinkle of the cowbell. Though Clover Blossom grazed quite unaware that she was being watched, as an actual fact she had quite an audience of wood folk around her, peering and

sniffing and studying the situation. Softly, silently, creeping through the hazel copse, came Frisky, the fox pup, as curious as his nose was long. Then came Bobby, Madame Lynx's kitten, to whose nostrils the odor was most tempting, though he did not dare attack an animal so large. Crouched flat along a low-hanging branch, he peered and peered with his narrow gold-green eyes, his claws working nervously into the bark.

Came also Unk-Wunk, the Porcupine, rattling his slow way up a beech tree from whose top he could see all that was going on. He, too, watched curiously as the Jersey wandered from one huckleberry bush to another, lowing faintly now and then as she realized that she needed to be milked.

But the two who were most interested as she came their way were the hungry fawns. They had waited hours for the familiar stamp of their mother's foot that should call them to her, and for the warm milk that had never failed them when they needed it, and their little stomachs ached worse and worse.

The hot sun had crept across the sky, and the birds who had chirped and warbled over their breakfast had come out again for the cool of the late afternoon to chatter over their worms. Then the sun had grown large and red in the west, and the crickets had begun to chirp, and the white-footed deer mice to scuttle through the leaves in search of beetles. Finally the shadows had grown long and black, and the woods full of a breathing silence, and still they waited for their mother to come and feed them.

Then, at last, they crept to where Clover Blossom mooed her invitation for some one to relieve her udders of their creamy burden. And when the Boy finally peered through the bushes beyond which she stood, he stopped amazed. For there on either side of her a tiny fawn stood nursing!

"Something must have happened to their mother," he told himself. "I wonder if I could coax them to go home with Clover Blossom?"

Then he heard a rustle behind him. Bobby Lynx was slinking home. (He was ever a coward where human beings were concerned.) The next instant the boy spied Fleet Foot, lying helpless in the brush heap.

In her exhaustion after the chase, the pain of her broken leg, and her terror, as she listened, hour after hour, for the coming of stealthy padded feet, she had been too weak to struggle. Then had come a kindly stupor.

The Boy set about applying such first aid as he had at his command. First knotting her fore feet together with his handkerchief so that she could not struggle, he searched until he found a cedar sapling very nearly the size of the leg that was broken. With his jack-knife he made two length-wise slits and removed the bark in two pieces, as nearly the same size as he could make them. They were just long enough to reach below the foot of the deer and above the knee.

These he lined comfortably with dry moss and crumpled grass, for he was

going to be as tender of the doe as he would be of a person. Next he tore his shirt, which was an old one, into bandages the width of his wrist, knotting their ends together. For splints he went down to Lone Lake and gathered a bundle of good strong rushes.

But when he tried to set the bone, Fleet Foot struggled so that he had to run home for his father.

The Valley Farmer was a man who could not see any creature suffer, so he came straight back with his son. Lifting her to the ground, the farmer braced himself and held the injured leg while the Boy gently but firmly grasped it with one hand above the fracture and one below. My! How it must have hurt! But his practised fingers pulled the two pieces of bone in opposite directions till he got them end to end! Fleet Foot tried hard to struggle free, for of course she did not understand. But she was helpless. Then the Boy worked the bones, ever so gently, till a slight thud announced to his listening ear that they had fitted together right. Next, he applied the padded halves of the cedar bark, which—as he had intended—did not reach quite around the leg. For, in this way, he could tie them more firmly, as he bandaged them immovably in place with the strips of his torn shirt.

"There!" the Farmer sighed at last. "That ought to heal. I don't see why a few weeks of rest and good feeding ought not to set her on her feet again. But we'll have to make a litter to take her home."

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# CHAPTER III.—AT THE VALLEY FARM.

Now that her broken leg had been set so skillfully, Fleet Foot felt better. And the fawns were content to get their supper of the Jersey cow.

But the Boy and his father had to face the problem of getting them all back to the Valley Farm.

"How can we make a litter?" asked the Boy, who was not so skilled in

wood-craft as the Farmer.

"First, find two good long poles," his father directed. "I wish we'd brought an axe, but perhaps you can manage with your jack-knife." And under his direction the Boy found what he needed. Next they peeled the bark from a chestnut tree, and on this they arranged a mattress of dried moss, then tied it firmly between the two long poles. Stretching this flat on the ground, they laid Fleet Foot on it and carried her home in state, one of them shouldering either end of the litter.

"She ought to ride easy on that," said the backwoodsman. But the doe shrank back in fear when the Boy tried laying his hand caressingly on her velvet throat. For every moment she expected they would kill her.

The fawns followed Clover Blossom, and finally they came out into the starlit meadow, where Fleet Foot caught the odor of cows and sheep from the big red barn. The next thing she knew, she was lying on a mound of sweet-smelling dried clover, in a clean stall of that same barn, and there was a pail of water beside her. She roused herself to drink feverishly, standing on three legs, but she could not eat. Then followed a few hours when she slept despite her fears, because she was too tired to keep awake.

In the pink dawn she awoke at the sound of the milk-pails, and her first thought was of the fawns. The Boy brought her a hatful of grass; but her great eyes only searched wistfully through the woodland and meadow before the open door, and on to the dew-wet forest where she thought they waited, and she struggled weakly to get to her feet and go to them.

"She's worrying about her babies," said the Boy. "Can't we show them to her?" he begged his father.

"The only trouble with that," the farmer replied, "is that, once they get a sight of her, they won't have anything more to do with Clover Blossom, and she's got to take care of them till their own mother is well again. But that leg will heal quickly. The bone was broken in only one place. We've got to keep her quiet, though,—and the fawns are better off where they are."

Thus several weeks went by, till at last Fleet Foot was able to trip daintily into the pasture lot. But still she worried about the fawns. She was comfortable and well fed, and was even becoming used to the Boy, who brought her food and water every morning and sometimes a few grains of rock salt. Through the bars of the open doorway she could gaze straight into the cool green woods all day. Had it not been for her longing for the fawns, she would have been quite content to lie still and get well.

The bone had set quickly, for her life in the open had given her pure blood and much reserve strength. But she was anxious to make her escape and search for her babies. Little did she dream, in the confusion of sounds and smells that

filled the barn every day, that the pair actually came to Clover Blossom's stall.

Meantime, the fawns throve on the Jersey milk. Though too shy to mingle with the cows and sheep in the pasture lot, they spent their days in a clump of alders down by the brook.

"Won't they be happy when they get their own mother back?" the Boy exclaimed to his father one evening.

The Father looked at his son in a puzzled way.

"The doe has disappeared," he announced. "I had just taken the splints off her leg. It was healed as good as new. Thought I'd turn her loose in the pasture to limber up a bit, when—would you believe it?—she leaped clean over that fence, and off into the woods out of sight."

"Honestly?" exclaimed the Boy. "Without so much as a thank you! And what will become of her now?"

"Oh, she'll be all right. But isn't it a shame now we didn't let her have her fawns?"

"Perhaps we can keep them ourselves," ventured the Boy wistfully, for he loved pets. "We could tame them and let them grow up with the cows. They're half tame already."

"I don't believe a wild thing is ever really happy that way," mused the Farmer. "Do you?"

"No, perhaps not," decided the Boy. "And besides, their mother will break her heart if she never finds them again."

"She'll feel badly, of course. But don't you see, the fawns will take to the woods again, sooner or later, unless we keep them tied all the time. And then do you know what would happen? They wouldn't know how to take care of themselves, without their mother's training."

"Oh," said the Boy. "And some hungry animal might catch them for its dinner!"

"I'm afraid so," agreed the Farmer. "It is always the young animals that have lost their mothers that get caught."

"Say, I've noticed a funny thing," said the Boy, a few days later. "Clover Blossom has been giving more milk lately, and yet the fawns aren't weaned."

"You didn't see what I saw last night," said the Farmer, smiling. And he told the Boy where to watch.

Meantime what had become of Fleet Foot? First she leaped the fence, and took to the trail down which Clover Blossom had wandered—here over the smooth pine needles, there through the crackling oak leaves, and yonder over a fallen log. And as she went, she nibbled course after course of the dainties of the woodland.

How fit she felt, after her long imprisonment! How swift her slender hoofs,

how strong her long hind legs that could send her over a hazel copse like steel springs! And how good it was to be alive in a world all sunshine and dancing butterflies and tinkling streams!

But where were her fawns? She searched and searched for some sign of the little fellows. But she searched in vain. And all the joy went out of life again.

Then, one evening, as she stood on a hill-top watching the Boy drive the cows home from pasture, she saw something that made her lonely heart beat high with hope. She couldn't make out the little spotted coats so far away, but she did see their red-brown outlines, so tiny beside the cows, and the furtive way they shied along, as if they never could get used to coming right out in the open. And her anxious mother-heart assured her that they were worth a closer view.

So, the next night, before they turned off the lane to the pasture lot, the fawns heard the little stamp that had always been their mother's signal. "Wait where you are—and hide!" she bade them with her whistled "Hiew!" "I will come to you."

And they obeyed, thrilling with a great wave of homesick longing for the mother they had thought lost to them. The Boy, tip-toeing back to see what had become of his pets, found the doe in the pasture lot, nursing her fawns.

And though he did not know it, she stayed with them until the first gray light in the east warned her that she must leave them for the day. For the fence was too high for the fawns to leap.

The next night the Boy watched again, from the cover of the hay-stack. Before long the doe leaped smoothly into the pasture, stamping for the fawns. Then he saw the flash of her white tail signaling for them to follow, and after that, two tinier tails wig-wagging through the dusk as they disappeared in the alders down by the brook that ran through the lower end of the pasture.

The Boy stared after them awhile, a smile of sympathy in his eyes. Then—ever so softly, so as not to alarm them—he slipped across to where she had leaped the fence, and lifted the top bars away.

The next morning the fawns were gone!

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# CHAPTER IV.—THE ROUND-UP.

Once back in the good green woods, both Fleet Foot and the fawns capered joyously.

It was good just to be alive.

Up and down through the forest trails they galloped,—down to Lone Lake, then back to Pollywog Pond and along the familiar trails on the slopes of Mt. Olaf. Summer was even riper and lovelier than when they had been taken to the Valley Farm,—and to the fawns, remember, it was their first taste of mid-summer in the Maine woods.

These tiny fellows leaped and gamboled hide-and-seek, till you would have thought they would have broken their fragile legs among the boulders and fallen tree-trunks. But their mother knew her training had been thorough, and they would know just how to leap and land with safety.

"Hello, there!—Chick-a-dee-dee, Chick-a-dee-dee," a little gray bird in a black cap kept calling, as he followed from tree to tree.

When at last they had had their dinner of warm milk, and Fleet Foot had cropped her fill of the tender green things that lay like a banquet table everywhere about them, she led them to a little rocky ledge that over-looked Lone Lake, where they could lie under the partial shade of a clump of yellow birch trees and rest, while she chewed her cud. The black fly season was well past, and there was nothing to disturb them save a passing swarm of midges that couldn't begin to bite through their thick fur.

(They little dreamed that Frisky, the Red Fox Pup, was peering down on them from a higher crag, where he, too, crouched on the red-brown soil that proved such a perfect cam-ou-flage.)

No one save a fox could have seen the fawns, so long as they lay still, their tawny orange-brown coats blended so perfectly with the ground. And if anyone had noticed the white spots on their sides, he would have taken them for a glint of the creamy birch-bark.

At first the 'two youngsters watched a yellow-jacketed bumble-bee, who bumbled and tumbled among the perfumed spikes of the Solomon's seals. Then

their ears pricked to a new voice.

"Greetings, my friends!" called a cheery red-brown coated bird who had been rustling about among the dead leaves just behind them.

He was as large as a robin, with even longer beak and tail, and his creamy breast was streaked with darker brown.

"Hello, Thrush," bleated the fawns in shy friendliness.

"You mustn't look for any nest in the bushes around here, because you won't find it," twittered Thrush, in a tone Old Man Red Fox would have been suspicious of. "Listen! I am going to give you a concert!" And he flew to the birch tree over their heads.

There followed a program of the most varied trills and whistles the fawns had ever heard; and though his voice was not so sweet toned as some of the tinier birds', his throaty trills and liquid, low-pitched chirps and whistles were just as delightful as they could be.

There were bird calls all around them, "Pee-wees" and "Chip-chip-chips" and "Wee-wee-wee-wees" and all sorts of soft little calls and answers.

They none of them minded the fawns in the least, except those who had nests on the ground. They always watched nervously when the frisky fellows capered too near, with their sharp little hoofs, though they knew the fawns wouldn't hurt an ant if they knew it.

Every now and again the singers would cease, when one of the soft patches of white cloud got in front of the sun; for instantly the air grew chilly, and a breeze started all the tree-tops to waving till the birds had to hang on hard.

Then the Lake would ruffle into tiny wave-lets and grow dark green like the woods along the shore-line. For before, the water had lain as still as a silver mirror, reflecting the pale blue of the warm sky.

In weather like this, it was good just to lie still and watch and listen, or drowse off with the sun warm on one's fur and the spicy earth smells in one's nostrils. The green world was so interesting.

When a passing cloud of a darker gray brought the big drops pattering about them for a few minutes, they merely scampered under an over-hanging boulder, where they huddled together on a drift of leaves, and watched it all.

Later, when the bull-frogs began their "Ke-dunk, ke-dunk," down under the banks of Lone Lake, where the ducks were feeding their nestlings, and the sun began to send long red beams slanting through the tree-trunks, Fleet Foot led them down to a shallow cove for a taste of lily pads, and they waded in and tried a nibble of everything she tasted.

After that came a night under a drooping pine tree, whose lowest branch roofed over a boulder in the most inviting way, and the wind droned through the branches and blew the mosquitoes all away, and they lay snuggled warmly

together on the fragrant needles, and watched the stars come out.

In the morning they were just starting out on an exploring tour when they were alarmed by the baying of a hound.

Now Lop Ear had always had an important duty at the Valley Farm. It had been his part to round up the cows when night came, or when any of them went astray in the woods. And all day yesterday he had missed Fleet Foot from her stall in the hay-barn.

True, she had always seemed different from the regular cows. Until she came there with her broken leg, he had always supposed she belonged in the woods. But surely, surely the Farmer would not have kept her there unless she belonged there, reasoned the, faithful dog. And now she was gone!

There was but one thing to do: he must go in search of her and bring her home.

All that day he tried in vain to find her trail. The next morning he was up with the sun. This time he would search farther afield. "Wow! Bow-wow! Wow-wow-wow!" Here was a footprint, unless his nose deceived him! What's more, they had passed that way not ten minutes since! It was but a matter of following the trail, and he would be nipping at their heels and driving them back to the Farm.

"Wow-wow-wow!" he bayed; and Frisky, the Red Fox Pup, heard and came trotting to peek at him and see what it was all about.

The sound filled the fawns with uneasiness. They had always been afraid of Lop Ear, with his nipping and yapping around the cattle.

"Children," bade Fleet Foot sternly, "hurry to that clump of bracken and lie down. Stretch your heads and fore legs out straight in front of you and lie there as flat as you can make yourselves,—while I lead this hound off somewhere where he'll lose your scent."

The fawns obeyed instantly.

Fleet Foot then doubled back on her trail, and with a stamp and a snort to call the hound's attention, she soon had him following her great bounds in quite the opposite direction. She kept just far enough ahead of him to make sure he wouldn't give up the chase—though she could easily have out-distanced him.

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# CHAPTER V.—A SON OF THE WILD.

Now Frisky, the Red Fox Pup, admired no one so much as he did his father. And he had heard his father tell how he had chased the doe and her fawns that dreadful day when Fleet Foot broke her leg.

Not that the little rascal really wanted to hurt those gentle soft-eyed babies. He wasn't hungry, and besides, he couldn't have killed them had he wanted to. He just thought it would be fun to play that he was Father Red Fox and give them a good scare. (But how were the fawns to know that?) In other words, like a great many very young persons, he didn't stop to think of the other fellow's point of view in the matter.

Thus, no sooner had he seen Fleet Foot headed in the other direction, leaving the fawns unprotected, than he pranced merrily up to them, his yellow eyes gleaming with mischief.

"Yip, yip!" he yelled at them in his high-pitched little voice.

Now the fawns had been told to lie still. But how could they, when danger was almost upon them? They were certainly not going to lie there and let this little wild dog bite them!

With a bleat of alarm they sprang to their feet and raced through the brush, leaping over bush and brier and boulder as if their very lives depended on it.

But Frisky Fox could also leap bush and brier and boulder. And he came leaping after, just two jumps behind them!

Now around a clump of greenbriar, down a trail of dainty pointed hoof prints that led through brush head high,—up hill, down hill the trio sped, startling the pheasants and sending them into the air with a whirr.

Here the trail turned abruptly down the side of a precipice, and the fawns followed, while Frisky, having paused for a moment when his tail got caught in a bramble, had to come trotting after with his nose to the ground, as he could no longer see them.

Now the fawns had never been taught that water carries no scent. They

just happened to go splashing across a bit of a frog pond that lay cupped among hillocks of seedling pines. But looking back at every seventh leap or so, they could see that the fox pup followed his nose to the water's edge, and there stopped and sniffed all about uncertainly, before again catching a glimpse of them.

But though the chase went merrily on (that is, merrily on the fox's part), the fawns had learned a valuable lesson.

They now made straight for Lone Lake, and my! You should have seen the ducks take flight as these two alarming little fellows came splashing in among them!

A deer, when pursued by hounds, will always take to water when he can, and the hounds have no scent to follow. Then, unless there is a hunter along, and he catches sight of his quarry, and fires, the deer are safe.

The Red Fox Pup uses his eyes, as well as his nose, and he was so close behind, and understood so well this trick of taking to water, (for he escaped the hounds that way himself), that he wasn't fooled the least little bit in the world. Not he!

Only once they had taken the plunge, the little fellows decided to swim out to a reedy islet where they could rest. And the fox pup didn't think it worth while to get his fur wet. For when his great brush of a tail gets wet, it is so heavy that it weighs him down, and he can't run nearly so fast, so the mice all get away.

Of course the fawns thought it was all their own cleverness, and you should have heard them telling Fleet Foot about it when she found them there!

The fawns never tired of watching the life that stirred everywhere about them, their great soft eyes filled with pleasant wonder.

One day it would be the one soft cluck of Mother Grouse Hen, calling to her chicks to hide before Frisky Fox should pass that way.

When he had passed, looking so wise and knowing, (with his bright eyes peering into every nook and corner, and his pointed little nose testing the air for a taint), Mother Grouse Hen would give a different sort of cluck; and back the frightened chicks would come to her, and she would gather them comfortingly under her wings, pressing each wee brown baby to her down-covered breast to reassure him.

Then she would utter a soft, brooding cluck that told them how she loved them, and how safe they were with Mother to look out for them.

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# CHAPTER VI.—A STRANGE FRIENDSHIP.

What was the matter with the hen-roost at the Valley Farm, the fox pup asked himself? He had killed so many field mice in the course of the summer that he felt he was really entitled to one of the farmer's nice fat hens,—because the mice might have destroyed the farmer's crops, had Frisky not prevented.

At the same time he knew that Lop Ear, the hound at the Valley Farm, would have another opinion in the matter.

Frisky sat up and thought.

Lop Ear would give the alarm, and then, even if he threw the hound off the scent, there would be men with guns, and more dodging of bullets than he cared to risk. He had often seen it, watching from his hill-top in the woods. And he always tried to profit by other people's experience.

Suddenly his bright eyes began to snap. The very idea! He would make friends with Lop Ear.

Then Lop Ear might try to be sound asleep on the night when Frisky visited the chicken coop; and should the Hired Man get out his gun, the hound would surely lose his trail.

Thereafter, for days on end, Frisky made the strangest advances to the dignified old hound, whenever the latter fared forth into the woods to catch him a mouse for supper. It was very much like a puppy trying to coax an old dog to play.

"Come chase me!" Frisky would invite, dancing ahead just out of Lop Ear's reach. Then, "I'll chase you," he would vary the program. And Lop Ear (half unwillingly) played the role assigned him, till at last he came to look on his evening ramble in the woods with Frisky as a distinct part of his day's pleasuring.

Not that Frisky ever came within reach of Lop Ear's jaws. No, indeed! That was carrying the thing a bit too far. But he did finally get the hound to the point where he no longer considered it his duty to try to make an end of the young fox. And he really enjoyed their games of hide and seek.

The Boy from the Valley Farm did not know what to make of Lop Ear's growing fondness for solitary rambles.

One night, when the October moon gleamed cool and sparkling through the fringe of fir trees, young Frisky Fox might have been seen loping softly through the corn-field.

"Who goes there?" bayed Lop Ear, as he leaped the barn-yard fence.

"Come and play," coaxed Frisky. "You can't catch me!" and leaping up the sloping roof of the hen-house, he squeezed gracefully through the barred window. A moment more and there was a stifled squawk and Frisky squeezed his way back through the bars, dragging a hen behind him.

But alas for the best laid plans.

"Bow-wow-wow! You can't do that, you know!" suddenly bayed Lop Ear. "That's carrying the game a little too far. After all, I have my duty to perform."

"What is it?" yelled the Hired Man, poking his head from his sleeping-room in the barn-loft. "A fox, eh?" and he grabbed for his gun, leaning far out to scan the moonlit fields.

Frisky Fox, by keeping the shed between himself and the gun, made off through the corn-field with the hen across his shoulder.

Lop Ear, his warning uttered, now dashed madly in quite the wrong direction,—for the memory of the fox pup's friendship was strong upon him. But the Hired Man was not to be fooled.

In less time than it takes to tell it, he was out circling the field, gun in hand. And the bright moonlight soon showed him where the cornstalks rustled with Frisky's passing.

"Hi, there!" yelled the Hired Man, gun in hand, as he raced around the corn-field.

But Frisky was an excellent judge of distance, and he knew to a certainty that he was out of gun range.

He therefore deliberately stopped where he was and snatched a bite of his hen.

As the Hired Man came nearer, the fox pup ran farther, always keeping just about so much distance between himself and the gun. He could easily have outdistanced his pursuer. But he was in a mischievous mood to-night, and it pleased him to see how far he could go toward devouring the entire hen while the angry man looked on.

He did it, too, saucily enough, gobbling a bite here and a bite there, looking back over his shoulder the while at the man with the gun. One or two shots did ring out on the crisp night air, kicking up the dirt a few rods behind him, but Frisky Fox ate on, secure by those few rods of space, as well he knew.

Only once did he miscalculate, the shot landing so near him that he knew

the next one would surely get him if the Hired Man tried again.

Quick as a flash the clever rascal toppled over on his side, playing dead. The ruse worked, for the Hired Man did not shoot again. And while he was fumbling his way through the corn-field to where he believed the fox lay waiting, Frisky was making for the woods with his nimble black feet fairly twinkling over the ground.

Throwing himself at last on the soft pine needles on a little hill-top, he peered through the moonlight to where the Hired Man was staring helplessly about him wondering where the dead fox lay. Frisky laughed silently at the success of his ruse,—the first time he had ever played 'possum himself, though he had seen it done once before, when his mother had been hard pressed. In her case she had actually let the boy pick her up, when he found her with one foot in a trap. But to her surprise he had only released her with pitying words and a caress on her silky red head.

No such treatment could be expected of the Hired Man, Frisky knew.

Lop Ear, slinking back to the barn-yard with tail between his legs, was just unlucky enough to catch the Hired Man's notice as the latter was returning foxless.

"Here," he ordered threateningly. "Put your nose to that trail and follow it, or I'll show you what's what!"

The next thing Frisky knew, he heard the baying of his one-time friend close on his trail. With a yawn and a lick at his jaws, where a feather still clung, he struck off as easily as if he had just arisen from a sound night's sleep.

He didn't even bother to keep very far ahead of the dog.

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# CHAPTER VII.—A WIT OUTWITTED.

Not that Frisky Fox believed greatly in Lop Ear's friendship.

Not after the way the hound had given the alarm at the chicken coop!

But he knew that at any moment he could so far outdistance that doubtful ally that he wasn't in the slightest danger. The ground was firm and dry, and he had all the advantage of his lighter weight and nimbler feet.

Had there been soft snow on the ground it might have been different. But the first frost had not yet ripened the hazel nuts in the woods around Mt. Olaf.

Once, just to punish him, Frisky turned back and bared his teeth so viciously at Lop Ear that the hound was driven back—to the Hired Man's amazement.

Then Frisky tripped his way down to Rapid River and crossed on the wet brook stones, leaving no scent for Lop Ear to follow.

The hound well off the trail, Frisky again crossed the stream farther up on a fallen log. And circling around through the shadows, he was soon following the Hired Man, slipping behind trees and boulders and smiling from ear to ear as the latter stumbled along with his useless gun.

When at last the hound stopped short at the river bank, where he lost the scent, the Hired Man gave it up in disgust, and went back home to his bed.

And Frisky, the handsome little scoundrel, calmly sought out the dry south side of a hill which would shelter him from the wind and slept with his black legs doubled under him and his white-tipped brush of a tail curled comfortably around him to keep out the draft.

Shrewd, cautious, daring, the Red Fox Pup bade fair at this stage of his career to develop the best set of brains in all the North Woods.

Yet there was one at the Valley Farm that could out-wit him.

Frisky was sitting on his haunches a few days later in the midst of the now deserted hay field, listening for the squeak of a meadow mouse, when something made him prick up his ears.

There was something about that squeak that sounded just a wee bit different from any squeak he had ever heard before.

But no, there it was again, unmistakably the tiny voice of a mouse on the other side of the field. The fox pup had such needle-sharp ears that he could hear fainter sounds than any human being ever could have.

But though Frisky Fox was clever, the Boy at the Valley Farm was more so. And the Boy sat behind a bush at the farther end of the field, as motionless as the gray stump that Frisky thought he was. This time the joke was on the Red Fox Pup, for the squeaks he heard issued from the Boy's pursed lips. It was an excellent imitation.

He tip-toed nearer and nearer the tiny squeaks, while the Boy gazed at the graceful fellow through his new field glasses.

He was a handsome fellow, was Frisky Fox, with his yellow-red coat shining sleek in the sunlight. And my! How his great plume of a tail fluffed out behind him! His tail was nearly as long as the rest of his body put together, and it fluffed out nearly as broadly. Mother Red Fox certainly had a son to be proud of!

Of a sudden a little breeze shifted around to where it brought the foxy one a faint scent. It told his keen black nose there was something down there besides the bush.

It wasn't a mouse, either!

"No, sir, that's no field mouse," said Frisky's nose, as the Red Fox Pup circled to windward of the tiny squeaking sounds.

"That's the Boy at the Valley Farm! That's what that is! Now I'll just pretend not to see him at all till I get behind that rock, then I'll race for the woods."

For Frisky didn't know that the thing the Boy was pointing at him was only a pair of field glasses. And it wouldn't have made much difference even had he known. Frisky did not like to be watched. He therefore did exactly as he had planned, crossing the field with seeming lack of interest in anything save the purple and yellow of asters and golden-rod and the scarlet of woodbine, and the blue of the Indian summer sky, till he felt himself out of range.

At the instant of his discovery that it was one of those dangerous human creatures that sat there like a stump he had cocked his ears sharply and leaped fully two feet into the air in his surprise.

That was the only sign he made, however, of the extreme anxiety that set his heart to thumping, till he was just on the edge of the woods; then he suddenly looked back with one of his thin, husky barks, to know why the Boy should have tried to fool him.

But afterwards, from the shelter of the barberry vines that fringed the old stone wall, he peered and peeked and wondered about it all as long as the Boy remained.

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# CHAPTER VIII.—STEEP TRAILS.

These hot days in August, when the trout took to the very deepest, coldest pools they could find, and hid themselves all day under the over-hanging rocks, and every creature that couldn't take to the water longed for rain, Fleet Foot used to lead her little family up the steep trails to the top of Mount Olaf or some near-by mountain-top, where the wind blew cool night and day.

These trips were full of much joy for the fawns, for there was all the spice of adventure in following a winding hoof-path that led—they knew not where. For one never knew what might be just around the next turn.

How their hearts thumped when they came suddenly to the edge of a precipice, where they could look down at Beaver Brook tumbling over the rocks away, 'way down below I Or perhaps they could get just a glimpse of Lone Lake lying gleaming in the hollow of the hills.

Not that there was any trail in the real sense of the word.

Left to themselves, they could not have told one rock from another, save here and there where a bit of mica gleamed silver against the gray, or a scraggly pine leaned too far out over a ledge to look safe.

But to their mother their trail was as plain as the nose on your face. It was just a matter of turning and twisting, here to pass between those two queer-shaped boulders, and there to go around that flat rock which teetered alarmingly beneath one's feet. She had been over it all so many times that she had learned the look of each new turn of the pathway. Had so much as one pinnacle been out of place, she would have known,—and wondered why.

One still, sunshiny morning, after they had drunk their fill at a cool green pool of Beaver Brook, they started up the mountain-side for a day under the shade of the last fringe of evergreens before one came to the bare, rocky ridges, where it got too cold for anything to grow, except in sheltered crevices.

The fawns danced and capered to the music of the bird song that filled the woods, while Fleet Foot cropped all sorts of delicious tid-bits,—now a clump of oyster mushrooms growing shelf-like on a fallen log, and now a bunch of blue-berries, plump and juicy and sun-sweet. Life was one long holiday.

One misty morning, as Fleet Foot was leading them in great bounds through the tall meadow grass, the fawns came to a sudden stand-still, their eyes popping with surprise. For they had just barely escaped stepping on the writhing coils of a great long snake.

Their bleat of fear brought Fleet Foot instantly.

"Pouf! That's only a garter snake," she reassured them, with one glance at the length-wise stripes (yellow and dark gray). "That's nothing to be afraid of. The only kind you want to look out for is the kind with cross-wisp stripes. I don't believe there is more than one snake in all the North Woods that is poisonous,—and there are at least a dozen that are perfectly harmless."

"What is the poisonous one?" bleated the trembling fawns.

"The rattler. But you won't see one of those in a year's time,—not in these woods, where it gets so cold in winter. They love it hot and dry, and so of course they live mostly out West, though you do find a few sometimes among the rocks on the warm south side of a mountain."

"Oo! What if we'd meet a rattler?" shivered the fawns.

"Well, he'd warn you before you went too near."

"Warn us?—How?"

"He'd rattle, of course. He has a little set of bones on his tail that he can rattle, and when you hear that, you need to look out, and get away quickly."

"Are the others really harmless, Mother?"

"Harmless to fawns. That is, they have no poison bite. Snakes do a lot of good, eating pests."

"But I don't like snakes," insisted the tinier fawn.

"Well, neither does Mother. But it's so silly, children, to be afraid. Where is that garter snake? Gone, to be sure! And even the rattler only strikes because he thinks you are going to kill him."

The fawns were very thoughtful after that. "Mother," they finally bleated, "Seems as if even the meanest creatures in the woods had *some* use."

"That's right," their mother answered them.

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# CHAPTER IX—THE OGRE OF THE AIR.

It was one of those breezy days when white wind clouds piled up against the sky, and patches of shadow traveled across the mountain-sides.

Fleet Foot had decided to take the fawns to Mountain Pond, in the pass between Mount Olaf and Old Bald-face, a peak that had been burned bare of trees by a forest fire, and now grew nothing much save blue-berries for the bears to feast on.

Fleet Foot wasn't a bit afraid of bears at this time of year, knowing how greatly they prefer a vegetarian diet, though, at that, she didn't intend to go too near. (After all, the steep gulch of Beaver Brook Bed lay between the two mountain-sides.)

They had a lovely time at the Pond, where they met several other does, with their fawns, and the youngsters played together while their mothers gossiped over their cuds. The cool breeze ruffled their fur delightfully, and they found enough shade in the patch of woods that huddled in the head of the gulch.

As the sun neared the tops of the purple peaks that faded away to the west, the little group started back down the trail to where there was more herbage to browse upon, Fleet Foot lingering along to allow the fawns plenty of time to pick out a sure footing. For it was their first trip over this particular trail.

Carefully they wound over a great over-hanging boulder, on the edge of which they paused to peer, with braced hoofs, over the precipice, which here dropped sheer to the rocks below. Just beyond, the first falls of Beaver Brook dashed green-white over the ledges.

Then Fleet Foot hurried on to the foot of the falls, where one might take a shower bath in the spray.

"Come on, children," she whistled over her shoulder, her eyes on the path ahead. And the tinkle of the falling water filled her ears till she could not have heard their foot-steps following, had she tried.

But fawns will be fawns. And the youngsters stopped to watch a queer

shadow that now danced across their path. Cloud shadows they had watched all day, but this one was different. In the first place, it was such a tiny thing,—for a cloud. And it danced about in the most amusing manner,—much faster than any cloud shadow they had seen before. In fact, it seemed to be going around and around them in big circles. And it looked exactly as if the little cloud had wings like a bird.

Alas for two such little helpless ones!—Had they but looked above their heads, instead of at the circling shadow, they would have discovered that it was a giant bird that made it. In short, it was Baldy the Eagle, the ogre of the air,—and an ogre that especially delighted in having fawn for supper!

An ugly fellow was Baldy, with his great curved beak and his great yellow claws. His body alone was bigger than that of the fawns, and his wings spread out like the wings of an aeroplane. He was mostly a muddy brown, with white head and fan-spread tail, and he smelled horribly fishy, for he isn't a bit particular about what he eats, and frequently stuffs himself so full of the spoiled fish he finds on the shore that he can't even fly.

The air hissed to his wings.

He waited now till he felt that Fleet Foot was surely too far away to come to their rescue, should he attack the fawns. For he knew from experience that with her sharp hoofs she could put up a fight he would rather not face.

For a while he wandered if he should just simply drop down upon one of the little fellows and pin his talons into his back, and fly away to his nest. But it would be awfully heavy to carry and of course it would kick and wriggle, 'till like enough he would be unable to manage his feathered aeroplane, and they would run into some jagged rock.

If the fawns had been orphans, he might have killed one right there, and no one would have interfered.

But they were not orphans, and their mother would come racing back and cut him to pieces with those knife-edged fore-hoofs.

Ha! An idea popped into his ugly old head.—He would scare one of the fawns off the edge of the precipice, and it would leap to its death on the rocks below; and then he could wait till Fleet Foot had gone, for his feast.

Swooping lower and lower, while still the foolish fawns stared innocently at the dancing shadow, he suddenly flapped his wings about the tinier fawn, startling him terribly, but not enough to make him back off the cliff.

Stronger measures must be tried,—and there was no time to waste; for at the fawn's first bleat of terror, Fleet Foot heard and was now leaping like the wind, back the trail to his rescue.

Swooping again, Baldy began beating the little fellow with great heavy blows of his middle wing joints. It hurt dreadfully, and the frightened fawn

turned first this way, then that, in his endeavor to get away. Nearer and nearer the edge of the precipice he crowded. Now one hind foot had actually slipped off the rock face, and he had to struggle to regain his balance.

Then the one thing happened that could have saved him. Fleet Foot reached the spot. Rearing furiously on her hind legs, she struck at Baldy's head with her sharp hoofs, tearing great wounds in his scalp. Then, with a scream of rage and pain, he raised his wings and slanted swiftly upward, wings hissing, to his granite peak.

The fawn was not seriously hurt,—only terribly frightened. His back was bruised, but that would heal, and he would be none the worse for his experience.

But where was the other fawn?—They found him wedged in between the boulders,—the one place where he could ever have escaped the beat of those wings. Fleet Foot praised him mightily for having so much sense, and he felt quite cocky,—though of course his brother was the real hero of the day.

One other danger marred their summer.

Every now and again, as they were passing beneath some low-hanging branch, they would catch a glimpse of a tawny form flattened along the limb, watching them with pale yellow eyes that gleamed through narrowed lids.

Perhaps it would be in a deep, dark hemlock thicket, or a cedar swamp, that they would meet the giant cat.

He was a ferocious-looking fellow, was Old Man Lynx, with his great, square, whiskered face, and his ears with their black tassels and the black stripe down the middle of his back. And my, how his claws crunched the bark as he sharpened them! How his whiskers twitched and his mouth watered as the fawns passed beneath him! He seemed all teeth and claws.

Perhaps the little family would be drowsing peacefully in the shade of a long September afternoon when suddenly some spirit of their ancestors, (or was it some guardian angel of their antlered tribe?) would whisper "Danger!" and set their fur to rising along their spines in a cold shiver of nameless fear.

Had Old Man Lynx ever really put it to the test, he could have won out with Fleet Foot. But he knew the sharp drive of her little hoofs, and he was terribly afraid of pain. (Did he not wear a great scar in his side, due to an adventure of his rash young days, when a fat buck had given him a rip with his antlers?)

Perhaps that was why Fleet Foot always raced away in a wide curve that presently brought her back to where she could peer curiously at the invader of her solitude, without herself being seen.

She used to spy in the same way on Old Man Red Fox, and Frisky, his promising young hopeful.

In fact, what with Frisky spying on the fawns, and the fawns watching Frisky, these children of hostile tribes kept pretty close track of one another.

The summer passed on the whole, however, with no more adventure than the sound of the lonely "Hoo-woo-o-o-o" of a loon at twilight, or the sudden whirr of a startled pheasant's wings, or a quarrel between some wicked red squirrel caught robbing a crow's nest. (Or was it a crow that had robbed the squirrel's little hoard, and was getting handsomely scolded for his villainy?).

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# CHAPTER X.—WILD GRAPES.

It had been one of those cool, crisp days when the sun shone just warm enough to feel good to the furred and feathered folk. Frisky, the Red Fox Pup, had been creeping up on a flying squirrel, who sat nibbling the ripe berries of the Solomon's Seal with her three little ones beside her, when the entire family took alarm and went leaping back to the beech-nut tree.

Now Frisky had not reached the age of six whole months in vain. He had sharp eyes, and he used them. And he had never seen a squirrel that could spread sail like that. He felt that his eyes must have deceived him.

He forgot his surprise at the very next turn of the trail, when he suddenly spied a tangle of wild grape vine that hung in a canopy of the luscious purple clusters over the stag-horn sumac.

Frisky Fox had never seen wild grapes before, though he had often passed the vines when the fruit was green. Now his keen little nose told him enough to make him eager for a taste.

But the fruit hung just too high. Leaping into the air, he occasionally got a nibble from the low-hanging bunches. But these only served to whet his appetite for more.

To add to his discontent, Fairy the Flying Squirrel suddenly sailed down

from a tree-top, alighting on the very top of the grapevine canopy. And there she perched saucily and munched and sucked at grape after grape before his very eyes.

This was too much for Frisky. Around and around the vines he circled, screwing up his courage for a leap.

He finally discovered a place where the vine hugged a slanting tree trunk, and he climbed as far as he could.

The next instant Fairy had sailed back to her branch as easily as if she had been laughing at him. But Frisky didn't mind that. It would take just a stretch of his neck and his jaws would close on a great cluster of the fragrant fruit.

If young Frisky Fox had only been content with that one taste, all might have been well. But just beyond was a larger bunch. Frisky gave a leap, landing on his tip-toes on crossed vines. But the vines parted beneath his weight, and down he plunged—almost to the ground, but not quite. Not far enough for a foot-hold.

And there he hung, head downward, hind legs tangled in the vines, unable to better his position!

My, how he writhed and squirmed, and bit at the vine that shackled him! But to no avail! He was a prisoner, just as surely as if he had been tied with a rope. Little his brains availed him now.

If any one had asked young Frisky Fox, as he hung head downward from that grapevine, what he thought of the situation, he would have said it couldn't be worse.

Yet it speedily became worse,—so much worse, indeed, that Frisky redoubled his efforts to free himself,—though he had an awful feeling that it was no use.

It was Tattle-tale the Jay who warned him.

Tattle-tale kept pretty close track of all that went on in the forest, and then told all he knew.

So many times had he flown ahead of Frisky Fox, screaming at the top of his lungs: "A Fox! A Fox! Beware!" that Frisky had come to dread the sound of his voice.

This time Tattle-tale, who played no favorites, was doing Frisky a good turn, but the little fox was in no position to appreciate the fact.

"Look out, there! Look out, everybody," Tattle-tale was screaming. "Old Man Lynx is coming!"

"Old Man Lynx!" squeaked Shadow Tail, the Red Squirrel, making for his hole in the oak tree.

"OLD MAN LYNX, Mammy, Old Man Lynx!" squealed Timothy Cottontail, hopping madly for a hollow log.

"Old Man Lynx!" grunted Unk-Wunk, the Porcupine. "A lot I care!" And he rolled himself up into a prickly ball in the top of a swaying birch tree.

"Old Man Lynx!" thought Frisky Fox, fairly beside himself with frenzy. Hanging there heels uppermost in the grapevine, he was as helpless as a mouse in a trap. And here was the great cat, his ancient enemy, creeping, creeping, creeping through the shadows, his nose sniffing this way and that for the scent that would tell him where to find a good supper.

Another moment and out of the tail of his eye he saw the great, heavy, bob-tailed cat, with his cruel face, squared off with a fringe of whiskers that framed his chin, and sharp ears tasseled with little tufts of fur at their tips.

The yellow eyes gleamed evilly as Old Man Lynx caught sight of Frisky hanging there so helplessly, and his grizzled gray-brown fur rose along his spine.

Now he was wriggling along the ground flattened out like a snake. Now he was creeping up the tree trunk as silently as a shadow, and now he was gathering his legs beneath him for the leap that would land him squarely on Frisky Fox.

Frisky knew that one crunch of those gleaming teeth would end it all, so far as the Red Fox Pup was concerned.

But Frisky had a trick up his sleeve. His wits were still in working order.

"What a pity!" sighed Shadow Tail, the Red Squirrel, as he peered from his hole in the oak tree.

For Old Man Lynx had no objection what-ever to having fox for supper. The only objection he had to foxes was that he could never catch one.

For to look at poor Frisky Fox, his red-brown fur still soft and silky, his black feet tapering so delicately and his white throat exposed, it didn't seem as if he had a show in the world of escaping the huge cat.

But Old Man Lynx was stupid. He had nothing but his powerful muscles and his murderous teeth and claws, whereas Frisky had the nimble wit of one who lives by being both hunter and hunted.

And even as he waited for the leap for which he saw the Lynx preparing, he thought of a way out of both the grapevine and the danger he was in.

The next instant the Old Man gave one of his blood-curdling screeches, by which he so often paralyzed his prey with fright. Then he dropped to the branch just above, claws out for Frisky Fox.

But the very instant his heavy form touched the tangled vines, they gave way beneath him, and he, too, went crashing down in a net-work that held him fast. And, what's more, his huge weight loosed the vines that held Frisky prisoner.

But wait! With his great steel claws the giant cat wrenched himself free. Frisky made for a clump of greenbriar, for his leg had gone to sleep, and he couldn't run right till it had had time to wake up.

Was Old Man Lynx to get him after all?

There was only one reason why he didn't—he had no great fondness for brambles. Cats, wild and tame, are mighty fond of their own skins, and Old Man Lynx was no exception. He'd have to be mighty hungry before he'd either scratch his fur out or get it wet.

While Old Man Lynx thought it over, Frisky Fox was certainly not standing still. Not Frisky! He was struggling so hard to tear himself free that the brambles were all trimmed up with little tufts of his tawny coat.

That the gray form crouched so near him meant to spring he could easily guess, and his heart thumped so loudly in his furry chest that he could hardly breathe. Eyes straining wide with fright, as he tugged this way and that, (for he was really caught fast again), he suffered far more from terror than from the pain of the brambles. His leg was awake now, and with one last twinge he wrenched himself loose.

At the same instant the great gray cat launched itself almost upon him.

But Frisky was too quick for it. By the time Old Man Lynx had reached the spot, Frisky was tearing down the slope.

Now lynxes have poor eyesight. Following their nose is their one best guide. Of this Frisky was aware, as his mother had told him so.

He could hear the great cat scrambling after him at a terrific pace. But he was going too fast to try any dodges, for one stumble and the other would be upon him. If it had been Mother Red Fox, she could have laughed at her pursuer. But Frisky was only a pup, remember, and his short legs had all they could do to keep ahead of such a big fellow.

Just as he was beginning to wonder how long this would keep up, he recalled something else his mother had taught him. Lynxes cannot swim. At least, they won't. The river was just off to the left, and with a quick turn and a sidewise leap that might or might not throw the Old Man off his scent, he dashed for the water.

On the very brink of the moonlit current, he suddenly remembered one thing more. The last time he had tried that swim he had let his tail get so wet and heavy that he had only reached the other bank by hanging on to his father's brush. Now there was no one to tow him. Should he risk it, or was he safer where he was?

To cross or not to cross, that was the question before him.

If he trusted his fate to the current, he might drown. And if he remained on the same side with Old Man Lynx, he might meet another fate.

There was but a heart's beat to decide.

Ah! What was that dark object just upstream? Could it be a log? What luck! Frisky veered to the right, his long agile leaps once more outdistancing the

merciless form behind him.

He reached the log. Alas, it reached only half way across! But he raced that half. Then one of his powerful forward leaps and he had landed within easy swimming distance of the other shore!

Old Man Lynx stood raging on the bank he had left, afraid to risk it. His disappointed screech sent shivers along Frisky's spine, but he knew he was safe.

Pup-like, no sooner was his mind relieved of worry than he burrowed into an old gopher hole and fell fast asleep.

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# CHAPTER XI.—SPECKLED TROUT.

The still warmth of Indian summer passed, with its dreamy days and its crisp nights ablaze with twinkling stars.

And Fleet Foot left the fawns to shift more and more for themselves,—though they still followed her about. At first they were puzzled and a little hurt by her growing indifference. Then, as they began to feel the strength of their coming buck-hood, they began to enjoy their taste of freedom.

Indeed, the little rascals even began to watch the bucks, (their big cousins and uncles), who were returning in little bands from their summer's wanderings. Someday they, too, would have those lordly antlers, and they, too, could join their bachelor explorations, while the does and younger fawns remained safely behind in the low-lands.

Now no longer could they hear Vesper Sparrow trilling in the meadows and locusts twanging in the tree-tops. The brook beds were drying, 'and the deer now pastured along the sedgy shore-line of Lone Lake or splashed knee-deep in the

shallows, while here and there the scarlet of a maple told of approaching winter.

No longer did the gabbling of countless ducks fill their ears when the pink sunsets tinted the Lake. Instead, there were many V-shaped flocks constantly migrating to the Southland, where the waters would not freeze.

Now it was that the speckled trout, whom all summer long they had watched flashing silvery through the shallows, began putting on their coats of many colors.—At least the bride-grooms did. The prospective brides remained a quiet brown, for reasons the fawns were soon to learn. (For October is the month when trout start housekeeping together.)

In the early summer the fawns had watched these same finny fellows racing and leaping up the water-falls to the rapids. With the long, hot days, they had taken to the deep, shadowy pools—those watery caverns that afford such peaceful coolness everywhere along Beaver Brook.

Now as the woods turned red and gold, the trout changed their cream colored vests to the most vivid orange, which looked gay enough with their red and white fins.

Their coats were still olive-green, mottled with darker splotches, and on their sides the green melted into yellow, with the little red spots and speckles that give the trout their name.

Their thousands of tiny scales were like suits of mail,—which came in very handy when they fought, as you shall see.

Now the fawns noticed that the larger and brighter colored fish were prospecting around in the shallows, where the water ran fastest, shoveling the gravel about with their bony noses, aided by their tails. Each trout soon had a little nest scooped out in the stream bed, and over it he stood guard, (or perhaps we ought to say swam guard), defending his homestead against all comers.

Sometimes a larger trout would come by and try to steal the nest of a smaller fish; and then what a fight they had! How they butted each other about, ramming each other's soft sides, and even, at times, biting each other on the lip. It must have hurt dreadfully, because each trout had a mouthful of the sharpest teeth, that turned backward, so that when they caught a worm he was hooked as surely as he would be on the end of a fish-line.

In trout-land, you know, it is the father of the family that makes the nest. He it is who wears the gayest clothing, too,—because if the mother were too bright colored, her enemies could see her on her nest.

Once the nests were ready the mother trout came swimming upstream and promptly set to work filling them with leathery yellow-brown eggs, which they covered with gravel so that no pike or other cannibal of the river's bottom could find and make a breakfast off of them.

The fawns marveled as they watched, day after day, till at last the trout all

went back into deep water for the winter, leaving the eggs behind them. And Fleet Foot explained how, next spring, each leathery brown egg that had escaped the cannibal fish and the muskrats would be burst open by the baby trout inside, and out would wiggle the teeniest, weeniest troutlet you can possibly imagine!

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# CHAPTER XII.—THE VICTOR.

One evening when the frost lay glittering in the moonlight, the fawns were suddenly awakened, in their soft beds of drifted leaves, by a loud belling down on the lake shore; and wide-eyed, they tip-toed down to see what it meant.

There on the muddy beach—stamped with long lines of little cloven hoof prints—stood a handsome buck, with polished antlers, dancing about as if too full of energy to stand still.

Now the fawns had never seen their father, for he had been killed by a hunter. And the other bucks of the herd had been rambling about all summer in the higher hills.

They now saw Fleet Foot mince daintily down to inspect the new-comer, who was belling his greeting at the top of his lungs.

But the meeting was brought to a sudden end. For out of the woods pranced another buck, belling a saucy challenge to a fight. Fleet Foot withdrew to a safe distance, as did the fawns, and watched admiringly as the two bucks came together; and the excitement, no less than the keen, frosty air, set the blood to racing hot through their young veins.

Stamping their steel-shod hoofs defiantly and tossing their antlered heads in the pride of their strength, the two bucks bellowed their battle challenge.

"Well, where did you come from?" shrilled Fleet Foot's champion.

"Never mind that. I've come to stay," bellowed the new-comer. "If either of us has got to go, it will be yourself, because I'm the strongest."

"Not if I know myself!"

"Look out! The strongest wins!"

"Yes, the strongest wins. So look out for your own self!" and the first buck gave a shrill snort of defiance.

Straightway the pair began dancing a sort of war-dance around each other. Slim and supple, they looked about equally fit.

Fleet Foot stepped gracefully a little nearer, and stood looking on, with her back to the fawns,—who thought best to keep their distance. They noticed that another little audience had gathered on the opposite side of the lake,—a couple of yearling bucks with proud spikes of horns and three with two-pronged antlers.

Around and around the two combatants tip-toed, heads flung back, chins in air. Then they lowered their antlers like shields, and Fleet Foot's champion got in a good dig at the other's ribs. With a bellow of rage, the second buck came plunging, and the two crashed together, antlers against antlers. Their sharp hoofs fairly ploughed the ground as they strove and struggled and pushed each other about, the very whites of their eyes showing in their rage.

"There's ginger for you!" thought the fawns.

Now the fighting pair were shouldering each other about roughly with their horns, lips foaming, gasping for breath,—almost locking horns in a butting match. At last the first buck lifted his knife-edged forelegs and struck at the intruder. The next moment he was belling in triumph, for he had cut a great gash in the other's shoulder, and the latter had had enough.

The victor now turned for the look of admiration he felt he ought to find in Fleet Foot's eyes. But instead, he barely caught a glimpse of her dancing away through the thicket, with just one merry backward glance to see if he would race her.

But he knew where to follow; for there was the faintest, loveliest perfume on the air where she had passed.

The fawns gazed after the pair, as they disappeared, then found themselves alone. All that month, while the woods turned from scarlet and yellow to brown and gray, and the nights grew frosty under the stars, the fawns were left very much to their own devices. But they were well capable of looking out for themselves at this time of year, for they found a beech wood and began fattening on the beech nuts against the increasing chill.

Their coats were changing from tawny red to bluish gray, and their fur thickening to keep a layer of warm air next their skins. There were coarser hairs growing out as well, that helped to shed the rain. Their new fur glistened in the sunshine, and the fawns raced and hurdled in the keen air, and took running high

jumps to work off their surplus energy.

Then Fleet Foot and the winning buck returned, and with them came two of the young bucks who had watched the battle. The six ranged happily from cranberry bog to evergreen swamp, feasting, feasting, feasting on mosses, lichens, anything and everything that grew, till their sides rounded with their winter plumpness, and a layer of warm fat lay just underneath their skins.

But with the first powdering of snow came a new danger. The hunting season had opened, and to the huntsman our little family meant merely a few pounds of venison for his table, and the pride of a pair of antlers to hang his gun upon.

To the buck, however, one little bullet might in an instant rob him of life and the keen joy of his airy speed, and all the glad wonderful world about them, and leave his family defenseless through the long, hard winter.

He was therefore more than wary. With the first crash of the Hired Man's thunder stick, he led his little herd to a distant cedar swamp, where they were soon joined by other groups as nervous as themselves at this new peril that could pick them out and wound them from so far away.

Sometimes, even then, a member of the band would have a race for his life.—And sometimes he never came back! But Fleet Foot and her five pulled through in safety.

Then the thunder-stick ceased to roar in the woods about Mount Olaf. The "season" was over, and the entire, band set about making active preparations for the on-coming winter. Already there were chill, drizzly days when all the world looked gray.

The former rivals now chewed their cuds together as peacefully as you please, the bucks sleeping on one side of the thicket, the does and their fawns on the other.

Then came a big surprise for the fawns.

It was a surprise for the Red Fox Pup as well.

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# CHAPTER XIII.—THE QUEER FEATHERS.

Frisky, the Red Fox Pup, had learned many lessons since the day he so nearly hanged himself in the wild grape-vines.

There was the day of the first snow, for instance.

Awakening one morning, cramped and chilled because he had not lined his bed deeply enough with leaves to keep off the cold, he peered from his little den on the hillside with wide eyes.

The air seemed filled, as far as he could see, with tiny white feathers, and the ground was covered with them.

He peered this way and that, wondering what kind of birds they could be whose plumage was being shed so freely. It must be a flock large enough to cover the whole sky, he decided, mystified.

He crept stealthily from the den, afraid, because he did not understand.

The instant his black feet touched the cold stuff, he leaped high into the air, with a yip of fright and amazement. But when he opened his mouth he got a taste of the falling flakes.

"Ha!" he said to himself, "that accounts for it. It is just rain turned white."

Still, he crept warily down to Pollywog Pond for his breakfast, stepping high, because he hated wet feet.

Arrived at the pond he stopped for a drink, when his lapping tongue came plump against a film of something hard and shining that seemed to cover the water. What could it be, he asked himself, lapping up a mouthful of the snow-flakes to ease his thirst. (He wisely held them in his mouth till they had melted, for fear of chilling his stomach.)

It was certainly very queer. Now the very trees were beginning to be outlined in white. It made the world look quite a different place.

As for the deer, they took to a thicket of poplar, birch and spruce, on which they could feed when the snow lay deep.

There was one other to whom winter brought a change and that was Old

Man Lynx.

Now it is very, very seldom that good luck falls right at one's feet undeserved.

So Old Man Lynx warned himself when he came upon the muskrat in the trap.

Of course the giant cat did not know it was a trap, as he circled around and around the struggling rat. His green eyes gleamed hungrily in his tawny face, and he crouched so close to the snow crust that his whiskers dragged on the ground. His tasseled ears twitched nervously, his stubby tail thrashed the earth and his claws were bared in a fringe across the great awkward paws, as he crept nearer and nearer the struggling bait.

To the nostrils of the cat tribe the musky smell of the water-rat is most tempting, and his mouth watered till he licked his jaws at thought of the feast within such easy reach.

And yet—and yet—some spirit of the wild—some instinct of the dumb brute who must fight to live—seemed to warn him that where man had been, there would be trouble for him. And he circled his prey without quite daring to close in upon it and end its squeaking protest.

Now the Hired Man at the Valley Farm had not meant the trap for Old Man Lynx. He had placed it there on the bare chance of there being a wolf at large in the forest around Mount Olaf.

As the midwinter dawn deepened from salmon to rose, and the snow began to glitter in the sun's first rays, Old Man Lynx decided that the thing was altogether too mysterious to be wholesome. Instead, he trotted down to Lone Lake, where muskrats were supposed to be. And he promised himself that even were it too late in the day to catch a rat, he could at least afford the pleasure of sniffing at the chimneys to their round houses,—those air-holes in the top, where their musky breath steamed out, while the rats themselves lay snug and warm within.

Then, suddenly, just as Old Man Lynx was passing a snow-laden clump of spruces, he caught a little movement in their lower branches. Circling till he had the ribbon of the wind in his nostrils, he discovered that it was a covey of grouse.

Grouse! How infinitely more delicious than muskrat—more tender even than rabbit! Now indeed he was glad he had saved his appetite.

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# CHAPTER XIV—STARVATION TIME

Fleet Foot, the Doe, would never have dreamed of taking her fawns down to the hay-stack at the Valley Farm, had not the Farmer and his Boy set her leg the summer before, and gained her confidence by their kindness.

But, though the herd had selected a south-west slope where the feeding was good, and though they had trampled the snow till it raised them higher and higher, and they could browse on the limbs of the fir trees, it was proving a cruel winter. As blizzard followed blizzard, and bark and browse alike were frozen stiff, they huddled together, weak with hunger.

Then the thought of the big hay-mow provided for the sheep and cattle proved too much for Fleet Foot, and she resolved to take the fawns, (now well grown,) slip down under cover of the early winter dusk, and there help herself to the few mouthfuls she could reach through the bars. For part of the hay stood in the open meadow, with only a canvas over top to keep it dry, and a few bars to keep it from being blown away.

The other deer of the herd, though they were starving, were far too timid to make the venture with her. To them it seemed a perilous undertaking to go so near human-kind. For they had seen many things in the woods. They had seen the Hired Man with his long black stick that spoke like thunder, and killed more surely than tooth or claw. They preferred to starve!

For Fleet Foot, the dangers of traveling alone with the fawns through the winter woods were many. First there was the chance of meeting Old Man Lynx. For now they would not have the protection of the hoofs and horns of the herd.

Then they might get lost and freeze, should another storm catch them far from the herd-yard. But, once having made up her mind, Fleet Foot whistled to the fawns and started off in a series of long, graceful bounds that carried them over one snow-bank after another.

Had they dared delay, they would have sunk to their knees in the hard, dry snow to rest for a while and nibble the tops of some bush that promised a few

mouthfuls of supper, for their empty stomachs fairly hurt. And if it had been freezing in the herd-yard, with its wall of snow, and the crowding bodies that helped keep each other warm, imagine how cold Fleet Foot's little family must have been, out on the open hill-top! The savage wind and the snow-filled air made it all but impossible at times to draw breath.

But worst of all was the shadow of fear that never left the doe's anxious mother heart. The tree-trunks crackled alarmingly with the frost, keeping her alert for enemies, and the wind tore savagely through the brush. Of a sudden Fleet Foot's spine began to prickle! It was one of those mysterious things that she had never been able to account for. But it usually meant danger!

Half blindly, they had been making their way, hardly able to see in the green-black of the darkness. But they marked their path by the darker blackness of the clumps of spruce trees, which to their trained instinct pointed the way like a map.

Again a chill ran down their spine and the hair raised along the backs of their necks! Some instinct told them real danger was near—what danger, they could not know. Rolling their startled eyes behind them, they could see points of light gleaming at them through the darkness.

At length, through the winter night, came a long, shrill cry like that of a hound, only wilder and more terrifying. Then came another, and a third. It was an uncanny sound, that of the three gray wolves, watching from behind the snowy evergreens.

Fleet Foot knew, more by instinct than experience, what they were, for their like she had never seen before. Nor had any one in those woods known a winter when these ravenous beasts had come down out of the Canadian wilds. But it had been handed down from grand-sire to grand-son that once, when the snows were uncommonly deep, and half the wild folk starved and frozen, wolves had come down from the far North in search of prey.

There were three of the lean gray shapes, like collie dogs, yet so much larger and fiercer—large enough to attack even bigger game than Fleet Foot, the doe.

Should worst come to worst, she would have no more chance with even one such foe than a rabbit with a hound. It would all be a matter of which could run the faster. And she had to look out for the fawns!

Their one chance of escape lay in their nimble heels. They might, for a time, outspeed their enemies, if their strength held out. The combined hoofs and antlers of the herd might have fought off the beasts for a time, but the herd-yard was now too far away for Fleet Foot ever to reach it with the fawns before those lean gray shapes would be at their throats. The Valley Farm lay straight ahead, and her fear of man shrank to nothing beside the terrors behind her.

Yes, the one hope on the horizon lay at the Valley Farm, where the fear of man might keep the wolves from following.

And to the Farm Fleet Foot and the fawns now sped with their great, bounding strides that took whole drifts at a leap. Would their feet slip in the darkness, crippling them and leaving them helpless almost within sight of safety?

On and on they ran, and behind them through the forest crept the three gray shapes, slinking along like shadows with glowing coals for eyes. Every now and again their barking howl, long drawn out and fearful, tore the darkness. Could they reach the Valley Farm, Fleet Foot asked herself with pounding heart?

It was hard going through the powdery snow, into which she sank dangerously every time she came to a drift too wide to leap. And the fawns were having an even harder time, the cold cutting into their lungs 'till it hurt.

At last, straight ahead, gleamed the dim lighted windows of the farmhouse. A few more bursts of speed would get them over the fence and into the pasture lot, and perhaps the wolves would stop at the boundary of man's domain. But—could they make it? Could they reach that fence before their grim pursuers?

Their eyes were fairly popping with the effort they were making. Here was a mammoth drift that in summer had been a creek, and there a patch of the higher wind-swept ground where the ice might take their hoofs from under them.

Ah! The fence at last! One leap over its smooth pyramid, and with a sobbing cough, Fleet Foot and the fawns were safe, with the wolves not ten paces behind!

Then, suddenly, the door at the farmhouse opened, throwing a long streak of lamp-light across the snow!

The wolves slunk back in fear. But so, too, did Fleet Foot. The terror of the great gray beasts behind her, all her old fear of man flooded back upon her, and what to do she did not know. She dared not go back, nor could she go forward. So she stood stock still, her fawns huddling, trembling against her sides. The sudden light half-blinded her, and made the darkness blacker. What could be its meaning? Curiosity might, at another time, have conquered fear, but now she was trembling in every joint, her spent lungs wheezing with the effort she had made. This was far different from slipping in under cover of darkness as she had planned.

"Father! Come quick! I do believe there is a deer out there—no, a doe, and two fawns!" cried the Boy of the Valley Farm, as the light from the open door threw a long ray across the barn-yard to the pasture beyond.

"Wait! I'll get her for you!" exclaimed the Hired Man, springing for his gun. But at the Boy's sharp command he dropped it, shame-faced.

Then from farther back in the evergreens came the spine-chilling howl of the gray wolves, baying their lost prey.

"Wolves, my son!" exclaimed the Farmer, joining the group in the doorway. "Wolves from Canada. It's a hard winter that has brought them down. I don't remember seeing wolves since I was a little shaver, forty years ago. And I expect that is what has driven the deer so close. Sh! Come out-side." The two closed the door behind them. "We mustn't frighten them away, or the wolves will get them, sure."

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# CHAPTER XV.—THE GRAY WOLVES.

"That's what I heard," exclaimed the Boy at the Valley Farm. "Wolves! Imagine! I didn't suppose they ever came into these woods."

"It's been an unusual winter," his father assured him, stepping out into the snowy barn-yard. "I saw them once when I was ten years old. But I thought they had been driven away for good. I suppose the rabbits all froze, up where they come from, and they got so starved they were driven to it. They've certainly been chasing these deer."

For as their eyes became accustomed to the snowy darkness, they could once more see the shadowy forms of Fleet Foot and the fawns by the hay-mow.

"It must have been those wolves that I heard ten minutes back," said the Farmer, rubbing his unmittened hands together.

"Just see how hollow these poor things look!" exclaimed the Boy. "They must be starving. Let's go back inside, so they won't be afraid."

They met the Hired Man just starting forth with his gun. "I'm going for those wolves," he hastened to explain.

"That's more like it," said the Farmer.

Here they were at last, beside the hay-stack, Fleet Foot and her fawns. And as three disappointed howls arose from the woods at their back, the famished deer turned to snatch their first ravenous mouthfuls from between the bars of the crib. They paused in their banquet only long enough to stare at the Hired Man, as with snow-shoes strapped to his feet, he strode down the Old Logging Road,—Lop Ear, the Hound, at his heels.

"Who-o-o-o!" howled the three gray wolves from the blackness of the woods. The Hired Man raised his thunder-stick and fired—straight between a pair of the red eyes that gleamed at him through the night.

"Yoo-o-o-o!" screamed one of the wolves, as he fell, while the cries of the other two retreated into the forest. And Whoo Lee, the great barred owl, could have told you that they carried their tails between their legs. Their weird voices faded rapidly into the depths of the woods; for wolves travel fast on their round, furry feet, which spread out beneath them like round snow-shoes.

The Hired Man strode on down the Old Logging Road past the charred trunks which the forest fire had swept,—standing like white ghosts now in their snowy mantles,—and on nearly to Lone Lake. But never a sign of the gleaming eyes of the two remaining wolves could he see, though his ears shuddered at the weird howls that rang down the wind, and Lop Ear bristled and growled.

Fleet Foot and the starving fawns nibbled and nibbled at the hay-mow,—for the time, at least, safe and happy. But could they ever get back to the herd-yard, with those wolves still at large?

For once they were in luck. The Hired Man was not the only hunter who followed the wolves that night. Old Man Lynx, that fierce, furry fellow with tassels on his ears and claws that could rend like steel hooks, had also been driven down to the Valley by the winter's famine. He, too, heard the howling of the wolves.

He heard the piercing scream of the wolf the Hired Man had shot, and he knew what it meant. The lynx was hungry, for the storms had lasted many days, and the rabbits and grouse hens hid away where he could not find them. On his own wide, spreading paws, therefore, he set out over the snow to find the wolf that had fallen. His heart was glad at the unexpected feast in store, and he whined hungrily under his breath.

Every now and again he had to pause to bite off the icy balls that had formed under his warm feet. But before ever the Hired Man had turned back from Lone Lake, Old Man Lynx was peering and sniffing at the wolf that lay dead.

One thing he did not know, though. No sooner had the two remaining wolves raced to Lone Lake, with their tails between their legs, and the roar of the thunder-stick in their ears, than it occurred to them that they were still ravenously hungry. And the one that had fallen would go far toward easing that

terrible emptiness that drew their sides together and made them desperate. (For wolves are cannibals!)

So, back the horrid beasts came, running on their furry snow-shoes—back down the wind, which told the noses of these great wild dogs as plainly as words that Old Man Lynx was there before them.

"Who-o-o-o," they howled wrathfully, speeding back through the burnt-wood, over whose ghost-like trunks they leapt in the darkness so fast that no Hired Man could have shot them had he tried.

Old Man Lynx raised his whiskered face and yowled an answering challenge.

"Ye-ow-w-w!" he screamed at them defiantly. Then he bent his head to snatch another mouthful of the meat he knew the wolves were on their way to claim.

"Ye-ow-w-w!" he screamed again, as the wolf cry swept nearer. This time he saw two pairs of red eyes gleaming in the darkness.

"I got here first, and I'll make it hot for the first one that comes within reach of my claws," he warned them, in tones they understood without words.

"We are two to your one!" they answered him.

Little did Old Man Lynx imagine that he had an ally so near. To him it was merely a case of having found a meal in the wolf the Hired Man had shot, and of having the rest of the pack demand it of him. So the giant cat took his stand, with claws outspread over the prize, his savage face tense with hate. His green eyes blazed at them through the darkness.

The cowardly wolves paused just out of reach, neither one of them quite daring to begin the attack, yet willing to fall in, should the other go first, for both were wild with hunger.

Old Man Lynx was not afraid. He meant merely to meet each wolf as he came, and fight him off with tooth and claw—or if worst came to worst, he could climb the nearest tree. For the power to climb is the one great advantage that cats have over all members of the dog tribe.

Old Man Lynx himself was lean with famine, for the great storm had made hunting all but impossible for him. Not so much as a wood-mouse had shown its tracks on the snow for days. And there had been nothing in his rocky den save the dried and frozen bones of dinners long since past.

To surrender his supper to-night might mean starvation and actual death to him. But so it did to the wolves. It was to be a fight for life!

Now a lynx's claws are like so many little curved swords of poisoned steel,—and he had five on each foot. He could dig at a wolf's unprotected sides with his hind legs while his fore legs were clinging to the throat in which he would try to fasten his fangs.

The gray wolves knew all this, for Old Man Lynx visited the same Canadian wilds that they had come from. But even so, in another moment they had taken the leap—together! And there was more lynx fur flying than wolf fur—as Whoo Lee, the owl overhead, could have told you.

Just in the nick of time for Old Man Lynx, the Hired Man returned. When he heard the shrill chorus of returning wolves, he had hastened back, his great snow-shoes shuffling their way down the Old Logging Road at a speed of which he had not known them capable.

He was not thinking of Fleet Foot and the fawns. But with the barn full of cattle, it would never do to leave such beasts at large in the forest. When he heard Old Man Lynx, however, the Hired Man understood just what was going on. He had not lived in the back-woods for nothing all his days. And he decided to draw a little nearer, in the hope of getting another shot or two at the great gray terrors from the North.

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# CHAPTER XVI.—THE FARMER'S PLAN.

It was thus at the very moment that Old Man Lynx was striking out with bared claws, and the gray wolves were closing in on him both at once, that his unexpected ally reached the scene.

The Hired Man raised his gun, pointing it straight between two gleaming eyes that shone out in the darkness. He had to do it quickly, they jumped about so fast. Then a shot rang out on the silent night!

It singed a streak across the lynx's flank, but it felled the wolf whose jaws were just about to clamp about his leg. A second shot nicked the tasseled ear

of the great cat fighting so desperately. But it singed the fur on the neck of the second wolf, just in time to check him, as his fangs were finding their way through the thick fur ruff that protected the lynx's throat. At this second shot, the wolf, with a howl of terror, tucked his tail between his legs and ran.

The Hired Man hesitated, then decided that the lynx had won the right to live by his pluck. Thus Old Man Lynx was left, somewhat the worse for the meeting, but still able to enjoy the rest of his meal; while the Hired Man, counting the night well spent, shuffled home on his snow-shoes. But there was still a gaunt gray wolf at large in the forest—and Fleet Foot and the fawns had still to get back to the herd-yard before morning found them in the haunts of man!

But strange things can happen. No sooner had the lone gray wolf fled from the unexpected slaughter than the wind shifted, and he caught an odor most agreeable to his palate. For his gaunt sides were so hollow that every rib showed. It was an odor he had never before followed up. He had not met it in his Northern wilds, but it smelled porky and delicious.

It was on the trunk of a wild apple tree that he found the little round bristly fellow. And he could see, by the gray light of dawn, that his black sides bulged with fat, in a winter when all the furry folk were lean and hungry.

That alone was puzzling. But what surprised him even more was that this queer fellow showed no sign of fear. He was singing a little song, all in one flat key—"Unk-wunk, unk-wunk, unk-wunk." It was a young porcupine, one of these prickly fellows so like a tiny bear, only with long black needles instead of fur. The gray wolf did not know how terrible those needle-like quills can be, when once they get in one's paw. For they are barbed like a hook on the end, and when they stick into one, it hurts worse to pull them out than to leave them where they are. The wood folk that lived around Lone Lake knew enough to leave Unk-Wunk strictly alone. So, he was never afraid. But the wolf did not know. And when the little porcupine, instead of climbing higher, out of his reach, came lazily back down the trunk and began to gnaw the frozen bark, the wolf thought it was easy game.

Thus, without so much as wondering what made this strange beast so fearless, he leaped open-jawed upon the little porcupine. There was just one howl of agony, as he clamped his jaws on those barbed quills, and it was not the porcupine who gave it!

Whining and clawing at his tortured mouth, the wolf rolled about in the snow-drift, choking and spluttering in mingled wrath and terror. For Unk-Wunk's terrible barbed quills were working deeper and deeper into the roof of his mouth. Finally he rolled over on them, and they pierced through to the brain. That was the last of the great gray wolf that had come down out of the North to prey upon the forest folk around the Valley Farm.

Unk-Wunk, without in the least realizing that he had done so, had performed a public service. And in particular, he had made it safe for Fleet Foot and her fawns to go back home to the deer yard in the gray of the winter dawn.

"I tell you what," said the Farmer to his son next day. "I've a plan that I think will interest you."

"What is it?" asked the Boy, eagerly.

"Just this: I've plenty of hay this year, (more than enough for the stock,) and I'm going to pitch a little of it out, after this, every time the storms make it hard for the deer. I declare, I can't bear to think of their being so starved!" And he gazed thoughtfully out over the drifting snow, as he thought how Fleet Foot had braved everything to reach their hay-stack.

"Hurray!" shouted the Boy. "May I pitch some out right now? Poor things, there wasn't much they could reach between the bars," and he gazed at the dainty footprints the fawns had made the night before.

The deep, dry snow was followed by a freeze that left a glistening crust over every drift. Once more Fleet Foot and the rest of the deer could run nimbly on their spreading hoofs; and young Frisky Fox and Mother Grouse Hen and Mammy Cotton tail, the brown bunny, could foot their way across the white expanse in search of food. For they were sure of at least a fighting chance of getting home again.

Fleet Foot and the fawns, returning every night to the hay-stack, with a little band whose sides were as pinched with hunger as their own, now passed Old Man Lynx without a fear. For where there was footing that would bear their weight, they knew they could outspeed him.

Hereafter the snow might whirl and the spruce trees bend and sway in the wind that wailed through their tops, but the white-tailed deer of the woods about Mount Olaf were always sure of a little hay to tide them over the month of hunger.

"Father," said the Boy, "I've made a birthday resolution. I am going to befriend every furred and feathered creature in these woods."

"All of them?" his Father asked. The Hired Man paused in the smoking of his traps to listen. "You aren't going to tell us we can't do any more trapping this winter?"

"You can trap muskrats," said the Boy thoughtfully. "And, of course, wolves, if any more should come. And weasels—the wicked creatures! They are only cruel, blood-thirsty ruffians who kill without need, just for the love of killing."

"What about Old Man Lynx?"

"Well, I know he is not popular. But, after all, he's a good mouser. And we must spare our mousers, the fox and the skunk and the big barn owl,—for the mice destroy our grain, and I don't know anything muskrats are good for except

their fur. I'm not quite sure about the wild cat, but he doesn't do much harm, does he, as long as there are fish to be caught? And he is a good mouser."

"What about bears?" asked the Hired Man, with one foot on the chopping block.

"Never do any great amount of harm," returned the Farmer. "They can catch mice with the best of them. Besides, they're mostly vegetarians. It isn't once in a coon's age you'll find one of these black bears that would harm a baby, if you let him alone."

"The deer seem awfully afraid of bears."

"They have a lot more reason for being afraid of men," said the Farmer, eyeing the Hired Man's gun.

"And porcupines? What about porcupines?" asked the latter.

"They mind their own business," spoke up the Boy. "Let them live. You'll have plenty to do, hunting animals like wolverines and martins and mink and weasels. But don't any one hurt my friends!"

Thus Fleet Foot and her fawns were allowed to live happily on, as season followed season in the good green woods.

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