THE LITTLE RED DOE

CHAUNCEY J. HAWKINS

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THE LITTLE RED DOE

She stood as proudly poised as a young princess. — *Frontispiece.*

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The Little Red Doe

By

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*With Illustrations by
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CHAPTER I

THE little red doe of Shinn Pond was just a year and two months old to the day when she ceased following the trail with her mother. Why, she scarcely knew. Possibly it was because the mother had given birth to two spotted fawns, and the troublesome little things were always in the way of the frisky red doe when she wanted to run down the hill. It might have been because the mother gave all of her attention to the fawns, and aroused the jealousy of the yearling.

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Whatever the reason may have been, one warm June day, when the leaves were young on the trees and browsing was good, she wandered from the trail, ran over the ridge, waded a river, and climbed a hard-wood range, where the undergrowth was thick and the fresh buds were abundant. When the night came, she was too far away to return, and the next morning she had forgotten all about her mother.

The air was so fresh and life-giving that she ran and kicked up her heels in play, jumped lightly over logs, and felt a strange sense of freedom. She was glad to be away from the troublesome little fawns and be alone, feeling that the great woods belonged to her, that she could go where she desired and do what she chose.

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She wondered if she were really alone. It seemed too good to be true. She stood for a minute looking about the woods to see that no creature was watching her, and strained her big ears to make sure that no man was tramping down the trail; then she bounded away, her white tail erect and her head held high. Freedom was expressed in the very ease and grace of her movements as she ran to the top of a knoll where she could look up and down the ridge. There was not a creature of any kind in sight, not even a scolding red squirrel or a chattering jay. For a minute she stood as proudly poised as a young princess, then she lifted her tail again, threw her head in the air, and rushed wildly down the slope. It

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was a new experience. She had never felt anything like it, and she could not restrain herself in her wild glee.

It was nearly noon before she saw a sign of life. She had spent the entire morning nibbling the new-born buds and playing without anything to disturb her peace of mind. Then her keen eyes caught sight of a slight motion in some brush, a thick growth of dogwood. Instantly she became alert and threw her ears forward to catch any sound that might tell of danger. Every nerve was tense. Her big eyes were fixed on the spot where she had seen the movement. Her nostrils were enlarged while she sniffed the air to detect any telltale scent.

How disgusted she was when she saw an old porcupine walk from the brush!

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She felt like rushing on him and giving him a sharp rap with her hoof for disturbing her play, but she remembered what she had been taught about his quills. She watched the awkward creature for a minute; then she bounded toward him as though she intended to trample out his life, stopped just in front of him, gave a loud, angry snort, and then jumped over him. The sluggish creature thought his end had come and quickly rolled himself into a ball, every quill erect, ready to pierce the deer's feet as they came down on his back. The little red doe seemed to think that she had played a good joke on him, and to add to his discomfort she pawed dirt and leaves over him until he was almost hidden from sight.

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The remainder of the day there was nothing to disturb her, and she played so hard and so continuously that she grew tired. When the sun was low and the shadows were growing long over the ridge, she lay down to rest. In a few minutes her flesh began to burn. The midges, tiny little flies so small that the Indians call them "no-see-'ems", had risen from the ground in millions, and were boring through her tender skin. She jumped to her feet and shook herself violently, but it brought her no relief. She poked them with her nose and rubbed her sides with her hind feet, but the more she disturbed the bloodthirsty creatures, the more they seemed to bite. In sheer desperation she raced down the hill and tore

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through the brush, rubbing herself against the low bushes as she rushed along.

Still she found no relief. Her sensitive nostrils caught the scent of fresh water, which told her that a lake was near at hand. She redoubled her speed and, finding a trail that led through a cedar swamp, she followed it for nearly half a mile. Suddenly she plunged into a large open space, nearly crazed from her torture, and there saw the lake spread before her.

She stopped for a minute to be sure no man was prowling about with gun or canoe, but all was silent. At the farther end of the lake she saw a small column of smoke rising straight into the calm evening air; probably it was from a camp fire, but it was so far away that no danger could possibly come from it.

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With cautious steps she slipped down through the tall grass and waded into the cold water. The polliwogs darted from beneath her feet, and frogs, disturbed by her approach, ceased their croaking. Gradually the water rose about her burning body, drowning the millions of pests. The pain ceased, and a delightful sensation of coolness made her forget her discomfort.

Then she discovered that a tender grass grew along the edge of the lake. It had the sweetest flavor she had ever tasted and, relieved from the flies, she forgot all her troubles as she nibbled the sweet, juicy blades.

Suddenly she saw a light moving along the shore. It looked like a big moon rolling silently over the surface of the

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lake. It would flash over the trees and then creep along the edge of the water, revealing sand beaches, fallen logs, and sedges. She had never seen anything quite so fascinating. She walked down to the shore to see what it was. There was not a sound anywhere except the hooting of an owl and the croaking of the green frogs singing their love songs. The light flashed into her eyes and almost blinded her. At first it was such a shock that it made her jump. She started to run, but the noise she made as she rushed through the water only added to her fright. She squatted down, thinking that she might hide herself, but the water was too shallow.

The strange light crept nearer; it grew more tense. She gazed at it for

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a few seconds, and then the blackness about her became more dense. All she could see was that stream of light. She could not keep her eyes away from it; it charmed her as the snakes are said to charm the birds. She found herself walking toward it, drawn by some bewildering power.

Then came a deafening sound, a flash, and the little red doe was knocked down in the water. A piercing pain shot through her body, and she jumped to her feet, staggered, and fell. She was blinded and could not see where to go, but, staggering up again on three legs, she rushed from the light. Some logs were in her way, and she tumbled over them, falling headfirst into the mud.

She found herself drawn by some bewildering power. — *Page 10.*

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Then her ear caught the voices of men, a sound that struck terror to her heart.

“You have only wounded her. Fire again or you will lose her.”

Another deafening sound broke the forest stillness, and a dull thud told her that something had struck the log over which she had fallen.

She struggled to her feet again and rushed toward the shore. Fortunately she found a trail free from fallen trees and brush, and she hobbled along. But the pain was so intense that it made her sick. She felt something warm running down her side; then she grew weak; her body swayed, and she lay down.

There was not a sound. The light moved along, and she found herself

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alone, lying in a pool of warm blood, everything swimming before her eyes, and her brain growing dizzy.

The next morning the little doe was stiff and lame. She tried to rise to her feet, but her shoulder was so sore that she sank back to the ground. Her mouth was dry, her tongue parched. She was famishing for water, yet she dared not go to the lake. She did not feel able to walk that distance, and she did not know where the men might be in hiding. She drank the dew on the bushes that were within her reach, but there was only enough to make her thirst for more. The sun rose over the hills, and the hot rays soon found their way to her fevered body, adding to her distress.

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She caught a strange noise, a measured sound like some huge animal wading through the water. She struggled once more to her feet and, looking over the lake, she saw a canoe pointing directly toward her. In each end of it a man was vigorously working at a paddle. They were coming to see the result of their hunt during the night.

The little red doe knew that she must run. It was the only chance she had for life.

While the men were still some distance from the shore, she summoned all her energy and hobbled up the trail, stumbling over logs and roots, plunging through miry swamps and over hills. Every step caused fresh pains to dart through her body. She could feel the

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broken bones sawing her flesh as her leg swung back and forth. Still she struggled on until she came to a thick growth of alders, through which flowed a clear mountain brook. The ground was covered with moss and leaves of creeping plants, and the little sufferer, too sick to travel farther, lay down to rest.

Anxiously she waited to see if the men were following her, but no sound came from their pursuing feet. She drank of the cold water until her thirst was quenched. She ate some of the moss and, lifting her head, she browsed on the tender buds and leaves which she could reach without moving.

For three days she did not stir. The flies bored into her flesh until the exposed

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side of her body was almost as raw as the torn flesh about her ugly wound. Still, instinct told her that she must remain quiet.

How she longed for her mother! Yet no creature came near to give her food; not even a porcupine wandered along the brook to comfort her. All was still, — a vacant, friendless world, with no one to assist, not even to give her a few fresh leaves to satisfy her hunger.

Every day she felt herself growing weaker. The food within her reach was becoming scarce, and her body was a mass of sores from the constant biting of the flies.

But the greatest of all her troubles lay in the future. It was the fattening time for the wild creatures, when they

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were preparing for the long, cold winter. She could see great stags wandering over the range, choosing the best feeding grounds. Each one that passed showed that the thick layers of fat were already forming over his sides, hiding his ribs and preparing him against the days to come.

The little red doe became more and more like a skeleton. Her bones were slow in knitting, and even after she was able to walk, her shoulder was so weak that she could only hobble slowly over the hills.

It was August before she could run; even then she had difficulty in jumping the logs, and she had to be careful not to enter the boggy marshes, as she had to work too hard for her freedom once

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she was in the mud. She should already have been sleek and fat to resist the frosts, but her shoulder was still weak, and she had not more than half the weight she should have carried.

CHAPTER II

OLD Bill Davies lived for eleven months of the year in a log cabin built on a range several miles south of Shinn Pond. The twelfth month he usually passed in Patten, the trading point for all lumbermen and trappers over a wide territory in Penobscot County, Maine. Of this month, usually June, he gave about three hours in exchanging greetings with his few acquaintances in the village, but the remainder of the time he passed in a state of beastly intoxication, when his brain was too stupid to recognize either friend or foe. This continued until his money was all spent,

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and then, going in debt for flour and salt and tea, he would start again for the woods, where he would remain for another eleven months.

It was hinted about Patten that Bill had come from one of the aristocratic old families of Bangor, but that the disappointment of an early love affair had driven him to the woods, where he had tried to bury his troubles in the vast solitude. Some declared that he was the son of one of Bangor's most famous sea captains, a man who had traded around the world and had made a fortune, the greater part of which had been offered to Bill if he would return to the city and care for his father's estate. But Bill had spurned wealth and had preferred to live his lonely life, nursing

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in the stillness of the vast forest the memory of his beloved. Others, more skeptical, said that the old trapper had committed murder and had gone to the woods when they were an unfrequented wilderness to escape justice. Whatever may have been the history of his early life, all were agreed that when Bill was first seen in Patten, he was a young man, well dressed, clean-shaven, and evidently from the city. They were further agreed that since that day a razor had never touched his face, and that, with the exception of the one month spent in Patten, he had lived alone, shunning the companionship of men, even refusing to stop for conversation with hunters whom he met in the woods. He had lived forty years in one cabin,

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—a small, dirty log shack he had built with his own hands, trapping through the winter, and occasionally gathering gum from the fir balsam. Nothing had shared his company, not even a cat, except during the last half dozen years. One day a big hound, shaggy and uncouth as Bill himself, had come to his camp, and Bill had kept him, not because he cared for the dog's friendship, but because the deer were becoming scarce, and Bill felt that the hound would make easier the task of securing fresh meat.

October opened with a heavy fall of snow, huge, dry flakes that covered the ground and clung to the spruce and pine, transforming the woods into a veritable fairyland. The bushes were a network of the finest white lace of every con-

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ceivable pattern, so delicate that the least breath of wind would tear it into shreds. The long, drooping limbs of the pines sparkled with millions of diamonds, each reflecting the brilliance of the sun that was just rising over the hills as old Bill stood in the door of his cabin, looking down the range.

But Bill saw nothing of the beauty that was all about him. If there had ever been any poetry in his soul, it had long since been lost. He had left only prose and that not noble prose, but such as belongs to the butcher's slaughterhouse. If he had once experienced the tenderness of love, now he thought only of murder, — the slaying of the deer and the moose for his food, and the beaver, the mink, and the otter for their

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furs which might be exchanged for money to make possible another month of debauchery.

As he stood in the door of the cabin, looking down the hill, he heard the report of a rifle echoing from the white walls of Mount Chase, announcing that the hunting season had opened and that men were abroad, tracking the deer. The mongrel hound also heard the shot; he stretched himself after his long sleep behind the hot stove, walked to the door, looked about for a minute, and then lifted his head, opened his big mouth, and gave a loud howl, as though he scented game from afar.

The little red doe also heard the report of the gun. It made her think of that terrible night on the lake when she

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had been knocked into the water, and her shoulder had been broken. The snow had come too early for her. She was still lean, with no fur to protect her from the piercing cold. She stood under a big spruce, shivering, the frost penetrating her thin coat and increasing her anxiety concerning the coming winter. When she heard the roar of the rifle, the very sound made her tremble. She plunged down the range to the great cedar swamp, — a growth so dense that few men would think of entering it, — that she might hide herself from the danger.

It was a lonely spot, without even a track to tell of the passing of a living creature. The deer avoided it as long as possible, for it contained no food

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except the bitter leaves of the cedars, the last bit of green to be eaten by the wild beasts. They preferred to remain on the open, hard-wood ranges, where they could find moss, and paw down through the snow for nuts or the green twigs of creeping plants, trusting to their keen senses and their swift legs to escape the hunter. They would take to the swamp only when the snow was so deep that they could not dig through it, or when some gunner pressed them so hard that they must plunge into the tangle where he could not follow.

But the shoulder of the little red doe was so stiff that she could not run swiftly, and she was too weak to use her energy digging through the snow for food. She dared not trust herself on the open ridges,

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and, terror stricken by the noise of the rifles, which now came from every direction, she chose the thickest part of the matted growth of low-spreading cedars, and hid herself where she thought no man could find her.

That night snow fell again; at first, the great flakes came tumbling lazily through the still air, as though they would gently place a covering over the cold creatures. Then the wind arose, whipping the snow from the branches and gradually increasing in fury until it drove the icy crystals into the face of the little red doe, and forced her to seek shelter still deeper within the thicket.

For three days the storm continued, the wind howling through the frozen

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trees, causing them to crack and snap. The drifts piled deeper and deeper, until they were so high that the little red doe could not look over them. She could see nothing except the sky overhead and the small space she had trampled down as she had moved about in a circle to keep from freezing. It seemed as though all the snow from the mountain had been blown into the swamp to make the little doe a prisoner.

It was the fourth night before the storm broke, and the cold full moon came out and looked down on the white world. Every bush had been buried beneath the snow, and the trunks and branches of the cedars were so encased that there was scarcely a touch of color to be seen anywhere. The air had a

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bitter sting in it, and the frost was busy sharpening his teeth to bite harder as the hours passed. The little red doe ran around in her small circle as fast as her lame shoulder would permit, a handicap that made it difficult for her to turn the sharp curves. Twice she went with such speed that she fell into the deep snow, and she had to struggle hard to free herself. Then she would rest for a few minutes until she felt that she was freezing, when she would start again, alternately walking and running to keep her blood in circulation.

The little doe had already eaten every twig within her reach. She had even stood on her hind feet to nibble those high up on the trees, and had picked them so clean of leaves that none re-

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mained with which she could satisfy her hunger.

After a hard struggle for life, it seemed that at last she must lie down and die of starvation. The snow was so deep that she could not break a path through it. She had tried several times, but she found that the attempts only exhausted her strength and did not bring food any nearer.

She had almost lost her courage, and was standing with her head drooping and her back humped, shivering with cold, when she heard the deep-throated baying of a dog. At first the sound was far away on the range; then it came nearer and nearer, evidently leading directly for the marsh. Then there echoed through the woods the report of

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a rifle, a sound that struck terror to her heart. The hound seemed to take new courage from the report of the gun, and he howled louder, coming closer every minute.

The little red doe crawled under the cedars, trying to conceal herself in the shadows. There was no trail running to her hiding-place, no scent on the snow to guide the dog, and she hoped that if he entered the marsh, he would not find her.

Then she heard the crashing of brush, the sound of some animal struggling through the deep snow, its heavy breathing indicating that it was being hard pressed by a foe. It would plunge forward; then, as though exhausted, it would stop to rest; again it would renew its efforts to break its way through the deep drifts. The dog was still howling,

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making the hills echo with his deep voice. As he came closer, the creature in the snow increased its struggles.

The little red doe wished that she might see what the frightened animal was, but the snow banks were too high. She must be content to crouch lower in the shadows, hoping that nothing would find her.

Then, to her surprise, she saw a great stag break through the snow and plunge into her yard. The poor creature was nearly exhausted. He stood with his legs spread as though trying to brace himself that he might not fall. His great, antler-crowned head drooped until it nearly touched the snow, while clouds of his hot breath steamed in the crisp, frosty air. Blood trickled down

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his neck, leaving crimson patches on the white floor.

The little red doe was so frightened that she did not dare to move. The stag might want her yard, and the sharp points of his huge antlers could soon put an end to her life. If he should undertake to drive her away, she could not escape through the snow, and she could not resist his great strength.

The stag slowly recovered himself, and finally he lifted his head, turned his big ears forward, and listened. The hound had ceased to bay. The winter stillness had settled again over the forest, a hush broken only by the occasional bursting of the trunks of the big trees by the frost, and the crackling of the ice on the branches. He lowered

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his head again and was just about to lie down, when he seemed to become conscious that he was not alone. He showed signs of nervousness, quickly raised his head, and looked around.

The little red doe was quivering with fright, not daring to move for fear she would be discovered.

Then the stag saw her dim gray outline in the shadows. His mane bristled, for it was the season when all the stags are sworn enemies, when each one feels himself the sole monarch of the woods, and is ready to fight until death to maintain his right. Though weary from his long chase, his neck tingling from the flesh wound inflicted by the rifle ball, the noble animal, who had never been defeated in any conflict,

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walked slowly, with head down, his eyes snapping with rage, toward the creature partly concealed in the brush. He would have tipped the scales over two hundred pounds, and his great sides heaved as he snorted in defiance.

The head of the little red doe had been concealed in the brush and, as she heard the stag coming, she turned as though she would plead for mercy. He saw her, stopped for a minute, and gazed in surprise. His mane gradually lowered, and his head was raised, while a tenderness came into his eyes. He walked slowly toward her, reached out his long nose, and smelled her, — the wild creature's caress. Then he turned back to the open yard as though he would stand guard and protect her from danger.

He saw her, stopped for a minute, and gazed in surprise.

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CHAPTER III

THE little red doe had felt very much alone in what seemed to her a cold, friendless world. Ever since she had left her mother, things had gone against her. She had seen only one day of real enjoyment, — the first day she had become conscious of her unrestrained freedom. All other days had been filled with either suffering or anxiety, and worst of all, with humiliation over her weakness.

Some strange stirring in her heart had told her that it was the love-making time for all the does on the ranges. Indeed, she had seen great stags fol-

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lowing the does, coquetting, trying to show their peculiar charms to the eyes of the shy creatures, even meeting in fierce combat with rival stags. But none had ever followed her; none even saw her. She had remained screened by the thick brush, hiding her shabby fur, her lean, scrawny body, and her stiff shoulder. More than once, when she had seen a stag trotting through the woods, evidently in search of a mate, she had slipped quietly away and hidden herself, that she might not be discovered.

The constant sense of her weakness, the feeling that she was not so beautiful as the other does, that the proud stags would scorn her, had left a greater mark upon her general appearance than even

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the physical suffering she had borne. She was shy, retiring, fearful of the gaze of a stag's eyes, and many times when she might have had the joy of companionship she had crept away and lived alone.

But now she had been kissed, yes, by the monarch of all the region about Shinn Pond, the very stag all the does admired, the one any doe would have gladly accepted. He had kissed her at the very time when she was the least attractive. Possibly he had seen her helpless state and had only meant to assure her that he would do her no harm; possibly he was just a strong, domineering stag, and took advantage of her weakness; possibly it was just a passing act of friendliness that he was

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glad to show when they were both in danger.

The little red doe did not know what to think or how to act. Of one thing she was certain: she had been kissed, and it had awakened in her a new life, a strange set of feelings which had never come to her before. Her heart was beating fast, and her legs trembled. She was ashamed of her weakness, fearing that the keen eyes of the stag would detect it. Still she could not control herself.

Would the kingly stag return to caress her again, or had he seen her unattractive form and left her in scorn? The little red doe was bewildered, confused. Though she stood where she could watch every move he made, she could detect no sign of nervousness about him. He

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stood in an easy, lazy attitude, as though he might be dreaming, but there was no indication that he thought of running away. He seemed to be quite contented. Hour after hour passed, but he did not even look in her direction.

To add to her keen discomfort, two little chickadees, in their heavy winter coats, played through the adjoining trees, twittering and chirping as though they were the happiest creatures in the whole world, each trying to increase the joy of the other. Two noisy jays shrieked and flitted about among the branches, glad that the storm had ceased, and that the sun was shining again. Every creature seemed well satisfied, each knowing the delight of happy companionship except the lonely little doe.

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She had nearly lost hope when she saw the stag slowly lift his head and turn his great, muscular neck until his two big eyes were staring directly at her. Thump, thump, thump, in quick succession went her heart, beating so fast that she could scarcely get her breath. The fatal hour had come. She felt sure of it. Was he preparing to run away and leave her alone? Would he walk toward her and give her another kiss? She tried to summon all her strength that she might appear as graceful as possible, swelled out her sides that she might not seem so lean, and snapped her eyes that they might look more brilliant. But her attempt only made her more awkward, made her feel more helpless, and caused her to turn

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away with a sting of humiliation to hide in the thicker brush.

It was a movement that quickly brought the stag to his senses. In a second he was all animation, alert and aggressive. He rushed toward the little doe, knocking snow from the overhanging branches with his big antlers, and rattling the bushes until he caused a red squirrel to scamper away, chattering and scolding for being disturbed. The chickadees flew toward the hardwood ridge, and the jays shrieked as they darted over the marsh.

The stag reached out his nose and rubbed it over the side of the little red doe, giving her a long kiss that made a chill run through her body. She crouched lower, her whole frame tremb-

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ling. She wished that she might bury herself in the snow and sink out of sight, — anything to hide her weakness.

To gain relief, she jumped from the brush into the open yard and trotted around the well-beaten path, an exercise that sent the blood coursing again through her veins and seemed to give her more self-control. She would have plunged into the snow and galloped through the marsh, but it was too deep, and there was no path that she could follow.

The proud stag seemed to feel that she was unlike any doe he had ever met. Others had always welcomed his advances. This little creature was the first to defy him, the first that had tried to run away, behavior that pricked his

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pride and made him more determined in his wooing.

She stood with her head erect, her eyes flashing with what seemed to him contempt, her mane bristling a challenge, as though she would enter into mortal combat if he dared to touch her again.

No creature ever looked so beautiful in his eyes as this frail doe as she stood broadside. Her very attitude seemed to him grace incarnate. He never once thought of her stiff shoulder; seemed not to observe her lean body, or her thin, ragged dress. He even forgot his wounded neck and the dog that had pressed so closely on his tracks. His whole body burned with a wild passion that made him forget all the past, made him think only of the present. He

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shook his large antlers, stood for a moment with every muscle in his body tense, and his eyes fairly flashing fire. Then, with kingly steps, he walked slowly, but with great dignity, toward the little doe, until he was within a few feet of her. There he stopped, as though he did not dare to thrust himself any farther into her charmed circle until he was invited. His hot breath steamed on the frosty air, his nostrils flared wide with his labored breathing, and his heart beat so hard that his body vibrated.

The little doe did not move, except to hump her back more fiercely as he approached and present an attitude of defiance.

For more than an hour they stood, alternately gazing at each other and then

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turning their eyes away indifferently, as though unconscious of each other's presence.

Gradually the back of the little doe fell to its normal position. She assumed a more friendly bearing. What was in her heart began to master her. She could not withstand his big eyes, his pleading gaze, and she turned slowly and walked toward him. He took a step forward, then reached out his nose until it touched her face. The battle was won. Every sign of opposition vanished; the little red doe surrendered.

CHAPTER IV

It was the most severe winter in the memory of the oldest trappers and lumbermen about Shinn Pond. Many evenings were spent about the huge iron stove in the Shinn Pond House by men who had lived their lives in those woods, discussing the low temperatures and deep snows of other years; but the conversation always ended with the admission that no other season had ever been quite so hard on men and beasts as this one. And for once the weather man agreed with the popular verdict.

One storm followed another, piling the snow ever deeper, and each storm

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was followed by a long drop in the thermometer, with a killing frost, that threatened the life of any creature not well protected.

It was weather that certainly would have brought death to the little red doe had it not been for the coming of the great stag. The small yard she had made for herself would have been her grave, if she had been left to depend on her own efforts. She would either have frozen or starved in a very short time. Deer far stronger than she struggled with the drifts until their food was gone and their energy exhausted, and then gave their bodies to foxes or to the prowling lynx.

The little doe felt that nature was especially cruel to the deer. Other

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creatures were far more fortunate. She saw a flock of juncos hopping about the trees, singing and playing, apparently finding all they wanted to eat. The chickadees, well protected, so fat that their coats seemed ready to burst, were shouting their satisfaction with life from a dozen branches, and the squirrels were sitting with their tails folded over their backs, shaking their little bodies and apparently laughing at the misfortune of the larger creatures who had been made prisoners by the snow. But there was nothing for the little doe to eat; not even water to drink. She must quench her thirst by eating the snow.

The great stag seemed to feel the seriousness of the situation. He looked about him and saw there was no food.

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His little mate had gathered all of the moss and every leaf within her reach. She had even nibbled the dry bark from the trunks of the trees to stop the gnawing hunger pains. The stag, with the wild creature's instinct, knew that something must be done quickly to save their lives. He plunged into the snow to break a path to new feeding grounds. The first jump took him into a deep drift that was over his head, and he had a long struggle to free himself. But again and again he lunged forward, beating down the snow so his mate could follow.

The little doe stood in the yard, her eyes bulging with admiration at the strength and determination of her stag. She forgot about her weakness, even her

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danger, as she watched him struggling, breaking a road toward other trees. He would fall over a log that was hidden in the snow, tumbling headlong into a deep drift; then he would find himself in a tangle of brush which would not only check his progress, but pierce his flesh. Again he would roll into a hole, sink out of sight, and finally emerge after heroic efforts, blinded by the snow that would fill his eyes and cling in great masses to his fur. No wonder the little doe watched in wonder and admiration. He was proving his affection by his actions, at least such was her feeling. His hard work, she was certain, was all for her.

Other deer had also come to the marsh. It was the only place where

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they could find anything whatever to eat. From every direction, through the cold, still air, could be heard the crackling of frozen sticks and branches, as the starving creatures tried to break a way to water and food. Not more than a hundred feet from the stag, four deer were working hard to make a way through the tangle. Singly and in companies, the famishing animals were fighting for their lives. Some of them, exhausted and too weak through lack of nourishment to struggle farther, lay down in the snow, never to rise again. Little by little the cold froze their veins, and they fell into a strange sleep from which there was no waking.

The struggle continued for days, until the cedar swamp was a network of

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paths running in every direction, leading to fresh trees covered with moss, or by branches whose leaves were within reach of the deer. Does and stags were trotting wherever they could find a bit to stay their hunger, the stags forgetting their old jealousies in their fight for life, while the does, followed closely by their fawns, seemed to give no heed to their kingly suitors.

But the great stag did not forget his little doe. He took no thought for himself and paid no attention to the large does that passed him many times during the day. He apparently had only one purpose, — to care for the one mate to whom he was so devoted. He led her to the best part of the swamp, where moss was abundant, and where

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tender bushes projected above the snow, providing food that made a pleasant change from the bitter cedars. When other stags or does tried to enter his ground, he drove them away, keeping for his little mate the choicest dainties.

After two weeks had passed, the happiest weeks in the life of the little red doe, the kingly stag walked toward her early one morning, rubbed her face gently with his nose, and gave her a good-by kiss before he started over the ridges.

He must find another feeding ground. Every day he had reached higher on the trees for the tender leaves. There were only two places now where the little doe could nibble enough to stop the hunger pains. The winter was just

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beginning, and in a few days there would be no food remaining for either of them. The stag was still strong and, with the wild creature's instinct to search for food, he started over the winding paths to discover some spot that had not yet been found by the moose or deer.

He had not traveled more than half a mile when he came to a well-trodden road, showing the tracks of horses and men, and ruts worn by the frequent passing of sleds. It was scarcely yet light. The first gray streaks of the morning were just stealing over the dark line of spruce on the horizon. The lumbermen had not yet left their camp. Everything was quiet. Not even a bird was moving about in the trees. The stag raced forward, running partly to

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drive the chill from his body, partly to reach a new country before the lumbermen were abroad to disturb him.

Suddenly, as he rounded a curve in the road, he found himself within a few yards of a camp. The smoke from the chimney was curling lazily in the crisp morning air. A few men were moving about, and their voices could be heard distinctly. Some of them were leading out horses and hitching them to sleds, while half a dozen others, with their axes thrown over their shoulders, were just starting for the woods. One of the cutters saw the big stag and rushed back to the cabin.

The stag knew that he had been discovered and, fearing danger, he ran back on the road until he came to a well

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trodden path, which he followed until he was securely hidden in the thick growth of spruce.

In a few minutes he heard the men coming down the road. They were talking in subdued voices and walking cautiously, so that only a sensitive ear like his could hear their moccasined feet on the snow.

One of the men walked in advance of the others. He had a gun on his shoulder, and even in the dim light of the morning it glistened. Occasionally the man would stop and look down the road, especially when he came to a slight bend. Once he took the gun from his shoulder, and held it in his hands, as though he wanted to be ready to use it quickly. It was just at the

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point where the road made a sharp curve, beyond which was a straight stretch, where he could see for a long distance. He tripped along on his toes and peeped around a tree as though he expected to see the stag. Then he saw where the wild creature had turned into the path and bounded into the forest.

For a minute the man stood as though undecided whether to follow along the path or continue on his way to work. The stag stood without a motion, watching every move the man made, ready to lunge forward and escape if he took a single step into the path. But finally the hunter took his gun from his shoulder, leaned it against a tree and, overtaken by the other woodsmen,

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started along the road, pointing through the forest as though indicating the direction taken by the deer.

The stag remained in hiding, without changing his position. He was in a strange territory, and he was afraid to run, as he knew not where men might be.

In a few minutes he heard a voice in the direction of the cabin. A man was alternately swearing at his horses and singing a French love song, both done in utmost good humor as though he enjoyed equally each performance. The stag could hear the thud of the horses' feet as they tramped over the snow, and he could also catch the creaking of the sled over the icy crust. Another team followed quickly, its driver

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apparently in the same good spirits. Then came a long silence. Evidently all the men had passed, and the sleds were following to bring the logs to the yards.

The great stag did not know the meaning of all these strange noises, but when the stillness settled down over the woods, and the stag began to feel himself alone again, he looked about to determine which way to go. He did not dare to venture back on the road. Feeling certain that he would not be discovered so long as he kept in the thick spruce growth, he started down the trail that wound in and out among the trees, ever keeping in the heaviest part of the forest. The trail turned first one way and then another, but led

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to no place that promised food. Still he followed it, not daring to risk the road again.

The sound of an axe being driven into dry logs with a sharp thud that echoed over the hills caught his ear. It was only a short distance away, apparently straight ahead of him. He waited for a minute, threw his keen nose up, and sniffed to catch any scent that might bring him a message of danger.

What a strange odor was on the morning air! It was the scent of fresh, new hay. There were other things the stag had never smelled before, — potato parings, onion skins, and much other refuse thrown away by the cook.

The stag was fascinated by what his nose and ears reported to him. The

He crept cautiously behind a heavy spruce. — *Page 61.*

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sound of the axe continued with measured stroke, and the rising breeze brought stronger whiffs from the garbage pile. He could not resist the temptation to creep closer. Slipping quietly along, careful not to make any noise on the snow crust, not to disturb a branch with his big antlers, he crept forward foot by foot until he could see a slight opening through the trees. The path led straight for the sound, and every step he took strengthened the scent that was drawing him on. He could scarcely restrain himself, so great was the desire to satisfy his curiosity.

He crept cautiously behind a heavy spruce whose branches came down to the snow. The tree stood just at the edge of the clearing. What a sight

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there was before him, — a long camp, sleds, logs piled high, a hovel, with something about it that steamed in the frosty morning air, then a man swinging an axe, and smoke pouring from the chimney of the huge house. A little boy was hobbling about on crutches. Best of all, and the thing that held the attention of the stag, was the pile that gave forth the odor that had been so alluring.

He had found it at last, food in abundance for his little doe, delicious things that were being wasted, when there were so many hungry creatures about the woods. But how could they reach it? The camp was filled with men, each one ready to kill any deer that came his way. Even more dangerous

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was the dog with sharp eyes and a keen scent. He would detect the slightest motion in the brush and announce the presence of the starving deer to the hunters. He might also give chase, and in the deep snow overtake them and drag them down with his big, sharp teeth.

As the stag, happy over his rich discovery, was considering how he could reach it and in safety lead his little doe to the abundant feast, he saw fresh tracks of deer that led along the path to the hovel. Other tracks told him that some of the wild creatures had only recently returned, so recently that no snowflakes had yet been blown into the prints they had left to tell of their passing. The secret was out; they had

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come during the night, when the men were asleep and the dog was curled up close by the big fire.

In the joy of his sudden discovery, the stag almost forgot to be cautious. He turned so quickly that his antlers rattled against some overhanging branches, and the snow crust crunched beneath his feet, a noise that disturbed the dog and caused him to run and bark as though he would warn his master of approaching danger. But the stag heeded not the challenge. He had found food that would save the life of his little doe, and he bounded joyfully along the trail at full speed to take back to her the glad news of his discovery.

CHAPTER V

THE little boy on crutches was Olaf Anderson. He had been busy feeding his friends, the chickadees, who came every morning to eat from his hands, and he was just beginning to win the confidence of a junco when he heard his dog bark, and saw him rush along the path toward the woods.

“Come here, you naughty Eli! Don’t you know we are all friends in these woods. No one chases deer here except old Bill Davies and his cur.”

The dog seemed to understand the rebuke of his little master, and he crept

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back to his side as though he would apologize for his forgetfulness.

The great stag heard the boy's voice and hurried his pace; jumping two or three logs that were in his way, and holding his white tail erect, he bounded along, fearful that he was being pursued.

He soon found himself on the road again. All was still; there was no sound of men or teams. He listened for the bark of the dog or the crunching of feet that might be following on his trail. There was nothing to break the great forest hush except the ripping of trees, torn apart by the frost, or snow falling with soft thuds from the spruce branches which were gently swaying in the wind.

His first impulse was to bound out on the icy road and race back to the

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little doe. But he knew the danger of the woods, especially the road-ways of the lumberjacks. Any turn might bring him face to face with a man. Then there was the gun. He had seen it glistening in the morning light, and any minute it might belch out thunder and lightning, leaving death in their path. Caution was the stag's first law. Only unceasing vigilance would save his life. He had been taught this from the hour he was born, and it had become a part of his nature.

Hence, much as he desired to reach his mate, possibly even then nibbling the bitter cedar tips to stay the pangs of hunger, he turned back on his trail to wait until the men were all asleep in the camp and darkness covered the road.

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He had not traveled far when he discovered the fresh tracks of deer, a huge buck, some does, and a fawn. Through idle curiosity he followed, stepping lightly and keeping as much as possible in the wind that he might not be discovered. The tracks indicated that the stag was an unusually large one. He might be in a fighting mood and, not seeking a battle, our stag did not wish to be discovered.

He had gone only a short distance when he found the path beginning to divide. Other paths led in every direction in a bewildering network, crossing and recrossing without any apparent purpose. The stag knew he was entering a yard where large numbers of deer were spending the winter. It was not

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more than a mile from the lumber camp, and the deer had chosen this spot that they might be near the garbage pile. Here they remained in hiding through the day, stealing forth at night when the men were asleep.

But it soon became clear that the advantage was not all on the side of the deer. Their blessings were not unmixed with sorrow. The stag came suddenly upon a spot of blood in the snow. At one side of the path he saw the head of a doe, cut from the neck close to the base of the skull. Tracks in the snow showed clearly where foxes had devoured the remains left by the hunter. The lumbermen had discovered the yard, so handy to the camp, and here they had come for fresh meat. A little

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farther along was another sign of slaughter,—this time a buck who had not yet shed his antlers. The deer were paying a heavy toll for their luxury, fattening on the lumber camp, only that they in turn might fatten the hungry men.

The sight of blood made the stag tremble. He had left the road to avoid danger, and now he was in the very slaughter-pen of the woods. Every nerve in his body tingled with excitement. He threw his antlered head high that he might survey the surrounding country, while his nostrils flared wide to catch any telltale scent the wind might bring. His eyes glowed with excitement. He had fought the storms, starvation, thirst, fought not only for himself but for his mate. Now he was

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facing even more cruel foes, — the keen eye of man and his deadly weapons. He realized the danger which came from walking about the paths. The hunter might be in ambush, waiting behind any tree to kill. The stag looked for a hiding-place, for thick brush where he could conceal himself. Not far away was a growth of low, scrubby spruce, matted in a tangle that a man could not easily penetrate. Into this the stag crept to conceal himself, lying down on some green, spreading bushes that would protect him from the cold snow.

Here the creature felt safe. He could not be seen, and no man would follow through such a matted mass of prickly briars and spruce needles. The warm sun poured down on his body, sending

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through him a feeling of comfort, making him forget his troubles and even his anxiety. In a few minutes he was half asleep, glad to rest in preparation for the work that was before him.

He had probably been dreaming for an hour when he was suddenly awakened by the baying of a dog. The sound was not far away, and seemed to come from the spot where the trail led from the logging road into the woods. The stag felt that the cruel beast was on his track, and was probably the very dog that had barked at him in the camp. The proud animal jumped to his feet and stood ready for battle. One strong blow from his hoof would drive the dog into the snow, or cause him to return yelping to his master.

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The sound of the dog came nearer, every bark indicating that the pursuer was hot on the trail. The stag listened to detect any crunching of snowshoes on the crust. The wind was blowing in the wrong direction to bring any scent to his sensitive nose, but he trusted his ears. There was no sound of man, and the stag felt sure the dog was alone. He determined to stand his ground, make resistance, and annihilate, if possible, the enemy of the deer.

In a few seconds, the hound appeared on the trail. His nose was close to the snow, following from one track to the next, and with each fresh scent, he opened his mouth and gave a howl that made the hills echo and caused the blood of the stag to run hot with rage.

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When the hound reached the spot where the stag had walked about the blood stains, tramping from one path to another, he became bewildered. The tracks led in every direction, confusing him. He ceased howling and ran about, trying to pick up the trail where it led on through the woods. At one time he appeared discouraged and was about to turn back, then he made wide circles, first on one side of the trail, then on the other. Suddenly he came to the fresh track the stag had made when entering his hiding-place. The dog threw his head into the air and gave another howl, as though he would warn his master that the deer was not far away. Then came a series of deep, prolonged bays, wild and bloodthirsty,

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that made the stag tremble with anger, made him forget all danger in the anticipation of battle. He stepped from the brush that he might have greater freedom in the fight.

At sight of him, the dog increased his barking, and each cry seemed louder than the last.

The stag waited for him to charge, prepared to deliver a stinging blow. But the hound, seeing that the deer intended to fight, ran back a few feet, and continued to howl. The stag made a wild rush, trying to close with his enemy, for he knew that delay meant danger. Could he only have known that old Bill Davies was hurrying on his snowshoes to reach the scene! But the dog had no idea of attacking his an-

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tagonist. He was old Bill's mongrel cur, the blood of the coward in his veins, never willing to fight unless he was sure of victory. At every charge the stag made, the cur would run back, his tail between his legs, until he knew that he was at a safe distance, when he would turn again and bark.

The stag saw that the dog would not fight. He knew, also, that such loud barking might bring a man to the spot, and he was just turning to trot away when he saw Bill Davies step from behind a tree. The stag whirled on his hind feet, but it was too late. Old Bill brought his gun quickly to his shoulder and fired while the stag was still in the act of turning. The forest rang with the deafening sound. The

Old Bill fired while the stag was still in the act of turning.

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stag felt a frightful pain, gave one long plunge to escape his enemy, then fell a lifeless mass in the snow.

Little Olaf Anderson, who was feeding his birds, heard the report. The chickadees and the juncos must have heard it also, as they darted from the presence of their friend and hid themselves in the trees. One chickadee was resting on the little cripple's finger, eating bread crumbs from his lips, but the report caused the bird to hop away to the nearest log.

"Chickie, don't be afraid. It is old Bill Davies, but Olaf won't let him hurt you."

Then turning to his dog, he exclaimed :
"Eli, you ought to be ashamed to chase the deer. See what company you are in."

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The dog seemed to understand. He crouched a little lower, hiding his face between his paws, as though ashamed.

The little doe also heard the shot across the cedar swamp, a faint, sharp report. She had heard these many times during the past month, but they never failed to send through her a shudder of fear. This one made her even more anxious, for her stag was somewhere in the woods, looking for a fresh feeding ground. What could she do if any harm should come to him? He was the one bright spot in her life, the only creature who had ever cared for her, that had ever taken any interest in her.

Already it was time for him to return. He had left early in the morning, and

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with the lumbermen abroad in the woods, no wise deer would risk his life by wandering through the forest. In the daytime there was only one place of safety, — the dense swamps. Hitherto the little doe had been waiting patiently, but the report of the gun aroused her anxiety. She walked to the edge of the swamp and looked out in the hope that she might see him coming down one of the paths. All day she walked back and forth, listening for his footsteps on the snow. All other deer were in their hiding-places, but she risked her life that she might watch for him.

The sun was sinking behind the hills, and the tinkling of the bells on the horses could be heard as the men and teams made their way toward camp. The

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cold, piercing, night air was beginning to penetrate the thin coat of the little doe. Still there was no sign of the stag! His absence increased her suffering, as she finally crawled into a thick growth of brush to find protection from the wind, and to wait for an answer to her troubles.

CHAPTER VI

ERIC ANDERSON, a fat, good-natured Swede, known through all the lumber camps about Patten, was one of the most popular cooks who ever went into the woods. The very title given him, "Old Eric," was an expression of the affectionate favor in which he was held. Not only was he a good cook; he was possessed of a happy nature that was constantly bubbling over, keeping the crews in the best of spirits, and helping to break the monotonous life of the lumber camp by merry laughter and constant joking.

When Olaf was only a boy of ten,

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Eric had taken him into the camp where he was to spend the winter. Father and son were inseparable, and though it was against the rules for a cook to take his family into the woods, Eric announced when he was sought for the job that the contract included the boy or nothing. The jolly cook was too valuable to be lost over the enforcement of a rule, and Olaf went with his father to live with the woodsmen.

The little fellow added a human touch to the camp life, which made the log cabins seem more like a home. From the day of his arrival, he was a favorite with the men. He made them forget themselves, and gave them an object on which they could bestow their affections.

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His favorite playground was in the yard where the logs were piled on the bank of the river, waiting for the spring drive. His favorite game was playing foreman, and so thoroughly did he enter into the sport that he soon imagined himself the boss of the camp. Even the teamsters caught the contagion of his enthusiasm, and they seldom came into the yard with a load without calling to him for directions.

One day he was especially active, jumping from one log to another, giving his orders with the confidence of an older head, when a sled hit one of the lower logs of the pile where he was standing, and they all came tumbling to the ground. Little Olaf was on the top, and before he could jump, he was caught

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between two logs and hurled under the falling mass.

No one thought he would be taken out alive. A huge log lay across his body. Both legs were crushed, and one arm was broken. He was unconscious, and hours after being taken to the camp, the men watched over him with aching hearts, every minute expecting to see him breathe his last.

Little by little the boy struggled back to life, but his legs were badly crushed. The bones were splintered, and there was no hope that he would ever walk again. The generous gifts of the men made it possible to send him to the best physicians, but even these skilled surgeons could do nothing for him. When he returned to Patten, he was on

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crutches which were to remain with him for life.

Still the logs had not crushed out his sunny disposition, and his father, bound even more closely to the crippled son by the affection born of suffering, still took him each winter into the woods. He was not only the idol of the lumberjacks; he was the friend of the wild creatures.

Not a single man in the camp had ever given a thought to the birds, except as he had stopped to hurl a stone at a noisy jay or to snare a partridge that had come to the places where the horses were fed to pick up a few seeds left on the snow. Their chief recreation on Sundays had been shooting the red squirrels that came about the camp for

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food, fortunately seldom hitting one, the result of their poor marksmanship rather than their merciful purposes.

But Olaf had brought a new spirit toward the wild creatures into the camp. He was not only a friend but a companion to the birds. When the wildest of the feathered creatures saw him come from the cabin, it was the signal for their gathering. Chickadees and juncos hopped around him as a brood of chickens flock about the one who gives them their evening corn or meal. He had even gained the confidence of a flock of snow-buntings that came every morning to be fed on the seeds that Olaf kept especially for them. On a dozen trees he had tied large pieces of fat for the jays. Nuts and quantities of prunes were

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placed where the red squirrels could help themselves. Even their greed, which caused them to waste their food or hide it for future use, did not cause Olaf to forget the noisy, quarrelsome creatures.

The men who loved the little cripple soon came to love his pets. Pistols were left in the camp, so that the timid creatures would not be frightened by the shots. The men spent their Sundays with Olaf, each lumberjack trying to coax some timid bird to rest on his shoulder; and the one who could persuade a chickadee to perch on his finger and eat bread from his mouth reported the triumph with more pride than he had felt formerly when he succeeded in shooting a squirrel. The entire camp

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became a voluntary society for the protection of the wild creatures.

The little doe, however, was faring hard. Her stag had not returned. She had waited patiently, but there had been no sound of his foot. Despair filled her heart. Once more she was alone, with no one to care for her, no one to break the trails, or lead her to new feeding grounds.

Food was scarce when the stag left her, and each day it grew less. The little doe had to reach high upon the trees for what few twigs remained. Once she tried to break a new path, but the attempt was useless. Her stiff leg was too great a handicap. When she sank in the fresh, unbroken snow, she could not free herself. Her stiff

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leg went down in it like a pole and made her a prisoner.

There was only one hope. She might venture on the logging roads and gather moss from the logs or nibble the tree-tops that were within her reach. But this was a serious choice. It would expose her to the men who were felling the trees, and might mean her death.

Yet when hunger pains gnaw with their sharp teeth, the wild creatures will risk even life for food, and the little doe was no exception. She must have something to eat, and early one morning, long before the men were on their way to work, she hobbled along a well beaten path, out to the road, to search for something that would stay her hunger.

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The day before, a gang of French Canadians had been cutting some spruce whose branches were covered with a light gray moss, like the silver-gray hair that hangs from the head of age. It was strewn over the snow, some of it in the road, and still more clinging to branches that were within easy reach. Truly it was a banquet for the little doe, a delightful contrast to the bitter cedar tips. She had eaten nothing with such flavor for weeks. It was a treat that caused her to forget danger, to take no notice of the fact that the sun was rising over the hills, and even fail to realize that the men would soon be returning to their work. To increase her pleasure, she found a small bundle of hay a teamster had left after feeding

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his horses, sweet meadow hay that was like sugar to her taste.

Before she knew what danger confronted her, she heard voices, then the steps of men. She was so frightened that she plunged into the snow and fell over some logs. The men rushed toward her, and before she could struggle up, she found herself surrounded by great stalwart creatures, each with an axe thrown over his shoulder. She exerted every ounce of her energy to free herself from the tangle, but the harder she labored, the more helpless she seemed. The men took the axes from their shoulders, a procedure that made her heart beat faster with fear. She thought the cruel, sharp things were going to descend on her head.

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One of the men plunged into the snow by her side and threw his strong arms around her neck. To struggle then was useless. She felt as though she were in a vise: she could not move. He threw his whole weight against her and, seeing that she could not escape, she ceased to struggle, waiting quietly for the expected blow. Seconds seemed like hours. Her great, innocent eyes flashed with fear. Still the blow did not come. Instead, she felt his hand stroking her fur, and her ear caught sounds that seemed to be friendly. Could she have fully understood the words, her heart would have beat with joy. Yet the poor creature with no language except that of a cry felt that the man might be her protector.

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His great, muscular arms were placed beneath her body and she felt herself being drawn from the snow, lifted gently, and placed in the road. Then, as though the man would reassure her, he placed his brown, sunburned cheek against her head, patted her lovingly, and talked to her again. One man after another came closer, reached out his hand, and added his stroke of assurance. Then the man who had lifted her from the tangle released his hold, and she found that she was free. But a strange change had come over her. She no longer wanted to run away, she had no more fear. She turned, reached out her nose, and smelled one man after another. Then she rubbed against the one who had been so kind, as

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though she wanted to express her gratitude.

All that morning the little doe remained in sight of the woodsmen, as they swung their axes and felled the trees. Occasionally one of the choppers, when he found a delicious morsel of moss, would throw it near where she stood, for she was not yet quite courageous enough to eat from their hands. The teamsters contributed bits of hay from their sleds, and one man tossed her an apple he had been saving for his dinner.

It was all strange to the little doe! She could not understand it, could not comprehend, especially, what had occurred in her own nature. A few hours ago she had been a wild deer. The

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least scent of man would have made a quiver dart through her body and caused her to run for her life, while the sight of him or the sound of his voice would have made her heart beat fast with fear. Now everything had changed. She loved the sight of the men. Their company was a delight to her, and their kindness was so great that she almost forgot the cruel winter and her troubles. She dreaded to hobble back to the swamp, and when evening came, and men and teams started down the road toward the camp, she followed them a long distance. She stopped only when another deer bounded across the road and plunged into the brush. The appearance of this deer seemed to bring the little red doe back to her old self.

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She hesitated a minute, and looked about to see what secret thing was in hiding. Her wild instincts suddenly returned in full force; for a second she was mastered by them, and hobbled back to the swamp.

CHAPTER VII

THE next morning, long before the fire was started in the huge kitchen stove, and while the dim light of the dawn was still shut from the cabin by the heavy coating of frost on the window panes, Olaf Anderson crawled from his bunk, hurriedly dressed himself, and hobbled out on his crutches to feed his birds. Some of them were already waiting for him, and others soon flew from the trees to receive their breakfast.

Olaf had passed a wakeful night. The story of the little doe had touched him deeply, and he could not rest comfortably when he thought of the wild crea-

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ture suffering in the deep snow. Even while he was asleep, he was dreaming of her. Several times during the night, he had awakened suddenly and found himself sitting up in bed ready to hasten to her relief.

Long before the men had fed their horses and were ready for breakfast, he had given the birds their food, placed some bread and prunes under the window for the squirrels, and was waiting for the first sled to start for the logs that he might go seek the little doe.

There was much excitement among the men. Breakfasts were hastily eaten, the teams harnessed, and the entire camp, even including the foreman and men of the yards, started out to find the little doe. All were in holiday mood,

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except Old Eric, who had to remain at the cabin to prepare the midday meal.

Olaf was on the first sled, bracing himself with his crutches that he might not be thrown into the snow. Keen eyes watched each turn in the road, and a silence rested over the entire group, so that the little doe might not be frightened away.

"I left some hay for her around the next bend," whispered the driver to Olaf. "She may be there."

The little cripple struggled on his crutches to an upright position, where he could look ahead of the horses. He was supported by two men that he might not fall. All were eagerly watching as they turned the point where they expected to find the doe, but there was

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no sign of her. The driver stopped his team that he might listen for any noise to reveal her presence.

Fifty yards or more away, in the brush, there was a sound of something struggling in the snow. One of the men gave a bleat, hoping to call the little red doe from her hiding-place, but there was no response.

“Some one has been here on snow-shoes,” said the teamster, as he pointed to the tracks leading in the direction of the sound.

“Old Bill Davies has been after a deer,” replied Olaf, the blood flushing his face as he contemplated the possibilities. Indignation filled his soul.

The teamster sprang from his sled and followed the tracks into the woods.

"We must take her out and care for her wounds." — *Page 101.*

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The men ran after him, while Olaf held the reins and waited anxiously for the woodsmen to bring back their report.

In a few minutes two of them returned, their faces white with rage, and took the little cripple in their arms to carry him to their discovery.

The little doe was down and helpless. Her eyes were flashing in fear, and her sides were heaving under labored breathing from the long struggle. One leg was held in a huge bear-trap, and the snow around was covered with blood.

"Old Bill Davies set his trap last night in the trail where the deer go out to the road," declared the teamster.

"The beast!" exclaimed Olaf. "We must take her out and care for her wounds."

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“It is her good leg that is in the trap,” added the teamster. “But I don’t think it is broken. She is caught by the foot.”

As they approached the little doe, she gave a few frantic struggles to free herself, as though she could not trust even her friends, and then, seeing that she was helpless, she fell back again and resigned herself to her fate. She looked at the men with her great eyes as though to plead for mercy, to beseech them to spare her life.

The rough lumberjacks, schooled in kindness toward the wild creatures by Olaf, were touched by her helplessness, and they walked quietly toward her. One man cut a long pole to spring the strong trap, while the others stroked her head to reassure her.

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“Half of her foot is cut away by the teeth of the trap,” exclaimed the teamster, as he examined her wound. “The rest of the foot is all right. She will be able to walk.”

“We must take her to the camp and care for her,” decided Olaf. “Careful, little doe! We are not going to hurt you.”

The great springs were pressed down, and the cruel jaws of the trap fell apart, leaving her hoof free. She struggled to her feet, but showed no inclination to run away. The teamster had his arms around her neck, expecting her to plunge into the woods. But she made no effort to escape. She snuggled close to him, as though he were her last hope. She looked into his face as

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though imploring protection, while Olaf reached forth his hands to pet her wet and ragged coat of fur.

When she had ceased to tremble with fear and pain, a strong lumberjack took her in his arms and carried her back to the sled. Some hay was placed over the rough boards to make a soft bed, while two men held her that she might not jump and do herself further harm, and the driver turned back to the camp with the little sufferer.

One of the stalls in the horse-sheds was thickly bedded with straw, — a stall that opened toward the south, where the warm sun could warm her shivering body. Her foot was washed with hot water to free it from all rust from the old trap, and then carefully bandaged

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to keep out the dirt. A bundle of sweet clover hay was placed within her reach, and then she was left by herself to rest. Little Olaf came often to peep through the door and see that she was comfortable, but he was careful not to awaken her from her sleep.

Late in the afternoon he found her nibbling the hay and, slipping into the stall, he gave her a handful of salt. She reached forth her nose, smelled his hand, and then lapped the salt as eagerly as a boy would devour a handful of chocolates.

“Poor little deer! But don’t you mind. You still have your legs, and you won’t have to use crutches,” said Olaf, as he gently stroked her neck.

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The little doe seemed to understand, and she came closer to him as though she would express her sympathy for the cripple and thank him for his kindness.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER the foot of the little red doe healed, she soon became the favorite of Olaf's pets. He did not forget his birds or squirrels, but there was something about the deer that made her appear almost human. She seemed to understand him better than the other creatures, and she was more generous in the bestowal of her affections. The birds came because they wanted food, and when their appetites were satisfied, they would fly away to the woods, leaving Olaf alone. The quarrelsome squirrels would take his food, sneaking it as though they thought they were

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stealing, and then scamper away, chattering and scolding for some reason which the boy could never understand. But the little doe was always about the camp, always affectionate and seeking Olaf's company. When he was sitting on a log, she would lie down at his feet, reach out her nose, and invite him to pet her. She would follow him into the cabins and patiently wait for him to eat his dinner; then she would tempt him into the yard for an hour of frolic. Olaf came to look upon her as his playmate, a want keenly felt by the little cripple living far away from other boys in the loneliness of the great woods.

She was equally loved by the lumberjacks, who would entice the little doe

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into the woods, where she would play about them as they cut the trees, and frolic before the teams on the logging roads. Many times these rough men would stop their work to discuss some trait of the little deer, and the man who could tell the story of the greatest attention from her quickly excited the envy of his fellows.

Gradually the little doe began to take excursions by herself, following the deer paths through the marshes. Each time she ventured farther, spying out some place where the wild creatures had tramped out hard paths in their search for food.

Early one morning, long before the men were astir about the camp, there came over her a desire to be free again,

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to live once more the unhampered life of the great woods. It was the same feeling that had urged her when she left her mother, a passion that was irresistible. She slipped from her warm bed in the stall and hobbled down the road. The first streaks of the morning were just touching the east. The air was sharp with frost, clear and cold as starlight. It set her blood tingling through her body, bringing to her a strange and gleeful mood of freedom. She was now hampered by an imperfect foot as well as by a stiff shoulder. Still she forgot these handicaps in the joy of the life-giving air.

Olaf called for her, as was his custom, when he came from the cabin. The birds hurried to him, but there was no

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response from the little doe. He hobbled on his crutches to her bed, but it was empty. He saw her tracks leading down the road, and he whistled louder to make her hear. Still she did not come, and after feeding his birds, he returned to the cabin to eat his breakfast.

At noon she had not returned, and when the men came from their work in the evening there had been no sign of her. The lumberjacks, quite as anxious over her absence as the crippled boy, started in different directions to seek her. Old Eric followed her tracks until they were lost in the many footprints in the deer paths. Then he turned down toward the swamp until he came out on a deserted road, one that had not been used all winter by the sleds,

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but was packed hard by the frequent passing of the deer.

Suddenly, only a short distance ahead of him, came the crack of a rifle. A little deer bounded into the road, staggered and fell, but struggled quickly to its feet and trotted away. It hobbled on three legs. The other dangled helplessly by its side.

Old Eric looked at the track. It was the print of the little red doe.

Already the sun was below the hills. The last glow of the evening was melting into the clouds that filled the upper darkness. Night was coming in the dense forest; yet Old Eric followed on. The trail was easily marked by the red stains in the snow. It led over the hill to the great swamp beyond.

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Old Eric pushed along until he saw three does standing as guards over the sufferer. Then he saw the little red doe rise from her hiding-place, lame and tortured with pain, to hobble into the great swamp beyond. She would rather die alone in the cold snow than put her trust again in man.

The old cook turned back toward the camp. His happy mood had vanished. He had beheld the slaying of the playmate of his little Olaf.

Before Eric could reach camp, the snow was falling so fast that he could scarcely find his way. The other men had given up their search, and were patiently waiting for his return. Long before he spoke a word, they read the story in his face. They knew something had happened to Olaf's pet.

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While he rehearsed the story of the tragedy, the men listened with angry faces. Then first one and another, turning to the cabin, swore vengeance on Old Bill Davies, setting aside the next day as the hour of wrath.

All night the wind howled about the cabins. When there was a moment's lull, the lumberjacks could hear the sobs of little Olaf or the hoarse cough of Old Eric, which told that none were sleeping. The snow beat on the window panes, piling in drifts that soon shut out the night. The dog walked from one bunk to another, smelling the men, as though he knew that something was wrong, something was stealing sleep away.

The next morning the wind was still raging, and the snow covered the cabins.

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The trees were burdened with a weight that bent their branches to the earth, and it was a long, tiresome task to dig a path to the horses.

When the men gathered at breakfast, there was a hush about the tables. Little Olaf's eyes were red, and Old Eric served the food with a reserve which told that his mind was not on his work.

All day the storm continued and the next, until hills and valleys could scarcely be distinguished. Every hollow in the woods was filled with snow. The roads could be followed only by the open space through the forest where the trees had been cut. Men and beasts were made prisoners by the greatest blizzard that had swept over the northern woods for years.

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When the storm finally broke, and the sun came out to reveal a fairy world, every tree laden with a wealth of white blossoms, the whole earth dazzling with a flash of diamonds, there was no thought of work. There was only one task in the mind of any man. Old Bill Davies must be driven from the woods. He had, to their minds, committed murder, and each man was a self-appointed officer of the law. Each man knew his task, and was ready to assume his responsibility for vengeance.

Tying on their snowshoes, buckling their pistols in their belts, or throwing their rifles over their shoulders, they started in single file over the unbroken snow. Old Eric led the way, only little Olaf remaining behind. He stood in

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the doorway of the cabin, waving a farewell as they rounded a curve in the road and were lost from sight.

The very tread of the men,—slow, deliberate, like climbers ascending an Alpine peak,—told that they were on serious business. No man broke the step or turned to look back on the trail. They were heading straight for Old Bill Davies' cabin, taking the road he must have followed on his return after he had shot the little red doe.

Eric suddenly stopped, and each man halted to listen. There was the strange, weird baying of a dog a few rods ahead of them, a lonely howl as from a dog lost in the woods.

The line moved forward again in the direction of the sound. Then, in

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an open field of snow, they saw old Bill Davies' cur. He was sitting in the snow, his head lifted high and his great mouth open, his harsh voice rending the forest stillness.

When the cur saw the men, he rushed toward them, floundering through the snow; then he rushed back again to the spot where he had been sitting. This action he repeated several times until the men thought the dog had gone mad.

Out of curiosity, Old Eric finally followed the cur, who led him to the foot of a large pine. The sides of the tree were charred, showing where a fresh fire had burned the bark. The dog thrust his nose into the snow and sniffed; then he lifted his head again and gave a howl that made the hills echo.

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The men looked grave, but not a word was spoken. Each man seemed to divine the secret, but not one ventured to voice it. Finally Old Eric cut a tree and then hacked from it a board that served as a spade. He had not dug far down in the snow before he touched something that made him stop his work. He looked at the men, but no one asked a question; they understood. Then he threw the snow back in its place and turned away. The storm by its own law had claimed Old Bill Davies that night before he had reached his cabin; the same storm that had buried the little red doe had destroyed her slayer.

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