

Roberts Charles G. D. Sir

The Hunters of the Silences: A Book of Animal Life



Charles Roberts

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Prefatory Note

THE present collection of stories dealing with creatures of the wilderness differs from its companion volumes, "The Kindred of the Wild" and "The Watchers of the Trails," in one important particular. It contains certain studies and depictions of a sphere of wild life which presents peculiar difficulties to the observer, viz.: the life of the dwellers in the deep sea. Our investigation of these remote kindreds is at best spasmodic, and conducted always at the extreme of disadvantage; and the knowledge which we may gain from such investigation must always remain in a measure fragmentary. It is not easy for any observer to be intimate with a sawfish; and the most ardent naturalist's acquaintance with an *orca*, or "killer" whale, must be essentially a distant one, if he would hope to put his observations upon record. Needless to say, my own knowledge of the orca, the shark, the narwhal, or the colossal cuttlefish of the ocean depths, is not of the same kind as my knowledge of the bear, the moose, the eagle, and others of the furtive folk of our New Brunswick wilderness. When I write of these latter I build my stories upon a foundation of personal, intimate, sympathetic observation, the result of a boyhood passed in the backwoods, and of almost yearly visits, ever since my boyhood, to the wild forest regions of my native province. But when I write of the kindreds of the deep sea, I am relying upon the collated results of the observations of others. I have spared no pains to make these stories accord, as far as the facts of natural history are concerned, with the latest scientific information. But I have made no vain attempt at interpretation of the lives of creatures so remote from my personal knowledge; and for such tales as "A Duel in the Deep," "The Terror of the Sea Caves," or "The Prowlers," my utmost hope is that they may prove entertaining, without being open to any charge of misrepresenting facts. On the other hand, in certain of the stories dealing with the results of my own observation and experience, I have dared to hope that I might be contributing something of value to the final disputed question of animal psychology. For such stories, which offer in the form of fiction what my observations have compelled me to regard as fact, I have presented my case already, in the prefaces to "The Watchers of the Trails" and "Red Fox." To those prefaces I would add nothing here; and from the conclusions therein stated I have nothing to retract. I would merely take this occasion to reaffirm with confidence the belief, which I find shared by practically all observers whose lives are passed in the closest relationship with animals, – by such vitally interested observers, for instance, as keepers, trainers, hunters, and trappers, – that the actions of animals are governed not only by instinct, but also, in varying degree, by processes essentially akin to those of human reason.

C. G. D. R.

The Summons of the North

I

IN the mystic gloom and the incalculable cold of the long Arctic night, when Death seemed the only inhabitant of the limitless vasts of ice and snow, the white bear cub was born. Over the desolate expanses swept the awful polar wind, now thick with fine, crystalline snow which volleyed and whirled and bit like points of steel, now glassy clear, so that the great, unwavering Arctic stars could preside unobscured over its destructive fury. When the wind was still, not less awful than the wind had been was the stillness, in which the unspeakable cold wrought secretly its will upon the abandoned world. Sometimes the implacable starlight would pale suddenly, and the lovely, sinister, spectral flames of the aurora, electric blue, and violet, and thin, elusive red, would go dancing in terrible silence across the arch of sky.

But the white cub – contrary to the custom of her kind his mother had borne but the one, instead of two – felt nothing of the cold and the unutterable desolation, saw nothing of the unchanging night, the implacable stars, the heatless and mirthless dancing flames. In a lair between two rocks, under seven or eight feet of snow, he lay snuggled against the warm, furry body of his mother, safe hidden from the world of night and cold. The mother, whose hot breathing kept open a little arched hollow in the sheltering snow, spent practically all her time in sleep, the ample layers of fat which the previous summer had stored upon her ribs supplying food and fuel to her giant frame. The cub, too, slept away most of the long unvarying hours, waking to nurse from time to time, and growing with marvellous rapidity on the inexhaustible nourishment which his mother's milk supplied.

Month followed month, as the night dragged slowly on toward spring and dawn; and still the mother slept, growing thinner day by day; and still the cub slept, and grew, and slept, day by day waxing fatter, and larger, and stronger for the great and terrible battle of life which awaited him beyond the threshold of the snow.

Except for the vast alternations of storm and calm, of starlight and auroral radiance, there was nothing to happen in that empty and frozen world. Such life as dared the cold and dark in those regions kept along the edges of the sea, where the great waters kept air-holes open through the incumbent ice. Thither frequented the walrus and the seals, and there hunted stealthily the savage old he-bears, who were too restless to yield themselves to the long winter sleep. But the wise mother had wandered far into the inland solitudes before retiring for her winter of sleep and motherhood. Over the place of that safe sleep and secret motherhood no live thing passed, all winter long, – save once or twice a small white fox, who sniffed cautiously at a faint, menacing scent which stole up through the hard snow, and once or twice the wide, soundless wings of a great white Arctic owl, winnowing southward to find the vanished ptarmigan.

Late and lagging came the beginnings of the dawn, – and then, much later, when dawn had grown into the long day, the beginnings of the Arctic spring. Something called to the heart of the old she-bear, and she heard in the deep of her lair. Bursting through the softening and decaying snow, she led her sturdy cub forth into the white outer solitudes, and turned her steps eastward toward the seashore. She was gaunt, loose-pelted, and unspeakably hungry; but she went slowly, while the cub learned the new and interesting business of using his legs.

Along the shore the massive ice was still unbroken for miles out; but where the currents and tides and storms had begun to vanquish it, and the steel blue waves were eating into it hour by hour beneath the growing sunlight, there the life of the north was gathering. Sea-birds clamoured, and

mated, and dived, and flew in circles, or settled in flickering gray and white masses on every jutting promontory of black rock. Along the blue-white ice-edge seals basked and barked, their soft eyes keeping incessant watch against the perils that always lurked about them. Huge bulks of walrus wallowed heavily in the waves, or lifted their tusked heads menacingly to stare over the ice.

Amid this teeming life, which the returning sun had brought back to the ice-fields, the old she-bear, with her cub close at her heels, moved craftily. She lurked behind piled-up ice-cakes, crept from shelter to shelter, and moved as noiselessly as a wraith of snow on the hair-tufted pads of her great feet. Sometimes her tireless hunting was promptly rewarded, particularly when some inexperienced seal had been foolish enough to lie basking close beside an ice-cake large enough to give cover to the cunning hunter. Sometimes her sudden rush would take unawares a full-fed gannet half-dozing on a rocky ledge. Sometimes a lightning plunge and sweep of her armed paw would land a gleaming fish upon the ice, a pleasant variation to the diet of red-blooded seal-meat. And presently, as the long sunlight gathered warmth, and the brief, swift heat of the Arctic summer approached, rushing down upon the ice as if it knew how short must be its reign, the melting of the snow on sheltered slopes and southward-facing hollows uncovered a wealth of mosses, and lichens, and sprouting roots, most grateful to the bears' flesh-wearied palates.

But not always was foraging a matter so simple. The mother bear had two great appetites to supply, her own, and that of the vigorous youngster beside her, who kept draining unremittingly at her sources of vitality and strength. Sometimes the seals were unusually alert and shy, the birds vituperative and restless, and the fish obstinate in their preference for the waters far offshore. At such times, if there were no greening hollows near by, where she might make a bloodless banquet, the old bear would call to her aid those great powers of swimming which made her almost as much at home in the water as the seal itself. Marking some seals at rest by the edge of some far-jutting, naked ice-field, where there was no possibility of her creeping upon them unobserved, she would slip into the water in the seclusion of some little cove, and swim straight seaward, swimming so low that only the tip of her muzzle was to be seen. This moving speck upon the waters was not conspicuous even to the keenest and most suspicious eyes. It might pass for a fragment of ice with seaweed frozen into it, or for a bit of floating moss, save for the fact that it moved steadily through the dancing of the waves, paying no heed to tide or wind. As the seals were not expecting danger from the direction of the sea, they were not inclined to scrutinize a thing so insignificant as that steadily moving speck among the waves. Arriving within well calculated distance of the unsuspecting baskers on the ice-field, the old bear would fill her lungs, sink beneath the surface, and swim forward with all speed. At the very edge of the ice she would rise up, lunge forward, and strike down with her savage paw the nearest seal, before any of them had time to realize the direction from which death had burst upon them.

The old bear's triumph, however, was not always so complete. On one day in particular she was confronted by an experience which almost left her cub without a mother. The cub, watching solicitously from behind a jagged hummock of ice, received a lesson which never faded from his mind. He learned that in the wilds one must never let himself become so absorbed in any occupation as to forget to keep a watchful eye for what may be coming up behind one's back.

It was on one of the lean days, when all game was wide awake and the lichen-beds far away. On the jagged ice off the mouth of an inlet lay two walrus calves sunning their round, glistening sides while their mothers wallowed and snorted in the water beside them. The old bear eyed the calves hungrily for a minute or two. Then, ostentatiously turning her back upon the scene, she slouched off inland among the hummocks and rocks, the cub lurching along contentedly beside her.

Once hidden from the view of the walruses, she quickened her pace till the cub had to struggle to keep with her, swung around the head of the inlet, and crept stealthily down the other side toward the spot where the calves were lying. The wind blew softly from them, her padded feet made no sound, and she kept herself completely out of sight. Peering warily from behind a tilted ice-cake,

she saw that one of the cows had crawled out of the water and lain down beside its calf for a noonday doze. Then she drew her head back, and continued her careful stalking by nose and ear alone.

At last she found herself within rushing distance. Not thirty yards away she could hear the loud breathing of the drowsy cow on the ice, the splashing of the one in the water. Turning upon the cub, she made him understand that he was to stay where he was till she was ready for him. Then gathering all the force of her muscles till she was like a great bow bent, she shot forth from her place of hiding and rushed upon the sleepers.

As the white shape of doom came down upon them without warning, the cow and one calf awoke in intuitive panic and with astonishing and instantaneous agility rolled off into the water. But the other calf was not in time. One sprawling struggle it made toward safety, and gave utterance to one hoarse bleat of despair, as if it knew that fate had overtaken it. Then a heavy stroke broke its neck; and as its clumsy legs spread out limp and unstrung upon the ice the bear clutched it and started to drag it back from the water's edge.

At this moment she was aware of a huge lumbering bulk crawling up upon the ice behind her. She took it for granted it was the dead calf's mother, and paid no heed. Walrus cows she despised as antagonists, though as game she held them in high consideration. She would attend to this one in a moment; and then her larder would be amply stocked for days.

An instant later, however, if she had deigned to look back, she would have seen a gigantic gray and brown, warty-skinned bulk, surmounted by a hideous face and grim, perpendicular tusks, rearing itself on huge flippers just behind her. The cub, peering from his hiding-place, saw the peril but did not comprehend it. The next moment the bulk fell forward, crushing the bear's hind-quarters to the ice, while those long tusks, which, fortunately for her, had failed to strike directly, tore a great red gash across her right shoulder.

With a grunting squeal of rage and pain the bear writhed herself free of the dripping mass of her assailant, and turned upon him madly. Blow after blow she struck with that terrible fore paw of hers, armed with claws like steel chisels. But the hide of the giant walrus was like many thicknesses of seasoned leather for toughness; and though she drew blood in streams at every tearing stroke, she inflicted no disabling wound. His little, deep eyes red with fury, the bull rearing himself on his flippers and lunging forward with awkward but irresistible force, like a toppling mountain, seeking to crush his enemy and at the same time catch her under the terrific downward thrust of his tusks. As he fought he bellowed hoarsely, and panted with great windy, wheezy breaths, while the walrus cows swam slowly up and down by the edge of the ice, watching the struggle with their small, impassive eyes.

The old bear was lame and aching from that first crushing assault, and her hind-quarters felt almost useless. Nevertheless she was much too active for her clumsy adversary to succeed in catching her again at a disadvantage. As she yielded ground before his blundering charges she led him farther and farther across the ice, farther and farther from the element wherein he was at home and invincible. Had she been herself unhurt she would eventually have vanquished his ill-directed valour, wearing him out and at last reaching his throat. But now she found herself wearing out, with loss of blood and the anguish of her bruised hind-quarters. As soon as she realized that her strength was failing, and that presently she might fail to avoid one of her enemy's great sprawling rushes, she was seized with fear. What would become of the cub if she were killed? She wheeled swiftly, ran to where the cub stood waiting and whimpering, nosed him solicitously, and led him away through the blue and sparkling hummocks.

After this misadventure the mother bear did no more hunting for a week or two, but kept inland among the sunny valleys, and nursed her wounds, and fed on the young roots and tender herbage which sprouted hurriedly wherever the snow left bare a patch of earth. On such clean and blood-cooling diet her hurts speedily healed. Then with renewed vigour and a whetted craving

for red flesh-food, she went back to her keen hunting of the seals. But the walruses she haughtily ignored.

The Arctic summer, meanwhile, with its perpetual sun, poured down upon the world in swift, delicious heat; and the desolate world began to laugh, with vivid greenery about the bubbling sources of the springs, and sudden fringes of bloom, yellow and pink, along the edges of the perpetual ice, and the painted fluttering of butterflies in every southward-sloping hollow where there was earth enough to hold the roots of flowers. The little winged adventurers would sometimes flit abroad over the snow, questing perilously beyond the narrow confines of their home. These rash wanderers, as a rule, would fall chilled, and die on the snow before they could get back; and the cub, attracted by the flecks of gay colour on the expanse of gray-white barrenness, would run gleefully to snap them up and eat them.

Throughout the summer the cub and his mother kept very much to themselves, seldom consorting with the other bears which roamed the rocks and floes or came to the sunny valleys to feed on the ephemeral herbage. The cub, meanwhile, having all the nourishment and care that was usually divided between two, was growing swiftly in stature and in the lore of the north. With his mother's example before him he learned to hunt seals, to creep up on the dozing sea-birds, to scoop the unwary fish from the sea, to waylay the stupid hare or the wary fox. But he was peculiarly averse to swimming, and never entered the water except under the compulsion of his mother's firm paw. The wise old bear, knowing how much his success in the battle of life must depend on his mastery of the water, would push him in from time to time, and keep him there in spite of every whimpering protest. In this way he learned his needed lessons. But his preference was all for land hunting, and it was obvious that only the extreme of hunger would ever lead him to follow the seals in their own element. As a matter of fact, since that memorable day when his mother had been beaten by the great walrus, the cub had grown to regard the sea as the peculiar domain of the walruses, and he felt a certain diffidence about trespassing.

When the summer was beginning to fade away as hurriedly as it had come, the cub was suddenly left alone in his grim world. It happened in this way. On a certain hungry day, when his mother's hunting had been unsuccessful, the wind brought over a ridge of rock a pungent and ravishing smell of fresh blood. As cautiously as a cat the old bear crept around the ridge, the cub creeping at her heels. The sight that met them was one they had never seen before. Close at the water's edge three men were busy skinning and cutting up a couple of seals. The cub stopped short. A natural, inborn caution warned him that man was a dangerous animal. But the old bear, to whom man was as unknown as to her cub, had her intuitions obscured at that moment by her too eager appetite. Moreover, she was in a bad temper, and felt that the strangers were intruders upon her own hunting-ground. They were insignificant-looking intruders, too, any one of whom she felt that she could settle at a single stroke of her paw. A green gleam came into her eyes, as with narrow, snaky head thrust forward and jaws half-parted savagely, she stalked down upon the group, expecting to see it scatter at her approach and leave her in undisputed possession of the prey.

As she drew near the men stopped work, stood up, and stared at her. For a moment they did nothing. Then, seeing that she meant business, two of them stepped aside and picked up what looked to her like two long sticks, which glinted in the sun. One man took a stride forward and pointed the stick at her in a way which seemed like a challenge. With a grunt of anger she charged straight at him.

From the point of the stick burst a flash and a roar, with a little puff of blue smoke that drifted off like a ghost over the waves. It might have been the ghost of the old bear herself, fading reluctantly back into the grim and desolate earth from which she had sprung; for at the instant of its appearing she plunged forward upon her nose and lay motionless, with a bullet through her brain.

It was a perfect shot; but the man who had made it took it as a matter of course. In a few moments the limp and warm body was being treated like that of the seal, for the pelt was a fine

one and fresh bear-meat was a delicacy not to be despised by Arctic travellers. But the cub was not a witness of this red work of the shambles. When he saw his mother fall he shrank back in overwhelming terror behind the rocks, then turned and ran with all his might till he could run no longer. Finding himself in a little sheltered valley where he and his mother had often fed together on the sweet herbage, he crouched down under a rock and lay shivering for hours, afraid even to whimper.

At first the white cub suffered torments of loneliness and vague fear; but presently the more insistent torments of hunger gave him forgetfulness of his loss, and in hunting for his meals he gradually got himself adjusted to the new conditions. Naturally keen-witted and adaptable, he prospered, and when the approach of the long Arctic night began to throw its shadows over the ice and rocks his ribs were well covered with fat. When the herbage in the little valleys was all frozen to stone and sealed away under the first hard-driven snow, he yielded to a drowsiness which had been creeping into his nerves. With this drowsiness came a stirring of vague memory, and he turned his steps farther inland, far beyond the roar of waves and grinding floes, till he reached a place of tumbled rock, and cleft ravine, and imperishable ice. This was the place where he had been born; and here, in the very same sheltered crevice, he curled himself up for his winter's sleep. He was no more than fairly asleep, when the snow fell thick with the first of the unbroken night, and covered him away securely.

II

Through the months of dark, and storm, and ghostly, dancing lights, and immeasurable cold, the cub slept unstirring, and grew in his sleep. But when he woke, at the very first hint of awaking spring, he was wide awake all at once, and fiercely hungry. Fiercely he burst out from the sheltering snow, and shook himself, and hurried through the mystic glimmer of dawn to the seashore, where he hoped to find the seals.

He was trusting partly to memory, partly to instinct; but he did not know that this year he was a little ahead of the season. The ice inshore was still unbroken, and the journey to open water was leagues longer than he had anticipated. His cunning sharpened by his appetite, he stalked and killed an unwary seal beside its blow-hole, and lay there among the tumbled hummocks for some days, alternately eating and sleeping. Then, his strength and craft and self-reliance increasing hourly, he pressed forward league upon league, under the ethereal, bubble-tinted, lonely Arctic morning, seeking the open sea.

When, at last, he heard the waves breaking along the blue ice brink, and the clamour of the sea-fowl, and the barking of the seals, he felt that he had come home again. He forgot the solid land, here upon what seemed as solid as any land. He forgot the little inland valleys, where presently the snow would be melting and the tender grasses beginning to sprout. Here was good hunting, and easy; and here he stayed, making his lair among the up-tilted ice-floes, till the yellow and blue glory of full day was pouring over the waste.

It happened that year that no storms came to shatter and eat away the ice-fields along their outer edges. Only the tides and the slow assault of the sun did their work; and presently a vast area of unbroken ice parted from the land and went drifting southward in the grip of the polar current.

For days the young bear was quite unaware of this accident. The ice-field was too vast and too solid for its motion to convey any warning. The sea-birds, of course, knew all about it; and in a few days they disappeared, requiring solid ground for their nesting business. As for the seals, if they knew they didn't care, holding the ice safer for their domestic arrangements than the perilous and hostile shore. The young bear found good hunting. No storms came to vex him. And the warmth of summer fairly rushed to meet him. For several weeks he was altogether content.

Meanwhile the sun and the sea were making inroads upon the strength of the ice-field. One day when the bear was prowling along its edges, a mass of perhaps a quarter-acre in area broke off, lurching on the long swell. Astonished and a little alarmed, the bear hurried across, swam the narrow but rapidly widening strait, and clambered out upon the main field. The incident in some way stirred up a latent instinct, and he became uneasy. Setting his pace northward and landward, he stalked straight ahead for hours, – and where he expected a familiar ridge of rocks he came upon open sea. Much disturbed, he kept on his vain search for land, forgetting to eat, and soon had circumnavigated his voyaging domain. There was no land anywhere to swim to. There was nothing to be done but accept the situation with such composure as he could command. The seals were still with him, and he was not compelled to go hungry.

Then came a storm, with blinding flurries of snow out of the north, and huge waves piling upon the weakened ice; and the field began to break up. The seals fled away from the turmoil. Frantic with terror, the bear was again and again overwhelmed among the warring floes, and only by sheer miracle of good luck escaped being crushed. Clever swimmer that he was, again and again he succeeded in crawling out upon a larger floe, ploughing its way more steadily through the tumult. But every such refuge went to pieces after a time, crumbling into chaos under the shocks of pounding wave and battering ice. At last, and not too soon, when his young courage was almost worn out and his young strength all but gone, he was so fortunate as to gain a particularly tough and massive floe which withstood all the storm's assaults. It was almost a young berg in its dimensions and solidity; and in its centre, crouched in a crevice, the bear felt, for the first time since the uproar began, something like a sense of security.

The drift of the current had by this time carried the ice so far south that the unchanging light of the Arctic day was left behind. Each night, for a little while, the sun dipped from sight below the naked horizon. For three days the great floe voyaged on through unrelenting storm, riding down the lesser ice-cakes, and taking the waves with ponderous lurch and slide. Little by little the lesser ice disappeared, till the great floe rode alone. Then the wind died down; and last of all the waves subsided. And the bear found himself sailing a steel-blue, sparkling, empty sea, under a cloudless sky and a sun that burned with a warmth he had never known.

It was now came the terrific trial of hunger to the young bear. For days together he had no taste of food, no comfort to his throat but the licking of the ice and lapping of the fresh water in the pools. Once only did he taste meat, – a blundering gannet which alighted within a foot of his motionless head and never knew the lightning doom that smote it. This made one meal; but no more birds came, and no seals appeared, and no fish came near enough for the bear to have any hope of striking them. Day by day he grew thinner and weaker, till it was an effort to climb the slopes of icy domain; and day by day the floe diminished, till it grew to be a race between the ice and the animal, as to which should first fade back into the elements.

But here fate intervened to stop this unnatural rivalry. By this time the ice had drifted down into the track of occasional ships; and one day, as a tramp steamer was passing near the floe, some one on deck discerned the crouching bear. The sea was calm, and the captain in a mood of leisure; so a boat was lowered and the crew set out for a bear hunt.

Having heard much of the ferocity of the polar bear, the men went well armed and full of excitement. But the reception which they met disarmed them. Too hopeless for fear, or hate, or wonder, the despairing animal turned upon them a look of faint appeal which they could not misunderstand. With a not unnatural distrust of such amenability they lightly bound and muzzled him, and took him aboard ship. There the cook admitted him to his special favour, gave him a little warm broth, and gradually, by careful dieting, coaxed him back to health.

The young bear, as soon as he recovered himself, became the admiration of the whole ship's company. His coat was rich and fine, its whiteness tinged with a faint golden dye. His teeth and claws were perfect, and in the small, inscrutable eyes with which he followed the business of the

ship gleamed an unusual intelligence. Nevertheless, though he showed no ill-temper, no one, not even his kind attendant the cook, could penetrate his impregnable reserve. To each individual who approached him he showed complete indifference, while, on the contrary, his interest in whatever was going on seemed unfailing. Chained to an iron stanchion near the galley, he would stand swaying from side to side and swinging his narrow, snake-like head for hours. But nothing that took place, aloft or aloft, escaped his keen observation. His indifference was plainly not stupidity, so every one on the ship, from the captain down, regarded him with vast respect. When at length, after a quiet voyage, the ship reached port, this respect was enhanced by the price which he commanded from the directors of the zoological gardens.

Now began for the young bear a life which, after the first annoying novelty of it had worn off, almost broke his spirit by its cramped monotony. His iron cage was spacious, – for a cage, – and built under the shadow of a leaning rock; and a spring-fed pool at the base of the rock kept the heat of the southern summer from growing utterly intolerable. But the staring, grinning crowds which passed endlessly before the bars of his cage filled him with weary rage; and day by day a fiercer homesickness clutched at his heart. The food which his keeper gave him he ate greedily enough, but through some inexplicable caprice he scorned the peanuts which the crowd kept throwing to him through the bars. He saw the other bears, in neighbouring cages, devour these small, dry things and beg for more; but he would have none of them. He was ceaselessly irritated, too, by the noisy sparrows which would flit impudently within a foot of his nose; and once in a while the stroke of his inescapable paw would descend upon one of them, easing for the moment his sense of injury. Such small trophies he would eat with a relish which the choicest of his jailers' gifts could not excite. The only moments when his homesick heart could even pretend to forget its longing for the desolate spaces, the lifeless rock ridges, the little, snow-rimmed flower valleys, and the call of the eternal ice, were when, in the solitary lilac-gray of dawn, he wallowed unobserved in his sweetly chilly pool, and dreamed that the barking of the seals from their tank across the garden was the authentic voice of his lost home. But the coming of the first drowsy attendants would shatter this illusion, and send him back under his rock to stand sullenly swaying and swinging his head all day.

In this way the summer dragged along, and then the fine, dry fall; and instead of becoming reconciled the young bear grew more moody. His appetite began to fail and his fine coat lose its live, elastic quality. The keepers were disappointed in him. At first they had expected to win him over easily, because of his apparent amenableness and that look of intelligence in his eyes. But now they gave him up as an irreconcilable, and set themselves to keep him from pining away.

When winter came with raw rains, and sleet, and some sharp frosts, the exile sniffed the air hopefully for a few days, then relapsed into a deeper gloom. Then came a flurry of snow. As the great flakes fell about him he grew wild with excitement, running with uplift head about his cage, plunging in and out of the pool, and rearing himself against the bars in a sort of play. While the flurry lasted he saw no one, and forgot to eat. But in a day this tender snow had vanished, and he found no sufficient consolation in the thin ice which came afterward to encrust the edges of his pool. He seemed to feel himself cheated in his dearest hopes, and grew more obstinately dejected than ever; till finally came days when nothing would persuade him from the deepest corner of his den. Some of the attendants thought this meant no more than the drowsiness which, in his own home, might precede the desire for hibernation. But one, more understanding of the wild kindreds than the rest, declared that it was the very disease of homesickness, and that the exile was eating his own heart out for desire of his frozen north.

The city of the young bear's exile was not so far south but that sometimes, once in a long while, it found itself in the track of a wandering northern blizzard. One day, with terrific suddenness, on the heels of a gusty thaw, such a blizzard came. In half an hour the pool was frozen and a fine snow was drifting in fierce whirls about the cage.

The unhappy bear lifted his head and looked forth from his den. But he was not going to let himself again be cheated. He had no faith in this alien storm; and turning his back upon it, he once more buried his nose between his paws.

Meanwhile the cold deepened swiftly; the wind grew savage and shrieked over the cages and the roofs; and the snow, dry and hard like the driven needles of the Arctic night, thickened so that one could not see ten paces before his nose. Through the throbbing drift the attendants went hurrying about the open cages, fixing shelter for the animals that needed it. The cold, the savage noises of the wind, the sharp buffets of snow that struck into his den, at last brought the bear to his feet. He turned slowly, and came out into the storm.

He found himself, now, actually alone, and in what seemed almost his own world. This storm was convincing. He could not refuse to believe in the icy driven crystals which cut so deliciously upon his tongue and against his open jaws. This was really snow, that whirled and heaped about him. This was really ice, which crashed about him as he plunged in and out of his pool. Around and around his cage he romped, biting the snow in ecstasy, rolling in it, breathing it, whimpering to it. When his keeper came and looked in at him with wonder, and spoke to him with sympathetic comprehension, he neither saw nor heard. To his eyes the storm was volleying over the illimitable fields of the ice. In his ears the raving of the wind held the crash of grinding floes. To his heart it was the summons of the north, – and suddenly his heart answered. He stood still, with a strange bewilderment in his eyes, as if transfixed by some kind of tremendous shock. Then he swayed on his legs; and sank in a lifeless heap by the drifted brink of his pool.

The Last Barrier

I

IN a circular hollow in the clean, bright gravel of the river-bar the tiny egg of the great Quahdavic salmon stirred to life. For months it had lain there among its thousands of fellows, with the clear, cold, unsullied current streaming over it ceaselessly. Through the autumn the wilderness sunshine and the bracing wilderness air, playing on the unshaded shallows of the wide stream, had kept the water highly vitalized, – though this was hardly necessary in that pure and spring-fed current. When the savage northern winter closed down upon the high valley of the Quahdavic it found difficulty in freezing the swift current that ran rippling over the bar; and when, at last, the frost conquered, gripping and clutching through the long, windless nights, it was to form only a thin armour of transparent, steel-strong ice, through which, as through the mantle of snow which made haste to cover it, the light still filtered softly but radiantly at noon, with an ethereal cobalt tinge.

The bar on which the parent salmon had hollowed their round gravel nest was far up the Great South Branch of the Quahdavic, not many miles from the little cold spring lake that was its source. The Great South Branch was a stream much loved by the salmon, for its deep pools, its fine gravel spawning-beds, the purity and steady coldness of its current, and the remoteness which protected it from the visits of greedy poachers. In all its course there was but one serious obstruction, namely, the Big Falls, where the stream fell about twelve feet in one pitch, then roared down for half a mile over a succession of low ledges with deep pools between. The Falls were such that vigorous fish had no real trouble in surmounting them. But they inexorably weeded out the weaklings. No feeble salmon ever got to the top of that straight and thunderous pitch. Therefore, as the spawning-bars were all above the Falls, it was a fine, long-finned, clean swimming breed of salmon that was bred in the Great South Branch.

When the tiny egg in the gravel stirred to life, – as the thousands of other tiny eggs about it were doing at the same time, – there was no ice sheet imprisoning the current, which ran singing pleasantly under a soft spring sun. The deep hollow in the gravel sheltered the moving atoms, so that they were not swept away by the current streaming over them. But minute as they were, they speedily gathered a strength altogether miraculous for their size, as they absorbed the clinging sacs of egg-substance and assumed the forms of fish, almost microscopic, but perfect. This advance achieved, they began to venture from behind and beneath the sheltering pebbles, to dare the urgent stream, and to work their way shoreward toward shallower waters where the perils which beset young salmon would be fewer and less insistent.

The egg from which he came having been one of the first to hatch, the tiny salmon mentioned in the opening paragraph was one of the first of the host to find his strength and to start the migration shoreward from the nest on the noisy bar. Perhaps a score started with him, trying the current, darting back to shelter, then more boldly venturing again. A passing trout, hungry and fierce-eyed, darted above them, heading up against the current; but being so few and scattered, they escaped his fatal attentions. Terrified, however, by the sudden shadow, they hid in the gravel and for some time made no further trial of the dangerous world.

When again the salmon atom adventured forth, he found himself in a greater company. Hundreds more of the tiny creatures had left the nest and were moving shoreward with him. As the defenceless throng advanced, he saw a couple of what seemed to him gigantic creatures dashing hither and thither among them, snapping them up greedily by twos and threes; and he himself barely escaped those greedy jaws by shooting forward in the nick of time. These seeming monsters were

but young redfins, a couple of inches in length, whom he would soon come to despise and chase from his feeding-grounds.

His superior development and speed having so well served him, he was now a foot or more in advance of the throng, and so escaped another and even more wide-ranging peril. A huge shadow, as vast as that of the trout, swept down upon them, and as he shrank beneath a sharpened stone he saw a big sucker settle lazily where the thronging fry were thickest. With round, horribly dilating and contracting mouth turned down like an inverted snout, the big fish sucked up the little wrigglers greedily, even drawing them out by his power of suction from their hidings in the gravel. Of the hundreds that had started on the first migration from the nest not more than three score were left to follow their frightened and panting mite of a leader into the shallows where the big sucker could not come.

Among the little stones close to shore, where the water was hardly more than an inch deep, even the greedy young redfins would not venture. Nevertheless there were plenty of enemies waiting eagerly for the coming of the fry, and the little fellow whose one hour of seniority had made him the pioneer of the shoal found all his ability taxed to guard the speck of life which he had so lately achieved. Keeping far enough from shore to avoid being stranded by some whimsical ripple, he nevertheless avoided the depths that were sufficient for the free hunting of the predatory minnows and redfins. Such of his kinsfolk as stayed farther out soon served, the greater number of them, as food for the larger river dwellers, while those who went too close inshore got cast up on the sand to die, or were pounced upon, as they lay close to the surface, by ravenous and unerring mosquitoes, which managed to pierce them even through a film of water a sixteenth of an inch or more in thickness. So it came about in a very brief time that of the countless throng emerging from the nest on the bar there remained but a hundred or so of the tiny fry to sustain the fortunes of that particular salmon family.

Even at the safest and most cunningly chosen depth, however, the little pioneer had plenty of perils to guard against. Secure from the suckers and redfins on the one hand, and from the mosquitoes on the other, he had yet for enemies certain predatory larvæ and water-beetles, as well as a few inch-long youngsters of the trout family, who were very active and rapacious. There was a water-beetle with hooked, pincer-like jaws and lightning rapidity of movement, which kept him almost ceaselessly on the alert, and filled him with wholesome terror as he saw it capture and devour numbers of his less nimble or less wary kin. And one day, when he had chanced, in the company of his diminished school of fry, to drift into a shallow cove where there was no current at all to disturb the water, he was chased by the terrible larva of a dragon-fly. The strange-looking creature, with what seemed a blank, featureless mask where its face and jaws ought to be, darted at him under the propulsion of jets of water sucked into its middle and spurted out behind. Having taken alarm in time, he made good his escape between the stalks of a fine water-weed where the big larva could not penetrate. From this retreat he saw his pursuer turn and pounce upon a small basking minnow. The mask that covered the larva's face shot out as if on a hinge, developed into two powerful, grappling claws, and clutched the victim in the belly. After a brief struggle, which terrified all the tiny creatures within a radius of three feet, the minnow was dragged down to a clump of weed and the victor proceeded to make his feast. The little salmon stole in terror from his hiding-place and darted out into the more strenuous but for him far safer waters where a live current stirred among the gravel. To be sure the beetles were there, and the hungry young trout; but he had learned the ways of both these species of foe and knew pretty well how to elude them. Meanwhile, as he was himself continually busy catching and devouring the tiny forms of life which abounded in those fruitful waters, – minute shell-fish, and the spawn of the water-snails that clung under the stones, gnats, and other small insects that fell on the water, and even other fry just from the egg, – he was growing at such a rate that presently the fierce water-beetles and the baby trout ceased to have any terrors for him. And at last, turning savagely as one of his old tormentors passed by, he

caught a small beetle between his jaws and proceeded to make a meal of him. A few days later one of the baby trout was too slow in getting out of his way. He made a rush, caught his former tyrant, and, though the latter was more than an inch long, found no difficulty in swallowing him head first.

By this time the little salmon was between two and three inches long. He was what those learned in matters pertaining to the salmon would have called a "parr". His colouring was very beautiful, in a higher key than the colouring of a trout, and more brilliant, if less showy. There was none of the pink of the trout, but a clear silvery tone on sides and belly, with a shining blue-black along the back. The sides were marked with a row of black dots, set far apart and accentuated by a yellow flush around them, and with another row of spots of most vivid scarlet. Along the sides also ran a series of broad, vertical, bluish gray bars, the badge of the young of all the salmon tribe. He was a slender, strong-finned, finely moulded little fish, built to have his dwelling in swift currents and to conquer turbulent rapids. His jaws were strong and large, and he had no reason to fear anything of his size that swam the river.

There were now not more than two score of his brothers and sisters left alive, and these scattered far and wide over the shoaling stream. It was high summer in the Quahdavic country, and the Great South Branch was beginning to show its ledges and sandy bars above water. Deep green the full-leaved boughs of elm and ash, poplar and cedar leaned above the current; and along the little wild-meadows which here and there bordered the stream, where the lumbermen had had camps or "landings", the misty pink-purple blossoms of the milkweed poured a wild sweetness upon the air. In a shallow run near the shore, where the sunlight, falling through an overhanging cedar "sweeper", dappled the clear ripples, and the current was about eight inches deep, and there was no pool near to tempt the larger fish, the active and wary little parr took up his home. The same run was chosen by three of his fellows also, and by a couple of small trout of about the same size. But there was room enough, and food enough, in that run for all of them, so the association was harmonious.

Lying with his head up-stream, his long fins and broad tail slowly waving to hold him in his position against the current, the little parr waited and watched while his food was brought down to him by the untiring flow. Sometimes it was a luckless leaf-grub, or a caddis-worm torn from his moorings, that came tumbling and bumping down along the smooth pebbles of the bottom, to be gathered into the young salmon's eager maw. Sometimes it was a fly or moth or bee or beetle that came bobbing with drenched, helpless wings along the tops of the ripples. And once in awhile a pink-shelled baby crawfish in its wanderings would come sidling across the run, and be promptly gobbled up in spite of the futile threatenings of its tiny claws. The river was liberal in its providing for its most favoured children, these aristocratic and beautiful parr, so the youngster grew apace in his bright run.

Happy though his life was now, in every kind of weather, he was still beset with perils. He had, of course, no longer anything to fear from the journeying suckers, with their small, toothless mouths, but now and then a big-mouthed, red-bellied, savage trout would pass up the run, and in passing make a dash at one of the little occupants. In this way two of the parr, and one of the little trout, disappeared, – the trout folk having no prejudice whatever against cannibalism. But our pioneer, ceaselessly on the watch and matchlessly nimble, always succeeded in keeping well out of the way. Once he had a horrible scare, when a seven-pound salmon, astray from the main channel, made his way cautiously up the middle of the run and scraped over the bar. In this case, however, the alarm was groundless. The stranger was not seeking food, but only a way out of the embarrassing shallows.

Another peril that kept the young parr on the alert – an ever imminent and particularly appalling peril – was the foraging of the kingfishers. A pair of these noisy and diligent birds had their nest of six little ones in a hole in the red bluff just above the run, and they took ceaseless tribute from the finny tribes of the river. Like an azure arrow one of them would dart down into

the river with a loud splash, and flap up again, usually, with a gleaming trout or parr held firmly between the edges of his great beak. If he missed his shot and came up with empty beak, he would fly off up the river with a harsh, clattering, startlingly loud cry of indignation and protest. Several times one or other of these troublesome foragers dropped into the run. The dappling of the shadow and sun, however, from the cedar, was a protection to the dwellers in this run; and only twice was the fishing there successful. The second little trout, and one more of the parr, were carried off. Then the birds forsook that particular bit of ripple and hunted easier waters.

In leaping at the flies which came down the surface of the run the little salmon one day got a severe but invaluable lesson. A large and gaudy fly, unlike anything that he had ever encountered before, appeared on the ripples over his head. Still more unlike those which he had encountered before, it did not hurry downward with the water, but maintained its position in a most mysterious fashion. While the parr eyed it curiously, wondering whether to try it or not, it suddenly moved straight up against the current, and was followed at a short distance by another queer-looking big fly, green and brown like a grasshopper. Excited by the strange behaviour of these two strangers, the parr rose sharply and hit the green fly with his tail, intending to drown it and investigate it at his leisure. To his astonishment both flies instantly disappeared. Chagrined and puzzled, he dropped back to the tail of the run, sulking.

A moment later, however, the two flies reappeared, slipping very slowly down the current, mounting up again directly in the teeth of it, sometimes dancing on the surface, sometimes sinking a little below it, but always remaining the same distance apart, and always behaving in a manner mysteriously independent of the power of the stream. For a few seconds the parr eyed them with distrust. Then growing excited by their strange actions, he dashed forward fiercely and caught the gaudy red fly in his jaws. There was a prick, a twitch, a frightful jerk, – and he found himself dragged forth into the strangling upper air, where he fell flopping on the dry gravel of the shore.

As he lay gasping and struggling on the hot pebbles, which scorched off the delicate bloom from his tender skin, a tall shape stooped over him, and a great hand, its fingers as long as his whole body, picked him up. He heard a vague reverberation, which was the voice of the tall shape saying, "A poor little beggar of a salmon, – but not badly hooked! He'll be none the worse, and perhaps none the wiser!" Then, with what seemed to him terrible and deadly violence, but what was really the most careful delicacy that the big hand was capable of, the hook was removed from his jaw, and he was tossed back into the water. Dizzy and half-stunned, he turned over on his back, head downward, and for a moment or two was at the mercy of the current. Then, recovering from the shock, he righted himself, and swam frantically to the shelter of an overhanging stone which he knew, where he lay with heaving sides, sore, aching, and trembling, till little by little his self-possession returned to him. But ever afterward, since he was by nature somewhat more wary and alert than his fellows, he viewed floating flies with suspicion and inspected them cautiously before seizing them in his jaws.

All through the summer and autumn the little parr was kept very busy, feeding, and dodging his enemies, and playing in the cheerful, shallow "run" beneath the cedar. When the early autumn rains swelled the volume of the Great South Branch, he first realized how numerous were the big salmon in the stream, – fish which had kept carefully clear of the shallow places wherein he had spent the summer. Though he held himself well aloof from these big fish, – which never paid him any attention, – he noticed them playing tempestuously, leaping high out of the pools, and very busy night and morning on the gravel bars, where they seemed to be digging with their powerful snouts.

Still later, when, instead of flies and beetles, there fell upon the darkening surface of the river little pale specks which vanished as he snatched at them, he grew fiercely and inexplicably discontented. What he longed for he did not know; but he knew it was nowhere in the waters about him, neither along the edges of the shore, where now the ice was forming in crisp fringes. All about him he saw the big salmon, – their sides lean and flat, their brilliant colours darkened and faded, –

swimming down languidly with the strenuous current. Hitherto their movements had been all up-stream, – upward, upward incessantly and gladly. Now the old energy and joy of life seemed all gone out of them. Nevertheless, they seemed very anxious to go somewhere, and the way to that somewhere appeared to be down-stream. Hardly knowing what he did, and not at all knowing why he did it, the parr found himself slipping down-stream with them. He had grown vastly in size and strength, while his vivid and varied hues had begun to soften appreciably. In fact, he was now no longer a parr, but a "smelt"; and after the ordained custom of his kind, he was on his way to the sea.

II

Long-finned and full of vigour, the smelt was not dismayed when he came to heavier water, exchanging the region of the gravelly bars for a space of broken ledges, where the great current roared hither and thither and lashed itself into foam. Through these loud chutes and miniature falls he shot safely, though not at first without some trepidation. The lean, slab-sided salmon, or "slinks", who were his travelling companions, served as his involuntary guides. Except to make use of them in this way once or twice, he paid them little attention; though now and again a big lantern-jawed fellow would rush at him with a sort of half-hearted fury, compelling him to make a hurried retreat.

The Great South Branch, soon after the region of the wild ledges was past, fell into quiet ways, and crept for a few miles with deep, untroubled current through a land of alders. Here the winter, which had by this time settled down upon the high Quahdavic country, had its will, and the river was frozen and snow-covered from shore to shore. The smelt, as he journeyed beneath the ice, was puzzled and disturbed by the unusual dimness of the light that filtered down to him.

This was a condition, however, which he soon left behind. Swollen by the influx of several lesser streams, the Great South now burst its fetters and thundered along through a series of tumultuous rapids. Then above the thunder of these rapids came a louder, heavier roar, a trampling whose vibration carried a warning to the traveller. He paused for a moment; but seeing that the salmon swam on without hesitation or apparent misgiving, he dashed forward-confidently into the tumult. A moment more and he was hurled onward bewilderingly, dashed downward through a smother of broken water which held so much air in it that it almost choked him, and shot into a great, deep, swirling pool where many "slinks" and a few slim smelts like himself were swimming lazily hither and thither. He had successfully made the descent of the South Branch Falls, though, in his ignorance of the best channel, he had missed the solid water, and come down through the smother.

After a very brief rest in the basin below the Falls, to recover his self-possession, the smelt, with many other migrants, resumed his seaward journey. The Great South presently, with a long rush, united its waters with those of the main Quahdavic. Down this full-flowing stream he swam steadily for three uneventful days, to find himself at length in a mighty river whose amber-brown current was a surprise to him after the clear, greenish floods in which he had been born. It took him several days, journeying leisurely, and feeding moderately as he went, to get accustomed to the change in the water. And barely had he become accustomed to it when another and more startling change confronted him. The current, flowing strongly in one direction, would change for a time and flow directly against him. This was confusing. But it was not by any means the worst. A strange, bitter taste was in the water. The great salt tides were rushing up to welcome him. He was nearing the sea.

At first the brackishness in the water repelled him; but almost at once he found himself accepting it with avidity. At the same time he could not but observe a sudden awakening of interest in life among the languid "slinks". They began to show a better appetite, to move about more alertly, to make themselves more dangerous to the smaller fish that crossed their paths. The water grew more and more salt, – with an ever increasing zest to it which made the smelt amazingly keen for his food. Then the shield of ice above him, beneath which he had so long travelled, suddenly vanished,

and through long, free shoreless waves he felt the sunlight streaming down to him unimpeded. The water was now no longer tawny brown, but green. He had reached the sea.

For some reason which he could never have explained, – for he certainly felt no affection for them, – the smelt, with others like himself, kept travelling more or less in the company of the reviving "slinks". Like all the rest of the strong-*finned, silver-sided host, he was now feeding with a ravenousness of appetite unknown to him in the old days of rapid and pool. His food was chiefly the very tiny creatures of the sea, shell-fish from the deep-covered rocks and floating masses of weed, young fry swimming in schools, jellyfish of various sorts, and the myriad minute sea things which made certain belts and patches of the sea, at times, almost like a kind of soup ready to his eager palate. Ever north and north swam the silver host, seeking those cold currents from the pole which are as thick with life as the lands they wash are lifeless. Very deep they swam, so deep that, countless as their armies were, they left no trace to betray them to the nets or hooks of the fishing fleets. In those faintly glimmering depths the slow tide stirred softly, unmoved by whatever Arctic storm might rave and shrink over its surface. In the gloom the tiny creatures of the sea shone by their own pale phosphorescence, and in such unimaginable millions did they swarm that the journeying salmon had but to open their mouths to be fed. At this depth, too, they had but little persecution from the more swift and powerful hunters of the sea, the big-mouthed whales, the sharks, and the porpoises. Their most dangerous enemies generally lived and fought and ravaged nearer the surface, leaving to them the lordship of the twilight deeps. Once in awhile, indeed, a sounding whale might drop its mighty bulk among them, and engulf a few scores in his huge maw before the pressure and the need of air forced him again to the surface. And once in awhile a shark or swordfish would rush down, as a hawk swoops from the upper sky, to harry their array. But for the most part now, as at no other period in their career, they went unmolested on their secret and mysterious northern drift.

When the young salmon had been about three months in the sea, growing diligently all the time, a strange but potent influence impelled him, along with most of his companioning hordes, to turn and journey backward toward the coast whence he had come. He was now about five pounds in weight, and if he had fallen into the hands of a fisherman he would have been labelled a "grilse". His companions were nearly all grilse like himself, varying in weight from two and a half to four or five pounds, with here and there a big, adult salmon journeying majestically among them. The majority of the full-grown salmon had preceded them shoreward by anything from one month to four, under the urge of the homing and parental instinct.

As the big grilse journeyed he went on growing daily, till by the time he found himself back in the waters of the Gulf he was a good six pounds in weight. As he mounted nearer the surface and drew inshore he passed the mouths of various rivers and encountered swirling currents of brackish water. At each of these river-mouths numbers of the host would separate and turn up the freshening tide. But our grilse kept right on, making unerringly for his mighty native stream. And those that continued with him were more in number than those that turned aside.

It was during this journey down offshore that perils once more began to assail the young salmon, perils which it took all his good luck and keen activities to evade. For one thing, there were dogfish. These miniature sharks, with their savage mouths set far under their snouts, were no match for the grilse, or any of his kind, in speed; but the latter, being unsuspicious, came very near being caught unawares. A swift surge of his long fins and powerful tail saved him, just in time. He shot away like a silver streak as the fierce jaws snapped sharply at his flank. After that he kept his eyes alert on the approach of any fish in the least degree larger than himself. And in the course of this watchfulness he saw many of his kinsmen caught and torn to pieces by the ravening dogfish, who are the very wolves of the sea.

Another and equally deadly peril was one that took several forms. Once as he swam swiftly but easily onward, he saw a number of his companions, who chanced to be a little ahead of him, stop

abruptly and engage in what seemed to him a meaningless struggle. Ever suspicious, he checked himself and tried to make out what was the matter. The struggle was desperate, but the adversary at first invisible. In a moment, however, he detected a mesh of fine, brown lines, which seemed to surround and grapple with the unfortunate fish. Not waiting to investigate further, he retreated with a nervous flurry of speed. Then, since nothing could divert his homeward impulse, he dived almost to the bottom and continued his journey, not returning toward the dangerous surface till he was nearly a mile beyond the throttling peril of the drift-net. But there were yet other nets, and as he entered the great outrush of his native river he encountered them on every side, stretched on rows of stakes running far out into the channels. These "set nets", as they were termed, he was fortunate enough, or wary enough, to detect when he first entered the river, and he avoided them by keeping to the deepest parts of the channel; but he saw what cruel toll they took of the eager and heedless schools that swam with him. Net after net they threatened him; but ever upward he urged his way against the tawny current, his long fins and powerful tail never pausing in their graceful, tireless effort. Neither he nor his companions now lost time in foraging, for their appetite had mysteriously vanished since leaving the salt water. They had become engrossed in one idea, the quest of the clean-rushing rapids and the beds of bright gravel where they were born.

Leagues up the great river, after mounting several noisy but not difficult rapids, the grilse came to a halt for the first time in a deep and spacious pool which swarmed with his fellows. Here he rested, and here he made light, casual meals, jumping at the little flies which fell upon the swirling surface of the pool. Once the bright yellow body of a struggling wasp allured him, – but just as he was rising to gulp it in, a memory, vague but terrifying, swung dimly up into his brain from the far-off days when he had been a tiny, gay-coloured parr in the ripples of the Great South Branch. He remembered the sharp point piercing his jaw, his choking and gasping on the hot, dry bank; and refusing the bright titbit, he left it to be gobbled up by one of his less wary companions. After that revival of memory the crafty grilse inspected every fly before he rose to it, to see if any slender, almost invisible line were attached to it. His precautions were unnecessary, in that instance, the pool being a lonely and unnoted one in a broad, shallow reach of the river; but his awakened watchfulness was to stand him in good stead later on.

A day's journey beyond the pool, a great outrush of colder water, green-white against the amber tide of the main river, greeted the returning grilse, and he found himself in the mouth of his native Quahdavic. It was a scunter and shallower stream, however, than when he left it, for now the long heats of the summer had shrunk all the watercourses. As he mounted the clear current he now encountered fierce rapids, and ledges boiling with foam, which put his swimming prowess to the test. After a day of these rapids and ledges and shallow rips, he felt quite ready to halt once more in a great green pool where two lively brooks, tumbling in from either shore, kept the surface flecked with whirling foam. Here the invigorating coolness of the water speedily refreshed him, and he fell to feeding on the various insects brought down by the meeting currents. The pool was thronged with grilse and full-grown salmon, with here and there a school of graceful whitefish or a group of sluggish suckers, whom he ignored. When the moon rose white over the black, serried masses of the fir woods, silvering the pool, the big grilse, obeying a sudden caprice, shot upwards with a mighty surge of fins and tail, and hurled himself high into the still air. Falling back with a resounding splash, he repeated the feat again and again. He had discovered the fascination of diving upward into the unknown and alien element of the air. Others of his kindred, large and small, had made the same discovery, and the wilderness silence was broken with splash after splash, as the tense, silver shapes shot up, gleamed for an instant, and fell back. As the noise of the mysterious play echoed on the night air, a black bear crept down to the water's edge on one side of the stream, and a lynx stole out to the end of a log on the other side, each hoping that some unwary player might come within reach of his paw. But all the salmon kept out in the safe deeps; and the keen-eyed watchers watched in vain as the round moon climbed the clean heights of sky.

After a few days in this pool, he was surprised one early morning by the sight of a long, dark shape gliding over the surface. From its side, near the hinder end, a strange-looking, narrow fin thrust downward from time to time, and with heavy swirls propelled the dark shape. The strange apparition disturbed him, and he grew restless and watchful. A few minutes after it had passed there came a faint splash on the surface above him, and a big, curious-looking fly appeared. It sank an inch or two, moved against the current, and was then withdrawn. He eyed it with scorn, remembering his former experience with such. But when, a moment later, the strange fly appeared again, he was amazed to see one of the biggest salmon in the pool rise lazily and suck it down. The next instant there was a terrific commotion. He saw the great fish rush hither and thither up and down and around the pool, now scattering the whitefish on the bottom, now splashing upon the surface and leaping half his length into the air. Very clearly the cunning grilse understood what it all meant. For many long minutes he watched the struggle, which showed no sign of ending. Then disgusted and apprehensive, he forsook the pool, darting beneath the canoe as he did so, and continued his journey up-stream.

Late in the day the returning traveller came to the mouth of the Big South Branch. Without hesitation he turned up that turbulent but shrunken stream, knowing it for his own; and he made no stop till he reached the deep, green, foamy pool at the foot of the Falls. Being still comparatively fresh, and very restless, he swam all round the pool, and took a crafty survey of the terrific obstacle before him. But among the sojourners in the pool were many fish with bleeding sides, who had essayed the leap in vain and were waiting to recuperate their energies for another effort. So he, too, paused a little, gathering his young strength.

The Falls of the Big South were about twelve feet in total height. There were two leaps, the upper one, of about three feet, rolling down into a hollow shelf of sandstone some six or eight feet in width, and the lower, dropping nine feet sheer into the pool. Most of the face of fall, at this stage of the water, was lashed into foam by fissures and projecting angles of rock, but on the right the main volume of the stream fell in a clear, green column. Up the front of this column the grilse presently flung himself, striking the water about a foot from the top. As he struck, the impetus of his leap not yet exhausted, his powerful fins and tail took firm hold of the solid water and urged him upward. Over the lip he shot, into the boiling turmoil of the shelf, then onward over the great surge of the upper dip. He had triumphed easily, and the way was clear before him to the shining gravel bars whereon he had been spawned. There were still some tough rapids – shallow, and tortuous, and grid-ironed with slaty rocks – to be climbed; but there were quiet pools to sojourn in, and no perils that his craft could not evade. One by one his fellow voyagers had dropped away, betrayed by the fisherman's luring fly, clutched by the skilful paw of wildcat or bear, or vanquished in their own element by the mink or the otter. But when he reached the wide spawning-beds he was still comraded by a fair remnant of the host which had entered the river with him; and the shallow run that swept the bars were noisy with their splashings through the twilight of evening and dawn.

Every day there were new arrivals at the spawning-beds, and among them the strong and wary grilse soon found a mate. She was considerably larger than he, a trim young salmon of the second year and perhaps nine pounds in weight. But his radiant colouring, his strength and his activity, as he swam around her and displayed his charms, appeared to content her. With his bony nose he dug her a circular nest in the gravel, where the current ran clear but not too strong; and in this nest she laid her countless eggs, while he rubbed his side caressingly against her shining flanks. When her eggs were all laid and fertilized he drifted away from her, dropped down to the nearest pool, and lay there sluggish and uninterested for awhile, until, seized once more by the longing for the great salt tide, he joined a returning company of "slinks" and hurried back down-river to the sea.

III

When he reached the deep sea once more, and regained his appetite among the sweeping tides, he once more began to grow. His fins became smaller in proportion to his bulk, and he was no longer a grilse, but a salmon. His life, however, underwent no great change; his adventures, perils, interests, appetites, were all much the same as during his first season in the sea. Only he now swam with a certain majesty, ignoring the grilse and smaller salmon who swam and fed beside him; for he was of splendid, constantly growing stature, of the lords of his kind.

This time he let nearly the whole round of the year go by, feeding at leisure and lazily dodging the seals, among the icy but populous tides that swung beyond the mouth of Hudson Straits. Then, late the following winter, long before the dark earth had any word of spring, spring stirred secretly in his veins, and he remembered the sunny gravel bars of the Great South Branch. The sudden urge of his desire turned him about, and he began to swim tirelessly southward, companioned by an ardent, silvery host into whose veins at the same time the same compelling summons had been flashed.

It was late May when the returning salmon, having successfully eluded the snares of the nets and the assaults of harbour seal and dogfish, came again to the mouth of his native river and fanned his gills once more in its sweet, amber current. He was now a good forty pounds in weight, and his clean blue-and-silver body was adorned with fine markings of extraordinary brilliancy. His vigorous, wholesome, seasoned muscles propelled him irresistibly against the current of the river, which was now fierce with freshet; and being urged by a stronger and more insistent desire than that which had swayed him on his former visit, as a grilse, he now made more haste in his journeying, with briefer halts in the pools. The pools, at this season, were some of them indistinguishable in the flood, and others turbulent and difficult of access, so the fly-fishermen were not yet out in force. Only once, in the great pool below the Quahdavic mouth, did he see the bright fly whose treacherous lure he knew so well go dancing over his head. He rose lazily and slapped it with his tail in angry contempt, then returned to the bottom of the pool and watched it lazily, while for nearly an hour it went through its futile antics. Then it vanished suddenly.

Perhaps ten minutes after the gaudy fly had disappeared, the big salmon saw a brown furry shape, more like a very young squirrel than anything else, go floating down the current. Other salmon, who, like himself, had ignored the fly, observed this furry shape with interest, and half started to investigate. But when the big salmon rose to it they turned away with resignation. As for him, though he had not been once really hungry since entering the fresh water, he felt that that strange object was the very thing he wanted. Gliding up to the surface on a long slant, very slowly, he opened his great jaws just below the object, sucked it in, and with a heavy splash turned back toward the bottom. The next instant there was a jerk, a prick, a fierce tug at his jaw which swerved him from his course; and he realized that he had been fooled. The furry shape was but the old treason of the fly in another form.

His first impulse was to rush madly across the pool in an effort to escape the small tormentor. But memory and experience, added to that native cunning which had brought him safely through so many perils, now came to his rescue. Instead of rushing to the surface and performing wild feats which would have soon worn him out while delighting the soul of his enemy, he turned resolutely back to his course and bored his way to the bottom against the exasperating pressure of rod and reel. Here he set himself to nosing vigorously among the stones, in the hope of rubbing off this troublesome thing on his jaw. The thing tugged, and tugged, and pricked, and worried, as the fisherman at the other end of the line strove to rouse him into a lively and spectacular struggle. But for some minutes he refused to be diverted from his nosing among the stones, till the fisherman began to fear that the hook had got fast to a log.

Presently, however, the great salmon decided to change his tactics. Though he did not know it, he had already loosened the hook appreciably, tearing the cartilage of his jaw. Now, having craftily eyed for some seconds the fine, taut, almost invisible line of gut as it slanted off through the water, he made a long, swift rush straight in the direction in which the line was striving to pull him. Instantly the pull ceased, the line fell slack. But he felt the hook, with its furry attachment, still clinging at the side of his mouth. He passed straight under the dark shape of the canoe, and heard a sharp, vibrant sound above him, something like the song of a locust, which was the noise of the big salmon reel as the fisherman made wild haste to take in the slack of the line. As he swam he shook his head savagely; but the hook still held. Then, near the farther edge of the pool, he darted between the limbs of a sunken windfall, and back again on the other side, effectually fouling the line a few feet from his nose. The next moment there was a violent jerk at his jaw. The hook tore out, and he swam free.

In tremendous indignation and trepidation the great salmon now darted from the pool and up against the wild current of the Quahdavic. In the next pool he delayed for but a few minutes, not resting, but swimming about restlessly and stirring up the other salmon with his excitement. Then, accompanied by three or four of those whom his nervous activity had aroused, he pressed onward. Through rapid and chute and pool, and white-churned trough where rocks scored the bed of the river, he darted tirelessly, and up the clear torrent of the Great South Branch; and he never halted till he found himself in the boiling basin of green and foam at the foot of the Falls.

The basin was a very different place now from that which he had visited as a grilse. Into its vexed deeps the flood fell with the heavy trampling of thunder, which was echoed back and forth between the high broken rocks enclosing the basin. But what was of most importance to the great salmon was a fact which, if he realized it at all, he realized but vaguely. The Falls themselves had changed since his last visit.

At the very first of spring there had been a landslide. The great, partly overhanging rock, seamed and split by the wedges of countless frosts, had all at once crumbled down beneath the tireless pressure of the cataract. The lower fall, thus retreating, had become one with the upper. The straight descent was now nearly five feet higher than before, – a barrier which no voyager those waters ever knew could hope to overcome.

The great salmon did not understand what had happened. He knew that he had passed the barrier before, and had come to those bright, gravelled reaches of which he was desirous. He knew that a summons which he could not disobey was urging him on up-stream. He had no thought but to obey. After a short rest in the deepest part of the pool, – he was alone there, being the first of the returning migrants, – he suddenly aroused himself, darted like a flash of silver through the green flood, and shot straight up the face of the fall. Within three feet of the crest he came, hung curved like a bow for a fraction of a second, glittering and splendid, then fell back into the white smother. Again, and yet again, he essayed the leap, gaining perhaps a foot on the second trial, but falling far short on the third. Then, exhausted and beaten by the great impact of the waters as he fell back defenceless, he retired to the quietest depth of the pool to recover his strength. He felt bewildered by his failure, and half stunned by the buffeting of the air-charged flood, which affected him somewhat as a tornado might affect a man who was fighting to make head against it. Moreover, there was a long crimson gash slanting down his flank, where he had been driven against a jagged rock as he fell.

Of all these things, however, he thought little, as he lay there in the green deep which seethed from the turmoil passing above it. Through the turmoil he saw the wide, clean-glittering, shallow-rippled gravel-bars of the upper stream, golden under the sun and blue-white under the moon. These he saw as he remembered them, and he saw the loud barrier to be passed before he could reach them. As he brooded, his courage summoned back his strength. Again he flashed up, with a power and swiftness that seemed irresistible, and again he shot into the spray-thick air on the face of the

fall. Again he hung there for a half a heart-beat, spent, to fall back baffled and confused. Again and again, however, he flashed back to the trial, undaunted in spirit though at each effort his strength grew less: again and again the rock teeth hidden in the foam caught and tore him as he fell. At last, all but stunned and altogether bewildered, he swam feebly into an eddy close to shore and half turned upon his side, his gills opening and closing violently.

Just about this time a visitor from the hills had come shambling down to the river-edge, – one of the great black bears of the Quahdavic valley. Sitting contemplatively on her haunches, her little, cunning eyes had watched the vain leaps of the salmon. She knew a good deal about salmon and her watching was not mere curiosity. As the efforts of the brave fish grew feebler and feebler she drew down closer and closer to the edge of the water, till it frothed about her feet. When, at last, the salmon came blindly into the eddy and turned upon his side, the bear was but a few feet distant. She crept forward like a cat, crouched, – and a great black paw shot around with a clutching sweep. Gasping and quivering, the salmon was thrown up upon the rocks. Then white teeth, savage but merciful, bit through the back of his neck; and unstruggling he was carried to a thicket above the Falls.

Answerers to the Call

THE little lake, long and narrow, and set in a cleft of the deep forest, led off like a pathway of light to the full October moon. The surface of the lake was as still as glass, and the woods, rising from each shore in dense waves, billowy where the hardwoods crowded thick, or serrated and pinnacled where the fir and spruce and hemlock drew their ordered ranks, were as motionless as if an enchantment had been laid upon them. The air was magically clear, almost pungent with suggestion of frost, and tonic with autumn scents.

In sharp contrast to the radiance of the open, the deep of the forest was filled with an extraordinarily liquid and transparent darkness, pierced with hard white lines and spots of light where the moon broke through. Down along the shores of the lake, under the ragged fringe of mixed growths where forest and open met, ran a tangle of grotesque, exaggerated shadows, so solid of outline as to seem almost palpable.

All these shadows were as motionless as if frozen – except one, a long, angular shadow, which projected itself spasmodically but noiselessly through the bushes, occasionally darting out upon the naked beach, but withdrawing again instantly, as if in dread of the exposure. The source of this erratic shadow was a lean backwoodsman, who, rifle in hand, was stealing on moccasined feet down the lake shore under cover of the fringing branches.

Suddenly across the water came a sound as if some one were thrashing the underbrush with a stick. The hunter stopped short, and listened intently from his place of concealment. Very well he knew that sound. It was a bull moose eager for fight, thrashing the bushes with his great antlers as a challenge to any rival who might be within hearing.

The woodsman's grizzled lips parted in a smile of satisfaction, and after a glance at his rifle to see that the cartridge was in place, he crept onward down the lake, well under cover and as soundless as his own shadow. He expected to come upon the challenger somewhere near the foot of the lake. He might, of course, have adopted a surer and lazier method of hunting by staying where he was and imitating the call of the big moose's mate; but this seemed to him gross treachery, and little short of murder. He would almost as willingly have condescended to snare the noble beast whom he gloried in overcoming in fair chase.

The hunter had not gone far, however, when another strange sound disturbed the enchanted silence. It was harsh, wild, yet appealing, and seemed in some way the very voice of the untamed wilderness. It was the call of the shy cow moose.

The woodsman crept down to the shore and peered cautiously through the screening boughs, to see whether the call was an authentic one or the cheat of some other hunter less scrupulous than himself.

About a quarter of a mile down the shore a bare sand spit jutted out into the sheen of the lake; and near its point, an ungainly black silhouette against the bright water, stood the cow, calling, listening, and calling again.

The hunter stood for a few moments, watching her with that deliberation which marks the man of the woods. As he watched, suddenly the cow wheeled half-round, as if startled, then dashed into the water, swam in haste to the next point, and vanished among the trees.

The woodsman, much surprised, waited motionless where he was for a couple of minutes, to see if the cause of her alarm would reveal itself. Then, as no sign of life appeared on the brilliantly lighted sand spit, he pressed on stealthily down the shore to investigate for himself.

In a few minutes – forest and lake meanwhile as still as if no living thing breathed within the borders – the hunter found himself at the head of the sand spit. Keeping within the deep shadow, he examined the ground carefully, but could detect no trail, except that of the cow which had been

calling. Puzzled, and nettled to find his woodcraft at fault, he continued his furtive progress toward the foot of the lake.

He had gone not more than two or three hundred yards when, just as he was about to step out upon a little lighted glade, that subtle and unnamed sixth sense which the men of the woods sometimes develop warned him that something alive and hostile was hidden in the thicket just ahead. He stiffened in his tracks and waited, eyes and nostrils intently alert.

He was so close to the edge of the thicket that his own concealment was very imperfect. In the thicket, just across the lighted space, nothing stirred; but he was sure that something was there. For fully five minutes he waited. Then, just to see what would happen, he gave, very softly and alluringly, the call of the cow moose.

What happened was something no previous experience had taught him to expect. No moose responded to the supposed voice of its mate; but a huge black bear fairly bounced into the open, and came at him in terrific leaps, evidently purposing to catch the cow before she could get started running. Annoyed, because he was not hunting bear and did not want to scare the game he was seeking, the woodsman stepped out into the full light as he raised his rifle.

But he did not have to shoot. If he was not hunting bear, neither was the bear hunting man. At this unlooked-for apparition of a man with a voice like a cow moose, the bear almost stopped in mid-jump, as if struck by an explosive bullet. Fairly falling over in his desperate haste to stop himself, he clawed the turf wildly, wheeled about, and scuttled off into the woods like a frightened woodchuck. The hunter smiled grimly, and went on. He knew now what had startled the cow moose.

For nearly half an hour the great white moon seemed to possess the world alone. At the foot of the lake the hunter had to appear in the shining open for a second or two, while crossing the shallow but wide brook which formed the outlet. But he drifted across from stone to stone like a shadow, marked, as he knew well enough, by vigilant eyes, but not, he trusted, by the moose.

On this point he was presently quite assured, for he had little more than reached cover again when he saw the cow reappear on the open beach a short distance up the lake. She walked out till her fore hoofs were at the very edge of the water, then called again and again. She knew that somewhere in these illimitable shades, bold but crafty, her mate was watching and listening.

In answer to her call he was likely to come rushing up noisily, defying all peril, and flinging his challenge abroad for all whom it might interest. But to-night there was a vague suspicion in the air. It was probable that he would come silently, and give no hint of his coming until he stood beside her on the beach.

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