



"AS A CAT CREEPS UPON  
AN UNSUSPECTING BIRD."

(See *The Haunter of the Pine Gloom*, page 54)

## THE HAUNTER OF THE PINE GLOOM

By Charles G. D. Roberts

FOR a moment the Boy felt afraid—afraid in his own woods. He felt that he was being followed, that there were hostile eyes burning into the back of his jacket. The sensation was novel to him, as well as unpleasant, and he resented it. He knew it was all nonsense. There was nothing in these woods bigger than a weasel, he was sure of that. Angry at himself he would not look round, but swung along carelessly through the thicket, being in haste because it was already late and the cows should have been home and milked before sundown. Suddenly, however, he remembered that it was going flat against all woodcraft to disregard a warning. And was he not, indeed, deliberately seeking to cultivate and sharpen his instincts, in the effort to get closer to the wild woods folk and know them in their furtive lives? Moreover, he was certainly getting more and more afraid! He stopped, and peered into the pine glooms which surrounded him.

Standing motionless as a stump, and breathing with perfect soundlessness, he strained his ears to help his eyes in their questioning, of this obscure menace. He could see nothing. He could hear nothing. Yet, he knew his eyes and ears were cunning to pierce all the wilderness disguises. But stay—was that a deeper shadow, merely, far among the pine trunks? And—did it move? He stole forward; but even as he did so, whatever of unusual he saw or fancied in the object upon which his eyes were fixed melted away. It became but a shadow among other shadows, and motion-

less as they—all motionless in the calm of the tranquil sunset. He ran forward now, impatient to satisfy himself beyond suspicion. Yes—of course—it was just this gray spruce stump! He turned away, a little puzzled and annoyed in spite of himself. Thrashing noisily hither and thither through the underbrush—quite contrary to his wonted quietude while in the domains of the woodfolk,—and calling loudly in his clear young voice, "Co-petty! Co-petty! Co-petty! Co-o-o-petty!" over and over, he at length found the wilful young cow which had been eluding him. Then he drove the herd slowly homeward, with mellow *tink-a-tenk, tank-tenk* of the cowbells, to the farmyard and the milking.

Several evenings later, when his search for the wilful young cow chanced to lead him again through the corner of this second growth pine mood, the Boy had a repetition of the disturbing experience. This time his response was instant and aggressive. As soon as he felt that sensation of unfriendly eyes pursuing him, he turned, swept the shadows with his piercing scrutiny, plunged into the thickets with a rush, then stopped short as if frozen, almost holding his breath in the intensity of his stillness. By this procedure he hoped to catch the unknown haunter of the glooms under the disadvantage of motion. But again he was baffled. Neither eye nor ear revealed him anything. He went home troubled and wondering.

Some evenings afterwards the same thing happened at another corner of the pasture; and again one morning when he was fishing



in the brook a mile back into the woods, where it ran through a tangled growth of birch and fir. He began to feel that he was either the object of a malicious scrutiny, or that he was going back to those baby days when he used to be afraid of the dark. Being just at the age of ripe boyhood when childishness in himself would seem least endurable, the latter supposition was not to be considered. He therefore set himself to investigate the mystery, and to pit his woodcraft against the evasiveness of this troubler of his peace.

The Boy's confidence in his woodcraft was well founded. His natural aptitude for the study of the wild kindred had been cultivated to the utmost of his opportunity, in all the time that could be stolen from his lesson-hours and from his unexacting duties about his father's place. Impatient and boyish in other matters, he had trained himself to the patience of an Indian in regard to all matters appertaining to the wood-folk. He had a pet theory that the human animal was more competent, as a mere animal, than it gets the credit of being; and it was his particular pride to outdo the wild creatures at their own games. He could hide, unstirring as a hidden grouse. He could run down a deer by sheer endurance—only to spare it at the last and let it go, observed and mastered, but unhurt. And he could see, as few indeed among the wild things could. This was his peculiar triumph. His eyes could discriminate where theirs could not. Perfect movelessness was apt to deceive. The keenest of them; but his sight was not to be so foiled. He could differentiate, gradually, the shape of the brown hare crouching motionless on its brown form; and separate the yellow weasel from the tuft of yellow weeds; and distinguish the slumbering night-hawk from the knot on the hemlock limb. He could hear, too, as well as most of the wild kindred, and better, indeed, than some; but in this he had to acknowledge himself hopelessly outclassed by not a few. He knew that the wood-mouse and the hare, for instance, would simply make a mock of him in any test of ears; and as for the owl—well, that gifted hearer of infinitesimal sounds would be justified in calling him stone-deaf.

The Boy was a good shot, but very seldom was it that he cared to display his skill in that direction. It was his ambition to "name all the birds without a gun." He would know the wild folk living, not dead.

From the feebler of the wild folk he wanted trust, not fear; and he himself had no fear, on the other hand, of the undisputed Master of the Woods, the big black bear. His faith, justified by experience, was that the bear had sense, knew how to mind his own business, and was ready to let other people mind theirs. He knew the bear well, from patient, secret observation when the big beast little imagined himself observed. From the neighborhood of a bull moose in rutting season he would have taken pains to absent himself; and if he had ever come across any trace of a panther in those regions, he would have studied that uncertain beast with his rifle always at hand in case of need. For the rest, he felt safe in the woods, as an initiate of their secrets, and it was unusual for him to carry in his wanderings any weapon but a stout stick and the sheath-knife in his belt.

Now, however, when he set himself to discover what it was that haunted his footsteps in the gloom, he took his little rifle—and in this act betrayed to himself more uneasiness than he had been willing to acknowledge.

This especial afternoon he got the hired man to look after the cows for him, and betook himself early, about two hours before sundown, to the young pine wood where the mystery had begun. In the heart of a little thicket, where he was partly concealed and where the gray-brown of his clothes blended with the stems and dead branches, he seated himself comfortably with his back against a stump. Experience had taught him that, in order to hold himself long in one position, the position chosen must be an easy one. Soon his muscles relaxed, and all his senses rested, watchful but unstrained. He had learned that tensity was a thing to be held in reserve until occasion should call for it.

In a little while his presence was ignored or forgotten by the chipmunks, the chickadees, the white-throats, and other unafraid creatures. Once a chipmunk, on weighty business bent, ran over his legs rather than go around so unoffending an obstacle. The chickadees played antics on the branches, and the air was beaded sweetly everywhere with their familiar *sic-a-dee, dee-ee*. A white-throat in the tree right over his head whistled his mellow *dear, dear eedledee—eedledee—eedledee, over and over*. But there was nothing new in all this; and at length he began to grow conscious of his

position, and desirous of changing it slightly.

Before he had quite made up his mind to this momentous step there came upon his ear a beating of wings, and a fine cock grouse alighted on a log some forty paces distant. He stretched himself, strutted, spread his ruff and wings and tail, and was about to begin drumming. But before the first sonorous note rolled out there was a rustle and a pounce. The beautiful bird bounded into the air as if hurled from a spring; and a great lynx landed on the log, digging his claws fiercely into the spot where the grouse had stood. As the bird rocketed off through the trees the lynx glared after him, and emitted a loud, screeching snarl of rage. His disappointment was so obvious and childish that the Boy almost laughed out.

"Lucifec," said he to himself, giving it the name it went by in all the back settlements. "That's the fellow that has been haunting me. I didn't think there were any lynxes this side of the mountain. He hasn't seen me, that's sure. So now it's my turn to haunt him a bit."

The lucifec, indeed, had for the moment thrown off all concealment, in his fury at the grouse's escape. His stub of a tail twitched and his pale bright eyes looked around for something on which to vent his feelings. Suddenly, however, a wandering puff of air blew the scent of the Boy to his nostrils. On the instant, like the soundless pelting of a shadow, he was down behind the log, taking observations through the veil of a leafy branch.

Though the animal was looking straight toward him, the Boy felt sure he was not seen. The eyes, indeed, were but following the nose. The lynx's nose is not so keen and accurate in its information as are the noses of most of the other wild folk, and the animal was puzzled. The scent was very familiar to him, for had he not been investigating the owner of it for over a week, following him at every opportunity with mingled curiosity and hatred. Now, judging by the scent, the object of his curiosity was close at hand—yet incomprehensibly invisible. After sniffing and peering for some minutes he came out from behind the log and crept forward, moving like a shadow, and following up the scent. From bush to tree-trunk, from thicket to stump, he glided with incredible smoothness and rapidity,

elusive to the eye, utterly inaudible; and behind each shelter he crouched to again take observations. The Boy thought of him, now, as a sort of malevolent ghost in fur, and no longer wondered that he had failed to catch a glimpse of him before.

The lynx (this was the first of its tribe the Boy had ever seen, but he knew the kind by reputation) was a somewhat dog-gish-looking cat, perhaps four or five times the weight of an ordinary Tom, and with a very uncatlike length of leg in proportion to its length of body. Its hindquarters mere disproportionately high, its tail ridiculously short. Spiky tufts to its ears and a peculiar brushing back of the fur beneath its chin gave its round and fierce-eyed countenance an expression at once savage and grotesque. Most grotesque of all were the huge, noiseless pads of its feet, muffled in fur. Its color was a tawny, weather-beaten gray-brown. Its eyes pale, round, brilliant, and coldly cruel.

At length the animal, on a stronger puff of air, located the scent more closely. This was obvious from a sudden stiffening of his muscles. His eyes began to discern a peculiarity in the pine trunk some twenty paces ahead. Surely that was no ordinary pine-trunk, that! No, indeed, that was where the scent of the Boy came from—and the hair on his back bristled fiercely. In fact, it was the Boy! The lucifec's first impulse on the discovery, was to shrink off like a mist, and leave further investigation to a more favorable opportunity. But he thought better of it because the Boy was so still. Could he be asleep? Or, perhaps, dead? At any rate, it would seem, he was for the moment harmless. Curiosity overcoming discretion, and possibly hatred suggesting a chance of advantageous attack, the animal lay down, his paws folded under him, contemplatively, and studied with round fierce eyes the passive figure beneath the tree.

The Boy, meanwhile, returned the stare with like interest, but through narrowed lids, lest his eyes should betray him; and his heart beat fast with the excitement of the situation. There was a most thrilling uncertainty, indeed, as to what the animal would do next. He was glad he had brought his rifle.

Presently the lucifec arose and began creeping stealthily closer, at the same time swerving off to the right as if to get behind

the tree. Whether his purpose in this was to escape unseen or to attack from the rear, the Boy could not decide: but what he did decide was that the game was becoming hazardous and should be brought to immediate close. He did not want to be compelled to shoot the beast in self-defence, for, this being the first lynx he had ever seen, he wanted to study him. So, suddenly, with the least possible movement of his features, he squeaked like a wood-mouse, then *quit-quit*-ed like a grouse, then gave to a nicety the sonorous call of the great horned owl.

The astonished lynx seemed to shrink into himself, as he flattened against the ground, grown moveless as a stone. It was incredible, appalling indeed, that these familiar and well-understood voices should all come from that same impassive figure. He crouched unstirring for so long that at last the shadows began to deepen perceptibly. The Boy remembered that he had heard, some time ago, the bells of the returning cows; and he realized that it might not be well to give his adversary the advantage of the dark. Nevertheless, the experience was one of absorbing interest and he hated to close it.

At length the lucifee came to the conclusion that the mystery should be probed more fully. Once more he rose upon his padded, soundless paws, and edged around stealthily to get behind the tree. This was not to be permitted. The Boy burst into a peal of laughter and slowly rose to his feet. On the instant the lucifee gave a bound, like a great rubber ball, backward into a thicket. It seemed as if his big feet were all feathers, and as if every tree trunk bent to intervene and screen his going. The Boy rubbed his eyes, bewildered at so complete and instantaneous an exit. Grasping his rifle in readiness he hurried forward, searching every thicket, looking behind every stump and trunk. The hunter of the glooms had disappeared.

After this, however, the Boy was no more troubled by the mysterious pursuit. The lynx had evidently found out all he required to know about him. On the other hand the Boy was balked in his purpose of finding out all he wanted to know about the lynx. That wary animal eluded all his most patient and ingenious lyings-in-wait, until the Boy began to feel that his woodcraft was being turned to a derision.

Only once more that autumn did he catch a glimpse of his shy opponent, and then by chance, when he was on another trail. Hidden at the top of a thick-wooded bank he was watching a mink at its fishing in the brook below. But as it turned out, the dark little fisherman had another watcher as well. The pool in the brook was full of large suckers. The mink had just brought one to land in his triangular jaws and was proceeding to devour it, when a silent gray thunderbolt fell upon him. There was a squeak and a snarl; and the long, snaky body of the mink lay as still as that of the fish which had been its prey. Crouching over his double booty, a paw on each, the lynx glared about him in exultant pride. The scent of the Boy, high on the bank above, did not come to him. The fish, as the more highly prized tid-bit, he devoured at once. Then, after licking his lips and polishing his whiskers, he went loping off through the moods with the limp body of the mink hanging from his jaws, to eat it at leisure in his lair. The Boy made up his mind to find out where that lair was hidden. But his searchings were all vain, and he tried to console himself with the theory that the animal was wont to travel great distances in his hunting—a theory which he knew in his heart to be contrary to the customs of the cat-kindred.

During the winter he was continually tantalized by coming across the lucifee's tracks—great footprints, big enough to do for the trail-signature of the panther himself. If he followed these tracks far he was sure to find interesting records of wilderness adventure—here a spot where the lynx had sprung upon a grouse, and missed it, or upon a hare, and caught it; and once he found the place where the big furry paws had dug down to the secret white retreat where a grouse lay sleeping under the snow. But by and by the tracks would cross each other, and make wide circles, or end in a tree where there was no lucifee to be found. And the Boy was too busy at home to give the time which he saw it would require to unravel the maze to its end. But he refused to consider himself defeated. He merely regarded his triumph as postponed.

Early in the spring the triumph came—though not just the triumph he had expected. Before the snow was quite gone, and when the sap was beginning to flow from the sugar maples, he went with the hired man

to tap a grove of extra fine trees some five miles east from the settlement. Among the trees they had a sugar camp; and when not at the sugar-making, the Boy explored a near by burnt-land ridge, very rocky and rich in coverts, where he had often thought the old lynx, his adversary, might have made his lair. Here, the second day after his arrival, he came upon a lucifée track. But it was not the track with which he was familiar. It was smaller, and the print of the right forefoot lacked a toe.

The Boy grinned happily and rubbed his mittened hands. "Aha!" said he to himself, "better and better! There is a Mrs. Lucifée. Now we'll see where she hides her kittens."

The trail was an easy one this time, for no enemies had been looked for in that desert neighborhood. He followed it for about half a mile, and then caught sight of a hollow under an overhanging rock, to which the tracks seemed to lead. Working around to get the wind in his face he stole cautiously nearer, till he saw that the hollow was indeed the entrance to a cave, and that the tracks led directly into it. He had no desire to investigate further, with the risk of finding the lucifée at home; and it was getting too late for him to undertake his usual watching tactics. He withdrew stealthily and returned to the camp in exultation.

In the night a thaw set in, so the Boy was spared the necessity of waiting for the noon sun to soften the snow and make the walking noiseless. He set out on the very edge of sunrise, and reached his hiding place while the mouth of the cave was still in shadow. On the usual crisp mornings of sugar season the snow at such an hour would have borne a crust, to crackle sharply under every footstep and proclaim an intruding presence to all the wood folk for a quarter of a mile about.

After waiting for a good half hour, his eyes glued to a small black opening under the rock, his heart gave a leap of strong, joyous excitement. He saw the lucifée's head appear in the doorway. She peered about her cautiously, little dreaming, however, that there was any cause for caution. Then she came forth into the blue morning light, yawned hugely, and stretched herself like a cat. She was smaller than the Boy's old adversary, somewhat browner in hue, leaner, and of a peculiarly malignant expression. The Boy had an instant intuition that she would

be the more dangerous antagonist of the two; and a feeling of sharp hostility toward her, such as he had never felt toward her mate, arose in his heart.

When she had stretched to her satisfaction, and washed her face perfunctorily with two or three sweeps of her big paw, she went back into the cave. In two or three minutes she reappeared, and this time with a brisk air of purpose. She turned to the right, along a well-worn trail, ran up a tree to take a survey of the country, descended hastily, and glided away among the thickets.

"It's breakfast she's after," said the Boy to himself, "and she'll take some time to find it."

When she had been some ten minutes gone, the Boy went boldly down to the cave. He had no fear of encountering the male, because he knew from an old hunter who had taught him his first wood-lore that the male lucifée is not popular with his mate at whelping time, having a truly Saturnian fashion of devouring his own offspring. But there was the possibility, remote, indeed, but disquieting, of the mother turning back to see to some neglected duty; and with this chance in view he held his rifle ready.

Inside the cave he stood still and waited for his eyes to get used to the gloom. Then he discovered, in one corner, on a nest of fur and dry grass, a litter of five lucifée whelps. They were evidently very young, little larger than ordinary kittens, and too young to know fear, but their eyes were wide open, and they stood up on strong legs when he touched them softly with his palm. Disappointed in their expectation of being nursed, they mewed, and there was something in their cries that sounded strangely wild and fierce. To the Boy's great surprise they were quite different in color from their gray-brown, unmarked parents, being striped vividly and profusely, like a tabby or a tiger. The Boy was delighted with them, and made up his mind that when they were a few days older he would take two of them home with him to be brought up in the ways of civilization.

Three days later he again visited the den, this time with a basket in which to carry away his prizes. After waiting an hour to see if the mother were anywhere about, he grew impatient. Stealing as close to the cave's mouth as the covert would permit, he squeaked like a wood-

mouse, several times. This seductive sound bringing no response, he concluded that the old lucifee must be absent. He went up to the mouth of the cave and peered in, holding his rifle in front of his face in readiness for an instant shot. When his eyes got command of the dusk he saw to his surprise that the den was empty. He entered and felt the vacant nest. It was quite cold, and had a deserted air. Then he realized what had happened, and cursed his clumsiness. The old lucifee, when she came back to her den, had learned by means of her nose that her enemy had discovered her hiding-place and touched her young with his defiling human hands, thereupon in wrath she had carried them away to some remote and unviolated lair. Till they were grown to nearly the full stature of lucifee destructiveness, the Boy saw no more of his wonderful lucifee kittens.

Toward the latter part of the summer, however, he began to think that perhaps he had made a mistake in leaving these fierce beasts multiply. He no longer succeeded in catching sight of them as they went about their furtive business, for they had somehow become aware of his woodcraft and distrustful of their own shifts. But on all sides he found trace of their depredations among the weaker creatures. He observed that the rabbits were growing scarce about the settlement; and even the grouse were less numerous in the upland thickets of young birch. As all the harmless wood folk were his friends he began to feel that he had been false to them in sparing their enemies. Thereupon, he took to carrying his rifle whenever he went exploring. He had not really declared war upon the haunters of the glooms, but his relations with them were becoming distinctly strained.

At length the rupture came; and it was violent. In one of the upland pastures, far back from the settlement, he came upon the torn carcass of a half-grown lamb. He knew that this was no work of a bear, for the berries were abundant that autumn, and the bear prefers berries to mutton. Moreover, when a bear kills a sheep he skins it deftly and has the politeness to leave the pelt rolled up in a neat bundle, just to indicate to the farmer that he has been robbed by a gentleman. But this carcass was torn and mangled most untidily; and the Boy divined the culprits.

It was early in the afternoon when he made his find, and he concluded that the lucifees were likely to their prey before evening. He hid himself, therefore, behind a log thickly fringed with juniper, not twenty-five paces from the carcass; and waited, rifle in hand.

A little before sunset appeared the five young lucifers, now nearly full grown. They fell at once to tearing at the carcass, with much jealous snarling and fighting. Soon afterwards came the mother, with a well-fed, leisurely air; and at her heels, the big male of the Boy's first acquaintance. It was evident that, now that the rabbits were getting scarce, the lucifees were hunting in packs, a custom very unusual with these unsocial beasts under ordinary circumstances, and only adopted when seeking big game. The big male cuffed the cubs aside without ceremony, mounted the carcass with an air of lordship, glared about him, and suddenly, with a snarl of wrath, fixed his eyes upon the green branches wherein the Boy lay concealed. At the same time the female, who had stopped short, sniffing and peering suspiciously, crouched to her belly, and began to crawl very softly and stealthily, as a cat crawls upon an unsuspecting bird, toward the innocent-looking juniper thicket.

The Boy realized that he had presumed too far upon the efficacy of stillness and that the lynxes, at this close range, had detected him. He realized, too, that now, jealous in the possession of their prey, they had somehow laid aside their wonted fear of him; and he congratulated himself heartily that his little rifle was a repeater. Softly he raised it to take aim at the nearest, and to him the most dangerous of his foes, the cruel-eyed female; but in doing so he stirred, ever so little, the veiling fringe of juniper. At the motion the big male sprang forward, with two great bounds, and crouched within ten yards of the log. His stub of a tail twitched savagely. He was plainly nerving himself to the attack.

There was no time to lose. Taking quick but careful aim the Boy fired. The bullet found its mark between the brute's eyes and he straightened out where he lay, without a kick. At the sound and the flash the female doubled upon herself as quick as light; and before the Boy could get a shot at her she was behind a stump some rods away, shrinking small, and fleeing like a gray shred

of vapor. The whelps, too, had vanished with almost equal skill—all but one. He, less alert and intelligent than his fellows, tried concealment behind a clump of pink fireweed. But the Boy's eyes pierced the screen; and the next bullet, cutting the fireweed stalks, took vengeance for many slaughtered hares and grouse.

After this the Boy saw no more of his enemies for some months, but though they had grown still more wary their experience had not made them less audacious. Before the snow fell they had killed another sheep; and the Boy was sure that they, rather than any skunks or foxes, were to blame for the disappearance of several geese from his flock. His primeval hunting instincts were now aroused, and he was no longer merely the tender-hearted and sympathetic observer. It was only toward the marauding lucifees, however, that his feelings had changed. The rest of the wild folk he loved as well as before, but for the time he was too busy to think of them.

When the snow came, and footsteps left their tell-tale records, the Boy found to his surprise that he had but one lucifee to deal with. Every lynx track in the neighborhood had a toe missing on the right forefoot. It was clear that the whelps of last spring had shirked the contest and betaken themselves to other and safer hunting-grounds; but he felt that between himself and the vindictive old female it was war to the knife. Her tracks fairly quartered the outlying fields all about his father's farm, and were even to be found now and again around the sheep-pen and the fowl-house. Yet never, devise, he ever so cunningly, did he get a glimpse of so much as her gray stub tail.

At last, through an open window, she invaded the sheep-pen by night and killed two young ewes. To the Boy this seemed mere wantonness of cruelty, and he set his mind to a vengeance which he had hitherto been unwilling to consider. He resolved to trap his enemy, since he could not shoot her.

Now as a mere matter of woodcraft, he knew all about trapping and snaring; but ever since the day, now five years gone, when he had been heart-stricken by his first success in rabbit-snaring, he had hated everything like a snare or trap. Now, however, in the interests of all the helpless creatures of the neighborhood, wild or tame, he made up his mind to snare the lucifee. He went

about it with his utmost skill, in a fashion taught him by an old Indian trapper.

Close beside one of his foe's remoter runways, in an upland field where the hares were still abundant, the Boy set his snare. It was just a greatly exaggerated rabbit snare, of extra heavy wire and a cord of triple strength. But instead of being attached to the top of a bent-down sapling, it was fastened to a billet of wood about four feet long and nearly two inches in diameter. This substantial stick was supported on two forked uprights driven into the snow beside the runway. Then young fir-bushes were stuck about it carefully in a way to conceal evidence of his handiwork; and an artful arrangement of twigs disguised the ambushed loop of wire.

Just behind the loop of wire, and some inches below it, the Boy arranged his bait. This consisted of the head and skin of a hare, stuffed carefully with straw, and posed in a life-like attitude. It seemed, indeed, to be comfortably sleeping on the snow, under the branches of a young fir-tree; and the Boy felt confident that the tempting sight would prevent the wily old lucifee from taking any thought to the surroundings before securing the prize.

Late that afternoon, when rose and gold were in the sky, and the snowy open spaces were of a fainter rose, and the shadows took on an ashy purple under the edges of the pines and firs, the old lucifee came drifting along like a phantom. She peered hungrily under every bush, hoping to catch some careless hare asleep. On a sudden a greenish fire flamed into her wide eyes. She crouched, and moved even more stealthily than was her wont. The snow, the trees, the still sweet evening light, seemed to invest her with silence. Very soundly it slept, that doomed hare, crouching under the fir-bush! And now, she was within reach of her spring. She shot forward, straight and strong and true.

Her great paws covered the prey, indeed; but at the same instant a sharp, firm grip clutched her throat with a jerk, and then something hit her a sharp rap over the shoulders. With a wild leap backward and aside she sought to evade the mysterious attack. But the noose settled firmly behind her ears, and the billet of wood, with a nasty tug at her throat, leapt after her.

So this paltry thing was her assailant! She flew into a wild rage at the stick, tearing



at it with her teeth and claws. But this made no difference with the grip about her throat so she backed off again. The stick followed—and the grip tightened. Bracing her forepaws upon the wood she pulled fiercely to free herself; and the wire drew taut till her throat was almost closed. Her rage had hastened her doom, fixing the noose where there was no such thing as clawing it off. Then fear took the place of rage in her savage heart. Her lungs seemed bursting. She began to realize that it was not the stick, but some more potent enemy whom she must circumvent or overcome. She picked up the billet between her jaws, climbed a big birch tree which grew close by, ran out upon a limb some twenty feet from the ground, and dropped the stick, thinking thus to rid herself of the throttling burden.

The shock, as the billet reached the end of its drop, jerked her from her perch; but clutching frantically she gained a foothold on another limb eight or ten feet lower

down. There she clung, her tongue out, her eyes flaring, her breath stopped, strange colors of flame and darkness rioting in her brain. Bracing herself with all her remaining strength against the pull of the dangling stick, she got one paw firmly fixed against a small jutting branch. Thus it happened that when, a minute later, her life went out and she fell, she fell on the other side of the limb. The billet of wood flew up, caught in a fork, and held fast; and the limp, tawny body, twitching for a minute convulsively, hung some six or seven feet above its own tracks in the snow.

An hour or two later the moon rose, silvering the open spaces. Then, one by one and two by two, the hares came leaping down the aisles of pine and fir. Hither and thither around the great birch tree they played, every now and then stopping to sit up and thump challenges to their rivals. And because it was quite still, they never saw the body of their deadliest foe, hanging stark from the branch above them.

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## "PAPABOTTE" SHOOTING IN LOUISIANA

HOW THE CREOLES KILL AND COOK  
THE FINEST PLOVER IN AMERICA

By Andrew Wilkinson

THERE is an American plover too susceptible to cold weather to endure even the mild winter climate of south Louisiana, though it nests in our northern border States.

That bird bears three names. When it reaches the cattle pastures and prairies of southwest Louisiana about the middle of March, it is called the Mexican plover, from its wintering place in Mexico. It carries a month or two in the Gulf Coast parishes to rest and recuperate after the first half of its long northward flight. During this spring journey and stay, true sportsmen do not trouble the Mexican plovers; the birds are lean from the weariness of long migration and so tame that the veriest tyro is able to shoot them on the ground at short gun-range. After feeding awhile on the re-

vivified insect-life of the south Louisiana and Texas prairies, the plovers commence pairing off about the middle of April and leaving in small detachments; and, before the middle of May, the last of them have departed from their half-way feeding grounds to follow the far northward advance of spring.

In their breeding region, they go by the general name of upland plover, with variations of title according to local provincialism.

In August the comparatively cool nights of their summer range warn their oversensitive bodies that it is time to depart for the milder climes and more abundant bird-pastures of the distant South. In the latter half of August, they appear again in south Louisiana. Having evidently stopped daily for meals in their southward migration, they reach the Gulf Coast region plump birds;