

THE INDIFFERENT

The winter had been hard. Through sunken eyes, the furry inhabitants saw that the bleak face of the Canadian woods still showed no sign that the spring thaw was coming and grew more and more desperate in their search for food. The only animals that fared well were those that fed on bark, and the chief of these, the rabbit, had been all but killed off by one of these mysterious epidemics that occurs every time the rabbit population becomes too dense. The few snowshoes that had escaped the disease were now part of the flesh and blood of the fiercer animals of the woods—the lynx, the fox, the weasel. Not a rabbit remained. And slowly but surely, death stared the other animals in the face.

The dawn broke, cold and grey. The porcupine, stirring in his hole beneath the pile of rocks, stretched himself, becoming twice his natural size as every quill on his body stood on edge. And his was no mean crop of quills, for every part of his body, except his stomach and the very tip of his tail, was covered with them. He leveled his quills, crept from the hole of his little den and marched indifferently forth to meet the cold and the snow and his breakfast. He climbed up a willow tree and soon made short work of some bark, tearing it off with his little teeth and swallowing it in large chunks. From all around, the eyes of the wilderness watched him, for in all this wide expanse every animal was hungry except the porcupine. From a neighboring tree, a lynx, who had been prowling for food all night, sat and mournfully watched him, licking his chops at the sight of the unprotected stomach of the porcupine, and recoiling in fear at the sight of the murderous quills covering the rest of the body. For more than a hour the lynx watched him feast on the bark.

His meal finished, the porcupine made his way across a bare patch of snow toward his little den. He was fully aware that hungry eyes were watching him; he was also fully aware that he could look out for himself. He had seen the lynx, but only through indifferent eyes. He also had seen a large owl and gave it just as much attention as the lynx. But here he made his first mistake, he underestimated the forces of hunger. Suddenly he saw a shadow on the snow becoming larger and larger and coming straight at him. Quickly his quills were on end and his tail

was lashing; the owl saw this but could not stop. The tail caught him in the chest and the early morning woods echoed his scream; dozens of the quills pierced into his flesh for inches and remained there. The lynx, who had been watching the drama, saw the owl fly to the nearest tree and attempt to pull the quills out with his beak. In some he succeeded, but many broke off, the tips remaining in the flesh to torment, to fester, and ultimately to kill the hunger-crazed bird. The porcupine continued indifferently to his den.

All that day the lynx waited. His first impulse at the sight of the devastation of the owl was to take to his heels. But hunger soon makes one forget danger and the lynx decided to wait for the porcupine to emerge again, not having anything more in mind than to feast his hungry eyes on something that was able to appease his hunger, on something so near and yet so far. Just after midday the indifferent little animal emerged again from his hole in the rocks, blinked at the white world with his small black eyes, saw the lynx and, paying no more attention to it than he did to the snow, began to eat again. Just at this moment some devil roaming the north woods must have taken possession of the lynx, for he dropped down out of his perch and headed straight for the spiny animal. The porcupine became a ball of quills at once, with nothing moving but the one great offensive weapon he possessed, the tail. The lynx knew when he was beaten, and came just out of reach of the tail, but no farther. His legs being weak from hunger, he lay down on the snow just behind the animal and waited.

About ten minutes later the tail of the little porcupine stopped its slashing movements but the quills still remained distended. The lynx had not made a move nor a sound since he had lain down behind the animal. The porcupine thought he had gone but the owl had taught him a lesson, he would remain at least a half hour before he drew down his quills. The lynx now saw his chance. With a quick leap he was behind the porcupine and had the very tip of the tail in his mouth. A squeal of agony rose from the ball of quills and the tail jerked to and fro and up and down, but the lynx held on stubbornly.

The drama seen by the hungry eyes of the wilderness was this: the lynx began to drag the struggling porcupine backwards over the snow, the tail slashing all the while,

little puffs of snow being driven up by the struggling feet of the lynx, grunts arising from the lynx and squeals from the porcupine. Up to the trunk of a large knarled fir the struggle continued and here it stopped. The porcupine was evidently becoming exhausted, the tail stopped slashing, and the lynx, with the tip of the tail still between his teeth, contemplated the great fir. A few minutes later he seemed to have his plan worked out. With slow movements, his claws tearing off pieces of the rough bark all the while, he started to climb backwards up the fir, dragging the squealing porcupine after him. He had climbed so far now that the porcupine seemed to be standing on his head. Then with a quick jump the lynx hopped back on the snow, holding the tail in his mouth for a second and then releasing it. The momentum of the lynx's jump caused the porcupine to fall flat on his back and here he remained a second. That second was enough for the lynx, he was on the unprotected spot on the stomach in a flash, tearing and biting - - -

The little den under the pile of rocks is deserted now. Sometimes a lynx trots by, sees the little heap of quills and bones, smells at the entrance of the den and remembers - - -

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VISIT TO AN IDEAL THESAURUS

(Conclusion)

The introductory remarks of His Excellent Power, Mr. Reason, were brief and to the point. In explaining the purpose of the institution of which he is the executive head, he constantly stressed the excellence of each and every intellect and its products. Certainly, he pointed out, this is an illustration of the fact of taking things for granted in that the average person is totally unaware that he possesses the greatest glory of God's creation. Because of the worth of this creature, the Creator has prepared for it a share of His happiness in His own kingdom. Of course its worth arises from its being a sharer in the very life and attributes of God Himself. Is it not proper then, he asked, to conserve the products of this most excellent of God's creations, as it itself is preserved? Although the question was purely rhetorical, I was nevertheless so moved by his