

THE LIFE OF CAPERS THE FAWN

STORY

THE first thing about danger that Capers learned was the value of his nose, but this was after he had staggered to his feet on a sunny hillside in the Adirondacks. He had entered this deer world of green grasses and rich beech mast when the mast was rotted beneath the melting snows and the green was rare and far between. May is still a chilly season there, but the sun glowed warmly through the bare branches of the thicket and tickled his spotted chestnut coat even while he lay beside his mother in the warm bed she had scraped together for his welcome.

His little stomach was first to send a current of instinct to his brain, and he fed himself so heartily that he was asleep, almost before he realized that he was satisfied. The sun was gone when he awoke, stirring under the gentle affection of the doe's tongue as she licked his sides, his ears, his eyes and cuddled him with her warm neck.

His little damp nose told him he was close to the larder, so again he fed until his tiny barrel grew bloated with repetition, and again he slept.

When he awoke his mother was gone, and Capers was scared. He bleated his woe and snuggled closer into the twigs and dried grass, for the hillside was frosty in the chill of dawn. Presently another deer stamped close by, and Capers shivered, for he had not known there were any other living things in the world but himself and his mother.

When a big buck pushed his head through the brush and sniffed scornfully Capers almost died from fright. Then, silent as the moonlight, his mother slipped into her home and stamped with menace and anger at the buck. That lordly person, denuded of his antlers, withdrew, feeling none of the pride and mastery he had carried into the first snows of the preceding winter.

Capers' mother had been out for breakfast. When she selected a home for the baby she expected she had chosen well. Running out from the higher hills back of the lake below till rimmed with snow and ice, was a ridge ending in a broad, thicket covered knoll. It lay where the first warm suns of spring would most easily find it and the tiny thing that should lie and play upon it.

Enemies must mount its steep sides and give warning by their effort or must come across the ridge whose curving contours promised to clog the air of the knoll with their scent, no matter whence blew the breeze. It was too wild and desolate for the foxes and too far from the steady diet of feathered flesh and rabbit rumps that most charm them.

Food must not be too distant, and the doe knew that first of the green things of spring would sprout between the fading snow rifts on the marsh at the lake side. In the hour before dawn she had left her baby to seek the earliest tufts of the green, to snatch some budding leaves from the brush and drink in the icy lake a long bumper to the health and long life of Capers.

He was safe enough, though alone, for his mother had never seen an enemy to threaten her life except man, and no men were in the woods then.

She had heard of the cougars and Capers would hear of them, too. Some winter night when he was stamping with the herd in their yard in the snow he was sure to be told by an old gray buck with a dozen tines on his antlers of how the veteran had escaped the cougar years before. Old bucks are prone to such boasting. It was always a tale of feeding at the base of a rocky cliff, a sudden scent full of murder and a quick glance above to see the crouching catlike form on a projecting rock.

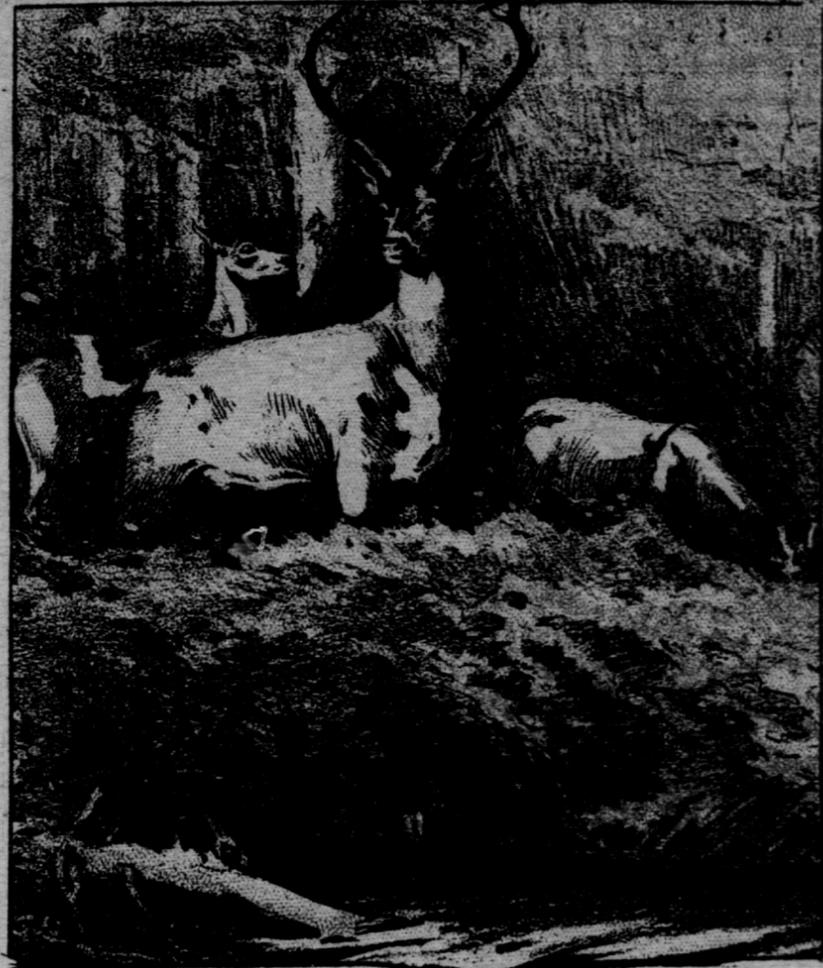
"He leaped as I saw him," the old buck said, "and I sprang, too, but, my children, I was wise even as a child—as I wish some of you were—and I did not spring away from him. I sprang toward him, right at the face of the cliff. Thus the murderer with all his claws and teeth ready for me landed where I had been, but where I was not.

"Believe me, no deer in all these hills could keep pace with me in those days, even through the thickets. Before the cougar could turn I was far away."

Capers' youthful fancy was still spared such terrors. When he woke again it was broad day. His mother was browsing near by and he concluded he was old enough to join her. To this end he staggered to upright-ness on his dicky legs and stood revealed, mostly head, ears and those same legs.

His walk was wobbly, but only for a little while, and in a few days he was as graceful as the fawn which gave a simile to grace.

His ears stuck out, it's true, and his body seemed a long way from the ground, but his little barrel was a delight of white spots on bright bay, and when he took sudden fright and leaped to his mother his little tail shot straight up and stood stiffly, like a ban-



ner. Soon he was trotting at his mother's side when she went to the lake, where he, too, learned to drink.

The world was changing all around him, leaves were springing out on the trees, the balsams were taking on a brighter green and the dry winter carpet of the earth was tinged with verdure. Capers found much to investigate, and one day he had his first real scare.

Following the doe to the lake, he had sniffed among the thickets while she waded in the water's edge eagerly plucking at the green marsh grass.

This peaceful domestic scene was viewed from afar by a very scraggy old fox who had not lined his ribs for months with anything better than moles and mice and a very rare rabbit. Reynard's mouth watered at the sight of the plump and tender fawn, but he knew exactly how small was his chance of converting Capers into breakfast.

IN DANGER OF THE FOX

Every breath of the breeze blew right across the fawn to his mother, and she would have left him to leeward while she fed in the lake as soon as he would have deserted him. Any taint of danger the air broke to Capers would reach her nostrils, too.

Thus Mr. Fox had to think hard, and as he sat licking his chops and showing his long, sharp teeth a plan came into his crafty mind. He dared not face a grown deer, but with one snap of his jaws he could break the fawn's legs, so that it would be sure to die, and a late breakfast was better than none at all. To reach Capers, however, without warning his mother was the problem.

The wind blew straight off the shore where Capers played, but the shore curved outward on the marsh edge. The fox calculated that he might slip along this shore without being discovered by the doe, and when nearer to the fawn than its mother one quick dash and Capers would run into the brush.

A snap of foxy jaws and a run from the doe and the marauder might retire until the inevitable should happen and he come into his own.

If Capers had not been a smart child even so young his career would have ended right there. The fox crept along the marsh edge and the doe did not discover him. He made his rush at last and was nearer Capers than his mother. But the fawn did not dash into the thicket in his fright. He leaped straight for his mother in the water. The doe had flashed the danger and was leaping shoreward.

Her rage and speed carried her past her little one and her first leap after touching dry ground brought her down all four pointed toes together and aimed at the fox's spine. This they missed as he sprang away, balked, but one tiny hoof struck square on his long brush, broke the bone and sent the would-be fawn slayer slinking off with half his tail in the dust.

When Capers was two months old he had seen many other deer and fawns and had frolicked with some of them. His mother had long quit the nest in which he had been born and they were moving as were the other deer toward less wild and more open parts of the

woods. Capers had begun to nibble the tenderest leaves and grasses and he soon found that blueberries and blackberries tasted very good.

As they traveled he sometimes caught a strange scent on the air, but the older deer had caught it more quickly and were bounding away in fear before the fawns realized what was the danger.

DAYS OF SLEEP

Their routine changed, too, for they began to sleep in the days, hidden in dark thickets, and in the nights they went to some water, lake or stream, where often many other deer gathered. By its side the deer browsed through the night, the fawns often lying down but awake to every move of their mothers.

Queer stinging things his elders told him were black flies and mosquitoes bothered the life out of Capers, especially near the water or on the marshes, but as September waned he found so much delight in eating lily pads, pickerel weed and other sweet green things he found there he almost forgot about the flies.

Then came the night when Capers learned what fear was. He was browsing at the edge of a lake with his mother and two other deer near by. One was a doe whose fawn had died and the other was a fine buck with six tines on his antlers and a very brusque manner toward fawns, especially buck fawns with just the hint of antlers on their heads. Capers was rather afraid of this unpleasant person, but the big buck held a fascination for him. Capers followed him, nibbled where he ate, and though he got a few pokes in the ribs at first, the big fellow finally ceased to notice him. They were at the very edge of the lake and close together when Capers heard the buck move quickly and glanced up, to see a wonderful thing.

Coming toward them over the water was a great star of light, which grew bigger and bigger each instant. Capers sniffed as his mother had told him to do whenever he saw anything he did not understand, but the wind was blowing from right behind him and he caught only the scent of the other deer.

Satisfied that he had done his duty, he gave his full attention to the light. It was almost as big as the sun now and lighted up the lake's edge and the water near it. The big buck stood beside him, head erect, still as a stone.

Then with a thunder that seemed to be the world tumbling about him a flash came from behind the star, shooting straight at Capers and the buck. The fawn was petrified with terror for an instant—just long enough to realize that the buck had started, made one-half leap and tumbled to the ground.

"Right through the head," were the strange sounds that followed. "I guess it's a doe. Did you see that fawn stand'n' almost under her?"

But Capers heard only part of this. He was gone like a shadow straight into the brush following the flying footsteps of his mother and the other doe. They stopped soon to sniff and listen, then ran on, and next night drank and fed at a lake far in the hills.

Capers was getting independent of

his mother, but before they parted she taught him one more lesson of protection against his foes. It was still warm at midday, though in October, when browsing at noon they came to stony ground on the edge of the white oak and balsam.

KILLING OF THE SNAKE

Out on a spot of bare earth Capers saw a strange, wormlike thing coiled in a heap. As the deer drew near it raised a hideous head and there came a queer, rattling sound.

Instantly the doe was all alive with excitement. She sprang into the open with long leaps and, rising highest in the last, came down on the rattlesnake, just as she had struck the fox, all four hoofs together. She seemed barely to touch the earth before she was up and away in a longer leap, only to turn and repeat the attack until the hideous reptile was cut to pieces. Capers tried it himself when his mother was satisfied with her work.

The fawn that had been with him that awful night by the lake was still with them and he and Capers had become quite chummy. They both played killing snakes for a time. They missed the doe soon and did not find her.

Feeling rather lonesome, the two young bachelors moved down the mountainside toward a river, though they found the dangerous man scent about the paths. It was dusk and they were close to the river bank, when sharp barks arose from the other shore. Plunging through the trees, they saw Capers' mother and close behind her two great long fanged beasts in pursuit.

She plunged into the water and began to swim, the dogs not a hundred yards away, when a shot was fired from the bank she had left and her head dropped into the water.

As a man slouched from the cover in which he had lain in wait while his hounds drove the unfortunate doe to her fate a second shot sounded from the bank over which the frightened fawns had stood. One of the hounds tumbled over dead. Another shot and his fellow followed.

Their owner turned, raising his rifle only to find himself covered by two rifles in a canoe.

"One move from you and you'll go after the other dogs," said a man in the boat. The man ashore dropped his weapon and slunk back into the brush under a volley of epithets and promises to report his unlawful deed to the game wardens.

While most of this was going on the two young bucks were speeding like mad into the woods, where they must thenceforth trust to themselves. They soon found themselves very unimportant among their tribe, for all the older bucks were rushing about with necks swollen, manes bristling and more than ready to attack any young buck that got in their way.

It was the mating season, and the deer, so timid at other times, seemed possessed of maniacal savageness and bravado. Let a doe call and a buck would plunge through the woods toward her, regardless of the crashing noise of his advance, regardless of man and hostile to murder his rival. Capers and his chum got a few drubbings and more fright during this exciting period, which was over early in December. Then the deer began to gather in numbers as the snow kept the ground constantly under a blanket. Capers had learned to eat beech nuts before this, and now he learned to paw up the snow to look for them. The winter was merely a memory of snow and storm and hunting for food, which grew harder and harder to find.

Spring came at last and Capers was a full grown buck before it had given place to midsummer. Then life for him was all joy.

To a Butterfly

I've watched you now a full half hour,
Self-poised upon that yellow flower;
And, little butterfly, indeed,
I know not if you sleep or feed.

How motionless! Not frozen seas
More motionless; and then,
What joy awaits you when the breeze
Hath found you out among the trees,
And calls you forth again!

This plot of orchard ground is ours,
My trees they are, my sister's flowers;
Here rest your wings when they are
weary,

Here lodge as in a sanctuary!
Come to us often, fear no wrong.
Sit near us on the bough!
We'll talk of sunshine and of song,
And summer days when we were
young;
Sweet childish days that were as long
As twenty days are now.

—William Wordsworth.

Dreadnoughts for Turkey

The Turkish minister of marine is urging the Ottoman parliament to spend \$100,000,000 for a Dreadnought navy.