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A Christmas in the Woods

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It was one of those dull, cold December days, when Jack frost is in a mischievous spirit, and rips everything he can, even making the air frozen. The sky was a hard, steely gray, which seemed almost reflected in the snow beneath, and the tall, dark evergreen trees blended well with the surrounding color. Certainly no one would like to venture very far from a cozy log fire on a day like this.

Not-with-standing the cold weather, two boys hurried along through the woods on snow shoes, although they were warmly dressed they seemed to suffer intensely from the cold. They were so intent, evidently, upon reaching some destination that they scarcely spoke. Finally the smaller of the two began to lag behind and complain of being sleepy.

"But, Jimmie, you can't stop here, hurry up," said Charles, the older boy.

"Oh! please just let me take a little nap, Charles," pleaded Jimmie, and in spite of Charles' opposition, he lay down and closed his eyes.

His brother was in despair, but finally thought of a plan for arousing him. Going over to the little fellow he commenced striking him, Jimmie tried to push Charles off, but all in vain, so he arose and began to fight. Charles played his part well, hitting his brother now and then but not hurting him. Before long Charles stopped fighting and tried to make peace with Jimmie. With considerable difficulty he succeeded in doing so, and found to his great joy, that his brother was no longer sleepy.

They continued their journey for a few moments in silence. Finally Charles spoke.

"Say Jimmie, do you know what would have happened if you'd gone to sleep back there?"

"You'd never have awaked up again. You'd have frozen to death."

"How do you know?"

"Do you remember when uncle Bill went hunting and never came back? Well, that's what happened to him."

It was no wonder that the little boy was tired. The two brothers had driven in a sleigh to the nearest lumber camp, but owing to a snow storm and bad roads, the last day's journey had to be made on snow shoes. Charles knew the way as he had been there once before with his father, who was a lumberman in the woods of Northern Wisconsin. Upon the sudden death of their mother, the boys had undertaken this trip, for they had no one to stay with except their father.

They expected to reach the camp early that afternoon, but the snow was deep and it was bitterly cold. Jack Frost helped them in one way, however, for he made a crisp crust over the snow, thus making the walking easier. The brothers had traveled a long distance through the woods, and it was here that Jimmie had such a hard struggle with death, as the boys walked along, the younger

one began to talk, almost to himself.

"I wonder if Santa Claus ever comes around this way with his reindeer. Don't you wish you'd see him now?"

"Why, Jimmie, I've just thought of something," said Charles, enthusiastically, "this is Christmas eve."

"Oh! goody, goody," cried Jimmie, jumping up and down and slapping his hands. "Santa'll surely come this way, any-how if he doesn't I'll hang up my stocking," cause he'll get to me before he gets to the other children way down home, won't he Charles?"

"I don't know, brother. I don't think there are so many children up here, so maybe he won't come at all."

"Oh, yes he will! I'll write him a special delivery letter, and then he'll come."

Charles could not answer this, for he knew that the morrow would be a sad disappointment to his little brother. When they had lived at home their kind mother had tried to make Christmas happy for the little boy, and Charles always helped her. Now, even if the latter had money to purchase something, there was nothing to buy.

As our fourteen year old Charles was thinking of all these things, he was startled by a shout from his companion.

"Look, Charles, look! What's that over there by those bushes?"

Charles looked in the direction in which his brother was pointing, and saw stealthily creeping along near some underbrush, a beautiful gray animal which he thought resembled a fox.

"Jimmie, I'm not sure, but I think that's one of those foxes father was telling about. It's a beauty isn't it. Let's watch him."

They followed the animal with their eyes, and in a few moments saw him disappear among the roots of an old tree. The boys were very much excited, for anything like a wild animal in the woods was a rare treat to them. They resolved to tell their father of it, and hoped to see it again, so excited were they that they did not notice a ring of smoke rising over the distant tree tops. When Charles finally saw it he cried out with joy.

"Look, brother, there's some smoke, the camp must be right over there."

The boys were so glad that in spite of their weary legs they almost ran the rest of the way. When they came in sight of the camp it was just growing dark and they could see a light near the window of a very rude log cabin. They could barely discern a lumberman sitting near it, with his elbows on a table, and his head buried in his hands.

"Jimmie," said Charles. "There's father, hurry up."

In a moment the boys had burst into the cabin and were in their father's welcome arms.

That evening when all the woodmen were gathered around the fire, and when weary little Jimmie had gone to sleep, Charles told them about the gray animal, which so resembled a fox, which had been seen that afternoon. He was surprised to see how much interest his story caused, for when he had finished he was bombarded on all sides with questions upon the appearance and a story of the animal.

"Charles, get that lantern and come with me," said the father excitedly. "You have probably seen the silver fox that we have been hunting for so long. No one has had a glimpse of him for many months and we thought he must be dead. A young Englishman came up here last year to try to catch that fox, he is so anxious to get him that he has offered two hundred dollars to any one that will bring him his skin. It is the only one in this part of the country. Hurry! I'll take the trap."

It was certainly an interesting experience to Charles for he had always wanted to see a trap set. When the task was done, Charles and his father returned to the camp and went to bed. Though the boy was very jubilant he was sorry that he had nothing to put in the little stocking hanging at the foot of his brother's bunk.

Bright and early the next morning, Charles arose, and before anyone was awake, dressed to go out to the traps. He hardly expected to find anything in it, but still he was anxious to see it. He glanced at his little brother, and saw the empty stocking still hanging where it was the night before. He sighed to himself, saying, "poor little fellow, he'll be disappointed when he finds that Santa has forgotten him."

He left the camp and started in the direction of the traps, it was a beautiful morning, and the sun shining on the snow, made it appear as though mother nature had sprinkled diamonds all over its surface. The air was crisp and snappy, and as Charles crunched along through the snow, he thought that he had never seen a more beautiful Christmas morning.

He walked briskly, and soon came to the identical tree under which the trap was hidden. His heart beat fast as he approached the spot, he was almost sure that he saw the fox, but was sadly disappointed to find it was only a stump. He went a little closer, but only to be again disappointed by some underbrush. He was about to return to the camp empty handed, but thought that he would examine the trap to see that it was allright, stepping over to the spot, he found a little distance from the tree and hidden behind a pile of brush, the valuable Silver Fox! In his attempts to free himself, he had dragged the trap a little way from the tree. He now lay dead in a pile of snow. His life was over—he, the proudest, yet cunningest of