

BETSEY'S NIGHT WITH THE BEAR.

What a dark wood, and what a brown little house right under the shadow of the tall Minnesota pines! Coming upon it, though, after long miles of silent forests, it seemed quite gray and lively, and if you went in, and saw the bright-faced mother and three wild children, and, after a while, the tall, sunburnt father, you made up your mind that this was almost a village. Then a few rods on, and the wood opened out of the clearing, where, day after day, the father worked in his great field of corn and potatoes, which hardly needed scarecrows, because the blackened stumps, still standing, each seemed to be one. Then the lake, and the lake which emptied into it, and on the other side, the maple-wood, where sugar was made in the Spring, when the Indians came down from the upper lakes.

In the Winter, the woods were filled with lumbermen, who camped only a mile or two from them, and through the summer they amused themselves in a way you never would dream of. And so the years went on, and little Betty, the youngest, came to be four years old.

It was August, a hot, bright day, and the very height of the huckleberry season.

"Now, children, I want you to do your prettiest to-day," Mrs. Brewer said early in the morning. "If you want your fill of huckleberry pie this Winter, you've got to get me a bushel more afore they're gone."

"I found a place yesterday," said Jack; "I bet there's half a bushel anyhow. Put Betty down in the middle, an' she might fill a two quart pail without getting up."

"Well, bring home all you can," said the mother; and here's your dinners in this little pail. Look out for Betty."

"She'll look out for herself; she's cute as a Injun this minute."

And Jack picked up his basket and started on, followed by Sarah and Betty in Indian file.

Five or six miles to the best huckleberry field would seem a long way to you, but the children's brown bare feet never tired.

Before long they passed a little lake, stopped there to drink, and soon reached the opening where the berries grew thickest.

What with finding better and better places, and stopping sometimes to watch the scolding squirrels, and then to eat dinner, the day went swiftly by, and it was almost sunset when they turned home with heavy pails and baskets. Betty lagged behind, for she ached with long stepping, and Jack and Sarah grew more and more impatient.

"Now, Betty, we'll just leave you if you don't hurry. You've got the lightest pail. Come along quick!" said Jack. "I can't. I won't go quick if I don't want to," and Betty half cried.

"Come along, Sal," cried Jack, hurrying on; and Betty, indignant, sat down on a log, and waited till they were almost out of sight.

"I know the way just as well as they do," she thought, and walked on leisurely.

Jack turned once or twice, and seeing her following slowly, concluded she would soon overtake them, and went on.

Now and then Betty stopped, the last time till they were entirely out of sight, determined to show she did not depend on them at all.

The shadows lengthened, the wood had never seemed so dark, and at last, a little frightened, Betty called loudly: "Jack! O Jack!"

No answer save the echo, and now Betty ran on, hoping every moment to see the two before her. She did not notice that she had taken a trail leading off from the one they had gone over in the morning, and only stopped on coming to a swampy spot she did not remember. "O Jack!" she sobbed, turning once more, but now darkness was closing in upon her. The forest was thick and close, and try as she would there was no finding the other trail. Over head an owl hooted. She stumbled on, startled at the sudden sound, then tripped over a root in the way, spilling the berries all about; picked herself up, only to fall again; caught at the air as she felt herself going; rolled down a steep decline, and lay at the bottom in a little heap.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Jack and Sarah walked into the little house and set their pails on the table.

"Where's Betty?" said the mother.

"Just behind; she wouldn't come along with us."

And Mrs. Brewer, satisfied, told them

to sit down and eat their suppers.

"Where's Betty?" said the father, presently coming in.

"She's coming; she wouldn't keep up with us," said Jack, privately a little uneasy in his mind at the long delay.

"Then go out now and help her along in," said Mr. Brewer. "It's a poor way for a boy to do, to leave a little gal alone in the woods, even if she does know the way."

"Jack, with a slice of bread in his hand, went out a little sulky, and Mr. Brewer stood in the door looking down the trail. Half an hour went by."

"I don't see what's the matter," said Mrs. Brewer. "I'm sort of worried, John. A'n't you a mind to go out?"

For answer, Mr. Brewer took down his gun and started. For an hour or more Mrs. Brewer waited, growing more and more anxious. Then she walked down the trail, calling now and then, coming suddenly at last upon her husband and Jack.

"Here's Jack, done beat out," he said. "Take him home, wife. I'm going for old Pierre Beauchamp. He knows every turn and crook o' the woods. Keep the fire going, for it's a raw night, and the child'll be cold when we bring her in; and don't fret," and Mr. Brewer turned down the old trail to Pierre's cabin.

I can hardly tell you how the night went by to the poor mother, waiting and watching, or to the father, who, with old Pierre, scoured every part of the woods on each side the trail, and by the light of their pine knot torches searched each hollow tree, thinking the child might possibly have crawled into one for shelter. They shouted and called; but morning dawned at last with no sign of Betty, and the father exhausted and almost despairing, sank down under one of the tall pines, and hid his face in his hands. Suddenly he lifted his head.

"Dat vay," old Pierre said, as his quick ear caught a slight sound, and Mr. Brewer darted off to the left, but stopped short, and stood with such a ghastly face that old Pierre too paused a moment. Not a stone's throw from them flowed a wide, deep creek, one of the tributaries of Gull Lake, and crossed here by an old log thrown over it long ago by the Indians. A white birch grew by its side, and under it lay Betty, resting partly against a huge brown bear, apparently asleep. At the slight crackling in the brush it raised its head, and growled low, put one paw on the child's dress, then as if scenting danger, turned about, saw the two faces looking toward it, and with a fierce, loud growl, caught Betty in its mouth and darted toward the log.

"Vat you do? Vat you do?" said old Pierre as Mr. Brewer leveled his gun. "You shoots now and mads dat bear, den de chile all gone; wait a oneminute. Hold you still—not cry; keep mooch quiet!" he called to Betty. "Not to be feared if you falls in de vater."

As he spoke the bear had reached the middle of the log, and turned now to see if he were followed. The small, fierce eyes rested a second on the pair, and in that second, old Pierre, the best shot in Minnesota, fired. Without struggle or sound, the bear reeled from the log to the dark water below, and in one minute Mr. Brewer had dashed in and seized the screaming child.

"De prettiest shot dis bon gun did ever fire," old Pierre shouted, hugging his gun and dancing wildly about, while Mr. Brewer hugged Pierre, the gun, and Betty all at once, and then ran toward home, forgetting all weariness in this great joy.

They were a happy family that day, as sitting about the bed where Betty lay in state, they tried to make her tell when the bear came to her, and how she felt.

"I rolled way down somewhere," said Betty, "and sort of went to sleep, and then I cried when I woke up because I was all scratched an' smart. Then I heard somefin comin' and didn't cry any more, an' it came an' snuffed all round me. I thought may be it would eat me up, but I couldn't cry, only I sort of whispered, 'Now I lay me,' an' it kep' smellin' me. Then it lay down an' licked me. Its tongue was all rough an' scratchy; it hurt me. But when I tried to get away it growled. Then I kept still, an' I was so tired, an' we went to sleep, an' I didn't remember till it picked me up an' made me cry, coz the teeth pinched me, an' then I heard Pierre holler, and you got me out of the water."

Do you think this can't be true, boys and girls? I know it is, for Betty herself told me the story. She is living still and if you are anxious to find out her real name, write to me and I will tell you.—*Hearth and Home.*

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