

FOREST NEIGHBORS

***Books by
Edith M. Patch***

NATURE STUDY

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Holiday Meadow

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Holiday Shore

Mountain Neighbors

Desert Neighbors

Forest Neighbors

Prairie Neighbors

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Hunting

Outdoor Visits

Surprises

Through Four Seasons

Science at Home

The Work of Scientists

FOREST NEIGHBORS

by

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TO

ERNEST THOMPSON SETON

whose books on woodcraft have helped many young
naturalists, and whose volumes on *Lives of Game
Animals* contain very much of interest to those
who wish to know more about the
four-footed neighbors of the
North Woods

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Pines and moosewoods grow together in this part of the forest.

CHAPTER I

THE NORTH WOODS

WOULD you like to follow the tracks of deer and meet their neighbors? Would you like to find the big antlers that a moose has shed? Would you like to eat some spicy checkerberries? Would you like to hear a loon “laugh” early in the morning, and at dusk hear a fox bark or a great horned owl sound his hunting call?

You may have those interesting adventures, and many others, in a forest. A forest, a dictionary will tell you, is a “woodland—a large tract of land covered with trees.” But the dictionary will not tell you what a very good time you and your comrades can have there. It will not say a word about the woodland hikes, nor mention the games that give you as much fun as the chipmunks have, when they chase one another round and round the roots of trees.

Where can you find a place like that to visit? If you travel north, south, east, and west, you will find that forests cover many parts of North America. There are dense growths of great trees in Alaska and on the hot sandy lowlands of Florida. Parts of what is called the “Central Hardwood Forest Region” may be found from

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southern Michigan to northern Alabama. You may visit many woodlands in the Atlantic States or go into the Pacific Coast Forest Region where there are more than sixty million acres of forest land. And even if you travel to all these places, there will still be some of the North American forests that you do not see. For example, there will still be the Rocky Mountain Forests. And there will still be the trees growing from northern Maine to northern Minnesota, and from New Brunswick to Manitoba—forests that we may call the “North Woods.”

Before we began to write *Forest Neighbors*, we had to choose one of these many regions, for of course we could not include two of them in one small book. We might have chosen the Rocky Mountain Forests if we had not already told you about some of the trees and animals there in *Mountain Neighbors*. Indeed, any of these regions would have been interesting but we hope you will be glad that we decided to devote this book to the “North Woods.”

If you visit a forest, you will see that not all the land is covered with trees. You will find water there, for a forest could not exist without it. That is why some of the forest neighbors are creatures who live in lakes or streams or swamps.

So, if you come to the North Woods, you need not be surprised to find loons there as much at home in Walloon’s lake as deer are in woodland trails. And beavers busy themselves in Poplar Creek as naturally as chickadees and many other birds fly among the trees.

Though all the neighbors mentioned in this book

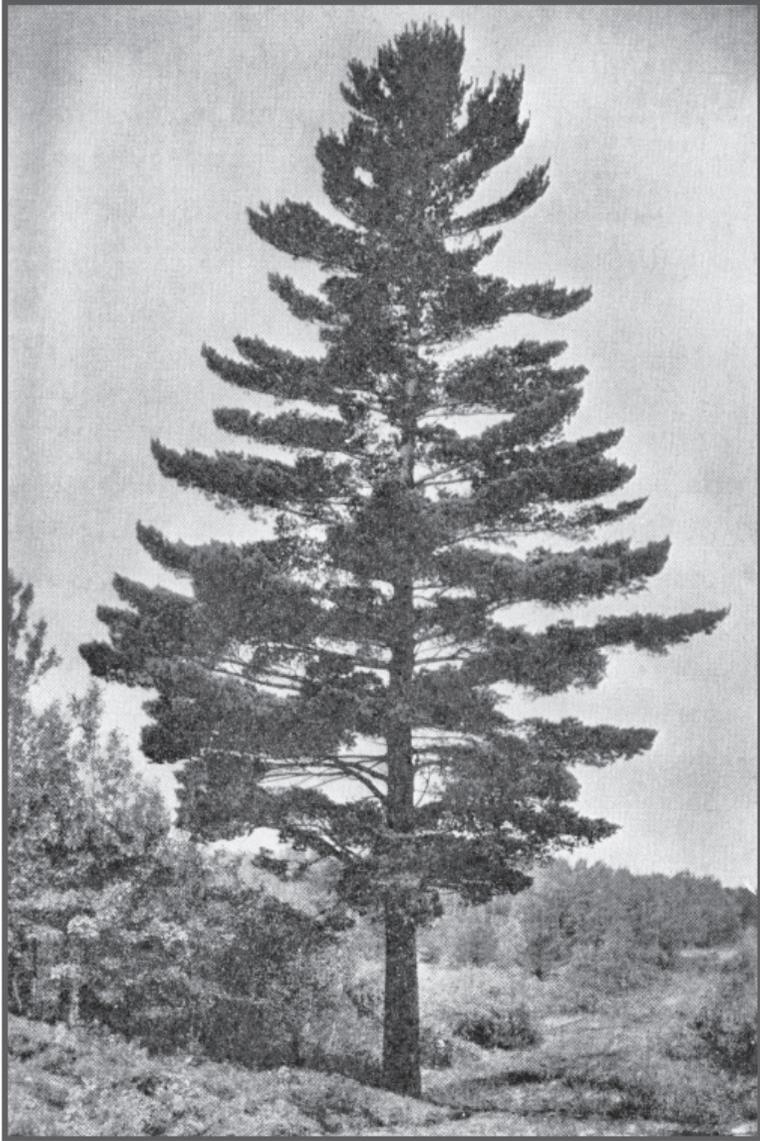
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dwell in the North Woods, creatures like most of them live in other forests, too. Mah-kay's cubs picked berries in western Ontario. But other black-bear cubs like hers, or nearly like hers, go berrying in Alaska, in Maine, in New York, in Georgia, in California, and in many other places.

You cannot meet the particular Wah-boos mentioned in this book anywhere except near his home in the North Woods, for he does not travel far. But varying hares, or snowshoe "rabbits," of the same kind (or species) leave their tracks on snowy slopes from Maine to the Rocky Mountains.

Tree frogs like *Hyla Versi-color* live in different parts of North America from southern Canada to some places in the Gulf States. So perhaps you yourself have heard music just like his trills. Or perhaps you have heard the different tunes of "Cricket Frogs" or "Whistling Frogs" or "Little Chorus Frogs" or "Cowbell Frogs" or "Spring-peepers" or some of the very many other tree frogs that sing in the spring, here and there. For whether you live in the southeastern State of Florida or the northwestern State of Washington, you have some interesting tree frogs for neighbors.

While you are waiting to meet some of the birds and furry animals in the forest, there are many things to interest you. For example, you may learn which of the trees and other plants you see are evergreens. An "evergreen" is a plant that has green leaves all the year round. It sheds its leaves when they are ready to drop, but it does not shed them all at one time. It waits until



The white pine is an evergreen and a conifer.

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new leaves come before it drops the old ones. So it is green in spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

In the North Woods, you will find partridge berries and some other low-growing evergreen plants that are covered by snow in the winter. As for the trees, all the cone-bearing trees (conifers) in these woods are evergreen, except the tamarack. The tamarack (also called “larch” and “hackmatack”) belongs to the Pine Family, as do all the other conifers. But unlike its relatives, the tamarack sheds all its leaves every fall. After its clusters of narrow leaves turn yellow and drop during the autumn days, its branches remain bare until spring.



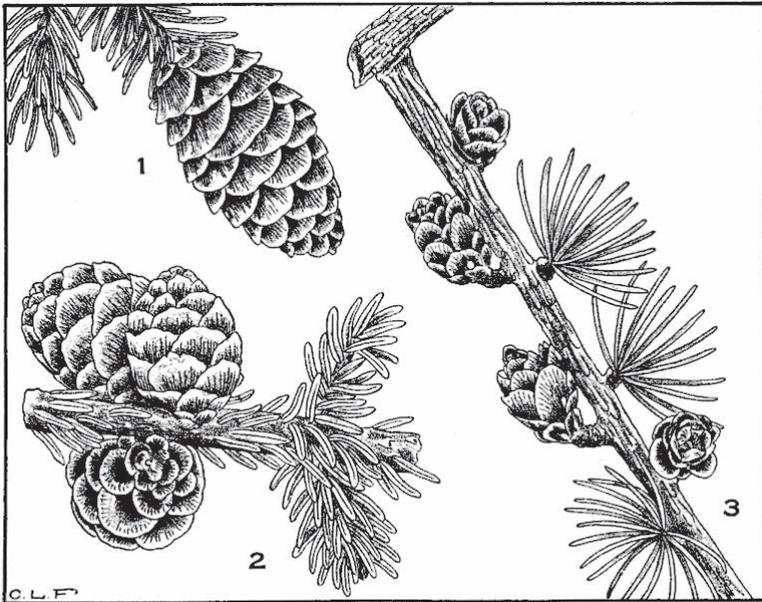
White cedars grow in a low, moist part of the forest.

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As you walk through the woods, you will notice that the leaves of most of the conifers are narrow—they are awl-shaped or needle-shaped. But when you look at an arborvitae tree (also called “northern white cedar”), you will find that its small, overlapping leaves are scale-shaped.

You may make a game of collecting cones of as many sorts as you can find. A good-sized arborvitae cone is only half an inch long. White-pine cones may be any length from five to ten inches. Perhaps you can find cones of all the different conifers mentioned in this book.

When most of the trees in a forest are cone-bearers, we call it a “coniferous forest.” When most of the trees



*Cones and needles: 1—white spruce. 2—black spruce.
3—tamarack or larch.*

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around us have wide, thin leaves, we say we are in a “broadleaf forest.” In some places, very often among hills, we may come into a “mixed forest”—with both conifers and broadleaf trees abundant.

A broadleaf tree does not bear its seeds in cones. The woody fruit of the alder, to be sure, may be said to be “conelike” in shape; but it differs from the true cones as you can see by comparing them. Some of the broadleaf trees you will find in the North Woods are oaks, maples, birches, beeches, and poplars. You would find it just as interesting to collect the seeds of these and other broadleaf trees as to collect cones. Their seeds vary greatly. For example, the oaks have nuts, or acorns; the maples have plump seeds with broad wings; the poplars have small seeds with cottony fluff that takes them sailing in the wind.

As we have remarked, all the conifers in the North Woods, except the tamarack, are evergreens. In these northern forests not one of the broadleaf trees is an evergreen.¹ Instead of staying green in the autumn, their wide, flat leaves turn yellow or red or brown and then flutter to the ground. Their bare branches wait until spring for a new set of leaves to make them green again.

Are you coming to the North Woods? When will your visit be?

AUTUMN . . . That is the gayest time, when the

¹ Some of the broadleaf trees, growing in parts of the country where the winters are not so severe, are evergreens, as you know if you are acquainted with live oaks and some of the hollies.

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maple leaves glow with gorgeous reds and the beeches are clear yellow. The branches are bright overhead, but enough of the leaves have fallen to make your pathway brightly colored, too. As you walk along, perhaps you will find a place near Poplar Creek, where the beavers have been cutting a tree. So, of course, you plan to come back by moonlight, very quietly, in the hope of seeing them at work.

WINTER . . . If you enjoy a tramp on snowshoes, you may follow the tracks of the varying hare, or see what a ruffed grouse is eating for breakfast. As you pause to look at the evergreens with their boughs piled with fluffy snow, you notice how silent the woods seem. And then you hear a cheery voice greeting you. "*Chick-dee-dee*," your little feathered neighbor calls, as he flies very near to see what you are doing. If you tie a chunk of suet to a branch, that will make a good Christmas feast for him.

SPRING . . . The colors of the broadleaf-tree tips are as varied in their springtime budding as they are in the fall. Not so bright and vivid, but their softer tints are fully as beautiful. The stay-in-the-North birds are singing their spring tunes; and the travel-to-the-South birds are coming back and singing, too. There is Seto, the redstart, just back from South America—and very glad he seems to be here. And there go two black-bear cubs out for a sunning and a frolic, with Mother Mah-kay near by to watch them. Feathery creatures and furry creatures, all are happy. The woodland stirs with the excitement of spring.

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SUMMER . . . Of course, this is the time when most of you will come, for you have your longest vacations in summer. You may go to some parts of the North Woods in trains or on boats. You also may go in automobiles, for good roads now lead to many parts of the forest. Perhaps you will drive along one of these roads through a pine forest to a lake. A black bear, picking berries beside the highway, may stand up to watch you go by. A moose may walk across the road ahead of you. No one has ever harmed him, and he walks with such slow, unhurried steps that your driver may have to stop the car to wait for him to pass.

After you have reached your hotel or camp cabin or pitched your tent in the woods, you will start for a walk in the shade. If you have come from a part of the country where the weather is very hot in summer, you will be happy to feel the comfortable air. Perhaps your first thought will be, "Why, how *cool* the woods look—all the way from the ferns underfoot to the branches overhead!"

Weeks later, when your vacation is over and you come back from your last walk in the woods, what will you be thinking then? Very likely you will be saying to some comrade, "I hope people can always have forests. It is fun to hike and swim and watch the birds. Vacations could not be so jolly without woods like these. I hope a forest fire never spoils these trees."

And then you will remember that people are not the only creatures to enjoy the woodland. You will think of the furry and feathered dwellers there and add, "Yes, I

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hope these woods will always be here, so that the forest neighbors can have all the food and shelter that they need—in their own wilderness.”



Some ferns that grow in the woodland: 1—wood fern, or New York fern. 2—maidenhair fern. 3—brake, or bracken. 4—beech fern.

CHAPTER II

THE HERD IN THE MOOSE YARD

THREE moose were tramping through their yard one cold January day. There was no fence around the yard, for it was not in a zoo, a park, or any other place where men put fences. There were no men with shovels in the yard either; and yet there were good paths through the deep snow. The paths led along sheltered slopes where poplars, willows, and birch saplings grew, and where tall thick pines served as windbreaks.

Alces and Moos-wa and Ten-nee, the three moose, made those paths themselves. Ten-nee, the calf, was not strong enough to do very much of the work; but he helped a little as he ran or walked along the paths, packing the snow with his hoofs as he went. In places, the snow was so deep that he could not see over the sides of the path. He walked between these high, white walls until he came to more open spaces where there were leafless twigs that he could chew and swallow. He liked the twigs of most of the bushes that grew there, and he browsed, too, on the low branches of poplars and birch trees; but he did not eat the pines.

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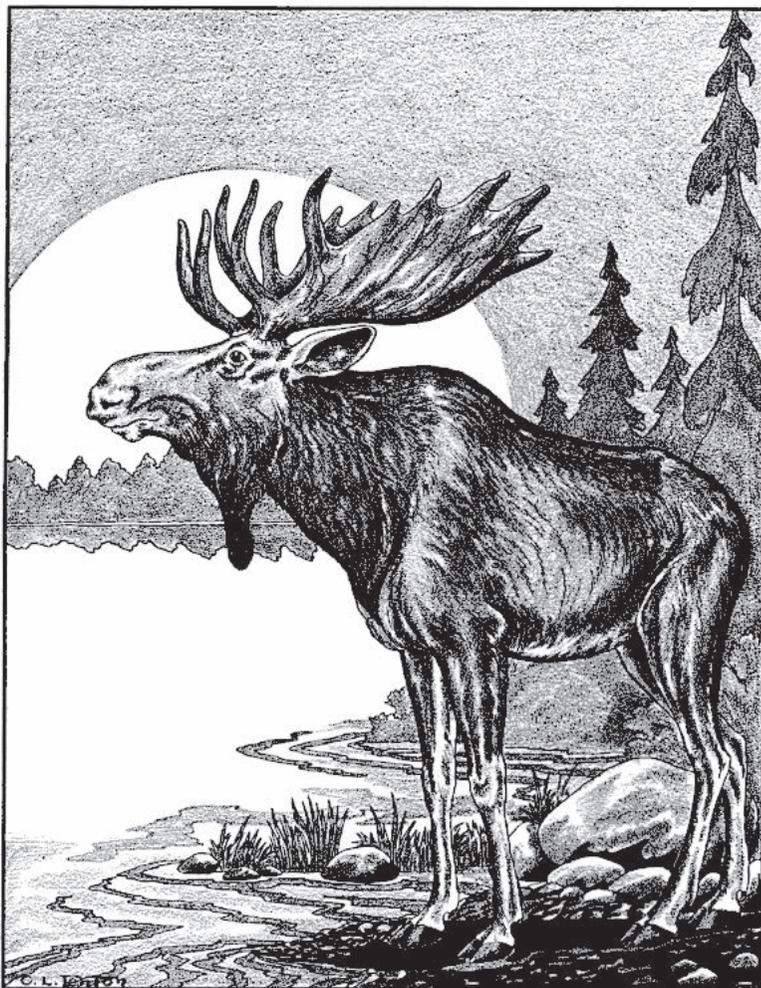
Alces, the bull, and Moos-wa, the cow, kept these walks open. They began this work in November, when only a little snow covered the ground. Their big hoofs made long, pointed tracks in the snow. Alces' tracks were four inches wide, six inches long, and as much as five feet apart. Moos-wa's tracks were not quite so large and they were not quite so far apart, showing that her steps were shorter than those of her mate.



Moose tracks in the snow.

For a while, the moose could leave their paths when they wanted to go for walks through the forest. But when snows became deep, they could not do that. Instead, they stayed in their "yard." They would not leave it again until springtime, when the thick drifts of snow would melt.

The moose did not mind staying at home. Indeed, no moose travels far unless hunters or wolves chase him or fire follows him. Alces had lived in the forest eight years, yet he never had been ten miles from the



*Alces, the bull moose, stood beside the lake
and gave a loud bellow.*

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shore of Walloon's lake. In the fall, he often crossed low ridges to lakes a few miles away; and once he had gone a bit farther. That was when an old bear came to live in the cedar woods near the lake shore. But when the bear disappeared, Alces returned to the very place where he and Moos-wa later made their yard.

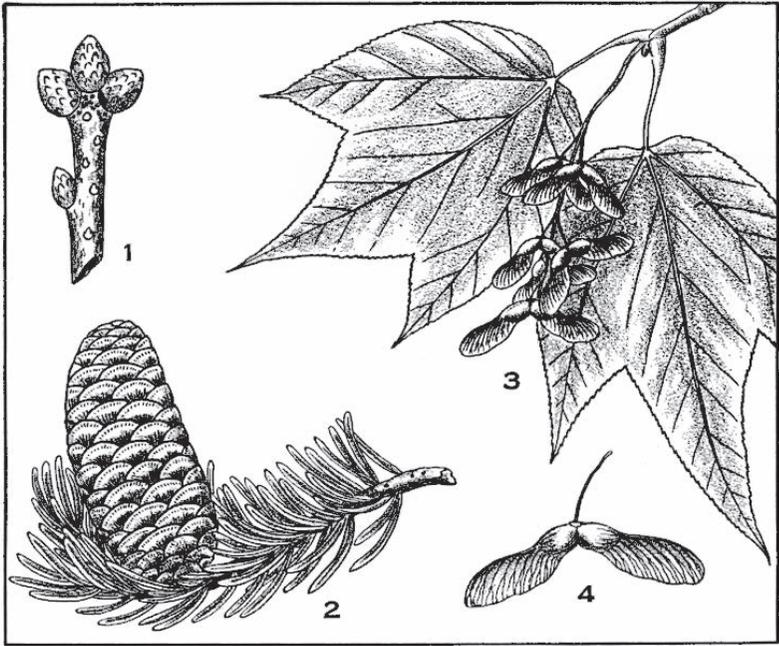
The moose yard was in a low, damp valley half a mile from the lake. Balsam firs and white cedars grew near it. There also were thickets of small trees, or large shrubs, called striped maple or moosewood, and growths of willows, poplars, and birches. Alces and Ten-nee ate twigs and buds of all these except the white cedars. They especially liked the moosewood. Their best, most-used paths were those that led to moosewood thickets.

Until the snow became too deep, they also ate sedges and marsh grass. When those were covered, they found some plants called "horsetails" with tips above the snow, and ate them. The jointed stems of the horsetails were tough and harsh, but they tasted good enough to the moose. They were better to eat than the club moss which was abundant in the forest, though the old moose sometimes ate that, too.²

When you look at the picture of Alces, you may think he used his large antlers to shovel snow from deep drifts, or to brush it from branches of balsam fir.

²Other names for "horsetails" are *Equisetum* and *scouring-rush*. They are small relatives of plants as big as trees that lived in forests and swamps of the Coal Age, millions of years ago. Club mosses also are dwarf relatives of Coal Age plants which were tall trees. These plants are mentioned in "Finding Rocks," a chapter in *Surprises* and in "Materials and Devices for Cleaning," a chapter in *Science at Home*.

THE HERD IN THE MOOSE YARD



The moose often went to balsam fir and moosewood for food.

1—tender twig-tip and buds of a balsam fir. 2—balsam fir needles and cone. 3—leaves and seeds of the striped maple, or moosewood. 4—moosewood seeds, with wide “wings.”

They do look as if they might be handy for work of that sort. However, Alces had no such help from his antlers. Indeed, he was without them for most of the winter. He shed them in December. When he did have them, he wore these antlers for weapons and not shovels!

As you may know, the solid antlers of moose, caribou, wapiti, and other members of the Deer Family, are quite different from the hollow horns that certain other hoofed animals have. Antelopes, bison, cattle, goats, and sheep do not shed their hollow horns; but

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the animals with solid antlers shed them every year and then grow new ones.

The bull moose's new antlers began to grow in April of each year. While they were growing, they were covered with deep, velvety skin in which rich blood was flowing. This blood held lime and other minerals that made the antlers grow rapidly. During this time of growth, they were tender, and Alces was careful not to hit them against branches. In about three months, however, his antlers were full-grown and hard. Then the "velvet" dried and came off in shreds. At first the fresh, bare antlers were bony white, but by fall they were tanned to a deep brown except that the tips were white and polished from being rubbed against bushes and trees.

While his antlers were growing and becoming hard, Alces lived alone. He spent spring and early summer on the ridges that were covered with willow and poplar thickets. These thickets became very hot in August, while millions of flies buzzed through them. So many flies bit Alces' big, soft nose that he moved to more open woods near the lake. If flies and heat bothered him there, he could bathe in the lake water.

Though Alces knew nothing about a clock, he divided his August days into six separate parts quite regularly. Before dawn, he got up and went to the lake, where he waded and ate a breakfast of water-lily leaves. At sunrise he went back to the woods and lay down, sleeping or chewing his cud until about eleven o'clock. Then he waded, bathed, and spent three hours among

THE HERD IN THE MOOSE YARD

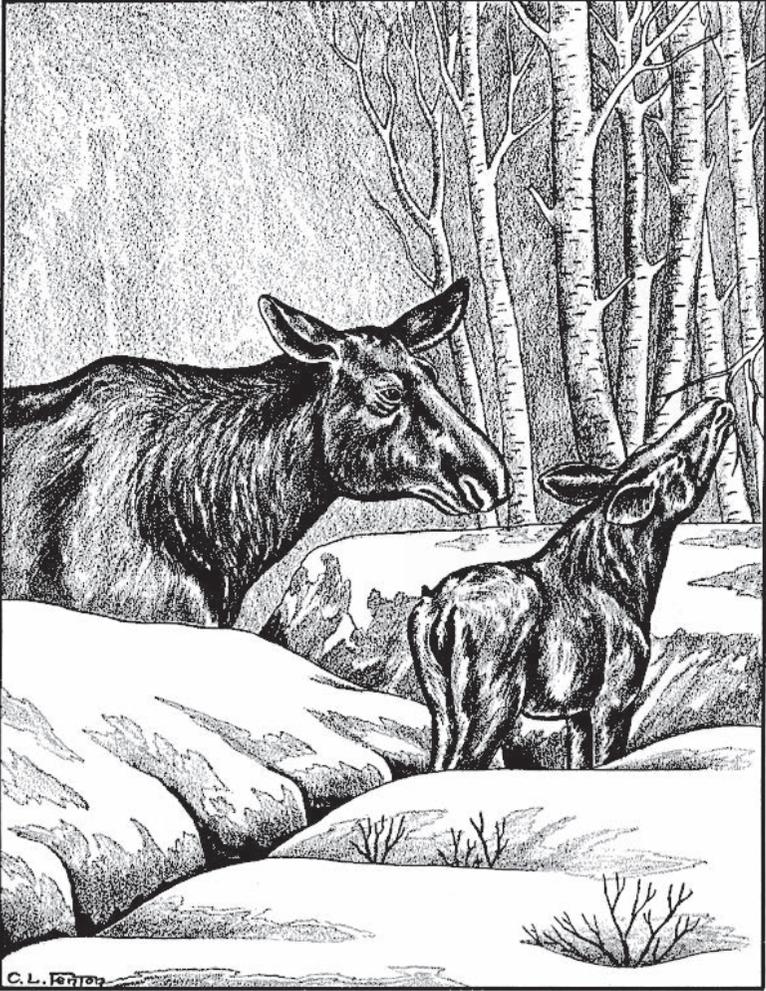
the plants near the lake's edge, where he ate his dinner. He took a nap from two until half-past five. Then he ate a supper of lily stems, grass, sedge, and horsetails. If the day was very hot, he bathed. At dark, he went back to the woods to chew his cud and sleep until morning, when he began all over again.

In September, Alces changed his ways. He became restless, trotting through the woods and hitting bushes with his antlers. Often he stamped his feet and gave deep, rumbling grunts. His temper became bad, too. He chased harmless young moose away, and scared off deer that passed through the woods.

One night, Alces stamped his way to the shore of the lake. There he lifted his head proudly and gave a hoarse, grunting bellow.

A young moose heard the deep, roaring sound. If he had been as old and strong and brave as Alces, he would have bellowed loudly in reply. Then he would have gone to meet Alces and the two bulls would have clashed their antlers together and fought. But the young bull was only three years old. The heavy voice of Alces made him timid. He slipped off among the pine trees, glad to get away.

There was no old bull in the valley to challenge Alces and become his rival. But Alces had one answer to his call. Moos-wa was walking in the moonlight with young Ten-nee when she heard Alces bellow. She liked the roaring sound of his voice. She was feeling rather lonely and called softly, "*Whoowah.*"



Moos-wa and Ten-nee at the edge of their winter yard.

THE HERD IN THE MOOSE YARD

Alces heard Moos-wa and went to meet her. He was lonesome, too, and was glad to find her.

Ten-nee was wary of the big bull at first and stayed away for a few days. Then he came back to Moos-wa and found that Alces was kind to him. So he followed the two moose when Alces led his mate to the shallow lake where they waded in above their knees to feed on yellow pond lilies called “spatterdocks.” There were no flowers on the lily plants then, but the moose liked the thick, pulpy leaves and the tender stems. They went into the lake every day for food until the weather became so cold that ice formed on the water. After that it was not long before snow began to fall, and the herd of three moose went to live in their winter yard.

No other moose joined Alces, Moos-wa and Ten-nee in their winter home that year. Their nearest neighbors were a few snowshoe rabbits, two squirrels, a porcupine, and some Canada Jays.³

The Canada Jays visited the moose yard very often. They sometimes found boring insects in the dead branches that the moose knocked down and broke as they tramped about. These birds have a habit of lingering near moose yards; and for this reason people call them “moose birds.”

When Alces dropped his antlers, the squirrels and porcupine nibbled them. The squirrels feasted during the daytime; and the porcupine came at night and

³A Canada Jay is very closely related to the Rocky Mountain Jay, which you may read more about in “Two Jays and a Nutcracker,” a chapter in *Mountain Neighbors*.

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stayed almost till daybreak. When these little animals finally finished their antler picnics, there were only two rough stubs left.

But Alces did not care what happened to these old things he had shed. He could grow new ones when he needed them. Until that time, he had enough to do breaking paths, without carrying two great, heavy antlers on his shaggy head.