

## THE CABIN DOWN THE GLEN

Witch hazel peers in at one window, pine branches drowse at another, and over the roof a huge rock-maple towers, brushing the shingles with pendulous twigs. Farther off, but all within one hundred feet, stand elms, wild cherries, hornbeams, birches black and yellow and white, young cedars, trembling aspens, and many hemlocks. The ground is everywhere covered with ferns in orderly masses, ferns vivid in sunlight and dark in shadow, swaying gently in the long slow drone of air that moves all day up the glen, or standing motionless as though painted in a picture. Shadow and sunshine shaken together, gleam and gloom intermingled and deepening each into the other, golden light probing the leafy recesses and laying robes of glory on tufted moss and fallen pine needles, shimmer of gold that shifts from leaf to leaf, and gold that sleeps in a pool of fern fronds — such is the scene from the cabin windows, always the same yet always changing, while the sun strides over the tree tops.

And at night when the moon comes walking there, she floods the familiar glade with a mysterious alchemy, changing the gold to silver.

The cabin itself is made of hemlock and is so engulfed and washed round and whispered over by numberless leaves that one comes to think of it as merely another tree, a huge commodious trunk of hemlock with openings to let in the daylight. It is not an intruder or even a guest in this company of trees but belongs here by as good a right as the boulder on which it stands. The light of morning rests upon the rough rocks of its chimney, still spotted with lichens, as though they had never been lifted from the glen below, and the level beams of sunset sift through the pine and lie as warmly red on its

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hemlock slabs as they do on the trunk of any living tree. Birds and squirrels, chipmunks and deer find it merely another growth of the fecund and multiform forest. The mother partridge brings her covey to feed beneath its windows.

Birds flutter about the cabin eaves and sing from its chimney top and ridgepole with no suspicion that it has been here less long than the boulders. Chickadees come in voluble troops to the witch hazel boughs and scramble and chirrup and flit there within arm's reach of the window. Then arrives a bevy of warblers, less loquacious but no less sociable, or a contingent of cedar waxwings fills the woods with vague high sibilance. Hermit thrushes sing all day farther down the glen where the shadows are deeper, and the white throat lifts a silver flute at intervals in the laurel thicket. Now and then a solitary vireo peers shortsightedly among the leaves beside the window. At noon sounds the swift shrill volley of notes that is the oven bird. A mourning dove ponders its woe, far away. In the closing weeks of summer the very voice of the glen is that of the wood peewee, distant, plaintive, summing up the stillness of the afternoon on one long sliding phrase.

When no bird sings, the air is filled with the humbler music of crickets and grasshoppers, tree toads and cicadas — a music seldom attended to until it ceases suddenly after a night of frost. And yet how comforting it is, and how much it adds to the homeliness of the American woods; those know who have listened for it vainly in some foreign land. These creatures play the ground bass in every woodland orchestration, and they play it not only all day long but far into the night. The slow and silvery song of the katydid rings on and on through the darkness. Without the steady croon of crickets, grasshoppers, cicadas, tree toads and katydids the cabin would be a lonelier place. It hums and rings with their tiny timpani. While one sits there reading a book or following some stream of reverie, their music steals into every thought and mood — an undersong of quiet contentment as though to say that in its basic and simplest elements life might be good to live.

Still more pervasive is the music of leaves, ranging from

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low to high, from swift to slow, and seldom ceasing. One gets to know the voices of individual trees. The deep and sober bass that sounds from the west when the cabin door is open comes from the giant pine, one hundred feet away, whose upper boughs catch many moving airs that never drop into the glen. That high exalted chattering, most audible when other leaves are still and when no otherwise discernible breeze is astir, can come from nothing but the little aspen. There is a special sound, too, of wind moving through masses of fern, and a peculiar voice of the hemlock, given forth in sombre monotone when the tree is roused from revery. All these are as characteristic as human voices. The pine could not speak in any other tone, having such mighty and long-considered thoughts to convey, nor could we expect the trivial aspen to chant with his magniloquence.

One sits in the cabin down the glen as though in a sheltering tree, unheard and unseen, watching and hearing the summer day and night go by. The gray squirrel comes head-first down the elm and sets out on mysterious errands among the ferns; the woodchuck blunders in from the meadow and explores along the brook; a chipmunk emerges suddenly from nowhere and surveys the tumbled fern forest from the rock; a dragonfly tacks and steers up and down. Such incidents are events to the watcher at the cabin window, any one of which may launch him on long voyages of thought. Even the floating strand of gossamer or the ball of thistle tuft that twirls down through the still afternoon is enough to catch and hold his attention, for these too are creatures of the place, natives here, not to be ignored.

So much for outward sights and sounds streaming in by window and doorway — but what of the inner events? For there is the test by which we may know whether this retirement is a charge or a retreat. By the depth and height and vigor of the thinking done here the question must finally be decided whether the man who lives in the cabin alone is still pulling his weight in the boat of the world or has merely skulked aside in weariness or disgust. Forty miles away a modern city rushes

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and roars. There the news of the world is gathered, weighty business is transacted, a state is governed, goods are produced and transported and sold. Here in this quiet glen, surrounded by sheltering hills and screened by leaves, a man sits all day alone. For a time he has sidestepped the world. At a very slight cost of effort and rejection he has won the rare boon of quiet and the inestimable boon of leisure. He may say and think what he pleases. His engagements are with the dawn and the sunset. The work he does is of his own choosing.

The quiet of the glen has hushed this man so that he needs less and less in the way of outer events to keep moving the stream of his thoughts. By learning to ask for little he has gained more than most men know how to ask. He is growing outward and sinking inward at the same time. He stretches up and reaches down like a tree. For, in spite of Ben Jonson's assertion to the contrary, it is precisely in "growing like a tree" that a man fulfills his manhood — that is, by solidifying his past into a support and structure for his present and by adding every year a new ring of growth. And this man is like a tree in other ways. He feels almost as a piety his utter dependence upon the earth. He has lost the wish to wander, realizing that his destiny may as well be worked out here as anywhere. His moods of ecstasy spring up like the hemlocks, after long pauses. He is trying to recall the secret of the hermit thrush — and, even beyond that, simpler and more elemental, the meaning, faith, or confidence that underlies the cricket's croon.

But need this mean that he does no work at all? Some of the most valuable and necessary tasks before us are such as the world cannot possibly imagine, and so cannot order and direct, until they are performed. Much of the most necessary and valuable work ever yet done has been so remote from the world's conscious needs that it has been performed either in solitude or else in the face of bigoted obstruction and of ridicule.

This man has not come here, at any rate, in a holiday mood. If he seems to retreat, that may be only his method of advancing. In one way or another, but at least in his own way, he will strive to perform his share of our total effort. Possibly

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his mere gesture of withdrawal may have some value for others, but that is not of his concern. He knows that the beginning of any difficult task is always a process of simplification, and that this is most true in a time superficially complex, like our own. First of all, then, he aims to simplify his life and so to concentrate his energy.

One wholly idle and relaxed, self-indulgent, or resting between two periods of activity might find all he sought here by merely sitting on the bare boulder day after day, watching the play of light among the ferns and listening to the song and whispering of the place. What, then, is the cabin for? Partly, to be sure, it serves to house a man who can never be close enough to trees until he feels almost one of them, but chiefly it serves to capture and enclose thoughts. For dreaming the horizon will do, but for thought one needs four walls and a ceiling, and therefore is it said in the *Ancren Riwele*: "Love your windows as little as possible, and see that they be small." Thought slips away and loses itself and does not come back again when the eye is set free in a wide landscape. There is such a landscape, many miles wide and deep, to be seen from the hill that rises just behind the cabin, but the hill hides all that splendor of tumbled mountains from the cabin windows. They face toward the glen, hardly seventy-five feet across, rimmed by rocks and screened by many trees. In the cabin, therefore, thought must turn inward and explore the inner landscape. And it happens to be in that interior country that this man's task awaits him.

Only a part of the world's necessary work is best done in roaring and rushing cities; some of it may be better done in glens. Only a part of our human effort is put forth most advantageously in mansions and business offices and laboratories; some of it may get better results in cabins. There are tasks, not the least important, that will never be undertaken at all unless in quiet and leisure. For these tasks there is little competition just now in America, or in the western world. Enough of us are working like engines and striving to keep the pace set by machines. We can afford to let this man work quietly, storing his strength within, like a tree.

## THE HERMITAGE

Remote from any noise of men,  
Hid half-way down the ferny glen,  
A hemlock cabin stands alone  
Beside a gray gigantic stone.  
Round it, the multitudes of leaves  
Make music all day long; its eaves  
Are brushed by pine; the lintels drowse  
Under long-layered maple boughs;  
Each chimney stone and step and sill  
Is green and gray with lichen still,  
Is unawakened from the sleep  
Its brothers in the brook-bed keep.  
The wild airs wandering out and in  
Encounter only their ancient kin,  
And fragrance from the forest blown  
Meets odor of meadows newly mown.  
There time stirs not the lily's bell  
And only the sloping shadows tell  
Of how the gold hours come and go.  
Far up the hawk, far off the crow  
Patrols the boundaries of hush;  
Far down the glen a hermit thrush  
Sacres the temples of green shade  
With holiness his song has made.  
There Eden breathes; there every tree  
And stone remembers Arcady;  
And there may one far-wandered heart  
Find all it seeks: a place apart;  
A haven for all wavering wings,  
The endless song that quiet sings,  
Long thoughts, deep hopes, and still delights  
Through golden days and silver nights.