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The Witches' Garden

JUST below the brow of Marquam hill, half a mile above the creek, a little spring bubbles out of an alder copse. Instead of trickling down the hillside, like an ordinary streamlet, the water scatters and seeps into the spongy soil; it forms a wet place an acre or so in extent, over which has sprung up a rich growth of swamp grass. This is the Yellow-throat's home. I call it the witches' garden.

There's a fascination about lying in the shade of the alders on the brow of the hill. Overhead, on the top branches of the maple, is the favorite perch of a meadow lark, who never fails to rear a brood of singers each season. He scatters his notes downward ^{as} like the wind of Autumn whirls the

red and gold-tinted leaves. A flicker rattles his salute from the hollow top of a fir stump. A grosbeak trills a roundelay that fairly sparkles in the sunshine. But none of these charm me like the fanciful call of the Yellow-throat. You may hear him almost any time of the day calling, "witch-et-y! witch-et-y! witch-et-y!"

Yes, you may hear him, but seldom see him.

I never know just when Yellow-throat will return in the Spring, or just when he is going to depart in the Fall.

You may hear him one day and find your garden ten-

"HE WEARS A JET-BLACK MASK ACROSS
HIS FACE"

antless the following. Then, after a long silence, you wake up some morning and find he's there again, as if he had grown out of the ground during the night, like a toad-

stool. After his return, he soon begins to scratch out a hollow in a tussock of swamp-grass.

What a little deceiver this golden sprite is! Looking for his nest is something like seaching for the

"HERE-I-AM! FOL-Low-ME! FOL-Low!"

bags of gold at the rainbow's tip. If you stand under the alders, looking down over the garden, he will call, "here-it-is! here-it-is! here!" and a minute later he will shriek the same lie from another tussock ten yards away.

It seems to be the appointed duty of this little witch to sing his lies all day long, while his wife broods the eggs. He wears a jet black mask across his face.

Perhaps, when Nature distributed the bird clothes, she gave
this to him, just
so he could sing
his falsehoods
without a blush.
The lady hops a-
bout without the
sign of a veil,
while the gentle-
man always wears
a mask; it's the
Turkish custom
reversed.

While I was
honest and open
in my treatment
of Yellow-throat,
he simply met ev-
ery advance with
deceit. I tried
to visit his

"HER NEST AND FOUR EGGS SET DOWN
IN THE MIDDLE OF A THICK TUSsock"
house again and
again when Mrs. Yellow-throat was at home, but every time
he led me by a different path to the furthest limits of
the garden. I tried to take him unawares, but he seemed to

do nothing else except come out to meet visitors and pilot them in the wrong direction. Whenever I got too near the home, the wife, herself, slipped off the nest and appeared right before me calling, "here-I-am! fol-low-me! fol-low!"

At last, I tried strategy. I took a long rope and two of us crept up to the edge of the garden late one afternoon. We quietly spread out, each taking an end of the cord. At a signal we skirted the opposite sides of the garden on a dead run, brushing the grass-tops with the rope. Just as it switched across the lower end, a yellow streak flashed in the air like a rocket, and as quickly disappeared. She had never dreamed of a snake sweeping the grass-tops at such a lightening speed as that rope went. It scared her witless. I walked over and saw her nest and

"THE MOTHER CAME WITH A BIG
SPIDER, WHICH SHE HELD CAREFULLY
SO AS NOT TO PERFORATE ITS BODY"

four eggs set down in the middle of a thick tussock.

At last, I had the little deceivers in my power. They found me not such a cruel tyrant after all. They had

"FLUTTERED WITH SUCH DELIGHT THAT HE FELL FROM THE
PERCH IN TRYING TO SWALLOW HIS MORSEL"

played me long, but now the game was mine, and the minute they lost, they quit deceitful methods. Day after day, the wife kept her vigil of love upon the spotted eggs.

We laid seige with the camera, but not in a way the least obtrusive. A sarvis-berry bush grew a few feet away, which was a favorite perch of both parents. We soon had a rampart of limbs built, from behind which, the camera

was leveled at the bush. After covering everything with green, and attaching a long hose and bulb to the shutter, we were ready. The mother was on the nest most of the time, but the father stayed about near at hand and kept flitting back and forth, like a watchman on his round.

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just like
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"WATCHING HER CHILDREN
WITH AN ANXIOUS EYE"

day slips by without getting a single good picture, but if you have had your eyes open, you have not failed to pick up some interesting bits of information.

Hunting and fishing have their moments of intense excitement. Occasionally, I like to go back to the more primitive way by taking to the trail for two or three weeks,

picture was
waiting for
lazy day at
But it was a
more exciting
gety father
sarvis-bush.
takes pa-
catch bird
Patience is
the old bird-
gend. You
wait hours at
ten, a whole

^{to} and hunting and fishing for a living. It sharpens the senses, to live as the Indian lived. I have waded mountain streams and whipped the riffles for trout. I have hunted the woods for a dinner of grouse and quail. There's not a moment of more intense excitement, that comes to the fisher or hunter, than comes to the photographer, as he lies hidden in the bushes, camera focused and bulb in hand, waiting

"SUCH A LARGE MOUTHFUL THAT IT TOOK A LITTLE PUSH TO
START IT DOWN"

for some sly creature to come into position. If it takes a fine shot to clip the wing of a flying quail, or ^{to} catch a buck on the jump, it takes a skilled hand to anticipate bird movements, that are too rapid for the eye, and click

the shutter at the exact instant. A smile of deep satisfaction sweeps over the face of the photographer, as he stands over the dim, red-lighted bench and sees the magic chemicals transform the white-colored glass, and etch out a feathered family as true as life itself. He senses a

"MAY THE BEST MAN WIN"

feeling of higher pleasure than the hunter gets in looking at his quarry.

Transition Yellow-throat, according to my ideas, was more of an ideal husband and father than many male birds. He was thoughtful about the home, he worked side by side with his wife and never failed or faltered for an instant. In fact, he often marched squarely up in the face of the camera,

when his mate had some hesitancy in facing the stare of the big, round eye. By this time, he had forgotten his "witch-et-y" call. He crossed the border of the garden with a harsher note of authority, "T'see-here!" He dropped to a quieter "quit! quit!" when he approached the nest, as if he were afraid of waking the babies.

One day ^W when I spent all afternoon about the nest, my note-book reads as follows: "Two of the youngsters were out of the nest. Set up a perch for them, focused the camera at one o'clock and hid in the bushes. In five minutes the mother came with a big spider, which she held carefully, so as not to perforate its body. The father was right at her heels. Both fed and went away on the hunt together, inside of two minutes. They returned in five minutes with green cut-worms. When the mother fed one of the bantlings, he fluttered with such ⁵delight, that he fell from the perch in trying to swallow his morsel. Both parents stayed about watching the young for ten minutes. After they departed, the mother returned in three minutes, but had no food. She hopped about the limbs over my head, watching her children with an anxious eye, till she heard the call of her mate, when she left. Inside of eight minutes, they were both back again with caterpillars and a moth. The mother fed, but the father hopped about the bush a little bit and swallowed the mouthful he had, wiping his bill across the

¹⁴limb with a satisfied air. In four minutes, the father was there again with a fat grub, which he gave one of the chil-

"THE MOTHER DROPPED TO THE PERCH AND GAVE THE NEARER YOUNGSTER A BIG CATERPILLAR"

dren. It was such a huge mouthful that it took a little push to start it down. He hopped up on the camera, stretched his wings and preened himself till he heard his wife."

The next day, as I sat in the shade watching the two bantlings, I had to roll over in laughter at their ^{antics} actions. Each youngster was afraid his brother would get the next morsel, and his fears were quite often realized. Two or three ⁶⁵ times, they became so excited that they went at

each other, as if it were going to be a case of "may the best man win." I don't believe in brothers quarreling, but once or twice, while I was watching, I saw just cause for disagreement. Both mother and father were putting their whole energy to satisfying the two little stomachs that seemed to go empty as fast as they were filled. The two

" "THAT BELONGS TO ME," YELLED THE BROTHER
IN RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION "

bairns were sitting side by side when the mother dropped to the perch and gave the nearer youngster a big caterpillar. The father came two minutes¹⁶ later. If he tried to tell, who had the last bite, by looking at those wide-stretched mouths,

he was fooled. In a twinkling, the chick had taken the morsel he brought. "That belongs to me," yelled the brother, in righteous indignation, but it was too late, papa was gone, so he squatted down beside his squirming brother with a stoical expression, that showed it was better to be a little too empty than a bit too full.

Both parents seemed nervous when their children were out in the unprotected open. They always tried to coax the little ones down into the bushes, before giving them food. I happened to discover a very urgent reason, just why these young yellow-throats had to keep under cover. My camera was well concealed and aimed at a branch, where the two bantlings were perched, while I was hidden a few feet away, waiting to click the shutter on one of the parents, when it came to feed. By the meekest chance, I happened to look around, and saw a black object whizzing earthward like a meteor. Instinctively, I jumped up. It swerved at the very point of striking, and glanced upward with a swishing sound, and left me gazing at a Cooper's hawk, that sailed off down the hillside. Later, I discovered what the yellow-throats had known all the time, that this hunter had a nest in a fir half a mile down the canon, and this very garden was part of his hunting preserve.

The young yellow-throats grew in strength, and later set out with their parents for the Southland. I may never see the children again, and I would hardly know them if I did, but I am sure the parents will build a new summer cottage in the garden, as soon as Winter goes away.

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