

# in which We All Learn About Halloween

'October 28

'I have been up and down the mountain every day for a week, watching to see if walnuts and hickory nuts are ripe. Today I found the squirrels all over the trees, harvesting them furiously, and so I have decided that ripe or not, I must gather them. It's me or the squirrels.

'I tethered Frightful in the hickory tree while I went to the walnut tree and filled pouches. Frightful protected the hickory nuts. She keeps the squirrels so busy scolding her that they don't have time to take the nuts. They are quite terrified by her. It is a good scheme. I shout and bang the tree and keep them away while I gather.

'I have never seen so many squirrels. They hang from the slender branches, they bounce through the limbs, they seem to come from the whole forest. They must pass messages along to each other—messages that tell what kind of nuts and where the trees are.'

A few days later, my storehouse rolling with nuts, I began the race for apples. Entering this race were squirrels, raccoons, and a fat old skunk who looked as if he could eat not another bite. He was ready to sleep his autumn meal off, and I resented him because he did not need my apples. However, I did not toy with him.

I gathered what apples I could, cut some in slices, and dried them on the boulder in the sun. Some I put in the storeroom tree to eat right away. They were a little wormy, but it was wonderful to eat an apple again.

Then one night this was all done, the crop was gathered. I sat down to make a few notes when The Baron came sprinting into sight.

He actually bounced up and licked the edges of my turtle-shell bowl, stormed Frightful, and came to my feet.

'Baron Weasel,' I said. 'It is nearing Halloween. Are you playing tricks or treats?' I handed him the remains of my turtle soup dinner, and, fascinated, watched him devour it.

'notes:

'The Baron chews with his back molars, and chews with a ferocity I have not seen in him before. His eyes gleam, the lips curl back from his white pointed teeth, and he frowns like an angry man. If I move toward him, a rumble starts in his chest that keeps me back. He flashes glances at me. It is indeed strange to be looked in the eye by this fearless wild animal. There is something human about his beady glance. Perhaps because that glance tells me something. It tells me he knows who I am and that he does not want me to come any closer.'

The Baron Weasel departed after his feast. Frightful, who was drawn up as skinny as a stick, relaxed and fluffed her feathers, and then I said to her, 'See, he got his treats. No tricks.' Then something occurred to me. I reached inside the door and pulled out my calendar stick. I counted 28, 29, 30, 31.

'Frightful, that old weasel knows. It is Halloween. Let's have a Halloween party.'

Swiftly I made piles of cracked nuts, smoked rabbit, and crayfish. I even added two of my apples. This food was an invitation to the squirrels, foxes, raccoons, opossums, even the birds that lived around me to come have a party.

When Frightful is tethered to her stump, some of the animals and birds will only come close enough to scream at her. So bird and I went inside the tree, propped open the flap, and waited.

Not much happened that night. I learned that it takes a little time for the woodland messages to get around. But they do. Before the party I had been very careful about leaving food out because I needed every mouthful. I took the precaution of rolling a stone in front of my store tree. The harvest moon rose. Frightful and I went to sleep.

At dawn, we abandoned the party. I left the treats out, however. Since it was a snappy gold-colored day, we went off to get some more rabbit skins to finish my winter underwear.

We had lunch along the creek—stewed mussels and wild potatoes. We didn't get back until dusk because I discovered some wild rice in an ox bow of the stream. There was no more than a handful.

Home that night, everything seemed peaceful enough. A few nuts were gone, to the squirrels, I thought. I baked a fish in leaves, and ate a small, precious amount of wild rice. It was marvelous! As I settled down to scrape the rabbit skins of the day, my neighbor the skunk marched right into the campground and set to work on the smoked rabbit. I made some Halloween notes:

'The moon is coming up behind the aspens. It is as big as a pumpkin and as orange. The winds are cool, the stars are like electric light bulbs. I am just inside the doorway, with my turtle-shell lamp burning so that I can see to write this.

'Something is moving beyond the second hemlock. Frightful is very alert, as if there are things all around us. Halloween was over at midnight last night, but for us it is just beginning. That's how I feel, anyhow, but it just may be my imagination.

'I wish Frightful would stop pulling her feathers in and drawing herself up like a spring. I keep thinking that she feels things.

'Here comes Jessie C. James. He will want the venison.

'He didn't get the venison. There was a snarl, and a big raccoon I've never seen walked past him, growling and looking ferocious. Jessie C. stood motionless—I might say, scared stiff. He held his head at an angle and let the big fellow eat. If Jessie so much as rolled his eyes that old coon would sputter at him.'

It grew dark, and I couldn't see much. An eerie yelp behind the boulder announced that the red fox of the meadow was nearing. He gave me goose bumps. He stayed just beyond my store tree, weaving back and forth on silent feet. Every now and then he would cry—a wavery owl-like cry. I wrote some more.

'The light from my turtle lamp casts leaping shadows. To the beechnuts has come a small gray animal. I can't make out what—now, I see it. It's a flying squirrel. That surprises me, I've never seen a flying squirrel around here, but of course I haven't been up much after sunset.'

When it grew too dark to see, I lit a fire, hoping it would not end the party. It did not, and the more I watched, the more I realized that all these animals were familiar with my camp. A white-footed mouse walked over my woodpile as if it were his.

I put out the candle and fell asleep when the fire turned to coals. Much later I was awakened by screaming. I lifted my head and looked into the moonlit forest. A few guests, still lingering at the party, saw me move, and dashed bashfully into the ground cover. One was big and slender. I thought perhaps a mink. As I slowly came awake, I realized that screaming was coming from behind me. Something was in my house. I jumped up and shouted, and two raccoons skittered under my feet. I reached for my candle, slipped on hundreds of nuts, and fell. When I finally got a light and looked about me, I was dismayed to see what a mess my guests had made of my tree house. They had found the cache of acorns and beechnuts and had tossed them all over my bed and floor. The party was getting rough.

I chased the raccoons into the night and stumbled over a third animal and was struck by a wet stinging spray. It was skunk! I was drenched. As I got used to the indignity and the smell, I saw the raccoons cavort around my fireplace and dodge past me. They were back in my tree before I could stop them.

A bat winged in from the darkness and circled the tallow candle. It was Halloween and the goblins were at work. I thought of all the ash cans I had knocked over on the streets of New York. It seemed utterly humorless.

Having invited all these neighbors, I was now faced with the problem of getting rid of them. The raccoons were feeling so much at home that they snatched up beechnuts, bits of dried fish and venison and tossed them playfully into the air. They were too full to eat any more, but were having a marvelous time making toys out of my hard-won winter food supply.

I herded the raccoons out of the tree and laced the door. I was breathing 'relief' when I turned my head to the left, for I sensed someone watching me. There in the moonlight, his big ears erect on his head, sat the red fox. He was smiling—I know he was. I shouted, 'Stop laughing!' and he vanished like a magician's handkerchief.

All this had awakened Frightful, who was flopping in the dark in the tree. I reached in around the deer flap to stroke her back to calmness. She grabbed me so hard I yelled—and the visitors moved to the edge of my camp at my cry.

Smelling to the sky, bleeding in the hand, and robbed of part of my hard-won food, I threw wood on the fire and sent an enormous shaft of light into the night. Then I shouted. The skunk moved farther away. The raccoons galloped off a few feet and galloped back. I snarled at them. They went to the edge of the darkness and stared at me. I had learned something that night from that very raccoon bossing Jessie C. James—to animals, might is right. I was biggest and I was oldest, and I was going to tell them so. I growled and snarled and hissed and snorted. It worked. They understood and moved away. Some looked back and their eyes glowed. The red eyes chilled me. Never had there been a more real Halloween night. I looked up, expecting to see a witch. The last bat of the season darted in the moonlight. I dove on my bed, and tied the door. There are no more notes about Halloween.

## **in which I Find Out What to Do with Hunters**

That party had a moral ending. Don't feed wild animals! I picked up and counted my walnuts and hickory nuts. I was glad to discover there was more mess than loss. I decided that I would

not only live until spring but that I still had more nuts than all the squirrels on Gribley's (including flying squirrels).

In early November I was awakened one morning by a shot from a rifle. The hunting season had begun! I had forgotten all about that. To hide from a swarm of hunters was truly going to be a trick. They would be behind every tree and on every hill and dale. They would be shooting at everything that moved, and here was I in deerskin pants and dirty brown sweater, looking like a deer.

I decided, like the animals, to stay holed up the first day of the season. I whittled a fork and finished my rabbit-skin winter underwear. I cracked a lot of walnuts.

The second day of the hunting season I stuck my head out of my door and decided my yard was messy. I picked it up so that it looked like a forest floor.

The third day of the hunting season some men came in and camped by the gorge. I tried to steal down the other side of the mountain to the north stream, found another camp of hunters there, and went back to my tree.

By the end of the week both Frightful and I were in need of exercise. Gunshots were still snapping around the mountain. I decided to go see Miss Turner at the library. About an hour later I wrote this:

'I got as far as the edge of the hemlock grove when a shot went off practically at my elbow. I didn't have Frightful's jesses in my hand and she took off at the blast. I climbed a tree. There was a hunter so close to me he could have bitten me, but apparently he was busy watching his deer. I was able to get up into the high branches without being seen. First, I looked around for Frightful. I could see her nowhere. I wanted to whistle for her but didn't think I should. I sat still and looked and wondered if she'd go home.

'I watched the hunter track his deer. The deer was still running. From where I was I could see it plainly, going toward the old Gribley farm site. Quietly I climbed higher and watched. Then of all things, it jumped the stone fence and fell dead.

'I thought I would stay in the tree until the hunter quartered his kill and dragged it out to the road. Ah, then, it occurred to me that he wasn't even going to find that deer. He was going off at an angle, and from what I could see, the deer had dropped in a big bank of dry ferns and would be hard to find.

'It got to be nerve-racking at this point. I could see my new jacket lying in the ferns, and the hunter looking for it. I closed my eyes and mentally steered him to the left.

'Then, good old Frightful! She had winged down the mountain and was sitting in a sapling maple not far from the deer. She saw the man and screamed. He looked in her direction; heaven knows what he thought she was, but he turned and started toward her. She rustled her wings, climbed into the sky, and disappeared over my head. I did want to whistle to her, but feared for my deer, myself, and her.

'I hung in the tree and waited about a half an hour. Finally the man gave up his hunt. His friends called, and he went on down the mountain. I went down the tree.

'In the dry ferns lay a nice young buck. I covered it carefully with some of the stones from the fence, and more ferns, and rushed home. I whistled, and down from the top of my own

hemlock came Frightful. I got a piece of birch bark to write all this on so I wouldn't get too anxious and go for the deer too soon.

'We will wait until dark to go get our dinner and my new jacket. I am beginning to think I'll have all the deer hide and venison I can use. There must be other lost game on this mountain.'

I got the deer after dark, and I was quite right. Before the season was over I got two more deer in the same way. However, with the first deer to work on, the rest of the season passed quickly. I had lots of scraping and preparing to do. My complaint was that I did not dare light a fire and cook that wonderful meat. I was afraid of being spotted. I ate smoked venison, nut meats, and hawthorn berries. Hawthorn berries taste a little bit like apples. They are smaller and drier than apples. They also have big seeds in them. The hawthorn bush is easy to tell because it has big red shiny thorns on it.

Each day the shooting lessened as the hunters left the hills and went home. As they cleared out, Frightful and I were freer and freer to roam.

The air temperature now was cold enough to preserve the venison, so I didn't smoke the last two deer, and about two weeks after I heard that first alarming shot, I cut off a beautiful steak, built a bright fire, and when the embers were glowing, I had myself a real dinner. I soaked some dried puffballs in water, and when they were big and moist, I fried them with wild onions and skimpy old wild carrots and stuffed myself until I felt kindly toward all men. I wrote this:

'November 26

'Hunters are excellent friends if used correctly. Don't let them see you; but follow them closely. Preferably use the tops of trees for this purpose, for hunters don't look up. They look down and to the right and left and straight ahead. So if you stay in the trees, you can not only see what they shoot, but where it falls, and if you are extremely careful, you can sometimes get to it before they do and hide it. That's how I got my third deer.'

I had a little more trouble tanning these hides because the water in my oak stump kept freezing at night. It was getting cold. I began wearing my rabbit-fur underwear most of the morning. It was still too warm at noon to keep it on, but it felt good at night. I slept in it until I got my blanket made. I did not scrape the deer hair off my blanket. I liked it on. Because I had grown, one deerskin wouldn't cover me. I sewed part of another one to it.

The third hide I made into a jacket. I just cut a rectangle with a hole in it for my head and sewed on straight wide sleeves. I put enormous pockets all over it, using every scrap I had, including the pouches I had made last summer. It looked like a cross between a Russian military blouse and a carpenter's apron, but it was warm, roomy and, I thought, handsome.

## **in which Trouble Begins**

I stood in my doorway the twenty-third of November dressed from head to toe in deerskins. I was lined with rabbit fur. I had mittens and squirrel-lined moccasins. I was quite excited by my wardrobe.

I whistled and Frightful came to my fist. She eyed me with her silky black eyes and pecked at my suit.

'Frightful,' I said, 'this is not food. It is my new suit. Please don't eat it.' She peeped softly, fluffed her feathers, and looked gently toward the meadow.

'You are beautiful, too, Frightful,' I said, and I touched the slate gray feathers of her back. Very gently I stroked the jet black ones that came down from her eyes. Those beautiful marks gave her much of her superb dignity. In a sense she had also come into a new suit. Her plumage had changed during the autumn, and she was breathtaking.

I walked to the spring and we looked in. I saw us quite clearly, as there were no longer any frogs to plop in the water and break the mirror with circles and ripples.

'Frightful,' I said as I turned and twisted and looked. 'We would be quite handsome if it were not for my hair. I need another haircut.'

I did the best job I was able to do with a penknife. I made a mental note to make a hat to cover the stray ends.

Then I did something which took me by surprise. I smelled the clean air of November, turned once more to see how the back of my suit looked, and walked down the mountain. I stepped over the stream on the stones. I walked to the road.

Before I could talk myself out of it, I was on my way to town.

As I walked down the road, I kept pretending I was going to the library; but it was Sunday, and I knew the library was closed.

I tethered Frightful just outside town on a stump. I didn't want to attract any attention. Kicking stones as I went, and whistling, I walked to the main intersection of town as if I came every Sunday.

I saw the drugstore and began to walk faster, for I was beginning to sense that I was not exactly what everybody saw every day. Eyes were upon me longer than they needed to be.

By the time I got to the drugstore, I was running. I slipped in and went to the magazine stand. I picked up a comic book and began to read.

Footsteps came toward me. Below the bottom pictures I saw a pair of pants and saddle shoes. One shoe went tap, tap. The feet did a kind of hop step, and I watched them walk to the other side of me. Tap, tap, tap, again; a hop step and the shoes and pants circled me. Then came the voice. 'Well, if it isn't Daniel Boone!'

I looked into a face about the age of my own—but a little more puppyish—I thought. It had about the same coloring—brown eyes, brown hair—a bigger nose than mine, and more ears, but a very assured face. I said, 'Well?' I grinned, because it had been a long time since I had seen a young man my age.

The young man didn't answer, he simply took my sleeve between his fingers and examined it closely. 'Did you chew it yourself?' he asked.

I looked at the spot he was examining and said, 'Well, no, I pounded it on a rock there, but I did have to chew it a bit around the neck. It stuck me.'

We looked at each other then. I wanted to say something, but didn't know where to begin. He picked at my sleeve again.

'My kid brother has one that looks more real than that thing. Whataya got that on for anyway?'

I looked at his clothes. He had on a nice pair of gray slacks, a white shirt opened at the neck, and a leather jacket. As I looked at these things, I found my voice.

'Well, I'd rip anything like you have on all to pieces in about a week.'

He didn't answer; he walked around me again.

'Where did you say you came from?'

'I didn't say, but I come from a farm up the way.'

'Whatja say your name was?'

'Well, you called me Daniel Boone.'

'Daniel Boone, eh?' He walked around me once more, and then peered at me.

'You're from New York. I can tell the accent.' He leaned against the cosmetic counter. 'Come on, now, tell me, is this what the kids are wearing in New York now? Is this gang stuff?'

'I am hardly a member of a gang,' I said. 'Are you?'

'Out here? Naw, we bowl.' The conversation went to bowling for a while, then he looked at his watch.

'I gotta go. You sure are a sight, Boone. Whatja doing anyway, playing cowboys and Indians?'

'Come on up to the Gribley farm and I'll show you what I'm doing. I'm doing research. Who knows when we're all going to be blown to bits and need to know how to smoke venison.'

'Gee, you New York guys can sure double talk. What does that mean, burn a block down?'

'No, it means smoke venison,' I said. I took a piece out of my pocket and gave it to him. He smelled it and handed it back.

'Man,' he said, 'whataya do, eat it?'

'I sure do,' I answered.

'I don't know whether to send you home to play with my kid brother or call the cops.' He shrugged his shoulders and repeated that he had to go. As he left, he called back, 'The Gribley farm?'

'Yes. Come on up if you can find it.'

I browsed through the magazines until the clerk got anxious to sell me something and then I wandered out. Most of the people were in church. I wandered around the town and back to the road.

It was nice to see people again. At the outskirts of town a little boy came bursting out of a house with his shoes off, and his mother came bursting out after him. I caught the little fellow

by the arm and I held him until his mother picked him up and took him back. As she went up the steps, she stopped and looked at me. She stepped toward the door, and then walked back a few steps and looked at me again. I began to feel conspicuous and took the road to my mountain.

I passed the little old strawberry lady's house. I almost went in, and then something told me to go home.

I found Frightful, untied her, stroked her creamy breast feathers, and spoke to her. 'Frightful, I made a friend today. Do you think that is what I had in mind all the time?' The bird whispered.

I was feeling sad as we kicked up the leaves and started home through the forest. On the other hand, I was glad I had met Mr. Jacket, as I called him. I never asked his name. I had liked him although we hadn't even had a fight. All the best friends I had, I always fought, then got to like them after the wounds healed.

The afternoon darkened. The nuthatches that had been clinking around the trees were silent. The chickadees had vanished. A single crow called from the edge of the road. There were no insects singing, there were no catbirds, or orioles, or vireos, or robins.

'Frightful,' I said. 'It is winter. It is winter and I have forgotten to do a terribly important thing—stack up a big woodpile.' The stupidity of this sent Mr. Jacket right out of my mind, and I bolted down the valley to my mountain. Frightful flapped to keep her balance. As I crossed the stones to my mountain trail, I said to that bird, 'Sometimes I wonder if I will make it to spring.'