

The Song of the Moose

by Charles H.L. Johnston

This the song which the trapper heard,
Heard in the gloom of the forest dark,
Heard while the embers snapped and snarled,
To the growl and glare of the glimmering spark.
Heard while the lucivee cried from the pines,
And the ribboned splash of a startled loon,
Crystalled the rim of the lake, as it lay
Soft in the gleam of the hunter's moon.
This is the song of the moose.

Near the amber drip of the torrent's rip,
Where the lean wolf howls at the blinding spray,
Where the sleeted pine is riven and rent,
By stress and strain of the mist-bank gray;
We struggled and fed through the reedling's bed,
Where the sheldrake croons to her fledglings brown,
And the otter mewed to its hungry brood,
As the osprey peered from the hemlock's crown.

Our moosling day was a rapturous play,
We browsed where the partridge drummed a song,
Where the brown bear hid in the tamarack,
Where the days were short and the nights were long.
We roamed 'neath the arch of the drowsy larch,
Where the beaver bred in the inky pool,
We splashed in the foam of the cataract,
In the frothing spume and the ripples cool.

We hid 'neath the pine of the Serpentine,
As the red fox barked to his sleek-fed mate;
We ate of the birch of the Restigouche,
Where the goldfinch whisper and undulate.
Oh, bright were the days, with surcease of care,
As we fed and grew from our clumsy birth;
While the woods were green with a shimmering sheen,
And the sun shone hot on the moss-grown earth.

Then came the prod from the fleet-flying squad,
As the gray goose sped to the Chesapeake;
The leaves grew sere at the slow, dying year,
And the salmon raced from their spawning creek.
Our mothers fled from our marsh-sunken bed,
We browsed no more on the soft lilies' pad;
From the distant blue came the caribou,

Rank upon rank—and their temper was bad.

Their eyes were bad, as they fought for our feed,
When the air grew chill in the Northern blast,
And the white flakes fell from the sodden sky,
On the sleeted lakes, soon frozen hard fast.
Pure white was the cowl of the arctic owl,
And soft was his voice from the cedar deep;
As we ploughed our yard 'neath the mountain's guard,
And marked our birch for the long winter's keep.

Now, sharp came the clang, as the wood-axe rang,
“'Tis man,” said our kin, “you must wander afar
From the sound of his voice and reach of his arm,
For his song is death and his hand is war.”
The blue wisps curled from the lone logger's hut,
Far down in the depths of the silent wood;
And shouts came loud from the boisterous crowd,
As they sapped the strength of the forest's blood.

We were taught to fend, with a lunge and bend,
The spring of the lynx, with his snarling yelp;
We were shown to ride, with a single stride,
The charge of the wolf and his whining whelp.
We saw how to strip the birch with our lip,
And to trample the shoots with our fore-leg weight;
We learned how to tell a foe by the smell,
That law in the wood was the law of hate.

Another year, and the wide ridge was clear,
As the snow grew less, and the day grew long;
With a start of the sap we swung from our trap,
While the chickadee whispered his mating song;
And the robin came, with feathers of flame,
To carol a psalm from the budding spray,
While the chewink's flute, like a minstrel's lute,
Trilled clear in the balm of the softening day.

Oh, that life was good in the opening wood,
As our brothers' horns turned velvet to bone,
We wandered at will over hummock and hill,
'Till we found out—alas—we were never alone.
Man found us there, in our deep, forest lair,
And plunge as we would in the thicket's gloom,
We ran on his track and the sign of his pack,
As he close hunted us down to our doom.

There, oft in the dark, we trembled to hark
To his muffled call, by bank of the pond,

And to those who lacked in spirit of fear,
It was death to inquire, and death to respond.
Oft have we trod on the ranks of the slain,
As prostrate they lay near some crystal stream
Lured to their end by the low, soothing cry,
Mocking the mate of a love-longing dream.

To the whispering rest of the trackless West,
We travel to live where the range-land is clear,
Where wolf and bear keep their sheltering lair,
Where silence is deep and man is not near.
Few—few are there left from merciless war,
Waged on our ranks, now broken and gone,
Yet, struggle we must 'gainst slaughtering lust,
Our end is in view—race-driven, forlorn.

This is the song which the trapper heard,
Heard in the gloom of the forest dark,
Heard of an ancient and vanishing race,
By the growl and glare of the glimmering spark.
Heard of the mannish blood-lust and greed,
Of the withering waste in the rifle's path,
Song of the steel-clad bullet's speed,
This is the song of the moose.

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