

2 A.M. Sept. 10, 1939

I could not sleep. Got up and opened the window and looked out into the darkness. The sprawling limbs and notched leaves of the maple tree over the terrace were etched in light green almost in front of me, made vivid by the lighted room behind me. The night was still except for the breathing of a ram pumping water down the hill and the rhythmic purring of the tree crickets, some steady, some in broken cadences. All at once almost above my head, there was a piercing cry that shattered the soft stillness, and was immediately answered by another shrill wavering call from the black hillside below. Back and forth <sup>they cut</sup> ~~sucked~~ the night air like the warning of a bombing raid above a silent city. It was only the screech owl family talking to each other.

How different the voices of a spring night when the parent owls were calling their young to breakfast. Then the calls were soft and whinnying. But now it sounded as if-- "Hunt fast over the mouse holes for there <sup>are</sup> many little fellows in fur moving about in the grass and out in the mowed hay field behind the house. The fall is here and the winter is coming when the pickings will be lean."

No more was heard the quorks of the big blue herons bringing <sup>food</sup> home to the nests high in the tall firs across the river. Then the young herons kept up a continuous clacking, calling for the small fish fry or frogs that their long-legged parents brought in all through the night. All that was ended and the scraggly youngsters were grown and out along the shorelines hunting for themselves. Somewhere down in the darkness the river lay quiet and serene.

But the screech owls talked back and forth on the hillside, floating here and there on noiseless wings, admonishing each other to feed fast against the cold to come. And it would soon be time to hear the soft honkings as the geese wedges <sup>plunged</sup> plied their way south high in the sky. It grew blacker; a few rain drops fell softly on the maple leaves outside the



window. The night is the time to hear the wild folks talking on their way to better feeding grounds. I looked and listened. The little birds, too, were cheeping in their sleep in the nearby boughs, dreaming a premonition of winter and their departing plans. I shut the window, crawled into a warm bed and went to sleep still hearing ever more faintly the weird wails of the little owls and the patter of the gentle rain.