

一只白色的苍鹭

这是六月里的一个黄昏，还不到八点钟，枝干间虽然还闪烁着一抹暗淡的夕阳，树林里却已经充满阴影。一个小姑娘正在把一头母牛往家里赶。这是只步子沉重、行动迟缓，好惹人生气的畜牲，不过尽管如此，它还算是个有用的伙伴。她们俩背对斜阳朝树林深处走去，她们的脚都很熟悉林中小路，因此，看得见也好看不见也好，她们都不用发愁。

整整一个夏天，这头老母牛几乎没有一天晚上，是自动走到牛栏跟前等人来开门的；相反，把自己藏在越桔丛里成了它最大的快乐。虽然它脖子上挂有一只声音响亮的铃铛，但是她已经**发现**：只要站定了一动不动，这只铃铛就不会出声。这样一来，西尔维亚就得费好大的劲儿来找它了。小姑娘嘴里不断发出“牛啊！牛！”的呼唤，却从来听不见一次“哞”的应和声。找啊找啊，小姑娘几乎都快失去了儿童有限的耐心。要不是这头牲口奶的质量好，产量也高，主人们是绝对不会这么迁就它的。而且反正西尔维亚有的是时间，她正犯愁不知怎样打发呢。有时候，遇到天气好，把牛的恶作剧看成一次饶有兴味的捉迷藏游戏，倒也可以**解解闷儿**。

小姑娘没有游伴，因此她就**兴致勃勃**地让自己参加到这样的娱乐里来了。这一回，“寻人”的时间实在拖得太长，连很沉得住气的畜牲也免不了反常地发出声音，从而暴露了自己的位置。西尔维亚是直到在沼泽地边缘找到“毛茛太太”时**才**乐得笑出声来的，接着，她亲昵地用带树叶的小桦树枝抽打它，催促它快点回家。老母牛也不再贪玩，甚至还自己对准正确的方向，跨着大步沿着小路朝前走去，自从离开牧场以来这还是第一次呢。

它已经很想让人给自己挤奶了，所以连地上的青草也**不怎么**停下来吃。她们这么晚回家，西尔维亚都不知道姥姥会怎么说呢。她是五点半离开家的，到现在时间已经很长了，不过谁都清楚，要用很短的时间完成这样的任务也不是件容易的事。梯尔利太太自己过去也多次在夏日傍晚放牧过这只磨人的两角畜生，她该不会责怪别

The woods were already filled with shadows one June evening, just before eight o'clock, though a bright sunset still glimmered faintly among the trunks of the trees. A little girl was driving home her cow, a plodding, dilatory, provoking creature **in her behavior**, but a valued companion for all that. They were going away from whatever light there was, and striking deep into the woods, but their feet were familiar with the path, and it was no matter whether their eyes could see it or not.

There was hardly a night the summer through when the old cow could be found waiting at the pasture bars; on the contrary, it was her greatest pleasure to hide herself away among the huckleberry bushes, and though she wore a loud bell she had **made the discovery** that if one stood perfectly still it would not ring. So Sylvia had to hunt for her until she found her, and call Co' ! Co' ! with never an answering Moo, until her childish patience was quite spent. If the creature had not given good milk and plenty of it, the case would have seemed very different to her owners. Besides, Sylvia had all the time there was, and very little use to make of it. Sometimes in pleasant weather it was a **consolation** to look upon the cow's pranks as an intelligent attempt to play hide and seek.

and as the child had no playmates she lent herself to this amusement with a **good deal of zest**. Though this chase had been so long that the wary animal herself had given an unusual signal of her whereabouts, Sylvia had **only** laughed when she came upon Mistress Moolly at the swamp-side, and urged her affectionately homeward with a twig of birch leaves. The old cow was not inclined to wander farther, she even turned in the right direction for once as they left the pasture, and stepped along the road at a good pace.

She was quite ready to be milked now, and **seldom** stopped to browse. Sylvia wondered what her grandmother would say because they were so late. It was a great while since she had left home at half-past five o'clock, but everybody knew the difficulty of making this errand a short one. Mrs. Tilley had chased the horned torment too many summer evenings herself to blame any one else for lingering, and was only thankful as she waited that she had

人磨磨蹭蹭。相反，她一边等待一边还应该感到欣慰呢，因为如今她总算添了西尔维亚这个帮手，这帮手还是挺有用的呢。慈祥的老婆婆猜想有时是西尔维亚自己贪玩才弄得这么晚的；自古以来还真没见过这样一个到了野外便不知回家的孩子！人人都说，对于一个在拥挤的工业城市里生活了八年、发育不良的小女孩来说，换个环境是最好不过的事。可是对西尔维亚自己来说，她的生命象是到了这儿乡下才真正开始的。小姑娘常常揪心与怜悯地想起城里邻家后院长出来的一株天竺葵。

“说‘她怕见生人，’”梯尔利老婆婆喃喃自语地说，脸上漾出了一丝笑容，那还是她从女儿那一大窝孩子里挑中了不起眼的西尔维亚，带了她刚回到农庄上那时候的事。“都说‘她怕见生人。’哼！我琢磨回到这儿老家，她就算想见生人也见不到啰！”当时，她们来到这所孤寂的房子的门前，正站停下来拿钥匙开门，一只大声喵喵叫着的猫走了过来，在她们身边挨蹭。这只猫咪有好一阵没人管了，不过她靠逮知更鸟的小雏鸟过日子，吃得圆圆滚滚的。当时，西尔维亚悄没声地说，能住在这个地方真是太美了，她是永远也不会想念自己城里的家的。

小姑娘和母牛沿着幽黑的林中小路往前走，母牛慢腾腾地跨着大步，小姑娘急急地移动着她的那双小脚。在溪流旁边，母牛为了饮水，停留了很久，仿佛方才离开的那片牧场并不是布满沼泽似的。小姑娘也只好站住了等候。她贪图凉快，把光赤的脚浸泡在浅滩里，黄昏出来活动的大飞蛾纷纷轻轻地撞在她的身上。牛往前移动了，小姑娘也涉过浅滩朝前走去。她谛听着画眉的啼鸣，她的心因为喜悦跳动得更快了。她头顶上的巨大枝干间响着一片嗡嗡营营声，显得生机勃勃。那些小鸟、小动物好象都还不睡，准备去干各自的营生；要不就是在用睡意朦胧的啼鸣向自己的朋友道晚安。走着走着，西尔维亚也有点瞌睡了。

好在现在离家已经不远，空气也温和、甜美得很。这么晚了还呆在树林里，这种情况对她来说也是很少有的，她仿佛感到自己都溶进了灰暗

Sylvia, nowadays, to give such valuable assistance. The good woman suspected that Sylvia loitered occasionally on her own account; there never was such a child for straying about out-of-doors since the world was made! Everybody said that it was a good change for a little maid who had tried to grow for eight years in a crowded manufacturing town, but, as for Sylvia herself, it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm. She thought often with wistful compassion of a wretched geranium that belonged to a town neighbor

"Afraid of folks," old Mrs. Tilley said to herself, with a smile, after she had made the unlikely choice of Sylvia from her daughter's houseful of children, and was returning to the farm. "Afraid of folks," they said! I guess she won't be troubled no great with 'em up to the old place!" When they reached the door of the lonely house and stopped to unlock it, and the cat came to purr loudly, and rub against them, a deserted pussy, indeed, but fat with young robins, Sylvia whispered that this was a beautiful place to live in, and she never should wish to go home.

The companions followed the shady wood-road, the cow taking slow steps and the child very fast ones. The cow stopped long at the brook to drink, as if the pasture were not half a swamp, and Sylvia stood still and waited, letting her bare feet cool themselves in the shoal water, while the great twilight moths struck softly against her. She waded on through the brook as the cow moved away, and listened to the thrushes with a heart that beat fast with pleasure. There was a stirring in the great boughs overhead. They were full of little birds and beasts that seemed to be wide awake, and going about their world, or else saying good-night to each other in sleepy twitters. Sylvia herself felt sleepy as she walked along.

However, it was not much farther to the house, and the air was soft and sweet. She was not often in the woods so late as this, and it made her feel as if she were a part of the gray shadows and the moving leaves. She was just thinking

的阴影与摇曳的树叶之中，成为它们的一分子。她又想起：她是一年前来到乡下的，但是时间好象过了很长很长似的，她不知道嘈杂的城里是否一切还跟她在的时候一样。她还想起那个红脸膛的大个儿男孩怎样经常追逐她，吓唬她，想到这里她不由加快了步子向前趲行，以逃离树木的阴影。

突然之间，这个稚弱的林中姑娘吓得毛骨悚然，因为她听见从不远的地方传来了一阵清脆的口哨声。这可不是鸟儿的啼啭，那种声音令人感到友好、亲切，而是男孩的口哨，肆无忌惮甚至有点咄咄逼人的口哨，西尔维亚听凭母牛去经受命运的摆布，自己蹑手蹑脚走了几步，钻进了一丛灌木。可是她行动得太晚了，“敌人”已经发现了她。他用一种很讨人喜欢、很有感染力的声调喊道：“嗨，小姑娘，这儿离开大路有多远啊？”全身颤抖的西尔维亚的回答几乎没法听清。“还远着呢，”她说。

她不敢放胆抬起头来看这个高高的小伙子，这人肩膀上扛着一支枪。不过她还是从树丛里钻了出来，重新跟在母牛屁股后面。那年轻人走在她的身边。

“我是来打几种鸟的，”陌生人和蔼地说，“我迷了路，非常需要朋友的指点，你可别害怕，”他殷勤地加上这么一句。“你大胆说好了，告诉我你叫什么名字，依你看我能不能在你们家里住一夜，好让我明天一大早再到林子里去打猎。”

西尔维亚更加害怕了。她的姥姥会不会加倍地责怪她呢？可是谁又能料到会出这样的事呢？这事好象也不能怪她呀。她耷拉着脑袋，仿佛脖梗都已经折断了。不过她还是费了好大的劲儿哼哼唧唧地发出了几个音：“西尔维。”因为她的同伴又再次问她叫什么名字了。

三个伙伴出现在家宅附近时，梯尔利太太正立在门口等候呢。母牛哞的大吼了一声，算是她作出的解释。

“对了，你最好还是自己来把事情交代清楚，你这个老坏蛋！西尔维，这一回她又藏到哪去啦？”

how long it seemed since she first came to the farm a year ago, and wondering if everything went on in the noisy town just the same as when she was there, the thought of the great red-faced boy who used to chase and frighten her made her hurry along the path to escape from the shadow of the trees.

Suddenly this little woods-girl is horror-stricken to hear a clear whistle not very far away. Not a bird's-whistle, which would have a sort of friendliness, but a boy's whistle, determined, and somewhat aggressive. Sylvia left the cow to whatever sad fate might await her, and stepped discreetly aside into the bushes, but she was just too late. The enemy had discovered her, and called out in a very cheerful and persuasive tone, "Halloa, little girl, how far is it to the road?" and trembling Sylvia answered almost inaudibly, "A good ways."

She did not dare to look boldly at the tall young man, who carried a gun over his shoulder, but she came out of her bush and again followed the cow, while he walked alongside.

"I have been hunting for some birds," the stranger said kindly, "and I have lost my way, and need a friend very much. Don't be afraid," he added gallantly. "Speak up and tell me what your name is, and whether you think I can spend the night at your house, and go out gunning early in the morning."

Sylvia was more alarmed than before. Would not her grandmother consider her much to blame? But who could have foreseen such an accident as this? It did not seem to be her fault, and she hung her head as if the stem of it were broken, but managed to answer "Sylvy," with much effort when her companion again asked her name.

Mrs. Tilley was standing in the doorway when the trio came into view. The cow gave a loud moo by way of explanation.

"Yes, you'd better speak up for yourself, you old trial! Where'd she tucked herself away this time, Sylvy?" But

西尔维亚却吓得一言不发。她出于本能，知道她的姥姥还不理解局势的严重性。她准是错把陌生人当成了本地的哪一个农家子。

那个年轻人把枪靠在门边，又把一只鼓鼓囊囊的狩猎袋扔在枪的旁边；接着他向梯尔利太太道了声晚上好，又重述了一遍他那徒步旅行者的故事。他还问能不能让他在这儿过一夜。

“随便找个地方就行，”他说。“我反正明天天不亮就要走的，不过我可真的是饿坏了。至少你可以让我喝点牛奶吧，这是很容易办到的。”

“好老天，当然啰，”女主人回答道，她那长期眠休的好客精神象是霎时间就被唤醒了。“要是你顺着大路往前走一两英里，说不定你过夜可以过得舒服些。不过我们当然也很欢迎你，虽然我们这里非常简陋。我马上去挤奶，你随便休息好了。你可以睡在玉米衣堆上或是羽毛堆上，”她宽宏大度地说。“都是我自已种的和养的。离这儿不远的沼泽地那边有一块牧场，放鹅再好不过了。西尔维，你动弹一下，给这位先生去拿只盘子来！”西尔维亚立即走开去了。她很乐意有点什么事儿干，再说，她也饿了。

能在新英格兰的穷乡僻壤找到这么一所干净、舒适的小房子，真叫人感到意外呢。年轻人在这一带见到过最原始的持家方式，也接触过让人糟心的家庭，那里十分邈远，人们对和母鸡生活在一起已经习以为常。可是这个老式的农庄料理得非常经心，虽然规模很小，象一处隐士住的茅舍。年轻人热切地倾听着老婆婆古雅的谈吐，兴趣越来越浓地观察着西尔维亚苍白的脸和炯炯发光的灰眼睛。他坚持说这顿饭是他一个月以来所吃到的最美味的一顿。晚饭吃罢，这几个新结识的朋友围坐在门口，望着明月冉冉升起。

摘草莓的季节眼看就要到了，西尔维亚是个摘草莓的好帮手。那头母牛出的奶不错，可是要看住它可真够费事的。女主人絮絮叨叨地说个没完，倒是很直爽。接着她又告诉客人，她埋葬过四个子女，因此西尔维亚她妈以及搬到加利福尼亚去的一个儿子（还不知是死是活）就成了她仅存的两个孩子了。“我那个儿子阿丹，他的枪法可

Sylvia kept an awed silence; she knew by instinct that her grandmother did not comprehend the gravity of the situation. She must be mistaking the stranger for one of the farmer-lads of the region.

The young man stood his gun beside the door, and dropped a lumpy game-bag beside it; then he bade Mrs. Tilley good-evening, and repeated his wayfarer's story, and asked if he could have a night's lodging.

"Put me anywhere you like," he said. "I must be off early in the morning, before day; but I am very hungry, indeed. You can give me some milk at any rate, that's plain."

"Dear sakes, yes," responded the hostess, whose long slumbering hospitality seemed to be easily awakened. "You might fare better if you went out to the main road a mile or so, but you're welcome to what we've got. I'll milk right off, and you make yourself at home. You can sleep on husks or feathers," she proffered graciously. "I raised them all myself. There's good pasturing for geese just below here towards the ma'sh. Now step round and set a plate for the gentleman, Sylvy!" And Sylvia promptly stepped. She was glad to have something to do, and she was hungry herself.

It was a surprise to find so clean and comfortable a little dwelling in this New England wilderness. The young man had known the horrors of its most primitive housekeeping, and the dreary squalor of that level of society which does not rebel at the companionship of hens. This was the best thrift of an old-fashioned farmstead, though on such a small scale that it seemed like a hermitage. He listened eagerly to the old woman's quaint talk, he watched Sylvia's pale face and shining gray eyes with ever growing enthusiasm, and insisted that this was the best supper he had eaten for a month, and afterward the new-made friends sat down in the door-way together while the moon came up.

Soon it would be berry-time, and Sylvia was a great help at picking. The cow was a good milker, though a plaguy thing to keep track of, the hostess gossiped frankly, adding presently that she had buried four children, so Sylvia's mother, and a son (who might be dead) in

准了，”她伤心地解释道，“只要他在家，我从不短缺山鸡和松鼠。我琢磨他这人坐不住，又不爱写信。唉，我倒也不想责怪他。要是我年轻那会儿走得动，我也是要到处走去见世面的。”

“西尔维这方面象他，”在稍停片刻之后姥姥深情地继续说道。“这儿没有一寸土地是她不认得的。林中的鸟兽都把她看作自己的同类。松鼠跟她熟得能到她手里来吃东西，各种禽鸟也都这样。去年冬天她把椋鸟招来，那些鸟儿聒噪个没完，要不是我看得紧，我相信她连自己盘子里的肉也会省下来给它们吃的。我告诉她，除了乌鸦，别的鸟兽我都可以养活——虽然阿丹过去也养驯过一只乌鸦，这鸟儿可通灵性了，简直跟人一样聪明。阿丹离开这里之后，它还常来，过了好久才不来。阿丹跟他爹，这爷儿俩合不来，——可是打从阿丹顶撞了他离开之后，老头儿就一直垂头丧气，再没打起精神来过。”

客人没有注意这些话里暗含的一本家庭伤心史，他的兴趣已经集中到另一件事上去了。

“这么说，西尔维对鸟儿的事很熟悉，对吗？”他大声地喊道，一边扭过头来看看小姑娘。小姑娘坐在月光底下，十分拘谨，但是越来越困了。“我目前正在收集各种禽鸟。我还是个小孩的时候就开始干这件事。”（听到这里梯尔利太太莞尔一笑。）“近五年来，我一直想要猎捕到两三种珍贵的禽鸟。只要办得到，我一定要依靠自己的力量把它们弄到手。”

“你是把它们关在笼子里养活着玩吗？”听了这番热情洋溢的表白之后，梯尔利太太狐疑地问。

“噢，不是的，我把它们剥制后保存起来，我已经有好几十个标本了，”年轻的禽鸟学家回答道，“每一个都是我自己用枪打、用网逮的。星期六那天，就在离这儿三里路的地方，我瞥见一只白色的苍鹭，我追踪它，来到这儿。还从来没有人在这一带发现这种禽鸟呢。这是一种小的白苍鹭。”他又朝西尔维亚看了一眼，希望能证实这只珍贵的禽鸟也是小姑娘的老相识。

可是西尔维亚的眼睛却盯看着小径上的一只獭

California were all the children she had left. "Dan, my boy, was a great hand to go gunning," she explained sadly. "I never wanted for pa'tridges or gray squer'ls while he was to home. He's been a great wand'rer, I expect, and he's no hand to write letters. There, I don't blame him, I'd ha' seen the world myself if it had been so I could.

"Sylvy takes after him," the grandmother continued affectionately, after a minute's pause. "There ain't a foot o' ground she don't know her way over, and the wild creaturs counts her one o' themselves. Squer'ls she'll tame to come an' feed right out o' her hands, and all sorts o' birds. Last winter she got the jay-birds tobangeinghere, and I believe she'd 'a' scanted herself of her own meals to have plenty to throw out amongst 'em, if I hadn't kep' watch. Anything but crows, I tell her, I'm willin' to help support — though Dan he had a tamed one o' them that did seem to have reason same as folks. It was round here a good spell after he went away. Dan an' his father they didn't hitch, — but he never held up his head ag'in after Dan had dared him an' gone off."

The guest did not notice this hint of family sorrows in his eager interest in something else.

"So Sylvy knows all about birds, does she?" he exclaimed, as he looked round at the little girl who sat, very demure but increasingly sleepy, in the moonlight. "I am making a collection of birds myself. I have been at it ever since I was a boy." (Mrs. Tilley smiled.) "There are two or three very rare ones I have been hunting for these five years. I mean to get them on my own ground if they can be found."

"Do you cage 'em up?" asked Mrs. Tilley doubtfully, in response to this enthusiastic announcement.

"Oh no, they're stuffed and preserved, dozens and dozens of them," said the ornithologist, "and I have shot or snared every one myself. I caught a glimpse of a white heron a few miles from here on Saturday, and I have followed it in this direction. They have never been found in this district at all. The little white heron, it is," and he turned again to look at Sylvia with the hope of discovering that the

蛤蟆。

“你只要见过这苍鹭一眼，便不会不记得它的。”陌生人继续热情地说。“这是一只身量高高的白鸟，羽毛很柔软，腿很细很长。它的窠巢准是筑在一棵高大的树的顶部，用小树枝搭成，跟鹰巢差不多。”

西尔维亚的心脏猛烈地跳动起来；她知道有这么一只奇异的白鸟。有一回，在树林的那头，她见到过它站在沼泽地翠绿的草丛里，她还蹑手蹑脚偷偷地接近过它呢。那儿有一块开阔地，这里的阳光总是显得特别明亮，特别温暖，这儿的地上长着高高的、不住点头的蒲草。姥姥警告过她，千万别陷到草底下乌黑柔软的泥淖里去，否则世界上就算没她这个人了。从这儿过去不远，便是盐滩地，再过去，就是真正的大海了。西尔维亚经常琢磨大海究竟是什么样的，她经常梦见大海，却从来没有见过大海。在暴风雨肆虐的夜晚，大海的怒吼有时能盖过林涛声传到她耳朵里。

“世界上我最最想做到的一件事就是找到那只苍鹭的窝了，”这时候，那个英俊的青年陌生人开口说了。“谁能帮我找到那地方，我就给他十块钱。”他又迫不及待地加了一句，“如果必要，我可以把整个假期全都用在捕捉它上面。没准它是一只过路的候鸟，也可能是被猛禽从原来生活的地区赶出来的鸟儿。”

梯尔利太太兴致勃勃地专心倾听着这一番话，西尔维亚却仍然在观察那只蛤蟆。要是心境平静些，她就能猜得出，这只蛤蟆是想钻回到台阶底下它的洞里去的，只是被这么晚还呆在外面的这些生客吓住了，不敢回家。那天晚上，就是想象力再丰富的人也想象不出，用这随便提到的十块钱，可以买来多少样自己渴望已久的好东西。

第二天，年轻的猎人在树林里漫游，西尔维亚陪伴着他。小姑娘已经消除了对这个友好的小伙子最初产生的畏惧。他显示出是个和蔼可亲、很有同情心的人。他告诉小姑娘许多关于鸟的知识：它们是如何的懂事，它们住在哪里，它们又是怎样安排自己的生活。他还送给西尔维亚一把折

rare bird was one of her acquaintances.

But Sylvia was watching a hop-toad in the narrow footpath.

"You would know the heron if you saw it," the stranger continued eagerly. "A queer tall white bird with soft feathers and long thin legs. And it would have a nest perhaps in the top of a high tree, made of sticks, something like a hawk's nest."

Sylvia's heart gave a wild beat; she knew that strange white bird, and had once stolen softly near where it stood in some bright green swamp grass, away over at the other side of the woods. There was an open place where the sunshine always seemed strangely yellow and hot, where tall, nodding rushes grew, and her grandmother had warned her that she might sink in the soft black mud underneath and never be heard of more. Not far beyond were the salt marshes just this side the sea itself, which Sylvia wondered and dreamed much about, but never had seen, whose great voice could sometimes be heard above the noise of the woods on stormy nights.

"I can't think of anything I should like so much as to find that heron's nest," the handsome stranger was saying. "I would give ten dollars to anybody who could show it to me," he added desperately, "and I mean to spend my whole vacation hunting for it if need be. Perhaps it was only migrating, or had been chased out of its own region by some bird of prey."

Mrs. Tilley gave amazed attention to all this, but Sylvia still watched the toad, not divining, as she might have done at some calmer time, that the creature wished to get to its hole under the door-step, and was much hindered by the unusual spectators at that hour of the evening. No amount of thought, that night, could decide how many wished-for treasures the ten dollars, so lightly spoken of, would buy.

The next day the young sportsman hovered about the woods, and Sylvia kept him company, having lost her first fear of the friendly lad, who proved to be most kind and

刀。她象个荒岛上的遗世之民似的，觉得这把刀简直是稀世之珍。整整一天，他没有使小姑娘感到难堪和畏惧，只除了把毫不猜疑在引吭高歌的小鸟从枝头打下的时候。要是他手里没有那支枪，西尔维亚会加倍喜欢他的。她不能理解，既然他这么喜爱这些禽鸟，何以又要把它们杀死。白日将尽，西尔维亚仍然用充满钦慕的眼光望着这个年轻人。她从来没有见过这么有魅力、这么招人喜欢的小伙子；潜伏在孩童心底那颗女性的心开始被爱恋的梦催醒了。这种威力无比的激情的先兆激荡着、摇撼着这两个年轻人，使他们在穿越这片肃穆的树林时轻手轻脚，默不作声。他们停住脚步谛听一只鸟儿的歌唱，接着又拨开树枝急急地往前趲行。他们只是偶而才用耳语相互交换几句话，年轻人走在前面，西尔维亚心醉神迷地在几步路后面跟着，她那双灰眼睛因为激动，变得乌黑发亮。

她感到茫然若有所失，因为要寻找的那只白苍鹭不知上哪儿去了。不过她可没有给客人带路，她仅仅是跟在后面，更谈不上主动开口和客人说话了。她要是没人问就说话，那声音自己听了也会吓一跳的——迫不得已时只说一个“是”字或“不”字就已经够费劲的了。夜幕终于开始降临，他们一起把母牛朝家里赶去。他们来到仅在头天晚上她听见口哨还吓了一大跳的那个地方，这时候，西尔维亚的脸上欣然泛出了笑容。

二

离她家半英里以外，在树林最外缘地势最高的地方，矗立着一棵高大的松树。这是一起长大的那批松树中的最后子遗。究竟它是作为界标留下的还是为了别的原因，没有人说得清楚。砍倒它同伴的那些伐木者不是死了，便是已经远走他乡。在树桩地上，又长出了一片新的树林，其中有松树，也有橡树和枫树。但是这棵仪态万千的大松树的树冠高高的凌驾在所有的树峰之上，成了方圆许多里之内海上和岸边的一处路标。西尔维亚非常熟悉这棵大树。她一直相信只要爬到它的顶部，就能看见大海。她经常把手按在巨大、粗糙的树干上，若有所思地仰望高处那些黑黝黝的枝叶。不管树底下有多热，空气纹丝不动，高处的枝叶总是被风吹得颤悠颤悠的。现在，想

sympathetic. He told her many things about the birds and what they knew and where they lived and what they did with themselves. And he gave her a jack-knife, which she thought as great a treasure as if she were a desert-islander. All day long he did not once make her troubled or afraid except when he brought down some unsuspecting singing creature from its bough. Sylvia would have liked him vastly better without his gun; she could not understand why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much. But as the day waned, Sylvia still watched the young man with loving admiration. She had never seen anybody so charming and delightful; the woman's heart, asleep in the child, was vaguely thrilled by a dream of love. Some premonition of that great power stirred and swayed these young creatures who traversed the solemn woodlands with soft-footed silent care. They stopped to listen to a bird's song; they pressed forward again eagerly, parting the branches — speaking to each other rarely and in whispers; the young man going first and Sylvia following, fascinated, a few steps behind, with her gray eyes dark with excitement.

She grieved because the longed-for white heron was elusive, but she did not lead the guest, she only followed, and there was no such thing as speaking first. The sound of her own unquestioned voice would have terrified her — it was hard enough to answer yes or no when there was need of that. At last evening began to fall, and they drove the cow home together, and Sylvia smiled with pleasure when they came to the place where she heard the whistle and was afraid only the night before.

Half a mile from home, at the farther edge of the woods, where the land was highest, a great pine-tree stood, the last of its generation. Whether it was left for a boundary mark, or for what reason, no one could say; the woodchoppers who had felled its mates were dead and gone long ago, and a whole forest of sturdy trees, pines and oaks and maples, had grown again. But the stately head of this old pine towered above them all and made a landmark for sea and shore miles and miles away. Sylvia knew it well. She had always believed that whoever climbed to the top of it could see the ocean; and the little girl had often laid her

到这棵大树，她心中又增添了一层新的激动：要是有人在拂晓时分爬到树巅把整个世界收入眼底，岂不是很容易看清白苍鹭是从哪儿飞出来的？认清了地点，不就能找到它那隐藏的窠巢了吗？

这是多么伟大的冒险精神，多么了不起的壮志雄心！然后，在早晨稍晚些时候，当她能够披露这个秘密时，她又将得到多么巨大的胜利、喜悦与光荣！这件事太不可思议，太伟大了，简直不是一个童稚的心灵所能包容的了。

整个夜晚，小农舍的门敞开着，夜莺飞来，停在大门口的台阶上婉转啼鸣。年轻的猎人和年老的女主人都睡得很香，西尔维亚却因为心里有一个伟大的计划，极其清醒，她瞪大了两眼望着黑暗，她把睡觉完全忘记了。短促的夏夜仿佛与冬天的黑夜一样漫长。最后，那几只夜莺不歌唱了，她又担心拂晓是不是已经来临。她蹑手蹑脚地走出屋子，沿着通向牧场的小路穿过树林，急急地朝林子那边的空地走去。当她听到一只半睡半醒的鸟儿在说梦话似的咯咯啾鸣时，她感到宽慰，感到有了伴儿。可是她的脚步声却惊醒了鸟儿，使它离开了栖息的枝头。啊，如果初次充塞在这个孤寂的小生命的那股人类私利的巨大浪潮，竟会把一种满足于同大自然朝夕相处，满足于过大森林中怡然寂寞的生活的心情冲走，那该多糟啊！

那棵大树还在灰蒙蒙的月光底下酣睡。傻乎乎的小西尔维亚开始以非凡的勇气向树顶攀登了，热辣辣的充满生命的鲜血循着她周身的脉管急急涌流，她的光赤的手和脚象鸟爪似的扒紧那上升、上升，几乎高达云霄的可怖蹬梯。不过她还得先爬上长在大树旁边的那棵白色的橡树，她几乎被它的黑枝桠和挂满露珠的绿叶埋没了。一只鸟儿从它的窠巢里扑愣愣地惊飞出来，一只红棕色的松鼠四处乱窜，愠怒地责怪这个没有恶意的不速之客。西尔维亚十分顺利地摸索着往上爬。这个地方她经常攀登，她知道再高一点的地方，橡树的一根高枝挨擦着松树的主干，也就是在这里，松树最低的枝桠密集地向外展伸。到了那儿，当她将提心吊胆地从一棵树跨到另一棵树去之后，伟大的事业才真正开始呢。

hand on the great rough trunk and looked up wistfully at those dark boughs that the wind always stirred, no matter how hot and still the air might be below. Now she thought of the tree with a new excitement, for why, if one climbed it at break of day, could not one see all the world, and easily discover from whence the white heron flew, and mark the place, and find the hidden nest?

What a spirit of adventure, what wild ambition! What fancied triumph and delight and glory for the later morning when she could make known the secret! It was almost too real and too great for the childish heart to bear.

All night the door of the little house stood open and the whippoorwillscame and sang upon the very step. The young sportsman and his old hostess were sound asleep, but Sylvia's great design kept her broad awake and watching. She forgot to think of sleep. The short summer night seemed as long as the winter darkness, and at last when the whippoorwills ceased, and she was afraid the morning would after all come too soon, she stole out of the house and followed the pasture path through the woods, hastening toward the open ground beyond, listening with a sense of comfort and companionship to the drowsy twitter of a half-awakened bird, whose perch she had jarred in passing. Alas, if the great wave of human interest which flooded for the first time this dull little life should sweep away the satisfactions of an existence heart to heart with nature and the dumb life of the forest!

There was the huge tree asleep yet in the paling moonlight, and small and silly Sylvia began with utmost bravery to mount to the top of it, with tingling, eager blood coursing the channels of her whole frame, with her bare feet and fingers, that pinched and held like bird's claws to the monstrous ladder reaching up, up, almost to the sky itself. First she must mount the white oak tree that grew alongside, where she was almost lost among the dark branches and the green leaves heavy and wet with dew; a bird fluttered off its nest, and a red squirrel ran to and fro and scolded pettishly at the harmless housebreaker. Sylvia felt her way easily. She had often climbed there, and knew that higher still one of the oak's upper branches chafed against the pine trunk, just where its lower boughs were set

她终于顺着那根颤颤悠悠的横枝往外爬了，她壮着胆子把脚往老松树上踩去。事情比她设想的要困难得多，她得狠命把身子探出去，死命用手攥住枝子才行，尖利的干枝象愤怒的鹰爪似的钩住她，攀住她，拽住她，她绕着大树的主干逐步攀登，松脂又使她纤细的手指变得笨拙与僵硬。在底下的树林里，麻雀和知更已经苏醒，开始迎着晨曦啾鸣，在松树的高枝上可比下面豁亮多了。小姑娘明白，如果要实现自己的计划，她的动作还得加快才行呢。

松树象是随着她的攀登而在不断延伸，在变得越来越高。它象是航行中的地球的一根巨大的主桅。这天早晨，这棵躯体庞大笨重的松树一定感到无比惊讶，因为它觉出有一颗人类坚定意志的火花在沿着它的高枝攀向顶巅。又有谁知道，那些最细小的纤枝怎样憋住劲儿不让自己断裂，好撑住这个轻巧瘦弱的小人儿帮她往上爬呢！老松树准也很宠爱他的新扈从。比起鹰隼、蝙蝠、飞蛾甚至歌喉甜美的画眉来，他更喜欢这个孤单单的灰眼睛小姑娘那颗勇敢的、怦怦跳动的心。于是，这棵古树站定了一动不动，皱起了眉头对着六月的晨风，而这时，东方的天空已经开始发白了。

攀上最后一根扎人的枝桠，西尔维亚终于哆哆嗦嗦地、精疲力尽地然而也是洋洋得意地站在高高的树巅上，这时，如果有人从地面仰望，她的脸就象一颗苍白的星星。真的，大海就在那边，刚露面的太阳给它蒙上了一层炫目的金光。在霞光灿烂的东边，有两只苍鹰在飞翔，翅膀几乎一动不动。过去总是远远地仰望它们背衬蓝天飞翔，象是黑色的阴影。现在，从这个高度看去，它们飞得多么低啊。它们的灰羽象飞蛾的绒毛一样柔软，离开松树仿佛也不太远，这就使西尔维亚觉得，只要她张开胳膊，也就可以在云端自由翱翔了。朝西边看去，一片片的林木与田畴一直伸向远方，星星点点的是教堂的尖顶和白色的农舍，这真是个广阔浩茫、令人肃然起敬的世界啊！

鸟儿的鸣声越来越喧腾了，最后，太阳终于升了起来，明亮得令人不安。西尔维亚可以看到海上

close together. There, when she made the dangerous pass from one tree to the other, the great enterprise would really begin.

She crept out along the swaying oak limb at last, and took the daring step across into the old pine-tree. The way was harder than she thought; she must reach far and hold fast, the sharp dry twigs caught and held her and scratched her like angry talons, the pitch made her thin little fingers clumsy and stiff as she went round and round the tree's great stem, higher and higher upward. The sparrows and robins in the woods below were beginning to wake and twitter to the dawn, yet it seemed much lighter there aloft in the pine-tree, and the child knew she must hurry if her project were to be of any use.

The tree seemed to lengthen itself out as she went up, and to reach farther and farther upward. It was like a great main-mast to the voyaging earth; it must truly have been amazed that morning through all its ponderous frame as it felt this determined spark of human spirit wending its way from higher branch to branch. Who knows how steadily the least twigs held themselves to advantage this light, weak creature on her way! The old pine must have loved his new dependent. More than all the hawks, and bats, and moths, and even the sweet voiced thrushes, was the brave, beating heart of the solitary gray-eyed child. And the tree stood still and frowned away the winds that June morning while the dawn grew bright in the east.

Sylvia's face was like a pale star, if one had seen it from the ground, when the last thorny bough was past, and she stood trembling and tired but wholly triumphant, high in the tree-top. Yes, there was the sea with the dawning sun making a golden dazzle over it, and toward that glorious east flew two hawks with slow-moving pinions. How low they looked in the air from that height when one had only seen them before far up, and dark against the blue sky. Their gray feathers were as soft as moths; they seemed only a little way from the tree, and Sylvia felt as if she too could go flying away among the clouds. Westward, the woodlands and farms reached miles and miles into the distance; here and there were church steeples, and white villages, truly it was a vast and awesome world

的点点白帆，原先嫣红、金紫的云霞也开始消隐不见。在这片绿色枝叶组成的海洋里，白苍鹭的窠巢又在哪儿呢？莫非攀登到这令人晕眩的高处，唯一的报酬就是一览大自然壮丽的奇景吗？现在朝低处看吧，西尔维亚，就在闪光的白桦和黝黑的铁杉林间，有一片青翠的沼泽地，有一回你不是在那儿见到过白苍鹭的吗？现在你会在那边见到它的。瞧，瞧！它那小白点似的身影飘浮起来了，象风中的一片羽毛，从枯死的铁杉林中升起，它变大了，飞高了，来近了，它匀称地拍击翅膀，伸直了纤细的脖子和有羽冠的头，在这棵路标似的大松树旁掠了过去。喂，等一等，等一等！小姑娘，千万别挪动你的脚，别移动你的手指，也别从你急切的眼睛里射去两道利箭似的目光与思念，那只苍鹭正停栖在离你不远的一根松枝上，正在鸣叫着应答它巢里伴侣的呼唤，正在为迎接新的一天而啄理它的羽毛呢！

一分钟之后，小姑娘长叹了一口气，因为一群叽叽喳喳的猫声鸟也来到这儿。它们乱扑腾、乱吵吵，搅得那只安静、庄重的鸟呆不下去，它飞走了。现在她知道苍鹭的秘密了，这只轻盈、纤细的野鸟总是在翱翔、遨游了一阵之后，立即象支火箭似的回到下面绿色世界它的家去。如今轮到达到目标的西尔维亚寻路往下爬了。下去的路也很危险，她都不敢让目光离开脚底站着的枝桠，朝尽底下望去。有几回她真想哭出声来，因为她的手指实在太疼了，她的疲软脚也打滑了。她一边爬，一边一遍又一遍地想象；等她告诉那陌生人该上哪儿去找苍鹭的窝时，他会对自己说什么样的话，会对自己有什么样的想法。

“西尔维，西尔维！”忙忙叨叨的老婆婆一遍又一遍地喊道，可是没有人答应。那张垫玉米衣的小床空着，西尔维亚不知上哪儿去了。

客人从甜梦中醒了过来，他想起今天将会是很愉快的一天，便赶紧穿衣服，好让它早些开始。从怕生的小姑娘昨天的一两次眼光中，他敢肯定她至少是见到过那只白苍鹭的，现在是想法让她开口的时候了。就在这个时刻，小姑娘走了过来，脸色比平时更苍白了，她那件旧外衣撕开了口子，一丝丝布条挂了下来，外衣上沾满了松脂。

The birds sang louder and louder. At last the sun came up bewilderingly bright. Sylvia could see the white sails of ships out at sea, and the clouds that were purple and rose-colored and yellow at first began to fade away. Where was the white heron's nest in the sea of green branches, and was this wonderful sight and pageant of the world the only reward for having climbed to such a giddy height? Now look down again, Sylvia, where the green marsh is set among the shining birches and dark hemlocks; there where you saw the white heron once you will see him again; look, look! a white spot of him like a single floating feather comes up from the dead hemlock and grows larger, and rises, and comes close at last, and goes by the landmark pine with steady sweep of wing and outstretched slender neck and crested head. And wait! wait! do not move a foot or a finger, little girl, do not send an arrow of light and consciousness from your two eager eyes, for the heron has perched on a pine bough not far beyond yours, and cries back to his mate on the nest and plumes his feathers for the new day!

The child gives a long sigh a minute later when a company of shoutingcat-birds comes also to the tree, and vexed by their fluttering and lawlessness the solemn heron goes away. She knows his secret now, the wild, light, slender bird that floats and wavers, and goes back like an arrow presently to his home in the green world beneath. Then Sylvia, well satisfied, makes her perilous way down again, not daring to look far below the branch she stands on, ready to cry sometimes because her fingers ache and her lamed feet slip. Wondering over and over again what the stranger would say to her, and what he would think when she told him how to find his way straight to the heron's nest.

"Sylvy, Sylvy!" called the busy old grandmother again and again, but nobody answered, and the small husk bed was empty and Sylvia had disappeared.

The guest waked from a dream, and remembering his day's pleasure hurried to dress himself that it might sooner begin. He was sure from the way the shy little girl looked once or twice yesterday that she had at least seen the white heron, and now she must really be made to tell. Here she

姥姥和猎人一起站在门口质问她，说出青翠的沼泽地旁边那棵枯死的铁杉树的光辉的时刻来到了。

可是西尔维亚一个字也没有说，虽然老婆婆生气地呵斥她，年轻人和蔼、求援的眼光又笔直地盯着她的眼睛。他能够使她们有钱。他答应过的，她们现在又正好缺钱。他是一个好人，使他高兴也是应该的，他又那么急煎煎地等着要听她讲她知道的事儿。

不行，她一定不能开口！那么，是什么突然阻拦住她，使她一言不发呢？她度过了九个孤寂的年头，今天，当外面的世界向她伸过来一只手时，难道她为了一只鸟一定得把这只手推开去吗？青松的涛声充塞着她的耳朵，她记起那只白苍鹭如何穿越金色的天空，她和白苍鹭又如何一起眺望大海，欣赏晨曦。西尔维亚自然不能开口；她不能泄露苍鹭的秘密，葬送掉它的生命。

当客人在那天稍晚时失望地离去时，忠诚的小姑娘的心灵蒙受着巨大的痛苦。啊，她本来是可以帮他出力，跟他去打猎，象一只忠犬那样爱戴他的！此后，在许多个夜晚，当西尔维亚把乱跑的母牛往家里赶时，她在林中小路上又仿佛听到了他口哨的回声。她甚至还忘掉了听到他那骇人的枪声、见到画眉与麻雀无声坠地时所感到的痛苦，那时，鸟儿的歌声突然中断，美丽的羽毛上沾满了湿漉漉的血污。鸟儿与它们的猎手相比，难道肯定是她更好的朋友？——这又有谁知道呢？不管她失去的是什么珍贵的东西，树林和夏天，你们可要记住！把礼物与祝祷带给她吧，向这位孤寂的乡下小姑娘倾诉你们的秘密吧！

comes now, paler than ever, and her worn old frock is torn and tattered, and smeared with pine pitch. The grandmother and the sportsman stand in the door together and question her, and the splendid moment has come to speak of the dead hemlock-tree by the green marsh.

But Sylvia does not speak after all, though the old grandmother fretfully rebukes her, and the young man's kind, appealing eyes are looking straight in her own. He can make them rich with money; he has promised it, and they are poor now. He is so well worth making happy, and he waits to hear the story she can tell.

No, she must keep silence! What is it that suddenly forbids her and makes her dumb? Has she been nine years growing and now, when the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake? The murmur of the pine's green branches is in her ears, she remembers how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together, and Sylvia cannot speak; she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away.

Dear loyalty, that suffered a sharp pang as the guest went away disappointed later in the day, that could have served and followed him and loved him as a dog loves! Many a night Sylvia heard the echo of his whistle haunting the pasture path as she came home with the loitering cow. She forgot even her sorrow at the sharp report of his gun and the sight of thrushes and sparrows dropping silent to the ground, their songs hushed and their pretty feathers stained and wet with blood. Were the birds better friends than their hunter might have been, — who can tell? Whatever treasures were lost to her, woodlands and summer-time, remember! Bring your gifts and graces and tell your secrets to this lonely country child!