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BECKY, A PET BEAR CUB

Becky, a black bear cub, dropped out of the north bringing with her the breath of the wild Alaskan coast, the wind that sings high and fierce through lonesome forests and the spirit of adventure in keeping with such a birthplace. She wasn't a bedtime fairy; at least her disposition wasn't fairylike. Sometimes she was a tartar. In general, however, she was a livable, lovable little cub. She arrived at Riverby on the Willamette on the Church's yacht Westward after the long cruise south and a two-hundred miles motor trip.

Two cars were in the driveway and several children and their parents were sitting on the lawn when Church's car swung ~~around the road~~ ^{around the road} and stopped. It was crowded to the top with camp and cruising outfits, bed rolls, rubber boots and a rubber boat, and what-nots. Out of the middle of luggage, Becky stepped down, walking with the sedate and accustomed assurance of a cosmopolitan traveler. One felt that whether her ship cruised the sea or the sky, or rolled along on land, she would be pleased and exhilarated.

Everybody fell silent and stood perfectly still as she padded deliberately from one to the other, smelling shoes and stockings, cocking a quizzical challenging eye up to the faces bent over her in dubious intentness. The lady of the house sat on the bottom step at the front door much pleased with Becky's way of introducing herself, and awaited her turn. Having reviewed some ten people and put each one in his place, he decided the lady on the step was friendly, so she dropped her reserve and crawled into her lap. She hugged an arm and began to chew fingers gently while casting a half mischievous, half inviting glance at the attentive crowd. Such eyes as Becky had, never

frightened, never hurried; always cool and knowing.

The spell of reticence was broken. The children gathered around chattering and eager to put their hands on the woolly ball, to pick it up and hold it in their arms. But a four-months old bear is no yielding infant. For generations behind her every foothold and advantage in her life has been won little by little by her forest ancestors. So to Becky, everything attained was to be defended. A lap with a friend to back up against was a stronghold to be held. She reared up facing the children, whom she accepted good-naturedly as opponents. As a hand was held out to her she batted it with a paw. If it was not removed she came back with the other, just as a warning to keep at a certain distance. Or she opened her mouth and made a fake pass at a youngster who touched the lady, protecting her as she would have the gnarled limbs of an old tree over her woods den. It seemed, however, that she did not want to vanquish her opponents too soon, and that she thoroughly enjoyed the boxing game. The boys enjoyed it, too, and the play came light and quick as they deftly batted back and forth.

Becky soon grew into a household personality, a hot-tempered little pal who adopted everybody and anybody at sight. She didn't want to be left out of anything. At tea time on the terrace she wasn't going to be kept away from the family. She wanted to be a part of the laughter and fun, especially when the little cakes were passed. So she was free, roaming contentedly among the crowd, mischievous grabbing a leg as it went by, or unexpectedly jumping into a lap. And getting her out of a lap was quite another matter. She was a good cuddler, angelically gentle as she licked fingers or accepted a cake. But when she was

lifted down, it had to be done rapidly before she perceived the intention, for she bit and scratched and flew into a tantrum, squalling like a very bad child. Anyone who approached to help got a sharp nip. But when she was tired she crawled close to a friend, and after she fell asleep she could be handled and jostled about at will. The minute one tried to leave her alone to finish her nap, however, she was wide awake and off with the crowd.

On the Fourth of July the firecrackers puzzled her more than they frightened her. She looked calmly over the terrace wall where they burst in the green grass with spluttering explosions, and when one was set off near her it was difficult to keep her from sticking her nose on it.

Becky was not nervous or flighty. She didn't fly off the handle except when she wanted to. There were certain things she was positive about, and she used no polite gestures, but promptly put up a fight. She inveigled herself into so many family affairs that it became a habit of taking her along on most occasions. Once it was a picnic to Kiernan's country place where she fitted into the scenery, a black cherub hugging the fountain pedestal, batting at the thin spray of water, blinking as it splashed her face. When the solemn faced cattle in the orchard, eaten at curiosity at this bumptious new kind of a dog, edged closer and closer, she reared up in curious courage, sticking out her lip at them, trying to "blow" them away. Losing ground, she finally scrambled up an apple tree where, forgetting the big creatures at the foot of the tree, she fell into a frenzy of throwing down green apples, thereby helping the farmer to thin his crop. When the stir of departure came she

was the first on hand, standing with her paws on the running-board.

The climax of Becky's summer was a week-end trip up the Mackenzie River. The crowd was off in gay spirits. How would Becky like to cruise down Martin Rapids, not in an ordinary row-boat, but a little Tom-thumb of a rubber boat? She would. It was Becky's day, and it suited her. She sat between Cam Church's knees listening to the echoing voices across the water, feeling the rub and push of the current through the thin bottom. She was taking in everything about her, getting ready for whatever occasion portended with the unconcern of one who was born to surprises in the out-of-doors. But to sit wrapped in a heavy fur coat over the glassy surface was too much ^{warmth} for Becky. She began to move around, to look over the edge of the tippy little craft and to dip her paws into the whispering water so close to her. Water to a bear is a soothing potion of life. It was hot: she might jump in.

For half a day her little rubber boat slid along, now becalmed in a green grotto, now carried on the crest of white cascades of lesser rapids of the upper river. At last she ^{inflated} sprawled full length on the ~~xxamx~~ rim of the boat and fell fast asleep, one hind foot bobbing in the water. For some time a dull roar had been heard, now here, now there, half misty as it was wafted on the wind. The word passed back- Martin Rapids were ahead. A stop was made while Cam put on a life belt. Bjorn, Cam's Norwegian bear dog that was to be taken aboard, was uneasy. He fawned at the feet of his master as if asking him to think it over. Becky sat facing the noise as if expecting to see the

cause appear where the river seemed to end abruptly. A soft word. The little shell slid away and paddled into the current. It became swifter. They were enveloped in a rushing, hissing turmoil. Like molten glass, a great glistening coil licked them up and ^{swept} ~~bars~~ them ~~betwixt~~ two big boulder sticking up in the water. Becky and her crew swished past only only to be borne down upon a black jagged rock in front of them. The frail balloon side-swiped it, keeling up as it slithered along the mossy surface. For once Becky lost her balance. When seen from the bank, the boat was reeling in the air against the rock, while Becky was scrambling frantically on the lower side, her hind feet under water. If she should puncture the inflated rim with her claws!. Somehow she got aboard. At this turn of affairs, she became silent and watchful. Just then they fell over the brink of the falls, down, down into a seething pit of white water, the spray thrown high into the air hiding them entirely. The next glimpse showed them riding the high white crests that boiled out of the cauldron, Bjorn hiding his eyes under his master's arm, Becky sitting bolt upright, business-like and unconcerned. Her expression said, "Let'er buck!" One might have known she could ride the waves of her fate.