

## My Pal, Terrible Jack

We met in a meadow in the moonlight on June 4, the moose and I. The poor fellow must have been banished by his mother to make way for a new sibling. He exhibited the behavior I have learned is typical of young moose on their own for the first time—bewilderment, loneliness, and lack of initiative. In this space last month I described the first morning we spent together, gradually drifting closer to each other, and finally reaching out and touching—his nose and my hand.

I returned to the pond the evening of June 5. The moose was standing by a spruce island in the middle of the pond-side meadow. I said hello and squelched across to the wooded rise where I had pitched my tent. The moose seemed pleased to see me and came right over to the edge of the meadow near my campsite. When I went out to greet him, he stretched out his nose, pressed it against my hand and took a big snuffle. Did this mean we were officially pals? Imagine, if you will, the confusion such a relationship must induce in the mind of an already confused moose. He knew I wasn't his mother. Was I another kid? A different sort of grown-up? Just what sort of relationship should he have with an animal as strange as I? He decided to figure it out the way most youngsters do, by initiating rough housing; after wandering away a bit he turned and loped toward me, waving his long front legs. Fisticuffs did not figure into my plans for our relationship. Even a little moose is too darned big for me to want to play with, and I didn't think I'd fare too well in a shoving match to establish dominance. I decided to let him know that our relationship was to be that of two mature indi-

viduals, and based upon mutual respect. I conveyed this by squawking and waving my arms. The moose quickly wheeled and trotted off. Soon, however, he wandered into my campsite and began exploring. I admit to maintaining a keen awareness of the little moose's position during this interval. I could tell by the rascally glint in his eye that he wasn't satisfied by his first game, so I puzzled over a better way to establish guidelines for appropriate behavior. The next time he initiated shenanigans, I stepped forward and issued an unequivocal "No!" Strangely enough, this worked pretty well. The moose trotted off again, and I headed for the beaver pond to see what the beavers were up to.

The moose came along. He strolled out into the water a couple of times but the beavers took exception to this invasion of their pond and drove him off with slapping tails. How dangerous can an animal be that runs from rodents?

The next day I hiked in to Surprise Pond at noon to look for the moose, now dubbed "Terrible Jack," after a mouse in an A. A. Milne poem. He wasn't there. The next morning I returned to check again; still no moose. I decided to go look for him in a similar meadow about a half mile upstream I wasn't particularly optimistic. It's a big woods, after all.

The meadow I headed for is long and convoluted, but when I approached the edge, there was Jack. He seemed relaxed. I sat on a rock in the woods by the edge of the meadow and he soon ambled over and browsed next to me. When he lay down in a bed of grass and ferns, I decided to go off and explore the meadow. I had almost returned to the napping nook when I heard the little worry noises of a baby moose—soft urgent humming noises surprisingly similar to the sounds made by other animal babies I have known—porcupines, beavers, puppies, humans. . . He settled down and started grazing as soon as he saw me, and I returned to the nap meadow to retrieve my notebook. Terrible Jack had not seen me leave, however, and soon came charging through the copse separating us, crying with greater urgency. Again he settled down when he found me, and soon returned to his bed and his nap. By this point I was overdue for an engagement and slipped away, leaving the dozing moose to his dreams.

I had not gone more than several hundred yards,



however, when I heard the cracking of branches and the calls of Terrible Jack. At first he trailed me shyly, keeping well behind, but soon was just twenty yards behind me. Then he began leapfrogging, trotting ahead, waiting for me to pass, and then trotting ahead again. I was going for a walk in the woods with a moose, I noted. That doesn't happen every day.

The difficulty now would be persuading him not follow me home. When we arrived in the meadow by Surprise Pond, however, Jack laid down for another nap, and when I tip-toed away, he stayed behind.

I couldn't get back to the pond for a couple of days, but decided that might be just as well. When I arrived on the evening of June 10, Terrible Jack

was standing by the little spruce island in the meadow. He appeared more self-assured. I wandered over to the edge of the pond to visit the beavers. A bouncing branch betrayed the presence of Terrible Jack. He stood quietly next to me on the other side of a little hemlock, gazing out over the pond and chewing beech leaves. Bunchberry, the beaver, sat next to me and enjoyed a snack. Peepers peeped. I doubted life could get much better. After half an hour, Terrible Jack turned and trotted away. I haven't seen him since.

Chances are good that we will meet again someday, Terrible Jack and I. Will he remember our six days as pals? I'll be sure to let you know.