

LIVING IN THE COMPANY OF NATURE

The old stone house sat alone by the river. Built by Irish immigrants, it served its purpose well, being home to three generations of the same family. The house was built with the labour of willing spirits wanting to settle in a new land. These early settlers to the Canadian wilderness were handicapped by the climate. Shelter had to be built in a short amount of time to protect the new immigrants from the brutality of the winter's cold. Most early homes were made from logs, but some were made of stone. Many of these dwellings were constructed within a short distance of a town, where supplies could be purchased when needed.

Now abandoned and just a relic of its former self, the old stone house has taken on a new meaning. The old home has become a mecca for a new life, life mostly unnoticed by the human populace. Nature has changed the house and surrounding yard into a preserve, a safe home for animals, insects, and plant life to flourish.

The warm air, melting snow, and bright sunshine announce spring's arrival. A multitude of events begin happening at the stone house. A vine grows up the back of the house, eventually covering the rock on the outside of the building. The vine will bloom, drawing insects to find this new source of sweet nectar. Many insects remain here to live after visiting, enjoying this new habitat which has been created for them.

The ancient laneway was lined with sugar maples. In the past, these trees had been tapped for their sap which was turned into a sweet syrup, a delicious spring treat provided for the families who lived there. Unfortunately, time has taken its toll, aging the maple trees past their life expectancy. A few of the trees now lay dead, while others are dying. The maples have become home to a broad range of nature's inhabitants; birds, mammals, and insects all sharing space on these trees of life.

When approaching the house, one will notice robins hopping in the yard searching for worms. Their young wait with open mouths in their nest, built in the now abandoned doorway of the stone house. A family of groundhogs live on the premises, the large front yard an inexhaustible source of food for the mother and her babies. Mice live throughout the house, multiplying at an alarming rate, as do the racoons who have made the attic their home.

As the years roll by, the home's inhabitants will change. Some will leave for new surroundings, while others will move in, finding the unfamiliar environment comfortable. There will always be a home here for nature, no matter the condition the house is in. An ecosystem formed from the remains of a home is now not fit for human habitation, but well-suited for nature.

WILLIAM STANLEY