

Little One

by Suzy Hopkins

There is a large lazy herd of California mule deer that lives wild on the beautiful undulating fields covered with massive oak trees beside the fast running American River in an unfenced part of the Folsom Prison property. The prison was built in 1847, by the inmates, in Folsom, California. The warden's pale gray with burgundy trimmed mansion had been built a few years later and is now the Museum, where I worked.

One morning a young doe was nibbling the new leaves on the flowering quince bush near the porch. Wanting to entice her I sprinted to my desk and got the only food I could offer – the granola bar from my lunch. I gently pitched pieces of it several feet away. She kept her distance, watching me carefully. Every time I tried to move towards her she would trot off.

Over the months, she would eat the treats I tossed closer and closer to me. Eventually I could feed her out of my hand. She seemed to know when I had arrived at work and would appear at the end of the handicapped ramp. I Hopkinsd her Little One. Every spring she would bring her two tiny white-spotted fawns with her, for her snack, although they were too timid to eat from my hand.

During one dismal cold and rainy winter I hadn't seen her for at least two months. I sadly assumed she had been hit by a car or killed by a mountain lion, both of which were common occurrences.

However, one day while I was sweeping the gingerbread-trimmed porch that wrapped around this Victorian mansion, I saw a deer nearby. I could see three huge claw marks on her tawny neck where a mountain lion had attacked her. She had survived a horrible attack and another deer must have kept the wound clean. She was so emaciated that I wasn't sure it was Little One until she turned around and started coming towards me. I ran into the house to get a treat and the next thing I knew she was calmly standing in the Museum entrance hall waiting for me. As I was feeding her I kept saying to myself, "I'm feeding a deer in the hall." What a thrill!

The trust of a wild animal is an honor I will never forget.