

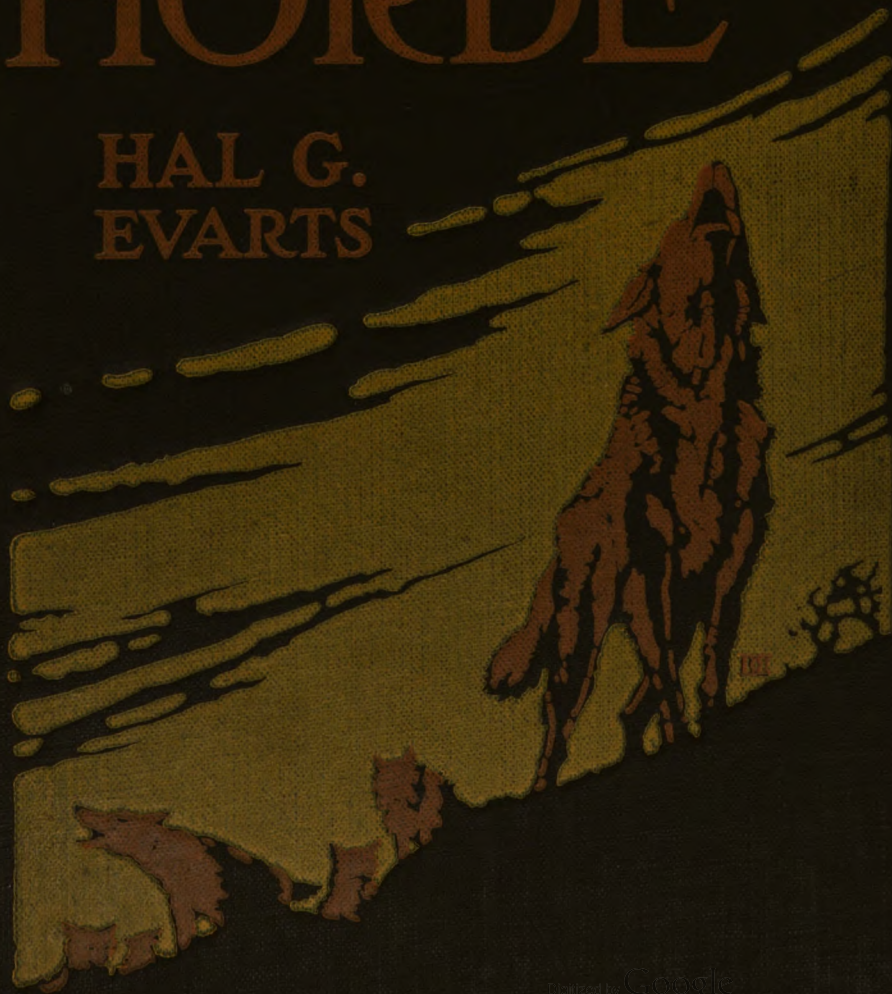
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THE YELLOW HORDE

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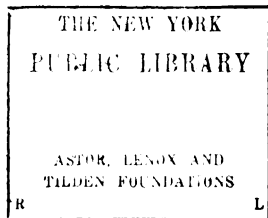


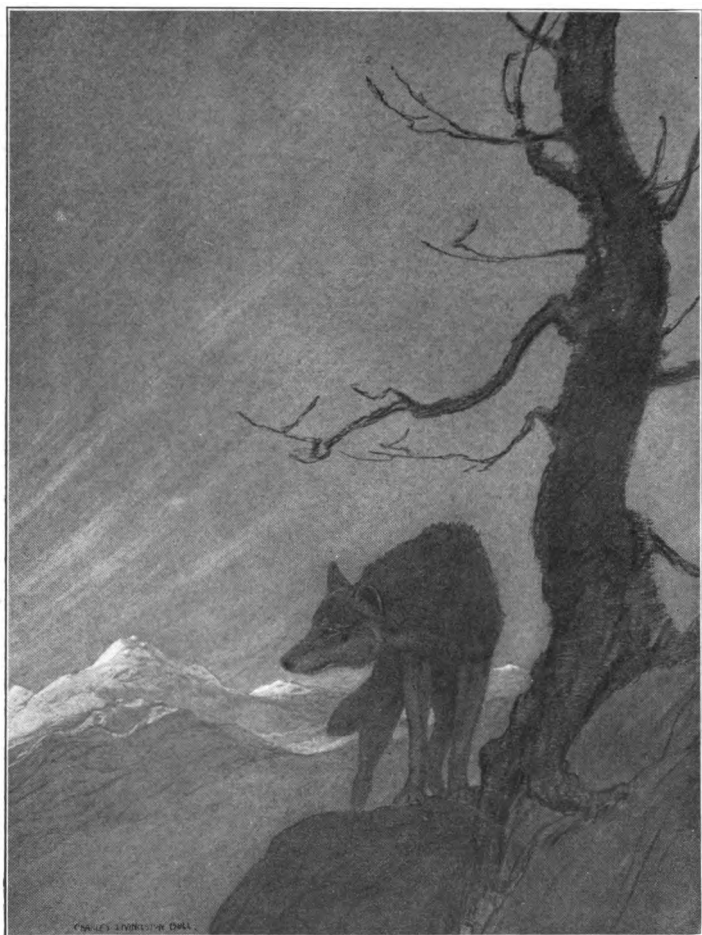
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THE YELLOW HORDE

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When dawn lifted the shadows from the low country, Breed was
prowling along the first rim of the hills.
FRONTISPIECE. *See page 6.*

THE YELLOW HORDE

BY
HAL G. EVARTS

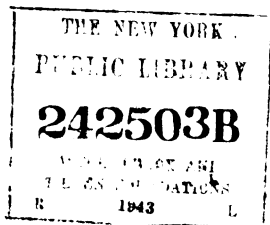
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL



BOSTON
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ETZ



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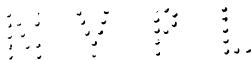
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THE YELLOW HORDE

CHAPTER I

THE wolfer lay in his cabin and listened to the first few night sounds of the foothills. The clear piping notes of migrating plover floated softly down to him, punctuated by the rasping cry of a nighthawk. A coyote raised his voice, a perfect tenor note that swept up to a wild soprano, then fell again in a whirl of howls which carried amazing shifts of inflection, tearing up and down the coyote scale. One after another added his voice to the chorus until it seemed that the swelling volume could be produced by no less than a full thousand musical prairie wolves scattered through the foothills for a score of miles.

Wild music to the ears of most men, the song of flat wastes and deserts and limitless



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horizons, freighted with a loneliness which is communicated to man in a positive ache for companionship, — and which carries a wealth of companionship in itself for those who have lived so long under the open skies that the song of the desert choir comes to them as a lullaby.

It moved Collins, the wolfer, to quiet mirth. Always it affected him that way, this first clamorous outburst of the night. He read in it a note of deep-seated humor, the jeering laughter of the whole coyote tribe mocking the world of men who had sworn to exterminate their kind.

“The little devils!” Collins chuckled. “The little yellow devils! Men can’t wipe ’em out. There’ll be a million coyotes left to howl when the last man dies.”

From this oft-repeated prophecy Collins was known to every stockman in three States as the Coyote Prophet, the title a jeering one at first, then bestowed with increasing respect



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as men saw many of his prophecies fulfilled. The coyote's larger cousin, the wolf, ranged the continent over while the coyote himself was strictly a prairie dweller. For twenty years Collins had predicted that wolves would disappear in settled districts while the coyote would survive; not only survive but increase his range to include the hills and spread over the continent from the Arctic to the Gulf. There were rumors of coyotes turning up in Indiana. Then came the tale that a strange breed of small yellow wolves had appeared in Michigan. Those sheepmen who summered their sheep in the high valleys of the western mountains complained that stray coyotes quit the flats and followed them into the hills to prey upon the flocks. The buffalo wolves that had once infested the range country were gone and it was seldom that any of the big gray killers turned up on the open range except when the pinch of cold and famine drove a few timber wolves down

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from the north. Men saw these things and wondered if all of Collins' sweeping prophecies would come to pass. In the face of conditions that had placed a value on the coyote's pelt and a bounty on his scalp, there was no apparent decrease in the numbers of the yellow horde from year to year.

Collins listened to the coyote clamor and knew that they had come to stay. The concert was suddenly hushed as a long-drawn wolf howl, faint from distance, drifted far out across the range. Collins turned in his blankets and peered through the window at the black bulk of the mountains to the north of him, towering clear and distinct in the brilliant moonlight.

"If you come down out of those hills I'll stretch your pelt," the wolfer stated. "I'll pinch your toes in a number four."

The wolf whose howl had occasioned this assertion was even then considering the possibilities of which Collins spoke. Men

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called those of his kind breed-wolves, half coyote and half wolf. He stood on the high divide which was the roughly separating line between the haunts of the two tribes whose blood flowed in his veins, — all wolf except for the yellow fur that marked him for a breed. The coyote voices lifted to him and Breed read them as the call of kind; for although he had spent the past ten months with the wolf tribe of his father his first friendships had been formed among his mother's people on the open range. The acrid spice of the sage drifted to his nostrils and combined with the coyote voices to fill him with a homesick urge to revisit the land of his birth.

But he would not go down. Breed knew well the dangers of the open range; the devilish riders who made life one long gamble for every wolf that appeared; he had gruesome recollections of the many coyotes he had seen in traps. But those things gave him small concern. It was still another menace

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— the poison baits put out by wolfers — which held him back. Not that he feared poison for himself, but coyotes writhing in convulsions and frothing at the mouth had always filled him with a terrible dread. It was an epidemic of this sort which had driven him to leave the sagebrush land of the coyotes for the heavily timbered country of the wolves. The memory of it lingered with him now. Would he find these stricken, demented creatures there?

Breed moved down the south slope of the hills at last, the sage scent luring the coyote in him, but moved slowly and with many halts occasioned by the wolf suspicion which urged him to turn back. When dawn lifted the shadows from the low country, Breed was prowling along the first rim of the hills.

Two dirt-roofed log cabins showed as toy houses, small from distance, and he could see the slender threads of smoke ascending from others, the houses themselves beyond

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the scope of his vision. The range was taking on fall shades, the gray of the sage relieved by brown patches of open grasslands and splotches of color where early frosts had touched the birch and willow thickets that marked each side-hill spring. Tiny dark specks moved through it all. Meat! It had been long since Breed had tasted beef, and his red tongue lolled out and dripped in anticipation of the coming feast.

But he would not go down until night. Twice during the early evening Breed howled, and Collins, down in the choppy country below, turned his glasses toward the spot to see what manner of wolf this was who howled in the broad light of day. The second time he located Breed. The yellow wolf stood on the rims half a mile above, looming almost life-size in the twelve-power lens. Collins noted the yellow fur.

"A breed-wolf," he said. "The most cunning devil that ever made a track. He'll

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never take on a feed of poison bait or plant his foot on a trap pan. He'll come down — and I'll ride him out on the first tracking snow.”

Just at dusk Breed howled again and dropped down to the broken country at the base of the hills, skirting the flats and holding to the roughest brakes, then swung out across the rolling foothills.

The wind soon brought him the message that coyotes were just ahead and he traced the scent upwind, anxious for the first sight of his former running mates. Two coyotes scattered swiftly before his approach, each carrying his own piece of a jack rabbit which the pair had caught and torn apart. Breed did not follow but held steadily on in search of more. The urge for companionship was even stronger than hunger, and he sought to satisfy the stronger craving first. Twice more he veered into the wind, and both times the coyotes slipped away as he advanced.

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He followed the line of one's retreat and the coyote whirled and fled like a yellow streak in the moonlight. Breed was puzzled by all this, but the craving for food had grown so strong as to crowd out all else, and he abandoned the hunt for friends to hunt for meat instead.

Out in the center of a broad flat bench a mile across Breed made out a group of slowly moving specks which he knew for cows, and he headed toward them, taking advantage of the cover afforded by every clump of sage as he crept up to a yearling steer that lagged behind the rest. He had hunted heavy game animals with the wolves, animals with every sense alert to detect the approach of the big gray killers, and he fully expected the steer to break into full flight at the first warning of his presence. He had almost forgotten the stupidity of the cows on the open range and the ease with which he had torn them down when hunting them with his wolf father

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long before. He made his final rush and drove his teeth deep into one hind leg before his prey had even quickened his gait. The steer lurched into an awkward gallop and bawled with fright as the savage teeth cut through muscles and hide. Breed lunged for the same spot again; once more and the leg was useless, the hamstrings cut, and it sagged loosely with every step. He slashed at the other leg. Within a hundred yards of the start the steer pitched down, bracing his foreparts off the ground with his two front feet, and even as he fell the yellow wolf drove for his throat.

Then Breed circled his kill, looking off in all directions to make sure that there was no route by which men might approach unseen. He stretched forth his head and cupped his lips as he sent his tribal call rolling across the range, the message that here was meat for all of his kind who would come and feed. A score of coyote voices answered from far and near.

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Collins heard the dread cry and knew that the wolf had made a kill. He knew too that whenever the wolf note was heard, all other sounds were stilled as if every living creature expected to hear an answering cry and waited for it to come before resuming their own communications. The fact that the coyotes answered the cry assured Collins that it was the breed-wolf that had howled; that coyote ears had read a note of their own kind in the sound, a note which even his experienced ears could not detect.

The yellow wolf tore at the warm meat and waited, — waited for his coyote kinsmen to join him at the feast. He howled again and they answered, reading invitation to coyote as well as to wolf in the sound, but they would not come in. An old dog coyote trotted up and down the crest of a slight rise of ground two hundred yards downwind. Another joined him, then a third, and in less than an hour there was a half score of coyotes circling

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the spot. Breed could see dim shapes moving across the open places and padding on silent feet over the cow trails that threaded the sage. Surely they would come in. The shadowy forms were restless, never still, and prowled round and round him, but they would not join him at the kill.

Breed was mystified by this strange thing. Here was meat yet the meat-eaters would not come in and feed. Coyotes had fed with him long ago but shunned him now. Breed could not know that then he had been accepted as one of them, having grown to maturity among them and so become known to every coyote on his range; that they had forgotten him as an individual, as he had also forgotten them. If there were any old friends among those who circled round him now he did not know them as such, only as a companionable whole; and they knew him for a wolf, — a wolf at least in size and strength. There was a coyote note in his call but not

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one of them would venture in to feed with the great yellow beast that was tearing the steer.

At last a grizzled old dog coyote drew up to within ten yards. He had lived to the limit of all experiences which a coyote can pass through and still survive. He had even known the crushing grip of a double-spring trap, a Newhouse four. This misadventure had occurred in midwinter when the range was gripped by bitter frost. The cold had numbed the pain and congealed the flesh to solid ice. He had cut through the meat with his keen-pointed teeth, and one desperate wrench had snapped the frozen bone and freed him. There were many of his kind so maimed, and the wolfers, abbreviating the term peg-legs, called these three-footed ones "pegs."

A second coyote joined Peg near the steer. He too had lived long and hard. He had been shot at many times and wounded twice. A shattered foreleg had healed with an ugly twist, the foot pointing inside and leaving

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only the prints of two warped toe pads when it touched the ground.

Peg and Cripp circled twice round the steer at a distance of thirty feet. They had known other breeds and had found that some would share their kills. Breed went out to greet them and they sidled away as he advanced, stopping when he stopped and turning to face him. Cripp allowed him to draw close, his teeth bared in warning against a too effusive greeting, while Peg drew swiftly in behind the wolf. The peg-leg coyote stretched forth his nose for one deep sniff, then sprang ten feet away as Breed whirled. Cripp drew up for a similar sniff as Breed faced Peg, then leaped away as Peg had done. Nature has endowed the members of each animal tribe with a different scent, and most animals identify enemies and friends with nose instead of eyes. That one deep inhalation had assured the two coyotes that there was a strain of their own scent mingled with that

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of the wolf. They grew bolder and stalked stiffly about him, appraising his qualities with eye and nose. When Breed returned to the feed they followed a few steps behind. At first they kept the body of the steer between them, then lost all restraint and accepted Breed as a brother coyote from whom they had nothing to fear.

An hour before dawn Breed left the spot and traveled back to the edge of the hills where he bedded for the day. He was full fed and satisfied with life. It was not until night closed down about him that he was conscious of the single flaw in his content, the one thing lacking to complete it all. Breed loosed the hunting cry but there was no answering call. He tried again without success. When with the wolves he had longed for the smell of the sage, the scent that spoke of home to him, and the mocking voices of the coyotes. Now that he had all these he missed the muster cry of the pack, hungered to hear

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the aching wails coming from far across the timbered hills, penetrating to the farthest retreats of the antlered tribes and sounding a warning to all living things that the hunt-pack was about to take the meat trail. But he knew that coyotes did not hunt in packs; that they hunted singly or in pairs, killing more by stealth than strength; clever stalkers and the most intelligent team-workers and relayers in the world, but lacking the weight and driving force to tear down a steer, — calves their largest prey.

Breed howled again and started on the hunt alone. Even then, though he did not know it, his pack was gathering to him. The two wise old coyotes who had fed with him the night before knew that wherever they found the big breed-wolf, there they would also find meat. They had started up at his first call and Peg was coming swiftly from the south, Cripp from the west. Breed had not traveled far before he was aware that other

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hunters were abroad and running with him, swinging wide on either flank. Here was his pack! At first he was not sure, but whenever he wheeled or veered from his course the two coyotes altered their routes to accord with his. He ran on for miles, thrilled with the knowledge that his queer pack followed loyally where he led, and when at last he singled out a steer the two veteran coyotes angled swiftly in and ran but a few yards on either side of him.

Then Breed sounded the meat call, — and two jeering coyote voices launched into full cry and howled with him. And Collins, the Coyote Prophet, for the first time in all his experience heard wolf and coyote howl in unison over the same kill.

Every night thereafter Breed's pack of two ran with him on the hunt and always there were the dim shapes circling the kill, padding restlessly through the sage as they waited for the yellow wolf to leave so they could swarm in and pick the bones.

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At first Breed had retired to the edge of the hills to spend his days, but his habits were changed through long immunity until his days as well as nights were spent in the open country; but his caution was never relaxed and he bedded on the crest of some rise of ground which afforded a clear field of view for miles in all directions. He frequently saw some of the devilish riders and occasionally one drew uncomfortably near his retreat, but always veered away before discovering his presence. His days were untroubled except by the memories of poisoned coyotes which persisted in his mind. When he slept his dreams often reverted to these poisoned horrors, and their death rattles sounded in his ears and his feet twitched in imaginary flight as he sought to put distance between himself and these haunting demons. Breed knew that poison was some evil exercised by man, but its workings were shrouded in mystery. Traps he could understand, — and rifle shots;

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for although this latter force was peculiar, yet there was sound. He understood only those things which to him were real and actual, things communicated through his physical senses. Poison seemed some sort of intangible magic, an evil spell wrought by man, and which transformed sound coyotes into diseased fiends in the space of seconds.

Always he waked snarling from these dreams, and always he was vastly puzzled by the abrupt change from night death scenes to the daylight calm of the open range. For dreams too were beyond his comprehension. They were actual scenes and scents and sounds to him, — then vanished. It was only natural that his greatest waking terror should stalk through his dreams, two mysteries combined to haunt him. Also it was inevitable that these dreams should eventually link up with the personal equation.

Breed slept one day on the crest of a knoll and suddenly it was night instead of noon,

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and Cripp and Peg were leaping about him in a frenzy, their frothing jaws snapping on the empty air in their madness. He faced them with bared fangs, — and it was noon once more, but the two old coyotes stood before him in reality, their own noses wrinkled in snarls which answered his menacing actions and warned him off. The same old baffling wave which flooded Breed after each of these recurring dreams engulfed him now. Peg and Cripp were as sane as himself, yet a moment past they had been stricken before his very eyes. It had been very real, and Breed started suddenly from the knoll and headed for the base of the hills five miles away, nor did he stop until he was far back among their sheltering ridges.

With the coming of the night he felt the loss of the two old coyotes who had traveled with him for the past three weeks. They had been normal when he saw them last and as this latter impression was the stronger he

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knew that he would find them untouched by madness; yet the vividness of the dream lingered with him and held him back from the low country. He howled once and started on a solitary hunt through the hills. The cry drifted faintly to the flats below and reached the ears of Cripp and Peg. They started instantly in the direction from which it came.

The chain of hills in which Breed hunted was but an outcropping spur, extending thirty miles eastward at right angles from the main bulk of the hills, and he found no meat. The elk and deer were high up in the parent range and would stay there until heavy snows drove them down to winter in the valleys of the lower hills. Breed worked up the slope until he reached the crest of the divide. He prowled along the bald ridge, undecided which course to take, then whirled and faced back in the direction from which he had come. Five miles below him a coyote had raised

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his voice; another answered. By traveling steadily Cripp and Peg had covered much ground since Breed's first cry of the night had reached their ears and the two coyotes were ten miles within the first folds of the hills and still seeking the yellow wolf, the leader of the pack.

Breed cupped his lips, his head stretched forth and his muzzle depressed to a line slightly below the peak of his shoulders as he sent forth the hunting cry to summon his loyal band. An hour later Cripp and Peg were with him, the three of them swinging west along the divide toward the rough mass of the main range of hills. Morning found them climbing through a matted jungle of close-growing spruce and down-timber.

Breed chose a ridge that lifted above the trees and there curled up for the day in a clump of stunted sage. Coyotes hunt in the full glare of the noonday sun as readily as at night and Cripp and Peg slept a bare two hours

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before starting once more on the hunt. They found small game less abundant in the high hills than in the flats and they scoured the surrounding timber without success, returning at last to bed down near Breed on the open ridge. Hunger drove Breed from his bed before the sun had set and he headed deeper into the hills, the two coyotes following, even though they had small liking for this country which seemed devoid of meat.

The yellow wolf sampled the cross currents of air which drifted in from each branching gulch. He crossed the cold trail scent of several deer but was in no mood for following a long trail so passed them by. It was the actual warm body scent he sought. He stopped suddenly with uplifted nose. The shifting breezes had carried the deer scent to his nostrils, — one brief flash and it was gone. Breed tacked back and forth across the wind, caught it again and held it, following the ribbon of scent upwind as easily as a man

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would follow a blazed trail through the timber. Two hundred yards from the start he sighted his prey, a fork-horn buck grazing slowly along under the trees. Breed turned his eyes to either side to determine the location of Cripp and Peg but they had suddenly vanished from sight.

He crept toward the fork-horn, standing without the moving of a muscle whenever the young buck lifted his head, advancing swiftly when he dropped it again to feed. The wind held steadily from the deer to him and Breed drew up to within fifty feet. The buck lifted his head and looked off in all directions, not from present uneasiness but from his never-failing caution, then reached for another bite of grass, and even as the downward motion was started Breed launched forward in a silent rush.

The fork-horn caught one backward slanting glimpse of him and fled just as the wolf's teeth clashed a bare inch short of his hamstring,

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and Breed was off in pursuit of an animal whose speed matched his own. This prey was no awkwardly galloping steer but a nimble beast that swept ahead in twenty-foot bounds, and after fifty yards Breed was still ten feet behind. Then a yellow streak darted over a windfall jam and Peg flashed at the buck. The deer turned almost at right angles in his fright, and as he turned Breed's teeth slashed his leg, but not deep enough to cripple, and the chase was on again. Another fifty yards and Cripp leaped from behind a spruce trunk and struck gamely for a leg hold. The flying speed of the buck jerked him clear of the ground, broke the hold of his teeth and threw him end over end. But he had retarded the deer for one half-second and the yellow wolf closed his jaws on a leg with all the force he could throw into the drive. Breed too was thrown, but the deer was turned again and running with less than half his former speed, one hind leg powerless. Peg was angling

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across to turn him still another time but Breed overhauled him first and slashed at the other leg, and as the deer rolled downhill the three-legged coyote dodged the churning hoofs and fastened on his throat.

Collins had journeyed far into the hills to replenish his supply of meat. It was scarcely dark under the trees when he heard the breed-wolf and two coyotes howl together, — thirty miles back in the heart of the hills!

“There now!” he exclaimed. “I’ve been telling ’em right along that the coyotes would take to the hills someday. Those breed-wolves — they’ll teach ’em to live in the hills.”

When Breed had eaten his fill from the deer he headed back for the low country. The effect of the mad dream was waning before the fact that Peg and Cripp were with him in reality, sane and normal in every way. The three of them were sluggish and heavy with meat and they traveled slowly with frequent halts for sleep.

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The following night Breed's howl sounded again in the foothills and a score of coyotes answered him from far and near. The coyote tribe had learned that when the yellow wolf prowled the range there would be fresh beef for all. Each night the number of shadowy forms that padded through the sage round his kills increased, waiting until the wolf should leave and they could close in and finish it to the last mouthful. They grew bolder from the fact that two of their own kind fed with Breed, and on the first night after his return from the hills three others found courage to come in and feed upon his kill before he left it. Within a week he was accepted unreservedly as a member of the coyote clan.

Each succeeding evening Breed found more and more coyotes gathering swiftly toward him at the first hunting cry of the night, spreading out over a quarter-mile front and running with him on the chase, knowing

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there would be meat in plenty at the end of the run.

Collins noted a curious change in the coyote signs in his immediate neighborhood. He still found their tracks singly or in pairs, where they wandered in all directions through the sage in their hunts for jacks, or padded thick round some spot where they had killed a calf, but he soon discovered that whenever he found a track which the breed-wolf had left the night before he had only to swing out to the right or left to find the trails of many coyotes pointing in the same direction, — a general movement of coyotes over a wide front. Collins had heard many tales of late which accorded with a prophecy he had made long ago; for three hundred miles north and south men who rode back into the mountains reported seeing coyotes far back in the very heart of them and of hearing their howls from among the highest peaks. His prediction that coyotes would take to the hills and feel

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as much at home high above timberline as in the flats had come to pass.

Collins studied long over the many coyote trails which always paralleled the tracks of the yellow wolf and made still another prophecy, — that breed-wolves would teach the coyotes to hunt in packs.

CHAPTER II

No man who has lived long in the open and observed the ways of animals and birds doubts that each tribe has a language of its own, — the vocabulary of cadence and inflection. A man may watch a marsh teeming with waterfowl, their contented chuckles filling his ears; then every wing will lift at once, every bird roused to sudden flight by the change of a single note so faint that it makes no impression on the ear of the watching man, yet sufficient to warn the birds as surely as a gunshot. A widely scattered bunch of range cows will graze placidly for hours, and suddenly every head will be raised and every cow gaze off in the same direction.

Coyotes catch all finely shaded inflections and interpret them as unerringly as a man

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notes the difference between a bawling cow and a blatting sheep. Mate communicates with mate through all the coyote refrains of the night; half-grown coyotes answer their mother's voice but are silent when another calls. All that wild outburst in which men read only an uproar of meaningless savagery is in reality the intelligent conversation of the coyote nation.

Breed's range covered fifty miles each way and there were some two hundred coyotes who used the same strip or whose range overlapped his own, and of these there were but few who had not at one time or another profited by some of his kills. Breed knew the voice of every coyote in the little band that made up his pack. Even when their notes reached him faintly through a maze of other howls his ears identified their voices as certainly as the eyes of man pick out the faces of his friends among a crowd. Those coyotes in whom dog ancestry was less than

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four generations removed betrayed that fact to him when they howled.

There are those who believe that the shepherds and police dogs sprang originally from the jackal. In any event, there are more dogs that revert to the wild bunch from these wolfish types than from all other kinds combined. The gulf between shepherd and coyote is not wide, and except when raiding coyotes and stock-guarding dogs meet in a clash of interests they are more apt to mate than to fight.

Throughout the whole of Breed's range there was but one note which puzzled him, — and it was not the ancestry but the present habits of the one who made the sound that baffled him. The parental mixture was plainly evidenced in the voice. It was the cry of a she-wolf, a half-blood coyote and dog, and Breed heard her howl night after night yet could not locate her. He would answer her cry and announce that he was

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coming, but always she evaded him. When he picked up her trail and followed it persistently, it invariably led him toward an isolated cabin. The wolf in him held him back from too close an approach to the homes of men. When he stopped she called again from up near the twinkling windows of the house. There was a lonesome note in her cry, and it was furtive, carrying both fear and invitation in its tones as if the she-wolf felt herself an outcast and both longed and dreaded to break down the bars between her wild relatives and herself.

And she was an outcast, without doubt. Collins had trailed her mother, a renegade shepherd, to the den. He had turned in the rest of the pups for bounty, keeping her for a pet. She was slightly heavier than a coyote and the fur of her back was dark, the badge of shepherd parentage. The yellow underfur showed through the black guard hairs of her back-strip when the wind ruffled it, the black

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shading to yellow on flanks and sides, and from this Collins called her Shady.

Shady's relations with men and beasts were unsatisfactory in the extreme. Stockmen hate the coyote with an intensity that they show toward no other animal, and with good reason, for the coyote meets them on a more equal footing than other beasts, his strategy outrivaling that of men. He repays their cruelties against his kind by killing their sheep and calves in broad daylight and executing a well-covered retreat before the owners can exact the penalty, then returning at night to raise his jeering laughter almost under the windows of his enemies.

Collins had no stock, his business being that of killing coyotes, and he found far more to admire than to despise in the qualities of his prey and so did not accord coyotes the undying hatred shown them by other men. In his gruff way he was kind to Shady. Those who came to his cabin were mainly stockmen

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and they hated Shady cordially. That she sprang from a renegade sheep dog, a traitor to her kind, was even more condemnatory in their eyes than the coyote part of her.

The coyotes, less averse to the proximity of man, had investigated Shady's case by drawing nearer to the cabin than Breed would go and so were no longer curious about her. Breed was almost two years old yet he knew nothing of dogs. His mother had ranged a limited strip of country in which only two men made their homes and neither had owned dogs. When north with the wolves he had met none of his domestic cousins except those renegades or breeds that were of the wild. He had crossed the trails of others at rare intervals. Therefore he did not know dogs as allies of men and so enemies to himself; rather Shady seemed some extra-shy wolf creature yet with sufficient courage to range in close to men. She seemed a daring adventurer to Breed.

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It was partly this curiosity which piqued his interest in her. Then too he recognized in her a freak type, — as he himself was a freak. Each stood for the first generation of a new breed, the equally divided parental strains not yet dulled and blended by further crosses, and so each of them recognized something outstanding and unusual in the other.

At first their knowledge was confined to what each learned of the other by ear alone, unaided by the testimony of other senses. Breed never once caught sight of her, and the trail scent which she left behind told him little except that she was half coyote and half dog, as he already knew.

For a month he answered her howls, his curiosity unassuaged. And as Breed puzzled over Shady's voice, so Collins puzzled over Breed's. Collins had heard him howl more than a hundred times and knew that there was some slight difference between his voice and the pure wolf note. He had made a close

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study of animal sounds and knew them well. He knew Shady's voice from that of other coyotes. Her variations were less sharply defined; more sustained than the bewildering staccato of the coyote and with a slightly coarser tone. Collins knew that he should be able to detect that peculiarity in Breed's howl, — a difference which he felt was there but could not place. There were times when the solution rose to the very surface of his mind and struggled for interpretation into readable thought, but always it eluded him in the end.

Shady came to listen for Breed's voice among the multitude of other sounds, and in some small measure she felt acquainted with the yellow wolf. She missed his voice on those nights when he hunted in some far corner of his range and the familiar cry failed to reach her.

This sense of familiarity led her at last to wait for a sight of him. Breed traveled one night toward the howl which always had the

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power to draw him, and he suddenly saw Shady fifty yards ahead. She would permit of no nearer approach, fleeing before him as he came on, stopping when Breed stopped, but always keeping that fifty-yard gap between. Every night for a week Breed strove to narrow the breach, but without success; but Shady's doubts were wearing down before his constant advances and she found no menace in his actions. She eventually allowed Breed to draw near and they viewed one another at a distance of ten yards. Their course through the sage was a series of eccentric loops as each circled repeatedly downwind to catch the other's scent.

Then their relations were reversed, Breed the retiring one, Shady the aggressive. There was the scent of the stables, a horsy smell that clung to Shady and which Breed could not understand. There seemed too some vague taint of man about her which held him back. Shady grew bolder in the face of his

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timidity, and Breed's new-found suspicion eventually waned before her friendly insistence. Their friendship once established they romped together night after night.

Shady was puzzled over the fact that this new playmate invariably left her early in the night. These meetings took place before Breed raised his voice to summon the coyote pack for the nightly hunt. He would break off in the middle of a race and send out the call, then leave the wondering Shady to her own devices for the rest of the night.

His curiosity satisfied, Breed answered her invitations less often and she saw him only at infrequent intervals; and there was a reason for this flagging interest. Wolves and coyotes mate for life, or till one or the other of a pair falls victim to the wiles of man. When once a pair is broken the survivor will not take unto himself another mate till the next running time of wolves. There were pairs of coyotes running together in Breed's pack; there were

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also single she-coyotes and single dogs, but while the mated ones were as devoted as ever before, these single ones had only a general interest in the others, their attitude uninfluenced by the lure of sex. And Shady, hampered by her relations with man and so unable to follow Breed's leadership at will, exercised less influence over him than either Peg or Cripp.

Breed killed abundantly, the coyotes picking the last morsel of each victim before dawn. Often he killed twice in one night. Word had spread that a breed-wolf had turned up on the range and was running with the coyotes. Private rewards were added to the State bounty till a total of two hundred dollars was posted as the price on his scalp. Every rider kept a sharp lookout for the breed; yet so great was his caution that except for that first day of his return, when Collins had seen him on the rims, no man had set eyes on the yellow wolf.

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Breed's watchfulness for traps and poison baits had waned from the fact that he found none of either on the range, and he now gave them scarce a thought. On the other hand his caution to avoid horsemen was quickened from seeing many of them and his vigilance in that particular was never relaxed. He chose his beds with care and he slept so lightly that the least sound penetrated his consciousness and carried its message to his brain. The shrill cachinnations of a prairie dog, the shriek of a burrowing owl or the bawling of a range cow; any of these usual sounds of the open failed to rouse him; but invariably he knew when a man was dangerously near. If the menace was upwind and within reasonable distance, his nose detected it. At times the creak of saddle leather reached his ears or the sound of the horse's hoofs warned him.

This hoof reading was a curious thing. Breed could not tell why he knew when a horse was ridden, but invariably he did.

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If walking, the feet of an iron-shod horse struck pebbles and rocks with a metallic sound and Breed was suspicious of all horses that wore shoes; but usually a rider traveled at a steady trail trot. It was not the way of loose horses to strike a steady, regular gait and hold it, and the even vibrations of a shuffling trail trot beat through all other sounds and warned him that a horseman was near.

Men grossly underestimate the keen physical senses of the animal world, being loath to credit them with finer sense perceptions than those possessed by man, dulled by countless centuries of disuse. A coyote can scent the tracks left by a bird long hours past; the smell of fresh blood is hot in his nostril a full half-mile downwind while the nose of man could scarce detect it at a distance of two feet. His ears, attuned to receive the delicately shaded tone inflections of coyote converse, catch vibrations of sound

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far too fine to make the least impression on the ears of man. And it is through these sense impressions that animals are warned at distances which men believe impossible without the aid of some subtle intuition or sixth sense. They speak of these things as animal instinct and let it go at that.

In addition to this Breed had many other ways of protection at his command; he usually knew of the approach of man long before the direct message reached him over the paths of his own physical senses, — this from his vast knowledge of the ways of animals and birds and his ready understanding of their widespread systems of communications. Their actions frequently put him on guard before his own senses apprised him of the actuality of the danger.

These things, coupled with his own habits and backed by coyote intelligence, made Breed an animal most difficult to stalk.

Collins knew the wolf habit of bedding on

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a rise of ground. He knew too that the dog who turns round and round before lying down is not merely chasing his tail but instead is exhibiting a relic of his wild ancestors' way of rising frequently from his bed and turning to look off in all directions before resuming it. Day after day Collins swept the range with powerful glasses and through his knowledge and persistence he located Breed at last.

Breed lay on the crest of a knoll. Peg and Cripp were hunting in the shallow basin below him and he watched with keen interest the diabolical cunning of his two chief followers. Peg ranged in the open while Cripp paralleled his course, moving along just behind the wave of a low ridge. A long-eared jack rabbit bounced from his bed in front of Peg and fled swiftly for a hundred yards, then halted to look back as he discovered that he was not pursued. He reared on his haunches, forefeet clear of the ground, as he watched the coyote who had veered

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away from him and was now questing aimlessly through the stunted sage. Peg turned toward him again and the jack bounced away toward the ridge, stopping again as Peg swung away. From his point of vantage Breed could see the cunning Cripp keeping even with the jack, following closely its every move and peering at it through the scattered sage that topped the ridge. Peg, apparently unconscious that there was meat in sight, rambled in erratic tacks that crowded the rabbit toward the ridge. Breed saw a crouching shape slip behind a sage within ten feet of the jack, whose eyes were occupied with Peg. There was a flash of yellow as Cripp struck him and the dying squall of the big hare floated to Breed's ears. He rose from his bed in excitement, then paused to sweep the country with his gaze before resuming his nap.

Collins had seen! From the point of a commanding ridge five miles away he had centered his binoculars on the yellow wolf.

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The wolfer's horse grazed in the bottom of a gulch, his reins trailing loose, and Collins moved swiftly down to him and swung to the saddle. He had covered less than two hundred yards before Breed, five miles away, knew that a man rode toward him!

The pronghorn antelope has a most peculiar signal system of his own. He is furnished with a white patch on his rump, the hair long and stiff, and when alarmed, instead of bristling his neck roach as do other animals, the antelope bristles this white rump patch. The sun strikes light from the glistening hair and every antelope within view follows suit; the warning is flashed from band to band till every antelope throughout an area of many miles knows that some man is abroad on the plains.

Whenever a band of antelopes sported within view of Breed his eyes flickered open for frequent glimpses of them. Ten minutes after the two coyotes had killed the jack Breed opened his eyes for a view of a prong-

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horn buck that had taken his stand on a low ridge half a mile away. Breed caught the danger signal and was instantly alert. For as far as his eye could reach he could see the glistening points of light which he knew for antelope flashes. The whole antelope tribe was facing toward the danger and so pointed out its direction for Breed. It is this sort of signaling which men will not understand, preferring instead to credit an animal, warned at a distance of many miles, with some mysterious occult knowledge.

A band of antelope joined the buck on the ridge and fled with him toward Breed, stopped to look back, stamping their feet excitedly, then swept on past as a rider topped the ridge they had just left.

Breed flattened in his nest, resting his head between his paws. It was not his way to rush off in panicky flight across the open at the first glimpse of man, but rather the coyote way of remaining motionless till the enemy had

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passed, or slipping away unseen if he came too close. The horseman came on at an angle that would take him three hundred yards to one side, then altered his course and angled the other way. He stopped to look over a bunch of cows, shifted again to view another bunch and circled round it; came on again but turned to head a stray steer back toward the rest. Collins was using the same tactics in approaching Breed that the two coyotes had so recently used to stalk the jack. He seemed about to pass two hundred yards away but lifted his horse into a keen run and whirled him straight for the point of the knoll, then shifted his course again to round the shoulder of the little hill instead of over its crest, knowing that Breed was running at top speed down the opposite slope. He pulled the horse back on his haunches and flung from the saddle with the first glimpse of the fleeing wolf.

Breed did not stop to look back as most

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other animals would have done but ran with every ounce of his speed. He flinched away from the sharp crack near his head as a rifle ball passed him and the crash of the report reached his ears. The next shot struck close behind and the biting gravel stung him as the ricochet hissed past within an inch of him. He held straight ahead but resorted to the coyote ruse of flipping from side to side in sharp tacks, his tail snapping jerkily outward to balance him on the turns. Bullets ripped through the sage about him as Collins emptied his gun. Then he was safe on the far side of a swell and Collins was grinning ruefully at a wolfless landscape.

“Coyote stuff!” he said. “A man might as well gun up the corkscrew flight of a jack-snipe as to pour lead through the gaps in a side-steppin’ freak like that. But you, Breed, — you better keep your eye on me. The Coyote Prophet is out for your scalp — so walk soft, old boy, — walk soft.”

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Breed struck a swift, gliding trot and held it clear to the base of the hills, stopping only when far up the first slope of them to sweep the low country for sight of his enemy. That night when he raised his howl it reached the ears of perhaps a hundred coyotes far out across the flats and immediately thereafter there was a strange movement in the coyote tribe. The majority of them rambled in all directions on personal business or pleasures of their own but through it all, strung out over a five-mile front, more than a dozen coyotes were running swiftly toward the hills. They were not to be turned aside but held their course, gathering to the wolf who had led them to many a kill, — willing to follow wherever he should lead. An hour later, when Breed raised his voice from the divide, a wave of coyote answers rose in unison and when he headed toward the parent range there were fourteen coyotes traveling with him through the hills. They moved together,

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but not as man understands that term, for they did not travel closely grouped. Some were half a mile to either side and some far behind, and there were gaps of several hundred yards in the line. Their trails sometimes shifted and crossed, but noses and ears kept them well informed as to the locality and actions of the rest.

They entered the rough mass of the main range and pushed on, traveling in this loose formation. Toward morning Breed stopped and listened to a far-off sound which reached him. Every coyote in the pack had also stopped to listen, their red tongues circling hungrily along their lips as they caught the significance of the sound.

There were no sheep on Breed's immediate range. Trouble between the cowmen and those who grazed sheep had been temporarily adjusted by apportioning the range. Sheep now grazed far to the south but the cowmen allowed the privilege of pastoral trans-

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portation across the cattle strip twice a year for those who summered their sheep in the hills. The snows were late in falling and the flocks had been held correspondingly late high in the hills.

Breed had known sheep in the past, — and this was the sound of sheep. Two herders had combined their bands to work them down to the low country and the camp tender stayed to help them with the crossing. Breed listened long to the droning undertone, the maddening blat of five thousand woollies on the bed ground, its querulous volume persisting through the sound of water and wind and drifting to him across a distance of five miles. Then he stretched forth his head and issued his hunting cry.

The savage peal ripped through the plaintive chant of the sheep as the prow of a canoe cuts sluggish water, and traveling against the current of sound it reached the ears of the camp tender who rolled over in his blankets

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and cursed. There was a half-minute cessation of the baa and blat, and before it was resumed the tender had prodded the two herders into wakefulness.

“Better sleep with one eye open,” he advised. “There ’s a wolf in the hills. Just crossing through, mebbe — but anyhow you better stay awake to hold the sheep while I fire a shot to scare him off if he comes too close. He ’ll put ’em off the bed ground and scatter ’em if he slips past the dogs.”

The cry sounded again, this time less than a mile away, and a clamor of coyote howls rose with it.

“Coyotes!” the tender exclaimed. “Night shooting won’t scare those cunning devils off, — they know a man can’t see at night. It sounds like they was running in a pack, and enough of ’em to make a noise like as if the whole damn coyote nation had took to the hills. Wonder how come they ’re pranking round with a wolf? They ’ll likely

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only hang along to cut out some strays — but if they do come in close in a mob like that, it's good night, sheep! Them shaller-brained woollies will take to the peaks."

The sheep had risen from their beds and were huddled close. The tender and herders stood with drawn guns and the three dogs bristled savagely and turned their gaze toward the timbered slope that rose on one side of the open side-hill bench that served as a bed ground. There was a movement among the sheep; the fleecy mass buckled and surged as those on the outer edge turned and sought safety by plowing toward the close-packed center. The three men stationed themselves in a triangle three hundred yards apart, hoping to steady the sheep and hold them. The dogs circled swiftly round the milling horde, driving merciless teeth into every panic-stricken sheep who sought to quit the flock. The whole mass suddenly crowded off to one side and all three dogs sped round to hold them.

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One herder saw a flitting streak leave the timber edge and glide toward the sheep; another; there was no moon and he could not be sure. His gun barked twice as a dozen shadowy forms crossed the open, strung out for two hundred yards. Then hell broke loose on the bed ground.

The fear-crazed horde streamed past the other herder and the tender. They shouted and struck out with heavy staffs, trying to stem the tide and turn it back. The resistless sea of fleece surged on and was swallowed in the gloom of the heavy timber down the slope. And in the center of it all Breed and the coyote pack were working.

They ripped through the mob and split it; drove through again. The sheep split into a hundred small detachments and blundered on under the trees. The men stumbled through the down-timber windfalls and their shouts and the frantic barking of the dogs rose above the clamor of the sheep, —

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but there was not a sound from the yellow killers who had started the stampede. Every coyote knew the location of the men and each one singled out a stray band for his own and swept ahead with it. The dogs worked like fiends but the marauders were in too great force for them. Whenever a dog bore down upon a coyote the raider fled straight away from the sheep and their blats recalled the dog to duty. The mad wave rolled down the slope and up the next.

The first light of dawn revealed each of the three dogs holding a large band of sheep. The two herders and the camp tender had each rounded up a smaller bunch. They worked their separate ways back toward the bed ground, gathering strays along the way. The camp tender held them in the open while the two herders and the dogs combed the surrounding hills for stragglers; and as they worked they cursed the coyote and his ways. It was no unusual thing in their experience

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for a few coyotes to fly at a bunch of sheep and scatter them, cutting out a few that straggled away from the protection of men and dogs, but this savage attack in pack formation and the harrying of five thousand head of sheep far through the hills was new to them.

All through the morning they rounded stragglers toward the flock and shortly after noon they headed the tired sheep down toward the foothills, fearing a repetition of the stampede. Just at dusk they milled the sheep and bedded them on a ridge in the low country, a mile from the base of the timbered hills.

The camp tender looked them over with practiced eye and shook his head.

“There’s no chance to make a count now,” he said. “But when we do make one it’s dollars to dimes that we’ll tally out two hundred short.”

CHAPTER III

COLLINS had waited till the fur was prime and the flesh side of the coyote pelt showed flint white before throwing out his trap line. He made the first set three hundred yards from the cabin, choosing the spot with care, for he knew that the last place a coyote would enter was the one where guiding clumps of sage formed an inviting lane across the traps. He selected an open spot instead and dismounted on a sheep pelt spread flat upon the ground; with a hand-axe he hewed out a triangular trap bed a foot across by three inches deep, placing every shred of fresh earth removed from it in a canvas sack; then he fitted a heavy Newhouse four in place with both springs bent far to the rear and drove a slender steel pin out of sight through the

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swivel ring of the chain. He smoothed a piece of canvas under the jaws and over the pan and poured the soft earth over it all, filling it level with the surface and tamping it firmly with his fingers except that within the six-inch circle of the jaws. From a second sack he sifted dust over the spot till it matched the surrounding flat, remounted and leaned from the saddle to recover the sheep pelt on which he had knelt and used it as a fan to whip the dust of the flat into curling eddies which settled back so uniformly as to defy the eyes of any man to detect the location of the trap. The surplus earth removed from the hole he carried away to be emptied far from the spot. For Collins knew the qualities of his prey and a good wolfer leaves no sign. He had used no foolish scent to disguise his own, knowing that the heat of day and the frost of night would diffuse his scent and obliterate all trace of it, the same as an animal's trail grows cold

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in time, while any foreign odor lingering longer than his own would only serve as a guide for the cunning prey he sought.

The wisdom of the fox has furnished theme for song and legend, and only those who have followed the trap line for both fox and coyote know that Reynard's vaunted brain is but a dry sponge when compared to the knowledge-soaked brain of the prairie wolf. It is the way of the coyote to live near man, confident that his own cunning will offset that of his arch enemy and lead him unscathed through all the contrivances men may employ for his destruction. Collins knew that the fox was only trap-shy while the coyote was — vast difference between the two — trap-wise; that he would go to a bait, knowing the traps were there, and risk his life in an effort to uncover them and so leave evidence behind that he was keener than his foe.

At the end of a week Collins had thrown

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out three pear-shaped loops of traps, each line with a length of twenty miles, the whole a clover-leaf effect with his cabin as the base. He had used no bait until his scent should have been blotted out round his traps, not from fear that coyotes would not approach the bait while his scent was fresh but from certain knowledge that they would approach too soon, locate his traps and uncover them. When the third trap circle was complete he started back over the first and baited the sets, then commenced the steady routine of riding one string each day and thus covering his entire line in three days.

Shady frequently accompanied Collins on these trips and when he made a trap set she sat down some distance away and watched him with full understanding of what he was about; for Shady's past experience with traps had been large. She had seen Collins take many a coyote from his traps. Twice she had slipped away to steal the bait from

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some set near the cabin and both times had felt the sudden deadly clutch of steel jaws on her foot, remaining in their grip till Collins had released her. She had seen coyotes dead and bloated from eating poison baits, — and meat was now a danger signal to Shady, not a lure. She would touch no food except that which she obtained at the cabin.

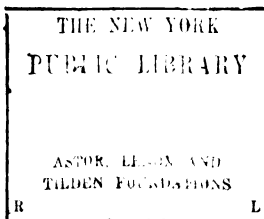
The trap line had yielded many coyote pelts while Breed was still in the hills and he knew nothing of the widespread mortality among the coyotes in his absence or the dangers which lurked in wait for him on his return.

There were two hundred sheep scattered for miles through the hills and Breed and the coyote pack found easy killing. Winter had claimed the lofty peaks, while but little snow had fallen below timber line.

Breed sensed the coming storm. The movements of the elk herds told him it would be a heavy one. It was nearing the end of the elk rutting moon but the bulls were still



The elk migration had begun. *Page 63.*



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bugling. Breed heard the clear bugle note of an old herd bull, the piercing sound reaching him from many miles back among the snowy peaks. It was closely followed by others. The elk migration had begun; the herds were evacuating the lofty basins of their summer range and boiling out through the high passes of the peaks before the snowfall of the coming storm should block them in, — coming down to winter in the lower valleys of the hills.

The certainty with which animals gauge a coming storm is cited as proof of that mysterious instinct with which men credit them; yet this information may reach them through known laws. Breed knew of it from the elk movements, and it is probable that the elk in turn were warned from some similarly natural source, — perhaps from atmospheric changes, more likely from the flight of migratory birds.

A marshland may be empty of certain

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species of ducks in the fall; then suddenly a flock will pitch down out of the blue, followed by another and another till the whole sky is streaked with the oncoming horde. They will feed and start on, the belated arrivals not even alighting but holding straight ahead. The flight ceases as suddenly as it commenced and inevitably a storm drives down out of the north in the wake of the flocks. But this is not instinct. The storm strikes those birds that have remained farthest north and as they scurry ahead of it the more southerly ones take wing. Many ducks fly at rates of speed that are well over a hundred miles an hour and so can distance the swiftest storms. Even the ears of man may detect the difference between the wing-whistlers of a flock of mallards or other slow-flying ducks and the humming screech of redhead or canvasback hurtling through the night with tremendous speed; and animals note such things more readily than man.

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In any event Breed knew of the coming storm many hours before the first soft flakes fell and melted on his yellow coat. He took shelter under the low-hanging branches of a stunted spruce and slept. It snowed for two days and throughout that time there was little sound in the hills. Each coyote in the pack had sought out a similar shelter, the mated pairs bedding together, the others singly. No one of them howled during the storm. The elk and deer held to their beds without a sound. The few stragglers who had not yet crossed out through the passes were the only ones that moved, pushing on through the storm, and the herd bulls traveling with them bugled to hold their cows together; but the snow-filled air deadened these distant sounds. And for two days Breed heard nothing but the soft hissing of the snow through the branches or the groaning of overburdened trees. The third night a big gray owl hooted gruffly an hour before dawn, and

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as if dispersed by the sound of his voice the last gray clouds scudded past and the stars flamed from the steel-blue sky of night.

A savage wind sprang up with the sun, shrieking along the exposed ridges and rippling the valleys of lodgepole pine, hurling its force against the spruce slopes. For another day Breed heard only the howl of the gale, the snow sliding from the swaying branches and the sudden crash of falling trees, — not a sound of life. The fury of the wind abated toward night and an hour after dark there was a sudden lull followed by one last rush of wind, leaving the white hills wrapped in a vast silence.

Breed heard a single bugle note of a young bull, the last he was to hear for another ten months, for the mating time of the antlered tribes had been ushered out with the storm. The gray owls hooted the warning that they would soon set forth on silent wings to strike down any small creature that moved across

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the white carpet under the trees. The elk were working back up to the bald ridges that had been blown free of snow. All the night-feeders of the wild prowled in search of food after the fast.

Breed raised the hunting cry and the coyote pack answered roll call. They were gaunt and their flanks were pinched up and hollowed from the three-day famine. They ran silently and with but a single purpose, spurred on by hunger. A coyote far out on one flank of the pack winded a bunch of elk and headed for them. The elk accorded him scarcely a glance as he drew near. In an earlier day, before the white man had invaded the foothills, the elk herds had wintered there, but the coyotes had not molested them; of late a few coyotes had invaded the high country, the summer range, but the elk did not fear them.

The coyote howled, one short eager blast, and angled in between the herd and a straggler

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on the edge of it, a yearling elk, a spike bull, his first antler growth consisting of two pointed spikes eighteen inches long. He was not alarmed, — but it was a new kind of coyote that faced him now, one that had learned pack hunting under the leadership of the yellow wolf.

The coyote made a swift lunge and drove his teeth in one hind leg. The young bull whirled and aimed a sweeping slash of his polished spears, intent upon impaling his foe; and as he turned a second coyote flashed from behind a tree and slashed him. The bull whirled again and struck wickedly with a smashing forefoot. The rest of the elk had stopped to gaze in amazement at this strange scene, — at coyotes attacking an elk.

Every coyote in the pack had altered his course at that short howl, wheeling as at a command. Yellow shapes had appeared as if by magic and were sliding under the trees on silent feet and circling the bull.

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There was something sinister and purposeful in this concerted action and the rest of the elk milled about uneasily and at last turned and trotted off. The spike bull fought with hoof and horn, but at every turn a coyote slashed him from behind, striking always at the hamstring. His rage turned to fear and he fled. He struck the heavy four-foot drifts where the wind had scoured the snow from the ridge above and sifted it deep in the timber. His sharp hoofs and heavier weight let him deep into the snow while the coyotes padded easily along, their feet sinking in but a few inches. He tired himself with desperate charges at some coyote that always eluded him while others drove fangs in him from behind. More coyotes joined the running fight and he was far gone before Breed drove through the pack and struck him with all the force of a killing wolf. He spent the last of his ebbing strength in a whirlwind of furious fighting, then went down and the yellow

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horde swarmed over him. They fed long and when they left the feast they were no longer gaunt. Flanks had filled out and paunches sagged heavily, nearly touching the snow. The following night they returned to the kill and finished it. Then Breed headed back for the open sagebrush foothills. The immediate fear of being shot had departed, leaving only the lesson as a reminder of his narrow escape.

The pack reached the edge of the hills in the first morning light and many of them kept on, but Breed, more averse to daylight traveling than they, would not venture down till night. The low country lay spread out below him, ragged patches of brown alternating with those of dirty white, the wind having scoured the snow from open grass-country and piled it to the tops of the sage in the heavier clumps and in long drifts trailing away downwind behind them, or packed it in the depths of badland washes and cracks.

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The powdery snow had been swept from the open before it had time to melt and the dry air of the hill country had sucked up what little moisture remained, leaving the flats almost as dusty as before.

With nightfall Breed descended to the tongue of the foothills that reached up into the notch formed by the outcropping spur where it joined the main range at right angles. Thirty miles east along this Hardpan Spur was his home territory and he followed along the base of it. Not till within ten miles of Collins' cabin did he howl. The wolfer heard it, and again he had the feeling that he could almost name that peculiarity in Breed's note, but before he could give it expression the solution was slipping away from him as always before. He could feel the odd quality but it defied analysis in words.

Shady too had heard the call and answered it. Breed started toward her but stopped abruptly and tested the wind. The scent

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of stale meat played on his nostrils and he veered aside to investigate. He moved along a cow trail and peered from the edge of the sage at a ten-pound chunk of meat that lay in the center of an open flat. He knew what that meant. Suspicion flooded him and every hair tingled as he realized that this was the work of man. Traps! No coyote on the range would have found need to look twice at the tempting morsel to know that it had not come there by accident but had been placed by some man as a coyote lure.

Breed, springing as he did from two wise tribes, had been educated in two schools. His coyote mother had led him to meat, knowing men had put it there to bait her, and she had taught him to detect the most cunningly buried trap. Later he had practiced this art himself. The old dog wolf who was his father had followed one simple rule which served him well. He killed each meal as he felt the need of it and would touch no other

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food, not even returning to previous kills of his own. Breed was possessed of both traits in moderation, inclining to either for long periods as his moods varied. Breed moved to within ten feet of the meat and extended one forepaw, feeling cautiously through the carpet of dust, then pushed it two inches ahead. For a solid hour that paw was not once lifted from the ground except when the other was pushed forward to replace it. He moved ahead an inch at a time, the edging forepaws feeling through the dust for the least sign of loosened earth beneath. He knew that the crushing jaws of a trap yawned beneath the surface somewhere near the meat. His eyes swept every inch of ground for a sign that differed from the rest and his nose quested for a spot which held the taint of man. A faint trace of it pervaded the place, coming mainly from the bait itself and almost blotted by the meat scent.

Cripp and Peg watched every move from

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a distance of ten feet. Two young coyotes had come to the spot and one of them worked in toward the bait from the opposite side, using the same tactics as those employed by Breed. At the end of an hour Breed stood within three feet of his goal and the outstretched paw suddenly touched yielding earth. He scratched gently along the edge of this softened spot; a claw scraped some solid substance and the moonlight glinted on a point of naked steel. Breed pushed his paw beneath it and gently lifted till half of a deadly four-pound trap showed above the dust. He looked long at it, then veered past it to the bait; and the young coyote edged in from the other side. Breed's feet did not shift an inch as he tore a mouthful from the meat, but the young coyote across from him strained to drag the whole of it from the spot. It was wired solidly to a stake and he shifted far to either side in his vain efforts to dislodge it. There was a hissing grate of loosened

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springs and the young coyote felt the bone-shattering snap of a trap as it closed on his foot. Breed whirled and leaped ten feet away, from which point he watched the struggles of his ill-fated friend. In his desperate struggles to free himself the young coyote leaped clear across the meat and the trap that Breed had unearthed closed on another foot. Breed circled uneasily round the spot, powerless to help the coyote that was stretched full length between two traps, yet he lingered till an hour before dawn.

This experience quickened old fears in Breed. Memories of past horrors, long dormant but not forgotten, welled up out of his mind to increase his caution, and fresh pangs were added by similar discoveries on each succeeding night. The whole range seemed studded with fearsome traps and the odor of stale meat was borne on every breeze. There were few nights when he did not find some animal fast in one of these man-made snares.

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Each new victim acted differently, according to the characteristics of its kind. Breed found a badger in a trap and the animal ceased his struggle long enough to wrinkle his nose and hiss at Breed with a thick snakelike sound. The badger's forepaws were more than twice the size of his hind feet, and were fitted with heavy two-inch claws, while those of the hind feet measured but half an inch. He was caught by one hind foot, leaving the powerful spading forks of the forepaws free to work. He had always found safety by burrowing in the ground and so now, in his last extremity, he turned to digging and plowed every inch of the surface within reach. He settled on one spot at last and burrowed from sight. Breed watched the heaving dirt till it ceased to move as the badger settled comfortably in fancied security, buried to the full limit of the trap chain.

Some nights later Breed passed a cross fox that had strayed down from the high country

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and had stepped into one of Collins' traps. The fox was never still, weaving in and out, looping and turning round the pin that held the trap; lashed into constant movement by his native nervousness but making no strenuous efforts to break loose. Later the same night he found a bobcat. The big cat made no move save a slight creasing of his facial muscles preparatory to a snarl if the wolf drew near. The first pain had dulled and he rested quietly, lacking the hardihood to stretch his own flesh and bones in a struggle against the trap.

But Breed always found a trapped coyote fighting, — fighting silently and gamely to the last heartbeat. Coyotes are high in the scale of intelligence and so each one has an individuality of his own. One would surge time after time against the chain, driving savagely to the end of it. Another would grind his teeth against the cold steel till his jaws dripped blood, while a third would

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amputate the mangled foot. But whatever the method, the basic fact was the same, — no coyote waited submissively for his fate but waged a ceaseless, desperate fight for freedom.

All these things heightened Breed's suspicions. He felt the reassertion of wolfish caution within him, driving out the coyote desire to outwit man. Three times he unearthed the traps and stole the bait. Then he refused to go near stale meat. He was nauseated by the smell of it and merely avoided instead of investigating the spots from which the scent came to him. And this was not through fear of traps—he retained full confidence in his ability to detect them — but from the fact that wherever he had found traps in the past he had also found poison and so these two were associated together in his mind.

Throughout a whole month of accustoming himself to these new conditions, Breed had visited Shady but twice. He had the com-

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panionship of coyotes to fill his time and the lonesome howls of the she-wolf were unanswered. It is the stock dog without steady occupation that reverts to the wild. Mere inactivity, even if coupled with kindness, is insufficient to still his natural restlessness and fill his life; he must have careful training and active employment to be content, — and Shady was half wild.

The mating time of wolves was drawing near and Breed caught the new note in Shady's voice. He dropped all other business to hurry to her. Though the season was yet some time ahead they knew its nearness and each recognized in the other a possible future mate.

Collins thought of Shady more as a pet than as a dog and so had not troubled to train her. The wild traits in her were as apparent in maturity as they had been in infancy — even more pronounced — and chief among these was her natural aptitude for stealing. She

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pillaged Collins' stores and even sneaked food from the table when his back was turned, as her wild ancestors for many generations had stolen his bait. Collins curbed this propensity, not by judicious training which would eliminate it, but by the simple process of chaining her to the cabin wall when he left for a trip and did not wish her to accompany him. So it was not strange that Shady viewed thieving from the standpoint of expediency. Those who came to Collins' cabin predicted a bad end for Shady.

That insistent note in her voice was more pronounced as the season neared and Breed tingled to the sound of it. The frequency of his visits increased till they were of nightly occurrence instead of semi-monthly. He used every wolfish inducement to lure her away from the vicinity of the twinkling lights that marked the abode of man. She longed to follow him into the wild but could not bring herself to face its terrors. Breed longed to

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follow her when she left him but could not bring himself to face the horrors which must lurk near the haunts of men. These clashing outlooks upon life held them apart. The wild represented safety for Breed, its dangers known to him and accepted as a part of it and not to be greatly feared. Those dangers were the work of man, and by natural consequence Breed assumed that their numbers and deadliness increased in proportion as he drew nearer the homes of men, the house itself the most dangerous of all. Shady's mode of life had taught her the reverse of this; that complete safety lay in the cabin and its immediate vicinity, the known and unknown terrors of the wild increasing in ever-widening circles dependent upon the distance from the refuge of the cabin that was home to her.

The season had started and some few coyotes had paired, yet Breed could not induce Shady to follow him. The preceding winter her desire for motherhood had been

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thwarted. Collins had chained her to the cabin for a month. Coyotes are without the wolf suspicion which fills their larger cousins with fear of human habitations, and they are prone to investigate them at night while a wolf will not approach. Several dog coyotes had braved the dangers of Collins' cabin in answer to Shady's howls. Her soft whimpering had roused the wolfer each time this occurred and every new admirer had been greeted with a charge of buckshot as he slipped toward the house, three dog coyotes having paid for their temerity with their lives.

The Coyote Prophet intended the same imprisonment for Shady the present season but he neglected it one day too long. He came from the cabin, a collar and chain in his hand, only to see Shady slip away into the dusk. A minute later she howled.

Breed heard it. Every fiber of him quivered to the sound. It was the mating call!

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Collins whistled in vain. There was no answering whimper from Shady. But the habit of obedience was strong in her and she lingered within sound of it. Breed came nearer than ever before, his fears dulled by the message she had sent him. Collins came from the house again and whistled shrilly. Breed shrank from the sound and drew back as Shady trotted a short distance toward the house; she answered the whistle with an uneasy whine and Collins moved in the direction from which it came, coaxing as he advanced.

Fear flooded Breed. It spurred him to sudden rushes of flight which were halted in a few stiff bounds as the longing for Shady cried out against his leaving her. Then came the clanking of the chain in Collins' hand. It was the clank of a trap chain to Breed, — and he was off. That same sound, its meaning so different for each of them, resulted in flight for both. Shady ran with him through

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the night, and once started it was not so hard to keep on. And as she ran she transferred her trust from Collins to Breed, giving herself entirely into his keeping to lead her through the unknown perils which lay ahead, — and she ran close to him, her nose almost touching his flank.

CHAPTER IV

THE exhilarating element of danger in trap robbing, which appeals so strongly to the coyote, held no fascination for Shady. She was vastly trap-wise but used her knowledge solely for self-preservation. Every scrap of meat on the range represented possible pain or death to her and she found no sport in close investigation with its attendant risks. She was entirely dependent upon Breed, feeling a sense of security in his nearness, but weighed down by the vast unknown which seemed to close in upon her whenever the gap between them exceeded the span of one leap. She would not touch any food other than that which he provided.

The coyotes clustered round the steer that Breed pulled down a few hours after

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luring Shady from the cabin and she viewed them suspiciously, warning them off by repeated growls. Peg and Cripp edged in to feed. Shady's protest rose frenziedly and she raged at them but did not attack, and the two old coyotes eyed her warily as they ate. She noted that Breed accepted their presence and she quieted and patterned her actions according to her mate's.

The rest of the pack came in. Her uneasiness persisted and for an hour she ate but little, edging away from physical contact with those who crowded about her. She pressed close to Breed's side and whirled to snap at any coyote who attempted to wedge between them, but her suspicions subsided as she found that these nips were never returned. Whenever a dog coyote was inclined to make friendly advances to Shady a low growl from Breed warned him from her side. The sense of strangeness, of having been catapulted from a sheltered life into

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the midst of a growling mob, wore off and Shady rapidly accustomed herself to these new conditions.

The feast was but half finished when the head of every coyote in the pack was raised at once and the shuffling feet and grinding jaws were stilled as a timber wolf howled from the slope of the Hardpan Spur. All animal sounds were suspended till the last ripples of Breed's answering cry died away; then lesser beasts, having preserved strict silence while two mighty hunters spoke, resumed their own interrupted communications.

The Coyote Prophet heard the two cries, and that baffling quality in Breed's voice was instantly clear to him, as was the reason why he had never before been able to give it name. He had quested for the difference with his ear, — and the difference lay in the feel of the sound. Collins had felt the crawling of his flesh and the roughening of his skin

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at the gray wolf's cry; for a man may hear that note every night of his life and the wolf shiver will shake his frame the last time it sounds as surely as it does the first. It is not fear; no man can name it; but the wolf shiver is as inseparably linked with the wolf howl as the involuntary gasp is linked with a dash of ice water on the spine. And Collins knew that that quality was lacking in Breed's cry. The personality of the gray wolf was marked by absolute savagery, his bleak outlook on life undiluted by a single ray of that humor which is so evident in every act of the dog and the prairie wolf; and this difference of temperament was reflected in his voice, apparent to the ears of the animal world, apparent to Collins only in the different way in which his subconscious mind reacted to his howl. Collins, having once defined Breed's note, its sound so identical with that of the wolf howl yet so dissimilar in the elusive feeling which accompanied it, had no further

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doubt that he could thereafter identify Breed by his howl.

“You, Breed! I’ve got your number now,” he said. “I could pick you out from amongst a hundred wolves.” This was merely a casual assertion, a self-congratulation over having solved the puzzle, and the Coyote Prophet made it without a thought that the day would ever come when he might have opportunity to file it among prophecies fulfilled.

The wolf howl affected Shady in a similar way, its stark savagery clashing discordantly with the dog strain in her. She felt the grating along her spine, and the hair rose with it. There was an air of expectancy among the coyotes. Heads were raised between mouthfuls and all eyes were repeatedly turned toward the hills. It was the first time that Shady had heard the cry of one of the big gray hunters. She noted the tension among her new friends without reading its

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portent. Of them all, Breed seemed the only one unaffected. One by one the coyotes left the feast, then the remaining few sidled hurriedly away as a huge dog wolf moved swiftly across the flat. His pace slowed as he neared the kill and he halted ten feet away, his quivering nose taking stock of the two who fed there.

Shady's long run through the sage had whipped her soft fur full of sage dust, its sharp scent nearly obliterating the conglomerate smell of the cabin which usually clung to her. The reek of coyote scent and fresh blood that permeated the spot still further concealed it, and though the wolf caught the peculiar odor he could not trace its source to her without closer inspection. He was hungry and advanced to the meat, tearing off huge bites and gulping them down till the wire edge of his hunger was appeased, then sidled cautiously round the steer to nose the mating she-wolf. As he neared her his eyes peered over her at

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Breed. That foreign odor which he had noted he now traced to Shady, but having once accepted her it did not trouble him. Shady flinched away from him and Breed's lips writhed up and cupped away from his ivory fangs. There was no mistaking the snarl that accompanied this baring of his teeth and the gray wolf moved back to the opposite side of the steer.

Thereafter both wolves ate sparingly and each watched for the least hostile move in the other. The coyote pack ringed in close, awaiting the departure of the timber wolf. He frequently turned his head and favored the closer ones with a baleful stare, the move always accompanied by a flattening of his ears, and the ones so fixed by his appraising eye shrank deeper into the sage. Each time this occurred his head swung abruptly back toward Breed.

Shady feared and hated the wolf. If she thought of him in human words she would

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have given him the name of Flatear, and with good reason. In coyote, fox and wolf the ears are even more expressive than the eyes. A wolf's ears work when he sleeps, one of them inclining toward the least sound that reaches him. When awake his ears seem to work automatically in conjunction with nose and eyes, tipping sharply forward and turning in the direction of any strange object or questionable scent that excites his curiosity. And the flattening of the ears is indicative of his mood, preceding even the snarl, their backward angle an accurate gauge of his intent. It seemed to Shady that the big wolf's ears were chronically laid as he regarded Breed. She was unversed in the ways of her wild kinsfolk and could not know that the yellow wolf and the gray were sparring for the advantage of the first blow in the savage fight that would soon be waged for the right of proprietorship, — herself as the prize.

Both wolves centered their attention on the

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main issue and waited only for an opening. Shady and the restless coyotes out in the sage were forgotten, each wolf conscious only of his foe. Those others mattered not at all, for there were certain known laws which all past experience had proved unalterable. She-wolves showed small concern over the clashes of rival males; coyotes never fought with their big gray cousins, and there were no other wolves about. The issue was squarely up to them.

Each time that Breed appeared off guard for a split second the gray wolf laid his ears, the involuntary betrayal of muscles tensing for the fatal spring; and Breed's own flattening ears each time evidenced his readiness to counter. Shady sensed the enmity between them without knowing the inevitable result. Her mode of fighting was the impulsive way of the dog, the act almost simultaneous with the desire, and this protracted, cold-blooded calculation was new to her.

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Breed gave an opening at last, turning and reaching for a bite of meat, and exposing the unprotected side of his neck. Flatear struck for it without a sound, driving straight across the steer with all his weight behind the gleaming rows of teeth. Breed dropped flat and as his enemy swept over him he swung his head up and sidewise in a terrible slash that tore an ugly rent in the gray wolf's paunch. They whirled face to face, — and both were treated to a series of tremendous surprises which shattered all previous convictions.

Shady harked back to the ways of her domestic ancestors, to the custom of dashing into a neighborhood dog fight and mauling the one strange dog in the lot, regardless of sex, — and Breed had been her friend long before he had become her mate. Flatear was the one strange dog to Shady, and he found himself assailed by a screeching fury who fought without care or caution, her sole aim being to sink her teeth in any available part of him.

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As he leaped away from this unnatural she-wolf he was met by a second surprise. The coyote pack had learned to strike when the leader struck. Peg flashed round a sage and laid open his flank, and as he whirled to face this new enemy Cripp slashed him from behind. Three coyotes darted past Breed and before he had recovered from the shock of the surprise his enemy had fled.

Flatear did not flee from fear but from an overwhelming sense of the whole world gone mad, the shattering of tradition and the overthrow of natural laws. The chaos in his mind sent him flying from this insane place within six seconds after his first attack. A mating she-wolf had been transformed into a she-fiend and in the same second he had been mobbed by coyotes. No doubt he believed with Collins that strange things had come to pass of late in the ranks of the coyote tribe. Flatear headed back for the hills out of which he had come, and as he ran his

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bewilderment crystallized into a consuming hatred for the strange yellow wolf, the hybrid beast who had upset the established order of things. He did not know that Breed himself had been so nearly paralyzed with sheer astonishment that he had not joined the attack.

The coyotes settled once more to the enjoyment of their interrupted banquet. Breed little realized that he had made a mortal enemy, one who would not merely attempt to deprive him of his mate during the running moon as would any other unattached dog wolf, but one whose enmity was for the individual and who had marked him for the slaughter when next they met, regardless of time or season.

CHAPTER V

THE number of coyotes in Collins' territory had been cut down by half and only the wisest were left. As they grew more trap-wise the wolfer increased the cunning of his sets. Clearly marked cow trails crossed through every low saddle in the foothills and Collins studded these with traps. After once his scent was cold the coyotes had nothing to warn them of these sets, but trail trapping is largely chance and not productive of great results.

Breed saw one coyote in a trail trap and he forswore the following of cow trails. The coyotes soon learned to avoid them. Collins noted the absence of coyote tracks on trails that had once been padded thick with them and the wolfer chuckled over this evidence of their resourcefulness.

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Some of Breed's pack had fallen victims to the trap line but their places had been filled by new recruits, every one trap-wise to the last degree. But even these found it increasingly difficult to retain their lives.

A new menace hovered over every coyote that ranged near the foot of the Hardpan Spur, a menace that filled the hardiest prairie wolf with dread. Many a lone coyote was suddenly startled by a huge shape that leaped for him and bore him down. None thus attacked lived to spread the warning and the only knowledge the others had of the lurking fiend was the finding of old friends, stiff and dead, their throats gashed open by savage teeth. The tracks and scent round these murder spots identified the slayer.

Flatear spent his days high in the hills and at night he dropped to the low country to perpetrate his unnatural crimes. Coyotes had violated the customs of centuries and turned their teeth against him. He now

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wreaked vengeance for this affront. There were no wolves to answer his call, so Flatear no longer howled, but prowled the range without a sound to warn prospective victims, a silent assassin that struck without notice.

At the end of a week he had left a long trail of victims behind but not one of Breed's pack was among them. Those that had pack-hunted with the yellow wolf and learned the advantages of combined attack in killing heavy game now put that same knowledge to good use for their own protection, sufficient evidence of the quick adaptability with which coyotes rise to meet any new emergency.

Mated pairs now ran close when hunting, sometimes traveling in fours. Flatear soon discovered that the teamwork of a pair of fighting coyotes was more than a match for even his great prowess and his kills grew fewer.

Cold fear clutched every coyote that caught a fugitive scent of the gray killer, but Breed did not share this dread. He was Flatear's

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match in size and strength and so was not concerned. Breed could not know that Flat-ear's hatred had become almost an obsession; that night after night the slayer was craftily trailing him and that killing coyotes was but a side line to lighten the hours of a protracted stalk for Breed himself. Flatear was a veteran warrior and he waited only for an opportunity to attack when he should find Breed alone. Nose and ears kept him apprised of the yellow wolf's whereabouts, but usually there were coyotes running with him and invariably the tracks of the she-fury were mingled with those of her mate. Breed was untroubled by any thought that sudden death lurked in wait for him the first time he should run alone through the sage.

While Flatear plied his bloody trade and made the nights fearsome for the coyotes, men found one more method of harrying them by day.

The first Breed knew of this danger was

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one day when he lay with Shady on a high point of ground. There were many things about Shady which he could not fathom. From the first he had found much of mystery in her. She insisted on traveling in broad daylight whenever the notion seized her and she seemed not to share his fear of horsemen, often rising incautiously from her bed for a better view of them, careless of the risk of their seeing her.

Shady cocked her ears alertly at a distant sound, and the same note, faint as it was, roused Breed from his nap. Somewhere off across the foothills several men had raised their voices in a wild outburst of cheers. This sounded again and again, each time from a point nearer to where Breed lay. A band of antelope sped past without following their usual custom of stopping to look back. Breed caught the vibrations of pounding hoofs, the sound of many hard-running horses blended in one. Through it all he heard an

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occasional note that was strange to him, a shrill, sharp note that had something of the wolf in it, yet which he knew was not made by any beast he had met before. And at this note Shady laid her ears and growled.

The cheers and the hammering hoofs came closer and Breed fixed his eyes on the edge of the flat bench spread out for half a mile before him. A coyote spurted from the mouth of a draw off to the left of Breed's position and raced across the flat. He was stretched out and running his best, but before he had covered two hundred yards five great wolfhounds poured out of the draw. They were slender and long-coupled, capable of tremendous speed, and before the coyote passed below Breed the lead dog was but a few lengths behind.

For the most part the dogs ran silently and wasted no breath in senseless clamor, but occasionally one of them loosed an eager yelp, the sound as thin and keen as his body.

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A dozen riders streamed across the flat on furiously running horses, cheering as they came. The coyote doubled to evade the snapping jaws of the foremost dog, and as he turned another struck him. He rolled over twice, and when he gained his feet he faced his enemies. He knew the game was up but he went down fighting, — fighting against odds without a whine; and Breed watched five savage dogs mauling a limp dead thing that ten seconds past had been his valued friend. These strange beasts did not move off as the men rode up, and Breed realized with a shock that the men did not ride with the purpose of killing them; that they were leagued together and that the dogs were the creatures of men the same as sheep and cows were their property.

He stole down the far slope, keeping the high ground between himself and the horsemen. Shady followed him closely, moving furtively and with many backward glances,

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her tail tucked almost between her legs, and Breed, accustomed to Shady's indifference to the approach of riders, wondered at this sudden reversal of her usual ways.

But it was not the men that roused Shady's fear; above all other things she feared and hated dogs. The few that had followed their masters to Collins' house had always sensed the wild blood in her, and at the first opportunity they had pounced on her with intent to kill. Shady had found friends among the coyotes and had found only hostility among dogs. Savagery is only relative, according to the views of the one who pronounces upon it, and from Shady's experience she was right in her judgment that the ultimate limit of savagery was reached only in the dog.

The owner of the dog pack lived some ten miles from Collins and the whole countryside had assembled to witness the first race. There were fewer riders in each chase as the novelty wore off but the days were few when

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the owner failed to take the dogs out for a run. Wolfhounds run only by sight and coyotes are slippery prey, doubling and twisting on their trails to throw their pursuers off, so the result was always in doubt and every chase did not yield a coyote pelt.

After that first day Breed did not wait for the dogs to draw near but started off the instant he found that they were coming his way. It was Shady's habit of daylight traveling that led Breed into grave danger within a week after the dog pack had made their first run. He followed Shady down the bed of a gulch which screened their movements from prying eyes but at the same time served to shut out all the various signs by which Breed received long-range warnings. As they loitered along the bottom of the draw the antelope bands were flashing the danger sign; range cows on the ridges all stood facing the same way; everywhere coyotes were scurrying for cover, but all these things

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passed over Breed's head. A coyote flipped into the gulch and he did not tarry but passed Breed with merely a sidelong look and vanished round a bend.

Breed was instantly alert. He darted to the rim of the draw and looked warily about him. There was not an antelope in sight and no cows grazed in the little basin that flanked the gulch at the point where he left it; not a sign to warn him of the source of the danger. He ran for the crest of a ridge for a better view, — and the next instant he was in full flight back the way he had come, for as he sky-lined himself on the ridge five sharp-eyed wolfhounds a quarter of a mile away had darted toward him. He knew that they had seen him and were coming, that death was sweeping down on him.

He turned up the gulch and followed it toward the hills, Shady running her best to keep up with him. The dogs fanned out to look for him as they topped the ridge. The

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upper end of the draw widened to blend into a broad mesa and the hounds caught sight of the two wolves as they headed out across the flat. Breed had held his lead but a clean race of over a mile confronted him, the flat affording not one shred of cover. He swung his head slightly to one side as he ran, one backward-rolling eye taking in every detail of what transpired behind him.

He saw the five specks increase their speed and knew that they had sighted him again; they angled slightly and he watched them draw gradually together, their courses converging on the center of his line of flight till they were once more running well bunched, — and gaining.

His lead was being steadily cut down, the gap perceptibly lessened; the specks showed larger with every backward glance till every dog was clearly visible. Shady was fleet but her speed was no match for Breed's and he would not leave her. The high-pitched

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sinister yelps sounded from behind him as the eager dogs closed up, putting forth every effort to end the race before the wolves reached the choppy badland breaks at the far edge of the flat. Shady's pace was lagging, and they gained the first gulch of the broken country a bare fifty yards ahead of the leading hound.

The gulch feathered out into a maze of branching draws and Shady lost Breed on the first sharp turn and ran on alone while the dogs streamed past after the yellow wolf.

Breed slowed his pace, fear for Shady's life surmounting even the fear for his own, but as the lead dog flashed into view without any sound of a fight behind him, Breed knew that his mate was safe and he turned on the reserve speed he had not been free to use while she ran with him.

The country ahead was a tangle of small flat-tops, crisscrossed by a network of badland washes and cut-bank draws, and for two

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miles he eluded the dog pack by sheer brain-work and cunning. But the hounds pressed him hard. Their speed was greater than his own and each time they lost sight of him they spread out both ways. Whenever he crossed a flat-top bench some one of them always sighted him and bored straight for the spot, and his team-mates, noting this sudden burst of speed, wheeled as one and fell in behind him.

Breed's one aim was to reach the hills, knowing that once among the trees he could shake them off. His course led him ever nearer to the base of the spur but he knew at last that he could not make his goal. His muscles had lost their spring and his breath came in leaky gasps; the dogs would pull him down on the first sagebrush slopes of the hills before he could gain the shelter of the trees.

He broke cover and started up the last long sloping bench that led to the base of the spur.

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The mouth of every gulch behind him seemed to belch forth a dog and they raced across the bench, spread out for two hundred yards.

Then Breed sprung one last desperate trick, — a coyote trick. A badland wash intersected the flat squarely across his route and Breed leaped to the bed of it and fled fifty yards along its course, then flashed into a narrow coulee that led straight back toward the dogs. The draw was shallow, with scarcely sufficient depth to cover him, but the dogs did not suspect and as they darted on ahead Breed doubled back through the very center of the pack. He ran with the last of his strength, crept from the sheltering coulee and leaped into the center of a heavy clump of sage where he crouched flat and peered out at the puzzled dogs. Of all the beasts there are but few with the brains to plan such a coup and the nerve to carry it through when winded and played out, — and with certain death the penalty for a single

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slip. The ruse would not have fooled a trail hound for an instant, but with sight-hunting coursers it worked.

Breed watched the dogs swing wide and scour the country off to the right of him till they appeared as swift-skimming dots in the distance. Then one of them lined out with increased speed as he topped a ridge. One after another Breed saw them flash over the skyline and disappear.

CHAPTER VI

SHADY'S first impression after taking the wrong turn in the coulee was one of vast relief at having evaded the dogs. The recovery of her breath was accompanied by a vague sense of loss which rapidly deepened into an ache of loneliness so oppressive that her whole spirit was weighed down by it. She started up through the long crescent-shaped neck of badlands that partially encircled Collins' cabin and extended clear to the foot of the spur, knowing that this was Breed's favorite route when making for the hills. She moved slowly and with many halts, cocking her head sidewise and tilting her ears for some sound of her mate. She came out into a funnel-shaped basin that sloped down from the first sharp rise of the

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spur. The small end of it formed a saddle between two knobs, leading to Collins' shack as through a natural gateway.

Shady trotted to the saddle and gazed down at the wolfer's cabin five hundred yards away, the spot which had meant home to her over the greatest part of her life. The door stood invitingly open. She turned and saw the five dogs pouring down the funnel of the basin. The sudden purposeful increase of speed which Breed had noticed as the dogs left his field of view had been occasioned by the sight of Shady standing in the notch.

Without an instant's hesitation Shady headed straight for that open door, a haven of refuge which had served her well in the past when assailed by the dogs of visiting ranchers. The dogs were jaded and Shady was fresh, and she reached her goal without their gaining an inch.

Collins sat smoking his pipe when he was startled by the frenzied entrance of his former

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pet. Shady failed to pause for greetings but made one mad leap from the door and slid to the farthest corner under the wolfer's bunk.

Collins grunted with surprise and for a space of five seconds his brain refused to function with its usual snap. Then he rose and crossed to the door to discover the reason for Shady's headlong home-coming, — and slammed it shut with but a single second to spare.

One dog rose on his hind feet, standing higher than a man, and savagely raked the door from top to bottom with his claws while another opened his jaws wide and closed them, his teeth splintering across the smooth surface as he sought to gnaw his way inside. The remaining three circled the cabin, sniffing explosively at the cracks between the logs. Shady was seized with a fit of excessive shivering induced by these dread sounds, and Collins heard her hind leg-joints beating a spasmodic tattoo on the cabin floor. Then he turned on his ready grin.

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“Just one split second more,” he said, “and they ’d have surged in here and wrecked this plant for fair, — and that ’s a fact !”

That night when Breed sent out his call for Shady there was no answering cry. He called again and again, an agony of longing and entreaty in his tones. A sickening dread entered his soul, — the fear that his mate had been caught in a trap, shot by some rider or killed in some other way by man. He little suspected that Shady was at that instant resting her head on a man’s knee and enjoying the feel of his fingers scratching behind her ears.

“Good old Shady,” Collins said, roughing her head between his hands. “You’re a renegade now, old girl, — a she-outlaw, that ’s what you are. You’ve gone over to the wild bunch, and men will be out after your scalp; and they’ll get it too. You’ll go ambling up to some man and he’ll blow you up. You won’t stick with me now unless I keep

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you chained. You 'll go back to 'em, — and if you 're lucky you may go right on living for mebbe a month. You don't know the ropes out there and they 'll pick you up."

Shady suddenly stiffened at Breed's first cry.

"Don't need to be afraid of that," Collins assured her. "That 's old Breed. He won't bother you. It must be hell, Shady, to be born astraddle of a fence like you, afraid of tame dogs and the wild bunch too."

Breed howled again and Shady moved to the door and whined, scratching and sniffing along the crack. Her uneasiness increased with every howl. She clawed so vigorously at the door that it rattled on the hinges; then her pent-up emotions sought partial relief in action and she ran in crazy circles about the cabin, weaving in and out among the furniture at top speed, running over and under the bunk and leaping over chairs, then brought up in front of Collins and gazed pleadingly

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up into his face. The Coyote Prophet regarded her speculatively.

“I read you wrong, Shady,” he said. “You’re not afraid of Breed — you want to go to him, that’s what; he’s a friend of yours. Surely now, an old savage like him did n’t go and take up with a little misfit like you.”

Breed’s voice sounded again and Shady raised her own, the whole cabin ringing with her long-drawn howl. Up in the funnel basin Breed had picked up her trail and was trying to work it out from among the trails left by the dogs. He stopped abruptly and listened. A strange muffled sound had reached him, hollow and drumlike, but there was a familiar chord in it, and Breed swept ahead on Shady’s trail, his hope of finding her alive renewed.

“You’re mated up with that yellow wolf,” Collins stated. “Two freaks paired up! If you track round with Breed you may live longer than I thought. He’ll show you how

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to beat the game." The Coyote Prophet crossed to the door and opened it. "Go to it, Pet," he said. "He 's a-calling you." But the last remark was addressed to a streak that vanished into the night.

Shady met Breed in the notch and frisked wildly around him. Breed's delight in this reunion was as deep as hers but he was more dignified and staid, his emotions less openly apparent. All through the night Shady held so close to him as to brush against him frequently as they ran.

Shady rapidly absorbed much of Breed's caution. Two days after their race with the dogs Shady had occasion to revise her estimates of horsemen. Twice in the same day, after imprudently showing herself in the open, she heard the vicious reports of their guns and the balls tossed up spurts of earth about her. Thereafter she followed Breed's lead in all such cases. Breed's way was the wolf way, recognizing no individuals among men

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but classing them as a dangerous whole. Shady, having lived among them, knew them as individuals, but this knowledge was soon blurred and she too acquired the views of the wild things toward men and lumped them as a whole. There was but one reservation. She placed Collins, the one man who had been kind to her, in a class by himself.

This eccentricity was the source of much worry to Breed. Shady could see no good reason why she should not revisit Collins when the mood so moved her. One night she turned abruptly from her course and headed for the twinkling lights of the wolfer's cabin. Breed turned with her. Cripp and Peg, each with his mate, ran on either flank. The coyotes stopped two hundred yards from the house but Shady held straight ahead. Breed tried to dissuade her but to no avail. He nipped her sharply, and its only effect was to cause her to tuck her tail and spurt for the house.

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Breed stopped twenty yards away, every nerve quivering from excitement over this suicidal move. He heard Shady scratch at the door. It swung back and a flood of light streamed out into the night. Breed heard a man's voice booming out a welcome; saw his mate jump up and put her paws against him, their outlines framed in the lighted doorway. Then the door closed and his mate was inside with a man, the arch enemy of all wolves. Breed whirled and fled. He ran blindly and at high-pressure speed as if he fled before an actual enemy. All his sense of balance was thrown out of gear, the fitness of things upset, and he felt his reason tottering. For his ear, attuned to receive the meaning of all animal sounds, could detect the least tremor of menace in any animal note; when a range bull bellowed Breed knew whether the tones held invitation to his cows or husked a warning to some intruder that had strayed over into his chosen range. In any

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animal voice the quiver of anger or fear was easily apparent to him; and there had been no vibrations of anger in the man's tones, only those of friendliness.

The coyotes were hard pressed to keep abreast of him, and after a wild race of some four miles he wheeled abruptly and retraced his course, the longing for his mate combining with curiosity to draw him irresistibly back to the spot where this impossible thing had transpired.

His pace slackened as he neared the house, then increased as he heard Shady's voice. Shady had met Breed in the notch after her first visit to the cabin and she naturally assumed that she would find him there again. She repaired to the spot at once after leaving the cabin and waited for him to come.

For three nights in succession Shady made her pilgrimage to meet her one friend among the world of men. Breed could not unravel the mystery of these visits. He could only

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know the actual that reached him over the trails of his physical senses. Sights, scents and sounds were facts to him. Those senses combined to show him that the unnatural visits were real,—that Shady actually entered the lair of a man and came back smelling strong of him. Yet when she was with him Breed felt a sense of unreality in his memories of those visits, partaking of the same vague qualities that dreams possessed for him after waking.

But he fathomed it at last, evidence that his brain came from his coyote mother, a brain that is capable of constructive reasoning, of taking two facts which the physical senses have verified and evolving a third from them, — the association of ideas.

His nose told him that there was something in Shady's scent that was similar to that left by the dog pack. His eyes had proved that those dogs were the companions of men. Eyes, ears and nose testified that Shady

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visited the haunts of men and was accepted as a friend. His nose further told him that Shady was half coyote, and her voice added proof of this. From out this fragmentary assortment of facts Breed found a satisfactory answer. He knew that Shady was of the wild, yet that she was also linked with the world of men, thus combining two things which in the past had seemed widely separate, a chasm too wide to span, dividing the animals of the wild from those belonging to man.

Each recurring visit confirmed this fact. Shady missed two nights, but on the third she headed for the cabin with the coming of night. The comparative warmth of early winter had given way to the gripping, penetrating cold of January. Breed's appetite increased with a corresponding drop in temperature and he was hungry. But from Shady's actions he knew that she was seized with one of those queer lapses which called her back to former ways and he delayed the

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hunt until she should return from this trip. The coyotes had all mated and the season for pack-hunting was past, yet many of them still rallied to his call; but on this night he lingered in the notch and waited for Shady to come back to him before summoning the pack.

He prowled uneasily about the narrow saddle, and in his nervousness over Shady's protracted absence he forgot the danger of following cow trails and padded restlessly up and down those which threaded through the gap. And as he waited for her a mortal enemy found the chance he had sought so long and began stalking him from behind.

Fletear dropped from the hills to follow his ruthless trade and as he swung down the funnel basin Breed's scent was wafted to his nose. The breeze held up the slope, — he had the wind on the yellow wolf. He shifted across the wind but it carried no coyote scent. His victim was alone. Fletear followed up the drifting current of scent and sighted Breed

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at a hundred yards. His feet made no sound and the wind held right; the breed-wolf was unaware of his approach.

Breed saw a sudden flow of light from the cabin and knew that Shady was leaving it to come back to him. He sent forth the rally call to the pack and turned to trot along a cow trail. He gave a sudden mighty leap into the air and crashed down four feet away as he struck the end of the chain swiveled to the trap that had crushed his foot.

CHAPTER VII

BREED'S great paw had not squarely centered the trap and the jaws clamped on but two toes. He fought the trap with all his strength, backing up to gain slack in the chain, then throwing all his weight and force into his spring as he launched himself into the air, only to be jerked violently to the ground at the end of the chain.

Four times he sprang, and four times the breath was almost jarred from his body as he smashed down on his side. As he rose from the last spring he suddenly stiffened, standing rigidly in one spot while every hair rose along his spine. Twenty feet away a great gray shape loomed in the sage. Breed knew it was the midnight killer who had left such sinister evidence of his handi-

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work scattered along the foot of the hills, — and there was no doubt of his purpose. The yellow wolf was handicapped and knew that he had no chance, but he did not storm and rage aloud as a dog would have done; his was the coyote way. He backed up inch by inch till he stood above the trap stake, and this move gave him a four-foot striking range each way.

Fletear did not fear traps with the full knowledge of their powers and limitations as the coyotes did, but with the superstitious dread of the wolf. In common with all his kind he had merely avoided instead of investigating this danger, and now his understanding could not distinguish between a trap that was set and one that was sprung and harmless.

The clank of the trap chain delayed his attack. He feared that the thing which clamped his enemy's foot might leap out and seize his own. The killer circled his victim,

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and the yellow wolf turned round and round in the same spot, keeping his bared fangs toward his foe. The trap chain kinked and twisted till it gave him less than a foot of play. Only his insane hatred of Breed led Flatear to brave his horror of that sound of grating steel, — but he came in close at last, crouched and sprang. Breed leaned sharply to one side and met him with a side slash of teeth but the weight of his enemy threw him and he felt the killer's teeth cut cleanly into his shoulder and slide along the bone. Flatear reversed his snap so swiftly that it seemed but a double swing of his head, yet the second swing drove his teeth along Breed's neck and laid open a six-inch gash. As Breed struggled to his feet the wolf's fangs sliced at his throat and ripped it open but not deep enough to kill. A loop of the kinked trap chain was tightened on Flatear's toes by Breed's convulsive backward dodge, and a ghastly fear that he himself was trapped swept through

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him, transcending even the lust to kill the yellow wolf. He made one wild leap for safety, — and the tightening kink cracked his toes and threw him, the same lurch dragging Breed down with him, and they rolled into a furious tangle of clashing teeth and rattling steel.

Out in the night the coyotes were moving in from all directions in answer to the call Breed had sent out ten seconds before the steel jaws gripped him. Shady was trotting leisurely up to the saddle to meet her lord and mate, — the mate whose life was flowing out through a score of ugly rents. Breed's strength was ebbing fast, and he no longer had the power to put killing force behind his teeth. Flatear snapped aimlessly, his mind half crazed by that fearsome pinching of the chain on his toes. He felt it loosen and slip off, and he leaped clear of the spot.

A shape moved over the edge of the saddle and the next instant Shady drove straight

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at the gray assassin, raging as she came, the dog in her boiling to the surface. Before she reached him a yellow streak split the night and Peg's teeth crunched on the wolf's hind leg, the little coyote's deadly silence contrasting queerly with Shady's fighting shrieks.

The big wolf fled from this combined attack, one hind leg sagging as he ran, the muscle torn raggedly across by Peg's one snap. Once more Breed was indebted to Shady and his coyote followers.

But Breed was far gone. He struggled to rise but fell back again and lay still, the blood oozing from the rents in his tattered pelt. He raised his head and looked at Shady, and for a single instant his mouth opened and his red tongue lolled out in friendly greeting, showing his spirit still intact even though his body was slit in ribbons; then he lowered it flat between his paws and moved nothing but his eyes.

Shady crept close to him and licked his

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wounds. The coyote pack came up in pairs and circled about their stricken leader, some of them squatting on their haunches as they regarded his plight, others moving restlessly about; all of them silent as the grave, the only sound in the notch being Shady's continuous low wails as she implored her mate to rise and follow her.

The bitter frost claimed Breed's swollen foot and stiffened it, numbing all sense of pain. He felt comfortable and content. Then Peg moved up and sniffed critically at the trapped foot. He set his teeth in it but Breed did not flinch. The three-legged coyote crouched beside him and turned his head sidewise, the right side of his jaws flat on the trap, his teeth sliding along the cold steel and shearing away the frozen flesh. The leg was dulled to all sensations and Breed felt no pain. Shady viewed this amputation closely and whined with anxiety as it proceeded. Peg sliced the meat from the

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two toes, set his teeth firmly across the bones and crunched just once. Then he hooked one forepaw over the trap and scratched it away from Breed's sprawling hind leg, two severed toes remaining in the trap.

Peg's lips and gums along the right side of his face were seared and burned from contact with the chilled steel of the trap, raw patches of flesh showing where the skin had adhered to the frosted springs and had been wrenched loose. He nursed these wounds with his hot tongue, and fiery twinges of pain racked him but he did not whine. He curled up and slept for an hour, then rose and nipped Breed's flank. The cold had stopped the flow of blood from Breed's cuts and the pain of the nip roused him from the stupor. He struggled to his feet and stood swaying while Shady bounced around him with joyous yelps. Then he set off for the hills, moving at a walk, with his head drooping weakly.

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The next morning Collins stood and looked down at the two great toes in the trap.

“Pegged him,” he said. “Pegged old Breed. He’ll be minus two hind toes from now on out—but he could lose two toes off each foot and still beat the game. The whole coyote tribe must have been up here to look him over from the number of tracks.”

When Collins returned to his shack he found six stockmen awaiting him. The stampede of the sheep and the big kill made by Breed’s pack up in the hills had enraged the sheepmen. They had confidently expected that some man would collect Breed’s scalp on a fresh tracking snow, but while every rider had scoured the foothills for Breed’s tracks after every storm, no man had cut his trail. After gorging on warm meat at night a wolf runs sluggishly the following day; his muscles lack snap and his wind is leaky, and a good horse can wear him down. Twice in his first year Breed had been harried

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far across the foothills by hard-running horses, and now the first spitting flakes of a coming storm brought recollections of those desperate races and roused his uneasiness to such a pitch that he set off for the hills and remained there till the wind had piled the snow and cleared long stretches which made tracking from a running horse impossible.

The sheepmen at the cabin informed Collins of the big killing and their tale was punctuated by every possible epithet applicable to the coyote tribe. Collins, owning no sheep, was in a position to view the killing in a more philosophical light than they.

"You can't rightly blame 'em," he said. "Men raise up sheep to kill 'em in cold blood; coyotes kill 'em when they 're hungry. Two sides to it, 'cording to whether you 're a coyote or a man."

The stockmen stated the purpose of their visit. Their association had raised the bounties, making it profitable for wolfers to

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hunt even in the summer months when pelts were unprime and valueless; the price for spring pups had been raised to equal the reward posted for adults; and now the association would furnish free poison for all wolfers and advocated its use all through the year. They stated their belief that this system, if followed ruthlessly, would result in the practical extermination of prairie wolves. They rested their case and anxiously awaited the Coyote Prophet's verdict on their plan. Collins shook his head.

"Part of it's good," he told them, "and part of it's dead wrong. Anyhow you can't kill 'em all. I've told you so for twenty year and I stand on what I've said. There'll be a million coyotes left to howl when the last man dies. The raise on summer bounties is a good move — a man can afford to kill shedders at that price; and the pup bounty will set men to digging out their dens. But your main plan was laid out by men that don't

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savvy the coyote mind.” Collins leaned forward and tapped one forefinger in the open palm of his other hand to emphasize his point.

“You let this all-year poison idea slide! You mark me — if you try that on you’ll lose; more ways than one. I know ’em! A coyote will take a chance on guns and traps, but he’s superstitious about these strychnine baits. After a few turn up on the range with a dose of it the rest will quit your line. Your traps won’t show one catch. There’s only one time to use it and that’s after you’ve bait trapped and trail trapped till only the wisest are left. Then shoot the whole range full of poison; get it all out at once and knock off all you can. Then take your poison up and quit! You hear me, — quit! Then they’ll sort of halfway forget before another year and you can spring it again. But I’m a-telling you the facts, — if you leave poison scattered round loose for

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six months you 'll see coyotes increasing fast and there 'll be hell to pay amongst your sheep; you 'll break behind two ways at once. There 'll be just enough that forget themselves and take on a poison feed to keep the rest in the notion of passing up all dead meat. They won't even touch bloats or winter-killed stock. When they 're hungry they 'll make a kill, — and they 'll work on your sheep.”

“I 've stripped off three times more pelts than any wolfer that 's mixed poison with his traps. Now my trap line is played out and I 'm going to throw poison into 'em for a month, — and quit.”

As Breed lay convalescing from his wounds he reviewed the dangers of his chosen range, not knowing that the one horror which he feared more than all else combined was about to sweep through the foothills. His former attitude toward Flatear had been one of aversion for his gruesome practices,

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but with no touch of personal enmity. But the gray wolf had not only pounced on him at a season when mating was past and dog wolves at peace, but had almost torn him to shreds while he was helpless in the grip of a trap. Breed now felt a terrible hatred growing in him, a desire to kill the slinking gray beast as soon as he gained sufficient strength to take his trail.

Breed was too weak to hunt but there was enough of the coyote in Shady to lead her to rustle food for her mate. For five days Breed lived wholly upon the chunks of meat which Shady purloined from the frozen bait piled against Collins' shack, — the meat which he intended to poison and strew all across the range as soon as he had finished taking up his traps. On the sixth night Shady found that the whole of the great stack of meat had entirely vanished and near morning she returned without food.

Breed's strength had flowed steadily back

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to him and he craved meat. By noon his hunger was a hollow ache. Then suddenly he knew that there was meat two miles west of him. The wind was square at his back so he could not possibly have scented it, and any man who had seen him rise from his bed and head for meat that lay two miles downwind would have charged the act to that mysterious intuitive knowledge that animals are supposed to have.

There is one sure way by which men of the open locate animal carcasses: the location of winter-killed stock or range cows mired down in an alkali bog is pointed out to them at a distance of several miles. Game wardens make use of it to locate the illegal kills of poachers, and rangers to locate the kills of cougars and wolves. In all countries there are meat-eating birds and their flights reveal much to practiced eyes.

Breed's mysterious information came from seeing an eagle pitch down far to the west of

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him. Two minutes later another swooped from another angle. Ravens and magpies winged toward the spot, — and Breed set off at once toward the converging lines of their flight. His hunger overcame his dislike for daylight traveling, but he held to high ground instead of the valleys.

He came to the edge of a shallow basin devoid of all vegetation except an occasional spear of grass, chalk-white patches on the surface of the earth showing it to be an alkali sink. A hundred yards beyond the last tongue of sage that reached out into it Breed could see a quarter of beef, two eagles jealously guarding it. Magpies and ravens flitted about, waiting for their share of the feast. One of the eagles made frequent moves to scatter them when they came too close, rushing at them with a queer hopping run, his wings half spread and trailing back. Breed could plainly hear the snapping of his powerful beak.

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The larger eagle suddenly took flight, rising with awkwardly flapping wings and cutting eccentric loops and curves, each dip calling forth a raucous scream. He fought his way to a height of two hundred yards, then lost all muscular control and fell loosely to the ground, his mate taking wing as he smashed down on the flat.

A vague dread seized Breed. He watched the magpies close in to the feed. A score of them took the air at half-minute intervals, fluttered wildly and with a spasmodic jerking of their long tails and pitched down in death. The rest of them left the meat. Breed's mind again proved capable of associating ideas, of constructing theories from known facts. The birds had been alive. There were no clanking traps or sound of gunshots to account for it, — yet they had died. Their crazy flappings had been in sharp contrast to their usual grace when in the air. Their actions had not been normal, and Breed

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someway thought of the ways of poisoned coyotes. He had never seen a poisoned horse or cow, or till now a poisoned bird, — had always believed it an affliction of coyotes alone; yet he felt the quickening of long dormant fears. He knew that meat was poisoned and he would not go near. He drew farther back in the sage and rested till night.

He started out with Shady at dusk and they were joined by Peg and his mate, the four of them hunting together. Peg killed a jack and Breed's share of it partially satisfied the gnawing of his hunger. As he traveled on he sampled the wind for some sign of the gray killer. It had narrowed down to a feud between the yellow wolf and the gray, an undying hatred, and whenever they next met there would be one of them whose trail the coyotes would never again cross on the range.

Then all thought of hunger, all thought of

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his feud with Flatear, everything but stark horror was suddenly swept from Breed's mind. A horrid, racheting cough sounded from straight ahead. A coyote whisked into the open and bounced toward them with bucking leaps, strangling and gagging as he came, then whirled and snapped at himself, the froth dripping and foaming from his jaws and the moonlight reflecting from his set, staring eyes. They drew away from him and he writhed on the ground in nasty convulsions, — stiffened and stretched out with his eyes bulging from their sockets and glaring forth in death.

Breed headed for the hills and Shady and the two coyotes clung close to his flanks, as if numbers relieved the horror of the thing they had just seen.

Three times before they reached the hills they were terrified by the appearance of former friends who had suddenly been stricken into foaming maniacs. Breed

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turned on the first rise of the hills and howled. The members of the coyote pack read the message. Breed was bidding farewell to the land of sage. Perhaps he knew that he would never see the gray foothills again.

Six pairs of coyotes gathered toward his cry. They had seen much and lived to pass their knowledge on. Every one of them had run the gauntlet of rifle fire; they had been hounded by dogs. Most of them had been maimed by traps, — and now this affliction that turned coyotes mad with a single bite of meat.

They followed Breed back into the hills, a wise band, the pick of the coyote tribe and well able to cope with new conditions and teach their future pups the work of pioneering in strange countries which lay ahead of them.

CHAPTER VIII

BREED found the hills buried deep under a blanket of snow. In the low country the drifts lay only in the gulches and the more sheltered spots but up in the lodgepole valleys and the heavy stands of spruce on the slopes the white covering seemed endless and unbroken. The dogs killed the meat for the whole pack, for at this season the she-coyotes were unfitted for the strenuous work of pulling down heavy game. For the same reason they were unable to travel long distances in the snow. Breed too was disinclined to move rapidly. His foot had healed but the swollen leg was weak and tender. The pack averaged less than twenty miles a day.

At the end of a week Breed's old home was more than a hundred miles behind and

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he was well up in the backbone of the hills. He came out upon a mighty divide and gazed off across a rolling country extending fifty miles each way, all of it high but ringed in by still more lofty ranges, their ragged saw-teeth standing gaunt and grim against the sky. There were broad, open meadows spread out before him, great areas devoid of trees, intersected by timbered ridges and rolling parks where the stand of spruce was dotted. The whole of it lay under a four-foot layer of snow and gleamed dead white and lusterless, but even so its aspect was more inviting than the gloomy forest through which they had come.

The open-loving coyotes elected to remain in this land rather than penetrate the questionable beyond. As they crossed the open spaces the racy smell of the sage leaked through the packed drifts underfoot and they knew that parts of these valleys were carpeted with the same brush that clothed the

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foothills of their home land. This was the summer range of the elk herds and once well down the slope of the divide they found a country that seemed devoid of game.

After advancing in loose formation for five miles without any coyote finding a promising trail, Breed caught a fugitive scent of meat. He circled and looped, now catching it, then losing it again. The broad valley stood white and silent, gripped in a dead calm, and the few vagrant breezes were imperceptible, merely the sluggish drift of local air pockets that shifted a few feet and settled.

The yellow specks that moved in pairs far out across the snow fields slowed and halted, changed their routes and headed toward the leader who was questing about with uplifted nose. Then Breed dropped his head and ran with nose close to the snow, twisting and turning in one locality of less than a hundred yards in extent. The eyes of every advancing coyote were fastened

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on Breed. They saw him stop abruptly and shove his nose into the snow, and the little puff of steam which rose around his head as he breathed hard into the drift was clearly visible to them all. They put on more speed as he began to dig, and when the first of them reached him they saw a tawny expanse of elk hair at the bottom of the excavation.

They tore away the snow and uncovered the whole carcass of a winter-killed elk that had been refrigerating there for months. Breed lingered near this spot for three days, the coyotes bedding near by in pairs, and up here where there were no men they fed in the daytime whenever so inclined. There was not an hour of the day or night when Breed could not see one or more coyotes tearing at the elk. When the last scrap of meat, hide and hair had been devoured and the bones gnawed white and clean, Breed moved on in search of more.

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There were always some few stragglers that lagged behind the elk herds and failed to start for the winter range till after the passes were blocked with snow. These turned back and starved when the grass was buried deep and their feet were cut and worn from pawing through the crust to reach it; for the elk is strictly a grazing animal and cannot live entirely by browsing on the twigs and brush as do moose and deer.

For a month Breed prowled this high basin country, and in all that time his feet never once touched earth except when crossing some bald ridge from which the wind had whittled the snow. His menu consisted exclusively of frozen elk.

A chinook swept the hills and held for a week, the hot wind melting and packing the drifts and clearing the more exposed slopes free of snow. The pack had split up and scattered in pairs, each she-coyote selecting some likely spot and remaining in that vicinity.

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The first day of the chinook every she-coyote started her den, and the sites, though widely separated, were identical in many respects. Each chose a ridge with a south-east exposure while higher ridges behind cut off the sweep of the north and west winds; and every den was located in a heavy clump of sage. This latter feature was not for the reason that sagebrush reminded them of home, but because experience had proven that the heaviest growths of sage were indicative of deep, soft soil beneath and so pointed to easy digging, a rule used not only by home-seeking coyotes but by homesteading men as well, and one that holds good throughout a half-million square miles of sagebrush country.

Shady too had settled on an open ridge and now spent much of her time there, but this seemed more from a disinclination to travel and a dislike of bedding in snow than from a definite purpose of excavating a den. This

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puzzled Breed. Shady leaned more to the casual dog way of trusting that a suitable spot would present itself on the day when her pups should arrive; yet there was enough of the coyote in her to cause her to scratch out a shallow nest in a sunny spot. This act was more for present comfort, however, than from any intent to make provision for the future.

Peg and Cripp had always clung more tenaciously to Breed than had the others of the pack and Peg had settled on a ridge not more than two miles away; but Cripp was no longer to be found. It had been long since his voice had been raised in answer to Breed's call and he had not come back into the hills with the coyote pack. Breed missed the trusty follower who had run with him on so many hunts, and day after day he expected to catch a trace of Cripp in the wind or to hear his friendly voice at night, but the crippled coyote never came.

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Peg was now Breed's sole companion at night, except when their mates joined them at the two frozen elk carcasses in the bottoms between their home ridges, and the two of them explored the surrounding country together. Peg's lips were scarred along the right side of his face, the price of Breed's liberty. There are close ties between animals, a myriad proofs of friendships and enmities, the same as among men, and it may be that the act which had brought Peg those honorable scars had helped to cement the bond between himself and the yellow wolf. Whether or not they had means of discussing Cripp's absence, there can be no doubt that they missed the genial old rogue that had been their running mate for so many months and that they wondered at his fate.

Breed visited Peg's home ridge during the height of the chinook. Peg's mate was a silky-haired coyote, her fur fluffy and long. Fluff lay sprawled contentedly in the sun-

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shine while her mate worked on the den. She growled uneasily at Breed as he peered down the hole. A shower of dirt greeted him and he drew away as Peg backed from the den and shook the dirt from his fur. Fluff took her turn at the work but soon tired of it, and Peg started in as soon as she left off. A she-coyote picks her own den site and starts the hole, but because she is easily exhausted near denning time it falls to the dog to complete the den.

When Breed returned to Shady he found her scratching leisurely at the nest she had scooped out. It was merely a raking of the surface to loosen and soften the bed which was smooth and glazed from her having bedded there when her fur was wet; but Breed read it as a tentative start toward making a permanent home.

When Shady ceased her aimless scratching Breed edged her aside and tore at the soft earth with his paws. He had buried himself

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to the hips before he drew back. Shady entered and critically inspected the hole, then immediately backed out. That was the extent of her interest. It may have occurred to Breed that his mate's shifts at digging were extremely brief, but nevertheless he persisted till he had tunneled a curving entrance eight feet long and hollowed out a nest eighteen inches high by three feet across. All well-ordered she-coyotes have at least two, and the majority of them three openings leading from their homes. Shady failed to indicate the direction which she wished these emergency tunnels to take so Breed laid them out according to plans of his own. By the time the den was completed the chinook wind had cooled, and winter tightened down over the hills once more, freezing the surface dirt so solidly as to make excavating impossible.

Breed repaired to the last frozen elk carcass in his neighborhood and found Peg

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there before him. An hour later a she-coyote came to the feed. She sprawled flat in the snow and tore ravenously at the frozen meat. Her eyes were hollowed from hard journeying and lack of food. Breed knew her for Cripp's mate and he momentarily expected to see his friend. When her hunger was appeased she faced back toward the divide over which she had come and howled; then, as if knowing her cry would go unanswered, she turned and left them as abruptly as she had come. She had no time to lose and she could not dig a den, yet she planned the best she knew. There would be no mate to rustle food for her, and meat would be the first essential while her pups were young. Five miles beyond Breed's home ridge she found an elk drifted deep under the snow in the heavy timber. She crawled into the heart of a windfall jam, choosing one where the lay of the land would prevent her being drowned out when the

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drifts should melt, and stayed there till her five pups were born.

When Breed returned home near morning he heard queer squeals issuing from the yawning mouth of the den. Shady's doglike faith that a place would somehow be provided for the great event had been justified and she had taken possession of the den which her wild mate had so carefully prepared.

Shady wandered no more with Breed, but stayed at home in the den, and for the first week all that Breed saw of her was a brief glimpse of her nose as she came to the mouth of the hole, seized the elk meat which he brought as an offering and backed down out of sight with it. After that he occasionally saw the whole of her but these views were hasty. Whenever Shady emerged from the den her tail barely cleared the mouth of it before she twisted back and dived headlong from sight, panic-stricken lest some mishap had befallen the pups during her long eight-

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foot trip from them to daylight. After two days of hourly excursions of this sort she spent a few moments outside the den, and thereafter these periods were lengthened until she remained on the warm slope fully as much as in the den.

Night after night Breed heard the howls of the lone she-coyote that had denned in the windfall. Always she faced toward the land that had been her home. A she-coyote whose mate is killed after the running moon will raise her pups alone and refuse to accept another mate; yet the howls she sent out were calls for a mate, and from this Breed knew that she did not believe that Cripp was dead. He pondered long over this mystery of why Cripp still lived but did not join his mate.

The supply of elk meat rapidly diminished and at last was gone. The only carcass Breed could locate within ten miles was the one near the windfall, and the widowed

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mother defended that furiously against all comers. The warm days of early March had turned it stale and putrid but it was all she had.

Every waking second of Breed's time was spent on the meat trail. An occasional blue grouse or snowshoe hare was the largest game he found. That the coyotes were faring as poorly he knew from the signs he crossed each day in the hills. He found the tracks of dog coyotes many miles from their dens and always the signs showed that they had been working out some cold rabbit trail. Breed found the tracks of many bobcats in the hills and these appeared to have been wandering aimlessly. But Breed knew that the noses of cat beasts are not keen enough to work out any but the warmest trails; that this accounted for his seldom finding signs that a cat had trailed a rabbit, and that their apparently crazy way of traveling was in reality a systematic shifting across the air

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currents in search of the warm body scent of their prey. Several times Breed picked up a hot cat track and followed it at top speed but the big bobs held mainly to the heavy timber and always took refuge in a tree.

When Breed's pups were three weeks old he had his first look at them when Shady came from the den on a warm afternoon and a swarm of fluffy little creatures toddled after her. There were eight of them, all with heavy frames that gave promise of their attaining almost as great size as their father, and there were strips of dark fur along their backs. After that first trip they spent much time romping and quarreling on the sunny side hill.

A pair of golden eagles had nested on the rough face of a pinnacle that rose from the floor of the valley near its head, some five miles from Breed's home ridge. These mighty birds soared far out over the divide and returned with meat for their fledglings

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in the nest. Their pealing screams often split the silence of the valley. Shady paid small heed to them but Breed often cast a wary eye aloft when the screams sounded from close at hand.

Shady was stretched comfortably before the den one day, watching the pups scattered out along the ridge, when she became aware of a faint rushing sound such as the first puffs of a fresh wind make when they strike the trees some distance away. This increased to a humming roar. She looked up to see a huge shape driving down upon a pup with incredible velocity, swooping at a sharp angle, the great wings spread wide and hissing through the air as the big bird tipped dizzily from side to side. Within two seconds after the first droning sound had reached Shady's ears she saw the eagle strike his claws through a pup and start up the valley on lazily flapping wings. Shady raced madly under him and raged until the valley echoed

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to her fury. Then she quieted and watched till he was but a tiny speck off toward the nesting peak, the dead pup dangling loosely from the talons that had struck clear through his slender body, the hind claw on each foot meeting and interlocking with one front claw in a grip which nothing short of the actual severing of a leg tendon could break.

Thereafter Shady knew why Breed showed uneasiness when an eagle screamed near the den.

The pups knew every note of their mother's voice and obeyed it implicitly. They would be asleep in the den when a note would summon them forth to play, every pup tumbling hurriedly out; she would give another cry when they were playing carelessly in the open, the tone being so nearly identical with that of the first that a man might hear it a hundred times and detect no difference, yet every pup would dive headlong for the nearest hole.

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Shady learned to watch for the eagles. Nearly always it was a shadow which warned her first. She would see a swiftly moving black speck gliding over the snow fields or darting along the slopes of the ridges that flanked the valley and she instantly issued a warning to the pups, knowing that where there was a shadow there must be a bird above. Sometimes Breed saw the birds first and called. Shady relayed the danger signal to her young, and even if she was half a mile away the pups made a prompt and desperate spurt for the den.

CHAPTER IX

THE snow melted slowly in the high country but by mid-April a few bare spots showed in the more open meadows, the hardy mountain grass sending forth green shoots. The rabbits were drawn from the timbered ridges to nibble these first spring dainties. The surface of the drifts showed thousands of tiny mouse tracks, — the mice that had lived deep under the snow, subsisting on food previously stored, now coming forth to swarm into these first cleared patches.

The pups had grown large and strong and were able to follow their parents on the meat trail, and they soon learned to catch their own mice. The drifts in the passes had packed so firmly as to afford good footing and the game was coming back to the summer range. After the first few had made the crossing the

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rest followed their trails and the main tide of the elk migration set in, great droves of cows boiling through all the passes and streaming down into the green spots in the meadows. There was now meat in plenty, and the yelping barks of the cows sounded in the valleys that had been wrapped in white silence for so many months; but there was not a sound from the bulls; the antlered lords whose ringing challenges had filled the whole expanse of the hills the previous fall seemed voiceless now. These old fellows had remained up among the high bald ridges, their new antler growth tender in its velvet sheath, and nothing would be heard from them till after the porous growth had hardened and their points were polished for the next rutting time.

The wolf family returned to the den no more, except perhaps for a casual inspection when their wanderings chanced to lead them to the neighborhood.

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The bears had come from their long sleep and left the dens. There were black and brown bears and monster grizzlies roaming in the meadows. At first the diet of these huge beasts consisted almost entirely of grass and twigs but their appetites rapidly increased and it was no unusual thing for a bear to appropriate one of Breed's kills.

Breed did not fear bears, knowing that their speed was less than his own and that they were harmless so long as he did not molest them and come into too close quarters. He accepted this stealing of his meat as part of the established order of things and always moved away when a bear came swaying leisurely up to his kill.

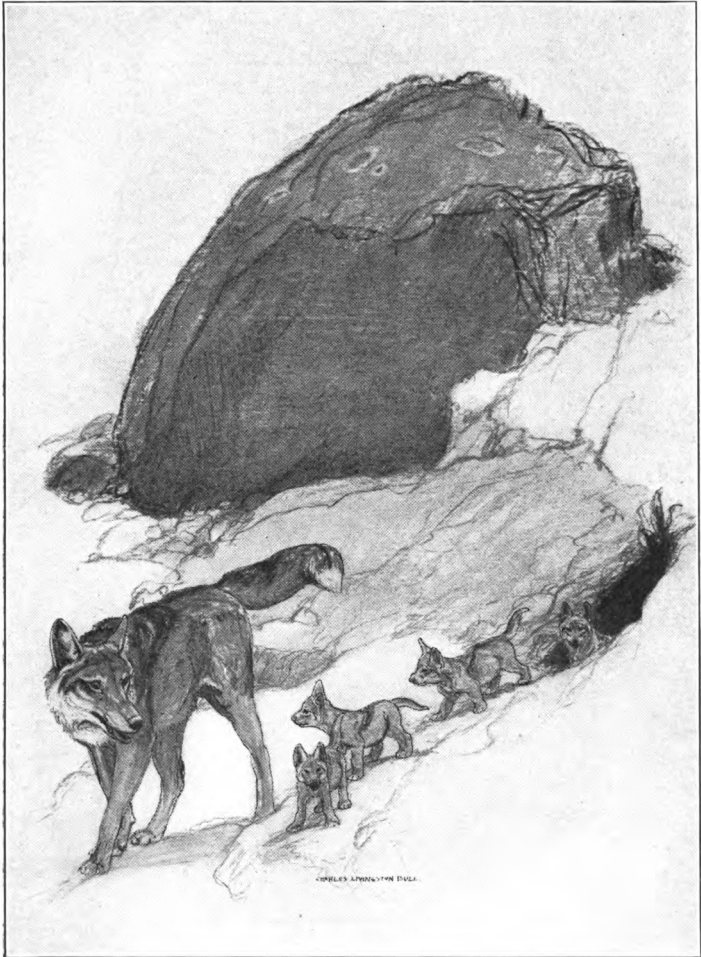
Shady, on the contrary, had a wholesome fear of bears and was excited at their approach, but at the same time she could not view their thieving ways in such a philosophical light and her resentment rankled deeper with each recurring theft.

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The wolf family returned to a kill to find a great silvertip feeding there. Shady's rage boiled over and she swept down upon him with a furious burst of barking. She would have halted short of him but there was no need. Breed was profoundly amazed to see the mighty baldface flee down the slope with Shady in full cry behind him.

Breed knew that bears did not fear him, even though his fighting ability far surpassed that of his mate, yet a grizzly fled at the first sound of her voice. This deepened his respect for Shady; the mate who was so helpless in many respects was surprisingly resourceful in others.

It was not known to Breed that bears had learned to dread the bellowing of a pack of trail hounds in the hills through knowledge that men followed close behind, and that the dog note in Shady's voice stirred up visions of a man with a magazine gun on their trail. But while the reason was not clear to Breed,



As the summer advanced the pups learned to pack-hunt with Breed.
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the fact that the mightiest grizzly took flight before his mate was repeatedly proved to him, and after once learning her power Shady permitted no bear to deprive her family of its meat.

As the summer advanced the pups learned to pack-hunt with Breed. The coyote howls at night were now confined to messages between mate and mate or between mother and pups. The life they led was essentially a family life and they had no interests outside of the family circle. Breed's cry to rally a pack was never raised, for his own domestic duties were many; and if he had sent forth the summons none would have answered it. He sometimes met Peg and ran with him for a while, but these visits were infrequent and brief, each having pressing business of his own.

Breed one day caught the scent of a coyote upwind from him. This in itself was nothing unusual but there was something vaguely familiar about it, something that roused old

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memories, and suddenly he thought of Cripp. He traced up the scent and as he topped the ridge he stopped short and bared his teeth, the hair rising along his spine. A horrid nightmare of a thing rose from its bed and leered at him. The hair had slipped from its body, leaving the skin shiny and slate-blue. The ears and head were furred, and the legs; tufts of hair sprouted from the shoulders and along the spine, but flanks and sides were bare and the long tail was rat-like, its joints showing through the tight-stretched skin. The lips were drawn back and revealed the blue gums receding from loosened teeth. This was the result of poison that had failed to kill.

Breed knew this grisly apparition for Cripp. The scent was there, and the warped foreleg. Cripp did not recognize his friend. His mind was clouded and the light of insanity gleamed in his sunken eyes. Breed whirled and fled, and a weird cry sounded behind him, — the eerie howl of a maniac.

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All through the summer the coyotes shunned the specter of living death that plodded silently up and down the valleys and the ridges. When it came suddenly through the trees, drawn by the scent of a fresh kill, some coyote family scattered swiftly and left the feast. Cripp was as apt to howl in broad daylight as at night, and the sounds were meaningless, the unintelligible jargon of an idiot. Every coyote within hearing bristled with fear whenever Cripp's jabbering reached their ears.

In the background of Breed's mind the purpose to slay Flatear still persisted, but his duties prevented his spending the time to hunt for him. Occasional wolf howls were heard back here in the hills, the calls of strays that had drifted down from the north, following the line of the hills and keeping well back from the dangers of the low country. Each time he heard the wolf note the urge to kill was strengthened in Breed. He had

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heard Flatear's voice but once and so was unable to identify him by ear alone but must receive added testimony through eyes or nose. Twice he left his family to investigate the source of these cries. One came from a lone female; the other from a big gray dog wolf who had mated with a coyote, and there were five pups trailing after the oddly assorted pair. These pups were much like Breed's own and they gave proof that the coyote strain was stronger than the wolf. Their language was that of their mother. The only trace of wolf parentage was shown in their greater size and the dark fur of their backs. Breed's search for his old enemy proved fruitless. Many things of which Breed was unaware had taken place on his old home range since he had left it, and Flatear, terrified by the latest of these events, had slunk away to the north.

Collins' prediction had been verified. The coyotes in the low country where poison had

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been strewn broadcast on the range had suddenly turned from stale meat as from disease. Much of their food supply had come from bloated sheep, from locoed horses, and from cows that had eaten larkspur and died, but they would no longer touch these carcasses. Deprived of this source of food, their kills became more frequent and they grew bolder in their raids on calves and sheep.

Then a new and appalling menace reared its ugly head in the foothills, striking not at coyotes alone but at every living thing. There were many coyotes such as Cripp, with the hair slipped from their hides, — the ones that had survived a dose of poison but were unable to shake off its devastating after effects. Hydrophobia broke out among these and they ran amuck, striking alike at friends and foes. Sound coyotes were turned into frothing fiends that helped to spread the wave of madness that swept across three States. Horses and cows died by hundreds and it was

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no unusual thing for one mad coyote to bite fifty head of sheep in a single night. The five dogs that had harried Breed were themselves infected when they pulled down a mad coyote, and they drove poisoned fangs into forty head of stock before the last of the five was run down and shot.

There was but one ray of hope in the whole dangerous business and men seized on that. Mad coyotes lost their cunning and ran stupidly on some chosen course, biting every living thing that crossed their trails, but refusing to be turned aside even to avoid an approaching man. Riders poured through the foothills on fleet horses, shooting down the stricken ones, all other business suspended till this menace had been stamped out. And through it all the ravages among the wily coyotes were far less than among domestic stock.

The spreading of coyotes over new territory, which had been only gradual before, was

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accelerated by the poison and madness that had blighted the foothills. Thickly settled districts far to the east, where coyotes had formerly appeared but infrequently, were now invaded by great numbers. Poison and traps could not be used effectively against them in localities where there were dogs on every farm, and the coyotes were safer there than on the open range. Reports that reached Collins showed that for eight hundred miles south along the base of the hills the coyotes were quitting the flats and roaming through the fastnesses of the Rockies.

Breed noted the steady flow of strange coyotes into the high basins of his new range. In the late summer his pups dropped one by one from the family circle, going off on some business of their own. During the latter part of August Breed was conscious of a vague sense of loneliness. This grew more pronounced and then suddenly he knew! The rally call for the pack rolled through the

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valleys and echoed among the peaks, and from far and near he heard familiar voices raised in answer. The parental responsibilities were over for one season, the pups gone forth on their own, and the members of the pack were free to follow the yellow wolf.

As Breed ran through the hills the pack gathered, and each coyote fell into his old place. Peg and his mate ran close on the right of Breed, — but the place on the left was vacant.

Cripp was coming, however. The cry for the pack had penetrated the fog that obscured his reason and touched a responsive chord buried deep beneath. That cry was meant for him. The coyotes made a kill and feasted, but before their hunger had been satisfied a living skeleton came moving toward them, and they scattered wildly and left the meat to Cripp.

Several strange coyotes joined Breed's pack and these new members seemed possessed

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of some haunting fear. Breed noted their constant air of expectancy and the intent regard with which they favored every coyote that drew near to them. They seemed always suspicious that some friend would suddenly turn upon them, and whenever some eager coyote clashed his teeth while feeding, these strangers that had come so recently from the low country started uneasily at the sound.

Night after night Cripp followed the pack and came to the kill. The coyotes all avoided him but the strangers were assailed with a ghastly dread of his grinning mask, and their fears were communicated to the rest of the pack. Breed himself caught it. An air of tense watchfulness pervaded their gatherings, a guarding against some menace as yet unknown but which the actions of the strangers indicated might be upon them at any moment.

After a week of this sort of thing Breed and Shady were bedded on a ridge slope that flanked a broad meadow when Breed saw

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a moving speck at the far edge of it. It proved to be a coyote, though at first its peculiar gait denied this. He came straight on across the open, and Breed saw one of his new friends trot from a willow clump in the meadow, take one look at the advancing stranger and become galvanized into a flitting streak that left the valley. Even at that distance his deadly fear was evident, and Breed knew that the unknown danger had become actual and was embodied in the queer-gaited coyote that was coming toward him.

He ran with an automaton-like stiffness, never changing his course, and occasionally stumbling as if unaware of the character of the ground over which he passed. His head swung out slightly to either side and he snapped each time. There was something sinister in every move, as if his body was driven on without conscious volition, actuated by some dreadful, unclean force. Breed knew it for some sort of poisoning, and his muscles

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bunched for flight. Shady barked angrily as if to drive the thing away. Then Breed saw a hairless travesty of a coyote move out of a draw and halt directly in the path of the mad coyote. Cripp stood there grinning till he felt the other's teeth score his unprotected hide; then he whirled and snapped back at him. The mad coyote kept straight on and Cripp followed at his own queer shambling gait. He drew close and ran alongside, and for a hundred yards they exchanged slashes in a senseless sort of way. Breed could see the blood oozing from the fur of the mad coyote's neck, and the blobs of white foam sliding down Cripp's shiny hide. Then the mad coyote fell and Cripp kept on for another ten yards before he missed him. He wheeled and returned, stumbled and fell and crawled back to his foe, and they lay there tooting one another in an impersonal, detached way, as if it did not matter.

Breed's soul revolted at this scene and he

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fled the spot. When he raised his howl that night he was twenty miles farther north, but the coyote pack answered from close at hand. Many of them witnessed the same scene from adjacent slopes of the valley. The others had viewed similar sights, and there was a general coyote movement north through the mountains, a widespread exodus ahead of the madness that was creeping up into the hills.

Breed had formerly been imbued with the home-loving nature of the coyote, and this had led him to restrict his wanderings to a comparatively limited area instead of ranging hundreds of miles in all directions after the manner of wolves. This love of a permanent home range now operated in a peculiar way. All ties were severed behind him, the land he loved bristling with such a wide variety of dangers as to preclude all possibility of his return. The wanderlust which now seized him appeared a complete reversal of his former desire to remain in one vicinity where

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every topographical feature was to him a familiar landmark; but in reality this very wanderlust was an expression of home love; every step he took away from his old range was unconsciously actuated by the desire to find some new spot which would take the place of the old.

For two weeks these wanderings were erratic and uncontrolled by any conscious purpose. He roamed on the Shoshone and the Thoroughfare, the Yellowstone and the Buffalo Fork of the Snake, then swung back across the Sunlight Peaks. Shady had acted queerly of late, frequently leaving Breed for hours at a time and climbing to some commanding point from which she would look far off across the hills, as if seeking something which was always just beyond the range of her vision; but she always came back to him. Breed found nothing out of the way in this. Mated coyotes were prone to follow separate trails for hours, even days,

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and then meet again. Shady had clung to him persistently, refusing to be out of his sight except when at the den with her pups, and this new manifestation seemed a natural one to Breed, an evidence that his mate had come to trust in her ability to shift for herself in the wild. But it was not this. Now that her pups had been schooled and sent out to face the world alone, Shady hungered to see the man who had raised her from a pup, and to feel his fingers scratching behind her ears.

As the pack straggled out among the ragged Sunlight Peaks Shady looked down across the lower slopes; one valley opened into another in an interminable procession and far down across the spruce tops a rift between two flanking hills afforded a view of the low country, shimmering in the sun. Sand Coulee Basin, her old home! And a variegated mass in the distance marked the Rainbow Buttes, rising isolated and alone from out the badlands. Shady struck a swift gliding trot

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and dropped down the slope, disappearing in the first twisted masses of timber-line spruce.

For the first few hours after her departure Breed gave it no thought, but when she failed to turn up he grew increasingly uneasy. Ten hours and he called to her and there was no reply, twelve and he circled to pick up her trail but it had cooled. He prowled the peaks for three days and nights, disconsolate and lonely, even though in close touch with the coyote pack, and sending out call after call for his mate. Shady had spent the first two days in almost continuous travel, put in a single hour with the Coyote Prophet, reveling in the feel of his exploring fingers and the friendly sound of his voice; then she departed as suddenly as she had come and spent two more days in reaching the summit of the Sunlight Peaks where she had left her mate, for after all his hold on her was far more gripping than that exercised by the man.

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She heard Breed's lonely cry and answered it, and an hour later she was frisking about him with doggish enthusiasm. The yellow wolf accepted her lavish display of affection with dignity; his joy in the reunion was a match for her own, but the wolf in him was unequal to matching the effusiveness of the dog in her.

CHAPTER X

ALL through the Yellowstone country the evidence of Breed's teachings was apparent on every hand. The progeny of the members of his original band had been taught pack-hunting by their parents, as they themselves had learned the art from Breed. For a hundred miles each way from Two Ocean Pass the hills were full of the disciples of the yellow wolf. The elk now fled from coyotes as once they had fled from wolves. The coyotes brought all their native trickery and resourcefulness into play and made pack-hunting a very different affair from that practiced by timber wolves. They did not hunt bunched, but scattered, saving their own strength and wearing down that of their prey. When an elk was singled out the

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coyotes relayed him and kept him on the move. Whenever he attempted a straight-away flight some coyote flashed out in front of him to turn him back, and he was headed through bogs and spongy ground on the slides at the foot of old snow drifts until his strength was gone.

Breed's movements now lost their aimlessness, and each day found him a few miles farther north. The home love in him was working, but he himself was unconscious of the fact that he was seeking some land that would answer all requirements. It was not given to him to plan largely for the future, and each move was occasioned by the dissatisfaction with the country in which he found himself, rather than from any definite idea of mapping out a course for a permanent range and there establishing his home.

Nevertheless he held steadily to the north and the faithful pack moved with him. Other coyotes flanked their line of march,

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urged on by fear of the madness that lay behind and finding courage for their pioneering in the fact that every night they heard the howls of the coyote pack ahead.

The game herds were milling restlessly in high basins. The blacktail bucks had short new coats of sleek blue-gray; they had shed the long hair of the previous season, — the season of short blue, the Short Blue Moon of the Northwest Indian tribes. Broad vistas of the low country showed through revealing gaps in the hills, marked by the blue-gray tinge of the sage; a pale haze hung in the hills and turned distant green spruce slopes to silvery blue; the rivers had long since passed the flood tide of melting drifts, and were cleared of the roily effects of late summer rains, and lakes and streams, now free of sediment, showed blue-green to their very depths; the high peaks were held in silhouette against a clear blue sky. Everything showed a touch of blue, — such is the Short Blue Moon.

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And the love-making time of the antlered tribes is ushered in with the season of short blue. As Breed moved north the whistling snorts of lovelorn bucks reached his ears day after day. The clarion bugles of challenging bulls was promise of meat in plenty. Bighorn rams squired their bands of ewes on the plateaus and pinnacles above timber line.

Breed's course was by no means a straight line. Hunts drew him to the east and west and frequently back to the south, but the general trend of it all was a northward migration for the coyote pack. Some days they gained twenty miles, some but three or four, and on others they lost ground. At the end of a month the land of the Yellowstone was a hundred miles southeast.

The big gray wolves were more plentiful here, but scattered and not traveling in packs. At every wolf howl Breed felt the old hatred of Flatear surge up in him, but though he frequently met wolves none of them proved

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to be his enemy. The big grays showed only a casual interest in coyotes, evidencing neither enmity nor delight at any chance meeting, indifference the keynote of their attitude.

Autumn blended into early winter and the gain toward the north was less apparent, Breed lingering in the vicinity of good hunting grounds as he found them, moving on when the supply of meat diminished. He held to the main divide of the Rockies, and when the heavy storms of midwinter set in, he was well across Montana and nearing the Canadian line. The deep snowfall had driven the game down out of the peaks to the lower valleys of the hills and Breed was forced to follow. He moved westward across the South Fork of the Flathead to the Kootenai Range. There were fewer elk here than in the Yellowstone, living in scattered bunches and not congregating in droves of hundreds on the winter feed grounds. Deer ranged the Kootenai

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nai country in plentiful numbers and Breed elected to stay. Mating was close at hand and the northward movement halted.

Stray coyotes drifted continually up from the south and joined the ranks of the pack, and there were stray wolves crossing the range from the Flathead to Swan River and back. Many of these mated with the unattached coyotes as they straggled north. Breed's pack was rapidly thinned down, pairs dropping out to den till at last only Peg and Fluff were left.

When the chinook set in Fluff chose a den site and stopped. Breed held on for another five miles, then Shady refused to travel. She picked her own site and showed a keener interest in home building than she had the season past, working short shifts to relay Breed on the digging, and the three tunnels that led to this new nest hole were longer and more elaborately curved and twisted than those of the old den on the Yellowstone.

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The last day of February seven pups came to share the den with Shady.

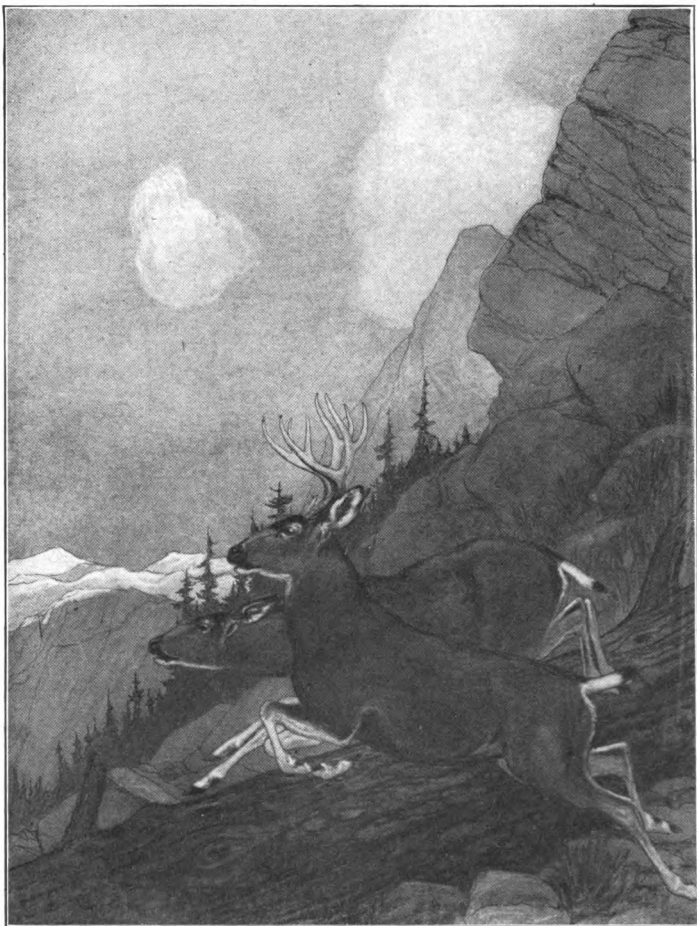
The rest of the pack had denned to the south and few encroached on Breed's hunting territory. Deer were still plentiful, even after a winter of hard hunting, and he found little difficulty in supplying meat. There was but one flaw in his contentment.

One day when the pups were a month old and had recently been out for their first romp Breed hunted across the divide and down the western slope of the Kootenais. He stood on a ridge in the gathering dusk when he was suddenly aware that other hunters were abroad before him. His eye caught flashes of white through the green of the spruce on the opposite slope. He knew that a band of deer had been startled to sudden flight, that the jerky gleams of white were the brief exposures of the underparts of their tails as they were upflung in hurdling windfalls. The wind was wrong and Breed could not catch the

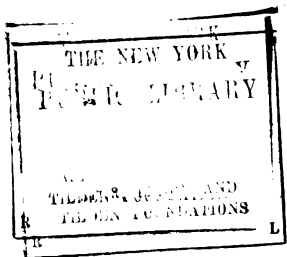
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scent. He traced their course through the timber by their white flags and saw three deer break cover and start out across a long narrow opening on the slope, the path of a snowslide that had stripped a lane through the trees on the steep side hill, its trail a clean split in the solid green of the spruce. In the center of the slide the lead deer suddenly collapsed and the sharp report of a rifle rolled across the hills.

At the sound of the shot Breed heard a few deep-chested dog notes half a mile down the narrow valley. He looked that way and saw a slender tongue of smoke curling lazily above the trees around a bend. The deep note was strange to him, but again the association of ideas came to his aid. Shady's occasional fits of barking and her strange ways; the wolf hounds that had belonged to men and had chased him in Sand Coulee Basin; this note that rose in answer to a rifle shot and came from near the smoke that denoted a



Breed was compelled to hunt farther from home as the deer quit the valleys. *Page 191.*



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cabin. Breed himself was unconscious of assorting these ideas, but he knew that the hoarse note came from some dog beast that belonged to man.

A lone prospector had built his cabin on the west slope of the Kootenais, and hereafter Breed avoided this vicinity.

When the pups were six weeks old Shady felt the call to help Breed rustle food and she hunted by herself in the neighborhood of the den, but her earnest efforts were unavailing, as there was no small game and she was unable to stalk a deer.

Breed was compelled to hunt farther from home as the deer quit the valleys to descend to the foothills for the first nips of green grass. One morning, when far south of the den, he heard again the note of the hound. It rose and fell, an eager bellow that moved slowly through the hills, and Breed did not like the music. This same baying reached him on three other days. The reason for all this

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uproar was beyond his comprehension, but from the fact that it came from a dog he knew that it meant no good for the wild things.

A few days after he first heard this strange sound he came face to face with a pair of coyotes that had run with his pack. Their air was one of dejection and there was no springiness in their gait. From their dispirited manner Breed knew that tragedy had overtaken his friends, that some calamity had befallen their pups. Later he met a second pair, a dog coyote and a she-wolf, and they too were traveling aimlessly, their family torn from them. But Breed had no way of linking these disasters with the music of the trail hound. The prospector kept a single hound and when he found a fresh wolf kill in the spring he put the dog on the tracks that led from it, keeping him in leash, and the hound led him to the den. He had found good hunting near his cabin this spring, as the hills were full of the dens of the small

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yellow wolves that had turned up in such numbers the preceding winter, but his activities so far had been confined to the country that lay south of Breed's range.

Breed led the pups forth for a few short trips as their strength increased. In his hunts toward the south he frequently crossed the trails of other coyotes that had led their offspring out for a ramble. At least one out of every three families were breeds, and the pups were uniform. They were heavier than coyotes and their backstrips were dark; but their language was pure coyote, their voices perhaps slightly deeper and with fuller volume, but the change was so slight as to escape detection from the ears of man. These pups were the same sort of hybrids as Breed, their parental strains identical, yet among them all he found only one with his own qualities, the coyote fur and the voice of the wolf. In all others this was reversed.

Breed's own pups grew strong and active,

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capable of covering ten miles of rough hill country in a single night, and the family would soon have left the den but that Shady indulged in one of her flighty streaks, — a streak prompted by the dog strain in her rising temporarily above the wild.

She had hunted tirelessly but had failed to bring home a scrap of meat. Her hopes ran high and she ranged continually farther from the den till she eventually crossed over the divide for a look at the west slope. The breeze held steadily from the west and Shady caught a whiff of wood smoke and moved toward it to investigate. She scouted along the edge of the timber, watching the cabin in the little clearing for signs of life. It appeared deserted. She crossed to it and sniffed at a crack, — then fled for her life. At the first sniff there came a deafening bellow and a great hound surged round the corner of the house.

As Shady fled she rolled her eyes back,

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coyote fashion, for a glimpse behind. She noted that the hound seemed to have trouble in getting started, and once back in the timber she stopped. She heard the rattle of a chain, — the hound was anchored! From long experience in the past Shady knew the futility of striving to break a chain. The dog was powerless to harm her. Even if he should free himself it would avail him nothing; these slow running hounds were known to her, and their speed was no match for her own.

Shady returned to the cabin and peered round one corner at the raging hound whose six-foot chain prevented his clearing the next corner by more than a foot. She moved along the side of the house till within ten feet of him and sat down, her tongue lolling out contentedly as she watched the frenzied hound almost strangle himself in his efforts to reach her.

A flutter of canvas caught her eye and she rose with her forefeet against the logs as she

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stretched her nose up toward it. The prospector had rolled the cloth round a ten-pound piece of fresh venison to keep the flies from it. Shady sprang and seized it, swinging clear of the ground, all four feet braced against the logs, then fell sprawling as the nail from which it was suspended bent and allowed the cord to slip. She started off across the open, and the first fold of canvas flapped loosely under her feet and tripped her. Halfway to the timber the meat dropped out and she took it, leaving the cloth behind; something over an hour later she turned up at the den with the first meat she had ever furnished for her own pups.

The prospector returned to his cabin and while still a mile away he heard the bellowing of the dog. The first sight that greeted him was the canvas, flapping limply in the open, and he found Shady's dust tracks round the cabin, and swore. He ducked hurriedly into the house and reappeared with a shotgun,

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unsnapped the chain from the cabin wall and resnapped it in his belt, and he was off, with the eager hound tugging ahead of him on Shady's trail.

Shady, elated by her first success, had left the den for another hunt. As she swung back toward home she heard the steady bellow of a hound and put on full speed ahead. The baying ceased except for an occasional bark, and when Shady came to the last fringe of trees along the ridge she saw a man standing at the den. The hound was chained to a single tree some thirty yards away and she knew there was naught to fear from him. The man started excavating with a light miner's pick and a short-handled shovel which he unslung from his back. In half an hour he had opened one tunnel till he could peer into the den hole. Then he unwound a strange instrument from about his waist, a wolfer's "feeler", three strands of wire twisted into a pliable cable ten feet long, the

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three ends of the strands extending forklike a bare two inches beyond the cable braid at one end. This simple invention eliminates much tedious excavation work, the sensitive tool following the curves of the branching tunnels which each wolf pup makes for himself as soon as he is able to dig. Shady prowled along the edge of the timber and viewed these preparations suspiciously.

The man inserted the end of the feeler in a hole that led off the main cavity of the den, and advanced it by gentle thrusts, twisting it as he pushed to clear the forks. There was not a sound from the den. The feeler would go no farther. He grasped it flat between the palms of his hands and twirled the cable rapidly from right to left. There was a sudden spitting explosion of baby snarls from the depths of the hole. The man gave one tentative tug and felt resistance, then hauled the feeler in hand over hand and drew forth a fighting pup, the three tines

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twisted firmly into his soft fur. The hound opened up excitedly; the short pick swept up and down, — and the pup was a lifeless heap.

Terror and rage flooded Shady in equal parts. She gave one sharp cry, — and the other two openings disgorged a shower of frightened pups that scattered toward the timber as so many flushed partridges, fleeing in response to their mother's sharp command, and Shady raged straight at the man!

The prospector was an old hand at rifling wolf dens. Occasionally a pup would dart from another exit, and the shotgun was an effective weapon with which to check his flight. But never had he seen such a mad outpouring of pups as this, and in all his long life in the hills a she-wolf had never rushed him, even in defense of her pups. Shady's charge was reversed so suddenly as to appear that she turned a flip in mid-air when she saw

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the man's hand stretch forth and lift the shotgun from the ground, for she knew well its purpose and its power.

The thunderous roar of black powder sounded behind her and a charge of heavy shot raked her hips and loins as she gained the trees. Shot pierced both ears and furrowed along her skull. The man turned and pulled the second barrel at the rearmost pup and he went down limply, a puff of fur flung into the air above him, his life snuffed out in a single instant as the heavy charge pulverized him from end to end.

A piercing series of yelps issued from the timber as Shady gave voice to her agony. The prospector nodded. The mystery was cleared; for he knew that he might shoot a wolf or coyote to mincemeat and neither would make a sound.

"A dog," he said. "A renegade. I should have knowed it all along; her stealing that-away right alongside of Buge; and her

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bristling up to me — no wolf would carry on like that.”

He strode to the tree and unleashed the hound.

“Go to it, Buge!” he said. “Go clean up them pups.”

As the dog sped into the timber a sharp note sounded from far down the slope. Shady had partially recovered her upset faculties and called the pups, and they gathered swiftly to her and ran their best. Even in her crippled state Shady could have outrun the trail hound, for her wounds had not yet had time to stiffen, but the pups could scarcely hold their own, and the dog's endurance was far greater.

Breed was returning to the den with a ragged chunk of venison when he heard the double roar of the gun and Shady's agonized yelps. Her later cry to gather the pups indicated the general direction of her flight. Then the steady tonguing of the hound broke

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forth. Breed flanked the dog's route till he drew abreast of him. The baying voice filled the valley and echoed among the rims till it seemed that the whole breadth of the hills was filled with dogs, but Breed knew that the sound came from but one. He could hear no sounds of man, and he dropped swiftly in behind Buge to decipher the signs of the trail. There were the hot tracks of Shady and the pups, the hound's tracks on top of theirs, and no man had come that way. Breed spurred ahead and sighted the dog, and swung out to flank him and get the wind.

Buge ran with his nose close to the ground. He was gaining on his prey, and his mind was so wholly centered on the trail that he was unaware of the deadly yellow wolf that ran almost abreast of him and forty yards downwind. Breed was puzzled as to how to handle the situation that confronted him. He feared the hound, believing that an ally of man might be endowed with man's strange

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power for harm. The dog was a slow, cumbersome animal and Breed knew that Shady was far speedier, yet he wished the spotted beast would quit her trail. He saw Buge's nose lifted from the trail as he caught the warm body scent from close at hand. The dog ran now with head held high, the body scent reeking in his nostrils. Then Breed saw Shady and the pups running under the trees a hundred yards ahead. The steady baying rose to a slobbering bellow as the hound followed his prey by sight. The gap narrowed, and Breed could see his slavering jaws, the froth drooling stringily back across his shoulders. The last pup was running desperately a bare twenty yards ahead, — and then the great hound was suddenly thrown off his feet as a fighting yellow devil struck him from the side without a sound to announce his rush. Breed's shoulder had caught him fairly in the middle of a stride and the shock of the impact slammed him

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down six feet away ; as Buge landed heavily on his side two flashing rows of teeth closed on his throat and sliced into it, and his life was torn out with the yellow wolf's backward wrench.

Then Breed ran on after Shady and the pups, knowing now that a single short-haired dog, despite the terrifying volume of his voice, was no formidable antagonist for a wolf when once caught outside the radius of man's protection.

Night settled down over the hills as Breed came to the end of Shady's trail and found her lying in a half-swoon with the pups crouching near. Breed felt that he was leaving this country to return no more, and almost unconsciously he raised the call for the pack, knowing that the pack season was far in the future, yet longing to hear the voices of his friends. Far to the south a pair of coyote voices answered him, and still beyond them, so far that the sound did not reach Breed's

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ears, a second pair of coyotes relayed the message that the yellow leader called.

Breed urged Shady on, but in three miles the wolf family was forced to lay over for a rest. Here a pair of coyotes overtook them. The slow march was resumed with frequent halts for rest, and before morning two other pairs of coyotes caught up with them, and these were all members of the original pack that had hunted together in Sand Coulee Basin. Just at dawn the dog coyote Breed had met some time earlier in the spring brought his she-wolf mate and joined the band. All of the new arrivals had lost their pups through the efforts of the hound that Breed had slain, and they were free to follow where the leader willed.

Breed moved east across the Flathead and for two days he urged Shady on relentlessly till they were far up the sheltering slopes of the main divide. Shady then took shelter in a windfall, and for the next three days she

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refused to move. Her wounds stiffened and festered from imbedded shot, and she was dry and feverish. Three stray coyotes crossed the Flathead and joined those that prowled within a few miles of Shady's retreat.

The third night Breed heard a well-known voice far down the slope and he threw all the force of his lungs into a welcoming cry.

A coyote invariably deserts a den that is neared by man. Peg had discovered Breed's rifled den and his keen nose interpreted the signs. He had heard the leader's call and wondered why it had been raised so early in the year. He followed the sign till he found the body of the hound. It was morning when he reached his own home, and the following night Peg and Fluff had led their pups off in the general direction taken by Breed. The trail had cooled, but in moist and sheltered spots he found sufficient trace to guide him, and in the heavy timber where the great drifts lingered he could follow it

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by sight. Then at last he heard Breed's voice above him and an hour later Peg and Fluff led six half-grown pups to the windfall.

When Shady was once more able to travel Breed led the way to the north, the band not traveling together, but every coyote's course laid out to accord with Breed's, and within hailing distance so that each might apprise the others of his whereabouts at night. When the pups were old enough to shift for themselves Breed had crossed the Canadian line and was two hundred miles north of it along the great divide that marks the boundary between British Columbia and Alberta.

All along this route clear from the Yellowstone there had been coyote country to the east of him. The prairie wolves had long since populated the valleys of the Musselshell, and, farther north, the Marias River and the Breast. There were coyotes east of him now, running the prairies of Alberta

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and Saskatchewan, but he had at last arrived at a point west of the extreme northern limits of the coyote range. All over the continent to the south and east of him pioneering coyotes were pushing on into new lands: they had penetrated the hill country of Pennsylvania to the east, and south almost to Panama; but it had fallen to the lot of the yellow wolf to lead the way for the horde that was invading the northwest hills.

During the first storm of the early fall Breed pulled down a yearling mountain sheep on a high plateau. A motley crew answered the meat call. Breed, the yellow hybrid, Shady, the half-blood renegade, and four pairs of coyotes born in Sand Coulee Basin; the dog coyote with his timber-wolf mate and several of Breed's and Shady's conglomerate pups; all were there to feed. And when the bones were picked Breed led his nondescript band on into the unmapped wilds of the British Columbia hills.

CHAPTER XI

WOLFING was no longer profitable in the foothills and Collins pulled up stakes and left. He loaded his belongings on his pack horses and journeyed far to the north. Later he sold his horses and traveled by canoe, and after a roundabout course he preëmpted an old cabin between the Laird Fork of the Mackenzie and the head of Peace River. The climate was moist and the underbrush growth was often so dense as to force him to hack out a trail in spots as he laid out his trap line. The side hills were matted tangles and the valleys shaking bogs, and Collins had little love for his new surroundings. There were no cheery sounds at night, only the howls of wolves. In midwinter of his first season in the north he was roused out of a sound

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sleep, certain that somewhere close at hand a coyote had howled. During the brief gray light of the following day Collins stopped and gazed long at a small, wolf-like track in the snow.

“Coyote!” he announced triumphantly. “It was him that howled.”

Twenty yards farther on he crossed a second coyote track, and for half a mile there were trails pointing to the north. There was one that showed evidence of a missing foot, a peg-leg such as those he had often seen on the open range. Then Collins halted and studied the next two trails that appeared side by side. One was a wolf track, and there were two toes missing from one hind foot. The smaller tracks were evenly spaced, and placed one before the other in a straight line after the manner of coyote and wolf, but ten feet beyond where Collins stood the trail showed the wavering gait of the dog with an occasional track out to either side. A

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sudden mist blurred Collins' eyes and he dashed it off with the back of his mitts.

"It's Shady," he said. "Old Shady and that yellow Breed, — both still alive and way off up here." Collins threw back his head and sent forth the clear piercing whistle that he had used to summon Shady in the long ago. Three times the shrill blast, long and sustained, was sent far out across the snowy hills.

Three miles to the north Shady lay curled up with Breed. She suddenly raised her head. Breed too opened his eyes and cocked one ear to listen. Shady was conscious of no actual sound. Some faint vibration reached her ears and seemed to play upon some chord deep within; the impressions were hazy and indistinct, yet she was aware of a vague sense of loss, a wave of something akin to homesickness, and she whimpered softly, then closed her eyes and slept.

Collins heard more and more coyotes howl,

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and in the next two months he had brief glimpses of perhaps a dozen as they moved across some opening. At least half of these seemed larger than the coyotes he had known, and they had dark fur on their backs. The Coyote Prophet studied long over these strange things. The coyote voices roused an ache for the homely cabin in Sand Coulee Basin a thousand miles to the south; and each time one howled he said:

“I’m going back. Once it comes spring I’ll make tracks out of here. This here’s no fit country for a white man, and me — I’m going back.”

But Collins did not go back with the opening up of spring. Rumors of a gold strike sent men stampeding toward the fabled spot, a long journey to the north and east. Three parties crossed over the old trail past Collins’ shack. The old wolfer caught the fever and followed the last of them. Before he left he made one last prophecy.

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He predicted that the hill coyotes of the northwest from the Yukon to the Yellowstone would be larger and have dark fur on their backs from frequent infusions of wolf blood; that within a dozen years the fur markets would distinguish between these dark silky-furred ones and the woolly yellow coyotes of the plains. He scrawled this message on a wrinkled scrap of paper, signed it, tacked it on the wall, and started off down the trail.

A month later a party of five men stopped overnight in the deserted cabin. One of them deciphered the queer scrawl.

“Crazy,” he announced. “Some old coot went off his nut from being holed up alone — and this is all he left.”

A tall lean man whose warped legs betrayed his sage-country origin leaned over and studied the signature.

“Collins,” he mused. “Now whoever would have figured to cut his trail up here? He maybe was crazy,—but anyway, I’ll

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bet five hundred that scrap of paper will pan out just like it says.”

A hundred miles beyond the cabin Breed and Shady were educating their third litter of pups. The nature of the country had prevented the excavating of a proper den and Shady had taken possession of a windfall. Breed was vastly disgusted with this new land, heartily sick of being shut in by the interminable hills and of traveling through swampy jungles of tall brush, and he was glad when the pups were old enough to shift for themselves.

He gathered the pack and started on, his course this time more east than north, and he covered better than twenty miles each day with a definite purpose of leaving behind him this country so thickly overlaid with brush that its effect upon him was almost a feeling of suffocation. He came out into the lower hills and crossed occasional open spots. Then, after ten days, he crossed

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through a rolling country and just at dusk came out on the shoulder of a hill; before him lay broad stretches of low plains, open meadows alternating with strips of heavy timber, the whole a wonderful park-like landscape swimming in the twilight. From nearby hills he heard the coyotes beginning to tune up, and each one was facing toward the plains, the first spot they had seen in three years which reminded them of home. Breed led the way and brought his band out into the first reaches of the Mackenzie Barrens that stretched back among the trees.

Breed found no trap lines here, and there were no mad coyotes or poison baits. Another two days and the trees were left behind, open country stretching ahead as far as his eye could reach; the brush was stunted and reminded him of sage; there were clumps of dwarf spruce much like the twisted cedars of the badland brakes, and thickets of stunted willows such as those that sprouted from every

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side-hill spring in Sand Coulee Basin. It was like a homecoming after being exiled for three long years, — and Breed was content at last as he bedded on a knoll. The range was once more dotted with stock — only these were wild caribou — and old habits cropped out in Breed; he knew there were no men here, yet all through the short two-hour day he frequently raised his head and his eyes swept the range for signs of the devilish riders. When he left his bed he found fresh evidence that he was home, that Sand Coulee Basin could not be farther away than over the next tongue of high ground; for he had not traveled a mile before he smelled coyote blood and traced it upwind to find an old friend stiffened in death, and with her throat slit open, — the work of the silent assassin that had terrorized the foothills of Hardpan Spur.

Breed's hatred of Flatear had been dulled with time. He had met hundreds of wolves

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since the fight in the notch, and at first he had sought for his enemy, but later this search had been manifested only by a careful investigation of each new wolf he met, a vague suspicion that the big gray might be an enemy; but this had become almost a mechanical process rather than a distinct impression of why he should expect to find an enemy among wolves.

Animal memories are a mixture of impressions received through the senses of hearing, sight and smell, and after a considerable lapse of time it requires the co-ordination of all three of these senses to reconstruct the thought in its entirety. The sight of the slain coyote filled Breed with rage but lacking a definite object upon which to vent it. The scent around the spot further enraged him, and the picture of the great gray beast swam nebulously in his mind. A wolf howl sounded close at hand and stirred still another long-dormant pool of impres-

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sions; the whole crystallized into a distinct likeness of Flatear, — and Breed was off on the hunt for his ancient enemy.

Flatear saw a great yellow wolf rushing down on him and he whirled and bared his teeth. The gray wolf weighed a hundred pounds, Breed slightly over ninety. They circled cautiously for an opening, hind parts tensed and drooping, ears laid flat and lips drawn back to expose the yellow tusks. Flatear sprang first and Breed met the open mouth with his own. The clash of teeth sounded far across the barrens and silent shapes changed their direction and moved toward the sound. Three times Breed took the force of the drive on his teeth and the jaws of both wolves dripped blood. A wolf came slipping up to watch, and two breeds of the yellow wolf's pack stationed themselves ten yards away. Three more wolves appeared; then Peg and Fluff came to the scene and Peg moved behind Flatear and crouched.

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Breed's snarl warned him off. The three-legged coyote was old and hoary, in his fifteenth year and with but a short span of life ahead; his teeth were rounded and worn down but his spirit was stout, and he longed to mix it with the wolf. His leader's order held him back, but he remained the nearest of the lot, watching every move of the combat as if appointed judge of it.

Flatear rushed time and again, using his greater weight to batter down his antagonist's guard, but Breed gave back each time and Flatear's driving shoulder never reached its mark and his teeth were met with teeth. Breed was losing ground and Flatear pressed him hard. The yellow wolf seemed to have but one style of defense and no heart for attack. The fight was a mere procession of retreats before Flatear's heavy drives, and the gray wolf grew accustomed to this monotonous defense, and his attacks were unconsciously conformed to it, becoming equally

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mechanical, his one purpose to wear his enemy down by sheer strength and weight.

And when Breed, instead of cringing away, struck at him with every ounce of his ninety pounds, Flatear was unprepared. He had started his spring and Breed's counter drive was aimed so low that his chest skimmed the ground. Flatear slashed savagely downward but the yellow wolf's head was well under him, and even as Flatear's teeth grazed Breed's shoulder his forward sweep was checked in mid-air as powerful jaws closed on a foreleg with a sickening crunch of bones. The opposing weights of both wolves pivoted on that one leg, and in addition to the fracture Flatear's whole side and shoulder were wrenched clear to his spine.

There was an uneasy movement among the spectators, now numbering more than a score, wolves and coyotes for the first time in history mingling to witness the settling of a personal feud. Peg now sat down con-

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tentedly, his tongue lolling out in a satisfied grin.

Breed's tactics changed and he wheeled round his disabled enemy with lightning feints; then his shoulder struck Flatear with a solid smash that crumpled him and he went down with Breed's teeth at his wind-pipe. His end was of the sort which he himself had handed to so many others, — and the new range was safe for coyotes.

The silent spectators were startled by a faint whining sound. This whimpering grew louder and the wolves slunk away but the coyote pack remained. Breed's sudden hunt for Flatear had caught Shady unprepared, but she had finally cut his trail and was following it to the spot.

For three months Breed saw no more of wolves, and when next he did see them the beasts were white. He had led the pack to the basin of the Copper River at the edge of the Arctic Circle. Their travels were over,

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and they now ranged a limited area of less than a hundred miles in extent. Except that no high hills flanked their new home, its features were much like the old. There were no longer any days and nights, but a seemingly endless period of varying degrees of twilight, and the rolling hills were deep with snow.

Breed had met many new animals since leaving the land of the Yellowstone; he had known moose and goats in British Columbia, caribou on the barrens and the iron-gray sheep at the head of the Nelson. Now there were strange shaggy beasts with hair that hung nearly to the ground, and they came out of the north in small droves, the white wolves traveling on the flanks of the herds. He found musk ox easy prey and there was no lack of meat.

A few days after the first of these appeared Breed and Shady topped a ridge and saw the one thing necessary to make the image of the

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old home complete. A light twinkled some half a mile away, as Breed and Shady had so often seen the lights of Collins' cabin. Shady whined as she looked at it and Breed raised his voice and howled. As if in answer to the howl a shrill whistle floated to them and Shady at once slipped from Breed's side and headed for the fire.

Collins had turned back from the fabled gold fields, heartsick for the sight of his native foothills, disgusted with the Arctic night and a flat white world, and with two companions he had braved the terrors of a winter journey and headed into the south. They traveled light, supplies for three packed on a single sled, drawn by six dogs. Food had run low and for a week they had been forced to subsist on starvation rations; one more day and they would have killed a dog, — and then they crossed the trail of a musk ox herd. There was now food in plenty but Collins' mental exhaustion did not vanish

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with returning physical strength. He was obsessed with the idea that he would never see the sagebrush hills again and his companions could not rouse him.

They fastened the dogs in a clump of dwarfed spruce and built a small fire on the downwind side of the trees.

The old wolfer sat huddled in his furs before the fire, dreading to enter the little tent to crawl into his sleeping bag alone with his thoughts; for the white madness was driving its iron into his soul and striking at his reason. His mind coined queer white couplets; the white wolf pack and the white ice pack, — a whole world shrouded in white night.

His companions had looked upon the white madness before; had seen men die from the deadly monotony of it all. It was conceivable that a book of bright pictures, anything with warm colors might penetrate the pall of white fog that clouded his brain and

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shatter the obsession, reinstating reason on its tottering throne. But there was only the howling of white wolves out across the white snow fields. Then a wolf howl sounded from close at hand.

It seemed to pierce Collins' stupor and strike some memory filed long ago in his subconscious mind, and he suddenly straightened and glared at them.

"I can pick him out from amongst a thousand wolves," he stated. "There's no wolf shiver to that howl. It's a yellow wolf! As yellow as gold, not a damned white hair on him anywheres! It's Breed, the yellow wolf of Sand Coulee Basin — there's color come into this white hell hole at last!"

A shrill whistle pealed from his lips and his companions shook their heads. Then the wolf howled again and they stiffened with surprise as a score of wild voices answered. The sounds were new to them and the snowy waste was filled with bewilderingly different

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inflections that ripped back and forth through opposing waves of sound till it seemed that jeering cachinnations rose from a thousand fiends.

They read the gleam in Collins' eyes and his disjointed utterances as a sign of hopeless madness, — but in reality it was returning sanity. A new warmth stole over him, and the certainty that he would win through.

“Here they come,” he said. “The little yellow devils! They've spread from the Arctic to the Neck, like I always knowed they would. There's music a white man can listen to — the music' of the little yellow wolves.”

Then the two men sat silent and wondered if they themselves were mad. For the dogs were snarling and straining at their leashes in the scrub spruce, and a strange yellow she-wolf with a strip of dark fur along her back came creeping toward the fire. Her eyes regarded the two men suspiciously and

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one ear tipped toward the dogs beyond. She slipped up and rested her head on Collins' knee, enjoyed his friendly voice and rubbing fingers for a single minute, then vanished in the night as the yellow breed-wolf called his pack.

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