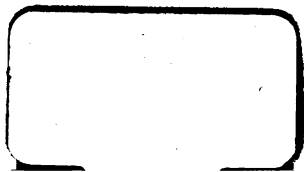


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THE CROSS PULL

NEW BORZOI NOVELS
SPRING, 1920

PETER JAMESON

By Gilbert Frankau

THE SECRET BATTLE

By A. P. Herbert

DELIVERANCE

By E. L. Grant Watson

THE ROLLING STONE

By C. A. Dawson-Scott

THE TALLEYRAND MAXIM

By J. S. Fletcher

**WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO
TREAD**

By E. M. Forster

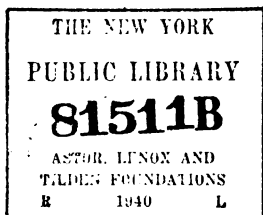
THE CROSS PULL

HAL G. EVARTS



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FEB 13 1920

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CHAPTER I

THOSE who believed in the famous legend of the Lost Herd are gone and few men know the truth.

History records the fact that when the last big herd of bison moved into the north on the spring migration it never returned. The hide hunters watched in vain for the southward movement in the fall for it never came. The big gray buffalo wolves, too, had suddenly vanished from the plains. Strange rumors were heard about this mysterious evaporation of the shaggy horde—rumors which gave birth to the fable of the lost herd that would some day come grazing down out of the north.

Not only in legend were they lost, but lost in truth. Rather than once more run the gauntlet of the guns along the Arkansas and the Platte, the last herd departed from the customs of untold centuries and sought refuge in the hills. They chose the Land of Many Rivers in which to make their final stand.

The snow that falls in one small tangled mass

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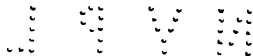
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of peaks and valleys feeds the headwaters of a score of rivers. The Wind River and the Grey-bull; the Gibbon and the Firehole; the Shoshone, Yellowstone, Green River and the Buffalo Fork of the Snake, each finds its course in one wild whirl of interlacing, tributary streams.

Here, in the Bighorns, the Tetons and the Sunlight peaks, the herd scattered in small bands through the high mountain valleys in one last effort to exist. The bleached white skulls that dot the green meadows on the head reaches of Thoroughfare River and the basins of the upper Yellowstone, mark the spots where they died in the deep snow of the high country while the buffalo hunters of Dodge still waited for the fabled return of the lost herd.

Stockmen grazed their cows on the old range of the bison, pushing farther to the west each year until their cows fed on the first roll of the hills; farther north until they came to a spot where Nature, as if exhausted from piling wonder upon wonder with lavish hand, had left the badlands of the Little Bighorn and the desolate foothills of the Greybull nestled under the very shadow of the Rainbow Peaks.

Then great wolves appeared, coming down out



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of the hills and taking heavy toll from the cows on the ranges; wolves of a kind the stockmen had never known, larger even than those of Siberia. Ranchers spoke of a new and savage breed. They distorted the word "logo"—the Shoshone Indian name for the baldface grizzly—to "lobo," meaning grizzly wolf.

The ranchmen organized a war of extermination against this savage lobo tribe, placing an ever-increasing bounty on each one, until an even hundred was posted as the price on every scalp.

This created a new occupation for men, and soon the professional wolfer was scouring the breaks of the badlands with poison, trap and gun for the last few survivors of a vanishing breed.

Old Dad Kinney was a wolfer and he had reason to believe that a single family of loboes were denned somewhere within forty miles of his spring camp. He knew, too, that Clark Moran was in the badlands on the same quest.

Between them was an agreement whereby Kinney felt there was no possible way for him to lose. If either of them found the den, Moran was to have one pup alive and Kinney was to draw the bounty on the rest.

Moran seemed more interested in some lost herd

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that had died fifty years before than in bounty rewards—in some theory that this was not a new species but an almost forgotten kind which had followed the lost herd into the hills and had now come back to the edge of their old range; that the rare lobo of the present was the buffalo gray of the past.

As Moran and Kinney lay rolled in their blankets ten miles apart, they formed two points of a human triangle of which Ash Brent, far up the slope of the hills, formed the third.

In common with most men who live their lives in the open, Kinney and Moran had come to draw a certain sense of companionship from the night sounds of the hills. But there is one note to which a man may listen for a thousand nights and on the next he will inevitably nestle a trifle closer into his bed roll when it sounds and feel the same chilly prickling of the skin along his spine. The far-off note of a lobo always carries an added ache of loneliness to the man in the open.

A lone lobo raised his voice and, as if connected by a mysterious current, the three widely scattered men each felt the same sudden tensing of the muscles and tingling of the skin. In the reaction only did they differ.

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While Kinney calculated a probable profit, Brent cursed fretfully at the wolf shiver which shook him at the sound, and Moran smiled over a pet theory of his own.

He knew that any beast, when angry or alarmed, bristles his back hair into a roach along the spine. He felt that this was a heritage handed down to him through a thousand generations from the time when his primitive ancestors, garbed in hair instead of cloth, had bristled with a mixture of rage and fear at each call of their enemy the wolf; that this sprouting of goose flesh between his own shoulder blades at the lobo call was but the age-old instinct to bristle the hair where hair had ceased to grow.

As always, the dread cry was followed by a vast, tense quiet, as if each dweller of the open hesitated to shatter the silence with his own voice and thus draw particular attention to himself. This was no paltry wolf—no straggler from the north, but an old dog lobo on his home range.

There was an answering call, and both Kinney and Moran raised on their elbows to better catch the sound. The starting note was a hoarse imitation of her mate's but seemed to break into the tremolo of the coyote. Both men arrived at al-

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most the same conclusion but in different ways.

Kinney linked the strange note with a renegade Scotch sheep dog he had seen traveling with the coyotes two years before.

"That she wolf is half coyote and half dog," he said.

Moran, too, had noted the coyote shrill and also that he experienced no wolf shiver from the sound.

"A cross," he reflected. "Part coyote and part dog."

The lobo does not call often, and not until half an hour before dawn did the sound come again. It awakened the three men, and each prepared his breakfast and was off upon his business of the day.

While Kinney and Moran resumed their tireless, systematic search for the wolf den, Brent headed his horses for a far divide. Beyond it lay the Land of Many Rivers, where, for a hundred miles, there was no human habitation known to men; yet Brent had twelve horses packed out with flour and supplies.

Ten days later Moran sat cross-legged on the ground with a third-grown wolf pup between his knees. The lobo pup was wrapped securely in a sack, tied round and round with heavy cord and with only his head protruding from the roll.

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"There goes the balance of your family, pup," said Moran. "You're an orphan now."

Kinney, leading two pack horses from which dangled the remains of the rest of the wolf family, was just disappearing in the direction of his camp and the last den of loboes in the badlands had fallen victims to the ranchmen's bounty war.

The father was a mighty lobo, almost a pack-load for one horse; the mother was a half-breed, crossed between a coyote and a dog. The rifled den had yielded a freakish lot of pups, as if each clashing strain of ancestry had struggled to perpetuate its own. One was a fluffy, yellow, coyote pup; two a strange mixture of wolf and dog; while the fourth was a blue-gray Scotch sheep dog, with shaggy face and a white splash on the breast. The one which Moran held between his knees was pure lobo from tip to tip. Only in his yellow coyote eyes did a trace of off color strain crop out.

"You're the prize pup of the lot," said Moran. "How about it, old fellow? Are you going to make friends with me?"

For answer the lobo pup writhed around in his wrappings and made one swift slash at his captor's face.

"You're a game little youngster and as quick as

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a flash," said Moran. "That's what I'll call you—Flash. Come on, Flash, let's be pals."

For more than an hour he tried to win the confidence of the lobo pup, rubbing and scratching his neck and head behind the ears where the white fangs could not reach his hand, and talking to him in an even, friendly tone.

Even a very young pup reads the intonations of the human voice sufficiently to distinguish between those men who care for animals and dogs and those who don't.

The wolf pup felt the first stirrings of the inner conflict—the battling for supremacy between the wild blood and the tame—that would influence his every move through life. It was as if the different elements of his ancestry had established cross-currents in his veins, exerting a strange cross-pull upon each thought and deed.

The wolf and coyote in him revolted at the man scent, but the dog strain responded to the friendly voice and thrilled to the touch of exploring fingers which scratched his neck and ears. He lay passive and made no protest at the touch.

At last he felt Moran's hand slip slowly around beneath his chin, rubbing his throat and lower jaw. His throat muscles contracted at this new move,

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and he withdrew his head, turtle-wise, as far as possible within the sheltering roll. The yellow coyote eyes were bright with suspicion; the sensitive lips writhed up, exposing the ivory fangs of the wolf, but the yearning of a dog to be loved by man held him from sinking them deep in the hand that was now within easy reach—the first compromise between the wild and tame.

The glare gradually died from his eyes, the lips settled slowly back and covered the fangs, and Moran knew then that he had won.

“Come on, Flash; let’s go home,” he said.

CHAPTER II

HARMON was away, and for two days Moran had the forest ranger's cabin on Spring Creek to himself.

He spent the time trying to wean Flash from his early training and induce him to eat by tempting him with morsels of fresh meat.

The first day the pup shrank away from it; on the next he sniffed it hungrily but still refused to eat. He craved it with every fiber of his being but there was one thing he knew. He must never touch one bite of meat other than that which he himself had freshly killed—and after once leaving that he must return to it no more.

In his few hunts with his parents they had pulled down a fresh beef each trip. At first he had seen no reason why he was not allowed to go near other food, but gradually he had seen many things which explained it all.

One night the wind had borne the scent of stale meat, and with the odor had come a clanking, grinding sound. A coyote leaped at the end of a

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chain and ground his teeth against the steel thing that clamped his foot.

Later they had passed near a steer his father had killed two nights before. Two coyotes lay there, dead and bloated, while a third ran in crazy circles and went into series of horrible convulsions with a rattling cough in his throat before he died. He knew then that it was unsafe even to return to previous kills of their own.

All over the range the wolf family had found tempting bits of meat and fat. Flash had not known that each rider was furnished with strychnine to poison the carcass of every dead steer on the range; that they cut off these bits of meat, filled them with the deadly crystals and scattered them about for the coyotes to pick up.

His parents had known—and a wicked snap warned each pup away from every such tempting morsel that they found. One of his sisters had broken over and swallowed just one tiny scrap, flattening her ears in anticipation of feeling her mother's teeth at this infraction of the rules.

Instead, agony had clutched her from within. The rest of them had watched her die as the mad coyote had.

From these things Flash had come to know that

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the scent of cold meat meant not food but death, and that only warm, quivering flesh was safe to eat.

Once more the blood of his ancestors exerted their cross-currents in his puppy heart. Hunger and the doglike affection he was beginning to feel for Moran spurred the desire to take the food; wolf suspicion of man and the things he had seen of their works against his kind combined with his dread of the cold meat scent to hold him back. He compromised by licking the meat Moran held out to him, but refusing to take it in his mouth.

Evening of the second day found Moran still patiently tempting him to eat.

A horse clattered into the yard and Ash Brent dismounted before the house. His horse flinched nervously away from him as he stooped to loosen the cinch and Brent jerked savagely on the reins until blood trickled from the ends of the heavy spade bit.

He strode to the door and stood looking in—a big man with a too small head set low upon wide shoulders. His light eyebrows showed up white against the baked red of his skin and from beneath them a pair of cold blue eyes peered bleakly forth upon the world and saw no good therein.

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"Hello, Moran. I want to see Harmon," he said by way of greeting. "Is he anywhere around?"

"I'm looking for him any minute," said Moran. "Come in, Brent. Come in and wait." The cordiality of the invitation masked Moran's vast dislike of this man—this maltreator of horses and cows. Moran was but a visitor at the ranger's, and Brent's business was with his host, so he could not reveal his real feeling for the man. But toleration passed for friendship with Brent. Even in this new country peopled by hard men, no one of them accorded him a warmer regard than that—and he paid them back in kind.

Rough men whose own hands were by no means light with horses shook their heads, disgusted by each new tale that was heard on the Greybull of Brent's frenzied atrocity when aroused by some nervous or refractory horse.

"What have you drug in now?" Brent asked as he entered, jerking his thumb at the wolf pup.

"That's my new dog," said Moran. "What do you think of him?"

Brent's mouth expanded in a mirthless grin.

"He's a sulky little brute," he said. "Can't you make him eat?"

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"That's intelligence," Moran explained. "His early training taught him not to gulp down everything he sees. I've only had him a day or two. He'll come out of it as soon as confidence in me overcomes that wolf caution of his."

As the two men talked, the wolf pup noted their difference of tone. Then, too, they gave off a different scent. Moran's was friendly and quieting, while Brent radiated an atmosphere of cold-blooded cruelty toward every living thing. His only ascendancy over beasts would be the rule of fear.

Flash was already beginning to classify the world of men. Those who do not know speak of "animal instinct" when referring to the unerring ability of animals to recognize love, hatred, fear and other emotions in man. Moran's naturalist mind was not satisfied with the vague generality of this term. He knew that this so called instinct was in reality a delicately balanced sense of hearing and of smell. No man who has lived much and understandingly with animals but knows that each kind has a vocabulary of its own—not that of the spoken word but of the varying inflection of tone.

It is this that enables a dog to catch the under-

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tone of hidden hate or fear in the voice which does not reveal it to the duller ear of man. He checks this with his nose so there is no chance for a mistake. Man's system reacts to any emotional strain and his pores betray his state of mind to the keenly sensitive noses of the animal world.

Moran knew that it was certain knowledge that caused Flash to sidle farther from Brent and closer to himself. With his nose flattened between his paws, Flash favored Brent with an unblinking stare from his yellow eyes—eyes as fierce and untamed as those of a hawk. Except in color there was little difference between his eyes and Brent's, and a wave of dislike was exchanged between them with the stare.

Not until Moran went outside to feed the horses in the corral did Flash shift from his position on the floor or remove his eyes from Brent. As Moran left him he moved away from Brent to the full limit of his chain.

Irritated by this move, Brent caught the chain near where it was fastened to the leg of the table and drew Flash toward him. The pup braced his feet but was dragged forward, his toenails scratching for a hold. When within a few feet of Brent his tactics changed and he leaped for the hand, his

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white teeth clashing shut in two lightning snaps as Brent jerked back. He retreated again to the length of his chain and stood there, bristling with rage and fear.

Brent's insane temper flared at the sting where the sharp little teeth had grazed his thumb. He stepped over to the pup, raising his heavy glove and bringing the gauntlet down across his head and ears. Flash tried to fight, but the glove bruised his lips and ears and when he cowered down on the floor, half dazed by the rain of blows, Brent kicked him under the table and went outside.

When the two came in once more, Milt Harmon, the ranger, was with them. As the three men talked, Flash lay in his corner, his head resting, wolf fashion, flat between his paws, and regarded their every move.

Harmon did not fit in either of his previous classifications, so he classed him by himself. Here in the room were men that represented each of the three divisions under which he would place all men as he met them—those he tolerated, those he hated with a savage intensity and those he loved. His present feeling for Harmon typified his later attitude toward the great majority of men. The mass

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of them would mean little to him and only a very few individuals would ever interest him sufficiently to be classed with either extreme.

Brent finished his business, and Moran stood looking after him as he rode away.

"There goes a beast," he said. "He hasn't one decent, softening thought. When you look at that blizzard of a face it forces you to believe all those tales you hear of him."

"They're true," Harmon said. "I saw it once myself. I heard a horse scream and rode down." The ranger swore softly. "Brent was standing there mouthing the same words over and over again as if his own mad-dog fit had left his mind a blank. 'He struck at me,' he mumbled. 'He struck at me. A horse can't strike at me.' I rode right on past. I knew I'd kill him if I stopped."

"Flash spotted that streak in him the minute he came in," said Moran. "It's harder to fool an animal than a man."

The next morning Moran shot a rabbit, jerked the pelt from it while it was still warm and offered the meat to Flash.

This time he took it. From this small start Moran led him on until in a few days he would take anything he offered. It was the first con-

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cession of the wild blood to the tame—the turning of the dog in in him to Moran. In order to keep the proper balance he presented his wolf side to all other men and would touch not a single bite of food that came from any other than Moran.

His education along all lines progressed. When Moran took long walks he led Flash with a light chain. Later he unsnapped it from the collar and Flash found himself free to wander around inside the cabin. Moran next tried him in the yard with the chain trailing loose. Flash was glad of this new opportunity to trot around, but it did not occur to him to leave. By gradual degrees Moran removed first the chain and then the collar, but Flash followed him as closely as before. His world revolved around Moran. His greatest moments were those that Moran spent in scratching his neck and ears and rolling him around in rough play. But he would let no other man touch him, moving stiffly away at the first sign of this intent.

Brent stopped at the cabin at infrequent intervals and on these occasions the hate flared to a white heat in Flash. From association he had lost his early unreasoning fear of men but had learned also that he must not turn his teeth against

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them. He showed his dislike of Brent by watching him suspiciously and bristling his shoulder hair at every move. Never once did he make a sound, and this silent, deadly hatred inspired a like feeling in the man.

Twice when Moran was gone, Brent kicked Flash the length of his chain when the pup bristled at his approach.

Eventually Moran let Flash follow him on long trips without his chain, trusting that his hold was greater than the call of the free hills to the pup. Flash joyously chased the long-eared jack rabbits of the foothills but always returned to Moran.

Flash had grown, and his was the wolf growth which lacks the awkwardness seen in growing dogs. In mid-August he attained his sixth month and with it the requisite speed to catch his first jack. Thereafter he hunted them tirelessly, killing for pleasure long after his hunger was appeased. The swift chase, growing in excitement and terminating in the wild thrill of joy with the final snap of jaws upon his prey, matched his supreme moments with Moran and thus both extremes in him were satisfied.

Horses no longer feared him and fled from the

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dread wolf scent as at first. From living long in the cabin and around the fire at cooking time he had come to smell much as a dog who leads that life and the horses accepted him as such. Moran then started breaking him to handle stock. He knew that in trying to teach this art to Flash it meant a two to one chance of having to sacrifice a horse.

Flash would take one of three holds upon the first animal that Moran worked him on. He might have inherited the strike of a natural born heeler from his renegade grandmother and go to the heel of a horse or cow. Otherwise he would lunge for a wolf hold, and a wolf strikes either for the flank, ripping a gash through which the heavy paunch drops out, or slashes each hind leg above the hock turn, severing the hamstrings of his prey.

Even a lobo, powerful as he is, never strikes for a throat hold until after his meat is down, knowing that even as he tore the life from a plunging steer the battering hoofs would strike him down or the crazed beast would kneel and crush his life out with its own.

Moran gathered a bunch of a dozen horses and headed them toward Harmon's cabin. He motioned Flash after them.

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"Run 'em in, Flash," he said, repeating the motion and the words until Flash understood that Moran really meant that he was to chase those horses. Always he had wanted to leap after every animal he saw but he had known that these were the property of man and that he must not molest them.

He trotted half way to the horses, turned and looked back questioningly at Moran. Again came the motion and the words, assuring him that this was right and he swept joyously down upon the bunch.

Moran's anxiety as to which of the three holds Flash would take had been reflected in his voice, and the doubt of what he was to do with the horses other than to chase them around was communicated to Flash.

He ran in on the hindmost horse and made a savage lunge for the flank but even as he struck, he withheld the slash, feeling that this hold might not be right.

He dropped back and ran behind the bunch. Moran's horse was running swiftly behind him, and once more Moran urged him on.

Flash singled out another horse and lunged for the hamstring—but the doubt aroused by the

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anxiety in Moran's voice still persisted and he withheld the snap of fangs that would have hopelessly crippled one hind leg. While he ran on close behind the bunch, a horse lashed out at him with wicked heels and even as he ducked the kick Flash knew that he must punish those offending feet. He darted in and nipped the heel.

He heard Moran's wild yell of encouragement. It dispelled all doubt—this was the thing to do.

He darted from horse to horse and his was the strike of the born heeler. Not once did he bite as the hind foot struck the ground, when a kick might have brained him, but timed each nip when the hind legs were outstretched to the fullest extent at the end of the stride. Before Moran could recall him he had scattered the flying horses all over the flat.

Moran patiently rounded them up each time Flash scattered them, and at last he understood that Moran wanted them to remain bunched and headed for home. From then on no straggler left the horse herd. If one started Flash was after him at a motion from Moran, and before he moved far he was headed back for the bunch.

After a few more lessons he knew what was

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expected of him and he began rapidly to learn all the details of the game.

In this as in all else the strange mixed blood cropped out. He loved this work of handling horses and performed it well. The dog in him thrilled at the trust Moran gave to him. But each time he darted to a heel, something called to him to lunge at the flank. Instead he struck like a stock dog but put behind it the forceful drive of the wolf.

Under his management the most confirmed bunch-quitter on the range would soon be the best of the lot. No horse or steer would chance those punishing teeth a second time.

Men soon began to speak of him as the best stock dog on the range.

CHAPTER III

NATURALISTS have made only incidental mention of the rare swift-fox that inhabits a limited area of the badlands and cedar breaks along the east slope of the Rockies.

Moran had searched long for a den of these little fellows, scarcely larger than a squirrel but an exact duplicate in miniature of the coyote.

The fur markets listed them as kit-fox but locally all men called them swifts. Aside from the fact that each year a few were caught in coyote traps or with strychnine bait, little was known of them.

To better study them, Moran shifted his base camp the following spring, moving his outfit into a log cabin used by the Bar T ranch for a winter line camp.

On his first day at the cabin Flash had jumped a pair of these tiny swifts in a near-by gulch. Several times since Moran had seen one running like a vivid yellow streak, and he knew the den was somewhere close at hand.

The year-old wolf could not resist the call to

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match his tremendous speed against that of these pigmy cousins each time he sighted them. This was no part of Moran's plan, and Flash, to his everlasting disgust, spent much of his time chained to a staple in the cabin wall.

Morning and evening Moran lay concealed on some commanding ridge, sweeping the country with his powerful glasses as he tried to determine the locality where the swift family had their home.

Riders from the Bar T ranch often dropped by, sometimes stopping to see Moran or lolling sideways in their saddles to exchange a few words before riding on. Those who came to the cabin when Moran was gone always spoke in a friendly tone to Flash but made no move to touch him. It was known to them that this great wolf dog with the bright yellow eyes would allow no hand to touch him but Moran's.

Long before they came in sight the thudding hoofs and creak of the saddle leather informed Flash of their approach. Then the wind announced their identity to his quivering nose.

Thus it happened that on the morning Brent rode to the cabin Flash was standing tense and rigid, his shoulder hair bristling, even before Brent turned the corner of the corral.

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As the man dropped from his horse and strode to the door, Flash moved only his eyes as they followed Brent.

Finding that Moran had gone, Brent started back to his horse. In his hand he carried a heavy blacksnake stock whip of plaited rawhide, and as he passed Flash he flipped it carelessly at the wolf. Flash snapped at it and the pop-lash drew the blood from his lip.

Without a sound he launched himself straight for Brent. His splendid body was three feet in the air when he struck the end of the chain and was jerked flat by his own force. His fangs had gleamed within a foot of the man's face before he was snatched back, and for one brief instant Brent had seen death staring him in the face.

The sudden, numbing shock from this unexpected move was followed instantly by a blind rage and he swung the whip again and again. The very intensity of his desire to hurt defeated its own purpose as he lashed out in a frenzy of harmless blows, swinging the pliable whip as he would a club, when the deathly sting of the blacksnake whip is carried only in the back-snap of the popper.

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Brent's gust of reason-shaking hatred cooled into definite purpose and he stepped back.

"You yellow-eyed devil! I'll start you for hell in slivers the size of a horse hair," he said.

From long and gloating practice, Brent knew himself a master of what he was about to do.

He sent the long lash curving toward Flash, and with the sudden backward twist of his wrist the pop-lash hissed sharply, then cracked like a rifle as the bare tip reached through the hair and drew blood from the chained wolf dog.

His only answer to the deadly hurt was to spring full length of his chain at Brent.

The man settled to his work. Each report of the whip wrung agony from Flash and brought a thrill of joy to Brent.

With the pride of an expert the man chose a fresh spot for each bite of the whip. Once it would strike blood from the knee joint of the hind leg where the hair was short; next pluck a patch of skin the size of a dime from the tender flank.

Burning agony wrecked Flash's frame; hot tongues of flame shot through him with every tortured pulse of blood in his veins. His senses were beginning to dull under the ordeal and at last the lash cut a half inch gash at the corner of

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one eye and the flow of blood partially obscured his sight.

Brent craved audible evidence of pain. With the same lash he had often worked on the tough hide of a steer until the crazed animal bawled. But the glazing yellow eyes of the wolf dog faced him with as deadly a hatred as before, and he surged against the chain which held him back from Brent.

"You big gray devil, I'll make you talk," said Brent. "I'll drag a yelp out of you." And he started in again.

Moran came over a ridge of two hundred yards behind the cabin and saw Brent's big blue roan standing in the yard. As he looked, the horse jerked his head and sidled a half step farther from the house. Again and again he repeated this strange move, and Moran stopped to listen. He heard a faint hiss followed by a sharp report. Once more the horse jerked his head and side-stepped. Then came the rattle of a chain and a dull thud, such as a roped steer makes when he strikes the ground. Moran started running for the house.

"Sing for me," Brent was mumbling. "Sing for me. I'll make you sing."

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A rough hand seized his collar, and he was snatched violently back, dropping the whip and reaching for his gun as he fell.

It flashed forth as he struck the ground, and Moran's boot struck square across his knuckles. The gun sailed twenty feet away, and Moran ground the hand into the gravel with his heel.

Brent wrapped his arms about the other's knees, shifted one hand to the belt and literally climbed up Moran against the rain of solid blows which rocked his head. He lurched to his feet with his long arms locked around Moran. As they swayed, Moran drew up one knee and braced it against Brent's chest in an effort to break the hold. The two fell together and rolled into a deadlock on the ground.

It was a silent, savage fight. Each man saved his breath and spoke no word. There was no sound but the shuffle of heaving bodies on the ground, the labored breathing of the two men and the repeated, heavy slam as the great wolf dog drove straight to the end of his chain.

Each man fought for a hold that would pin the other helpless to the ground. Moran writhed on top and freed one hand, driving it full into Brent's upturned face.

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Then Brent got his hold. With his right arm clamped around the small of Moran's back he squeezed down on it with a grip of death while his left arm was doubled under the other's chin. Slowly, like opening a pair of shears, he lifted the left forearm, forcing Moran's head up and back to snap the neck.

Moran could not break the hold. The veins purpled at his temples as he strained neck and shoulder muscles to resist the terrible pressure that was cutting off his wind. Specks danced before his eyes, and a nasty rattle sounded in his throat. Six times while the lock held he heard the wicked smash of the wolf against his chain.

His weight shifted to one side. The two men turned as one until they rested on their sides, but the grip still held. Brent arched his back for the final heave that would snap the neck, but instead his arms flew wide apart and Moran felt the blessed air rush back to his lungs.

The slight arching of his back had edged Brent just one bare inch within the limits of the chain, and Flash instantly struck just one inch deep and slashed the full length of his hip.

The two rose to their knees, and Moran bored his fist full against Brent's mouth to drive him

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back. Brent did not strike but groped toward him, trying to regain his hold, and they rolled together in another lock.

Brent used his head and butted Moran in the face. It was a fast pace and was telling upon both men; the strain of heaving muscles knotted the cords of neck and face. Their breath sounded in spasmodic gasps.

Fear began to assault Brent from within.

The regular, deady slam of the chain was beginning to shake his nerve. If the wolf would only make a sound! Only growl or rage aloud—anything but this silent, murderous concentration upon one point—to break that chain.

Moran found his chance to writhe on top and force Brent down on his face, stretching him full length, toe locking toe, and hands pinioned to his sides, with his forehead pressed down upon Brent's head, jamming his face in the ground.

Both men heard a screech, such as a rusty nail makes when drawn from a board, and a shape hurtled above them, propelled by the driving force behind its own release. The staple had given away from the wall.

A dog, in trying to punish Brent, would have fallen in a fighting frenzy upon both men, but

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Flash would not touch Moran — and Moran was on top.

As he lit sprawling and darted back, one waving foot was all Flash saw of Brent and there was a choked grunt of pain as his long fangs sank through leather and flesh and reached the bones of the foot.

The wolf leaped for the sound of the hated voice.

Moran felt a hot breath fan his cheek, and something pressed against his hair as Flash pushed under him and stretched his long jaws as far down each side of Brent's head as he could reach.

There was a sudden scream of mortal agony and fear as he closed the jaws, and the savage teeth cut through Brent's scalp and grated along his skull.

As Flash reached under a second time, Moran fastened both hands in his heavy collar.

"Run, Brent!" he gasped. "Run or he'll kill you sure!"

Brent scrambled away on hands and knees with Flash after him, dragging Moran, and twice more his teeth slashed Brent's legs before he could rise. Then he gained his feet and made a staggering

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run for his horse, with Flash lunging for him and jerking Moran along.

The loss of blood, and the long fight to break the chain had weakened Flash by half, or Moran could not have stayed with him for a single jump. The wolf dragged him past a hitch-post in the yard, and with his right hand gripped in the collar Moran reached out his left, and made two quick turns of the chain and snubbed him to the post.

The horse flinched away from the smell of blood, but Brent seized the reins and swung to the saddle. He wheeled to run, but pulled up and stopped when he saw that Moran had snubbed the wolf.

"That slobbering fiend damn near scalped me," he raged. "I'll kill him for that, Moran."

Moran waved his arm down the gulch.

"Get started, Brent, before I change my mind and turn him loose on you," he said. "And don't come back."

After the two had watched Brent out of sight, Moran took the wolf's great head between his hands.

"I'm half-way sorry I held you back," he said. "Next time you can have him, Flash."

CHAPTER IV

FOR two weeks Flash had seen no human being but Moran.

It was late in June, and even in the high passes the snow drifts had melted down until Moran could put his horses across from one valley to the next all over the Land of Many Rivers. Up in this high country the drifts never entirely disappear.

All through the summer, tiny streams trickled from the foot of each miniature glacier that lingered in some sheltered spot, and defied the sun to blot out its last few ragged patches before the early fall snows once more began to build it up.

These were great days for Flash.

He had known the stunted cedars of the badlands, the cottonwoods along the stream beds in the foothills, and the willow thickets that marked each sidehill spring, but this was his first trip into the heavily timbered hills themselves.

Now they wandered through solid forests for

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miles on unending miles; the slopes dense with spruce growth and valleys of stately lodge-pole pines, broken only by the open parks and meadows along the streams or by the bald, windswept ridges that reared their rocky crests above the trees.

The world of men was far behind them, and Flash had Moran to himself.

Moran spoke to him as he would have spoken to another man, and found a sufficient sense of companionship from the presence of the dog. Often he told him that he was the best stock dog in the world, and while Flash could not understand the words he knew from the inflection that his master spoke in praise.

It was merited praise, for Flash solved the one problem that is always uppermost in the mind of every lonely Rambler in the hills — the possible loss of his horses.

The love and understanding between Moran and his horses far surpassed that between most men and their saddle stock, but Moran was also a realist and he endowed no animal with legendary qualities it did not possess.

He knew that when in a strange country a range-bred horse will inevitably make use of every

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opportunity to break for home—a gelding for the spot where he was born, and a mare straight for the range where her first colt was foaled. The fact that he always knew where to find them later had proven small solace upon the several occasions in the past when they had eluded his every precaution and left him on foot in the hills.

But now no worry or listening for a distant horse bell broke his rest at night. Flash knew that Moran wanted the horses kept close at hand, and he kept them there.

His nose and ears told him things which his master could not know, and often at night he raised his head and nosed the air or inclined his ear to catch some sound, then slipped silently away from the sleeping Moran. In the morning the horses were always grazing near.

They saw many animals that Flash had never seen before. Doves of cow elk in the valleys and bunches of blacktail does and fawns along the streams, while higher up in the rim-rocked pockets near timberline they met the lords of the same species with their antlers in the velvet. Bighorn rams peered down at them from ledges of the cliffs and their ewes and lambs grazed on the broad grassy meadows above the timberline.

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Moran told Flash why it was that these animals are seldom seen in pairs and how, among all the animals of the wild, the wolf and his cousins are the only true lovers of the lot; that the males of wolf, fox and coyote are the only ones that help raise their own young and rustle food for the female and the pups.

Moran knew that fatherhood rests lightly on the antlered tribes and that the bull elk or black-tail buck that remains with the herd, and protects his wives and offspring, is the hero of legend, not the real animal of the hills whose wives know him only during the mating moon; that the males of the wandering cat tribes in common with most of the furry kinds are even prone to kill their own offspring if they meet before the kits are grown.

Moran told all this to Flash, and he listened in dignified silence, drinking in each word without understanding even one. But in his own right Flash already knew these things—and many more which Moran, for all his constant research, would never know.

As if to make up for the marital shortcomings of other beasts the wolf lavishes the utmost care upon his mate and pups.

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Flash combined the love of wolf for mate and the love of dog for man into one of single hearted devotion to Moran. But even this binding tie did not still the warring cross currents of mixed ancestral blood.

Here, away from the cabin and the works of man, the night sounds seemed to take on a new meaning, and as Moran slept Flash lay night after night and listened to their call.

The note of the big gray owls, and the quavering howl of the coyotes; the yelping, turkey-like bark of the cow elk, and the weird squall of the foxes that traveled the high bald ridges; all these in some way seemed of a world which he had known and to which he should belong.

Whispering voices called him and urged him to come. But with it all there was something lacking in the nights — some note for which he seemed to listen but never heard. At times he felt that if he could but raise his own voice, this unknown note for which he longed must surely answer it.

One night when the ache grew strong he slipped away and ran for miles. His was not the scrambling gait of the dog but the swift, gliding movement of the wolf. As he ran he learned a new

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game that seemed in some way associated with the missing sound. After that he played it often when Moran lay asleep in his blankets.

As Flash trotted under the trees it seemed that phantom shapes were trotting with him and that he heard the soft patter of running feet. Some larger shape fled before them and he increased the pace, pressing after it with all his flying speed. He thrilled to the rush of air past his ears as his powerful muscles drove him on. His sole purpose in life was to be first of all the dim forms that traveled with him to reach the fleeing shape ahead.

It always eluded him until one night when he burst from among the trees and sped down a long, grassy park.

The pattering feet of the shades beside him were as soft and unreal as before but the shadow out ahead seemed suddenly to take on more concrete form.

He gained on it. The sound of flying hoofbeats on the grass, and the warm elk scent in the air made the game more real. With a last tremendous spurt he closed with it, and while still in the throes of his exalted dream he lunged and struck.

His teeth cut through real flesh and blood, and

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he was thrown end over end on the grass. The dream was gone but he struck again and the shape fell, both ham-strings cleanly cut. Then he drove at the throat. In less than a minute from the first lunge he was tearing at the warm, quivering meat of a dead cow elk. A dream come true in part—he had led a phantom wolf pack to his first real kill.

Often at night Moran noticed his keen interest in every far off note, and he appeared to nose the air and tilt his ear as if to catch some scent or sound, the meaning of which was not clear to him.

Each morning they packed up and wandered on, making a new camp each night.

They moved up the Buffalo Fork of the Snake until one evening they stood in Two Ocean Pass. Moran could almost have tossed a chip from either hand, consigning each one to a different sea. They were in the very center of the Land of Many Rivers—the wonder spot of the world—and for fifty miles around there was no evidence of man.

Fifty miles to the south the nearest wagon road skirted the base of the Teton range: a like distance east of them the Sunlight Gap broke through the Rainbow Peaks to the scattered ranches of the Greybull; north they could see the Rampart Pass

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in a saddle of the Wapiti Mountains, leading down Seclusion Creek to the government trail on the Shoshone, the one dim tentacle of civilization stretching forth into the hills; fifty miles to the west, across Lake Yellowstone, was the Thumb Station on the Park road. Between, there was not even a path except the network of game trails worn by countless generations of elk and deer.

Moran prodded a white skull from the grass with his toe.

"Here's one of the lost herd, Flash," he said. "This is where they died. Their skulls are scattered through here for a hundred miles. And you come straight down from the buffalo grays that followed them into the hills."

"You're nearly the last of your line. I doubt if you ever hear that note you listen for every night. I'm afraid the rest of your breed have followed the lost herd, Flash, and have gone this route," and he tapped the skull with his toe.

The whole country here was high, yet the hills were not nearly so lofty as the distant ranges that ringed them in. The bald ridges that branched off from the divide on which they stood were barely above timberline.

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That night as Moran slept, the breezes bore faint vibrations of sound and whiffs of scent that spoke of man to Flash.

He grew restless and uneasy and explored various long ridges, trying to find the source of these. Near morning a sound floated up to him as he trotted along a crest and he moved to the edge and looked down. The rimrocks fell sheer away from his feet. From below the scent came strong. He could catch no individual odor, only the combined scent of a number of men and someway, while there was not a single trace of the one scent he hated worst of all, the whole air of the place was suggestive of Brent and he flattened his ears at the thought. These men must be camped in the gulch below.

He trotted back to Moran and looked him over carefully to see that all was right, then found a break and dropped down to the floor of the canyon that ran along the base of that particular ridge. It was a jungle of heavy spruce but he found no trace of the camp he sought.

He stopped often and nosed the wind but it brought no scent. Dawn was beginning to gray off toward the Sunlight Gap when he finally caught a sound, but the sound came from above.

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They were on the ridge after all it seemed. He sat down and peered up through the trees at the sheer face of the towering cliff. The drone of voices came plainer now and there was an undertone to it all that he liked as little as he had the scent. But he had no time to figure it out—Moran would be up and around by now—so he hurried back.

Moran noticed that Flash was uneasy. All through the meal and while Moran saddled and packed up, Flash made repeated trips to the break and looked first down the gulch, then far out along the ridge.

“What’s the matter, boy?” Moran asked. “Is there a grizzly around somewhere? You’ve seen enough of them by now to know they don’t mean any harm to us.”

Not until they were half a dozen miles away did the wolf’s uneasiness subside. Even then he continued to turn on every commanding point and look back toward their former camp.

Moran finally decided that Flash had pulled down an elk or deer during the night, and that a grizzly had happened along and driven him from the kill.

But Moran was wrong.

CHAPTER V

THE Shoshones who had once peopled the Land of Many Rivers had called this season the Short Blue Moon.

The lordly blacktail bucks were preparing to renew acquaintance with their wives and must beautify themselves accordingly. They had discarded the long, faded hair of last year's coat, and the new one had not yet deepened into the dark gray of early winter.

For one brief span the short new hair was a glistening blue-gray.

Moran pointed across a gulch to where a big buck grazed placidly in a little open park.

"The deer are in the short blue," he said. "This is the best season of all the year, Flash. It'll soon be love making time for the antlered tribes. Wait until all the old bull elk tune up. We've stayed too long now but it's worth waiting another week to hear. You've never heard one of those old boys blow off—but you will."

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Flash raised his head and listened to a distant call. There is no animal sound in the world so distinctive—so impossible to describe or imitate—as the clear, silvery bugle of a bull elk.

“There!” Moran exclaimed. “What do you think of that? He’s a small one, a five pointer, and he’s rushing the season some. He’ll prance around the cows now because he knows the old herd bulls will come down out of their bachelor nooks in a few days and drive him off.”

Each day the pealing bugles of the younger bulls grew more insistent. Then there sounded the fuller, rounder notes of the old herd bulls, the big six pointers. Every band of cows now had a tyrannical male who herded them jealously and bugled his defiance to the less fortunate bulls who tried to cut out a few stragglers from his harem.

The blacktail bucks, casual free lovers of the hills, made no pretense of holding their own bunch of does but kept ever on the move, philandering from one love to the next.

Rams with great, curling horns traveled with every bunch of ewes in the rough peaks above the timberline.

One night when the running season was in full swing, Flash lay listening to the bugling of dis-

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tant bulls when his nose detected the first sign of the proximity of man since the night at Two Ocean Pass, almost three months before.

Twice he trotted a short way into the wind, then came back to Moran.

"You old rascal," said Moran. "You're planning a midnight raid. After I'm asleep you'll slip away and interrupt the courting of some old bull. You're a queer mixture, Flash, but you're more wolf than dog after all."

Two hours later Flash stood in a little valley across a ridge from where Moran was camped. The wind was heavy with the odor of a dead camp fire and living men. He followed it up the valley until he knew that they were less than a hundred yards away.

He shifted back and forth across the wind to catch each different angle from the camp. There was something that was unlike any thing he had chanced across before, and it aroused an intense desire to investigate.

Little by little, shifting silently from tree to tree, he approached to within twenty feet of three sleeping figures. They lay in a little open park with the moonlight streaming down on them.

Flash did not know that when men slept their

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minds were not at work, but he did know that at such times their scent was negative. He could identify those he had met before but that was all—he could not classify them with nose and ear as when they thought and spoke.

One of these he knew was Dad Kinney whom he had often met with Moran. The other was a stranger to him, but neither of them interested him in the least.

The third was of a kind he had never seen. He knew unerringly that this was the female of the species man—the first woman he had known. She radiated bubbling vitality and health and a wholesome, friendly interest in all things—and from this Flash knew that she was not asleep.

She was lying awake, enjoying the silvery bugle chorus of challenging bulls that came from far and near—in love with the spell of the Short Blue Moon.

Flash was irresistibly drawn to her. He wanted to creep close and investigate this strange being. He knew she was watching him and he stepped from under the trees into the moonlit open space and stopped.

Then the girl spoke.

“Come here,” she said.

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At the sound of her voice the two men beyond her opened their eyes instantly but made no move. Flash knew they were awake.

"Come here," she said again, and extended her hand.

Flash took one more step and for one brief instant his big bushy tail flipped aloft, then dropped again. Inch by inch he edged up to her, keeping a wary eye on the two silent spectators beyond. His nose barely touched the tips of the extended fingers.

The girl reached out still farther and stroked his head.

"Come on up here—don't be afraid of me—I won't hurt you," she coaxed.

He crept closer, thrilling to the soft touch of her hand. His nose brushed her cheek and pressed against the mass of brown hair, breathing deep of its fragrance; then he abruptly raised his head and peered across her at the two men as one of them spoke.

"That's the first time he ever let a soul touch him but Moran," Kinney said.

"You know him then," said the stranger.

"It's Flash," Kinney answered. "He belongs

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to Clark Moran. Did it make you nervous to watch a wolf crawl up to her that way?"

"No," said the other man. "A wolf wouldn't come that close to us in a thousand years. Then I saw him swing his brush up in the air when Betty spoke to him. A wolf never cocks his tail up in the air—and I knew he was a dog."

This stranger with the close-clipped gray beard and close-clipped accent of the east evidently knew the animals of the hills.

Their voices had a friendly ring and Flash lay flat beside the girl.

"Who is Moran?" she asked. "I'm going to buy his dog."

Kinney chuckled and shook his head.

"You can't," he said.

"But I want him," she insisted. "Surely he'll sell him at some price."

"Not him," said Kinney. "Moran seems to have enough money of his own to worry along. It don't mean as much to him as Flash. He wouldn't consider any sum."

Kinney gave them a brief history of the wolf.

"Moran's a queer one—and a good one too," he said. "He puts in his time visiting around

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after first one animal and the next—studying how they act and all. He even claims they talk among themselves in sounds and smells.”

“A naturalist,” said the girl.

“That’s him. He’s a naturalist sure enough. He came in through Sunlight Gap and hit this country near three months ago. No one’s seen him since. He’s camped around here close. But you can’t buy Flash, Betty. Moran keeps him for company when he’s out alone.”

“Then I won’t try to buy him,” the girl generously decided.

Kinney chuckled as he rolled over and prepared to resume his interrupted slumbers.

The two men slept but Flash lay motionless beside the girl. Her hand rested on his head and held him. Her regular breathing soon announced that she too was asleep.

Flash heard their horses moving around farther up the valley. He slipped away and went up to look them over. One horse was picketed and the rest were grazing near. He went back to the girl.

Twice during the night she half woke.

“Flash,” she said sleepily each time. “Flash, old fellow, are you still here?” And stretched out her hand to touch him.

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There was something in her voice when she spoke his name that brought a thrill which was only second to his love for Moran. He waited until almost dawn, hoping that she would wake again.

Then he grew nervous—Moran would soon be awake and waiting for him to bring the horses into camp.

Half an hour before the first streak of light showed in the east, he slipped away under the trees, stopped and looked back, then started for Moran. There was a crisp cool in the air. As he crossed the open places the tall grass was coated white with frost and bent stiffly under his feet.

He had never been away from Moran for so long a time and once free of the spell of the girl his desire to get back to him and see that all was well amounted to almost a panic and he covered the miles with all his speed.

He found Moran already up and lighting a fire.

"Where are the horses, Flash?" Moran greeted. "Go get 'em, boy. Go bring 'em in." He waved his arm toward a meadow below. "We're going to make an early start to-day. It's back to the flats for us, Flash. Do you want to go back?"

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Late in the afternoon they stopped on the crest of a mighty divide, and Moran turned for one last look at the country over which they had wandered alone for the last three months.

In a narrow valley below, a file of moving specks caught his eye and he focused his glasses on the spot. Two men were wrangling a string of a dozen packhorses along a game trail.

Two cream colored buckskins and a calico pinto in the outfit identified the string as Brent's.

Moran knew that the other man would be the same one Brent guided to this country for a hunting trip each fall.

"There's Brent, Flash," he said. "They're just coming in so it's just as well we're going out. You'd stumble across their camp some night and hell would be to pay. I wouldn't give two cents for Brent's chance to go on living if you found him curled up some place asleep."

"That man with him is a New York lawyer—Luther Nash. I'd like to have you sniff him over and hear his voice. I'm curious to know what your verdict would be on Nash."

Every fall Nash came for a two weeks' trip into the hills with Brent, and Moran had met him several years before. On one of Moran's trips

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to the east Nash had looked him up—and as far as Moran was concerned that once had been enough.

Moran's healthy outdoor sense of the fitness of things had revolted at this man's mode of life. Human weakness he could understand but not the ugly, perverted pleasures which Nash had reveled in. Even his oaths were not mere profanity but putrid slime.

"He showed me around one time, Flash," said Moran. "He's one hell of a fellow—that Nash. I like him the same way you like stale meat."

He swept his glasses over the country, searching the grassy slopes of the peaks in search of a bunch of mountain sheep. Another file of horses showed way off to the right above the timberline, heading for the Rampart Pass. Three people walked behind the pack animals, leading their horses up the steep divide.

Moran rested his elbows on a rock to steady them for a better view. He looked long before he finally swung to his horse and headed down the opposite slope.

"One of that outfit was a woman, Flash—a girl," he said after a while. "Now whatever do you suppose she was doing away off up in here?"

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Far below them they could see tiny green spots that broke the solid brown of the foothills; little cultivated fields of the squatters that were beginning to settle the range.

They made camp in a little side hill meadow.

"I wonder if she was young and pretty," Moran said as he sat smoking one last pipeful before going to sleep.

"The spell of the Short Blue Moon is working on me too, Flash," he went on. "After all, a man can live too much alone.

"All this we've been listening to—that's what it means. The bucks polishing their horns on the trees, and all those bugling bulls. That note you listen for every night and don't know what it is. The wolf season doesn't start for a few months yet—when it does come you'll know what all that means. It's the same way with us all, even men. Every living creature needs one thing to round out his life—a mate."

Moran slept, and Flash climbed back to the crest of the divide.

A light gleamed from a ridge above the valley where Brent's pack outfit had halted late in the afternoon. It swayed back and forth as if suspended in the air. Far off among the bald ridges

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near Two Ocean Pass Flash could see a tiny point of fire twinkling through the clear air. This too, made sweeps to the right and left.

Flash could not read the message, but he watched until the lights disappeared. From below him on one side sounded the wild, pealing bugle of an old bull elk, and the whistling snort of a blacktail buck; from the other came the occasional stroke of a horse bell. This reminded him of his trust.

He turned his back on the Land of Many Rivers and trotted down the opposite slope to Moran and the world of men.

CHAPTER VI

EVEN though he held himself frigidly aloof from all men Flash was a prime favorite at the Bar T ranch. He was a changed Flash; his former springy alertness had been replaced by a drooping, dispirited air of complete dejection. Moran had gone from his life—and life had lost its tang.

He could not know that Moran would either soon return or send for him; he only knew that he was gone, and the longing for him was like a sickness.

Flash was often missed for a time from the Bar T. Later they found that he had been several times to Harmon's cabin and had spent a few days at Dad Kinney's camp. Thereafter when he was absent they knew he was at one of the places which he associated with Moran.

His handling of stock was a marvel of intelligence but it was a mere mechanical following out of the tasks Moran had taught him for he now found no joy in the work.

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As he sat on a ridge a few hundred yards from the bunkhouse he distinctly heard some one call his name. He deliberately turned away and trotted off through the darkness. He had investigated every human habitation for miles around, searching vainly for some sign of Moran. Flash was losing hope, and with it his allegiance to the world of men. More and more now he listened to the night sounds that called him, and he spent much of his time alone in the hills.

He rambled aimlessly on until sometime near daylight, when he curled up on a ridge seventy miles from the Bar T range and slept. The air was crisp and cold. Except for the drifts in the gulches the light fall snows had disappeared from the foothills, but even this early the peaks were one solid glare of white. A stiff breeze rose with the sun and whipped his exposed position, and he started to seek a more sheltered spot.

Below him, a rider was gathering some cows from the rough sidehill breaks. As Flash watched, a steer turned and the rider wheeled his horse and plunged across the draw to head him.

Habit was strong in Flash and he dropped down the slope to head the steer. The instant he appeared, the rider jerked his horse back on his

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haunches and pulled his gun. Flash whirled and snapped at a hot stab of pain which seared across his rump as the report crashed in his ears. He fled and from behind him the sharp reports rang out in quick succession. spurts of gravel were tossed up about him and there were whining rushes of air close to his head.

Flash knew well the use of firearms. He had often seen Moran and others shoot and after each report there had been a jack rabbit flopping in his death throes or a dying antelope twitching on the ground. He knew that this man, for no reason whatever, had meant to kill him.

Half an hour later as he trotted across the flat there came the sharp crack that a high velocity rifle ball makes when it passes close to the ear. The distant report reached him as he whirled to run. Four hundred yards away a man leaned against the door of a sod house and emptied his gun at the gray form that was running with incredible speed across the flat.

Flash entered the mouth of a long valley. A horseman was plunging down the right hand slope to cut him off. He veered to the left, and as the furiously running horse pulled in behind him the rider's gun barked six times at the fleeing wolf.

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Flash could not know that to all men but those who knew him he was a wolf. He only knew that all men had turned their hands against him and sought his life.

The next man he saw he avoided, and when next he bedded down it was on the crest of a knoll that offered a clear view for miles.

When night came he traveled on, crossing a low range of mountains and descending into the rolling grasslands of the Wind River Valley. Hunger pressed him and he found no living thing but cows. The sense of distance from familiar scenes made the Bar T seem so far behind as to be part of another world. The fact that men had so recently turned against him was bitterly uppermost in his mind—and he was hungry.

Men sought his life. And for the first time he turned his teeth against an animal that belonged to men and singled out a steer. His first snap was half hearted and did not entirely sever the cords of the leg. The steer fled in a panic and the others, crazed by the smell of blood and this silent wolf shape that had appeared among them, crowded around him in a mad stampede. The one taste of warm blood and the clattering roar of hoofs as more scattered cows joined the frantic

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rush stimulated the wild blood in Flash and he lunged again, this time with all the powerful drive of a killing lobo behind his teeth.

The steer ran on, one hind leg giving under him. Then Flash struck the other leg and the steer went down. Even as he reached the ground a gray shape drove at his throat and slashed it open with savage fangs that cut in like knives.

Flash stood over his kill, listening to the roar of hoofs, and the crazed bawling of cows as the stampede gathered numbers and rolled on down the valley—and he was all wolf, a great gray beast of prey with the tame strain submerged deep beneath the wild.

He roamed the valley for a full week, sleeping by day and killing by night. Then the old longing for Moran reasserted itself and called him back to the Bar T range. He covered the hundred miles in a single night and approached the Bar T buildings cautiously just before dawn. There was a light in the bunkhouse; the boys were getting up.

Flash drew near, trying to catch the sound of Moran's voice in the murmur that came from the bunkhouse. A horrible shock of surprise flooded

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through him and he wheeled to run as a voice spoke seemingly out of the air and called his name. But the voice was friendly and old habit was strong. Flash stopped.

"Hello, Flash." From his perch on the windmill platform the early riser had seen the dim form slipping toward the house. "You old rascal, where have you been?"

Flash trotted off to the sheltering gloom of the corral and waited, undecided which course to pursue.

When the windmill fan started to turn, the bunkhouse door opened and the occupants emerged irregularly and started splashing face and hands with the icy water from the tank: Halfway down the ladder, the man above stopped to call out that Flash was back and from the group at the tank there arose an immediate chorus of friendly remarks and whistles for the dog.

Flash trotted near them, his muscles bunched for sudden flight at the first hostile move, but he was greeted as an old friend.

During the next week he reconstructed his ideas of man. Twice he was shot at when far from the ranch. He finally knew that he was safe

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when with the Bar T boys but that when off his own range men sought his life. He accommodated himself to this.

His two stronger strains were balanced by the coyote intelligence which, except for his eyes, was his sole inheritance from the little yellow prairie wolf grandfather.

The reason coyotes are caught in traps while wolves are not is because wolves avoid all man scent while a coyote believes in himself—he simply cannot resist the call to pit his intelligence against that of man. This curiosity costs many coyote lives, but his kind has survived in numbers on ranges where man has long since exterminated the wolves.

Flash began to lead a strange dual life which accorded well with his opposing strains of blood and in which this coyote brain stood him in good stead.

Stock dogs were scarce on the range. They did not long survive the poison baits which wolfers laid for coyotes. The Bar T men firmly believed Flash to be the best stock dog in the world. There was talk of taking him to the Frontier Day fair in the far off capitol and issuing a free-for-all

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challenge, backed by a thousand dollar purse, proclaiming him the wide open champion of the world. The Bar T owner had made Moran a standing offer of five hundred for the dog.

The stockmen of Wind River had posted a five hundred dollar reward for the scalp of the most savage lobo that had ever showed up on the range and who made periodical forays among their cows, killing more than the price on his head in a single week.

Thus each of the two extremes in Flash built up a reputation of its own, for the champion stock dog of the Greybull and the famous lobo killer of Wind River were the same.

His absences which were attributed to wandering around in search of Moran, were now spent in raiding. On these trips he was all wild. He bedded down with the wind at his back and a clear field of view in front. He feared men, not with blind, unreasoning terror but with a certain knowledge of their power for harm.

His coyote intelligence saved him from panicky flights in the open at the first whiff of man scent; instead he would flatten out and let them pass or watch his chance to slip away unseen. Then old

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habit would cry out for the companionship of man, and he would show up innocently at the Bar T ranch.

In the face of all his cleverness the net began to tighten around Flash after two months of this dual existence.

Dad Kinney shifted his camp to Wind River. Winter had crept down the mountains until it was one rough white mass clear down to the base of the hills. A full half of the time there was a tracking snow in the foothills and with a relay string of grain fed horses Kinney commenced his tireless hunt for the five hundred dollar wolf.

The wolfer knew well the one greatest weakness of his prey—that of gorging on warm meat and bedding down. A swift horse can often wear down an overfed wolf. It is established custom for any rider who sees such a race to throw himself into it and press the wolf with a fresh horse. More of the big gray killers of the open range country have been relayed to death on a new snow than by all other methods combined.

Day after day Kinney rode steadily on the trail, his sights set for a thousand yards. Flash learned to watch for the tiny speck that always appeared on his back track and gradually enlarged into a

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rider on his trail. It was only a question of time.

One morning in mid-December Kinney found a steer that had been killed not two hours before and he swung his horse into a steady trail trot on the big tracks in the fresh light snow.

Flash had bedded down on a slight rise of ground five miles from his kill. He had feasted heavily and was loath to leave his bed; not until the man was within two miles did he start.

When Kinney saw a dark speck trotting across the white snow two miles away he lifted his sorrel into a keen run and Flash started in on the first lap of the most terrible day of his life.

He felt stupid and sluggish, disinclined to travel fast or far but was forced to keep on and on. He ran in a straight-away toward the base of the Wind River hills, seventy miles away. The country was slightly rolling, almost flat. Often he increased his speed and drew away from the man behind. Always his gait slackened when the man was out of sight; then the wiry sorrel would appear over some ridge close behind, running swiftly on his trail. Each time he saw smoke or the low buildings of a ranch ahead he veered slightly to the right or left to miss the spot by at least a mile. After twenty miles as he passed a ranch he missed

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the man; it seemed that he had shaken off his hunter at last. He was deathly tired and slowed his pace. A few miles farther on he sprawled down in the snow on a little swell of ground. It seemed but a few short minutes until another horse loomed up on his back track.

Kinney had veered off to the ranch and changed mounts, throwing his saddle on the best horse in the corral. This time it was a rangy pinto that was running like a greyhound on his trail. So the desperate race kept up. Another score of miles and Flash had one more brief respite before a tough, smooth-running buckskin was after him.

His powerful muscles seemed to have lost their spring. His body was a leaden weight, almost too heavy for his legs. Only the one ever present knowledge that death lurked close behind forced him to keep ahead. He ran desperately, the mechanical driving of his muscles sending him on and on. From the first roll of the Wind River hills he looked back. A blocky, mountain-climbing bay loped away from the ranch house a mile below and buckled sturdily to his ascent of the hills.

With heaving sides, Flash started across the low divide for home. His breath sounded in leaky

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gasps; the yellow eyes were set and bloodshot and the savage jaws dripped froth which spattered back and dried on his breast and sides.

He kept ahead across the spur and down the other side. Just at dark Kinney quit the trail at the foot of the slope and stopped at a ranch house overnight. The dim suspicion which had haunted his mind all day as to the identity of the wolf now crystallized into a certainty. The size of the tracks; the fact that no man had ever heard this lobo howl; the sense of familiarity he had felt at each distant glimpse of the big gray shape that had fled before him all that day; the periodical raids dove-tailing with certain absences from home; all these pointed to one thing—Flash.

Five miles away Flash was stretched out in the snow. After raiding all night he had been ruthlessly harried for more than a hundred miles, starting when gorged with meat, a time when a wolf's endurance is at its lowest ebb.

Before daylight he started on, heading for the fancied safety of the Bar T.

Once there he kept his eye on the low ridge half a mile away over which he had come. No wind had sprung up to blot his tracks and late in the

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afternoon a horse topped the ridge and Kinney came jogging slowly along to the ranch on the trail of the Wind River wolf.

Flash scratched at the bunkhouse door and the lone occupant let him in. From the window he watched Kinney ride up, and as he entered Flash knew this was the man who had hounded him, and his hair bristled as he backed into a corner, his teeth bared savagely.

"Too bad, Flash," Kinney said. "I'm sorry it's got to be done."

Flash wanted to get out of the bunkhouse but was kept there until the rest of the men came in at dusk.

Kinney's proof was clear. These were hard men. If a friend turned rustler they regretted it—and led his horse under the fatal tree. Flash was a friend but justice must be done. The wolf dog listened to his trial. He could not understand the words but there was menace in the tones and the looks they cast at him. He knew it was connected with the race and a chill dread of death shook him.

The men drew lots from a hat.

"I'm sorry it fell to me," said one. "I'll call him outside and get it over with." He slowly

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pulled his gun and opened the door. "Come on, Flash, old fellow," he said.

With one mighty spring Flash cleared the open door and was off, a swift gray streak in the moonlight with a gun barking spitefully behind him.

"He's a smart one," said the man with the gun. "He knew! He almost made it at that, but I got him."

The men crowded out of the bunkhouse. Fifty yards along the trail Flash had left they found where he had fallen and there was blood in the snow.

"We'll find him to-morrow," Kinney said. "He can't travel far." But in the morning the trail was blotted under half a foot of new snow. When Moran notified them to ship the dog to him, word was sent back that Flash was dead.

CHAPTER VII

FLASH stood on a divide that overlooked the valley of the Little Bighorn. The Bar T and his past life were a week behind and several hundred miles to the south. The ragged tear across his shoulder had healed and troubled him not at all. He was outlawed by men but did not care. The one thing that most concerned him now was the insistent desire to hear the missing note for which he had always listened among the sounds of the night. This was the mating moon of the wolves but he did not know. He did know that the craving for that long sought note was a positive ache.

Then it came! From far down in the valley there sounded a call that set his veins on fire. He knew now what it was. The far off cry was that of a she wolf questing for a mate.

His whole body thrilled and tingled to the call. He had never used his voice yet he knew he must reply. He stood erect, his great head stretched forth but no sound came. The note drifted to

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him again and he threw all the force of his lungs into one convulsive effort to answer it. For miles and miles across the white hills every living creature held its breath and lonely ranchers far down the valley felt the chill tingle of the wolf shiver as the lobo cry reached their ears. Having found his voice he called again and this time it was charged with all the pent up longings of the past year.

It started with a deep bass note, carrying a full, smooth volume, then swept abruptly up into a clear, siren peal that rolled on and on until it was tossed and echoed among the rimrocks of the valley.

The dog lobo and the she wolf from the north circled the edge of the basin until at last they met and stood facing one another across fifty feet of moonlit snow. They approached cautiously. The she wolf was suspicious of his scent; it was wolf scent, no doubt of that, but there was a faint trace of the conglomerate odor that marks the domestic dog. She sniffed at him, then snapped and fled.

Her speed was no match for his and he ran easily at her side. When she whirled and slashed at him he eluded her teeth but did not offer to re-

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turn the snap. She soon found that he meant no harm to her. He was a massive, splendid figure of the true lobo; a mate to win the savage heart of any lovelorn she wolf. The urge of motherhood was warm within her. At last she stopped and they walked stiffly around, nosing each other until satisfied that all was well. She whined softly and he tried to answer. She seemed to understand the deep rumble which issued from his throat and he leaped about in a frenzy of delight and caressed her with his tongue.

She was a slim northern wolf with a dark strip along her back, blending into a soft silver gray on sides and flanks. Half an hour of courtship and the big lobo and the silver she wolf started for the valley in quest of meat.

Close under the rims they found where a lone steer had left his bed at the lobo call above and started out across the flats. Always before Flash had felt a furtive sense of wrong when on his raids but now with Silver running with him there was no thought save to kill—kill food for her. She whimpered eagerly and as he ran swiftly on the warm trail he was all wolf; the yellow eyes were streaked red with the lust to tear down his prey.

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They closed in on the steer and pulled him down. Silver raised her voice and gave the summons to the feast, the victorious cry of the wolf who has killed. Once more Flash tried out his voice and the lobo note rang out with hers. From far up the slope of the mountains to the north, as if an echo of their own call cast back to them, there came an answering cry. Then another. Several blended into one. The cry of the pack. They sounded closer and soon were answering from all along the face of the hills, assuring Flash and Silver that they were coming to the kill.

All up and down the valley, ranchers listened to this devils' chorus and planned for ruthless, bloody war as soon as the sun should shine. This was no new thing to them. Each winter when the snow fell heavy in the north there was at least one scattering band of wolves that were lured across the mountains, coming down to the easier killing of the open range.

Two gray shadows came sliding through the night and fell ravenously upon the steer; then two more. Presently there were fourteen wolves tearing at the warm meat. They were gaunt with the pinch of famine and not until the last bone was picked did they quit the feast. As they ate

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they snarled. Flash had come into his own at last. He imitated these sounds of his kinsfolk and added his snarl to theirs.

There were frequent slashes and snaps but no resulting fights. They had come in pairs, and each one, with true wolf constancy, was contented with his own. The season of selection had passed its height. Among them were grizzled veterans who bore the marks of recent conflict gained during the savage courting period that had raged all through the north. A little earlier and Flash would have been compelled to defend his right to mate with the silver she wolf.

Two hours before dawn the pack left off gnawing on the bones of the steer and trotted slowly away. As he traveled with them, the big lobo was four inches taller at the shoulder than the next, looming up by comparison as a giant of his kind. A wolf loses or picks up weight more rapidly than any other animal and as they moved across the snow they were no longer gaunt. Paunches sagged heavily, low to the ground. After famine they had gorged to repletion. Some of them had not touched food for three days when they came to the kill, yet they had appeared springy and tireless. Now, after feeding, instead

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of feeling new strength they were sluggish and lethargic. Ten miles from the steer they sought a knoll and bedded down, each pair choosing quarters of their own a few yards from the rest.

As Flash slept, his dreams dwelt upon a far off speck on his back track which developed into a horseman on his trail. The horse changed color continuously—first a sorrel and then a tireless buckskin was pressing him. When some nearby wolf clashed his teeth together in his sleep it was a pistol shot to Flash, and he was instantly on his feet, the new found snarl rumbling in his throat.

He nosed Silver into wakefulness and started off. It was agony for her to travel but she would not be left behind by this magnificent new mate of hers. She followed, and daylight found them resting far up the slope of the hills on a ledge that overlooked the valley.

Flash made out little specks which he knew to be horsemen riding at two mile intervals along the base of the slope. Out across the valley as far as his telescopic eyes could reach, the tiny specks were moving swiftly across the white snow. The reports of irregular, rapid fire shooting drifted up to him through the thin, clear air.

No ranchman on the Little Bighorn had need

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ask what his neighbor would do after listening to the chorus of the pack. At daylight the fastest horses stood saddled in front of every house and a relay string to which any rider was welcome was held in each corral. On every commanding knoll a rider lolled in the saddle, ready to dash down upon any hard pressed wolf which another should bring his way. From the dirt roof of every log cabin a man swept the country with powerful glasses for signs of an approaching race, his horse standing below with a rifle butt showing from the saddle scabbard.

These northern wolves were accustomed to the deep snow under the heavy trees where men traveled slowly on webs. They had not yet learned the lesson of the hard running horses and hard riding men of the open range—and most of them died as they learned.

That night when Flash and Silver made another kill there were but five of the pack who answered the call to feast.

Flash and Silver left them early and started on. The coyote brain warned the lobo of the danger of killing too often in one place. For almost two months they wandered on across several states, seldom killing in the same place twice.

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They followed down the narrow valley of the Cache La Poudre, bedding down each day far back in the hills.

Silver felt great confidence in the judgment of this mate of hers, yet there were certain habits of his which she could never learn to view complacently. Often at night he went close to the dwellings of men, even sniffing around their corrals and barns. Flash knew that men were nearly powerless in darkness and their eyes very weak at night but Silver only knew that the man scent meant death for wolves and she scrupulously avoided it. Then too, meat was meat to Silver but Flash killed only beef. His greatest pride had been the charge of handling Moran's horses and now he never would turn his teeth against a horse.

The cross currents were still at work in Flash. In the old days he had longed for the wild; now that he was wild he felt the call to be near man. When with Moran his dreams had been of the phantom shapes of the wolf pack. Now his dreams were all of men. Most often he was back in the Land of Many Rivers with Moran and always in his dreams his former master was associated with the girl—the wonderful creature he had seen but once.

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His soft whimpering aroused Silver. The she wolf could not know that her mate was living over again the delicious thrill of feeling a woman's soft hand upon his head. Silver's irritable nip always brought him back to the grim present and he was instantly awake, the cold yellow eyes sweeping the country for sign of his most bitter enemy, man.

The last week in February they came to the rough country at the head of Powder River. Silver grew less and less inclined to travel far and panted heavily when she ran. A chinook swept across the hills and this warm wind softened the frozen ground in spots that had blown free of snow. Silver chose a place where the earth was deep and started to excavate.

Flash watched her and when she tired and backed from the hole he took her place, tearing at the dirt with his great forepaws and pushing it out behind. He withdrew, shaking the dirt from his coat, and viewed this start of their home with pride.

Silver was very irritable these days, snapping at his approach. He turned his shoulder to her shrewish slashes and stalked stiffly out of reach. One night he came home to find a new scent in

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the den. Soft sniffings and squeaks issued from the depths of the hole. As he prepared to enter a savage snarl warned him off.

His curiosity was great and he wished to know more of this miracle but not until the pups were three weeks old did Silver let them come out for a romp on the sunny slope and Flash then saw them for the first time. Every night he had brought meat to the den and this was the result. He was very much excited as he nosed them over and Silver growled a warning not to be too rough when he rolled them around with his huge forepaw.

He was never allowed to occupy the den, which was just as well for in any event he could not have been induced to spend a day inside of it. He had seen Moran dig out the swift-fox den on Peace Creek. Once Harmon, the ranger, had found a hole and dropped into it a stick of something with a spluttering fuse attached. Shortly after they ran away there had sounded a roar as of several guns and Flash had watched Harmon dig out the crushed bodies of a coyote and her pups. So he spent the days alone in the hills and carried food at night.

The snow had melted from the foothills, leav-

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ing only the heavy drifts. As soon as the pups could follow, they were led forth at night and taught the arts of hunting and the dangers they must avoid. By the middle of April they could cover thirty miles in one night.

CHAPTER VIII

AN hour before daylight Flash slipped up to the den. It was cold and silent. At sunrise of the previous day a rider had passed close to the den. Silver had run true to she-wolf form and departed with the pups as soon as he was out of sight. The day had been hot and had diffused and evaporated the scent of her trail. The night frost had finished blotting it out.

Flash had circled for miles in the effort to pick up the scent but could find no trace and there was no answer to his calls.

Far to the north Silver and the sturdy pups were traveling steadily, headed for the she wolf's old hunting grounds from which the winter's famine had driven her. Just at daybreak she turned on the crest of a divide and gazed back along her trail, then loosed one last wail for the mate who never came and journeyed on to the north.

Flash too, was starting for his old home—the Bar T range. The third day he spent on the rim

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of the Wind River hills, awaiting nightfall before venturing down among the familiar scenes of the Greybull. At the upper end of the valley where it was narrowest he crossed to the foothills that flanked the other side and started down to the Bar T ranch.

When thirty miles from his destination, a point of light in a shallow foothill basin caught his eye. He drew near and partly circled the cabin, undecided whether to go on or not. He did not know this place. Moran had never taken him to Brent's. The lighted window attracted him and he trotted close. Several horses stood saddled in the yard.

Flash slipped to the door and sniffed along the crack. The tobacco smoke drowned the individual scent of each man within but the general air of the place and the murmur of voices was not to his liking. There was something vaguely and unpleasantly familiar about it all; and suddenly the hair rose along his spine as he recalled the night at Two Ocean Pass when he had searched among the bald ridges and heavy spruce for the phantom camp which he never found—the voices and smells that had reminded him of Brent.

He reared to his great height, rested his fore-

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paws on the window ledge and looked inside.

Three men sat there with Brent. A ragged scar lined the face of one from ear to chin and his stubbly red beard sprouted at eccentric angles along the line of it, lending a sinister twist to his face. Another was a dark, slender faced man with a hint of the Oriental in look and manner. The head of the third was wide and flat on top, slanting down abruptly to his pointed chin which gave a fox-like cast to his triangular countenance.

At a sudden move from the man with the scar Flash dropped from the window, and as his feet touched the ground the glass crashed above him and there was a jarring report from within. He ran, and behind him the muffled roar sounded twice again.

The man had leaped suddenly to his feet and at the look in his eyes the others dropped flat to the floor as he shot twice across them at the window. Brent swept the lantern from the table and another, from his prone position, fired through the door, then followed his shot and sprang outside. They scattered through the night and threw themselves flat upon the ground.

Twenty minutes later Brent's voice broke the silence.

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"What the hell started you off that way, Hanlin?" he demanded. "I've made a circle around and there's no one near."

"He was at the window," Hanlin said. "Ask Harte. Didn't Harte open on the door at the same time?"

"Mere presence of mind," a cool voice answered from the night. "I didn't see a soul. When you started shooting I took it for granted they had jumped us and cleared the door for a break outside. You're getting spooky, Red."

"I saw him, I tell you!" Hanlin snapped. "He was looking in at us."

"We can easy tell," said Harte. He strode to the window and sheltered a match with his hand while he studied the ground beneath it. The others peered down over his shoulder at the big prints in the dust.

"A stray dog," Harte said indifferently. "But he evidently looked like a marshal to Red."

"He makes a track as big as that beast Clark Moran had," said Brent. He traced a finger along a ridge in his scalp and swore. "I'd like to have got a chance at that big gray brute before the Bar T outfit killed him off."

"It's proof of a low order of mentality to let

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hate stew up the system until the fumes go to the head—especially anything so simple as hate for a dog. You had one fight over him with a man you couldn't afford to have on your trail; but then you always were more or less of a fool, Brent," Harte remarked dispassionately. "Let's go in."

The fourth man had not spoken a word. Once inside Red Hanlin laughed hoarsely.

"Look at Fox," he said.

Fox Jarrat's triangular face still twitched from the recent strain, and his little wide-set eyes glittered dangerously.

"Nerves," said Harte. "Without brains." He flipped a coin in the air, caught it deftly on the muzzle of his gun and balanced it with a steady hand.

"You're a cold blooded fiend for a fact," Brent grunted with grudging admiration.

"Warm blooded," Harte corrected, "but cold headed. Let's start. We can ride to the snow line and you bring the horses back."

They left the cabin, riding single file up a gulch that led away into the hills. Ten miles farther down the Greybull, Flash too, was heading for the hills.

The scent around the cabin had carried his mind

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back to the night at Two Ocean Pass. This in turn awakened a host of half forgotten memories of the Land of Many Rivers. His feet followed the trend of his mind, and he found himself climbing the first range of the mountains. At first he traveled without definite purpose, but the desire to revisit these places gradually shaped in his brain.

The spicy smell of balsam and silver spruce lured him on, and he came to the first straggling groups of limber pine. When he entered the heavy lodge-pole growth he encountered many drifts of snow. Half a mile of climbing and he struck the solid, hard-packed drifts of the dense spruce slopes. Then he angled along the face of the range toward a pass that led across it.

The jar of hoofs, creaking of saddles, and the drone of voices reached him from below, and he stopped to listen. It was not often that men rode at night. The horses breathed heavily as they bucked the drifts. Then all sounds ceased but the undertone of voices. When the horses started again they went back down the way they had come, and Flash heard the crunch of snow as three men climbed toward him on foot.

The spring sunshine had packed the snow until

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it held a man where the sharp hoofs and heavier weight of horses would break through. Flash waited until they were quite close before slipping on ahead.

He found the high country under a solid blanket of white. When he had been here with Moran there had been little evidence of man, but the hills had been teeming with all varieties of game. This condition was now reversed. He found no signs of game, but near Two Ocean Pass he crossed many trails that had been made by men.

Flash was not constituted to live happily alone. With Moran he had been content, and his life had been full when he traveled with Silver. Companionship he must have, either of his own kind or that of man.

Except for the big gray owls there were now no sounds to entertain him at night. The whole expanse of the hills seemed dead and frozen, and the hollow silence oppressed his spirit with a sense of world wide emptiness.

His memories were sooner dimmed than those of man. Every vivid instance, each great love and hate, had left its imprint and helped to shape his life, but these did not now reveal themselves in definite form. His love for Silver and Moran

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was no longer a distinct longing for each of them personally, but was manifested only in the absolute need of companionship in some form.

He therefore lingered near Two Ocean Pass. The camp was no longer a phantom camp but very real. He avoided these men by day but when any one of them chanced to be abroad in the hills at night, Flash flanked his trail, testing him with nose and ear, much as a criminologist would have studied his facial characteristics and the shape of his head.

Food was scarce, and Flash foraged a precarious living, a scant half portion of his usual rations. An occasional snow-shoe rabbit or blue grouse were the only living things he found. He grew thin and gaunt, his flanks pinched up in odd contrast to the deep chest, and his eyes were sunk in hollowed sockets.

The days were warm and by the second week in May there were green patches showing through the white in the broad open meadows of the Thoroughfare and the Yellowstone, the hardy new grass peeping through within a few hours after the melting down of the drifts. Flash prepared to leave this country of loneliness and little meat.

He left Two Ocean Pass and when he came to

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the confluence of the two rivers he followed up the ridge between them. When well up toward the head he looked far across to the main divide. There were many brown specks on the white slopes of the Rampart Pass. They were strung out in scattered bands as far as his eye could reach; they were coming his way, and Flash went to meet them. The famine was broken. A few more hours and the Land of Many Rivers would once more be the land of plenty. The elk herds which wintered in the low valleys of the Shoshone were coming back to the upland meadows of the Yellowstone, the summer paradise of the elk.

Flash met the first few leaders of this migration and pulled down a cow. Great droves streamed down into the bottoms and traveled on toward the Yellowstone. The valley was a veritable thoroughfare for migrating elk—from which fact comes its name.

For a week they came in scattered bands. The big herds that had wintered in Jackson's Hole were now coming from the south and mingling on the meadows with those from the Shoshone.

There was now food in abundance and in a few days Flash regained his usual fullness of form.

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The meadows and all exposed slopes were bare of snow. The deer had not yet come back. Less averse to the proximity of man, the blacktail bands descended clear to the foothills each spring when the first shoots of green grass sprouted at the roots of the sage. They would follow the grass line up into the hills and not for another month would they cross the divide and join the elk in the Yellowstone meadows. The mountain sheep go up to winter instead of down, grazing on the highest flat-tops of the peaks where the savage winds that follow each storm keep the bald ridges scoured free of snow. They now came down for their first nip of green grass and for the first time Flash saw these shy animals in the valleys. But all this was not enough.

He must have company and here, away from Two Ocean Pass, there were no men, and he could not even experience the vicarious sense of companionship he had drawn from following them at night. He left the green bottoms and traveled up through the spruce. When he came out above timberline he headed straight for the Rampart Pass.

He had not left the tree line two hundred yards

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behind until he crossed a track that angled back down into the timber.

The track was many hours old, and the scent was faint but the little that was left thrilled him with a strange excitement. He knew it for the woman scent.

He had now no clear cut recollection of the girl he had seen but once. His dreams of her were misty visions of some lovely being—like a child's dream of a fairy princess. Flash turned and followed along on her trail. Dusk was settling over the hills when he started and night shut down around him as he sped through the trees.

The trail led almost straight down, and he soon dropped to the lower edge of the snow line. The trail grew steadily warmer and at last he could smell smoke and see the glimmer of a camp fire through the trees. The girl was wrapped in a single blanket and sat leaning back against a tree. Flash circled twice around the fire, his pads making no sound on the pine-straw carpet under the trees. As silently as a shadow he drew near until he stood watching her from a distance of ten feet, breathing deeply each time the shifting breeze carried her scent to him.

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A sudden shift of wind drove the campfire smoke straight to him and he sneezed loudly twice. The girl started up in sheer terror at this sound just in time to see a gray shape disappear.

"Flash!" she called after him. "Flash! Come, Flash. Come here."

Flash halted. It had been long since he had heard any one speak his name. From centuries of being sheltered and protected by man, brutality and the lust to kill have been refined out of civilized woman to an extent that is easily apparent to the animal world, and Flash sensed that he had less to fear from the female of the human species than from the male.

Animal estimates of men are not formed by reasoning but through the composite impression they receive from eye, ear and nose; of this impression, the strongest factor is that of scent. Flash's eyes told him that this girl was the one he had met before. Her tones were stirringly familiar, yet his nose denied all this. She was as alluring as ever but instead of radiating the bubbling vitality and happiness he associated with her he now sensed an air of weariness and mental depression.

This had the effect of adding a fresh pang to

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his own loneliness and brought an unexpected whine to his throat. The girl, hearing it, knew he was still near and resumed her coaxing.

"I knew it must be you," she said. "Come, Flash. Come on up to me, Flash," she begged.

Ancestral strains waged grim conflict for the possession of his soul. The ancient heritage of dog to be the slave of man clashed with the wolf urge to be away from all this and back to the free hills. Lured on by the magic spell of a woman's voice the spirit of the dog crept forward, dragging with it the protesting flesh of the wolf. Inch by inch he neared her until at last she touched him.

At the touch of her fingers he was once more the dog, the wild in him subservient to the tame, and he fawned upon her, whining with eagerness.

The girl threw her arms about him and drew him close.

"Don't run off like you did that other time," she begged. "Stay with me, Flash. I couldn't live through another night alone. Stay with me, won't you, Flash?"

The note of appeal in her voice was more urgent than any other sound he had ever heard. His craving for companionship had found an answering need in the girl.

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He sensed her helplessness and some vague undertone of fear. The blood of many fighting forebears who had protected man rose to the surface in a feeling of responsibility for the safety of this girl—a desire to fight off that thing she feared.

Even now he was not assured that she was the woman he had met before. Not until a measure of her former buoyancy and high spirits returned with her joy at his presence was he sure. Then all three senses coördinated and definitely identified her as the same.

It was long before she slept, and Flash curled close beside her, his newly aroused protective instincts fully alert. He growled at each far off sound. When a cow elk sounded her yelping bark close at hand he rushed out and drove her off, returning proudly to the girl. He knew the elk was as harmless as a mouse, and all this was more to assure the girl that nothing could harm her now that he was with her.

“It won’t be so bad if you’ll stay with me, Flash,” she told him. “The loneliness won’t be so heavy that it hurts—like it did before I had you.”

Then she slept, and the wolf stood guard.

CHAPTER IX

THE girl rested on a rock beside the game trail. A tiny mountain stream rushed past a few feet away. The ground sloped steeply up on either side of the stream bed, matted with a tangled jungle of spruce that was tropical in its density. Great windfalls of down timber were piled about and many trees had not even found space in which to fall but rested at odd angles against living trunks. A thick carpet of moss covered earth and rocks and clung in frowsy shreds to the trees themselves.

“This seemed the most peaceful, lovely spot on earth when I was here before, Flash.” The girl shivered slightly as she glanced around. “It seems dark and gloomy now. I must have been mad to do it. I had to act at once—no time to think; and I was too dazed to think even if I had been granted time. There was no one to advise me, Flash, and I did the best I knew.”

“I’m glad we’re here at last, Flash.” She pointed up the slope. “It’s right up there, only a

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few minutes' climb. It's weakening to live for three days on cold lunch alone, especially on short rations of that. I had to travel light."

She slipped into the harness of the haversack in which she had packed her scanty store of food. The single blanket was rolled sling fashion, and she adjusted it across her shoulders and started to climb the slope.

For two hundred yards the ascent was steep. They crawled under and over log jams and threaded their way between close growing spruce trunks. Then Flash stopped in his tracks.

The ground had flattened into a tiny hollow at the base of the cliffs that towered abruptly up above the trees and defined the limits of the narrow gorge. In the center of this depression a cabin showed among the trees.

His nose had given him no warning of this. Always he knew of the presence of man before drawing near, yet he had come full upon this house; even now his nose told him that his eyes were wrong. There was not the slightest trace of man scent, and his ears caught no single vibration of sound. He had no previous experience to guide him in sizing up a house that had been so long untenanted as to have lost all taint of

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man. He shrank from approaching this unnatural place. But the girl pressed on, and he followed, every hair tingling and each nerve aquiver, his muscles bunched for sudden flight. He was filled with all the apprehensions of a boy who enters at night a house alleged to be haunted.

The girl lifted a heavy wooden latch and entered, but Flash refused to be coaxed inside. He circled the cabin, examining it minutely, shoving his nose hard against the logs and breathing explosively in his effort to solve this strange mystery of the house that held no scent.

It was built of heavy logs. A woodsman could have told at a glance that it had been erected long ago and that only primitive tools had been used in its construction. The door was built of spruce planks slabbed out with an axe and swung on hinges of elk hide nailed on with wooden pegs. The roof was of lodge-pole logs five inches through and covered with a foot of dirt.

Satisfied at last that there was no lurking menace about this strange place, Flash went in to the girl.

The fireplace was built of flat stones cemented with clay which had baked hard. The furniture was of rough hewed pine with legs of seasoned

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mountain ash driven in two-inch auger holes bored in the planks.

Inside Flash caught a very faint scent which was not that of man, but was in some vague way suggestive of man. This came from the flour, beans, rice and other food that was sealed in almost air tight cans to protect it from marauding pack rats.

The girl gathered branches and kindled a blaze in the fireplace. From an icy spring at the base of the cliff she carried a small pail of water and started to prepare a meal, cooking over the coals in the fireplace as if over a camp fire in the open.

Early dusk was settling in the depths of the canyon, and before eating she gathered a great pile of wood.

"That's the only light we'll have, Flash," she told him. "Firelight." She offered him a share of the meal but cooked food was not to his liking.

Since finding this lovely goddess the previous night Flash had not once been out of sight of her, but he now felt the pangs of hunger. He scratched at the door and whined, imploring the girl to let him out.

"Where's that man Moran who owns you, Flash?" she asked. "He must be here some-

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where or you wouldn't be here yourself. If I let you out you'll run away and go back to him. I want you to stay with me until Dad Kinney comes."

Flash scratched and whined again.

"He should be here now," she said. "He'll be here surely in a day or two. Then you can go. You'll stay with me until then, won't you, Flash?"

His whining and scratching became so insistent that at last she walked reluctantly to the door and opened it, leaving it ajar so he could reënter when he wished.

"Don't you desert me, Flash," she admonished him as he slipped out.

Flash dropped swiftly down the slope to the game trail and followed along it toward the mouth of the canyon, his nose uplifted to catch the first scent of meat. Half a mile below, the gorge widened into a narrow park beside the stream. A cow elk was feeding there. She caught a faint whiff of danger and stood rigid. The dread wolf scent suddenly reached her flaring nostrils and she fled—but not in time to escape the shadowy form that drove down upon her from the timber edge with lightning speed.

Back at the cabin the girl, alarmed at his long

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absence, was whistling and coaxing from the door in the hope that he would hear and come back to her, but there was no answering whine from the inky blackness under the trees and at last she decided that he had gone back to Moran.

Loneliness clutched her with an icy hand. She sat by the fire, knowing she would not sleep until dawn lifted the shadows from the canyon. The vast silence seemed freighted with unknown dangers. She almost prayed for some sound to break it. Then it came! And her supplication was instantly transformed into an earnest prayer that she might never hear that awful cry again.

She did not know what it was—except that it was made by some terrible beast of prey. It carried to her the same sensation as if she had scratched her finger-nails across the rough surface of a sand rock.

It sounded again, this time close at hand, filling the canyon with its volume. The cry was charged with all the aching misery and loneliness of the ages.

A sudden bump at the door startled her horribly. It was followed by an eager whine and a furious scratching. She sprang to the door and let Flash in, barring it shut once more the instant he crossed

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the sill. The flood of relief that surged through her was like a blessing. She put her arms around the dog.

"Poor Flash," she said. "Poor Flash. It chased you home. Did it nearly catch you, old boy?"

Flash did not seem troubled. On the contrary he sprawled in front of the fire and blinked contentedly up at her. His mood was mellow, for he had dined well, and his placid calm reassured the girl for she knew that if danger lurked just outside Flash would be bristling and alert.

She spread her blanket on the bunk and the rough boards felt soft. The last sight that her drowsy eyes rested upon before she slept the sleep of utter exhaustion was the peacefully dozing dog before the fire. It was well for her peace of mind that she did not suspect the truth; that the soul chilling cry had been his own imploring message to a long lost mate—the summons to come and feast upon the elk he had torn down with his savage teeth.

She slept on soundly until the dog's restless wanderings about the room aroused her to the light of day. Every muscle ached from the night on the hard bunk and her first task after breakfast

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was to carry spruce boughs to cover the boards.

Early in the afternoon she grew restless from inactivity and wandered down the game trail with Flash. Half a mile down she saw a dead elk in an open park. It had not been there when they came up the previous day. She could see the throat, gashed open by savage teeth, and knew that the elk had been killed by the beast whose cry had chilled her the night before.

She had no further taste for walking and hurried back to the house. Near evening she went to the spring for water. As she knelt to dip it Flash came creeping up from the opposite side. He moved with a stealthy crouch and there was a queer light in the yellow eyes. When within twenty feet he sprang straight towards her.

There was a sudden rushing whir of wings as a blue grouse took flight only to be struck down by a big paw. The wings drummed on the ground as Flash held the bird down after beheading it with one nip.

For a full ten seconds she could only gaze, fascinated by this wild picture, then jumped the spring and ran to him. Flash drew away, fearing he had offended her by this deed, but when

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she picked up the grouse and turned to him there was no reproach in her voice.

"Oh, Flash, it's a mean trick to steal your dinner," she said. "But I haven't any meat. Beans and rice and biscuits are so dry and I do love grouse. Will you share it with me, Flash?"

She carried the bird back to the cabin and dressed it, reserving only the white breast meat for herself and giving the rest to Flash. This female tyranny was no new thing to Flash. Often when with Silver he had killed some small game animal or bird only to have Silver deprive him of it.

The next day he foraged near the cabin and killed another grouse. As he pulled off the head and swallowed it a sudden thought struck him, and he did not tear at the bird. He had been the main support of his family during the first month after Silver's pups were born, carrying food to the den each night. This wonderful, shining Goddess who had adopted him had taken his last grouse for her own.

He took the grouse in his mouth and trotted back to the cabin. From past experience with Silver it seemed perfectly natural to kill and

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carry his prey to the den of this new companion.

When he dropped the grouse before the girl the light in her eyes and thrill of love in her voice repaid him a thousand times.

"Why, Flash! You old darling, you're trying to feed me, aren't you?" she cried. "You're the smartest dog that ever lived. I envy that Moran. I think I'll steal you, Flash."

That night Flash once more scratched to get out. Soon after she heard the dreadful cry of two nights before. She did not know that Flash had pulled down a small yearling elk, and that this was his joyful call for her to come and join him at the kill; for now, having killed food for her, his call was meant for her instead of the departed Silver.

Someway he knew that the girl would not come and after eating his fill he sliced deeply into a hind quarter to tear it off. When he had cut nearly to the bone he seized the foot and wrenched the leg over the back at right angles, throwing the hip socket out of joint.

He worked tirelessly, alternately cutting at the ligaments with his teeth, and wrenching on the foot with all his strength until it was severed from the rest.

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It weighed forty pounds but was no heavier load than he had frequently taken home to Silver and the pups. He lifted the heavy end and started for the cabin, the foot trailing on the ground beside him. Every few yards the weight tired his neck and he rested, sometimes taking the foot and dragging the heavy end.

The girl sat in the cabin, wondering at his long absence, when she heard a peculiar dragging sound punctuated with dull thumps as Flash wrestled the heavy quarter up the slope from the game trail, jerking it over and through the windfall jams.

She opened to his scratching and he backed in, pulling his offering across the sill.

The frayed end of the meat was black with dirt and spruce needles, and she drew back from the gruesome relic. She little suspected that Flash had killed this elk for her but naturally supposed he had found a portion of some dead animal and brought it in.

Her eyes were bright with tears as she patted and stroked his head.

"You're a good provider, Flash," she praised. "You don't want me to starve on beans and rice, do you, old boy? There was never in this world another dog like you."

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He revelled in the knowledge that his lovely mistress was pleased with him. At the same time he fully realized her distaste for this latest contribution. He knew that she relished some of the meat he had brought. Evidently she did not care for this kind. He was not critical of her tastes. She should have the kind she chose.

To his mind the animal world was divided into two classes as far as food purposes were concerned. The first and by far the most important included the meat of all large animals. The second included all small animals and birds. Of this division there were some few whose meat he did not like and which only starvation would have driven him to touch.

His mistress seemed to prefer meat that came from the smaller species. For the next two days he hunted tirelessly as he had for Silver and the pups. The den must be supplied with meat.

The girl was between laughter and tears at the growing assortment of game he brought to the cabin. Grouse, rabbits, woodchucks, a marten, a packrat and a whole family of little striped chipmunks were included in the list of small creatures whose lives were sacrificed through his love of her.

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His intelligence seemed so almost human that she hesitated to throw away these offerings lest he should take offense. When he was off on his hunts she dropped the undesirable specimens in deep cracks in the rock rubble that lay piled at the foot of the cliff.

In common with the majority of the human race she grossly underestimated animal powers of scent. Flash could scent a track made by a grouse two hours past. A rabbit has a half inch of hair on his feet yet Flash could follow the trail one left on hard frozen ground or even on glare ice as easily as a man sees its track in soft snow.

He had no need to go within thirty feet of the cliff to know accurately the exact spot in which each one had been dropped and just which one it was.

In the old days with Silver he himself had buried meat in a score of places near the den after the family had feasted to capacity. That these caches had never been re-opened mattered not at all. They were but reserves against the possible famine which never came.

It now seemed perfectly natural that the girl should bury her surplus meat. However he preferred dirt to rocks for this purpose and those

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of the victims he could reach he drew forth and carried to some spot of his own selection, interring them deep in the ground and pushing the soft dirt in place, tamping it firmly with his nose.

CHAPTER X

IN the spring a bear's pelt is in its prime when the fur of all others slips. His hair has grown thick and silky during the long winter sleep of hibernation. In this high country the bear does not leave his den until some time early in May but even this is too early for men to bring horses across the lofty passes that lead into it.

The girl knew that this fact was intimately related to Dad Kinney's plans. The previous fall he had left supplies at the cabin, planning to come in on foot, and collect many prime spring pelts to be packed out later when the passes were free of snow.

The days passed and Kinney failed to come.

The girl often talked of this to Flash.

"He should have been here long ago." Each day she repeated this to the dog. "Even if he had changed his plans he would come the instant my letter reached him, Flash. He's a little late, that's all. He'll be here to-morrow sure." And as each succeeding night fell without a sign of

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him she bravely promised the dog that the next day he would surely come.

Many doubts had arisen in her mind; the possible failure of her letter to reach him or the chance that some mishap had befallen the old man on his long trip across the treacherous snow combs of the peaks.

She still dreaded the cry that sounded every few nights in the canyon but restlessness at last forced her away from the cabin in the daytime. She took long tramps with Flash, climbing to some commanding point from which she could scan the surrounding country. She explored their own immediate vicinity but not until a week after her arrival at the cabin did she venture into new territory.

Then one afternoon she turned downstream. The canyon gradually widened until it shaded into another at right angles a mile below the cabin. Here the two streams forked into one. The girl climbed the high ridge on the opposite side and looked down upon a still wider valley.

A sudden storm swept down across the divide, and she sought shelter under an overhanging ledge.

The rain fell in torrents and the lightning flashed and cracked until it seemed to play along

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the rocks around her. Even Flash shrank from the terrific reports that hurt his sensitive ear drums and he burrowed his head into the folds of her walking skirt to protect them. She read this move as one of fear and it added to her own misgivings.

She felt no active fear of the lightning itself, but it shattered the control of overwrought nerves, and she buried her face in the dog's fur and sobbed wildly.

Flash was strangely affected by her grief. His own plastic nature, subject to all outside impressions, responded to her emotion and his soul was wrung with misery.

For a time he whimpered in sympathy, but this mood was soon superseded by a desire to comfort her. He drew away and regarded her anxiously, then pawed at the arms which shielded her face. He confronted this, his first experience with a woman in tears, as helplessly as most men face a similar situation.

He wanted to help her—to fight for her, but he could not fight this intangible enemy. He snarled savagely at imaginary foes, clashing his teeth in vicious snaps. If the girl had not soon quieted he would have dashed away in a frenzy to kill the first living thing he met.

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She regained her self-control and felt better for having relieved the nervous tension of the last few days. Flash's mood changed with hers. He too felt better.

The steady downpour slackened to a drizzle. Heavy gray clouds scudded past, obscuring the hills beyond and the valley below. This in turn changed swiftly to a dense fog—one of the milk-white mountain fogs in which even seasoned hill men hesitate to travel when in a strange country.

As the girl started for home the tree trunks loomed vaguely a few feet away. For all she could see of it it might have been a forest of stumps, the trunks-being invisible at a height of twenty feet.

Flash kept a pace before her, heading unerringly for home, and she followed him unconsciously, thinking that she chose the route herself.

The fog seemed to deepen and turn to purple instead of white. With a thrill of apprehension she realized that night was settling down over the hills. Before she reached the foot of the slope night had completed the swift transformation of the fog from milky white to oozy black which shut her in until she was unable to see two feet ahead.

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She groped forward, feeling her way. Her mind recoiled from the thought of the mile-long trip before her; every foot of it seemed fraught with perils. She remembered the one horrible night she had spent alone before Flash, like an answer to a prayer, had come to her on the second night. But then she had had a fire.

The wind was at their backs and not until they turned into the canyon, and started up the trail did Flash scent the menace ahead. His hair bristled and he turned back. But the girl was now sure of her ground and went on. Flash ran around in front of her, pushing to turn her aside. Not until he growled did she understand that there was danger lurking near.

The scent came plain and it was that of men. He could hear voices which the girl could not. A sudden thought assailed her. Flash must have detected the presence of the beast whose chilling cry she had often heard at night, but she hurried on. It was all she knew—to reach the refuge of the cabin at all costs.

Flash knew these scents and voices were those of some of the men who lived near Two Ocean Pass. To him they meant danger, even death, and as he followed her he bristled uneasily. That

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they meant danger to her he was not so sure. The ways of men with men had always baffled him. Men whom he trusted associated with those he knew to be dangerous in the extreme. Of the way of men with women he knew nothing at all. Perhaps these men that meant death to him would not harm his lovely mistress in the least.

The sounds which he heard so clearly did not reach the girl until she rounded a sudden bend in the canyon. She heard a man's laugh at the same instant that she saw the dim, wavering light of a fire gleaming through the fog. It appeared far off but was in reality only fifty feet. It meant but one thing to her. Kinney had come at last and some one else was with him.

In her relief at escaping the imaginary dangers of the night she hurried toward the very real one at the fire. The voices which covered the sound of her approach ceased suddenly as she appeared like a wraith out of the night. The group of half a dozen men around the fire stared incredulously. She too, was startled by the unexpected number and the absence of any familiar face. Kinney was not there.

"I'm lost," she said unsteadily. And she saw the hungry gleam leap into the eyes of one after

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another of the group. The firelight revealed faces that were hard and desperate.

These men had long denied the society of women. This appearance among them of a beautiful girl was like the smell of meat to starving beasts of prey. Not a man there but would have murdered his friend in order to own her for an hour.

From beyond the circle of light thrown by the fire a pair of yellow eyes watched this tableau. Flash sensed the menace to his Goddess, satisfied at last that she was unsafe among these men.

There was one man whose cold brain never failed him in an emergency.

"Where are your friends camped?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said, some inner voice prompting her to lie. "But somewhere close. I stayed under a rock—and out of the rain—not far from camp."

As her voice trailed away the man arose.

"I'll take you to them," he offered. "Just come with me."

"Leave it to Harte to think first," said another. He rose also. "I need exercise. I'll just go along with you."

Every last man leaped to his feet and leered

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at her. These men stood in awe of Harte but the beauty of the girl had inflamed them beyond caution. One man crowded closer to her.

As he moved, a silent shadow out in the fog moved with him, crouching low to the ground.

Harte's own blood pounded hotly from her nearness, and he knew that he could not control the lawless impulses of the others yet his brain functioned as coolly as before.

"Think it over," he advised them calmly. "You know what it will mean to have a fight with a party of hunters in here. In a week we'd have posses scouring this whole country."

"What of it? The Hole is twenty miles from here," said one, his eyes resting hungrily on the girl. "I'll have my taste of her before she goes."

He threw his arms around her and as he touched her a demon apparition with flashing eyes and fangs split the curtain of fog and drove straight for his throat. The teeth sank deep in his up-raised shoulder and the force of the drive bore him to the ground.

The blank wall of fog had swallowed both the dog and the fleeing girl before a man of them fully realized what had occurred. Before she had

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run twenty feet up the game trail they were after her. The pupils of their eyes, accustomed to the firelight, were not readily readjusted to the velvety black under the trees and they stumbled blindly.

When the foremost man stretched forth his hand to seize her something struck his extended arm with such force as to almost shear it off. He tripped and fell.

"The dog!" he screamed. "She's got a dog! Look out for him."

The next man fell over him and pulled his gun as he scrambled to his feet. He bounded ahead—and teeth with the grip of death clamped his leg from behind and a backward wrench slammed him down across a log. As he fell the red spurt of flame from his gun streaked the night and the man close behind cursed him for a fool for shooting almost point blank in his face.

Love transcended fear in Flash and, in his rage against these men who would harm the girl, he conquered his dread of guns. Always it was the man ahead, the one nearest to her, that felt his teeth. Human flesh could not endure against this silent, unseen fiend that slashed them and

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was gone. By common consent they had all turned back before the boldest had made fifty yards from the fire.

Retreat turned to rout for Flash followed them back, striking swiftly and leaping away from the shot he feared would follow. They shot blindly after him, endangering their own lives more than his. The last man he heeled as he would a cow and threw him.

When they burst into the circle of firelight they found Harte seated on a rock calmly smoking a cigarette.

"You're a bloody looking crew," he observed. "I'd like to own that dog."

One man extended his left hand, exhibiting a ragged flesh wound between thumb and forefinger.

"Some fool shot me," he growled. "It was either Seely or Cole." Both men profanely denied this charge. Harte laughed scornfully as he looked them over.

"Mistaken identity," he jeered. "Clay Siggins, shot by a pal who mistook him for a dog in the Battle of Hide and Seek." They scowled down at him.

"I was out with Jarrat and Hanlin this spring,"

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he went on. "Jarrat belongs in a coop for the homicidal insane and Hanlin's a thick skulled brute—but even so, when it comes to brains they have this layout cheated seven ways from the deuce."

"You wanted the girl yourself," said Cole. "You aimed to take her off somewhere alone."

"What of it?" Harte shrugged. "I wouldn't have made a mess of it. Tie up those rents in your hide and let's go."

"Go!" Cole exclaimed. "Go where?"

"Anywhere," said Harte. "Do you poor brainless apes expect to bed down here and sleep? There's a hunting party of the girl's friends camped around here close. They'll have guides. When they hear the girl's story they'll be looking for us and pick us off like rats as we lay asleep around the fire."

As always, his logic was convincing. They started to apply what rough first aid they could to the deepest cuts. As they moved, a beast with dripping jaws circled round and round the fire, waiting for one to venture out into the night.

When they left they started downstream in the opposite direction from the girl. Flash let them go and went back to her. He followed her warm

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trail for almost a mile before he found her stealing cautiously along the game trail.

She believed Flash was dead. She knew he had fought desperately to give her time. He had not come back to her after the shots. It was a stunning shock when, without a sound to warn her, a cold nose was thrust suddenly against her hand. The eager whine which followed told her it was Flash, alive and safe. She dropped to her knees and threw her arms about him, whispering her gratitude in broken sobs.

She started ahead once more, urged on by the thought that they still followed her. Flash turned from the trail, and whined for her to come and she felt her way through the down timber of the slope and entered the cabin.

As she closed the door behind her the rain began to fall, blotting out whatever trail she might have left. She lay on the bunk, straining to hear any sound of pursuit. She heard nothing but the rain and near morning she slept from sheer exhaustion.

When she opened her eyes it was light. Flash seemed calm and peaceful and she knew from this that the men could not be near. He scratched at the door and she let him out.

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Flash started at once for the scene of the fight. He circled cautiously, testing the wind. The rank odor of the drowned camp fire was all that reached him. The rain had washed out all but the faintest trace of human scent.

As he drew near he snarled and bristled his back roach at the smell of blood that haunted the wet spruce needles where he had slashed at them the night before.

He followed their cold trail for a mile, then left it, satisfied that they were far away, and started on a hunt for meat. An hour later he turned up at the cabin carrying a grouse.

The girl would not leave the cabin again, not even descending to the game trail along the stream. The scant store of provisions was running low.

She could not help but associate these men with Dad Kinney's failure to arrive. Her worry over him inspired a like uneasiness about a man she had never seen—Moran, the owner of Flash.

On that other trip when Flash had crept up to her in the moonlit park Kinney had told her that the dog would never leave Moran yet Flash now stayed with her. Her chief fear had been that Flash would leave her any moment and go back to him. But he had stayed. It now occurred to

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her that he would not so easily desert the man who had raised him from a pup. Something had happened to Moran.

The thought persisted and she often referred to it in her conversations with the dog.

The frequent repetition of Moran's name struck some chord of memory in Flash. He had by no means forgotten Moran, but his recollection of him was more of a vague longing than a definite picture.

Man's most dependable sense is his sense of sight and he carries the memory of absent loved ones by a mental visualization of their faces. Dogs, instead of a mental likeness, retain a mixture of sight, scent and sound, the latter two being the predominating elements of animal memory. It is this which sometimes causes a dog to bark at the approach of his master who he can plainly see but cannot recognize until some familiar scent or sound identifies him.

It was sound—the name of Moran—that stirred Flash. Each recurring time it came from the girl's lips it quickened the half dormant longing that was in him. And it was sound that one day caused him to drop all else and investigate a distant note with a familiar ring.

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He had rambled far up the slope of the main divide where he often hunted. Something beat faintly against his ear drums, and he knew it was a far off sound of man. His ears pricked forward and he moved excitedly from spot to spot. It was a man who whistled and the air was one of the few little tunes that Moran had whistled endlessly as he wandered alone. Flash started swiftly along the hill in the direction of the sound.

CHAPTER XI

THERE was one man who had given many interesting facts to the world. He had unravelled the half-century old mystery of the lost herd. All that men knew of the swift-fox was through his research. He had definitely linked the buffalo gray with the so-called lobo wolf.

Great beasts had come down out of the north and it was rumored that for the first time moose had been seen in the beaver swamps of the Thoroughfare. This man was now on his way to the Land of Many Rivers to determine whether this new western moose was a distinct type or merely a detached band strayed down from their northern range.

Far up Seclusion Creek Moran lay rolled in his blankets, his head propped up on one elbow as he listened to the night sounds which he loved so well and had not heard for so long a time. A cow elk barked from the timber; from far down the stream came the shrill staccato of a coyote, and another

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answered from above. An owl on the rim-rocks overhead hooted his whereabouts to a far off mate. These sounds, the very essence of loneliness to most men, were the voices of old friends to Moran. He read in them more of primitive love and understanding of savagery.

There was a sudden hush, and for a space of minutes no living creature raised its voice. Moran had heard no sound to indicate the reason for this but he knew that the wild things of the hills could hear things much too distant to be detected by the ear of man. This sudden suspension of all animal communications, the absolute cessation of every note, meant but one thing to Moran. As unerringly as if he himself had heard it he knew that somewhere a wolf had howled. Yet Moran knew too, that this high country was not infested with wolves. This one must be a straggler passing through.

Moran had stopped for the night at the lower edge of the snow line and when he rolled his pack in the morning it took him less than an hour to climb out of the spruce belt above the timberline. He worked his way on up the divide and before noon he stood in the Rampart Pass. The serrated masses of the Rainbow Peaks, the ragged

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saw-teeth of the Tetons, and the other distant ranges that walled in the Land of Many Rivers showed up in miniature, clear cut and distinct, broken only by the dark rents which marked each wild gorge through which the rivers rushed on their way to the low country.

The south slope of the divide was streaked with brown where the more exposed spots were free of snow. Moran chose a long ridge that swept down far below timberline, its bald crest looming above the trees and splitting the solid green of the spruce belt, and followed it down the far side of the divide.

When well down among the trees three jays flew above him, rending the air with weird squawks. He watched them pitch down into an opening in the timber. An eagle swooped grandly down out of the sky, and a string of chattering magpies flitted from tree to tree toward the same spot. Two ravens winged down from a cliff face, one of them croaking hoarsely and the other emitting a series of clear tenor whistles, each note ending with a click as if a sharp rap on the beak had chopped each whistle short.

Moran knew what this feathered conclave presaged. The meat-eating birds of the hills were

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assembling to the feast. He would find some carcass in the opening, and he turned aside to investigate. The carrion hosts flapped away at his approach, protesting raucously at this interruption of their banquet. Out in the open spot he could see a dead cow elk.

Moran knew there were but three beasts in the hills who could kill an elk; the grizzly, the mountain lion and the wolf. The fact that the elk lay in open country eliminated the first. Few grizzlies are killers and those who are invariably stalk their prey in dense, down-timbered spots. They must creep close enough for a short rush and then tear and hammer down their meat by sheer strength. The mountain lion launches himself for the back, strikes his talons deep through skin and flesh and rides his victim to death, his teeth buried ever deeper in the neck.

As Moran drew near he had no slightest doubt as to the identity of the slayer. The severed hamstrings convicted the wolf.

The birds had hopped about and obliterated most of the other signs. In a spot of moist earth he could make out one track and whistled in surprise at its size. He wondered if it was possible that one last buffalo gray still lingered in the hills.

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He had come down from winter to spring. Here each open spot was green and the drifts only laid in the darkest, most sheltered spots in the timber. As he walked under the trees Moran whistled cheerfully.

He had a sudden feeling that something watched him—followed him. Many times he had tried to analyze this feeling. All men who live in the open are familiar with it. They variously speak of it as a "feeling" or a "hunch." Others, slightly more learned, refer to it as intuition or class it as some mysterious, subtle sixth sense. Moran strove always for some natural explanation of all things.

Often when hunting or rambling in the hills he had suddenly known that game was near him. He could not tell why he knew. At times he had even known the kind—bear, elk or deer as the case might be. Later, upon investigation, he frequently found a fresh bear track or the warm bed of some elk or deer if the animal itself was gone. There is a strong odor that lingers for hours about the deserted bed of a large animal and when very close to it even the nose of man can easily tell the difference between the scent of deer and elk. It was this fact that had first started Moran's mind

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working along one certain line until he had finally evolved a satisfactory theory of his own.

In the dim ages of the past man had undoubtedly used his senses of scent and hearing as keenly as the beasts, else he had not survived. From long centuries of disuse these senses had become dulled yet they still functioned slightly. Some faint scent or sound, the snapping of a twig or the soft pad of a distant footfall, too elusive to make a distinct impression upon the consciousness of modern man, was communicated to some long dormant brain cell which now only reacted sluggishly and the warning was manifested by this vague feeling, hunch or intuition that all hill men know.

This was Moran's solution and as he walked he kept his face straight to the front, glancing to the right and left without turning his head, seeking ocular proof of the presence he felt. His patience was rewarded by one brief glimpse of a long gray shape that slipped between the spruce trunks a hundred yards up the slope and that one instant enabled him to identify the animal as belonging to the wolf tribe. His thrill of satisfaction was accompanied by a shock of surprise.

Moran knew that the tales of animals who stalk men through the hills originate mainly in the too

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imaginative minds of novices in the woods. Animals who had lived in localities little frequented by man had sometimes approached him out of curiosity. He had seen deer draw near and stamp excitedly at this strange two legged beast—many such evidences as that—but to be followed was something entirely new. To be followed by a wolf, the one creature who avoids man scent like a pestilence, was almost incredible to Moran. It upset all the convictions formed by years of study.

This beast must be a dog. Moran turned back until he reached a long drift that stretched far up the slope along the sheltered side of a gulch and started up to find the track where the wolf had crossed. The tracks of dogs and wolves are so similar that even experts can not always be sure. The wolf track is slightly, almost imperceptibly longer than that of some dogs but the large, wolfish types of dogs incline also to that shape of track.

One thing Moran knew. A wolf's track would be evenly spaced and placed one directly before the other in a straight line and show no trace of the wavering, scrambling gait of the dog. But some of the wolfish breeds of dogs inherit this wolf gait and the one glimpse had proven that the animal was of that kind.

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Moran found the trail across the drift, true, straight and evenly spaced; still he was not convinced. A sudden thought flitted across his mind.

"Flash!" he called. "Flash! Come out of it, you big gray rascal. Come on out here."

He knew that Flash's body had never been found after the shooting at the Bar T ranch. The Wind River wolf had never reappeared on the range and it was presumed that Flash was dead. There was just a chance that he had survived.

Moran called again and again.

Out in the timber Flash thrilled and trembled. First the sound of the whistle; then the familiar appearance of the man he followed and the scent he knew for Moran's; now the much loved voice; all senses coördinated and Flash knew that this was Moran. He longed to go to him but hard experience had taught him that all men, even former friends, now sought his life.

He circled several times clear around the spot where Moran sat on a log. Moran caught occasional glimpses of him through the trees. It was Flash!

Each circle was drawn closer. Flash heard the glad note in Moran's voice. Moran carried no rifle but there was a holster at his hip and Flash

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had learned to dread all guns. At last he stood in plain sight, standing rigid fifty yards away down an aisle through the trees.

Foot by foot he approached. He whined and this was the first sound Moran had ever heard from him. When he stood within ten feet of Moran his conflicting emotions were so powerful that he writhed his head from side to side and clashed his teeth in savage snaps to relieve the inner strain, baring his fangs terribly but whining eagerly at the same time.

When at last Moran touched him all doubt was gone. In his frantic joy he abandoned his usual dignity and threw his weight upon him so recklessly that Moran braced himself to keep from being overthrown.

At the end of an hour Moran started on and Flash stayed so close as to almost touch him. When they reached a spot where several canyons branched off, Flash trotted ahead and stood in a break in the rims through which a game trail pitched down over the lip of a deep gorge. He looked back expectantly at Moran.

"You think that's the best one to follow down, old boy?" said Moran. "All right, we'll try it." And Moran started along the trail that tacked diz-

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zily down the nose of the canyon. After striking the bottom it followed a tiny stream which grew steadily larger, fed by springs and melting drifts.

After a mile of this Moran noted wolf tracks in the trail. It was padded thick with them.

"You old rascal, you've been holding out here for a long time," he said.

Flash turned aside and started up through the down timber of the slope. Moran was not surprised. He had a sudden hope that Flash was mated and that he would find the den under a windfall or among the rocks at the base of the cliff. It was late for pups to remain at a den but wolves sometimes mated late. This was no place for a wolf den but it was possible.

Flash watched Moran. The man kept on as if he had not noticed. Flash whined after him. He ran around in front and once more turned up the slope.

"What's up there, Flash?" asked Moran. "What do you want to show me?" He smiled as he thought of the consternation his appearance would occasion a she wolf if the den were really there. He turned and followed Flash up the slope.

He stopped and stared incredulously at the

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cabin. It was old and moss covered. The occupant had left no tracks on the game trail. This must be the refuge of some hermit—some fugitive who avoided men.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Teton Jackson tore away from between two guards and threw himself from a moving train he left no trail.

The isolated mountain valley in the shadow of the Tetons, from which, as a boy, he had led his Robin Hood band to prey upon three states, still bore his name but the world never again found a single trace of the man himself. The valley of his name was settled by ranchers. Some few of the earlier settlers remembered him—and kindly, for no struggling squatter ever had cause to complain of his treatment at the hands of Jackson and his men.

Among all the outlaws that escaped during the next quarter of a century there were but few, perhaps a score, of whom no trace was ever found.

In prison circles rumor linked the names of these men together and there were whispers of some phantom rendezvous called "The Hole."

No man seemed possessed of knowledge as to

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the whereabouts of this place. Stool pigeons heard nought but rumors. These rumors were persistent and it was recalled that the majority of these vanished ones were of the outdoor type of bandit. At last the authorities inclined to the belief that some of these men were banded together somewhere beyond reach of the law.

As Moran viewed the cabin these things flitted through his mind. He recalled tales that men told of signal lights flashing from peak to peak. One sportsman who could read the wigwag alphabet claimed to have caught a portion of one message. Among the words he made out were the names of two men—the names of two of the most desperate escaped criminals alive. Moran dismissed these thoughts as absurd—absurd at least in so far as they concerned this particular spot. A number of men could not help but leave numerous telltale signs of their presence. This was the home of some lone hermit.

Flash preceded him and scratched at the door. It opened—and the scene was transformed for Moran. Any man would have pronounced the girl's beauty exceptional and perhaps Moran's surprise at this vision in the door added to his estimate of her. He was instantly aware that he had

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never seen anything so intensely beautiful as the girl who stood there, vivid and alive, in this wild setting. She looked up and saw him and the color fled from her face, leaving it white and drawn.

"I startled you," said Moran. "I'm sorry."

She gazed at him without a word. Flash moved back to his side, his big tail waving proudly. Moran placed his hand on the dog's head and from this move the girl divined the man's identity.

"You're Clark Moran," she said. He nodded, surprised that she should know his name.

"Then they didn't kill you after all."

"No," he smiled. "I'm very much alive."

"Flash brought you here." Again he nodded.

"Did they get Dad Kinney—is that the reason he hasn't come?"

"I saw him a few days ago as I came up the Shoshone—stayed at his camp overnight," said Moran. "He's alive and well."

"Then he didn't get my letter," she stated positively.

"Probably not," said Moran. He sensed that there was some connecting link of thought between each disjointed phrase and he tried to understand it all.

"I can get him for you," he offered. "I can

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make his camp in three days—two days on a forced hike—and have him back here in five; that or any other way in which I can help you.”

The reaction to her normal self was swift. It occurred to her that this man was wonderfully self-controlled. He was passing off a strange situation as if it were no unusual thing for him to find a girl in a secret cabin fifty miles from the nearest ranch. Her remarks must have sounded incoherent; she had spoken of things he had no way to know yet he showed no excitement or curiosity. She liked his level gaze—knew she had nothing to fear from him.

“I’m here alone, waiting for Dad Kinney to come. Please come in,” she said. “I’m starting dinner. As I work I’ll try and decide how I can take advantage of your offer to help.”

Flash prowled continuously between the two, his toenails clicking across the floor as he tried to keep within touching distance of each one. He sensed a certain constraint, an air of strangeness between them but he was too well pleased at having brought these two together to pay much heed to so trifling a thing as that.

When Moran picked up his axe Flash followed him outside. Moran selected a tall dead pine,

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sized it up with an appraising eye and notched the trunk.

"We'll cut some regular wood for her, old boy," he said. "She's been burning squaw wood—limbs and scraps. I wish you could talk and tell me what it's all about. She's had something happen which has upset all her little world—and she's run away from it. Her plans didn't work out right and she's had a tough time of it. Who is she, Flash, and how did she happen to know about this place?"

He had carried a dozen arm loads of wood before she announced the meal. The shadows were lengthening in the canyon when they had finished and Moran picked up his blanket roll.

"I'll camp somewhere close at hand," he said. "I'll hear you if you call. You can decide in what way I can help you and I'll hear the verdict in the morning."

"Oh, don't go," she said. "Stay and talk to me. I've been alone too much. There's some horrid beast that screams here in the canyon nearly every night. I want you to tell me what it is."

Their conversation had been a little trite, limited to formal remarks, and Moran now welcomed the opportunity to break the ice by speaking on

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this familiar topic which was almost a hobby with him. He opened the door.

"Let's sit here," he said. "The wild things will soon begin to talk. I'll try and interpret their notes as they come. There's probably one man out of ten thousand who really understands half of what he hears in the woods at night."

They sat together on the sill and Moran told her many things. He realized that the girl had stayed there night after night alone, assailed by all the imaginary dangers that besiege the mind of each novice in the hills. He explained away many man-made superstitions surrounding the creatures of the wild. Flash wedged in between them and as they talked he felt the dying out of that strangeness, the lessening of restraint between them.

"It must be a panther, I think," she told Moran. She noted the almost imperceptible shake of his head. "Why not? Don't they live here?" she asked.

"Yes—only they're called lions here," he said. "The panther, puma, cougar and the mountain lion are the same animal, only differently named according to locality. I've known and studied them under all four names. I've lived in hopes—but

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I've never yet heard a panther scream. I have inquired of scores of reliable, observing men who have spent their lives in the hills of the northwest where the lions range; in the deserts of the southwest, the range of the cougar; the swamp and hard-wood country of the eastern panther and in Mexico, the home of the puma. A very few of them have told me that once or twice in their lives they had heard a note which they believed to be that of the panther. Even they could not be sure."

"But I've read—"

"That they wail like a woman screams," Moran smilingly finished for her. "That their eyes glow like twin coals of fire in the night as they stalk men through the hills. As a matter of fact it's only in legend that a panther has ever once attacked man; and no man ever saw, or ever will see, an animal's eyes at night unless the orbs are struck by a strong, direct ray of light which reflects back from them. A tin can or bit of glass will do the same."

Moran broke off to explain each new sound. Some of the more common ones she knew; the owls and coyotes; even when a series of high-pitched barks sounded from down the slope she knew they came from a band of cow elk on the

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game trail. Flash suddenly pricked up his ears and attempted to squeeze past. Moran pushed him back as a low wail issued from the timber.

"Flash knew there was a tragedy going on out there. Guess what made that sound," he urged.

"A wildcat," she guessed.

"A rabbit," said Moran. "That was his dying scream of fear. Few know that a rabbit makes a sound. Most men would have guessed as you did. That cottontail was probably struck by a weasel or an owl."

A weird, unearthly squall floated down from the bald ridge that topped one wall of the canyon.

"There!" said Moran. "Try again."

"A lynx," she said.

"A fox," he corrected. "Long ago some curbstone naturalist who owned a poodle dog announced to the world that the fox note was a yap. They've been yapping ever since. That long-drawn, maniac squall is their real note—call it a yap if you like. I rather thought we'd hear a fox and that it would prove to be the sound that had worried you. That wasn't it?"

The girl shook her head.

"Not in the least like that," she said.

"I can't imagine what else it could be." Moran

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was puzzled. A sudden thought struck him. He remembered the dead cow elk with the severed hamstrings, recalled the sudden hush and cessation of animals sounds that occurred as he lay on the far slope of the Wapiti Divide—the silence that had told him of a distant wolf howl. He looked around for Flash, but Flash had squeezed past on the other side of the girl and was gone.

“I think I can make a pretty accurate guess as to the source of that sound,” he said. “Our old friend Flash has been out with the wolves and found his voice. If he inherited his father’s cry it was the lobo call you heard.”

“Flash!” she exclaimed. “Why, Flash couldn’t make such a hideous sound. Oh, surely it wasn’t Flash!”

“I’m inclined to believe it was,” he said. “You see you’ve had the most dangerous beast in the hills right with you all the time.”

“Flash dangerous!” she cried. “Why he’s not dangerous. He’s the smartest dog alive.”

“And for that very reason he is positively the most dangerous beast within five hundred miles. Flash has all of the killing power of a lobo wolf but without a wolf’s blind fear of man. Flash fears men intelligently, can gauge their power for

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harm. He knows their tricks. Instead of fleeing in a panic from the first taint of man scent he investigates it. Then he knows! Of course Flash wouldn't attack men indiscriminately—he'd have to be spurred on by some strong dislike of one individual, but if he held a grudge against some man—well I'd hate to be that man and have Flash find me somewhere asleep or traveling through the hills at night."

"It doesn't seem possible that he could harm a man with only his teeth to fight with," she insisted.

"Only his teeth!" Moran exclaimed. "Yes, that's all. You've not the slightest conception of what those teeth of his can do. They cut like knives through the muscles, hide and even the hamstring cords of a bull elk. I've known him to kill elk, deer, antelope and mountain sheep. Only a few months ago there was a five hundred dollar bounty posted for the scalp of the worst lobo that ever struck Wind River. Flash was that wolf. I shouldn't have left him. Ask Kinney. He tracked the Wind River wolf over a hundred miles on a new snow and found Flash at the end of the trail. You and I are the only ones who know he's alive to-day. What chance

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would a man have against a killer like that if he didn't have a gun?"

The girl's mind traveled swiftly back to a certain night when she had heard screams and oaths behind her as Flash fought half a dozen men to give her time. She had had a vague idea that his snaps and snarls had retarded them until she was out of hearing. Now, for the first time, it occurred to her that he had struck them so savagely that they had feared to follow her through the night.

"Would you sell Flash at any price?" she asked.

"No," Moran answered instantly. "He's yours. I lost my title to him when I left him behind. I knew he would hate it in the city and I expected to be away but a week or two. He turned outlaw, was hunted all over the range. He showed up here and attached himself to you. I have no claim to him. He belongs to you."

The girl held out her hand to him.

"Kinney told me that all men like you," she said. "Now I know why. 'They don't make 'em any whiter than Clark Moran,' was what he told me. I endorse his statement. And I want

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you to know that I consider that the very nicest present I ever had."

"That repays me," he said.

"And thank you for talking to me—instead of questioning me. Of course you know that I have a definite reason for being here. I'd tell you if I could. I think I know now how you can help me if you will. If you will stay near here until Dad Kinney comes, then send him here to me: is that too much to ask?"

"I intended to camp within a few miles of here," he smiled. "So you're asking nothing but what I would have done in any event. Just one question, please?"

She nodded assent.

"If I'm to camp here—how shall I address you? As an aid to conversation, you understand."

"I'd rather you didn't know my name," she told him frankly. "At least not all of it. One of my reasons for being here is to try and forget who and what I am until I can reason things out coolly. That's why I don't care to hear my name spoken over and over again. But as an aid to conversation—Betty is the only part of my name I care to hear. You may call me that if you like."

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"Thank you," said Moran. He picked up his blanket roll. "I'll bunk just outside."

"If it storms, come inside," she said. "Circumstances alter cases, and I'm not priggishly conventional, you know. Good night."

Moran knew that there was no least touch of coquetry in this permission to use her given name. There was some deep-rooted reason why she shrank from hearing the rest of her name. When he knew that reason he would know why she was here.

He had scarcely spread his blankets when a sudden shiver shook him as a cry rang out from the rims above; the lobo cry, the most chilling sound of all the wild. It was tossed from wall to wall of the canyon, its echoes dying slowly away among the peaks as the diminishing ripples caused by a thrown rock die out against the far shore of a quiet pool. Moran heard the girl call softly from the cabin.

"Do you still believe Flash could make a sound like that?"

"I'm sure of it. That was Flash—no other."

"It's rather a dreadful sound for so lovable a dog to make," she said. "But now that I know it's only Flash I need not shiver when I

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hear it again." She heard Moran laugh softly.

"You are mistaken," he said. "If you live for a thousand years and hear it every night it will always be the same. You may not fear it—but the wolf shiver will shake you each time it sounds."

For the first time since her arrival the girl failed to bar the door at night but left it swinging open—mute evidence of her absolute confidence in Moran.

Half an hour later Flash touched Moran's hand with his cold nose, gave one brief sniff and went inside to the girl. He sat beside her bunk, his chin resting on the edge while she stroked his head.

"Flash," she whispered. "Flash. Why couldn't it have been a man like the one out there—like Clark Moran?"

Flash trotted outside and lay beside Moran.

"You old rascal," said Moran. "Just look what you've led me into now! I believe I've found her, Flash—I know it. Isn't she a little beauty? Don't you dare tell me you ever saw a woman who could compare with her. Any girl I've ever met would seem drab and commonplace beside her. What do you think about it, Flash?"

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Flash only thought that he was vastly contented. Nevertheless he was restless, and spent the main part of the night in prowling uneasily back and forth between Betty and Moran.

CHAPTER XIII

MORAN sat on a ledge of the rimrocks above the canyon, viewing the country with his glasses. Flash appeared suddenly, coming up through a break in the rims. He lingered near Moran for a few minutes, then started back as suddenly as he had come. With his forefeet over the edge he paused and looked back over his shoulder at Moran.

"This trying to keep in touch with both of us will wear you to a shadow," laughed Moran. In less than an hour Flash had made four trips between the cabin and the rims. "Bring her back with you this trip," said Moran. "She promised to join us up here, Flash."

Half an hour later Flash reappeared, this time followed by the girl.

Moran led the way to a little projection of the cliff, a tiny promontory jutting out over the void of the canyon. A rolling jumble of hills and valleys spread out before them; dense spruce slopes and sidehill parks, bald ridges and windswept

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peaks. Far down in the stream beds each tiny meadow was framed as a picture by the fringe of trees that ringed it in, the pale green aspens shimmering through the deeper green of the pines. A few hundred yards behind them mighty cliffs towered up above the timberline at the base of the Wapiti Divide.

Flash was satisfied at last. These two were once more together. He lay flat, his head between his paws and peered off into the distance. Each movement that caught his eye aroused his immediate interest and he raised his head, regarding it intently.

"Poor Flash. He must have traveled miles this morning trying to keep in touch with both of us at the same time," said Betty, leaning to run her fingers through his hair. "Look at his eyes. They're positively human in their intelligence. I believe he knows every word we say. Don't you, Flash?" When she spoke his name Flash wagged his tail. "See!" she cried. "That proves it."

Moran smiled and shook his head.

"You make the common error of going to extremes," he said. "Men either consider that animals have no intelligence at all or credit them with too much. Flash does not understand one

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word except those sounds which, from repetition, he has come to associate with certain things. You probably do not understand Siwash or Chinese, yet that is no slur on your intelligence. By the same token it doesn't mean that Flash lacks intelligence because he has only the most limited understanding of what we say. On the contrary I believe him to be the very smartest animal I have ever known."

"So do I," she said. "But you have such an analytical mind that you probably know the cause as well as the fact. Tell me."

"His coyote brain," said Moran. "The coyote is the smartest animal alive but men have not yet fully awakened to that fact. Men usually get their facts reversed so it's not strange that they speak knowingly of the cowardly coyote, while in reality he's one of the nerviest little rascals that ever breathed. Men can't exterminate them. There are more now than there were ten years ago. They're adaptable. The coyote was once strictly a prairie dweller but he has increased his range to cover all these western hills; north to British Columbia and east to Michigan. In a few years' time we'll hear of him ranging in the New England States and in the Arctic Circle. Remember that and see how my prophecy works out. Brains

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have enabled him to increase in the face of conditions which have put a value on his pelt and a price on his head. Flash has that brain."

"Yet in spite of that you don't think he understands our words?"

"I know it. I'll demonstrate the fact. He has heard me call you Betty a dozen times to-day yet the repetition has been insufficient to cause him to connect that sound with you any more than any other word which I use frequently in speaking to you. On the other hand he does associate the word Moran with me. I'll show you."

He spoke to the dog and Flash looked up at him. Moran spoke the girl's name over and over again. Flash gazed at him, puzzled by this reiteration of the same sound. He inclined his head from side to side, his ears tipped forward alertly as he tried to understand. His attention was entirely centered on Moran and he never once looked at the girl.

"Now you try it," Moran instructed.

She spoke to Flash and as she talked he accorded her the same close attention with which he had favored Moran. Then she spoke Moran's name twice and Flash turned instantly and looked at him.

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"It's true!" she cried. "You know so many queer things like that."

"He is physically incapable of speaking the words of men and that renders him mentally incapable of understanding man's vocabulary except from repetition and association; but he can read tone inflection and know the spirit behind the words. However he is intelligent enough to learn any trick or work within his physical limitations. Each lesson would have to start from some basic fact which he already knows and be gradually developed from that. For example we could easily train him to be a liaison courier and to carry messages between us."

"How?" she asked. "Please show me."

"Starting from these few facts; he knows the words 'go' coupled with this motion—the outward swing of my arm. I taught him that in handling horses and cows. His present natural inclination is to travel back and forth between us. We would make use of that. At first he would not know where to go but he would know that I was sending him away. From habit he would return to you. You could send him back to me by coupling the same words and motions with my name. Aside from the fact that he knows my name he would

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naturally look for me anyhow. In a short time he would see a definite purpose behind it all and soon understand what we expected of him."

The following few days were busy ones for Flash. The next morning Moran fashioned a collar from an elkhide thong and took Flash some distance from the cabin. He rolled a leaf from his notebook around the thong and fastened it with a pin.

"Go, Flash," he ordered, swinging his arm and pointing back toward the cabin. "Go! Go on, boy! Take it back to her."

Flash bounded away in the direction of the cabin, stopped and looked back. He knew that Moran was ordering him to go somewhere. There were no horses or cows. He sat down and watched Moran, undecided as to what was expected of him. Moran's insistent command assured him that he was to go. He knew that word. He trotted about in eccentric circles and whined. At last he started off.

As soon as he lost sight of Moran his natural inclination was to return to the girl and he made straight for the cabin. She unfastened the slip of paper from the collar, examined it at length and spoke to Flash in words of praise according

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to Moran's instructions. Then she once more fastened the paper to his collar and pointed off in the general direction taken by Moran.

"Go, boy!" she urged. "Go! Moran! Moran! Take it to Moran, Flash! Go!"

Flesh knew that she was sending him away. He knew that she spoke of Moran but his mind was still hazy as to just what was wanted of him. Once more he merely followed his natural inclination and returned to Moran.

Each time this was repeated they unfastened the paper the instant he arrived at either end, examining it and praising Flash, at the same time holding the note out for him to inspect. After a few trips he knew what was expected of him—traveled between them with a certain knowledge that this was what was meant by their commands. However, the reason for this was not as clear to him as the mere fact itself. At last the light began to dawn, slowly at first, then with a sudden full realization of the truth. This from constant repetition of one thing! The paper was each time held out for him to sniff. At first it meant nothing to him. Then, in a vague way, he came to know that it concerned these trips. When either Betty or Moran picked up a slip of paper Flash was instantly alert, know-

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ing he was soon to be started out. He sensed that men had means of communication which were beyond his comprehension. This paper was a message—a understanding between these two, delivered through his medium. He had no conception whatever of the written word. When the paper was held out to him he invariably tested it with nose instead of eyes. His most dependable sense was that of smell. There must be some scent to this paper by which these two read its significance. For a time he sniffed longingly at each paper but its scent told him nothing and at last he gave it up. His was not the mind of man—the mind which ever strives to fathom the very things that smack of mystery. There was no least particle of use to excite himself over what he knew to be beyond his understanding. He was content to carry this thing because they willed it so.

The little nose of the canyon wall which Moran had picked that first morning afforded a wonderful outlook over a wide expanse of country and the girl spent much time there with him.

Flash knew that a change had come into the relations of these two. That first strangeness had been swept away. He sensed a new, sweet current in its place, felt its growth from day to day.

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He read it in their voices, caught vibrations of which they themselves were unaware.

Life was now bright for Flash. The two extremes in him were satisfied. These two whom he worshiped were together and he could revel in the combined love of both. When that other urge came, when the wolf strain rose rampant and uppermost, he ran with the phantom pack and killed; killed joyously and with no fear of hard-running horses on his trail.

Moran partially understood the conflict of inherited instincts which swayed Flash's every move. As nearly as possible he explained all this to the girl.

"Every action has two sides for him," he told her. "There's a cross-pull exerted on every act of his life; the opposite longings of dog and wolf. He has struck the strangest compromise I've ever known. Instead of being a mixture at all times like most crosses of his kind, he swings like a pendulum from wild to tame. It is as if the warring strains in Flash had never fused, that he is two distinct animals in one—two spirits who alternate in their rule over the same flesh; one gentle and loving, the other ruthless and savage in the extreme. Do you get what I mean?"

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"Yes, it's true," she said. "He's the most loving, faithful dog I ever knew. That lobo howl he gives when he goes off alone and reverts to the wolf—it's the most savage sound in the world; it fairly drips with death. Those two strains you speak of—instead of flowing in a dull blend, each has been strengthened, sharpened by the clash until each extreme has built up a powerful individuality of its own."

"There!" said Moran. "You've analyzed it. Those words are a complete summing up of the soul of Flash—at least so far as mortal mind is capable of understanding the soul of a dog."

Moran handed his glasses to the girl.

"I won't be gone long," he said. "I'm going after something I want you to see. I've had my eye on it for several days." Flash followed him down the game trail into the canyon. Moran stooped occasionally and picked up something which he dropped into his hat. He had long since killed an elk for meat and brought the slender store of canned goods from his cache; but she had craved something fresh—and he was gathering the first of the delicious wild strawberries of the season. Flash scoured the adjacent slopes in search of small game.

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An hour later Moran stopped at the cabin. He washed the tiny red berries in the icy spring and placed them in a tin dish. A can of condensed cream, the one chief treasure of his cache, he slipped into his pocket as he started for the rims. Half way up Flash joined him, a small striped animal dangling limply from his jaws. He carried it to the point of rocks and deposited it gravely beside the girl.

"Flash, you old sweetheart," she laughed. "How like a man you are! You woo me with delicacies from the hills as a man would with chocolates, dinners and wine. It's the male instinct to feed the she he loves." She glanced up and saw Moran. He too had brought her food and for one brief instant she could not meet his eyes but looked off across the hills, wondering if he had heard. Then she turned and stretched forth her hand.

"Oh! Give them to me!" she said. "I'm starved for something fresh." She ate them slowly, lingeringly, and thanked him with each bite. Moran had heard! That note which Flash had so long since detected in his voice was no longer an undertone but was now so apparent in each word he spoke that the girl could read it and know what it held out to her. She thrilled to

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it, craved its full expression as she had craved the taste of each delicious berry—a thousand times more insistently than that—and knew that it could never be fulfilled.

They spoke but little. Dusk settled down around them. A soft violet haze drifted across the hills, shaded to purple, and the deeper valleys swam in obscurity below them while the sun still glinted brilliantly from the snow caps of far off divides. The girl's heart was touched with the shadows while Moran's was alight with the sparkling reflection from the peaks. At last all was night except one gleaming spot, the blaze of snow on the most lofty point in the Sunlight Peaks.

Then Moran turned and held her close in his arms. She stayed there, clung to him for a long minute. As the last light faded from the distant point she drew away.

"Maybe it was wrong," she said. "But I'm only human. Right or wrong—I had to have my one minute with you. Besides, I wanted you to know. You would rather know it that way—once; even though we can't go on with it. I've made one big, unutterable mistake, the worst a girl can make." Moran attempted to speak, but she shook her head.

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"It meant everything at the time. It means a great deal now; enough so that I'd do almost anything—but not the thing I did. I couldn't since this has come to us. Some day I'll tell you what it is—some time soon, before you go. You're so understanding with animals, so tolerant of their faults, that you may find some extenuation for me."

"Whatever you have done won't matter a straw," he said. "I don't even care to know what it is. It's past. You're mine by every natural law. And I want you — now!"

"Not now," she said. "Sometime perhaps. I can't tell—only hope. But if that time ever comes I promise to send for you. Will you be satisfied with that?"

"For now," he assented, "but not for long. The one big, outstanding fact is that we belong. Nothing, absolutely not one thing I can think of can stand for long against that fact. It's a natural law—the most compelling law of nature. If there is any made-made convention which says it is wrong we'll shatter it."

He swept her to him, held her close, kissed her until she was dizzy with love. The lobo cry rolled up out of the valley below, swept past them

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and clanged against the cliff face behind; savage, powerful, exultant!

Moran released her and stepped back.

"I won't do that again but I wanted you to be sure. You heard that cry. I've never had a mate. I've waited long years for the right one. You've given me your love. That's all that matters to me. I've lived so long alone among wild things that perhaps I've absorbed some of their philosophy of life. I'll keep that love you've given me. If there's no other way to keep it for ourselves I'll keep it as the beast that made that cry would keep it—as Flash would hold his mate!"

CHAPTER XIV

A MAN may learn to stalk and study one animal and then hopelessly bungle the matter when he tries to approach the next because he is prone to attribute the same qualities to all. Nature has endowed each species with some peculiarity of its own—some method of protection for itself and young. Both Moran and Flash had learned these things and Moran had told Betty many strange problems which Nature has worked out—things about which few men know the truth.

She lay flat on her favorite point of rocks thinking of what had transpired there the night before. She frequently rested her elbows on the ledge and swept the far hills with Moran's glasses, examining each slope and open park for signs of game. From all those things Moran had told her she now had a keener, more intelligent interest in the animal world. Little ways and habits of each species, formerly meaningless, now carried a

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greater significance in the light of this new knowledge.

She saw a bunch of cow elk feeding along the edge of an opening in the spruce. She no longer wondered why there was not a single calf with so large a band of cows. She knew that the calves were lying motionless far back in the timber. This was one of the curious things Moran had told her.

For a calf elk gives off no scent. The coyote, the keenest nosed animal of all the wild, will pass a few feet downwind from a new born calf and never know; and a coyote can scent a mouse for a hundred yards downwind!

When moving, the lamb of the mountain sheep looms up whitely against the green meadows of his lofty home above timberline but when the old ewe leaves her offspring she caches him with an eye for details. Even the piercing eye of the circling eagle can not pick the motionless sleeping lamb from among the white rocks of a boulder field.

The sun dapples down spottedly through the leaves of the trees and mingles with the spotted coat of the blacktail fawn. In later life this changes with the deer.

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Bucks travel much during that season which white men have named Indian Summer and which Indians know as the season of the Short Blue Moon. A bluish haze hangs in the hills; the sage brush on the open slopes between the trees takes on a blue-gray tinge—and the new fall coat of the blacktail blends in with the color scheme.

Each animal has some one sense more highly developed than the rest and on this one super-sense he mainly relies.

The antelope of the open plains has only fair nose and ears but wonderful all-seeing eyes. The white hairs on an antelope's rump are stiff and this white patch bristles, each hair standing out, when the animal is alarmed. The sun flashes on this sparkling white field, and in a few brief moments every antelope within many miles is made aware that there is danger abroad on the plains from these signals flashed from band to band.

Elk, whose range is both in the timber and on broken slopes which seldom afford a clear field of view, find less use for their eyes. Their vision is very good but not exceptional. It is an even break whether nose or ears first warn them of approaching enemies.

The bear lives more in the down-timbered

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gorges and gloomy pockets of the hills. He has nearsighted eyes. If a man stands motionless it is difficult for a bear to distinguish man from stump. He may hear a sound which warns him—but if he catches one least whiff of scent he knows!

Out above the timberline the mountain sheep beds down upon some dizzy pinnacle, sweeps the hills with his telescopic eye and defies his enemies to approach unseen. Scent seems to mean little to him and sound evidently means nothing at all. Some men claim that the constant falling of storm-loosened rocks among his native peaks has rendered him careless of sound, that each noise is attributed to the clatter of a rolling stone. Others assert that the battering, smashing fights between ram and ram in the running moon shatter the ear drums and deafen them. Either may be true. The fact remains that the hearing of ewes is better than that of rams.

The girl thought of these things as she located each new kind with the glasses. She saw Flash staring steadily at the face of the cliff behind. Three rams were moving along the sheer wall. It seemed impossible that even a lizard could cling to it. Not even a wolf, lithe and active as he is, can follow the bighorn sheep and it is a question

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whether even the mountain lion can keep in sight of him at all times. A ram's hind feet are sharp, his front feet larger, each forefoot fitted with two oval, non-skid pads. He can jump ten feet along the sheer face of a cliff and land safely on a projecting nose of rock no larger than a foot across. In this way he tacks fearlessly from ledge to ledge along the dizzy wall of any precipice.

Betty studied these three rams with even more interest than any other animals she had seen. Moran had told her that they were his favorites of all horned game.

Flash knew all these things; knew that those rams were safe from him, temporarily safe at least. When he stalked his meat he was well aware of the individual abilities of his prey. He would move upwind on an elk, crouching motionless when it looked his way, knowing he might escape its sight but that he could never remain undetected for one instant if the wind carried his scent to it. When he stalked a sheep he paid less heed to the wind, crossed rock slides without care for the stones his feet dislodged, but centered his attention wholly upon avoiding those never-failing eyes until he could come between his prey and some impossible cliff.

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These things he knew from observation, from stern experience, not from that broad term "instinct" under which men are so prone to lump all animal knowledge and dismiss it as a settled fact. True he had instinctive knowledge of some things—not many—but in the main it was experience that had taught him. Once failing, he profited by his loss and learned each day.

Flash raised his head and peered toward the break through which the game trail topped the bench and the girl knew that he heard Moran. He soon joined her on the ledge. Each knew the longing that throbbed in the other's heart, but neither spoke of it.

Moran had pondered long over what this trouble could be—this reason why she could not freely give herself to him. He knew that it had to do with the gray, moss-covered cabin, built secretly so long ago. Something had sprung up out of the past to lay its skeleton hands on her, snatched her up out of her smoothly polished little groove in life, and sent her traveling across the seamy cross currents of new viewpoints which were hard to face.

Kinney must know. Dad Kinney was a very old man and had lived a long life in the hills.

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He could unravel the past history of this cabin, and its meaning in her life. He recalled vague tales that Kinney had long ago ridden with the wild bunch; that when law and order claimed the west and divided its citizens by approving some lines of occupation while others were frowned upon, Kinney had been one of those who remained outside.

Flash rose and stretched, yawned widely, and trotted off along the rim, turning where the game trail dipped down into the canyon.

"He's off again," Moran observed. "He'll turn wolf again for the next hour or two."

"Would he ever turn all wolf?" she asked. "Leave us and never come back?"

"Not unless he lost us," said Moran. "Then he would. The hold most men have on him is small. He might even leave us for a while in midwinter, the mating time of wolves. It's hard to say."

She turned the glasses on the lower country to search for Flash. Through an opening of the trees she could see the sheen of water, a beaver pond where a colony of them had dammed a stream until the water backed up and flooded a thicket of willows and birch. She saw the ripple as one

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moved across the pond and watched him climb out upon the dam. A porcupine waddled across an open park. Then Flash came into the field of her glasses, creeping stealthily across a meadow, his belly close to the grass. He made a sudden mighty leap, then clawed frantically at the ground. Several times he repeated this strange maneuver.

"Look! Can you see him?" she asked. "What in the world is he doing now?"

"Trying to catch a picket-pin for you," said Moran.

"Picket-pin?" she inquired. "And who is he—this pin?"

"You've seen them," Moran explained. "Those slender little ground squirrels. They balance on their hind feet, standing motionless until they look like a stake an inch through and six inches long. It's hard to distinguish them from the stakes men drive to picket their night horses, then move on and leave them behind, sticking up out of the grass. They're called picket-pin gophers out here from the fact that each newcomer finds it hard to relinquish the notion that he can walk up and tie his horse to one."

"You tell me so many strange things that I sometimes wonder," she accused.

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"It's Gospel," he assured her. "There are so many queer truths in Nature that I couldn't begin to think up fabrications to compete with them. Besides I want you to know things as they really are."

Flash came back without his prey. These little squirrels were hard to catch; had an exasperating way of vanishing in their holes at the very instant his jaws were but a foot from them, then chattering and scolding from beneath his very nose. He sprawled contentedly on the rock and dozed. Even in his sleep the significance of each sound penetrated his consciousness. The hum of their conversation did not disturb him. A red squirrel broke into a voluble chatter in a tree below the rim. One eye flickered open for an instant; closed again. A wheeling hawk screamed harshly overhead and drew only a twitching of one ear. Then he was suddenly alert, standing erect on the edge of the canyon wall, his hair bristling and a low snarl in his throat as he looked off across the hills.

From far away there had sounded the faint report of a rifle. He knew that this meant the presence of men. His thoughts were whirled back to those who lived at Two Ocean Pass; those who

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had only once appeared near here and that once had tried to harm the girl.

"I wonder who that could have been," said Moran. "Evidently some one killing meat. I hardly think Kinney could cross through Rampart Pass with horses for a few more days. Besides that was too far down the country for him. He'd have camped almost even with us. Harmon expected to come in from the other way. They have delegated him to pick the most feasible route for a Forest Service pack trail from the gap straight through to the lake and blaze a string of game trails that link up clear through. Sunlight Gap should be nearly free of snow by now; so perhaps he has come in. To-morrow I'll go down that way and see."

"You mustn't go," she said. "What do we care who it is?" She had not told him of the men she had stumbled across that night, the men who would have taken her but for Flash. She had feared that if Moran knew of this he would insist on taking her out of these hills at once. She had thought of what awaited her back there—and decided to stay in the hills. She had thought that those men had gone, unable to find her hiding place, and that they were probably hundreds

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of miles away. This shot indicated that they might still be in the hills. She could not risk a meeting between them and Moran.

"Don't try to find out who it was," she urged. "It might turn out to be some stranger, not Harmon or Kinney at all."

"It wouldn't matter," he said. "Any man in the hills would be glad to give me a part of his food supply. A little variety wouldn't be a bad thing for us."

"I have a perfectly good reason to think that shot came from some one I don't want you to meet," she insisted. "Let's go back to the cabin and I'll tell you what it is."

Flash did not follow them down the trail. He stayed on the rim, trotting from one point of vantage to the next, peering across the hills for some sign of the man that had fired the shot.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN Flash returned to the cabin he did not go in and sprawl before the fire as was his usual custom; instead he remained outside, watchful and alert. He tilted his ears to catch all sounds and his nose quivered eagerly as he sampled each slightest shift of wind under the trees. Twice he trotted down to the game trail and followed it a few hundred yards downstream. He wanted to know the meaning of that shot; to be sure of the exact location of the man that had fired it. He was well aware that as long as daylight lasted he was handicapped. He could, of course, view men at long range; sometimes in favorable cover he could approach unseen but such observations were highly unsatisfactory. Besides there was always an element of danger in this daylight scouting, the odds heavily against him, and he was far too smart to take such chances often.

“Flash knows that some man is within a few miles of us,” said Moran. “That shot has wor-

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ried him. He'll start off to investigate before long." He called Flash inside and closed the door. "Just to keep him out of trouble," he explained.

Flash read his purpose and whined uneasily, scratching at the door. He prowled along the wall, shoving his nose against the cracks where the chinking had dropped from between the logs as he tried to catch the scent of the outside world.

Moran had made use of a convenient arrangement of windfall logs some fifty yards from the cabin, thatching the sloping top with spruce bows and spreading over them the hide of the elk he had killed. An hour after dark he unrolled his blankets in this retreat and lay smoking his pipe and pondering over what the girl had told him. The fact of the men having been in this high country so early in the spring indicated that they might have wintered here. If this was the case they might even now be lingering in the hills—some band of hunted fugitives.

Inside the cabin Flash was waiting. At last the regular breathing of the girl announced to him that she slept. He reared up, placing his forepaws against the wall beside the door. The latch was but a beam, one end working on a wooden

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pivot and the other fitting down into a slot notched in the wall. Flash lifted the bar with his teeth and gave a backward wrench. The door gave toward him and the clatter of the heavy beam aroused the girl.

"Flash!" she called. But Flash was gone.

He was gliding silently down the slope, a gray shadow slipping through the trees. Without a pause he made straight for the spot where the men had camped on that other night. The vivid memory of the fight in the black, dripping fog was fresh in his mind and led him to that place as a starting point because he associated it with men.

He circled it swiftly. There was no taint of man. He rambled on, nose uplifted to catch the side currents of air that blew in from each opening gulch. Tiny streams trickled from the larger of these draws; a second creek forked in and the two plunged on together to the Thoroughfare. Still he held to the bottoms until he knew that he was too far west. A creek flowed in from the south and he turned and followed it upstream. It forked and he chose the eastern branch and eventually came out upon a ridge.

Below him lay another valley, a feather-veined network of streams. The ridge on which he stood

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swept away, stretching up to the parent divide, a myriad canyon heads dropping away from it. Fives miles along it, one among hundreds, the canyons which sheltered the cabin headed against this same ridge.

Flash knew the habits of men. They would be camped in the valley below along some one of the stream beds. It was not their custom to camp on ridges or away from water. He stopped, undecided whether to drop down and continue his hunt or to follow the ridge back to the cabin. His was not the mind of man, the mind which reasons out a plan of action and follows it tenaciously to the end; therefore he did not have the continuity of purpose that is solely the heritage of man. Only along certain lines, the few great natural laws that sway the flesh, was he capable of long sustained concentration. When hunger pressed him he hunted tirelessly for food. When in danger his mind was wholly concerned with escaping it. In the mating moon of his tribe he would listen to its call, the urge of the season keeping ever uppermost in his mind as he searched for a she wolf with whom to mate; and always there was running like a guiding thread through all other thoughts his great love for Betty and Moran. Every animal

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act hinges directly upon the first three fundamentals; food to maintain life, caution to retain life, and mating of the sexes to reproduce and perpetuate life. Analysis of any one move will prove it to be actuated by one of these dominating three—that the animal mind does not soar above these primary elements. Added to these, the dog, alone of all beasts, is given a fourth—his faithful, unwavering allegiance to man.

In all other things Flash was one with all animals—and the majority of men—in that only those things of immediate concern could hold his undivided interest for long; other issues would creep in to detract from the first, to share or overshadow the importance of the original design.

So it was with this. His desire to be near Betty and Moran now seemed paramount. He set off along the ridge toward the cabin; the idea that had urged him from it was still in his mind but was now relegated to a place of minor importance. If the men were camped in the opposite valley they were too distant to mean harm to-night. To-morrow could invariably be taken care of when it came. He wanted to be with Moran and the girl right now!

Nevertheless, in following out this latest im-

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pulse he achieved the first. He found the trail. Five horses had angled from a canyon and topped the ridge, turning up the country along its crest. Flash followed this trail swiftly. It was warm—scarce an hour old.

When within half a mile of the game trail that led down to his own destination he caught a faint trace of man scent and knew that the men had dismounted. He knew too that they had now moved on. Any dog can tell the trail scent or the odor left behind by men from the actual body scent itself. Flash sped to the spot, using no caution in his approach.

The two men had lingered for some time, one of them leaning against a single gnarled tree which stood on the ridge. Flash bristled and snarled as he neared it. Old, half dormant hates welled up within him. Flash had lately found all men to be his enemies and he hated and feared them as a whole without singling out each latest individual who sought his life. That was the wolf in him—the attitude of all wolves toward all men. These hates that now bubbled up in him came from back beyond the days of his running wild in the hills; from the days when he had been more

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dog than wolf and had formed an individual estimate of each man as he met him.

In those days of his impressionable puppyhood only one man had continuously mistreated him. That man had come to typify all that was mean in the human race and upon him was concentrated the hate aroused by the deeds of the many. This had long been passive but it was there and it flamed with the old intensity at this trace of his old enemy. The scent came strong and it was clearly, unmistakably that of Brent.

The two men had separated and there was no continuation of Brent's trail. The horses had turned down a canyon that was next to the one which sheltered the cabin and Flash knew that Brent had remounted and gone that way; that where he found the horses he would find Brent.

The other man had gone on along the ridge on foot. If Brent had continued on foot the hate would have urged Flash to follow his trail instead of that of the stranger. Animals deal more with actualities than with probabilities. Flash's brain told him the trail of the horses would lead him to Brent but the other's trail was actual, warm and fresh under his very nose. Also the strang-

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er's way led nearer to the cabin and so coincided with his wish to return to it—and he chose that way.

If Flash had overtaken him it is possible that, from associating him with Brent, he might have torn him down without added incentive. However, he did not overtake him, for the man he followed had reached the end of his trail.

Flash reached the game trail which crossed the saddle in the ridge and dipped down the canyon. The man had followed it. Flash increased his speed. When he reached the last break in the rims the man's tracks still led down toward the cabin.

A sound reached Flash, a far faint sound too muffled and indistinct to have reached the ears of man, but which told him many things. He could not catch the words but he knew the voice. It was Her voice and the vibrations were those of deadly fear; for the first time in his life Flash answered a human voice with the lobo howl.

CHAPTER XVI

THE man had slipped to the cabin, his feet making no sound on the soft pine-straw carpet and leaf mold on the slope. The door stood open and he peered inside. The last rays of the dying fire threw a fitful illumination across the bunk where the girl lay rolled in her blanket. She was alone and he stepped inside.

At the first footfall she opened her eyes, thinking that for some reason Moran had come to waken her. It might be that Dad Kinney had come at last.

Then she saw that it was neither of these. The man wore western apparel which was so new as to seem out of place. The broad brim of his hat was stiff and straight, announcing only a few days of wear. Unversed as she was in such matters she still knew that this was an eastern man garbed out in new regalia which he deemed suitable for the west. The hat shaded his face but his presence in the cabin was like a contagion of evil and she knew him—and screamed.

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"Clark!" she cried. "Clark Moran! Flash! Flash!" Then he was beside her, sitting on the edge of the bunk and reaching out to take her in his arms.

"Don't excite yourself, my dear," he said. "No one can hear you. A long hunt has ended. We'll have our honeymoon after all; a trifle belated, perhaps, but all the sweeter for that."

She noted the gun swinging at his hip and feared for Moran should she call again. She braced her hands against his chest. The blanket fell back and the man's arms gripped her more convulsively.

He sprang suddenly erect, his face paling as a sudden awful cry rang out in the canyon.

At the first note from the girl Moran had leaped from his blankets, snatching his belt from beneath his rolled coat which answered for a pillow. He jerked the heavy automatic from the holster and dropped the belt as he ran. Before the man had recovered from the shock of the lobo howl Moran had him covered from the door.

Dim as the light was Moran still recognized the handsome, dissipated face of Luther Nash. A cold apprehension clutched him—a sudden thought that Nash was at the bottom of this reason why

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Betty could not give herself to him; that she might have come under his influence as so many others had before. However, when he spoke there was no sign of these thoughts reflected in his voice.

"All right Nash—you can start explaining now," he said. His tones were flat and even but suddenly the girl knew what he had meant when he had said that if necessary he would keep her as Flash would keep his mate.

Before Nash could reply a gray shape landed on the sill and made one twelve-foot leap straight for his throat. The man shrank back a step, both arms upflung to protect his face. This backward step and the length of the spring caused Flash to fall short and his teeth only tore one leather sleeve. Before he could spring again, even before his feet were on the floor, Moran's warning command thundered in his ears. There was no mistaking the sincerity of his tone.

"Flash! You, Flash! Down!" he roared. Flash stood bristling in front of Nash, backing from him inch by inch, impelled against his will by the stern insistence of his master's voice. He knew that Betty was unhurt, that Moran did not wish him to kill this man, yet he knew too that

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the stranger was an enemy to them all. Then he noticed that Moran's gun menaced Nash. Moran must intend to kill this man himself. Flash backed close to where the girl sat upright on the bunk, her blanket held close about her. He stood guard there, his hair bristling and his lips drawn back from the dripping fangs. For the first time the girl really knew the absolute savagery that was part of Flash.

Moran spoke again, his voice as flat as before.

"All right, Nash, you can go on now and state your case," he said.

Nash's nerves were twitching from the nearness of the beast who seemed eager to try for his throat again but he sensed that he had an implacable judge in Moran and strove for self-control.

"Watch that hound," he said hoarsely. "I'm on lawful business. She's mine and I've come to take my own."

"She may have been yours once," Moran returned. "Whatever she may have been to you is past. Your claim is smashed. She's mine from now on out."

The girl knew then that he had spoken the truth when he had held her in his arms and told her that he wanted her regardless of what had

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gone before. In that instant all reservations were swept aside, and she knew that he could have his way with her no matter where that way led.

"How did you guess that you could find her here?" Moran inquired.

"That article in the papers," said Nash. "About the girl who turned up in a little town at the foot of the hills and bought a blanket, a few articles of underwear and a walking suit. She caught the Shoshone stage, left it ten miles below the upper ranger station and disappeared. The eastern papers took it up—and I knew it was my charming runaway wife."

Moran turned and the girl's white face confirmed the truth of this assertion but her eyes looked unflinchingly into his. It was this name, now hers, that she had so disliked. A wave of nausea swept him at the thought of her being the wife of a beast like Nash.

Nash sought to take advantage of this long look between them and his hand stole nearer to the gun at his hip. Flash tensed his muscles for a spring and his snarl warned Moran. His gun steadied as his eyes came back to Nash.

"Very well, Nash. I've heard you out," he said. "You can be going now."

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"Going! Me?" Nash exclaimed. "Do you mean that you're going to keep my wife here with you—alone?"

"Just that," said Moran. "Your ideas of propriety seemed to have undergone a change since last we met. I'll take charge of your gun and you can start." He pulled Nash's gun from its holster and stepped back. He knew that Nash could not have found his way so far into the hills alone. "Who is with you?" he asked.

"I came alone." His eyes slipped away from Moran's as he answered.

"Then you fired that shot I heard this afternoon. I notice considerable elk hair on your clothes. You killed an elk for meat?" Nash nodded assent and Moran flipped out the cylinder of the gun and squinted through the barrel toward the fire, snapped it shut and looked at Nash. "You can trot along back to the man who killed that elk," he said, motioning to the door.

Nash felt safe since he had been deprived of his gun; more secure than while he had worn it. He shook his finger at Moran.

"I'll break you for this, Moran," he threatened. "Don't you know there is such a thing as law? You can't come between man and wife." He

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turned to the girl. "You think you tricked me. Remember what this means when I go. The pretty little story of this cabin given to the world." He waited for her answer but it did not come and he turned back to Moran. "A fine case you'll have. She lied to me—married me to get a few proofs that won't matter in the end; she left me—walked to the door with her arm around the preacher, damn him, and ran. She came out here to live with you. What do you think the courts will have in store for a pair like you!"

"We'll take a chance," said Moran. A load seemed lifted from his heart. She had tricked Nash; by his own admission she had beat him at his own game, whatever that game had been; she had been forced to marry him to gain her purpose, then fled instantly and defeated his. "Nash, there are no courts within a hundred miles," he said. "Some day, in our good time, we'll come out and see what those courts have to say. In the meantime if you try just once to enforce your ideas of man-made laws in here I'll enforce the law of the hills on you. I hope that's plain; at least it's final. You can start now." He strode to the door and stood beside it waiting for Nash to pass. He started to speak but Moran held up

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his hand, and Nash went out into the night without another word.

Instead of turning up the game trail in the direction from which he had come, Nash turned downstream. He would find Brent camped where the next canyon to the south opened out into the bottoms below the junction of the two small streams. Nash knew of a dozen men within twenty miles who would kill a man for a thousand, or for half of that, with as little concern as most would feel over shooting down a deer. He would start in the morning for the place where these men held out.

Nash never knew that immediately after he left the two in the cabin they saved his life by a narrow margin; as he passed through the door Flash suddenly knew that Moran was allowing this man to escape. Unerringly he knew that this was a grave mistake and he sought to rectify it. He moved stealthily toward the door. If he had gained it Nash would never have reached Brent's camp that night. Betty saw and understood.

"Flash!" she called. "Flash! Come here!"

For a single second he hesitated and that second gave Moran time to see and he shoved the door shut with his foot as Flash jumped for it.

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Moran sat on the bunk beside the girl.

"What was it, Betty?" he asked. "What hold did he have to drive you far enough to marry him?"

"He had wanted me to for years," she said. "I loathed him. Dad was away. Then he told me that my father had built this cabin over thirty years ago—told me why and showed the proofs; said he would publish them and the officers would be waiting when Dad came home. I lied to him; promised without ever intending to go through with it. I played for time but he said he would turn the proofs over to the law that day unless I complied at once; that he would give them to me if I did." She produced two papers, yellowed with age, from the crack between the bunk and wall and handed them to Moran.

She watched him anxiously, giving frequent words of explanation as he sat before the fire and studied them.

One was a map without a single word, merely one small sheet covered with queer lines. Moran oriented it and knew it for the stream lines of the Land of Many Rivers. One portion was filled in with a sketch of even the smallest tributary creeks. In that part there was a single square dot and from

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it's location Moran knew that indicated the cabin in which he sat.

It had been smuggled inside the prison walls to another man—a boyhood friend less fortunate in his efforts to evade capture than was the man who drew the map. On his release he had found the cabin and found that letter telling where and under what new name to find his friend—the friend who had changed both name and mode of life and whose money had enabled both to break away from the wild outlaw days of youth. A quarter century later Nash had gained knowledge and possession of these documents while settling up this man's estate.

"I ran away and came out here the minute he handed them to me," she said. "I wrote to Kinney from the train, telling him to meet me here. I mailed another which will explain everything to my father when he gets home."

Moran turned to where Flash was sniffing at the door.

"I'm half way tempted to open the door and let him go," he said. "Nash will never trouble anyone again if Flash gets out of this house tonight."

The girl shivered slightly.

"Not that way," she said.

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Flash had noted the papers which Moran held and his hope of escape was renewed. He had come to look on all papers as messages for him to carry. True they were both in the cabin and he did not know where this message was to go but that mattered not at all if only it afforded him an opportunity to be free of those four confining walls.

This hope died as Moran tossed both map and letter into the fire. Then Moran crossed to the door, driving a wooden peg behind the bar which wedged it shut.

"Too bad, Flash," he sympathized. "But Betty is right. Your way is my way—but it's not the best."

CHAPTER XVII

A STORM had settled down over the hills, a fine rain falling from leaden skies. Flash had been confined to the cabin for two days and nights. Fearful lest he locate Nash and either kill or be killed himself, Moran had kept him a prisoner. Flash found this extremely irksome. The storm terminated in a fierce downpour of rain; this over, the sun peeped through the rifts and turned the floating fog banks to milky white. The wind which invariably follows each storm in the western hills sprang up and dispersed the mist. Flash's insistence to be freed now amounted to a clamor. He scratched furiously at the door and chewed at the beam which wedged it shut. His whining was so continuous as to resemble a steady chant of woe. He wished a speedy end put to this imprisonment. He was no indoor dog. Moran opened the door at last, and he was free to go.

He was hungry and his first concern was meat. As he topped the ridge above the cabin a luckless

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bobcat prowled along it far from any sheltering tree. This hate for the cat tribes was one of the things Flash seemed to know instinctively. There is a long standing grudge between the dog and cat kind. The enmity between domestic dogs and cats has been handed down from the age old feud between their wild progenitors. The first cat track which Flash had ever struck he had followed, knowing that he would find a natural enemy at the end of the trail. Nevertheless, while this knowledge had been inherited it was the knowledge of experience which had finally taught him how to handle cats.

The wind was right and not until he was almost upon it did the big cat know it's danger. It was too late to flee and the old tom whirled to face his enemy with tooth and claw, his back arched high. One paw darted forth in a lightning jab for the eyes of the rushing wolf. Flash braced all four feet, and halted his drive a yard from his prey. He had killed many cats, and previous battles had taught him the slashing qualities of those hooked feet.

He knew that the instant he launched himself upon the cat it would fall upon its back and rake his flanks and belly with savage strength. In-

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stead he commenced to circle slowly, the cat always facing him. The bobcat does not squall like his domestic cousin, and the snarls which issued from the gaping red mouth of the old tom were short and explosive.

Flash increased his speed, whirling round and round his prey with feint attacks. These amazing tactics were too rapid and bewildering for the lesser brain of the cat and he turned to flee. Even as he turned Flash pounced upon him and clamped his wicked teeth into his neck close behind the ears. As the big cat threw himself on one side to use his claws Flash hopped clear across him the opposite way. Twice more the cat changed sides and twice more Flash hopped, still retaining his crushing grip. His powerful jaws had closed until the long canine teeth pierced through the neck and met. Then Flash gave one savage shake and wrench, dropped his prey and leaped clear.

The bared claws worked convulsively, slashing circles in the air; this subsided to a mere twitching of the muscles, and the big round eyes stared in death. Flash tore the skin from the hips and feasted.

By some strange freak the meat of the bobcat or bay lynx is tender, fine fibered and clear, almost

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as transparent as the breast meat of a quail; however, Flash cared less for this kind than for the heavier red meat of larger game, and he did not gorge as hugely as he would have done if his victim had been an elk or deer.

The wind rose to a gale, shrieking along the cliffs and moaning in the timber. There came sudden lulls after which the wind leaped again from some new direction, sometimes completely reversing its course in a space of seconds; gusts drove down from different divides and eddied about the hills, rushing up one canyon while the currents were sucked straight down the next.

Revelling in his freedom, Flash left the cat and rambled on. He chose the ridge which broke away from the parent divide and flanked the north side of the canyon, and followed it to where it ended in a point which fell away abruptly to the narrow floor of the valley at the confluence of the two little streams.

As he stood on the point of this spur there came one of the sudden lulls in the wind. Faint vibrations trembled in his ears; the sound of iron on rocks, and he knew that somewhere far up the slope of the divide a pack outfit was coming down from the Rampart Pass.

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He growled uneasily and turned back. When halfway along the rims toward the cabin he stopped in his tracks, every hair stiff and erect along his spin. He had caught the plain scent of a single man; one strong whiff and it was lost in a conflicting rush of air. He knew that scent. It was that of one of the men who had been at Brent's cabin the night he had looked in at the window; one of the three who had come into the hills that same night. Often he had noted his trail among those around the secret camp near Two Ocean Pass. Later he had been among those who had tried to take the girl when she stumbled across their fire in the black fog.

Flash knew that this man was somewhere close at hand. It was not the trail scent but the body scent that he had caught! He prowled along the rim but could not catch the scent again and he raced for the cabin without another pause.

Moran was sitting on the sill but Betty was not there. Flash found her warm trail, less than five minutes old, leading along the slope. It soon dipped slantingly toward the stream. The wind was at his back and he could not catch her body scent, and the groaning of the trees under the lash

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of the gale drowned the sound of her footfalls but he knew she was close ahead.

There was a second's calm and the wind shifted abruptly, the draft now being sucked up the canyon instead of down. The change in Flash was as startling and abrupt as the change of wind. The dog in search of a loving mistress was transformed into a wolf in search of dangerous prey. He slipped cautiously from one windfall jam to the next. He did not snarl. Snarls would not terrify the enemy he now stalked—would only serve to warn him and, once warned, the day was lost for Flash. The thing he now stalked was man.

The wind blew full in his face and carried the tidings that Betty was just ahead through the tangle of down timber—and that near her was the man. A few yards more and he saw her seated on a log near the game trail. Fifty yards above her the man crouched behind a stump.

His actions were furtive. As Flash watched him he moved to a tree a few feet nearer to the girl and stood motionless as she turned and glanced uphill. Flash circled to come in behind him; circled cautiously with great care to remain unseen. When he had reached his goal the man

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was halfway to the girl. Experience in stalking all varieties of game helped Flash now and his coyote brain was working. A full-strain dog would have rushed valiantly at the first sign of menace to one he loved; and he would have defeated his own purpose as he died. This man wore a gun at each hip and Flash knew well his danger; that his one chance of success was to wait until the man entered cover which was dense enough to screen his own close approach for one desperate spring.

He drew near enough so that he could slip into each bit of cover as the man left it but still he was not close enough to spring. When within thirty feet of the girl the man knelt behind a waist-high mass of fallen lodgepole trunks. Forty feet behind him Flash crouched flat behind a log. It was too far for a single spring but it was his last hope. When the man started to crawl over or through the logs would be his time to strike. For a space of minutes neither moved, the man seeming unable to decide on his next step. Then he leaned forward and Flash tensed his muscles for the rush—but both suddenly drew back, each behind his own log screen.

Flash's every sense had been so absorbed by

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this dangerous stalk as to exclude all else. The man's quick ears caught a sound at the instant Flash caught the scent. A second man turned a bend in the game trail and came steadily on. He was of slender build and erect carriage; his gray beard was carefully trimmed, announcing the fact that he had come but recently from the outside world.

This new complication was too much for Flash. The dog in him rose above the wolf and the issue trembled in the balance. Only a saving ray of memory out of the dim past held him back from following the dog impulse to throw himself upon both men and sacrifice himself to warn the girl. This memory was not a distinct recollection of the time he had met this man in the moonlit park on the night he had first found the girl. His memory was not so retentive as that; could not retain for so long a time the identity of one who had made no very strong impression upon his mind. Rather, it was a certain haunting familiarity about his looks and scent that seemed in some vague way to be pleasantly associated with the girl. Without knowing why, he suddenly felt that this man was a reinforcement instead of an added menace.

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Berry was leaning instinctively away from him so did not see him until he was quite close. When he looked up and saw him and with a little start he stepped into the game trail and threw himself into his arms. Flash knew that this grasp was not one of battle, no fight to the death.

Berry and his man were friends. A search of Flash was an exceptional man. The two men so near him were exceptional men. They were both men of resourceful. It would be difficult to surprise either sufficiently to cause him for once to lose his presence of mind. Nevertheless the man who watched seemed to lack his usual keenness. At last he rose from behind the log his right hand dropping to the gun at his side.

Flash moved without a sound. The gun was held steady when his teeth ripped the forearm from elbow to wrist and struck solidly against the base of his hand the gun falling to the ground.

The force of the blow carried Flash clear against the log and he rolled half under the windfall. Even this sudden shock of surprise and pain was insufficient to cloud Harte's lightning brain. His

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only sound was a sharp, gasping breath as his left hand reached for his other gun.

Flash would have surely died as he darted back to the attack if the man on the trail had not gone into action as suddenly as Harte himself. His eye had caught the charging gray streak on the slope and with it the man rising from behind the log. He sprang six feet from the girl, his hand thrust inside his coat for the gun which was slung under his left armpit.

Harte's steady nerve did not desert him even in the face of this emergency. Instead of shooting Flash, he turned the gun in his left hand on the man below and crooked his crippled right arm to protect his throat from the wolf's fierce lunge. Two shots roared together and even as Flash drove his teeth into Harte's shoulder the man collapsed behind the log. As Flash darted away he saw the other man sag limply and crumple down on the trail.

Flash took shelter behind a windfall. Both men lay still and quiet. He heard Betty sob as she knelt beside the older man. Then he heard Moran bounding toward them from the cabin, crashing through the underbrush and hurdling fallen logs. He moved farther away. He knew

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that two men were dying and he could not tell how much of this was wrong and how much was right—or for how large a part of it he himself would be held accountable. Men sometimes reasoned queerly. Flash kept out of sight.

Moran found Betty kneeling on the trail.

"Where's the other one?—quick!" he said.

"Up there," she answered, pointing up the slope. "But he is dead. Don't go. I want you here to help me with my father."

Moran knelt beside her and started to unbutton the flannel shirt.

"I'll do all I can," he said.

The other man opened his eyes and shook his head.

"Too late, son," he said. "It's just as well this way. Look after her. Keep her away from Nash." He smiled at Betty and closed his eyes. Out in the timber Flash howled—not his usual note but a mournful dog howl which had never before sounded from his throat.

Moran sprang suddenly to his feet as a voice spoke from among the logs a few feet up the slope.

"I wonder how it happens that a dog always knows when someone cashes in," it said.

Moran found Harte sprawled behind the log.

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"You don't know me, Moran," he said. "I'm Calvin Harte. It's queer how things work out sometimes. No man could down me as long as I used my brains—but I lost my head for the one time in my life and here I am. I'd seen the girl before. I was sent here to get you and saw her again. She went to my head. I hung around watching her, planning to kill you and take her for myself. Indecision downed me. It never fails. You lose your decision, and you lose your life."

"Who sent you after me?" Moran demanded.

Harte smiled and shook his head.

"Even now I can't squeal on my own breed," he said. "I never tried to play both ends against the middle but only played one end—the losing end." After a short silence he reverted to his original question. "How is it that a dog can tell when a man kicks out?" he asked. "You're a naturalist, they tell me, so you should know."

It all seemed an unreal dream to Moran; Betty kneeling there with her dead and this man inquiring on odd subjects as calmly as if he had a hundred years of life ahead instead of seconds. Harte guessed the thought.

"I'd rather die talking than thinking," he said.

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"That topic will answer as well as any. Can you tell me why it is?"

"It is scent," Moran said, humoring his whim. "A bird dog knows the difference between a dead and a crippled bird. He will point a wounded quail but step in to retrieve it the instant it dies. There is a difference of scent. It is probably in that same way that a dog knows the instant a man's life goes out."

"Sounds reasonable," said Harte. "Thanks. I rather hope they don't get you, Moran—but they will." He closed his eyes. Once more Flash howled dismally out in the timber, and a human soul traveled with the sound.

Moran knew that Calvin Harte was considered the most clever and dangerous criminal at large. As he stood looking down at him he heard Flash growl warningly. There sounded the thud of hoofs and the jangle of equipment as Dad Kinney's pack train came swinging up the trail.

CHAPTER XVIII

KINNEY and Moran sat on the edge of the rims above the cabin and Flash sprawled near them. He eyed Kinney suspiciously each time he spoke or shifted his position. Ever since finding the girl Flash's out-look on life had been gradually swinging back to the one he had held before Moran had left him at the Bar T ranch. Since Moran's arrival at the cabin the change had been even more pronounced. Flash himself was unconscious of this change, it being the very natural consequence of his renewed association with man; but it was noticeable to Moran. His attitude toward men was now more that of dog than wolf. He did not fear Kinney but he resented his presence here, his intrusion into the life that had been so full and complete for Flash before he came. The one joy Kinney's arrival had brought to him was that he brought Moran's horses with him.

These old favorites had thrilled Flash with all the old pride and responsibility of the days long

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past when he had wrangled them night after night for Moran. Since Kinney had turned them out the evening before Flash had guarded them jealously, holding Kinney's horses along with Moran's on a meadow a mile or more below the cabin. The horses had been tired from the long trip across the Wapiti Divide and had alternately fed and rested quietly without attempting to leave. This had slightly disappointed him for he craved one of the long chases after the runaways. From where he lay he could see them grazing on the open meadow.

Kinney and Moran spoke but little. Both men were thinking of Betty's father who had so recently found his last resting place near the cabin he had built so long ago. Teton Jackson's secret was buried with him. Aside from these three at the cabin—and Nash—no man had knowledge that this quiet, successful New York business man was the wild rider of the Tetons whose daring had been proverbial almost half a century before. Kinney seemed to know all about the other's past and Moran once more recalled the rumors which linked the old man beside him with Teton Jackson's band.

"He was my friend," Kinney said, after a long

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and thoughtful silence. "As a boy he was wilder than a hawk—but square. Ideas was different then. All men throwed a pretty wide loop those days. Looking back, I can see that way maybe wasn't the best—but rustling was what you might call an honorable profession then. Half the men who own big outfits in this country to-day started in business years ago with nothing but a long rope and a running iron. Half the countryside stood in with Teton Jackson then. He was just about the king of this whole country. I've heard men link his name along with the riffraff they say is holed up back in here somewheres. That's all wrong. If they're here at all it's because this country affords a thousand natural places where a man can hide away, not because they was connected in any way with him. He wouldn't have let a gang of those petty larceny murderers light out here at all when he was running things. They're of a different breed from him. Don't make any mistakes, son, in your judgment of that little girl's father. Teton Jackson was a man!"

Moran laid his hand on the old man's arm.

"His name doesn't need any defense," he said. "He changed sides when he saw that his former game was wrong. He played that end even bet-

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ter than the first. But I'm glad you told me all this, Dad."

Flash had been gazing steadily in one direction. Moran eventually noted this concentration and turned his eyes in the same direction. The horses were quiet and he knew that it was something else that held the dog's interest for so long.

He looked on beyond the horses, down the valley which widened where each new stream flowed in. Five miles below, it opened onto the meadows of the Thoroughfare, one green strip of which was visible. A lazy ribbon of smoke ascended, twisting oddly about as the shifting breezes caught it. Moran turned his glasses on the spot.

"A camp," he said. "It's behind the point of a spur and I can't see the camp itself but I saw a man haze the horses out onto the meadow. It's a big outfit. There were more than thirty horses in the string. I'll go down and see who they are."

"It won't hurt any to find out," Kinney agreed.

Moran called Flash and started for the camp. When they passed the horses Flash looked them over until satisfied that all were there, then followed on after Moran. When they neared the other camp he was vastly uneasy at crossing the trails of so many men. He knew from the fact

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that Moran held to the open bottoms and used no caution in his approach that he expected to find none but friends. Hard experience in the old days at the Bar T had taught Flash many things. He knew that he must be with some man in order to be safe from others. When alone, all men shot at him on sight. Therefore, he did not forge ahead for a first view of the camp as most dogs would have done but turned the corner of the spur a few feet behind Moran.

Several men who lounged there eyed them curiously as they approached. While Moran was still fifty yards away one of them rolled over and set his toe against a large, blackened coffee pot, pushing it into the edge of the smoldering fire. Distances are far in the western hills and the first thought is that any approaching stranger should be fed. The man's move had been almost an unconscious one from long experience. They all nodded a greeting as Moran came up and another man pulled a tarp from over the remains of their noonday meal.

"Thanks, boys, but I've fed," Moran declined. He sat down cross-legged and rolled a cigarette from the makings which one of them offered him.

One of them questioned Moran as to the likeli-

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hood of their finding many bear in this locality and they all discussed that topic with enthusiasm.

"I've always lived in Vermont," said the man who had pushed the coffee pot. "I'd like to kill a bear."

Moran glanced at him in surprise. His instinctive move to warm the coffee had identified him with the west. The courtesy of an easterner might have been as instantaneous but it would never have taken just that form. The leathery complexions and sun-squinted eyes indicated that these men had spent their lives in the open. This was no sporting camp. Holsters, belts and guns were old with wear as were their clothes. Every saddle which straddled a log nearby carried a battered saddle scabbard and the rifle butts which protruded from them were all the same—.30-.40 Winchester carbines. For some reason they wished him to believe that their object was solely that of hunting bear.

Moran smiled at them and they knew that here was a man of their own kind; one who knew they lied. But no man volunteered any information as to the real reason of their presence here nor inquired the reason for his own.

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"Fine dog," said he of the coffee pot, and they turned and looked admiringly at Flash.

"Part wolf—most wolf," he qualified. He stretched forth his hand to Flash. "Come here, boy!" he ordered.

Flash avoided the hand and moved stiffly away.

"He's more or less peculiar and set in his ways," Moran explained. "I raised him and he never lets any man handle him but me."

"He'd soon make up with me," the other persisted. "I'd like to own that dog. I've got a pack horse," he suggested. "He's about as wicked looking as your wolf. He can kick, strike, buck and bite at the same time; but man—he's built! And he sure can tote a pack; weighs eleven hundred lean and was raised in the hills."

"Of Vermont?" Moran mildly queried.

"Bullseye!" the would-be Vermonter said regretfully. "Will you swap?"

Moran shook his head.

"He can't be bought," he said.

One of the men leaped suddenly to his feet and crossed to the point of the spur. After looking up the meadow he turned hurriedly to a picketed horse and led him back to the log which held the saddles."

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"Horses pulling out?" Moran inquired, as he jerked a saddle from the log and threw it on the horse.

"Out of sight," the other admitted. "I forgot it was my turn to wrangle."

"I'll save you a trip," Moran offered. He walked with Flash to the point of the hill and pointed up the meadow.

"Horses! Horses!" he said. "Go get 'em, boy! Go bring 'em in." He swung his arm and Flash raced away in the direction which he pointed out.

There were numerous horse tracks in the meadow but they all led one way. A quarter of a mile beyond, he found many spots where the long grass was mashed flat and he knew that after feeding they had bedded down here for a rest. One broad trail led away from here, heading straight up the meadow, and he followed it.

The men watched until he appeared but a swift-moving speck against the green. The pine clad hills closed in upon the ever narrowing valley until the timber pinched out the last slender tongue of open meadow. The speck vanished among the trees.

"There's a game trail there that leads on up the

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hills," the wrangler commented: "He's on their trail all right. We came in that way and they're taking their back track out. Someone will have to ride herd on those willow tails every living second or they'll leave us all afoot."

Twenty minutes later Moran pointed. The horses fled from the timber and swept straight down the meadow, well bunched and running smoothly. It was a picture which appealed to these men as no other could have done. Each laggard was heeled in turn and each one laid his ears and lashed out with vicious heels as he felt the teeth. As he brought them abreast of the camp Flash veered widely to the right and forged ahead, then inclined toward the leaders and forced them to the left. He held this point of vantage and wheeled them in a circle; then a smaller circle and a smaller until they milled in one spot and at last stood while he sped round them, driving back any bunch quitter who made a break to leave.

The men watched this exhibition and their faces expressed unqualified approval. The alleged Vermonter turned to Moran.

"I've got your number," he said. "You're Clark Moran. I never laid eyes on that dog be-

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fore to-day but I've heard many a bunkhouse yarn from men who have seen him work. I heard he turned killer on Wind River and that a wolfer trailed him clear back to the Bar T ranch on the Greybull and that they shot him there. It's my belief that they didn't shoot deep enough and that he got away. That lobo look; that wolf droop at his hips and that sliding gait of his; those yellow eyes and the way he handles stock. You say yourself he's a one man dog. There's only one like that. I'll bet my spurs he's the champion of the Greybull—Flash."

"You've guessed it," said Moran. "Funny how the news filters into an out-of-the-way place like Vermont."

"It is for a fact," the other admitted.

Moran's mind had been working on a solution of the reason for presence here of these eight men under pretense of hunting bear and he thought he had fathomed it at last.

"I'm going to ask you one question, Vermont," he said.

The man answered readily to the name; thus are new nicknames easily acquired in this land of loose nomenclature.

"I'll answer it," he promised.

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"I'm no man hunter," said Moran. "But I think I know what you're looking for and there's at least a chance that I can help you find it. You're a marshal, a ranger or a sheriff. Do you mind telling me which one?"

All eyes turned to Vermont for guidance, seeking a clew as to how to answer it, and from this Moran knew that Vermont was the man in charge.

Vermont turned back his leather vest and exposed a marshal's badge.

"U. S.," he said. "I've deputized these other boys."

CHAPTER XIX

HAVING milled the horses to his satisfaction Flash came back to camp and sat down close to Moran, listening gravely while the men discussed the real purpose of their hunt.

Moran was no manhunter, as he had told Vermont. It was something which ordinarily held no appeal for him, this tracking down his fellow-men. But Moran loved this hundred mile stretch of wilderness, almost untouched by the hand of man, in which he had spent so many pleasant months in the past few years. It was for him the most beautiful land in creation, the wonder spot of the world. The fact that it had become the stronghold of murderers and thieves was in itself a sufficient justification for his helping to stamp them out. Primarily, it was something more than that, something even deeper and stronger—his love for Betty, which had led him to commit himself to this course. Many times a day a wave of pure

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savagery possessed him as he thought of the fate which would have been hers but for Flash. At such times he was filled with a desire to crush and kill that matched the most ruthless strain in Flash. He reached out his hand and rested it on the dog's head.

"Flash, old boy," he said, "The gulf between us isn't so very wide after all."

Vermont smiled understandingly.

"Not so very," he agreed. "Take them as a whole and men aren't so bad—not much worse than dogs."

"What was your particular reason for thinking your men were up in here?" Moran inquired. "Merely the rumors to that effect?"

"Not altogether," said Vermont. "There's an eastern man, a lawyer, who is leagued with them. He's been suspected of planning and financing one or two escapes. It couldn't be proved. He's too smooth for that. His fees seem to be in the nature of a percentage rake-off on every crime. There's no law to prevent his taking money to defend these men in the event of their being caught. Once or twice a year he takes a hunt—maybe he hunts the same way we are hunting bear. Anyway this is where he hunts. Take that along

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with all those rumors about the gang that's holed up in here—well they sent me in to look for a man who is wanted on a federal charge, with instructions to investigate any others I could find.”

“Nash!” Moran exclaimed.

“Absolutely,” said Vermont. “That’s the man. Even if we’d find him prowling around up here we couldn’t touch him. Any man has the right to do that. I’ve never seen him—wouldn’t know him if I did. Would you?”

“I certainly would,” Moran stated. Many things were now quite clear to him. He had wondered how these men who had attacked the girl managed to live through the long winter and spring when the passes were blocked with snow. They could kill enough meat in the fall to last them through; it would freeze and keep; but they would need other things. These were marked men and they could not easily appear in the towns and buy supplies. They could go in and out themselves, revisiting old haunts when the hunt for them had died down. They might raid and rob and get back to the hills unseen; but they could not supply so large a number of men with food except through outside help. Nash’s connection with them pointed to the identity of this

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outside man, Brent. Moran recalled his frequent absences from home; the isolation of his cabin in the little blind basin from which a deep gorge led far back into the hills. A few trips with a pack train in the summer and fall would solve the problem of winter food. He explained this to Vermont.

"Very likely," he returned. "What's your idea of the best way to locate them?"

"Track them down with Flash," said Moran.

"But he's no trail hound," Vermont objected. "Collies, shepherds and the wolf breeds won't hold a trail."

"That's because they're trained for other things," Moran pointed out. "It's harder to teach them to hold a trail than it is to train a hound whose natural inclination already leans that way; but it can be done."

"But it will take a month to train him." Vermont was not convinced.

"Not over two days," Moran corrected. "Three at the outside. A hound wouldn't do at all. You'll need a silent trailer for this job, a dog broken to track at the end of a leash. One that will lead you up to them without a sound. His actions will tell us when we're close to them

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—when he catches the body scent ahead. We can start breaking Flash on a friendly trail—yours.”

Vermont looked doubtful.

“I know considerable about dogs myself,” he said. “I don’t relish having that wolf turned loose on any trail of mine. That breed of a dog don’t know when to quit.”

“One more reason for keeping him in leash,” Moran explained. “When we overtake you he’ll see that there’s no resulting fight. He’ll soon learn that we’re not following a trail to kill whatever we find at the end of it. He’ll get the point after a few tryouts; learn that this tracking of men is only a friendly sport. Then we’ll have less trouble handling him when we finally put him on the trail we want.”

“It’s worth a trial,” Vermont decided. He was a man of action. “Let’s start right now,” he said. Moran shook his head.

“In the morning,” he returned. “I’m going to send him on an errand now and have him guard my horses to-night.”

Moran wrote a note on a leaf of his notebook, rolled it around the elkhide collar and fastened it with a pin. At the first sight of Moran’s notebook Flash was alert. He knew what this meant

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and with the knowledge came a wave of longing to be with the girl. He moved up to Moran and watched him excitedly.

"Go!" said Moran. "Go!" He waved his arm and Flash was off.

Then men watched him turn up a side valley, running at top speed.

"He's an all around dog," said Vermont.

Flash raced straight to the cabin, stopping but once, and that time only to assure himself that the horses were all there. He burst into the cabin with a rush and leaped joyously around the girl. Never since finding her had he been away from her for so long a time. Then too, there had been a certain strain attached to suddenly meeting so many men. During his outlawry he had been forced to avoid all men; of late he had avoided all but Betty and Moran. Even Kinney's presence was distasteful. He could not drop back into old ways so completely in so short a time. He was glad to be away from them all and back home alone with her.

Betty read the note and held out her hand to Flash.

"Oh, I wish he hadn't decided to go into this thing," she said. "I'm afraid for him, Flash. I

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want him here with me. I miss him—miss him every living second he's away. It's all true, Flash, every word. I don't mind confessing it so shamelessly to you. How is it all going to come out?"

When Kinney arrived Flash dropped down to look over the horses. He spent most of the night in the cabin but made frequent trips to make sure of the safety of the stock. Once they left, intending to cross out over the divide, but he drove them back. Half an hour before daylight Betty attached a note to his collar and sent him back to Moran.

"Take care of him, Flash. Bring him back to me. Go, boy! Take it to Moran. Go!" Flash departed swiftly. When he neared the other camp he was shy about approaching it. Even though he had been among them the day before these men might shoot. He circled uphill behind it and slipped down through the timber. Figures moved about in the gray dawn. A fire blazed up. He heard Moran's voice and made a silent dash for him. The first they knew of his presence was when Moran stooped down to take the note. Each man greeted him warmly. It is almost an invariable rule that an indoor man of soft habits has little appreciation for the practical work of

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the staunch, half savage breeds of outdoor dogs while the outdoor man has a corresponding lack of interest in the parlor tricks of indoor dogs. There was not a man in the posse who did not envy Moran's ownership of this great gray wolf dog.

Immediately after breakfast Flash was launched upon his new course of training. Vermont left camp half an hour ahead of Moran who spent the intervening time reinforcing the dog's collar with a second strip of elkhide. He attached to this a heavy rawhide thong to serve as a leash. Flash did not relish this proceeding in the least, and submitted to it only because Moran willed it so. It brought memories of the tedious hours long ago when he had been chained to some one spot or other, unable to chase jacks or otherwise amuse himself.

Moran led him from camp, taking a course diagonal to the one Vermont had chosen. At first they traveled with considerable difficulty. Moran had fastened the thong to his heavy belt and Flash persistently refused to learn that he could not swing out to the side and pass on the opposite side of a tree. Moran, instead of following around, which appeared the more simple course,

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pulled Flash back each time to his own side of the tree. This was to teach him more quickly that they must both follow the same course. Flash quite often started off at a tangent to investigate anything which happened to interest him.

A snowshoe hare, whose coat was in the course of transition from the pure white of winter to the dark gray of summer and which was now spotted with maltese and white, leaped from his bed and darted away. Flash was after him with one leap which threw him flat at the end of his leash and jerked Moran to his knees, his back jarred by this lurch at his belt. Progress was slow and erratic for the first mile, much easier the second and from then on they proceeded without difficulty. Flash had learned that it was better for all concerned if he chose the same route as Moran.

Moran commenced circling when three miles from camp. Every few feet he stooped and examined the ground narrowly. He persisted in this course until it was impressed upon Flash that he was searching for something. His ears, eyes and nose informed him that there was nothing of interest in their immediate neighborhood so he was not much concerned. However, Moran's behavior at last roused his own interest and he

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watched him curiously, wondering what this thing could be for which Moran sought so long.

They neared a low ridge, the prearranged spot where Moran was to find Vermont's fresh trail. When within a hundred yards of the crest Flash caught the scent, and knew one of the men from camp had passed less than an hour before. He did not in any way connect this with the thing for which Moran still hunted. As they topped the ridge Moran pointed triumphantly at the plain print of a boot in the gravelly soil. Flash sniffed it critically but it told him nothing which he had not known for the past five minutes. Moran turned down the ridge on the tracks. They were of small consequence to Flash and it was some time before he fully realized that they interested Moran. Had they been those of a stranger he would have known this sooner, as his own quickened interest would have rendered him more alert. There seemed no good reason why Moran should trail this friend whom he had seen so recently. The one outstanding fact remained that whatever the reason, Moran was deliberately tracking him. Once sure of this Flash began to help, unconsciously at first, then with deliberate intent.

The trail was an easy one for a tracker of

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Moran's ability but he lost it intentionally time after time. As he veered away from it and circled to pick it up, Flash moved back to it. At first he did this without thought that he was helping Moran, but each time he was lavishly praised. Later, he sensed that Moran required his help. He was not surprised that his master seemed to have difficulty in working out this trail. There is one bit of knowledge which comes to but few animals; only the grizzly and a few of the more intelligent dogs who have hunted with man or have been hunted by him seem to know that man follows a trail, not by scent, but by the sight of the tracks. All animals know that their back track is a source of menace and they watch it. When followed, many of them double and twist, exercising every ingenuity known to them to break their trail. Close study will prove conclusively that they have broken it to confuse the nose but not the eye. The grizzly and a few renegade dogs have the sagacity to cross territory which shows no tracks, working for invisibility without regard for scent when trailed by man.

There was no longer the slightest doubt that Moran was following this man. Flash bristled slightly. Only one possible reason occurred to

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him. Men who were apparently friends one moment sometimes fought the next. Moran had fought with Brent. Flash had seen many sudden quarrels spring up at the Bar T ranch. Even when these disputes had not culminated in a physical clash the voices had frequently been hoarse with anger—much as dogs are prone to snarl even if there is no resulting fight. Not that Flash retained any precise recollection of every such event but their cumulative effect had implanted the knowledge that even friends disagreed among themselves.

Moran showed no anger and this puzzled Flash. In spite of that the longer they followed the trail the more Flash's distrust of the other man deepened. At last he caught the body scent and snarled. They found Vermont seated in the center of an open park and Flash bristled fiercely. Vermont hailed them joyously and Moran answered him in kind. There seemed to be no hostility between these two; but Flash's doubt still persisted and he walked stiffly as they approached and never once took his eyes from the man they had tracked until Moran sat down a few feet away and rolled a cigarette. Then Flash relaxed and his indifference to Vermont returned.

CHAPTER XX

LATE in the afternoon Kinney rode into camp, leading Moran's favorite saddle horse as the note had asked. He brought also the news that Harmon was camped some five miles east of the cabin. He had seen the pack train winding down a ridge and later had located the horses grazing on a meadow. With the aid of his glasses he had identified them as Harmon's string.

Moran had speculated over the possible number of men they would find when Flash led them to their retreat. There might be many and it was certain that they were desperate—men who would never surrender. He had put another proposition to Vermont to which he had at last agreed. Harmon's opportune arrival simplified the carrying out of this plan. As a consequence, when Kinney left it was with the promise that he would visit the ranger's camp on the following day. He carried both a letter and a verbal message from Moran. The letter was for the owner of the Bar

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T ranch, asking for the services of as many men as could be spared for the next two weeks. The verbal message was for Harmon, asking that he undertake the long trip to the Bar T and bring the others back.

Moran knew that both requests would be granted at once. Those men to whom he appealed were friends of long standing. Harmon and the Bar T boys would stay in a separate camp until their help was needed.

Shortly after Kinney's departure Flash grew restless. He longed for the girl and the quiet of the cabin. Moran noticed it and once more sent him off, a note fastened to his collar. Even if he had not, Flash would soon have slipped away.

The following morning he reappeared at the camp at daylight and his training was resumed. After the first experience on the previous day he had tracked Vermont no less than half a dozen additional times; enough so that he was heartily tired of it. This mode of traveling at the end of a leash bored him exceedingly.

The second day was spent in the same way as the first except that they tracked many different men. He had now learned what Moran desired and on each new trail he increased the amount of

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help until at last he took the lead altogether, following the tracks at the limit of his leash. Every period of trailing was preceded by one of circling and hunting in the timber. These invariably terminated at the trail of some man and Flash soon discovered that it was for men that Moran was hunting. Once sure of this he started for the first trace of man scent, tugging at the end of the thong.

Of all the things which Moran had taught him he cared for this the least. Perhaps it was because of the restraining thong. Whatever the reason, he deemed it a vastly stupid game without point or end, this trailing of a man and finding him only to start out almost at once in search of another. If he had considered only his own inclinations he would have avoided rather than have sought them. He held to this business for the one reason that it pleased Moran, whose praise was so well worth working for. By the end of the second day he would follow any trail on which Moran started him.

The morning of the third day Moran and Vermont rode away from camp shortly after Flash returned from spending the night at the cabin.

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Moran knew the country as well as any man and he had gone over it in his mind, first eliminating all places which seemed unsuitable for sheltering the men they sought. Some were discarded for one reason and some for another. The full length of the Wapiti Divide was the first to go. Hunters scoured the Shoshone slope every fall and frequently came across and worked along the near side. If the camp had been there it would have been discovered by some one of these. One after another the stretches of gently rolling, easily accessible country were discarded. The open meadows along the river bottoms were crossed off the list of possibilities. The occasional parties of hunters which penetrated this deep into the hills usually followed these easier lines of travel.

Of the places which remained he chose the roughest spots as the most likely possibilities. Among these was the divide between the Thoroughfare and the Yellowstone. Bridger Lake nestled on the flat at the confluence of the two streams and behind it Hawk's Rest, the point of the dividing range, swept up from its very banks, rising hundreds of feet in rugged cliffs.

All the first day was spent in exploring this one

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ridge. Flash found no taint of man scent and neither man found any likely traces. Before they had covered half of it Moran was positive they would not find it here. Flash's keen senses would have detected some sign of any large number of men. Nevertheless, to make absolutely sure they pushed on, peering down into every rimrocked pocket which fell away from either side. Night found them far back where this short divide joined the mass of the parent range.

The Yellowstone breaks into a dozen smaller streams at its very head and these flare up into the hills, draining the fan-shaped basin in which the river heads. The following two days they worked around this rugged basin but still without success. They discovered many old signs of man; a scrap or two of paper; the ashes of two small fires and a dozen dim heel prints made early in the spring when the earth was soft and spongy from melting drifts. Both knew that these had been left by the men they sought. No others came to this high country so early in the spring. These men could wander all over the hills for nine months in the year. Only when the passes were clear and infrequent pack parties came in were they forced to withdraw to their main re-

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treat. Even then they could travel about in twos and threes with little chance of being seen and even less of being recognized.

Every night Flash went back to the cabin and every morning Betty sent him back to Moran. They were now far from home and the round trip was a long one, but it meant no hardship for Flash as the two men proceed slowly by day, covering only eight miles on an average.

The fourth morning of the hunt they broke camp at the head of the Yellowstone and rode downstream. Their intention was to work the divide between that stream and the Buffalo Fork of the Snake. Pacific Creek flows from Two Ocean Pass to the Snake while Atlantic Creek drains the opposite slope to the Yellowstone, joining it some ten miles from the head of the river. They rode down to the junction and turned up Atlantic Creek to follow the game trails up to the crest of the divide. They left their horses in the heavy timber near the mouth of the creek which was some five miles nearer their base of supplies than the spot where they had camped the previous night.

A well worn game trail led up the creek from the broad meadows of the Yellowstone. Here too were many signs of men and evidence that

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horses had often traveled on this trail. They had gone but a few yards upstream when Flash's uneasiness was noticed by Moran. Flash knew well what lay ahead. Moran studied his actions closely. Flash gave no sign of having discovered any definite scent or sound but his general air was one of caring little for the place where Moran was leading him. From this Moran decided that Flash detected some lingering taint of man among these old signs; that it caused him uneasiness even though he knew that the men themselves were gone.

But it was not this. Once more Flash was handicapped by the animal habit of heeding more what his senses told him than of relying on what he knew. He needed something actual, something of the present, communicated to his brain over the paths of his senses rather than that which was stored in his mind from the past. He knew the camp was ahead. He had been there many times. From this he felt uneasiness. But there was nothing definite, no real scent or sound to prove to him that the danger was still there. Being an animal he needed the present corroboration of his physical senses to be sure of the menace which his mind told him lay ahead. Man, on

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the contrary, would have relied upon what he had previously discovered and which his reasoning mind assured him would be the same as in the past.

Moran watched him closely. When less than a quarter of a mile from the mouth of the creek Flash stopped abruptly, his hair bristling. A snarl rumbled in his throat. He had caught the trail scent of a man he knew. Moran turned and nodded to Vermont.

"He's caught a trail scent," he said. "He would be more excited if he smelled the man himself."

Vermont assented, knowing this was true. They went ahead, hunting carefully for a sign. Flash noted these movements and immediately associated them with Moran's actions during his two days of training. This was grasped the more readily from the fact that Moran still kept him leashed, yet he made no move to help. These other trails which Moran had sought had been made by friends. This man he knew for an enemy. He was one of those who had been around the fire that night. Flash had driven his teeth into him at least twice during the fight. Now that the actual scent was there he had no

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further doubt. True the scent was cold, having been left the evening before, but it was leading toward the secret camp.

Even though he did not consciously help Moran he located the trail for him. As they neared it his anxiety for closer inspection caused him to strain at the end of his leash and Moran followed. Flash held his nose low to the ground as he reached it, breathing deep of the hated scent. Moran discovered one or two faint prints on the hard packed game trail. The man had come in from a side gulch and turned upstream on the main path.

The valley was deep and gloomy. The little side streams which branched in were walled with frowning cliffs. There were a score of such, any one of which would have served as an ideal hiding place for the gang they sought. Both men knew that from now on the way was fraught with danger. While the outlaws had never molested parties who hunted here through fear of calling attention to their presence in the hills, any one of them would undoubtedly shoot on sight the first man who, either by accident or design, discovered their chosen hiding place. Moran motioned to Vermont to drop back and follow along behind.

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The marshal knew the reason for this; that it would be a useless sacrifice for both to stay with Flash. He would gladly have taken the lead but knew that the dog would not work for him. He shook his head regretfully and allowed Moran to proceed alone. He followed at a distance of a hundred yards.

When Flash realized that Moran was following the trail he was filled with doubt. This man was the girl's enemy; therefore he was also Moran's. If his master elected to play the foolish game of tracking him it must be through a mistake of identity whereby Moran believed he was following a friend. Flash held the trail merely from the habit of submitting to Moran's will but he held it reluctantly.

He presently detected that Moran was working this trail in a different manner from the way he had worked the previous ones. He made frequent stops and stood motionless while he peered ahead through the trees. Several times he reached back and loosened the automatic in its holster. Flash caught glimpses of Vermont moving noiselessly along behind. He carried a Winchester with his thumb on the hammer. Never once did he cross one of the little open glades in the timber until

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after Moran had disappeared among the trees on the opposite side. Flash had many times seen Moran stalk game. He was stalking now. Flash knew the truth at last. They were deliberately hunting down this man. A savage thrill surged through him with the knowledge but his uneasiness also increased.

Additional trails joined in from every branching canyon. The main path flashed a multitude of messages. These varying bits of scent were as plain to his quivering nose as the crazy colors of a patchwork quilt are plain to the eye of man. True, the majority of these scents were old, none of them made since the previous day, but he knew the perils of the spot to which they led.

Both men too, had noted all these things. The trail up the main creek was worn broad and deep; those that joined in from tributary canyons were too well traveled to have been worn by the feet of the few animals who would be apt to live in so restricted a space. The scarcity of game signs indicated that the country had been hunted thoroughly and often. Every open glade showed evidence of having been closely pastured year after year by many horses. Moran judged these to be

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the tracks of Brent's string, left during his many visits to this spot with a pack train loaded with supplies.

Flash's actions suddenly changed. As they neared the mouth of a canyon which opened from their left the wind brought him the scent of the men themselves. They were still far away but the air was heavily laden with their conglomerate odor. He shrank from entering this place in the light of day. But Moran proceeded no farther. He had found what he sought—all that he could find in this way. He knew that Flash had caught the body scent. The men were there. It would be suicidal for the two of them to enter that gloomy canyon alone. In addition, their closer approach might serve to warn the men they hunted.

The entrance to the canyon was narrow, scarcely fifty yards across, and the mouth of it was flanked by towering cliffs. The broad trail turned into it while only a dim path followed on up the bottoms of the main creek. Just outside the canyon mouth was an opening which would have been the usual grassy park except that each succeeding spring the floods from melting drifts turned the

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rivulet which drained it to a raging torrent which boiled out of its banks and swept the flat. These freshets were freighted with débris and rocks. The lighter driftwood was carried on but the stones were deposited when the force which carried them was dissipated by spreading over the flat. This had formed a rock bar, thrown fan-wise from the mouth of the gorge. Behind it, just within the grim walls, the timber grew again, standing dense and tall.

The two men retraced their steps. Flash could not understand this sudden change of front but he knew it for the better course. No good could result from penetrating this dim canyon in the light of day.

They rode down the Yellowstone to its junction with the Thoroughfare and up the latter stream to camp.

"To-morrow we can locate the head of that canyon," Vermont said as they rode. "But before we go prowling along the rims I want to go back to camp and tell the boys where that place is. There's always a chance that they may spot us just a second or two before we spot them. That gulch is probably rimrocked the full length so there's no trail out except at the head. But

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we want to be sure. Then when the Bar T men come we can close in on them from both ways at once."

The message which Flash bore to Betty that night carried the news of the find. She was not in the cabin when Flash arrived but he followed her warm trail up to where she sat with Kinney on the point of rocks.

It was too dark to read it without the aid of matches which Kinney shielded with his hands. She found its text disquieting and she feared terribly for Moran. Its effect upon the old man beside her was exactly the opposite. He looked back over the better part of a century of strenuous life and found that his most pleasant memories were those of the wildest days. He knew he could not stay out of the coming fight.

"Hell will break loose in these hills in a day or two," he prophesied and the girl detected an eager note in the old man's voice.

A dim glow showed through the trees on the point of the spur which hid the marshal's camp. A bright blaze danced in a meadow just across the ridge from it and Kinney knew that Harmon had just arrived with the Bar T men. Another tiny point of light caught his eye; up among the

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bald ridges near Two Ocean Pass it dipped and swayed. A few brief flashes answered it from away off toward the Sunlight Gap. Kinney dropped his arm across the girl's shoulders.

"War times, girl! War times!" he said. "The Injuns have got their signal fires going all through the hills."

CHAPTER XXI

THE first faint streaks of gray lightened the sky above the eastern peaks and the marshal's men arose—and found old Dad Kinney seated on a log. He called Moran aside.

"I left Flash with her," he said. "Son, I'm going to mix into this deal myself. Nash was the man that sent Harte out to do his killing. Teton Jackson was my friend. I crave just one good look at Nash somewhere within three hundred yards before I die." A relic of early days swung at his hip. The gun which had answered in the past was good enough for him now. It was the Frontier Model Colt, the murderous black powder forty-five of the Seventies.

A horse neighed from the meadow and another answered from the hills. Ten minutes later Harmon rode up to the fire.

It was Vermont's plan to locate the trail at the head of the canyon that day and attack from both ends the next. Day was just breaking when the ranger, the marshal, Kinney and Moran put their

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horses into a steady trail trot down the Thoroughfare bottoms. Harmon's horse snorted and shied away from the timber edge as Flash joined them a hundred yards from camp. Betty had known that no one could slip up behind Moran during the fight if Flash was with him; that Flash would fight like a fiend for him if occasion arose and she had sent the dog in spite of Kinney's instructions to the contrary.

They left their horses in a wooded basin and started up the slope of the divide on foot. The country was a veritable maze of bald ridges and intersecting canyons. It was noon when they stood at the head of the gorge they sought. A faint trail led from it.

"That's all we need to know," said Vermont. "Let's get back before they spot us prowling around up here."

The canyon widened rapidly, then narrowed down again. As the men started back they kept well away from the edge to avoid skylining themselves on the rims. At the widest part of the canyon Flash slipped toward the edge. Moran was watching him. Flash crouched flat a few feet from the brink and looked across at the opposite cliff five hundred yards away. During the

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days he had run wild up here he had often come to this point, the one place from which he could see the secret camp. Moran saw the hair fluff up along his neck. His ears were tipped sharply forward.

"Flash sees them!" said Moran.

The four men lay prone and crawled up to Flash from behind. Kinney cautiously pushed two stones near the edge and looked through the crack between. The others followed his example and after the first glance no one of them had a single doubt as to the whereabouts of the long rumored Hole.

The far wall of the canyon rose sheer and straight for half its height. From that point to the top a crescent shaped depression was nicked out of it. The floor of this dent was almost flat, forming a bench of several acres in extent. It was covered with a dense growth of spruce. The encircling walls which rose above it were as glassy smooth as the rims which fell away from its lower edge.

It seemed that there could be no possible way of entering this pocket in the cliff but the hill trained eyes of the four men detected the trail at once. A faint streak angled across the face of

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the wall, appearing above the trees farther down the canyon and inclining up toward the corner of the wooded bench set back in the cliff. At that distance it looked to be but a faulted vein but these men knew it for a ledge which traversed the face of the rock, undoubtedly wide enough to permit the passing of men and possibly affording a foothold for their horses as well. Somewhere in that pocket were the cabins which sheltered the men they sought.

As they watched, a string of horses appeared on the lower end of the ledge and moved in single file across the face of the cliff. They counted fifteen. A single man rode the last horse and urged the others on.

"I don't know the man but the horses are Brent's," said Moran.

"Then we'll bag him too," Vermont predicted. "To-morrow morning's sunrise will see the end of the hunt."

Old Dad Kinney shook his head.

"That will be just too late," he said. "They're pulling out. You'll have to strike to-night. I know the signs." He spoke with a conviction which impressed his friends.

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This old strategist of the hills had pieced his bits of knowledge together and arrived at a conclusion of his own. The outlaws had retired to their hidden retreat as soon as the marshal's posse had come in. They had undoubtedly spied upon his camp with glasses from some commanding point. Moran had discovered at once that Vermont's party was no camp of hunters and he had known them for what they were. The men they trailed were no less keen. The signs which Moran had found the previous day had indicated that Brent usually held his horses on Atlantic Creek when here on his frequent trips. This time he had departed from the custom through fear that their presence would betray the spot. Instead he had held them in some distant pocket of the hills where their discovery would mean nothing at all. Except from urgent reasons he would not now have sent them back. In all probability some of the band had seen Harmon coming in the night before at the head of a dozen men. The signal flashes had been the call for Brent.

"They're afraid the hunt will get too hot for them," Kinney said. "They've got saddles cached up there. They could make thirty miles

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if they rode all night. Then they could scatter, each man for himself, until the hunt died down. Better get your men here to-night."

The four men drew back from the rims. Vermont was a man of quick decisions and he recognized the logic of Kinney's words. They had no time to waste.

"We can't take that chance," he said. "But we'll have to work fast to block them in to-night. Harmon's men will have the longest trip so I'll bring my boys to cover the upper end and work down the trail on foot. Harmon should be able to reach the mouth of the canyon an hour or two after dark by riding hard. You two stay here to watch which way they go if they leave before we get back. Then join Harmon's men to-night. They can hardly miss that broad trail up the creek."

Time was precious. Kinney and Moran watched the other two go back the way they had come.

When the marshal and the ranger reached their horses they rode together until late in the afternoon. Then Harmon turned up a creek which branched from the Thoroughfare in the direction of his own camp. Both horses were tired but

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the distance was now short and neither man spared his mount. Vermont reached his destination first. Half an hour later the Bar T foreman saw Harmon's horse swing round a bend. The horse was lathered and running hard. The foreman spoke to the man who had been detailed to wrangle the horses for the day.

"Run 'em in," he said. The wrangler mounted and whirled up the valley.

"Every man throw his saddle on a horse," the foreman ordered. "One of you catch up a fresh horse for Harmon. We're about to make a ride."

Ten minutes later Harmon and the twelve Bar T men were pouring down the valley. Just before dusk they turned into the bottoms of the Thoroughfare. Harmon noted tufts of grass and dirt loosened by the feet of running horses.

"Vermont's men are ahead of us," he said, "and going strong."

Back on the rims, Kinney and Moran watched the trail which angled down the cliff until too dark to see. Three men had gone up to the pocket during the day but not one had left it.

With the coming of dusk Flash felt the restless urge to be off; to get back to Betty and the cabin which was home to him. Moran wrote a brief

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note in the waning light, promising to return to the cabin the following day.

"I want to see her even more than you do, old boy," Moran said to Flash. "Go!" Flash darted away into the gathering dusk.

Not until night obscured even the outlines of the opposite rims did the two men quit their post. When they left they did not return to their horses but made a wide detour which would bring them out near the mouth of Atlantic Creek. They threaded their way along the dividing ridges between the many yawning canyons and eventually came out upon one long spur which led away in their chosen direction.

When halfway along its course both men stopped with one accord as a voice spoke to them out of the night. Moran knew the voice. It was that of Nash. Forty feet from them a figure loomed on the brink of the rims, hazy and indistinct except for the sharp silhouette of the broad brimmed hat. Moran involuntarily closed his fingers on Kinney's arm.

"Nash," he whispered.

"Brent! Is that you, Brent?" Nash called huskily. "I tried to locate you and lost the way.

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I left the horses down in the bottoms and climbed this point to try and flash a signal to you." The voice trailed away. When it came again it held a note of fear. "Why don't you answer? I took the wrong trail, I guess."

Moran felt Kinney gently disengaging his arm and drawing away from him.

"All right, Nash," Kinney said soothingly. "You're going to get started on the right trail at last."

The roar of Kinney's gun crashed in Moran's ears. The figure on the rims tossed up its arms and swayed for a single second, then disappeared. A sound floated up to the two men on the ridge—the sound of a heavy body crashing through the spruce trees hundreds of feet below.

Without a word they resumed their way, working down the point of the spur. Once in the bottoms they turned into the mouth of Atlantic Creek and took the broad trail which followed it. When they reached the rocky bar they removed their boots and crossed it without a sound, resuming their footgear as soon as they reached the far side. It had been prearranged between them to wait just within the mouth of the canyon for Har-

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mon's arrival with the men from the Bar T. They moved cautiously ahead for a hundred yards. Then Moran touched Kinney's arm and they stopped. It was inky black between the towering walls of the gorge. They sat down cross-legged on the ground. Before they were well seated a horse gave a whistling snort of surprise from the brush nearby.

Out in the darkness a man cursed fretfully.

"The horses are getting spooky," he said. "It's blacker than hell in here. Let's have a light." A second man gave a grunt of assent and they moved toward Kinney and Moran.

Both rose silently and drew back flat against the base of the cliff. A match flared up near them, glowing pinkly through the fingers which shielded it, and throwing a dim light across an unshaven face. Kinney stretched his hands up along the wall and felt the edge of a break a few inches above his head. He gripped it with his fingers, placed his foot on a projecting point of rock and drew himself up. He swept one arm out to determine its width and leaned down to touch Moran. It was only an irregularity in the cliff, a little shelf some two feet wide. The two men were breaking dry sticks for their fire and

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under cover of this noise Kinney and Moran mounted the shelf and lay flat upon it, screened by the low hanging branches of a spruce.

A blaze sprang up within fifty feet of them. As its brilliance increased they could see that it had been kindled in the center of a small open glade only a few feet across. The branches of the surrounding spruce almost met above it, roofing it in. Several men rode down the gorge, tied their horses among the trees and joined the first two at the fire. The newcomers were scarcely seated when more arrived. They came in straggling groups of twos and threes until there were fifteen men around the fire. Every word of theirs reached Kinney and Moran.

They discussed the possibility of the posse finding their retreat. All were agreed that their present plan was best—to ride all night and scatter through the hills in little groups, returning to the Hole once more as soon as the hunt died down. They now only waited for Brent and Nash to come before starting on their nightlong ride. The two men on the shelf heard things which turned their blood to ice. Both had taken it for granted that Nash and Brent had planned to leave by themselves a few hours earlier than

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the rest; that Nash had lost the way, which accounted for his unexpected appearance on the ridge. They had guessed as much from his speech.

The things they now heard forced them to put a different, more sinister interpretation upon the few words he had spoken prior to Kinney's shot. Brent had been bribed to go to the cabin for the purpose of killing Moran and bringing the girl to Nash. Nash was to take the horses and wait for Brent a few miles from the spot, leading a third horse for her. Several of the men laughed at his timidity; his sending another instead of doing the thing himself.

Moran reconstructed his ideas of the reason for Nash's sudden appearance on the rims. The harrowing picture was plain to the last detail. Naturally they had avoided the bottoms on their way to the cabin but had held to the hills instead. Nash, a novice in the woods, had been confused by these unfamiliar trails and failed to make the appointed spot by dark. Already far from it he had blundered on in the wrong direction until at last some landmark which he knew informed him that he was nearer the spot from which he had started than the one where they were to meet. He had climbed the ridge to flash a signal of his

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whereabouts to Brent. Moran could see it all. Nash now lay dead in the bottom of some obscure canyon and Betty was somewhere off there in the hills with Brent. It was not a pretty picture.

Moran's hands were clenched and beads of moisture rolled down his face as he realized his helplessness. He silently cursed himself for entering into this hunt at all; cursed Harmon and Vermont for idling on the way and Kinney for leaving her alone. There was no slightest chance of his getting away to hunt for her. If he was killed in the attempt she was lost. By sheer force of will he fought off the impulse to make a run for it and he strained his ears to catch some distant sound which spoke of approaching help.

The horses stamped fretfully back in the timber beyond the circle of firelight that danced in the little opening and threw fantastic shadows on the trees that fringed it. The hard faces and varied attire of the men completed a wild picture which held no appeal for the two men on the shelf.

Moran's one devout hope was that they would go and leave him free to hunt for her. Kinney viewed it more coolly and in a different light. If these men should make an all night ride and

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scatter in some distant spot Brent would follow with the girl. If they made a move to leave before help came it would be far better to scatter them here.

They were growing restless. Nash and Brent were long overdue. It was evident that they would soon start without them. Seely yawned and stretched. He spoke of Harte and wondered why he had never returned. They did not know of the double killing at the cabin. Their words were conclusive proof that they had not even known of its existence until Nash had described its location to Harte. They did not know of Kinney's arrival or that Moran had not been staying there of late. Nash had undoubtedly taken it for granted that conditions there would be the same; that Brent would find Moran and Betty there alone.

Siggins, Fox Jarrat and Cole rose to their feet. Their impatience was reflected a thousandfold in Moran. The men moved restlessly about the fire. Hanlin paced back and forth.

"Oh, hell! Let's go!" he said. "Brent will know where to look for us."

Kinney had risen to his knees. The branches which had shielded them in such friendly fashion

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now seemed only to hamper him as he peered down the barrel of the big Colt at the men around the fire. He shook his head and lowered the gun as he leaned over to Moran.

"Watch your chance to slip away and look for her," he whispered. "Good luck, Son."

The old man dropped from the ledge and began to shoot.

The next second Moran stood beside him, the sharp crack of his automatic alternating with the terrific roar of the black powder forty-five.

Siggins and Cole sank down beside the fire. Jarrat took three jerky steps and collapsed. Hanlin reached for his gun but his fingers fell away from it. The murderous fury of his face faded to a look of blank surprise. He placed his hand over his heart, turned on his heel and pitched down upon his face.

The rest were leaping for the shelter of the trees as the thought flashed into every mind that they had been ambushed and surprised. Their frantic horses reared and plunged as they sought to untie them with one hand while with the other they shot back across the open space. The flashes of their guns showed in red splashes among the purple shadows under the trees and the balls flat-

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tened with a nasty splintering of rock against the cliff back of Kinney and Moran.

One horse, unmanageable from fright, stamped with his rider into the firelit opening, Seely shooting as he came. Kinney was cramming fresh shells into the Colt. Moran steadily fired his last cartridge and the horse swerved. Seely sagged limply in the saddle and slipped to the ground as the horse plunged back among the trees.

Every man thought the marshal's posse was upon them. As each one succeeded in mounting he crashed away through the brush.

There was a sudden sound of drumming hoofs which increased to a clattering roar as a dozen hard running horses struck the rock bar coming in. With exulting yells the Bar T men flung from their saddles and blocked the mouth of the gorge.

Some few of the outlaws whirled their horses and headed up the canyon, only to turn back again as the marshal's posse opened on them with a deadly hail of rifle fire. Every sound of their progress drew an answer from some fast shooting Winchester. The fight shifted from a general engagement to scattered individual duels and the gun flashes cut vivid crimson streaks through the night.

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Moran slipped toward the mouth of the canyon, keeping close to the wall. He reached it safely and mounted the first Bar T horse he found. One of his own friends emptied his gun at him as he clattered across the rock bar. He headed the horse down the trail and urged him on. His one idea was to get to the cabin with all possible speed. For the first time he thought of Flash. If he found him at the cabin he could put him on Brent's trail. Then suddenly he had the one single comforting thought which had come to him since hearing of Nash's devilish plans.

When he recalled having dispatched Flash to her at dusk he fervently blessed the inspiration which had led him to train Flash in this work of carrying messages. If Flash reached the cabin and found her gone he would take her trail. Moran knew his terrible fighting qualities when aroused. If he suspected that Brent meant to harm her there would be a savage fight and she might escape under cover of his attack. If only he learned this in time—discerned the man's intentions before Brent had time to see him and use his gun.

The horse which Moran rode stumbled under him, recovered his balance and staggered on.

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Moran guessed the truth and dismounted. The horse stood with drooping head and the light of a match revealed a red stream bubbling from his flank with each labored breath. One of the shots fired at Moran as he crossed the bar had found the horse.

The firing had long since ceased and he knew the outlaws had been killed to a man. He made a rapid calculation of distances, determining whether to keep on and go to his own horse or to turn back for another. He drew his gun and inserted a fresh clip of shells. As he led the horse aside so its body would not obstruct the trail, Moran prayed that Flash had found the girl.

But Flash had not.

He had reached the cabin only to find that she had left it long before. Her cold trail mingled with that of Brent. The hair along his spine stood straight and stiff, and Flash snarled deep in his throat. Without an instant's hesitation he swept away on the trail, and as he ran there seemed to be two of him—two spirits urging the same flesh along on this double trail left by the one he loved the best and the one he hated the most of all those on earth. The dog strove to overtake

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the girl and protect her with his love; the wolf hungered to reach Brent and fall upon him with murderous hate. So often in the past one extreme had been swayed from its course by the opposing force of the other. Now, for the first time in his life, both combined to drive him on and on over the trail from which nothing but death could shake him.

Their course led along the ridge which stretched to the low divide between the Thoroughfare and the Yellowstone. It was rougher but much shorter and more direct than the longer trail through the bottoms by way of the forks. On the divide they had stopped long until Brent was satisfied that Nash was lost. But Flash did not stop, and he found the trail much warmer as the plunged down the far slope. The roar of the fight at the canyon thundered in his ears as he ran. It had ceased when he reached the bottoms. The two he followed had forded the Yellowstone and the trail led straight away to the mouth of Atlantic Creek. It was warm and still slippery from the water which dripped from their soggy clothing.

While still a mile from the mouth Flash heard a single shot from a short distance up the creek

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—the shot which ended the misery of Moran's wounded horse. It was followed by a sound which turned Flash to a raging fiend.

Half a mile inside the mouth of the creek Brent had stopped at the outbreak of the fight ahead. He had turned back when the shooting ceased. The sound Flash heard was Betty's cry for help sent out to the man who had fired that last single shot. There was no second cry, for Brent clamped his hand on her mouth. But one had been enough and Moran and Flash were both leaping toward the sound.

Flash swept on with every ounce of his terrific speed, knowing that he followed this trail to kill. He ran now with the froth slobbering from his fangs and spattering back on his silky coat. The yellow eyes were streaked with red. His whole heart was driving him with the seething lust to sink his teeth into the man who had caused that cry.

The body scent came from just ahead. Then he saw Brent coming toward him down the trail, his left hand clamped on the girl's wrist as he pulled her after him.

Brent half turned, reaching for his gun as he heard Moran bounding down the trail behind him.

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Then a dim shadow drove at him and savage teeth slashed at the arm which held the girl. The instant his grip relaxed she tore away and fled. Moran almost ran over her as he turned a bend but checked his rush and caught her, holding her close in his arms.

Brent's gun spoke once and the flame scorched Flash as he sprang the second time. Then his teeth closed on the hand and crunched the bones as he tore the gun away. Brent was a powerful man. He lunged and struck, kicked terribly with his heavy boots. His head struck a dead limb and with one wrench he tore it from the tree. It whistled through the air as he whirled and struck again and again. He screamed like a fighting animal as he sought to drive off this thing which had pounced on him out of the night.

The fight was short. Brent lurched to his knees, and before he could rise again the teeth which had torn the life from many a tough bull elk closed on the soft throat of a man. There was no sound under the trees.

Then a cry filled the valley and echoed among the rims—the savage, triumphant cry of the killing wolf.

CHAPTER XXII

THOSE who dwelt in the fashionable suburb which nestled under the bluff were far from suspecting the origin of the big gray dog who had lived among them for so many years. It was generally conceded that he sprang from some gentle breed of dogs; from some strain that never barked or snapped. It was inconceivable that he would ever bite.

A new snow had fallen, and the suburbanites looked from their windows upon a familiar scene.

The big gray dog was racing over the winding drives with his peculiar sliding gait. He drew a sled, and the six-year-old boy who rode it was making the air ring with shouted commands. No one who beheld the sight suspected the grim conflict which tore the soul of Flash. How could they know that this was The Season—the running moon of the wolves?

When night fell Flash slipped away and ran for miles over the hardwood hills. The phantom

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pack ran with him but there was no real kill at the end of the chase.

It was one of those still nights that come at this time of year. No slightest breeze rustled the branches. The mercury did not vary a fraction of a degree; cold enough that the leaves beneath the snow were not even moist from its melting; warm enough so that no crust formed on top. All nature seemed suspended—trying to decide whether there would be a thaw or a drop to bitter cold.

Flash came out upon the bluffs which overlooked the town, standing erect, his great head stretched forth in a straight line with his back.

Horses and cows stood rigid in their stalls as the cry reached their ears. Prowling wild things stopped in their tracks. Distant bands of sheep stilled their maddening blat. Conversations in the houses below were broken short.

The suburban dwellers endeavored to explain the queer thrill the sound had given them.

Of them all only two knew the truth. Clark Moran and his wife knew that it was the wolf shiver which shook them; that the cry had been the call of the last buffalo gray for his mate—a cry that would never be answered.

THE END

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