

Dusty Star

Olaf Baker

The image features a vibrant abstract design. The top half is white, while the bottom half is a solid cyan color. Overlaid on the cyan background are several lime green geometric shapes: a horizontal bar on the left, a thick curved line, a downward-pointing triangle on the right, a vertical bar on the left, another downward-pointing triangle at the bottom left, a vertical bar at the bottom center, and an upward-pointing triangle at the bottom right. The text 'Project Gutenberg' is written in white at the bottom right, partially overlapping the upward-pointing triangle.

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DUSTY STAR

BY OLAF BAKER

Author of "SHASTA OF THE WOLVES."

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BRANSOM

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**FIVE TIMES MORE THE MOTHER MADE THE LONG
DOUBLE JOURNEY**

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Five times more the mother made the long double journey

The arrival of Kiopo was now known to every husky in the camp, and each husky hated him from the bottom of his husky heart

Her look said as plainly as possible, "What are you going to do?"

On came the big grey stranger, walking stiffly, his tail waving slowly from side to side



DUSTY STAR



PART I



CHAPTER I

CARBOONA'S SECRET

In an old badger-hole among a maze of bramble-brakes and ancient thickets of thorn and juniper covering the foot of one of Carboona's eastern spurs, one morning very early, as Little-Sweet-Voice, the white-throated sparrow, was singing his earliest song, a great event took place.

It was twilight in the badger-hole, and only persons accustomed to odds and ends of day-light could have seen what was going on. Not that it mattered. The only person to whom it could have mattered was a grey mother-wolf, and she did not need the light.

The badger-hole had been enlarged, and specially arranged for the event, without the badgers having been consulted. This wasn't as rude as it sounds, for the simple reason that there hadn't been any badgers to consult. Long before the mother-wolf and her mate had gone apartment-hunting, the badgers had moved deeper into Carboona, leaving no address. Now that it was more roomy and better aired, it was a pleasant place enough so long as you didn't stub your nose against a jagged stump of pine root that pierced the northern wall. True it was a little damp in places, and got noticeably stuffier as you went further in; but it was a good wolf stuffiness, and helped to give the true home smell that warned strangers that all interfering noses had best keep out of the way.

Before Little-Sweet-Voice, at the tip of his fir-branch high over the hole, had come to the end of his song, seven baby wolves had got themselves born.



Seven little blind, hairless, helpless things that hadn't an inch of beauty between them; seven little flabby uglinesses that could do nothing but wriggle and suck. But such as they were, the old wolf loved her ugly babies with all her wolfish heart. For a long time no one—not even the father wolf—saw them but herself. A better place for being secret than the hole among the bramble-brakes she could not have chosen. The great old thorn-trees, with their twisty stems and thorny

branches which had been growing twistier and thornier through countless moons, stretched their gnarled limbs high above the den and guarded endless secrecies as countless as the moons. And the brambles reached their twisted tangles this way and that in a bewildering labyrinth of thorns. While, dotting all the upper slopes, the junipers, large and little, stood up in dusk battalions above the lonely land. None but the wild furred feet of the wilderness ever went that way. In all its mazy length the print of human moccasins had never slurred the undergrowth trails. Even the wild creatures themselves did not greatly frequent it, by reason of its mighty growth of thorns, so that even among the long solitudes of Carboona, it was a loneliness apart.

It was some time before the little wolves got any idea of the outside thorniness and brambleness which hid them from the public gaze. All they knew of the world was the good smell and the good gloom of the badger-hole, where, as soon as their eyes were opened after the nine days, they could make out the immense grey mass of their mother, who came and went mysteriously, a mountain of warmth and food. And here, in the perpetual twilight, they slept and sucked, and sprawled and tumbled, and occasionally went tremendous expeditions, and stubbed their noses against the pine root that struck like a savage promontory into the abyss.

Not until they were several weeks old, and were really getting very troublesome in the den, did the patient old mother allow them their first glimpse of the world; and then only after she had taken every possible precaution to safeguard against anything, bird, beast and human, being on the watch.

The first coming out of the cubs into the sunlight was a wonderful affair. The old mother, having first scoured the country on all sides to see that no danger was lurking near, put her nose into the mouth of the den, and made a low noise in her throat. Instantly there was a hollow thumping and scurrying and scrambling and yelping, and then the badger-hole became a miniature volcano that shot seven small wolf-bodies into the light.

Out they tumbled, seven little furry fatnesses, with pointed noses, and pricked ears, and tiny black eyes that blinked nervously in the sun. And there they sat for a while in unspeakable amazement, and stared and blinked, and blinked and stared, and wondered where they were.

The first to move was a cub the merest trifle larger than the rest. He ran a few steps in an uncertain wobbling manner, stubbed his nose against a stone, yelped,

backed almost as fast as he had gone forward, lost his balance on an old mole-hill, and rolled over on his back. And this was his first experience of the unevenness of the world. After that he lay and kicked, struggling with all his baby might to get right side up again. And his six brothers and sisters observed him from their superior elevation of six inches, and never offered to help; till, all of a sudden, it occurred to them what a glorious opportunity his upside-downness presented to them, and rolled down upon him in a body. During the scuffle which followed, the old mother sat and watched with admiring love. When the babies rolled over on their backs, or came to mimic disaster with roots or stones, she let them recover themselves as best they could, and learn by experience what were the hard things in the world and what the soft. And when she considered they had been long enough out of doors, she packed them back to bed again, and went off to hunt.

The cubs had played out of doors many times, and had grown quite used to the look of the bramble-brakes and the great thorns, and that immense hot roundness that went dazzling down behind the western peaks, when, one evening, the wolf-mother came upon a strange trail. Of all the creatures upon Carboona there was not one with whose body-scent and foot-scent she was not familiar. When the merest ghosts of scent came wafting along the tides of the summer air, her nose disentangled them delicately and never gave the right smell to the wrong owner. But the smell of the strange trail puzzled her. It belonged to neither bear, badger, fox, wolf, lynx nor caribou. It was buckskin, and yet not wholly buckskin; it was buckskin with something inside it which certainly was not buck.

The strange trail did not cross the brakes. That was fortunate, but it came dangerously near their northern extremity, and then turned east. The wolf followed it for a long distance till it passed out of her home range, and then slowly retraced it through the darkening spruce woods, sniffing suspiciously as she went. A week later she hit upon the trail again. This time the smell was fainter, but the trail itself was more disturbing: it actually touched the upper slopes where the junipers went black against the moon.

Three nights later Carboona's watching eyes saw an unaccustomed sight. They saw a gaunt grey shape pass silently and swiftly between the junipers in the light of the setting moon. From the jaws of the shape, a wolf-cub hung, very limp—swaying a little as its bearer trotted.

Past the junipers, past the beds of wild raspberries, over the granite-covered shoulder of the hill, deep into the black heart of the spruce woods, the old wolf

went. She knew her way, though her eyes saw no trail. She had passed that way before, during the days and nights when her heart misgave her, because of the strange trail, and the knowledge that a new presence had come into the woods. She had no fear of the forest, so long as it lay far from the trail, and the thing she distrusted. For all that, the great secrecy that was upon her made her shun the open places where the moonlight glared, and keep rather to the good grey glooms where her body melted among the shadows, and seemed itself a shade. And the little furry fatness hanging helpless from her jaws gave itself up limply to its mother's will, and to the vast movement of the night.

The new den she had chosen as a refuge for her cubs lay among the innermost recesses of Carboona, below the granite peaks. No brakes here, no watching junipers: a waste of rock and scrub, scored by deep ravines and dried beds of water-courses that thundered in the thaw.

But black and inhospitable though the region was, it possessed the one thing dear to uneasy motherhood—absolute loneliness. She had dug the den herself, enlarging a natural hollow beside an enormous rock. Not even the father wolf himself knew as yet where the new den was; for by the unwritten law of wolf-life he was banished from the home during the infancy of the cubs.

Here the old wolf deposited her baby, leaving it in shivering loneliness to grow used to the new home as best it might till its brothers and sisters were brought to join it. Five times more the mother made the long double journey, each time carrying a cub. As she returned to the old den on the sixth and last time, the sun was already high above the eastern hills.

The last cub was not in a happy frame of mind. One by one, its brothers and sisters had been taken away from it, which meant that, as each hairy little bundle of warmth went out under the moon, the warmth in the den was that much the less. And when the fifth had followed the way of the others, the remaining cub felt solitary indeed.

At first he lay perfectly still, for that was his mother's command, though she had not put it into words. The deep mother-wisdom that warms the wits of the wild creatures has its own mysterious ways of conveying its meaning. "Lie still!" is one of the very first lessons a mother teaches her young. "Run home!" follows close upon it. To disobey either may mean death.

It grew colder in the den and lonelier. The last cub didn't want to disobey and he really did try to go to sleep; but cold and loneliness are uneasy bed-fellows, and

he had a sort of feeling that perhaps if he went to the den door, he might find out where the rest of the family were. The little fat body lay curled up close, and, in spite of the warmth the family had left behind, tiny shivers shook it every now and then.

It was no use any longer pretending to go to sleep. The small bright eyes opened wide, and stared into the shadow that glimmered with the moon. And suddenly, out of the shadow, Fear came, and the cub shivered with something worse than cold. He had never been frightened before. It was a new and terrible experience. It was in his head; it was in his stomach; the thing was all over him; the very den was full.

He lay for a long time, trembling, and whimpering in a small smothered way. He hoped his mother might hear him, and come back; yet he did not dare to cry too loud lest other ears might catch the sound and lead some prowling enemy to the den. Dawn was just beginning to break when at length he could bear it no longer, and, in spite of his mother's strict command, he crawled to the mouth of the den.

With wide-open, frightened eyes, he stared out into the world. On the bramble-sprays the dew lay thickly. Dew was grey on the grass round the trodden doorway of the den. It was a damp world that glimmered in the yellow gleam of the dawn. Beyond the brambles lay the trees, beyond the trees, the rocky peaks; beyond the utmost peak, the blue vastness where the eagles have their trails. It all made the cub feel dreadfully small, dreadfully alone.

Yet somewhere out there, in the wet grey world of the dawn, his mother and the family were to be found. He put his baby nose to the ground and sniffed. The family smell was plain all about the doorway. A faint trail of it seemed to lead off towards the junipers, but when he took a step or two in that direction the trail was drowned in dew. He went back to the den-door, paused to sniff again, and set off in the opposite direction.

Why he went that way, he could not tell. Once he had started, he did not think of turning back. To return meant the den again. He had a distrust of the den. It was in the den that he had first known fear.

He went on for what seemed to him an endless distance among enormous jungles of bramble and fern. No sign of his mother, or the other cubs, nor any faintest whiff of the heavy family smell! Once a rabbit, leaping past, scared him out of his wits; and once—how his heart thumped with terror as he pressed himself close to the ground!—a great dog-fox went slinking to windward,

spilling the musk of his murderous self into the telltale air.

For some time after the fox had disappeared, the cub crouched where he was, too terrified to stir. Then, bit by bit, his courage came to him again, and he went cautiously on his way.

He had just reached the end of the thickets, where the forest proper began, and was plucking up heart to enter the shade of the giant trees, when a new terror presented itself, and he crouched low as before. But this time it was no fox, lynx, or other four-footed enemy that threatened him. It was a creature that stood on two hind feet, with its fore-paws by its side, and an eagle feather in its hair.

The cub narrowed his eyes till they were as good as shut, with only the tiniest slit between their lids through which it could see the strange adornments the creature wore on its feet. He hoped, if he lay as motionless as a stone, that the creature would not notice him. When hunting was afoot, absolute stillness would often serve to hide you as effectually as a cover of leaves. In his utter ignorance of the world, he could have no idea of an Indian's piercing sight.

There was a swift movement, noiseless as the swoop of an owl's wing, and before he could open his eyes, he felt himself seized by the back of the neck and swung into the air.

When the mother-wolf reached the den for the sixth and last time, her fine sense told her in an instant that something was wrong. She entered the den with misgiving. As she feared, it was empty. Her nose found the trail immediately; but it was growing a little stale, for the sun was high now, and it had been made in the dawn dew. Nevertheless, the mother-passion within her sharpened the keenness of her scent, and off she went at a swift trot. Every time the cub had stopped, she sniffed eagerly, as if to drink his very body through her nose. When she took up the fainter trail of his movement, an uneasy light glittered in her eyes. Woe to the creature, whatever it was, which had dared to harm him, if she should find a second trail!

Where the maze of the thickets ended and the forest began she stopped dead, her hair bristling, her eyes alight. Here was the spot of the cub's capture! Here was the second trail! As she sniffed, and learnt the record told in smell, her anger rose. But with the anger went misgiving, and the uneasiness of fear; for here she recognized again the trail of the new presence upon Carboona, the dread of which had caused her to seek another den. The trail went straight into the forest, in a south-easterly direction. With the utmost caution the mother-wolf took it up,

in a swift, noiseless lope, passing deeper and deeper into the vast wilderness of spruce and pine that went descending, always descending, towards the basin of the world. But long before it reached the lowest levels, the trail turned due east through the mighty gorge that sucks the prairie wind into Carboona's bosom like an enormous throat. Through the gorge went the old wolf, sniffing, peering, listening—every sense strained to the utmost, for now the buckskin scent was strong upon the ground, and the trail was very new.

Just where the gorge began to deepen at its western extremity, the wolf caught sight of a creature moving, the like of which she had never seen before. It was like a wolf that went upon its hind legs, and yet it was certainly not a wolf. Its gait was slow, yet certain, with a free, elastic movement that seemed to drink the wind.

The wolf slackened her pace, crouching so low as she went that the longer hairs on her belly swept the ground. Nearer and nearer she drew in her soundless progress, and as the distance lessened between her and her mysterious foe, the green fire in her eyes glittered more dangerously, for now her senses told her what her heart and brain had already guessed. *She saw the little shape that lay in the Indian's arm!*

And in spite of the unseen danger slowly but surely drawing upon him down the dark throat of the gorge, the Indian's elastic stride never faltered, as he proceeded towards the spot where he had hobbled his pony beside the camp of the evening before. And yet, before it was too late, the warning came.

He heard nothing; he saw nothing. That strange sense which seems to belong to the wild creatures, and the wild people, only, woke in the dark places of his brain. He turned his head quickly over his shoulder, sweeping the gorge with a piercing glance. He saw the fir-trees bracing themselves in the clefts of the precipice; he saw the tangled curtains of clematis and vine; he saw the ancient tree-trunks that went on dropping to decay through a thousand moons. One thing only he missed—the gaunt grey shadow where two points of light smouldered dully in the shelter of a rock.

Having satisfied himself that nothing living was in sight, he continued on his way.

As for the wolf-cub, he had long given up all attempts to escape. The continuous movement, together with the warmth of his captor's body, produced a soothing effect upon him, and he made no fresh effort to regain his freedom.

Suddenly, part of a rock on the Indian's right seemed to split and launch itself into the air, with a rasping, tearing noise between a growl and a snarl. Quick as a weazel, the Indian leaped aside. The long fangs, intended for his throat, missed their mark by half an inch, but struck his shoulder with a clash of meeting bone. Instantly he whipped out his knife, and stabbed fiercely at his foe. As he did so, the wolf leaped away. She, in her turn, was the fraction of a second too late. She snarled as she felt the blade. At the sound of his mother's unexpected voice, the cub gave a bleating cry. The noise seemed to send a wave of fury through her. Once more she sprang with eyeballs that blazed.

But this time the Indian was prepared. He met her savage leap with an equally savage blow. And as he struck, he let loose the ringing war cry of his tribe. With a yelp of pain and baffled fury, the she-wolf bounded aside. The knife had done its deadly work. The searching man-cry had completed it. Bewildered, terrified, utterly cowed, the great wolf went bounding up the gorge, bedabbling the ground with blood.

Not till late the following day, weakened with loss of blood and moving heavily, did she drag herself back to the cubs in the new den. But the fibres of the mother-heart were firmly-knit within her, and the fibres of the wolf-race tough. Day by day her strength came back to her; and day by day the father-wolf, having discovered the new home and seeming to realize what had happened, brought freshly-killed game to the door of the den. He did not dare to enter. But the grand old mother dragged her body painfully to the meat, and the cubs never wanted for a meal.

And within earshot of the new den, as of the old, Little-Sweet-Voice, the white-throated sparrow, sang his heart out into the sun.

CHAPTER II

WHY "DUSTY STAR" WAS

They called him "Dusty Star" because he happened in the night. All over the prairies of the immense West you might find here and there, in the old buffalo times before the White men ploughed, those little circles of puff-balls that weren't there yesterday and which began under the stars. "Dusty Stars" the red men called them, in their strange prairie tongue. The name, like other Indian names, was very ancient. It was a word that went walking in the beginning of the world.

Dusty Star, unlike his name, was very young. But he was big—very big for his nine years. Even in the star-time he must have done a lot of growing, for when the morning light crept into the tepee, he was seen to be a considerable-sized baby—extra large for a papoose. And the thoughts in his head were like the bones in his body—big, very big! He soon grew tired of lying in his little beaver-skin hammock, slung so cunningly from one lodge pole to another, and listening to the prairie larks as they sang in the blue morning. He did such tremendous things with his fat arms that the lodge-poles creaked. And he screamed with the sheer force of being alive. When he fell out of the hammock and all but broke his neck, his mother thought he would be safer if she let him crawl. Even in his crawling days, he learnt a lot about the world. He learnt how grasshoppers jump and prairie mice run. He wanted to crawl right out along the prairie into the middle west. His mother caught him just in time. After that, she fastened a deer-thong round his middle. It wasn't fair, and stopped him being one of the greatest explorers—for his age—which the world has ever seen. But it probably saved his life.

After that he grew up as all prairie children grow, with a great deal of play by day, and a huge deal of sleep by night. And the sun and the wind were great companions, and meant very much to him; and the sun baked him to a fine redness, and the wind searched him, and seemed somehow to send gusts along his blood. And often and often he would fall asleep, listening to the eerie whisper and whack of it, when the poles creaked and the lodge-ears tapped; or to the long sobbing chorus of the coyotes, far out where the prairie humped itself to

blackness against an orange-coloured sky, and the east began to be hollow for the rising of the moon. And where the wind ran, and the moon walked, and the coyotes chorused, was to him a magical country, with edges as sharp as the prairie ridges, that girdled all his dreams.

On the day that he was nine years old, Dusty Star sat outside the tepee, blinking in the sun. From where he sat he could look far across the prairies, and so observe anything that might be moving over its immense expanse. For a long time he saw nothing at all. That was not strange, since in that vast apparent flatness there were thousands of hollows where all manner of four-footed Cunningnesses could go about their business and never show so much as the tip of an ear to any human eye.

It was the middle of the afternoon, and many of the prairie people were not yet risen from their noon-day sleep. Presently, over the high butte to the north, he saw a buzzard on wide motionless wings, "sitting" in the blue. The circles he made were so immensely wide and slow that he scarcely seemed to move in that high watch-tower of the air where he scanned the world for carrion. Next, a pair of hawks came into sight, skimming above the clumps of sage and bunch-grass. And now Dusty Star knew by their busy flight that the smaller prairie folk had begun to follow the runways in their eager search for food. Then, as he watched, came a flash between the sage bushes, as a jack-rabbit dashed to feed on the juicy leaves that grew under the alder thicket by the stream.

After that, nothing happened for some time, until suddenly he saw something very far off that was like the figure of a horseman riding over a swell. It was only visible, for a moment or two before it disappeared, but Dusty Star's piercing eyes had seen it long enough to make him sure that it was Running Wolf, his father, returning from the chase. The boy looked eagerly for his father's reappearance. He had been gone for some time. Whenever Running Wolf returned from good hunting he always brought much game with him, and there was feasting many days. When Running Wolf came into sight again, he was so close home that Dusty Star could make out quite clearly the form of a buck lying across the pony's shoulders. Also, his father carried something small and dark that cuddled against his left side. When Running Wolf had reached the tepee and Dusty Star had seen what it was that he had brought home, and when he had finally realized that the little wolf-cub was to be his very own, there were no bounds to his delight. To be the owner of a cub that would one day be a grown-up wolf—*this* was a thing beyond his wildest dreams!

Henceforward the cub was the centre of his little world. He called it Kiopo, because that was a name that meant for him all sorts of wolfish things, which he could not otherwise express and which he could never have explained to anyone grown-up; which, indeed, he could not explain even to Kiopo himself. He talked to Kiopo a good deal, and when he was not telling him of matters of the highest importance, he was plying him with questions. It did not discourage him in the least that Kiopo received the information with the utmost unconcern, and never answered one of the questions. Dusty Star concluded that baby wolves were like that. They might indeed be full of wisdom, but they expressed it solely by means of their teeth.

Kiopo left the marks of his teeth upon everything that he could bite. When Dusty Star's mother, Nikana, found them upon one of her best bead moccasins, so that many of the beads were missing, she gave him a tap with the moccasin that made him yelp with pain. But when Blue Wings, Dusty Star's baby sister, was, one fine day, found lying carelessly about on the floor of the tepee, to Kiopo's intense delight, and began to be treated like the beads, Nikana, roused by her screaming, gave Kiopo such a shaking, and such a cuffing between the shakes, that he really thought his last hour had come, and yelled as piercingly as Blue Wings herself. Not that he wanted to hurt things for the sake of hurting. He merely wanted to worry them, and to bite and bite, and bite.

It was all very strange after the old life in the Carboona, where the blue jays made such loud remarks to each other from thicket to thicket, and whoever hadn't got wings, went upon four feet. But here the tall, human creatures went always upon two only, and it was only the little Dusty Star that understood stomach-walking on all fours, and making companionable noises in the throat. As for Blue Wings—the cub that yelled when you bit her—she was a poor imitation of a human, though possibly with a high food value, if only they would let you try.

One of the hardest things to get used to was the tepee itself, with its peculiar Indian smells, so utterly different to the badger-hole where the only scent was the good home smell of the family, or perhaps of some fine old bone that had had many teeth at work upon it, and was trying hard to be dead. It was some time before Kiopo grew accustomed to the new smells, so as to be able to sort them out as belonging to the various objects which gave them. And when night had fallen, it was a dismal experience to wake up and see the inside of the tepee full of unfamiliar shapes in the glimmer of the moon. And then a great fear would take him, and he would lift the thin pipe of his cub voice and yelp aloud,

because he wanted his mother, and because there lay at the back of his head a dim idea that there were ears upon Carboona that would catch the sound, and send a gaunt hairy body loping to the rescue. But the listeners upon Carboona were too remote to catch that wailing cry, and those that were close at hand were not disposed to be sympathetic. When Running Wolf shouted at him, he was all the more terrified, and yelped the louder, and when the angry Indian seized him and shook him into silence, his little heart was fit to break.

Under cover of the darkness, Dusty Star stole across to where the wolf-cub lay cowering, and gathered the little shivering body into his arms. And then he made him a lair in the buffalo robe that covered his own bed. And when Kiopo felt the warmth and good neighbourhood of the human brother's body, he cuddled himself against it with a sigh and whimpered himself to sleep.

In the day-time it was not so lonely because there were many things to sniff at and to watch. Besides there was always the big brother ready to play with him, and to come down on all fours from the great heights of the hind-leg-walking world, or to tickle him in the ribs when he rolled over on his back and exposed the round bulge that was his stomach to the public. It was wonderful how much Kiopo managed to cram into that bulge, and how his body grew in proportion to the bulge. His appetite never seemed to be satisfied. Bits of buffalo meat, old bones, odds and ends of waste, shreds of pemmican, or gollops of stew—the bulge took them all and still had room for more.

By the end of the second moon after his arrival, he was already far advanced in cub-hood, and showed signs of extraordinary development when he should be fully grown. And always he was learning new things. With Dusty Star for his constant companion and teacher he was learning very fast. And what he learnt, he never forgot, so that his knowledge was of the utmost service to him afterwards when the time came to fight his own battles far out along the world. His love and reverence for the little man-brother were unbounded. What the man-brother said and did were for him the great, important, splendid things. In a surprisingly short time, he had forgotten to think about his wolf-kindred, far away upon Carboona. Yet though he did not know it, the wisdom of his wolf-ancestors lay deep down within him in the secret lair of memory where the wild things never forget.

He was immensely curious about the outer world. There was the willow-copse by the stream where the brown water talked with a wet tongue. It was crossed by tiny trails of wood and water folk that had furtive scurrying movements and

were very hard to catch. Kiopo's small wolf-eyes had the keenest possible sight, and what his eyes did not tell him about the little furtive folk, he found out by experiments with his paws, mouth and nose. Sometimes his curiosity got him into trouble, as upon the day when, pouncing upon an immense green grasshopper close to the water's edge, he lost his balance, and rolled head-over-heels into the stream. Fortunately the water was shallow, but the scrambling and spluttering and yelping were so tremendous that the commotion brought the big brother racing to the rescue. After that experience Kiopo learnt the lesson that however tempting game may be, it is best to look beyond it before you make your spring.

It was not long before he became a mighty hunter of mice. Between the grass bents and the stalks of the prairie plants, their runways ran like little roads down which they scurried in the early morning or late afternoon, doing a hundred miles of mouse geography to their watering-places at the stream. No cunning wolf-mother taught Kiopo to nose these narrow water-trails, and lie down beside them very craftily, with his head between his paws. Yet the ancient hunting-craft of wolf ancestors who had made their kills years beyond memory in the grey backwards of the moons, woke in his blood when the time arrived and showed him what to do. And Dusty Star, observing how, after countless failures, his cub gained mastery over the mice, admired his tireless perseverance, and loved the little hunter with all his Indian heart.



CHAPTER III

RUNNING WOLF MOVES

Running Wolf was like his name. He was always on the move. Ever since Dusty Star could remember anything at all, his father had been going and coming, disappearing without warning, and re-appearing unexpectedly, as if the feet of many wolves went hunting in his blood.

It was in the Red Moon, the moon of the harvest, that he now made up his mind to pay a visit to his tribe, and see how the world wagged itself where great Chiefs and Medicine-men smoked the medicine-pipe together in the wonderful painted lodges very far south. But as the journey was a long one, and the cold weather would follow the geese, before he could return, he decided that the whole family should travel with him, and take up their winter quarters with the tribe.

Once Running Wolf had made up his mind, there was not a moment to lose. Almost before you could have believed it possible, Osikomix, the piebald pony, had the lodge-poles fastened to his back, and the entire family—Nikana, Dusty Star, Blue Wings and Kiopo—were on their way, following the direction the wild geese would take when they left the vast northern waters when the call came from the south.

Their way lay at first through the meadows of high bunch-grass that lay beside the stream, where the alders were tinged with faint purple, and all the willow thickets shone a fine clear red. Kiopo badly wanted to stop and hunt mice, but Dusty Star made him clearly understand that no loitering by the runways was possible now, and that he must keep in his place in the procession behind Osikomix and Running Wolf.

After a while they came to the country of the cottonwoods, where the trees were turning yellow, and where the sarvis berries were scarlet like flame. And they reached the borders of the great southern prairies where the low roll of the ridges seemed to have no end.

Dusty Star was very excited. He had never travelled so far on the prairies before, nor imagined that the world could be so tremendously big. And he knew that

somewhere out in that always increasing bigness lay the great camp for which they were bound. He had never seen such a camp, but his mother had told him stories. He knew it was full of people—braves, squaws, papooses—very many papooses, like the baby-sister which Nikana was now carrying on her back. And there was feasting and dancing, and pony-racing, and being religious, though the last was not at all tiresome, being full of buffalo dances, and wolf songs, and generally ending in a sarvis-berry stew. What Nikana omitted to mention, were the huskies: so Dusty Star did not know that every Indian camp swarmed with huskies—dogs that were half-wolves, always hungry, always quarrelling, always ready for a fight; and—what was even more important—*Kiopo did not know*.

At sundown, Running Wolf made his camp. The spot he had chosen was at the foot of a low cliff, under which ran a river, which would have to be forded before they could proceed on their journey. Running Wolf attended to Osikomix. Dusty Star helped his mother to collect brushwood for a fire. Kiopo went hunting along the river bank to get an evening meal. Blue Wings was the only person who remained idle. Yet even she sucked her thumb with unceasing perseverance, and made soft glug-glugging noises in her little Indian throat.

That night when Dusty Star had lain down in his buffalo-robe bed, with Kiopo curled at his feet, he stayed awake a long time. He listened to the voices that seem born of the darkness—the hoot of the little grey owl from the swamp across the river, the evening call of coyotes among the prairie bluffs and those other small mysterious sounds that creep about the silence without paws or walking feet. And overhead was the night—the enormous Indian night, with all its glittering fires—stretched like a huge tepee from horizon to horizon, though the stars upon its sides were anything but dusty, and if the Great Spirit walked there, he was careful that his moccasins should not crush the tiny stars. And when at length Dusty Star fell asleep, he dreamed of a great hunting across the windy places of the sky, where the buffaloes clashed their horns against the cliffs of Heaven, and the wolf-pack woke the echoes in the hollows of the moon.

The fording of the river next morning was a great delight. Dusty Star rode on his father's back, and Blue Wings went on her mother's. Osikomix, splashed grandly across, taking the water up to his belly. But when the party had reached the opposite shore, Dusty Star found that Kiopo was left behind. There he stood looking anxiously at the water, and enquiringly at his owners, as if asking which of them was coming back to fetch him. But as it was soon made plain to him that no one intended to do so, and that the party was preparing to continue on its way, he put his courage into all his paws and plunged into the stream. It was the very

first time he had taken to the water, but his instinct taught him what to do, and he swam bravely across, dragging himself up the opposite bank, a little half-drowned caricature of a wolf, panting with excitement and pride.

After that, there were no more adventures for the day. At night, they camped as before, and again Dusty Star dreamed of the great hunting that swept between the stars.

It was in the afternoon of the nineteenth day's travel that they came at last within sight of the camp. When Dusty Star saw the great number of tepees crowded together, his eyes grew big with amazement. He had not thought there could have been so many lodges in all the world. To him it was a huge prairie city, whose houses were built of buffalo, with doors of buckskin at which no one ever knocked.

If Dusty Star's eyes were filled with wonder at the sight of so many tepees, Kiopo's nose was tickled with amazement at the quantity of smells. Every bush, every stone, every clump of grass he came to, told him of a dog. It might have been expected that fresh scents would greet him in a land of many trails. But so much smell (in, other words, so much *dog*) at once, was overpowering, and disturbed his peace of mind.

Nothing could have been quieter or more orderly than the manner in which the travellers approached the camp. It is true that Kiopo was a little in advance, and that his hair was bristling uneasily between his shoulders, but that was only to be expected with so much smell in the air. Suddenly, without a moment's warning, a large hairy body sprang with a snarl from a clump of bunch-grass, and rushed savagely upon him. Now for all his dog training with his Indian friends, Kiopo was, in the mind of him, as well as in the muscle, a genuine wolf. So, when the husky rushed, Kiopo leaped aside, as the wolves leap. Before his enemy charged again, the long wolf fangs glittered; there was a lightning plunge of the whole body, and down the husky's haunch went a long clean rip. The husky turned in fury, and his teeth shut like a trap. They closed—but not on the little wolf. They clashed on an inch of clear atmosphere which lay to the west of Kiopo's hairy neck. And in almost the same moment, the husky got a second slash.

But alas for Kiopo! Wolf-like though his tactics were, he was not yet old or powerful enough to fight with more than one foe at once. His enemy's attack was a signal to all the huskies on that side of the camp. The moment before, hardly another husky was to be seen. Now they seemed to spring from every tepee and

clump of grass. At least a dozen bore down on the combatants in a yelping, snarling pack. In an instant, and before Dusty Star could do anything to save him, Kiopo had disappeared from sight under a mass of writhing bodies, legs, and tails. Dusty Star was desperate, and cried wildly to his father and mother to save his little wolf. Fortunately it was not the first time that Running Wolf and Nikana had had to disperse a mob of Indian dogs. With loud yells and violent kicks they charged the rolling heap. Several Indians, hearing the commotion, came running to their aid. Dusty Star himself was foremost in the attack, yelling, kicking, pulling, pounding with all his might, utterly regardless as to whether he might be bitten or not. Wild with fury against the huskies, and his deadly fear lest Kiopo should be killed, he hurled himself on the pack like a little demon.

Mercifully for Kiopo, the very number of his enemies saved him from serious harm, for he was so completely covered by them that only a few could reach him with their teeth, and many of the bites that should have been for him fell to the share of a husky; so that, while half the pack appeared to be worrying Kiopo, they were in reality falling foul of each other to his decided advantage. Kiopo, on the other hand, never ceased for an instant to use his powerful teeth. No need for *him* to watch for a chance to bite. He had simply to work his jaws like a piece of perfect machinery. He fought with all the desperation of an animal caught in a trap. What roused him to fury was not so much the combined attack, as the being pinned down by numbers so that he was powerless to escape. Every muscle in his strong young body was contracted to the utmost. Not even a fully-grown wolf could have fought with more determination and pluck.

At last the huskies, beaten and kicked on all sides lost heart and were driven off. What was left on the ground was an extremely mauled and tumbled specimen of what less than five minutes before had been a very trim little wolf.

Instantly Dusty Star was on his knees beside his pet. Kiopo was bleeding in various places, and panting hard. Dusty Star put his arms round him, and besought him not to die. To die, however, was one of the last things Kiopo intended to do. Exhausted he might be, and wanting to get his breath, but his body was sound and his spirit unbroken. In the eyes that looked up gratefully into those of his big brother, there shone a clear, unconquerable light. Very soon he was able to get up and shake himself. Then, keeping a wary eye on all sides, he walked forward with his party, and so entered the camp.

Although his reappearance alive, when, according to all husky calculations, he ought to have been dead, was the occasion for many growls, and a threatening

show of teeth, his enemies did not venture to attack him again. Unwelcome though he was, it was plain that he had come among them under the protection of powerful friends. An unprotected stranger would have indeed led "a dog's life," and sooner or later, died a dog's death, unpitied to the last. But into their hard husky intelligence, this fact had embedded itself like a stone: What the lord-humans protect, it is dangerous to attack.



CHAPTER IV

KIOPO FINDS AN ENEMY

After this stormy introduction to the camp, the family settled down quietly enough. Running Wolf's long absence from the tribe had made no difference to his membership or position in it. Half-an-hour after his arrival, his tepee was set up in the place appointed for it by the head chief, and in two days' time the family were living the life of the camp as if they had never left it. To be quite truthful, Running Wolf, Nikana, and Blue Wings were living it. With Dusty Star it was different. The number of people of all ages, from newly-born papooses, up to braves and old squaws—some of them so wrinkled and bony that it almost seemed as if they had forgotten to be dead; the constant coming and going, the pony-racing, the chanting of medicine songs and the beating of drums;—all these things were so utterly strange and bewildering that, after the long day's experiences, he was almost too excited to sleep.

As for Kiopo, if an animal could have spent the whole of its puppyhood in the moon, and then, one slippery night, have all at once fallen off into the middle of the earth, it could not possibly have felt more an unwelcome intruder than Kiopo in his new surroundings. The fact of his arrival was now known to every husky in the camp, and each husky hated him from the bottom of his husky heart. For the most part they lived on the worst possible terms with each other. This individual dislike did not stand in the way of a combined attack upon a common enemy when opportunity offered. Left to themselves to arrange matters, Kiopo would not have had the ghost of a grasshopper's chance. There were two great obstacles to his immediate destruction. One was his owner, Dusty Star, who kept a pile of stones and a heavy stick, always ready for instant use; and the other was Kiopo himself.

THE ARRIVAL OF KIOPO WAS NOW KNOWN TO EVERY HUSKY IN THE CAMP, AND EACH HUSKY HATED HIM FROM THE BOTTOM OF HIS HUSKY HEART

Kiopo was now three parts grown, and was considerably larger than the ordinary wolf of his age. For the average full-grown dog, he was more than a match. The few that had ventured to fight him singly had learnt that to their cost. But against a combined attack of the whole husky rabble, he was naturally powerless. And owing to the peculiar make-up of the general husky mind, you never could tell from one moment to another when the rabble would unite. He knew himself surrounded by enemies. Go where he would, hackles were raised, lips curled back, and glaring eyes were fastened upon him. It was small wonder if, as week after week went by, he became nervous, irritable, and depressed.

Among all his foes, the one of whom he stood most in dread, was a big dog called Stickchi. He was a surly, sour-tempered, evil-eyed brute whom none of the other huskies dared to face, but whom they nevertheless regarded as one of the leaders of the pack. Stealing, fighting, and bullying were accomplishments which had earned for Stickchi this position of authority, and he took a constant delight in showing his power. It was he who had led the attack on Kiopo's arrival in the camp, and now he hated him with a murderous hatred. Kiopo returned the hate in full, though he stood too much in awe of the great bully to venture to attack him when they met. The principal thing that enraged Stickchi was that, while the other huskies at once got out of his way as their acknowledged master, Kiopo only avoided him at the last possible moment after he had fully expressed his feelings by drawing back his lips from his dangerous teeth in a defiant snarl. Then, when infuriated beyond measure by this open defiance of his authority, the bully charged his foe, Kiopo, leaping lightly aside, would seem to send his supple body floating through the air, and land a dozen feet away, only to crouch for a new spring, and bare those evil-looking teeth as before.

Yet in spite of his defiance, Kiopo harboured a great uneasiness at the back of his mind, for his keen wolf-intelligence told him that sooner or later, the day must come when the contest for mastery could be no longer postponed, and that the struggle would be a fight to the death.

Dusty Star, for all his vigilance, did not fully understand. He could not think why it was that Kiopo generally kept so close to the tepee, and rarely ventured any distance away unless he went with him. This was because Stickchi was as cunning as he was cowardly. Whenever he saw Kiopo with any one of the family he did not attempt to attack him, but contented himself with growling deep in his hairy chest, and looking very ugly. Like many other bullies, he was easily frightened, and he never forgot one particular experience when Kiopo had been busily gnawing an elkbone behind the tepee. Stickchi had made up his mind to have the bone. Believing that no one saw him, he had crouched on his stomach in his most cunning manner, and had begun a stealthy game of stalking. If Kiopo had not been so engrossed in his bone no amount of Stickchi's artfulness could have caught him unawares. But the treasure had such flavoury bits of very high meat attaching to it that, for once, he was completely off his guard. So, bit by bit, Kiopo blissfully gnawed, and, bit by bit, Stickchi's stomach drew nearer.

There is nothing much more exciting than to stalk something that is already stalking something else. And so, when Dusty Star, returning from the other side of the camp, came up quietly and saw the game that was being played, he joined in with delight. Inch by inch the artful Stickchi's stomach trailed elaborately over the ground, and, inch by inch, Dusty Star gained upon him.

At last there was only a tuft of wild turnip between Stickchi and his prey, and then open country for at least six feet.

Hardly daring to breathe, Dusty Star gathered his body together very tightly. In his right hand was a heavy stick. Stickchi also was making himself very tight, preparing for the final rush. He wriggled his body slightly, bracing his hind feet firmly against the ground. There was a second's pause before he uncoiled the powerful spring that was himself, and hurled his body on his unprepared victim. In that momentary pause a human whirlwind loosed itself on him from behind, and a heavy blow descended on his head.

With a yelp of fear and pain he bounded aside, twisting half round as he did so, to see what had attacked him. Quick as lightning, Dusty Star struck again, this time in the very middle of the husky's back.

The bully did not wait for another blow. Yelping with terror, he turned with his tail between his legs, and fled across the camp for his life.

After this lesson he observed Running Wolf's tepee from a respectful distance. But it only served to increase his enmity towards Kiopo, and he nursed black

revenge at the bottom of his evil heart.



CHAPTER V

"SITTING-ALWAYS"

Among the many odd and unexpected things which Dusty Star found in the new life in the camp, one of the most peculiar and unaccountable was a grandmother, whose name was Sitting-Always.

Up to the present, a grandmother had been entirely wanting in the arrangement he called the World. That there was a great Spirit called the Sun, he knew. He also knew that there was another less great one called the Moon. And there were the stars. These also were spirits. They sat about in the sky and generally had a good time. If you watched them carefully against the tops of the lodge-poles, you could see that they gradually did their sitting a little higher up, or a little lower down; and sometimes, especially in the Mad Moon, they actually *ran*. To watch a star run swiftly down a steep place in the sky and disappear, made your heart jump. When the running stars which did not fall off into the dark reached the prairie, they turned into the puff-balls the Indians called "dusty-stars."

But a grandmother, it appeared, though neither a spirit nor a star, was a Great Power to be reckoned with. There were days when she painted her face bright yellow. These were solemn occasions. If you made a noise or got in her way, she would wrinkle her skin till the paint cracked. If you continued the annoyance, she would smack. As a painted curiosity Dusty Star observed her with awe.

His first introduction to her was not on one of her painted days. Without wanting to be rude he thought her face looked more like raw buffalo hide than anything else he had yet met. Her hands also seemed of that material, and did not feel pleasant when they felt his arms and legs. Dusty Star objected to being mauled, even by a Great Power; but he bore it as well as he could, because his mother told him to stand still; only from that day onwards his grandmother's hands were the part of her body he most thoroughly distrusted.

The second time he saw her was when she came to the tepee on her way to take part in a medicine-bundle ceremony. She was very grandly dressed in a beaded buckskin robe, and her face was thickly coated with the famous yellow paint. Dusty Star was squatting with Kiopo at the back of the tepee, watching his

mother making pemmican, when this yellow vision peered in upon them through the opening. He stared at it with astonishment. He was not afraid, but it made him feel uncomfortable. It was as if his grandmother's face, like the maple leaves, had gone yellow with the Fall. And from the middle of the yellow, her sunken eyes glared blackly in the hollows of her head.

Kiopo also disapproved of the vision. That was very plain by the way his hair bristled along his back, and his upper lip curled back to show his fangs while he snarled.

The yellow face of Sitting-Always scowled between the eyes, and made the paint crack. She declared she would not enter the tepee unless the husky was first driven out. When Nikana explained that Kiopo was not a husky but a true wild wolf, and that when he snarled through his teeth it was best to let him be, Sitting-Always was more displeased than ever. Like most old Indians she firmly believed that the wolves had a "medicine," and by a "medicine" she meant a power that was stronger than either wolves or men. She herself was a great believer in "medicine." Half the things with which her tepee was stuffed were supposed to possess a medicine of one kind or another. Only she infinitely preferred tame medicine—the sort you stored in painted parfleches—to the wild kind on four legs that bared its fangs and snarled. So when she had shot out a few biting remarks about beasts and boys in general, she took her yellow face out of the opening and stalked angrily away.

After that Dusty Star saw her quite often when Nikana took him with her on visits to her tepee, and the yellow maple-leaf face had given way to the buffalo-hide one, and her teeth were the only yellow things she had in her head. By degrees, his awe of her wore away, till one day when she presented him with a rich plateful of sarvis-berry stew, he arrived at the conclusion that, after all, a grandmother, like the buffalo, could have her uses, and be very nearly pleasant when she did not paint her face.

Kiopo, however, never changed his mind. Not even the richest stew could have made any difference. With or without her paint, his deep wolf wisdom taught him that here was an enemy, and whenever she came near him, he always showed his teeth.

It was in the moon that the Indians call the Mad Moon, or, as we call it, November, that Kiopo began to take on strange ways, and to stay away, for days together. When he returned from these mysterious absences, he was in the habit

of sneaking back into camp under cover of the darkness. In the morning, when Dusty Star spoke to him very plainly, and asked him where he had been, Kiopo would turn his head away with an uncomfortable expression in his eyes. Dusty Star began to watch the wolf's movements, growing more and more anxious to find out where he went. And the closer the human brother watched, the deeper grew the wolf-brother's cunning day by day. Neither going, nor returning, did Kiopo let himself be seen.

Dusty Star grew afraid lest he should disappear once for all, and never return. His fear was so torturing that he tied him with a raw-hide thong, and fastened it to one of the lodge-poles. There was a high wind that night, and the poles strained and creaked; but it was not entirely owing to the wind; and, in the morning, Kiopo had gone.

Those were the evenings when Dusty Star, lying awake in the tepee, could hear the coyotes raise that eerie song of theirs which they love to sing after sunset on the high buttes. It always began in the same way, with a succession of short barks, growing gradually louder and higher, and always ending with a long-drawn, squalling howl. And as the boy caught the high-pitched, yowling cries ringing out in the dusky air, he knew that God's Dog, as the Indians called him, was at his medicine-making again, making medicine with his voice. Through enormous spaces of the twilight, these uncanny cries set his brain spinning. The cries ceased to be mere coyote notes; they became voices crying the names of unfamiliar, yet unforgettable things; until at last, when the unearthly chorus became too piercing to be borne, he pulled the buffalo robe over his head, to deaden the terrible sound.

If the coyote cries affected Dusty Star so powerfully, they affected Kiopo equally, though in a different way. At times they made him angry, at others, wholly miserable. When Kiopo felt upset, he always wanted to get hold of something to worry with his teeth. So the raw-hide thong came in very useful, and after gnawing for half the night, Kiopo was free. Once his own master again, he did not waste valuable time sitting down to think. Softly as a trail of mist, he drifted out of camp, and not a husky of them all winded him or saw him go.

The very morning after Kiopo's departure, Sitting-Always was taken ill. She lay on her couch of antelope skins and moaned with pain. While Nikana went to summon the medicine-man, Little Fish, Dusty Star was left to watch his grandmother. He had never seen any one ill before, and the noises she uttered made him feel uncomfortable. When he asked her if the pain was in her chest,

she said it was lower down. Dusty Star nodded his head wisely. He had suffered pain in that part himself. It was the place that made you wish you had not eaten berries before they were ripe. He observed his grandmother gravely for some time. Suddenly without warning, he doubled up his fist and thumped her on the spot where she complained of the pain. This he did, because he knew that if you hit things, they sometimes went away. He hoped that if he could hit his grandmother's pain right in the middle, it might drive it out.

Sitting-Always uttered a loud cry. Mistaking it for a shout of triumph, Dusty Star struck her again. This was more than she could bear, and she uttered such a piercing scream that the boy was startled. Still it seemed to prove that the thumping was taking effect. He was preparing to smite her for the third time when his mother came hurrying into the tepee.

With groans of pain and anger, Sitting-Always explained what had happened. Naturally Nikana was very angry. She could hardly believe that the boy could have dared to take advantage of his grandmother's helplessness to play her so evil a trick. Without waiting to hear his own account of the matter, she gave him a sound cuff or two, and ordered him to go at once and fetch Lone Chief, the medicine-man, since Little Fish had said he could not come.

Only too glad to escape, Dusty Star rushed indignantly out of the tepee.

Lone Chief's tepee lay at some distance from the camp, round the north-west corner of Eagle Bluff. He was understood to be a great medicine-man. His medicine, or Supernatural Power, was very strong, though it was not always that he could be prevailed upon to put it to the test. Among the many mysterious things about Lone Chief was that no one could ever say with certainty where he was to be found. Wandering across vast spaces or journeying to the edge of the world, had got into his feet. Hunters from the far west would bring tidings of his camp on the shore of the mighty lake that washes the feet of the Rockies for half-a-hundred miles. Deep in the North, on the lonely barrens where the wolves howled at sundown, and the red-fringed pools were a-glimmer in an unearthly light, his slightly drooping figure might be seen moving soundlessly in the windy twilight along the deep-worn trails of the caribou. Or in the torrid south lands where the salt lakes were caked with brine, and the antelopes, startled by the solitary figure, floated across the desert like vapours carried by the air, Lone Chief travelled till he filled his head with the roar of the gulf of Mexico.

To the tepee of this extraordinary, and much-travelled person, Dusty Star went

with a reluctant tread, and a feeling, which, if it was not exactly fear, was certainly one of awe. When he came at last within sight of the camp, he saw that Lone Chief was at home, smoking his pipe in the doorway of his tepee.

Dusty Star advanced slowly. When he reached the tepee he sat down in front of the medicine-man. Neither of them spoke for some time, although no one had told the boy that this was the politest way of beginning a conversation, when it is not necessary to talk about the weather. So Lone Chief gazed politely beyond Dusty Star's head, and Dusty Star stared politely at Lone Chief's moccasins, while now and then a maple leaf drifted down beside them.

When the fourth leaf had fallen, Dusty Star explained the reason of his visit.

Lone Chief waited a little before he replied, because of his habit of being very sure about his thoughts before he made words to fit them.

And while Lone Chief made his words, his gaze struck into his visitor's face with the edge of a tomahawk. Dusty Star returned the look without flinching and noted the way in which Lone Chief painted his face. And indeed it was something to observe, for across his forehead and down his cheeks went bars of black and yellow and red, as if his face were a cage to keep his eyes from rushing out.

"My grandmother has a pain here," Dusty Star began abruptly, indicating the place.

He did not say any more then, knowing that Lone Chief would know quite well why he had come, so that any further explanation would be merely throwing words away.

"When did it begin?" the medicine man asked.

"She made many noises this morning," Dusty Star answered. "She is making them all the time when she does not like herself inside."

Lone Chief remained silent.

"Have they made any medicine for her?" he asked presently, with a shade of suspicion in his voice.

It was an awkward question. Dusty Star wished to be quite truthful. At the same time, he did not want to confess what he had done. He had intended the

thumping for medicine, though it was hardly the same thing as the grown-up people made, particularly as he had performed it without saying any medicine-words with it. It was his grandmother who had said the words, and they differed considerably from what the medicine-men used.

"No," he said at last. "They have not used any medicine." He could not find courage to add. "But I thumped."

After which nothing was said by either of them for a long time. And the maple leaves went on falling.

At length Dusty Star thought it was time that Lone Chief should begin to make preparations to start, if he intended to visit his grandmother. So he looked into the painted face and said.

"The shadows grow longer."

Lone Chief understood.

"Yes," he answered solemnly. "When the sun goes towards his lodge, it is what the shadows are accustomed to do."

It was not the words themselves which told Dusty Star what was going on in the medicine-man's mind, but that unspoken knowledge which flashes, none knows how, from one prairie-dweller to another along the invisible trail. In an instant he realized that Lone Chief did not intend to come. Slowly rising to his feet, he gazed straight into the medicine-man's face. Then with a clear, ringing tone, he spoke in a voice that was almost a cry.

"I am sent to bid you to come to my grandmother Sitting-Always, who is not happy with herself inside. If you do not come, the pain will drive her along the wolf-trail; but she does not wish to go."

He ended abruptly, his body held very stiff, like a young larch-tree when there is no wind. And in his eyes, fixed upon the medicine-man's face with an unblinking stare, a spark glimmered as if his mind were set ablaze.

Lone Chief looked at him in astonishment. In the many thousand leagues his moccasins had travelled, he had never met anything like this. That a mere boy—hardly more than a child—should find the daring to address *him*, Lone Chief, the famous medicine-man, words which were like a command uttered by a full-grown man, was an astounding thing. In spite of himself, he felt uneasy. What

was it, he asked himself, which made this boy so strangely different from other boys? The cunning eyes, practised to read the faintest signs on all faces and all trails, employed their utmost skill now to read the secret hidden in the boy. But that strange glitter in the boy's eyes baffled him; and when, after a long gaze, he looked away into the distance, he had a curious feeling that he had been questioning the eyeballs of a wolf.

He moved his hand in the direction of the sun, now almost touching the rim of the western hills, saying as he did so:

"When the sun has entered his lodge, I will come."

With a glow of triumph, Dusty Star knew that he had won. He also knew that Lone Chief would waste no more words. He simply bowed, to acknowledge his gratitude; then turned, and ran swiftly towards the trees. As he ran, the lithe movements of his body caught the medicine-man's eye.

"That way the wolves run, with their whole body," he murmured approvingly. "There is medicine in his feet."



CHAPTER VI

THE MEDICINE-MAKING

When Lone Chief arrived that evening, an hour after sundown, Sitting-Always was worse. In spite of that, her spirit was not sufficiently broken to be pleased that Lone Chief should attend her. However, as Little Fish had refused to come, and Lone Chief was too great a person to offend, she had to disguise her dislike and fear of the medicine-man as well as she could.

The tepee was so crowded with people that any one not acquainted with Indian customs might have thought that Sitting-Always had fallen ill in order to give a party. Dusty Star was there, of course, because his grandmother's sickness was a very splendid entertainment, not to be missed; but he had taken care to keep well hidden behind a couple of parfleches, so that the sight of him might not exasperate the patient.

Lone Chief's arrival made Nikana very nervous. She wished she had not invited three other medicine-men to attend, without first waiting to see if Lone Chief would come. It would be so extremely awkward if they arrived in the very middle of his medicine-making. He might not mind. On the other hand, he might object, and be very angry. She devoutly hoped they would not come.

Hardly taking any notice of his patient, Lone Chief began his preparations immediately. First he placed four round stones in the fire to get hot. While they were heating, he remained seated, looking at nobody, with his eyes half closed. When he considered the stones were hot enough, he uncovered his medicine drum, and held it over the fire. Dusty Star, craning his neck round the parfleches, gazed at the drum with wonder. It was painted yellow to represent a cloudless sky. In the middle, a bright red ball indicated the sun. He wondered if Lone Chief intended to put it on his grandmother's head, for a hat. When the drum was sufficiently warmed, Lone Chief looked round on the company and declared that he could not begin his medicine till every one except Nikana went out. There was no use in arguing about it, because a great medicine-man's word is law. One by one, the visitors reluctantly withdrew. Dusty Star, in the deep shadow behind the parfleches, made himself as small as possible, humped upon the ground.

As soon as Lone Chief had seen the last visitor, as he believed, depart, he raised the drum, and began to sing a medicine-song, beating time, as he sang, upon the drum. It was a very peculiar song about buffaloes, wolves, and thunder, and at the end of every verse, Lone Chief barked like a coyote. When he had finished the song, he took an ember from the fire, and placed some dried sweet pine upon it. As the smoke rose, he held his hands in it, and prayed to the Spirits of the sun, and of the buffalo, that he might have power to find out with his hands the spot where Sitting-Always was ill. He then rose, and went across to the patient. Dusty Star watched his movements with such excitement, that it seemed as if his eyes would fall out of his head.

It was when Lone Chief was in the very middle of his examination that the event which Nikana dreaded took place. No fewer than four other medicine men stalked into the tepee. All were heavily painted, beaded and feathered, and each carried a drum. Dusty Star shrank, if possible into a smaller space than before.

Without uttering a word, the four sat down in a half-circle about the fire, and began to smoke their medicine pipes. Lone Chief continued to move his hands over his patient's body as if nothing extraordinary had taken place. He was annoyed at the intrusion of his rivals, but was too dignified to show it. He fully believed his power to be far greater than theirs, and was prepared to treat them with contempt.

Sitting-Always was relieved in her mind now that the other medicine-men had come. If it annoyed Lone Chief, so much the better. It would make him exert his medicine to the utmost.

When Lone Chief had finished his examination, he lifted his drum again, and recommenced his song, sitting with his back to the newcomers, as if they were not there. As each one of them enjoyed great importance in his own eyes, Lone Chief's action made them determined to perform their medicine as loudly as possible. First one and then another drew his pipe from his mouth, and lifted his drum.

The first to do so was Kattowa-iski. His doctoring power came from the beaver.

Kokopotamix followed him. His medicine was from the grizzly bear.

Apotumenee came third. He took his medicine from the buffalo, and had two buffalo horns fastened to his head.

The last to begin drumming was Ohisiksim. The Thunder-bird had given him his medicine, which was very much sought after when the tribe was short of rain.

At first the drumming was slow and soft, growing louder by degrees. Then Kattowa-iski got up and began to dance, striking his drum in imitation of the beavers when they hit the water with their tails. Kokopotamix then rose and imitated a grizzly bear when he walks on his hind legs. Apotumenee and Ohisiksim began their performances at the same time. Apotumenee crouched with his head lowered, and dug his horns into the ground to imitate buffaloes digging wallows in the Fall, while Ohisiksim blew out a spray of water from his mouth to suggest a thunder shower.

All this time Lone Chief went on drumming as if nothing else was going on.

And now the noise of the drums, louder than ever, made the tepee throb with sound. It maddened Sitting-Always who screamed out again and again that it was driving the pain into her head; but as no one paid the slightest heed to her cries, she put her hands over her ears, and moaned in despair.

And now the medicine-men, as if excited by their own drumming, grew wilder in their movements. Kokopotamix's walk became a dance in which he clawed the air like a grizzly sharpening his claws upon a tree. Kattowa-iski banged his drum like a beaver with a hundred tails. Apotumenee made terrible roarings and bellowings in his throat, like a bull buffalo; while Ohisiksim sprayed his thunder-showers so far from his mouth that they moistened Sitting-Always in her bed.

Dusty Star, looking out upon it all from his hiding-place, felt a strange excitement growing within him. To him, the antics of the medicine-men became so life-like that, more and more, they seemed to grow like the things they represented; and in the flicker of the fire, on which, from time to time, Nikana put more fuel, the shadows on the sides of the tepee danced and balanced, as if they also were alive. He did not understand the new feeling; only it seemed to have to do with Kiopo; almost as if Kiopo himself were crouching by his side. And the wolf that was in Kiopo seemed to urge the wolf that was in Dusty Star so that he felt that he must shoot his body in amongst the dancers, and make, with Kiopo, the medicine of the wolves.

The movements became wilder, and the drumming louder. The figures swaying round the fire, appeared to have lost themselves in the medicine and to feel nothing but the dance. It was not Kokopotamix only who was there, or Kattowa-

iski, or Apotumenee, or Ohisiksim; nor even a Grizzly bear, a Beaver, a Buffalo, or a Thunder Bird; but all the spirits, and the beasts, and the birds, of the lonely places, and the great silences of the enormous West. Either it was the tepee which had expanded into the prairie, or the prairie which had crowded into the tepee. Dusty Star crouching behind the parfleches could not tell which. All he knew was that the wild dance of the prairie was tingling in his feet, and the voices of the prairie calling in his head.

Suddenly, with a ringing cry, he leaped from his hiding-place, and landed on hands and knees in the middle of the tepee. Then, with head thrown back, and eyes glittering, he gave the hunting-call of the wolves.

If the Thunder-bird itself had suddenly alit with flapping wings in their midst, the medicine-men could not have been more utterly taken by surprise. The dance came to an abrupt stand-still. Even Lone Chief stopped his drumming, and stared in astonishment. Sitting-Always, not being able to see clearly, because of her position, thought a wolf had entered the tepee, and screamed aloud with fear.

Before any one could move, Dusty Star, now barking like a coyote, began to run on hands and feet round the fire. Quicker and quicker he went, barking and leaping up and down as if all the madness of the Mad Moon were in his blood, and he were forgetting to be Indian, and remembering to be wolf.

If Lone Chief had given the order, Nikana would have seized her son; but Lone Chief was disturbed. Dusty Star as the grandson of his patient was one thing, but Dusty Star as this leaping madness crying like a wolf, was totally another. He did not approve; yet he did not dare to interfere. What he had felt vaguely in the afternoon, he knew for a certainty now. There was medicine in the boy. It was the true medicine—the medicine of the lonely barrens; of the lairs in the glooms of the spruce forest; and of the wolfish crags where the air throbbed with the thunder of the streams. Great Medicine-man though he was, it was a power he would have given many buffalo robes to possess. He knew himself to be in the presence of a medicine more mighty than his own. And because he knew it, he did not dare to answer the expectancy of his companions by ordering that Dusty Star should be turned out of the tepee.

As for Dusty Star himself, he knew nothing at all about possessing "medicine." All he knew was that he felt very splendidly mad, with an uncontrollable desire to throw his body in the air, and cry wolf calls with his throat. And the fact that none of these important medicine-men, nor even his mother, made any effort to

stop him, encouraged him to an adventure of great antics which he would not have believed possible in his most tremendous dreams.

Moment by moment, a wilder spirit of mischief seemed to enter into him. The occupants of the tepee looked on in amazement, as the lithe crazy shape, leaped and crouched, howled, barked and sang.

Rising suddenly to his full height, he took a flying jump and landed close beside his grandmother's couch. Sitting-Always terrified, out of her wits, uttered a piercing cry.

Up to the present, Nikana had sat rigidly still as if mesmerised by her son's madness. But her mother's cry of fear broke the spell, and she darted forward to seize him. But Dusty Star was too quick for her. Springing back across the fire, he gave, with a full throat, the hunting cry of the wolves. Then, before any one could stop him, he tore back the door-flap and fled laughing from the tepee.



CHAPTER VII

HOW THE WOLVES SANG

Next day, Sitting-Always had recovered. The awkward part of it was that no one could tell which of the medicine-makers had brought about the cure. Dusty Star went about with an uncomfortable sense that, sooner or later, he would be punished for his share in the performance. It had been a splendid piece of frolic; and when you had enjoyed yourself in an extra special way, it generally happened that the grown-up people would come down heavily upon you. Yet as the day went on and nothing happened, he felt more and more bewildered. He had often been punished for naughtiness far less daring. Now, when he had set everybody at defiance, no one said a word. But there were eyes. He could not hide the fact that people looked at him in a strange way as he went about the camp. Even in the home tepee his father and mother observed him curiously, and he felt their eyes upon him even when he pretended not to know.

Gradually, as the days went by, the impression faded. There was a more important thing that haunted his mind continually. *Kiopo did not come back.*

The weather grew colder. There was much business in the upper sky. By day it took the form of a great arrow-head of wings, driving from the north; by night it was a voice. And as the harsh honking cry fell from the roof of the world, Dusty Star knew that the vast waters of the North were giving up their geese.

And when the last arrow-head had winged, and the last *honk* fallen, the night-breeze that came sighing along a thousand miles of prairie was barbed with early frost.

One night, the strange restlessness that was in the hearts of the coyotes, making the prairie ridges clamorous with their choruses, disturbed Dusty Star so strongly that it brought him trouble in his dreams. He woke with a sense that something was calling him. As he listened, he recognized the familiar and yet always uncanny way in which the coyotes arrange their evening chorus—the short barks of the opening bars, which grow louder and more acute, till they change to the final howl. They were singing to-night as coyotes had chorused it a million times before. Yet to-night there seemed to Dusty Star to be something special in the

cry, as if it were an invitation to him from the prairie folk to go out and do something, or be something, which he had neither done nor been before. Without waiting to question what the thing might be, he got up softly, and crept out of the tepee. Outside, the camp lay very still. Most of the inhabitants had gone to bed. Only here and there a lodge glimmered with the light of an inside fire which had not yet died down.

Dusty Star looked carefully round on every side to see if anything moved, and then glided away into the darkness.

The coyote calls had died away now, but he fancied that they had come from the direction of Look-out Bluff. The bluff was known to be a bad place. The Thunder-bird (so they said) visited it in the moon when the grass is green, and darkened it with his wings. Old Ahitopee, moreover, who had gone upon the Wolf Trail many moons ago, was reported to make evil medicine there, and to hob-a-nob with the prairie wolves. Nevertheless, Dusty Star took his courage in both hands, and went towards the bluff.

He was about half-way there, when he caught, far out upon the prairies, a faint, but carrying note. He stopped, listening intently, but it did not come again. For all that, Dusty Star was certain that he had heard the hunting call of a wolf.

He went on. Overhead, in the black sky, the stars glittered like arrow-heads of white fire. But, under his moccasins, the prairie seemed blacker than the sky. It was dead, dark, motionless. Yet the darkness seemed to have movement in it, as of a furtive travelling which you could not see. *Things walked!*

At the foot of the bluff, Dusty Star stopped. If old Ahitopee were making medicine, it might be as well to avoid that side of the bluff. Those who went upon the Wolf Trail did not like to be disturbed. He listened very carefully. The huge quiet of the prairies seemed filled with thread-like sounds as from that stealthy travelling which you could not see. Only the medicine of Ahitopee was not audible. It seemed safe to go on.

But now he had the fancy that, towards the north, a shadowy shape kept pace with him as he advanced. When he stopped there was no shadow, but when he moved, it was there.

At the summit of the bluff, he sat down to wait. He did not know what he was waiting for. That did not matter. The prairies knew. They had the Great Wisdom; the Wisdom of the Wolves.

Suddenly, to the north, he saw a pair of glowing eyes that watched him less than a dozen yards away, as motionless as if suspended in the air.

Dusty Star did not move an eyelid. He was not frightened. But he knew now that things were beginning to happen, and it made him feel a little strange. And beyond the eyes, further to the east, a pale light glimmered, which he knew would be the twilight that goes before the moon.

By degrees, as the glimmer grew, Dusty Star saw a shape that gathered about the eyes. It crouched a little, like a coyote. It looked bigger than a fox. And then he became gradually aware as the light increased, that he and the eyes were not alone. He counted one, two, three, four more pairs of eyes with shadows darkening about them east, west, and south. And beyond them there was an outer circle of similar shadows in the likeness of prairie wolves.

The light grew stronger. The moon rose. Dusty Star found himself the centre of a circle of coyotes who sat motionless on their haunches as if waiting for some signal.

Then, from a neighbouring ridge, there broke, clear and ringing, the long voice of a wolf.

The coyotes stiffened with attention. Then, first one, and then another, lifted its head and began to bark. The barking became louder. By degrees, the separate voices began to blend together in a wild, unequal chorus. And now and then some hunched shape; upon an outer ring would become a voice to swell the clamour till it rang echoing from ridge to ridge.

More and more, as the sound drove in upon him, Dusty Star felt a strange sense take hold of him; and as each separate set of barks changed to the combined roar of the final squawl, his entire body shivered to the thrill.

He felt the creatures all about him now. And yet they were not strange. The coyote world, the fox world, the world of the wolves and of the other prairie folk, was closing in upon him in narrower and narrower circles, hemming him in with a roar of sound.

He did not know what the chorus meant, nor what wild impulse urged the coyotes to sing. Nor could he tell why he himself should feel so strangely a part of it all. In the moonlight everything was very clear. For prairie eyes, it was not likely to make mistakes as to what one saw. Yet suddenly Dusty Star stared as if

his eyes were starting out of his head.

Right in front of him, with its back to the moon, a great form, larger than a coyote, seemed to have risen out of the ground. As he looked, the creature, lifting its head, let out a long melancholy howl.

Dusty Star held his breath. *Could* it be?—was it *possible*?—*Kiopo at last?*

He was too excited to wait in order to be sure. Springing to his feet, he darted forward with a cry.

The wolf leaped swiftly aside, and was gone.

The creature's disappearance seemed a signal. There was a general movement on the butte. The next moment dusky bodies melted soundlessly down its furrows into the grey vastness of the prairies, and Dusty Star found himself alone.

He was bitterly disappointed. Now, when it was too late, he knew that he done the wrong thing. All his wisdom of prairie-craft and wood-craft had left him in one fatal moment: he had moved at the very instant when he should have remained still. Now he would never know if he had been face to face with Kiopo or not. A sob rose in his throat; a mist swam over the moon: he could hardly see for tears, as he went recklessly down the hill.



CHAPTER VIII

HOW KIOPO CAME BACK

One night, when all the camp was in deep sleep, and nothing could be heard but the gentle flapping of the lodge-ears in the breeze, or the occasional bark of a hunting coyote, Dusty Star woke suddenly.

What was it? He raised himself on his elbow, and peered about in the glimmer of the dying fire. The tepee was full of shapes of things that were somehow stranger than the things themselves. There were dark, heaped-up objects which made companionable sounds in their noses, and could be explained. But there were others which did not explain themselves, that made no sound at all. Dusty Star looked at them suspiciously in case they might have moved.

As he looked, and listened, there came from the direction of Look-out Bluff a long-drawn, ringing, call. It was no coyote voice. It was deeper, more resonant in tone. Some peculiar quality in it thrilled Dusty Star to the very marrow of his bones. It was the very soul of a wolf that went walking through the wandering spaces of the night: one of the thirsty prairie voices that go hunting down the wind.

Again the cry came. This time it was louder, as if the creature were drawing nearer. The boy's pulses began to beat more wildly. Then there came a long silence, in which the lodge-ears ceased to flap and the wind itself seemed to have died away. Was it going to be nothing at all, Dusty Star asked himself—nothing but a bodiless voice that went by on a windy trail?

Hark, what was that? There was a breathing snuffing sound, as of some creature sniffing at the bottom of the tepee. Then, something scratched.

As Dusty Star left the buffalo-robies, and crept stealthily across the tepee in dreadful fear lest either of his parents should wake, his body burned like a flame.

With the utmost care he unfastened the calf-skin flap and passed out.

There was no moon, but the sky was deep with stars. In their clear-shining, he saw a wolf crouching on the ground.

Dusty Star did not take any risk by rashly stepping forward. He stood absolutely still, yet so anxious lest his wild hope should be vain, that he hardly dared to breathe.

He saw the wolf rise, depress its body slightly and then leap upon him. He felt the weight of the heavy body against his chest, struggled to keep his balance, and fell without a sound.

And then the night and the stars, and the whole world were blotted out by a great hairy wolf-body, and a tongue that licked and slobbered, and slobbered and licked.

Kiopo at last!

Dusty Star did not struggle. He knew if he attempted to rise, Kiopo would only knock him down again, at the risk of rousing the sleepers in the tepee. Even as it was, he dreaded lest his father might hear, and come out to see what was going on; for Kiopo, in his wild delight, could not content himself with action only, but must keep up a continual whining and growling, broken every now and then by smothered barks.

It was some time before Kiopo's excitement had cooled enough for him to let Dusty Star get up. Every time the boy seemed inclined to rise, the wolf, planting a fore-paw firmly upon his chest, bared his shining teeth, and growled. It was as much as if he said:

"I ran away from you once, little brother, because it was necessary, but now I am going to see that you don't escape from *me!*"

When Kiopo was calm enough to behave more reasonably, Dusty Star sat up. He put his arms round his neck, and began to talk to him in a low, gurgling flow of quaint Indian words. And indeed the words seemed to be sweet with the juice of sarvis berries and wild pears, and to have the wind in them over a thousand miles of prairie, and the wet sound of great waters, and syllables borrowed from beasts and birds since the beginning of the earth. If Kiopo did not understand the words in the very exact shape of them as they ran from Dusty Star's mouth, he had a sense of what he was trying to tell him, because he understood the great nature-language that is deeper than the dictionaries, and lies broad along the world.

Beyond a low whine occasionally, or a gurgle in his throat, Kiopo did not reply. Yet his very silence was an answer. His whole body gave it. *His silence bulged*

with Himself.



CHAPTER IX

SITTING-ALWAYS SPEAKS HER MIND

The news of Kiopo's return ran swiftly through the camp. They spoke of it in the tepees as something to be reckoned with. It might mean evil, or it might mean good. Whether good or evil, it was very strange. As for the huskies, they had but one feeling about it: the wolf's return was bad. All that day, and the days that followed, Stickchi's eyes had a wicked glitter; and not a husky of them all but knew that mischief was brewing.

But what the huskies felt did not cause Kiopo any serious discomfort. He was a half-grown cub no longer. The long winter had made a wolf of him. His chest had deepened, his limbs lengthened. He was a creature to be feared. When Dusty Star went through the camp, Kiopo close at his heels, he had reason to be proud of his wolf. The boy held his head high, because of the great pride and gladness that was in his heart. Now that he had Kiopo once more, his heart soared like a hawk. The joy that was in him shone clear in his eyes. He gave a bold look into the faces of every one he met. But when he and Kiopo passed out on to the prairie, suspicious glances followed them, and watched keenly where they went.

Nothing happened that day, or the next; but upon the third day after Kiopo's return, Dusty Star became uneasy. He could not have definitely said what was the matter. But things were in the air. Something new was in the camp. It had not declared itself, but it was none the less there. Beneath the painted coverings of the tepees, he felt that the secret grew.

On the evening of the third day, just after sundown, he was returning from the prairie, after driving his father's ponies in for the night. The camp fires were burning brightly and in the deepening twilight dusky figures were passing to and fro. He noticed that round the tepee of Spotted Owl a small group of people had collected. Inside, a drum was beating softly and very slowly, as if some medicine ceremony were beginning. Dusty Star lingered a little to watch, and then passed on. When he reached the home tepee he found his supper ready. But after he had finished, he did not go immediately to bed as usual. Instead, he went out again into the camp.

The night had fallen now. It was cloudy and very dark. But the glow of the camp fires made a sort of twilight in the camp itself; a twilight that wandered as the fires rose or fell. While he stood intently on the watch, he saw a figure come out from the doorway of his grandmother's tepee. The figure stood quite still, as if it, too, were on the watch. It was muffled in a robe, from head to foot, so that its actual shape was hidden. Dusty Star was surprised. It was not his grandmother's habit to stir abroad after nightfall. She had grave misgivings in the dark. But if it were a late visitor why then was it so carefully covered?

The figure moved and glided away into the darkness. Dusty Star, keeping well within the deepest shadows, followed swiftly in the figure's track. It did not stop till it reached Little Owl's tepee. Dusty Star watched it enter, and then crept close to the back of the lodge. The soft beating of the drum was still audible, but soon after the entrance of the newcomer it ceased. Then a voice spoke.

Dusty Star, crouching close against the bottom of the tepee could hear every word distinctly. The speaker was Spotted Owl.

"The wolf has returned to Running Wolf's lodge," he said. "It is five moons now since he went away. He may have brought back much medicine with him. It may be good medicine. Lone Chief thinks it is a strong medicine—very good, perhaps, if we sent a war party against the Yellow Dogs. But he must be watched."

The voice ceased. Apparently, for the moment, Spotted Owl had nothing more to say.

Then another voice spoke.

"The wolf is always with the boy. They go out upon the prairies together. If the wolf has medicine, he shares it with the boy. The boy knows many things about the wolves."

Several other speakers expressed an opinion that it would be wise to advise Running Wolf to send the wolf away. It was clear that the general feeling of the meeting was that Kiopo should not be injured, and that if he were driven away, no one must attempt it but Running Wolf.

At this point another voice broke in which Dusty Star recognized only too well. The person was no other than Sitting-Always herself. She spoke quickly and with great earnestness.

"The wolf is bad," she said. "Nothing has gone well since he came to the camp. The boy also is bad. He and the wolf are always making medicine. That is why they go alone upon the prairies that they may make medicine together out of sight of the tepees. It will not be sufficient to drive the wolf away. As long as the boy is here, the wolf will come back. He is teaching the boy the wolf medicine. When the boy has learnt it fully, it will be a madness to send war parties against the Gros Ventres. If you destroy the wolf, you will destroy the medicine, and the boy will lose his power. He is Indian now, but there is something in him that is wolf. Either he will carry his medicine to our enemies, the Gros Ventres, or he will go back to the wolves. You must kill the wolf, even if you do not touch the boy. You must kill, kill, *kill!*"

As Sitting-Always finished her speech, her voice rose to a shrillness that was almost a shout. In the yellow desert of her face her sunken eyes glittered with passion. It was plain to all who saw her that she was very greatly moved. To the one person who heard, but did not see her, it was as if a poisoned arrow had plunged into his heart.

After she had ceased speaking, a low murmur of voices filled the tepee. The passionate words of the old squaw had roused the Indians to a feeling that something must be done. Spotted Owl's next speech showed this very clearly. He did not commit himself so far as to say that the wolf must be killed; but he allowed his hearers to draw their own conclusions. Once the wolf was out of the way, the boy could be dealt with as the tribe should decide. When Sitting-Always heard the concluding words of the speech, a look of evil triumph glimmered in her face.

Dusty Star did not wait to hear any more. Whatever plan his enemies might adopt, there was no time to lose. The secret was out now—the dark, unspoken thing which his sense had warned him was walking in the camp. As he crept away from the tepee, hatred, fear, and anger made his heart feel as if it would burst. Yet it was not so much for himself, as for Kiopo, that his passions were fully roused. He did not doubt that his father and mother would devise some means to protect him from any serious harm, as soon as they realized the threatened danger. But if Kiopo were the cause of that danger, his instinct warned him that neither of them would hesitate a moment to sacrifice the wolf. In all the vast world, he knew that the only friend Kiopo could rely on was himself.

When he got back to the tepee, he saw with alarm that Kiopo was not there. His

mother scolded him for staying out so late. His father, already under his buffalo robe, muttered drowsily of a beating in the morning. Dusty Star had his own ideas connected with the morning. His brain was thick with the dust of a great plan. His mother's angry words were like fireflies that darted but did not sting.

Dusty Star went immediately to bed. His mother, having eased her mind, did likewise. Blue Wings and the father were already fast asleep. Very soon the only person still awake in the tepee was Dusty Star himself.

And the night deepened. Out there, in the awful hush of the prairies, you could almost hear the deepening of it from the roots of the camass flowers right up to the very roots of the stars!

In the camp itself only one sound was audible—the low persistent throbbing of a drum.

As the boy listened, the beating of his heart became another drumming; for his instinct told him that it was the medicine-making that would surely send Kiopo to his death.

It was impossible to stay longer in bed. Out there, in the night, things were happening. The evil thing that Sitting-Always had planned, was hatching. When it was fully hatched, Kiopo would be doomed. Dusty Star felt there was not any time to lose. If Kiopo did not return immediately, he might not come back till the dawn. And if he delayed till then, it might be too late to warn him. His enemies might wait for him in ambush and kill him as he returned.

Dusty Star made up his mind. If Kiopo did not come back to him, he must go out to find Kiopo; there was no other way.

He got up softly, took his bow and arrows, and a strip of pemmican that was handy, and passed stealthily out of the tepee.

The night was starlight. Dusty Star saw the world in a vast glimmer. It was the twilight of the stars. He paused a moment, embracing the camp in one swift, sweeping glance that missed out nothing that was important to be seen. All was one deep shadow in which the tepees were lesser shadows that stood up gaunt and black. Dusty Star was not afraid of the shadows. What he dreaded were eyes. You could see the shadows, but the eyes that might lurk in them you could not see. And the eyes you did not see might watch you as you went. He was very anxious. Why of all nights should Kiopo have chosen this one to be out? If they

were to escape, it must be to-night. To-morrow it might be too late. Ah! What was that? Surely it was a man's form, black against the glimmer of the prairies! And it moved! It was coming nearer! To his horror Dusty Star saw another form, and then another, moving the direction of the tepee. He cast a fearful glance behind him. Again he distinguished moving figures. There was no mistaking it. A ring of Indians was closing in upon the tepee. He crept to the back of it, in the hope that he might not be seen, for a time, at least, till there was an opportunity to make a dash for freedom. As he crouched on the ground behind the tepee, a cold nose was thrust against his face. Kiopo!... Unknown to him, the wolf had returned after the tepee had been secured for the night, and had lain down to sleep against it.

Dusty Star shivered in an agony of fear. If they were discovered it seemed as if some terrible fate had ordered that Kiopo should return just when he had. The one lucky thing was that they were not inside the tepee. Yet even so, the chances of escape were small indeed with that ring of pitiless enemies steadily closing in.

Kiopo saw them too. More than that, his unfailing instinct warned him what the danger was. He gave a low, rumbling growl. Dusty Star, with his arm tightly about him, whispered to him to keep still. As he looked up, he could see the heads of the approaching Indians black against the stars. They were terribly close now.

Then he heard a slight noise at the front of the tepee, and knew that some one was trying to unfasten the calf-skin flap. He held his breath, dreading from moment to moment that they would be discovered. Kiopo had ceased to growl, because he had realized that absolute silence was necessary for their safety; but Dusty Star could feel how the wolf's heart was throbbing, while his whole body shivered as if ready to spring upon his foes at the slightest hint.

Suddenly it seemed to Dusty Star as if one of the nearer Indians bent forward to look more closely at the back of the tepee. If that were indeed so, they were discovered.

There was no time to make sure. An instant's delay might be fatal. He leapt to his feet and made a blind rush, calling to Kiopo as he did so.

The Indians were taken by surprise. Before they realized what had happened, both boy and wolf were clear of the enclosing ring.

The prairie! To reach that was Dusty Star's one hope. Once out upon that he

would trust to his speed and the darkness of the night. He shot forward at a headlong pace, urged by a frenzied fear. Behind him he heard the swish and thud of racing moccasins. Also there were cries. The cries struck terror into him as much as the feet. And they were terribly close.

On he sped, Kiopo running at his side. The fact that they were together seemed to lend him extra speed. He knew without a doubt that they were running for their lives. Had not Sitting-Always cried "*Kill! Kill!*"?

It was fortunate that his constant going to and fro upon the prairie had made him completely familiar with the lie of the land. If he continued in the same direction as he was going, he knew that he would reach broken ground where it would be impossible to keep up the pace, and not risk a fall. He swerved to the north. To swerve was to lose ground, but he dared not take the risk.

The sound of moccasins drew nearer. It seemed plain that some, at least, of his pursuers had discovered the alteration in his course. With every muscle and nerve strained to the utmost, Dusty Star fled desperately on.

From the sound behind, he judged that the Indian who was gaining was in advance of his companions. Kiopo made the same judgment with even greater exactitude as to actual distance. For a moment or two, the wolf dropped a little behind. Before Dusty Star had grasped what was happening, there was a snarling growl, a noise as of a falling body, and the sound of the moccasins ceased. A second or two afterwards, Kiopo was again running at his side.

After that the sounds of pursuit died gradually away. But for a long time Dusty Star continued his flight. When he felt that he could run no further, he let himself sink to the ground, and lay for a long time, grasping for breath.

When at last his breathing became regular, he felt the dewy vastness of the prairie night cover him as with a robe. The darkness, the quiet, above all, the sense of immense relief after the danger escaped, lulled him, and he slept.

As dawn broke, he was on his feet, for he dared not risk remaining in the open during the day.

By that mysterious means through which the wild creatures convey ideas to each other, Dusty Star made it plain to Kiopo that they must go and hide. Kiopo understood hiding. Half his life long he had either been going into hiding, or coming out. Directly they came upon a deep gully with a thicket at the head of it,

both the boy and the wolf knew they had found the place to lie in till the dark.

It did not take Kiopo long to make himself a lair in the centre of the thicket. It was a thorny covert, not too comfortable, but it was safe from prying eyes. As the sun rose higher, the air grew warm. The air was full of a drowsy silence in which tiny noises hummed. First the wolf, and then the boy, settled themselves to sleep.

Towards the middle of the afternoon, Kiopo began to be restless. In other words, his stomach reminded him that it was time to stop feeling empty. He crept cautiously to the edge of the thicket and looked out. Down the gully on one side, far over the prairies on the other, there was nothing moving to be seen. Either the Indians had not started on their search, or else they had not come in this direction. True to his lifelong training, Kiopo examined the country carefully on every quarter before venturing to leave the thicket in search of game. Apparently his observations satisfied him that nothing dangerous was afoot, for Dusty Star, who was now awake, watched him quit the shelter of the bushes and drop over the edge of the gully as quietly as a cloud-shadow floats.

About half-way down the gully a large buck rabbit was washing itself in the sun. The instant Kiopo sighted it, he flattened himself to the ground, and never blinked an eye.

The rabbit, utterly unconscious of the threatened danger, went on licking its paws and drawing them down its face, as if the only important thing in life was to be sure of being clean. And, as it did so, inch by inch and foot by foot, the grey flatness that was Kiopo moved very slowly towards it, and hardly seemed to breathe.

While Dusty Star watched the lithe wolf-body working its way down the gully, creeping nearer and nearer to its kill, he became aware of another similar shape approaching the same spot, but from a different direction and much higher up the further side. The wolfishness of its appearance was made all the greater by the fact that, like Kiopo, it kept very close to the ground in its stealthy onward movement, taking advantage of every bush, and rock, to screen its advance. As Dusty Star watched the two animals approaching the same point from different directions, it seemed almost impossible that neither of them should be conscious of the other's presence. Yet it only needed a few moments' observation to convince him of the fact. He grew more and more excited. Which of the two stalking animals would be the first to catch sight of the other? And what would

happen when it did?

Nearer to the prey crept Kiopo; and still nearer to Kiopo crept the other wolf.

Was it a wolf? As it glided over an open piece of ground from bush to bush, Dusty Star started. In the animal's shape and movements there was something strangely familiar. The next moment, he knew in a flash that the supposed wolf was a big husky, and that, moreover, the husky was none other but Stickchi himself.

If he had been excited before, he was doubly excited now. When the moment came that Kiopo found himself face to face with his hated enemy, Dusty Star knew that it must be a fight to the finish.

By this time Stickchi had reached the point where he must come into open view of the lower part of the gully along which Kiopo was travelling. All at once, Dusty Star saw him stop dead, and stiffen into attention. He was too far off to note the sudden rising of the hackles between his massive shoulders or to catch the smothered growl that was rumbling in his throat. But, even at that distance, he could read perfectly what had happened. *Stickchi had seen!*

And still Kiopo kept moving on, utterly unconscious of the danger in his rear.

Instantly Stickchi altered his tactics. Hitherto he had only watched the game. Now he had a more absorbing interest—Kiopo himself! Dusty Star watched him slightly change his course, and then move forward again with redoubled caution. From this onward, the advantage, what ever might happen afterwards, lay entirely with the husky. Dusty Star's heart began to beat wildly. A lump rose in his throat. Suppose Kiopo should be taken unawares? A wild desire to warn his friend surged through him. But how to convey that warning? If he shouted, his voice might reach other ears than those for whom it was intended, and bring some Indian to the spot. He ran the same risk if he ventured out into the open and tried to warn Kiopo by signs. There seemed nothing to be done but to wait, and let things take their course.

All this time the rabbit had continued washing itself in total unconcern of the two deadly foes advancing upon it from different points, and it was not until Kiopo was close up to it that it realized its danger. In an instant the white tail flashed in the sunlight as it turned to run. It was an instant too late. In two tremendous bounds, the wolf was upon it, and the great jaws snapped.

If Kiopo had started upon his meal at once, it is probable that his enemy might have been able to stalk him to a closer point before he made his rush; but in Kiopo's mind there was a clear idea that the kill must be shared with Dusty Star. If the Little Brother disdained the raw meat, it could not be helped. Kiopo would have behaved in the brotherly manner, and he could not be expected to do any more. He turned therefore with the rabbit in his mouth, to retrace his steps to the thicket. As he did so, the bush to his left opened in its middle and seemed to *explode* upon him in a hairy mass, with a snarl that was like a roar.

It was not easy to stalk Kiopo, but Stickchi's tactics had been so carefully performed that, for once, the wolf was taken off his guard. Dusty Star, from his look-out, watched the husky leap clean on Kiopo's back, and then saw both animals roll over together. There was a couple of moments of furious struggle and then Kiopo tore himself free.

The sudden attack, the rolling over, the taste of the husky's teeth, had done Kiopo good; it had aroused his fighting instincts to their utmost pitch. Besides, he had been attacked while in possession of his just-killed meat—an unpardonable offence in the law of the wilderness, in which to kill is to possess, and to possess is to make your kill a part of yourself by devouring it!

The instant he had wrenched himself free, he launched his counter attack; that is, he launched the entire weight of his hundred and forty-pound body through the air straight at the husky. Stickchi tried to evade the onset, but he was not quite so nimble as the wolf. Kiopo's charge struck him full on the shoulder, and carried him off his legs. But a husky down is not by any means a husky beaten, and Stickchi showed that, although a bully and sometimes a coward, he could, when necessary, show a fighting spirit that was not easily cowed.

From the point at which Dusty Star stood it was not very easy to follow each movement of the struggle, partly because of the distance, partly owing to the fact that now and then the fighters were so mixed up with each other that it seemed hardly so much like a dog and a wolf fighting with two separate bodies, and sets of legs, as of one wildly-whirling, tumbling mass of bodies, legs, and tails. The excitement was too great to be borne, so throwing all caution to the winds, he ran down into the gully till he was within half-a-dozen yards of the fight.

By this time both animals were bleeding freely, but they fought on in apparent unconsciousness of their wounds. At a glance it was easy to see that their methods of fighting were plainly different; for while the husky's main object

seemed to be to close with the wolf and, if possible, to hold him down by sheer force, Kiopo fought in true wolf fashion, springing away after each lashing stroke of his deadly fangs, and returning to the charge in a series of leaps that bewildered his foe by their lightning rapidity.

The end of the fight came more quickly than might have been expected, considering how powerful both animals were. In the most furious whirlwind of struggle, Kiopo's mind had never lost sight of one possibility. He knew, as all wolves know, that the hamstring, or tendon at the back of the leg, is one of the most vital spots in the whole fighting machine. If once that can be cut the result of the fight is only a question of time. At last, the opportunity, so long looked-for, came. There was a tremendous snap of Kiopo's terrible jaws, and Stickchi was disabled. After that, the husky's powers of resistance were speedily exhausted, and the bully Stickchi would bully no more.

After this second kill, Kiopo retired to the thicket to lick his wounds, and Dusty Star went with him.



PART II



CHAPTER X

"BALTOOK" THE SILVER FOX

News upon the prairie travels fast and far. That of the disappearance of Dusty Star and his wolf into the West, was no exception. After travelling many leagues, it reached at last the people of the Yellow Dogs, whose hunting-grounds extend from the Comanache Country to the great lakes in the north.

It was the famous spy Double Runner who carried the news. Double Runner was a true Yellow Dog; very fast and cunning. Also like all other true Yellow Dogs he hated the Comanaches with a bitter hatred. The Comanaches and the Yellow Dogs had been enemies so long that nobody knew what the original quarrel had been about. However, that didn't matter in the least so long as the hatred, which was older than history, wasn't allowed to die down.

When the Yellow Dogs heard Double Runner's news, they put their heads together in a great Pow-wow. If it were true what rumour and Double Runner said, that Dusty Star and his wolf had a strong medicine, it would be a splendid thing if they could capture or kill them, and get the medicine for themselves. And even if they failed in that, at least Dusty Star belonged to their ancient enemies, and it would be one more Comanache out of the way.

Now many moons before, a band of Yellow Dogs had gone into the West, and settled down by the river that flowed out of the Chetawa lake. If Double Runner could find their camp and carry his news, it might happen that they could put him in the way of finding a trail. And if Double Runner found a trail, many buffalo robes and ponies would be his on his return.

So that was how it came about that, one shining morning, in the Moon of Roses, Double Runner disappeared into the West.

At the foot of a great boulder, high up on Carboona, Baltook, the Silver Fox, had his den. It was a wonderful look-out place from which to observe the world, and Baltook was a first-class observer. What his piercing eyes didn't see, or his sharp ears detect, was caught by the amazing keenness of his nose. When the forest people glided softly from the good green gloom of the trees, Baltook marked them the moment they appeared. Below the level of his den went the runways of

half the lower world. Deer, badger, mink, hare, opossum, took their ways delicately along the trails, and, all unconsciously to themselves, were instantly noted by Baltook's gleaming eyes. But whatever fine housings of hair or fur they wore, they paled before the splendour of Baltook in his wonderful black robe powdered with silver hairs.

No other fox on all Carboona had such a coat as he. Even in shadow it was beautiful; and when the fine machinery of his muscles moved beneath it in the sun, it rippled silver lights. And Baltook was as splendid as his coat. Certainly, his mate, Boola; the Cunning One, was convinced that he was lord of all the foxes; and as for the cubs, *they* would have been equally convinced, if it had not been for a drawback which they couldn't help, and that was, they were too young to have any views about it at all. Besides, up to the present, they had had to do chiefly with their mother, and it was only recently that their father had appeared to be a person of great importance as the bringer of choice food, which they were allowed to worry and chew and swallow like the shameless little Greedinesses they were. And when they had finished a meal, they simply went to sleep, and slept and slept and slept, till they seemed to be furry lumps of warm fat sleep, all neatly rolled up with their noses under their tails.

One day, Baltook was sitting on his favourite look-out place on Carboona about a dozen yards from his den, gazing down into the green and golden depths of the drowsy afternoon.

To all outward appearances, the world looked pretty much as it had done for the last ten thousand years. So had the hemlocks looked, so had the spruces, ever since the first fox had made his earth upon Carboona, and the world of the foxes had clashed with, that of the lynxes, and the old hatred began. But Baltook was not thinking of lynxes today, not indeed of anything else in particular. He had just feasted off a very plump rabbit, and inside the den, the family was busy wrangling over the bones. So the possibilities of other game did not tickle his brain, although his nose kept up a series of fine wrinklins, just from force of habit, to find what sort of folk might be walking down the wind.

Yet in spite of everything looking so thousands-of-years-the-same, something very important *was* happening, after which Carboona would be never quite the same.

There were strangers walking in the wind!

If Baltook did not scent them, that was no fault of his nose. If you sit very high

up you cannot expect your nose to tell you what is happening very far down. It is along the level of the runways that the nose does its business; and Baltook's nose forgot to be very busy, even where he sat.

Down, down, down, through the vast forests of spruce and fir, with here and there a sycamore, or some huge hemlock that seemed to have hugged five hundred winters to its old black heart, the strange folk came journeying on scarcely-sounding feet. The forest was so thick, and the ground so springy with fir-needles, that Baltook's eyes and ears gave him no more warning than his nose. Yet a vague murmur of softly-padding feet was audible,—to ears near enough to catch it—the ears of the little peoples that live close along the ground.

At the doorways of little underground dwellings between the twisted fir-roots, small furry bodies, with long tails, and eyes like sparkles of black dew, crouched quivering with expectancy, as the murmuring sound went by. To them, it was like the boom of walking thunder, far away, but drawing nearer. And the tiny eyes brightened, and the tiny whiskers twitched as two enormous shapes went glimmering past their doors. And for a long, long time afterwards, the little under-root dwellings were stuffy with uneasy people who comforted themselves together in the good grey gloom.

Immediately below the spot where Baltook sat, the lowest fringe of forest ended in a dried stream-course, filled with boulders. From a spring on the nearer bank, a narrow thread of water trickled into a pool. Above the spring the ground was rocky and clear of trees; and between the rocks the grass was short and fine, showing that deer and rabbits found it good grazing ground. (Baltok could have told you all about the rabbits, but he did not dare to meddle with the deer.) Within this open space, as the silver fox looked dreamily down, there appeared, to his utter amazement, two unexpected shapes.

The one, though unexpected, was not altogether strange, being that of a large timber wolf; and in his life on Carboona, Baltook knew all about wolves. But the other shape was as unfamiliar as it was unexpected—that of a human being.

To say that Baltook sat up on seeing this unusual sight would not give the right impression, for the single reason that Baltook was already sitting up. But if you were to say that inside his springy body every sense he had sat up so violently that he almost jumped, you would be very nearly correct.

These astonishing visitors being so very far down in the world below him did not make much difference to Baltook's cunning sight. But it did make a difference to

his nose. Before he could make up his mind about them fully, he must get them put into *smell*; so when, presently the strangers disappeared from view, Baltook got up softly and melted down the hill.

That evening a great news began to travel in Carboona. Newcomers had arrived. There was a strange wolf of enormous size: there was a human creature, stranger than the wolf. They were aliens, interlopers, interferers with the ancient habits of Carboona which people had got used to since the beginning of the world. The human creature had broken trees and made itself a lair of boughs. The wolf guarded it, spending his time in going up and down the valley as if he were its lord. If once he made that the centre of his range, things would happen upon Carboona: nothing would ever be the same.

Not content with bringing themselves into the borders of Carboona, the intruders had brought a third thing with them—Fire! The human creature had collected sticks and made a pile. And out of the pile had come strong-smelling mist that stung your nose; and, presently, an awful shining, like the sun and moon gone mad!

The great news travelled far and wide. It penetrated even into the damp dullness of the tamarack swamp where old Goshmeelee, the black bear, lived with her precious cubs. The little peoples of fur and feather caught the scatterings of it in the air and went uneasy in their minds.

But the person who could have given you more information than anybody else, was one who started the news travelling—Baltok, the Silver Fox.

CHAPTER XI

WHY THE FOXES TRUSTED DUSTY STAR

When Dusty Star and Kiopo, after many long days of journeying came into the valley below the den of the Silver Fox, they saw that there was water, and a good place for rest. They did not waste any time in discussing its advantages or drawbacks. They simply decided at once that here was the goal of their wandering and that here they would make their camp. That is to say, Dusty Star would make it. Kiopo would look on and, if he approved, would consent to making it his temporary home. If he did *not* approve, he would show his dislike and uneasiness in so many plain ways that Dusty Star had no peace until they moved elsewhere. Even if the wolf was satisfied that no hidden danger lurked in the neighbourhood, and that they might safely settle down for a time, he could never take kindly to a sitting-down existence. For the great life that he had was always in his feet, so that he must be continually on the move, or going long journeys or short ones, as the case might be, but sooner or later, always coming back. So while Dusty Star built the tepee, Kiopo went exploring up and down the valley, getting every point of it well into his eyes, and every drifting smell it had well up his nose. And more than once, when he tried the wind suspiciously, he caught a faint yet unmistakably musky odour that suggested a fox.

That night they slept soundly; Dusty Star in the bough-built tepee, Kiopo stretched full length across its entrance. And all night long, Carboona, the old savage home of countless lives, gloomed darkly above them, though they did not even know its name. Still less had either of them the least idea that they had chosen their resting-place within the borders of that very region where Kiopo had first drawn breath.

Next morning Dusty Star woke up well pleased with his new home. The day passed quietly, and the inhabitants of the neighbourhood kept well out of the way. Kiopo did his hunting at a distance, and supplied the camp with food. Besides that, there was nothing particular to do. That was the joy of living where the world forgot to get civilized. After you had caught your meat and cooked it, the days and nights were very wide, because there were no clocks to make them narrow, and to chop them up into little bits called Time.

So because there really was nothing particular to do, Dusty Star on the fourth day after settling down in the new home, thought he would climb up Carboona in the climbing afternoon.

Now the same idea, almost at the same moment happened to come to another dweller upon Carboona, and that was the Catamount, or great wild cat, which had its lair in a hollow tree less than half-a-mile from the camp, and carried the dull green fire in his cruel eyes to make the leafy shadows a terror to all lesser forest folk.

He had slept most of the day in his tree after a good kill the night before, and was not feeling especially hungry. Still, to a blood-loving creature like the Catamount, there was always a pleasure in tracking fresh meat even if it was not needed. So the great cat set out for a leisurely stroll across Carboona to find if any new smells had been spilt along the world since he had gone to sleep.

For some time he got nothing that particularly interested his nose. There were smells of course. But some were old, and some were unpleasant, and one or two were really dangerous. Among these last, was one of the big wolf which had recently come to harry Carboona, as if he were its rightful lord. The Catamount's eyes gleamed with an ugly light as he recognised Kiopo's hated scent, and went a little more warily on his way. Unlike Dusty Star, he did not immediately seek the upper sunny slopes. The green glooms of the evening shadows pleased him more. As he slunk along, lifting and setting his cushioned feet so delicately that his coming was like that of a piece of drifting thistledown, he looked as evil a presence as could be found abroad in the ending of the day.

When he reached the last ravine, above the further side of which the foxes had their den, he paused. A faint, unusual sound reached his ears at irregular intervals. At first it sounded like some small creature in distress. That was the very sort of prey the Catamount enjoyed. He began, very cautiously, to make his way across the ravine. When he was half-way up the opposite side, the sound came again. This time he heard not one voice, but several—and the notes were not those of creatures in distress. He was plainly puzzled. He had reached the sunlight now, and partly because of that, partly because every step brought him nearer to possible danger, he went with even greater caution than before. All at once the meaning of the commotion became clear to him. He heard; he smelt; he saw!

All this time, Dusty Star had gone on steadily climbing till he had caught up, as

it were, with the very middle of the afternoon. But for all he knew, he mounted alone, and never once got a glimpse of that other stealthy climber who stole up like a furry shadow of the evening itself into the golden places of the afternoon. And the Catamount was equally unaware of the neighbourhood of the boy.

Suddenly Dusty Star came upon one of the surprises which Carboona keeps in its most secret spots. In an open space between a mass of thickets he found a family of fox-cubs playing in the sun. Five, fat, funny little bodies, tumbled and sprawled and tussled and rolled in a frenzied frolic which, if you looked closely, was really a furious battle over the leg-bone of a grouse. Sometimes they bit the bone; sometimes each other. It really didn't seem to matter, so long as somebody bit *something*. It was the triumphant glory of being able to bite! The fight raged first to one side, then to the other. There were little yelps and squeals, and miniature growls, like fairy thunder. Once the tide of battle rolled almost to Dusty Star's feet. The excitement was so great, and Dusty Star so still, that the cubs saw nothing and smelt nothing.

But for all their seeming unconsciousness, their little ears were keenly alive to sound. For when the mother fox suddenly gave the sharp warning bark which is the signal of approaching danger, four out of the five cubs scurried instantly back to the den.

The fifth cub, either because he was more stupid than the others, or more daring, stayed where he was, sitting up on his little haunches and moving his head from side to side as if to assure himself there was no need to hurry home when there was such an unexpected chance of having the grouse-bone all to himself.

And Dusty Star was not the only watcher of the disobedient cub.

Between him and that other watcher was less than a dozen paces, but as the boy had arrived on the spot a little earlier, and was now as motionless as the tree behind which he peeped, the Catamount was still unaware of his presence. Screened by a thick bush and a tangle of creepers, the great cat watched its opportunity with a mouth that quivered.

His first instinct on seeing the cubs was to retreat immediately with the same caution as he had approached. Various unpleasant experiences had already taught him the danger of interfering with young animals whose parents are likely to be within springing distance. But although he looked from side to side with the utmost care, not the merest whisker-tip of any parent was visible.

It was precisely at this moment that the mother-fox had uttered her cry of warning. What had startled her neither Dusty Star nor Catamount knew.

Over the trackless barrens, along the runways of hare, mink, and fisher, down the world-old trails of the journeying caribou, there have always travelled—there still travel—mysterious warnings that convey themselves to the hunted creature neither by sight, sound nor smell. And when the warning comes, all wise creatures seek the cunning of their feet.

At the cry, the startled Catamount crouched back into the bush; and if the fifth cub had followed the example of his brothers and sisters, the great cat would have retreated as he came; but the sight of that plump, furry little Disobedience, that sat there on its little tail impudently defying the world, almost within reach, was too great a temptation to resist.

The Catamount threw another piercing glance all round the locality. The mother fox gave no sign of her presence. If he wanted the furry Disobedience, it was now, or never. He crept forward half a pace and gathered his legs under him for a spring.

The movement he made was very slight; but it was sufficient to betray him to Dusty Star. Instantly the boy realized the danger threatening the cub, but before he could do anything, a lightning streak of fur flashed out of the bush, and hurled itself on the cub.

No sooner had the Catamount made good his hold on its squirming prey, than it turned to flee. To its intense astonishment, it found itself face to face with Dusty Star!

Never in its life before had the great cat set eyes on a human being. For one brief moment, it was paralysed with fear. And that moment cost it dear. Quick as a hawk, Dusty Star stooped and struck. The keen blade of his hunting knife flickered in the sun, and then buried itself in the Catamount's fur.

With a scream of rage and terror, the animal dropped the cub, and turned savagely on its foe. But at that very instant there was a rush and a hoarse squall, and it was knocked clean head over heels by the furious charge of the mother fox.

This totally unexpected attack completed the great cat's discomfiture. Spitting and squawling, it bounded into the underwood and was instantly out of sight.

It might have been expected that the fox, having routed one enemy of her little one, would have turned at once on what she might have well supposed was another. But just as she had quitted the den to look for the missing cub, she had seen Dusty Star attack the Catamount, and her quick senses told her that the action had not meant any injury to her cub.

For all that, he was a new experience; and the wisdom of the wilderness is that new experiences had better not be trusted. So while she nosed the cub tenderly, turning it over with her paw, to see if it had been injured, she kept one eye jealously on Dusty Star to watch his slightest movement.

And now that wonderful knowledge of the feelings of wild animals partly taught him by Kiopo, which he had been gradually gathering all his life, came to his aid and told him what to do. For while his body remained so absolutely motionless that he hardly seemed to breathe, his mind made itself a finer body, and went out towards the fox; and the fox, receiving the message, learnt that she had nothing to fear. For all that, she was not easy that the cub should be left in the open, so far from the den's mouth. Dusty Star she had ceased to mistrust; but her instinct told her that, although the Catamount had disappeared, he was still in the neighbourhood. So before she allowed herself to find out any more about Dusty Star, she picked up the cub by the loose skin at the back of its fat little neck, and carried it back to the den. As a matter of fact, the Catamount was further than she knew, and now sat in the fork of a red-cedar tree, licking the wound inflicted by Dusty Star's knife, and making up his mind that if this new monster, with a paw that struck so fiercely was a protector of the foxes, it would be wiser to leave the entire gang severely alone.

When Baltook returned from his hunting with a plump partridge in his mouth, he was confronted by a strange sight. At the very entrance of their den he saw his mate sitting wholly at her ease, with a *human being* by her side.

In all his life of surprises, Baltook had never come upon anything so surprising as that. Boola must be crazy—gone clean mad before the time of the Mad Moon when the wolves and foxes sing. Yet Boola had no appearance of madness. She just sat and gazed at the human being with extreme calmness as if she had known him all her life. For a moment or two, Baltook stood observing this astonishing sight, with one fore foot raised, as if uncertain what to do. Then he laid the partridge down quietly in order to get clear of the smell of the kill and so be able to scent the stranger. Screened by the bushes, he wrinkled his fine nose, and sniffed, and wrinkled, and wrinkled and sniffed, and still was unable to

make up his mind. And there Boola sat all the time, as calm as a toadstool and seemed to have neither eyes nor ears except for her new friend.

At last Baltook could bear the suspense no longer. With his brush held high, and his eyes shining, he stepped warily out into the open.

When Boola saw her mate approaching, she rose to her feet with a low growl. But the growl was not meant as a sign of anger: it was merely her way of saying "Now, here we've got a visitor. Mind how you behave." Yet behind these words, if she had used them (which she didn't!) her mind was disturbed. A strange creature was close beside her, whom, though he had proved himself friendly, Baltook did not know.

It was extremely difficult to explain anything at all. Because it really was an unheard of thing that an Indian boy should sit neighbourly at your front door, and spill his mind out at you in a way you couldn't smell! Yet when Dusty Star did it, it didn't seem odd at all, but as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Yet now Baltook came, and made it seem all odd again, because he carried with him the *foxiness of things* which had always remained foxy since the beginning of the world!

In this embarrassing situation, there was only one thing to be done, and Boola did it. She advanced six paces toward her mate, and touched his nose with hers. Among the wild peoples the nose is a most important organ for conveying information. Because great persons like the President of the United States and the King of England do not use it for conversational purposes, does not alter the fact. Just exactly what Boola told Baltook by this means, I do not know. Whatever it was, Baltook was reassured, and came slowly up to the mouth of the den. Dusty Star never stirred. But again—as he had done with Boola—he moved his mind towards Baltook, while he kept his body still.

And so, while the afternoon climbed still higher, and the evening came softly after it, on its soundless shadow-feet, the three sat on silently together and learnt to know each other, without anything being said. It is like that in the forest-life. You sit in silence, with your mind open; and so you learn to understand.

When at last Baltook and then Boola began to show signs of restlessness, Dusty Star knew it was time to go. He never said good-bye. There was no need. He just rose to his feet quietly and walked down into the trees. The two foxes carefully smelt the place where he had sat, and then, while Boola went back to her cubs, Baltook followed the trail.

It was very dark when Dusty Star reached the camp. Kiopo, who was out hunting, had not returned. Dusty Star made a fire by rubbing two sticks together in the Indian way, in order to be ready to cook anything which Kiopo might bring back.

In the gloom of the dark woods, a black shadow having a wrinkling nose sat up and smelt the fire with wonder, and violent disapproval; and when a little later, the figure of an enormous wolf holding a hare in his jaws, glided into the open, the shadow with the wrinkling nose followed the best fox-wisdom and melted back into the trees.

Although Dusty Star did not actually tell Kiopo where he had been visiting, Kiopo smelt foxiness, and learnt a good deal. Foxes he did not mind, so long as they behaved themselves. If Dusty Star had been with them, Kiopo was not going to make a fuss. So, Dusty Star cooked and ate his hare supper, and thought of the little foxes, and wished they had the bones.



CHAPTER XII

GOSHMEEELEE

In the deep, damp silence of the ancient forest you could not hear a sound. Through the swampy thickets, sodden with old rain, and floored with slime, nothing stirred. The very trees—cedar, tamarack, waterash, and black poplar—seemed to do their growing by stealth, as if afraid of its being found out. Even the skunk cabbage—that robust vegetable—spread its broad leaves craftily, as if it covered a world of secrecy, and might at any moment be forced to confess. If any life were gnawing at the roots of this damp silence, or paddling among the slime, its teeth and toes were muffled. The world just here was dreadfully damp, dreadfully secret, and dreadfully old.

Not a nice nursery for babies, you might imagine. In such a place, if ever a baby were rash enough to get born there, you would think it must be born old, and be damp for the rest of its days. Which only shows how deceptive things may be. For—in the very heart of the dampness, and where the ancientness was so old as to have begun falling to pieces—two perfectly new, and (what is perhaps even more surprising) perfectly dry babies were curled up in a hollow scooped out between the roots of a couple of hemlocks growing together on a knoll! Neither the dampness, nor the ancientness, nor the silence, nor the gloom, nor any of the other things which would have made ordinary civilized people uncomfortable, had the least effect upon the babies. To be quite truthful, I must here remark that it was partly because they were fast asleep. If you curl yourself up very tight, and sleep very sound, and if, when you wake, you spend a good deal of your spare time in taking in food, it is quite surprising what a snug place the old, damp world may seem; and it would be quite ridiculous to sit up and worry.

Except very rarely the babies did not sit up. Their usual position when awake was a sprawling one on their stomachs, while they pushed their little fore paws into their mother's and sucked and sucked and sucked. And most certainly they never worried; worrying being a disease which grown people seem to catch from each other in places where the sky scrapers go up and scratch the stars.

The babies in the tamarack swamp knew nothing about civilization. Their umbrella was the hemlock and their mother's body was the stove. And if a raving

wind moaned gustily in the poplars, and twisted the tamaracks till they creaked, the umbrella never closed and the stove never burned out.

Perhaps I ought to be a little more accurate about the stove. It did not burn out, but it sometimes *went* out. Occasionally when the babies woke up, they found that the stove had gone out walking, taking care, however, to leave part of its warmth behind.

One day Dusty Star, on his way across to the opposite side of the valley to dig roots, passed through the spruce wood which skirted the swamp on its eastern side. On the brown, elastic carpet of dead fir needles, he went without paying any special heed to his footsteps, because the travelling was so good. Suddenly round the end of a hollow tree, he found himself face to face with a large black she-bear.

Now Dusty Star knew nothing about the babies in the tamarack swamp, nor that this great furry blackness was their blessed heating apparatus gone out for a walk. But he knew that a bear as a bear can be an extremely dangerous animal if there is any reason for its being cross. Also he knew that, of all the wild creatures, a bear is the most human, and is prepared, at a moment's notice, to do all sorts of unexpected things.

Goshmееlee gazed at Dusty Star with disapproval out of her little shining eyes. She had no desire to have people hanging about the borders of the tamarack swamp, whether they had business there or not. They might mean no harm to her babies, even if they found them, which was very unlikely; but she wasn't going to take any risks. What sort of creature this new animal was, she couldn't directly decide. Its going on its hind legs was bear-like, but, except on the top of its head, it was very deficient in fur.

Dusty Star remembered that Lone-Chief once presented to him a piece of very old Indian wisdom: "Bear won't bother you, if you don't bother bear." But in case you *did* meet a bear that seemed determined to be bothered, another piece ran: "If Bear is angry, make medicine with your mouth."

Now although Dusty Star was sure he hadn't done anything to make Goshmееlee angry, he was quick enough to see by the glint in her eyes that she was uneasy in her mind. So, he thought it could do no harm if he followed Lone-Chief's second piece of advice.

The "medicine" he made with his mouth was very curious. It consisted of all

sorts of Indian words the like of which Goshmeelee had never heard in all her life before. The sound was very strange, yet she did not find it altogether unpleasant. A creature that could make a noise like this was certainly to be studied. So, in order to study more at her ease Goshmeelee sat down in front of Dusty Star, with her big black paws hanging in front of her, while she held her head first on one side and then on the other, in a comical kind of way.

Translated into our own language, this is the "medicine" which Dusty Star made:

"I am the Little Brother.
I am the Little Brother to all the Forest Folk.
But I am the Little Brother to Kiopo first of all.
The forest is very big, and has many ranges.
If it is big enough for me, it is big enough for you.
If I have got into your range, there's no occasion for you to fuss.
The Bears are a wise folk. They have a strong medicine.
When they are among the trees, they are in the middle of their
 medicine.
My folk live a long way back east, where the sun comes up out
 of the prairies.
They have a medicine which they make among the Lodges.
It is a strong medicine, and many birds and beasts have given it
 their power.
Our medicine-men make it in the moon when the Thunder-bird
 claps his wings in Heaven.
You cannot harm me, even if you wished it.
My medicine is stronger than your medicine of the Bears."

Dusty Star paused. All the time he had been making his "medicine," Goshmeelee, except for turning her head from one side to another in her droll way, had never moved. It is true that she did not understand a single word of what Dusty Star had said. In spite of that she was impressed. Somehow, or other, the power of the "medicine" had spelled itself out of the words and trickled into her head. She knew that this creature that owned the strange medicine was something she must not hurt. She also knew that he would not hurt *her*. But the babies! In her fierce mother-love, they mattered more than herself. On their account she was not quite satisfied.

How Dusty Star became aware that Goshmeelee had cubs, is one of the many mysteries. The forest is a place of hidden secrets. Yet sometimes the secrets get

carried, like thistledown, on fine currents, and are passed from brain to brain. So, gradually, a light dawned on Dusty Star; and he *knew*. And in the same secret way, Goshmeelee knew that he knew, and also was aware that she need have no fear. As her mind was at rest, she allowed her body to be also. And in order to be completely at her ease, she sat down where she was widest, and looked at her new acquaintance with a humorous expression in her little gleaming eyes.

"It is a good place for them." Dusty Star remarked, after he had looked at Goshmeelee silently for some time.

By "Them" he referred, of course, to the cubs.

Goshmeelee simply blinked. But the blink was as good as if she had said:

"I, Goshmeelee, am a person of much wisdom. If I choose a place, I know what I am about. My children have everything which they require."

Naturally Dusty Star wasn't going to argue as to whether Goshmeelee was a suitable parent for her own children.

"Wolves not wanted," she suddenly remarked.

Dusty Star, looking at her, saw that the humour had gone out of her eyes. She looked almost fierce. Kiopo had not been mentioned. But he saw that Goshmeelee knew.

"I shall tell my wolf," he said quietly. "He will not harm them!"

A look shot out of Goshmeelee's eyes which there was no mistaking. It said, as plainly as words, that if any wolf was so ill-advised as to attempt to harm any babies he might happen to find in that swamp, she had a claw or two, in a paw or two, which that wolf would devoutly wish had been pulled out when she was born!

After that, the conversation, which had never been very fluent, dragged a little, and though Goshmeelee didn't cease to be friendly, Dusty Star felt that perhaps it was time that the interview came to an end. So, letting her understand how glad he was to have made her acquaintance, and again assuring her that neither he nor his wolf were persons to be uneasy about, he moved quietly away.

Goshmeelee watched him carefully till he was out of sight, and then remarked to herself, that the forest was becoming dreadfully overcrowded, and that she

hoped the new Carboona neighbours would know how to behave.

If she had happened to be at the other end of the swamp, and had seen another human figure working its way stealthily through the underbrush, as if it wished to avoid observation, her feeling about over-crowding would have been even stronger than it was. But fortunately for her peace of mind, she did not see it, and so went back to the lair between the hemlock roots totally unconscious of the fact that a far more objectionable intruder than Dusty Star had crossed the borders of the forbidden land which swampily surrounded the treasures of her heart.

As he returned home, Dusty Star also was equally unaware of the intruder picking a cautious way through the shadowy stillness on moccasins that seemed to avoid by instinct every fallen twig. He, too, by force of habit, moved silently through the woods. But by this time he had ceased to feel that he was in a strange land, and followed the trail with the certainty of one who knows he is going home.

Very different, indeed, the passage of that other figure, which seemed to be seeking for something which kept itself in hiding behind the forest screen.

And although in his own evil heart, Double Runner knew full well the object of his search, to the eyes of the wilderness he was a suspicious mystery that followed an unknown quest along an invisible trail.

And so along that trail, nearer and nearer to the Yellow Dog camp by the Chetawa river, and little guessing that less than half-a-league divided him at the moment from his unsuspecting prey, Double Runner, the artful mischief-maker, took his noiseless path.



CHAPTER XIII

"NEW BED-FELLOWS"

The days in the new home slipped quietly one after the other without anything particular happening, till once again Dusty Star found himself in the neighbourhood of the Tamarack Swamp. He was not thinking of Goshmeelee; and as the point at which he approached it was a long distance from the spot where they had met, he had not the least idea that he was anywhere near her lair. The thing which occupied his mind was how he could get across the swamp without sticking in the slime. Of course he could have avoided it altogether by going round; but that would have meant a long tramp, and he wanted to reach the camp before the evening fell.

It was just the hour before the coming-on of dusk when the swamp appeared at its worst for damp, draughtiness and general dismalness. On the surface of its stagnant pools nothing stirred, but if you waited long enough, peering close into the black depths, bubbles would rise slowly, telling you that things lived oozily far down in the fat slime. And for all it was so terribly still, the air, when you stopped to consider it, was full of low breathings, tickings, and watery whispers, that seemed to come from hidden pockets, and tangles in the weeds. Every tree, branch and stone had its covering of moss, or lichen. The lichen was grey like very old hair. The moss was green with the greenness of things that are very damp.

But here and there in this waste of watery bog, there were knolls of dryness, like islands, where hemlocks or hardwoods lifted their twisted boughs. And it was possible, if you knew the geography of the place, to work your way from one island to another without getting bogged in between. Dusty Star had reached one of these islands, sheltered by two hemlock trees, when he noticed a deep hollow scooped out between their roots. He stooped down and saw to his astonishment two baby bears curled up together and fast asleep. They looked so beautiful with their little bulgy bodies cuddled close against each other, that he loved them at first sight. He was so much taken up with admiring them that he did not notice a large black body moving quietly but surely along a well-worn trail across the swamp. And it was only when he heard a quick rush and a snort of rage that he

realized his danger.

It was the mother bear!

There was no time to tell her that he was doing no harm to her cubs. There was no time to escape. Three tremendous leaps, and she was upon him—almost! Then, in the very last fraction of a second, an extraordinary thing happened. It was as if the bear's great body almost twisted itself in the very middle of its spring. Even then, it only missed Dusty Star's body by an inch.

"Nearly finished you *that* time!" would have been Goshmeelee's comment, if she had put her mind into words.

The very instant she landed she knew that Dusty Star had not touched her cubs. It was because she recognised in a flash that it *was* Dusty Star she was attacking, which had made her last fatal spring fall short of its mark. Even then, it was a moment or two before she fully recovered from the effect upon her nerves.

"Don't do it again!" she seemed to say, looking at the boy out of her little glittering eyes.

Dusty Star gave her to understand that far from doing it again, he had never meant to do it once. Bear babies he regarded as absolutely untouchable, beautiful and bulgy though they were. Somehow or other, Goshmeelee believed him. She thrust her great head and shoulders into the hollow, and began to lick the cubs with her enormous tongue. This was not so much for cleaning perhaps, as to comfort herself after her anxiety. The cubs hated being cleaned. One sweep of that great tongue was warranted to spring-clean a cub down all one side from throat to tail. And if the cub objected, a huge paw would deftly turn him over and clean the other side with aggravating thoroughness. It was an added annoyance to the cubs to be washed so late in the day. What they wanted at that hour was food, not washing—extra nourishment, not extra tongue. They squealed and wriggled and gave miniature growls and tried to bite their mother's paw. Their behavior was very wicked indeed. Goshmeelee, being used to their wickedness, calmly went on cleaning.

When she had finished, she backed out of the hollow and sat down to look at Dusty Star; and her look said as plainly as possible, "What are you going to do?"

HER LOOK SAID AS PLAINLY AS POSSIBLE, "WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?"

Dusty Star had not decided upon doing anything, and he let Goshmeelee understand that his mind was open to any fresh ideas. As Goshmeelee didn't happen to have any fresh ones at the moment, she hadn't any to pass on. Dusty Star looked away across the swamp. It was growing dark, and the black pools were even blacker than before. Unless you knew a path, it would be impossible to find your way across, now that the dusk had fallen. Goshmeelee, could have done it, of course, but then she was at home. Goshmeelee, however, had no intention of doing any such thing. If persons chose to visit at awkward times, she really couldn't be expected to see them safely home.

Blackness was in the swamp now: all its pools and bogs and rotting logs seemed breathing out a damp dusk of their own, heavy with decay.

Dusty Star looked at Goshmeelee and shivered. *She* looked dark enough in her black fur, but also warm and *dry*. There was an air of large comfortableness about Goshmeelee which was very pleasant to contemplate on a damp night. Dusty Star contemplated, and had an idea. When the bear turned into her lair, he had made up his mind. He gave her time to settle herself comfortably, and arrange the cubs to her liking, and then boldly crept in after her.

To say that Goshmeelee was surprised, is putting it very mildly. Goshmeelee was thunderstruck. In all her great experience, extending over many moons, such an utterly amazing happening had never before taken place. If any other creature—beast, bird or human-being—had attempted to approach her precious cubs, Goshmeelee would have barely given it time to wish it had never been born. But when this small Indian boy fearlessly did the quite impossibly monstrous thing—actually pushing himself in beside her as if he were another cub—she had every claw and tooth ready to tear him into little strips, but—she hadn't *the heart!*

What it was in Dusty Star that made him different from every other creature she had ever come across, she didn't in the least know. Only she felt that the difference was there. Also, she felt quite certain, that, whatever he was, or did, he wouldn't damage the cubs.

It was very cosy in the lair, not to say stuffy. Also, there was very little room. If you wanted to be thoroughly comfortable, you hadn't to be backward about pushing. The cubs weren't troubled with a feeling of backwardness. First one gave a good shove, and then the other. Dusty Star, nestling close against Goshmeelee's furry side, felt distinctly jostled.

When the cubs discovered that a third cub had pushed its way into their proper bed, they grumbled and shoved all the harder. Dusty Star soon found that there were two sides to his share of the den: one was the soft one against Goshmeelee: the other was the hard one against a piece of hemlock root. The more the cubs shoved, the more he felt the root. It was no good saying "Don't!" The cubs didn't understand "Don't." Even when their mother growled at them, they kept on pushing and grumbling and making a fuss, so that *no* one could be comfortable, or pretend to go to sleep. Dusty Star made medicine with his voice—much medicine. He also pushed and shoved. He was not very polite; but then when people are sleepy they are not always polite, and the cubs really were very inhospitable. Goshmeelee was at her wits end to know what to do. Short of cuffing everybody all round, there seemed nothing to be done but growl. So growl she did, till all her body seemed a big thunder-box, with a lid that was always on the point of bursting open.

But by degrees the cubs got sleepier and sleepier, and at last forgot to push. And the rumbling in the thunder-box died away. And Dusty Star, pressed close against the great old thundermaker, slept his first sleep among the bears.

When the early morning twilight was stealing into the black places of the swamp, he crept softly out of the warm furry darkness of the lair, and picked his way across the bog.

And when he finally reached home, he found that Kiopo had not yet returned from his night's hunting, and so would not ask him any awkward questions about his very beary smell. For though you might hide things from Kiopo's eyes, and ears, it was dreadfully difficult to conceal them from his nose.



CHAPTER XIV

THE "YELLOW DOGS"

One day about a week after Dusty Star's night in the swamp, he was returning with Kiopo from a long excursion in the forest, which they had been exploring to the east, when suddenly a large fox came leaping down a run-way straight in front of them.

He stopped dead the moment he caught sight of them. Kiopo, who was in front, growled.

Dusty Star expected to see the fox instantly turn tail, and was surprised to see that it stood its ground, though it held one paw suspended, as if for immediate escape. Still growling in a threatening manner, Kiopo advanced. His hackles were raised, and Dusty Star saw that he lowered his body slightly in preparation for attack. Then, in a flash, he recognised his new acquaintance, the Silver Fox.

At once he grabbed Kiopo by the thick mane on his neck, and gave him clearly to understand that this was a friend whom he must not attack. Kiopo stopped growling, and stood still, while Dusty Star stepped quietly forward towards the fox.

Whatever it was that had startled Baltook, it was quite plain that he was in flight, and that the danger behind alarmed him more than that in front. He allowed Dusty Star to approach to within a few feet, though his wary gaze was fixed upon the wolf, who now came up slowly to Dusty Star's side.

Baltook, watching warily, never winked an eyelid; but his unwinking eyes spoke. "Danger!" they said, as clearly as if he had put the warning into words.

"There is danger coming behind me—coming quickly. There are strangers in the forest. The trees hide them. But they are coming quickly along the trail."

And then, as noiselessly as he had come, Baltook leaped lightly into the underwood, and disappeared.

In spite of the warning the silver fox had given, Dusty Star was at a loss as to what was best to be done. Both the danger, and its direction, were equally vague.

In what part of the forest Baltook had met it, he had not said. Dusty Star's senses were keen, but he knew that Kiopo's were keener. It was for Kiopo to decide. So he contented himself by watching the wolf to see what he would do.

At first Kiopo did nothing, except to throw his nose into the wind; After waiting a little, Dusty Star moved forward. A low growl from Kiopo checked him. He turned in the opposite direction. Kiopo growled again.

By this time, the sympathy between them was so close that the slightest hint was enough to say what they wanted. So that whenever Kiopo went so far as to growl, Dusty Star always knew that something was seriously amiss and never failed to take the warning.

And now, Kiopo began to move in the same direction as that which the fox had taken. Moreover he went quickly, as if there was no time to lose. Dusty Star realized that they were travelling rapidly westward, but not towards the camp.

The forest was intensely still. There was no sound save that of their own going, as they brushed against the undergrowth where it was too thick to avoid. Yet the further they went, Dusty Star was aware of an increasing sense of fear. Kiopo, too, was plainly growing more and more uneasy. In spite of his anxiety to cover the ground, he went with extreme caution. If it had not been for Dusty Star, he would have travelled much more quickly. As it was, he kept looking behind, impatiently waiting for the boy to catch up. Yet the speed at which they travelled did not seem to carry them out of reach of that mysterious danger threatening them behind.

For a long time Dusty Star had observed that they were travelling uphill; so that when, at last, they reached more open ground and came out on the top of a cliff, at the edge of a deep ravine, he was not surprised. The place was utterly unknown to him; yet Kiopo appeared to be on familiar ground. He trotted on down a shelving ledge dividing the upper from the lower part of the cliff, and Dusty Star followed. At a point where the ledge turned abruptly round an angle of the cliff, Kiopo suddenly looked back, stopped, and showed his teeth. Dusty Star saw an Indian come out from the forest almost at the same point at which they themselves had left it, and then turn towards the ledge. A moment afterwards he was followed by several more.

Without waiting to see if a still larger band now followed, Dusty Star ran quickly on, with Kiopo closely at his heels. As they proceeded, the gorge grew narrower.

Suddenly the ledge came to an end, so that it was impossible for them to continue any further. Above them, rose a precipitous wall of rock. Below, the precipice plunged sheer to the bed of the ravine. To return by the way they had come, was to run straight into the arms of their pursuers. One chance only remained: to leap the chasm before them.

It was not more than could be cleared by a vigorous jump; but down below was a terrifying depth where the shrunken stream sent up a hollow sound among the stones. If, after jumping you failed to make good foothold, you would go down to almost certain destruction in the black throat of the gorge.

Dusty Star was fully alive to the danger. But he knew that a still greater danger was coming on behind. He pressed himself against the rock at his back, in order to make the most of the few steps possible for a run, drew a deep breath, and then took a flying leap over the chasm. He heard the dull roar of the water, he saw the yawning blackness below, and then found himself clinging for dear life to the roots of a stone pine on the opposite bank.

He pulled himself into safety, and looked back, expecting to see Kiopo follow him at once; but Kiopo did not move.

"Kiopo!" he called. "Kiopo!"

The wolf never turned his head. Dusty Star looked nervously back along the gorge. A few moments afterwards the figure of an Indian came quickly around the turn. Rigid as the rock against which he crouched, Kiopo never stirred. Dusty Star watched with breathless excitement. He knew that the wolf's stillness meant deadly danger to the unconscious Indian. The latter came quickly on. In the intense silence the soft padding of his deer-skin moccasins was plainly audible.

From where Dusty Star crouched, he was invisible to the Indian. So also was Kiopo hidden by the rock. The boy saw at a glance that the man was not of his own people, but belonged to the dreaded Yellow Dogs. Now the Indian had almost reached the rocks. Dusty Star saw Kiopo's powerful haunches quiver, and held his breath.

The next instant he saw the wolf's great body hurl itself through the air.

Quick as lightning, the Indian leaped aside. Kiopo's terrible fangs missed his throat by a finger's breadth. In a flash, the Indian's tomahawk was out. Kiopo did not wait, and cleared the chasm with a bound.

And now Dusty Star could see that several more Indians were coming down the ledge. When they reached the spot where Kiopo had launched his attack they stopped and examined the opposite bank carefully. Like Dusty Star, Kiopo had drawn himself out of sight, among the thick mass of brambles, and creepers.

The Indian who had been attacked could be seen pointing out to his companions the exact point at which the wolf had disappeared. Dusty Star watched them with a terrible fear growing moment by moment. If their pursuers succeeded in making the crossing, he and Kiopo were only two against five. At present, they were in a sort of rude cave formed by the roots of the pine and screened by the hanging foliage; but in order to continue their flight, it would be necessary to come out full in view of their enemies and risk exposure to their deadly arrows.

They had not long to wait in suspense. They saw one of the Indians prepare to take the leap.

Close against his side, Dusty Star could feel Kiopo's body shivering with excitement.

Through the opening in the leaves, he saw an Indian lean back against the rock as he himself had done in preparation for the spring. The next instant Kiopo dashed through the opening with a snarl of fury.

Dusty Star saw him meet the Indian at the moment his feet touched the rock. The body of the wolf and the man seemed to sway together for one agonized moment on the very brink of the precipice. Then there was a ringing scream, and both disappeared from view over the edge of the abyss.



CHAPTER XV

THE TAKING OF DUSTY STAR

For the first few moments after this awful event, Dusty Star was too terrified to do anything but crouch where he was. Through the opening he could see the Indians gesticulating wildly on the other side of the chasm, as they gazed down into the gorge. Then they disappeared, and peering out from behind the foliage, he saw that they were retreating rapidly along the ledge.

He waited a little to allow them to get out of sight; then cautiously climbed down from his hiding place, and, lowering himself by the pine-tree's roots till he hung over the very edge of the precipice, looked down, dreading what he might see.

What he saw, was only a mass of shadowy boulders, far below, with the wreck of a pine-tree fallen across the creek. Not a sign of Kiopo, or of his victim! He listened intently. He heard the hollow wash of waters, rising and falling in a muffled roar, as the flow of the air rushed through the neck of the gorge. There was no other sound.

It was not possible to climb down at this point. Even if it had been, he dreaded lest the Indians might be there before him. Nevertheless he could not bear to remain in uncertainty as to what had been the fate of Kiopo, who had so nobly defended his life at the risk of his own. He felt that, at all costs, he must find his way down to the depths of that terrible gorge.

To do this, owing to the necessity of travelling back along the ravine, took him so long that darkness had fallen before he would reach a place where the descent would be possible. After wandering about for some time, he became completely lost, and it was not till the morning of the following day that he was at length able to make his way back to the camp.

During all his wanderings, he was comforted by a vague hope that Kiopo might, after all, have miraculously escaped with his life, and have reached the camp before him. But when he came in sight of the familiar landmarks, and arrived at last to find the place wholly deserted, a terrible loneliness settled down upon him. The night passed, and the following day. Still there was no sign of Kiopo. Dusty Star did not like to leave the camp, in case the wolf should return in his

absence and not find him there to welcome him. He kept hoping against hope that the worst had not happened. The thought that Kiopo was killed, that he had seen his faithful companion for the last time, was unthinkable. Kiopo *must* come back! He had told himself that he had been injured in the fall from the precipice, and was in hiding somewhere till his wounds should heal; Or that he had lost his way, and was wandering in the forest; Or, being hungry, that he had followed the trail of some far-travelling buck, and would not return till he had gorged himself with his kill! Any of these things! But not that other unthinkable thing, in the black throat of the gorge!

And all round the little valley that now seemed so deserted, the forest stood gigantically silent, as if it *knew*.

Not far from the camp, grew an immense hemlock. Over its dusky summit a thousand moons had waxed and waned. The shadow of its boughs was the darkness that had followed the dead moons. Several times, Dusty Star had seen Kiopo re-appear from its gloomy shade after he had been away on some of his long hunting expeditions. Now, he found himself continually turning his anxious gaze in its direction.

Suddenly, as he looked, he thought he saw something move. He was not sure. The space under the tree was very dark. Anything might crouch there and be invisible, even at high noon. What was it?—animal or human? He could not tell. The great old tree looked as if it had known no motion within the circle of its shade for a thousand years. Yet Dusty Star was not to be deceived. He *knew* that he had seen!

Yet for all his looking at the tree, he saw nothing more. The movement, whatever had made it, had been very slight. He would have thought nothing was there if it had not been for the instinct which continual dwelling among the wild creatures had developed in him: *he felt he was being watched*.

For some time, he could not make up his mind what to do. He knew that his smallest movement would not escape the unseen watcher. As the time went on, the suspense became unbearable. He felt he must do something definite. Gathering all his courage, he advanced deliberately towards the tree.

Except his hunting knife, he carried no weapon. But Dusty Star was no coward. Even though his heart was pounding, and his body tingling, he did not falter. Without pausing for an instant, he stooped beneath the sweepings boughs, gripping his knife.

To his astonishment, there was nothing to be seen. He went round the trunk to the farther side and gazed up into the overhanging gloom. Still, nothing! He examined the ground all about with the minutest care. Whatever had lurked there a minute before had left small trace of its presence yet slight though the traces were, he detected them. *Something had been there.*

He remained where he was for a long time. He preferred to be the eyes under the tree rather than allow the tree to get eyes again so that it might keep watch on *him!*

He was so very still that a couple of wood-mice went running over his moccasins, and a little black-and-white woodpecker ran up and down the trunk, searching for insects almost within reach of his hand. But these things belonged to the ordinary happenings of the forest. There was neither sight nor sound which gave him any reason to think that the thing which had watched under the hemlock was still lurking in the neighbourhood.

After a while he felt he could not stay any longer in the gloom. As he stepped out into the warm current of air, he had a sense of intense relief. Yet he did not wish to continue his watch from the camp, because of its nearness to the hemlock, lest there should steal back into its blind gloom the eyes that made it see.

So he climbed through the scrub up the mountain-side till he came out upon a grassy slope, two hundred feet above the camp.

He was above the tops of the sombre spruce woods now. The slanting sunbeams touched their summits into bronze and ruddy gold. Yet always, beneath the gold, —as Dusty Star well knew—lay the heavy green silence that never stirred even at noon, where the furtive feet padded softly over the brown fir-needles, and the furtive eyes glimmered in the gloom.

In the valley beneath nothing moved. From a thousand miles of forest and mountain the silence seemed to be oozing into it, filling it to the brim. And at his back, rose Carboona. From all its gorges, precipices and barrens there came not a single sound. The vast world of the afternoon seemed heavily asleep. Worn out with all his watching, Dusty Star also slept.

When he awoke, the last ray of sunlight had left the eastern peaks. At his feet the camp lay in deep shadow.

Ah, why did not the Spirit of the Wild Places come to him now, and tell him not to go down? At various times already during the life the Spirit had warned him, he didn't know how. There had been no distinct shape, nor any sound. But the same mysterious warning, that tells moose and caribou when danger threatens, had come to him also, and he had turned aside, or taken another trail. And so, whatever the unknown peril was, it had been escaped. Yet now, even though he needed it as never before, the warning did not come. But perhaps the Spirit had gone upon a long trail, and had not yet returned? Or perhaps it had considered the experience of the hemlock sufficient. Whatever was the reason, nothing warned him now as he went into the shadow of the trees.

Dusty Star's mind was filled with one thought—the wild hope that Kiopo might have returned: but when he reached the camp the place was empty, and everything desolate as before.

He gave a long look up and down the valley into the fast-falling night, and his heart sank. The forest was very dark now. The hemlock was inky black. He went to bed with a heavy heart.

He slept uneasily, waking from time to time; but it was only to hear the solemn cry of a horned owl sitting on some dead limb, or rampike; or the long, wailing laughter of a loon from the water-meadows to the south.

And once, far off in Carboona, he heard the hunting-call of a wolf. Even at that remote distance he knew it was not Kiopo's deep-toned, vibrating bellow.

He was fast asleep when the wolf-call came again. As it rang faintly out, a shadowy form, gliding from under the hemlock, paused to listen. When, receiving no answer, it had died away, the form moved stealthily on.

Dusty Star woke with a start. He knew that something had disturbed him, but could not tell what it was. He listened intently. Over the valley he heard the notes of a pair of night-hawks swooping down from the hill; and between the stones, the stream went with a wandering murmur. That was all.

He lifted himself on his elbow, and looked towards the doorway. A silvery glimmer showed that the moon had not yet set. As he looked out; a man's shape darkened the entrance of the hut.

Dusty Star held his breath. In the absolute stillness, he could hear his heart thump against his ribs.

The man entered the hut. Instantly Dusty Star sprang for the opening. As he did so, he felt arms thrown round him. He struggled frantically, but, in that strong Indian grasp, he was powerless, and the next moment he was dragged mercilessly outside the hut.

Half-a-dozen Indians immediately surrounded him; but not a word was spoken. While two of them held him, a third passed a deer-skin thong round his chest, fastening it securely under his arms.

The thing had been done so rapidly, that from the moment when the Indian's shape darkened the doorway till that when the whole party moved noiselessly down the valley with their captive in their midst, the thin shadow of a rampike falling on the moonlit space in front of the tepee had scarcely shifted its black finger an inch towards the east.

In spite of the fact that it was night, the Indians travelled quickly, owing to the moonlight. It was only under the trees, or in the shadow of some great rock, that the darkness made it necessary to slacken the pace. As they went, Dusty Star kept listening backward along the trail. Suppose, at the last moment, Kiopo should have returned? Finding the hut empty, Dusty Star knew that he would start instantly in pursuit. But suppose he did not come back in time to get the scent before it faded from the trail? Even *his* fine nose would not serve him on a cold trail. Once only, when they were nearing the end of the valley, Dusty Star caught a faint wolf-howl very far behind; but whether this was Kiopo's voice or not, it was impossible to say.

It was evident that the Indians had some idea that the wolf might follow them, for it was plain, by the speed with which they were travelling, that they were anxious to push on with the least possible delay. They were among the spruce woods now, and the air was full of the unmistakable smell of the trees, with that peculiar tang one could never forget. They travelled in single file. Even when it was so dark that Dusty Star could scarcely see his captors before, or behind, the deer-skin thong about his chest was always there to prove their presence as it tightened or slackened according to the pace, or the unevenness of the ground.

At dawn, they reached the thin edges of the forest. Dusty Star's heart sank. If Kiopo had caught them up in the thick woods, there would have been some chance of escape under cover of his whirlwind method of attack which would have suggested a pack of wolves rather than one. But now, in the more open country and the growing light, this would not be possible.

The Indians quickened their pace. In the day-light, Dusty Star recognised them as belonging to the same tribe as those who had followed him and Kiopo a few days earlier; Yellow Dogs every man of them, under the leadership of Double Runner.

It was near noon before they reached the head of a long lake. Dusty Star could see the water glimmering far away to the south over the tops of the red Indian willows. Without pausing for an instant, the Indians pushed their way through the thicket, their moccasins sinking deeply in the spongy ground between the willow roots. Then they pulled out a slender canoe of birch-bark concealed among the reeds.

Dusty Star had never seen a canoe before. It struck him with astonishment; and when his captors forced him to get in, and he found himself floating on the water, his astonishment was mingled with fear, especially when, urged by the vigorous strokes of the Indian paddles, the canoe shot out into the open. Once out upon the lake he was utterly amazed. Prairie-bred, he had never imagined it possible that so much water could exist. And it was deep, very deep! When you looked down, you could not see any bottom. And the thin sides of the canoe seemed a poor protection from the rippling vastness of that inland sea. The waves struck the bows with a husky noise. Dusty Star dreaded that at any moment, the canoe might be engulfed. Already the willow-thicket where they had embarked seemed a long distance away. A feeling of despair took hold of him. The thicket was the last place where Kiopo could find the trail; for, as Dusty Star knew too well, all trails die out upon the running watery smell.

When at last the Indians reached the end of their journey, Dusty Star found himself in a large camp near a stream which flowed into the river down which they had come from the lake.

Their arrival caused a great deal of excitement among the inhabitants, who came crowding round to examine the captive. It was evident to Dusty Star that they had already received the news of Kiopo's attack upon the Indian who had jumped the gorge. As he looked at the hostile faces crowded about him, as if he were some strange wild animal, his heart sank. In spite of his youth, he knew only too well what Indian vengeance meant. After he had been sufficiently examined, the deer-skin thong with which he was bound was fastened to one of the lodge-poles, and he knew that, unless a miracle happened, he was a prisoner whose chance of escape was small indeed.

When night came on, he was ordered to enter the lodge, which he found he was to share with Double Runner, and another Indian; and, after they were all inside, the door-flap was securely fastened.

Notwithstanding his long journey and the anxiety of the last few days, he found it difficult to sleep. All night long he kept waking up with a start, and then dropping off again into uneasy slumbers, in which the dread of the uncertain fate in store for him oppressed him with terrible dreams.

Next morning he was let out again, and the day passed without any sign as to what his enemies intended to do with him. And at night he was imprisoned as before. Food was given to him as often as was necessary, and, although he was kept a close prisoner, carefully guarded day and night, he was not subjected to any ill-treatment.

Day after day passed, and it became evident that the Yellow Dogs were preparing for some great ceremony. Plentiful game of all sorts was brought into camp, and there was much boiling of tongues and other Indian dainties, filling the air with a juicy smell. The forest people wrinkled their noses in the tainted breeze, and the word travelled.

CHAPTER XVI

"THE GRIZZLY"

It was old Kitsomax, the mother of the Chief, Spotted Calf, who first brought the alarming news which spread terror through the camp.

Among all the inhabitants she was the one person who had showed any kindness towards Dusty Star. His friendlessness and helplessness had appealed to the old woman's heart. A son of hers had died when he was just Dusty Star's age, and in the little lonely captive she fancied she saw a resemblance to her own boy. Only dread of what the tribe might do, if she were discovered, prevented her from contriving his escape. Yet she bided her time. If circumstances should favour her, she knew what she would do.

On the day before the ceremony she had gone down late in the evening to bring water from the stream. As she was dipping her bucket, stooping very low, she heard a twig snap. Looking up quickly she saw an enormous grizzly come out between the alder bushes on the other side of the stream. She was so terrified, she said, that, for the moment, she could not rise, but kept crouching on the bank hoping the bear had not seen her. But when she heard him growl softly and deeply, she knew that he had scented her. Without daring to draw up the bucket, she had sprung to her feet and fled.

That same night, Dusty Star was wakened by a loud breathing sound close to his head, so near that it sounded as if it were in the lodge itself. He was very much frightened, but lay absolutely still. Something seemed to brush the outside of the elk-skin covering of the lodge, and then moved heavily away. Almost directly afterwards, a great clamour arose among the huskies. It continued some time before all was quiet. But as the huskies were continually making disturbances in the night for very little reason, the Indians did not come out.

Next day, unmistakable signs showed that a large bear had visited the camp. Two huskies had been killed, and a third carried off into the woods.

It was plain to Dusty Star that the Indians were very much alarmed. This was partly accounted for (as he gathered from their talk) by the fact that there existed a legend in the tribe of a great medicine grizzly which haunted the lower slopes

of the mountains, and which was supposed to be the spirit of Catawa, a famous chief who had been murdered treacherously many moons ago during one of the tribal feasts. The year before, at the same time of the year, a grizzly had visited their camp on the Potamac, and had destroyed one of the tepees. And hunters, coming over the mountains had brought disquieting accounts of a huge grizzly, of ferocious habits, whose range extended from the western slopes of Mount Hunting-Wolf to the northern bank of Potamac. This, they firmly believed, was the dreaded Catawa. And now, Catawa was come again.

Some said that it would be wise to have a special grizzly-bear dance in the festival in order to make a strong medicine that should drive Catawa away; but others were firmly of the opinion, that the bear dance would only infuriate the grizzly, and that it would be wiser to postpone the festival until he had left the neighbourhood.

They were still discussing the question, when Double Runner rushed breathlessly into camp. He said he had gone up the mountains to cut lodge-poles when he had come upon an enormous grizzly feeding among the raspberry bushes on a hill to the northward of the camp. The bear had seen him, and had immediately given chase, and it was only by putting forth his utmost speed that he had been able to escape.

This alarming news settled the disputed matter of the festival; and it was decided that it could not be held until the grizzly had either been killed, or driven far away from the neighbourhood of the camp.

To do this; it would be necessary that all the able-bodied men, young and old, should form themselves into a strong war-party, and go out to attack the grizzly wherever he might be found.

This plan was immediately carried out, and in a very short time, the camp was empty except for the squaws and children and a few of the very oldest men. As usual, Dusty Star was left fastened surely by the deer-skin thong.

The day was very warm, and so he sat just outside the tepee observing the sleepy life of the camp as it went leisurely on through the long passing of the drowsy afternoon. Kitsomax sat a few feet away, busily softening a tanned buckskin, which she worked skilfully with her skinny hands. Several times, Dusty Star noticed that her eyes were upon him instead of the buckskin, and that then her gaze wandered uneasily round the camp, as if to see whether any one were watching her. The air was very still. Apart from the camp, nothing living could

be seen, except a pair of buzzards circling high up in the eastern blue.

Suddenly Kitsomax, after a swift glance all round, leant towards him, speaking rapidly.

"They will hold the festival after Catawa is driven away. And then they will kill you, because your wolf killed Little Owl; and because Double Runner says you belong to the wolves. But I, Kitsomax, do not believe you intended to harm us. If they had not followed you, your wolf would not have attacked. If you do as I tell you, you may yet escape before the festival begins. You must ..."

Here the old squaw broke off suddenly, and bent over her work. Turning his head, Dusty Star saw that a woman had come out from a neighbouring tepee, and was looking in their direction.

After that, Kitsomax did not say any more, and Dusty Star went on staring into the forest, where the shadows looked so cool under the trees. The words the squaw had said kept on running in his head. "They will kill you, because your wolf killed Little Owl." The thing of which the great fear had haunted him since his captivity was true then! The thing Kiopo had done was to be avenged by his own death. He shuddered as he thought of the terrible fate in store for him. He knew that Indian vengeance could be more cruel than the wolves. He longed to ask Kitsomax if she had heard what had happened to the wolf; but whenever he turned to do so, it seemed to him that some one was looking their way.

And the thing she had told him was a terror which grew. And although he looked straight into the forest, he saw it merely as a dense green mass. What he saw was the terror—the thing that should happen when the Indians returned.

But all at once the vacancy of his gaze vanished. From the shadow of the trees, he saw a large form slowly detach itself. It made a few paces towards the camp, and then turned back into the forest.

He looked round the camp. No one else seemed to have noticed. The squaws continued their occupations just as before. Dusty Star kept his eyes continually moving along the line of trees, always returning to the spot where the thing had disappeared. And although he saw nothing more, he was convinced he had not been mistaken. The shape had been that of a bear.

A long time had passed when one of the squaws suddenly screamed. Looking in the direction of the cry, Dusty Star saw an enormous grizzly walking slowly

towards the tepees.

Instantly the whole camp was in wild confusion. Squaws ran in every direction, snatching up their babies, and screaming at the tops of their voices. Several of the more courageous old men advanced towards the grizzly, waving their arms and trying to frighten him back; but when, growling fiercely, he broke into a run towards them, they turned and joined the women in their flight. It was in vain that the huskies circled round him in a snarling, furious ring. He broke the neck of one which had rashly ventured within the range of his deadly fore paw, and wounded another. As he charged the pack, it broke before his murderous onset and fled yelling into the woods.

Dusty Star ran quickly into the tepee and began feverishly to try to unfasten the thong which bound him, while the screaming of the women, and the yelping of the huskies continued. Presently, a sharp, rending noise told him that the grizzly had attacked either a tepee, or one of the parfleches in it. The tearing noise continued for some time and then ceased. After that there was silence in the camp, the inhabitants having by this time taken refuge in the woods. And still the thong resisted his utmost efforts to unfasten it. Then, just as he was about to peep out to see what was happening, he heard something approaching.

Instantly he crawled under a buffalo robe, and lay there, shaking from head to foot. Something entered the tepee. Dusty Star did not dare to look. He felt the thong that bound him violently tugged: he heard, or thought he heard, a muffled growl. The next moment, the robe was snatched from his head, and he saw—not the grizzly—but old Kitsomax with a hunting knife in her hand.

"Quick! Quick!" she cried. "I have cut the thong. He is coming! He is coming!"

Dusty Star leaped from the couch. As he did so, Kitsomax gave a scream.

The entrance of the tepee was filled by a huge form. The little red eyes of the grizzly were glaring at them in fury.

For a moment the bear seemed to hesitate. Then he turned towards Kitsomax. Instantly Dusty Star stepped forward, and gave a short bark like a coyote. The grizzly turned savagely in his direction. With a marvelous quickness in one so old, Kitsomax darted out of the tepee.

In thus turning the bear's attention from the old squaw to himself he was well aware that he had risked his own life. Yet he felt he could not have done

otherwise, since she had willingly taken the same risk in coming to set him free, instead of escaping with the other squaws while there was yet time.

Seeing itself balked of one prey, the bear now concentrated his rage upon the other. He made a furious rush.

If Dusty Star had been a fraction of a second too late, the delay would have cost him his life; but even as the furry Terror hurled itself upon him, he made one of his swift wolf-leaps to the other side of a pile of skins. The grizzly turned like a flash. It was amazing that so huge a body could move with such terrible ease and quickness. But quick though the bear was, the boy was quicker. He knew that death was hard upon him. A false, or undecided movement, and nothing could save him from those murderous claws. All the muscles of his lithe body were contracted in preparation for the final rush for life. Before the grizzly could cut him off, Dusty Star seemed not so much to run, as to *shoot* himself out from the lodge.

The big paw missed its mark by a hair's breath—no more. Only one of the frightful hooked claws touched with its tip the spot where Dusty Star's buckskin shirt bulged slightly from his back. It rent it as clean as the slash of a tomahawk, but failed to reach the skin. Dusty Star felt the slash, and bounded for his life. He could see Kitsomax's stooping form already half-way towards the forest.

If he had made a straight run now, it was probable that the bear would have caught him, owing to the extraordinary speed with which a bear can move over the ground, but as Dusty Star took a zig-zag course all across the camp, doubling right and left as he darted round the tepees, the grizzly lost ground.

From the last tepee to the edge of the forest was less than a dozen yards. Dusty Star took them at a wild run, hearing the snarling growl of the grizzly as it came wheeling furiously round the last tepee. He swung himself desperately into the nearest tree. With a roar of disappointed rage, the grizzly flung himself against it, tearing savagely at the bark, and stripping it into splinters. Then, clasping the trunk with his mighty fore-arms, he hugged it with all his might, wrenching it this way and that in an attempt to break it down.

Dusty Star, on his perch, felt the whole tree shiver beneath him. A tree of smaller growth must have given way at last to the enormous strain, whereas a sapling would have yielded like matchwood.

As Dusty Star was aware, a full-grown grizzly rarely climbs. Still, in the present

enraged condition of the brute's feelings, there was no telling what he might not attempt to do. So, when he saw that the bear, finding he could not break the tree down by main force, was beginning to climb it, he was more alarmed than surprised. Yet even then, as he felt the tree vibrate to the movement of the great body as it came slowly up, he kept his presence of mind. He threw a quick look round him that took in all the details at a glance. In an instant he knew what he must do. When the bear was a third of the way up the trunk, Dusty Star climbed out along a branch and dropped quickly to the ground. By the time the grizzly had laboriously climbed down backwards, Dusty Star was out of sight among the trees.

When the Indians returned that evening, they found the camp a total wreck; for the bear, disappointed in his attempt to seize Dusty Star, had turned back to vent his rage upon the tepees. Here, one was completely torn down; there, another showed wide rents between its lodge-poles. And where one had apparently escaped, it was found, when entered, to have its contents torn and thrown about in all directions.

Of Dusty Star himself, they could not see a sign. And the only person who could have thrown a light upon his disappearance, took the wise course of holding her tongue. Even the thong which had bound him had likewise disappeared. For when the terrified squaws had crept back one by one to the ruined camp, Kitsomax had taken the precaution to bury it under a bush.



CHAPTER XVII

THE SWIMMING OF KIOPO

When Kiopo had leaped upon the Indian, and had fallen with him over the precipice edge, he had, like his foe, crashed down to almost certain death. The Indian, indeed, had been killed instantly, with a broken neck; but the wolf, instead of falling straight upon the boulders at the bottom of the gorge, had turned a somersault in mid-air, and had landed in a thick clump of junipers growing on a slope some thirty feet above the creek bed.

Probably it was the passionate instinct of self-preservation, when all hope seemed gone, which had made him give his body that violent contortion. Apart from that, he owed his life to a miracle which must always remain a mystery unexplained.

In spite of the break in his fall, he lay half-stunned among the bushes for some time. And when at length his senses came to him again, he felt sore in every limb.

There is an unfailing law among the wild peoples that, when an individual is injured, it creeps into the most secret place it can find, and there rests till it recovers sufficiently to face the world. Kiopo had no need to look for a place more secret than the one he had fallen into, so he stayed where he was, and let nature do the rest. For fully two days, he remained in hiding. On the third, he crawled out into the open; on the fourth, was sufficiently recovered to make a kill in the shape of a fat buck rabbit; and, on the evening of the fifth, made his way back to camp.

Instantly he returned, he knew that something was wrong. He ran anxiously this way and that, scenting and looking. Eyes and nose told him the same story. Dusty Star had gone, and he had not gone alone. Kiopo soon found the trail, and immediately started off. The scent was getting a little stale, but, faint though it was, it was sufficient for the wolf's unerring nose. It was the well known Indian smell that he had learned to distrust, and as he ran, his hackles rose. He ran on swiftly, growing angrier as he ran, and eating up the distance with his long, loping stride. Here the scent was a little fainter, there a little stronger; but always

the trail kept going on in the same direction to the south. Kiopo knew that he was getting beyond his usual range. He had never penetrated so far into the southern forest country before. He was uneasy, as well as angry. There was a bad smell in the trail. It meant mischief. And mischief towards his beloved little brother was the thing in all the world which Kiopo would not stand.

Under the solemn shadow of the trees the great wolf sped on soundless pads that carried his body like a phantom through the silence of the woods. Now and then he would come to a cross trail, where some other animal had lately passed, or the trail itself would be obscured. But Kiopo had far too serious a business on hand to waste time upon the cross trails, and when the double trail divided, he followed the fainter, and the human one, as before. Of other hunters who, like himself, were abroad in the woods, he saw little, for his eyes rarely wandered from the ground under his nose. And those of the forest-dwellers who caught sight of the great grey shape that went floating through the trees, gave it a wide berth, with that curious forest etiquette which is deeper than politeness, and is close in touch with death.

When he emerged from the forest into the open country, Kiopo paused to reconnoitre. His eyes became of the utmost importance now, because the world was widening. In the forest you could only see where the trees permitted, but now its place was taken by long grassy swells that rippled under the wind. Into it, Kiopo swung his nose. It came in a series of soft surges from the south. Many faint odours were travelling down it now; scents that were the body of the wilderness lifted into the air. They were subtly mixed, it would take the very finest nose to disentangle them. With his eyes narrowed, and his head raised, Kiopo searched the wind. His sensitive nostrils gave little quivers and rapid twists that were like a play of fingers that dabbled delicately in the air. The scents that came were chiefly those of the growing things, grass, flowers and trees. But running through them, in fine streams of odours, there were other scents that were like the flowing souls of birds and beasts, spilt, in spite of themselves, into the wandering world.

Was some tiny drop of Dusty Star's body-scent mixed among them—sending out its wordless message through the enormous space? For all the keen searching of Kiopo's nostrils, the drop, if it were there, escaped them. But if the trails of the air were lost in the wilderness of the wind, the trails of the earth remained, and still the one he had hitherto followed went plainly through the grass. Once again Kiopo took it up, following it steadily till at length he came to the spot where the Indians had taken to the canoe. In the marshy ground under the willows, he lost

it completely. It was as if it was sucked into the marsh. In vain he searched the whole neighbourhood, and ran backwards and forwards in a desperate effort to find some vestige of the broken trail, always returning with the same result to the roots of the willows among the black ooze.

Now Kiopo's faultless wood-craft taught him, without the slightest uncertainty, that there had been no back trail. If, therefore, the trail ended at the water, those who had made it must have gone *through* the water. There was no other way. Once he had made up his mind, Kiopo did not hesitate. He plunged into the lake.

When once in the water, Kiopo, like all wolves, was a powerful swimmer; but he had never before had any experience of such an immense expanse of it. The further he went out, the wider it seemed to become. He swam on and on. As he swam, the shores receded further and further on either side. He found himself out in that whispering vastness, alone in a world of waters, with no sign of any human being, nor the faintest trace of a trail. After a while, he grew disheartened. The great water gave him a sense of loneliness and fear which he had never felt before. In the dark silences of the woods, you could smell the good smells of the travelling folk, hunting or being hunted, which you could not even see. But here there was no hunting, nor good smells; only a wet, uneasy movement, and a watery smell which his growing fear made hateful to his nose. And the sound of its wetness beat unceasingly on his ears like a din of unintelligible voices bewildering his brain. The only living things that he could see were two fish-hawks sailing overhead. In their annoyance at his appearance, they gave piercing cries of disapproval; for they knew well that no fish was likely to come to the surface while this great hulk of wolfishness went churning up the water in that unwieldy way. And if they had only dared, they would have swooped down to strike at him savagely with the terrible talons which made their feet such formidable weapons.

At last Kiopo grew tired of battling against that vast wetness, with its loneliness, and voices that rang against his head; and so he turned and swam straight towards the shore.

The distance was much further than he expected. He found himself swimming more and more slowly. In spite of all his efforts the shore seemed still very far away, while always that great weight of water seemed to push itself continually in between him and the trees, as if it were a living thing which had determined that he should never land. His strength and power of endurance were enormous, even after they had been weakened by his recent injuries; yet for the most

powerful wild creature there is a limit to its strength. And now Kiopo knew that his capacity was being taxed to the utmost. Gradually, but surely, his great strength was ebbing. But he also knew that, unless he could reach the shore before his force gave out, all hope of once more joining the little brother would be for ever lost. His strong fore paws worked valiantly, beating down the water which seemed rising and rising in spite of all his efforts. The trees were nearer now. He could see that, even though his eyes were dimmed by the splashing of the ripples. And yet they seemed so terribly far away for the effort he knew he must put forth, if he were to reach them before his strength was done. He swam more and more slowly, his breath coming in short gasping sobs that quivered through him from head to tail. The fish-hawks, circling above him, came sloping down, with triumph in their shining eyes. They needed no explanation of the tragedy that was taking place beneath them. They knew that the hated intruder was slowly but surely being dragged down to a watery death, and their wild hawk-hearts approved.

Slowly, and still more slowly! Kiopo felt now as if the heavy wetness of the water had developed long tentacles that seized him and sucked him down. His head was becoming too heavy to hold above the water. There were moments of terror when it swirled about his nose, and when the fish-hawks, screaming with excitement, would hover, as if about to swoop. And then, once again, the big head would force itself up and, choking, spluttering, gasping, the struggle would continue.

When at length, Kiopo, beating his last desperate strokes, felt his feet touch ground, he could scarcely stand. Fortunately for him, a sandy spit of land at this very point thrust itself out for some distance into the lake. The sensation of ground under his feet gave him courage. With a last supreme effort, he dragged himself above the water-line, and sank exhausted on the sand.

If any watchful enemy had attacked him now, the big wolf would have offered an all but resistless prey. Even the fish-hawks, in their exultation might have safely swooped upon him and threatened his eyes; but now that the detested intruder had shown sufficient strength to drag himself out of the lake, they became more wary, and as they knew that a wolf ashore was a far more formidable foe than a wolf afloat, they thought better of their rashness, and once more climbed up the steep afternoon to sit again in the wind.

Other eyes besides the fish-hawks' noted the dark shape that lay on the sand-spit, motionless as a log. Log-like though it appeared, there was something about its

dusky bulk that, to their wary gaze, looked remarkably like a wolf asleep, or possibly even dead. But even a dead wolf is not beloved by the wilderness folk; and a buck who had pushed his way warily through the willow shoots to drink, when he saw the sinister form on the sand-spit, stopped, threw up his head suspiciously, and blew his breath angrily from his nostrils. The wolf never stirred. The buck looked longingly at the water, looked again at the shape on the sand-spit, drew back softly into the shelter of the willows, and went to quench his thirst elsewhere.

The buck had scarcely disappeared, when a fox, also thirsty, came down the trail, placing his slender feet delicately one after the other so as not to disturb the slumber of the afternoon. When he caught sight of the sand-spit, he stopped instantly, and wrinkled his nose to feel the wind. As the wind did not help him, he advanced a few steps further with extreme caution, ready at the slightest warning to leap back upon his trail. He observed that the great body was stretched out flat as if lifeless; the head resting between the paws. But there is flatness *and* flatness. The fox noted with disapproval that this particular flatness *breathed!* Drawing back his lips, he disclosed his teeth in a low snarl of hatred against the hereditary foe of his tribe. Then he doubled his flexible body till his nose nearly touched his brush, and slunk back into the woods.

Totally unconscious of all these happenings, Kiopo took his rest. The forest-folk might come and go as they pleased. Hour after hour he slept that heavy sleep of sheer exhaustion through which no messages pass from the outer world. The sun blazed down upon the sand-spit, drying his coat; and sleep, that marvellous medicine to which all the wild things turn, brought his strength slowly back to him in the waning afternoon.



CHAPTER XVIII

HOW KIOPO FOUGHT THE LYNX

When at length he opened his eyes, the sun had sunk below the hills. He rose slowly to his feet. He was so stiff that, when he stretched and shook himself, he gave a little yelp of pain. Then he sat down on his haunches and considered. On three sides of him stretched the lake; on the fourth, the forest, darkening in the evening gloom. Somewhere far out in the lake, a fish leaped with a splash. Kiopo turned his head uneasily towards the sound. It seemed to make the immense water more vast and lovely than before. He dreaded the lake now: it was a horror he would never forget. And because he sat there, still surrounded by the horror, and because the loneliness and longing that was in his heart for the little brother, swept over him all at once, he suddenly lifted his nose to the sky, and poured forth a wild, despairing howl, followed by another, and yet another.

Those desolate notes sent a message and a thrill far through the neighbourhood, till they died among the whispering reeds on the furthest shore. In the secret gloom of the forest, the startled creatures paused upon the trails. If Kiopo had wanted a good hunting, it was the worst mistake he could have made; for now every lesser animal within earshot would have warning of his presence, and know that a strange wolf was in a dangerous condition of unhappiness in the neighbourhood of the lake. Those who had intended feeding there, moved uneasily to safer pasture, and those who were hunters sought out more distant trails. So it happened that when, at last, Kiopo had finished his sorrow-making, and had entered the forest, he found it, to all appearances, emptied of its life.

He walked a little stiffly at first, but, by degrees, as his muscles worked, his body regained its suppleness, and very soon he was moving with the free swing which is particularly a wolf's.

The thought still uppermost in his mind was that of Dusty Star; but now he was utterly at a loss to know in which direction the Little Brother had gone. His long swim in those cold waters where he had so nearly met his death, seemed to have confused his wits. He roamed up and down, now along the lake shore, now back into the woods with a vague hope that somewhere or other he would come upon something that should set him on the trail. Yet although his nose worked

incessantly, he smelt nothing but the darkness filled with vague scents of invisible things, and the old smell of the trees. As he wandered about, his forces came slowly back to him, and, with his strength, his anger. If he had now recovered the trail of those who had stolen the Little Brother from him, he would have followed it furiously to the death. The anger that was in him burned like a dull fire. It needed only a very small thing to fan it to a blaze.

Nosing the ground as he went, he came suddenly upon a plain scent. It was one which he detested. It roused old memories, and an old slumbering hate. The trail led on below the spruces, and was fresh enough to be easily followed. And now Kiopo's whole being seemed to change. He no longer slouched along with a sulky and dejected air. His body stiffened and became alive. He carried himself as if on compressed springs. His eyes glowed with a dangerous fire. As he went on, the scent freshened with the odour he detested. The hair between his shoulders rose like a threat.

By the side of a big hemlock, the trail bent sharply to the right, leading over some rocky ground at the foot of a small hill. Upon the granite boulders covered with grey and orange lichen, the reflected light from the sunset sky lingered in a warm glow, as if they themselves were luminous. Kiopo moved with the utmost caution. He hardly seemed to walk so much as to *slide* over the uneven surface, with his belly close to the ground. Instinct, as much as sense, told him that the object of his hatred was now extremely near. In another moment, his eyes saw what hitherto he had only gathered with his nose.

Not twenty yards away lay the dead body of a deer; and, busily at work upon the carcass, crouched the form of a big, hunched-up animal with sharp, tufted ears. Those humped hind quarters, those hair-tufted ears surmounting the round, short-nosed head were familiar enough to Kiopo to tell him, apart even from the scent, that the humped ferocity before him was one of those ancient enemies of wolf and fox—the lynx.

The creature was so deeply engrossed in its occupation of feeding on the deer that at first it was totally unconscious of the wolf's presence. Tearing and biting at the freshly-killed and still-warm meat, it was enjoying its horrible feast without any fear of interruption. Kiopo drew his long body noiselessly nearer, foot by foot. He had almost reached a leaping distance, and was gathering his hind legs under him for a spring, when the lynx suddenly turned its head.

In an instant the great cat had realized the approaching danger and had snatched

his whole body round so as to face the foe.

A more violent image of hate and defiance could not possibly be imagined. Its round, widely-spaced green eyes shone with a cold glitter that was terrifying in its unwinking glare. The tufted ears, laid back close along the head, gave the face an extraordinary evil look. Its entire body clung to the carcass of the deer, as if to proclaim its ownership of the kill, while the upper lip, curled back, uncovered the long fangs, clear white in the furry dusk of its face.

As the lynx crouched defiant on its prey, measuring its foe with its furious eyes, it gave a harsh, rasping snarl. But if the sound was intended to frighten Kiopo, it failed completely. Instead, this rasping challenge merely served to exasperate him still further. Without an instant's warning, his eyes blazing with fury, he leaped.

This swift attack took the big cat utterly by surprise. It set at defiance all lynx etiquette of warfare, which consisted in a good deal of growling, snarling, and hissing, coupled with stealthy crouchings and crawlings, and appalling stillness during which you glared at your enemy with bottled fury in your green eyes. But to observe none of these niceties of passion, and begin a fight without even a spit, was a thing utterly abominable to every well-bred cat.

Taken off its guard, the lynx sprang half a second too late. He gave a savage sweep with wicked claws, which scored Kiopo's flank; but the force of the wolf's spring, with 150 lbs of sheer weight behind it, fairly knocked him off his feet; while, at the very instant that he struck, the merciless steel trap that was Kiopo's jaw closed upon his neck. It was then that Kiopo showed his wisdom. If he had attempted to hold his enemy down, as he easily might have done by his weight alone, the lynx would have been able to bring into play his formidable hind feet, armed with their fearful claws, and have inflicted an awful punishment upon the wolf's stomach. It would have been like trying to subdue a furry mass of springs that spat, tore, slashed and bit in a humped bundle of madness. So, instead of running such a risk, Kiopo, exerted all the strength of his powerful neck, shoulders and jaws, and shook the lynx as the latter might have shaken a raccoon, and then flung him violently backwards.

The force of the jerk was so tremendous that the big cat was wrenched from his hold upon the deer, and turned upside down in the air; but he had barely touched the ground when, using the strong springs of his hind quarters, he rebounded like a ball. His object was to descend, cat-like, on the wolf's neck, and to claw out his

eyes. But, swift as sight, Kiopo leaped again. Once more the trap snapped-to, and the lynx felt the wolf's teeth buried in his neck; while, as before, the skirmish ended in his being tossed violently backwards into the air.

The lynx was bewildered. He had fought wolves before, and with success, leaving the marks of his claws deep in their torn and bleeding flesh; but Kiopo's tactics were something fresh in his experience. Not only was there more cunning, but the strength and ferocity of half-a-dozen wolves seemed to unite in his foe's mighty frame.

On his second descent to earth, the lynx again made use of his strong hind-quarter springs. The only difference was that on this occasion he took care to rebound into the air *away* from his antagonist instead of *upon* him! A clear five feet he bounded from the ground, landing on the side of a granite boulder. He was not allowed to remain. With a snarl that was more like a roar, Kiopo hurled himself at the rock.

As the lynx pulled himself up the boulder, the wolf reached his right flank, and inflicted a ripping wound. Screeching in rage and terror, the defeated lynx sprang over the boulder and disappeared into the trees.

And now Kiopo, triumphant, but by no means pacified, was able to glut his hunger upon the deer. It was the first full meal he had enjoyed for a long time, and he was not slow to make the most of it. Usually, after such a meal, he would have been inclined to settle himself down for a long sleep; but in his present enraged state of mind, sleep was impossible.

All the evening, and through the night, he traveled maddened, and raging, devoured with the lust to kill. Woe to any living creature that should fall across his path! Fortunately for themselves, the forest dwellers seemed to receive mysterious signals that madness was abroad. That night, the Spirit of the Wild Creatures did much business on the trails. East, west, south and north, the warnings travelled. Along the lake shore, through the decaying silence of the cedar swamps, into the whispering glooms of the spruce woods, the voiceless tidings went.

Hunting was understood—the plain, pitiless killing for food. It meant death, and terror, but at least it followed the ancient law of the wilderness that one killed in order to live. But this other thing that recognized no law, and hounded to death merely because of the madness in its heart—this nameless Terror that seemed, in the haunted darkness, to be everywhere at once—*this* they shrank from,

trembling, as from something more deadly than even death itself. And so, realizing that it was Madness and not Hunger that went hunting down the trails, the forest-folk took heed to the tidings, and slunk into their lairs.



CHAPTER XIX

THE PURSUIT

After Dusty Star had dropped from his tree to escape the grizzly, his one thought was to put as much distance as possible between himself and his terrible foe. He ran on and on, listening fearfully for any sounds which should tell him that the bear was in pursuit. Yet the fear of what was behind was not all. There was an equally great danger in front lest he should find himself face to face with the returning Indians who had gone out to seek the bear. His dread was all the greater because he knew that it was the same direction in which he was now travelling which they had taken on leaving the camp, and that it was extremely probable that, not having come upon the grizzly, they would now be on the homeward trail. At the slightest sound, he would stop, and listen, nervously scanning the trees ahead lest he should catch sight of a red-skin figure standing motionless in the shade. And behind, he would listen for the pad, pad of great bear feet, or the rustling of leaves in the pursuit. Yet in spite of all alarms, the sun was sloping a long way to the west when Dusty Star found himself still undiscovered and working his way along the side of a great hill many miles to the northward of the camp.

He continued to travel swiftly, yet still with the utmost silence. Although he saw little of any wild creatures, he was aware of their presence, though most of them kept well out of sight as they crouched in hiding, or drifted soundlessly as driven smoke along the ancient deer-paths that had been worn by the feet of the wilderness, age after countless age.

As the day wore on, it grew darker under the trees, and presently he noted the on-coming of that swift northern twilight which so soon deepens into night. So far, he had not struck any trail which could cause him uneasiness; and although a few moons earlier he might have stood in fear of some of the larger and fiercer of the forest beasts, his intimacy with Kiopo had taught him many things which kept the fear at bay. And yet, as he glided softly along, stepping as warily as one of the deer themselves, his fear of the greater beasts seemed to have passed into an awe of the forest itself. Often and often, in the deep stillness there had come to him a sense of something behind the beasts, elder to the oldest of them, more

wise than the most cunning, which ran when they ran, stalked you with their stalking, and watched you with their eyes; something which, in the old darkness of the world, had spilt itself into fur and feathers, and moved with wings or feet. It was perhaps not exactly a comfortable thought; yet for all that, it need not necessarily be a bad Thing. On the contrary, it might even do you good, if you could get close enough to it, and learn not to be afraid.

Darker and darker under the trees! At last, so dark that you could not tell them by their shape. Yet to Dusty Star the shape did not matter, since he could feel them by their smell. Now it was hemlock; now balsam fir. And now he caught black poplar; and again the scent was birch. And so he went his way less by sight than feeling,—*seeing* things by their smell.

At length he came to a part of the forest so thick with undergrowth and creepers, that further progress in that direction was impossible in the dark. He decided to camp here for the night. So when he had found a suitable spot in which to make his couch, he lay down and almost immediately fell fast asleep.

When he awoke, dawn had already begun to break, and he could distinguish the shapes of the trees. He sat up and looked about him. He felt that none of his enemies would track him here. Only keen noses of beasts might scent him, and they, as likely as not, would give him a wide berth. He lay quiet in the intense morning stillness, feeling full of thankfulness that he was once more free. If only he could make his way home in safety, and find Kiopo there to meet him, happiness would come to him again. He could not believe that Kiopo had been killed. He remembered what Kitsomax had said. If the wolf had met his death as well as the Indian, surely she would have mentioned both? The recollection comforted him, as he got up and once more started on his way.

Though the country he was passing through was utterly strange to him, he knew that the river must be somewhere to the north-east, and that if he wished to strike the shores of the great lake, he must keep to the neighbourhood of the river for a guide. He pushed on rapidly, and, when the sun was half-way towards noon, saw with relief the light on the water between the trees. But now, owing to the swampy nature of the ground, the going was not so good, and he found it necessary to go back continually into the woods in order to travel on firmer ground. Evening was already drawing on before he heard the roar of the rapids in the distance, and knew that the lake was not far off. But he also knew that it was necessary now to travel with extreme caution, owing to the fact that there had been plenty of time for his enemies to have learnt of his escape, and have

sent out a party to re-capture him. In spite of all his efforts, it was night before he reached the rapids, and could see in the darkness the glimmer of the foam.

All that night, the roar of a great water mingled with his dreams. Whatever noises sounded in the forest, they were drowned by the rapids. If any enemy had crept towards him now, he would have received no warning. But he trusted to the darkness, and slept soundly.

On leaving the rapids at early dawn, Dusty Star travelled as quickly as he could along the eastern shore. It was still thickly covered with mist, which, although it prevented him from seeing what danger might be ahead, also kept his own movements from being observed. As he went on, he crossed many trails to the water's edge, but as they were only those of thirsty animals going down to drink, he knew he had nothing to fear.

Suddenly he heard a sound that made him stop and listen intently. It was a splashing noise, repeated at irregular intervals, and was not far ahead. He approached the spot with the utmost care, straining his eyes in the mist. Suddenly a large shape loomed out directly in front of him.

The creature's fore quarters were humped to a ridge on the powerful shoulders, covered with thick, glistening hair of a dark shade that was almost black on the upper parts. The under parts were a tawny yellow. The ridge along the back sloped to the hind quarters which, compared with the fore quarters, were small. A little tail with a thin tuft of hair finished off the animal in that direction. A much smaller animal of a similar shape was browsing along the lake shore a little distance away. Dusty Star did not know that this odd-shaped creature was a moose, but he did know that, whatever the creature was called, she was a cow with her calf. As he looked, he saw the moose lift one of her large fore hoofs and paw the water among the water-lily leaves on which she had evidently been feeding.

He was so intent on watching these animals that he set his foot on a twig which cracked. It was only a slight sound but it startled the moose. Instantly she wheeled round in order to face the possible danger which threatened from the shore. She paused for a moment or two, while her big ears turned towards every side, and her wide nostrils scented the air. Then she gave a harsh and peculiar cry, as a summons to her calf, which immediately came blundering and splashing up to her.

Dusty Star remained absolutely still, not daring to flick an eyelid. He would not

have been afraid of the odd beast if she had been alone; but he knew that a cow with her calf beside her was a totally different matter; and that an alarmed and angry mother is one of the most deadly perils of the wilderness.

For a few seconds, owing to his complete stillness, the cow did not see him, and neither ears nor nose helped her, partly because the light air which was blowing did not carry his scent towards her. In spite of this, the moose suspected that something she had not yet seen was within the range of her eyes, if only it would betray itself by some motion, however slight. Giving her calf a push with her long nose to make it get behind her, she advanced cautiously a step or two inshore. And still what she was looking for remained indistinguishable. She stopped, pawed the water angrily with her hoof and again advanced.

Dusty Star began to feel uncomfortable. He knew that if the cow came within very short range, she might discover him in spite of that absolute motionlessness which often deceives the eyes of the wild creatures.

As if she had heard a fresh sound somewhere down the lake, she turned her head in that direction. Dusty Star unwisely took the opportunity to step softly back. Instantly the cow swung her head round. Dusty Star froze to stillness as before. And yet it was as if the movement he had just made still vibrated about his stillness, like a quivering of the air. The great eyes of the cow fastened upon him, and she *saw!*

Without a second's hesitation, and snorting with anger and defiance, she charged.

In the forest things usually happen very quickly or they do not happen at all. The moose had been so intent in searching for Dusty Star that she had not perceived a much greater danger stalking her unawares. At the very moment the boy leaped aside to escape her furious onset, a long dark body shot itself through the air, and all but landed on her back. All but, yet not quite!

The panther had calculated his spring to a nicety, but he had not foreseen the sudden leap with which the moose swerved as the danger launched itself upon her. Swift though her movement was, she did not receive the warning soon enough to jump entirely clear; and although the panther had not succeeded in landing on her neck as he had intended, he caught her shoulder with a raking sweep of his paw. Two long gashes, from which the blood sprang freely, showed the track of those murderous claws. Yet the blow was not a disabling one, and only served to rouse the moose to fury. Rearing on her hind legs, she brought her hatchet-edged fore hoofs down with all her force. Where she aimed, she struck—

the panther's neck. The blow from these terrible weapons, of which every wild animal stands rightly in awe, with all the force of her great weight behind them, was tremendous. With a howl of pain the panther went down; but as he sank, he buried his fangs deep in the cow's neck. His weight pulled her to one side. She lost her footing, and plunged into the lake.

Dusty Star saw a fountain of spray and a welter of bloody foam. Then, out of the seething whirlpool, the panther's dark body emerged and staggered to the bank. The cow meantime had struggled to her feet, and gave a defiant bellow of rage. Dusty Star fully expected to see the battle begin again. But the panther, evidently not relishing the sight of the Mother Fury, thought better of it, and slunk off into the bushes. Dusty Star followed his example, and while the moose was busy in nosing her terrified calf to assure herself that it had come to no harm, he made quickly off into the woods, so that when the cow once more turned her blazing eyes to the shore in search of her enemies, Dusty Star, like the panther, was lost among the trees.

After his adventure with the moose, nothing disturbed the still monotony of the sultry day. The mist had lifted now, and a grey haze veiled the distance. He travelled as rapidly as possible, avoiding the swampy ground. Every time he reached a point where he could look back along the lake, he gazed anxiously for the shape of a canoe. Yet nothing broke the glimmering levels of its vast expanse. For all that, he grew more and more uneasy as the day wore on. He could not rid himself of the sense of a danger already on its way. The fact that it gave no outward sign of its approach only served to increase his anxiety. He went on steadily, hoping that every fresh point he reached would show the end of the lake. At length, from a narrow spit of sand (the very same in which Kiopo had recovered himself) he saw it. Beyond in a dusky background, the forest lay for leagues; and after the forest, the valley: and—in the valley—home! He turned to look behind him, down the lake. As he did so, his heart bounded. Far away in the hazy distance, he saw the shadowy outline of a canoe.

They were coming then! The warning had spoken truly. He had not been deceived. Without an instant's delay, he darted from the sand-spit and plunged into the woods.

Owing to the extent and thickness of the willow swamps, it was some time before he reached the head of the lake. Beyond that, as he knew, the forest was more open, and he would be able to travel much more rapidly. But what would be good for him, would also help his pursuers. All he could hope was that he

would be able to get a long enough start of them to keep well ahead—till he could find a sufficiently safe hiding-place. He found an old deer-path, and followed it for a long distance, though it trended rather too much to the south. Behind him he heard the harsh calling of a couple of jays, and now and then he came across a chipmunk which chattered indignantly at his presence. Otherwise he neither saw nor heard anything to cause him alarm. As the time went on, he began to hope that he had out-distanced his pursuers. And yet he could not rid himself of the feeling that he was being followed.

In front of him the forest climbed the slope of a small hill. Here and there the trees gave way to rocky spaces where enormous rocks towered between them. At a glance, Dusty Star could see that it would be a good place to hide in. He stood for a moment or two and looked carefully along the back trail. He saw only the endless tree-trunks, grey-green in the shadows. Nothing stirred.... Ah, what was that? His eyes fastened on the spot where for the fraction of a second something seemed to have flickered. He could not say that he had *seen* an Indian flit from one tree-trunk to another. Yet the sense that something was there made him almost sure. If he had obeyed his first instinct to continue his flight he would, most probably, have fallen at once into his enemies' hands. Instead, he climbed quickly up among the rocks.

There was no time to lose in searching for the best hiding-place; yet he stumbled by chance upon one which might have been made for the very purpose. It was a narrow opening that led into a passage running into the very centre of a pile of flat-topped rocks which enclosed it on all sides, and which was so curiously formed that they looked exactly as if deliberately placed one on top of another in the form of a building. To all appearances, the passage had only one entrance, and it was not until Dusty Star had crept to the extreme end that he found another opening so thickly covered with ferns and brambles that it could not be seen by any one on the outer side. He parted the undergrowth with the utmost care and looked out. Almost immediately afterwards he saw what made his heart beat with renewed fear. He saw an Indian leave the cover of the trees and advance quickly towards the rocks. He was followed by another, and yet another. Dusty Star counted five in all. Before he could tell exactly what part of the rocks they were making for, they disappeared.

After that, he lay perfectly still trembling at the lightest sound.

All at once he was conscious of a shadow which darkened the passage. He looked up and saw, through the fern, an Indian apparently gazing straight down

at him.

Dusty Star knew only too well what an Indian's eye can see, in spite of leafy coverings; and because he could observe every detail of the tall figure towering above him in the light, it seemed almost impossible that he himself could escape detection. He lay stiff with fear, scarcely daring to take breath, while those moments of terrible suspense passed slowly one by one and he dreaded that the next would bring his doom.

He closed his eyes, lest even the flicker of an eyelid should betray him, and waited helplessly for the worst. When at length he found courage to open them again, the Indian had gone.

The shadow of the wilderness had saved him; the ancient darkness that is darker than men's cunning in a shadow-casting land.

For a long time he did not dare to move. When at last he crept from his hiding-place, the afternoon was well advanced. He moved from point to point with the utmost caution, but could see no trace of his enemies. That, however, as he well knew, did not mean that they were gone. That things were out of sight only too often meant that they were very close at hand. Yet, in spite of the danger of continuing his flight, Dusty Star decided to take the risk, in case the Indians should return and make a more thorough search among the rocks. He travelled on as swiftly as he dared, keeping his eyes to the utmost on the alert.

It was only the merest motion of a fir-branch well to the right, such as might have been caused by the weight of a perching bird, or the movement of the breeze; but Dusty Star saw it and took the alarm. When, an instant later, an Indian broke cover and came bounding towards him like a buck, Dusty Star was already on the run.

One swift glance behind, showed him that his foe was coming at full speed. As he came, he uttered a shrill whoop as a signal to his companions that their quarry was in sight. The cry sent a thrill of terror through the boy's veins. From the start, he felt that unless he put forth his utmost strength, he was doomed.

And now he fled between the trees as if his moccasins were wings. His running power was marvellous. The prairies and the wolves between them, had given him that. If the antelopes went like the wind, Dusty Star went like the antelopes. Even his pursuers, as relentless and almost as tireless as the wolves themselves, and who passed their lives among winged and footed swifts, were

astonished at such running, the like of which they had never seen. To their amazed eyes he seemed less to be running than *floating* out of their sight. There was "medicine" in his feet!

What his own running looked like, Dusty Star did not know. But he knew what the forest looked like. It ceased to stand still. The trees raced to meet him, in a hurry to be past! And as they came, he seemed to cast them behind him, tree by tree; hemlock and fir, sycamore and maple—it was as if he flung the whole rushing forest in the teeth of the pursuit!

After the first terrified glances to measure the distance, he did not dare to look behind. All his sight was needed for the ground immediately ahead. To fall—even to stumble—might cost him his life. Yet he knew that, so far, he was keeping ahead. The knowledge gave him courage. If only his strength would hold out! The pace was killing. He knew he could not keep it up for very much longer. Even now he fancied he was running less quickly. He was beginning to realize that he got his breath with more and more effort. And to lose his breath was the beginning of the end. For a considerable distance, his greater speed would enable him to out-distance all pursuit; but in a long race, it is endurance which counts; and while his pursuers were full-grown men, he was, after all, only yet a boy. Yet with breath going, and courage failing, Dusty Star fled on.

If there is a Good Spirit which carries its mysterious warning to the children of the wilderness when danger threatens, it would seem sometimes as if there were an evil one which lures them to their doom. Else why should Dusty Star swerve suddenly to the right along a new trail, and in doing so turn to look behind? The next moment, he had caught his foot against a projecting root, and was down.

He was on his feet in an instant; but the fall had lessened his breathing power, and when he started to run again, it was plain that he was losing ground.

With savage whoops of triumph, his pursuers came bounding on.

With a feeling of wild despair. Dusty Star gathered himself together for a final effort. As he made it, he cried aloud. It was a strange sort of bark, half-human, half-wolf. If any wolf-ear happened to catch it, the hearer would recognize it as a call for help. But although Dusty Star threw all his voice into that last despairing cry, it seemed to be muffled by the forest till it died in the throat of its glooms.

The Indians were very close upon him now. Only the humming of the blood in his ears deadened the soft padding sound of their moccasins as they ran.

But now, at the very last, there swims into Dusty Star's sight a confused vision. It comes at a tremendous pace. Its running is that of a wolf at full speed, the body low along the ground. The strong, deeply-padded feet spurn the ground from under them with bounds that are like blows. The eyes burn like green fires. There is a wild glare in them, of rage goaded to madness. All the fury of the forest is in that grey running with the eyes that burn.

Dusty Star, dazed with exhaustion did not immediately realize what the creature was, until it leaped upon him, and he fell.

The Indians saw a huge grey wolf which seemed to be pulling their prey down before they could reach it. They gave tongue to a savage yell, and bore down upon the wolf.

However terrifying an Indian war-whoop is to human ears, it produced a contrary effect on the animal mounting guard over Dusty Star. Before the foremost red-skin was within half-a-dozen yards of the spot, the crouching, snarling Fury unbent like mighty springs of its hind quarters. Like a battering-ram, all the 150-lb weight of Kiopo's body drove against the Indian's chest. He went down with a cry. The Indian immediately behind him, realizing the danger when too late, sprang aside. But Kiopo was too quick for him. There was a leap, a flash of fangs, and he shared the fate of the leader.

What followed took place almost more quickly than it can be described. The Indians, finding themselves attacked by so dangerous an enemy, separated at once, but not before another of their number had gone down before the terrific onslaught of the wolf. One or two hurled their tomahawks, but Kiopo's movements were so bafflingly swift that it was like trying to wound the wind.

All round Dusty Star's body, the Madness that was Kiopo swept a magic circle which no Indian dared to cross. Those who had rashly attempted to do so payed dearly for their rashness. The wolf's fangs were splashed with blood. His eyeballs glittered with that ominous green light, which seemed the very glare of madness.

It was indeed a question whether Kiopo was not really partly mad. His passionate attachment to Dusty Star, his grief in losing him, his fury against his captors, his joy at recovering him and fear of losing him again—all united to turn him into this wolfish Terror against which nothing could stand. The Indians grew more and more alarmed. The manner in which Kiopo kept them at bay while avoiding any injury which they tried to inflict, impressed their

superstitious minds with the belief that this was no ordinary wolf. And if, as they began to believe, he were a "medicine-wolf," an animal gifted with supernatural powers, then it was only inviting death to provoke him. It was plain to them now that this boy they were trying to kill was under the protection of the beasts. And the medicine of the beasts was very strong. The Great Spirit ran with the beasts. There were times when it was better not to hunt, lest you should hunt the Great Spirit and be destroyed.

It was this feeling of uncertainty, and growing awe, which weakened their attack and made them waver. And Kiopo, realizing that his enemies were giving way, became more daring. Not content with continuing to keep them at bay, he passed suddenly from defence to attack. Nothing could withstand the fury of his onset. The great body hurled itself on all sides; the deadly fangs never missed their mark; the wolf launched himself terrifically, like a thunderbolt with teeth!

In utter panic, the Indians broke and fled. Those who were fortunate enough to escape the raging madness at their heels, scattered far into the woods, and sought refuge at last by climbing into the trees.

It was not till the last Indian had disappeared, that Kiopo, glutted with vengeance, returned to the spot where he had left Dusty Star. The boy had risen to his feet, and was looking round fearfully lest one or other of his enemies might take advantage of Kiopo's absence to return to the attack; but when he saw the wolf come bounding back through the trees, he knew that he was safe. He was overcome with joy at Kiopo's reappearance. As for Kiopo himself, he was utterly at a loss how to express his wild delight; but though he gave vent to it in strange wolfish ways, Dusty Star understood. And when they each had expressed their happiness after their own fashion, they turned their faces westward, and took the homeward trail.

It was sunset when they reached the valley. As the familiar landmarks rose to view, Dusty Star felt a great joy surge up in his heart. Once more back out of the world! Once more to be hidden out of sight and mind in the vast shadowy silences that were older than the beasts; older even than the ancient footways of the cariboo, which, as everybody knows, began before geography, because the Cariboo have gone on walking since the beginning of the world.

After this wonderful re-union the two settled down again to the old life in the valley, and the moons went quickly by. Summer passed into Fall, Fall into Winter, and Dusty Star for the first time learned the real meaning of cold. If it

had not been for Kiopo and Kiopo's constant activities, he must surely have perished. But Kiopo was food and warmth and protection rolled into one. It was a great hunting which Kiopo had in the nights when even the moon seemed to break her way through a frozen sky, and the trees cracked in the black frost. But though the hunting was great, the game was often small; and as the season advanced, the wild kin took the trails with less and less flesh upon its bones. With the last geese and the first snow, Dusty Star piled fresh branches round the tepee, so that it swelled visibly to double its outer size. And for reasons of warmth, the doorway became nothing but a hole in and out of which he, like Kiopo, went on all fours. When the snow came and buried them, Kiopo dug themselves out. And in the blizzard that lasted three days and nights, Kiopo's body was a central-heating arrangement that kept the Little Brother from freezing to death.

In the snow darkness, and snow silence, Dusty Star listened to the muffled roar of a giant wind that wrenched the forest till it seemed as if not a tree would be left to stand. And he wondered How Baltook and Boola did, and wished he could have persuaded Goshmeelee to take up her winter quarters with them in the snowed-up tepee. But Goshmeelee was extremely occupied—that is, she was extremely busy with being fast asleep, and she wasn't going to wake up for anybody till it was time to be Spring.

And so the winter passed, and Dusty Star followed Kiopo's example in learning to be lean. Very lean and scraggy they both were when the snow melted and the geese took a thought to go North. But the scragginess did not injure their health, and as the grass grew, and the hunting improved, the meat began to come once more upon their bones.

And so the moon of roses came once more, followed by the Thunder Moon, and the Moon-when-the-leaves-turn-yellow; and there was not a sign of a Yellow Dog, or of any other enemy to trouble their peace. And Winter came again; as before. And when the spring came for the second time, it seemed almost as if Carboona had always been their home. And nothing seemed to change except that Baltook and Boola got a new litter of cubs each year, and that after Goshmeelee had licked one or two babies into cleanliness one season, it was the same tongue, but a new Baby, the next! As for Mr. Goshmeelee, he was so very shy and retiring that it was only once in a blue moon that you ever saw him at all. And as Goshmeelee didn't bother to mention him, Dusty Star didn't like to press her with questions, and pretended he wasn't there.

But the one real change was just the one about which Dusty Star knew the least and did not fuss himself about at all. For the winter and the summer, and the heat and the cold, and the meat coming on his bones, and going off again, and the great life he lived with Kiopo beyond Human ken, were slowly but surely working upon him.

He was growing up!



CHAPTER XX

THE TERROR OF THE CARBOONA

In the inmost heart of the Carboona, among a wilderness of boulders, old pine stumps, and dense thickets of juniper and thorn there was a spot to which all wise Carboona dwellers gave a wide berth. Apart from its bareness and lack of pasture, the place bore an ill name. Its evil reputation came from very ancient times. It was shunned equally by catamount, fox, bear, wolf and moose. And the lesser creatures, which haunted the neighbouring thickets, kept well within their shelter and rarely ventured out. Even the Cariboo, with the travelling restlessness strong within them, turned aside after much uneasy pawing of the ground, and suspicious blasts of breath, and fetched a semi-circle to the north or south. Yet not one of these suspicious folk could have given any plain reason for their avoidance of the spot. It was enough for them that the wisdom of the ages informed them it was bad.

But now, in addition to the vague influence of the place, its evil reputation had been strengthened by an added terror which was by no means vague: it was known as the lair of a new resident—the Great Lone Wolf.

Where the Lone Wolf had come from, nobody could tell. One Fall, when the air was full of the honking of the geese, he had arrived mysteriously with the first cold, and seemed to bring the winter with him. And from that day, the soundless word went throughout Carboona's inmost recesses: "Beware of the Terror of the eastern thickets. Beware of the Lone Wolf." And those who were foolish enough to disregard the warning, escaped a hard winter by falling to prey to the wolf.

One morning, Lone Wolf slept later than was his habit. During his sleep he did not dream; yet warm scents, drifting in the shimmering tide of the heat, lapped against his nose in ripples so fine that they did not disturb his brain.

When at length he awoke, he yawned. The yawn was like a huge gash in his lower face. After the yawn, he rose, and shook himself. Then he sat down on his haunches and looked abroad into the world. He had slept well, and was not aware of being hungry; so there was no need to bother himself about hunting. For all that, he was not contented. He wanted something, but he didn't know

what. He felt he might find it, if he went for a walk. So he walked. When he came to the angle of a certain stone, he stopped dead, sniffed, set his hair bristling between his shoulders, and growled in the very black places of his throat.

He had found a rival's mark!

The sudden change in Lone Wolf was remarkable. From being an apparently lazy hump of dark grey wolfishness with an air of nothing to do, he turned into an alert, cunning Ferocity whose every nerve and faculty were tightened up for the performance of something very particular indeed. As he moved over the sun-scorched surface of the rocky ground, his body carried low on the great springs of his legs, he seemed to gather all the ancient floating evil of the locality to himself and give it a wolf's shape.

If the Carboona peoples had known that the Terror was once more upon the prowl, a thrill of fear would have shot along the mountain, like an electric current. But at this drowsy hour of the day, most of them were resting from their hunting of the previous night and early morning, and were sleeping in their lairs. Boola and her family were curled up in the cool chamber at the end of the hole. Baltook was taking a light nap in a shady spot he knew of among a cluster of shumacks a quarter of a mile from the den. Goshmeelee sat in huge contentment in the edges of the swamp—sitting up commodiously on the well-cushioned and very wide sitting-down part of her, and rocking herself slowly to and fro with a pleasant sense of the damp and slimy cosiness to be had in the swampy parts of the world. While the squirrels, chipmunks, and blue jays, and all other small watchers and warners of danger coming, or to come, perched on shady look-out points, and blinked their eyes a little in the drowsy warmth.

As soon as Lone Wolf left the open mountain side and entered the out-lying edges of the spruce woods, he was fully aware that he was being watched by many pairs of eyes. And he had not gone very far before he had annoying proof of this in the defiant chatter of a chipmunk which was taking noon-tide observation on a hollow log. Above all things, Lone Wolf wanted to go secretly. As he passed the log, he shot a murderous look at its occupier out of his cruel grey-green eyes; but he knew better than to waste his energy by making a leap at that alert bundle of fur-covered springs, and so went softly on his way, while the chipmunk sent its angry warning out to all forest-folks within earshot that murder was on the trail.

He had reached a spot about a mile from the camp when he came to an abrupt stand. There not fifty paces away, he saw a big wolf, with another creature beside it which was certainly not a wolf. Both were travelling quickly eastward. He remained motionless till they had disappeared and then took up the fresh trail. Its mingled beast and human smell disturbed him. He had met Red men before, and detested them. He still carried the mark and the memory of an Indian tomahawk which had slashed him in the neck, when, running one hard winter with a desperately hungry pack, he had attacked a solitary Indian travelling across the frost-bound levels of the lakes. Now, as the mixed smell of the wolf-breed, and hated man-breed, rose to his nostrils, the old enmity slumbering within him leaped again to life.

For the rest of that day, he dogged the footsteps of the pair; and when they separated at twilight, Kiopo going to hunt, and Dusty Star returning to camp, it was the boy he followed, not the wolf. And little did Dusty Star suspect, as he went alone through the darkening woods, that every step of his homeward way was shadowed by the Terror of the Carboona on delicately-stepping feet.

Over and over again the wolf wanted to leap upon the boy and destroy him then and there, yet the vague fear of the human being, which disturbs wild animals, haunted his nerves, and he could not throw it off before Dusty Star reached the camp.

All that night, he watched in the edges of the forest, roaming to and fro uneasily, and did not finally leave the neighbourhood till just before dawn.



CHAPTER XXI

HOW DUSTY STAR MET THE TERROR

Midsummer—the Moon of Roses—had melted into the Thunder Moon, and the Moon when the blueberries ripen drew nigh. Now if there was one thing above another which Goshmeelee loved in all the world, it was a good feed of berries. So that when the early tang of the Fall began to tickle her nose, the blueberry feeling made itself felt also, and she made up her mind to appease it. By this time, the cubs had long passed out of babyhood, and were growing into good-sized little bears, quite able to take care of themselves. But as it was a long climb to the berry patches, and Goshmeelee couldn't be sure that they would be ripe, even if she found them, she decided not to cumber herself with the family, but to leave it at home. So, making her wishes more than clear by a good-natured cuff apiece when the little bears wanted to follow her, she lumbered contentedly off upon her quest.

Now on the very morning on which Goshmeelee started to find her berries, Dusty Star was also climbing up Carboona, after having waited until he had seen Kiopo trot off in the opposite direction after game. Of late, Kiopo had developed a strange uneasiness. He was continually leaving the camp and returning to it at short intervals. When in the camp he was always on the alert, watching the forest with a wary eye. By his behaviour, Dusty Star was convinced that his finer wolf-sense had detected some threatening danger which he himself could not perceive. Kiopo told him nothing directly, but the two were by this time in such complete sympathy that the boy learned half the danger, merely by feeling as the wolf felt. He also watched the forest, wondering from what quarter the danger threatened. Yet never had the great woods appeared to hold themselves in such deep untroubled peace. Nothing broke their stillness save the occasional sharp chirr of a chipmunk, or the tapp, tapp of the little black-and-white wood-peckers on some hollow limb. Night came, and the stillness only deepened,—night—and the soundless glitter of the stars.

Once only Dusty Star saw, or fancied he saw, a wolf stand in a clear space in the glimmer of the coming dawn. And at first, thinking it was Kiopo, he had not moved. But when at last, he had gone forward to see, he found the place where it

had stood empty.

Slowly, day by day, the sense of danger passed. Kiopo went off hunting for longer and longer distances. But he avoided the upper slopes of the Carboona, and followed trails that led him well away. And not again, either in late twilight, or early dawn, did Dusty Star catch the shadows at their old illusive game. Only one thing remained, and that was the very plain objection which Kiopo had to Dusty Star going up into Carboona at any time of the day. Now when Kiopo objected to anything strongly, his ways of expressing himself were perfectly clear. Not only his eyes, his ears and his mouth, but his whole body said *No* in the plainest possible way. Dusty Star had no excuse for not understanding that Kiopo objected to his going up Carboona. Yet the more definitely Kiopo objected, the more Dusty Star wanted to go.

He was moving very quickly now, because he was anxious to get as far as possible, in case Kiopo discovered where he had gone, and came to fetch him back. Kiopo was doubtless very wise, and knew the forest better than any one else; yet Dusty Star was quite sure that he had a wisdom of his own, and he liked sometimes to set the Indian "Yes" against the wolf "No." Now, as he mounted higher and higher into an unexplored world, he enjoyed the feeling of having asserted his right to decide things for himself. And every time he stopped to look back, he could see a vaster tract of forest and hills, lying out and out to a distance that had no end.

He was above the forest now, and had entered the borders of the great barren where the waterfowl had their homes along the solitary pools. He pushed on rapidly. Except the flocks of wildfowl, he saw no other life. Here and there, in patches on the rising grounds, he came upon the blueberries, beginning to be ripe. But the bears had not visited them yet, and there were no signs of other large game. It was a little lonely here on the high barren. He wondered, all at once, what he should do if he came upon a grizzly. It was a long, long way from camp, and Kiopo's protection. He began to be conscious that he was very much alone. Something made him look suddenly behind.

Not fifty paces away he saw an enormous wolf.

It stood stock-still, as if caught in the act of stealthy movement, and Dusty Star noticed with uneasiness that between them there was no obstacle or cover of any kind. A couple of swift bounds and the creature could be upon him. Instinctively he realized that it had been stalking him for some time, and was now preparing

for the final rush.

For a moment his heart failed him. Then he rallied. Face to face with the Terror of the Carboona, Dusty Star did not flinch. The fine Indian breed of him, descending through long generations, rose magnificently to the test.

He took in his surroundings with a glance. On one hand lay a pool; on the other, a tangle of bushes. Behind him, the ground rose. He waited for the wolf to make the first movement.

For a moment or two, Lone Wolf remained in the half crouching attitude in which he had been surprised. Then, snarling threateningly he began to move slowly forward.

Dusty Star drew his hunting-knife in readiness, and stood his ground. The wolf continued to advance. When not more than a dozen paces separated them, he stopped again. Dusty Star noted the cruel light in his eyes, and knew that he paused for the first spring of the attack. Yet his own gaze did not falter. He held the wolf boldly with his eyes. Never before had Lone Wolf borne the direct stare of the human eye face to face, and the experience made him uneasy. He felt the presence of a mysterious power out of all proportion to the body which contained it. His own eyes glittering with evil as they were, lacked this power. He was fully conscious of his own importance—a great wolf, lord of a wide range; yet some unexplained feeling within him told him that he was now in the presence of a creature greater than himself. For all that, he knew that this new enemy must be attacked, and his right to enter Carboona challenged. For he felt that here, though he could not understand it, was a challenge from the wolves.

Without further warning, he sprang. In the same instant, Dusty Star leaped aside, escaping by a hair's breath the slash of the wolf's fangs at his throat. But he had not been able to leap quite far enough, and, though he tried to save himself he fell. As he did so, he drove his hunting-knife with all his force into the wolf's side.

What happened next was like a thunderbolt from a blue sky.

As the keen blade went home, Lone Wolf yelped and turned furiously on his fallen foe; but before he could slash a second time, a huge black body bounded through the air from the tangle of bushes on the right. The thing was so utterly unexpected that the wolf was completely taken off his guard. The great body, descending full upon him, bore him to the ground.

If his assailant could have kept its hold, the reign of the Lone Wolf, mightily sinewed though he was, would have been over for ever; but the force of the creature's landing had been so great that it slightly lost its balance. That slight loss saved the wolf's life. With a snarl of mingled rage and pain, he tore himself from his enemy's clutch with a tremendous wrench; then, not daring to face those terrible claws again, he bounded off across the barren, leaving a trail of blood.

In the first moment of astonishment, Dusty Star had not recognised his deliverer. Yet Goshmeelee it was, and no other, who now stood before him, gazing at him reprovingly out of her little pig-like eyes.

It was exactly as if she had said:

"You are out of bounds. You have no business to be here. If I hadn't happened to come in the nick of time you'd never have escaped to tell the tale!"

Dusty Star was well aware that all this was perfectly true, even though Goshmeelee didn't put it into plain Indian speech. Also he could see that her rescue of him had been at the cost of some damage to herself. In the brief moment of her grapple with the wolf, his long fangs had seized. It was not a serious wound, but it bled. Goshmeelee, with her immense practicalness, instantly produced from her mouth the washing apparatus dreaded by her cubs, and began to lick the injured spot. Dusty Star looked at her very solemnly with his big brown eyes.

"I never meant you to get hurt," he said in his throaty Indian voice. He kept repeating the words over and over again.

If Goshmeelee had ever been examined in the tongues spoken at Washington, London, Paris, and the other great centres of civilized gabble, by the learned gentlemen so high up in the educational world that it must make them dizzy to look down the precipices of their own minds, she would have been regarded as a perfect "dreadnought" of a dunce. But if they and she had to compete in the tongues used by the forest-folk, not to mention the running language of the water-voices and the wind, I should have been greatly surprised if she had not left them very far behind indeed! So, although she did not know a single word of Dusty Star's Indian talk, she grasped the meaning of it at once, and knew that he was being sorry with his mouth.

When she had licked as much as necessary, she looked pleasantly at Dusty Star with every bit of her good-natured face. That her wound was better, and that she

was still ready for blueberries, was what she wanted him to understand.

And Dusty Star fortunately remembered the spot on the barren where the blueberries were on the point of being very nearly ripe. If Goshmееlee had not passed that way, Dusty Star was delighted to think that (although it was nothing in comparison with what she had done for him) he could nevertheless put her in the way of filling with berries that part of her which was wanting to be filled.

He grabbed her by the fur, and gave her a tug.

"You come with me, and *I'll* show you!" he said.

And Goshmееlee went.



CHAPTER XXII

THE MOON WHEN THINGS WALK

By signs that were unmistakable, Dusty Star knew that a new, strange restlessness had invaded Kiopo's bones. It was not that he watched the forest borders with suspicion, as before, for an invisible foe. That uneasiness might be there, but it seemed for the present to be swallowed up in a deeper restlessness which preyed upon him day and night. After Dusty Star's return from his Carboona excursion, Kiopo had regarded him with a reproving eye. It was useless for Dusty Star to pretend that nothing had happened. Kiopo never met the Lone Wolf; and Goshmeelee bulging with berries did not blab. Nevertheless, Kiopo knew that the Little Brother had taken the law into his own hand, and that trouble was on the way.

Kiopo could not rest. The Fall had come, and, with the Fall, its wandering impulses. An unquiet itch had got into the skin of things, and into the heart of things a strange desire. Every wild creature felt it, each in its own degree. The Cariboo were off on their vague journeyings that took them half across the world. It was the moon when things appeared and vanished; the moon when travelling voices came out of the north, when a thin sleep covered the earth by day, and when things went out walking at the falling of the night.

Kiopo also walked.

Where he went Dusty Star could not tell. He watched and watched; but Kiopo always eluded him at the coming-on of dusk. Mere hunting did not account for it. The kills he made were not numerous. Often he brought back what barely sufficed for their needs. It was only too clear that something beyond mere hunting occupied his mind.

What made the thing still more peculiar was that, wherever it was Kiopo went, there he also howled. Night after night, about an hour after sundown, Dusty Star would hear the familiar voice raised in melancholy wailing in the distance, as if it resounded from the sides of a gorge.

And as he lay awake, listening to the woeful sound, he would hear, ever and anon, dark voices out of the north, that came clanging above the hollow woods,

and making the silence quake. And though he told himself that it was only the first flights of the geese, he could not get rid of the feeling that other voices went along the middle sky, and that the dark was haunted with wings.

At last he determined to discover where it was that Kiopo went to do his howling, and what happened when he howled. So, one evening, when the wolf, as was his custom, slunk into the shadow of the woods, Dusty Star, on noiseless moccasins, disappeared also. He kept Kiopo in sight for some time without his knowledge. Then, when at last his form became indistinguishable in the gloom, he followed as best he could the direction he believed he had taken.

Due south-west from the camp, a high spur of rock jutted from the mountain at the side of an immense gorge. It struck boldly out like an ocean promontory; and on nights when the wind was high, it would have been easy to imagine that the deepening roar which rose from the straining spruce woods beneath was the welter and crash of a rising sea.

Dusty Star had seen the place several times in the day-time, and it struck him now that it would be a likely spot for Kiopo to choose for his nightly performance. The trail thither lay through thick forest and was not an easy one to follow. But the boy had a strong sense of direction, and every time he reached an open space between the trees, he took his bearings from the stars. As he went, he listened intently for the first notes of Kiopo's singing, and before he had travelled half the distance, they came. In the deep stillness of the night, the call sounded comparatively close. There could be little mistake as to its direction, which was either that of the promontory, or some spot very near it.

Seven times he heard the cry, each time clearer than before: then there was a long silence, disturbed by not a single sound. Through the breathless stillness, Dusty Star continued his secret advance. By the last howl he guessed that he must be drawing very near to his goal; yet that very nearness made it necessary for him to use the greatest caution in order not to give Kiopo the alarm. Soon he saw a huge mass of rocks loom blackly between him and the rising moon.

He did not dare to attempt to climb its almost perpendicular sides; but, skirting the base of it, worked his way up the mountain slope so that he might reach it from above. He arrived at last at the beginning of the promontory, and, lying flat on his stomach, looked about him. On all sides, the rocks took strange appearances, like humped beasts, crouched, and watching. Yet nothing stirred, nothing breathed. Of Kiopo there was not a sign. In front of him, a large boulder

hid the end of the promontory from sight. Dusty Star worked himself slowly round it, foot by foot. When he was half-way round, he stopped; for there, at the extreme end of the rocks, with his back towards him, he saw Kiopo sitting motionless, as he gazed out into the enormous night. Then, he saw him throw up his head; and again the long, throbbing howl made the gorges ring.

Dusty Star had heard howling many times before. Since his earliest infancy, the throats of wolf, fox and coyote had haunted his ears like nursery song-books with ancient, terrible tunes. But to-night, the tune seemed to gather a new terror, and made his pulses throb. His first impulse was to call to Kiopo so that he might not do it again. Only this was one of those times when, in spite of the intimate comradeship which bound them together, he stood a little in awe of that mysterious wolf-mind which was in Kiopo, and which seemed to understand the stars. In the breathless stillness which followed the cry, Dusty Star listened to the quickened beating of his own heart.

Once again, Kiopo howled. This time, he was answered. From the hollow gloom of the forest below there came a deep-toned "woof" that was half a roar.

Dusty Star saw Kiopo immediately stiffen into attention, as he turned his head in the direction of the threatening sound. Owing to his position he could not see what the wolf saw, but Kiopo's attitude told him that he was watching something that had come into sight from among the trees. His whole body was tingling with excitement. He cast all further secrecy aside, and ran towards Kiopo. The wolf turned quickly, and growled. As Dusty Star fully understood, the growl was one of disapproval, not of anger. It said plainly: "You are not wanted. You are very much in the way."

Dusty Star knew, when too late, that this was true. Yet he was glad he had come. Kiopo could not keep *this* thing secret, as he had kept others. He would see what was to be seen: whatever the danger was, Kiopo and he would meet it together.

Again Kiopo lifted his voice; but this time it was no weary howl, making melancholy echoes: it was a short, deep bark, like an explosion.

Another "woof," rather higher pitched than the first, rose angrily from below. The enemy had accepted Kiopo's challenge for the fight. A few minutes afterwards, a great, grey timber wolf came stalking down the promontory with the battle-light in his eyes.

As soon as he appeared, Dusty Star realized in a flash that they had met before,

and that he was once again face to face with the giant wolf from whose murderous attack Goshmeelee had rescued him. For the Terror of the Carboona, Goshmeelee had been more than a match. But Kiopo, mighty fighter as he was, was not Goshmeelee. As he watched, an awful dread began to creep into Dusty Star's heart.

And now Kiopo prepared for what he knew must come. The first thing he did was to give Dusty Star a butt with his head, which said clearly enough: "Get well out of the way."

Dusty Star was not so foolish as to disobey, knowing well that he could be of little use to Kiopo as soon as the fight began. So he scrambled hastily to the top of a high rock where he could watch what happened without being in danger.

On came the big grey stranger, walking stiffly, his tail waving slowly from side to side. As he advanced, he growled deeply. Kiopo awaited him without moving, every muscle tense, while he measured his enemy's points and probable strength. The Lone Wolf came to a stand, and for a few moments the wolves stood facing each other at the distance of a spring.

**ON CAME THE BIG GREY STRANGER, WALKING STIFFLY,
HIS TAIL WAVING SLOWLY FROM SIDE TO SIDE**

Both animals were splendid specimens of their class. What Kiopo wanted in height, little though that was, he made up for in breadth and depth of shoulder and chest. An onlooker would have said that in actual fighting powers, the creatures were almost equally matched, though the chances lay on the side of the stranger. It would be only a close observer of beasts who would have marked not merely the depth of Kiopo's chest, but the greater width of his skull between the eyes.

It was plain that Lone Wolf was in an ugly mood. The hairs along his back stood stiffly, and his eyes gleamed like smouldering brands. In Kiopo he saw the hated rival whose hunting lay so close to the borders of his own range, and whose

howling was a nightly challenge to the lordship of Carboona. He was well aware that Kiopo was not a foe to be slighted; but his repeated victories had made him insolent, and in the present instance he was confident of success.

Kiopo too, was in a rage; partly because his right to exist had been challenged by a powerful foe, partly because of the presence of Dusty Star. The mere idea that any harm threatened the Little Brother was more than enough to rouse him to a fury of fighting pitch. Rather than that a hair of the Little Brother should be injured, he would fight to the death. Yet in spite of his anger, he was wary. He had not fought Stickchi in vain. His strong limbs gathered well beneath him, he bided his time.

Suddenly, the Lone Wolf sprang.

Dusty Star caught his breath, and gripped his rock more tightly. The fight had begun!

Kiopo was not caught napping. In a flash he jerked his body sideways, so that Lone Wolf, instead of bearing him down as he had intended, and so gaining the advantage, landed close on his left flank. And although his fangs raked Kiopo's ribs, Kiopo replied at the same instant by a counter slash that ripped his antagonist's shoulder.

The fight had started now in real earnest. It was a wolfish whirlwind of motion. The two enraged animals bounded, slashed, gripped together, tore themselves apart, in a series of movements so lightning-swift as to baffle the eyes. When locked together, sometimes one would be on top, sometimes the other; but their immense strength, and amazing agility, made it impossible for either of them to hold the other down for any length of time. And Lone Wolf soon learnt that, when Kiopo was on his back, his methods were even more to be feared than when he was on his feet; for it was then that his hind quarters came most successfully into play. Those powerful quarters, fully armed with claws, were formidable engines of war when directed against Lone Wolf's stomach. More than once Lone Wolf was forced to loosen his grip upon his foe and tear himself away with a yelp of pain. And each time, like a relentless fury, Kiopo had leaped upon him in a fresh onslaught. Soon, both animals were streaming with blood; yet their many wounds, far from lessening their rage, seemed to make them more madly determined to fight on to the death.

Perched upon his rock, Dusty Star watched the appalling struggle going on immediately below him, with an excitement and a dread that passed all bounds.

His close intimacy with wild animals, had taught him that a fight of this sort could only be ended by the death of one or other of the fighters, and his terror naturally was lest Kiopo should not be able to hold his own. He had never known him to fail before; but then never before had he encountered a foe so nearly matched with him in strength. So far, it would not have been possible to say that either wolf had gained any decided advantage over the other, but now Dusty Star observed something which filled him with a new fear. Either by chance or design, the wolves were very much nearer to the edge of the precipice than at the beginning of the fight. Surely, he thought, Kiopo, the always wary one, must have realized *that*? In his frantic anxiety to make sure that he realized, Dusty Star clapped his hands and shouted.

Whether Kiopo understood the warning or not, the sound of Dusty Star's voice seemed to goad him to fresh efforts. The Little Brother had cried. He was fighting for the Little Brother as much as for himself. For a while it seemed as if the Lone Wolf must succumb to the fresh fury of his onslaught. In spite of this, Dusty Star saw with horror that the fight had rolled closer than ever to the edge.

And now it seemed that Kiopo had begun to lose his temporary advantage. Soon it became all too plain that he was steadily losing ground, and was being pushed nearer and nearer to the fatal edge. At last he reached it. In the final struggle for mastery, the wolves, still tearing furiously at each other, seemed poised on the very brink. In another moment, one or other, if not both, must surely be dashed to destruction. Again, in a fever of suspense, Dusty Star held his breath.

And then the thing happened—the amazing thing which, to the latest day of his life, he would never forget!

Just as Kiopo appeared to be pushed to his last foothold, with his hind quarters doubled under him beneath the fatal pressure of his all-but victorious foe, he gathered himself together for a last supreme effort, and the powerful sinews of those compressed hind legs did the work he relied on them to do.

In spite of appearances to the contrary, he had deliberately allowed himself to be pushed to the precipice. There was cunning in him, as well as courage. The breadth between the eyes was beginning to tell. If Dusty Star had been able to guess this, he might have been spared some, at least, of the terror of the last few eventful moments. What he actually saw was *this*—a violent movement throughout the whole of Kiopo's body; a mighty upward urge that lifted his enemy clean off his feet; then, a swift sideways wrench of his powerful neck and

shoulders; and the heave of a dark body over the precipice edge.

With a thrill of unutterable relief, Dusty Star realized that the body which went crashing to its doom was not Kiopo's!

He sprang down from his rock, wild with exultant joy, Kiopo was safe! Kiopo had won! The great fight was over, and Kiopo was the victor.

He rushed to the wolf, but in the very moment of throwing his arms about him, stopped. For, in spite of his overwhelming delight, his wilderness wisdom did not forsake him. He realized that Kiopo was too badly wounded to be touched.

The wolf lay on his side, bleeding from a dozen wounds. He took his breath in panting gasps that were almost sobs. It went to the boy's heart to hear the struggle for air, for life itself; yet for the moment he was helpless. If he had had a wound himself, he possessed sufficient Indian medical knowledge to treat it with healing herbs and bind it up. But with the wolf it was altogether different. Kiopo could not have borne bandages, even if Dusty Star had had them to apply. The only remedies possible were three: rest, Nature, and his own wolfish tongue. This Dusty Star knew quite well. All he dared to do was to kneel on the ground beside Kiopo while he gazed into his eyes, and made a murmuring medicine-talk with his mouth. And it needed no explanation to tell the wolf that all the love in the Little Brother's heart was flooding out through his eyes and mouth. He could not have borne the Little Brother's hand just then, tender though its touch would have been. But he was grateful for the medicine-talk of the Little Brother's Mouth; and the Little Brother's eyes comforted him: they seemed to lick him like soothing tongues.

For the rest of that night, and far into the next morning Kiopo lay where he was, licking his wounds. When the sun began to beat down upon the promontory, he dragged himself painfully into the shadows of the rocks, and remained there for the rest of the day. Dusty Star went in search of water and found a spring half-way down the gorge. By making a cup of a broad leaf of skunk cabbage, he was able to carry back a little water, which Kiopo eagerly drank. He had to make the journey many times, because no matter how cunningly he twisted the leaf, the pitcher would find a way of leaking; and although he always started with it as full as it would hold, it was more than half empty by the time it reached Kiopo's parched tongue.

There was another thing which Dusty Star found besides the spring. Down at the precipice foot, not far from the spot where the skunk cabbage grew, he came

upon a large grey body which had broken its neck upon the rocks. And he knew for a certainty that the Terror of the Carboona would hunt on his range no more.

Nature, the great Mother of Healing, did her work. With her help, two nights and a day of rest and licking, and the cool water the Little Brother brought, enabled Kiopo gradually to regain his strength. Great was Dusty Star's joy, when, on the second morning after the fight, he saw Kiopo struggle to his feet and move slowly towards the forest.

They travelled slowly, but, in spite of that, reached home before sundown, while high over their heads, the tall tops of the spruces loitered in the golden light. Never had the valley looked more peaceful than on this still evening of early Fall. The restlessness which had waxed with the waxing of the moon, seemed to have departed from it on furtive feet beyond Carboona to the great Shuswap lake where the heavy waters rest. Yet the valley was not so deserted as it looked. For just as they came in sight of the camp, a large body was seen to move slowly away. Kiopo saw it, but did not growl. He recognized it as that of the old she-bear.

When Goshmeelee became aware of the travellers, she did not quicken her steps. Why should she? She never hurried unless folks worried her. She made a special point of living very slowly. It suited her digestion, and she usually had a great deal to digest. So instead of departing in a fluster, she sat down heavily in order to contemplate them at her ease.

"Been fighting," she said to herself, as soon as she had taken note of Kiopo, but she was too polite, or too lazy, to put it into speech.

Kiopo observed her out of the corner of his eye, walking past with great dignity, as much as to say that she needn't pity *him*. She was a very feminine bear, and he was a very masculine wolf. She took up more room in the world than he did, and had a wider way when she sat down. If it had not been for the Little Brother, he could do without her in a world where the bear-folk and the wolf-folk do not mix. But the Little Brother carried confusion with him. He seemed brother to half the forest. He made acquaintances right and left. If you made a kill, you could never be sure that the Little Brother would not make a fuss because you had killed one of his folk!

If the Little Brother's way got general, all the world would become brothers, and there would be nothing left to kill.

Dusty Star went up to the old bear joyfully, and gave her a playful push.

"We've come back," he said.

Goshmeelee grunted, as much as to say that she had already perceived the fact.

"Say you're glad!" Dusty Star said, shaking her thick coat.

Goshmeelee gave a second grunt, which might mean anything, or nothing. She did not feel she had any cause for special thankfulness. But she looked at her tormentor with such a grave expression that he felt uncomfortable. Goshmeelee's way was to make you feel she had things to say before she said them.

"I am very glad to be back," Dusty Star said, pretending he hadn't noticed anything odd in Goshmeelee's manner.

There was a pause. Then Goshmeelee asked him suddenly:

"Will you be glad to go?"

"Go? But we have only just come back!" he exclaimed.

"In Carboona there are many comings and goings," Goshmeelee said vaguely. "One does not always remain."

"But why should I go?" Dusty Star asked earnestly; for his curiosity was now fully roused.

Goshmeelee swayed a little, and grunted, which meant that the *reason* for his going was hidden from *her*.

"But we have come back to stay always," Dusty Star said uneasily. "Has anything happened since we have been away?"

"Strange feet are walking," the bear replied darkly. "In the forest there is a new trail."

What the trail told, where, by whom made, Goshmeelee would not say. All Dusty Star's utmost efforts were useless to induce her to throw any further light on her mysterious remarks. When she had stared at him for a little longer, in an aggravating dumbness, she dropped down on her front feet, and lumbered gently away.



CHAPTER XXIII

LONE CHIEF GOES WEST

Many moons had come and gone since Dusty Star and Kiopo disappeared into the West. To those who asked questions, none made answer. That was partly because the folk who knew were not asked. The folk who knew, not being asked, kept that knowledge to themselves. Baltook could have told; Boola also. Goshmееlee herself was a storehouse of information. But none of these were likely to travel hundreds of miles east to carry news to those who did not come to them. Even Lone Chief himself, popularly supposed to know all things, if only he could be persuaded to tell them, did not know.

One evening, in late summer, an Indian came riding into camp. He had ridden fast and far, and his pony was exhausted. He brought disquieting news. The Yellow Dogs, their deadly enemies, were gathering in the North. The Sarcees, allies of the Yellow Dogs, were also on the war-path. Trouble would come from the north, even before the wild geese.

Hastily the old Chief, Spotted Eagle, summoned a gathering of the braves. But first he sent an urgent message to Lone Chief. And Lone Chief, already knowing of the threatening danger, came. So when Spotted Eagle made a solemn speech of few words but very packed with information, Lone Chief was not surprised. How did he know?... In the vast solitudes of the North West, long before Telegraph wires were invented, news travelled in peculiarly wireless ways along the fine waves of the air for those whose minds were the right sort of receivers. And Lone Chief had that sort of mind which was always receiving. But though he came, he sat in silence at the meeting, and let other people talk. And not till every one else had spoken, some suggesting one thing, and some another, did Lone Chief open the outside of his mouth and astonish his hearers with the inside of his mind.

"You will never be able to defeat the Yellow Dogs without the strong medicine," he said. "The strong medicine departed from you, when you drove Dusty Star's wolf into the west. Dusty Star and his wolf are a powerful medicine. You have none left to you which is as strong as theirs. Unless they bring it back to you, you will lose your scalps to the Yellow Dogs."

After Lone Chief had ceased speaking, great astonishment filled his audience; yet because it was Lone Chief who had said the marvellous thing, they were forced to believe it, even against their will.

But when Spotted Eagle and the rest of the company had discussed the matter very gravely, and had solemnly asked him on behalf of the whole tribe, to find Dusty Star, and beg him to come back, Lone Chief shook his head, and swept his hand towards the West.

"Out there," he said, "is the land of the buffalo; and beyond the land of the buffalo, is the land of the timber-wolves, and the country of the Cariboo. Dusty Star might have stayed with the buffalo; but the wolf would seek his own kindred; and the wolf-kindred make long journeys on the trails of the Cariboo. How do I know that they have not taken a trail—Dusty Star and the Wolf? And the journeying Cariboo have a thousand trails to the great Lake of the sunset where all trails have an end."

Yet though Lone Chief spoke so discouragingly, throwing whole prairies along his tongue, to show the difficulty of finding what had once disappeared into them, he knew in his heart that the Chief would still believe him capable of finding Dusty Star. And so when Spotted Eagle again urged him earnestly to go out into the West to recover the lost medicine, Lone Chief shook his head despondingly, but nevertheless promised to go.

The next morning, very early, anxiously watching eyes saw the famous medicine man issue from his tepee, and travel steadily westward, till the enormous distances of the prairie swallowed him up.

Fortunately for Lone Chief, he was accustomed to long journeys. But whereas, in the journeys he was used to making, he went for no particular reason except that the great distances had made a nest in his brain and kept chirping there like birds, the present journey he was taking for a very big reason, firmly believing that unless he could find Dusty Star a terrible fate must fall upon his tribe.

Day after day, he travelled west, on and on towards the sunset-place, deeper and deeper into the heart of the old buffalo land. And he saw the great herds of buffalo, thousands and thousands of them, more than man could count; because it was a time long and long ago before the White Man had become Lord of the prairie, and the freight cars had thundered their cotton-goods and kerosene along the iron trails of the Middle West.

But Lone Chief did not waste his time among the buffalo, because he knew that Dusty Star would not be there, that it was only in the timber-wolf country that he would have a chance to come upon him, if he had not already started for the land of the Cariboo. But if you think that Lone Chief went wandering into the foothills all by chance, you are mistaken, for he had a way of doing things quite his own. And his way was this: To listen out for the news that is always passing through the wilderness though it is never printed, nor do they shout it from the tops of the trees. For if anything strange or dangerous has lately gone along the trails, word of it goes abroad, and the wild creatures flash the message to each other without a sound.

For a long time, Lone Chief did not get any news. Then one day, towards sunset, he caught a thin strand of a message as it drifted through the trees. Thin though it was, Lone Chief read it. It told him that Something had happened lately—for all he knew, might be *still* happening—along the secret trails.

For a long time after receiving the message. Lone Chief stood perfectly still. His eyes and his ears were not the only parts of him working: he used his nose, too, like the animals, in case the thing might have spilled a little of itself into the wind. Yet though he looked and listened and smelt, he got no certain information as to what the thing was. He was now less than half-a-day's journey from Carboona, and might reasonably be supposed to be within hail of some of its folk; but darkness closed down before he could get sight or wind of them, and because it was night, he lay down, sensibly, and went to sleep.

He was awake very early in the morning, at the hour when forest people smell the dawn before they see it. For a time, he lay still flat on his back, gazing up into the old darkness of the trees where the twilight was beginning. That was his way of learning the things that come to you if you do not walk about. And as he lay, it came to him clearer and clearer that he was near the end of his journey. And out of sight, with faint rustlings and fine foot-falls, the hunting-beasts came back along the trails. Yet Lone Chief never moved. As he lay there, wrapped in his elk-skin-robe, he might had been a log. And no eyes saw him, and only one nose smelt him, and that belonged to Baltook, the silver fox.

Now Baltook's acquaintance with Dusty Star had taught him the human smell. It had also taught him another thing: that things which smell like that are not necessarily enemies, and may possibly be friends. So instead of turning tail immediately, Baltook drew cautiously nearer, so that his eyes might complete the information which had been given to him by his nose. Nearer and nearer he

came, setting each paw delicately down on the fir needles, so that not a whisper of sound gave warning of his approach. As for *seeing* him, one would have needed sharp eyes for that, as the black robe with the frosted surface made itself part of the darkness of the trees.

And yet for all Baltook's cunning, and delicately treading, Lone Chief knew that something was stealthily drawing near. In spite of that, he made no movement. Was not his hunting knife at his belt; and his bow and arrows within reach of his arm? And was he not prepared for whatever might happen? So he simply obeyed the law of the forest: Lie still!

When the silver-powdered robe was within a dozen feet of him, Lone Chief slowly turned his head. The movement was so quiet that Baltook was not startled. Only with eyes, ears and nose, he drank in everything that was to be known of Lone Chief by that method. And Lone Chief looked straight into the shining eyes of the fox. And though he asked no questions, and got no answers in the ordinary sense, he learned something that told him what he most wanted to know. And when at last Baltook, having gratified his curiosity, turned on his tracks and disappeared softly through the trees, Lone Chief noted the way he went, and followed in the same direction.

He had not gone very far before he came upon a big black body sitting in an open place, rocking itself gently to and fro. Lone Chief waited a little, and then came up-wind very slowly. And because he came up-wind, Goshmeelee did not smell his coming, but went on rocking peacefully, as if that was the only common-sense way of being happy in the world. In these early Fall days, Goshmeelee often amused herself in this way. The rocking helped her to feel the comfort of her large body all the better—to get closer to herself, as it were, and feel good and pleasant down to her very toes. Lone Chief watched her for some time, without moving, and then came slowly forward till he stood within six feet of the old bear's nose.

Goshmeelee stopped rocking, and fixed her little black eyes upon him in amazement. She had grown used to Dusty Star, whose comings and goings did not upset her in the least; but to be suddenly confronted by the same sort of animal in a larger size was distinctly disturbing when one wasn't expecting it.

Lone Chief and Goshmeelee went on looking at each other for some time, and never said a word. But Lone Chief knew by the look in her eyes that she had seen something like him before, and *she* knew perfectly well, by the look in *his*,

that this wasn't the first time he had come upon a bear. And another thing was, that they each of them knew they had nothing to fear from the other. So, after a little time, Lone Chief turned away quietly and Goshmееlee watched him vanish among the trees.

And now Lone Chief felt that he was not far away from the thing that Baltook knew, and the thing which Goshmееlee knew likewise; and the further he went, the nearer he came to it, though as yet it was out of sight behind the spruces and the pines. Suddenly, upon the very edge of Carboona, he came upon it and his journey was at an end.

Two days after Goshmееlee's strange warning, Dusty Star had gone down to the spring to drink. As he raised his head, he caught a glimpse of the tall figure coming through the trees. His heart gave a jump, lest it should be one of the dreaded Yellow Dogs; but when, almost directly afterwards he recognized the famous medicine-man, he went boldly forward to meet him.

They looked at each other silently for a little, and then in a very few words, Lone Chief explained why he had come. When he had finished, Dusty Star shook his head.

"I cannot come," he said. "And if I did, what could I do? Besides, I would not come without Kiopo. And they wished to kill Kiopo. That is why we left my people—so that Kiopo should not die."

"But that is many moons ago," Lone Chief said. "They do not want to kill Kiopo now. I have told them that he is the Medicine Wolf, and that those who would destroy him are the enemies of the tribe."

"They hated us!" Dusty Star replied quickly. "They would hate us still, only that you have told them we can be of use!"

As he spoke, his eyes shone. It was not a good shining. He, too, had learnt to hate.

In vain Lone Chief explained, argued, protested. Dusty Star stood his ground. In spite of all the Medicine-man could say, he refused absolutely to come. Lone Chief was annoyed at the boy's firmness, but he was also surprised. In the interval since he had last seen him, it was only too plain that the boy had learnt many things; among others, he had learnt to be a man.

It was a long time before Lone Chief gave up the attempt to bring the boy to a

more reasonable frame of mind. He stayed all day. At nightfall he made his camp beside Dusty Star's. At dawn he was still there, ready, with an Indian's doggedness to begin the argument all over again. But in the morning, something happened. Kiopo came back.

He had been out hunting, and as soon as he set his eyes on Lone Chief, he showed his teeth in a threatening snarl.

By this time the wolf had every reason to distrust human beings. Dusty Star was the one great exception. In the Indian before him, Kiopo saw an enemy. If Dusty Star had not held him back, he would have flown at him.

And the wolf's return seemed to make the boy all the firmer in his refusal. Faced by the pair of them, Lone Chief realized at last that he was powerless. He knew that he would be forced to return to the tribe, and confess the failure of his mission. Whatever the coveted wolf-medicine might perform, it was not for them. They had lost it in the moons. And in spite of his great wisdom, and his ancient cunning, he was uneasy. He felt that he was in the presence of a great and peculiar power. In all of his wide experience he had never come across anything like it before. There was something about the wolf that seemed more than the mere animal. There was something in Dusty Star that seemed uncannily related to the wolves. He was relieved when at length he turned from the camp, and found himself out of sight of it once more, among the endless ranks of the trees.



CHAPTER XXIV

EVIL DAYS

The Maple leaves were yellowing in the Fall. The hollow seed-cups of the wild parsley were turning old and grey. Up the slopes of the northern buttes, the shumack flared like a shout of flame. Over a thousand leagues of prairie the days carried the warmth and stillness of that mysterious season called the Indian Summer; but the nights had cold in them, and the middle sky had voices. For the geese were coming now—driving out of the north in great arrow-heads of flight—and the nightwind passed with a dry whisper, like the running of antelope through dead grasses, over a thousand leagues.

The camp of Dusty Star's people was feverishly astir. The air was filled with rumours. Scouts coming from the north-east brought disquieting tidings. There was a great movement among the Yellow Dogs. Scattered bands were coming in daily to join the main body. It could mean only one thing—the gathering for the final attack.

And still Lone Chief did not come back.

Day after day, scouts watched from the summit of Look-out Bluff, scanning the western prairie eagerly for signs of the returning Medicine-man. Day after day, they returned with heavy faces to the anxiously waiting tribe.

And as the days passed, the rumours grew more black. The Senakals were in movement now. They were allies of the Yellow Dogs, related to them by ties of blood. The Senakals were a powerful tribe. If they joined forces with the Yellow Dogs, the strength of the enemy would be enormously increased.

It was late October now, or, as the Indians named the season, When-the-Geese-fly-South. In the rich meadows along the Wide-Water river, the bunch-grass was very long, and on the slopes of the eastern hills the huckleberries were large and ripe. But no Indian ponies grazed in the meadows now, having been brought closer into camp: for fear of a hostile raid; nor, in the early morning or late evening, were any parties of squaws to be seen out on the prairies, going to the hills, or returning with baskets full of fruit.

Among all the families in the camp, that of Dusty Star was the most disturbed. His parents had always hoped that, sooner or later, he would come back. His mother, especially, had grieved for his absence, and had looked anxiously for his return. It was a pity, she said, they had not taken his part about Kiopo. Only then, who could possibly have foreseen that all this medicine power which Lone Chief made so much of would be discovered in the wolf? But, even so, she thought, they might have been kinder to Dusty Star himself, and have tried more fully to understand his feelings for the wolf. And after all, was it not his father who had presented him with the creature in the beginning, when it was nothing but a little compact bundle of fat and fur, not yet very steady on its legs? She was now quite clear in her own mind that they had been decidedly to blame. Day after day, she waited anxiously for tidings of Lone Chief, and, as night after night brought no news of his whereabouts, her anxiety grew.

The only person who clung stubbornly to her old opinions was Sitting-Always. But that was only to be expected, since she was so very like her name. Once the mind of the old squaw had laid an opinion, she would sit on it like a broody hen, till it went addled in her head. She had never really liked Dusty Star, and she had always hated the wolf. If the wolf *had* a medicine (which, for her part, she very much doubted) as everybody said, she had made up her mind that it was a bad medicine, and could not help the tribe. As a protest against all this nonsense about the wolf, she painted her face with an extra coat of yellow, and sat in a bad temper at the door of her tepee.

Things were in this state, when, one morning early, a scout came into camp. He brought alarming tidings. He had rashly crossed the border of the Yellow Dog country, and had been seen and chased. Fortunately his pony was a very swift one, and he had reached the Wide-Water river in time to swim across, and so escape. All day he had lain hidden in the willow thickets of the southern bank, and had only dared to leave them after dark. He said that his pursuers were in advance of a large body of Indians who were camped to the north-west of the Sokomix hills.

Instantly Spotted Eagle ordered a strong war-party to start off, in order to meet the advance guard of the enemy, and, if possible, drive them back. Dusty Star's father, Running Wolf, as one of the leading braves, was a member of the party.

At sundown, a solitary Indian came galloping into camp. He was the bearer of terrible news. The war-party had encountered the enemy, and had given battle shortly after noon; but, owing to the fact that the Yellow Dogs greatly

outnumbered them, they had been defeated and finally put to flight. But in spite of their victory he did not know whether they would continue their advance immediately or not. It was best to be prepared for the worst.

When the news became known, panic seized the camp. Terrified squaws ran from tepee to tepee, uttering shrill screams and tearing their hair. To their cries were added the neighing of ponies driven into camp, the barking of huskies, and the beating of drums.

During the evening, the remainder of the defeated war-party returned. Fully a third of its members were missing. Among the missing was Running Wolf.

Nikana did not run, nor scream. She walked restlessly up and down in front of her tepee, holding Blue Wings closely in her arms, and filled with a horrible fear.

The night which followed the defeat was one of terrible anxiety. With the exception of the children and the animals, hardly any one slept. From moment to moment no one could say what might happen. If their enemies were already in the neighbourhood, they might attack at any instant. People wandered aimlessly about, or squatted at the entrances of the tepees, listening uneasily to the slightest sound, even if it were nothing more than the howling of some distant coyote far off upon the prairie that set every ear straining lest it should be an Indian signal for the gathering to attack. And when, at long intervals, a flock of wild geese would approach with shrill, honking call out of the vast darkness of the North, the cry seemed to carry evil tidings of their approaching doom. When the first streaks of dawn brightened above the Eastern hills, a feeling of relief passed through the camp that, if the dreaded attack were indeed preparing, at least it would not be launched under cover of the dark.

And with the dawn, came a sudden ray of hope. From Look-out butte a scout came galloping into camp. Far to the south-west several Indians had been sighted. It was almost certain that Lone Chief was one of them.

The news ran through the camp like wild-fire. But was Dusty Star coming too? Or, if not of the party, would it be found that he was following with the wolf? The excitement and suspense were tremendous. People crowded to the western side of the camp, some even going out to wards Look-out butte in order to be the earliest to receive the fateful news.

They had not long to wait. Soon the little party was seen rounding the southern slope of the hill. And Lone Chief was indeed one of the party. He had fallen in

with them on his homeward route, a day's journey from the camp. But he came without either Dusty Star or the wolf. And when at last he had arrived, and in a few short words had announced the failure of his mission, a feeling of gloom that was almost despair spread over the whole tribe.

In vain Spotted Eagle, and some of the other chiefs, attempted to give them fresh courage. The deep superstition of the Indian mind had settled darkly upon them. If the wolf-medicine did not come, they said, it showed clearly that the Great Spirit had refused to give them protection.

After that, things went from bad to worse. And although the day went by without any fresh signs of the enemy's approach, the camp was filled with disquieting rumours, and gave itself up more and more to the despondency of fear.

Another night of suspense passed, and still there were no signs. Hope began to rise that the Yellow Dogs, in spite of their victory, had suffered so severely that they would not dare to attack the main camp. It was possible that some of their allies had failed at the last moment. And then, just as the feeling began to be general, the new hope was dashed to the ground by the news that the enemy was again in motion and was moving rapidly south in force.

If it had not been for the courage and coolness of Spotted Eagle and Lone Chief, the tribe would have been thrown into a state of more hopeless desperation than before; but they summoned all the chiefs together and gave them the command of strong parties which should post themselves on the outskirts of the camp, in order to show the enemy that they were fully prepared to do battle without waiting for the attack upon the camp itself. Orders were also given that no fires were to be lighted if the enemy did not appear before nightfall. Scouting parties were then to be sent far out on the northern prairie so as to prevent all possibility of a surprise attack.

The afternoon passed into evening. The short-lived northern twilight darkened swiftly down the prairies, and it was night. And above, in the enormous hollow of the sky, the stars glittered like many camp-fires, and ever and again the flocks of travelling voices came honking out of the north, and filled the silence with a wandering cry.



CHAPTER XXV

HOW DUSTY STAR DANCED WITH THE WOLVES

After Lone Chief had left him in order to carry his refusal back to the tribe, Dusty Star was not happy in his mind. Wherever he went, whatever he did, the vague unhappiness went with him. The forest was the same; the creatures were the same, and yet, somehow nothing was quite as it had been before. Even Carboona, that colossal Sameness, seemed to hold something uneasy sitting in its heart. In vain he went and sat on his favorite look-out places above the runways, and secretly observed the coming and going of stealthy feet. Equally in vain was the long conversation he had with Goshmeelee, who gave him her views about the increasing difficulty of finding grubs in the cedar swamp, and the other important matters.

And the growing unhappiness of the boy was shared by the wolf, who now ceased to make long expeditions and did his hunting nearer camp.

When once Dusty Star had convinced himself that he had done wrong in refusing to help his people, he did not waste any time in making up his mind. He would go back. He would follow Lone Chief along the vast distances that lay out there to the east. But he would not go alone. Where he went, Kiopo should go too. They would carry the medicine between them that should bring deliverance to his tribe. But first he must say good-bye to his friends, whom he might not see for a very long time, if indeed he ever saw them again. Out there in the east many things might happen. And Baltook and Goshmeelee would not be there to understand.

It was with a heavy heart that he climbed up to the den of the Silver Fox. To his great disappointment, he found that Baltook was not at home. Boola was, however, and the family. Without saying a word to her, he made Boola understand. She gazed at him with a look in her eyes which said as plainly as any expression could: "Don't do it!"

Dusty Star stroked her glossy fur affectionately, and felt the heaviness sit heavier in his heart. And then, because the shadows were lengthening, he went slowly down the hill. And far above him, in the golden silences, Boola lifted her voice

and howled.

With Goshmeele the case was different. *She* did not content herself with merely looking. She told him very plainly that he was a fool to go. Even if grubs were scarce, she said, there were fat frogs by the stream borders, and the berries were not yet over, if you were energetic enough to search for them, and knew where to look. Dusty Star explained that it was not a question of food, but of feeling. To which Goshmeelee replied that food *was* feeling, and that a stomach without plenty of berries in it was a feeling that could keep you from going to sleep. She either couldn't or wouldn't understand that there was such a thing as duty. But she *did* understand that what Dusty Star had in his mind meant a deal of exercise; and that a lot of walking walked the meat clean off your bones. "Stay here and get fat," was her unalterable opinion as to the best thing to do. And when she found that Dusty Star was obstinate, she growled at him in affectionate remonstrance, and let him dig his hands into the deep places of her fur. And the good healthy smell of her warm bearishness tickled his nose, and made him feel at home, and inclined to keep hidden in Carboona from all the worry and tongue-wagging of the stormy Indian world.

But then the memory of Lone Chief, and of the strong things he had said, came to him, and teased his brain even more than the smell of Goshmeelee tickled his nose.

So, without any more argument with her, he got up, and ran away quickly till he was hidden among the trees. And after he was gone, Goshmeelee watched the way he had disappeared, and then began solemnly to lick the places where he had disarranged her fur.

After leaving her, Dusty Star did not return to camp. Once he had started to say good-bye, meant with him that the departure had already begun. There was no need to go back for Kiopo. Before leaving he had made the wolf clearly understand that they were going upon a long journey; also, that although he expected him to remain near at hand, he did not wish him to be too close while he paid his good-bye visits to the foxes and the bear. And Kiopo did what was expected of him, and kept discreetly out of sight.

So now, Dusty Star went on swiftly through the forest, not in the least doubting that, although Kiopo was out of sight, he was within earshot in case of need, and that the great pads of his feet carried him softly along the trail.

When the last glimmer of twilight departed, Dusty Star camped for the night.

The camping was very simple. It only meant finding a sheltered place among the tree-roots, eating some of the food he had brought with him, and settling himself for sleep. And as he settled down, he felt rather than saw the big wolf-shape that stole softly into camp and lay down within reach of his arm.

In spite of their journey having begun, the travellers lay still within the edges of Carboona—the strange and lonely land. Voices out of Carboona travelled to them darkly, at long intervals, like voices of departing and farewell. There was the far-off bark of a fox, signalling to its mate; or the dreary hooting of an owl. But Dusty Star slept soundly, and if the voices reached him, it was only in his dreams. Once only he woke, and that was not because of a sound, but of a touch. A cold nose touched his cheek. Instantly he was wide-awake, thinking it was Kiopo warning him of some danger. But the wolf was sleeping where he had lain down, and had not stirred. Dusty Star waited expectantly. But though he kept absolutely still, his mysterious visitor made no other sign. Once only a twig cracked faintly under the pressure of a stealthy foot; but the darkness was too dense for Dusty Star to detect the secret movement of the black robe with the silver tips, as it drifted softly away. But long, long afterwards, when countless moons had come and gone, Dusty Star, remembering, was sure that it was Baltook who had brought his cold nose to him as a token of farewell.

The morning song of little Kilooleet, the white-throated sparrow, was already trickling through the maple leaves, when the travellers started again upon their way. As on their first coming into the region, so now, at their departing, the small grey people in the underground doorways watched the great shapes furtively, and made disturbed noises at each other after they were gone. And in the little damp corridors, where the darkness was twisty because of many roots, the tiny feet pattered nervously, and the tiny whiskers twitched.

From the summit of a bare-topped hill, up which they had been mounting slowly from the lower forest levels, Dusty Star paused for the first time to look back. There, in the distance, with the morning mists lying in white streaks along its sides, rose the great heights of Carboona against the autumn sky. Would he ever see it again—or was he gazing at its shining peaks and precipices for the last time? A dim fear of the unknown crept into him—of the unseen things that lay in wait behind him in the world. And Carboona had become, in a strange manner, his home—his wolf-home, where, with Kiopo, he had learned those forgotten secrets which are the medicine of the wolves. And now they were looking at it together perhaps for the last time! As he turned away, to continue his journey, his eyes were troubled as if they were seeking an unfamiliar trail.

Between the forest and the prairies lay a tract of broken country full of ravines and rocky hills. It was a barren, treeless region, where the water-courses dried up in the summer, or shrank to muddy pools. With the exception of a few rabbits and prairie dogs, game was scarce. Now and then a wolf or coyote would wander across its barren buttes, scenting the hungry air; but usually retreating with stomachs as light as when they entered it. During the greater part of the year, the larger animals gave it a wide berth. Indians avoided it also. They called it the Bad Lands. But in spite of its reputation among the human kind, the beasts had their uses for it at certain times of the year. It had seen many a fierce battle when the wolves and coyotes followed the mating call. The Wild Kin made their marriages there, but mostly settled their breeding haunts far enough away. It was not a good place to be born in. But animals hunted to the death, or those whose limbs were stiffened with old age, knew in some mysterious way that they could crawl there to die.

But a use that was neither for mating nor dying, was one of which even the Indians knew very little, and the reason for which even the Wild Kin itself was in the dark.

Hunters crossing the borders of the Bad Lands in the late Summer or the Fall, would sometimes stop to listen to a sound that rose, and died, and swelled again, in strange discords that set Indian pulses throbbing in an uncomfortable way. Sometimes the sound would seem to be a series of single notes, from a solitary voice. At others, the notes crowded thickly together as if from a multitude of throats. Indians who were deeply religious declared that it was the wolves making medicine, when the Great Spirit walked across the Bad Lands at the falling of the year.

Dusty Star and Kiopo reached this haunted region just at sundown. The great bare buttes stood up redly in the sunset light. The deep stillness was unbroken by the slightest sound. As far as the eye could reach there was not a sign of a living thing. They had travelled steadily all day since early dawn, and Dusty Star was glad to rest. He still had some food left over from the previous day, the fruits of Kiopo's hunting, so he had only to look out for a convenient spot for camping, and settle down for the night. As soon as he had found one near a small spring, Kiopo went off. That was nothing extraordinary, Dusty Star watched him lift his nose to try the air, and then trot quietly down the creek bed to the south. He knew by his movements that he was off to hunt.

After he had finished his supper, Dusty Star lay down in the place he had chosen,

and dropped instantly to sleep. He seemed to have been asleep a long time when he woke suddenly to find Kiopo standing over him in the moonlight. The wolf was plainly uneasy. He was making the half-whining, half-growling sound which was always a sign that something unusual was taking place.

Dusty Star sat up, and looked about him. In the intense clearness of the cloudless night every object was distinctly visible. The buttes stood out in huge silver masses, washed by the light of the moon. Their hollows and ravines were deep in shadow; but neither in light nor shadow was there anything which gave sign of life. Yet Dusty Star felt as if, in spite of the apparent stillness, sound had lately travelled through the air. The silence was not empty.

As he listened, he heard a long wolf-howl rise and fall in the distance. It had scarcely died away when it was followed by another, and then another. Then a whole chorus of howls filled the night with a loud and desolate clamour. At once he knew what he was listening to. It was the singing of the Wolves.

He listened for some time, shivering a little in spite of himself. He was not afraid. But he was deeply stirred. Something in him answered to the wolf voices. Kiopo's uneasiness had communicated itself to him also. He could not explain it. He felt as if he were inside Kiopo's mind; rather, that they shared one mind, and that the soul of the wolf-world was calling to it.

With one accord, they set off in the direction of the cries.

The sound came from the eastward. But, owing to the broken nature of the country, it seemed sometimes to come from every side at once. In that hollow land, full of echoes, the ears were not always the safest guides. But Kiopo did not travel by ear alone. His nose quested the distances. It met the things that went walking in the wind. And surer even than his nose was the Wisdom of the Wild Things, which was an extra sense to him, and which mankind has put to sleep with its making of machines. So he trotted steadily east without being bewildered by the echoes, and Dusty Star followed, confident in his lead.

They came at last to the foot of a big butte, which Kiopo immediately began to ascend. The cries were very clear now. The moonlit air was filled with a chorus of high-pitched, vibrating sounds. As they climbed, Dusty Star noticed that they did not mount alone. He counted no fewer than four other wolves, besides Kiopo, moving swiftly up the hill. If he saw them, Kiopo paid no attention. Even when one of them drew a little closer than the others, he did not attempt to drive it off. And the low growl that rumbled in his throat seemed a recognition rather than a threat.

At the top of the hill, they came upon a wide, open space. Dusty Star saw to his wonder that it was crowded with wolves. They formed a wide, irregular circle, composed of single animals, and of little groups of five or six. In the centre of the circle sat a large wolf by himself. The remarkable thing about him was not his size, but his colour, which was pure white. With the moonlight full upon him, it almost seemed as if his coat itself gave out light.

As soon as Dusty Star and Kiopo joined the circle, the howling suddenly ceased. The wolves were uneasy. It was plain that they regarded the newcomers with suspicion, if not with enmity. Kiopo would have passed muster, but his companion was certainly anything but a wolf. One or two of the nearer wolves raised their hackles and growled. The rest maintained a grim silence. And the silence was not re-assuring. Dusty Star had the uncomfortable feeling that the pack were merely waiting for some signal, which, whenever it was given, would be an order to attack. In such a case he knew he must leave Kiopo to take whatever course was wisest. They were in the wolf-world now. The law of the man-world did not hold. The part that was so strangely wolf within him, knew that it must submit to the law of the pack, or pay the penalty of death. He watched Kiopo anxiously. Whatever Kiopo did within the next few moments

would decide their fate. The silence grew terrible in its stillness. After their first restless movements the wolves were motionless, waiting for the sign.

It was then that Kiopo acted on the sudden impulse of an instinct that told him what to do. Very slowly and deliberately he made his way through the ring of wolves towards the place where the white wolf sat.

As his great body detached itself from the ring, and emerged to full view into the open space, the waiting wolves realized at once that they had before them a born leader, one of the Great Ones of the packs. Hitherto, the big white wolf had had no rival. His sway was recognized over a range of wide extent to the north-west. None had ever dared to dispute his overlordship. Far and near his fame had travelled as the white wolf-king of the north.

Yet here was an animal, who, in point of mere size stood even higher at the shoulders than the white giant. A hundred pairs of gleaming eyes glared at the intruder with a hostile light.

With his own eyes shining, and every hair on his body bristling, so as to make him seem even larger than he was, Kiopo advanced steadily towards the leader. The White wolf rose from his haunches, growling low. He, too, bristled, as if in resentment at the intrusion. With a common impulse, the pack edged nearer, waiting expectantly for the coming fight.

Dusty Star, meanwhile, remained where he was on the outer circle of the ring, motionless as a stone, for he had received a sign from Kiopo, warning him to stay behind.

Fear clutched at his heart, and made his pulses throb, but it was not fear for himself. The dread was for Kiopo, lest he should do something rash. In single combat he was not afraid of the result, even with the white wolf for an adversary. But with the pack in their present temper, Dusty Star knew that a single fight would not long be possible. With the fine sense that felt the wolfish mind about him, he knew that, at the first smell of blood, all control would vanish, and that even though Kiopo was the most magnificent fighter in the world, his fate would be sealed.

Hardly daring to breathe, he watched the two wolves draw closer in the centre of the ring. Now they were within a few feet of each other.

He prepared himself for the sudden leap, the lightning slash, the jagged rip, the

manoeuvring for the deadly ham-stringing which meant the beginning of the end.

It was one of those great moments in which anything might happen, and when the merest accident might decide. Dusty Star was fully aware that the lives of Kiopo and himself hung trembling in the balance.

Bristling with excitement, the wolves drew nearer in. And still, rigid and motionless, Kiopo and the White Wolf faced each other with defiance in their eyes.

Suddenly there was a sound, half-howl, half-cry, and in the tense moment something seemed to snap. Partly running, partly leaping, with his body crouched, Dusty Star, as he gave tongue, flung himself into the centre of the ring.

The White Wolf bared his teeth and snarled with his eyes upon him. Kiopo also started in astonishment. Was the Little Brother gone mad?

If what followed was madness, it was the most amazing madness the wolves had ever seen. Leaping, bending, running, turning his body in every direction, Dusty Star danced a wolf-dance the like of which the Bad Lands had never known. What mysterious impulse at the very last moment, and in the nick of time, had suddenly come upon him, and taught him what to do, he could have told no more than the wild creatures themselves. And as he danced, he barked short sharp wolf-notes that stabbed the air like knives.

They watched him. He wanted them to watch. They had never seen a human being dance the wolf-dance before; nor were they likely to again. It was the wolf-dance, and yet it was not the wolf-dance. It was something more. What the something more was, Dusty Star himself could not have explained. But he knew that the power that was secretly hidden within him was coming out. It was that strange thing which had been with him as a child, and which, during the long days and nights in the Carboona, had grown stronger moon by moon.

He danced now, as he had danced once before in his grandmother's tepee when she had been ill. There were the same wild antics; the same cunning movements of his feet and hands. Only then he had danced as a splendid joke. Now, he did it seriously, as a thing that mattered enormously: he danced with his very soul.

And as he danced, apparently oblivious of everything except his own movements, he felt the wolf-mind surge towards him, like waters under the

wind.

They were coming! They were coming! The wolf-tide was rising within him, without him. The moon drew it, the dance, the wild notes that sobbed and gasped in his throat! They could not help themselves any more than he could help himself. They were driven by a power stronger than themselves. As he danced he saw the great ring of dusky bodies, and glimmering eyes—the white wolf and Kiopo in the centre—saw them as one sees things in a dream.

The wolves watched him as if spellbound. Then one on the outside of the circle threw back his head and howled. Another answered him from the opposite side. A third took up the call. Soon the whole pack was giving tongue; and one of the big wolf choruses went thundering out for leagues along the hollow land.

But to give tongue was not enough. The madness that was in Dusty Star's body seemed to bite into the bodies of the wolves. Some strange power moved them. The mysterious restlessness that had stirred the wolf-kindred since the beginning of the world came upon them now with an irresistible force. First one, and then another, began to run about and bark. The movement spread. It was not long before the entire pack was in violent motion, running and leaping in continuous circles, narrower and wider as the impulse came.

It was like a storm of wolf bodies, the centre of which was Kiopo and the White Wolf.

All this time neither Kiopo nor the White Wolf had moved. But upon them also the mysterious power grew. All at once, as if by a swift agreement, they sprang into the air, and joined Dusty Star in his Dance.

And now, as if a barrier had been suddenly withdrawn, like surging waters breaking over a dam, the wolves poured from all sides into the ring.

There was no thought now of attacking either Dusty Star or his wolf. The boy's sudden action had certainly saved their lives; for the wolves had recognized in him a mysterious power which, unfamiliar as it was, claimed kinship with the pack.

If any human eyes had been watching from a neighbouring butte they would have seen an unaccountable sight. In the haunted stillness of the Bad Lands, beneath the white glare of an enormous prairie moon, the wolves danced a stormy movement about the young Indian brother who made medicine with his

feet.

Circling about him, leaping over him, chasing each other in bewildering circles, snarling, snapping, barking, howling, the united packs swept round the plateau in a roaring, rushing storm.

In that tumultuous sea of wolf-bodies, Dusty Star was engulfed. He scarcely knew what was happening. He had been in a dream before. Now he was swept far out of himself into an even wilder dream—into places where the moon herself danced the wolf-dance and the stars yelped at her heels.

How long the dance continued he did not know. He saw the writhing wolf-forms on every hand. He was dimly conscious that Kiopo was continually at his side. What he knew was, that now, at last, he had entered the great mystery; he was making the medicine of the wolves.

And so, in the white moon-glare, among the lonely buttes, the fierce wild creatures gave their leaping bodies to the dance that had been seen by no man since the beginning of the world.



CHAPTER XXVI

HOW THE WOLVES CLOSED IN

How the dance came to an end, and what happened when it did, Dusty Star never fully remembered. All he could recollect was that he found himself lying on the flat of his back, with Kiopo standing over him licking his face and hands with his large tongue. His wandering senses came back to him, and he sat up. All around, the wolves sat or lay with their tongues hanging out, panting after their exertions. In the centre, the white wolf sat as before, as if he had never moved. And the moon was there, and the stars, which also seemed to be panting, only they were too far off to see what they did with their tongues.

After that, Dusty Star did the only wise thing to do in his state of exhaustion. He gave himself up to the stillness, and let himself fall asleep. When he awoke, the moon had set, and dawn had risen over the buttes. Kiopo lay facing him with his head between his paws, watching till he should wake. Dusty Star looked for the pack. Not a single wolf was in sight. They had melted away into the barren gullies of the Bad Lands, as if they had been a dream. But the Bad Lands remained, and Kiopo, and an odd feeling in his bones; and Dusty Star knew that now the great journey must continue that could only end where the prairies were yellow with the East.

When the sun had lifted himself above the horizon, the travellers had already reached the last buttes of the Bad Lands, and saw the prairies stretching at their feet. As Dusty Star's eyes travelled over the enormous expanse, a sense of trouble came to him. Out there, concealed in the vast distances that hid it like a buffalo-robe, lay the home of his people. And he was going to return to them. As sure as the wolf-trail ran across the heavens, he was going back. But what would happen then? He would not see them as he had seen them before. The free life with Kiopo; the friendships with the wild kin that were not of his blood, yet seemed to be half his heart; the great mountain-world of Carboona, the mystery-land of the West:—all these had come between him and his people with their life in the tepees.... And Kiopo?... He belonged to Kiopo now, as Kiopo to him. He had danced himself into the wolf-world with the medicine of his feet. His body might remain Indian; but the wolf-dance was in his veins: his moccasins had

touched the wolf-trail: his mind was half a wolf's.

As they crossed into the prairies, he kept looking out for any signs of the white wolf's pack; but not a vestige of them was to be seen. Yet although they were invisible to the eye, there were signs that they had not left the neighbourhood. Kiopo's manner alone was sufficient to show that the country was not so empty of life as it appeared. He was evidently on the alert, keeping on the watch in every direction.

Just before noon he disappeared. When towards the middle of the afternoon he caught up with Dusty Star, who had continued his journey, it was certain that he had been running with other wolves.

That night, just before sundown, a great idea flashed upon Dusty Star. Kiopo must find the white wolf, and bring the packs to camp. When they were all assembled, Dusty Star would tell his mind to the white wolf, and he, in his turn, would communicate it to the packs. He made the message clear to Kiopo, and the wolf immediately departed.

As the twilight fell, Dusty Star became aware that here and there it seemed to thicken into a wolf-shape, till at last it darkened to a pack. When the pack finally closed in upon the camp, he knew that he was imprisoned by a wolf-ring that shut out the world. And when the last wolf had taken its place, Dusty Star found that the white wolf, with Kiopo, was by his side.

With the pack about him, Dusty Star sent his mind out to their leader, and communicated the great idea.

And in words which he did not use, even in the Indian tongue, the Idea shaped itself thus:

"Far out along the prairies to the sun-rising is the camp of my people. My people are very many. They outnumber the wolves. As the foxes and lynxes are enemies to the wolves; so my people have enemies who are thirsting for their blood. The enemies of my people are now gathering to attack. They are numerous and very strong. If I do not carry help to my people, they will be pulled down and killed, as the wolves pull down the moose when he is yarded for the winter, and food is scarce. By myself I can do little, though my people say I own the wolf-medicine. But the wolf-medicine that is in me is only strong enough when I am running with a wolf. Kiopo and I are very strong together. With you, we should be stronger still. With the pack, nothing could stand against us. The medicine then

would be on many feet. If you will lead the pack, and follow us, we shall save my people from their death."

To get all this meaning into the white wolf's mind, took some time. But the white wolf's mind was like his jaws. Once it took firm hold, it tore the meaning of an idea like meat from off a bone. And when he had snatched the idea and swallowed it, he brought it up again for distribution, as a mother-wolf does for her cubs, in the form of pre-digested meat.

So the white wolf, having carefully digested the idea, disgorged it for the pack's benefit, and fed them bit by bit. And when the pack had swallowed it again, they liked the taste of it, and were ready for anything in the way of a fight. Long after the night had settled down, Dusty Star's excitement kept him awake planning the carrying out of the great idea.

On the evening of the third day, a Scout belonging to the Yellow Dogs took a strange tale back to the tribe. Out on the prairies to the west, he said, he had come upon a great pack of wolves. They were led by a white wolf of enormous size, and were travelling eastwards. As he was uncertain what such a large body of wolves might do, he had not waited to watch their further movements, and had given them a wide berth. The Yellow Dogs did not treat the news seriously. At this time of the year, the wolves, even in large numbers, were not dangerous. Now that hunting was good, they would not attack human beings. It was only in winter, when the moose yarded and game grew scarce, that men watched the gaunt grey bodies that hung about the thickets, and listened uneasily to the eerie cry far off over the frozen levels, as it rang from the throats of a famished pack which had found a promising trail. Besides, the Yellow Dogs had more important matters to consider. Now or never the attack upon Dusty Star's people must be made. The moon was favourable now. She did not rise until a sufficiently long time after sunset to enable them to approach the enemy's camp under cover of the dark, so as to be able to deliver the long-planned attack in the growing light of her beams. Without waiting for any further delay, small scouting parties were ordered to go on ahead; and the advance began.

But there were other scouts abroad, of which neither the Yellow Dogs nor their intended victims were aware. Every thicket, and matted tangle of prairie grass, seemed to conceal one. There was hardly a hollow that did not harbour some crouching form; and the prairie buttes had eyes. As the great Yellow Dog war party moved stealthily forwards, it was shadowed by another company more numerous and more stealthy still. This second company was roughly divided into

three main bodies, with small intermediate bands which seemed to move independently, but which were in reality in touch with one or other of the larger groups.

The night was windless and very still, the few vagrant wafts of air which occasionally stirred the prairie grasses, flowing softly from the west. The older and more experienced of the Yellow Dog warriors could not understand the night. From time to time they seemed to catch a faint wolf smell from the west. And the stillness seemed full of some invisible motion as if the very prairies moved. Moreover it was very plain that the ponies were unusually restless. Now one, now another, would snort and whinney, or shy at some vague shadow which melted into the dark.

In the Comanche camp, things were much as they had been for many days past. A careful watch was still kept towards the north. But the general opinion was that the Yellow Dogs had delayed their threatened attack so long that they had at length given up the intention. Spotted Eagle was in his tepee consulting with one or two other chiefs, when suddenly the door flap was raised, and Dusty Star stood before them.

The suddenness of his arrival, and the change wrought in his appearance during his long absence, prevented Spotted Eagle from recognizing in the tall, imposing-looking youth who now stood before him, the wild boy with the wolfish ways who had disappeared mysteriously many moons ago.

There was a pause of typical Indian silence, while the piercing eyes in the tepee looked him through and through, before Spotted Eagle asked him his business.

"I am Dusty Star," the boy said quietly.

If the Thunder-bird itself had pronounced the words under cover of its deafening wings, they could not have produced a more startling effect.

Spotted Eagle and his companions rose instantly to their feet. Although the old chief's face did not betray his feelings, his action, together with that of his followers showed how deeply he was moved.

"You have come?" he asked incredulously. "Lone Chief brought us your message that you would not come."

"Lone Chief spoke truly," Dusty Star answered, "but there was something within me which was stronger than my words. I have come to help my people against

the Yellow Dogs."

The old chief bowed his head as an expression of gratitude, but said nothing.

"The Yellow Dogs are even now approaching," Dusty Star continued. "Yet the camp is unguarded. I came in from the south. No one challenged me."

"The Yellow Dogs do not come from the south," Spotted Eagle answered. "Their camp is far to the north. We watch the north. Also our scouts have been out to the east and west. Only a wolf could steal upon us from the south."

Dusty Star was not slow to catch the double meaning of the old chief's remark. His eyes flashed as he answered quickly.

"Your only help comes with the wolf."

"It is you who must help us," the Chief replied earnestly. "You will lead our braves, as if you were my own son. See, I will order them to get ready. If the Yellow Dogs are indeed approaching we must surprise them by an attack."

He was about to give the order, when Dusty Star interrupted him.

"You must not go out to attack," he said hurriedly. "See that the braves are fully prepared, but do not allow them to leave the camp. If I am to help you, you must do as I say. I have made my plans. Do not attack until you have heard the signal of the wolves."

Then, without another word, he lifted the door flap, and was gone.

The news that the Yellow Dogs were upon them, threw the camp into a state of terrible fear. Even the news of Dusty Star's miraculous reappearance was not sufficient to reassure them. Their nerves were over-strained with the watching of long days and nights. And now, when they had believed the danger to be past, its sudden revival filled them with an unreasoning dread. It was in vain that Spotted Eagle did his utmost to inspire them with confidence, by quoting Dusty Star's words. What did his speeches mean, they asked. What signal was that which would come for them from the wolves? The camp was in confusion, some advising one thing, some another. It was only Spotted Eagle's express orders which prevented a large party going out to meet the enemy and offering battle.

The time went on, and nothing happened. There was no sign of the enemy. Spotted Eagle, listening anxiously, caught no sound that might be the signal of

which Dusty Star had spoken. He grew more and more uneasy as the time passed.



On leaving the chief's tepee, Dusty Star had left the camp immediately, not even waiting to show himself to his parents. He dared not risk any delay, realizing that upon him and his wolves their fates, as well as that of the whole tribe, rested.

Over the dark surface of the prairie he passed with a swift step, knowing where his waiting wolves were to be found. In a very short time he was among them. A third of the pack—that upon the west—was about him. He knew that Kiopo, and the wolves under his charge would be lying somewhere to the east. To the north, dogging the heels of the advancing Yellow Dogs, the White Wolf and his company closed stealthily in.

Totally unprepared for the fate awaiting them, the Yellow Dogs came on. When they were about half-a-mile from the camp, they stopped; for it was understood that the attack was not to be delivered until the moon had risen.

In the north-east, an increasing brightness showed that her appearance was very near. About them the prairies began to take on a pallid glimmer, in which objects wore mysterious shapes. As the light increased, the ponies became more and more restless. Their riders dreaded lest the sounds of their growing uneasiness should be carried to some sharply-listening ear in the camp which they were waiting to surprise. They began to be certain that animals of some sort, wolves, or bison, must be somewhere in the locality. The nervousness of the ponies communicated itself to their masters. A whisper ran that it would be better to move at once, without waiting for the moon. Only that their chiefs remained firm, they would have advanced to the attack.

At length, the edge of the moon's disc rose into sight above the eastern hills. Instantly there was a movement of expectation in the Indian's ranks. They only waited now for the signal from their leader to launch the long-delayed attack. But before that signal came, another was heard.

The moon had barely raised herself clear of the hills when a deep, long-drawn howl broke the intense stillness to the west. The waiting Indians recognized it as the mustering call of the hunting wolf when he summons the pack. The note carried for an infinite distance. Hardly had it died away, when it was answered

from the east. Then, silence as before. And the moon began to cast long shadows—shadows that seemed to move!

Out from the thickets, up from the hollows, down the dark slopes of the bluffs, the shadows crept.

The wolves were closing in!



In the camp, Spotted Eagle stood uncertain what to do. He had distinctly heard the wolf-calls, but could not be sure whether they were signals from Dusty Star or not. The camp, hushed with suspense, was very still. A subdued murmur, rising here and there at intervals, was all that could be heard. Now and then a woman's figure would step softly from one tepee to another, or a husky would slink across a moonlit space. There was no other movement.

Suddenly, a dull sound like distant thunder came from the north. It grew louder moment by moment. As all listening ears knew well, it was the beat of galloping hoofs. A series of savage shouts now broke into it—the mingled war-cries of the Yellow Dogs, and their Allies.

There was no time now to wait for the promised signal from Dusty Star. In an instant, Spotted Eagle's heart was black with rage and fear. There would be no sign from the wolves. The wolf-boy had betrayed them. His promise, like his name, was a puff-ball after all!

The Chief was just about to give the order to advance, when another sound caught his ear. It was a chorus of sharp barks mingled with howls that seemed to come from all sides at once. It swelled onward in a deafening clamour that filled the prairies to the horizon. It was a sound to which all old Indian hunters responded with a thrill—that last terrible rallying cry of wolves when their chase is ended, and the prey about to be pulled down; the pitiless summons, "Close in!"

Instantly, Spotted Eagle gave the command, and lifting their shrill war-cry, the Comanches rushed out to meet their foes.

They were hardly clear of the camp, when they stopped, bewildered by the extraordinary sight before them.

In the clear light of the now fully risen moon, they saw a dense mass of Indians in violent commotion, with their ponies rearing and kicking in the wildest confusion. On the outskirts of the mass, and completely encircling it, was an enormous pack of wolves, which leaped and dashed against its edges like the waves of a living sea.

Here and there a small company of Indians would thrust itself from the main body, forcing their assailants to give way. But before they could gain sufficient headway to get through, and make their escape, it seemed as if a rising tide of wolves overwhelmed them and drove them back. Again and again the Indians made a desperate effort to break through; and each time the waves of the billowing pack surged over them, broke, and surged again.

Amid all the bewildering confusion of the struggle, two objects showed themselves distinctly again and again. One was a huge white wolf whose body, gleaming in the moon, was continually hurling itself against the Indians in the thickest of the fight and goading the packs on. It was in ceaseless movement, first on one side, then on the other. Now it would be lost to view among the dark bodies of its mates; now it would flash into sight at some other point, like a beam of leaping light.

The other object was the figure of a tall Indian boy, who was also perpetually changing his position as he mingled with the wolves, and which the thunderstruck Comanches realized could be no other than that of Dusty Star himself.

Like the white wolf, his efforts seemed directed to urging the wolves forward at any point where they were in danger of giving way. Now and again as he flung up his arms, he would utter a wild cry, half-human, half-wolf, which, piercing the general uproar, rang like a note of doom.

At length, the Yellow Dogs, driven to a frenzy of desperation, forced a passage through the ring of wolves at a point where it had grown thin. As they burst forth towards the open prairie, it was plain that they had abandoned all intention of attacking the camp, and that their one idea was that of escape.

And now Dusty Star's figure was seen to break away from the wolves and to come running towards his people. As he ran, he shouted loudly, waving his arms excitedly in the direction of their fleeing foes.

Without a moment's further delay, Spotted Eagle gave the signal, and the

Comanches leaped to their ponies.

Out upon the moonlit prairie the pursuit swept with savage cries, Dusty Star leading it upon the pony Spotted Eagle had hastily given him.

Never before in the longest Indian memory, had there been such a flight, or such a pursuit. As it swept tumultuously northwards, men and beasts mingled strangely under the pale glare of the moon. Across the quiet spaces of the night it sped on its ghastly way, till the thunder of the beating hoofs roused the echoes in the hills.

Dusty Star, galloping onward, with Kiopo running by his side, was filled with a wild feeling of exultation. The wolves had conquered. The enemy was in the full flight of utmost panic. Never again could any one doubt the power that had been given to him through Kiopo—the Medicine of the Wolves. Never again could it be urged by those who hated them both that, when his people were in danger of destruction, he had refused to help them in their need. And as the last overtaken Yellow Dog was struck down, with the exception of the small number who managed to escape their merciless pursuers, he knew that his work was ended, and that Kiopo need fear his enemies no longer.



CHAPTER XXVII

CARBOONA'S CALL

It was a triumphal entry which Dusty Star with Kiopo at his side, made into the camp. In the absence of the men, the squaws had built large outside fires partly to celebrate their victorious return, partly for the purpose of extensive cooking.

As Dusty Star and his wolf came within the circle of the light, a great shout went up. The entire camp stormed forward to meet them, Spotted Eagle and the other chiefs forming a guard of honour. Naturally Dusty Star's father, who had returned at last in safety, and his mother were the first to greet him. Nikana's delight in having her now famous son safe and sound once more was unbounded. Running Wolf made little outward sign of joy; but it was not the blaze of the fires alone which made his dusky features take that unaccustomed glow, or the light glitter in his black eyes, as he gazed with pride upon his son.

And though half the camp seemed pressing forward to do him honour, and the other half to hang back respectfully in awe of his terrible wolf, Dusty Star's memory did not sleep. There were other scenes, little less vivid, in which he and Kiopo had played very different parts, and when the eyes which now gazed upon them with gratitude and awe had watched them with suspicion and hate. Within him the human mind, and the wolf's instinct, were fighting; and neither would allow him to forget.

There were two other persons who also had a long memory, and who remained at the outside of the crowd. Dusty Star's sharp eyes caught sight of a tall, slightly stooping figure, standing alone in solitary contemplation, and he immediately made his way towards it.

As he saw the youth approaching him, Lone Chief never moved. Something that might almost have been taken for a smile flickered in his face.

Dusty Star was the first to speak.

"I said I would not come," he said, and stopped.

Lone Chief understood. He was remembering an occasion when a boy had come

to him with an urgent appeal for help which he had refused; and which because the boy had brought a strange influence with him, he had given it after all.

"I also said I would not come," he replied, while the thing that might have been a smile flickered and went out. "The medicine has strange ways. Though the words go west, the heart may take the eastern trail."

Dusty Star's mind flashed to Sitting-Always's sickness, and he also understood.

They said nothing more, but each felt that, whatever happened in the future, there was a sympathy between them which would always hold them friends.

The other person with the backward-reaching memory remained even further in the background than Lone Chief. As the reflections of the dancing flames lit up the old yellow-painted face, its sunken eyes glared out upon the scene with an expression of uneasiness that was almost fear.

"The wolves are bad medicine," the painted mouth muttered. "No good will come of it, if the wolf stays."

Nikana found her mother crouching in the shadows on her way back to the tepee, and did her utmost to persuade her to come and join in welcoming her grandson back; but the old squaw's obstinate refusal was not to be overcome, and she gave up the attempt.

So, half in shadow, half in flickering light, the old painted mouth went on muttering from time to time: "Bad medicine! Bad medicine," till at last Sitting-Always took herself off uneasily to bed.



For three days the feasting and rejoicing were continued. Dusty Star, was, of course, the central figure. In spite of his extreme youth, the treatment he received was that of a great chief and famous medicine-man combined. He was loaded with honours and marks of distinction. Presents of all kinds were showered upon him. He became rich—as the Indian mind counts riches—in a day. Even those who had been most hostile to him in the past, were now the foremost in courting his favour, as the hero of the hour. Beside him, Spotted Eagle himself took a second place.

Even Sitting-Always changed her behaviour, and seemed to wish to stand in the

good graces of her famous grandson. So that when he visited her tepee, leaving Kiopo behind, she showed her broken yellow teeth at him in a smile that was like a wound across her face. And her words were sweet as sarvis-berries that have been well stewed. Only, as Dusty Star listened to them, he heard behind their juiciness, the old false, yellow voice that had cried passionately: "Kill! Kill!"

Yet in spite of all his overwhelming good-fortune, he was not happy. If Kiopo had shown himself content, it might have been different. But the honours heaped upon the Little Brother left Kiopo untouched. To all friendly advances from any person outside the immediate family circle, he showed an indifference which occasionally gave dangerous signs of changing into enmity. People became chary of visiting the tepee when it was observed that the wolf was on guard... He might be, and doubtless was, a marvellous animal—a mighty "medicine." But like other great Powers, his jaws could close with a snap. From the rabble of the huskies, he naturally held aloof with the utmost scorn. And they in their turn, hating him whole-heartedly, but, fearing him with equal measure, gave him the widest possible berth.

Day by day, his dislike and distrust of camp-life became more and more apparent. Even when his body was still, and he lay motionless as a log, with his great head laid between his out-stretched paws, his eyes, turning constantly from Dusty Star to the prairies, and back again to Dusty Star, had the haunted look of a creature in a trap. And Dusty Star, reading their expression, felt a heavy foreboding settle upon his heart. He was not surprised when, on the fourth day after their return, Kiopo disappeared.

Since the defeat of the Yellow Dogs, nothing had been seen of the White Wolf and his pack. But by sounds heard at sundown, and during the night, and by the unusual restlessness of the ponies, it was believed that a large body of wolves was still hanging about the neighbourhood. If Dusty Star had not heard the night calls, he could have learnt the truth of the thing by reading Kiopo's eyes.

On the morning of the fifth day, he was wakened early by the continual howling of a wolf, which seemed to come from a point not far off in the prairie. Listening intently, he was sure that Kiopo was calling him, and that, for some reason or other, he would not enter the camp.

He rose softly from his couch, so as not to disturb his parents, and went out upon the prairie. He expected every minute to find Kiopo at his side; but Kiopo's

voice, like a will-o-the-wisp, was always on ahead, leading him further and further away.

At last he came to the foot of Look-out-Bluff and, in the dim light of the dawn, saw Kiopo standing before him. After a rapid licking of the Little Brother's hand, Kiopo turned at once and began to ascend the bluff. Dusty Star followed him without hesitation.

After they had reached the summit, Kiopo sat down and gave three, short howling barks. They were answered immediately from a spot to the north. Then there was silence, while he and Dusty Star waited.

Presently, a large white wolf appeared over the top of the bluff. He was followed by a line of wolves. In the twilight the line appeared endless. And still they came. It seemed as if, for leagues around, the entire prairie was giving up its wolves.

Dusty Star and Kiopo stood in the centre, with the White Wolf a little to one side. Here and there a wolf would sit or lie down, and begin to lick or scratch his coat, but for the most part the animals remained standing, their heads turned towards the group in the centre, as if waiting for some sign.

For a considerable time nothing happened. In the windless air, the deep stillness of the dawn seemed to surround the bluff with a ring of silence, cutting it off from the rest of the earth. Within that ring, Dusty Star felt himself in a world, in which, every moment, the wolfishness of things grew more enormous, excluding everything besides. As never before, he felt the soul that was in him answer to the wolves.

He knew not why he was here. The wolves were claiming him. They were waiting for something which had not yet happened. When it happened, they would take him with them across the prairies into that tremendous endlessness of the West; to the places beyond the sunset, where the black lakes glimmer to the wolf-trail of the stars. And he knew also, that, if he went, he would not come back; for the moccasins that follow the wolves far enough, find at last the wolf-trail that is worn across the heavens, and never more return.

All at once, the White Wolf got up and advanced slowly towards Kiopo. The two wolves touched noses. The White Wolf then turned towards Dusty Star, looking him full in the face, as much as to say: "Are you ready?"

After a moment's pause, he trotted away across the bluff and disappeared. The rest of the pack, followed him in a body. When the last wolf had disappeared, Dusty Star found himself alone with Kiopo. The wolf stood straight in front of him, gazing at him intently.

Dusty Star, looking right into his eyes, read the message there, all too plainly: "It is time for us to go."

And deep, deep in the West, over a thousand leagues of soundless prairie, he heard Carboona call.

He wanted to go. All the part of him that was wolf cried out to go. Yet something held him back. If Carboona sent a voice from the West, so also the camp of his people called him in the East. The human in him, the deep, loving, human thing, which had been born with him, and which he could not understand, refused to let him go.

Yet Kiopo! How could he part with Kiopo—the one creature in the world which he fully understood? He felt that he would give all he possessed—his new-found honours, his wealth, his power over his tribe—if only Kiopo would return with him to the camp. Yet he knew it could not be. It would be asking Kiopo to come back to a life which, sooner or later, would prove his doom.

Yes; whether he himself went or stayed, he knew Kiopo must go. That wild heart, faithful as it was, could never more cabin itself in the cramped circle of an Indian camp. It, too, had heard Carboona's call. Carboona—the grim foster-mother had summoned it—and the wolf-heart obeyed.

In Dusty Star's own heart the fight was terrible. It seemed as if the Wolf and Human, in a final struggle for victory, were rending it apart. And yet, in spite of the Wolf within him, tearing him to pieces, the old mystery of his race, true to its age-long, world-deep roots, held. He knew, at last, that Kiopo must return *alone*.



In the clear light of the rising sun, there might have been seen, drawn sharply against the morning sky on the ridge of Look-out-Bluff, the figures of an Indian and a wolf. Then the wolf's disappeared, and the human figure was left standing alone. But although, in the long clearness of the prairies, sound sometimes

carries further than sight, no listening ears caught the despairing cry, "Kiopo! Kiopo!" which sobbed itself westward into a silence that gave no answering voice.



And now, as to all things, there comes an end, even to the endless-seeming journeys of the wandering cariboo, so also we have reached the the end of the history of Dusty Star.

Did he stay with his people always, you ask? Or did he one day disappear into Carboona to find Kiopo? Or did Kiopo, after long wanderings, return once more to seek the Little Brother along the eastern trail?

I cannot say. Only in the West, strange things may happen. But this I know. Of the final parting between the boy and the wolf there was no witness, beast or human. And exactly what took place then, no white man's tongue may tell.

The big things happen like that. Out there, in the enormous spaces, the Great Spirit hides them in the shadow of His robe.

FINIS

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