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The Voice of the Pack

art areas car came out yawning, as graceful a thing as treads upon the earth. He was almost nine feet long from the tip of his nose to the end of his tall, and he weighed as much as many a full-grown man. He stood and yawned insolently, for all the forest world to see. He rather hoped that the chipmunk, staring with beady eyes from his doorway, did see him. He would just as soon that Woof's little son, the bear cub, should see him too. But he wasn't so particular about Woof himself, or the wolf pack whose song had just wakened him. And above all things, he wanted to keep out of the sight of men.

For when all thiugs are said and done, there were few bigger cowards in the whole wilderness world than Whisperfoot. A good many people think that Graycoat the coyote could take lessons from him in this respect. But others, knowing how a hunter is brought in occasionally with almost all human resemblance gone from him because a cougar charged in his death agony, think this is unfair to the larger animal. And it is type that a ru -grown cougar win some times attack horned cattle, something that no American animal cares to do unless he wants a good fight on his paws and of which the very thought would throw Graycoat into a spasm; and there have been even stranger stories, if one could quite believe them. A certain measure of respect must be extended to any animal that will hant the kiral ball alk for to miss the buroke and get caught six neath "he churning, lashing, slashing razor-edged front hoofs is simply death, painful and without delay. But the difficulty lies in the fact that these things are not done in the ordinary, rational blood of hunting. What an animal does in its death agony, or to protect its young, what great game it follows in the starving times of winter, can be put to neither its debit nor its credit. A coyote will charge when mad. A raccoon will put up a wicked fight when cornered. A hen will peck at the hand that robs her nest. When hunting was fairly good, Whisperfoot avoided the elk and steer almost as punctillously as he avoide men, which is saying very much it deed; and any kind of terrier could usually drive him straight up a tree

But he did like to pretend to very great and terrible among the smaller forest creatures. And he was Fear itself to the deer. A human hunter who would kill two deer week for fifty-two weeks would be called a much uglier name than poacher; but yet this had been Whisperfoot's record, on and off, ever since his second year. Many a great buck wore the scar of the full stroke-after which Whisperfoot had lost his hold. Many a fawn had crouched panting with terror in the thickets at just a tawny light on the gnarled limb of a pine. Many a doe would grow great-eyed and terrifled at just his | to have a slight vertical motion that

strange, pungent smell on the wind. up the ridge toward his hunting seemed to move at all. grounds. It was a curious thing that snow fields, and yet there wasn't a neither had the chipmunk seen him

n chill at the end of his williskers. The little, breathless night sounds n the brush around him seemed to madden him. They made a song to him, a strange, wild melody that even such frontiersmen as Dan and Lennox could not experience. A thousand smells brushed down to him on the wind, more potent than any wine or ust. He began to tremble all over with rapture and excitement. But unlike Cranston's trembling, no wilderness ear was keen enough to hear the leaves rustling beneath him.

CHAPTER II.

Shortly after nine o'clock, Whisperfoot encountered his first herd of deer. But they caught his scent and scattered before he could get up to them. He met Woof, grunting through the underbrush, and he punctiliously, but with wretched spirit, left the trail. A fight with Woof the bear was one of the most unpleasant experiences that could be imagined. He had a pair of strong arms of which one embrace of a cougar's body meant death in one long shrick of pain. Of course they didn't fight often. They had entirely opposite interests. The bear was a berry-eater and a honey-grubber, and the cougar cared too much for his own life and beauty to tackle Woof in a

A fawn leaped from the thicket in the thicket. The truth was, Whisperfoot had made a wholly unjustified misstep on a dry twig, just at the crucial moment. Perhaps it was the fault of Woof, whose presence had

friven Whisperfoot from the trail, nd perhaps because old age and stiffness was coming upon him, But neither of these facts appeared his anger. He could scarcely suppress a snarl of fury and disappointment,

He continued along the ridge, still stealing, still alert, but his anger increasing with every moment. The fact that he had to leave the trail again to permit still another animal to pass, and a particularly insignificant one too, didn't make him feel any better. This animal had a number of curious stripes along his back, and usually did othing more desperate than steal eggs and eat bird fledglings. Whisperfoot could have crushed him with one bite, but this was one thing that the great cat, as long as he lived, would never try to do. He got out of the way politely when Stripe-back was still a quarter of a wile away; which was quite a compliment to the little nimal's ability to introduce himself. Stripe-back was far: Harly known as

Shortly after ten the mountain lion ad a remarkably five chance at a ick. The direction of the wind, the the thickets and the light were li in his favor. It was old Blacktail, vallowing in the salt lick; and Whisperfoot's heart bounded when he dected him. No human hunter could have laid his plans with greater care, He had to cut up the side of the ridge. indful of the wind. Then there was long dense thicket in which he might approach within fifty feet of the lick, still with the wind in his face, Just beside the lick was another; deep thicket, from which he could make his leap.

His body lowered. The tail lashed frontiersmen have learned to watch awiftly, but a deer is light itself. The looked white and abnormally large in summate grace, and few sets of huthe moonlight. His great green eyes man nerves have sufficient control were still clouded and languorous over leg muscles to move with such from sleep. Then he began to steal astonishing patience. He scarcely

But when scarcely ten feet rehe walked straight in the face of the mained to stalk, a sudden sound from afar, but it was no less terrible. weathercock to be seen anywhere, And | It was really two sounds, so close together that they sounded as one. wet a paw and hold it up, after the | Neither Blacktail nor Whisperfoot approved fashlon of holding up a fin- | had any delusions about them. They ger. He had a better way of knowing | recognized them at once in strange

ways under the skin that no man may describe, as the far-off reports of a claws were bared; he was prepared rifle. Just today Blacktail had seen to fight to the death. He didn't underdescribe, as the far-off reports of a his doe fall bleeding when this same | stand. He only knew the worst single sound, only louder, spoke from a terror of his life. It was not a doe covert from which Bert Cranston had | that he had attacked in the darkness, poached her-and he left the lick in It was not Urson the porcupine, or

Terrified though he was by the rifle shot, still Whisperfoot sprang. But the distance was too far. His outstretched paw hummed down four feet behind Blacktail's flank. Then forgetting everything but his anger and disappointment, the great cougar

opened his mouth and howled. The long night was almost done when he got sight of further game. Once a flock of grouse exploded with a roar of wings from a thicket; but they had been wakened by the first whisper of dawn in the wind, and he really had no chance at them. Soon after this, the moon set.

The larger creatures of the forest are almost as helpless in absolute darkness as human beings. It is very well to talk of seeing in the dark, but from the nature of things, even vertical pupils may only respond to light. No owl or bat can see in absolute darkness. It became increasingly likely that Whisperfoot would have to retire to his lair without any meal whatever.

But still he remained, hoping against hope. After a futile fifteen front of him, startled by his sound in | minutes of watching a trail, he heard a doe feeding on a hillside. Its footfall was not so heavy as the sturdy tramp of a buck, and besides, the bucks would be higher on the ridges this time of morning. He began a cau-

tious advance toward it. For the first fifty yards the hunt



A Full Twenty Yards Farther.

and the brush made a perfect cover. But the doe unfortunately was standing a full twenty yards farther, in an her birthday and knowing of it in open glade. Under ordinary circum- time he had arranged for the delivery stances. Whisperfoot would not have

He yawned again, and his fangs for. He placed every paw with cona motionless thing in the thickets, hoping some other member of the deer herd to which the doe must have belonged would come into his ambush. But the hunt was late, and Whisperfoot was very, very angry. Too many times this night he had missed his soft wind that came down from the pricked through the darkness, It came kill. In desperation, he leaped from the thicket and charged the deer. In spite of the preponderant odds

against him, the charge was almost a

success. He went fully half the distance between them before the deer nerceived him. Then she leaped. There seemed to be no interlude of ime between the instant that she beheld the dim, tawny figure in the air and that in which her long legs pushed out in a spring. But she didn't leap straight ahead. She knew enough of the cougars to know that the great cat would certainly aim for her head and neck in the sante way that a duckbunter lends a fast-flying duck-hoping to intercept her leap. Even as her feet left the ground she seemed to whirl in the air, and the deadly talons whipped down in valu. Then, cutting You haven't any cause to thank me." back in front, she raced down wind. It is usually the most unmitigated folly for a cougar to chase a deer against which he has missed his stroke; and it is also quite fatal to his dignity. And whoever doubts for a to them, simply knows nothing about the ways of animals. They cling to It to the death. But tonight one disappointment after another had crumbled, as the rains crumble leaves, the last vestige of Whisperfoot's self-con-

stopped to think, it would have been one of the really great surprises of his life to hear the sudden, unmisliving creature not fifteen feet distant | might be. in the thicket.

so it is certain that he didn't smell it. The sound grew nearer. If he saw it at all, it was just as a Whisperfoot leaped straight at it. high on its shoulders. His head lashed down, and the white teeth closed. All other man. the long life of his race he had known His senses perceived it, a message

then he opened his mouth in a high,

natr stood still at his snowgers, me

even Woof. It was that imperial master of all things, man himself. Unknowing, he had attacked Landy Hildreth, lying wounded from Cranston's bullet beside the trail. Word of the arson ring would never reach the settlements, after all.

And as for Whisperfoot-the terror that choked his heart with blood began to wear off in a little while. The man lay so still in the thickets. Besides, there was a strauge, wild smell in the air. Whisperfoot's stroke had gone home so true there had not even been a fight. The darkness began to lift around him, and a strange exultation, a rapture unknown before in all his hunting, began to creep into his wild blood. Then, as a shadow steals, he went creeping back to his dead.

Dan Falling had been studying nature on the high ridges; and he went home by a back trail that led to old Bald mountain. The trail was just a narrow serpent in the brush; and it had not been made by gangs of laborers, working with shovels and picks. Possibly half a dozen white men, in all, had ever walked along it. It was just the path of the wild creatures, worn down by hoof and paw and cushion since the young days of the world. It was a roundabout trail home,

but yet it had its advantages. It took him within two miles of Snowbird's ookout station, and at this hour of day he had been particularly fortunate in finding her at a certain spring on the mountain side. It was rather a singular coincidence. Along about four he would usually find himself wandering up that way. Strangely enough, at the same time, it was true that she had an irresistible impulse to go down and sit in the green ferns beside the same spring. They always seemed to be surprised to see one another. In reality, either of them would have been considerably more surprised had the other failed to put in an appearance. And always they had long talks, as the afternoon drew to twilight.

"But I don't think you ought to wait so late before starting home," the girl would always say. "You're not a human hawk, and it is easier to get lost than you think."

And this solicitude. Dan rightly figured, was a good sign. There was only one objection to it. It resulted in an unmistable inference that she thing on earth that he wanted her

were the standards of the mountains, question why, every day, he trod so many weary miles to be with her. She was as natural as a fawn; and

ally. He didn't think that so long as able to forget that experience. It was trysting hour be had come tradging over the hills with it, and few experiences in his life had ever yielded such unmitigated pleasure as the sight of her, glowing white and red, as she took off its wrapping paper. It was a jolly old gift, he recollected-and when she had seen it, she fairly leaped at him. Her warm, round arms around his neck, and the softest, loveliest lips in the world pressed his. But in those he had now. He felt he could endure the same experience again with no embarrassment whatever. His first impression then, besides abounding, incredible astonishment, was that she had quite knocked out his breath. But let it be said for him that he recovered with notable promptness. His own arms had gone up and closed

"But you mustn't do that!" she told

around her, and the girl had wriggled

"But, good Lord, girl! You did it to me! Is there no justice in women? "But I did it to thank you for this lovely gift. For remembering mefor being so good-and considerate.

He had many serious difficulties in thinking it out. And only one conclusion was obtainable—that Snowbird kissed as naturally as she did anything else, and the kiss meant exactly what she said it did and no more. minute that the larger creatures have But the fact remained that he would no dignity, and that it is not very dear have walked a good many miles farther if he thought there was any possibility of a repeat.

But all at once his fantasies were suddenly and rudely dispelled by the intrusion of realities. Dan had been walking silently himself in the pine trol. Snarling in fury, he bounded needles. As Lennox had wondered at long ago, he knew how by instinct: She was lost to sight at once in and instinctively he practiced this atthe darkness, but for fully thirty yards fainment as soon as he got out into he raced in her pursuit. If he had the wild. The creature he had heard was fully one hundred yards distant, yet Dan could hear him with entire plainness. And for a while he couldn't takable stir and movement of a large, even guess what manner of thing it

A cougar that made so much noise He didn't stop to think at all.' He | would be immediately expelled from didn't puzzle on the extreme unlikell- the union. A wolf pack, running by hood of a doe halting in her flight from sight, might crack brush as freely; a cougar. It is doubtful whether, in but a wolf pack would also bay to the thickets, he had any perceptions ware the dead. Of course it might be of the creature other than its move- an elk or a steer, and still more likely, ments. He was running down wind, a bear. He stood still and listened.

Soon it became evident that the creashadow, sufficiently large to be that ture was either walking with two legs. of a deer. It was moving, crawling as or else was a four-footed animal put-Woof the bear sometimes crawled, ting two feet down at the same inseemingly to get out of his path. And stant. Dan had learned to wait. He stood perfectly still. And gradually It was a perfect shot. He landed he came to the conclusion that he was listening to the footfall of an-

But it was rather hard to imagine that pungent essence that flowed forth. | what a man might be doing on this lonely hill. Of course it might be a shot along his nerves to his brain. And deer hunter; but few were the valley sportsmen who had penetrated to this far-carrying squeal of utter, abject far land. The footfall was much too the sprang a full fifteen feet back evidently of another trail that interinto the thickets; then crouched. The sected his own traff one hundred yards

tarther up the hill. He find only to stand still, and in an instant the man

would come in sight. He took one step into the thickets, prepared to conceal himself if it became necessary. Then he waited. Soon

the man stepped out on the trail. Even at the distance of one hundred yards, Dan had no difficulty whatever in recognizing him. He could not mistake this tall, dark form, the soiled, slouchy clothes, the rough hair, the intent, dark features. It was a man about his own age, his own height,



Dan Saw His Purpose

weighing fully twenty pounds more, and the dark, narrow eyes could belong to no one but Bert Cranston. He carried his rifle toosely in his arms. He stopped at the forks in the trail and looked carefully in all directions.

Dan had every reason to think that Cranston would see him at first glance, only one clump of thicket sheltered him. But because Dan had learned the lesson of standing still, because his olive-drab sporting clothes blended softly with the colored leaves, Cranston did not detect him. He turned and strode on down the trail.

He didn't move quite like a man considered him unable to take care with innocent purposes. There was of himself-and that was the last something stealthy, something sinister in his stride, and the way he kept to think. He understood her well such a sharp lookout in all directions. enough to know that her standards Yet he never glanced to the trail for deer tracks, as he would have done valuing strength and self-reliance waiting to meditate on the matter. had he been hunting. Without even Dan started to shadow him.

Before one hundred yards had been traversed, he could better understand many times she had quite taken away ing. It was the same process—a cautious, silent advance in the trail of death spared him he would ever be prey. He had to walk with the same the thickets. He began to feel a curious excitement.

Cranston seemed to be moving more carefully now, examining the brush along the trail. Now and then he glanced up at the tree tops. And all at once he stopped and knelt in the

dry shrubbery. At first all that Dan could see was the glitter of a knife blade, Cranston seemed to be whittling a piece of dead pine into fine shavings. Now he was gathering pine needles and small twigs, making a little pile of them. And then, just as Cranston days he didn't have the strength that drew his match. Dan saw his purpose. Cranston was at his old trade-set-

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