

The Voice of the Pack

... came out yawning, as graceful a thing as treas on the earth. He was almost nine feet long from the tip of his nose to the end of his tail, and he weighed as much as many a full-grown man.

For when all things 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 he did like to pretend to be very great and terrible among the smaller forest creatures. And he was Fear itself to the deer, the human hunter who would kill two deer a 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.



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... came at the end of his whiskers. The little, breathless night sounds in 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.

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.

A fawn leaped from the thicket in front of him, startled by his sound in the thicket. The truth was, Whisperfoot had made a wholly unjustified mistake on a dry twig, just at the crucial moment.

Shortly after ten, the mountain lion had a remarkably fine chance at a buck. The direction of the wind, the trees, the thickets and the light were all in his favor.

His body lowered, the tall lashed back and forth, and now it had begun to have a slight vertical motion that frontiersmen have learned to watch for.

He didn't stop to think at all. He didn't puzzle on the extreme unlikelihood of a doe hunting in her flock from a cougar.

He sprang a full fifteen feet back into the thickets; then, crouched. The

ways under the skin that no man may describe, as the far-off reports of a rifle. Just today Blacktail had seen his doe fall bleeding when this same sound, only louder, sprang from a covert from which Bert Cranston had poached her—and he left the lick in one bound.

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 awakened by the first whisper of dawn in the wind, and he really had no chance at them.

For the first fifty yards the hunt was in his favor. He came up wind, and the brush made a perfect cover. But the doe unfortunately was standing a full twenty yards farther, in an open glade.



And the brush made a perfect cover. But the doe unfortunately was standing a full twenty yards farther, in an open glade. Under ordinary circumstances, Whisperfoot would not have made an attack.

But when scarcely ten feet remained to stalk, a sudden sound pricked through the darkness. It came from afar, but it was no less terrible. It was really two sounds, so close together that they sounded as one.

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hair stood still at his shoulders, as claws were bared; he was prepared to fight to the death. He didn't understand. He only knew the worst single terror of his life. It was not a doe that he had attacked in the darkness.

And as for Whisperfoot—the terror that choked his heart with blood began to wear out in a little while. The man lay so still in the thickets. Besides, there was a strange, wild smell in the air.

It was a roundabout trail home, but it had its advantages. It took him within two miles of Snowbird's lookout station, and at this hour of the morning he was particularly fortunate in finding her at a certain spring on the mountain side.

She was as natural as a fawn, and many times she had quite taken away his breath. And once she did it literally. He didn't think that so long as death spared him he would ever be able to forget that experience.

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 needles. As Lennox had wondered at long ago, he knew how by instinct; and instinctively he practiced this attainment as soon as he got out into the wild.

But it was rather hard to imagine that a man might be doing on this lonely hill. Of course it might be a deer hunter; but few were the wader sportsmen who had penetrated to this far land.

rather up the hill. His feet 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.

Before one hundred yards had been traversed, he could better understand the joy the cougar takes in his hunting. It was the same process—a cautious, silent advance in the trail of prey.

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.

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