

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

Chapter Twenty Seven

The wolf doesn't bite when he tries to touch its shoulder. He wants to see how badly it's hurt, so he moves his hand real slow. It growls a little, but then looks away like it doesn't want to see him touch it.

He doesn't want to touch the wolf either. Its shoulder is all bloody. Looks awful. He doesn't know what's wrong, but he sees bone.

When he backs away, the wolf goes back to licking its wound. But most of the blood is on the back side of its shoulder where it can't reach.

His dad would know what to do for the wolf.

His dad would know what to do about everything.

He's thirsty, and he imagines the wolf is. The only thing he can get water in is one of the dog bowls, and they all have doggy germs on them. He doesn't want to drink out of any of them, but maybe the wolf wouldn't mind.

He'd drink out of Champ's bowl. After all, he let Champ kiss him, and if he didn't get any germs from his kisses, he doesn't think he will from drinking out of his bowl.

Their spring is still frozen. His dad had been dipping water from the lake, but when he looks at the hole, the ice is thick enough he can't break it by dropping the bucket down on it. His dad uses the spud, but he doesn't know where it is. Probably in their cabin, burned.

What can he use? A limb, maybe, if he had one. He would need to cut one, but all of the axes were in their cabin.

Not the one he had with him setting rabbit snares. He left it stuck in a birch up on the ridge.

The wolves got his rabbits, but they won't be back for more than a week. His dad said they go all the way over to Shelikof Strait before they come back through here. So maybe he has a caught rabbit in a snare since this morning. He should look— and get the axe while he's at it. Then he could cut a stick to break the ice on the hole his dad kept open all winter.

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The mid-afternoon sun has softened the snow, sugared from the cold. Hiking the trail up to the ridge where his line of snares tangle in rabbit runs as many hangman nooses, he sinks into the frozen crystals, each step leaving a boot print like the step before. Last night's hoarfrost has fallen from the blades of grass sticking out from around black birch trucks the size of his leg— he sees the little piles of hoarfrost, and sees last night's wolf prints.

Besides himself, the wolf with the injured shoulder seems to be the only thing alive on this side of the lake. Usually, a cow moose stayed on the ridge— except when wolves were around. He doesn't know where she goes, but she disappears somewhere whenever the pack hunts the shore of the lake.

His dad knows where she goes; his dad knows everything.

His dad even knows how to catch fish under the ice with a net— and he remembers the net near the mouth of the Sam's Creek. He knows how to pull it, but he doesn't know for sure how to set it.

His dad told him that there are three things he always needs to know: how to keep warm; how to get food; and how to build a shelter.

He knows about getting food in the summer. Grayling come into the creeks— and there are berries to pick. And in the fall, caribou come through. They can be hunted. And there are always a few moose around, more moose towards Mother Goose Lake, or at least that's what his dad told hunters last fall who flew in from Anchorage.

It's this time of year when food isn't so easy to get. Moose are having calves and aren't around as much. The ice hasn't gone off the lake, but enough snow has melted that water stands on it, making it dangerous because of how heavy the water is. So he isn't supposed to go out on the ice if there is any overflow on it.

He finds the axe, but no rabbits. He resets six snares, pulls the rest, then watching the sun dip towards the far side of the lake, he feels fear blow against him like the wind does when the hurt wolf howls moments before he hears the helicopter.

As if frozen, he stands among mixed spruce and birch saplings on the ridge as the helicopter circles low over the still-smoldering embers of the cabin, its propwash swirling snow and ashes, raising a cloud of whiteness that hides all but the shadow of the machine. He wants to wave, but his arms won't move. He wants to run down into the open, but his legs seem not to belong to him. So he stands watching as the helicopter circles twice, swings out over the lake, then returns for one more loop before disappearing as quickly as it had come.

His dad didn't see him— couldn't see him where he stands.

Inside the helicopter, the pilot radios north: "Tell the inholder, the fellow with the cabin, that wolves got his kid. We looked for him, but all that's here is wolves and wolf tracks. Okay?"

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