

EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

Chapter Thirty Two **Becharof Lake**

He caught a rabbit, just one, and not a very big one, but it was big enough he gave half of it to the wolf that will now let him sit near her without looking away. He's sure the wolf is a her. Has to be. The wolf doesn't look like Champ did before his dad made Champ an *it*.

The mountains behind him and across the lake seem taller today than he has ever seen them. Ice on the lake has cracked. A little open water shows in the middle. He's certain the main part of the lake has opened. Below Severson, with all of the islands in the lake, the ice stays longer, last year a full month longer.

It's warm today, not cold like it was last night. The fire— well, it went out last night when he was asleep. He could have kept it going if he'd had more wood, but he really didn't know how much wood he would need. The fire took a lot more than he thought it would. The stove in the house never used that much. A couple of armloads would keep the fire going all night, but in the ashes, well, two armloads lasted until it was really dark. Then he couldn't see to get more so—

He wishes his dad were here. His dad would know what to do.

The snow is rotting; it's suffering termination disease— that's what his dad calls it when winter is over, almost. So when he walks he sinks down to the top of his toes.

The wolf wants to be friends. Well, maybe not. Maybe the wolf wants her friends, wants to run from here to Kanatak, over the pass and around Ruth Lake, then through the cottonwoods and along the shore, over the drifted snow and tussocks and mosquito bogs.

He should give the wolf a name. Then she would be his.

What kind of a name fits her? She's really big, too big for a doggie name.

He doesn't know any names that aren't doggie names.

He needs to move up on the ridge and get in the trees, not that the trees are very tall. They are really alder bushes and black birches and a few short spruce trees growing out of the moss and rocks. Once in a while, there is a cottonwood. But even they are small. His dad cut down the good trees to make their cabin.

He'll call her, *Wolf*. She'll recognize that name. And that can be her name forever.

"What do you think of *Wolf* for a name? Think you'll like that name. But now you have to come when I call you. When I call, *Here Wolf, Wolf*, you'll have to come like Champ did."

The wolf looks at him and seems to understand what he says.

"But you don't have to come until you're not hurt anymore."

He looks at what's left of his half of the rabbit, looks at *Wolf*, then throws her more of his half that he hasn't eaten. He's really not hungry. That's not true. He's really hungry, but not for rabbit. Pancakes, maybe. Even oatmeal. Even white beans. But not rabbit.

He knows what he would like: stew, with lots of potatoes, more potatoes than turnips.

But he doesn't know how to make stew— and he doesn't know where the potatoes are. They were in the root cellar under the floor of the cabin.

The ashes are still a little bit hot. Maybe when they're cold he can look and see if he can find the root cellar. If he can, well, maybe the potatoes are still okay to eat.

He looks across the lake, sees nothing but ice and water, Mt. Peulik and blue sky that seems to go forever. It is warm, really warm. The snow is going fast. The lake will flood, forcing muskrats out of their pushups. His dad showed him how to throw a rabbit stick. Maybe he can get a muskrat with his rabbit stick— if he can remember where he put it— when they're swimming around because of the high water.

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Wolf caught the muskrat. Actually, she caught three of them, ate two without sharing, but left the third one for him. He couldn't hit them when he threw the stick. They would see it coming and duck. The closest he came was when he hit one in the tail.

Wolf can't walk very good, but she didn't have to really run or walk. She just waited behind a tussock and when a muskrat came swimming by, she snapped at it— she's faster than Champ was. He hardly saw her move, she's that quick.

So after she got the first one, he sort of chased them to where she waited.

She ate hers with the fur still on, but he skinned his. Now he doesn't know what to do with the pelt. His dad would stretch it, dry it, sell it. But the stretcher boards were in the cabin, and they all burned up. So he stands there with it in one hand while he tries to eat the raw meat the way Wolf did.

The meat seems to get bigger the more he chews it, so he sort of just swallows it without chewing. But then, his stomach hurts.

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He'd spent the past two nights curled up beside Wolf, who has little tiny, real tiny bugs in her fur. He picked some of those little bugs off her, squashing them with his fingers. The reddish colored ones squashed easy, but the others didn't want to die. He had to cut them in two with his fingernail to get them to quit moving.

She lets him touch her whenever he wants, not that he wants to very often. Only when they are curled up together.

He's not hungry anymore. They caught a lot of muskrats, more than his dad ever got. He would see one swimming, and he would start throwing sticks behind it until it swam near Wolf, who never misses when she snaps at one. After a while, killing them seemed like a game they were playing. They killed lots more than they can eat, so he skinned and gutted the ones they couldn't eat and he split them the way his mom split salmon. Then he put them on a rack of limbs he made so they would dry. Only he and Wolf had to keep the birds away.

One magpie teased Wolf too many times: she caught the magpie, and the other magpies came to help so she caught another one. Then the birds stayed away, except for a lone raven, the one Santa Claus followed here. That raven just waited until we weren't looking, then it took a whole muskrat and flew off with it.

I'm gonna be all right. The raven said I'd be, said that was his way of saying thanks for the meat.

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