

# EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

By Homer Kizer

---

## Chapter Fifteen

The burning logs of his home cast sparks into the darkness.

Eddie watches the sparks warm the darkness, push against it, wrestle with it like he does his dad, but he isn't thinking about wrestling right now as he shivers and listens to wolves howl across the lake. From the ridge behind him, other wolves answer with long, mournful plaints, holding the notes that tell the truth about what happened, about how the fire started, about where Mom is, Dad.

Howls ride the cold wind that pushes across the lake and through the willows where the dogs lie, each shot on its chain. Long howls ride like spirits, their muzzles uplifted, feet flying, gnawing the darkness, the fear. They swirl over the ice, white packs snapping at the small moon. They flare as jagged light bands arch high overhead, sawing the darkness half in two before bending west and falling behind mountains where more howls streak like wind through mountain passes and over low hills, onto the lake and into the willows. Eddie hugs Champ, his husky, stiffening and cold, as he cries and shivers. Champ was special. Champ was his. Champ wasn't part of his dad's team. And tears form ice crystals in the husky's thick ruff.

Howls pierce shadows, lunge against the little dome of light cast by the crackling embers, then circle around to growl as they seem to come from everywhere. Hungry wolves, smelling blood, closing in to eat the dogs, to eat Champ, to eat him.

Less afraid of him than of the dying fire, the wolves work closer, their footsteps silent and soft. A pale green band of light stretches across the sky. It divides and swells, encircling the darkness, engulfing it, then spitting it back out as if the darkness tasted foul, tasted of death. Another pale band stretches, then suddenly shrinks back to become a staggering arrow, barbed and lethal, shot through the bear but missing the wolves that now snap at each other as they circle, hungry.

He doesn't know where Mom is, or why she would leave without him, why anyone would shoot the dogs, would shoot Champ. He saw the helicopter. He was setting snares on the ridge above the cabin. He would've been back if they'd waited a few more minutes. But they took off without him.

Did they leave because of the fire? because Mom was hurt? If Dad were hurt, Mom would've stayed. So maybe it was because of the fire. But why shoot Champ?

Dad told him if he ever got lost, he was to sit down and wait until somebody found him, but he isn't lost. Dad knows where he is, Mom does.

Dad wouldn't have left without him if Mom wasn't awfully hurt.

But he would have fed the dogs. There's meat in the cache, a little. Enough to have fed the team for another day or two. And if they would've waited—

He was hurrying, he really was. They could've waited. They didn't have to leave without him. He tried to get back, would've been back in another few minutes.

And for a long time, he sits without thinking, sits shivering, whimpering, listening to the wolves howl as they edge close to the cooling embers. He has never before spent a night outside without a sleepingbag. He has never not eaten supper, never been away from his parents. He was born in the cabin, has lived here all of his life. He has been homeschooled through, now, third grade even though he is only seven— and as with many Bush children, his maturity is away beyond his age and size in some areas, behind in others, with his educational mean two full years ahead of his public schooled peers.

But he doesn't face a test of knowledge.

He rocks back and forth as he hugs Champ, now cold and stiff. Wolves scamper through the dogyard, circle the embers and the cache. More wolves drift, like driven snow, in from across the lake. They growl as they devour everything except chains and collars, and at the edge of the firelight, their eyes glow like embers that won't die.

He won't let them get Champ: he has his .22 and a box of shells, and when one wolf darts in to grab Champ's leg, he shoots like Dad does, one handed.

The wolf wasn't a foot from the muzzle of his .22 when he fired. The bullet struck the wolf in its front shoulder, and it jumped up. Three other wolves pounced on it, and ripped it apart at the edge of the light. He tries to shoot all three, but thinks he only hit one of them three times, he couldn't tell.

The cabin burns long into the night, the mound of coals growing smaller with each passing hour. But after he shoots two more wolves at point blank range, the mingled packs separate and slink off to hunt their own territories, with the pack from the ridge behind the cabin site leaving to run his line of rabbit snares. He hears when they come upon a snared rabbit, the quick work they make of it, then their moving farther down the ridge.

He huddles yet closer to the dying embers as northern lights continue to flare, arch high, then bend west to fade into a single band of cold light that wavers like a mended flyline cast from pole to pole. But he doesn't look up at them. Rather, he stares into the darkening fire, seeing always the helicopter lift off and streak north, the direction they took Raven after Dad radioed for help. The coals, still warm below their surface, are all the fire he has.

When he spent nights on the trail with his dad, they always built a fire, even in the summer. Dad carries matches, but he doesn't have any... he needs to keep this fire going. And just before daylight, for the first time, he stirs the coals as he pushes unburned log ends onto the remaining embers.

\* \* \*