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In the Frozen North

A dark forest stood on both sides of the frozen waterway. Silence covered the empty, lifeless land. It was the Wild—the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild.

Down the frozen waterway came a string of dogs, pulling a sled. One man walked behind the sled, the other in front of it.

The last pale light of day was fading when they heard the first howl. Then a second howl rose, piercing the silence like a needle. A third howl followed.

“Wolves!” Bill cried. “They’re after us.”

“Meat is scarce,” said Henry. “I ain’t seen a sign of a rabbit in days.”

When darkness came, the men stopped at the edge of the waterway and made camp.

Bill fed the dogs. Then he asked Henry, “How many dogs we got now?”

“Six,” Henry replied.

“Well,” said Bill, “I took six fish out of the bag. I gave one to each dog—but I was one fish short.”

“You counted wrong,” Henry said.

“Nah. I saw the other one run off across the snow,” Bill said. His voice was cool and sure. “I saw seven.”

“Then you’re thinking it was one of them wolves?” said Henry.

Bill nodded.

Howl after howl turned the silence into a madhouse. The sounds came from every side of the camp. The dogs were frightened. They huddled so close to the fire their thick fur scorched in the heat.

A wall of darkness pressed about the men on every side. A circle of glittering eyes had drawn about their camp.

“How many cartridges did you say you had left?” Henry asked.

“Three,” Bill said. “And I wish it was three hundred. Then I’d show ’em what for!” He

shook his fist angrily. “I wish this trip was over and done with. I wish you and me was a-sittin’ by the fire in Fort McGurry.”

Henry grunted and crawled into bed. As he dozed off he was awakened by Bill’s voice.

“Say, Henry,” Bill said. “That one that came in and stole a fish—why didn’t the dogs fight it? That’s what’s botherin’ me.”

“You’re botherin’ too much,” Henry said.

Morning came. In the darkness just before dawn, Henry went about preparing breakfast. Bill got the sled ready.

“Say, Henry,” Bill suddenly asked, “how many dogs did you say we had?”

“Six,” said Henry.

“No, five—one’s gone,” Bill said.

Henry swore. He left the cooking to go out and count the dogs.

“You’re right,” Henry said. “Fatty’s gone.”

“He always was a fool dog,” Bill said.

“But even a fool dog like Fatty wouldn’t go off and commit suicide that way,” Henry said. “I bet none of the others would do it.”

After breakfast, the men turned their backs on the cheery fire and went out into the darkness.

At once the howls began, the wolves calling out to one another. Daylight came at nine o'clock. It lasted until three o'clock, when the Arctic night fell on the land. The men made camp.

Henry was bent over a bubbling pot of beans when he heard Bill yell. Then he heard a sharp cry of pain from among the dogs. He looked up just in time to see a dim form disappearing across the snow. Bill was standing by the dogs, holding part of a salmon.

"That dern wolf got half of it!" Bill said. "But I got a whack at it just the same. Did you hear it yelp?"

"What'd it look like?" Henry asked.

"Couldn't see," Bill said. "But it's tame, whatever it is. It's comin' here at feeding time to get its piece of fish like the other dogs."

That night, when supper was finished, the circle of gleaming eyes drew in even closer than before.

Bill was nervous. "I wish we was pulling into Fort McGurry right now," he said.

"Shut up your wishing," Henry burst out angrily.

Early the next morning, Henry was aroused