

"Yaller"

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And choose he assuredly did. Don read in the little dog's restlessness the proximity of the fox, but he was sound asleep when Yaller got up and left the hut, casting sidelong glances in the direction of the bunk.

On the same flat boulder sat the little she fox, waiting as though by appointment, and ere long the two were running side by side, the vixen leading the way. Slowly she edged round in the direction of the flock of sheep which, since his puppyhood, Yaller had guarded. The bleating of a lamb brought her to a dead stop with ears acock. She looked at Yaller, licking her chops, then gazed off into the grey loneliness towards the sheep, taking three steps in that direction.

Words could not have made more clear what her suggestions were, and Yaller, understanding, dropped his tail and looked wistfully towards home. "I am ready to follow you anywhere," he might have said. "But I cannot do that."

The vixen came up to him, jostled him with her shoulder, and licked his muzzle, then again she led him on towards the flock. An old ewe rose suddenly from the heather, her two white lambs vastly conspicuous under her, and barred the way with lowered horns and stamping forefeet. Yaller she knew, yet even him she could not trust, and as for this russet and golden freebooter from the heights—she knew well enough why the fox was there.

The vixen approached a foot or two, whereupon the old ewe charged. Vic neatly sidestepped, and looked to Yaller to back her up, but the little sheep dog sat on his haunches taking no hand in the unlawful business. Only in his eyes was a new lustre—the lustre which shone from the eyes of the vixen, who was out to hunt and to kill, for in such is the joy of life.

Vic circled round, while the old ewe, her eyes shining with fear and solicitude for her little ones, pivoted between them and the vixen, so that every time Vic approached she found herself confronted with lowered horns and stamping hoofs. Round and round she went, faster, faster, feinting, parrying, till the old ewe became flustered and giddy, while Yaller's eyes shone brighter as he watched. At length he could no longer refuse the invitation to lend a hand, and rising he bounded in and threw the ewe by a single, harmless twist.

The vixen had darted in and clutched a lamb fairly before the deed was done, and when Yaller turned she was carrying it off triumphantly, looking to him to follow.

This was not the only kill that night, for ere dawn came Yaller and the vixen had scattered the sheep to the four winds, while every here and there a dead lamb lay. Yaller himself did none of the killing: his part was to throw the charging ewe, cut her off and isolate her till finally she became bewildered and stuck in a bog, or galloped away in wild stampede. But, Oh, the wild joy of it! Yaller tasted that night, as he had never tasted before, the true delight of living, for this was the wild life of his dreams, unfettered, unrestrained—to-night the wild wolf within him found its being. Often he had started in his sleep from such a chase as this, to stare wild eyed at the fire or look into his master's face, but never had those dreams taken any definite shape—always they were dim, ethereal visions of breathless pursuits and bloody deeds done in the half light, harking back to his wild ancestors who lived as he was living now, fettered by no laws, boundlessly free, with all God's earth at their feet.

With the first coming of dawn Yaller licked the crimson from his coat and rolled in the sand to hide all traces, finally to sneak back to the hut. He entered with deadly stealth and curled himself up at his master's feet, there to lie awake, looking into the face of the sleeping Don. And as he looked the wild gleam came back into his eyes, the gleam of savage blood lust, cold, cruel, and he stirred restlessly with a new consciousness upon him. It took the form of a strangeness in those old familiar things about him, the little rusty stove, the in-

congruous oddments that strewed the walls, even the man himself. It was as though they were all new to him, as though he had stepped hither from another world, a world to which he really belonged, and that this was not his place. He had crept back to his old familiar corner, yet here, this dawn, he knew himself a usurper, and the desire came upon him to creep away and hide—to hide from the man.

Don awoke, groped for his dog, touched him and slept on. Then to Yaller there came the knowledge of his guilt—the knowledge that he had done an irreparable thing, for which no quarter could be given. He knew nothing of sheep dog lore, the lore that governed him and his kind, how he had sprung from spotless ancestry, at least on his mother's side. There is a book, in which the name of each dog is written, and here and there in that book a list comes to a dead end

at a name against which is scrawled a big black cross. That cross means sheep killer, the blackest of all crimes in the sheepdog world, for there is no curing it, and when once a dog has fallen, be he the cleverest and most human in the world, he is irredeemably lost. There is but one penalty, dealt without court or question, and that dog's name remains henceforth on the list of the unspeakable, and the shadow of his name falls even upon his children.

How much of this Yaller knew we cannot say, but one thing is certain, that from that hour on he knew himself beyond reprieve.

Don rose, wolfed his breakfast of porridge and brook trout, then went out with Yaller skulking at his heels. He looked across the moor and saw the destruction far and wide, uttered a cry of bewilderment and horror, then turned to his dog.

"Did ye no hear, mon!" he cried. "Look at 'em! Look at 'em! O Yaller! Yaller!"

Yaller crouched down in the heather, shame and guilt in every line of him, and when his master spoke again he covered away trembling. But his master's voice was kind, and Yaller knew himself as yet undiscovered.

In truth the possibility of Yaller's guilt never occurred to Don. He knew the ways of mountain foxes, how swift and silent they are, and now, when he came to examine the ground, he found Yaller's prints everywhere, judged that the dog had done his best, probably driven the foxes away in the end, and he only cursed himself for sleeping so heavily.

Don was greatly troubled in his mind, for the grievous destruction was a black slur on his abilities as a shepherd. It

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