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"SALADA"

BAREE, SON OF KAZAN

by James Oliver Curwood

A LOVE EPIC OF THE FAR NORTH

SYNOPSIS.

Baree, the young wolf-dog, wandering in the wilderness, came upon a colony of beavers. He tried to make friends with Umiak, their leader, but the little animals ran away from him, leaving Baree lonely and unhappy. He was attracted by the moaning of the moose and the yap-yap-yap of a fox but thrilled most at the wolf cry. It was the call of his own, summoning him to the chase, the hunt, the wild cry of torn flesh and running blood.

CHAPTER VII.—(Cont'd.)

For a quarter of an hour Baree watched him while he knocked fish out of the pool. When at last he stopped, there were twenty or thirty fish among the stones, some of them dead and others still flopping. From where he lay flattened out between two rocks, Baree could hear the crunching of flesh and bones as the bear devoured his dinner. It sounded good, and the fresh smell of fish filled him with a craving that had never been roused by crawfish or even partridge.

Twenty seconds after the last of Wakayoo had disappeared in a turn of the creek, Baree was under the broken balsam. He dragged out a fish that was still alive. He ate the whole of it, and it was delicious.

Baree now found that Wakayoo had solved the food problem for him, and this day he did not return to the beaver pond, nor the next. The big bear was incessantly fishing up and down the creek, and day after day Baree continued his feasts.

For a week he continued to be exceedingly pleasant. And then came the break—the change that was destined to mean as much for Baree as that other day, long ago, had meant for Kazan, his father, when he killed the man-brute in the edge of the wilderness.

This change came on the day when, in trotting around a great rock near the waterfall, Baree found himself face to face with Pierrot the hunter and Nepeese, the star-eyed girl who had shot him in the edge of the clearing.

It was Nepeese whom he saw first. If it had been Pierrot he would have turned back quickly. But again the blood of his father was rousing the strange tremblings within him. Was it like this that the first woman had looked to Kazan?

Baree stood still. Nepeese was not more than twenty feet from him. She sat on a rock, full in the early morning sun, and was brushing out her wonderful hair. Her lips parted. Her eyes shone in an instant like stars. One hand remained poised, weighted with the jet tresses. She recognized him. She saw the white star on his breast and under her breath she whispered "Uchi moosis!"—"The dog-pup!" It was the wild dog she had shot—and thought had died!

The evening before Pierrot and Ne-

peese had built a shelter of balsams behind the big rock, and on a small white plot of sand Pierrot was kneeling over a fire preparing breakfast while the Willow arranged her hair. He raised his head to speak to her, and saw Baree. In that instant the spell was broken. Baree saw the man-beast as he rose to his feet. Like a shot he was gone.

Scarcely swifter was he than Nepeese.

"Depechez vous, mon pere!" she cried. "It is the dog-pup! Quick!"

In the floating cloud of her hair she sped after Baree like the wind. Pierrot followed, and in going he caught up his rifle. It was difficult for him to catch up with the Willow. She was like a wild spirit, her little moccasined feet scarcely touching the sand as she ran up the long bar. It was wonderful to see the lithe swiftness of her, and that wonderful hair streaming out in the sun. Even now, in this moment's excitement, it made Pierrot think of McTaggart, the Hudson's Bay Company's factor over at Lac Bain, and what he had said yesterday. Half the night Pierrot had lain awake, gritting his teeth at the thought of it; and this morning, before Baree ran upon them, he had looked at Nepeese more closely than ever before in his life. She was beautiful. She was lovelier even than Wyola, her princess mother, who was dead.

Floating back to him there came an excited cry.

"Hurry, Nootawe! He has turned into the blind canyon. He cannot escape us now."

She was panting when he came up to her. The French blood in her cheeks glowed a vivid crimson in her cheeks and lips. Her white teeth gleamed like milk.

"In there!" And she pointed.

They went in.

Ahead of them Baree was running for his life. He sensed instinctively the fact that these wonderful two-legged beings he had looked upon were all-powerful. And they were after him! He could hear them. Nepeese was following almost as swiftly as he could run. Suddenly he turned into a cleft between two great rocks. Twenty feet in, his way was barred and he ran back. When he darted out, straight up Nepeese was waiting, not a dozen yards behind him, and he saw Pierrot almost at her side. The Willow gave a cry.

"Mama—mama—there he is!"

She caught her breath, and darted into a cove of young balsams where Baree had disappeared. Like a great entangling web her loose hair impeded her in the brush, and with an encouraging cry to Pierrot she stopped to gather it over her shoulder as he ran past her. She lost only a moment or two, and was after him. Fifty yards ahead of her Pierrot gave a warning shout. Baree had turned. Almost in the same breath he was tearing over his back-trail, directly toward the Willow. He did not see her in time to stop or swerve aside, and Nepeese flung herself down in his path. For in instant or two they were together. Baree felt the smother of her hair, and the clutch of her hands. Then he squirmed away and darted again toward the blind end of the canyon.

Nepeese sprang to her feet. She was panting—and laughing. Pierrot came back wildly, and the Willow pointed beyond him.

"I had him—and he didn't bite me, Nootawe!"

That was the wonder of it. She had been reckless—and Baree had not bitten her! It was then, with her eyes shining at Pierrot, and the smile fading slowly from her lips, that she spoke softly the word "Baree," which in her tongue meant "the wild dog"—a little brother of the wolf.

In and out among the rocks Baree sought swiftly for a way of escape. In a moment more he had come to the "box," or cup of the canyon. This was a break in the wall, fifty or sixty feet wide, which opened into a natural prison about an acre in extent. It was a beautiful spot. On all sides but that leading into the coulee it was shut in by walls of rock. At the far end a waterfall broke down in a series of rippling cascades. The grass was thick underfoot, and strewn with flowers. In this trap Pierrot had got more than one fine haunch of venison.

Adapted to the sea, even if it would in the face of his rifle. He called to Nepeese as he saw Baree entering it, and together they climbed the slope.

Baree had almost reached the edge of the little prison-meadow when suddenly he stopped himself so quickly that he fell back on his haunches, and his heart jumped up into his throat.

Full in his path stood Wakayoo, the huge black bear!

Baree darted to one side and ran for the open meadow. Wakayoo did not stir as Baree sped past him—no more than if he had been a bird or rabbit. Then came another breath of air, heavy with the scent of man. This, at last, put life into him. He turned and began lumbering after Baree into the meadow trap. Baree, looking back, saw him coming—and thought it was pursuit. Nepeese and Pierrot came over the slope, and at the same instant they saw both Wakayoo and Baree.

Where they entered into the grassy dip under the rock walls, Baree turned sharply to the right. Here was a great boulder, one end of it tilted up off the earth. It looked like a splendid hiding place, and Baree crawled under it.

But Wakayoo kept straight ahead into the meadow.

From where he lay Baree could see what happened. Scarcely had he crawled under the rock when Nepeese and Pierrot appeared through the break in the dip, and stopped. The fact that they stopped thrilled Baree. They were afraid of Wakayoo! The big bear was two-thirds of the way across the meadow. The sun fell on him, so that his coat shone like black satin. Pierrot stared at him for a moment. Pierrot did not kill for the love of killing. Necessity made him a conservationist. But he saw that in spite of the lateness of the season, Wakayoo's coat was splendid—and he raised his rifle.

Baree saw this action. He saw, a moment later, something spit from the end of the gun, and then he heard that deafening crash that had come with his own heart, when the Willow's bullet had burned through his flesh. He turned his eyes swiftly to Wakayoo. The big bear had stumbled; he was on his knees; and then he struggled up and lumbered on.

The roar of the rifle came again, and a second time Wakayoo went down. Pierrot could not miss at that distance. Wakayoo made a splendid mark. It was slaughter; yet for Pierrot and Nepeese it was business—the business of life.

Baree was shivering. It was more from excitement than fear, for he had lost his own fear in the tragedy of these moments. A low whine rose in his throat as he looked at Wakayoo, who had risen again and faced his enemies—his jaws gaping, his head swinging slowly, his legs weakening under him as the blood poured through his torn lungs. Baree whined—because Wakayoo had fished for him, and because he knew it was death that Wakayoo was facing now. There was a third shot—the last. Wakayoo sank down in his tracks. His big head dropped between his legs, and a racking cough, or two came to Baree. And then there was silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

As Nepeese gazed about the rock-walled end of the canyon, the prison of the dead, driven Wakayoo and Baree, Pierrot looked up from his skinning of the big black bear, and he muttered something that no one but himself could have heard.

"Non, it is not possible," he had said a moment before, but to Nepeese it was possible—the thought that was in her mind. It was a wonderful thought. It thrilled her to the depth of her wild, beautiful soul. It sent a glow into her eyes and a deeper glow of excitement into her cheeks and lips.

As she quested the ragged edges of the little meadow for signs of the dog-pup, her thoughts flashed back swiftly. Two years ago they had buried her mother under the tall spruce near their cabin. That day, Pierrot's sun had set for all time, and her own life was filled with a vast loneliness. There had been three at the graveside that afternoon as the sun went down—Pierrot, herself, and a dog, a great, powerful husky with a white star on his breast and a white-tipped ear. He had been her dead mother's pet from puppyhood—her bodyguard, with her always, even with his head resting on the side of her bed as she died. And that night, the night of the day they buried her, the dog had disappeared. He had gone as quietly and as completely as her spirit. No one ever saw him after that. It was strange—and Pierrot thought it was a miracle. Deep in his heart he was filled with the wonderful conviction that the dog had gone with his beloved Wyola into heaven.

But Nepeese had spent three winters at the Mission's school at Nelson House. She had learned a great deal about white people and the real God, and she knew that Pierrot's

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thought was impossible. She believed that her mother's husky was either dead or had joined the wolves. Probably he had gone to the wolves. So it was not possible that this youngster she and her father had pursued was of the flesh and blood of her mother's pet? It was more than possible.

Baree had not moved an inch from under his rock. He lay like a thing stunned, his eyes fixed steadily on the scene of the tragedy out in the meadow.

Baree wanted to approach. It was like an invisible string tugging at his very heart. It was Kazan, and not Gray Wolf, calling to him back through the centuries, a "call" that was as old as the Egyptian pyramids and perhaps ten thousand years older. But against that desire Gray Wolf was pulling from out the black ages of the forests. The wolf held him quiet and motionless. Nepeese was looking about her. She was smiling.

For a moment her face was turned toward him, and he saw the white shine of her teeth, and her beautiful eyes seemed glowing straight at him. And then, suddenly, she dropped on her knees and peered under the rock. Their eyes met. For at least half a minute there was not a sound. Nepeese did not move, and her breath came so softly that Baree could not hear it.

Then she said, almost in a whisper:

"Baree! Baree! Upi Baree!"

It was the first time Baree had heard his name, and there was something so soft and assuring in the sound of it that in spite of himself the dog in him responded to it in a whimper that just touched the Willow's ear. Slowly she stretched in an arm. It was bare and round and soft. He might have darted forward the length of his body and buried his fangs in it easily. But something held him back. He knew that it was



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not an enemy; he knew that the dark eyes shining at him so wonderfully were not filled with the desire to harm—and the voice that came to him softly was like a strange and thrilling music.

"Baree! Baree! Upi Baree!"

Over and over again the Willow called to him like that while on her face she tried to draw herself a few inches farther under the rock. She could not reach him. There was still a foot between her hand and Baree, and she could not wedge herself in an inch more. And then she saw where on the other side of the rock there was a hollow, shut in by a stone. If she had removed the stone, and come in that way—

She drew herself out and stood once more in the sunshine. Her heart thrilled. Pierrot was busy over his bear—and she would not call him. She made an effort to move the stone which closed in the hollow under the big boulder, but it was wedged in tightly. Then she began digging with a stick.

Five minutes—and Nepeese could move the stone. She tugged at it. Inch by inch she dragged it out until at last it lay at her feet and the opening was ready for her body. She

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