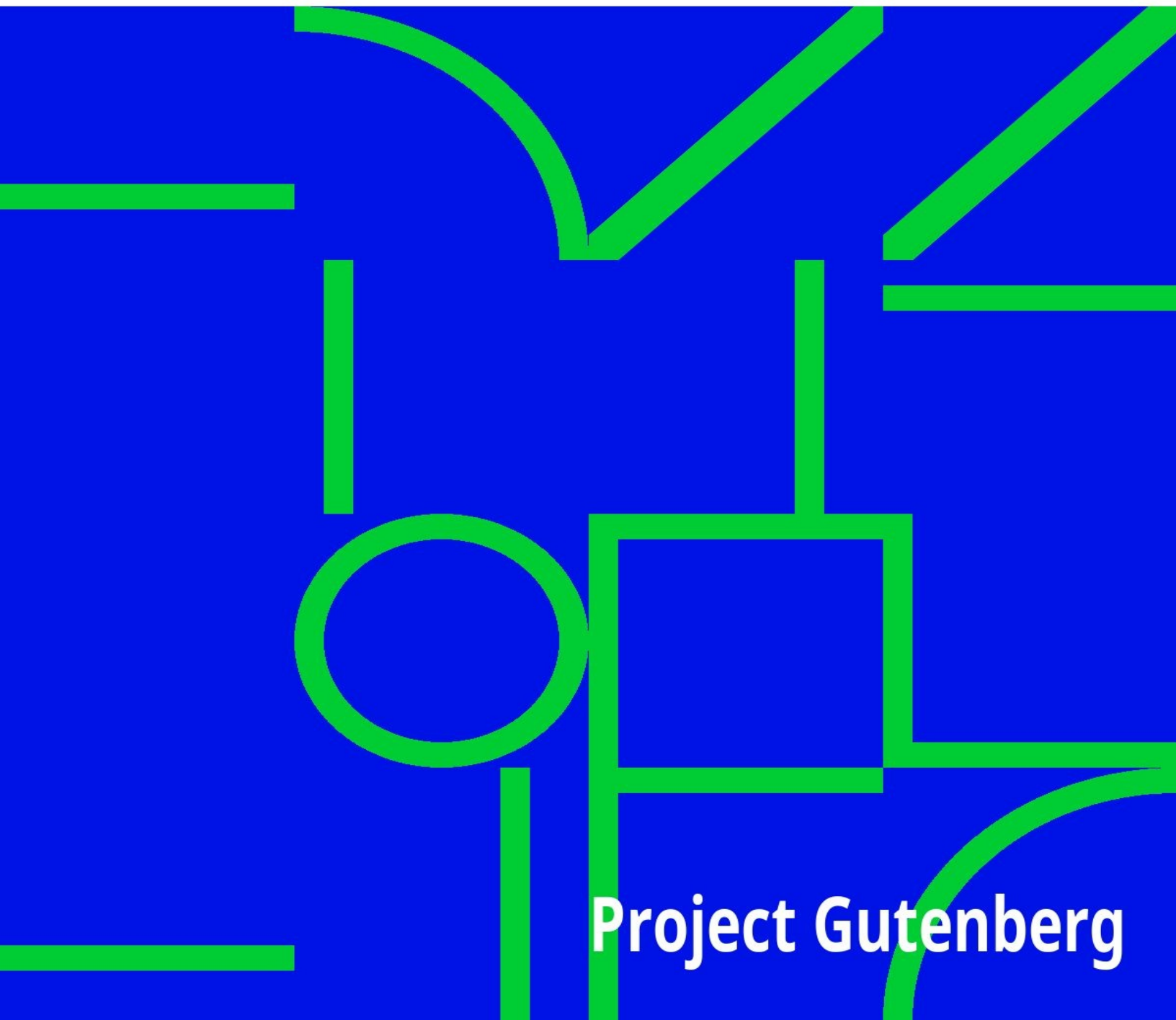


Finn The Wolfhound

A. J. Dawson

An abstract geometric pattern consisting of various green lines of different thicknesses on a solid blue background. The lines form a complex, non-representational shape that includes a circle, several rectangles, and various straight and curved segments.

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FINN THE WOLFHOUND ***

Produced by Clare Graham, in memory of my dear father
George Edgar Graham who first introduced me to Finn and
his son Jan.

front endpaper

man and wolfhound attacked by dingoes

The man had his back to the withered iron-bark now.

FINN THE WOLFHOUND

wolfhound walking with puppies

By A. J. DAWSON

AUTHOR OF "THE MESSAGE," "THE GENTEEL A.B.," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY R. H. BUXTON

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TO "THE MISTRESS OF THE KENNELS" AND TO THE MEMORY OF
TYNAGH MOTHER OF WOLFHOUND HEROES ITS WRITER
DEDICATES THIS HISTORY

Witchampton, 1908

puppies tugging towel

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APPEARED

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CHAPTER I

THE MOTHER OF HEROES

For a man whose thirtieth year was still not far behind him, the man's face was over careworn. It suggested that he felt life's difficulties more keenly than a man should at that age. But it may have been that this was a necessary part of the keenness with which the whole of life appealed to him; its good things, as well as its worries.

He rose from his writing-table and straightened his back with a long sigh, clenching both hands tightly, and stretching both arms over his shoulders, as he moved across the little room to its window. The window gave him an extensive view of dully gleaming roofs and chimney-pots, seen through driving sleet, towards the end of a raw forenoon in February. The roofs he saw were those of one of London's cheap suburbs; first, a block of "mansions" similar to those in which his own flat was situated; then a rather superior block, where the rents were much cheaper because they were called "dwellings"; and beyond that, the huddled small houses of a quarter with which no builder had interfered since early Victorian days.

wolfhound head

The man turned away from the dripping window, and looked round this den in which he worked. Its walls were mostly covered by book-shelves, but in the gaps between the shelves there were pictures; a rather odd mixture of pictures, of men and women and dogs. The men and women were mostly people who had written books, and the dogs were without exception Irish Wolfhounds; those fine animals which combine in themselves the fleetness of the greyhound, the strength of the

boarhound, and the picturesque, wiry shaggyness of the deerhound; those animals whose history goes back to the beginning of the Christian era; through all the storied ages in which they were the friends and companions of kings and princes, great chieftains and mighty hunters.

For several minutes the man paused before a picture, underneath which was written: "The Mistress of the Kennels." This picture showed a girl with wind-blown hair, happy face, and laughing eyes, standing, with a small puppy in her arms, in the midst of a wide kennel enclosure on the sloping rise of an upland meadow. In the background one saw a comfortable-looking house, half hidden by two huge walnut trees, and flanked by a row of aged elms. When the man had looked his fill at this picture, and at other pictures of various Irish Wolfhounds, each marked with the name and age of the hound depicted, he sighed, and went to the window again. While he stood there, looking out through the February sleet, the door of the den opened, and the Mistress of the Kennels came in, wearing a big, loose overall, or pinafore, which covered her dress completely. Her face had not quite the colour which the picture made one feel it must have had when she stood in that wide, windy, kennel enclosure; but it was still a sunny face; the eyes were still laughing eyes; a loving, lovable face, one felt, even though London had robbed it of some of its open-air freshness. She walked up to the man's side, and, seeing the expression on his face as he gazed out over the wet roofs, she said--

"Yes, it is, rather--isn't it?--after Croft."

"Oh, don't talk of Croft, child, or you'll bring my spring madness upon me before its time. I have had hints of it this morning, as it is. It seems almost incredible that we have only been two years and four months away from Croft, and the old open life. I was looking at the picture of the Mistress of the Kennels just now. Do you remember that morning? Tara's first litter hadn't long been weaned. My goodness, the air was sweet in that meadow! That was the morning poor old crippled Eileen ran the rabbit down, you remember."

"Yes, and it was old Tara's third day out, after that awful illness. Well, well, it's a blessed thing to know that the old dear is happy, and has such

a lovely home down in Devonshire, isn't it?"

"Yes, oh yes; I know it might have been worse, and I'm a brute to be discontented, but--two and a half years! Why, it seems more like twenty, since we lived in a place where you could lean out of the window and drink the air; where I could go outside in my pyjamas before tubbing in the morning, and see the dogs, and set the rabbits flying in the orchard. Two years and four months. Do you know, if we give spring madness half a chance this year, it strikes me it will lead us out of this huddled, pent-in town, out to the open again. I almost think we could manage it now. I hardly seem to have lifted my nose from that table since last summer; but it's true the bank book shows small results as yet."

"And four years was to be the minimum, wasn't it? We thought of five, at first."

"Yes, yes; I know. My idea was that we would not go back till it seemed sure we should be able really to stay; no more returns to town with our tails between our legs. But, all the same, when I look out of that window--if we *really* lived cottage style, you know."

"But should we? Cottages don't have kennels, you know; not Wolfhound kennels, anyhow."

"I know. Oh, of course, it would be quite unjustifiable, quite mad; but--I thought I felt signs of spring madness when I looked out of that window this morning."

"Oh, well! Now do you know what I came in for? I came to tell you that this is the last day of the Dog Show at the Agricultural Hall. You remember that I have to go over to Mrs. Kenneth's this afternoon, and I think it would be a good plan for you to take an afternoon off and go to the Show. If you don't, it will be the third year you have missed it. I really think you ought to go. It will do you good."

"H'm! I should hardly have thought a Dog Show was a good thing for spring madness and the change fever; rather dangerous, I should have thought," said the man, with a queer little twisted smile.

"Oh, yes; I think it is all right; quite bracing; a sort of trial of strength; and quite safe, because we know that madness in that direction is simply and altogether impossible. You have been working too hard; and besides, it will do you good to meet the people. You will see a lot of the youngsters we reared; there are three champions among them now. Do go!"

A little more than an hour later he was on his way to the Dog Show, at which, in other days, he had been one of the principal exhibitors. A bout of ill-health, combined with consequent diminution of earnings, and a characteristic habit of doing things on a more generous scale than his income justified, had led to a break-up of his country home, with its big kennels and stabling, and a descent upon London in pursuit of economical living and increased earnings. Parting with the kennels and their inhabitants had been the severest wrench of all; and it is probable that, even in the mean little town flat, room would have been found for Tara, the well-loved mother of Irish Wolfhound heroes, but for the special circumstance that an excellent home had been offered for her in Devonshire. The Devonshire lady to whom Tara had, after long deliberations, been sold by the Master, had been extremely keen upon purchasing her, and, in addition to offering a splendid home, had faithfully promised that in no circumstances whatever would she think of parting with Tara unless to the Master himself. Here then was an opportunity which the man had felt that he could not afford to miss.

He had been very much concerned about other matters and other troubles at the time, but when the actual morning of Tara's departure had arrived, he had begun to feel very bad about it. The household gathered round to bid good-bye to the beautiful hound, and her Master himself took her to the station. When Tara was in the guard's van she looked out through a barred window at her friend on the station platform, and he said afterwards that the situation exhausted every ounce of self-control he possessed. He had an overpowering impulse, even when the train was moving, to jump aboard and release old Tara.

"I would sooner face the Bankruptcy Court than have her mournful old eyes turned upon me again with just that wonderingly reproachful look," he said.

But glowing reports were received of Tara's happiness in her new home, with its extensive grounds and generous management; and, though Tara was never forgotten--one does not forget such a mother of heroes, when one has bred her and nursed her through mortal illness--her Master had ceased to grieve about her or to feel self-reproachful about having parted with her.

Arrived in the great show building, he wandered up and down between the benches, pausing now and again to speak to an old acquaintance, human or canine, as the case might be. But this was the last day of the show, and the majority of the exhibitors were away. The place had a half-dismantled air about it. The Show was virtually over. Presently the Master found himself in a kind of outbuilding, where an auction sale of dogs was being held. There he sat down on a chair at the edge of the ring in which the dogs for sale were being led to and fro by attendants for inspection.

After a while a young Irish Wolfhound was led into the ring for sale, and immediately monopolized the Master's attention, for it was a dog of his own breeding, sold by him from the country home, Croft, soon after weaning time. He handled the dog with a deal of interest, and was expatiating upon its merits to a small group of possible buyers when he felt another dog nuzzling his arm and wrist from behind, where it was evidently held by a chain, or in some other way prevented from coming farther forward, for its muzzle was pressing hard under his cuff. But the Master was too much interested in examining the young hound then being offered for sale to pay any attention to any other animal. In due course, however, the young Wolfhound was sold and led away, and the auctioneer was heard to say--

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, we come to lot number a hundred and twenty-seven, lot one-two-seven, the--er--the--er--er--yes, ladies and gentlemen, the dam of the fine young hound just sold--a remarkable good bargain, too--to my friend Mr. Scarr-Hislop. This magnificent bitch, whose show record I will read to you directly, is, most of you are probably aware, by the famous Champion O'Leary, ex--er--Come, come, man; let's have that bitch in the ring, please. No one can see her there."

The auctioneer spoke sharply to an attendant who stood close to the

Master's seat tugging at a chain. The Master, who had been busy in conversation up till that moment, turned now to respond to the pressingly affectionate advances of the unseen animal, whose cold muzzle he had felt at his wrist for some minutes past.

"Just push her out for me, sir, if you please," said the rebuked attendant, sulkily. "I can't get her to budge from your chair. The brute's as strong as a mule."

"Let me have the chain a minute," said the Master, as he rose from his chair. "I expect you've frightened the---- Why--Great Caesar! Why--Tara! Tara--dear--old--lady. Who the devil put this hound in here?"

"Mrs. Forsyth, the owner, put her in; she's for sale, without reserve," said a groom, who forced his way forward through the crowd at this moment.

The Master wasted some moments, but not many, in wondering, disgusted expostulation, while fondling the head of poor Tara, who had stood erect with her fore-paws on his shoulders the instant he recognized her, her noble face all alight with gladness and love. Through ten acutely unhappy minutes she had nuzzled her friend's hand, and gained never a hint of recognition or response. Then the Master walked up to the auctioneer's rostrum, followed by Tara, who, with no apparent effort, dragged the sulky, puzzled attendant after him, paying not the slightest heed to his angry jerks at her collar.

"I'm sorry," said the auctioneer, after a few moments' conversation; "but I cannot possibly postpone the sale, can I? I had my instructions direct from the owner, and she should know. I am told the dog is positively to be sold, and---- No, there is no reserve at all. Yes, certainly, I will take your cheque as deposit, if you will get it endorsed by the Show Secretary. But--- Very well, sir; no need to blame me about it. I'll give you five minutes. Bring in lot 128, Johnson."

Five minutes was not much of a respite, but the Master meant to make the most of it. See old Tara put up and sold to a dealer in the ring, he felt he could not. The bare idea of her being held there in the auction-room by a show attendant--Tara, the queen of Wolfhound mothers, the

daughter of innumerable generations of Wolfhound queens, the noblest living dam of her noble race--was maddening to the man who had bred and reared her, seen her through her puppy's ills, and bred from her the most famous hounds of the day. The groom said Mrs. Forsyth was in the tea-room, and there the Master sought her, with anger and anxiety in his eye; sought her unavailingly and in a frenzy of haste. To and fro he hurried through the huge, noisy show building. At one moment of his fruitless search he obtained a card from the Show Secretary stating that his cheque might be accepted; but even as he thanked the worried official for his confidence in an old exhibitor, he realized with bitterness that he could not by any stretch of fancy pretend that he was able to afford anything like the sort of price that Tara would bring. Not a sign did he see of Mrs. Forsyth, and at last a Kennel-man, whom he remembered tipping years before for some slight service, informed him that he had seen Mrs. Forsyth leaving the building some time before. Almost despairing now, and conscious that the limit of time given him was passed, he hurried back to the auction-room, caught a glimpse of his beautiful Tara standing sorrowful and stately in the ring, head and tail both carried low, and heard a tall, clean-shaven man in a kennel-coat bid forty-eight guineas for her.

"Forty-eight!" echoed the auctioneer. "This magnificent Irish Wolfhound bitch, the dam of many winners and two champions, is positively going for forty---- Why, gentlemen, she'd be worth that to the Natural History Museum!"

"Forty-nine!" cried the Master, with a tightening of his lips.

And then he saw the mean, ferrety face of a well-known low-class dealer thrust forward from among the crowd. This dealer was notorious for keeping a large number of big Danes and Newfoundlands in the miserable backyard of a cobbler's shop in the East End of London. He had been ordered out of show rings before that day for malpractices. He had never owned a Wolfhound, but he was a shrewd business judge of the values of dogs. He nodded to the auctioneer, and that gentleman nodded responsively before taking up his tale afresh.

"Fifty guineas only is offered for the celebrated Irish Wolfhound Tara, by

the famous Champion O'Leary. Fifty guineas only is offered, and the time is running merrily on, gentlemen, all the time. Fifty guineas only is offered--and one. Fifty-one guineas--Thank you, sir. Fifty and one guineas is my last bid for----"

The auctioneer babbled serenely on, and the Master followed his words, rather pale in the face now, for fifty-one guineas was a great deal more than he could afford to pay at this time, for such a purpose.

The ferret-faced dealer raised the price to fifty-three guineas, and the Master bit his lip and made it fifty-four.

"May I say fifty-five for you, sir?" said the auctioneer to the clean-shaven man in the kennel-coat.

"If you'll just wait one moment, sir; I must just ask my----" The clean-shaven man was edging his way towards the back of the crowd, where several ladies and gentlemen were seated at a table just out of sight of the ring.

"Time and tide and auctioneers wait for no man, sir," continued the auctioneer. "The hammer is very near to falling, gentlemen. The magnificent St. Bernard dog--um--er----The magnificent Irish Wolfhound Tara is going for fifty-four guineas only; for fifty-four guin--and one---- Thank *you*, sir"--this to the ferret-faced dealer--"at fifty-five guineas only, this noble animal is going for fif----Why, gentlemen, what has come over us this afternoon? Her record alone is worth more than that. You must know that if this animal were sold by private treaty, double the sum would not purchase her. What am I to say for the gentleman who appeared to be recognized by this fine animal? Surely, sir, civility demands a little recognition of such touching devotion!"

"We're not dealing in personalities, sir," snapped the Master. "Sixty guineas!"

And then he turned on his heel; this desperate bid being far more than he could afford. The auctioneer smiled amiably.

"As you say, sir, this is strict business, strict business; and all I am offered for this magnificent hound, gentlemen, is sixty guineas! But my instructions are to sell, gentlemen; and sell I must, whatever the figure." He raised his hammer. "At sixty guineas, gent--and one. At sixty-one guineas, gentlemen; lot number 127 is going--a rare bargain for somebody--going! Will nobody try another guinea on this magnifi--- Thank *you*, sir! That's a little better, gentlemen. Seventy guineas I think you said, sir?"--this to the man in the kennel-coat, who had returned from his visit to the back of the crowd.

The ferret-faced dealer who had bid sixty-one guineas now turned his back on the ring; and, as he heard the cry of seventy guineas, the Master moved slowly forward among the crowd toward the door of the building. He dared not offer more, and he could not wait to see Tara led out of the ring by some stranger. He paused a moment, without looking up, and heard the auctioneer's "Going, going, gone!" Then he walked to the entrance of the main hall, to escape from the scene of so grievous a disappointment.

Outside, in the main building, while moodily filling a pipe, the Master decided that, whatever happened, he must find out who had purchased Tara in order that he might put in a word for his dear old friend, and thereby, it might be, ensure more consideration for her in her new home. There were one or two little whims and peculiarities of hers which he must explain. He thought of pretty Mrs. Forsyth and her broken pledge regarding Tara. He looked along the dusty, littered hall, and, in the distance, saw an elderly lady leading an Irish Wolfhound. A moment later, and he recognized the hound as Tara, and the lady as a good friend of his own, a kindly, wealthy Yorkshire woman who had bought two whelps of him before he left the country, and with whom he had corresponded since. He had visited this lady, too, to help her in the matter of some doggy trouble of hers. Now she was walking directly toward him, leading Tara, and smiling and nodding to him. Just then the lady leaned forward and unsnapped Tara's chain. In an instant, the great hound bounded forward to greet her well-loved friend, the Master, furiously nuzzling his hands, and finally standing erect to reach his face, a paw on either shoulder, her soft eyes glistening, brimming over with canine love and

delight. The man's eyes were not altogether dry, either, as he muttered and growled affectionate nonsense in Tara's silky ears. His heart swelled as he felt the tremulous excitement in the great hound's limbs.

"You see, dear old Tara cannot be deceived; she knows her real friends," said the lady from Yorkshire, as she shook hands with the Master.

"Please take her chain, and never give any one else the right to handle it. You will allow me this pleasure, I am sure, if only because of the love I bear Tara's son." (One of the whelps this lady had bought from him was a son of Tara.) "I know Mrs. Forsyth quite well--a whimsical, fanciful little person, who takes up a new fad every month, and is apt to change her pets as often as her gloves. I could not possibly let a stranger buy the beautiful mother of my Dhulert, and it gives me so much real pleasure to be the means of bringing her to your hands again."

This good woman bowed her silvery head when the Master took her hand in his, because she had caught a glimpse of what glistened in his eyes, as he tried to give words to the gratitude that filled a heart already swelled by another emotion inspired by Tara.

They walked all the way home, the Master and Tara; and twice they made considerable detours (despite the distance still before them), for the sake of spending a few minutes in open spaces, where there was grass--smutty and soiled it is true, but grass--and comparative solitude. In these places they exchanged remarks, and Tara placed a little London mud on each of the Master's shoulders, and he made curious noises in his throat, such as Tara had been wont to associate with early morning scampers in an upland orchard, after rabbits.

At last they came to the "mansions," and made great show of creeping along close to the railing, and dodging quickly in at the entrance to avoid being overlooked from the windows above. As a matter of fact tenants of the flats in these buildings were not supposed to keep dogs at all, while the idea of an Irish Wolfhound, thirty-two inches high the shoulder!---- But it was little the Master cared that night. The meeting between Tara and the Mistress of the Kennels was a spectacle which afforded him real joy. The flat seemed ridiculously tiny when once Tara was inside it; but, like all her race, this mother of heroes was a marvel of deftness, and could

walk in and out of the Mistress's little drawing-room without so much as brushing a chair-leg. There was great rejoicing in the little flat that night; and a deal of wonderful planning, too, I make no doubt.

And this was how Tara, the mother of heroes, returned to the friends who had watched over her birth and early training, and later motherhood, with every sort of loving care.

wolfhound lying downCHAPTER II

IN THE BEGINNING

It was little that Tara, the Wolfhound, cared about lack of space, so that she could stretch her great length along a hearthrug, with her long, bearded muzzle resting on her friend's slippers, and gaze at him, while he sat at his work, through the forest of overhanging eyebrows which screened her soft, brown eyes. And in any case, the next four months of her life, after the happy meeting at the Show which restored her to her old friend, were too full of changing happenings and variety of scene and occupation to leave time for much consideration about the size of quarters, and matters of that like.

For one thing, it was within a few days of the show that Tara was taken on a two days' visit to a farm in Oxfordshire, where she renewed her old acquaintance with one of the greatest aristocrats of her race, Champion Dermot Asthore, the father of those great young hounds she had given to the world during her life with the Master; the children whose subsequently earned champion honours reflected glory upon herself as the most famous living mother of her breed, though not the most famous show dog. The qualities which win the greatest honour in the show ring are not always the qualities which make for famous motherhood. As a show hound merely, Tara might have been beaten by dames of her race who had not half her splendid width of flank and chest and general massiveness, though they might have a shade more than her height and raciness.

After that, something considerable seemed to happen pretty well every day. The Master spoke laughingly of the spring madness that was as quicksilver to his heels, and of great profit to furniture removers. He laughed a good deal in those early spring days, and took Tara and the

Mistress of the Kennels with him on quite a number of journeys from Victoria railway station. Tara heard much talk of Sussex Downs, and when she came to scamper over them, found herself in thorough agreement with every sort of joyous encomium she heard passed upon them. Then there came a day of extraordinary confusion at the little flat, when men with aprons stamped about and turned furniture upside down, and made foolish remarks about Tara, as she sat beside the writing-table gravely watching them. That night Tara slept in a loose box in the stable of a country inn, and in the early morning went out for a glorious run on the Downs with the Master, who seemed to have grown younger since they left London.

Within a very few days from this time, Tara and her friends had settled down comfortably in a new home. An oddly-shaped little house it was, full of unexpected angles and doors, and having a garden and orchard which straggled up the lower slope of one of the Downs. It had a stable, too, of a modest sort, and rather poky, but the coach-house was admirable, light, airy, facing south-east, and having a new concrete floor, which the Master helped to lay with his own hands. The back half of this coach-house consisted of a slightly raised wooden dais; a very pleasant place for a Wolfhound to lie, when spring sunshine was flooding the coach-house. But Tara did not spend much of her time there, for between the stabling and the house there was a big wooden structure with a tiled roof, large as a good-sized barn, but with an entrance like an ordinary house-door, and comfortably matchboarded inside, like a wooden house. A pleasant old villager who was doing some work in the garden referred to this place as "th'old parish room," but the Master made it his own den, lined one of its sides with books, and pictures of dogs and men, and fields and kennels. He had his big writing-table established there, with a sufficiency of chairs, a few rugs upon the forty-feet length of floor, and an old couch upon one side, manufactured by himself with the aid of an ancient spring mattress, a few blocks of wood, a big 'possum-skin rug which some friend had sent him from Australia, and a variety of cushions. The actual house, for all its rambling shape, was small, and possibly this was why the Master chose to utilize this outside place as his den, and to fix a big stove in it for heating. Here, too, at one end, and just beyond the big writing-table, was a raised wooden dais or bed, like that in the coach-house, a good six feet

square, with sides to it, perhaps six inches high. Tara watched the making of this dais, and saw the master cover its floor with a kind of sawdust that had a strong, pleasant smell, and then nail down a tightly stretched piece of old carpet over that, making altogether, as she thought, a very excellent bed. And as such Tara used it by night, but in the daytime she usually preferred to stretch herself beside the writing-table, or on the rug by the door, where the sunshine formed a pool of light and warmth on a fine morning.

Here it was that Tara took her meals, a dish of milk in the morning, with a little bread or biscuit, and the real meal of the day, the dinner, which the Mistress of the Kennels always prepared with her own hands, so that it was full of delightful surprises and variety, though everything in it had the moisture and flavour of meat, in the evening. At about this time it was that Tara noticed a kind of white sediment, quite inoffensive and not at all bad to eat, in her morning milk dish; and this she welcomed, because in some dim way it was connected in her mind with happy old days that came before her parting with the Master, when she had lived with him in a place not unlike this clean, fragrant down-land, which stretched now, far as one could see on either hand, outside the garden and the orchard, all about this new home, which Tara found so good. (At certain times and in certain circumstances, some breeders of big hounds believe in mixing precipitated phosphate of lime with ordinary food, for the sake of its bone-forming properties.)

To describe one half the many delightful incidents and occupations which made the days pass quickly for Tara now, would require a volume; but as time went the great hound tended to become less active. There were any number of rabbits on the Downs beyond the orchard, and at first, in her before-breakfast ramble with the Master, Tara used greatly to enjoy running down one or two of these. But after a little time the Master seemed to make a point of discouraging this, even to the extent of resting a hand lightly upon Tara's collar as she walked beside him; and, gradually, she herself lost inclination for the sport, except where greatly tempted, as by a rabbit's jumping suddenly for its burrow close beside her. In the afternoon, when Tara generally went out with the Mistress of the Kennels for a good long round, she wore a lead on her collar now, so

that even sudden inspirations to galloping were checked in the bud, and a sedate gait was maintained always. Without troubling her head to think much about it, Tara had a generally contented feeling that these precautions were wise and good. The same prudent feeling influenced her in the matter of meals now. Though she frequently felt that she would much rather be without her morning milk, she always lapped it carefully up, and conscientiously swabbed the dish bright and dry with her great red tongue. She could not have explained, even to herself, just why she did these things; but sub-conscious understanding and fore-knowledge play a large part in a Wolfhound's life, and so does sub-conscious memory and the inherited thing we call instinct. Without considering prehistoric ancestry, there were fifteen hundred years of lineal Irish Wolfhound ancestry behind Tara; her own family dated back so far. For instance:--

In the year 391, seven centuries before the Conqueror landed in England, there was a Roman Consul whose name was Quintus Aurelius Symmachus. In a letter that he wrote to his brother Flavianus, he said:--

"In order to win the favour of the Roman people for our Quaestor, you have been a generous and diligent provider of novel contributions to our solemn shows and games, as is proved by your gift of seven Irish hounds. All Rome viewed them with wonder, and fancied they must have been brought hither in iron cages. For such a gift, I tender you the greatest possible thanks."

standing wolfhound

That these Irish Wolfhounds of fifteen hundred years ago were big and fierce, and brave and strong, you may know from the conviction of the Roman people that they must have been brought in iron cages. Also, friend Symmachus writes in other letters of the boars, and lions, and the armed Saxons provided to do battle with the Irish Wolfhounds. Also, he shows the quaintest sort of annoyance over the fact that some twenty-nine of these perverse Saxons, who were obtained to fight the Irish Wolfhounds, cut their throats on the night before the games--their own throats, I mean--and so spoiled sport for the holiday-loving Romans. In the first century of our era, Mesroida, the King of the Leinstermen, had an

Irish Wolfhound which was so mighty in battle that it was said to defend the whole province, and to fill all Ireland with its fame. For this hound, six thousand cows, besides other property, were offered by the King of Connaught, and about the same price was offered by the King of Ulster. Irish Wolfhounds fought regularly in battle, through the early centuries of our era; and fearsome warriors they were. Right down to the period of a couple of centuries ago, a leash of Irish Wolfhounds was considered a fitting and acceptable present for one monarch, or lord, to offer to another king or great noble; while from the earliest times, down to the day of Buffon, and, in our own time, "Stonehenge," the naturalists have written of the Irish Wolfhound as the greatest, that is finest, and "tallest of all dogs."

But it was not alone in such matters as refraining from violent exercise, and the taking of food whether inclined for it or not, that a sort of prescience guided beautiful Tara at this time in her new home beside the Sussex Downs. There came a morning when, as she strolled about the strip of shrubbery and orchard which lay between the stabling and the house, it occurred to her that it would be a good thing to dig a hole somewhere in the ground; the sort of hole or cave into which a great hound like herself could creep for shelter if need be; a cave in which she could live for a while. Tara did not know that the Master was watching her at this time; but he was, and there was a sympathetic and understanding sort of smile on his face, when Tara forced her way in between two large shrubs, and began excavating. The earth was soft and moist there, and Tara's powerful fore-feet scooped it out in regular shovelfuls, for her hind feet to scatter in an earthy rain behind her. She made a cavern as big as herself, and then divided the rest of the day between the beautiful big dais in the coach-house, all dry, and sweet, and clean, and her fragrant, carpeted great bed in "th'old parish room." Lying there at her ease, with one eye on the Master's shoulder, where it showed round the side of his high-topped writing-table, Tara wondered vaguely why she had troubled to dig that hole in the wet earth. But the Master knew all about it, though he could not claim to have fifteen hundred years of Wolfhound ancestry behind him, and he seemed quite satisfied.

On the following day Tara gravely inspected the hole she had dug, and

decided that it was not altogether good. So she went and dug another in a rather more secluded spot; and then came back and dozed comfortably at the Master's feet while he wrote. Later on in the day she strolled round the whole premises, and inspected carefully the various places in which, during the past week or so, she had buried large bones. The next day found Tara extremely restless and rather unhappy. She had an uncomfortable feeling that she had forgotten some important matter which required attention. In her effort to recall what the thing could be that she had neglected, she dug two or three more holes, and finally, a thing she had never thought of doing before, took one of the Master's slippers--always a singularly dear and comforting piece of property to Tara--and buried it about two feet deep in a little ditch. She felt vaguely ashamed about this, though she had no idea that the Master had watched her taking the slipper away; but she could not bring herself to return the slipper, because of the hazy need she felt for laying up treasure and taking every sort of precaution against a rainy day.

During the afternoon, Tara's general uneasiness increased. She felt thoroughly uncomfortable and worried; convinced that she had forgotten some really important matter, and disinclined either to go out or to stay in. Fifty times the Master opened and closed doors to suit her changing whims, until poor Tara felt quite ashamed of herself, though still quite unable to settle down. As a sort of savoury after dinner, the Master gave her some silky, warm olive oil; an odd thing to take, Tara thought, but upon the whole pleasing and comforting. Then, suddenly, and as she woke from a doze of about ten seconds' duration, Tara decided that it would be a good thing to tear a hole in the middle of the tight-stretched old carpet on her big bed. She got to work at once, pleased to think that she had remembered this little matter in good time, and was distinctly disappointed when the Master came and sat beside her on the edge of the bed and playfully held her paws, after gently lowering her into a lying position. Still, it was good to have him sit there and chat, as he did for some little time, rubbing the backs of her ears, and being generally sociable. He was the only human creature, with the exception of the Mistress of the Kennels, who had ever really chatted with Tara.

While Tara was gradually forgetting her desire to tear the bed covering, a

cart stopped outside the house, and a whiff, the hint of an odour, drifted in through the open door of the den, and caused the great hound's nose to wrinkle ominously. Next moment she gave a savage bark, deep, threatening, and sonorous, and sprang to her feet. She was not quite sure what ailed her, but she was conscious of an access of great anger, of passionate hostility. After soothing her, the Master carefully locked the door of the den, and then went round through the gateway leading to the front of the house, and took delivery of a large hamper from the station carrier. Then the Mistress of the Kennels came and sat in the Master's den for perhaps half an hour, while he was busy down at the coach-house with the hamper, and a lantern, and a dish of dog's dinner of a milky, sloppy sort.

That was a strange, eventful night in the den. All the country round was silent as the grave, and the air of the June night was soft and sweet as the petals of wild roses. The Mistress of the Kennels was persuaded into going early to bed, but the Master sat behind his big table, writing beneath a carefully shaded lamp, and rising quietly every now and again, to peer over the top of the high table in the direction of the big bed in the shadow, where Tara lay. Many things happened in the meantime, but it was just after the clock in the tower of the village church had struck the hour of one, that the Master was thrilled by a cry from his beloved Tara; the fifth he had heard during the past three and a half hours.

He leaned forward on his elbows, waiting and listening. Tara had never heard of duty or self-control. She was a pure child of Nature. But the moment of that cry of hers was the only moment she allowed for self-consideration, or the play of her own inclinations. In the next moment she was busying herself, with the most exquisite delicacy and precision, over the care of her latest offspring; the last late-comer in her new family of five. In that next instant, too, a weak, bleating little cry, a voice that was not at all like Tara's, smote pleasantly upon the ears of the Master, where he waited, peering watchfully from beside the deeply shaded lamp on his table.

It was then, just after the Master heard that little bleating cry which told of new life in the world, that Tara, with infinite care and precaution, lowered her great bulk upon the bed in a coil--she had been standing--the centre

of which was occupied by four glossy Irish Wolfhound puppies, who had arrived respectively at ten, eleven, twelve, and half-past twelve that night. The four, then blindly grovelling over the carpeted bed, were now perfectly sheltered in the still heaving hollow of their mother's flank. These comparatively world-worn pups had not arranged themselves conveniently in a cluster to receive their loving mother's caress. On the contrary, they were all groping in different directions at the moment in which Tara's pain-racked body was lowered to rest, and to shelter them. But, while yet that great body hung over them in the act of descending, it had twisted and curved into the required lines, and a soft muzzle had thrust this puppy that way, and the other another way; the mother's soft, filmy eyes missing nothing before her or behind. One inch of miscalculation, and the life had been crushed out of one of those tiny creatures. But pain brought no miscalculation for Tara.

One quick movement of her head satisfied the mother that her four firstborn were safe and well disposed. Immediately then, with never a thought of rest, her nose thrust the new-comer into position between her fore-paws, and she proceeded to administer the life-giving and stimulating tongue-wash. Over and over the little shapeless grey form was turned, cheeping and bleating, until every crevice of its soft anatomy had come under the vivifying sweep of six inches of scarlet tongue, warm and tenderly rough. Then the mother's sensitive nose thrust and coaxed the little creature to its nesting-place under her flank, where three sisters and a brother already nosed complainingly among milk-swollen dugs, quite indifferent to the coming of an addition to their number, and desiring they knew not what--desiring it lustily.

Then, and not till then, did the beautiful mother of these new-born descendants of an ancient race permit herself to draw a long breath of relief, and lower her massive head upon her fore-paws. A moment later, and a desire which overcame weariness impelled Tara to part her hot jaws, and glance in the direction of the shaded lamp. No least movement of hers escaped the Master, and in the moment of her glance, he came forward with a dish of fresh cold water in his hand. The mother lapped, slowly, weakly, gratefully, thanking whatever gods she knew, and the friend whose hand and eye were so ready, for the balm of water. The

man moved very gently and deftly before her, and no anxiety came into her brown eyes when he leaned forward to examine the now resting litter at her flank. But it had gone hardly one fancied with the stranger, or even with the casual acquaintance, who should have approached too inquisitively the little family.

"There, there, pet; all right, my Tara girl," murmured the man, as he stepped back softly to his table, to return a moment later with a dish of warm milk and water, which the slightly rested mother drank with forethoughtful eagerness, though the effort necessary for lapping in that constrained position, and without disturbing the little ones beside her, was far from pleasant, and far enough from personal inclination.

Ten minutes later the dam very gently changed her position, all idea of rest having left her now, and proceeded systematically to lick, first her own swollen dugs, and then the little featureless faces of her offspring, with many small encouraging muzzle-thrusts and undulations of her sinuous frame; while the Master (ready to give assistance if that were required, but too knowledgeable in these matters to wish to hasten Nature, or botch the delicate handiwork of the mother) stood in the shadow of his big table, watching and waiting. Within another few minutes the five pups were immersed in the most important affair of life (from their point of view) and, with wriggling tails and tiny, heaving flanks, with impatient, out-thrust, pink fore-feet, wet faces, and gaping little jaws, were nursing in a row like clock-work.

The mother turned a proud, filmy eye in the direction of her friend, the Master, and allowed her massive head to fall on its side, her whole great form outstretched to reap the benefit of a few more minutes of needed repose.

"Good girl!" whispered the Master; and stepping backward, he turned yet lower than it was the wick of his shaded lamp. "Good! Excellent! Five's a very good number. I should have been sorry to see a big litter, for dear old Tara. And, anyhow, that last one, the grey, is about equal to any two I ever saw; an immense whelp; dog for sure, and a giant at that."

The Master lay down to sleep presently, on the couch with the 'possum-

skin rug; and before many hours of the June daylight had passed, he had verified his impressions of that last-born son of Tara's as a grey-brindle, and the biggest whelp of its age that he had ever seen. For purposes of registration in the books of the Kennel Club--The Debrett of the dog world--the late-comer was forthwith christened by the Mistress of the Kennels, under the name of Finn, in honour of the memory of the fourth-century warrior Finn, son of Cumall, lord of three hundred Irish Wolfhounds, whose prowess in battle and in the chase were sung by Oisín in two thousand, two hundred and seventy-two separate verses. Finn was chief of King Cormac's household and master of his hounds; for the most honoured counsellor that the ancient Kings of Ireland had were masters of the hounds always.

And this was the way of the Irish Wolfhound Finn's entry into the world, at the end of the first hour of a June day, in the Master's den beside the Sussex Downs. You may see the embalmed body of his great mother's sire, Champion O'Leary, if you care to look for it, in the Natural History Museum at Kensington; woefully shorn of his imposing beard and shaggy eyebrows, it is true, but yet only less magnificent in death than he was always in life. Her mother was the dam of the hound who marches to-day at the head of His Majesty's Irish Guards. Between them, the sire and dam of Finn would have scaled three hundred pounds, while either could easily have stretched to a height above the shoulders of a six-foot man. Finn rested easily in the palm of the Master's right hand when christened by the Mistress of the Kennels, for he was little bigger than a week-old kitten. But he was none the less Finn, the lineal descendant of King Cormac's battle-hounds of fifteen hundred years ago; and it was said he had the makings of the biggest Wolfhound ever bred.

sitting wolfhound puppy

CHAPTER III

THE FOSTER-MOTHER

Finn's first adventure came to him when he was no more than about thirty-seven hours old, and, of course, still blind as any bat. That being so, it may be taken that the grey whelp was not particularly interested. Still, the event was important, and probably affected the whole of Finn's after life. This was the way of it:--

Early on the second morning of his life in this beautiful world, Finn was lying snugly asleep between his mother's hind-legs on the great bed at the stove-end of the outside den. When a litter of puppies are lying with their mother there is always one place which is snuggler, and in various ways rather better than any other place. You would have said that the little more or less shapeless, blind lump of gristle and skin that was Finn, at this stage, had no more intelligence or reasoning power than a potato; but it is to be noted that, from the very beginning, this best place had been exclusively occupied by him; and if while he slept one of his wakeful brothers or sisters crawled over him and momentarily usurped his proud position, then, in the very moment of his awakening, that other puppy would be rolled backward, full of gurgling and futile protestation, and Finn would resume the picked place. Whatever was best in the way of warmth, and food, and comfort, that Finn obtained, even at this absurdly rudimentary stage, by token of superior weight, energy, and vitality. Also, though the last to be born, Finn was the first to approach the achievement of standing, for an instant, upon his own little pink-padded feet, and the first, by days, to dream of the impertinence of blindly pawing his mother's wet satin nose, while that devoted parent washed her family.

But Finn and the rest were sound asleep, and Tara was dozing with one brown eye uncovered, when the Master came into the den on that

second morning and spoke invitingly to his beloved mother of heroes. The great bitch rose slowly and with gentle care, and Finn, with the other sucklings, rolled helplessly on his back, sleepily cheeping a puny remonstrance, though he had no idea what he wanted. Then, in his ridiculously masterful way, Finn grovellingly burrowed under the other puppies, that he might have the benefit of all their warmth, and was asleep again. Tara eyed the blind things for a moment with maternal solicitude, and then, seeing that all was well with them, followed the Master out into the bright, fresh sunshine of the stable-yard. She did not think about it, but she was perfectly well aware that it was desirable for her to take fresh air, and move about a little to stretch her great limbs.

"Come and see the Mistress, old lady; come along and stretch yourself," said her friend.

And so Tara strolled round the yard twice, and then across to the back-kitchen door, where, inside the house, she had some warm bread and milk with the Mistress of the Kennels. Tara lapped steadily and conscientiously, but without much appetite. Suddenly, when the basin was about three-quarters empty, she realised with a start that the Master had left her. One quick look she gave to right and left, and then, the mother anxiety shining in her brown eyes, she reached the outer door in a bound.

"Look out for Tara!" cried the Mistress through the open window. And: "All right! I'm clear now. Let her in, will you?" answered the Master, from beyond the gate leading to the coach-house.

So the Mistress opened the house door, and in three cat-like bounds Tara reached the door of the den, and stood erect, her fore-paws against the door, more than six feet above the ground.

"There, there, pet; your children are all right, you see," said the Mistress, as she let Tara into the den.

In a moment, lighter of foot than a terrier, for all that she weighed as much as an average man, Tara was in the midst of the big bed, where she saw her puppies bunched snugly and asleep. She looked up

gratefully at the Mistress, as the roused pups (she had touched them with her nose) came mewling about her feet, and coiled down at once to nurse them, apparently unconscious of the fact that there were only four mouths to feed instead of five. One cannot say for certain whether or not she missed Finn then. She licked the four assiduously while they nursed; and, in any case, four gaping little mouths, and four wriggling, helpless little bodies, represent a considerable claim upon a Wolfhound mother's attention and strength; also, it may be, that if she did notice that the big grey whelp was missing, she was too wise and devoted a mother and nurse to allow herself to injure the remaining four by fretting and worrying over matters beyond her immediate control. One must remember, too, that Tara lived in an atmosphere of the most implicit confidence, in which she never even heard an unkind word. On the other hand, if there had been no puppies at all on that bed, when Tara returned from her brief excursion to the back-kitchen, then it is likely that the big den would not have been strong enough to have held her for long within its wooden walls. The room had windows, and match-boarding and weather-board are not like iron.

Having seen Tara comfortably settled down with her family of four, the Mistress hurried back to the house in time to see the Master unwrapping little Finn from a soft old blanket, and placing him carefully in the midst of three puppies of perhaps half his size, in a hamper near the kitchen stove. Finn bleated rather languidly for two minutes in his new environment, and then, being very full of milk, and very warm, forgot what the trouble was and fell asleep. The Master closed the lid of the hamper then, and said:--

"I'll let them have a good two hours together there. Finn ought to assimilate the smell of the others pretty well by then. What do you think of the foster?"

"Oh, I like her," said the Mistress of the Kennels. "She seems a nice affectionate little beast, and I think she has quite recovered from the effects of that awful journey."

sheepdog nursing puppies

Finn and his foster-mother

"Um! Yes, twelve or fourteen hours' travelling with three new-born pups must be rather awful--poor little beast! Did she take her breakfast?"

"Yes; a first-rate meal. And I think she will be a good mother. She seems to have any amount of milk--more than is comfortable for her, poor little thing!"

"Yes; that's exactly what I want. I want her to be uncomfortably heavy for the time, and then she will be the less likely to resent my great big Finn's introduction. It's only discomfort, you know, not pain; and we shall put it right in a couple of hours."

"Then you have decided to put Finn to the foster-mother?"

"Yes. You see, poor old Tara--well, she----"

"Yes, I know; she's poor old Tara--spoiled darling!"

The Master chuckled. "Well, perhaps it is partly that. And, any way, she deserves it. The old girl has done a good share of prize-winning, and nursing, and the rest of it. I think of her as a lady who has earned repose, particularly after----"

"Yes, I know; the illness, you mean."

"Well, anyhow, I think four pups quite enough for her to nurse. And, as a matter of fact, I am none too comfortable about that. You know I have always believed that that awful bout of mammitis permanently affected her; her heart, and----and other things, too. Four days with a temperature of over a hundred and five, you know; and, mind you, the vet. said she must die. It was, so to say, in spite of Nature that we pulled her through. I am not at all sure that we may not have to take them all from her. We shall see better by to-night."

"Yes; I see." The Mistress of the Kennels was thoughtfully balancing on

the tip of her fore-finger a big wooden spoon, used in the mixing of Tara's meals. "But why do you choose Finn for the foster?"

"Well, now, that's rather a nice point, and involves a conviction of mine which I know you'll resent, because you rightly think Tara the perfection of all that a Wolfhound should be. But the conviction is right, all the same. A mongrel's milk is far stronger, heartier food than the milk of so highly-bred a great lady as dear old Tara. Tara gives the most aristocratic blood in the world; but when you come to food, the nourishment that is to build up bone and muscle, and hardy health--that's different. Also, I only mean to give the foster this one pup, though I dare say she is capable of rearing two or three. Therefore that one pup ought to do exceedingly well with her. Now Finn, as you see him, is the biggest pup I ever knew, and I want to give him every chance of growing into the biggest Irish Wolfhound living. That's why he is going to have this sheep-dog foster all to his little self, and, unless I'm mistaken, you'll find him in a week the fattest little tub of a pup in all England--the fatter the better at this stage, so the food's wholesome and digestible."

In about one hour from that time, Finn woke among his strange bedfellows, and trampled all over them, in a vain and wrathful search for his mother's dugs. Then he bleated vigorously for three minutes; and then the warmth of that snug corner of the kitchen sent him off to sleep again.

Another hour passed, and when Finn woke this time one could tell from the furious lunges he made over the little bodies of his foster-brothers that he had arrived at a serious determination to let nothing stand any longer between himself and a good square meal. He would take one indignant step forward (as it might have been a rather gouty and very choleric old gentleman, prepared to tear down his bell-rope if dinner were not served that minute); then his podgy little fore-legs would double up, and the next few inches of progress would be made on blunt little pink nose, and round little stomach, his hind-legs being flattened out behind him in the exact position of a frog's while swimming. Several times Finn quite thought he had at length found a teat, and, in its infantile, impotent way, the blind fury he displayed was quite terrible, when he discovered that he was merely chewing the muzzle of one of the other pups. On one

of these occasions, Finn spluttered and swore so vehemently that the effort completely robbed him of what rudimentary sense of balance he had, and he rolled over on his back, leaving all his four pink feet wriggling in the air in a passion of protest.

It was in this undignified position that the Master presently found the grey whelp, and he chuckled as he picked up Finn, with two of the other pups, and wrapped them together in a warm blanket. The remaining puppy was handed over to the gardener and seen no more in that place; so it is safe to assume that this little creature's life embraced no sorrows or disillusion. The next thing Finn knew was that his gaping mouth, held open by the Master's thumb and forefinger, was being pressed against a soft surface from which warm milk trickled. "At last!" one can imagine Finn muttering, if he had been old enough to know how to talk. Immediately his little hind-legs began to work like pistons, and his fore-paws to knead and pound at the soft udder from which the milk was drawn. Finn, with his two foster-brothers, was at the dugs of the foster-mother, a soft-eyed little sheep-dog, then occupying a very comfortable corner of the big bed in the coach-house.

The Master sat watchfully beside the sheep-dog. She was very glad to be eased of some of her superabundance of milk, and curved her elastic body forward to simplify matters for the pups. Then she began to lick the back and flank of the pup nearest her head; one of her own. The Master leaned forward. The foster's sensitive nose passed over the back of the first pup to the wriggling tail of Finn; and her big eyes hardened and looked queerly straight down her muzzle at the fat grey back of the stranger; a back twice as broad as those of her own pups. The black nostrils quivered and expanded, expressing suspicious resentment. No warm tongue curled out over Finn's fat back; but, instead, a nose made curiously harsh and unsympathetic pushed him clear away from the place he had selected, after spluttering hurried investigation, and out upon the straw of the bed.

Immediately then, and almost before Finn's sticky mouth could open in a bleat of protest, the Master's hand had returned him to the warm dugs. Again came the harsh, suspicious nose of the foster about Finn's tail, and this time a low growl followed the resentful sniff, and blind, helpless,

unformed little jelly that Finn was, instinct made him wriggle fearfully from under that cold nose. The language in which bitches speak to the very young among puppies is simplicity itself. The Master, human though he was, had not failed to catch the sense of this observation of the foster's, which was:--

"Get out of here, you lumping great whelp! You're not mine, and I won't nurse you. Get out, or I'll bite. It's true you've somehow got the smell of mine; but--you can't deceive me. Gr-r-r-! Get out!"

But, though Finn instinctively wriggled his hind-quarters from under that cold muzzle, his mouth and fore-feet vigorously pursued their business; and, before the threatened bite came, the Master's hand (a firm one, and soothing to dog people) had caressingly pressed the foster's head back upon the straw, and held it there.

"There, there, little woman," he said, good-humouredly. "Let him have his chance; he's a good pup, and will do you great credit presently."

His hand continued to rest on the sheep-dog's neck or head, till the three pups were comfortably full, and the foster herself was comfortably eased of her bounteous milk-supply. Then, gently, he removed his hand, and the foster proceeded to lick her own two pups with exemplary diligence. Out of consideration for the Master, whom she found an obviously well-meaning person, she refrained from taking any active steps against the big grey pup, but she very pointedly ignored him. And when, in due course, Finn came galumphing about her neck, with all the doddering insolence of the full-fed pup, she turned her head in the opposite direction with cool superciliousness, and exhaled a long breath through her nose, as though she found the air offensive. But the Master petted her, and gave her a very little warm bread and milk. Then he took the three puppies away in the warm blanket and handed one of them to some one who waited outside the door of the back-kitchen. Finn, with one sleepy foster-brother, was replaced in the hamper near the kitchen stove.

A couple of hours later, the foster-mother began to worry, and to wish that her puppies would come and take another meal. At about the same time

Finn and his diminutive companion in the hamper began to worry, and to wish that they could have another meal. Ten minutes after that they were carried down to the coach-house, and put to nurse again. While they fed vigorously, the foster, apparently by accident, touched Finn once or twice with her tongue, in process of licking her own pup; and she did not growl.

"Good!" said the Master, and he sat down on a little barrel of disinfectant powder to fill a pipe.

Then both puppies began to grovel and slide about the foster's legs and body; this being the natural order of things for very young puppies: to feed full, to grovel and wriggle, to sleep; and then to begin again at the beginning. But for the complete comfort and well-being of puppies at this age, certain maternal attentions, apart from the provision of nourishment, are requisite. For several minutes the foster-mother plied her own offspring with every good office, and severely ignored the rotund and would-be playful Finn. Then the sheep-dog lay flat on her side, and breathed out through her nostrils a statement to the effect that:--

"That is really quite as far as I can be expected to go. This big grey creature has fed beside mine, and I have suffered it, as a matter of charity; but---no more. The great clumsy thing must shift for itself now."

But Finn appeared to think otherwise. His mode of progression was rather that of an intoxicated snake, or an over-fed turtle on dry land; but he managed to stagger along as far as the foster's muzzle, and swayed there on his little haunches within reach of her warm breath. Instinct guided the pup so far, and left him waiting vaguely uncomfortable.

The Master watched closely, but nothing happened, save that the bitch ostentatiously closed her eyes. Then instinct moved again, strongly, in shapeless little Finn, and he straddled the foster's nose, so that his round stomach pressed on her nostrils. There he wriggled helplessly. Then a curious thing happened, while the Master leaned forward, prepared to snatch the pup from danger. The sheep-dog emitted a low, angry growl, which filled Finn with uncomprehending fear, and toppled him over on his fat back. But, even while she growled, maternity asserted its claim strongly in the kindly heart of this soft-eyed sheep-dog. Finn did not know in the least what he wanted; but the wise little sheep-dog did; and, her growl ended, she rolled Finn into the required position with her nose, and gave him the licking and tongue-washing which his bodily comfort demanded, with quiet, conscientious thoroughness. When this was over, Finn, feeling ever so much more content, sidled back to a place beside the other pup, and in a minute the pair of them were fast asleep in the warm shelter of the foster's flank. Then the Master laid down his pipe, and bent forward to stroke and fondle the little sheep-dog for two or three minutes, chatting with her, and establishing firmly the friendship already begun between them. And then, feeling quite safe in the matter, now that the foster had once licked Finn into comfort, he went away, and left the three together while he paid a visit to Tara.

Next morning, while the foster-mother was being petted and fed in the garden, some one removed her own little puppy from the bed, and when she returned to the coach-house, full of the contentment inspired by a good meal, a little exercise, and a deal of kindly petting, it was to find her bed occupied only by the big grey whelp. But she showed no more than

momentary surprise and uneasiness, and within the minute was busily engaged in giving Finn his morning tubbing and polishing, after which she disposed herself with great consideration in a position which made nursing an easy delight for Finn, and enabled his assiduous foster-mother to watch the undulations of his fat back, out of the tail of her left eye, while apparently sleeping.

puppies tugging towel

CHAPTER IV

FIRST STEPS

The sturdy, kindly, plebeian sheep-dog proved an admirable foster-mother, diligent, thorough, and forgetful of nothing, not even of her own needs and well-being, though it was evident that these were served from quite unselfish motives, and obliged to take a secondary place in all her thoughts. It was particularly well for Finn that the sheep-dog proved so sterling a soul; for, though he naturally knew and cared nothing about it all, Finn received less attention during the next few days from the Master and the Mistress than they were wont to give their canine families. Of course, the foster was properly fed and given exercise and otherwise looked after; but the Master did not smoke his pipe in the coach-house, and the Mistress of the Kennels did not sit on the side of the bed for half an hour at a time and stroke the foster's ears while admiring her nursling, as certainly would have happened in normal circumstances.

The Master's doubts about poor Tara's health had been fully justified. Her puppies were thin and inclined to be ailing, and she herself was only just saved, by means of scrupulous care and attention, and the use of other drugs besides externally-applied belladonna, from a severe illness. Meantime, another foster was telegraphed for, and, an hour after this new-comer's arrival, one of Tara's pups died. The Master had no time to be greatly concerned about this, by reason of his anxiety regarding Tara herself. He felt that another bout of the illness in which she had nearly lost her life in the early days would almost certainly be fatal, and the steps he took to stave this off kept him very busy. In addition to this, a carpenter had to be set to work in a great hurry to put together a suitable bed for the new foster-mother in a shed in the orchard. Fortunately, the weather was very favourable, and the two puppies taken from Tara soon picked up their lost ground when they were established with their foster,

an active, cross-bred spaniel-retriever.

But Finn in the coach-house knew nothing of all this. Apart from anything else, he was still perfectly blind; also, he had as much of the best kind of nourishment as he was capable of absorbing, and was watched over, and cared for, and ministered to by the loyal little sheep-dog quite as scrupulously as a human baby is tended. There never was a truer saying than that "Blood will tell." But, not only is a mongrel mother's milk rich and strong (if she is a healthy, well-cared for animal), but also her care of her young is slavish and unremitting. Her nerves are never overstrained; she is not unduly sensitive; she knows how to economize vital energy. There is as much difference between her life and temperament and that of a champion-bred aristocrat and winner of prizes at shows as there is between the life and temperament of a society belle and a Devonshire dairymaid. In the sheep-dog's case, a healthy appetite waited always upon plentiful meals. She had but one whelp to care for, and of that one she hardly ever lost sight, even when sleeping. If the blind, foolish Finn wriggled from her side in mid-most night, he ran no risk of taking cold, for if the sheep-dog did not see him, then her instinct (keener in the plebeian than in the dog of high degree, just as nerves and sentiment are keener in the aristocrat) woke her within the minute, and up she got to nose her erring infant back to sleep and warmth and safety.

On the evening of his tenth day in the world, Finn was still perfectly blind. His eyes as yet showed no signs of opening. This rather surprised the Master, when he looked in before shutting up for the night. He was quite easy in his mind now about Tara, who was almost well again, to all appearances, and lay contentedly in the den all day, having apparently forgotten, not only her illness, but its causes, and her puppies. She was rather listless and lackadaisical, but seemed to be well content so that she could lie within sight of the Master and dream. And now the Master was chatting with the sheep-dog foster, after having had a good look at Finn, and before shutting up for the night.

"But perhaps it is well he is still blind, for your sake, old lady," said he to the foster. "He will be a bit of a handful for you before you've done with him, I fancy; and the sooner he begins to find his own way about, the longer he will torment you. Never mind, little bitch; you must do your best

for Finn; for he's a great pup."

And a great pup he assuredly was, to be sprawling across that little sheep-dog's sandy flank. He covered pretty nearly as much space as a whole litter of her own kind would have occupied. His pink pads looked monstrous now; his timbers were quite twice the thickness you would have expected to find them; and his shapeless, abundantly nourished body was very nearly as broad at the haunch as it was long from neck to tail. His flat, black nose was remarkably broad, in spite of the unusual length of the black-marked muzzle, and the Master, who had studied Wolfhound puppies very closely, seemed particularly pleased about this. Finn's corners, so to say, were practically black. His body, as a whole, was of a steely, brindle grey, but the centre of the back of his tail and its tip were almost black, and so were his little podgy hocks, knees, muzzle, brows (if he could be said to have any) and the hair over his gristly shoulder bones. The Master swung his hurricane lamp high for a last look at Finn and the foster.

"You certainly are a marvel of size, my son; but I wonder you don't begin to open those eyes of yours, I must say. Let's hope they're very dark. Good-night, little shepherd!"

The light of Finn's twelfth day on earth had already filled the coach-house through its back windows when the sheep-dog stirred next morning and yawned. The slight sound and movement woke Finn, and automatically he burrowed vigorously after his breakfast without an instant's hesitation. Presently he emerged with milky nose from the foster's flanks, and meandered forth to be licked and made comfortable. The licking ended, the foster rose, and stepped off the bed to stretch her limbs. Finn rolled rollickingly over on his back, and then staggered up and on to his absurdly large and spreading feet. Then he backed sideways among the straw, like a crab. Then he tried to rub one eye with one of his mushroom-like fore-feet, and, failing abjectly in that, fell plump on his nose. Staggering to his feet again, Finn turned his face once toward the broad sunbeam that divided the coach-house in two parts from the side window; and then, as though tried beyond endurance, opened wide his jaws and bleated forth his fright and distress to the world, so that the patient little foster-mother was obliged to cut her constitutional short, and

hop back to bed, lolling a solicitous tongue and making queer comforting noises in her throat.

But for some several minutes the puppy absolutely refused to be comforted; and when the Master came in an hour or so later he understood at a glance what Finn's trouble was, though the casual observer might well have thought there was no particular change in his circumstances. The fact was Finn had sustained a real shock, and his perturbation about it lasted for nearly half an hour, after which it retired, overcome by youthful curiosity. Finn had suddenly awakened to the fact that he was no longer blind; he had stepped, at one uncertain stride, into a seeing life. It was like being born again, and that with faculties matured and sharpened by nearly a fortnight's life in the world. It really was no trifling adventure for Finn, this discovery of a new and very wonderful sense, which had come simply with the parting of the lids that covered his black-brown eyes.

He spent practically the whole of that day testing this new sense which had come to him with so great a shock. For instance, he found that if he crawled a certain distance from the foster in one direction, the air before him became whiter and whiter, until at last he stubbed his toes and his nose against it. And that was his first acquaintance with walls. Then, when he crawled in another direction, he came presently to a ledge several inches in height, and when, as the result of really herculean efforts, he had raised his fat body upon that ledge, the floor beyond jumped up and hit him very hard, and left him helpless as a turtle on its back, till the foster came and lifted him back to bed in her jaws. That was how he learned that it was not wise for very small pups to climb over the edges of beds. Towards evening, when many useful lessons had been learned, and the pup was beginning to swagger over the advantage given him by his new-found sense, in the matter of picking and choosing feeding-places, and demanding his foster-mother's attention by planting one foot on her eye, and so forth, Finn came to the conclusion that this new power he had was, upon the whole, a remarkably fine thing, and a jolly gift, even if it did keep one awake, and lead to considerable exhaustion, and---- And then he shut up his little black-brown eyes, and, well sheltered by the foster's right hind-leg and tail, went fast asleep and

dreamed of warm milk.

From this point onward, Finn's progress was rapid. Whereas till now he had seemed little more than an appendage of the sheep-dog foster-mother, he now rapidly developed a personality, and a very masterful one, of his own. His eyes, which were quite as dark as the Master had desired them to be, were idle only when he slept; and the same might have been said of every part of him. He grovelled most industriously during all his waking hours, until such time as his podgy legs had hardened sufficiently to bear his weight--with many falls, of course--and then he began to scurry about on his feet. His usual style of progression at this period was to take from two to four abrupt, jerky strides, rather with the air of a fussy and corpulent old gentleman who had to catch a train, and then to subside in a confused lump, on chest and nose, with tail wagging angrily in mid-air. This was not so annoying to the grey pup as one might suppose, because, though generally in a hurry, he always forgot his intended destination by the time he had taken three steps towards it, and therefore a sudden halt at the fourth seemed reasonable enough, and quite an agreeable diversion.

During the third week of his life, the weather being very fine, Finn, with the other pups, was treated to long sun-baths in a little fenced-in square of gravel which was covered with deodorized sawdust. These sun-baths were extremely good for the pups, and provided pleasant periods of rest and relaxation for the foster-mothers, who, though never allowed to see each other, were each within smelling distance of the pups, one upon one side and one on the other.

A huge dry bullock's shin-bone was put into the sun-bath, on a piece of matting, and this was a source of great interest to the pups, whose little white teeth were now as sharp as needles; a fact known only too well to their respective foster-mothers. Finn's favourite amusement was to lie straddled along this bone, and defy the other pups to touch it. He would give hard-breathing little snorts which he meant for growls, when one of the other pups began to nuzzle the bone; and, at times, these snorts would be vehement enough to make him lose his balance and roll helplessly off the bone on to the ground. Then the other three pups would straddle across his tubby body and snort defiance at him, each with a

paw planted victoriously in his protuberant stomach or on his broad chest.

On Finn's twenty-first morning he spent the better part of half an hour in the lap of the Mistress of the Kennels, learning to lap warm milk and water. First of all he learned to suck the milky tip of the Mistress's little finger. Then, gradually, his nose was made to follow the little finger-tip into the milk; and, one way and another, he consumed during that first lesson about a tablespoonful of milk. In the afternoon he was kept for perhaps two and a half hours from the foster-mother, and then he, with the other pups, made great progress in the art of lapping; though they were all glad to approach the feeding question in a more serious and practical manner on being returned to their foster-mothers. Still, they had learned something, and the succeeding lessons of each following day brought quick familiarity and facility. In fact, the trouble with Finn, after two or three days, was that, in his lusty eagerness for nourishment, he generally risked the suicide's end by stumbling forward and plunging his whole face in the milk. His one notion of a safeguard against this danger was to plant one, or both, of his tubby fore-legs in the dish, a course which always brought him rebuke from the Mistress of the Kennels.

Toward the end of the fourth week these lessons in lapping became real meals, and the milk so consumed was always fortified with a thickening of some cereal rich in phosphates, besides minute doses of precipitated phosphate of lime, intended to stiffen the gristly leg-bones of these heavy pups, and increase bone development. The foster-mothers had been taking this, and communicating it in their milk, all along. This was the period in which the maternal feelings of the foster-mothers were submitted to the most severe strain. Finn's milk-white teeth, and his toenails, too, were sharp as pins, and used with great strength and vigour. Naturally, he entertained no unkind feelings for his loving little foster-mother; but, from sheer ignorance and riotous good living, he gave her a good deal of pain. Some dog-mothers would have warned him about this pretty sharply; but not so the little sheep-dog. She never even growled when, after feeding till he could feed no more, the insolent grey whelp would pound and paw at her soft dugs, and tug at them with his sharp teeth in sheer wantonness, till they were a network of red scars and

scratches. The most the gentle, plebeian little mother would do would be to lie flat, after a while, to protect her dugs--and that for the puppy's own sake--a movement which always brought Finn galumphing over her shoulder to bite her ears and paw her nose, and otherwise seek to provoke breaches of the peace. A riotous, overbearing, disorderly rascal was Finn at this stage.

sitting puppy

On the morning which ended Finn's fifth week in the world, all the pups were solemnly weighed in the kitchen scales, which were brought into the coach-house for that purpose. The Master stood by with a note-book, and these are the weights he recorded:--

Fawn bitch 10 3/4 lbs.

Grey bitch 11 1/4 lbs.

Fawn dog 12 lbs. 3 oz.

Finn 14 lbs. 4 oz.

In other words, at the age of five weeks, and while still a suckling pup, Finn weighed as much as some prize-winning fox terriers, and that breed when fully developed, in point of size, though not, of course, shapely or set. After corresponding with other breeders, the Master was confirmed in his already-expressed conviction that, thus far, Finn was a maker and breaker of records.

During the week following this weighing Finn was only allowed to visit his foster-mother once, for half an hour or so, in each day. But the meals he lapped from a dish, in his own blundering way, included broth now, as well as milky foods, and he still slept with the foster at night. During the next week--in fine, dry July weather--all four puppies were gambolling together in the orchard, from six in the morning till six at night, and never saw the foster-mothers till they were tired out with their day-long play and ready for the night's sleep. The Master and the Mistress took their own lunch and tea in the orchard at this time, and a table and chairs were kept

under a big oak tree for this purpose. In and out among the legs of these chairs and the table the Wolfhound pups played boisterously hour by hour, till fatigue overtook them, with capricious suddenness, and they would fall asleep in the midst of some absurd antic and in any odd position that came handy.

Then one of the pups, usually Finn, would open his eyes and yawn, realize once more how good life was, and plunge forthwith upon his still sleeping brothers and sisters, tumbling them triumphantly into the midst of a new romp before they knew whether they were on their heads or their heels. A twig, a leaf, or a stone would be endowed with the attributes of some cunning and fierce quarry, to be stalked, run down, and finally torn in sunder with marvellous heroism, with reckless, noisy valour. The sun shone warm and sweetly over all, there beside the immemorial Sussex Downs; life and the dry old earth were very, very good--if only one's breath did not give out so soon, and one's fore-legs had not so annoying a trick of doubling up; and then---- What was that rascally fawn pup rushing for? The Mistress, with the four little dishes and the big basin? Another meal? Here goes! Bother! I should certainly have reached her first, if I hadn't turned that somersault over the fawn pup!

That was how it seemed to Finn, whose life was one long, happy play and swagger at this time. But there were moments of a kind of seriousness, too, in which Finn had glimpses of real life. That very night, or rather late afternoon, Finn discovered that he could bark, more or less as grown-up dogs bark. True, his first, second, and third barks proved too much for his unstable equilibrium, and he rolled over on his side in emitting the noble sounds. But the fourth time he leaned against the table-leg under the oak tree, and on that occasion was able to stand proudly to observe the paralysing effect of his performance upon the others of his family, who sat round him on their podgy haunches in a respectfully wide circle, and marvelled fearfully at his robust prowess. They had all yapped before, but this deep, resonant bark--fully one in three had no crack in it--this was an achievement indeed. After a while the grey bitch pup came and tentatively chewed Finn's backbone, with a vague idea that the sound came from there.

When Finn was escorted--prancing drunkenly--to the coach-house that

evening after his supper, the little sheep-dog within was just finishing her supper. Finn conceived the notion of showing his foster-mother what he could do, and accordingly swaggered unsteadily into the coach-house, delivering loud barks as he advanced, all up and down the scale. The little sheep-dog (less than twice Finn's size now) raised her nose from the dish and barked angrily in good earnest. Finn rolled forward and sniffed in casual fashion at her dish. Whereupon the foster growled at him quite ferociously, and shouldered the great whelp out of her way. The Master, who was looking on, nodded his head once or twice thoughtfully.

"Yes," he said, as Finn sidled off to the bed rather crestfallen, "I think you may take that as your notice to quit, my son; that's weaning. You've been a good deal on your own lately, you know. Well, I had meant this for your last night as a baby, anyhow. But as it is--there, there, little shepherd, you've been a dear, good little mother, haven't you? Six weeks now; and, as you say, he is a great hulking chap, isn't he? Well, all right; make it up then, and give him a good-bye lick. I don't think you've much else to give now, anyway, but the warmth of your body."

But the good, patient little sheep-dog had already placed herself at the grey whelp's voracious disposal, and he was pounding and tugging away at her in his usual merciless style. Then, when she went dutifully to lick the rascal, he thrust at her strongly with his great strong legs, and the Master, who had been standing, smoking and watching, said--

"Come along, little shepherd. That's good-bye."

And that was the last Finn saw of any foster-mother. That was the end of babyhood, and the beginning of childhood for Finn. He slept alone that night, and found it rather awesome during the few minutes in which his eyes were open, between the last lapped meal at ten o'clock and the first of the next day, when the Master came to him at five-thirty. The Master held that if you would breed a really exceptional hound, you must be prepared to take really exceptional trouble over the task, since a chance lost in the first half year of your hound's life, is lost for good and all.

downland scene

CHAPTER V

YOUTH BESIDE THE DOWNS

Finn did not have more than one solitary night for the present. His great bed in the coach-house, which was twelve feet long by six feet broad, was shared the next night by the other three puppies, who had seen the last of their foster-mother that morning. They whimpered a little after the last night meal, when they found themselves bereft of maternal attention, and this gave Finn an opportunity for indulging in a certain amount of swagger on the strength of his previous night's experience. He had already adopted the air of a dog accustomed to go his own way and to sleep alone. Also, he regarded the coach-house bed as his own, and the other puppies as youngsters only admitted to that place by his courtesy. Thus from the very outset, here as elsewhere, he gave his comrades to understand that he was master, and that no one must presume to trespass upon any quarter which he took up as his own. All day long the four puppies had the run of the shed in the orchard, which was kept wide open. If a shower of rain came, they were hustled into this place by the Mistress of the Kennels, and there the most of their nine daily meals were served to them.

Nine meals in a day seems a very large number, but this was part of the Master's theory in the rearing of Irish Wolfhounds, or any other dog in whom great size is aimed at. In the week after weaning the meals began at half-past five in the morning and finished at ten o'clock at night. In the next week they were cut down to eight meals; the next week seven, the next week six; the next fortnight five; and then, for a long time, the number of meals served to these young princes of their breed each day was four. The object in all this was threefold. First, the Master held it necessary that these pups should have as much nourishment as they were capable of assimilating with advantage; secondly, he was anxious

never to spoil their appetites by permitting them at any time to experience surfeit; and, in the third place, he believed strongly in light meals for young hounds, as distinguished from the sort of meal often given, which leaves the puppy fit for nothing but the heavy sleep of the overeat. Tara's pups romped after their meals, and slept before them. Their digestions were never overtaxed, and their soft, unset legs were never overstrained by the extremely bulging stomach which many breeders associate as a matter of course with puppyhood. This the Master held to be a point of great importance with hounds of this kind, whose limbs take just as long to harden and set as those of any other breed, while their increase in weight to be carried on those limbs is enormously rapid, at all events in the case of such whelps as those of Tara's.

For instance, at the age of five weeks Finn weighed just over fourteen pounds. Sixteen days later he weighed 22 lbs. 2 ozs., while the other three pups weighed respectively on the same day 20 lbs., 19 1/2 lbs., and 18 3/4 lbs. Growth at the rate of just half a pound weight per day is growth which requires a good deal of wise feeding and care. At the age of twenty weeks Finn weighed 91 [sic] 1/4 lbs. Puppies' legs are easily bowed and rarely straightened. Finn and his brother and sisters were never allowed on damp ground at this period. It was rarely that they were out of the sight of either the Master or the Mistress of the Kennels for more than half an hour at a time. As the Master said, breeding champion Irish Wolfhounds is no light undertaking. The Mistress of the Kennels was the more inclined to agree with him for the reason that it was her province to see to it, even when the pups were having their nine meals a day, that the same kind of meal was never served twice consecutively. The dietary included four or five staple articles, with as many as seven or eight different accessories. The bills of fare at different successive periods were as studiously and exactly drawn up by the Master as ever a human patient's diet is arranged by doctors in a hospital.

But of all these things, which kept several people pretty busy--five or six feeding dishes were scalded and washed nine times a day; there was a puppy's kitchen and a puppy's larder--Finn and his companions knew nothing. To them life was the most delightfully haphazard affair, made up exclusively of playing, sleeping, and eating, with a little occasional

fighting and mock-fighting (over the huge bones which were placed at their disposal to serve the purpose of tooth-brushes and tooth-sharpeners) by way of diversion and excitement. Their play was not at all unlike that of human children. They loved to dig holes in the ground; to hide behind tree-trunks and spring out upon one another with terrifying cries and pretended fierceness; all kinds of make-believe appealed to them greatly, and to none of them more keenly than to Finn, who liked to come galloping down from the other end of the orchard to the old oak tree, flying exaggerated danger signals, and making believe that he was pursued by a savage and remorseless enemy.

wolfhound playbowing to puppies

Tara smiled broadly, and stretched out her fore-legs on the ground.

One morning, very much to the amazement of the pups, the Master came strolling into the orchard, followed by a huge creature of their own species, who walked with the slow and gracious dignity of a great queen. None of them guessed that this was Tara, their own mother, and Tara herself gave no sign of being aware that these were her own children. After some minutes of embarrassed, watchful uncertainty, Finn, greatly daring, ventured to step out from among his companions and approach Tara closely enough to sniff warily at her legs and tail, his own tail hanging meekly on the ground the while. Tara sniffed at him once with amiable indifference, and then turned her head the other way. Two minutes later Finn had discovered that this great hound was perfectly well-meaning and kindly disposed, and that, his habit and nature being what they were, was sufficient to place him at once upon terms of highly presumptuous familiarity. Having watched their daring brother from a distance so far, the other pups now took heart of grace, and were soon sniffing respectfully about Tara's legs. For a moment the mother of heroes felt, or pretended to feel, mere boredom; but as the Master turned away to look at some distant object--a diplomatic move upon his part this--Tara smiled broadly, stretched out her fore-legs on the ground, exactly as a cat will when about to play, and, again in cat-like fashion, began to spring about, around, and over the half-fearful but wholly delighted

puppies. When the Master turned round again, the five of them, mother and four children, were in the midst of the wildest sort of frolic, and impudent Finn had actually reached the length of growling at his mother with theatrical savagery, and leaping at the loose skin about her throat with widely distended eyes and gaping jaws.

After this Tara spent most of her days in the orchard with the pups. When tired of their frivolity, she would retire to the roots of the oak tree and give them to understand that they were not to bother her further, or she would leap the gate leading into the garden, leaving her offspring gaping admiringly upon its orchard side, and stroll into the Master's den for an hour or so. On one occasion she opened a new vista of life before Finn and the others. At the higher end of the orchard, nearest to the open downs, there were a number of rabbit earths, and one morning, when the four pups were frolicsomenely following Tara in that direction, an unwary rabbit allowed the dogs to get between himself and the earths. Too late the rabbit started up from the leaf he had been nibbling, and headed for his burrow. Tara bounded forward and cut off his retreat. Wheeling then at a tangent, the rabbit flew toward the far end of the orchard, where there was a gap in the fence. Tara was after him like the wind, her puppies excitedly galloping in her wake, yapping with delight. Half-way across the orchard Tara overtook the bunny, and her great jaws closed upon the middle of its body, smashing the spinal column and killing instantaneously. A moment later and Finn was on the scene in a frenzy of excitement. Tara drew back, eyeing the dead rabbit with lofty unconcern. Finn, on the other hand, endowed the poor dead little beast with the dangerous ferocity of a live tiger, and sprang upon it, snarling and growling desperately. Round and round his head he whirled the rabbit till his throat was half-choked with fur, and by that time the other puppies butted in, each snatching a hold where it could, and tugging valorously. Then it was that the Master arrived, attracted by the noise of the youngsters' yapping, and the pups saw no more of their victim.

puppy with dead rabbit

But this brought a new interest into Finn's life, and much of his time now was spent in the neighbourhood of the rabbit earths. Many glorious runs Finn had after venturesome rabbits in that corner of the orchard, but he

was not fleet enough as yet to catch them, and possibly his jaws could hardly have managed the killing in any case. But even so, he experienced great joy in the matter of stalking, hunting, and lying in wait.

On a glorious mellow afternoon in September, when the four pups, captained as usual by Finn, were having great fun with a hammock chair, from which they had managed to tear the canvas, they looked up suddenly, and not without some sense of shame, to see three people strolling into the orchard from the garden with Tara. There was the Master and the Mistress of the Kennels and a stately, white-haired lady, who fondled Tara's beautiful head as she walked. Tara was walking with great care and delicacy to make the fondling easy. She had no idea who the lady might be, but yet remembered having met her before upon more than one occasion. This was the lady from Yorkshire who had been the generous means of restoring Tara to the Master. She was staying now in Sussex for a few days, and had been asked to come to the little house beside the downs to see Tara's children. Tara was perfectly aware that this was the object of the walk in the orchard, and, though she may have forgotten that these puppies were her own offspring, she certainly had a distinctly proprietary feeling where they were concerned, as one could see from the modest, deprecatory expression on her face when the youngsters came gambolling about her, and were duly admired by the visitor.

"You have not disposed of any of them yet, then?" said the lady to the Master. "Oh, no; I should not have thought of doing that until you had an opportunity of making your choice," he replied.

"I? Oh, but, really, I--I----"

The lady from Yorkshire paused. For one thing she was not quite sure whether the Master meant that he wished her to buy one of the puppies, or whether he wanted to give one of them to her. She was a wealthy lady, so that the monetary aspect of it did not exercise her mind much, but she would not for the world have hurt the Master's feelings.

"But I am quite sure you will not deny me the real pleasure of giving you one of Tara's children," said the Master. "That is a small return for your

gift of Tara herself; but I should like to think of your having one of this family, and it would make me unhappy if you were to deny me the opportunity of giving you your real choice. That was why I asked you to come to-day. It is Tara's thank-offering, and I can assure you she has excelled herself in the making of it."

The three were seated now, so that they might observe and admire the family at leisure.

"Yes, she really has excelled herself. That grey dog there is Finn. When he was weighed yesterday he scaled nine pounds more than the biggest of the other three, and they are as big as any whelps of their age I have seen. That grey dog is going to be the biggest Irish Wolfhound bred in our time, in my opinion; and if you choose him he will do you credit. He should be a great champion one day. You will always know, if you take Finn, that Tara was not ungrateful to you. As for me, I know very well you will never suspect me of ingratitude."

"It is very, very good of you, and I shall be delighted, delighted to have one of Tara's children."

And then the visitor stopped, gazing thoughtfully at the puppies. Her kind heart was a good deal moved in this matter, and she guessed more than the Master gave her credit for guessing, in the matter of how much hope and pride he had centred on the rearing of Finn. When the visitor spoke again, it was to say, slowly—

"Finn is quite splendid, there is not a doubt of that, and I can easily believe he will do all that you expect of him. But, if I may be quite frank, what I should really most like would be to have a female if I might. I should then feel that I not only had one of Tara's children of this family, but also that I had a possible future mother of heroes. But--perhaps you want to keep both females, or to dispose of them otherwise?"

One would not like to suggest of this good lady that she was anything but strictly truthful; but it is a fact that she never had done any breeding of hounds, and that, up till that day at all events, she had never thought to. But the Master did not know this, and it was with an undeniable thrill of

pleasure that he hailed the unexpected chance of being able to keep Finn. He had made up his mind that Finn would be chosen, and was quite prepared and glad to make the sacrifice; but it was a notable sacrifice, and if the same end could be served without losing Finn, why that was blithe news. He was not sure of his intention to keep either of the bitch pups, and in any case he would not have thought of keeping both of them. But honesty and real gratitude made him, impelled him, to point out to the visitor that she might never again have the opportunity of obtaining the kind of hound that Finn would make. However, she stuck to her preference for a daughter, and so it was decided. Three days afterwards a large dog-box on little wheels, with grated windows and a properly ventilated roof, arrived from Yorkshire, and was placed outside the back-kitchen door. After a very light breakfast next morning--it is bad for whelps, or grown dogs either, to have a full meal before a journey, because the stress and excitements of railway travelling, which are at least as great for a dog as those of air-ship travelling would be for a man, arrest the process of digestion--the fawn bitch puppy was coaxed into this box, while Tara looked on with a good deal of interest; and that was the last she saw of the cottage by the Downs. When the fawn whelp left that travelling-box again, some nine hours later, she was in the paved stable courtyard of a great house in Yorkshire.

A week later another visitor came, this time from Somerset, and his choice fell upon a fawn dog, after half an hour spent in trying to tempt the Master to part with Finn. When this visitor, who was a famous breeder of Irish Wolfhounds, was leaving, with the fawn dog whelp in a travelling hamper, he said--

"But, really, I think you are mistaken, you know, about the grey whelp. He's a beauty, of course, or I shouldn't want him; but I fancy you made a mistake not to accept that offer. Fifty guineas is a longish figure for a three months' pup, with distemper to face and all that. I'm not sure that I wasn't over rash to make such an offer."

The Master laughed. "Well," he said, "be thankful that there's no likelihood of my taking advantage of your rashness. As for distemper, we don't deal in it at all; don't believe in it. If pups are consistently nourished, and get no chills and no damp and no infection, there's no earthly reason

why they should ever have distemper. At least, that's how we've found it."

So the fawn dog whelp went, and Finn stayed with the grey bitch pup, and Tara's family was thus reduced to two. The Master said that as he had sold only one puppy of the family so far, he really could not afford to keep Finn's sister; but, however that might be, he kept her for the present, and now that there were but two of the youngsters, they began to live more after the fashion of grown hounds. As autumn advanced the pair were gradually given more and more in the way of grown-up privileges. They learned to come into the den with Tara, and to behave themselves with discretion when there. They never saw such a thing as a whip, but the Master spoke to them with all the sharp emphasis of a growl when original canine sin tempted them to the chewing of newspapers, or attempting to tear rugs. Also, they learned very much from Tara in the matter of the deportment and dignity which becomes a Wolfhound. In the latter part of November their meals were reduced in number from four to three a day, and they were presented with green leather collars with the Master's name engraved in brass thereon. These were for outdoor wear only, outside the doors of the home premises that is, and with them came lessons in leading which required a good deal of patience on the part of the Mistress of the Kennels, for, after the first two lessons, which were given by the Master, much of teaching work fell to her.

Early in the morning, as a general thing, the Master took Tara and the two youngsters out on the Downs, and these were altogether delightful experiences for Finn and his sister. It was on one of these occasions, and just after entering his sixth month, that Finn tasted the joy and pride of his first kill. He had started with Tara after a rabbit which had scurried out from behind a little hillock no more than ten distant paces. The rabbit wheeled at a tangent from under Tara's nose, and, as it headed down the slope, was bound to cross Finn's course. The grey whelp's heart swelled within him; his jaws dripped hot desire as he galloped. The fateful moment came, and the whelp seized his prey precisely as Tara would have seized it, a little behind the shoulders. It was bad for the rabbit, because Finn was neither practised nor powerful enough to kill instantaneously as his mother would have done. But his vehemence in shaking was such that before Tara reached his side the quarry was dead.

Tara sniffed at the dead rabbit with the air of an official inspector of such matters, and then sat up on her haunches to indicate that she had no wish to interfere with her son's prize. As for Finn, he was uncertain what course to adopt. The rabbit was very thoroughly killed; killed with a thoroughness which would have sufficed for half a dozen rabbits. A number of obscure instincts were at work in Finn's mind as he jerkily licked, and withdrew from, and nosed again at his first kill. In the main his instincts said, "Tear and eat!" But, as against that, he was not hungry. The Master believed in giving the dogs a snack before the morning run, and breakfast after it, because this prevents a dog being anxious to pick up any more or less edible trifle of an undesirable kind that he may meet with, and, then, there were other instincts. It was long, very long, since Finn's kind had been killers for eating purposes. Finn was undecided in the matter. He certainly would have allowed no dog to take his quarry from him; but the matter was decided for him when the Master arrived on the scene and picked up the rabbit by its hind legs. Finn jumped to catch it in his jaws; but the Master spoke with unmistakable decision when he bade Finn drop it, and there the matter ended, except as a proud and inspiring memory, and a ground for added swagger on Finn's part.

In the quiet corner of Sussex, where Finn was born, it was the rarest thing for the Wolfhounds to meet another dog; but it did occur at times, and then it was odd to see how strong the instincts of their race was in the whelps. They seemed to take it as a matter of course that other dogs must be lesser creatures, and that as such they were to be treated with every sort of courtesy, patience, and good humour. Finn and his sister never made advances, but they would stand politely still while the stranger sniffed all round them. For pups in their first half-year they were extraordinarily dignified. Much of this, of course, they learned from gracious Tara, one of the gentlest and sweetest-mannered hounds that ever lived. Also, they had that within, in the shape of truly aristocratic lineage, which gave them great self-respect, a tradition of courtesy, and a remarkable deal of *savoir-faire*. The notion of snapping or snarling at a stranger, human or brute, simply never occurred to either of them; never for an instant. That there were certain creatures whose part it was to be chased and killed seemed evident to Finn; but that there was any created thing in the world to be feared, mistrusted, hated, or snapped at, he did

not believe. It may be that Finn was more of a gentleman and a sportsman than many who have borne those titles in the world without challenge or demur from any of their own kind.

wolfhound lying down

CHAPTER VI

THE ORDEAL OF THE RING

Finn's first winter was a mild one, and it passed without his noticing anything remarkable in climatic conditions. But he was aware of change when spring came. The Downs round Finn's home never seemed to get really wet. The drainage of their chalky soil was such that their surface could not hold much moisture, and outside the Downs the world was as yet a closed book to Finn. But spring asserted itself notably in his veins, and appeared to enter into a partnership with his lusty youth, and wholesome, generous scale of living, to speed the young Wolfhound's growth in wonderful style. Long, slow trots along the Sussex highways and by-ways, behind the bicycle of the Master or the Mistress, hardened Finn's round feet without overstraining his young legs, for the reason that the pace was always set with special reference to his capabilities in this direction. Even in the winter nine-tenths of his waking hours were spent in the open; yet so wise and constant was the supervision of his life that he never knew what chill meant, and never lay on damp ground, never missed a meal, and never suffered from the penalties which attend overtaxed canine digestion, as surely as they attend the same state in human beings.

wolfhound jumping gate

On the morning of his first birthday, Finn, with his sister Kathleen and Tara and the Master, walked down to the little local railway station and was weighed. He weighed 119 lbs., exactly 26 1/2 lbs. more than his sister, and thirteen pounds less than his mother. With the standard pressed down upon his shoulder-bones he stood within an eighth of an inch of thirty-five inches in height. (The height of Wolfhounds is measured from the shoulder to the ground, not from the head.) It must be

remembered that although some dogs reach their full development in one year from birth, Irish Wolfhounds are not really fully developed before the end of the second year, though they may be said to attain their full height, and probably their full length, in about eighteen months. After that, however, comes a good deal of what breeders call "furnishing," which means filling out, general development of flesh and muscle and coat, and an all-round hardening and "setting." Chest and loin deepen and widen a good deal in the second year; ribs, legs, jaws, tail, and neck all develop and strengthen greatly during this period, under such favourable conditions as Finn enjoyed. But he was a noble-looking young hound, even on this day which, technically, saw the end of his whelphood.

And then came three more months of Sussex downland summer, the hunting of innumerable rabbits, out-of-door days which were fifteen hours long, and a steadily increasing amount of slow-road exercise, for which Finn was still fortified by three good meals a day, and those of the best that care and science could devise. In early October the Master devised a new game, tolerably amusing in its way, but rather lacking in point and excitement, Finn thought. A ring was marked out in the orchard by means of a few faggots being stuck into the ground at intervals, and in the centre of this ring the Mistress of the Kennels would take up her stand as a sort of director of ceremonies. Then, sometimes with the assistance of the maidservant and the gardener, and sometimes a couple of village lads, Tara and Kathleen and Finn would be led gravely round and round, and to and fro, by the Master, while all their movements were closely watched from the centre of the ring. At first Finn found this a good deal of a nuisance, because he disliked having a lead attached to his collar; his inclination was to pull against it sideways. Before him always, however, he had the gracious example of his beautiful mother, who never did more than keep the lead nicely tight while she marched round, with her head well up, her tail hanging in a graceful sweeping curve, and her whole body radiantly expressive of alertness. Gradually it was borne in upon Finn that these were matters which touched his reputation, his pride, his belief in himself; that he, Finn, was being observed and judged with regard to his appearance and deportment. Once possessed of this idea, who so stately proud in all the Wolfhound world as Finn? At the end of a week he could march as sedately as Tara herself, or bound forward with

the springy elasticity of a tiger-cat at a touch on his flank from the Master's hand; stand erect on his hind-feet, with one fore-paw on the Master's forefinger raised shoulder high; or fall to attention with hind-quarters well set out, fore-feet even and forward, head up, and tail correctly curved, in the position of a thoroughbred hackney at rest. It was great fun to find how easily commendation could be earned from the Master in this simple manner, for Finn never realized that quite a number of hours of patient instruction and practice had been devoted to the attainment of this end.

Then there came a mid-October morning when, in place of the early scamper on the Downs, Finn and Kathleen were given a light breakfast a little before daylight arrived, and after that were treated to an unusually elaborate grooming. Finn had an exciting sense of impending change and adventure, and even Tara seemed moved to a stately kind of restlessness which kept her pacing the den as though performing a minuet, instead of sitting or lying at her ease. Tara seemed to be a good deal moved and excited when two bright nickel chains, with queer little tin medals attached to them, were produced, and fitted on two new green collars for Finn and Kathleen. She nosed these chains with great interest, for they roused all kinds of vague memories in her, and anticipations, too, which she could not define to herself. (Finn and Kathleen had never seen dog chains before, and paid very little heed to them now. Their necks and shoulders had never tasted the irk of the state which is called being "tied up.") The Master drew the attention of the Mistress of the Kennels to Tara's interest in the chains, and then he stroked the great bitch's head as he said--

"Never any more, old lady. You have done your share, and shall never be hustled about at shows again; so just lie down and go to sleep. The Missis will be home to see you again this evening. Be a good girl, and wish your son and daughter luck!"

Tara watched them wistfully as they all filed out of the stable-yard gateway to the road, and then, with the philosophy born of honoured age and matronhood, returned to the den and lay down with her muzzle on the Master's slippers.

Finn was weighed on the station platform that morning, and turned the scale at 139 lbs., with nine months still before him for "furnishing."

"Of course, one has to remember that not a single chance has been missed with Finn," said the Master. "His development is probably some months ahead of the average hound of his age, but it is pretty good at that; yes, I think it is pretty good."

And then a train came roaring into the station, and Finn and Kathleen, who up till now had only occasionally seen trains from a distance, lowered their tails, and pulled back a little on their chains. The Master had a pleasant way with people like railway guards, and this particular train had not very many people in it. Accordingly the two young hounds presently found themselves in a passenger compartment, the door of which was locked. So chains were removed, and while Finn stood with his nose against the glass of one window, Kathleen, facing the other way, had her nose against the opposite window. When the train started, with a jerk, Finn had his first abrupt sensation of travel, and he did not like it at all. It seemed to him that the ground was suddenly snatched from under him, and then he saw trees and posts and houses flying bodily past him. He barked loudly at one little flying house, which seemed almost to brush the window against which his nose rested, and the Mistress of the Kennels laughed at him as she placed a hand caressingly on his neck. Now Finn detested being laughed at. He did not know what it meant, and when the Master laughed *with* him, during a frolic of any kind, he liked the sound very much. But being laughed at always made the hair stir uncomfortably on his shoulder-blades. As the culprit in this case was the Mistress of the Kennels, he did not even look at her angrily; but when Tara laughed at him, as she often had done in the past, he always protested with a sort of throaty beginning of a growl, which was not so much really a growl as an equivalent for the sound humans make and describe as "Tut, tut!" or "Tsh, tsh!" Finn did not again bark at a flying house or tree; but, though the whole experience interested him very much, he was greatly puzzled by some of the phenomena connected with this railway journey.

In due course, but not before Finn had become comparatively blasé as a traveller, and more than a little weary of the whole thing, the chains were

put on again, and the hounds were led out from the train into the midst of a crowd of strange people. Finn had no idea that there were anything like so many people in the world as he found pressing about him now, and many of them were leading dogs on chains. Finn's attitude towards these strange dogs was one of considerable reserve. He was very self-conscious; rather like a young man from the country who suddenly and unexpectedly found himself in the midst of some fashionable crush in London; an exceedingly well-bred young man, of remarkably fine figure; a sportsman of some prowess, too; but one who felt that he had not been introduced to any of the members of the noisy, bustling throng, and fancied that every one else was conscious of the fact.

New experiences were crowding thick and fast upon Finn and Kathleen just now. After rubbing shoulders with this astonishing crowd for some minutes, they found themselves face to face for the first time in their lives with a flight of steps. True, they each felt a soothing hand on their shoulders, a hand they knew and loved, but the thing was disconcerting none the less. At first glance these steps obviously called for small leaps and bounds as a mode of progression. And yet, when one took ever so small a leap, one's nose inevitably came into sharp contact with the legs of strange humans who climbed in front; a distinctly unpleasant experience, because undignified, and implying a desire for familiarity which Finn by no means felt.

However, an end came to the steps at length, and then, after walking some distance in the open road, and being allowed to run loose for a few minutes in a quiet street, full of strange, strong smells and a curious absence of air, Finn and Kathleen were led into a large building, bigger than the orchard at home, and containing, besides countless humans, all the dogs that ever were in all the world, all talking incoherently, and together. At least, that was how it struck Finn and Kathleen. As a matter of fact, there were some thousands of dogs in the Crystal Palace that day, for it was the opening day of the great annual Kennel Club Show; the biggest society event of the year among dogs. It was a more exclusive assembly than any of the purely human sort, because every dog, among all the thousands there assembled, was an aristocrat with a pedigree as long as his body. There was not a parvenu among them all;

and there are no human assemblies about which that may be said.

It is difficult to conceive precisely how great an ordeal it was for Finn and Kathleen to face, when they were led down the length of this great building to their own particular bench among the other Irish Wolfhounds, of whom there were some thirty or forty present. For fifty yards or more they walked down an aisle between double rows of benches, every yard of which was occupied by terriers of one sort and another, all yapping and barking at the top of their respective registers. Be it remembered that Finn and Kathleen, up till that morning, had never been at close quarters with more than one dog at a time, and had never seen more than about a dozen dogs outside their own breed altogether. The noise of barking, the pungency and variety of smells, and the crowded multiplicity of doggy personalities were at first overpowering, and Finn and his sister walked with lowered tails, quick-shifting eyes, raised hackles, and twitching skin. But pride of race, and the self-confidence which goes with exceptional strength, soon came to Finn's aid, and by the time he reached his own bench, his tail was carried high and muzzle also, though he walked with unusual rigidity, and at heart was far from comfortable.

Though the benches were continuous, the space allotted to each dog was divided from that of the next dog by a strong galvanized iron network, and each dog's chain was fastened to the back of his bench. When the Wolfhounds were benched, Finn had his sister upon his right, and (though he never suspected it) his redoubtable sire, the great Champion Dermot Asthore, on his left. On Kathleen's right was a big rebel of a dog with an angry eye, named Wolf Tone. Facing them, on the other side of their aisle, was a long row of their cousins, the Deerhound family; while behind them, and out of sight, was an even longer row of their cousins on the other side: the Great Dane family. Farther on, beyond Champion Dermot Asthore, who sat in the rear of his bench wrapped in a cloak of kingly isolation--he disliked shows very much, and now, late in his great career, was thoroughly weary of them--was a row of five and twenty distant connections of Finn's, belonging to the Russian Wolfhound or Borzois family. Finn had noticed these white and lemon coloured curled darlings as he was led along to his own bench, and his nostrils had wrinkled with scorn as he noted their "prettiness," the snipey sharpness

of their long muzzles, the extraordinary slimness and delicacy of their legs, the effeminate narrowness of their chests, and the toyish blue ribbons that decorated some of their collars. Mentally, he granted these fashionable darlings fleetness, but absolutely withheld from them the killing powers they are credited with. "Bah!" one may imagine Finn muttering to himself. "Foxy tails, weasel's faces, terrier's legs--you are almost toys!"

Heavy-coated, massive old Dermot Asthore took no more notice of Finn than of the rest of the show. He was supremely bored, and, being perfectly aware that the show lasted three days, his immediate prospect disgusted him. One fancied that on the few occasions upon which he did open his mouth at all, his remark was always the same--"Tcha! And at my time of life, too!" But Finn was not otherwise neglected. The Mistress of the Kennels had a little camp-stool, and on this she sat mid-way between Finn and Kathleen. Finn also had the Master's hand-bag in his section of the bench; and that was rather nice and companionable. Also, the Master himself seemed seldom to be far away. He flitted to and fro, generally in conversation with somebody, and always followed, for so long as he was in sight, by the eyes of Finn and Kathleen. In his hand he carried a yellow book which told him the names of every dog in all that vast assemblage of canine princes and lordlings, with details, too, as to their exalted ancestry.

The Mistress of the Kennels was studying a similar book, and if Finn, whose muzzle at this time was just above her shoulder, could have read, he would have seen that she was busy with the Irish Wolfhound section of the catalogue. This showed her that there were three separate classes for Irish Wolfhound dogs, and three for bitches of the same breed--Open, Limit, and Novice; with first, second, and third prizes to be won in each class. The Open classes were for all and any Irish Wolfhounds of each sex; the Limit classes were for such as had not previously won more than six first prizes; and the Novice classes were for hounds that had never won a first prize in any show. There was also a junior class for hounds of both sexes under the age of eighteen months. In the Open dog class there appeared the names of no fewer than two fully-fledged champions, and two other fully developed hounds that were already within

measurable reach of championship honours; besides several other Wolfhounds of high repute and proved prowess as prize-winners at shows. In the Open bitch class there was one champion entered, and four or five others of whom great things had been predicted. In the other classes it was evident that competition would be brisk. In the Limit class, for example, were several hounds well past maturity who had already won at other shows as many as four and five first prizes. The Novice classes included the names of some extremely promising hounds, several of whom had already won second and third prizes elsewhere. In the junior class there were four other entries, besides those of Finn and Kathleen. But Finn and Kathleen had been boldly entered right through, in all classes for which they were eligible. Old breeders who had not seen them smiled over the breeder's enthusiasm in entering fifteen months old youngsters in Open classes, where they would meet old champions, whose very names carried great weight, both with the judges and the public.

A young Irish Wolfhound, lying down among the straw of his bench, is a very deceptive animal. When he is, say, three years old, his beard and brows, massive shoulders, and set, assured expression give one fair warning of the commanding presence he will display when he rises. But when he is yet young he looks a much lesser creature than he is when seen on a show bench, particularly if, as so often happens, he makes a kind of nest for himself in the straw. Most of the people specially interested in Wolfhounds paused opposite Finn's place, and made some passing remark about: "Fine head, that!" "Good muzzle that youngster has!" or if they noticed one of his forelegs over the straw: "Wonderful heavy timbers, those!" But they paid no very particular heed really to the hounds from the cottage beside the Downs. Now and again, however, an old breeder, passing leisurely along the benches, would pause when he had passed Kathleen, and, after a quick glance back, return to Finn's place, looking up his number in the catalogue, and gazing at the young hound with a gravely calculating eye. "Fifteen months old!" muttered one of these, glancing to and fro between his catalogue and Finn. "H'm! By old Dermot--Tara. Yes. Finn. Ah!" And so on down the benches. Finn had a notion that these men knew a good deal; they had a knowledgeable way with them. Finn would have obeyed them readily. That was how their

manner impressed him.

By the time Finn had to some extent exhausted the first novelty of his surroundings, and was contemplating the desirability of sleeping off some of its effects--the number of new impressions he had formed that morning was at least equal to those of a human's first visit to a great picture gallery--the Master came along with something of a rush, chains were unsnapped, and Finn and his sister were taken down from the bench. A number of other Wolfhounds were leaving the bench at the same time, and being led in the direction of a fenced-in judging ring (square in shape, by the way) at one end of the building. The dog classes for Irish Wolfhounds were about to be judged, and the Mistress of the Kennels brought Kathleen along, though her sex was not to be judged for some time, because she knew the youngster would be unhappy if left alone on the bench. The Master was leading Finn, and, before they entered the ring, he passed his hand solicitously over the dog's immature brows and beard once or twice, even as a very young man may be noticed to tug at his moustache with a view, presumably, to making the very most of it. The Mistress found a place for herself beside the ring with Kathleen, which not only gave her a good view of the judging, but also showed her plainly to all in the ring. This was for Finn's especial benefit. And then the Master walked into the ring with Finn, and took up his place next to the lady who led the grand old hound who had sired Finn--Champion Dermot.

In the centre of the ring, accompanied by a busy steward with a sheaf of notes in his hand, stood the Judge of Irish Wolfhounds; a man grown grey, white-haired indeed, in the study of dog-folk, and one of whom it might be said that, by his own single-hearted efforts, he had saved the breed of Irish Wolfhounds from becoming extinct in the middle of last century, and accomplished a great deal of the spade work which has brought the modern breed to its present flourishing state. No man living could claim to know more of Irish Wolfhounds than this white-haired Judge, who stood in the centre of a ring formed by all the greatest aristocrats of the historic breed.

"Move them round, please," he said quietly. "Keep them moving as freely as possible."

Finn was the only hound in that ring under two and a half years of age, and Finn was just fifteen months old, a child among the acknowledged leaders and chieftains of his race. One noticed it in the comparative angularity and leggyness of his build. He carried less flesh than the others, was far less set; in a word, they had "furnished," and Finn had not. The Mistress of the Kennels, from her place beside the ring, noticed these things, and sighed for the soaring ambition which had led to the entering of this tyro in Open class.

"Finn, boy!" said she, in an impressive, long-drawn whisper, as Finn passed her place. The youngster's ears lifted, and his fine neck curved superbly as he looked round at the Mistress. And just then the Master bent over him, whispering close beside his ear certain nonsense words which were associated in Finn's mind with certain events, like rabbit-hunting and racing on the Downs.

"Chu, chu, chu--u--u--, Finn!" whispered the Master. And that was a nonsense word connected with two things only: the unexpected rising of a rabbit ahead, and the new game in which Finn had been led round a ring with Tara and Kathleen in the orchard at home. And, to be sure, there was the Mistress of the Kennels looking on all the time, and Finn and the Master walking round, and other dogs, and----

And it was thus that Finn passed a Judge at a dog show for the first time. It was thus that he realized that it was a show; that he, Finn, was being judged, compared with others of his kind. From that moment Finn showed the best that was in him to show, with an air as kingly as that of any of his warrior ancestors in the ancient days when they were the friends and defenders of kings, the companions in sport of great chieftains. When next Finn approached the Judge in the march round, the Master touched his flank, and he rose up to his full towering height, his fore-paws higher than a man's head, and the Master pretended to rebuke him with: "Down, Finn! Down, you rascal!" But Finn knew well, by his tone, that all was well, and his own appearance most imposing. The Judge, in the centre of the ring, chewed the end of his pencil reflectively, and now and again he said, "That will do, thank you!" to some exhibitor, and that exhibitor withdrew from the ring with his hound, wearing an elaborately assumed air of indifference or relief, and feeling much real

chagrin. Occasionally the Judge would merely wave his hand for the same purpose, with a nod to some particular exhibitor.

During about the fifth or sixth march round the Judge waved his hand and nodded to the Master with a murmured remark. The Master's face fell, and, as he drew abreast of the opening in the side of the ring, he moved out slowly with Finn. To him then came a steward, fussily official. He was not to withdraw from the ring, it appeared, but only to take up his stand in one corner of it with Champion Dermot Asthore, Champion Munster, and a magnificent hound named Cormac. The Judge was making notes on slips of paper now, and in another minute or so the ring was empty, save for the three hounds mentioned and Finn.

And now there came the most searching sort of examination of these four Wolfhounds, who were drawn up in a row before the Judge. Teeth, eyes, claws, all were in turn closely scrutinized by the man who had weighed and studied such matters for the half of a century. Muscles and joints were carefully felt, and all in a manner which no self-respecting hound could take exception to; with the assured, gentle, knowledgeable touch which soothes and inspires confidence in all animal folk. Then the four hounds must walk round once more in single file. Then they must run to and fro, singly. And, lastly, they must stand together to have the measuring standard applied to their shoulders. Young Finn was the last to come under the standard; and the Judge measured him four times over before he would admit himself correct in pronouncing Finn full 35 1/4 inches at the shoulder: "And I may say, sir, the biggest hound I ever measured. Fifteen and a half months, you say? Tcha! Remarkable; remarkable, sir." And this Judge knew more about Irish Wolfhounds than any other man living.

Cormac's master was told that he could stand aside, and a murmur went round the ring of spectators to the effect that Cormac was the winner. Then Champion Munster was told to stand aside, and the crowd placed him second. And then the Judge spent five reflective minutes in pondering over Champion Dermot Asthore, the most famous Irish Wolfhound of his day, and young Finn, his son, and the son of beautiful Tara. The crowd wondered which of these two was to have third prize, the celebrated old champion or the tyro.

At last the Judge drew back, saying: "That will do, thank you!"

The crowd surged round the notice-board. Excitement ran high now, for this was the most important Wolfhound class of the whole show, and the stewards were approaching the board to pin up the winning numbers. The Master glanced across at the Mistress of the Kennels, and stooped then to fondle Finn's ears, and murmur nonsense words to him. Then he, too, pressed forward to the notice-board, and read the awards, thus:--

1st...No. 247.

2nd...No. 248.

3rd...No. 261.

V.H.C...No. 256.

H.C...No. 259.

Not daring to be quite certain, the Master drew out the little medal from beside Finn's collar, and read again on it Finn's number: 247. By this single judgment, then, Finn was declared winner of the Open class for Irish Wolfhound dogs, and that meant that, unless a bitch could be found to beat him, Finn also won the Challenge Shield for best Irish Wolfhound in the Show. Champion Dermot Asthore, his sire, came second, Champion Munster third, Cormac very highly commended, and a dog called Patrick highly commended.

A moment later the Mistress of the Kennels was in possession of the great news, and her arms were about Finn's neck, while Finn nosed the momentarily neglected Kathleen's muzzle.

"You great, beautiful Finn, do you know you are first? Do you know you've beaten all the champions?" she said. And Finn nuzzled her shoulder and wondered why she was in any doubt about his recognition of a thing so obvious. But it was a very great triumph all the same; the greatest triumph that had ever fallen to a breeder of Irish Wolfhounds, as some of those who hastened to congratulate the Master now were careful

to point out.

"For a fifteen months' novice, you know, against two champions, and a hound like Cormac--wonderful!" they said. But all were agreed that Finn justified the award. "He's the tallest hound in the breed, now," said the Judge, as he passed that way, and lingered to pass his hand over Finn's shoulder; "and he will be the biggest and finest if he lives; distinctly the finest Irish Wolfhound I have ever handled, and--I've handled most of them." Higher tribute from such a Judge no dog could earn. The Master flushed with pleasure and pride as he heard it, and turned to receive the congratulations of the exhibitors of Champions Dermot Asthore, and Munster.

In the Limit and Novice classes Finn was awarded first place as a matter of course. There was nothing there to beat him. And then came the judging of the bitch classes, in which Kathleen did extraordinarily well for so young a hound, and in such "good company," as the saying goes. She won third prize in the Open class, second in the Limit, and first in the Novice. And then four other young hounds filed into the ring with Finn and Kathleen to be judged in the junior class. The other four young hounds were of a very good sort, but they had not the development, the bone, muscle, and stature of Finn and Kathleen, and there was not much hesitation in the decision which placed Finn first, Kathleen second, and a youngster called Connemara third.

And then Finn had to be judged beside the winner in the Open class for bitches, to decide who should be given the Challenge Shield for the best Irish Wolfhound in the Show. And this was a task which tried the white-haired Judge's patience for a long time. The female was Champion Lady Iseult of Leinster, and one of the most beautiful hounds of her sex ever seen. She was fully matured, and her reputation was world-wide. Judged on "points," as breeders say, she was very near to perfection. Technically, it was difficult to find fault in her, unless that she was a shade too straight in her hocks, a fault that often goes with great stature in a hound. Finn's hocks were curved like an Arab stallion's, springy as a cat's. The Judge tested the two hounds side by side, again and again, and in every way he could think of, but without coming to a decision between them. At last, after passing his hand down the hocks of the Lady Iseult, he asked that

they might both be run, quickly as possible, while led. That seemed to guide him a good deal. But it was clear that the conscientious old Judge and breeder was not yet fully satisfied. Finally, he had the opening to the rings closed, and a hurdle brought in. Then the Lady Iseult was invited to run at and leap the hurdle. She did so, and with a good grace, returning docilely enough to her master. Then the Master loosed Finn, and the Mistress of the Kennels called him from the far side of the ring. Finn bounded forward with the elasticity of a cat, and cleared the hurdle with a perfect spring and fully two feet to spare. The Judge stroked his imperial, laid a hand on the shoulders of both hounds, and said--

"The young dog has it--the finest hound I ever saw!"

dognapper and wolfhound by night

CHAPTER VII

REVELATIONS

It is the custom at dog shows for the authorities to distribute certificates on coloured cardboard of all the awards made by the judges. At this show of Finn's great triumph, first prize cards were all blue, second prize cards red, and third prize cards yellow. The custom was for exhibitors proudly to affix these cards to the wire net-work stretched above the bench of the winning dog. So it fell out that soon after the judging of Wolfhounds was over, two red cards and two blue cards were fixed over Kathleen's bench, and the Mistress of the Kennels lavished considerable attention upon her, lest she should be moved to jealousy of Finn. The decoration of the wire-work over Finn's bench was most striking.

First, there were four blue first prize cards, for his sensational win in Open, Limit, Novice, and Junior classes. Then there was a very handsome card with ribbons attached, signifying that Finn had won the Challenge Shield for the best Irish Wolfhound in the Show. And then there were two other blue cards telling that Finn had won two special prizes; one, a medal offered by a member of the Irish Wolfhound Club for the best hound at the Show bred by its exhibitor; and another, of two guineas, offered by a well-known Irish sportsman for the biggest Irish Wolfhound in the Show. And so Finn sat in state beneath a sort of dome consisting of no fewer than seven trophies. It seemed a little hard on that magnificent hound, his sire, who occupied the next bench, under the shelter of but one solitary red card. But Dermot Asthore was a philosopher, and, as has been said, weary of shows. He lay curled, like a great cat, and slept stolidly, presenting nothing more conscious to the passing throng than a small triangular section of one blood-shot eye.

With Finn matters were otherwise. His numerous trophies won him much

attention, even from the large majority who were ignorant of his great technical claims to fame. There was always a little group in front of Finn's bench, and those of his admirers who had claims upon the Master--besides many who had none--were continually begging that he should be taken down from the bench, so that they might admire his full stature. Then there were newspaper men with cameras and note-books; and there were dealers with cheque-books, and a ready hand and eye for deprecation. But these were given no sort of encouragement by the Master. Finn received as much attention in the evening papers that day as any leader of human society; and in the papers devoted to doggy interests, a great deal more. He was conscious of more of this than you might suppose, even though he could not read newspapers: but the thing he was most keenly conscious of was the fact that he had managed greatly to please the Master and the Mistress of the Kennels. Finn felt happy and proud about this, but, although he was taken down from the bench several times and led into out-of-the-way corners where his chain could be removed and he was able to stretch his limbs, still, he became pretty thoroughly tired of the publicity and racket of the Dog Show before he was led out of the building at ten o'clock that night, with Kathleen, by the Master. The Mistress had gone home to Tara, early in the evening; but the Master was sleeping in lodgings near the Palace, which he had engaged on the clear understanding that he was allowed to bring the Wolfhounds there with him. Finn had not realized as yet that one of the penalties of the fame that he had won lay in the fact that he was obliged to spend another two whole days in the show building.

But though Finn and Kathleen knew it not, their lot was a far more fortunate one than that of the great majority of their kind at the Show. Knowing that they would be unhappy if left in the building at night, that they probably would be too much wrought up to eat there, and that they would feel being chained up for so long more than most dogs, the Master had arranged to take them out at night, in order that they might have half an hour's freedom before supper and retirement to a sleeping place in the room he had taken for himself. There were dogs in the Show whose masters did not come near them after the judging on the first day, until the end of the third day. These unfortunates were left to the rather chancy attentions of the show attendants, who, with thousands of dogs to care

for, could hardly be expected to give any of them much individual notice.

On the evening of the second day of the Show, while the Master was engaged in conversation at some distance from Finn's bench, the young hounds from the cottage by the Downs received a visit from a man who showed the utmost admiration for them, and particularly, of course, for Finn. This man, whose appearance rather reminded Finn of one whom he had heard referred to as the gamekeeper, down in Sussex, looked up Finn's name and ancestry in the show catalogue, and gave particular heed to the fine display of prize cards over his head. He fondled Finn for several minutes, and Finn knew by the various smells which hung about the man that he was accustomed to mixing a good deal with dog-folk. Before turning away, this friendly and admiring man presented Finn with a small piece of meat which he took from a paper-bag in one of his pockets; and, of all the meat that Finn had ever tasted, this piece had the most fascinating smell and the most provocatively exciting and pleasing flavour. He meditated over this piece of meat for quite a long time, and when, during the last afternoon of the Show, the friendly stranger appeared before him again, Finn welcomed the man effusively, and, with nose and paw, plainly asked for some more of that fascinating meat. The man chuckled, and rubbed the backs of Finn's ears in an affectionate manner for several minutes. What Finn found more to the point was that, before leaving, the man did present him with another small section of this delicious meat with the fascinating smell. Finn wished there was more of it, but he felt exceedingly grateful to the stranger for the one piece and for the rest of his friendly attention.

By payment of a small fee the Master was enabled to take Finn and Kathleen away from the Show much earlier on that evening than before, and a few hours later they were all three being welcomed at home by the Mistress of the Kennels and Tara. Tara, by the way, was hardly able to spare time for a remark at first; she was so busy sniffing all round Finn and Kathleen, and reading for herself the sort of record of their recent adventures which their coats and her delicate sense of smell provided. The three hounds dined sumptuously, and in a row, while the Master and the Mistress sat before them fighting their battles over again and discussing their triumph in the show-ring. Then, the night being fine, the

three were allowed to wander out into the orchard for a quarter of an hour or so before going to bed. The Master remained in his den talking.

Directly Tara reached the orchard she barked out loud, "Who's there?"-- an unmistakable sort of bark one would have thought. But the Master was pretty thoroughly tired, and, perhaps, the fact that he was chatting with the Mistress prevented his understanding Tara's bark. At all events, he paid no heed to it. Tara promptly trotted across to the gate between the orchard and the open down, followed closely by Finn and Kathleen. There, much to Finn's delight, they found the friendly stranger of the Show. Tara eyed the man with hauteur, as one whose acquaintance she had not made. Kathleen remained modestly in the background. Finn, with lively recollections of the peculiarly savoury meat which the stranger dealt in, placed his fore-paws, on the top of the gate, and lolled his tongue at the man in friendly greeting. The man gave Finn a provokingly tiny fragment of the savoury meat, and rubbed the young hound's ears in the coaxing way he had. Then he stepped back a pace or two, and produced a large piece of the meat.

"Here, boy! Here, Finn! Jump, then, Finn!" The gate was less than five feet high, and the seductive odour of this peculiar meat floated just beyond it in the still night air. Finn drew back a pace or two, and then, with a beautiful spring, cleared the gate easily. While giving Finn the piece of meat he had been holding, the man slipped a swivel on to the ring of the handsome green collar, and attached to the swivel there was a strong leather lead. The man moved on slowly, with another piece of meat in his hand, and Finn paced with him, willingly enough. When Finn had finished the next piece of meat he was a hundred yards away from the orchard. He looked back then, and an uncomfortable thrill passed through his young heart; a vague thrill it was, conveying no definite fear or impression to his mind. Still, it was uncomfortable. He had half a mind to go back and rejoin Tara and Kathleen, and so, tentatively, he halted. If the friendly stranger had tried to force Finn then, there would have been trouble. But he did not. Instead, he bent down and played with Finn's ears, and then brought another piece of meat out of his pocket. Holding this out, he moved on again; and the dog followed, forgetful now of his momentary thrill of discomfort. After all, he thought, vaguely, very likely

this unaccustomed night walk was all part of the Show and its many novel experiences. There had been night walks at the end of each show day. When Finn had had another morsel of the meat, the friendly stranger put another collar on his neck, and removed the green one. Then he began to trot, and Finn trotted with him, quite contentedly. Finn was always glad to run.

So the two trotted for miles, through the mild, still October night, the man breathing heavily. Once something made Finn pause suddenly; and the pause let him into a secret. The collar he was wearing now was different from any other he had known in his short life. If you pulled against it, it slipped round your throat so tightly as to stop your breathing instantly and absolutely. The only thing to do was to go the way the collar and lead pulled; then, immediately, the pressure relaxed. It was a collar that had to be obeyed, that was evident. These "slip-collars" are well known to some members of the Great Dane family, and particularly to those who are owned by dealers; but their use came with rather a shock to lordly young Finn, who, living the free and happy life he always had lived, there beside the Sussex Downs, had rarely been asked to wear a collar of any sort.

After a time, Finn and the stranger came to a little town, and walked into the yard of an inn. There another man met them, to whom Finn's friend said, hurriedly--

"I'll walk straight on. You drive on with the cart after me. Don't stop till you're clear of the village."

"You've got him, then?" said the second man.

"Never you mind about that. Can't yer see I've got him? You get the pony out."

And then Finn followed his leader out of the yard, and through the quiet little village to the open country beyond. But by this time Finn was beginning to feel that the night walk had been prolonged far enough. There was no sign of any more of the aromatic meat coming his way, and he had given up asking for it, and nosing the man's pocket. He thought he would like to turn now, and get back to Kathleen and Tara and the

Master. The day, and its immediate predecessors, had been tiring, and Finn thought with strong desire of his fragrant wheaten straw bed in the coach-house at home. Yes, it was certainly time to return.

Accordingly, Finn asked his leader to stop, and, finding that the man took no notice, he asked again, through his nose, and urgently. The man paid not the slightest heed to this, and that rather angered Finn, who was not accustomed to being ignored; so he planted his fore-feet firmly, and stopped dead. As the lead tightened, the slip-collar pressed painfully on Finn's throat; but he felt that the time had arrived to bring this excursion to an end, and so steeled himself to ignore this pressure.

"None o' that, now!" said the man, with a new note in his voice, of extreme harshness. "Come along now; d'ye hear!"

Finn's fore-legs remained rigid. He had made up his mind now, and already he was beginning to regret having stayed so long with this stranger.

The man now gave a powerful tug at the leather lead, and at that the pressure of the slip-collar forced Finn's tongue out between his teeth. This was really painful, but it was clear in Finn's mind that he must go home, so he remained straining backward.

"Come on 'ere, ye brute!" growled the man savagely, and, with a vicious jerk at the lead, he took a step to one side, and then kicked Finn on the hind-quarters as hard as he could. That was the first real blow Finn had ever received, and it taught him quite a lot. Up till this point it had not occurred to him for a moment that the man entertained any other than kindly, friendly feelings for him. In fact, he supposed that every one entertained kindly feelings towards him. He had never experienced any other sort of attitude. But this savage kick was a revelation to him. Also, it hurt. Finn turned in his tracks and plunged forward in the direction from which, they had come with such sudden strength that he almost dragged the lead from the man's strong hand, and would undoubtedly have freed himself, but for the slip-collar. As it was, the sudden jerk nearly throttled Finn, and brought him rolling on his back with all four feet in the air. Before he could rise again, the man had planted two ferocious kicks on

his ribs; and Finn was thankful then to draw a free breath by moving towards his persecutor, so as to slacken the pressure on the lead. But, the moment he had drawn breath, the desire to escape possessed him once more, and he repeated his leap for freedom. This time the man was prepared, and, in addition to the pressure brought about by Finn's reaching the end of his tether, there was the savage extra pressure of a quick backward jerk at the lead, to bring the hound on his back a second time. This time the man kicked him very severely, and, in addition, smote him violently on the nose with clenched fist, as he staggered to his feet, gasping for breath.

Just then the dim, smoky lights of a cart appeared at the bend in the road, twenty yards away, in the direction of the village.

"That you, Bill?" cried the man who held Finn, and an affirmative answer reached him from the cart. "Come on, then, and let's get this stubborn beast into the cart." He gave a savage jerk at Finn's slip-collar as he spoke, and once more his nailed boot crashed against the bewildered Wolfhound's ribs. The man had an itch of anger and brutality upon him by this time. Finn leaped sideways with a quick gasp as the man's boot struck him and the cruel collar tightened; and at this sharp movement of his great body, there in the middle of the road, the pony shied violently, just as it was being drawn in to a standstill; the cart swerved sharply into the hedge, and a cracking sound betrayed the breaking of a shaft.

This was the finishing touch required to round off the naturally vicious temper of the man who held Finn into a passion of sullen, brutal anger. He cursed unceasingly while the man in the cart made the necessary repairs with cord and a couple of sticks from the hedge; and with every curse there was a kick, or a vicious blow, or a savage jerk at the torturing slip-collar, and sometimes all three together. Finn could have killed the man with ease; but, so far, the thought of even biting him never occurred to the Wolfhound. Every hour that he had spent in the world had taught him that humans were his friends, his very kindly protectors, his guardians and governors, so to say. Every hour of his mother's life, with but very few exceptions, had borne the same belief in upon her, and her nature was the sweetest and gentlest imaginable. With his father, now, the case was somewhat otherwise. There were those who said that the

rather taciturn and shy Dermot owed some of his wonderfully heavy coat to the mesalliance of a forbear of his with a Tibetan Sheep Dog of a half-wild sort, with a temper far from reliable. But, as yet at all events, Finn's temper was that of a clean run, well-bred English boy; frank, open, trusting, and kindly; and, sorely as he ached, sorely bewildered as he felt under the rain of blows and kicks, curses and strangling tugs at his collar, he had as yet no thought of vengeance. His only desire was for escape, and a return to the sweet, free life he knew beside the Downs.

The man who held Finn instinctively recognised all this, and the knowledge whetted the savagery of his temper, and withdrew all restraint from its cruel indulgence. He had no conscious wish to injure the hound; quite the contrary, since Finn represented money to him, and money was what he desired more than anything else; but he was tired, things seemed to be going ill with him, his temper was thoroughly roused, and the innocent cause of all this, a sensitive, living creature, was tethered and helpless beside him; and so he kicked and cursed, and jerked at the lead, and found relief in Finn's gasps of pain and want of breath.

When the shaft was mended, the tail-board of the little cart was let down, and, with a savage kick at Finn's hind-quarters, the man bade him "Get up, there, ---- ye! Get up, ye brute!" Another kick. Poor Finn tried to squirm forward under the cart to escape the heavy boot of his persecutor. Then he was furiously jerked backward and half throttled.

"Steady with 'im, matey," said the other man. "Don't knock the dollars off of 'im."

"Who asked you to shove your jaw in?" snarled the first man. "You didn't get the brute, did ye--curse him!"

Another kick.

The other man was used to his friend's temper, and said nothing; but he hated to see a valuable animal knocked about, just as he would have hated to see money thrown in the gutter instead of into a publican's till; so he stooped down and lifted Finn's fore-feet from the ground, and placed them on the floor of the cart.

"My oath!" he said, "but 'e's a tidy weight, ain't he? Up ye go, my bully boy!" And up Finn went, on the spur of another violent kick, which broke the skin across one of his hocks. The lead was now fastened close down to a staple in the floor of the cart, Finn being forced down on his side by the simple process of being knelt upon by his persecutor. To make doubly sure of him, his fore-legs were then tightly lashed together with his own green collar; and then the two men mounted the front of the cart and drove off.

The memory of that night's drive burnt itself deep into Finn's young mind. He never really forgot it; that is to say, its effect upon his attitude toward men and life was never completely lost. His skin was broken in three or four places; every bone in his body ached from the heavy kicks he had received; an intolerable thirst kept him gasping for every breath he drew; the cramp set up in his fore-legs by their being strapped tightly together, one across the other, was an exquisite pain; and his muzzle was held hard down against the grimy floor-boards of the cart, while his mind was full of a black despairing fear of he knew not what. It was a severe ordeal for one who, up till then, had never even known what it meant to receive a severe verbal scolding; for one who had never seen a man's hand lifted in anger.

An end came at last to this horrible drive.

"Thank Gawd, 'ere's 'orley!" said the man who drove; and after another minute or two the little cart came to a standstill in a walled-in yard. The pony was taken out and stabled, and then the man addressed as "Matey," still sullen and sour, let down the tail-board of the cart with a jerk, and dragged Finn out by the collar, allowing him to fall with a thud from the cart to the ground, rendered helpless by the strap round his fore-legs.

"'Ere, get up outa that!" growled the man, with a careless kick. Then, seeing that Finn could not move, he bent down, unbuckled the green enamelled strap, dragged it roughly away, and kicked the dog again. Cramped and sore beyond belief, Finn staggered on to his feet. A door was opened, and Finn was jerked and dragged into a perfectly dark, evil-smelling hole, about four feet square, with an earthen floor, from which

horrible odours rose. The ground in this place was filthy. It had no drainage and no ventilation, except a few round holes in the door; which door was now slammed to and locked on the outside.

"Ain't ye goin' to give 'im a drink, matey?" asked Bill, outside.

"Drink be blowed! Let 'im wait till mornin'. Come in an' 'ave one yerself. I'm blessed glad this night's job's done; an' if I can't make fifty quid out 've it, I shall want to know the reason why, I can tell yer. Big, ugly brute, ain't 'e! Strong as a mule, too. *I'd* want to be paid pretty 'andsome fer the keepin' o' such a brute; but the American gent's red 'ot ter get 'im, I can tell yer. Biggest ever bred, they tell me. I think I shall 'ave to stick on another tenner, eh, Bill? Come on!"

Their very voices were a misery to the shrinking, aching, choking Finn, who stood shuddering in his fetid den, his sensitive nose wrinkling with horror and disgust. His need of water was the thing which hurt him the most cruelly; but the nature of his prison was a good deal of a torture, too. Remember that his life so far had been as cleanly and decent in detail as yours or mine. Certainly this was a sad plight for the hero of the Kennel Club Show, and the finest living descendant of a fifteen hundred year old line of princes among dogs.

wolfhound fleeing through downland

CHAPTER VIII

FINN WALKS ALONE

For a long while after the men had left the scene of Finn's miserable captivity, he remained standing, and occupying as small a space as possible in his prison. The fastidiousness bred in him by careful rearing told severely against Finn just now. He had never, until this night, been without water to slake his thirst; and never, never had he smelt anything so horrible as the earth of the little den in which he was now confined. Also, the place was actually filthy, as well as apparently so. Finn could not bring himself to move in it. He stood shrinking by the door, with his nose near a crack beside its hinges. For long he reflected upon the events of that night, without moving. Then, gradually, thoughts of Kathleen and Tara, and the sweet cleanliness and freedom of his home beside the Downs, came swimming into Finn's mind, and these thoughts seemed to add intolerably to the aching of his bruised bones and muscles, to the soreness of those spots in which his skin had been broken, and to the misery of the thirst which kept his tongue protruding at one side of his jaws.

Unable to bear these things any longer, Finn turned cautiously toward the middle of his loathsome prison, and, though his feet shrank from the task, scraped a hollow place in its midst of about the bigness of a wash-hand basin. Then, treading as though upon hot bricks, he squirmed his great body round to avoid touching the walls of his prison, and sat on his haunches in the hollow he had made. He was now filled with a desire to inform Tara and the Master, and, it may be, the rest of the world, about his sorry plight. But, particularly, he wanted to let the Master and Tara know about it. And so, seated there in what he had endeavoured to make the one approachably clean spot available, Finn pointed his long muzzle toward the stars he could not see, and, opening his jaws wide, expelled

from them the true Irish Wolfhound howl, which seemed to tear its way outward and upward from the very centre of the hound's grief-smitten heart, to wind slowly through his lungs and throat, and to reach the outer air with very much the effect of a big steamship's syren in a dense fog. It is a very long-drawn cry, beginning away down in the bass, dragging up slowly to an anguished treble note in a very minor key, and subsiding, despairingly, about half-way back to the bass. It is a sound that carries a very long way--though not so far as from the place of Finn's captivity to the Sussex Downs--and carries misery with it just as far as ever it can reach. Upon the hearer who has any bowels of compassion it falls with a weight of physical appeal which may not be denied. Above all, it is a strange, mysterious, uncanny cry, and not a sound which can be ignored. It is a sound to fetch you hurriedly from your bed at midnight; and that though you had been sunk in dreamless sleep when first it smote its irresistible way into your consciousness.

Finn was beginning the bass rumble of his sixth howl when the door of his prison was flung suddenly open, and he saw Matey, armed with a hurricane lamp and a short, heavy stick. He was still so new to the ways of Matey's kind of human, that he thought his howls had brought him release, and, for an instant, he even had a vision of a deep basin of cold water, a meal, and a sweet, clean bed, which his innocent fancy told him Matey might have been engaged in preparing for him. If he had not been so loath to risk touching the walls of his prison, his powerful tail would have wagged as the door opened and the clean night air came in to him. As it was, he leaned forward to express his gratitude for the opening of the door. And as he moved forward, delicately, Matey's stick descended on his nose, with all the weight of Matey's arm and Matey's savage anger behind it. There was no more sensitive or vulnerable spot in the whole of Finn's anatomy, physically or morally. The blow was hideously painful, hideously unexpected, hideously demoralizing. It robbed Finn of sight, and sense, and self-respect, and forced a bewildered cry from him which was part bark, part howl, part growl, and part scream of pain. It planted fear and horror in a single instant in a creature who had lived in the world for fifteen months with no consciousness of either. The filth of his prison was forgotten in this new anguish of pain, and fear, and humiliation, compared with which the kicks and stranglings of the early part of the

night were as nothing at all. In a few seconds of time the proudest of princes in the dog world was reduced to a shuddering, cringing object, cowering in one corner of a filthy cupboard.

Matey was not only furiously angry, he was also a good deal afraid; and that added cruelty to his anger. He had heard a number of bedroom windows raised as he crossed the walled-in yard; he wanted no enquiries about the source and reason of the weird, syren-like howls that had brought him out in his shirt and trousers. It was his business to see that there were no more howls; and the only means that occurred to his brutal mind were those he now proceeded to put into operation. He closed the door of the den behind him, and he rained down blows upon Finn's shrinking body till his arm ached, and the dog's cries subsided into a low, continuous whimper, the very paralysis of shame, anguish, fear, and distress. Then, when his arm was thoroughly tired, he flung the stick viciously into Finn's face, went out, and locked the door.

Matey certainly could not be called a clever dog stealer, because he had no notion of how to preserve that which he stole. Putting aside their brutality, his methods were incredibly stupid; but when, five minutes later, he lay listening in his bed, the only reflection that his stupid mind brought him was that he had succeeded admirably. No further sound came from the walled-in yard; and it appeared that there was to be no further risk of neighbours being disturbed by howls from Finn. Matey was too far away to hear anything of the low, tremulous, nasal whimpering which trickled out into the night through the holes in the door of Finn's prison; and, in any case, there was no fear of that small sound disturbing any one. So, after his own fashion--which one really hesitates to call brutal, because brutes rarely, and probably never, indulge in pointless, unnecessary ferocity--Matey had been successful.

But if Matey had had sense enough to be called a clever dog-stealer, he would have recognised that, despite his huge bulk and strength, Finn was one of the gentlest and most docile of created things, whose silence and tractability a little child could and would have brought about with the greatest ease, and without so much as an angry word. And, so, one has to admit that Matey's cruelty was like nine-tenths of the other cruelty in the world, alike among the educated and the uneducated, in that it was

due to ignorance and stupidity.

For a long time Finn was conscious of nothing but fear, and pain, and misery. He really had been very badly handled, and, though he knew it not, one of his ribs was broken. After an hour or two, he became perfectly silent, and began, tentatively and in a half-hearted way, to lick some of his bruises and abrasions. Then, before this task was half accomplished, wise Nature asserted her claims, and the exhausted Wolfhound fell into a fitful sleep just before daybreak. When he woke, fully a couple of hours later, much of his pain and misery remained with him; but the fear had given place to other feelings, chief among which came the determination to escape from the dominion of Matey. His own short experience of life gave Finn nothing to draw upon in coping with the situation in which he now found himself. He was drawing now, not upon teaching or experience, but upon what we call instinct: the store of concentrated inherited experience with which Nature furnishes all created things, and some more richly than others. Deep down in Finn's share of this store there were faint stirrings in the direction of hatred and vengeance; but of these, Finn was not actually conscious as yet. What he was acutely conscious of was the determination with which instinct supplied him to seize the very first opportunity of getting clear away from his present environment, and from Matey. So much, instinct taught him: that he must get his freedom if he could, and that he must never, never again, for one moment, trust Matey. This was only the surface of the lesson instinct taught him. There was a lot more in the lesson which would permanently affect Finn's attitude toward humans and toward life itself. But the surface was the immediate thing; to win to freedom, and never to trust Matey again.

The first result of Finn's lesson was that he examined the whole of his prison very carefully, by the aid chiefly of his sense of smell and touch. There was hardly any light in the place. His nose was very sore, because Matey's stick had knocked a large piece of skin from it and bruised it badly. Also, the smell of every part of Finn's prison was revolting to him. But, though with sensitively wrinkled nostrils, Finn made his examination very thoroughly. And in the end he decided that he could do nothing for the present. Three sides of his prison were brick-work, and the fourth, the

door, presented no edge or corner which his teeth could touch. So Finn sat still, waiting, listening, and watching, with his tongue hanging out a little on one side of his mouth, by reason of the horrid dryness which afflicted his throat. And every hour that he waited brought greater strength to his determination, besides teaching him something in the way of patience and caution.

Presently, the waiting Finn heard heavy footsteps in the yard outside, and the muscles of his body gathered themselves together for action. The door opened, and Finn saw Matey standing there with a stick and a chain in his hand. Instinct told Finn on the instant that he must at all hazards avoid both the stick and the chain; but, more than anything else, the chain.

"Come 'ere!" said Matey. And Finn came. But, whereas Matey had reckoned on a slow movement, in the course of which his hand would have fallen on Finn's slip-collar preparatory to fixing the chain on that, the movement was actually very swift and low to the ground, and resulted in Finn's passing out scathless into the walled-in yard.

"Oho! So we don't like our new master, don't we? Haven't forgotten our blooming gruellin', eh? Better take care we don't get some more o' the same sort, Mister Wolfhound, if you arst me!"

The walled-in yard was quite safe. Matey was in nowise perturbed, and, moreover, having slept soundly and breakfasted copiously, he was, for him, in an amiable mood. Still, he had no wish to waste time, and he wanted to overhaul his plunder, and groom Finn up a little before the prospective purchaser arrived. So Matey turned round, leaned forward with a hand resting on one knee, and tried to twist his features into an ingratiating expression, as he said--

"Here, then, good dog! Come on, Finn! Here, boy!"

But instinct made Finn's intelligence upon the whole superior to Matey's in this matter, and, having already satisfied himself by means of hurried investigation that at present he could not escape from the walled-in yard, the Wolfhound stood half a dozen paces distant from the man, waiting,

with every nerve and muscle at concert pitch. The man moved forward, with hand outstretched invitingly. The Wolfhound moved backward, with hackles slightly raised. Thus they followed each other round the little yard perhaps six times, the distance between them being maintained with nicety and precision by Finn. Then Matey's mental inferiority appeared. He was expecting very shortly now the man from whom he hoped to receive his reward--the price of Finn. His intelligence, such as it was, told him that strategy would now be necessary to enable him to lay hands on the Wolfhound; but, even while recognising that, he could not refrain from angrily flinging his chain in Finn's face, after his sixth promenade of the yard, and cursing the dog savagely, before retiring into the house to prepare a stratagem.

Finn did not snarl as the chain struck him. Instinct had not carried him so far from education. But he barked angrily, and bounded to one side. While the man was away Finn examined the gate of the yard through which he had been driven on the previous night, and, though it rattled hopefully when he plunged against it with his fore-paws, raised high above its fastening, it remained solidly closed.

As Finn turned away from the doors of the yard, Matey appeared from the house, holding in one outstretched hand a piece of the same kind of meat with which he had seduced Finn into accompanying him on the previous evening, and calling the hound to him in a friendly tone. But Finn had learned a good deal since his first taste of that savoury meat; more a good deal than the man who offered the meat had learned in the same time. Taking the middle of the yard, so as to leave himself ample space for retreat, he remained watchfully regarding Matey, and refused to advance a step. Matey's spoken blandishments were now a dead letter to Finn. Having once discovered the possibilities of human treachery, he would never forget them. And here the folk who belong to what we call the brute creation are apt to be a good deal wiser than their betters in the scale of evolution. They do not forget the teaching of experience so readily as do those of us who are farther removed from Nature. To be sure, Matey's notion of strategy was puerile enough; but, apart from that, it is safe to assume that Finn would never again completely trust this man, who had been the first to introduce him to fear and misery, to

humiliation, and to knowledge of the existence of treachery and cruelty in men folk.

Matey cursed the Wolfhound angrily, but that did not incline Finn to trust him any the more. Then the man advanced a little in his strategy, and tossed a piece of the meat on to the ground, before Finn, to inspire confidence. But Finn's mistrust was too profound to admit of his stooping to pick this up. He was not very specially hungry, in any case; and if Matey had been an observant creature, or even one who used his memory wisely, he would have known that

the offer of drinking-water would have been infinitely more tempting to Finn than any quantity of savoury meat. But, as a fact, Finn was too much possessed just now by his determination to escape from Matey and all his works to be very clearly conscious of any other need.

Then, his petty strategy exhausted, and his paltry measure of self-control with it, Matey started to chase Finn with a stick. Now and again he succeeded in getting a blow home, as Finn wheeled and leapt before him within the narrow limits of the yard; and every time the stick touched him Finn barked angrily. This performance was extremely bad for Finn. It was calculated to break down some of the most valuable among his acquired qualities; the characteristics that he acquired with his blood through many generations of wisely-bred and humanely-reared hounds. In one sense it was more harmful than the merciless and unreasonable punishment of the previous night, because there was no faintest hint of a punishment about it; not even of the sort of punishment that had followed his howling. That had had the bad qualities of cruelty and unreasonableness, unjustifiableness. This was not punishment at all, it was sheer savagery, the savagery of a running fight in which the man, though he might hurt occasionally, could not conquer. And that is a most demoralizing sort of a happening, as between dog and man. Its demoralizing influence could have been detected by an observant spectator in the notes of Finn's barks when the stick reached him. They approached momentarily nearer the threatening nature of a growl; a new, dangerous note to hear in Finn's speech with mankind.

Matey was rapidly becoming exhausted, and in another moment or two

would probably have flung his stick at Finn and given up his senseless pursuit, when, just as the Wolfhound bounded forward from under his stick at the house end of the yard, the gate leading into that yard opened, and Bill appeared. In an instant Finn had sprung for the opening, Bill's legs were thrust from under him, and as he stumbled, with one hand on the ground and an oath on his lips, Finn reached the open road outside. Behind him, for a moment, Finn heard a hurried scrambling, and a deal of broken, breathless whistling, and calling aloud of his name. And then he heard no more from the place of his captivity and anguish, for the reason that he was already nearing the limits of the little town, and galloping hard for the open country, over the road by which he had travelled some ten hours earlier in Matey's cart.

man opening yard gate onto wolfhound

The gate leading into the yard opened, and Bill appeared

Finn galloped for about three miles, his heart swelling within him for joy in his freedom. Then, gradually, his gait slackened to a canter, and then to a trot, and, finally, the sight of a wayside pond brought him to a standstill; and, after a mechanical look behind him, he walked into the water and drank, and drank, and drank till he could drink no more. Finn emerged from the pond with heaving flanks and dripping muzzle, conscious now of some of his hurts and bruises, but licking his wet chops with satisfaction, and supremely glad of his freedom. He lay down on the grass near the pond and proceeded to lick those of his wounds and bruises which were within licking reach, and to pity himself regarding the sharp pain in his side which his broken rib was causing. Presently a cart came jolting along from the direction in which Finn had come, and the Wolfhound shrank back as far as possible into the hedge behind him. But the driver of the cart took no further notice of Finn than to stare idly at him, possibly without even seeing him; at all events with an absolutely incurious stare. With renewed confidence, the young hound stretched himself out again on the cool grass and presently began to doze, this being the wise manner of all his kind in assisting Nature to cure them of their various ills.

While Finn dozed, another cart approached him from the little town he had left behind, and in this second cart were two extremely angry men, one of whom strongly desired Finn's recapture on mercenary grounds, while the other desired it upon these grounds and others also. Bill wanted his share of Finn's price; Matey wanted his larger share of that price, and he also wanted badly to have Finn securely tied up in a convenient position for being soundly beaten. Matey would almost rather have foregone the money than the satisfaction of administering the beating, the very thorough beating which he pictured himself administering to Finn. His heavy mouth twitched viciously as Matey thought about it. Suddenly Bill pulled the pony on to its haunches with a jerk.

"I'm jiggered if that ain't 'im a-waitin' for us!" exclaimed Bill, in a hoarse whisper.

Matey was out of the trap in an instant, and, with meat in his hand, was already beginning a whining call, which was meant to be extremely ingratiating. But Finn sprang to his feet at the sound of the cart coming to a standstill, and, after one glance at Matey, was off like a wolf down the empty country road.

This was yet another lesson learned. Finn would not be in a hurry to rest by the wayside again. After two miles of galloping at the rate of nearly twenty miles an hour, Finn steadied down to a fast loping gait, which would have kept him abreast of any other road vehicle than a motor-car, and maintained this for quite a long while. Then, by reason of the pain in his side, and of other pains, he decided to stop. But, with his last-learned lesson fresh in his mind, he had no intention of resting by the roadside. With a twist of pain that cut into his side like a knife, he leapt a field gate, and crept along the inner side of the hedge for some distance before finally curling up in a dry hollow beside a hayrick. Here, sheltered by the rick and half buried in dry hay and straw, Finn courted the sleep he needed, so that it came to him swiftly. In his sleep the young Wolfhound whimpered occasionally, and once or twice his whole great body shook to the sound of a growling bark, causing two bloodshot eyes to be half opened, and then mechanically closed again, with a small grunt, as Finn's muzzle drove a little deeper into the dry hay under his hocks, and he allowed sleep to strengthen its healing hold upon him.

It was a dream that caused Finn to give that growling bark, and it was a dream of a kind that had been foreign to his breed for generations. He dreamed that he was chasing Matey, in the form of a huge rabbit, armed with a stick. Matey, the rabbit, bounded away from him, just as ordinary rabbits did; but sounds came from Matey's rabbit mouth, and they were the horrid, venomous sounds of the curses with which Matey had followed him that morning in the walled-in yard. In the dream Finn was always on the point of leaping upon the back of rabbit-Matey's neck, with jaws stretched wide for slaughter. But something always intervened to prevent Finn taking the leap. The something was this: at the moment of the leap, Matey always looked more like a man and less like a rabbit, and the instinct which told Finn not to slay a man was a very strong one. But, somehow, rabbit-Matey seemed an exception. Finn was very anxious to feel the crunching of his shoulder and neck bones; and altogether it was unfortunate that such a dream should have been inspired in the brain of so nobly born a hound.

When Finn finally woke he gaped right in the eye of the setting sun, and all about him was the solemn silence of a fine October twilight. He yawned cavernously, and, raising his haunches, stretched his huge trunk from fore-paws placed far out. But, in the midst of the stretch, he gave a little smothered yelp of pain, and came to earth again, solicitously licking at the ribs of his right side. Matey's heavy boot had done great execution there. Slowly, then, Finn rose, and walked out into the darkening twilight of the field. Before he had covered a hundred yards, a rabbit started up from behind a bush, and scurried hedgewards for its life. But the distance was too great for bunny by three yards, and Finn's jaws snapped his backbone in sunder within six feet of his own burrow. This was hard on the rabbit; but it was no more than one tiny instance of the outworking of Nature's most inexorable law. Finn had killed many rabbits before this evening; but in the past he had merely obeyed his hunting and killing instinct. Now this instinct in him was sharpened by hunger, by having slept on the open earth, and by being conscious of no human control or protection. Finn proceeded to eat this particular rabbit, and that was distinctly a new experience for him, and one that left him upon the whole pleased with himself. He was not aware of the fact, of course, but this

simple act placed him more nearly on terms with his ancestors than anything else he had ever done, unless, perhaps, one counts the dream acts of that afternoon.

After his meal Finn strolled along the hedge-side till he came to a gap, and then slipped through to the road. For a mile or two he trotted along the silent road with no particular object in view, and then, coming to a grassy lane, turned into that, and trotted for another mile or two, leaping a gate and a stile which barred his way at intervals, and coming presently to a group of three large ricks. His side was aching dully, and Finn was rather unhappy over finding no sign of the home beside the Downs where his friends were, and his own comfortable bed. Having allowed his mind to dwell upon this for several minutes, he sat down on his haunches near one of the ricks, and howled to the stars about it all for quite a while, and so effectively that a farmer, sitting in his comfortable dining-room nearly half a mile away, made a remark to his daughter about the new-fangled way these pesky motor-car people have of blowing fog-horns like the ships at sea, and carrying on as if the road belonged to them--drat 'un!

It was not active unhappiness, let alone misery like that of the previous night, that moved Finn to this vocal display; but only a kind of gentle melancholy such as we call home-sickness, and after five minutes of it, he curled up beside one of the ricks, after scratching and turning round and round sufficiently to make a kind of burrow for himself, and was fast asleep in about two minutes.

In the morning, long before the dew was off the grass, Finn set out to do what he had never done before: he set out deliberately to hunt and kill some creature for his breakfast. He very nearly caught an unwary partridge, though the bird did not tempt him nearly so strongly as a thing that ran upon the earth, and ran fast. In the end his menu was that of the previous evening, and, as he eyed its still warm and furry remains, Finn felt that life was really a very good thing, even when one had a pain in one's side, and a large assortment of bruises and sore places in various other parts of one's body.

Towards midday Finn lounged into a rather large village, and did not like it at all. It stirred up in him the recollection of Matey and his horrible

environment, and he began to hurry, impelled by a nervous dread of some kind of treachery. Towards the end of the village he passed a pretty, creeper-grown cottage, from the door of which a policeman issued. The policeman stared at Finn, and smacked his own leg. Then he bent his body in an insinuating manner and called to the Wolfhound: "Here, boy! Here, good dog! Come along!" But Finn only lengthened his stride, and presently broke into a gallop. He was no longer the guileless, trustful Finn of a week ago. The rural constable sighed as he resumed an erect position and watched Finn's disappearing form.

"He must be the dog that's wanted, all right; reg'ler monster, I'm blessed if he isn't. But, takin' one thing with another, I'd just as soon they caught him somewhere else than here. Why, I reckon my missis 'ud have a fit. I don't call it hardly right, myself; not 'avin' 'em that size."

Half an hour later, to his great delight, Finn found himself clear of roads and houses, and on the warm, chalky slopes of the Sussex Downs. These great, smooth, immemorial hills, with their blunt crests, and close-cropped, springy turf, brought a rush of home-feeling into Finn's heart, which made his eyes misty, so that he had to sit down and give vent to two or three long-drawn howls by way of expressing his gentle melancholy. But Finn's nose told him plainly that he had never before been on these particular Downs. And so, good and kindly as this ancient British soil was to him, it brought him no sight of actual home.

Towards evening he coursed and killed another rabbit, eating half of it, and providing, in the other half which he left, a substantial repast for a prowling weasel who followed in his trail.

Something--it may have been merely the fact that the day had not been in any way exhausting like its predecessors--prevented Finn from being inclined to curl down and sleep, when he passed a convenient wheat rick in a valley an hour after his supper. The night was fine and clear, and night life in the open, with its many mysterious rustlings, bird and animal calls, and other enticing sounds and smells, was beginning to present considerable attractions to Finn. The events of the past few days had aroused all sorts of latent tendencies and inclinations in him; feelings which resembled memories of bygone days in their effects upon him, but

yet were not memories of any life that he had known, though they may have been blood memories of the experiences of his forbears. Later on, however, the young Wolfhound began to tire of the freedom of the night, and home-sick longings rose in his heart as he thought of the coach-house and of Kathleen. It was at about this time that Finn fell to walking along a narrow, white sheep-walk, on the side of a big, billowy down, which seemed to him pleasanter and more homely than any of the hills he had traversed that evening. Gradually the track in the chalk deepened and widened a little, until it became a path sunk in the hill-side to a depth of fifteen or twenty feet, and ended in a five-barred gate beside a road. Finn leaped the gate with a strange feeling of exultation in his heart, which made him careless of the sharp pain the leap brought to his side. Something rose in his throat as he reached the road. His eyes became misty, his nose drooped eagerly to the surface of the road, and he whimpered softly as he ran, with tail swaying from side to side, and a great tenderness welling up within him.

Two minutes later he came to a white gate leading to a shrub-sheltered garden before a small, low, rambling little house. He leaped the little gate, and turned sharply to the right in the garden. But then his way was blocked by high doors, set in masonry, which could not possibly be climbed or jumped. Before these gates, which evidently led to the stables and rear of the house, Finn sat down on his haunches. Then he lifted his long muzzle heavenward and howled lugubriously. He continued his howling steadily for about one minute and a half, and at the end of that time a door opened behind him in the front of the house, and a man clad in pyjamas rushed out into the garden. Finn had studiously avoided men for these two days past now; but, so far from avoiding this man, he rose on his hind-legs to give greeting, and could hardly be induced to lower his front paws, even when the man in pyjamas had removed his caressing arms from about the Wolfhound's shoulders. The man, you see, was the Master, and three minutes afterwards he was joined by the Mistress of the Kennels. But they were all three in the Master's outside den then with Tara.

standing wolfhound with reclining wolfhound

CHAPTER IX

THE HEART OF TARA

The Mistress of the Kennels held on to one of Finn's fore-paws as though she feared he might be spirited away from the den, even while he was being welcomed home there. The fatted calf took the form of a dish of new milk and some sardines on toast which had been prepared for the next morning's breakfast. But this came later, and was polished off by Finn more by reason of its rare daintiness and his desire to live up to what the occasion seemed to demand of him, than because he was hungry. At an early stage in proceedings the Master noticed, and removed, the slip-collar.

"Well, that disposes of the theory that Finn wandered away of his own accord," said the Master. "If the police know their business this ought to help them." Then he turned to Finn again. "You didn't know there was a twenty-five pound reward out for you, my son, did you? It was to have been made fifty in another day or two; though, if you did but know it, our solvency demands rather that you should be sold, than paid for in that fashion."

The Mistress nodded thoughtfully.

"But that's quite impossible after this," she said; "selling Finn, I mean."

The Master smiled. "I suppose it is. That seems to be rather our way. It's a dead sure thing there can be no selling of Tara, and--I'm inclined to think you're right about Finn, too. Heavens! If I could lay my hands on the man who took that chip off his muzzle, I think I'd run to the length of a ten pounds fine for assault. I'd get my money's worth, too. The dog has been clubbed; he has been man-handled; I could swear he has had to fight for

his freedom. Poor old Finn! What a dog! What a Finn it is!"

While the last of these remarks was being made the Master was carefully examining Finn all over, parting the Wolfhound's dense hard hair over places in which the skin beneath had been broken, and pressing his fingers along the lines of different bones and muscles solicitously. There was a half-spoken oath on the Master's lips when Finn winced from him as his hand passed down the ribs of the hound's right side.

"There is a rib broken here," he said to the Mistress, "unless I am much mistaken. When the post office opens in the morning we must wire for Turle, the vet. Thieving's bad enough, but--there are some stupid brutes in this world!"

The Mistress stared.

"Oh, no, I don't mean Finn; nor any of his honest four-legged kind. I meant two-legged brutes. Finn has been handled more roughly than an understanding man would handle a tiger. And look at his face. Look into his eyes. Notice his keenly watchful air, even while I am handling him. Well, Finn, my son, you have said good-bye to puppyhood with a vengeance now. Unless I am much mistaken he has crowded more into the last three days than all the rest of his life till now had taught him. That dog's years older than Kathleen to-night in some ways. Do you get the effect I mean? The youth has gone; there is a certain new hardness. Watch his eye now as I lift my hand!"

The Master lifted his hand with a sudden jerk, and the two who were watching Finn's eyes saw that in them which they had never seen in Kathleen's, nor yet even in Tara's eyes; for neither Tara nor her daughter had ever pitted their agility against man's brutality. They had never been clubbed or kicked; they had never seen as far into the ugly places of human nature as Finn; and you might brandish your arms in any way you chose before old Tara or Kathleen, and, while the one would have blinked at you with courteous tolerance of your foolishness, the other would have suspected you of inventing a new game, and gambolled before you like a huge kitten.

It was not, of course, that Finn was foolish enough to distrust the Master, or suspect him of any hostile intention. But certain instincts had been awakened in the young Wolfhound, and, for a long time, at all events, and probably for the rest of his life, those instincts would not again become latent. In some respects he may have been the better off; certainly he was better equipped to face the world; but the Master, naturally enough, could not withhold a sigh for the old utter trustfulness which had held even the instincts of self-preservation in abeyance. But, as has been said, Finn was better equipped to face the world than either his sister, or that gentle great lady, his mother; all his instincts were more alert, and his senses also. His eyes moved more rapidly than their eyes; his attitude toward life and toward men-folk was more elastic and less absolute. Men-folk remained his superiors in Finn's eyes, his superiors in a hundred ways, and it might be his dearly loved friends; but they were not any more the absolute, omnipotent, and all-perfect gods that they had been, and still were to Kathleen, for example, who would not have felt the slightest uneasiness if the Master had placed his heel on her throat, or touched her head with a club, as she lay on the ground before him.

To a great extent, however, the Master's sympathetic anger over Finn's wounds, and twinges of regret regarding the subtle changes which he recognised in the hound he affectionately called "son," were out-balanced by the joy he felt at seeing Finn safe in his den again. The loss of Finn had been hard to bear, and not the less hard because it came immediately after the great triumph of the Show. There were the seven prize cards adorning the wall over Tara's great bed in the den; but their presence had been something of a mockery in the absence of their winner. When the Master and the Mistress finally bade Finn good night, after making him thoroughly comfortable in his own clean, big bed, the coach-house door was carefully padlocked.

It could not have been said a month later that Finn was physically the worse for his adventure in the hands of Matey. His ribs were sound once more, and all his wounds and bruises were healed, though a light-coloured scar remained, and would remain on his muzzle, where the dog-stealer's stick had bitten into the bone. If it had come nine months earlier, such an experience would have been bad indeed, for sets-back in

puppyhood are hard to make up. But at fifteen months Finn had as perfect a physical foundation to go upon as any living creature could have. He was fortified against physical ills as few animals can be; his system lacked nothing that makes for resisting power; he had attained his full growth without having known a day's illness, and his reserve strength was enormous.

And now came a long and rather severe winter, in which no evil thing befell Finn, and the process of "furnishing" went on in him with never a hitch of any sort, and in circumstances that could not possibly have been more favourable. All day long he drank in the heartiest air in England; on every day he had ample exercise and ample food, and when young summer of the next year brought him to his second birthday, Finn scaled 149 lbs., and his shoulder bones just skimmed the under side of the measuring standard at thirty-six inches. Hard measurement brought him within an eighth of an inch of the yard, and it was fair to say that, favourably measured, standing well up, he did reach full thirty-six inches at the shoulder.

Remember that, when his head was inclined upward, the tip of his nose would be more than a foot higher than his shoulder. With all four feet on the floor, he could rest his nose on a window-ledge that was exactly four feet high. His eyes, and shaggy brows and beard, like the tip of his tail, were dark as night; there were some extra dark hairs at his hocks, fetlocks and shoulder blades; and all the rest of Finn was of a hard, steely grey brindle colour; the typical wolf colour of northern climes, very steely, and with odd suggestions about it of ghostly fleetness, of great speed and enduring strength. His fore-legs were straight as gun-barrels, his knees flat as the palm of your hand; his feet hard, close, round, and rather cat-like, save that his claws were more like chisels, black, and hard, and strongly curved. His hind-legs, on the other hand, were finely curved, with swelling rolls of muscle in the upper thighs. The first or upper thighs were very long and strong, curving sharply out to hocks that were well let down, and without a hint of turn inward or outward. His loins were well arched, his chest deep, like an Arab stallion's, his neck long, arched, and very strong, like the massy muscles of his fore-arms. It was difficult to say that he had grown much since his fifteenth month, and yet he

looked a very much bigger dog, and, above all, he looked and was very much stronger. There was no longer anything immature or unformed about Finn. During his next year he might possibly add half a score of pounds to his already great weight; but on his second birthday he was set and furnished, a superb specimen of pure breeding and perfect rearing in Irish Wolfhounds.

For almost six months now Finn's only companion of his own kind had been Tara. He had not seen Kathleen's departure from the cottage beside the Downs, and for some days he was greatly puzzled by her absence. He even stood by the orchard gate and growled fiercely, with the hair on his shoulders standing almost erect, because the thought was in his mind that Matey may have had something to do with this disappearance. The Master saw him engaged in this way, and was greatly puzzled by it. He said to the Mistress of the Kennels afterwards--

"I really think old Finn must have gone mad for five minutes this morning. I never saw a more fearsome-looking creature than he was when he stood and growled beside the orchard gate. I assure you he was terrible. He looked about six feet high, and as fierce as any tiger. It made me think of his ancient godfather, or namesake, the Finn of fifteen hundred years ago, who kept King Cormac's three hundred Irish Wolfhounds in fighting trim, as the most awe-inspiring and death-dealing portion of his master's army. I must read over those 'Tales of the Cycle of Finn' again; they are fine, stirring things. But in these worrying days I hardly seem to get time for sleep, let alone for reading about old Finn. But I wish you had seen Finn--our Finn--this morning. He was very terrible, but I never saw a dog look more magnificent. Upon my word, I believe there are very few living things that Finn could not implant fear in, if he set his mind to it; yes, and pull down, to boot--a hundred and fifty pounds of muscle and bone, and teeth and fire and spirit!"

But Finn need not have worried for Kathleen's sake. She had gone to a good home, and lives there to-day in honoured old age. Her owner paid a hundred guineas for her, and would not sell her for ten times the figure. But there was no way of telling Finn these things, for though he could understand most things that the Master said to him, and was able to tell the Master most things that he wanted to tell; yet the matter of buying

and selling and its causes were naturally beyond him. He had no way of telling that the Master was in sore straits financially, though he did know that his friend was not over and above happy. Neither could he tell that the mere keeping of a Wolfhound like Kathleen runs away with the better part of twenty pounds a year. Things were not prospering with the Master, and, feeling that he could not part with Finn or Tara, he had been absolutely obliged to sell Kathleen.

But that was by no means the end of the Master's troubles, the root of which lay in the fact that he loved the country, and hated the town, but was unable to earn money enough in the country to meet the various obligations with which he saddled himself, and was saddled by circumstances. And so it fell out that soon after Finn's second birthday the Master began to spend a good deal of time away from the house by the Downs. Tara liked to pass the greater part of her time in the Master's outside den with her muzzle on his slippers, but Finn was not like that. Tara was a matron getting on in years, and her matronhood had cost her dear in illness from which it had been thought she could never recover. Finn, on the other hand, was the very personification of lusty youth and tireless virility. The Mistress of the Kennels would take him out behind her bicycle, while Tara lay dreaming at home, and it may be that the Mistress fancied her gentle ten and twelve mile runs tired Finn. She never saw him when he would set off upon his hunting expeditions, in the course of which he covered every foot of the Downs for a dozen miles around. He was safe enough, too, for he would have had nothing but angry growls for any man of Matey's ilk, charmed he never so wisely with spiced meats and the like. The weasels and the stoats, and a score of other wild things that roamed that country-side, could have told the Mistress of the Kennels just why Finn did not always clear his dinner dish in these days, and thereby saved her an addition to her many worries of that period. She did not like to depress the Master with tales of half-eaten meals, and she had no knowledge of the half-eaten hares and rabbits and other wild creatures which Finn left behind him on his hunting trails.

From one point of view, Finn suffered at this stage from the absence of the Master's eye and hand, and so did the rabbits; but, from another point of view, Finn gained. He became harder, more wily, and a far more expert

hunter than he would have been under a more disciplined regime. But certainly he also became less domesticated, and vastly less fastidious than, for example, that exquisite great lady, his mother.

There came a certain late summer's day, with more than a hint of autumn in the air, when something happened which Finn never quite forgot. The Master had been away for three weeks on end, and Tara had missed him sadly. In the evening the great bitch would often whimper quietly as she lay outstretched, with her long, grey muzzle resting on the slippers which the Mistress never thought of taking from her. Of late she had cared less and less for any kind of activity, and seemed more and more to desire the presence of the Master. Now, in the evening of the day which brought strong hints of coming autumn with it, Finn lay beside Tara in the outside den, thinking lazily of an upland meadow, with a copse at its far end, which he meant to hunt presently. Suddenly there came a sound of a man's footfall on the gravel beyond the gateway and in front of the house. Tara's nostrils quivered as her head rose. With one mighty bound she was outside the den. The gates stood open. The Master, at the garden's far end, called--

"Tara! Tara, girl! Here, girl!"

Finn was by Tara's flank, and he saw her leap forward, hurtling through the air like an arrow from a bow. Six great bounds she gave, while fleet Finn galloped a good twenty paces behind her, and then Tara stopped suddenly with a strange, moaning cry, staggered for a moment, as the Master ran towards her, and then fell sideways, against his knee, with glazing eyes turned up for a last glimpse of the face she loved. The Master was kneeling on the gravel, and Tara's shoulders were in his arms; but at the end of two long-drawn sighs, Tara was dead.

Finn was sniffing at his mother's back. He did not know just what had happened, but he was profoundly conscious that the happening was tragic, and that his beautiful mother was the victim. The shock to the Master was very great; for he was already unhappy, and he had loved this mother of heroes of his very dearly. But the shock to Finn, though far less complex, was scarcely less great. He had killed many scores of times, but it seemed that he had never seen death till now. He

recognized it clearly enough. He knew that Tara was never going to move again; the instant his sensitive nostrils touched her still, warm body he knew that. But there had been no killing. That was what baffled Finn, and struck a kind of terror into his heart, to lend poignancy to his sorrow. One more look he gave at his mother's sightless face, this time where it rested on the crook of the Master's arm, and then he sat down on his haunches, and with muzzle raised high poured out his grief in the long-drawn Irish Wolfhound howl; the most melancholy cry in nature.

The Master had looked careworn and weary before he called Tara to him. It was a very grey, sad face he showed when he rose gently and bade Finn go into the coach-house and be silent. He had known that Tara's heart was weak, but this thing that had happened he had never anticipated, and the nature and circumstances of Tara's death were such as to move a man deeply. In a sense, her love of the Master had killed this beautiful hound. Her great love had burst her heart in sunder, and so she died, the very noble daughter of an ancient, noble line.

fox sniffing dead rabbit

CHAPTER X

A TRANSITION STAGE

To Finn it seemed that life was never the same after the evening of Tara's death. He did not know, of course, that changes had been set afoot during many months before his mother's end came. And in a way he was right; life never was quite the same for him. Active changes, toward which the Master's circumstances had been leading for some time past, began immediately after that strange home-coming which finally separated Finn from his own kin.

For instance, the Master seemed generally to be away from the house beside the Downs; and the Mistress of the Kennels seemed always to be busy, and never to be in playful mood. Days passed without even one of those gentle runs behind a bicycle to which Finn had grown accustomed; days during which no one ever spoke to Finn except at meal-times, and the home seemed strangely silent and deserted. Finn was always locked up at night, or he would have chosen that time for hunting expeditions. As it was, however, the long days were his own, and he grew to devote less and less time out of these days to the home life. He was not inclined, as his mother had been, to lie dozing and dreaming for hours together in the outside den. He would slip through the orchard, and over its gate to the open Downs; and there, roaming that country-side for hours at a stretch, he would hunt; only occasionally killing to eat, and for the greater part of his time hunting for the sheer pleasure of it. For so great a hound, he became wonderfully adept and cunning in the pursuit of the small creatures of the open; stalking them as silently, cautiously, and surely as a cat, and acquiring, day by day, more and more of that most distinguishing characteristic of the wild creatures: indomitable patience. Great fleetness and great strength were his by birth; tireless patience and cunning he learned in these lonely days beside the Sussex Downs; and

learned them so well that his silent, shadowy great form became a very real terror to all the wild things of that district. There was, of course, no creature among them that could attempt for an instant to meet Finn in open combat; and as time went on, there were few who could successfully pit their cunning and their agility against those of the great hound.

There was one wild creature, however, in this district, who grew to know Finn well, and to fear him not at all; and this was a large male fox, born and bred in a copse not half a mile from Finn's home. To this strong and cunning fox, Finn appeared in the light of a provider of good things, and for long he waxed fat and lazy upon Finn's numerous kills, without the Wolfhound ever having suspected his existence. Then, late one autumn afternoon, Finn saw Reynard descend from a little wooded hillock and seize upon the half of a rabbit which the Wolfhound had left lying there in the valley, beside a little brook, where he had killed it. Like a flash, Finn wheeled and gave chase; but the fox disdained even to drop his prize, and, by reason rather of his superior woodcraft, and his knowledge of every leaf and twig in that country-side, than of his fleetness, Reynard was the winner of the long race that followed.

This interested Finn more than anything that had happened for a long while. His trailing faculties, though they had been greatly developed of late, were nothing like so keen as those of a foxhound, or a pointer, or a setter; his race having always done their hunting by sight and sheer fleetness. But, as against that, the big fox had grown very lazy of late. He had done practically no hunting at all, preferring to trail Finn on his hunting expeditions, and fare sumptuously upon Finn's leavings. As it happened, this particular fox had never been hunted, and during a big slice of his life he had been wont to regard himself as the unquestioned monarch of that country-side; so far as its wild life went. He did not realize, even after Finn's first pursuit of him, that he had made a powerful enemy, and one in whom the determination to run him down had already taken firm root.

And now, for days, Finn's great interest in life was the pursuit of the big fox. For the rest, he only killed rabbits and the like when they came in his way; and, even so, he supplied ample food for the cunning fox. At first,

Finn spent his time largely in looking for his new quarry, and then giving forthright chase. But gradually he learned that the fox was his master in this work, if only by reason of its comparative smallness, which enabled it to twist and double through places which were impenetrable to the great hound who followed. So Finn fell back upon his recently acquired cunning. He killed a rabbit, and left three-quarters of its carcass in an exposed, open place, while he himself crawled into a clump of brush and lay waiting, with eager, watchful eyes peering through the leaves. Presently, Reynard approached from some undergrowth a hundred yards away on the other side of the kill. But he did not approach very nearly. His sharp, sensitive nose wrinkled and pointed skyward for a moment, and then, as the breeze gave him Finn's scent, he turned promptly round and trotted back to covert.

Finn gave an immense amount of reflection to this, and two days later, his cunning evolved a very much cleverer scheme. He killed another rabbit, and placed it in a convenient run-way of the big fox's. Then he trotted off on the lee side of the kill, and quietly made towards his entrance to the orchard at home. But, instead of entering the orchard, he circled again, and, keeping religiously to leeward of his track, flew at great speed for the far end of the run-way in which he had left his kill. When Reynard discovered the rabbit, he merely glanced at it, and then quietly took up Finn's trail, to make sure of the Wolfhound's whereabouts. This trail he followed to a point that was as near as he cared to venture to the orchard fence. Then, satisfied that Finn had gone home, he trotted back to where the kill lay, being naturally to windward all the while of Finn's second trail.

wolfhound attacking fox
Finn's teeth sank deep.

Arrived in the run-way, Reynard picked up the dead rabbit and slung it carelessly across his shoulder. Then he trotted leisurely down the run-way toward his own earth, where he meant to feast in security and comfort. At the end of the run-way came a wide, open stretch of waste land, on the far side of which lay the track to Reynard's cave. Well hidden by the bushes at the end of the run-way, on its lee side, crouched Finn,

every nerve tensely alert. He waited till Reynard was well clear of the runway and fairly started across the open, and then he sprang out from the place of his concealment, his leap carrying him to within a yard of Reynard's flank. The insolence of good and easy living, and long mastery over the creatures that dwelt about him, led the fox into perhaps two seconds of indecision; and those two seconds cost him dear. There was no indecision about his flight, of course, and almost before Finn's feet touched the ground, the fox was stretched to the full stride of his top gait. The indecision was in the matter of relinquishing his booty; and that it was which cost the fox dear by reducing his starting speed. At the end of his fourth stride, he dropped the rabbit; but at the end of his fifth stride the Wolfhound was abreast of him, with neck bent sideways, and jaws stretched wide. Less than a second later, Finn's great jaws closed upon the back of the fox's shoulders; and that was where Finn made his first mistake. He was, for all his recent experience, quite new to the killing of such a quarry as the fox, who himself was easily able, and big and strong enough for the killing of such prey as Finn had learned to hunt. The shoulders of a hare or a rabbit were easily smashed between Finn's jaws; but the shoulders of the big fox, with their mat of dense fur, were far otherwise. Finn's teeth sank deep, but they broke no bones.

Nevertheless, his weight and the force of the impact between the two, brought Reynard to earth, where he rolled smartly on his back, slashing at Finn's fore-arm with his sharp white fangs, and snarling ferociously. In the same instant almost, the fox was on his feet, but before he could leap away, Finn's jaws descended on the back of his neck, gripping him like a vice, and shaking him almost as a terrier shakes a rat. With a desperate squirm the fox wriggled earthward from this terrible grip, and, as Finn drew breath, stabbing at the fox with one fore-paw, as he would have stabbed at a still living rabbit, to hold it, Reynard's fangs cut deeply into the loose skin of his chest. As he slashed, the fox, after the manner of his kind, leaped clear. But he had no time to run before Finn was upon him, with a roar of awakened fury. The fox dodged and slashed again, drawing blood from the fleshy part of Finn's fore-arm. Reynard fought like a wolf, or a light-weight boxer; and after this last slash, he wheeled like lightning and flew for cover. But the Wolfhound's fighting blood was boiling in him now, and Finn swept down upon the fox, exactly as a greyhound sweeps

upon a hare. When his great jaws closed upon the fox's neck this time, it was to kill. Reynard squirmed valiantly; but Finn flung him on his back, and took new hold upon his throat. The fox's two hind-feet, drawn well up, scored down Finn's belly like the feet of a lynx; but it was Reynard's last movement, for, as he made it, Finn's long fangs met in his jugular, and his warm blood streamed upon the ground.

That was Finn's first big kill, and it marked an epoch in his development, leaving active in him a newly-wakened instinct of fierceness which had been foreign to his family for several generations. If the big fox could have kept clear of Finn for but two more days he would have saved his life; and, in any case, such killings as Finn's had been during the past month or so could hardly have continued much longer in that country-side without attracting human attention, the result of which might have been awkward for the Wolfhound. As it was, the superficial wounds the fox had inflicted upon him were never noticed by the Master or the Mistress of the Kennels, by reason of other happenings in which Finn also was concerned. His wounds were not deep, his coat was dense, and Finn doctored himself effectively with his own tongue.

Early on the morning after his successful hunting of the fox, Finn found several strange men about the house and grounds. The Master had arrived home late on the previous evening, unconscious, not alone of Finn's fox-hunting, but of his foraging habits generally; ignorant even of the fact that his one remaining Wolfhound ever left the premises, unless with the Mistress of the Kennels. It was a very large slice of Finn's life during the last few months that was unknown to his human friends. All through this day Finn pottered about the house and garden and the outside den, observing with curiosity the behaviour of the strange men who wore green aprons. It seemed to Finn that these men were bent upon turning the whole place upside down. The game they played seemed to consist of laboriously lifting heavy articles of furniture, carrying them about, and putting them down again, in what seemed to Finn a confused and pointless manner. Evening found the Wolfhound scarcely more comfortable than his human friends, who were evidently in very poor spirits. They were moved by conscious regret, and by conscious anxiety regarding the future. Finn was moved by conscious discomfort,

and vague mental stirrings of impending trouble of some sort. When he slept, he dreamed of Matey; this time in the form of a huge fox, whose jaws slashed the air in the most fearsome manner. (Up till the previous day, Finn had hunted and killed innumerable wild creatures, but never fought with one.)

The next day was one of even less comfort and more bewilderment. In addition to the men with green aprons and strongly vocal boots, there was quite a large assemblage of other people, who strode about through the rooms of the little house, and in its garden, stable, and outside den, as though the place belonged to them, and they were rather disgusted with it. Later on, however, these noisy men-folk (there were women among them, too) drew together in one of the front rooms of the house, and made all sorts of--to Finn--meaningless noises, while one among them stood upon a kitchen-chair and occasionally smote the top of a salt-box with a small white hammer, before proceeding to call forth more meaningless noises from the other people. Finn prowled about in a most unhappy mood, and once, the Mistress of the Kennels led him into an empty bedroom, and knelt down on the floor and cried over him, while he endeavoured to lick her face, whimpering the while, to show his sympathy. Later on, the people flocked out into the den, and made more vain noises there; and then to the stable. Finally, they streamed out into the orchard, and made stupid remarks about the kennels there; and at long last they went away, leaving the green-aproned men in undisputed possession, and free to throw furniture about, and pile it on carts in the road, as they chose.

Then the Master and the Mistress and Finn went away together to the station, saying nothing, and looking very unhappy. Finn carried his tail so low that it dragged, and its black tip picked up mud from the wet road, upon which a fine autumnal drizzle had begun to fall. That night, and for two subsequent nights, Finn lived unhappily in a poky London lodging with his friends; and on the third day, he walked with the Master to a railway station, while the Mistress of the Kennels drove in a cab with a mountain of baggage. Finn was not allowed in the carriage with his friends, but had to travel in a van full of boxes and bags, with a rough but amiable man whose coat had shiny buttons, and whose attitude toward

Finn was one of respectful and distant deference.

Some time before this, Finn had come to the conclusion that they were all going to a Dog Show; and, remembering vividly a Great Dane who had snarled viciously at him in the last show he had visited during the middle of the summer (when, as on each other occasion of his being exhibited, he had been awarded first prize in each class for which he was eligible), he decided that he would adopt a killing demeanour and stand no nonsense at all. Four or five months ago, at the time of this last show, the Dane's fang-bearing snarl had made him shudder. To-day he would have rather welcomed it than otherwise, and returned it with interest.

After walking some fifty or sixty yards from the train, among a great crowd of people and baggage, Finn, with the Master, entered what he supposed was the show building. The chief reason, by the way, of his conviction that he was bound for a show, lay in the fact that a long, bright steel chain was attached to his best green collar, with its brass name-plate bearing Finn's name and the Master's. The odd thing about this show building, however, was that there appeared to be only two other dogs in it, besides Finn; one a collie, and one an Irish terrier, whose head, so far as its shape went, was a tiny miniature of Finn's own head. In colour, however, the terrier reminded him rather of the big fox he had slain. Finn found these two dogs--both, of course, unimportant small fry, from his lofty standpoint--each chained to the front part of a barrel half filled with straw; and that seemed to the Wolfhound an extremely odd kind of show bench. But the bed to which Finn himself was chained was a good deal more like the kind he had seen before at shows, in that it was a flat bench, well strawed, and a good foot above the floor level; but it had solid wooden sides and roof, so that, while he lay on it, Finn could not see the other dogs, unless by craning his head round the corner. And before he left, the Master fixed up some wirework before the bench, so as to shut Finn in, while on the inside of that network a notice was hung, for the benefit of passers-by, most of whom read the notice aloud, until Finn was thoroughly tired of hearing it. It ran like this: "Warning! Do not touch!"

After arranging this matter of the network, the Master disappeared, with a hurried wave of his hand in Finn's direction, and a "Wait there, old man!"

a rather unnecessary request Finn may have thought, seeing that he was securely chained.

Upon the whole, Finn decided that this was the most curious show he had visited. He heard no barking, beyond an occasional yap from the Irish terrier, and among the innumerable people who passed the front of his bench, the majority seemed to be carrying bags or bundles, and none seemed to have come there to see dogs. After a time Finn tired of the whole thing and, curling up on his bench, went to sleep. He slept and waked, and slept and waked again, for what seemed a very long time; and then the Master came to see him, with the Mistress of the Kennels. He was taken down from his bench and allowed to stroll to and fro for a few minutes, though not for any distance. The Master knew that cleanly habits had long since become second nature with all the Wolfhounds of his breeding, and that it would have been cruel to have left Finn on his bench for very long stretches of time. Supper was given Finn, on the floor near his bench, and fresh water was placed in his dish in the front corner of the bed. Then he was chained up again, and the Master told him to be a good Finn boy, and go to sleep till the next morning.

Days passed, all manner of odd things happened, and Finn saw many strange sights before he actually realized that he was not at a Dog Show at all, but a passenger aboard a great ocean liner. And even then, when a good part of the ship had become quite familiar to him, the Wolfhound did not know, of course, that they were all bound to the other side of the world, that their passages were booked for Australia, and that this great steamer, which had once belonged to the Atlantic service, was now given over entirely to passengers of one class, who were travelling at a uniform and cheap rate to the Antipodes.

wolfhound chasing rabbit into burrow

CHAPTER XI

A SEA CHANGE

That long sea voyage was a strange, instructive experience for Finn. The preceding few months had made for rapid development upon his wilder side; they had taught him much as a hound and a hunter. This voyage developed his personality, his character, the central something that was Finn, and that differentiated him from other Irish Wolfhounds. Above all, the voyage brought great development in Finn in the matter of his relations with the Master and the Mistress of the Kennels.

The first three or four days of the passage did, as an experience, resemble a Dog Show, in that Finn spent almost the whole time on his bench, and was only taken down for a few minutes at a time. Later on, however, when things and people had settled down into their places on board the big liner, the Master obtained permission to give Finn a good deal more freedom, on the understanding that he held himself responsible for the Wolfhound's good behaviour. This meant that, by day and night, Finn was given his liberty for hours together; but during the whole of that time he was never out of the sight of one or other of his two friends, and, the Mistress not being a good sailor, it meant that Finn was nearly always with the Master. This, again, meant a marked change in Finn's ways of life, and a change which affected his character materially. Here was no orchard through which he could wander off to the open country, there to roam and hunt alone, and out of touch with humans. Now, whether moving about or at rest, Finn was continuously within hearing and sight of the Master, and practically always within touch of him.

One result of all this was that Finn became greatly humanised. He grew to understand far more of the Master's speech than he had ever

understood before; he came to depend greatly upon the Master's company and kindly intercourse with him. With this came the development of an enduring and conscious love of the Master, which filled Finn's mind and heart through all these warm and lazy days, and entirely dominated his environment. With regard to other people, he was a great deal more reserved than he had been in the old days before he met Matey, and before he took to hunting. He permitted their attentions courteously and, in the case of children, he would lend himself to their desires readily enough. But he never invited attention from any one, excepting the Master; and, whereas he would settle down comfortably to doze on the sun-bathed deck, with his muzzle resting on the Master's feet, he never volunteered to touch other people, though he accepted their caresses good-humouredly enough.

Hitherto, putting aside the exuberant demonstrativeness of early puppyhood, this had been Finn's attitude toward all humans, including even the Master. He had liked the Master and the Mistress; he had trusted them, and he had been deeply thankful to find them again after his escapade with Matey; but it could hardly have been said that he had loved them, in the sense, for example, that his mother had loved the Master, or that he himself loved the Master now; now that he would lie for hours on his bench, waiting, watching, and listening for the sound of the footfall which he easily distinguished from among the many that he heard. In short, what had been no more than friendly affection and confidence, grew now to personal attachment, to a feeling which could fairly be called love, seeing that it comprised intense and jealous devotion, and a contentedness which approached rapture, in the touch and presence and society of one person. When they sat on the deck together at night, the Master and Finn, under the gorgeous sky which so often favours Pacific travellers by sea, the Wolfhound's intercourse with the man stopped only just short of articulation, and went far beyond the normal companionship of man and dog.

For instance, the Master would sometimes growl out low remarks to Finn about the Old Country, about Tara, and the house beside the Sussex Downs; and Finn understood practically every word he said on those occasions. And then the Master might wind up by stroking his head in a

heavy, lingering way that Finn loved, and saying--

"Ah, well, Finn boy; there's other good places in the world, too. The Australian bush is a mighty big hunting ground, I can tell you. We'll have some good times there, Finn boy; rabbits, and wallabies, and kangaroos, Finn; great sport for my big Wolfhound and me. And maybe we'll get a good home together out there before long, old man; might even strike it rich, somehow, and go back to the Downs again, and do the thing in real solid style, my Finn, with big kennels and half a score of hounds for you to lord it over!"

And at such times, Finn's inability to speak after the human fashion was no particular bar between them. Understanding was so clearly voiced in his dark, glistening eyes, in the eager thrust of his wet, cool muzzle, and sometimes, for emphasis, in the compelling weight of his great arm, as he laid it, with a pulling pressure, over the Master's shoulder. In addition to all this, he would occasionally whimper, or make low growling noises, while he pawed the Master's shoulder; and these sounds said as plainly as any words could, and perhaps more emphatically: "I love you. I understand; and I love you, Master. It's you and me, for always; and nothing else matters, wherever we may be!"

And then the Master would say something about the Mistress of the Kennels, and Finn would beat the deck with his thirty-inch tail, which was as thick and strong at its roots as a man's arm. Or perhaps, if the weather were calm as well as fine, the Mistress herself would come along and join them, seated in a low deck chair; and then, though Finn's eyes would take on a momentarily anxious look if her hand touched the Master, he would yet be very happy, stretched out between them, with the half of one dark eye to spare for one of them, and his whole big heart shining out upon the Master in the gaze which held his head always turned the one way.

Just as something always seems to strike a balance in the affairs of men-folk, so the gods who watch over the affairs of Finn's kind are wont to provide compensations. For months, before this sea voyage, Finn's whole being had been absorbed by the interests of the half-tame wild, in the country beside the Sussex Downs. Dreaming and waking, the hunt

had held his thoughts, and solitary roaming had been his delight. Here aboard the great steamer he was suddenly and completely cut off from all these things; but something else had come to take possession of his active nature, his busy mind, his growing heart; and the great love of the Master which grew in him now effectually shut out anything like regret for the old life, by making the new life all-sufficing and more compact of interest, of satisfying fullness, than ever the home life had been at its best.

If it had not been for this remarkable development of Finn's character which was brought about by his confinement on board a ship with the Master, he would never have played the part he did in what was really the most important event of his life up till this time; and one, too, which taught the Master a good deal, regarding his own relationship to the great Wolfhound he had bred. It all happened on a Sunday morning when, the weather being very hot, the captain held service on the upper deck, under awnings, of course. Half a dozen children were allowed, during the latter part of the service, to withdraw, and play quietly by themselves, twenty yards away from the last row of chairs occupied by the congregation. At one end of this last row the Master sat, with Finn beside him on the deck. Among the children, one, a curly-headed rascal of a boy named Tim, aged eight, was everybody's favourite, and the leader of the rest in most kinds of mischief. Exactly how he managed it was never rightly understood, but when the piercing sound of a childish scream smote upon the Master's ears, through the droning periods of the captain's read sermon, Tim was in mid-air, half-way between the ship's rail and the sea, and the other children were staring, horror-stricken, at the place he had occupied a moment before, with his chubby arms about the stem of a boat's davit, and his brown legs astride the rail.

The Master was a man given to acting swiftly upon impulse. Finn had leaped to his feet at sound of the scream. The Master followed on the instant, and reached the ship's side within a second or two of Finn's arrival there. Finn's muzzle was thrust out between the white rails, and he saw the tiny figure of Tim in the smoothly eddying water a little abaft of the ship's beam. The Master saw it, too, and, turning, with one urgent hand on Finn's neck, he shouted--

"Over and fetch him, Finn! Over boy! Over!"

There was no mistaking his meaning. Finn had instant understanding of that. But Finn was no water dog. The sea was very far below. He let out two short nasal whimpers. The Master swung one arm excitedly.

"Over, boy! Fetch Tim! Over, then!"

Then the growing love of the past few weeks spoke strongly in Finn, overriding instinct in him, and, with a whining sort of bark of protest against the order his new love forced him to obey, he leaped over the white rail, and down, down, down through five-and-thirty feet of space into the smooth, blue sea, where it swirled and rippled past the high steel walls of the ship.

This exhausted the Master's first impulse. Instantly then there flashed through his mind knowledge of the fact that Finn was no water dog; that he had never been trained to fetch from the water, or to handle human beings gently with his teeth. The Master had never even seen Finn swim. That was a great love, a wonderful trust which had shone out from Finn's eyes, when, instinct protesting in his whining bark, he had leaped the rail in obedience to orders given on the impulse, and without thought. Would Finn be able to help the child who had often played with him about the deck? And how if that whining bark were a last good-bye?

In the next moment the Master acted on his second impulse, regardless of the shouts he heard behind him. His shoes and coat were shed from him in a moment, and he, too, leaped the rail, reaching the warm, blue water feet first, and striking out at once towards Finn and the child. As a swimmer his powers were not at all above the average.

For all his inexperience of the water Finn was a quicker swimmer than the Master, and he reached little Tim within a very few seconds, and seized the youngster firmly between his great jaws, while turning in the water towards the ship he had left. Finn was careful enough to prevent his teeth from injuring the child; there was no more fear of his doing that than of his biting the hand of a man who caressed him. But he was no trained life-saver, and it did not occur to him to notice which side up the

child was held. Also, a few seconds later, he caught sight of the Master in the water, and that made him loose his hold of Tim, in his haste to reach one whose claim upon him he regarded as infinitely greater. This was only momentary, however. Some instinct told him he must not leave undone the task he had been set, and with a swift movement he plucked the child to him again, and exerted all his great strength to reach the Master. This time little Tim's face was uppermost; but his small arms hung limply and helplessly at right angles from his body.

It was only a matter of seconds now till Finn and the Master met in the water. The Master seized little Tim, and Finn seized the Master, by one arm.

"Down, boy! Get down, Finn!" shouted the Master; and Finn obediently loosed his hold, and swam anxiously round and round his friend in short circles, while the Master trod water, and held Tim high above him, head down, and body bent in the middle.

It was less than three minutes later that the second officer of the liner shouted, "Way enough!" and a big white lifeboat slid past the Master's shoulder. The second officer leaned far out, and snatched little curly-headed Tim from the Master's hands, passing him straight to the waiting arms of another officer, the ship's surgeon.

"Help the dog in!" shouted the Master, as two sailorly hands reached out toward himself. But Finn was watchfully circling behind him. It was rather an undertaking getting the great Wolfhound into the lifeboat; but it was presently accomplished, the Master thrusting behind, and two men in the boat tugging in front. Tim was lying on his face on the doctor's knees, and gasping his way back to life under a vigorous kneading treatment. Whatever it may have been for the man and the Wolfhound, it had undoubtedly been a close call for the child. There were great rejoicings on the big Australian liner during the rest of that sunshiny Sunday, and you may imagine that Finn came in for a good deal of flattering attention. But he paid small heed to this. What did make his heart swell within him, till his great chest seemed scarcely big enough to hold it, was the little talk he had with the Master before they boarded the ship from the lifeboat. The Master had one dripping arm about Finn's wet shoulder, and

held it there with a warm pressure, while he muttered certain matters in Finn's right ear which sent hot blood pumping into the Wolfhound's heart. The Master knew that Finn had done a big thing for love of him that day, and he would never forget it. Finn would have leaped overboard fifty times to earn again that pressure about his shoulder, and that low murmur of loving commendation in his ear. The half-hysterical caresses of Tim's mother, and the admiring attention of the whole ship's company were trifles indeed after this.

The voyage to Australia took Finn into a new world in more senses than one. Nature and the Master had endowed him richly before. This voyage endowed him with the gift of true love, which he had not known before; and whereas he had come aboard that ship a very magnificent Wolfhound, he would leave it, the richer by something which would almost be called a soul, a personality developed by these long weeks of close intercourse with a man, and the final mental triumph which had ended in his successfully rebelling against the dominion of instinct, by reason of the completeness of his devotion to the Master.

encamped circus

CHAPTER XII

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

If Finn had been transported on a magic carpet and in an instant of time, from England to that part of Australia in which he did eventually land, the first few months he spent in the land of the Southern Cross would have been a desperately unhappy time. As it was, he landed under the influence of six weeks of steady character development, his whole being dominated by the warm personal devotion to the Master which had taken the place with Finn of mere friendly affection. And that made all the difference in the world, in the matter of the great Wolfhound's first experience of the new land.

But it is a fact that it was not a very happy period for Finn. The intimate understanding he had acquired regarding the Master's moods and states of mind and spirits, gave him more than a dog's fair share of the burdens of that curious period. It was a bad time for the Master, and for that reason, quite apart from anything else, it was not a good time for Finn. Some of the evil happenings of that period Finn understood completely, and with regard to others again, all that he could understand was their unhappy effect upon his friends and himself. The first of them saluted Finn's friends before they left the ship, in the shape of news of the death, one week before this date, of the one man upon whom the Master had been relying for help in establishing himself in Australia. So that, instead of meeting with a warm welcome, Finn and his friends had to find quarters for themselves, and to spend days in the country without a friendly word from any one.

The man who had died, suddenly, was a bachelor, and a squatter on a large scale. His spacious country home was now in the hands of the representatives of the Crown, pending its disposal for the benefit of

relatives in remote parts of the world who had never seen the man who made it. This meant that, instead of going up country on their arrival in Australia, the Master and the Mistress and Finn were obliged to find economical quarters for themselves in the city. It was a pleasant, sunny city enough, but no city would ever commend itself much to an Irish Wolfhound, and cheap town lodgings formed a poor substitute for the Sussex Downs for one of Finn's kind. And then, before the situation had ceased to be strange and unfamiliar, the Master was smitten with an illness which confined him to one room for several weeks, and kept the Mistress of the Kennels pretty constantly employed in tending him. If it had not been for his consciousness of the Master's trouble and weakness, Finn would have had no great fault to find with this period, for he was allowed to spend the greater part of his days and nights beside the bed, and within sight of the man he loved.

But after the Master's recovery came many weeks of anxiety and increasing depression, during which every sort of misfortune seemed to pursue Finn's friends, and they were obliged at length to move into a cheaper, smaller lodging, into which Finn was only admitted by those in authority upon sufferance; in which he had hardly room to turn and twist his great bulk. The Master's walks abroad at this time took him principally into offices and places of that sort, where Finn could not accompany him, and, if it had not been for the Mistress's good care, the Wolfhound's life would have been dreary indeed, and without any outdoor exercise. All these matters, however, Finn could have endured cheerfully enough, by reason of the content that filled his mind when the Master was by, and the anticipations that possessed him while he waited for the Master's return. But the thing that sapped Finn's spirits and vitality was his consciousness of the growing weight of unhappiness and anxiety and distress which possessed the Master. Finn knew by the manner in which his friend sat down when he entered the poor little lodging at night, that things had gone evilly during the day. The touch of his friend's hand on his head, languid and inert, told the Wolfhound much; and the nightly messages which reached his understanding were increasingly depressing. He did not understand the Master's explanations to the Mistress of how he had been swindled here, turned away in the other place, and misled by such and such a person. But he did realize very

keenly the effects of these things, and the distress they produced.

But this little party of strangers in a strange land had not reached the end of the long train of misfortunes with which the new world tested them before making them free of its bounty. The climax of several long-drawn months of unhappiness came to them in the form of serious illness for the Mistress of the Kennels, which, for weeks, prevented the Master from seeking any further to better his fortunes. At the end of a month, in which the Master and Finn plumbed unsuspected deeps of misery, the Mistress, white and wan, and desperately shaky, left her bedroom for the tiny sitting-room which Finn could almost span when he stretched his mighty frame. (He measured seven feet six and a quarter inches now, from nose-tip to tail-tip; and when he stood absolutely erect he could just reach the top of a door six feet six inches high with his fore-paws.) And there the Mistress sat, and smiled weakly, as she bade the Master go out to take the air and walk with Finn. By her way of it, she was to be quite herself again within a few days, but a fortnight found her practically no stronger; and the doctor spoke plainly, almost angrily, of the necessity of change of air and scene. When the Master hinted at his inability to provide this, the doctor shrugged his well-clad shoulders.

"I can only tell you, my dear sir, that if the patient is to recover she must leave this place. A month up in the mountains would put her right, with a liberal diet, and comfortable quarters. The expense need not be great. I should say that, with care, twenty pounds might cover the whole thing."

It was then that, with a certain gruff abruptness, the Master informed the doctor, outside the door of the sitting-room, that his resources were reduced to less than half the amount mentioned, and that there were bills owing. The doctor looked grave for a moment, and then shrugged his shoulders again. As he was leaving he said--

"Why, you have a dog there that must eat as much as a man. I imagine you could sell him for twenty pounds. Indeed, there is a patient of my own who I am sure would pay that for so fine a hound."

"I dare say," said the Master sadly, "seeing that I refused a hundred guineas for him before he was fully grown. That is the finest Irish

Wolfhound living, a full champion, and the most valuable dog of his breed in the world. But we could not part with Finn. He---- No, we could not sell Finn."

Again the young doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, well, that's your business, of course; but I have told you the patient will not recover in this place. If the dog is such a fine one as all that, perhaps you could get more for him; enough to set the patient on her feet, and establish yourself in some way. In fact, I think my friend would give more, if I were to ask him; he is one of the richest men in the city, and a great lover of animals."

The rest of that day proved the most miserable time that the Master and Finn had spent in Australia. But a pretence at cheerfulness had to be maintained until the Mistress had retired for the night; and then, for many hours, the Master sat before an empty fire-place, with Finn's great head resting on his knees, and one of his hands mechanically rubbing and stroking the Wolfhound's ears, while he thought, and thought, and found only greater sadness in his thinking. Finn felt plainly that a crisis had arrived, and he tried to show his agreement and understanding, when at long last, the Master rose from his comfortless wooden chair, saying sadly--

"I don't see what else a man can do, my Finn, boy; but--but it's hard."

Early next morning, before the Mistress appeared, the Master took a leash in his hand, and set out with Finn from the poor house that sheltered them, in the dingy quarter of the town where they lived. They walked for two miles through sunlit spacious streets, and then they came to the house of the doctor. The Master waited in the hall, and the doctor came to see him there, a finger napkin in his hands.

"Doctor," said the Master; "I want the address of that rich patient of yours who is fond of animals."

"Ah! Yes, I thought you would," answered the doctor. "Just step in here a moment, and I will give you a note for Mr. Sandbrook. If you are going

there right away, you will certainly be sure of catching him in."

It was nearly an hour later that the Master and Finn reached the entrance to a beautiful garden, in the centre of which stood a big, picturesque house, with windows overlooking the sparkling waters of a great harbour. The house had only one storey above the ground floor, and its walls rambled over a large expanse of ground. All round the house, with its deep, shady verandahs, spread a host of ever-diminishing satellites, in the form of outbuildings of one kind and another; extensive stabling, coach-houses, wood and coal lodges, laundry, tool-sheds, workmen's living-rooms, and so forth.

The Master and Finn were kept waiting for some time, and were seated on the verandah when Mr. Sandbrook, the portly broker, merchant, and shipping agent, came to them. Finn was lying stretched at his full great length on the cedar-wood planks of the verandah, fore-legs far out before him, head carried high, his big, dark eyes fixed lovingly on the Master's face. Mr. Sandbrook was a good-natured, kindly soul, very prosperous and very vain, and little accustomed to deny himself anything which his quickly roaming little grey eyes desired. As these eyes of his fell upon Finn, they told him that this was the most magnificent dog he had ever seen; the handsomest dog in Australia; as indeed Finn was, easily, and without a doubt.

And then the merchant shook hands with the Master, and read the note from the doctor.

"I don't know, I'm sure, what made the doctor think I wanted another dog," he said; "but this is certainly a noble animal of yours, Mr.----er."

And then the Master showed him Finn's printed pedigree, with one or two newspaper descriptions of the Wolfhound, and a list of his championship honours, and other papers showing the Master's own connection with the Irish Wolfhound Club, and so forth. Mr. Sandbrook had already made up his mind that this dog must belong to him, however; he almost resented, in a good-humoured way, the fact that Finn had not belonged to him before. It seemed to him only right that the best should be his. But he was a business man, and he said--

"Of course, in this country no dogs have the sort of market value that you speak of this hound having in England. That would be regarded as absurd here. You understand that, I am sure."

"No price you could name, sir, would tempt me into parting with Finn; only dire necessity makes that possible. But, in this country or any other, Finn's value, not to me, but to the dog-buyer, would be a hundred guineas; and he would be very cheap at that. He would bring double that in England. But I will sell Finn to you, sir, for fifty guineas, because I am assured that he would have a good home with you--on one condition; and that is that you will let me have him again for, say, eighty guineas, if I can offer you that sum within a couple of years."

Mr. Sandbrook stuck out his chin, pulled down his white waistcoat, and said that he was afraid he could not make such an offer as that.

"You see, I am not a dealer in animals," he said. And the Master answered him rather sharply with: "Neither am I. You know why I am here, sir." "Yes, yes," said Mr. Sandbrook, stroking his whiskers with one plump white hand; "but you see, I don't want to feel that I have to give up a--er--a possession of my own whenever I may happen to be called upon to do so. No; I could never do that. But, I'll tell you what; I'll give you seventy guineas for the dog outright, if you like; but I assure you there's not another man in the country but would laugh at such a figure for a dog, for any dog. But I can see he's a fine fellow, and--er--I'll do that, if you like."

The Master shook his head.

Suddenly then, the Master turned upon the merchant, with a little upward movement of both hands.

"Sir, I would ask you to reconsider that," he said. "I would ask you please to try and think what this means to me. It is not a business proposition to me at all. I have told you what the doctor said. I cannot neglect that--dare not. But Finn--Finn is like a child of my own to me; like a young brother. Take him from me for thirty guineas, and promise to let me buy him back for sixty, if I can do it, in two years, in one, then. It--it would be a great

kindness."

The merchant measured the Master with his little grey eyes. He was good-natured and very vain. He wanted to own that magnificent hound. No one else in the colony (it was not a State then) owned such a hound as that. He pictured Finn lying on a rug in the fine hall of his fine house, which he was told was equal to that of one of the stately homes of England. It had cost enough, he thought, with its armour, and its dim old portraits of men and women whose names he had never heard, though he was wont to refer to them vaguely as "family portraits, you know--the old folk at Home." And it was true enough they had come from the Old Country; through the dealer who supplied the armour. But then to have some one come and take his fine hound away from him--no, his dignity forbade the thought of such a thing. He turned half round on his heels.

"No," he said decisively; "I'm sorry, but I couldn't think of it. I'll make it seventy-five guineas for an outright sale, and that's my last word."

While the Master pondered over this, he had a vision of the Mistress of the Kennels, sitting, white and shaky, in the dismal little room on the far side of the city, waiting for the change which was to give her health again. He did hesitate for another minute; but he knew all the time that there was no alternative for him, and, watching the expression on his careworn face, the merchant, good-natured creature though he was, told himself that he had been a fool to offer that extra five guineas. It really was a preposterous price for a dog, he thought.

Five minutes later the merchant was making out a cheque in his study, and the Master was engaged in writing down a long list of details regarding Finn's dietary, and the sort of methods and system which should be followed to secure health and happiness to an Irish Wolfhound. The Master used great care over the preparation of these instructions. At least, he thought, Finn would be sure of a luxuriously good home.

"You don't think he'll run away, do you?" asked the merchant.

"No; I don't think he'll run away," said the Master. "I'll tell him he mustn't do that." The merchant stared. "But, for a week or two, you should be

careful with him, and not leave him quite at large." The Master had already made it clear to the merchant that Finn was an aristocrat in all his habits. And now the merchant was anxious to get to his much-deferred breakfast, always a rather late function in that house; and the Master had no wish to prolong a situation of unmitigated wretchedness to himself.

They parted in the big hall, the Master and Finn, among the dim portraits of somebody's ancestors and the armour which came from a street near Regent's Park. Finn had been eyeing the Master with desperate anxiety for some time past. At frequent intervals he had nervously wagged his tail, and even made a pretence of gaiety, with jaws parted, and red tongue lolling. Now he sat down on his haunches on a big rug, because the Master told him to sit down. For a moment the Master dropped on one knee beside him, one arm about his shoulders. Finn gave an anxious little whine. His heart was thudding against his ribs; the prescient anxiety stirring within him affected him with a physical nausea.

"Good-bye, my old Finn, son! Good-bye, you--you Irish Hound! Now mark me, Finn, you stay here; you stay here--stay here, Finn!"

Such episodes are always suspect when seen in print. I have no wish to exaggerate by a hair's-breadth about Finn. His whole nature bade the Wolfhound follow his friend. The Master said, "Stay there!" And there was no mistaking his meaning. Finn crouched down. His body did not touch the floor; his weight rested on his outstretched legs, though his position appeared to be that of lying. There he crouched; but, as though the thing were too much for him to see as well as feel, he buried his muzzle, well over the eyes, between his fore-legs, just as he might have done if a strong light had dazzled him. It was obedience such as a great soldier could appreciate. Finn stayed there, hiding his face; but as the house-door closed behind the Master, a cry broke from Finn, a muffled cry, by reason of the position of his head; a cry that was part bark, part whine, and part groan; a cry that smote upon the Master's ears as he stepped out upon the gravel drive in the sunlight, with the biting, stinging pain, not of the parting, but of an accusation. There was a twinge of shame as well as grief in the Master's heart that day, though he knew well that what he had done was unavoidable. Still, there was the sense of shame, of treachery. Finn had been wonderfully human and close to him since they

left England together.

Before noon of that day the Master was on his way to the mountains with the Mistress of the Kennels.

wolfhound looking at closed door

CHAPTER XIII

AN ADVENTURE BY NIGHT

For some thirty-six hours after his parting with the Master, Finn mourned silently in the big house, which overlooked the harbour and was filled with brand-new luxuries, including the brightly polished suits of mail and the carefully matured family portraits in the hall. If Finn had been a year younger the Sandbrook family would have learned from him the exact nature of the Irish Wolfhound howl, and they would not have liked it at all. But, though Finn would be capable of the howl as long as he lived, he had no mind to indulge in it now. His grief was too deep for that and too understanding; so understanding, indeed, that he was perfectly well aware that no howls of his would bring the Master back to him. It was true he had not understood the nature of the transaction which made him the property of the Australian merchant; but he had clearly understood that some grievous necessity had forced the Master to hand him over to Mr. Sandbrook, and that his, Finn's, duty to the Master involved remaining there in the house by the harbour.

But, as he saw it, his duty did not make it incumbent upon him to enter into communication with a whole pack of people who had nothing to do with the Master. In some dim way he comprehended that he owed deference and obedience to Mr. Sandbrook; that the Master had undertaken so much on his behalf; but he had no wish to become familiar with the Sandbrook household; and the consequence was that the daughters, and the servants--there were no sons at home--and the lady of the house, while they admitted the magnificence of the new acquisition's appearance, agreed in pronouncing him a rather sulky animal. They showered caresses and foolish remarks upon him, and he lay with his grey-black muzzle resting on outstretched fore-legs, staring through them all at the door by which the Master had disappeared. The

only sign he would give of consciousness of the presence of these other people, was in turning his head away from them when they touched his muzzle. Once, when the younger daughter of the house went so far as to sit down beside Finn, and bend her head close down to his, he submitted courteously, though his nose wrinkled with annoyance, until the young lady raised her head; and then, very gently, lie rose, walked away from her to the mat beside the door, and lay down there, with his nose close to the spot on which the Master's feet had last rested in that house.

Finn was taken out in the garden two or three times on a leash; but he had no thought of escape. The Master had left him, and bade him stay there; and his heart was empty and desolate within him. Now and again his dark eyes filled with moisture, and the sadness of his face was so wonderfully striking as to impress the Misses Sandbrook, who, truth to tell, were not over and above intelligent, nor even very kind-hearted. They had not half the kindly good-nature of their vulgar parents, though they had much better taste, and a great variety of accomplishments.

Through the night Finn did not sleep, though he dozed occasionally for a few minutes at a time, dreaming fitfully, waking and dozing, of the Master and the Mistress, and the lodging they had shared of late. The whole of the next day he passed in the same employment, except that, in the afternoon, he had to go through the wearisome ceremony of being introduced to a number of strange ladies, not one among whom seemed from the smell of her clothes to have anything to do with the Master. He comported himself through this ordeal with dignity and patience, but, as one of the ladies said--"The dear darling, he does look so dreadfully sad and tired of everything, doesn't he?" To which Mrs. Sandbrook replied that this was just his "strangeness," and that he would soon get over it. She added that she did not object to this look of Finn's herself, he being such a regular *a-ristocrat*. It seemed to her in keeping with his general appearance, she said, and quite suggestive of the sort of ancient, ivy-covered mansion he had come from in the Old Country. The good lady drew upon her imagination, of course, in the matter of Finn's home in England. But she meant well, and Finn suffered her head-pattings more gladly than those of the rest of the household, recognizing clearly in her just about what there was to recognize, and rightly appreciating that

simple character, as being of greater worth than the frothily pretentious nature of her daughters.

That night the master of the house announced that he thought Finn had quite settled in his new home, and that he would now take the Wolfhound for a stroll in the grounds without the leash. He did so, and when they had walked twice round a lawn and down an avenue, they came to the green gate by which Finn had first entered that place. Finn had been walking dejectedly, his head carried low and close to Mr. Sandbrook's legs, his mind still too full of mournful thoughts of his lost Master to permit of his inquiring closely into those smells and other details of his immediate surroundings, which would have interested him in ordinary circumstances.

Now, as his eyes fell upon the green gate, an overpowering desire to see the Master swept through his mind. He had no intention of running away from his new owner. His one thought was just to run down to the old lodging and see the Master again. His hind-quarters bent under him, and the next instant saw him neatly clearing the top of the five-foot gate, with never a thought of the consternation he left behind him in poor Mr. Sandbrook's mind.

Before the portly merchant had the gate fairly open, Finn had trotted thirty or forty yards down the moonlit road in the direction from which he had approached the house with the Master on the morning of the previous day. He paused once, and looked back at Mr. Sandbrook, in response to agitated cries and whistles; but, not being able to explain his precise object in going out in a manner that would have been comprehensible to the merchant, he decided that it would be better to get on with the matter in hand without delay. So he went forward again, and this time at an easy canter which took him out of earshot of Mr. Sandbrook in less than one minute.

When Finn arrived in the streets of the city he was more than a little confused, and once or twice took a wrong turning. But he always retraced his steps and found the right turning before going far, and in due course he arrived at the house in which he had lodged with his friends. Rising on his hind-feet, he pawed the front door vigorously. A few moments later

the door was opened by the landlady, to whose utter astonishment Finn brushed hurriedly into the little passage and up the stairs to the door of the room the Master had used, where he paused, with one foot pressed against the closed door.

"Here, Sam!" cried the startled landlady, "you talk about your blessed menagerie, come an' look 'ere. My word, this'll surprise yer!"

The landlady's son, who had paid her a flying visit that day, appeared in the passage in his shirt sleeves, holding a small lamp. The landlady closed the front door, and together the two walked upstairs to where Finn sat, whining softly, and pawing at the closed door of what had been the Master's sitting-room.

"My bloomin' oath, what a dog!" exclaimed Sam, as his mother reached forward and opened the sitting-room door, leaving Finn free to plunge forward into the dark interior, which he did on the instant. In the next instant he was out again, and pawing at the opposite door, leading to the bedroom. This, too, was opened for him, and in another moment he had satisfied himself that neither room had been occupied by the Master or the Mistress for a considerable time. This was a grievous blow to Finn, and as he returned to the little landing between the two rooms, he sniffed despairingly at the landlady's skirt, and even nuzzled her rough hand, with a vague feeling that she might be able to produce his friends. Not that he had any serious purpose in this, however, for it was strongly borne in upon Finn now that he had lost his friends for good and all.

"Well, what jer think of 'im?" the landlady asked of her son.

Sam was a tall, loosely built, rather slouching fellow; a typical young Australian of a certain class; not unintelligent, rather lazy, given to drawl in his speech, and extremely self-centred. He had been eyeing Finn all this while with growing interest, and now he said--

"Is he savage?"

"Wouldn't hurt a sheep," replied the mother. "Wouldn't yer like to know where I got such a beauty?"

"No kid. He's not yours," said Sam.

"Well, I reckon he could be, if I wanted sech a great elephant. 'Is Master lodged 'ere these two months an' more, but 'e went off to the mountins yesterday with his sick Missis. Why, come to think of it, er course, that's what it is. 'Is Master's sole him, that's what 'e's done; and that's why 'e was able to pay me, an' the doctor, an' go off to the mountins yesterday. An' now the bloomin' dog's run away an' come back to look for 'im; that's what that is, you can take yer oath."

Sam spat reflectively on the little coloured door-mat. "Well, the dog's no use to you, mother," he said. "You can't do nothin' with him."

"I'm not so sure about that, Sam," replied the landlady thoughtfully. As a matter of fact, the idea of keeping Finn had not occurred to her for a moment, up till then. But hers was not an easy life; she was always short of money, and found it extremely difficult to worm anything out of this big son of hers during his rare visits to her. In fact, of late she had given up the attempt, so that his visits represented only an additional expense for her. "I don' know about that, Sam. I might keep 'im, an' watch out fer the reward. A dawg like that's worth money."

"Too bloomin' big an' clumsy to be worth much," said Sam disparagingly. "Clumsy" was no more applicable to Finn than it would be to a panther, and Sam was well aware of it. "Tell you what," he said, "I've got to be makin' for the station in half an hour, anyway. I'll take the dog out o' yer way, an' give you half a quid for him, if yer like. I shall lose on it, fer it's not likely the boss could make any use of 'im, anyway. But I'll chance the ducks this time, if yer like. You can't keep a bloomin' camel like that here."

But the landlady knew her son tolerably well, and he could not deceive her very much. When he left the house half an hour later he was leading Finn at the end of a rusty chain, and the poorer by twenty-five shillings than he had been an hour before. So Finn changed hands for the second time in forty-eight hours, once for seventy-five guineas, and once for twenty-five shillings; and upon this second occasion the transaction was a matter of complete indifference to him. He thought vaguely of returning

to Mr. Sandbrook's house later on. In the meantime this young man seemed to want him to take a walk in another direction, and all ways were alike to Finn in his bitter disappointment over not finding the Master. He did not know that he was treading exactly the path the Master and the Mistress had trod on the previous day, when leaving their lodging for the mountains. He only felt that he had now completely lost his friends, and that he was rather well-disposed than otherwise toward long-legged Sam, for the reason that Sam came from the house in which the Master had lodged.

tiger behind bars

CHAPTER XIV

THE SOUTHERN CROSS CIRCUS

The night which followed Finn's departure from his old lodging with Sam was the most peculiar that he had ever spent in his life, and, not even excepting the night in Matey's back-yard in Sussex, the most unrestful. It was the second consecutive night during which he went practically without sleep; but on this occasion it was not so much grief over his loss of the Master that kept him awake as the peculiar nature of the immediate surroundings.

In the first place, the greater part of the night was spent on a moving railway train; and, secondly, Finn's particular resting-place was a sort of wooden cage, sheathed in iron, and having another similar cage upon either side of it. In the compartment upon Finn's right were two native bears. These philosophical animals slept solidly all the time, and made no noise beyond a husky sort of snoring. But they had a pronounced odour which penetrated Finn's compartment through a grating near its roof; and this odour was peculiarly disturbing to the Wolfhound. In the cage on Finn's left was a full-grown, elderly, and sour-tempered Bengal tiger, who had sore places under his elbows, and other troubles which made him excessively irritable, and a bad sleeper. The tiger also had a pronounced odour; and it was much more disturbing to Finn than that of the philosophical little native bears. In fact, it kept the wiry hair over Finn's shoulders in a state of continual agitation and his silky ears in a restlessly upright position, with only their soft tips drooping. Sometimes, when the train jolted, the tiger would roll heavily against the iron-sheathed partition between his abode and Finn's, and then Finn would spring to his feet, against the far side of the compartment, every hair on his body erect, his lips drawn right back from the pearl-white fangs they usually sheltered, his sensitive nostrils deeply serrated, and all the

forgotten fierceness of bygone generations of Wolfhound warriors and killers concentrated in his long-drawn snarl of resentment and of warning threat.

It may be imagined, then, that for Finn the night was even less restful than the one he spent in Mr. Sandbrook's house. The smells and sounds about him strained every nerve in the Wolfhound's body to singing point, even as a prolonged gale strains the cordage of a ship that flies before it through a heavy sea. They penetrated farther into the pulsing entity that was Finn than even his experience with Matey, or his hunting and killing of the fox beside the Sussex Downs. They stirred latent instincts which came to him from farther back in the long line of his ancestry; from just how far back one could not say, but it may well be that they came from a dim period, beyond all the generations of wolf-hunting and, earlier, of man-fighting in Ireland, when forbears of Finn's had been pitted against lions and tigers and bears, as well as Saxons, in Roman arenas. Again, it might be that that reputed Thibetan ancestor played his part in endowing Finn with the hitherto unsuspected instincts which stirred within him now, changing his aspect from its usual courtly dignity and grace to lip-dropping ferocity, and fierce, forbidding wrath. It was curious, the manner in which the play of these instincts affected Finn's very shape, giving to his massive depth of chest a suggestion of the hyæna, to his head a marked suggestion of the wolf, and to his drooping hind-quarters more than a hint of the lion. The facts that the hair along his spine stood erect like wire, and that his exposed fangs and updrawn lips changed his whole facial aspect, had a good deal to do with the alterations wrought in his shape by the curious position in which he found himself this night. A wiser man than Sam would have refrained from putting Finn in this predicament, and that more especially while he was still a stranger to the great hound. But Sam had been invited to join a party of his companions who were supplied with euchre cards and a bottle of whisky, and, as he told himself, he "couldn't be bothered with the bloomin' dawg!"

Sam rather regretted his carelessness when he came to release Finn next morning. Since the small hours, the part of the train in which Sam had travelled had been lying in a siding, close to a little mountain station. And now the different wagons, including that containing Finn and the tiger

and the bears, with a lot of paraphernalia, were being swung out upon the ground, preparatory to being drawn by road to the neighbouring town. At this stage Sam had intended to take Finn out to be inspected by his employer, and, if fortune willed it, sold to that gentleman for what Sam considered a handsome figure, say, fifteen or twenty pounds.

Sam was one of the underlings employed by Rutherford's famous Southern Cross travelling circus; and his idea was that Finn would be found a suitable and welcome addition to the menagerie of performing animals attached to that popular institution. But when Sam came to look at Finn by daylight, and to note the extreme fierceness of the Wolfhound's mien--brought about entirely by his own stupidity in locking the hound up beside a tiger and two bears--his heart failed him in the matter of releasing his prize, and he decided to wait until the camp had been formed, and things had settled down a little. That cowardly decision of Sam's affected the whole of Finn's future life.

The process of transferring his cage to the road, and travelling along that road, which was in reality no better than a very rough mountain track and exceedingly bumpy, worked old Killer, as the tiger was ominously called, into a frenzy of wrath, the which was by no means softened by the removal of the outer side of his cage, in order that the casual passer-by might observe his ferocity through the inner iron bars. Now the tiger's frenzy meant something very like frenzy for Finn. When the tiger snarled, and thrashed the inner side of his cage with his great tail, Finn's snarl became a fierce, growling bark; his fore-legs stiffened, like the erect hair along his backbone, his white fangs were all exposed, and his aspect became truly terrifying. Saliva began to collect at the corners of his long mouth; his great wrath and unreasoning, instinctive fierceness and resentment made him look twice his actual size; and altogether it may be admitted that when Sam came to investigate, after the camp had been formed, Finn truly was, to all appearances, a fearsome and terrifying creature. His snarls and growls waked fury in the breast of the irritable old tiger, who was not accustomed to hear threats or warnings from any of his neighbours, he being the only large carnivorous animal in the show, and, in consequence, he threw himself against the partition between Finn's cage and his own, snarling ferociously. This put the strength of

centuries of hunting and fighting courage and fierceness into Finn's replies, and left the Wolfhound, to all outward seeming, a more formidable wild beast than the tiger himself.

Sam marvelled at his own courage in having led this monster through the streets, and told himself that nothing would induce him to be such a fool as to take Finn out of the cage. His mother had given him both Finn's name and the name of the breed, but Sam had never before heard of an Irish Wolfhound, and, looking now at Finn's gleaming fangs and foamy lips, all that he recalled of the name was "Irish Wolf." It was thus that Finn was presented to the great John L. Rutherford himself, the proprietor of the circus.

"He's the Giant Irish Wolf, boss," said Sam, "and the only one in the world, as I'm told. I bought him cheap, an' I got him into that cage single-handed, I did; an' now I'll sell him to you cheap, boss, if you'll buy him. If you don't want him, he goes to Smart's manager, who offered me twenty-five quid for him, as he stood last night."

"Smart's" was the opposition circus; but the rest of Sam's remarks were imagination for the most part, based upon his desire to make a good sale of Finn, his cowardly fear of handling the now infuriated hound, his ignorance, and a natural wish to afford an explanation, a plausible and creditable explanation, of the liberty he had taken in appropriating the empty cage. As a matter of fact, the great John L. Rutherford experienced quite a thrill of satisfaction when his eyes lighted upon the raging Wolfhound. He had lost his one lion from disease some weeks previously, and felt that the menagerie lacked attractiveness in the way of fierce-looking and bloodthirsty creatures. Like Sam, he had never even heard of an Irish Wolfhound, or seen a dog of any breed who approached Finn in the matter of height and length and lissom strength.

From the point of view of one who regarded him as a wild beast, and was without knowledge of the tragic chance which had made so gallant and docile a creature appear in the guise of a wild beast, Finn did actually present both an awe-inspiring and a magnificent spectacle at this moment. His cage was seven feet high, yet at one moment Finn's fore-paws came within a few inches of touching its roof, as he plunged erect

and snarling against the partition which separated him from the growling and spitting tiger. The next moment saw him crouched in the far corner of the cage, as though for a spring, his fore-legs extended, rigid as the iron bars that enclosed him, his black eyes blazing fire and fury, his huge, naked jaws parted to admit of a snarl of terrifying ferocity, his whole great bulk twitching and trembling from the mixture of rage, bewilderment, fear, and wild killing passion with which his neighbours and his amazing situation filled him. It was an amazing situation for such a creature, reared as Finn had been reared, and, withal, having behind him the lordly fighting blood of fifteen centuries of Irish Wolfhound history.

"Well, Sam, he sure is a dandy wolf," said the astonished Mr. John L. Rutherford, who hailed, men said, from San Francisco. "I'd just like to know who you got him from, and how you got him aboard the train last night."

Sam began to feel that he really was a very fine fellow, and one who had accomplished great things.

"Well, I'll tell ye, boss; I bought him from a wild Irishman named O'Flaherty, who landed yesterday from the steamer, *Prince Rupert*, yer know; and I brought him to the train in a zinc-lined packin'-case with iron bars to it, which I sold to a bumner in the goods-yard for a bob." Sam did not mention at the same time that he had flung away the brand-new collar Finn had worn, with Mr. Sandbrook's name upon it. "Yes, I got him into that cage single-handed, boss; but I reckon it'll take the Professor all he knows to handle the brute." "The Professor" was the world-renowned Professor Claude Damarel, lion-tamer and performer with wild beasts, known sometimes in private life as Clem Smith.

"Giant Irish Wolf, you say," mused John L. Rutherford, who knew the world tolerably well between Chicago and San Francisco, and in the continent of Australia, but nowhere else. He could both read and write, but his favourite literature was the *Police Gazette*, and for other writing than his signature he preferred where possible to employ some one else, because it was work which made him perspire copiously. It also made his lower lip droop, even when he signed his name, and altogether was a laborious business. "Well, he's certainly a giant right enough; big as any two wolves I ever see. My! He must stand a yard at the shoulder." Which he did, and at that moment his hackles were giving him another three inches, and his rage was giving him the effect of another foot all round. "What figure have you got the gall to ask for him, Sam?"

"Well, I'm only askin' a fiver for meself out've him, boss; so I'll take twenty down."

"You will, eh? Why, what a generous son of a gun you are, Sam! I should've thought twenty would've given you three fivers profit."

"What, an' him the only Irish Wolf in all the world, boss! Why he'll be the draw of the show inside of a week. See him jump, now! Look at the devil! Strike me! He is a dandy from way back, boss. How'll the Giant Wolf figure on the bills, boss? Why I believe Smart's man'd rise to thirty for him, sure."

"Well, Sam, we won't quarrel for a pound or two. It was smart of ye to get the beast, an' you shall have fifteen for him, though ten's his price; an' if the Professor makes a star of him, why you'll get a rise, my boy. Say, touch him up with that stick there, an' see how he takes it."

Sam thrust a stave in between the bars of Finn's cage, where they adjoined those of the tiger's place, and prodded the Wolfhound's side as he stood erect. The thing seemed to come from the tiger's cage, and Finn was upon it like a whirlwind, his fangs sinking far into the tough wood, till it cracked again.

"Well, say," said the boss, with warm admiration, "if he ain't two ends an'

the middle of a jim-dandy rustler from 'way back, you can search me! Say, Sam, cut along an' find the Professor. Tell him I'd like to see him right here."

The great barred cage, with its three divisions, was now enclosed, with various other cages and properties of the circus, within a high canvas wall in the centre of the camp. The circus was to open that night, and much remained to be done in the way of preparing a ring in the big main tent, and so forth. A number of piebald horses stood in different parts of the enclosure, nosing idly at the dusty ground, and paying not the slightest heed either to the scent of the different wild creatures, or to the roaring snarls and growls that issued continuously from Killer's cage. Familiarity had bred indifference in them to things which would have sent a horse from outside half crazy with fear.

The Professor arrived with Sam, after a few minutes. He wore knee boots, a vivid red shirt, and a much soiled old leather coat which reached almost to his boots. From his right wrist there dangled a long quilt, or cutting whip, of rhinoceros-hide. Born in the neighbourhood of Pretoria, the Professor had been through most phases of the showman's business in South Africa and, during the past half-dozen years, in Australia. In one sense he was a cruel man; but in the worst possible sense of the word he was not cruel. That is to say, it gave him no particular gratification to inflict pain; but he would inflict it to any extent at all, in the pursuit of his ends. He was not afflicted with the loathsome disease of wanton cruelty, but there was no pity in his composition, and practically no sentiment. He was reckoned an able tamer of wild beasts. By stirring up the tiger, as the Professor approached, the boss provoked a striking exhibition of savage strength and ferocity in Finn.

"Say, Professor," he said, with a smile, "what d'ye think of the latest? How does the Giant Irish Wolf strike you, as an addition to the domestic fireside? Sweet thing, ain't he? Couldn't you make him do some sentimental stunts with the Java love-birds, now?"

The Professor inspected the furiously raging Finn with considerable interest.

"You'll not manage much taming with this fellow, Professor, will ye?" asked the boss, craftily aiming at putting the lion-tamer on his mettle. "You'll hardly manage the Professor among his pets act in this cage, eh?"

"I'd like to know what's goin' to stop me, boss," said the Professor doughtily. "I guess you've forgotten the fact that Professor Claude Damarel was the man who tamed the Tasmanian Wolf, Satan; and the Tasmanian Wolf is about the fiercest brute in the world to tackle, next to the Tasmanian Devil; an' I had one o' them pretty near beat in Auckland, till he went an' died on me. Tame this Giant Irishman--you bet your sweet life I will; an' have him cavortin' through a hoop inside of a month--or maybe a week--if I'm not kept busy wastin' my time over groom's work."

"Right-ho, Professor!" said the boss, good-humouredly. "You shall have a groom of your own, right here an' now. I'll promote Sam to the job, with half-a-dollar rise. I'll find a feller in the town here for your job, Sam. Enterprise goes with me every time, an' brings its own reward--sure thing. But I'd like to be on hand when you tackle the Giant Wolf, Professor. You might want help."

"Help! Me want help! You wait here two minutes, boss, an' I'll show you."

The boss grinned over the success of his tactics in rousing the Professor's pride, and strolled round among the horses for five minutes or so till the tamer returned with Sam, carrying a brazier full of live coals, and an iron rod with a rough leather handle at one end of it. The other end of the iron rod was buried among the live coals. At sight of it the Killer crouched down in the far corner of his cage with a snarling whine, half covering his face with his huge paws.

"Now I'll show you how much help I need in taming, boss," said the Professor.

Grasping the leather handle of his now red-hot rod, the Professor deftly opened the gate of Finn's cage, far enough to admit of his own swift entrance; the gate being instantly slammed to behind him by Sam, and bolted. Finn was lying crouched in the far corner of the cage, and if the light there had been good, the tamer would surely have seen by the

expression on the Wolfhound's intelligent face that he was no wild beast. On the other hand, froth still clung to Finn's jaws, the hair on his shoulders was still more or less erect, and a few minutes before this time he had been raging like a whirlwind.

For a moment or two the Professor glared steadily at Finn. He undoubtedly had pluck, seeing that he believed the Wolfhound to be as ferocious and deadly a beast as any tiger. Then, slowly, Finn rose from his crouching position, prepared to come forward and to treat his visitor as a friend, even as a possible rescuer from that place of horrid duration. The Professor's plan was all mapped out in his mind, and he did not waver in its execution. Had he been given to wavering he would long ago have been killed by some wild creature. In the instant of Finn's move towards him the Professor took a quick step forward and, with a growling shout of "Down, Wolf!" smote Finn fairly across the head with the red-hot end of his iron bar, so that pungent smoke arose. One portion of the red-hot surface of the iron caught Finn's muzzle, causing him exquisite pain; pain of a sort he had never known before. At the moment of the blow, a terrific snarling roar came from the tiger's cage. Half blinded, wholly maddened, dimly connecting this strange new agony that bit into him with the tiger's roar, Finn sprang at the Professor with a snarl that was itself almost a roar. The red-hot bar met him in mid-air, biting deep into the soft skin of his lips, furrowing his beautiful neck, and stinging the tip of one silken ear. The pain was terrible; the smell of his own burnt flesh and hair was maddening; the deadly implacability of the attack, coming from a man, too, was baffling beyond description. Finn howled, and sank abruptly upon his haunches, giving the Professor time for a flying glance of pride in the direction of the admiring John L. Rutherford.

And now, had he been really a wild beast, Finn would probably have remained cowering as far as possible from that terrible bar of fire. Even as it was, he might have done this if the Professor had not made the mistake of raising the bar again, with a suddenly threatening motion. Finn had greater reasoning power, and greater strength of will, than a wild beast. He was robbed of all restraint by his surroundings and by the Professor's absolute and crushing reversal of all his preconceived notions of the relations between man and hound. The snarl of the tiger in

his ears, the smell of his own burnt flesh in his nostrils, the pitilessness of the Professor's wholly unexpected attack, filled him with a tumultuous fury of warring instincts which generations of inherited docility were powerless to overcome. But, through it all, he was more capable of thought than a really wild beast, and, as the hot iron was lifted the third time, he leaped in under it like lightning, and with a roar of defiance brought its wielder to the ground, and planted both fore-feet upon his chest, while the iron bar fell clattering from the man's hand between the bars of the cage.

Be it remembered that Finn stood a foot higher at the shoulder than the average wolf, and weighed fully twice as much, being long and strong in proportion to his height and weight. The Professor was momentarily expecting to feel Finn's great jaws about his throat, and his two arms were crossed below his chin for protection of that most vulnerable spot. The tiger was now furiously clawing at the partition a few inches from Finn's nose, and emitting a series of the most blood-curdling snarls and roars.

"Draw him off with a stick!" shouted the Professor; who, even in his present sorry plight, was concerned most with the injury to his pride. Sam jabbed viciously at Finn's face with a long stake, through the bars, and as Finn withdrew slightly, the Professor wriggled cleverly to his feet, in a crouching posture, and reached the gate of the cage. Finn growled threateningly, but made no move forward, being thankful to see the retreat of his enemy. In another instant the Professor was outside the cage, and the gate securely bolted. He was bruised, but bore no mark of scratch or bite, and so far was able to boast; having no knowledge of the fact that Finn had not thought of biting him, but merely of overpowering him, as a means of evading his hot iron. This the Wolfhound had done easily. He could have killed the man with almost equal ease, had that been his intention.

"Well, he sure is a rustler from 'way back, Professor, every single time," remarked the boss.

"You'll see him hop through a hoop when I say so, inside of a week," replied the tamer, sourly, as he brushed the dust from his coat. "As it is,

you'll notice that he didn't dare to bite or scratch. Don't you fear but what I'll tame the beauty all right, Giant Wolf or no Giant Wolf. I've handled worse'n him."

And a couple of days before this, the younger Miss Sandbrook had been resting her carefully dressed curls against Finn's head.

snarling wolfhound head

CHAPTER XV

THE MAKING OF A WILD BEAST

The transformation begun in Finn by the night he had spent in a rocking train, caged between a tiger and two bears, was enormously accentuated and confirmed by his encounter with the Professor. If zoologists had deliberately set themselves the task of converting an Irish Wolfhound into a wild beast, they could hardly have taken any more effective measures than those which had been adopted by pure chance with Finn, from the time at which he reached Sam's hands; and it is probable that no zoologist with any humanity in him would have made progress so extraordinarily rapid. The mere fact of being caged behind iron bars for the first time in his life, and that between a roaring, snarling tiger and two grunting little bears, strongly odoriferous of the wild, affected Finn in somewhat the same manner that a highly excitable and nervous man of quite untrained intellect might be affected by being flung into a cell, surrounded by raving maniacs. If such a man, after a dozen hours in his cell, were approached by some one whom he had every reason to regard as a friend and a rescuer, and beaten cruelly with a weapon possessed of strange and altogether horrible qualities--supernatural qualities, so far as he could tell--it is fair to suppose that he would be as much transformed by the ordeal as Finn was by his ordeal.

Shortly after the episode of the red-hot iron, Finn's cage was again visited by Sam and the Professor, the former being laden with a big, blood-stained basket. From this basket the Professor took a large chunk of raw flesh, and pushed it through the bars into Finn's cage. A bone was also thrust through the bars, and a fixed iron pan near the gate was filled from outside with water. The Professor eyed Finn curiously while he performed these operations, and was surprised that the Giant Wolf, as they called him, did not spring forward upon the food.

"I've put the fear of God into him all right, Sam," said the Professor. "He's not going to touch his grub while we're here. Like all wolves, he's mighty frightened of traps; and I guess he reckons there's a trap attaching to this meat. Watch how Killer tackles his."

Killer was already ravening furiously at the bars of his cage, his yellow eyes ablaze as he watched the meat his soul desired being thrust into Finn's cage. The tiger's roars kept Finn's hackles up, and his fangs bared in a fierce snarl; so that the Professor was struck afresh with the savageness of the latest addition to the menagerie under his care. Killer's meat barely reached the floor of his cage before he had snatched and carried it to the rear, where he tore it savagely, while maintaining an incessant growling snarl. But he dropped the meat as though it burned, and crouched fearfully in the opposite corner of his den, when--by way of display for Sam's benefit--the Professor picked up his iron bar and threatened the tiger with it. Now Finn, on the other hand, when he saw the cruel bar raised, sprang forward with a growling roar of defiance, fore-feet outstretched, bristling back curved for the leap, and white fangs flashing.

"Too sulky to eat it, but mighty concerned when he thought I was goin' to take his meat from him," commented the Professor, in explanation to Sam. As a matter of fact, Finn had not thought of the meat. His present feeling was that he had fallen among a lot of mad wild beasts, some of whom, by curious chance, had the appearance of men folk. If one among them should lift an iron bar, and more especially if the maddest and most hated among them, the Professor, should lift the bar, why then, as Finn saw it, his one chance for life was to fight; to strike hard and swiftly.

"We'll have to keep these two always caged together," said the Professor, with a careless glance at Finn and the tiger. "Old Killer works him up in great style. I guess he'll fetch the public all the time, while he can hear old Killer at his antics. He certainly is the finest-lookin' beast I ever saw in the wolf line, and he's as strong and heavy as a horse. I guess your number would 'ave been up for sure, Sam, if you'd been in my shoes a while back, when he got me down. What I don't like about the beggar is you can't reckon on him; he don't seem to have the same ways as most of 'em. He don't fly at ye right away; he doesn't even jump for his grub,

you see. He seems to lie back an' consider. It's a bad thing that, for he's hefty enough, anyway, without stopping to think out his wickedness like a man. He's goin' to be a rough, hard case to tame, Sam, that Giant Wolf of yours; but he's come to a hard-case tamer, too, and don't you forget it. He's got to bend or break, and you can gamble clear down to the butt of your sack on that, my son. Come on now, and I'll show you how the others are fed. Just fill old Killer's water-dish first."

It was now thirty hours since Finn had tasted food, and three days since he had eaten a proper meal. If his experiences of the past four-and-twenty hours had been in every other respect distressing, they had at least robbed him of grief about the Master. His outraged physical senses, and the tremendous strain placed upon his nervous system, effectually shut grief out from his mind. Finn was accustomed to have meals served to him in spotless enamelled dishes, and it had always been food of which a man might have partaken: well-cooked meats, bread, vegetables, and gravy, nicely cut and mixed. Now for a long time the condition of passionate protest and irritability produced in him by all that he had gone through, and by Killer's continuous growling, prevented his touching the meat which lay near the bars of his cage. But hunger triumphed after a while, and with a quick, rather furtive movement, but with lips drawn back and every sign exposed of readiness to defend his action, Finn lifted the big chunk of meat from its place by the bars, and carried it into a corner at the back of the cage, where he tore it into fragments, and ate it, of necessity, very much as a wolf eats, the blood of the raw meat trickling meanwhile about his jaws. To drink, Finn had to place his head close to those bars which most nearly adjoined the front of the tiger's cage. But drink was necessary to him now, and so, with his nose all furrowed, his fangs bared, and a formidable low snarl issuing from his throat, he slowly approached the water-pan, and lapped his fill, pausing to snarl aloud at the tiger between each three or four laps of his tongue. But Killer had fed full, and crunched his bone to splinters and eaten that; so now he was preparing himself to sleep.

If Finn could have followed Killer's example and slept it would have helped him immensely, for his overwrought system needed rest more badly than anything else just then. But this was impossible as yet for the

sensitive Wolfhound. The two bears in the next cage were playing together fubsily, and the tiger's breathing while he slept was a maddening kind of cross between a purr and a snore; maddening, that is, to one who found the creature's mere proximity incredibly distasteful. This hatred of the Killer's neighbourhood was no whim, no personal fastidiousness on Finn's part. It went much deeper than that. For example, so far, the hair on Finn's back would not assume its natural position; it still stood half erect, and harsh and stiff as fine wire; by which the tension of his nerves may be imagined. No, Finn could not sleep.

The hours of the day dragged slowly by, and Finn began to suffer in new ways. He had never been confined for any length of time before, and strict cleanliness was an instinct with him.

At length, as the hot afternoon drew to its close, a number of men came to the cages, and horses were hitched on to the heavy wagon which supported them, at a level of less than three feet from the ground. Killer woke with a start and, with his tail, angrily flogged the partition which divided him from Finn, while delivering himself of a snarling yawn. Finn leapt to his feet, answering the tiger's snarl viciously, himself looking to the full as savage as any of the wild kindred. The wagon moved with a jerk, Killer rolled against his side of the partition and growled ferociously; Finn sprang at the partition as though he thought his great weight would carry him through it, and his jaws snapped at the air as he sprang. The men roared with laughter at him, and this accentuated his feeling that they were all mad wild beasts together. Presently, Finn's cage, with others, was ranged along the side of a canvas-covered passage way by which the public were to approach the main tent, where that night's performance was to be given. This double row of cages was arranged here with a view to impressing the public; a kind of foretaste of the glories they were to behold within. The Southern Cross circus had patent turnstiles fixed at both ends of the main tent, those at one end admitting only of ingress, those at the other end admitting only of egress.

It was shortly after this that Finn became conscious of a curious grinding small sound at the back of his cage. Presently a sharp, bright point of steel entered the cage from behind, just above the level of Finn's head, as he sat on his haunches. The steel wormed its way into the cage to a

length of fully six inches, and then it reached the side of Killer's cage, pointing diagonally, and bored slowly through that. The auger was well greased, and made only a very slight sound, so slight indeed that Killer was not aware of it. He was not so highly strung as Finn at this time.

This auger-hole was an idea of Sam's, for which he hoped to derive credit from the boss. He had noted carefully the remark of the Professor about keeping the Giant Wolf close to the tiger, in order to lend additional fierceness to his demeanour. And so, with the thoughtlessly cruel cunning of a schoolboy, he had devised a means of improving upon this. He took a thin iron rod, and covered the end of it with soft, porous sacking, which he moistened with the blood of raw meat. Then, by thrusting this between the bars of Finn's cage, and jabbing violently at the Wolfhound with it for several minutes, he endeavoured to impregnate the sacking on the rod with a smell of Finn. Then he invited John L. Rutherford to take up a stand in front of the cages, as though he were a member of the general public, and to whistle, by way of signalling that he was ready. Directly Sam heard the whistle, he being now behind the cages, he thrust his sacking-covered rod through the auger-hole he had made from Finn's cage into the tiger's, and there rattled it to and fro to attract the Killer's attention. Killer not only heard and saw the intruding object, but smelt it, and sprang at it violently, with a rasping, savage snarl which challenged the Giant Wolf to come forward or be for ever accursed for a coward. The rod was withdrawn on the instant, and Finn's whole great bulk crashed against the partition, as he answered Killer with a roar of defiance. The great Wolfhound stood erect on his hind-feet, snapping at the air with foaming jaws, and tearing impotently at the iron-sheathed partition with his powerful claws. The boss applauded vigorously, and gave Sam a shilling for beer.

"You keep that up while the people are coming in, Sam, an' by gosh we'll have 'em in fits. The Giant's a sure star performer, every time. He's worth two or three of the Killer, when he prances round on his tail that way. It was quite a bright notion o' yours, Sam, that auger-hole."

It must have been nearly two hours later, when the public was being admitted in a regular stream to the big tent, and Sam had succeeded in working the tiger and the Wolfhound into a perfect frenzy of impotent

rage, of snarling, foaming, roaring fury, that a faint odour crossed Finn's nostrils, and a faint sound fell upon his ears, through all the din and tumult of the conflict with his unseen enemy. In that moment, and as though he had been shot, Finn dropped from his erect position, and bounded to the front bars of his cage, with a sudden, appealing whine, very unlike the formidable cries with which he had been rending the pent air of his prison for the last quarter of an hour. He had heard a few words spoken in a woman's voice, and those words were:--

"I cannot bear to look at them; I never do. Let us hurry straight in."

In a passion of anxiety, and grief, and love, and remorse for not having been on the look out, Finn poured out his very soul in a succession of long-drawn whines, plaintive and insistent as a 'cello's wailings, while his powerful fore-paws tugged and scratched ineffectually at the solid iron bars of his cage. The woman whose voice he heard was the Mistress of the Kennels, and the man to whom she spoke, who walked beside her, looking obstinately at her and not at the cages, was the Master.

Something seemed to crack in poor Finn's breast, as the two humans whom he loved disappeared from his view within the great tent. He did not know that they would not pass that way again, because the audience left the place by the opposite end of the tent. But he gave no thought to the future. Here, in the midst of his uttermost misery and humiliation, the Master, the light of his life, had passed within a few feet of him, and passed without a glance, without a word. For long, Finn gazed miserably out between the bars, sniffing hopelessly at the air through which his friends had passed. Then, slowly, he retired to the furthestmost corner of his cage, and curled down there, with his muzzle between his paws, and big drops of bitter sadness trickling out from beneath his overhanging brows. And not all the ferocity of Killer, nor all the ingenuity of Sam with his sacking-covered rod, availed to draw Finn from his corner again that night. It seemed as though his heart had cracked, and every other emotion than grief trickled out from it in the form of tears. It was the saddest moment of Finn's life till then; and it was a bitter kind of sadness, too. Not one little look; not one glance for Finn in the midst of his torment!

wolfhound gnawing bars of cage

CHAPTER XVI

MARTYRDOM

It may be that a good deal of the wisdom and philosophy of mankind is born of grief and suffering. It is certain that a good deal of philosophy came to Finn as the aftermath of that evening upon which he retired, heart-broken, to the farthest corner of his cage, after seeing the Master and the Mistress of the Kennels pass him without a word or a glance. His mind did not deal in niceties. He did not tell himself that if the Master had only guessed at his presence there, all would have been different. He was conscious only of the apparently brutal fact that the Master had walked past his cage and ignored him; left him there in his horrible confinement. He bore no malice, for there was not any malice in his nature; which is not at all the same thing as saying that he was incapable of wreaking vengeance or administering punishment. He simply was smitten to the very heart with grief and sorrow. And so he lay, all through that night, silent, sorrowful, and blind to his surroundings.

The natural result was that sleep came to him after a while, when all was dark and silent, and the folk who had visited the circus, like those who had entertained them, were in their beds. And this sleep he badly needed. While he slept the burns on his muzzle and ear were healing, the searing heat of his grief was subsiding, and his body and nervous system were adapting themselves to his situation, and recharging themselves after the great drain which had been made upon them during the past couple of days.

When Killer's long, snarling yawn woke Finn in the morning he did not fling himself against the partition which hid the tiger from him. He did not even bark or snarl a defiant reply. He only bared his white fangs in silence, and breathed somewhat harshly through his nostrils, while the

hair over his shoulders rose a little in token of instinctive resentment. This comparatively mild demonstration cost Finn a great deal less in the way of expenditure of vitality than his previous day's reception of the tiger's snarls; and left him by just so much the better fitted to cope with other ordeals that lay before him.

If Finn had been a wild beast, his experience in the Southern Cross Circus would have been a far less trying one for him than it was. He would have learned early that the Professor was a practically all-powerful tyrant, who had to be obeyed because he had the power and the will to inflict great suffering upon those of the wild kindred who refused him obedience. That he was a tyrant and an enemy the wild creature would have accepted from the outset, as a natural and an inevitable fact. In Finn's case the matter was far otherwise. His instinct and inclination bade him regard a man as a probable friend. Naturally, if the Professor had been aware of this, he would never have approached Finn with a hot iron, and their relations would have been quite different from the beginning. As it was, or as Finn saw it, anyhow, the Professor had proved himself a creature absolutely beyond the pale; a mad wild beast, disguised as a man; a devil who met friendly advances with repeated blows of a magic weapon, a stick made of fire, against which no living thing might stand. Matey had seemed to Finn a mad man, and one to be avoided. But Matey had not been a wild beast as well, neither had he carried fire in his hand. The Professor was a far more formidable and deadly creature. However he might disguise his intentions, his purpose clearly was Finn's destruction. That was how Finn saw it, and he acted accordingly; consistently, and not from malice, but upon the dictates of common sense and self-preservation, as he understood them.

Having said so much, it is hardly necessary to add that Finn suffered greatly during the next few weeks of his life; for had not the Professor sworn to make the Giant Wolf his obedient creature, and a docile performer in the circus? That he never did. His boast was never made good, though with a real wolf it might have been; and again it almost certainly would have been, had he ever guessed that Finn was not a wolf at all, but one of the most aristocratic hounds and friends of man ever bred. But his failure cost Finn dear, in pain, humiliation, fear, and

suffering of diverse kinds.

The boss jeered at the Professor when the failure to tame Finn had extended over a week; and that added greatly to the severity of Finn's ordeal. The Professor was on his mettle; and now, while he made no further spoken boasts, he swore to himself that he would break the Giant Wolf's spirit or kill him. He never guessed that his whole failure rested upon one initial mistake. To the wild beast the red-hot iron bar was merely the terrible insignia of the Professor's indubitable might and mastery; a very compelling invitation to docility and respectful obedience. To Finn it was not that at all; but merely terrible and unmistakable evidence of basest treachery and malevolent madness. And it was largely with the red-hot iron that the Professor sought to tame Finn, believing, as he did, that this was necessary to his own, the Professor's, preservation.

Upon one occasion--one brilliantly sunny morning of Finn's martyrdom--it did dimly occur to the Professor that it might be the hot iron which somehow stood between himself and the mastery of Finn. Accordingly, he twisted some wire round the end of his quilt, or cutting whip, and entered the cage without the iron, while Sam stood outside with the brazier, ready to pass in the iron if that should prove necessary. Finn absolutely mistrusted the man, of course--he had suffered what he believed to be the man's insane lust of cruelty for a fortnight now--but yet he saw that the iron was not in the cage, and so he made no hostile demonstration; and that was a notable concession on his part, for, of late, the Professor's tactics, so far from taming him, had taught the naturally gracious and kindly Wolfhound to fly at the man with snapping jaws the instant he came within reach. Now the man moved slowly, very slowly, nearer and nearer to Finn's corner, using ingratiating words. When it seemed that he meant to come near enough for touch, Finn decided that he would slip across the cage to its opposite far corner in order to avoid the hated contact. He did not snarl; he did not even uncover his fangs, for the fiery instrument of torture was not there. He rose from his crouching position, and of necessity that brought him a few inches nearer to the Professor, before he could move toward the far side of the cage.

"Would yer? Down, ye brute!" snarled the man, in his best awe-inspiring

tone. And in that instant the wire-bound rhinoceros-hide whistled down across Finn's face, cutting him almost as painfully as the hot iron was wont to sear him. He snarled ferociously. Down came the lash again, and this time a loose end of wire stabbed the corner of one of his eyes. The next instant saw the Professor flung back at length against the bars of the cage; and in his face he felt Finn's breath, and heard and saw the flashing, clashing gleam of Finn's white fangs. Sam thrust the white-hot bar in, stabbing Finn's neck with its hissing end. The Professor seized the bar and beat Finn off with it; not for protection now, but in sheer, savage anger. Then he withdrew from the cage, and seizing a long pole beat Finn crushingly with that, through the bars, till his arms ached. Meantime, Finn fought the pole like a mad thing; and the Professor, unable to think of any other way of inflicting punishment upon the untameable Giant Wolf, took his food from the basket and gave it to Killer before Finn's eyes, leaving the Wolfhound to go empty for the day.

wolfhound standing over man in cage

The next instant saw the Professor flung back at length against the bars of the cage.

That was the result of the Professor's one attempt, according to his lights, at humouring the Giant Wolf, by approaching him without the iron. That also was a specimen of the kind of daily interviews he had with Finn.

By this time the Wolfhound actually was a very fierce and savage creature. But he was not at all like the magnificently raging whirlwind of wrath which had aroused the boss's admiring wonder on the day he first saw Finn. Killer might growl and snarl himself hoarse now for all the notice Finn took of the great beast. Scarred from nose to flank with burns, bruised and battered and aching in every limb, Finn remained always curled in the darkest, farthest corner of his cage now, roused only by the daily fight, the daily torture, of his interviews with the Professor. At other times, as the boss said bitterly, he might have been dead or a lap-dog, for all the spectacle he offered to the curious who visited his cage. All they saw was a coiled, iron-grey mass, and two burning black eyes, with a

glint of red in them, and a blood-coloured triangle in their upper corners.

Now and again, in the midst of the night, Finn would rise and go down to the bars of his cage and stand there, motionless, for an hour at a stretch, his scarred muzzle protruding between two bars, his aching nostrils, hot and dry, drinking in the night air, his eyes robbed of their resentful fire, and pitifully softened by the great tears that stood in them. At the end of such an hour he would sometimes begin to walk softly to and fro, inside the bars, the four paces that his cage allowed him. Thus he would pad back and forth silently for another hour, with tail curled toward his belly and nose on a level with his knees, almost brushing the bars as he passed them. He made no sound at all, even when the moon's silvery light flooded his cage, or when Killer snarled in his sleep. But always, before returning to his corner, he would systematically test every bar at its base with teeth and paws; and then sigh, like a very weary man, as he slouched despairingly back to his corner.

But, for all the glowering misery that possessed him by day and the despair to which he would give rein by night, it was always with dauntless ferocity that the tortured Wolfhound faced his enemy, the Professor. Short of starving him to death, or killing him outright with the iron bar, the Professor could see no way of making the Giant Wolf cringe to him; he could devise no method of breaking that fierce spirit, though he exhausted every kind of severity and every sort of cruelty that his wide experience in the handling of fierce animals could furnish. For any one who could have comprehended the true inwardness of that situation, its tragedy would have lain in the reflection that, had he but known it, Finn could without difficulty have earned not alone ease and good treatment, but high honours in the Southern Cross Circus. But Finn had no means of guessing that the Professor merely desired to master him, and to teach him to stand erect, or leap through a hoop at the word of command. No sign of any such desire, that Finn could possibly read, had been furnished. But, on the contrary, the one thing made evident to the Wolfhound's understanding was that here was a bloodthirsty man in a leather coat who desired to burn him to death, when not engaged in beating him with a pole, or thrusting at him viciously through the bars of his cage with a stick, or slashing at him with a whip that cut through hair

and skin. And, be it remembered, that the hound who was faced with these, to him, utterly gratuitous and senseless atrocities, was one who, if we except the single occasion of his night with the dog-thief in Sussex, had never known what it meant to face an angry man, or to receive a blow from a man, angry or otherwise. It was small wonder that Finn had only snarls and snapping jaws for the Professor. The pity of it was that he could have avoided as much suffering if he had only known what it was desired of him. The wonder of it was that he faced the Professor day after day with such unfailing courage, with a spirit which remained absolutely uncowed, though the body which sheltered it could not present a single patch of the bigness of a man's hand which was neither burned, nor bruised, nor cut.

There came a day when, other matters occupying his attention, the Professor did not trouble to pay one of his futile visits to Finn's cage. Sam fed him as usual, when Killer was fed. (One of the features of Finn's captivity, which, while in his confinement it helped to injure his physical condition, also helped to make him the more fierce, was the fact that his diet consisted exclusively of raw meat.) Finn waited through the long day for the Professor, steeling himself for the daily struggle and the daily suffering. His body free of new pains he rested that night more thoroughly than he had rested for a long time; and there were faint stirrings of hope in his mind. Next morning the boss happened to walk past the cages with the Professor, and when they came to Finn's place the Professor said--

"I reckon I'll give that brute best, unless you'd like him killed. I'll tackle that job for you with pleasure; but your Giant Wolf's no good for the show."

"No, the joke's on me about the Giant Wolf," admitted the boss, crossly. "Sam had me for fair, over him. Fifteen quid for a useless pig like that! Why, he won't even stand up to make a show. The brute's not worth his tucker, is he?"

"He is not. And, if you ask me, you'd better let me feed him to the others, while there's any meat left on his bones. He's no good for aught else, as I can see. The Tasmanian Devil was a lap-dog to him, and he died before I could get him trained, you remember."

"H'm! Well, we'll see. We might get some fool to buy him. Anyway, you'd better tell Sam to pry him round a bit somehow when the show's opening. He looks all right when he gets a move on him, but he ain't worth a hill o' beans lyin' curled up there in a corner. How'd it do to get a dingo, and put it in there with him!"

"You might as well give him a mouse. He'd swallow it whole. He's twice the size of a dingo."

"He sure is twice as sulky as any beast I ever saw. An' that blame book-writin' chap from the city the other night said he reckoned the Giant was a dog, an' not a wolf at all! Nice sociable sort of a dog for a family gathering, I *don't* think!"

"You should have asked the gent to go in his cage an' try 'im with a bit of sugar. My bloomin' Colonial! He wouldn't have written any more books."

And now, whenever the boss met Sam, he would "jolly" the young man a bit, as he said, regarding the Giant Wolf as a bargain, and ask what Sam had done with the fifteen pounds, and whether he had any other cheap freaks to sell. Also, Sam's half-crown was docked from his wages; and Sam, after all, had never laid claim to any bigness of heart or philosophy of mind. He had long since spent the fifteen pounds. The twenty-five shillings he had paid for Finn loomed larger in his recollection now than the fifteen pounds he had received; particularly after a dose of the boss's chaff.

"Why the blazes can't yer learn, an' work fer yer livin', ye ugly great brute?" Sam would growl, as he threw Finn his daily portion of flesh. And, more often than not, he would pick up a stake, and thrust viciously at the Wolfhound, or strike at him as he crept forward to snatch his meat. Thus, as poor Finn saw it, another of the strange man-like beasts had gone mad, and was to be treated as a dangerous enemy.

If the Professor had continued his daily attempts to cow Finn, as a preliminary to training, he would have been likely to succeed at about this time; for the Wolfhound was losing strength daily, and though the fire of wrath and fierceness burned strongly when he saw the leather-coated

man, it had little to feed on now, and must soon have died down under the hot bar and the wired whip. But the Professor could not be expected to know this. He had had as many as sixty futile struggles with Finn, and, as he thought, had only stopped short of killing the Giant outright. But idleness, or some other cause, did lead him to make one other attempt, on a hot afternoon, just before the hour of tea and of dressing for the evening show. Finn's fighting blood, inherited through long centuries of unsmirched descent, made him put his best foot foremost, and meet the Professor with a mien of most formidable ferocity as soon as the red iron appeared. The Professor did not know how near to breaking-point Finn's despair had reached. There was little sign of it in the roaring fierceness with which he faced the iron and whip. A wolf in such a case, with the cunning of the wild, and without the life's experience of humans which made the Professor's part so incredibly base, so gratuitously cruel and treacherous to Finn, would have given in long before. Finn fought with the courage of a brave man who has reached the last ditch, and with the ferocity that came to him out of the ancient days in which his warrior ancestors were never known either to give or to receive quarter.

The Professor felt that this was a last attempt, and he did not greatly care whether the great hound lived or died. The Giant Wolf had defeated him as a trainer; but the Giant Wolf should never forget the price paid for the defeat. It was a cruel onslaught. The iron bit deep, and--it had been better for the Professor's character development, better for his record as man, if he had left Finn alone when he decided to make no further attempt at taming. But men, too, have fierce, brutal passions, with less than the simplicity of brutes, and more, far more, of the knowledge which makes cruelty leave a permanent stain upon them. The Professor himself was aching and sore when he flung passionately out from Finn's cage and slammed the iron gate to; and as for Finn, I have no words in which to explain how his poor body ached and was sore. If the iron had been stone cold, Finn would still have been a terribly badly beaten hound, when he staggered to his corner, after this last visit from the mad beast-man in the leathern coat--so he thought of the Professor, in that tumult of sinking flames which we may call his mind. He lay in his corner, quivering and shuddering, and did not even find the heart to lick his wounds till long hours afterwards, when silence ruled in the field where the circus was

encamped that night.

This field was on the outskirts of a considerable township; the twenty-second that Finn had visited with the Southern Cross Circus. The authorities had refused to allow the boss to come closer in, and so one side of his camping-place was walled by virgin bush; a dense tract of blue-gum and iron-bark stretching, almost as far as the eye could reach, to the foot-hills of a gaunt mountain range. For a mile or so from the circus camp the trees had all been ring-barked a couple of seasons or more before this time, with the result that they were now the very haggard skeletons of mighty trees, naked for the most part, their white bones open to all the winds of heaven, but here and there sporting a ghastly kind of drapery, remnants of their grave-clothes as it might be, in the shape of long hanging streamers of dead bark, which moaned and rustled eerily in the night breezes. High above the tattered grave-clothes of their lifeless trunks, the knotted, tortured-looking arms and fingers of the trees groped painfully after the life that had fled their neighbourhood.

Finn could just see the ghostly extremities of these spectral trees over the top of the main tent as he lay crouched in his corner, after devoting an hour to the licking of his sores. Presently, an almost full moon rose among the trees' fleshless limbs, and painted their nakedness in more than ever ghostly guise. It was then that Finn rose, painfully and slowly, to his feet, and moved, like an old, old man, across the floor of his cage to the bars, the bars that were of an inky blackness in that silvery light. For almost an hour this great hound, this tortured prince of a kingly race, stood sadly there, staring out at the moonlight between the bars of his prison; and for almost an hour, big clear drops kept forming in his black eyes and trickling along his scarred muzzle, till they pattered down upon the floor of the cage. If he had ever heard of such a thing as suicide, it may be that his soul would have known the final humiliation of self-destruction that night. But there is something that strikes a balance, as well in a Wolfhound's life as a man's life.

Near as Finn was to the limit of his endurance, his brave spirit lived within him yet, and he did not forego the nightly habit he had formed long since of trying the bars that made him a prisoner. It is possible that there never was a much more pathetically forlorn hope than that which animated this

sorely racked prisoner when he felt his bars. But if the iron of them had entered into his soul, then it had made for endurance. The process was not made easier by the existence of Finn's latest wounds. Both his fore-legs and his muzzle had suffered severely under the iron that day; and it was with these that he now tested his bars, slowly, conscientiously, and with painful thoroughness, from the bar nearest Killer's cage to that at the end of the gate of his own, which closed on to the partition of the native bears' division. It was the bottom of the bars that Finn always tried, where they entered the floor of the cage. He took each between his teeth and pushed and pulled; sometimes pushing or pulling with his paws as well. And the result, on this night of bright moonlight and great pain, was as it had always been. The iron did not change.

wolfhound fleeing circus by night

Was lost in the shadow of the main tent.

Having reached the end of his task, Finn sat erect on his haunches for it may have been a quarter of an hour, gazing out at the risen moon, which sailed serenely now, high above the praying hands of the skeleton trees. Certainly, Finn's spirit was near to breaking-point. He rose, meaning to seek his corner again, as after so many other futile testings of his bars; but something moved him first to look out as far as he could, over the tent-top, to the great world beyond. Sore though his body was, he rose erect upon his hind-feet, placed his fore-feet against the upper half of the gate, and only narrowly escaped falling forward through the gate to the ground beneath. In his passion the Professor had slammed the barred gate to as usual and, in flinging himself angrily off from the place, had omitted to slip the two thick bolts which normally held it secure. The gate fitted closely, and was rusty, besides; so that Finn's jaws, tugging at its extreme foot, and upon this particular occasion less strongly no doubt than usual, had not shifted it. But his weight pressing against the upper half was quite another matter; and now the gate stood wide open before him.

For an instant, Finn's heart swelled within him, so sharply, and so greatly,

that a little whine burst from him, and it seemed he was unable to move. So the sight of the open gate, giving upon the silent open night, affected the Wolfhound. In the next instant he dropped quietly to the earth, and was lost in the inky shadow of the main tent.

man and kangaroo hound outside tent

CHAPTER XVII

FREEDOM

Very wonderful and wolf-like, cat-like, too, in some respects, was Finn's progress through the circus encampment on that bright moonlight night. The field was full of silvery moonlight you would have said; but never a glint of all that liquid silver touched Finn's outline for a moment. Just so, beside the northern mountains of another continent, one has watched a leopard--mountain lions we call them there--braving the strange terrible smells and dangers of a man's camp, to stalk a sleeping fox-terrier; in absolute ignorance of the rifle barrel that covered it, yet miraculously successful in never giving the man behind the rifle the chance of a moonlight shot. Finn was sore and aching from many wounds, and stiff from long confinement. He knew that every one connected with the circus was sleeping; but on this occasion he gave no hostages to fortune, he took no risks. The stakes at issue, as he saw it, were, upon the one side, life and freedom, freedom which was almost unbearably sweet to think of, after the long-drawn agony of the past couple of months; and upon the other side, slow death under the torture of confinement, the iron, the lash, and the mad man-beast in the leathern coat.

It is the greatest mistake in the world to suppose that an animal like Finn has no imagination. Indeed, the animals which have no imagination are comparatively few; while such an Irish Wolfhound as Finn has, at the least, as much of it as some men the writer has known.

A fiery picture of the issues at stake was floating in Finn's mind as he crept in and out among the tents and wagons of the enclosure: and he was conscious neither of wounds, or weakness, or stiffness; but only of his great resolve, based upon the wonderful chance that had come to him. Once he came to a place where ten feet of brilliant moonlight lay

between the black shadow he occupied and the next. He paused for a moment or two, looking about him upon every side with all the cunning of the truly wild kindred; and then, with a very good imitation of the lightness and elasticity of other, happier days, he sprang clear from the one shadow to the other, landing as delicately and silently as a cat, though the impact jarred all his stiffened joints, and touched, as with living fire, every one of his almost innumerable wounds.

Then he came to the outer canvas wall of the big enclosure. It was too high to jump, a good twelve feet. An attempt to jump and scramble over it might have led to noise. Finn approached it in the deep shadow cast by a caravan wagon, and, thrusting his muzzle underneath the canvas, midway between two stakes, easily forced it up, and crawled under it into the open. When he was half-way out, the boss's fox-terrier gave one sleepy half-bark, too languid and indifferent a sound to be taken as a warning; and for the rest, complete silence paid tribute to the extreme deftness of Finn's passage through the sleeping camp. But that low, sleepy bark from the fox-terrier who slept beside the boss's own caravan, served to stop the beating of Finn's heart for one long moment. In the next moment, almost as silently as a passing cloud shadow, the great Wolfhound streaked across the thirty yards of moonlit paddock which divided the camp from the ring-barked bush, and melted away among that crowded assembly of tree ghosts. The barbed wire fence of the paddock was no more than four feet high, and this Finn took in his stride, without appreciable pause.

The ring-barking of trees admits sunlight and air to the earth, and this means rich "feed" and a sturdy undergrowth. On the other hand, the death of the trees introduces a kind of nakedness and publicity to the bush which naturally is not favoured by wild folk during daylight. But this does not detract from the merits of ring-barked country as a night feeding-ground; and Finn was amazed by the wealth and variety of wild life which he saw as he loped swiftly through the few miles of bush lying between the circus camp and the foothills of the mountains beyond. His immediate purpose, of putting a considerable distance between himself and the place of his captivity, was too urgent to admit of delays, no matter what the temptation; and, accordingly, Finn made no pauses. But it

added greatly to the joy of his escape to find himself surrounded by so great an abundance of creatures which instinct made him regard as game for him. Upon every hand there were rustlings and whisperings, tiny footfalls and scufflings among dead leaves and twigs; and here and there, as the great grey, shadowy Wolfhound swept along between the white tree-trunks, he had glimpses of rabbits, bandicoots, kangaroo-rats, and many of the lesser marsupials, all busy about their different night affairs, all half-paralysed by amazement at his passage through their midst. Once he heard a venomous spitting overhead and, as he hurried on, caught a flying glimpse of a native cat, who had pinned an adventurous young 'possum on the lower limb of a giant black-butt. Once, too, he was startled into momentary horror of some human trap of the Professor's invention; and his speed approached that of flying, under the spur of a laughing jackass's raucous cachinnation.

The ring-barked country was soon left behind, and then Finn found himself among dense living bush, climbing a steep ascent. Here his speed was necessarily a great deal slower. There was a good deal of undergrowth upon the mountain side, besides much heavy timber; and hidden among this lush undergrowth were occasional boulders and innumerable fallen tree-trunks, over which Finn stumbled heavily again and again, he being without that curious bush-lore which enables men-folk born in the bush, no less than its own wild folk, to steer clear of these obstructions by means of a sort of sixth sense, which tells them when they must leap, and helps them to know when the leap must be an extra cautious one, because of the danger of disturbing the deadly people of the wild. The Australian bush has many varieties of snakes, and quite a good number of them are deadly; though some of those most formidable in appearance are not. Finn had never even seen a snake; so that, though his ignorance made him run many risks that night, he was at least spared all anxiety regarding the deadly folk, their quick tempers and swift methods of attack.

Dawn was not far off when Finn emerged, with heaving flank and lolling tongue, into the green but stony glade which formed the ridge and crest of the Tinnaburra range. The last hundred yards of his progress had been a good deal of a scramble, through thick scrub and over lichen-covered

boulders, on a very steep rise. And now that he had reached the cool glade of topmost Tinnaburra, he found that his arrival had caused considerable perturbation among a small mob of brumbies, or wild horses, consisting of some seven or eight mares and foals, led by a flea-bitten old grey stallion, who snorted angrily as he saw Finn, and minced forward toward the Wolfhound, his long chisel teeth bared, his four-foot tail billowing out behind him like a flag, and his black hoofs (the feet of mountain-bred brumbies are prodigiously hard and punishing in the attack) rising and falling from the dewy earth like spring hammers.

Finn devoted the little breath he could spare to the rather whining note of explanation which means: "Don't fear me! I pursue my own affairs only, and they are harmless for you!" But the old stallion was taking no chances. Age made him fussy, and his family included two very recent additions. Also, Finn brought a baffling mixture of scents with him, including those of men and of wild creatures such as the stallion had never seen and did not wish to see. So he continued his threateningly mincing progress toward Finn, and whinnied out a declaration to the effect that this could be no resting-place for dingoes, however huge and diversified in their smells. Finn was not in the least like a dingo; but, on the other hand, he was not like a kangaroo-hound. He was twice the size of a dingo, very nearly, and a good seven inches taller than the biggest kangaroo-hound the stallion had seen. Also, his coat was shaggy and long, instead of close and short like that of a greyhound, or kangaroo-hound. As against that, he carried with him more suggestion of the fellowship of the wild kindred than of the tribe of renegades who are men-folk's adherents; and therefore, for the moment, dingo was a good enough name for him, so far as the old stallion was concerned, the dingo being the only creature of the wolf kind which he knew.

Finn was in no mood for disputes of any sort, and so, though exceedingly weary now, he made a wide detour to satisfy the nervousness of the flea-bitten grey stallion, and began a diagonal descent upon the south side of Tinnaburra. Just as the sun cleared the horizon over his right shoulder, Finn dropped wearily down from a clump of wattle upon a broad, flat ledge of many-coloured rock which caught the sun's first glinting rays upon its queer enamel of red and brown and yellow lichen. From this

point Finn looked down a densely-wooded mountain side, and out across a tolerably well-timbered plain to hills which stood nearly forty miles away. It would have made an eyrie for a king eagle. Finn had already slaked his thirst hurriedly a mile back, in a chattering, rock-bedded mountain streamlet. And now he was weary beyond all further endurance. He had been sick, and sore, and stiff, and sadly out of condition when he started; and he had been travelling now for six hours. A feeling of security had stolen over him since he reached the topmost ridge of Tinnaburra. The very fragrance of the air told him, as he drew it in through his nostrils, that he was far from the works of men. Food he could not think of while every bone and muscle in his great body ached from weariness. By the edge of the rock was a sandy hollow, over which a feathery shrub drooped three or four of its graceful branches at a height of three feet from the ground. Finn eyed this inviting spot steadily for two or three minutes, while his aching sides continued to heave, and his long tongue to sway from one side of his jaws. Then he stepped cautiously into the sheltered nook, turned completely round in it three or four times, and finally sank to rest there in a compact coil, and with a little grunt of contentment and relief.

Finn opened his eyes, and half-opened them, many times during the day; once, to his utter amazement, when a huge wedge-tailed eagle swept gloriously past with a lamb in its talons no more than ten feet from his nose; but the day was practically done, and nightfall approaching, when the Wolfhound finally rose from his sandy bed and stretched his seven-foot length from nose to tail. The long stretch drew a sharp whine from him towards its end, when the stiffness and soreness of his limbs, and of some of his more recent burns and bruises, found him out. But even in the pain there was a sense of luxury and gladness for Finn. His sleep had not been devoid of sudden starts, of shudderings and twitches, born of fearful dreaming; but now that he was broad awake, and in the hushed grey twilight looked out across forty miles of wild open land, with never a sign of tent or house, or other work of man, his heart swelled within him with satisfaction and content, and he drew deep breaths of grateful pleasure and relief before setting out upon the descent of Tinnaburra, and, if it might be, the capture of a supper.

Before Finn had travelled half a mile along the hill-side, he made his first acquaintance with the snake people. In descending at a sharp angle from the side of a fallen tree, his fore-feet just scraped the end of the tail of a nine-foot carpet snake, whose colouring was vivid and fresh. Before Finn knew what had happened, one coil of the sinuous reptile's body was about his left hind-leg, and, as the startled Wolfhound wheeled in his tracks, the big snake's head rose at him with a forbidding, long-drawn "Ps-s-s-s-t!" of defiance. The rapidly tightening pressure about his muscular lower thigh produced something like panic in Finn's breast; but, luckily enough, his panic resulted in speeding him toward precisely the right course of action. He feinted in the direction of his hind-leg, and then, as the snake plunged for his neck, his jaws flashed back and caught the reptile just behind the head. A single bite was sufficient, for it smashed the snake's vertebrae and almost divided it. A moment later Finn's teeth were at the coil about his hind-leg, and in another instant he was free. But he was too greatly shocked to make a meal upon the remains of his enemy, which is what he should have done, and, after taking a good look at its long, brilliantly-coloured body, he was glad to make off down the hill, travelling now with a good deal more caution than he had shown before. It was a merciful thing for Finn that his first contact with the snake people should have brought him in touch only with the powerful and courageous carpet snake, and not with one of the many deadly venomous members of his tribe.

This experience rather shook Finn by reason of its utter strangeness to him. He recalled the spitting venom of the native cat, of whose kill he had caught a fleeting glimpse on the previous night. That again was rather strange and outside his experience. This great open wild world was certainly quite unlike the mild, half-domesticated and cared-for little patch of wild that Finn had claimed as his hunting-ground beside the Sussex Downs. Just then a laughing jackass started a hoarse chuckle above Finn's head, and a big white cockatoo, startled by the jackass, flew screaming out from the branches of a grey gum, with the agonized note in its cry which these birds seem to favour at all seasons, and quite irrespective of the nature of their occupations at the moment. The loose skin on Finn's shoulders moved uneasily, as he trotted along, using the most extreme care.

But, with all his care, he was in strange surroundings, and his bush-lore was all to learn; and because of his strangeness his most careful gait seemed a noisy and clumsy one to the little wild folk of that mountain side, and Finn saw none of them. By chance he saw one of the larger kind, however, and the sight of it added to his sense of strangeness, for it was unlike any other beast he had ever seen. This was a large female rock wallaby, a big grey doe, with her young one. The youngster was at the awkward age, free of the teat, yet unable to travel alone. It was nibbling and playing some distance from its big mother when she had her first warning of Finn's approach, in the crackling of dead twigs under his powerful feet. The youngster showed awkwardness in getting to its snug retreat in the mother's pouch, and so, by these delays, Finn was given his glimpse of a big marsupial in the act of taking a fifteen-foot leap through the scrub. Finn almost sat down on his haunches from astonishment. But, unlike the snake, the wallaby inspired him with no sort of fear, possibly by reason of its evident fear of him. It was, however, another item in the strangeness, the complete unfamiliarity of Finn's present surroundings.

It seems absurd to suggest that the great Wolfhound may have been suffering from loneliness, seeing that he had never been so thankful for anything else in his whole life as he was for his escape from the circus, with its small army of men-folk and animals. But it is a fact that as Finn plodded along through the wild bush to the south of Tinnaburra, he began to be haunted by a sense of isolation and friendlessness. It was now thirty hours since he had tasted food, and it seemed that game shunned his trail, for he saw none of the many small animals he had passed on the previous night; and the sight he had had that day of the great wedge-tailed eagle, of the carpet snake, and of the grey rock wallaby, these only added to the uncanny strangeness of his surroundings. In one sense, persecution, witting and unwitting, had made a wild beast of him during his confinement in the circus; but, by reason of the close confinement which had accompanied these persecutions, increasing self-dependence and self-reliance had not come with the access of fierceness and wildness. Finn inherited fighting instincts and savage ferocity under persecution from a long and noble line of hunting and fighting ancestors. But he inherited few instincts which bore practically upon the matter of

picking up his own living, of walking alone, of depending exclusively upon himself, and of leading the solitary life of the really wild carnivora. But this would have troubled him very little if the scene of his present wanderings had been, say, some part of Sussex. As it was, the big snake, the huge eagle, the screaming cockatoo, the nerve-shaking cacophony of the jackass, and the half-flying progress of the big wallaby, all combined with the huge wildness of the country and its vegetation to oppress Finn with the sense of being a lone outcast, an outlier in a foreign land which was full of sinister possibilities. The recollection of that hissing nine-foot worm, of a thickness as great and greater than that of his own legs, lingered unpleasantly with Finn. Also, he was getting very hungry.

While these impressions were sinking into the Wolfhound's mind, the country through which he was travelling was becoming more open, more like a long-neglected park, in which many of the trees were dead, and all had a gaunt and scraggy look, with their thin, pointed grey-green leaves, their curiously tortured-looking limbs, and their long, rustling streamers of decaying bark. But, however Finn might feel in the matter of loneliness, it was with a pang of something like horror that he came presently upon a barbed wire fence, exactly like the one he had leaped on the previous night, directly after leaving the circus. Could it be possible that the circus had been moved during the day to this place, and the barbed wire fence brought with it? Finn prowled cautiously up and down that fence for a couple of hundred yards in each direction, peering beyond it, and sniffing and listening with the extreme of suspiciousness, before he finally leaped the wire and continued his way in a south-easterly direction.

Five minutes later he saw a rabbit, and though he lost it, by reason of the fact that it was sitting within a foot of its burrow and disappeared with lightning-like rapidity at sight of Finn, yet he was cheered by this homely sight, and pursued his way with renewed hope in the matter of supper. A moment later and he stopped dead in his tracks as though shot, and then crawled softly aside to take cover behind a thicket of scrub.

In topping an abrupt little ridge, he had come suddenly into full view of a bark gunyah or shanty, in the triangular opening of which, beside a bright fire, sat a man and a big black hound. A billy-can swung over the fire on a tripod of stakes, and the man was engaged with his supper. Finn did not

know, of course, that the man was a boundary-rider, and his dog a not very well-bred kangaroo-hound. The wind was north-west, or the kangaroo-hound would surely have scented Finn's approach and given tongue.

For a long time Finn lay under the cover of his thicket, peering through the darkness at the boundary-rider and his dog. And while Finn gazed his thoughts were very busy, both with matters of his own knowledge and experience, and with vague instinctive knowledge, dream knowledge and dream experiences, which came to him from his forbears of old, even as a setter's or a pointer's hunting knowledge comes to him in the vanguard of experience. The thing that most impressed Finn in the picture he saw was the figure of the black hound, stretched at ease beside the fire, steadily eyeing its master. Every once in a while the man would break a chunk from his damper, or cut a morsel from his meat and toss it to the kangaroo-hound, who opened and closed its jaws like a steel trap, and gulped the gift with portentous solemnity, and absolutely without visible sign of any emotion whatever. The hound showed only watchfulness. Finn heard its jaws snap, and could almost hear the gulp which disposed of each morsel. The sight and the sound gave an edge to the Wolfhound's already keen appetite, and, almost unconsciously, he drew nearer and yet nearer to the gunyah, crouching low to the ground as he moved, his hind-quarters gathered under him ready for springing, like a huge cat.

There was no suggestion of circuses, or cages, or cruelty about the picture Finn saw; but his recent experiences had been far too severe to admit of anything like the old simple trustfulness in his attitude. That could never be again. Even hunger would never make this Wolfhound trustful again. But for all that, there was something in the picture of the camp-fire and the pair who sat beside it which drew Finn strongly; tugging somehow at his heart-strings; pulling at him strongly, softly; drawing him, as by silken cords of instinct and immemorial association. So far as his own life in the world went, this was the first camp-fire Finn had ever seen. One could not say exactly how or why it should have been so, but it is a fact that, while crouching Finn gazed upon and crept closer to that camp-fire, his mind was full of affectionate thoughts and

memories of the Master, and of the old days of their happy companionship. Up till this evening he had not thought of the Master for many days.

man walking along a road

CHAPTER XVIII

TOO LATE

It was doubtless the camp-fire picture which filled the lone Wolfhound's mind with thoughts of the Master; but, while there is no suggestion of telepathy about it, it was none the less an odd coincidence that, at the very hour of Finn's approach to a camp-fire in the bush, a dozen miles and more to the south-east of Tinnaburra, the Master should have been approaching the big house by the harbour outside the capital city, three hundred miles away, with a mind full of Finn. Yet so it was. And at that moment the Master's reminiscent thoughts of the Wolfhound were to the full as affectionate as were Finn's thoughts of him.

The Mistress of the Kennels had more than justified the doctor's prophecies. Less than a month of life in the mountains had given her back her old energy and strength. The third week there had given her also the acquaintance, soon to ripen into friendship, of a certain squatter's wife, who was spending a few weeks in the hills with her husband and three children. Before the acquaintance was a week old the Mistress of the Kennels had been pressingly invited to make her home with the squatter and his wife at their station, for a time at all events, in order that she might supervise the education of the three youngsters, and, also, give the squatter's wife the benefit of some of her experience in the rearing of dogs. The Master could have found a minor opening on the same station, but decided that he could not afford to take up a life which offered no particular prospect of advancement, and was confirmed in his decision by an offer that was made to him at this time to join, in a working capacity, a small prospecting party which was setting out for a tract of back-block country said to be extremely rich in gold, copper, and silver. And so, for a time, the Master and the Mistress had parted company.

Now, while there are many prospectors in Australia who, during a lifetime of adventurous toil, have never made much more than a labourer's wage, there are others who have made and lost many fortunes, to whose credit may be placed a score or more of rich discoveries, and much wealth enjoyed by other people. The leader of the Master's party was of this latter class, and less than three weeks after the outseting of this particular expedition, the party had pegged out a considerable number of rich claims. Some of these claims had been of a kind which admitted of good deal of highly profitable alluvial working but the majority called for the use of machinery and the outlay of capital. Accordingly, the party gathered to themselves such surface gold as was obtainable--the Master's share came to £260--and then, laden with samples of ore, returned townward, with a view to selling their claims to mining capitalists, before starting out upon a second and more protracted journey. The fascination of the prospector's calling had gripped the Master strongly, and he gladly agreed to remain a member of the party. But, in the meantime, having reached the city, he had determined to pay a visit to Mr. Sandbrook's house, first, that he might have the satisfaction of seeing Finn again and, secondly, in order that he might try the effect of a substantial money offer in the matter of regaining possession of his Wolfhound. And so now while Finn was thinking of him, in the heart of the wildest part of the Tinnaburra country, three hundred miles away, the Master strode up the hill overlooking the city and the harbour, strongly hopeful that he might soon have the great hound he had bred trotting by his side.

Mr. and Mrs. Sandbrook were both away from home, but one of the daughters of the house explained to the Master how, after "sulking desperately for two whole days," the Wolfhound had basely deserted his luxurious new home, and never been heard of since. She showed the Master an advertisement offering a reward of five-and-twenty pounds for Finn's recovery, and was at some pains to make clear the indubitable fact that her father had paid very dearly indeed for the doubtful privilege of possessing for two days a Wolfhound who had "treated everybody as if they were dirt under his feet." The Master expressed sympathy in sentences which were meant to be loyal excuses for Finn; and then he turned and walked back to the city, heavy at heart for the loss of the great

Wolfhound whom he had loved, and feeling vaguely that the money he had made was not such a very precious thing after all. He placed the greater part of it at the disposal of the Mistress of the Kennels, and went back to his fellow-prospectors.

wolfhound playbowing to kangaroo hound

CHAPTER XIX

THE DOMESTIC LURE

As Finn drew closer to the camp-fire, the savoury smell of the stewed mutton the man by the gunyah was eating came sailing down the breeze into his nostrils, emphasizing his hunger to him, and reminding him strongly of the days in which carefully cooked foods had been his portion every day. But the Wolfhound's desire for food was nothing like so keen a thing as his dread of renewed captivity, and his approach to the camp-fire was an illustration of the extreme of animal caution. His powerful limbs were all the time gathered well under him, prepared for instant flight.

Suddenly and simultaneously two things happened. A log on the fire broke in half, allowing a long tongue of flame to leap up and light the ground for fifty yards around, and the kangaroo-hound turned its greyhound-like muzzle sharply to one side and saw Finn. In the next instant three things happened together: the man's eyes followed those of his dog and saw Finn; the dog leaped to its feet and barked loudly; and Finn jumped sideways and backwards, a distance of three yards. Then the man said, "By ghost!" and the kangaroo-hound bounded forward towards Finn.

Now it was not in Finn's nature to run from a dog, and so, as the boundary-rider did not move, he held his ground. But his recent experiences had all made for hostility and the fighting attitude toward other animals; and so, instead of standing upright and awaiting the salutations of the lesser creature in a courteously non-committal manner, as he would have done in the old days, Finn held his hind-quarters bunched well under him ready for springing, his fore-legs stretched well before him, his jaws slightly parted, and the lips lifted considerably from his fangs, while eyes and nostrils, and slightly raised hackles, though

making no killing threat, said very plainly, "Beware! I am not to be trifled with!"

But apparently the black kangaroo-hound was not very greatly impressed. It is practically certain that this dog knew at a glance that Finn was not really of the wild kindred; also, she was a brave creature, a fearless hunter, and a hound who stood twenty-eight inches at the shoulder; eight inches lower than the giant Wolfhound it is true, but, even so, taller, bigger, and heavier than a typical greyhound of her sex. It may be, too, that the kangaroo-hound was already aware of Finn's sex before he knew hers. Be that as it may, she showed not the slightest fear of the Wolfhound, but flew right up to him, barking loudly, and with every sign of readiness for fight. Finn growled warningly, and, as the stranger snapped at him, he leaped aside and, turning then, prepared to administer punishment. It was then, as his jaws parted in anger, that consciousness of the black hound's sex came to him, in the subtle way that his kind do acquire such facts, and his jaws promptly closed upon space. When the kangaroo-hound snapped a second time, Finn turned his shoulder to her meekly and gave a little friendly whinny of a whine. This was repeated two or three times, Finn evading the black hound's snapping jaws (one could see that her bites no longer meant serious business; they were more ceremonial than punishing), but showing not the slightest intention to make reprisals. True, he growled low down his throat every time the black hound's jaws came together, but the growl was almost meek, certainly deprecatory, rather than in any sense threatening. Finn was obeying the law of his kind where the weaker sex is concerned.

After a minute, the kangaroo-hound began to sniff curiously at Finn instead of snapping at him, and at this, as though ordered to stand to attention, the Wolfhound drew himself up proudly, and remained perfectly still and very erect, his long tail curving grandly behind him, legs well apart, and his magnificent head carried high, save when, as opportunity offered, he took a passing sniff at any portion of the kangaroo-hound's anatomy that happened to come near his muzzle. He was a fine picture of alertness and masculine canine pride at this time; but, though obviously prepared for any emergency, the wiry hair on his shoulders lay flat now, and his mouth was quite closed.

All this while--these elaborate formalities had occupied no more than three minutes altogether--the boundary-rider, who was a knowledgeable person with animals, had been standing quite still beside his fire, watching Finn and his own dog with intent curiosity. He had never seen a dog at all like Finn, but he felt certain Finn was a dog, and not a creature of the wild, if only by reason of his own black hound's attitude. Also, he was not looking at the Wolfhound through iron bars. He pictured himself hunting kangaroo with Finn and Jess (the black hound), and the prospect pleased him mightily. So now he picked up a piece of mutton from the dish beside the fire, and took a couple of steps in Finn's direction, holding the meat out before him, and saying in a friendly way--

"Come on in, then, good dog! Here, boy! Here then!"

Finn eyed the man hesitatingly for a moment. The meat was tempting. But Finn's memories and fear were strong, and he moved slowly backward as the man advanced. For a little distance they progressed in this wise: the man slowly advancing and calling, Finn slowly retiring backward, and the kangaroo-hound playing and sniffing about him in a manner which said plainly that he was hereby invited to make free of her fireside, and become acquainted with her man.

The man was the first to tire of this, as was natural, and, when he came to a standstill, he tossed the meat from him to Finn, with a "Here then, boy; eat it there, if you like." But Jess had no notion of carrying hospitality as far as all this. She sprang upon the bit of meat, and growled savagely as her nose grazed Finn's. She had forestalled the Wolfhound, and was likely to continue to do so, since the law of their kind prevented him from exerting his superior strength against her.

Then the man walked slowly back to the shanty, calling both dogs over his shoulder as he went. Jess obediently ran to him, and then danced back, encouragingly, to Finn. Finn advanced with her till the man reached the fire and resumed his seat on the ground. Then Finn stopped dead, his hind-quarters well drawn up and ready for a spring; and no blandishment that Jess could exercise proved sufficient to draw him closer to the fire. Seeing this, the man called Jess sharply, after a while, and ordered her to lie down beside him, which she did. Then he cut off a

good-sized chunk of meat and tossed it to Finn, saying, "Here, good dog; come in and feed then!" He carefully threw the meat to a point about three yards nearer the fire than where Finn stood, but still a good six or seven paces from it. Finn watched the meat fall and sniffed its fragrance from the dry grass. The man, after all, was sitting down, and humans always occupied quite a long time in rising to their feet. Very slowly, very warily, and with eyes fixed steadily on the man, Finn covered the three yards between himself and the meat, and, as he seized it in his jaws, moved backward again at least one yard.

The warm mutton was exceedingly grateful to Finn, and he showed little hesitation about advancing the necessary four or five feet to secure a second and larger piece thrown down for him by the man. But again he withdrew about a yard, before swallowing it. Then the man held another piece of meat out to him at arm's length, and invited him to come and take it for himself. Finn advanced one yard, and then definitely stopped, at, say, eight paces from the man's hand, and waited, as one who would say: "Thus far, and no farther; not an inch farther!" Still the man held the meat, and would not throw it. Finn waited, head held a little on one side, black eyes fixed intently on the man's face. Then, slowly, he lowered his great length to the ground, without for an instant removing his gaze from the boundary-rider's face, and lay with fore-legs outstretched, watching and waiting, and resting at the same time. Evidently the man regarded this as some sort of a step forward, for he yielded now, and flung the piece of meat so that it fell beside Finn's paws. The great Wolfhound half rose in gulping down the meat, but resumed his lying position a moment later, still watching and waiting. The man smiled.

"Well, sonny," he said, with a chuckle; "you play a mighty safe game, don't you? You're not takin' any chances on the cards. I believe you reckon I've got the joker up my sleeve, hey? But you're wrong, 'cos me sleeves is rolled up. But you've got a tidy twist on ye for mutton, all the same, an' I reckon it's lucky for you I killed that staked ewe. Now, how d'ye like plain damper? Just see how Wallaby Bill's tombstones strike ye!"

As he spoke, the man called Wallaby Bill flung Finn a solid chunk of very indigestible damper, which the Wolfhound gratefully disposed of with two bites and three gulps, before plainly asking for more. This was Finn's first

taste of food other than raw meat for some months, and he enjoyed it.

"Well, say, Wolf, I suppose your belly has a bottom to it, somewhere, what? Here; don't mind me; take the lot!"

With this, having first broken up a good large section of damper in it, he pushed the dish along the dry grass as far as he could in Finn's direction, with all that was left of the meat cooked that evening, a fairly ample meal for a hound, apart from what had come before. The boundary-rider lay on the ground to push the dish as far toward Finn as he could, and then recovered his sitting position, and pretended to become absorbed in the filling of a pipe, while continuing to watch Finn out of the corner of his eyes. The dish was now perhaps three yards from where Bill sat, and a yard and a half from Finn. The man appeared to be wrapped up in his own concerns, and Finn's hunger was far from being satisfied. Very cautiously, then, he advanced till he could reach the lip of the dish with his teeth; then, still moving with the most watchful care, he gripped the tin dish and softly drew it back about a couple of feet. Then he began to eat from it, the upper halves of his eyes still fixed upon the half-recumbent figure of the man, who was now contentedly smoking and pulling Jess's ears.

Finn polished the tin dish clean and bright, and then retired into the shadows.

"There's gratitude for you!" growled Bill. But he did not move, being the knowledgeable person with animals that he was. Finn had only gone as far as the water-hole he had seen, some thirty or forty yards from the shanty. There the Wolfhound drank his fill, and drew back, licking his jaws with zest, and feeling happier and better than he had felt since the day of his parting with the Master, months before.

Slowly, and with only a little less caution than before, Finn now approached the camp a second time, and heard Bill say to the kangaroo-hound: "All right, Jess; go to him, then!" In another moment, Jess came prancing out towards him, and Finn spread out his fore-legs and lowered his great frame to the earth, while his hind-quarters remained erect and ready for a pivoting movement. This was the precise attitude that old

Tara, the most gracious lady of her race, had adopted toward Finn and his brothers and sisters, years ago in the orchard beside the Sussex Downs, when Finn was still an unweaned pup, and Tara came to play with him, without a notion that she was his mother. (Finn's loving little foster-mother, it will be remembered, had been safely shut up, out of hearing and scent of the pups.) Jess now imitated Finn's attitude, and when his nose had almost touched hers she bounded from him sideways and backwards, sometimes wheeling completely round, and barking with pretended ferocity, till she stooped again and repeated the process.

Wallaby Bill was pleasantly interested in watching this amiable performance, but it would have impressed him vastly more if he could have pictured to himself the sort of spectacle Finn had presented a couple of days before, when, with foaming jaws, gleaming fangs, raised hackles, and straining limbs, the great Wolfhound had pitted himself, with roaring fury, against the leather-coated man who wielded the hot iron. To an observer who had known of this, there would have been something at once rather pathetic and a good deal grotesque about Finn's present kittenish play with Jess. To lend verisimilitude to the game Finn had to growl low down in his throat at intervals, while Jess snarled and barked; but when Finn laid one paw on the kangaroo-hound's curved back, as he frequently did at different phases of the game, his touch, for all his huge bulk and weight, was one that would not have incommoded a new-born pup. The Wolfhound was deft and agile enough, despite his want of practice in such occupations, but yet, by reason of his great size, and the hard-bitten, fighting look which the last few months had given him, and the extreme wariness of his continuous observation of the reclining Bill; because of these things, there was more than a hint of grotesqueness about his gambols, such as one could not find in the antics of his playmate. Her sex, her smoothness, her smaller size and greater slimness of build, combined with her evidently complete domestication, made Jess's foolery sit naturally upon her; and, indeed, her movements were without exception graceful in the extreme.

Wallaby Bill's pipe had burned itself out before the hounds tired of their play and stretched themselves upon the ground, Jess lying a good yard and a half nearer to the fire than Finn ventured. But Finn moved only very

slightly now, when Bill rose slowly to his feet and stretched his arms, while taking careful observations of the new-comer. In the bright firelight, he was just able to make out the bigger among Finn's scars, where the Professor's iron had burned through the Wolfhound's wiry coat. Finn half rose, with ears cocked, and muscles ready for the spring, when Bill yawned and said--

"Well, Wolf, you are the biggest thing in your line ever I did see. But it seems to me you've been havin' a pretty rough house with somebody. What township have you been paintin' red, Wolf, hey? Did ye clear out the town? How many stiffs was there in the dead-house when you struck the wallaby again, Wolf? I bet you jest made things hum, old son--my oath--hey!" He took one slow step forward; and Finn immediately took three backward, in one quick jump. "All right, sonny; who wants to hurt ye? Keep your hair on now, do. I only want to get the dish, an' wash up after your royal highness. Save me soul alive! Can't I move, then? You're too suspicious, Wolf, my son. I believe you're a bit of a Jew." And then, in a lower tone, "My oath, but some one's handled you pretty damn meanly before to-day, I reckon. All right, Wolf, you walk backwards, like a Salvation Army captain, while I get the dish, an' then we'll both be safe, an' the dish'll get washed."

Bill's notion of washing up was distinctly primitive. He took a long drink of tea from the billy, and then used what was left to rinse out the dish that Finn had polished. Then he wiped it carefully on his towel, and hung it up inside the gunyah. Finn had returned to his old place by this time, but hesitated to lie down while Bill moved about.

"Now, just you take a rest, Wolf," said the boundary-rider, satirically. "I'm goin' to turn in now, an' I don't attack thunderin' great grey wolf-dogs while I'm undressin'; not on your life I don't; so jest you take a rest, son. Look at fat Jess! You couldn't shift her from that fire with a stock-whip! An' jest you remember, my boy, that where I sleeps I breakfast--sure thing--an' where I breakfasts there's apt to be oddments goin' for great big grey wolf-dogs as well as black kangaroo bitches; so don't you forget it, Wolf. I'm hopin' to see you in the mornin', mind; and don't eat Jess by mistake in your sleep. I know she only weighs about seventy pounds, but if you're careful, an' don't yawn too sudden-like any time, you'll be able to avoid

swallowing her. So long, son!"

And with that the man retired to his bunk, which consisted of two flour-sacks stretched on saplings, supported a few inches above the ground by forked sticks; a very comfortable bed indeed. As for Finn, the feeling inspired in him by Bill's talk, to say nothing of Bill's supper, and Bill's fire, and the black hound, this was something really not far removed from affection; but it was nothing at all like complete trust. It was the friendliest sort of gratitude and, while the man's kindly talk rang in his ears, something very like affection. But it was not trust, and Finn did not lie down again until his ears had satisfied him that the man was lying down within the bark shanty. Yet it was not many months since Finn had faced the whole world of men-folk with the most complete and unquestioning confidence and trust. So much the Professor had accomplished in his attempt at "taming" the "Giant Wolf," you see. But, well fed, and cheered by companionship, Finn rested more happily that night than he had rested since his parting with the Master. It was very delightful to slide gradually off into sleep, with the sound of Jess's regular breathing in his ears, and the warm glow of the smouldering log fire in his half-closed eyes.

dogs following man on horseback

CHAPTER XX

THE SUNDAY HUNT

Finn's new friends were distinctly an odd couple. The type to which Wallaby Bill belonged is not a very rare one in Australia. He was one of those men of whom storekeepers and publicans, and country-folk generally, say that they are nobody's enemies but their own. Bill had been a small farmer, a "cockatoo," at one time, with land of his own; but when he received a cheque for stock or for a crop, it was his wont to leave the farm for days together while he "blew in his cheque" in the township. After that, he would have to buy flour on credit, eat kangaroo flesh and rabbit--even the despised and accursed rabbit--and his stock would have to live upon what they could pick up for themselves in the bush. So an end had come to Bill's farming, naturally.

His present life could only be described as nomadic; and it seemed to be the only life he cared for. He was an excellent boundary-rider, shrewd, capable, and far-seeing. As such he would work for weeks, and even, occasionally, for months at a stretch, utterly alone, save for his dog, and apparently quite content. Then, without apparent reason, and certainly without any kind of warning, he would make tracks for the nearest township, and be seen no more outside its "hotel" till every penny he could lay hands upon was transferred to the publican's till. Then, if his employer cared to allow him to resume work, he would go back to his boundary-riding as contented and efficient as ever. If the employer had so much as a word of criticism for his conduct, Bill would be off into the bush like a wild creature, and that particular boss would see him no more. He never argued. He simply fled. His life was as purely nomadic as that of any Bedouin, and he had not spoken to a woman for years. Outside public-houses, he never thought of drinking anything but water and tea, generally tea, of which beverage he consumed several quarts

every day of his life. He was a keen hunter, and at his worst had never been known to sell his horse or his dog, both good of their kind; though there had been occasions upon which he had sold everything else he possessed, and then knocked a man down for refusing to purchase the ragged coat he was wearing.

This man had reared Jess by hand, with the aid of a cracked tea-pot; and the kangaroo-hound bitch knew him better than any one else did. For her, he was the only human being who counted, seriously; and it was said that she had come near to killing a certain publican who had attempted to "go through" Bill's pockets when he was drunk. She accompanied Bill everywhere, and, whatever his occupation or condition, was never far from his side. She was a big strong hound, and her flanks bore many honourable scars attesting to her experience of the marsupial at bay.

Bill had probably never been guilty of wilful meanness or cruelty in his life; though, upon occasion, he could display a certain rough brutality. His normal attitude of mind was one of careless, kindly good-humour. From Finn's point of view, he was an extremely good sort of fellow, of a type new and strange to the Wolfhound; one of whom nothing could be predicted with any certainty. Six months before, Bill's obvious good nature would have been ample passport to Finn's confidence and friendship. But all that had been changed, and everything and everybody strange was now suspect to Finn.

The Wolfhound was the first to wake in the very early morning of the day following that of his arrival at the boundary-rider's gunyah. His movement waked Jess, and together they stretched and walked round the camp. Then Finn trotted off towards the denser bush which lay some hundreds of yards eastward of the camp. Jess ran with him for perhaps a score of yards, and then, determined not to lose sight of her man's abode, she turned and trotted back to camp. This surprised Finn, but did not affect his plans. He noted a warm little ridge some distance ahead, which looked as though it contained rabbit earths. This spot he approached by means of a flanking movement which enabled him to reach it from the rear, moving with the care and delicacy of a great cat. As he peered over the edge of the little ridge, he saw three rabbits performing their morning

toilet, perhaps a score of paces beyond the bank. He eyed the bunnies with interest for about a minute, and then, having decided that the middle one carried the most flesh, he pursed himself together and leaped. As he landed, ten or a dozen paces from the rabbits, they separated, two flying diagonally for the bank, and the middle one leaping off ahead, meaning to describe a considerable curve before reaching its earth. But Finn was something of an expert in the pursuit of rabbits and, besides being very fleet, had learned to wheel swiftly, and to cut off corners. Two seconds later that rabbit was dead and, holding it firmly between his great jaws, Finn had started off at a leisurely trot for the camp.

As Finn arrived beside the gunyah, Bill appeared at its entrance, yawning and stretching his muscular arms.

"Hullo there, Wolf," he said lazily; "early bird catches the worm, hey? Good on ye, my son."

Finn had stopped dead at sight of the man, and now Jess bounded towards him, full of interest. Finn dropped the rabbit before her, quite prepared to share his breakfast with the kangaroo-hound. That had been his intention, in fact, in bringing his kill back to camp. But to his surprise Jess snatched up the rabbit and wheeled away from him.

"Come in here, Jess! Come in!" growled the man sharply. "Come in here, an' drop it."

Whereupon, Jess trotted docilely up to the humpy, and laid her stolen prize at Bill's feet. Bill whipped out his sheath-knife and, with one or two deft cuts and tugs, skinned the rabbit. The pelt he placed on a log beside the gunyah, and the carcass he cut in half across the backbone. Then he tossed the head half to Jess, and the other, and slightly larger portion, to Finn.

"Fair doos," he said explanatorily. "Wolf's the biggest; and it was his kill, anyway; so he gets the quarters. "

So the hounds fed, while Bill washed and prepared his own breakfast. Jess ate beside the bark hut, but Finn withdrew to a more respectful

distance, and lay down with his portion of the rabbit some twenty yards from the camp.

After breakfast, the man took a bridle in his hand and set out to find his horse, who carried a bell but was never hobbled. Jess walked sedately one yard behind her man's heels; Finn strolled after them at a distance of fifteen or twenty yards. Occasionally Jess would turn and trot back to the Wolfhound for a friendly sniff; but, while receiving her advances amiably, Finn never responded to her invitations to join her in close attendance upon the man. Once Bill was mounted, Jess seemed satisfied to leave twenty or thirty yards, or even more, between herself and her man; and, this being so, the two hounds ran together and shared all their little discoveries and interests. Bill rode a good many miles that day, always beside a wire fence; and occasionally he would stop, dismount, and busy himself in some small repair, where a fence-post had sagged down, or the wire become twisted or slack.

At such times, while Bill was busy, Finn and Jess would cover quite a good deal of ground, always within a half-mile radius of the man; and in these small excursions Finn began to learn a good deal in the way of bush-craft from the wily Jess. Once she snapped at his shoulder suddenly, and thrust him aside from a log he was just about to clamber upon. "'Ware! 'Ware!" said her short bark, with unmistakable vehemence. As Finn drew back, wonderingly, a short black snake rose between him and the log, hissed angrily at the hounds once, and then darted away round the log's butt end. Jess made some gruff remarks in her throat which could not well be translated into our tongue; but they sufficed to teach Finn a good deal. He had now seen a death-adder, the snake whose bite kills inside of fifteen minutes; and, so much more apt are the dog kind in some matters than ourselves, that Finn would never again require reminding or instructing about this particular form of danger. Jess had bitten his shoulder pretty hardly, by the way. Finn may or may not have given this particularly deadly reptile a name in his own mind; or Jess may have supplied him with one for it. The point is, he knew it now for a deadly creature; he knew something of the sort of resting-places it chooses for itself; and he would never, never forget the knowledge thus acquired, nor the significance it had for him and his like.

On the other hand, when a sudden pungent scent and a rustle among the twigs set Finn leaping forward after the strangest-looking beast his eyes had ever seen, Jess joined with him, in a good-humoured, rather indifferent manner, and between them they just missed a big "goanner," as Bill called the iguana, or Gould Monitor. This particular 'guana had a tail rather more than twice its own length, and the last foot of this paid forfeit in Finn's jaws for the animal's lack of agility. Though, when one says lack of agility, it is fair to add that only a very swiftly moving creature could have escaped the two hounds at all; and, once it reached a tree-trunk, this reptile showed simply wonderful cleverness in climbing, running up fifty feet of iron-bark trunk as quickly as it could cover the level ground, and keeping always on the far side of the tree from the dogs, its long, ugly, wedge-shaped head constantly turning from side to side, in keen, listening observation. From Jess's contemptuous, half-hearted bark, Finn gathered that this singularly ugly creature was not one of the deadly people, but also, on the other hand, that it was not game worthy of a hound's serious attention.

After four days of this sort of life, during practically every hour of which Finn was learning bush-craft from Jess, and learning at a great rate for the reason that his intelligence was of a higher order than that of the kangaroo-hound, while his hunting instincts came to him from an older and more direct line of inheritance, the Wolfhound began to feel almost as thoroughly at home in the bush as he had felt on his own hunting-ground in Sussex. But, rather curiously perhaps, he advanced hardly at all in the intimacy of his relations with Bill. In a sense, outwardly at all events, Bill was more closely allied to Sam and the Professor, and to other people of the Southern Cross Circus, than to the Master, or to humans Finn had known at all intimately before. The Wolfhound was conscious that the boundary-rider was friendly; but, on the other hand, he had points in common with the circus people, whose doings had burned right into Finn's very soul; and, in any case, Finn saw no particular reason for taking further risks where this man was concerned. It was extremely pleasant to lie near the camp-fire with Jess of a night, and to run with Jess in the bush by day; but nothing would induce Finn to approach the gunyah more nearly, or to allow Bill's hand to come within a yard of him. The possibility, however remote, of confinement, of torture

behind iron bars, was something he could not bring himself to trifle with.

As for Bill, he seemed content. Finn brought rabbits to the camp every day, with occasional bandicoots, and in the evening, sometimes, a kangaroo-rat. And, more than once, Bill took these kills from him, through Jess, and boiled them before giving them to the hounds to eat. In this he was doubtless moved by friendly thought for the dogs' welfare, since these little creatures, and more especially the rabbits, are often inhabited by parasites of a kind most harmful to dogs. Bill never thought of making any use of the over-plentiful supply of rabbits for the replenishment of his own larder. He regarded rabbits as English people regard rats, and would never have eaten them while any other kind of meat was available. And, as Finn found later, the same pronounced distaste for rabbit's flesh holds good, not alone among the men-folk of the country, but with practically all its wild folk, also; even the highly carnivorous and fierce native cat paying no heed to bunnies as game.

The fifth day of Finn's acquaintance with Bill and Jess was a Sunday, and the boundary-rider was a strict observer of the Sabbath. His observation of it might not have particularly commended itself to orthodox Sabbatharians, but, such as it was, Bill never departed from it. Directly after breakfast he washed the shirt and vest he had been wearing during the previous week, and hung them out to dry. Then he brought in his horse and trifled with it a while, examining its feet, and rubbing its ears, and giving it a few handfuls of bread. Then he took a very early lunch and went off hunting. He had no gun, but he had a formidable sheath-knife, his horse, and Jess. And now, in a way, he had Finn as well. He had been wondering all the week about Finn's quality as a hunter, and looking forward to the opportunity of testing the Wolfhound. As for Jess, she knew perfectly well when a Sunday had arrived. For her, Sunday was quite the festival day of the week; and, indeed, by reason of her anticipatory bustle, Finn himself was early given to understand that this was a special day of some kind.

On the previous day, Bill had paid particular attention to some tracks he had seen on the far side of a gully some three or four miles from the gunyah; and Jess had shown herself amazingly anxious to make further investigations at the time, until brought sternly to heel by Bill, with the

suggestion that--

"You've got mixed up in your almanack, old lady. This is Saturday."

Now, with a tomahawk stuck in the saddle-cleat he had made to hold it, and a stock-whip dangling from one hand, the bushman ambled off on his roan-coloured mare in the direction of this same gully. Jess, full of suppressed excitement, circled about the horse's head for some few minutes, till bidden to "Sober up, there, Jess!" when she fell back and trotted beside Finn, a dozen yards from the horse. Arrived at the gully, Bill reined in to a very slow walk, and peered about him carefully upon the ground. He never walked a yard on his own feet if a horse was available. This was so much a matter of principle with Bill that he had been known to walk and run three miles in pursuit of a horse with which to ride across a paddock no more than a quarter of a mile from his original starting-place. It was Jess who found what her man was questing: the quite fresh tracks of a kangaroo; and Finn was keenly interested in the discovery. He noted carefully every scratch in the tracks as Jess nosed them, and noted also, as the result of long strong breaths drawn through his nostrils, the exact scent which hung about them. This scent alone proved the tracks quite fresh. Finn was puzzled by the long, scraping marks, which looked far more like the work of some garden tool than of the feet of any animal he knew of. For the time he had forgotten the fifteen-foot leap of the rock wallaby that he had witnessed on the day after his escape from the circus. The hind-foot pressure required to start a heavy animal upon such a leap as that is very considerable, and well calculated to leave evidence of itself in soft ground.

In starting away from the gully, Bill rode at a walk, and with extreme care, Jess going in front, and Finn, not as yet so clever in tracking, following up the rear, and taking very careful observations, not alone of the trail, but also of fallen timber and likely places for snakes. They progressed in this way, in a curving line, for between two and three miles, when Jess came to a momentary halt, and gave one loud bark. Next instant they were all travelling at the gallop for a thick clump of scrub which stood alone in a comparatively clear patch. On the edge of this scrub Finn had a momentary glimpse of their quarry, a big red old-man kangaroo, sitting on his haunches, and delicately eating leaves.

The kangaroo covered over twenty feet of ground in his first leap, and that with a suddenness which must have strained the tendons of his wonderful hind-quarters pretty severely. But, by the time the hunters had reached the scrub, the quarry was between two and three hundred yards distant, travelling at a great rate in fairly open country. Bill had urged his horse to the top of its gallop, and Finn was close behind them. He could have passed them, but was not as yet sufficiently familiar with the man to do so. He felt safer with Bill in full view; and, in any case, the roan mare was a very fast traveller and kept as close to Jess's flying feet as was safe. The old-man seemed confident of his power to outrun his pursuers, for he made no attempt at dodging, taking a straight-ahead course over ground which left him clearly visible almost all the time. That his confidence in his superior speed was misplaced became quite evident at the end of the first mile, for by that time there was not much more than a hundred yards between Jess and himself, in spite of the enormous bounds he took, which made his progress resemble flying. He could take a fallen log in his jump easily enough, but whenever the course rose at all sharply the old-man lost ground; his jumps appearing to fall very short then.

At the end of the third mile Jess, who was galloping in greyhound style, was within twenty feet of the kangaroo; Bill and the roan mare were twelve or fifteen feet behind her, and Finn, running a little wide of the trail, was abreast of the mare's flanks with a fierce, killing light in his eyes. In that order they entered a steep gully which, if the old-man had been on thoroughly familiar ground, he would have avoided. But, as to that, if he had been on familiar ground, he would not have been alone, but the leader of a mob, for which position his commanding size fitted him. Be this as it may, the red old-man plunged straight down the steep gully, and then, fearing to attempt the comparatively slow process of mounting the other side, turned at a tangent and bounded along the bottom of the gully. With a gasping bark, as of triumph, Jess wheeled after him, and the roan mare, unable to turn quite so swiftly, left Finn to shoot ahead for the first time, perhaps fifteen paces behind Jess.

But, unfortunately for the kangaroo, this was a blind gully, and Jess knew it. Two minutes later the old-man found himself facing a quite precipitous

rocky ascent at the gully's end, and so, there being no alternative that he could see, he turned at bay to face his pursuers. Jess was tremendously excited by the three-mile chase, and it may be that the sound of Finn's powerful strides behind her gave the black hound more than ordinary recklessness. At all events, with practically no perceptible slackening of speed, she flew straight for the old-man's throat, and received the cruel stroke of his hind-leg fairly upon her chest, being flung backwards fully five yards, with blood spouting from her.

Now, although Finn had never seen a kangaroo before, and never hunted bigger game than the fox he killed in Sussex, yet he had a full view of poor Jess's terrible reception, and with him, as with all his kind, action follows thought with electrical swiftness. Finn saw in that instant exactly the old-man's method of defence: the cow-like kick, with a leg strong enough to propel its weighty owner five-and-twenty feet in a bound, and armed at its extremity with claws like chisels. Seeing this, and acting upon the hint it conveyed, were a single process with Finn. He swerved sharply from his course, and then leaped with all his strength for the old-man's throat from the slightly higher level of the gully's bank.

Now, the old-man weighed two hundred and forty pounds, and measured nine feet from the tip of his snout to the tip of his long tail. But, as against that, he was sitting still, while Finn came at him with the tremendous momentum of a powerful spring from higher ground than that occupied by the kangaroo. And Finn weighed one hundred and forty pounds odd--not of fat and loose skin, but of muscle and bone, without a pound of superfluous flesh. He lived almost entirely on meat. The impact of Finn's landing on the old-man was terrific; but, be it noted, the kangaroo was not bowled over, though he did sway for a moment on his haunches. But it was a terribly punishing hold upon his neck that Finn's jaws had taken, and Finn's great claws were planted firmly in the old-man's side and back. The kangaroo made a desperate effort to free one hind-leg sufficiently from Finn's clinging weight to be able to take a raking thrust at the Wolfhound, by shaking him sideways; and if he had succeeded in this, the result for Finn would have been very severe. Meantime, however, the whole strength of Finn's muscular neck and jaws was concentrated upon dragging the kangaroo's head back, upon breaking

his neck, in fact. An old-man kangaroo, such as this one, is generally able to give a pretty good account of himself in the face of four or five hounds; but the hounds he meets are of Jess's type and weight, and not of Finn's sort.

However, it was never known exactly whether or not Finn would have succeeded in his task of breaking this old-man's neck; for, with a suddenness which surprised the Wolfhound into suffering momentary contact with Bill's arm, the boundary-rider slipped into the fight, having first picked up the old-man's tail so that he could not kick (a kangaroo knows that if he attempts a kick while his very serviceable tail is being held up he always topples over on his side, and is thus made helpless), and then leaned across Finn from behind, and slit the marsupial's throat with his sheath-knife. Finn growled fiercely as he felt the weight of the man's arm pressed across his shoulders, and sprang clear at the same moment that the kangaroo toppled over dead, Bill's practised hand having severed its jugular vein. And so the fight ended, without a scratch for Finn; which, seeing that this was his first kangaroo, and an old-man, and that many an old-man has stretched as many as four and five hounds bleeding on the ground before him in less than as many minutes, must be regarded as a piece of exceptionally good fortune for the Wolfhound.

With Jess, now, matters were far otherwise; the black hound could do no more hunting for some time to come. Finn was already sympathetically licking Jess when Bill turned away from the dead kangaroo; but, as the man came forward, Finn retreated, his lips lifted slightly, and his hackles rising. He was not quite sure of Bill's intentions, and had been greatly disturbed by the pressure of the boundary-rider's arm across his shoulders. It had brought with it an instant flashlight picture of an iron-barred cage, and other matters connected therewith. He did not realize that Bill, and not he himself, had killed the old-man. However, Bill was not paying any particular heed to Finn just now, though he had greatly admired the Wolfhound's handling of the kangaroo, as showing more strength than any other hound's attack that he had ever seen.

With a single blow the kangaroo had practically laid open the whole of one side of Jess's body. The gash his terrible foot had made extended

from the front of the breast down to the inside of the flank; and it was far from being simply a skin wound. Down the chest it had reached the bone; in the belly it had carved a furrow which suggested the wound of an axe. Bill sighed as he told himself that poor Jess's chances were problematical. An Englishman in Bill's position would almost certainly have put a bullet through the black hound's heart or head, if he had had a gun. But Bill had done a good deal of kangaroo hunting in his time, and had seen many and many a hound ripped open, and even then preserved to hunt again.

A surgeon would have been vastly interested by Bill's operations now. First, he walked along the gully to where he had seen a little water and, bringing this back in his felt hat, proceeded carefully to cleanse parts of the torn flesh as well as he could. Then he unbuckled a big belt that he wore, and opening a pouch on it drew out two or three needles and some strong white thread. Having threaded one of the needles he began now, in as matter-of-course a manner as though he were mending a shirt, to stitch up the whole great wound so as to draw its sides together. During the whole lengthy operation the black hound only moved her head twice, in a faint, undecided manner, and almost as though from an intelligent desire to watch Bill's progress; certainly with no hint of any wish to interfere with it. It was far from being an easy or simple operation, and doubtless Bill's performance of it differed a good deal in detail from what a surgeon would have called the best method; but the thing was done, and done thoroughly.

Then Bill filled a pipe and smoked it for a time, while watching the filmy eyes of his hound. Presently he rose and brought more water in his hat. This he held under Jess's muzzle in such a position as to enable her to loll her tongue in it, and lap a little. The gratitude which shone in her eyes was very touching and unmistakable. Bill waited for another quarter of an hour, and then he stooped over the black hound and raised her bodily in his arms with great care, and much as a German nurse carries a baby. In this position, and stopping occasionally for short rests, Bill carried Jess the whole way back to the camp, a distance of about three and a half miles. (The course taken by the kangaroo had been a curve which ended rather nearer to the gunyah than it began.) Finn followed, twenty paces

behind the man, with head and tail carried low. He was conscious that Jess was sorely smitten.

Arrived at the camp, Bill made a bed of leaves for Jess beside the gunyah, and placed her down upon it very gently, with an old blanket of his own folded round her body in such a way that she could not reach the wound with her mouth. Then he mounted the horse which he had driven before him, and galloped back to the blind gully armed with a small coil of line.

When Bill returned with the old-man lashed on his horse's back, he found Finn affectionately licking the black hound's muzzle. Jess had not moved an inch.

three curious dingoes

CHAPTER XXI

THREE DINGOES WENT A-WALKING

Wallaby Bill showed himself a kind and shrewd nurse where Jess, his one intimate friend, was concerned. He had no milk to give the sorely wounded hound, but the thin broth he made for her that Sunday night formed almost as suitable a food for her; and before leaving her for the night the man was very careful to see that her lacerated body was well covered. For her part, Jess was too weak and ill to be likely to interfere with the wound; even the slight lifting of her head to lap a little broth seemed to tax her strength to the utmost. All night Finn lay within a couple of yards of the kangaroo-hound; and in the morning, soon after dawn, he brought her a fresh-killed rabbit and laid it at her feet. Finn meant well, but Jess did not even lick the kill, and as soon as Bill appeared he looked in a friendly way at Finn, and then removed the rabbit. But he afterwards skinned and boiled it for Finn's own delectation, and at the time he said--

"You're a mighty good sort, Wolf, and you can say I said so."

After making the black hound as comfortable as he could, Bill rode off for his day's work. He had rigged a good shelter over Jess with the help of a couple of sheets of stringy-bark and a few stakes. He gave her a breakfast of broth, and left a dish of water within an inch of her nose, where she could reach it without moving her body. Lastly, as a precaution against the possibility of movement on Jess's part, he stitched the old blanket behind her in such a way as to prevent its leaving her wound exposed. He looked over his shoulder several times after riding away, thinking that Finn would be likely to follow him. But the Wolfhound remained standing, some twenty paces from Jess's shelter, and, when the man was almost out of sight, stepped forward and lay down within a

yard or two of the kangaroo-hound.

"Queer card, that Wolf!" muttered Bill, as he rode away. "But he's pretty white, too; whiter'n some men, I reckon, for all he's so mighty suspicious."

In some climates any dog would have succumbed to the injuries Jess had sustained; and even in the beautiful air of the Tinnaburra, a town-bred dog would probably have gone under. But Jess was of a tough, bush-bred stock; she had lived in the open all her life, and the air she breathed now, in her shelter beside the gunyah, was aromatic with the scent of that useful antiseptic which in every part of the world has done good service in the prevention of fever--eucalyptus. Blue gum, red gum, grey gum, stringy-bark, iron-bark, and black-butt; the trees which surrounded Jess for fifty miles on every side were practically all of the eucalyptus family. Insects bothered her a good deal it is true, but Finn did much in the way of warding off their attacks, and the wound itself was well protected.

It was an odd and very interesting and pleasant life that Finn led now, his time divided pretty evenly between bearing the wounded kangaroo-hound company and foraging on his own account in the bush within a radius of two or three miles of the gunyah. He found that countryside wonderfully full of different forms of wild life, and wonderfully interesting to a born hunter and carnivorous creature like himself. He did not know then that the country he traversed, all within four miles of the camp, was but the fringe of a vastly more interesting tract of bush; and in the meantime the range he did learn to know thoroughly proved sufficiently absorbing and various.

Five miles from Bill's gunyah, in a direct southerly line, stood the big, rambling station homestead, where Bill's bachelor employer had lived for many years. He did not live there now, because six months before this time he had died, and his station had reverted to distant relatives in other countries. This was the man who was to have met the Master and the Mistress of the Kennels on their arrival in Australia. His executors had seen no reason to dispense with Bill's services as yet; and, truth to tell, they had never seen the man, nor heard of his doings. It was only during the last few months that a manager had been placed in charge of the

station, and during his time Wallaby Bill had stuck closely to his work.

Jacob Wilton Hall, the man who had made Warrimoo station, had all his life long been something of an eccentric; and yet, withal, a man who generally accomplished what he had set out to do, and one who had converted a modest competence into a handsome fortune. He had been an indiscriminate admirer of animals, and an interested student of the manners and customs of all the creatures of the wild. When the rabbit pest first began to be severely felt in the neighbourhood of his home-station, he had tried a variety of methods of coping with it, and in the execution of some of these methods he had met with a good deal of opposition and ridicule from his neighbours. He had, for instance, imported fifty ferrets and weasels of both sexes and turned them loose in pairs, in rabbit-earths situated in different outlying portions of his land. These fierce little creatures were a scourge to the countryside by reason of their attacks upon poultry; but it was freely stated that they adopted the curious attitude of nearly all the native-born animals in ignoring the rabbits they had been expected to prey upon.

Jacob Hall had then imported two pairs of wild cats, and turned these loose in the back-blocks of his land, besides encouraging a number of cats of the domesticated variety to take to the bush life and become wild, as they have been doing all over Australia for many years. With great difficulty and considerable expenditure of money, the eccentric squatter had succeeded in securing a pair of Tasmanian Wolves and a pair of Tasmanian Devils, and, having successfully evaded the customs and quarantine authorities, he turned these exceptionally fierce and bloodthirsty creatures loose in the wildest part of his land. Indeed, he took up an extra few thousand acres of quite unprofitable "Church and School land," hilly, rocky, and heavily timbered on the flats, largely, it was said, for the purpose of turning his Tasmanian importations into it. The Wolves and the Tasmanian Devils killed a number of his sheep; and it was stated among the neighbours that if Jacob Hall had lived he would eventually have imported Bengal tigers and African lions before trying the commonplace virtues of rabbit-proof fencing. It was supposed that the persistent efforts of hunters and boundary-riders had resulted in these wild creatures being driven well into the back country; and it is certain

that, despite an occasional strange story from bushmen regarding the animals whose tracks they had come upon in the back-blocks, nothing was ever actually seen of Jacob Hall's more fantastic importations. It was said, however, that there were already notable modifications in certain of the wild kindred of that countryside. There was talk of wild cats of hitherto unheard-of size and fierceness, and of dingoes having suggestions about them of the untameably fierce marsupial wolf of Tasmania. But such talk did not amount to much in this district, for the rocky ranges of the Tinnaburra country, its densely wooded gullies, and wild scrub-dotted flats, was almost entirely in the hands of a few big squatters, who had long since pre-empted the back-blocks in the hinterland of their stations for very many miles up country.

Naturally, Finn and Jess knew nothing of these things. To the one the native denizens of such small portions of the bush of that neighbourhood as he had ranged were quite sufficiently numerous and interesting to keep his mind occupied; while Jess, for her part, was fully engaged in the task of regaining her hold upon mere life. They lived for themselves, these two; but Jess was deeply interested in the return of her man to the camp each night, and Finn was equally keen and interested in his daily foragings and explorations in the bush of that particular quarter. They neither of them knew that they themselves were objects of the greatest interest to a very large circle of the wild folk. But they were.

Within twenty-four hours of the fight with the old-man kangaroo in the blind gully, the news had gone abroad among all the wild folk in that strip of bush which surrounded the camp that a redoubtable hunter had been laid low, and was lying near to death and quite helpless beside the gunyah. Jess, having always been well fed by her man, had never been a great hunter of small game; but she had accounted for a goodly number of wallabies, and had played her part in the pulling down of a respectable number of kangaroos. And, though she had seldom troubled to run down the smaller fry, she was as greatly feared by them as though she lived only for their destruction; and innumerable small marsupials, from the tiny, delicate little kangaroo-mouse, up to the fleet and muscular wallaby-hare, with bandicoots, kangaroo-rats (bushy-tailed and desperately furtive), 'possums, native cats, and even a couple of amiable and sleepy-

headed native bears, and a surly, solitary wombat, all took an opportunity of peering out from the nearest point of dense covert for the sake of having a glimpse of the helpless kangaroo-hound. To the wild folk, an animal that cannot rise and fend for itself is regarded as an animal practically dead, and but one remove from carrion; which, of course, Jess would have been, lacking the friendly attentions of her man, and, it may be, lacking the protection of the great Wolfhound.

Be that as it may, it is a fact that news reached the rocky hills behind Warrimoo of Jess's condition, and during the second night of her helplessness three dingoes left their hunting range to come and look into this matter for themselves. A dying hound might prove well worth investigating, they thought. The movements of these dingoes, once they reached within a couple of miles of Bill's gunyah, would have interested any student of the wild. The caution with which they advanced was extraordinary. Not a dry leaf nor a dead twig on the trail but they scanned it shrewdly with an eye for possible traps or pitfalls. They moved as noiselessly as shadows, and poured in and out among the scrub like liquid vegetation of some sort; a part of their environment, but volatile. When the three dingoes from the hills reached the edge of the clear patch in which the gunyah stood, they saw the almost black, smouldering remains of a camp-fire, and, stretched within a couple of yards of the ashes, Finn. His shaggy coat was not that of a kangaroo-hound, and his place beside the man-made fire seemed to forbid the possibility of his being a monster dingo. Vaguely, the dingoes told themselves that Finn must be some kind of giant among wolves who was connected in some mysterious way with men-folk. They had learned something during the past few years with regard to the possibilities of Nature in the matter of strange beasts; and they remembered that the new-comers in their country had arrived with a strange and persistent taint of man about them; were even brought there by man, some said.

In the meantime, it was quite evident to the dingoes' sensitive nostrils that man inhabited the gunyah at that moment; and that, therefore, quite apart from the presence of the huge strange beast near the fire, it would never do to investigate the shelter at the gunyah's side just then. The dingoes ate where they made their kills that night, within a couple of

miles of the camp, thereby spreading terror wide and deep throughout that range; for the little folk feared these fiercely cunning killers far more than they had learned to fear big ghostly Finn, who roamed their country more in student fashion than as a serious hunter of meat, so far.

When the dawn came, the three dingoes were crouched in a favourable watching-place opposite the gunyah, and saw Finn rise, stretch his great length, and stroll off leisurely in the direction of the bush on the shanty's far side. They looked meaningly one at the other, with lips drawn back, as they noted Finn's massive bulk, great height, long jaws, and springy tread. They decided that the Wolfhound might, after all, be of the wild kindred, since he evidently had no mind to face the owner of the gunyah by daylight. Then, with hackles raised, and bodies shrinking backward among the leaves, they saw Bill come out, and yawn, and stretch his arms, and go to look at Jess, under her shelter. Now as it happened, Finn stumbled upon a fresh wallaby trail that morning, a trail not many minutes old; and he followed it with growing excitement for a number of miles. To his nose it was more or less the same scent as that of the old-man kangaroo; and there was hot desire in his heart to pit his strength against such an one, without the sport-spoiling assistance of Bill's knife. Finn's hunting of the wallaby took him a good deal farther from the humpy than he had been before, since his first arrival there; and so it fell out that Bill left upon his day's round without having seen the Wolfhound that morning.

"I guess he's after an extra special breakfast of his own," muttered Bill, before he left; "but I'll leave him this half a rabbit, in case." And he left the hinder part of a boiled rabbit on the big log beside the fire, and rode away. The patient dingoes watched the whole performance closely, licking their chops while Bill ate his breakfast, and again when he placed the cooked half-rabbit on the log. The whole proceeding was also watched by several crows. It was largely as a protection against these, rather than against the elements, that Bill had given Jess her substantial bark shelter, under which the crows would be afraid to pass. Otherwise, as Bill well knew, Jess would have been like to lose her eyes before she had lain there very long.

After Bill's departure, the crows were the first to descend upon the camp;

and they soon had the meat left for Finn torn to shreds and swallowed. Then they swaggered impudently about the fire, picking up crumbs, a process they were in the habit of attending to daily during Finn's absence. The presence of these wicked black marauders gave courage to the waiting dingoes, and they determined to proceed at once with the business in hand: the examination of the dying kangaroo-hound of which they had heard. As for the huge spectral wolf, it was evident that he had no real connection with the camp. Indeed, the bigger of the three dingoes told himself, with a regretful sigh, that this great grey wolf had in all probability dispatched the kangaroo-hound at an early stage of the night, and had been sleeping off the first effects of his orgy, when they first saw him lying near the camp-fire. At all events, the wolf had disappeared.

The three dingoes advanced, still exhibiting caution in every step, but marching abreast, because neither would give any advantage to the others in a case of this sort. When they got to within five-and-twenty paces of the shelter, poor Jess winded them, and it was borne in upon her that the hour of her last fight had arrived. She knew herself unable to run a yard, probably unable to stand; and the dingo scent, as she understood it, had no hint of mercy in it. With an effort which racked her whole frame with burning pain, the helpless bitch turned upon her chest and raised her head so that she might see her doom approaching. She gave a little gulp when her eyes fell upon the stalwart forms of no fewer than three full-grown dingoes, stocky of build, massive in legs and shoulders, plentifully coated, and fanged for the killing of meat. Their eyes had the killing light in them too, Jess thought; and a snarl curled her writhen lips as she pictured her end, stretched helpless there under the bark shelter. Well she knew that even three such well-grown dingoes as these would never have dared to attack her if she had been in normal condition.

Very slowly the three dingoes approached a little nearer in fan-shaped formation, and, with a brave effort, Jess succeeded in bringing forth a bark which ended in something between growl and howl, by reason of the cutting pain it caused her. The three dingoes leaped backward, each three paces, like clockwork machinery. Jess glared out at them from under her thatch of bark, her fangs uncovered, her nose wrinkled, and

her short close hair on end. The dingoes watched her thoughtfully, pondering upon her probable reserves of strength. Then, too, there was her shelter; that was endowed with some of the mysterious atmosphere which surrounds man. But the biggest of the dingoes had once stolen half a sheep from a shepherd's humpy, and no disaster had overtaken him. He advanced three feet before his companions, and that spurred them to movement. Again Jess essayed a bark; and this time the predominant note in her cry was so clearly one of anguish that the three dingoes took it almost as an encouragement, for Nature had not endowed them with a sense of what we call pity for weakness or distress. They thought Jess's cry was an appeal for mercy, and mercy was foreign to their blood. As a fact, poor Jess would rather have died a dozen deaths than call once upon a dingo for mercy. It was the pain in her lacerated body, resulting from the attempt to bark, that had introduced that wailing note into her cry. And now, as the dingoes drew nearer, inch by inch, the black kangaroo-hound braced herself to die biting, and to sell her flesh as dearly as might be.

As the snout of the foremost dingo, the largest of the three, showed under the eave of Jess's shelter, she managed to hunch her wounded body a little farther back against the side of the gunyah, meaning thereby to draw the dingo a little farther in, and give herself a better chance of catching some part of him between her jaws. With a desperate effort she drew back her fore-legs a little, raising herself almost into a sitting position against the side of the gunyah. The faint groans that the pain of moving forced from her were of real service to her in a way, for they made the foremost dingo think she was in her death agony, and gave a sort of recklessness to his plunge forward under the thatch. He meant to end the business at once and slake his blood thirst at the hound's throat. Well he knew that hounds do not groan before a dingo's onslaught unless their plight is very desperate.

In the instant of the big dingo's plunge for Jess's throat, several things happened. First, Jess's powerful jaws came together about the thick part of the dingo's right fore-leg, and took firm hold there, while the snarling and now terrified dingo snapped at the back of her neck, the rough edge of the bark thatch on the middle of his back producing in him a horrible

sense of being trapped. That was one thing that happened in that instant. Another thing was that the two lesser dingoes between them produced a yelp of pure terror, and, wheeling like lightning, streaked across the clear patch to the scrub, bellies to earth, and tails flying in a straight line from their spines. And the third thing that happened in that instant was the arrival at the end of the gunyah of Finn. The arrival of the Wolfhound was really a great event. There was something elemental about it, and something, too, suggestive of magic. The Wolfhound had caught his first glimpse of the two lesser dingoes as he reached the far side of the clear patch, and, for an instant he had stood still. He was dragging a young wallaby over one shoulder. Then it came over him that these were enemies attacking his crippled friend Jess. He made no sound, but, dropping his burden, flew across the clearing with deadly swiftness. As he reached the end of the gunyah, a kind of roar burst from his swelling chest and, in that instant, the two dingoes flung themselves forward in flight, Finn after them. Five huge strides he took in their rear; and then the power of thought, or telepathy, or something of the sort, stopped him dead in the middle of his stride, and he almost turned a somersault in wheeling round to Jess's assistance.

As Finn plunged forward again toward Jess, the big dingo succeeded by means of a desperate wrench in freeing his leg from the kangaroo-hound's jaws, and with a swift turning movement leaped clear of the shelter. Then the big dingo of the back ranges found himself facing Finn, and realized that he must fight for his life.

The dingo has been called a skunk, and a cur, and a coward, and by most other names that are bad and contemptuous. But the dingo at bay is as brave as a weasel; and no lion in all Africa is braver than a weasel at bay. Finn had brought himself to a standstill with an effort, a towering figure of blazing wrath. He had made one good kill that morning, his blood was hot; the picture of these dogs of the wild kindred attacking his helpless friend had roused to fighting fury every last little drop of blood in his whole great body. Rage almost blinded him. He flung himself upon the big dingo as though he were a projectile of some sort. And then he learned that the creatures born in the wild are swifter than the swiftest of other creatures. He had learned it before, as a matter of fact; he had

seen a striking illustration of it only a few days before, when the kangaroo stretched Jess helpless on the ground at a single stroke. Finn only grazed the dingo's haunch, while the dingo slashed a three-inch wound in his right shoulder as he passed. Even while Finn was in the act of turning, the wild dog's fangs clashed again about his flank, ripping his skin as though it were stretched silk.

It may be imagined that Finn's wrath was not lessened, but his blind rage was, and he pulled himself together with a jerk, a cold determination to kill cooling his brain like water. This time he allowed the dingo to rush him, which the beast did with admirable dexterity, aiming low for the legs. Finn plunged for the back of the dingo's neck, and missed by the breadth of two hairs. Then he pivoted on his hind-legs and feinted low for the dingo's legs. The dingo flashed by him, aiming a cutting snap at his lower thigh--for the wild dog was a master of fighting, and worked deliberately to cripple his big opponent and not to kill him outright--and that gave Finn the chance for which he had played in his feint. Next moment his great fangs were buried in the thickly furred coat of the dingo's neck, and his whole weight was bearing the wild dog to earth.

His legs lost to him, by reason of Finn's crushing weight, the frenzy of despair filled the dingo, and he fought like ten dogs, snarling, snapping, writhing, and scratching, all at the same time. Despite Finn's vice-like hold, the dingo did considerable execution with his razor-edged fangs in the lower part of the Wolfhound's fore-legs. But his race was run. Finn gradually shifted his hold, till his front teeth gripped the soft part of the dingo's throat, and then he bit with all the mighty strength of his great jaws, closer, closer, and closer, till the red blood poured out on the ground and the struggles of the wild dog grew fainter and fainter. Finally, Finn gave a great shake of his head, lifting the dingo clear of the ground, and flinging him back upon it, limp and still.

For two whole minutes Finn glared down at the body of the dingo, while licking the blood from his own lips, and working the torn skin of his body backward and forward as though it tickled him. Then he turned to look to Jess. And then an extraordinary thing happened; the sort of thing which does not happen save in the life of a dingo; the thing, in short, that couldn't happen, but that just is, sometimes. That dingo's glazing eyes

opened wide, and looked at Finn's back. Then the slain dingo (Finn had almost torn out its throat) dragged itself to its feet and staggered off like a drunken man toward the bush. A feeble snarl escaped from Jess, whose head faced this way. Finn, who had been licking her, wheeled like a cat, and in that amazing moment saw the dingo he supposed he had killed staggering towards the scrub thirty paces distant. Five seconds later the still living dingo was on its back, and its throat was being scattered over the surrounding ground. In his fury Finn did actually tear out the beast's jugular vein, practically severing the head from the trunk, smashing the vertebrae, and tearing open the chest of the dead creature as well.

When Wallaby Bill came to look at that corpse some hours later he said--

"Well, by ghost! If I didn't tell that Wolf this very morning that he was a mighty good sort. Wolf, you can say I said that John L. Sullivan and Peter Jackson, and the Wild Man o' Borneo were suckin' infants in arms to you. My colonial oath, but that blessed dingo has been killed good an' plenty, and a steam-hammer couldn't kill him no more!"

There was a wallaby lying beside the fire, Finn having been too busy licking his own wounds and comforting Jess to think of feeding, though common prudence had reminded him to bring in his kill from the edge of the clear patch. Bill gave a deal of time and attention to Jess that night, but Finn was fed royally on roughly cooked wallaby steaks and damper. But even upon this special occasion the Wolfhound, still mindful of his awful circus experience, refused to come within touch of the man.

koala on a branch

CHAPTER XXII

A BREAK-UP IN ARCADIA

Jess's struggles on the day of the dingo fight naturally retarded the healing of her wound; but, before the week was out, Bill was able to remove his rude stitches, and the great gash showed every sign of healing cleanly. Yet, in spite of the kangaroo-hound's wonderful hardihood and her advantages in the matter of pure, healing air, almost another week had passed before she was able to move about round the camp, and a full ten days more were gone before she cared to resume her old activities.

During all this while Finn played the part of very loyal and watchful protector. He had much desired to follow up the trail of the two dingoes that escaped him, but he would not leave Jess long enough at a time to make this possible. The wild folk of the bush situated within a mile of the camp, however, became as much accustomed to his presence as though he were in truth one of themselves, so thoroughly and constantly did he patrol their range during his guardianship of the wounded hound. In this period he learned to know every twig in that strip of country, and practically every creature that lived or hunted there. The snake folk, brown, tiger, carpet, diamond, black, and death adder--he came to know them all, from a very respectful distance; and he studied their habits and methods of progression, and of hunting, with the deepest interest.

For instance, on one occasion, towards evening, Finn saw a carpet-snake pin a big kangaroo-rat, close to a fallen log. With a swiftness which Finn's sharp eyes were unable to follow exactly, the snake twisted two coils of his shining body round the marsupial and crushed the little beast to death. Then, slowly, and as though the process gave him great satisfaction, the snake worked his coils downward, from the head to the

tail of the kangaroo-rat, crunching its body flat and breaking all its joints. Then, very slowly, the snake took its victim's head between its jaws and, advancing first one jaw and then the other, an eighth of an inch at a time, very gradually swallowed the whole animal, the operation occupying altogether a full ten minutes. When the snake had quite finished, Finn leaped upon it from his hiding-place, killing the creature with one snap of his jaws immediately behind the head. Finn's front teeth actually met in the tail of the kangaroo-rat, which had only reached thus far in its progress. Indeed, the tip of the tail was still in the snake's mouth at the time, and Finn was perfectly aware that in this condition the big reptile was not very dangerous. Bill was just dismounting beside the gunyah when Finn arrived, trailing just upon twelve feet of gorged snake beside him.

But this was only one small incident among the daily, almost hourly, adventures and lessons which came to the Wolfhound during this period of Jess's convalescence. He actually caught a half-grown koala, or native bear, one hot afternoon, when Jess was beginning to stroll about the clear patch; and, finding that the queer little creature offered no fight, but only swayed its tubby body to and fro, moaning and wailing and generally behaving like a distressed child, Finn made no attempt to kill it, but simply took firm hold of the loose, furry skin about its thick neck, and dragged it, complaining piteously, through the bush to the gunyah, where he deposited it gingerly upon the ground for Jess's inspection. Bill found the two hounds playing with the koala on his return to camp that night. It was a one-sided kind of game, for the bear only sat up on his haunches between the hounds, rocking to and fro, and sobbing and moaning with grotesque appealing pathos, while Finn and Jess gambolled about him, occasionally toppling him over with a thrust of their muzzles, and growling angrily at him, till he sat up again, when they appeared quite satisfied. Bill sat on his horse and shook with laughter as he watched the game. He thought of killing the bear, for there is a small bounty given on bears' heads. But long laughter moved his good-nature to ignore the bounty, and after a while he called Jess off, and drove the bear away into the scrub. He did not call Finn, because that was unnecessary. Finn withdrew immediately upon Bill's approach.

It was perhaps a week after the bear-baiting episode, when for several days Jess had been following her man by day in the same manner as before her hurt, that both hounds began to notice that Bill was undergoing a change of some sort. He never talked to them now. He took not the smallest notice of Finn, and but rarely looked at Jess. When she approached him of an evening he would gruffly bid her lie down, and once he thrust her from him with his foot when she had nosed close up to him beside the fire. Jess had vague recollections of similar changes in her man having occurred before this time, and she had vague, uncomfortable stirrings which told her that further change of some sort was imminent. This made the kangaroo-hound restless and uneasy, and before long her uneasiness communicated itself to Finn, who immediately began to think of the worst things he knew of--men in leathern coats, iron-barred cages, and the like. All this made the Wolfhound more shy than ever where Bill was concerned, and more like a creature of the real wild in all his movements and general demeanour. He slept a little farther from the gunyah now, and relied almost entirely upon his own hunting for food. Still, he had no wish to leave the camp, and regarded Jess as his fast friend.

One evening the now definitely surly and irritable Bill devoted half an hour to counting and recounting some money in the light of the camp-fire. He had visited the station homestead that day and drawn his pay from the manager.

"Ger-r-router that, damn ye!" he growled at poor Jess when she crept towards him with watchful, affectionate eyes. So Jess got out, to the extent of a dozen yards, with the mark of one of Bill's heavy boots on her glossy flank. She bore not a trace of malice, and would have cheerfully fought to the death for her man at that moment; but she was full of vague distress and whimpering uneasiness; of dim, unhappy presentiments. And in all this Finn shared fully, though without the personal intensity which marked Jess's feeling by reason of her great love of the man. But the uneasiness and the presentiments were shared by the Wolfhound, and he dreamed vividly that night of red-hot irons, the smell of tigers, of wire-bound whip-lashes, and the panic sense of being caged.

In the morning Bill would hardly take the trouble to prepare a breakfast

for himself, and the clothes he wore were not those that Finn had always seen him in before. Bill presently tied up the hanging door of the gunyah and mounted his horse. Jess and Finn followed him as their wont was, but their hearts were sad, and Bill's glowering looks gave them no encouragement. For almost seven miles they followed Bill, and then, after leaping a low "dog-leg" fence, they found themselves in the one wide street of Nargoola township. Bill cantered slowly down the empty road till he came to the "First Nugget Hotel," and there he drew rein and finally hitched his horse's bridle to a verandah post. Then he strode across the verandah and disappeared within the "hotel," and Jess remembered--many things.

Finn remained with Jess, a few yards from the horse, waiting; but whereas the experienced Jess lay down in the dust, Finn stood erect and watchful beside her. He was already rather nearer to the house than he cared about; and the air was heavy with the scent of man and his works. Finn was acutely uncomfortable, and told Jess so as plainly as he could, with a hint as to the advantages of returning to the bush. But Jess urged patience, and tucked her nose under one of her hind-legs.

Presently one or two men came straggling down the street and made overtures to Finn, after standing and gazing upon him with admiring astonishment, and slowly piecing together his connection with Bill and Jess through the horse. Bush folk have a way of arriving at their knowledge of people through horseflesh.

"My oath!" exclaimed one of the men. "He's got a touch of the Tasmanian blood in him, all right. I guess old man Hall's pets have been busy back in the hills there. Wonder how Bill got a-holt o' *him*!"

And then, with every sign of deferential friendliness, the man endeavoured to approach Finn. But though Jess lay still, showing only pointed indifference where the men were concerned, Finn leaped backward like a stag, and kept a good score of paces between the men-folk and himself.

The man who made the remark about Finn and Tasmanian blood had never seen the zebra wolf, as it is sometimes called, owing to the stripes

which often occur in its coat, or he would not have thought of Finn in this connection. The Tasmanian wolf is a heavy, long beast, with a truncated muzzle, short legs, a thin, taper tail, and a very massive shoulder and neck. Wolves of this type have been known to keep six hunting-dogs absolutely at bay, and finally to escape from them. Their appearance is more suggestive of the hyæna than of any such symmetrically beautiful lines as those of Finn's graceful, racy build. But, by reason of his great height and size, Finn was strange to the Nargoola man, and he, having heard of old Jacob Hall's strange importations from Tasmania, at once linked the two kinds of strangeness together in his mind, and saw only further reason for so doing in the fact that he was quite unable to get within a dozen paces of touching the Wolfhound.

Out of consideration for the patient Jess, Finn endured the discomfort of waiting beside the "First Nugget" all through that day, though he never ventured to sit down even for a moment; there among the man-smells and the threatening shadows of the houses, each one of which he regarded as the possible headquarters of a circus, the possible home of a "Professor." But when evening set in, and Jess still showed no sign of forsaking her post, Finn could endure it no longer, and told his friend several times over that he must go; that he would return to the camp in the bush and wait there. The nuzzling touches of Jess's nose said plainly, "Wait a bit, yet! What's your hurry?" But Finn was in deadly earnest now. He refused to be restrained even by a little whimpering appeal, in which Jess made every use she could of the craft of her sex, showing exaggerated signs of weakness and distress. "Well, then, why not come with me?" barked Finn in reply, fidgeting about her on his toes. Jess pleaded for delay, and licked his nose most persuasively. But Finn's mind was made up, and he turned his shoulder coldly upon the bitch, while still waiting for some sign of yielding on her part. But Jess was bound to her post by ties far stronger than any consideration of her own comfort or well-being; and, as a matter of fact, forty Wolfhounds would not have moved her from that verandah--alive. Also, of course, she had not Finn's violent distaste for the neighbourhood of man and his works. She had never been in a circus. She had never been suddenly awakened from complete trust in mankind to knowledge of the existence of mad man-beasts with hot iron bars; so Finn would have told her.

In the end, Finn gave a cold bark of displeasure and trotted off into the gathering twilight, leaping the fence and plunging into the bush the moment he had passed the last house of the township. Half an hour later he killed a fat bandicoot, who was engaged at that moment in killing a tiny marsupial mouse. A quarter of an hour after that, Finn lay down beside the ashes of the fire before the gunyah, his kill between his fore-legs. He rested there for a few minutes, and then, tearing off its furry skin in strips, devoured the greater part of the bandicoot before settling down for the night; as much, that is, as he ever did settle down, these days. His eyes were not often completely closed; less often at night, perhaps, than in the daytime. But he dozed now, out there in the clear patch where the gunyah stood, free of all thoughts of men and cages. And the bush air seemed sweeter than ever to him to-night after his brief stay in the man-haunted township.

wolfhound bringing down kangaroo

CHAPTER XXIII

THE OUTCAST

For nine consecutive days and nights Finn continued to regard the empty gunyah in the clear patch as his home, to eat there, and to rest there, beside the ashes of the fire, or in the shadow of the shanty itself. And still Jess and her man came not, and the Wolfhound was left in solitary possession. Once, when the heat of the day was past, Finn trotted down the trail to the township, and peered long and earnestly through the dog-leg fence in the direction of the "First Nugget." But he saw no trace of Jess or her man; and, for his part, he was glad to get back to the clear patch again, and to take his ease beside the gunyah.

He had recently struck up a more than bowing acquaintance with the koala that he had once dragged through a quarter of a mile of scrub to the gunyah, and was now in the habit of meeting this quaint little bear nearly every day. For his part, Koala never presumed to make the slightest advance in Finn's direction, but he had come to realize that the great Wolfhound wished him no harm, and, though his conversation seldom went beyond plaintive complainings and lugubrious assertions of his own complete in offensiveness, Finn liked to sit near the little beast occasionally, and watch his fubsy antics and listen to his plaint. Koala was rather like the Mad Hatter that Alice met in Wonderland; he was "a very poor man," by his way of it; and, though in reality rather a contented creature, seemed generally to be upon the extreme verge of shedding tears.

Another of the wild folk that Finn met for the first time in his life during these nine days, and continued to meet on a friendly footing, was a large native porcupine, or echidna. Finn was sniffing one afternoon at what he took to be the opening to a rabbit's burrow, when, greatly to his surprise,

Echidna showed up, some three or four yards away, from one of the exits of the same earth. The creature's shock of fretful quills was not inviting, and Finn discovered no inclination to risk touching it with his nose; but, having jumped forward in such a way as to shut Echidna off from his home, they were left perforce face to face for a few moments. During those moments, Finn decided that he had no wish to slay the ant-eating porcupine, and Echidna, for his part, made up his exceedingly rudimentary little mind that Finn was a fairly harmless person. So they sat up looking at one another, and Finn marvelled that the world should contain so curious a creature as his new acquaintance; while Echidna doubtless wondered, in his primitive, prickly fashion, how much larger dogs were likely to grow in that part of the country. Then the flying tail of a bandicoot caught Finn's attention, and the passing that way of an unusually fat bull-dog ant drew Echidna from reflection to business, and the oddly ill-matched couple parted after their first meeting. After this, they frequently exchanged civil greeting when their paths happened to cross in the bush.

But, unlike the large majority of Australia's wild folk, Finn was exclusively a carnivorous animal, and this fact rather placed him out of court in the matter of striking up acquaintances in the bush, since meetings with the Wolfhound were apt, as a general thing, to end in that very close form of intimacy which involves the complete absorption of the lesser personality into the greater, not merely figuratively, but physically. Finn might, and frequently did, ask a stray bandicoot, or rabbit, or kangaroo-rat to dinner; but by the time the meal was ended, the guest was no more; and so the acquaintance could never be pursued further. Finn would have been delighted, really, to make friends with creatures like the bandicoot people, and to enjoy their society at intervals--when he was well fed. But the bandicoots and their kind could never forget that they were, after all, food in the Wolfhound's eyes, and it was not possible to know for certain exactly when his appetite was likely to rise within him and claim attention--and bandicoots. Therefore, full or empty, hunting or lounging, Finn was a scourge and an enemy in the eyes of these small folk, and, as such, a person to be avoided at all cost, and at all seasons.

man on horseback waving whip at wolfhound

Spurring his horse forward.

The hunting in the neighbourhood of the gunyah was still amply sufficient for Finn's needs; and, as he continually expected the return of Bill and Jess, he did not forage very far from the clear patch. He generally dozed and rested beside the humpy during the afternoon, preparatory to hunting in the dusk for the kill that represented his night meal. It was on the evening of his tenth day of solitude, and rather later than his usual hour for the evening prow, that Finn woke with a start in his place beside the gunyah to hear the sound of horse's feet entering the clear patch from the direction of the station homestead. There was no sign of Jess that nose or eye or ear could detect, but Finn told himself as he moved away from the gunyah that this was doubtless Bill, and that Jess would be likely to follow. As his custom was, where Bill was concerned, Finn took up his stand about five-and-twenty paces from the humpy, prepared gravely to observe the boundary-rider's evening tasks: the fire-lighting, and so forth. As the new-comer began to dismount, or rather, as he began to think of dismounting, he caught a dim glimpse of Finn's figure through the growing darkness. It was only a dim glimpse the man caught, and he took Finn for a dingo, made wondrous large in appearance, somehow, by the darkness. He was both astonished and exceedingly indignant that a dingo should have the brazen impudence to stand and stare at him, within thirty yards of camp, too. In his hand he carried a stock-whip, with its fifteen-foot fall neatly coiled about its taper end. Swinging this by the head of its fall, he flung it with all his might at Finn, at the same time rising erect in the saddle and spurring his horse forward at the gallop to ride the supposed dingo down.

"G-r-r-r, you thieving swine! I'll teach ye!"

The voice was strange to Finn, and very hoarse and harsh. The Wolfhound cantered lightly off, and the rider followed him right into the scrub before wheeling his horse and turning back toward the camp. Before he moved Finn gave one snarling growl; and the reason of that was that the heavy butt-end of the stock-whip handle had caught him fairly in the ribs and almost taken his breath away.

From the shelter of the bush, Finn peered for a long while at the camp from which he had been driven; and as he peered his mind held a tumult of conflicting emotions. He saw the man gather twigs and light a fire, just as Bill had been wont to do. But he knew now that the man was not Bill. He heard the man growling and swearing to himself, just as a creature of the wild does sometimes over its meals. As a matter of fact, this particular man had been removed from a post that he liked and sent to this place, because Bill had left the district; and he was irritable and annoyed about it. Otherwise he probably would not have been so savage in driving Finn off. But the Wolfhound had no means of knowing these things.

All his life long, up till the time of his separation from the Master, Finn had been treated with uniform kindness and consideration, save during one very brief interval in Sussex. Then, for months, he had been treated with what seemed to him utterly purposeless and reasonless cruelty and ferocity. From that long-drawn-out martyrdom had sprung his deep-rooted mistrust of man. But it had been reserved for Wallaby Bill's successor to implant in Finn's mind the true spirit of the wild creature, by the simple process of driving him forth from the neighbourhood of civilization--such as it was--into the bush. Finn had been cruelly beaten; he had been tortured in the past. He had never until this evening been driven away from the haunts of men.

The writer of these lines remembers having once been driven himself, under a shower of sticks and stones, from a village of mountain-bred Moors who saw through his disguise. This being driven, hunted, shooed out into the open with blows and curses and scornful maledictions, is a singularly cowering sensation, at once humiliating and embittering. It is unlike any other kind of hostile treatment. It affected Finn more deeply and powerfully than any punishment could have affected him. Though infinitely less painful and terrible than the sort of interviews he had had with the Professor in his circus prison, it yet bit deeper into his soul, in a way; it produced an impression at least equally profound. He desired none of man's society, and during all the time that he had regarded the camp in that clearing as his home, he had never sought anything at man's hands, nor approached man more nearly than a distance of a

dozen paces or so. But now he was savagely given to understand that even the neighbourhood of the camp was no place for him; that it was forbidden ground for him. He was driven out into the wild with contumely, and with the contemptuous sting of the blow of something flung at him. It was no longer a case of man courting him, while he carefully maintained an attitude of reserve and kept his distance. Man had set the distance, and definitely pronounced him an alien; driven him off. Man was actively hostile to him, would fling something at him on sight. Man declared war on him, and drove him out into the wild. Well, and what of the wild?

The wild yielded him unlimited food and unlimited interest. The wild was clean and free; it hampered him in no way; it had offered no sort of hostile demonstration against him. Nay, in a sense, the wild had paid court to him, shown him great deference, bowed down before him, and granted him instant lordship. (If Finn thought at all just now of the snake people, it was of the large non-venomous kind, of which he had slain several.) Altogether, it was with a curiously disturbed and divided mind, in which bitterness and resentment were uppermost, that the Wolfhound gazed now at the man sitting in the firelight by Bill's gunyah. And then, while he gazed, there rose up in him kindly thoughts and feelings regarding Jess, when she had played with him beside that fire; regarding Bill, when he had talked at Finn in his own friendly admiring way, and tossed the Wolfhound food, food which Finn had always eaten with an appearance of zest and gratitude (even when not in the least need of food) from an instinctive sense of *noblesse oblige*, and of the courtesy which came to him with the blood of a long line of kingly ancestors. Vague thoughts, too, of the Master drifted through Finn's mind as he watched the stranger at his supper; and, somehow, the circle of firelit grass attracted. Forgiveness came natural to the Wolfhound and, for the moment, he forgot the humiliation and the bitterness of being driven out as a creature of the wild, having no right to trespass upon the human environment.

Slowly, not with any particular caution, but with stately, gracious step, Finn moved forward toward the firelight, intending to take up his old resting-place, perhaps a score of paces from the fire. No sooner had Finn entered the outermost ring of dim firelight than the man looked up and

saw, not the whole of him, but the light flickering on his legs.

"Well, I'll be teetotally damned if that ain't the limit!" gasped the man, as he sprang to his feet. He snatched a three-foot length of burning sapling from the fire and, rushing forward, flung it so truly after the retreating Wolfhound that it fell athwart his neck, singeing his coat and enveloping him from nose to tail in a cloud of glowing sparks. A stone followed the burning wood, and the man himself, shouting and cursing, followed the stone. But he had no need to run. The flying sparks, the smell of burned hair, the horrible suggestion of the red-hot iron bar--these were amply sufficient for Finn, without the added humiliation of the stone, and the curses, and the man's loud, blundering footfalls. The Wolfhound broke into a gallop, shocked, amazed, alarmed, and beyond words embittered. He snarled as he ran, and he ran till the camp was a mile behind him, beyond scent and hearing.

There was no mistaking this for anything but what it was. This was being driven out of the human world into the world of the wild with a vengeance. The burning sapling made a most profound impression upon Finn, and roused bitter hostility and resentment in him. The stock-whip and the stone were as nothing beside this thing--this fire that had been flung at him. From time immemorial men have frightened and chased wolves from their chosen neighbourhood with burning faggots. The thing is being done to-day in the world's far places; it was being done thousands of years before our era began. Finn had never before experienced it, and yet, in some vague way, it seemed he had known of such a thing. His ancestors for fifteen hundred years had been the admired companions and champions of the leaders among men. But a thousand years before that--who knows? Our domestic pet dogs of to-day adhere still to a few of the practices (having no bearing upon their present lives) of their forbears of many, many centuries back. Certain it is that nothing else in his life had been quite so full of hostile significance for Finn as this fact of his having been driven out from the camp in the clear patch with a faggot of burning wood. This was man's message to him; thus, then, he was sent to his place, and his place was the wild. Well!

The wild folk of that particular section of the Tinnaburra country, though they live to be older than the most aged cockatoo in all Australia, will

never, never forget the strange happenings of that night, which they will always remember as the night of the madness of the Giant Wolf--only they thought of him as the Giant Dingo. For four mortal hours the Irish Wolfhound, who had been driven out from the haunts of men, raged furiously up and down a five-mile belt of Tinnaburra country, slaying and maiming wantonly, and implanting desperate fear in the hearts of every living thing in that countryside.

Once, in the farthest of his gallops, he reached the fringe of the wild, rocky hill country which lies behind this belt; and there, as luck would have it, he met in full flight one of the two dingoes that had escaped him on the day of the attack upon wounded Jess. It was an evil chance for that dingo. A fanged whirlwind smote him, and rended him limb from limb before he realized that the devastating thing had come, scattering his vital parts among the scrub and tearing wildly at his mangled remains. A mother kangaroo was surprised by the ghostly grey fury, at some distance from the rest of her small mob, and, though she fought with the fury of ten males of her species (bitterly conscious of the young thing glued to the teat in her pouch), she was left a torn and trampled mass of scarcely recognizable fur and flesh, crushed among scrub-roots. Lesser creatures succumbed under the blinding stabs of Finn's feet; and once he leaped, like a cat, clear into the lower branches of a bastard oak tree, and pinned a 'possum into instant death before swinging back to earth on the limb's far side. He killed that night from fury, and not to eat; and when he laid him down to rest at length, on the rocky edge of a gully fully four miles from the camp, there was not a living thing in that district but felt the terror of his presence, and cowered from sight or sound of his flying feet and rending, blood-stained fangs. It was as the night of an earthquake or a bush fire to the wild folk of that range; and the cause and meaning of it all was that Finn, the Irish Wolfhound, had been hunted out of the men-folk's world into the world of the wild people.

koala looking down from branch

CHAPTER XXIV

A LONE BACHELOR

If Finn had deliberately thought out a bad way of beginning his life as one of the wild folk, who have no concern at all with humans, he could have devised nothing much worse, or more disadvantageous to himself, than the indulgence of his wild burst of Berserker-like fury, after being driven out of the clear patch. And of this he was made aware when he set forth the next morning in quest of a breakfast. Every one of his hunting trails in the neighbourhood of the encampment he ranged with growing thoroughness and care, without finding so much as a mouse with which to satisfy his appetite. Even Koala and Echidna were nowhere to be found. It was as though a blight had descended upon the countryside, and the only living thing Finn saw that morning, besides the crows, was a laughing jackass on the stump of a blasted stringy-bark tree, who jeered at him hoarsely as he passed. Disconsolate and rather sore, as the result of his frenzied exertions of the night, Finn curled himself up in the sandy bed of a little gully and slept again, without food. The many small scavengers of the bush had already made away with the remains of the different creatures he had slain during his madness.

Finn did not know it, but hundreds of small bright eyes had watched him as he ranged the trails that morning; and the most of these eyes had in them the light of resentment, as well as fear. Finn had been guilty of real crime according to the standards of the wild; and, had he been a lesser creature, swift punishment would have descended upon him. As it was, he was left to work out his own punishment by finding that his hunting was ruined. These wild folk, who were judging Finn now, tacitly admitted the right of all flesh-eating creatures to kill for food. But wilful slaughter, particularly when accompanied by all the evidences of reckless fury, was a crime not readily to be forgiven, for it struck at the very roots of the wild

folk's social system. It was not merely a cruel affliction for those needlessly slain, and their relatives (some of whom depended for life upon their exertions); but it was an affliction for all the rest, in that it spoiled hunting for the carnivorous, rendered feeding extremely difficult for the non-carnivorous, and generally upset the ordered balance of things which made life worth living for the wild people of that range. It was as disturbing to them, and more lastingly so, by reason of the comparative slenderness of their resources, as the passage through a town of an armed giant, who was also a thief and a murderer, would be to humans. Finn had been feared and respected in that corner of the Tinnaburra; while, by some of the wild folk who, from one cause or another, were able to afford the indulgence in such an emotion, he had been admired. He was now feared and hated.

Now the hatred of some thousands of living creatures, even though they may all of them be lesser creatures than oneself, is a fearsome thing. Just as the wild people's methods of direct communication are more limited than ours, so their indirect methods are more perfect, more impressive, and swifter than ours. A drawing-room full of men and women have before now shown themselves tolerably capable in the matter of conveying a sense of their dislike for some one person. But humans waste a lot of their telepathic power in speech, and their most offensive method of conveying unspoken hatred to its object and making him feel an outcast, is as nothing by comparison with the wild folk's achievements in this direction. If you have ever studied the life of a kennel of hounds, for example, when the pack has made up its corporate mind that one of its members is for some reason unworthy of its traditions, you will remember what a masterly exposition you saw of the art of freezing out. The offending animal, unless removed in time, will positively wilt away and die under the withering blast of unspoken hatred and scorn with which it is encompassed. And hounds, from their long intercourse with talkative humans, have lost half their skill in this respect. The wild kindred have a way of making hatred tangible, perceptible in the air, and in inanimate nature. They can almost bewitch the flesh from off the hated creature's bones without ever looking at him, if a sufficient number of them are in agreement in their hating.

When Finn rose from his day sleep it was to realization of the uncomfortable fact that he was stark empty of food. (His first ejection from the camp on the previous evening had occurred before the evening kill, and, after the second ejection, Finn had been too furious to think of eating.) The next thing he realized--and this was before he had walked many hundred yards through the falling light of late afternoon--was the solid atmosphere of hatred which surrounded him in his own range of bush. He did not get the full sting of it at first--that bit into him gradually during the night but he was aware of its existence almost at once. And he found it singularly daunting. True, he was the undisputed lord of that range. No creature lived there that could think of meeting him in single combat. But the concentrated and silent hatred of the entire populace was none the less a thing to chill the heart even of a giant Irish Wolfhound.

The silence of the ghostly bush, in that brief half-light which preceded darkness, spoke loudly and eloquently of this hatred and resentment. The empty run-ways of the little grass-eating animals were full of it. The still trees thrust it upon Finn as he threaded in and out among their hoary trunks. The sightless scrub glared hatred at him till the skin twitched over his shoulders, and he took to flinging swift glances to left and right as he walked--glances but little in keeping with his character as hunter, and more suggestive of the conduct of the lesser hunted peoples. When a long streamer of hanging bark rustled suddenly behind Finn, he wheeled upon it with a snarl; and the humiliation of his discovery of what had startled him partook of the nature of fear, when his gaze met the coldly glittering eyes of a bush-cat (whose body he could not discern in that dim light) that glared down at him from twenty feet above his head.

It was with a sense of genuine humility, and something like gratitude, that Finn met Koala a few minutes later, passing hurriedly--for him--between the trunks of the two trees in which he made his home at that time. Koala stopped at once when Finn faced him--not from any desire for conversation, but from fear to move--and waved his queer little hands in an apparent ecstasy of grief and perturbation, while protesting, as usual, what a lamentably poor and wholly inoffensive person he was, and what a tragic and dastardly act it would be if any one should hurt him. Finn

whispered through his nose a most friendly assurance that he had too much respect and affection for Koala to think of harming him, and the little bear sat up on his haunches to acknowledge this condescension, tearfully, while reiterating the time-honoured assertion that there was no more inoffensive or helpless creature living than himself. With a view to establishing more confidence Finn lay down on his chest, with fore-legs outstretched, and began to pump Koala regarding the chilling attitude of all the people of that range towards himself. In his own dolorous fashion Koala succeeded in conveying to Finn what the Wolfhound already knew quite well in his heart of hearts, that the attitude he complained of was simply the penalty of his running amuck on the previous night. Finn gathered that the native-born wild people would never forgive him or relax their attitude of silently watchful hatred; but that there were some rabbits who were feeding in the open a little farther on, in the neighbourhood of the clear patch.

Finn thanked Koala for his information, with a little forward movement of the muzzle, and walked off in a rather cheerless mood, while the bear wrung his little hands and moaned, preparatory to ascending the trunk of the giant red-gum upon whose younger leaves he meant to sup before retiring for the night in one of its hollow limbs. It was not for any pleasure in hunting, but because he was very empty, that Finn proceeded in the direction indicated by the bear. He had already developed the Australian taste in the matter of rabbits, and regarded their flesh with the sort of cold disfavour which humans reserve for cold mutton on its second appearance at table. Still, he was hungry now, and when he had stalked and killed the fattest of the bunch of rabbits he found furtively grazing a quarter of a mile from the clear patch, he carried it well away into the bush and devoured it steadily, from the hind-quarters to the head, after the fashion of his kind, who always begin at the tail-end of their meals. It was noticeable, by the way, that Finn approached the neighbourhood of the clear patch with reluctance, and got right away from it as quickly as possible.

During a good part of that night Finn strolled about the familiar tract of bush, which he had ranged now for many weeks, observing and taking note of all the many signs which, though plain reading enough for him,

would have been quite illegible to the average man. And he decided that what he saw was not good, that it boded ill for his future comfort and well-being. The simple fact was that he had outraged all the proprieties of the wild in that quarter, and was being severely ostracised in consequence. The lesser creatures were still sharper of scent and hearing than he was, and their senses all made more acute by their fear and indignation, they succeeded in keeping absolutely out of the Wolfhound's sight. It was shortly after midnight when a crow and a flying-fox saw Finn curl down to sleep in his sandy gully, and, by making use of the curious system of animal telepathy, of which even such ingenious humans as Mr. Marconi know nothing, they soon had the news spread all over the range. The lesser marsupials and other groundlings were glad to have this intelligence, and the approach of dawn found them all busily feeding, watchful only with regard to the ordinary enemies among their own kind, the small carnivorous animals and the snake people. Indeed, they fed so busily that a pair of wedge-tailed eagles who descended among them with the first dim approach of the new day, obtained fat breakfasts almost without looking for them, a fact which, unreasonably enough, earned new hatred for Finn among the circle upon which the eagles swooped.

"If that great brute had not obliged us to feed so hurriedly, *this* wouldn't have happened!" a mother bandicoot thought, as she gazed out tremulously from her den under a rotten log upon the specks of hair and blood which marked the spot where, a few moments before, that fine strapping young fellow, her only son, had been busily chewing grubs.

For another three days Finn continued in his old hunting-ground, and during the whole of that time he had to content himself with a diet consisting exclusively of rabbit meat. Indeed, during the last couple of days he found that even the despised rabbit required a good deal of careful stalking, so deeply had the fear and hatred of the Wolfhound penetrated into the minds and hearts of that particular wild community. If it had not been for the rabbits' incorrigible habit of forgetting caution during the hours of twilight and daybreak, Finn might have gone hungry altogether. Apart from their hatred and resentment, the wild people of that range felt that the giant's madness might return to him at any moment, and that for this reason alone it would be unsafe to permit of any

relaxation in their attitude towards him.

On the fourth evening, with a rather sad heart, Finn turned his back on the familiar trails, and hunted west and by south from the little gully in which he slept, heading toward the back ranges and the stony foot of Mount Desolation, that is. For a mile or more, even in this direction, he found that his evil fame preceded him, and no good hunting came his way. But presently a flanking movement to the eastward was rewarded by a glimpse of a fat wallaby-hare, which Finn stalked with the most exquisite patience, till he was able to spring upon it with a snap of his great jaws that gave instantaneous and everlasting sleep. Finn carried this fat kill back to his den, and feasted right royally that night for the first time since he was expelled from the purlieus of the gunyah and the easy-going old life. These few days had changed the Wolfhound a good deal. He walked the trails now with far less of gracious pride and dignity, and more of eager, watchful stealth than he had been wont to use. He walked more silently, he stalked more carefully, and sprang more swiftly, and bit more fiercely. He was no longer the amateur of the wild life, but an actual part of it, and subject to all its laws and customs.

Thus it was that, in the afternoon of the day following that of his first hunt outside his own range, he leaped in a single instant from full sleep to fullest wakefulness in response to the sound of a tiny twig rolling down the side of his little gully. There, facing him from the western lip of the gully, with a rather eager, curious, inviting sort of look upon her intelligent face, stood a fine, upstanding, red-brown female dingo, or warrigal. The stranger stood fully twenty-three inches high at the shoulder, and was unusually long in the body for such a height--thirteen inches less than Finn's shoulder height it is true, but yet about the same measurement as a big foxhound and of greater proportionate length. Her ruddy brown tail was bushy and handsome, and at this moment she was carrying it high and flirtatiously curled. Also, she wagged it encouragingly when Finn's eyes met her own, which were of a pale greenish hue. Her hind feet were planted well apart; she stood almost as a show cob stands, her tail twitching slightly, and her nostrils contracting and expanding in eloquent inquiry. She had heard of Finn some time since, this belle of the back ranges, but it was only on that day, when Nature recommended her to

find a mate, that she had thought of coming in quest of the great Wolfhound. Now she eyed him, from her vantage-point, fearlessly, and with invitation in every line of her lissom form.

Finn sniffed hard, and began a conciliatory whine which terminated in a friendly bark, as he scrambled up the gully side, his own thirty-inch tail waving high above the level of his haunches. Warrigal fled--for ten paces, wheeling round then, in kittenish fashion, and stooping till her muzzle touched the ground between her fore feet. But no sooner had Finn's nose touched hers than the wild coquette was off again, and this time a little farther into the bush. To and fro and back and forth the shining bushy-coated dingo played the great Wolfhound with even more of coquettishness than is ever displayed in human circles; and twilight had darkened into night when, at length, she yielded herself utterly to his masterful charms, and nominally surrendered to the suit she had actually won. As is always the case with the wild folk, the courtship was fiery and brief, but one would not say that it was the less passionately earnest for that; and, at the time, Warrigal seemed to Finn the most gloriously handsome and eminently desirable of all her sex.

When their relations had grown temperately fond and familiar they took to the western trail together, and presently Warrigal "pointed" a big bandicoot for Finn, and Finn, delighted to exhibit his prowess, stalked and slew the creature with a good deal of style. Then the two fed together, Finn politely yielding the hind-quarters to his inamorata. And then they lay and licked and nosed, and chatted amicably for an hour. After this, Warrigal rose and stretched her handsome figure to its full length--there was not a white hair about her, nor any other trace of cross-breeding--her nose pointing west and by south a little, for the back ranges, whence she came. When she trotted sedately off in that direction Finn followed her as a matter of course, though he had never been this way before. There were no longer any ties which bound him to his old hunting-ground. It was not in nature to spare a thought for lugubrious Koala or prickly Echidna, when Warrigal waved her bushy tail and trotted on before. Finn had never before been appealed to by the scent of any of the wild people, but there was a subtle atmosphere about Warrigal's thick red-brown coat which drew him to her strongly.

dingo and wolfhound meeting

CHAPTER XXV

MATED

Finn knew the life of his own range pretty well, and was more familiar with the life of the wild generally than any other hound of his race has been for very many generations. Yet, when he contentedly took up the back-blocks trail with Warrigal, after their supper together upon the bandicoot he had slain, Finn was absolutely and entirely ignorant of the life of the world in which the handsome dingo had spent her days and attained her high position as the acknowledged belle and beauty of her range. One hour afterwards, however, he knew quite a good deal about it.

Possibly from a sense of gallantry, or it may have been because the trail was a new one to him, Finn trotted slightly behind his mate, his muzzle about level with her flank. His great bulk was less noticeable now in relation to the size of his companion, partly by reason of the coquettish pride which puffed out Warrigal's fine coat and the lofty way in which she pranced along, and partly because Finn had now adopted his usual trailing deportment and exaggerated it a little, owing to his being on a strange trail. He went warily, with hind-quarters carried well under him ready for springing, and that suggestion of tenseness about his whole body which made it actually, as well as apparently, lower to the ground than when he stood erect. As for Warrigal, she trod a home trail, and one in which she was accustomed to meet with deferential treatment from all and sundry. The law of her race prevented a male dingo from attacking her, and no female in that countryside would have cared to face Warrigal in single combat.

The country grew wilder and more rugged as the newly-mated pair advanced, and as they drew near the foot-hills surrounding Mount

Desolation, the bush thinned out, and the ground became stony, with here and there big lichen-covered boulders standing alone, like huge bowls upon a giants' green. Then came a patch of thin, starveling-looking trees, mere bones of trees, half of whose skin was missing. Suddenly Warrigal gave a hard, long sniff, and then a growl of warning to Finn. She would have barked if she had known how, but her race do not bark, though they can growl and snarl with the best, and, besides, have a peculiar cry of their own which is not easy to describe other than as something midway between a howl and a roar. Finn recognized the growl as warning clearly enough, and all his muscles were gathered together for action on the instant; but he had no idea what sort of danger to expect, or whether it was danger or merely the need of hunting care that his mate had in mind. He knew all about it some two seconds later, however.

The starveling trees, with the mean, wiry scrub that grew between them, had served as cover for two lusty males of Warrigal's tribe--cousins of hers they were, as a matter of fact, though she had never known the kinship--both of whom had waked that day to the fact that Warrigal was eminently desirable as a mate. Now, in one instant, they both flew at Finn, one from either side of the trail on which he trotted with Warrigal. Warrigal herself slid forward, a swiftly-moving shadow, her brush to the earth, her hind-quarters seeming to melt into nothingness, as the jaws of her cousins flashed behind her on either side of Finn's throat. Then, when there were a dozen paces between herself and her new mate, she wheeled and stopped, sitting erect on her haunches, a well-behaved and deeply interested spectator.

Finn suffered for his ignorance of what to expect, as in the wild all folk must suffer for ignorance. It is only in our part of the world that a series of protecting barriers has been erected between the individual and the natural penalties attaching to ignorance and wrong-doing. Some of these barriers are doubtless sources of justifiable pride, but in the wild the confirmed loafer, for example, the vicious and idle parasite, is an unknown institution. The same practically holds good even of humans, when they live close to Nature in a stern climate, as, for instance, on the Canadian prairie; but never in great cities, or other places from which

Nature is largely shut out.

The penalty Finn paid was this, that he was cut to the bone upon his right and his left shoulders by the flashing teeth of his mate's stalwart young cousins. They had both aimed for the more deadly mark, the throat, but were not accustomed to foes of Finn's great height, and had not gauged his stature correctly as he trotted down the trail. Their own shoulder-bones were a good foot nearer the earth than Finn's, and his neck towered above the point their jaws reached when they sprang. Wolf-like, they leaped aside after the first blow, making no attempt to hold on to their prey. And now, before the keenly watchful eyes of Warrigal, there began the finest fight of her experience. Regarding her mate's good looks she had more than satisfied herself; here was her opportunity to judge of his prowess, in a world wherein all questions are submitted to the arbitrament of tooth and claw in physical combat. And keenly the handsome dingo judged; watchfully she weighed the varying chances of the fray; not a single movement in all the dazzling swiftness of that fight but received her studious and calculating attention, her expert appraisal of its precise value. As the fight progressed from its marvellously sudden beginning, her unspoken comments ran somewhat after this fashion--

"He is not so quick as our kind--as yet. He is marvellously strong. He is not smart enough in the retreat after biting. His jaws are like the men-folk's steel traps, when they do get home. He misses the leg-hold every time, and that is surely foolish, for he could cripple them there in an instant. My teeth and claws! but what a neck he must have! It is reckless the way he leaves his great legs unguarded. Save me from traps and gins! Saw dingo ever such a mighty leap!"

In the first moments of that fight the two dingoes were half drunk from pride. It seemed certain to them that they would easily overcome the giant stranger. Indeed, Black-tip, the bigger of the two, who had a black bush at the end of his fine tail, actually seized the opportunity of taking a lightning cut at one of the fore-legs of his cousin in the confusion of a rush in upon the Wolfhound, feeling that it was as well to get what start he could in dealing with the remaining claimant for Warrigal's hand. He counted the Wolfhound dead, and wanted to reduce his cousin's chances

in the subsequent fight that he knew would be waged to secure possession of Warrigal. It was sharp practice, according to our standards in such matters, but perfectly justifiable according to the laws of the wild, where the one thing demanded is ultimate success--survival. But, though morally justified, Black-tip was actually at fault, and guilty of a grave error of judgment.

wolfhound fighting dingoes

He was backing gradually towards a boulder beside the trail.

Finn took much longer than one of Black-tip's kindred would have taken to realize the exact nature of his situation and to act accordingly; but, as against that, he was a terrible foe when once he did settle down to work, and, further, his mighty muscles and magnificent stature, though they could not justify either recklessness or slackness--which nothing ever can justify in the wild--did certainly enable him to take certain liberties in a fight which would have meant death for a lesser creature. But Finn had been learning a good deal lately, and now, once he had got into his stride, so to say, he fought a good deal more in wolf fashion than he would have done a few months earlier; and, in addition, he had his own old fashion and powers the dingoes knew not of in reserve.

At first, he snapped savagely upon one side only, leaving his unprotected side open to the swift lacerations of Black-tip's sharp fangs. But even then he was backing gradually towards a boulder beside the trail, and the moment he felt the friendly touch of the lichen-covered stone behind him his onslaught became double-edged and terrible as forked lightning.

He was kept too busy as yet to think of death-blows; both dingoes saw to that for him, their jaws being never far from one side or the other of his neck or his fore-legs. But though, as yet, he gave them nothing of his great weight, he was slashing them cruelly about the necks and shoulders, and once--when Warrigal swore by her teeth and claws it was--he managed to pluck Black-tip's cousin bodily from the earth and fling him by the neck clean over a low bush. A piece of the dingo's neck, by

the way, remained in Finn's jaws, and spoiled half the effect of his next slash at Black-tip's shoulder. But from that moment Black-tip lost for good and all his illusion in the matter of the stranger being as good as dead.

When the sorely wounded dingo, who had been flung aside as if he were a rat, returned to the fray his eyes were like red coals, and his heart was as full of deadly venom as a death-adder's fangs. His neck was tolerably red, too; it was from there that his eyes drew their bloody glare. He crawled round the far side of the boulder, close to the ground, like a weasel, and, despairing of the throat-hold, fastened his fangs into one of Finn's thighs, with a view to ham-stringing, while the Wolfhound was occupied in feinting for a plunge at Black-tip's bristling neck. It was the death-hold that Finn aimed at, but the sudden grip of fire in his thigh was a matter claiming instant attention; and it was then that the Wolfhound achieved the amazing leap that made Warrigal swear by traps and gins. He leaped straight up into the air, with the sorely wounded cousin hanging to his thigh, and Black-tip snapping at his near fore-leg, and in mid-air he twisted his whole great body so that he descended to earth again in a coil, with his mighty jaws closed in the throat of Black-tip's cousin. His fangs met, he gave one terrible shake of his massive neck and head, and when the dingo fell from his jaws this time, two clear yards away, its throat was open to the night air, and it had entered upon the sleep from which there is no awakening.

Finn was bleeding now from a dozen notable wounds, but it was not in nature that Black-tip single-handed should overcome him, and Black-tip knew it. The big dingo ceased now to think of killing, and concentrated his flagging energies solely upon two points--getting away alive and putting up a fight which should not disgrace him in Warrigal's watchful eyes. He achieved his end, partly by virtue of his own pluck and dexterity, and partly because his smell reminded Finn of Warrigal, and so softened the killing lust in the Wolfhound.

Finn could handle the one dingo with great ease, even wounded as he was, and, because of that smell, he had no particular desire to kill. Indeed, he rolled Black-tip over once, and could have torn the throat from him, but caught him by the loose skin and coat instead and flung him aside with a ferocious, growling snarl, in the tail-end of which there was a

note which said plainly, "Begone, while you may!"

And Black-tip, with life before him and desire in his heart where Warrigal was concerned, was exceedingly glad of the chance to bound off into the scrub with a long, fierce snarl, which he hoped would place him well in Warrigal's esteem, though he was perfectly aware that it could not deceive Finn.

Then, when it was quite clear that Black-tip had really gone, having taken all the fight he could stand, Warrigal stepped forward mincingly and fell to licking Finn's wounds, with strongly approving tenderness and assiduity. Her mate had fought valiantly and doughtily for Warrigal, and she was proud of him; proud, too, of her own perspicacity and allurements in having drawn him to herself. A savage creature was Warrigal and a brave and quite relentless enemy, the marks of whose fangs more than one fighting member of her race and more than one powerful kangaroo would carry always. But she was very feminine with it all, and the remarks she murmured to her great grey lord, while her solicitous tongue smoothed down the edges of his wounds were sweetly flattering and vastly stimulating to Finn's passion and his pride.

And then, when between the two busy tongues every wound had received its share of healing attention and antiseptic dressing, Warrigal moved slowly off down the trail, throwing a winsome look of unqualified invitation over her right shoulder to Finn, so that the Wolfhound stepped grandly after her, with assumed unconsciousness of his many wounds, as who should say--

"It is nothing, my dear child; nothing at all, this trivial incident by the way. If there are any more champions of your tribe about, let them come on while I am in the vein for such sport."

But, as a matter of fact, though it was true he would cheerfully have fought all night at his mate's bidding, Finn was none the less glad now to have peace and rest, for the dingo champions' methods of attack were marvellously swift and telling, and the wounds they had inflicted, while not very serious, were certainly numerous and sore.

Immediately below the crest of a sharply rising spur of the great mountain they came upon the entrance to Warrigal's own den, which was masked and roofed-in by the spreading roots of a fallen tree. The mouth of the den was narrow and very low for one of Finn's stature, but he bent his aching body gladly and followed his mate in, to find that the den itself was comparatively roomy and capable of accommodating half a dozen dingoes. As a matter of fact, it had been the den of Warrigal's mother, but it was more than a year now since that mother had fallen to a boundary-rider's gun. The father had gone off to another range with a second wife, and Warrigal's brothers and sisters had each been vanquished in turn and given to understand that this den was now the sole and exclusive property of their big sister.

Finn sniffed curiously all round the walls of the den and, finding them permeated with the scent of Warrigal and with that scent only, he lay down there restfully, stretching himself to the full extent of his great length, and sighing out his pleasure in being at ease. Warrigal sat gravely erect beside him, admiring the vast spread of his limbs. From tip of nose to tip of tail he covered practically the whole width of the den, which was a shade over seven and one half feet. The dingo looked over her mate's wounds once more, giving an occasional lick here and there, and then, with a little grunt of gratified pride and content, she curled herself round, after circling three or four times, and went to sleep under the lee of Finn's mighty hind-quarters, her muzzle tucked under the spreading hair of her tail, and one eye, half opened, resting upon her lord.

Two hours later, Warrigal rose softly and went out to inspect the night. She found the world bathed in a shining glory of silken moonlight; bright as day, but infinitely more alluring and mysteriously beautiful. After gazing out at this wonderful panorama for a few minutes and drawing in information through her nostrils of the doings of the wild, Warrigal sat down on her haunches and raised her not very melodious voice in the curious dingo cry, which is a sort of growling howl. Next instant Finn was beside her, with lolling tongue and sensitively questioning nostrils. She gave him one sidelong look which seemed to say, "You here? Why, what an odd coincidence that you also should have waked and come out here! I wonder why you came!" Not but what, of course, she knew perfectly

well what had brought the Wolfhound to her side. She had called of good set purpose, but, in her feminine way, she preferred to let it appear that Finn joined her of his own volition. It may be assumed that the remark she made to him at this point was a comment upon the fineness of the night and the undoubted beauty of that glamorous silvern sheen through which the pair of them gazed out at Tinnaburra.

In the next minute the two began to play together like young cats, there on the sandy ledge of moon-kissed stone that stretched for yards on either side of the den's mouth. Perhaps it was then, rather than in the afternoon hours which came earlier, that Finn courted Warrigal. The stinging of his wounds, caused by the rapid, sinuous movements with which he danced about his mate, seemed only to add zest to his love-making. They were, after all, no more than love-tokens, these fang-marks and scratches, and Finn rejoiced in them as such. He had fought for Warrigal, and was ready and willing to fight for her again. And this his mate was most sweet to him; so deft, so agile, and so swift; so strong and supple, and withal so instant in response to his gallantries. The night air was sweet, too, to headiness, and the moonlight seemed to run like quicksilver in Finn's veins. Certainly, he told himself, this new life in the wild, this life of matehood, was a good thing.

dingoes stalking kangaroo

CHAPTER XXVI

THE PACK AND ITS MASTERS

When Finn took up his abode in the den of his mate, Warrigal, he entered what was to him an entirely new world, and this new world was in fact one of the most interesting corners of the wild in all Australia. For example--

When Finn and Warrigal tired of their play on the flat ledge outside their den, the moon had set, and in the eastern sky there was visible the first grey hint of coming dawn. In that strange, ghostly light, which gave a certain cloak of mystery even to such common objects as tree-stumps and boulders of rock, Finn saw two unfamiliar figures emerge from the scrub below the spur next that of Warrigal's den, and begin slowly to climb toward Mount Desolation itself. There was a deep, steep-sided gully between Finn and these strange figures, but even at that distance the Wolfhound was conscious of a strong sense of hostility toward the creatures he watched. Their scent had not reached him, because the spur they climbed was to leeward, yet his hackles rose as he gazed at the ghostly figures, whose shapes loomed huge and threatening against the violet-grey sky-line. The Wolfhound and his mate were just about to enter their den, and Finn touched Warrigal with his muzzle, "pointing" meaningly at the strangers. Warrigal looked, and though her shoulder hairs did not rise at all, her lips curled backward a little from white fangs as she indicated that these figures were perfectly well known to her.

The foremost of them was of great length and bulk, low to the ground, and a savage in every line of his massive frame. His tail, carried without any curve in it, was smooth and tapering, like a rat's tail; his chest was of immense depth, and his truncated muzzle was carried high, jaws slightly parted, long, yellow tusks exposed. In general outline he was not unlike a

hyæna, but with more of strength and fleetness in his general make-up, more, perhaps, of the suggestion of a great wolf, with an unusually savage-looking head, and an abnormally massive shoulder. From spine to flank, on either side, the strange creature was striped like a zebra, the ground colour of his coat being a light yellowish grey and the stripes black.

This was old Tasman, the Zebra Wolf, who had been turned loose in that countryside six years before with a mate of his species, who had died during the first year of their life in the Tinnaburra. Behind Tasman, burdened with the weight of a fat wallaby which he dragged over one shoulder, marched Lupus, his son, now almost four years old and the acknowledged master of Mount Desolation. Lupus had none of his sire's stripes, and his tail, though not so bushy as a dingo's, was well covered with hair. He was longer in the muzzle and more shapely in the loin than his father. Lupus, in fact, was a half-bred dingo, differing from other dingoes of the Mount Desolation pack only inasmuch as that he was greater than the rest, more massive in trunk and shoulder, more terrible in tooth and claw. His feet were weapons almost as deadly as a bear's feet, by which I mean the feet of the northern and western bear, and not those of inoffensive Koala. His loins and thighs were those of a fleet runner, and his fore-part, in every hair of it, was that of a killer. Tasman was feared on that range rather as a tradition than as a killer; Lupus was feared and obeyed as an actual, living ruler.

It was many months since Warrigal had seen the old wolf Tasman, but Lupus was abroad every night of his life. Also, his eyes, unlike those of his terrible old sire, could face the daylight. All the wild folk knew that Tasman was like an owl by day; light actually hurt him. Lupus was not fond of the light, but he could endure well enough, and kill by it if need be, as was well known. He still shared with his savage old sire the den in which he had been born, deep in the heart of Mount Desolation, and it was stated among the wild folk that he had killed his own mother towards the end of his first year of life, and that he and Tasman had devoured her body during a season of drought and poor hunting. Be that as it may, her blood had given Lupus his rating in the Mount Desolation country as a dingo, and his own prowess and ferocity had given him his unquestioned

rank as leader and master of the pack. He had never openly preyed upon the pack, but he had killed a round half-dozen of its members who dared to thwart him at different times, and the manner of their killing had been such as to form material for ghastly anecdotes with which the mothers of that range frightened their offspring into good and careful behaviour. It was supposed that Tasman did not hunt now, and that Lupus hunted for him, but venturesome creatures of the wild, who had dared to climb the upper slopes of Mount Desolation, claimed to have seen Tasman foraging there after insects and grubs; and as for Lupus, his hunting was sufficiently well known to all on the lower ground. And, in the meantime, though Tasman was credited with very great age, there was no creature in that countryside who would have dared to face the old wolf alone.

It was not very much of all this that Warrigal managed to convey to her mate, as they stared out through the grey mist at these strange creatures, but Finn was profoundly and resentfully impressed by what he did gather from her. The shuddering way in which she wriggled her shoulders and shook her bushy coat before turning into the den for rest after their long play in the moonlight, told Finn a good deal, and it was information which he never forgot. It did not seem fitting to the great Wolfhound that his brave, lissom mate should be moved to precisely that shuddering kind of shoulder movement by the sight of any living thing, and, now, before following her into the den, he stepped well forward to the edge of the flat rock and barked fierce defiance in the direction of old Tasman and his redoubtable son. Lupus dropped his burden in sheer amazement, and father and son both faced round in Finn's direction, and glared at him across the intervening ravine. It was a fine picture they saw through the ghostly, misty grey half-light, which already was getting too strong for Tasman's eyes, over which the nictitating membrane was being drawn nervously to and fro as a mark of irritation.

wolfhound standing on rocky ledge

Finn was standing royally erect.

Finn was standing, royally erect, at the extreme edge of his flat table of

rock, from which the side of the gully sloped precipitately. His tail curved grandly out behind him, carried high, like his massive head. That head was more than fourteen inches long, and when, as now, its jaws were parted to the expression of anger and defiance, and all its wealth of brows and beard were bristling, like the hair of the grandly curving neck behind it, and of the massive shoulders, thirty-six inches above the ground, which supported that neck, the sight of it was awe-inspiring, and a far more formidable picture than any dingo in the world could possibly present. Tasman and Lupus glared at this picture for fully two minutes, while themselves emitting a continuous snarling growl of singular, concentrated intensity and ferocity. This savage snarl was not the least among their weapons of offence and defence. Its ferocity was very cowing in effect, and had before now gone more than half-way towards deciding a combat. It introduced something not unlike paralysis into the muscles and limbs of the lesser creatures of the bush when they heard it; in hunting, it might almost be said to have played the part of a first blow, and a deadly one at that. On this occasion, it merely served to add wrath, and fierceness, and volume to the roar of Finn's deep bay.

As the light in the east strengthened, old Tasman's eyes blinked furiously, and his snarl died down to a savagely irritable grunt, as he turned again to the mountain. Lupus bent his head, still snarling, to pick up his heavy kill, and together the two trailed off up the mountain side to their den, full of angry bitterness. They had not eaten since the small hours of the previous day, and both were anxious to reach the twilit shelter of their stony mountain den, where they would feed before sleeping, among the whitened mouldering bones that told of six long years of hunting and lordship, bones which probably included those of Lupus's own dam. No creature of that range other than themselves had ever seen the inside of this den and lived. No man had ever set his foot there, for the climbing of Mount Desolation was a thankless task for all save such as Tasman and Lupus, who liked its naked ruggedness and its commanding inaccessibility, high above the loftiest of the caves inhabited by other wild folk of the countryside.

Barking fiercely at intervals, Finn watched the savage lords of Mount Desolation ascending, till their forms were lost among the crevices and

boulders of the hillside, and then, with a final, far-reaching roar, he turned and entered the den, where Warrigal sat waiting for him, and softly growling a response to his war-cries. This defiance of the admitted lords of the range was not altogether without its ground of alarm for Warrigal; its utter recklessness made the skin over her shoulders twitch, but it was something to have a mate who could dare so much, even in ignorance. Long after Finn had closed his eyes in sleep, Warrigal lay watching him, with a queer light of pride and admiring devotion in her wild yellow eyes.

The afternoon was well advanced when Finn and Warrigal finally sallied forth from their den in quest of food, though in between short sleeps they had lounged about in the vicinity of the den several times during the morning, and Finn had accustomed himself to the bearings of his new home, and taken in the general lie of the land thereabouts. Now, before they crossed the patch of starveling bush which skirted the foot of their particular ridge, they were approached by Black-tip and two friends of his, who were also preparing for the evening hunt. Warrigal growled warningly as the three dingoes approached, but it seemed that Black-tip had spread abroad news of the coming of the Wolfhound in such a manner as to disarm hostility. It was with the most exaggerated respectfulness that the dingoes circled, sniffing, about Finn's legs, their bushy tails carried deferentially near the ground. Seeing the friendliness of their intentions, Finn wagged his tail at them, whereat they all leaped from him in sudden alarm as though he had snapped. Finn's jaws parted in amusement, and his great tail continued to wag, while he gave friendly greeting through his nostrils, and made it quite clear that he entertained no hostile feeling towards his mate's kindred.

After this the dingoes took heart of grace, and there was a general all-round sniffing which occupied fully ten minutes. Finn stood quite still, his magnificent body erect and stretched to its full length. Occasionally he lowered his head condescendingly to take a sniff at one or other of the dingoes, who were employed in gravely circling about him, as though to familiarize themselves with every aspect of his anatomy, with eyes and noses all busy. During this time Warrigal sat a little to one side, her face wearing an elaborately assumed expression of aloofness, of lofty unconsciousness, and of some disdain. Finally, the whole five of them

trotted off into the bush, and then it was noticeable that Warrigal clung closely to Finn's near side. If any small accident of the trail caused a change in the position of the dingoes, Finn instantly dropped back a pace or two, and a quick look from him was sufficient to send the straying dingo back to his place on the Wolfhound's off side. There was no talk about it; but from the beginning it was clearly understood, first, that Finn was absolutely master there, and, secondly, that place on his near side was strictly reserved for his mate, and for his mate only; that no creature might approach her except through him. The manner in which Finn's will in this matter was recognized and respected was very striking indeed; it meant much, for, from the point of view of the three dingoes, Warrigal appeared at that time in the light of an exceedingly desirable mate, and one for whose favour the three of them would assuredly have fought to the last gasp that night but for the dominating presence of the great Wolfhound.

Finn appeared to lead the hunting party, but its real leader that evening was Warrigal, who had taken note on the previous day of the exact whereabouts of a big mother kangaroo. She now desired two things: a good supper and an opportunity of displaying before the three dingoes the fighting prowess of her lord. Black-tip had had his lesson, as various open wounds on his body then testified, but it was as well that his friends should see something of Finn's might for themselves, apart from the information they had clearly received. That was how Warrigal thought of it, and she knew a good deal about mother kangaroos as well as dingoes. She knew, for instance, that they were more feared by dingoes than the "old men" of their species, and that, even with the assistance of his two friends and herself, Black-tip would not have thought of attacking such prey while there were lesser creatures in plenty to be hunted.

In due course Warrigal winded the mother kangaroo, and conveyed instant warning to Finn and the others by a sudden checking of her pace. Silent as wraiths between the shadowy tree-trunks then, Finn and the four dingoes stalked their prey, describing a considerable circle in order to approach from good cover. To Warrigal's keen disappointment, they found as they topped a little scrub-covered ridge that the mother kangaroo was feeding with a mob of seven, under the guidance of a big, red old-man. Then she conceived the bold plan of "cutting out" the mother kangaroo from the mob, and trusting to Finn to pull her down. This plan she conveyed to her fellow-hunters by means of that telepathic method of communication which is as yet little comprehended by men-folk. One quick look and thrust of her muzzle asked Finn to play his independent part, and another, flung with apparent carelessness across her right shoulder, bade the three dingoes follow her in the work of cutting out.

It was a careful, silent stalk until the hunters were within ten yards of the quarry, and then with a terrifying yowl of triumph, a living rope of dingoes--four of them, nose to tail--was flung between the big mother kangaroo and the rest of the mob. The red old-man gave one panic-smitten look round his flock, and then they were off like the wind, in big twenty-foot bounds. But the mother could not bring herself to leap in their direction by reason of the yowling streak of snapping dingoes which had flung itself

between them. She sprang off at a tangent and, as she made her seventh or eighth bound, terror filled her heart almost to bursting, as a roaring grey cloud swept upon her from her right quarter, and she felt the burning thrust of Finn's fangs in her neck. She sat up valiantly to fight for her life and the young life in her pouch, and her left hind-leg, with its chisel claws, sawed the air like a pump-handle. The dingoes knew that it would be death, for one or two of them, at all events, to face those out-thrust chisels. They surrounded the big beast in a snarling, yowling circle, and gnashed their white fangs together with a view to establishing the paralysis of terror. But they did not advance as yet. Finn slipped once, when he tried to take fresh hold, and in that instant the kangaroo slashed him deeply in the groin. But the wound was her own death warrant, for it filled the Wolfhound with fighting rage, and in another instant there was a broken neck between his mighty jaws and warm blood was running over the red-brown fur of the kangaroo, as her body fell sideways, with Finn upon it.

The three other dingoes approached the kill with Warrigal, but she snarled at them, and a swift turn of Finn's head told them to beware. In the end Warrigal settled down to make a meal at one side of the kangaroo's hind-quarters, Finn took the other side, and the three dingoes were given their will of the fore part. There was more than enough for all, and though, when they left the kill to the lesser carnivora of that quarter, Finn carried a good meal with him between his jaws, it was not that he needed it for himself, but that he wished to place it in the den at Warrigal's disposal; a little attention which earned for him various marks of his mate's cordial approval. She was extremely pleased to have this evidence of Finn's forethoughtfulness as a bread-winner. Instinct told her the value and importance of this quality in a mate. And while she carefully dressed the wound in her lord's groin that night, Black-tip and his friends, with much chop-licking, spread abroad the story of their glorious hunting and of Finn's might as a killer. They vowed that a more terrible fighter and a greater master than Lupus, or than his even more terrible sire, whom few of them had seen, had come to Mount Desolation, and old dingoes shook their grey heads, feeling that they lived in strange and troublous times. But as for Lupus, he was ranging the trails at that moment on an empty stomach in savage quest of no other than this same stranger who

had dared to defy him, and challenge his hitherto unquestioned mastery over the dingoes and lesser wild folk of that range.

dingo and wolfhound entering cave

CHAPTER XXVII

SINGLE COMBAT

Even while he hunted, the irritating thought of the creature who had barked defiantly at him remained with Lupus, and was not softened by the fact that he missed two kills and failed to find other game. As a fact, he was in no real need of killing, for he had fed during the afternoon on the remains of the wallaby he had dragged up the hill early that morning. This was probably why he missed two kills; when empty it was rare indeed for him to miss.

And, now, with irritation added to the anger of his recollection of the Wolfhound, he happened by pure chance upon the warm trail of Warrigal and the others who had accompanied Finn that night. This led him to the remains of the mother kangaroo, where he disturbed some lesser creatures who were supping at their ease. Lupus had no mind to leave bones with good fresh meat on them, and when he turned away again on Finn's trail, the unfamiliar scent of which raised the stiff bristles on his back till he looked like a hyæna, there was nothing much left for the ants or the flesh-eating rats and mice of the bush.

Finn's home trail was still fresh, and Lupus followed it easily, growling to himself as he noted its friendly proximity to the trails he knew well, of Black-tip and Warrigal and the rest. Lupus told himself these dingoes needed a lesson, and should have it. He licked his chops, then, over a recollection of sundry whiffs and glimpses which had interested him of late in Warrigal, and as his nose dropped low over her trail on the near side of Finn's, it was borne in upon Lupus that it would be well for him to have a mate, and that Warrigal would be a pleasing occupant of that post. The stranger must be removed, once and for all. Lupus growled low in his throat. Black-tip and his friends must be cautioned severely. And

then Warrigal should receive high honours; high honours and great favour. So Lupus pieced the matter out in his mind while loping heavily along Finn's trail; while among the starveling trees near the mountain's foot, Black-tip and his friends discussed the new-comer's prowess; while in the den on the first spur Finn lay dozing under the admiring eyes of his mate, who did not greatly care for sleep at night. Regarded as a fighting animal, the thing which really formed the keynote of Lupus's character was the fact that he had never met a creature he could not overcome. He had never tasted defeat, unless, conceivably, in his young days, from old Tasman. It did not occur to him that any creature could face him in serious combat and survive.

Before Lupus touched the first loose stone of the trail leading up the hill to Warrigal's den, the people of the scrub below were all aware of his passage, and Black-tip, with seven other dingoes who did not happen to be away hunting, were following up the same trail, in fan-shaped formation, and at a respectful distance behind the master of the range. Half-way up the rugged side of the spur, his unbeaten insolence betrayed Lupus into what the wild folk considered an unsportsmanlike and stupid mistake. He paused for a moment, and bellowed forth a threatening and peremptory announcement of his coming in the form of a hoarse, grating howl of challenge which could have been heard a mile away. Then he proceeded on his upward way slowly, because he was fully fed, carelessly, because he had never known defeat, but with determination, because he was bent upon ridding the range of one who had flung defiance at him across the gully, and because, the more he thought of it, and recalled various small matters of recent experience and connected with the trail he then followed, the more ardent became his desire to possess Warrigal for a mate.

Warrigal's friendly warning to Finn was not needed. In the same instant that Lupus's hoarse cry fell upon his ears he was awake and alert, and perfectly conscious as to the source of the cry. He knew that it came from the great wolf-dingo, whose passage he had challenged in the dawning of that day. He recognized the voice, and read clearly enough the meaning of the cry. He knew that this was a more considerable enemy than any he had faced as yet, and there was time in the moment of his

waking for regret to flash through his mind that the challenge should have come now, while his whole body was scarred with unhealed wounds, and his left thigh was stiff from the punishing slash of the kangaroo's mailed foot. In the next moment he was outside the mouth of the den, his deep, fierce bark rending the silence of the night. The eight dingoes who followed in Lupus's trail heard the bark, and glanced one at another in meaning comment thereon. Never was a leader of men or beasts more cordially hated than Lupus. There was not a dingo who could call his leadership into question; even the young and daring members of the pack who pretended to scoff at the traditional awe in which Tasman was held, admitted the tyrannical mastership of Lupus as something ever-present and unavoidable; but that by no manner of means lessened their cordial hatred of the fierce half-breed, with his massive neck and shoulders that fangs seemed powerless to hurt, his jaws which were as swift as they were mighty to rend, and his claws which were as terrible as those of an old-man kangaroo, and more deadly in action because he had four sets of them. Black-tip experienced a generous sensation of sympathy and pity for Finn, and so did the two friends of his who had fed that night upon good fresh kangaroo flesh. But they, like all the others, were keen to see the coming fight, and--to act accordingly. The question of what was to become of Warrigal had occurred with interest to each one of them, for she was eminently desirable just then to all her kind.

Fierce, savage, and justly feared though he was physically, Lupus was mentally a sluggish beast, and not over and above intelligent. In this he favoured his sire, who was slow-moving, sluggish, and, withal, as fierce as any weasel, and immensely powerful. When Lupus caught his first glimpse of the creature he had come to slay, he had a momentary thrill of uneasiness, but it was no more than momentary. Finn's towering form stood out clearly in the moonlight, as he stood, with tail curved upward and hackles erect, on the stone ledge outside the den. Lupus was scaling an extremely steep section of the trail at the moment, and, seen against the sky-line, Finn seemed monstrous. But, in justice, one should say that Lupus knew nothing of fear. It was only that for a moment, as he dragged his full-fed weight upward over the stones, the thought passed through his dull mind that this was surely a strange sort of dingo and extraordinarily tall. Finn was, as a matter of fact, ten inches taller than

any other dingo on that range except Lupus, and four inches taller than he. Lupus was half as heavy again as any other dingo on the range, but, though he knew it not, Finn was twenty pounds heavier than he. But Lupus always had killed every animal that he had met in combat, and it did not for an instant occur to him that he might fail to kill this new-comer. And then there was Warrigal--he got her scent now as she emerged, crouching, from the den--he wanted Warrigal for his mate and he would have her.

wolfhound standing above Lupus

Finn's towering form stood out clearly in the moonlight.

Finn was standing in the middle of the flat ledge outside the den, and he neither advanced or retreated a single step as Lupus drew nearer. He simply bayed, at intervals, like a minute-gun, and scratched a little at the sandy rock beneath him with his right fore-foot. Once, Warrigal, snarling savagely, ranged up alongside him, but he sent her back to the mouth of the den with a peremptory growl which admitted of no argument. "This is my affair," his growl said. "Stay you back there in the doorway." And Warrigal, like the good spouse she was, retreated to the mouth of the den. Just then Lupus landed on the rock-ledge with a hectoring snarl which betrayed extravagance in a commodity he could ill afford to waste--breath. He plunged forward upon Finn with the clumsiness of a buffalo, and, for his instruction, received a slashing bite across one shoulder and a chest thrust which sent him rolling backwards off the ledge to the trail below, on his back.

A dingo in Finn's place would have leaped upon him then, and, it may be, the fight would have ended suddenly; for even so redoubtable a foe as Lupus is of no very great account if he can be seized when on his back, with all four feet in the air. Black-tip and his companions in the rear drew in their breath sharply. They had never before seen Lupus on his back, and if he had stayed there another second he would have had their fangs to reckon with. But his reception by the stranger taught Lupus something, and the enemy that faced Finn for the second assault was a far more

deadly one than the Lupus of a few moments earlier. Finn had scorned to pursue his fallen foe, but it would have been better for him if he had had less pride. The fan-shaped line of watching dingoes closed in a little as Lupus remounted the rocky ledge, with a blood-curdling snarl and an awe-inspiring exposure of his gleaming fangs. In another instant the two were at grips, and Finn realized that he was engaged in a fight for life, and a far more serious combat than any he had known before. The mere weight of impact with the wolf-dingo was sufficient to tell Finn this, and for the infinitesimal fraction of an instant he felt a sense of fatality and doom when his opponent's tremendously powerful jaws closed over the upper part of his right fore-leg.

In the next instant Finn had torn one of Lupus's ears in half, and the terrible grip on his leg was relaxed. The Wolfhound sprang completely over the wolf-dingo, and took a slashing bite at the creature's haunches as he descended. Then they rose one at the other, like bears standing erect, and meeting jaw to jaw in mid-air, with a flashing and clashing of fangs which sent a thrill of excitement along the line of watchful dingoes, who realized now that they were looking on at the greatest spectacle of their lives. Lupus missed his grip that time, but so did Finn, being unable to withstand the violent sidelong wrench which snatched the enemy's neck from his jaws. And, as they came to earth again, Lupus secured firm hold upon Finn's leg in the same grip that he had obtained before. The grip was so vice-like and punishing as to flash panic into Finn's very soul, such as an animal knows when trapped by a man's device in unyielding steel. It was only by a violent twist of his neck that he could bring his jaws into action upon Lupus at all. But panic drove, and the long, immensely powerful neck was curved sufficiently. His jaws took the wolf-dingo at the back of the head, and one of his lower canines actually penetrated Lupus's lower jaw, causing him the most excruciating pain, so that he emitted a sound more like a hoarse scream than a growl, and snatched his head back swiftly from so terrible a punishment. That was the last time in this fight that Finn's legs were in serious danger. He had learned his lesson, and from that point onward, no matter what punishment his shoulders might receive, his hanging jaws, from which the blood dripped now, effectually guarded his legs.

From this point, too, Lupus seemed to have centred all his desires upon the Wolfhound's throat; an underhold was what he sought, and in the pursuit of that he seemed prepared for, and capable of standing, any amount of punishment. The line of watching dingoes was still and silent as a line of statuary; it seemed they hardly drew breath, so intent was their preoccupation. Warrigal, too, stuck closely to her position, but she was not silent; a low, continuous snarl issued from her parted jaws, and the updrawn line of her lips showed white and glistening in the moonlight. She had been ordered to the rear by her mate, but the waiting dingoes on the trail below realized that if Finn were to be laid low, there would still be fighting to be done on that ledge of rock, and fighting of a deadly sort, at that, from which there would be no escaping.

In one sense the Wolfhound's great height was against him now, since it placed Lupus in a more favourable position for securing the underhold upon which he was intent. But, as against that, it gave Finn readier access to the hold which in all his fights hitherto he had made fatal: the hold which a terrier takes upon a rat. But Lupus was no rat, and Finn had already found more than once that even his mighty jaws were not powerful enough to give killing pressure through all the mass of harsh bristles and thick rolling skin and flesh which protected Lupus's spinal cord at the neck. Three times during the later stages of the fight Lupus managed to ward off attack with a lightning stroke of one fore-foot, the claws of which scored deep into Finn's muzzle and neck, in one case opening a lesser vein, and sending the red blood rushing over his iron-grey coat. It seemed the long claws of the wolf-dingo were almost more deadly than his snapping jaws.

The flow of his own blood seemed to madden Finn, and he made a plunge for his enemy's neck. Lupus sat erect, and, like a boxer, or a big bear, warded off the plunge with a violent, sweeping blow of his right paw. There was a quick flash of bloody, foam-flecked fangs, and the deadly paw was crushed between Finn's jaws. The pain of the crushing drew a screeching howl from Lupus, and in that same instant a powerful upward twist of Finn's neck threw him fairly on his back, snarling despairingly. One could not measure the fraction of time which elapsed between Finn's release of the crushed foot and his seizure of the throat--the deadly

underhold. The wolf-dingo's bristles were thin there, and the skin comparatively soft. The fight was for life, and it was the whole of the Wolfhound's great strength that he put into his grip. Lupus's entire frame, every inch of it, writhed and twisted convulsively, like the body of a huge cat in torment. Finn's fangs sank half an inch deeper. The wolf-dingo's claws tore impotently at space, and his body squirmed almost into a ball. Finn's fangs sank half an inch deeper, and hot blood gushed between them. Lupus's great body hunched itself into an almost erect position from the shoulder-blades; he was standing on his shoulders. Then, as in a convulsion, one of his hind-legs was lowered in order that it might saw upward, scoring three deep furrows down the side of the Wolfhound's neck. Finn's fangs met in the red centre of his enemy's throat. There was a faint grunt, a final spasm of muscular activity, and then Finn drew back, and shook his dripping muzzle in the air. The fierce lord of Mount Desolation had entered upon the long sleep; his lordship was ended.

Finn sank back upon his haunches, gasping, with a length of scarlet, foam-streaked tongue dangling from one side of his jaws. The watching line of dingoes advanced two paces. Warrigal, stepping forward to her mate's side, snarled warningly. But Finn pushed her gently with his lacerated muzzle, and, turning then to the watchful dingoes below, he emitted a little whinnying sound which said plainly: "You are welcome here!" Acting upon this, Black-tip moved slowly, deferentially forward, and climbed the flat ledge of rock, his bushy tail respectfully curled between his legs. Long and thoroughly he sniffed at the dead body of the terrible Lupus, and then he looked round at his still waiting companions, and whined as he walked back toward them. In twos and threes the dingoes followed Black-tip's lead, and climbed the flat rock to sniff their dead tyrant, and satisfy themselves that he had indeed entered upon the long sleep. And the gesture in Finn's direction, with which they turned away from the rock, was as near to being a salutation, an obeisance, as anything that mortal dingo has ever achieved. And when the last of the band, reinforced now by half a dozen others who had been hastily summoned from their hunting near by, had paid his visit of inspection, Finn did a curious thing, which probably no dingo would ever have done. He moved slowly forward on his aching limbs, gripped the dead body firmly by the neck, and heaved it down from the flat rock to the trail below.

Then he barked aloud, a message which said plainly--

"Here is your old lord and tyrant! Take him away, and leave me now!"

Black-tip and half a dozen of his comrades seized upon the carcase of the tyrant and dragged it away down the trail. I cannot say what was done with the remains of Lupus, the terrible son of Tasman; but Finn and Warrigal saw them no more, and for three days after that night of the slaying of Lupus, the bush-folk saw nothing of the Wolfhound. They saw Warrigal hunt alone each evening and, doubtless with thoughts of Finn in their minds, they respected her trail, and sought no speech of her, tempting though the sight of the Mount Desolation belle was to the young bucks of the pack. These young bloods, by the way, began to mutter now of the desirability of banding together to beard old Tasman in his den, and rid themselves of the shadow and tradition of tyranny, as well as its actuality. But the counsel of the elders strongly favoured delay. "Let us wait and see what the Great One will do when he is healed of his wounds," was what they thought, and, after their own fashion, said to the ambitious youngsters.

dingo with pups

CHAPTER XXVIII

DOMESTIC LIFE IN THE MOUNTAIN DEN

If a man succeeded in getting himself as much chopped about as Finn had been since the evening of his departure from the boundary-rider's gunyah and the severance of his connection with the world of men-folk, he would require weeks of careful nursing and doctoring before he could be said to have recovered. Fortunately for the people of the wild, who have neither nurses nor doctors, and whose ways of life do not permit of prolonged periods of rest, recovery from wounds is not so serious a business with them as it is with us.

When the Wolfhound and his admiring mate between them had thoroughly licked and cleansed his numerous wounds, he stretched himself deliberately across the rear corner of the den, and there lay, sleeping soundly, until the next morning was well advanced. His body was lacerated by the wounds of three considerable fights: the fight with Black-tip and his friend; the sufficiently violent struggle with the mother-kangaroo; and lastly, the most serious fight of the Wolfhound's life, which had ended in the death of Lupus. But even the ten hours which Finn gave to sleep--he opened his eyes two or three times during that period, but did not move--brought a wonderful change in the aspect of these numerous wounds. They had advanced some distance in the direction of healing already. Now they were submitted to another thorough licking. Then Finn crept out into the sunlight beside the cave's mouth, and slept again, fitfully, till evening came. Then he sat up and licked all his wounds over again with painstaking and scrupulous care. They were healing nicely, and the healing process made Finn as stiff and sore as though he had had rheumatics in every joint in his body. So he crept painfully into the den again, and lay down to sleep once more, while Warrigal, with a friendly, wifely look at her lord, went out hunting.

In this way three full days and nights passed, and on the fourth night Finn killed for himself--a small kill, and not far from home, but a kill, none the less, that required a certain agility, of which he already found himself quite capable. In the matter of strength and vital energy the Wolfhound had immense reserves to draw upon--greater reserves, really, than any of the wild folk possessed; for, in his youth, he had never known scarcity of food, or lack of warmth, or undue exposure; and, on the contrary, his system had been deliberately built up and fortified by the best sort of diet that the skill and science of man could devise. Finn could not have stood as much killing as a dingo, and still have lived; for the dingo is as hard an animal to kill as any that walks upon four legs. But, as against that, the Wolfhound could have stood a far greater living strain than any dingo. He had more to feed upon in himself. For actual toughness under murderous assault a dingo could have beaten Finn; yet in a test of staying power, an ordeal of long endurance, the Wolfhound would have won easily, by reason of his greater reserve of strength and vitality.

From this point onward, Finn's wounds troubled him but very little, and in the healing air of that countryside they soon ceased to be apparent to the eye. An ordinary dingo would assuredly have been obliged to fight many fights before obtaining ascendancy over the Mount Desolation pack; but the mastery fell naturally to Finn without calling for any effort upon his part. He had slain the redoubtable old leader and tyrant of the pack. He had soundly trounced one of the strongest among the fully-grown young dingoes, Black-tip, and killed another in single-handed fight against two. Now, he administered condign punishment to two or three young bucks who ventured to attempt familiarity with Warrigal, but for fighting he was not called upon. Most of the pack had taken good measure of his prowess on the night of the slaying of Lupus, and that was enough for them, so far as mastery went. Further, the pack found Finn a generous leader, a kingly sort of friend; slow to anger, and merciful even in wrath; open as the day, and never, in any circumstances, tyrannical or aggressive. Then in the matter of his kills, Finn was generosity itself. As a hunter of big game he was more formidable than any three dingoes, and, withal, never rapacious. Three portions he would take from his kill; one to satisfy his own hunger, one for Warrigal to satisfy her hunger upon, and a third to be set aside and taken back to the den against the time when

Warrigal should care to dispose of it. For the rest, be his kill what it might, Finn made the pack free of it.

But no sort of temptation seemed strong enough to take the Wolfhound near to the haunts of men. It came to be understood that Finn would not touch sheep, and, reasoning it out amongst themselves, the rest of the pack accepted this as a prohibition meant to apply to all of them; so that Finn's mastership was an exceedingly good thing for the squatters and their flocks all through the Tinnaburra. But a full-grown kangaroo, no matter how heavy and strong in the leg, never seemed too much for Finn; and so, all dingoes liking big game better than small, it came about that every night saw the Mount Desolation dingoes hunting in pack formation at the heels of the great Wolfhound. They scorned the lesser creatures whose flesh had fed them hitherto, and expected to taste wallaby or kangaroo flesh every night. Finn thoroughly enjoyed the hunting, and did not care how many fed at his kill, so that his mate and he had ample.

Once, the two youngest members of the pack, puppies quite new to the trail, were attacked and driven from the remains of a big kill the leader had made by an outlier, a strange dingo from some other range. The youngsters, bleeding and yelping, carried their woes to the scrub below the mountain, and within the hour Finn learned of it. Followed by Black-tip and one or two others of the more adventurous sort, he set out upon the trail of the outlier, now full fed, ran it down at the end of four or five miles' hard galloping, pinned the unfortunate creature to the earth and shook it into the long sleep, almost before they had come to a standstill together. This was true leadership the pack felt, a thing Lupus would never have done; something to be placed to the great Wolfhound's credit, and not forgotten. The mother of the whelps that were attacked, a big, light-coloured dingo, with sharp, prick ears, was particularly grateful to Finn.

During this time a subtle change crept over Finn's appearance. In its details the change was so slight that the casual observer would have said it did not exist at all; yet, in truth, it was radical. It would be impossible to put this change precisely into words. An Irish Wolfhound is never sleek; at least, that is never a characteristic of the breed. Yet, as compared with the wild folk, every sort of animal which lives with men has a certain kind of sleekness or softness about it. It may be imagined that Finn did not

have much of this when he escaped from the Southern Cross Circus. And in the period which followed that escape, although he had, in a sense, associated with a man and a man's dog, yet there had not been much in the life of the boundary-rider's camp to make for sleekness. Nevertheless, when Finn first met his mate, Warrigal, there had lingered about him still a kind of trimness, a suggestion of softness, far different, indeed, from that of the ordinary domesticated house-dog; but yet, in its own way, a sort of sleekness. Not a vestige of this remained now. Though he fed well and plentifully, and his life was not a hard one, since he only did that which pleased him, yet Finn had acquired now the hard, spare look of the creatures of the wild. In his alertness, in the blaze of his eyes, and the gleam of his fangs when hunting, in his extreme wariness and in the silence of his movements, and his deadly swiftness in attack, Finn had become one of his mate's own kindred. He differed from them in his great bulk, his essentially commanding appearance, in his dignity, and in a certain lordly generosity which always characterized him. He never disputed; he never indulged in threats or recrimination. He gave warning, when warning was needed; he punished, when punishment was needed; and he killed, if killing was desirable; making no sort of fuss about either process. Also, upon occasion, though not often, he barked. Otherwise, he was thoroughly of the wild kindred, and the unquestioned master of the Mount Desolation range.

Some six or seven weeks after his arrival upon that range, Finn began to notice that Warrigal was changing in some way, and he did not like the change. It seemed to him that his mate no longer cared for him so much as she had cared. She spent more time in lying about in or near the den, and showed no eagerness to accompany him in his excursions, or to gambol with him, or even to lie with him on the warm, flat ledge outside the den. She seemed to prefer her own company, and Finn thought her temper was getting unaccountably short, too. However, life was very full of independent interest for the Wolfhound, and it was only in odd moments that he noticed these things. One night he was thoroughly surprised when Warrigal snarled at him in a surly manner, without any apparent cause at all, unless because he had touched her with his nose in a friendly way, by way of inviting her to accompany him, he being bound for the killing trail in quest of that night's supper.

Finn walked out of the den, carrying his nose as high as he could, in view of the stoop necessary at the entrance, and feeling rather put out. A dingo in his place would have snarled back at Warrigal and, it may be, have wrangled about it for half an hour. Finn's dignity would not permit of this, but he was hurt, and decided that his spouse needed a lesson in courtesy. Since she responded so rudely to his invitation to join him in the hunt, she might go supperless for him; he would eat where he killed, and bring home nothing.

Finn killed a half-grown kangaroo, a lusty red-coated youngster, that night, and he, with Black-tip and two or three others of the pack, fed full upon this before going down to the creek together to drink. Finn even spent an hour in trifling with a pair of sister dingoes who generally hunted together, and ranged the trails with Black-tip, in more or less sportive mood, till long after midnight. In the small hours the Wolfhound parted with Black-tip and the sportive sisters among the scrub at the mountain's foot, and wended his way alone to his den on the first spur, prepared, as many a male human has been in like case, to seek his rest without taking any notice of his mate, unless, perchance, he found her in a repentant mood. At the mouth of the cave he stooped low, as he was bound to do, to gain admittance, and in that moment he was brought to a halt by a long, angry, threatening snarl from within. Warrigal was very plainly telling her mate to remain outside, unless he was looking for trouble. This was unprecedented, and he was a very angry and outraged Wolfhound, who withdrew slowly with as much dignity as might be in walking backward with lowered head and shoulders.

"You will think better of this before morning, my dear!" was the sort of thought that Finn had in his mind, as he selected a comfortable sleeping-place in the shadow of a bush some half-dozen paces away from the mouth of the den. And then, being well fed and rather tired, he fell into a sound sleep until just after daybreak, when he woke to the sound of an unfamiliar small cry. With head slightly on one side and ears cocked sharply, Finn listened. The small cry was repeated. It certainly was not Warrigal's voice, though it came from the inside of the den. Also, there were a number of other small sounds that were strange--weak, quaint, gurgling sounds. Finn inclined his head a little farther to one side. Yes,

his mate was licking something. Could she have been out and hunted alone? Even that would hardly account for the queer little, weak, strange voices within the den. The dingo people are not cats, and when they kill they kill outright. It was extremely puzzling and interesting, and Finn decided to investigate. After all, this was his own home and, however rude she may have been, Warrigal was his own mate, for whom he had fought and bled in the past; the mate who had lovingly dressed his wounds and shared his kills for nine weeks now--nine long, eventful weeks, which were more than equal to nine months in human folk's lives.

Finn stooped low in the entrance and Warrigal snarled. But this time there was no note of aggression in her snarl. Indeed, to her mate, there was a hint of appeal in the salutation, which said clearly: "Be careful! Please be careful!" He advanced with extreme caution into the den, and saw his spouse lying full at length on her side, her bushy tail curled round to form a background for the smallest of four sleek puppies, of a yellowish grey colour, whom she was nursing assiduously. Moving with the utmost delicacy and care, Finn sniffed all round his mate, refraining from touching the puppies by way of humouring Warrigal, in whose throat a low growl sounded whenever his nose approached the little strangers. Then Finn stood and stared at the domestic group with hanging head and parted jaws, his tongue lolling, and his eyes saying plainly--

"Well, well, well! Who'd have thought of this! They are really very nice little creatures, in their insignificant way, though I don't quite see why their presence should make you snarl at your own lawful mate."

Seeing that her lord manifestly entertained no shadow of a hostile intention toward the family (the history of the male dingo is not altogether free from blame in the matter of infanticide), Warrigal raised her nose in friendly fashion to the Wolfhound and permitted him to lick her, which he did in the most affectionate manner, and with no further thought of her previous harshness. Then she gave a little whine and glanced round the walls of the den. Finn barked quietly, bidding his mate rest assured that all would be well, and ten minutes later he was descending upon a rabbit-earth that he knew of, a moving shadow of death among young bunnies assembled to welcome the dewy warmth of the new day. On the way home he dropped his rabbit to stalk a half-grown bandicoot; and finally,

after less than an hour's absence, he returned to the den carrying a rabbit and a bandicoot, so that Warrigal might have variety in her breakfast. Being parched with thirst, Warrigal gratefully accepted both kills, and without actually eating either drew some sustenance from both. Then with an anxious look at the family she nudged Finn out of the den with her nose, and, leaving him outside on the ledge, turned and raced for the creek, like an arrow from a bow. She was back again inside of two minutes with bright drops clinging to her fur. Finn had sat patiently beside the mouth of the den waiting, and for this Warrigal gave him a grateful glance of appreciation before gliding into her puppies, who already were beginning to whimper for warmth and nourishment.

Finn took very naturally to the part of father and bread-winner. He lounged about the mouth of the den through the day, creeping in occasionally to see how things went with his mate, and returning then to keep guard outside. She allowed him now to touch the odd little creatures who were his children; but they did not like the feeling of his tongue, and wriggled away from it in their blind, helpless way. "There, there!" said Finn low down in his throat, and withdrew, marvelling afresh at the mysteries of life and the cleverness of femininity. As for Warrigal, she seemed absurdly happy and proud about it all now, and assumed considerable airs of importance. She took her food in brief snatches a dozen times during the day, and when Finn left her in the early night for the trails, she looked at him in a meaning way which said plainly that she attached importance to the matter of food supply, though she could not take to the trails herself, being otherwise and fully occupied. Finn licked her muzzle reassuringly and went out.

The pack had to forage for itself that night, for when Finn made his kill--a fat rock wallaby--he announced in the most unmistakable manner that there was nothing to spare for followers that night, and marched off mountain-wards, trailing the whole heavy kill over his right shoulder. In the course of the night it became known to all the wild people of that range that the mate of the leader of the pack had other mouths than her own to feed, and that for the time Finn would do all the hunting for the den on the first spur.

Tasman carrying off dead pup

CHAPTER XXIX

TRAGEDY IN THE MOUNTAIN DEN

When Warrigal's puppies were born, Finn, their father, had been in the Tinnaburra for nearly five months, though he had only known the Mount Desolation range for some nine or ten weeks. During the whole of that five months of late winter and spring, not one single drop of rain had fallen in the Tinnaburra, and with the coming of Warrigal's children there came also the approach of summer. Finn, for his part, gave no thought to this question of weather, because he had quite forgotten that there was such a thing as rain. It had not rained while he was in the city with the Master, after landing in Australia. The little that fell during the period of his imprisonment with the Southern Cross Circus had never touched the caged Giant Wolf, and he had entirely forgotten what falling rain felt like. He had slept on the earth ever since his escape from the circus, and he accepted its dryness as a natural and agreeable fact.

But both Finn and Warrigal were rather annoyed when, just as the puppies began to open their eyes and become a little troublesome and curious, the creek at the foot of Mount Desolation disappeared through its shingly bed and was seen no more. This meant a tramp of three and a half miles to the nearest drinking-place, a serious matter for a nursing mother, whose tongue seemed always to be lolling thirstily from the side of her mouth. Warrigal would make the journey to the drinking-place as swiftly as she could, and drink till she could drink no more. Then during the return journey concern for her children would set the pace for her, and she would arrive at the den panting and gasping, and more thirsty than when she left it; for the weather was already hot, the air singularly dry, and Warrigal herself in no condition for fast travelling, with her heavy dugs and body, both amply fed and amply drawn upon in her capacity of nurse-mother. Finn did his part well and thoroughly, and there was no

lack of good fresh meat in the den on the first spur, but he could not carry water. Warrigal tried to slake her mother-thirst by means of an extra heavy meat diet, but though she knew it not, this only aggravated her continual desire for water, which was Nature's demand for assistance in fitting her to discharge adequately her duty to her children. And so, during all this time, Finn's mate found herself obliged to run over hard, parched ground at least fourteen miles a day, and often twenty-one, when it would have suited her, and her puppies also, a good deal better to have confined her exercise to strolls in the neighbourhood of the den.

One result of this was that Warrigal's children began to eat meat at an earlier stage of their existence than would have been the case if water had been plentiful and near at hand for their mother. There never were more carnivorous little creatures than these puppies. At first, of course, their mother saw to it that the meat they consumed was of a ready-masticated and even a half-digested sort; but in an astonishingly short while they began to rend and tear raw flesh for themselves, under the mother's watchful eye; and from that time on Finn was a very busy hunter. It was probably because of this unceasing demand for fresh meat in the den on the first spur that the leader of the Mount Desolation pack was the first member of it to notice that hunting was becoming increasingly difficult in that region. Finn's quest was necessarily for large meat; and at about this time he was discovering to his cost that he had to go farther and farther afield to find it. It was well enough for the bachelors and spinsters of the pack, the free-lances of that clan. The district was still rich in its supply of the lesser marsupials, rats, mice, and the like; not to mention all manner of grubs, and insects, and creeping things, among which it was easy for a single dingo to satisfy his appetite. But a giant Wolfhound, with a very hungry mate and four ravening little pups, all waiting eagerly upon his hunting, was quite differently situated.

Finn's hunting took him one evening far enough south and by east to bring him within half a mile of the boundary-rider's encampment in which he had lived with Jess. Here he happened upon Koala, who was softly grumbling to himself while waddling from one tree to another. Koala, of course, began the usual plaint about his poverty and inoffensiveness. This was mechanical with him, and he must have known very well that

Finn would not hurt him. As a matter of fact, the Wolfhound lay down beside the native bear, and they had quite a long confab upon bush affairs, during which Finn referred in some way to the growing scarcity of game in that district, and Koala mournfully added that gum-leaves themselves were by no means what they had been. But, for all his foolishness and helplessness, Koala had lived a very long time, and actually was very well versed in bush-lore, though he liked to describe himself as the most forlorn and helpless of beasts. He knew all about the scarceness of big game and its causes, just as he knew all about the dryness and want of sap in his own vegetable food; and now, by means of the methods of communication of which we know nothing, he managed to convey some of his knowledge to Finn, so that when they separated, Finn connected the drying up of the Mount Desolation creek with the hardness of his recent hunting, and the heat and absence of rain with both. The ordinary season for rain had passed now, and the full length of Australian summer was before them; a fact of which the learned Koala said nothing, probably because he did not know it, or, possibly, because he did not greatly care, being a total abstainer from drink himself.

It was at about this time that Warrigal herself returned to the trails. Finn had in no sense failed her as bread-winner, but, game being scarce, and her children still too young to do any foraging for themselves worth talking about, Warrigal felt that she owed it to her mate to share his burdens with him. The pups had already reached the stage of grovelling about outside the den, and pursuing the few live things of the insect type who affected that stony spot. One of them, indeed, had already learned a lesson that would last him for the rest of his life, regarding the habits, customs, and general undesirability of the bull-dog ant as play-mate or prey.

wolfhound carrying wallaby up mountain

He slung the wallaby over his shoulder and set out for the mountain.

It happened, about a week after his meeting with Koala, that Finn had a stroke of luck in the matter of stumbling upon a badly wounded wallaby

within a couple of miles of the den. In some way this unfortunate creature had managed to get its right hind-leg caught in a dingo-trap, to which a heavy clog of wood was attached. In the course of time the wallaby would have died very miserably, and already it had begun to lose flesh. But Finn brought a mercifully sudden death to the crippled creature, and then proceeded to tear in sunder the limb which held the trap. Having accomplished this, he slung the wallaby over his shoulder and set out for the mountain, meaning to allow the family to feast upon this early kill, while he took a further look round upon the trails.

Just as Finn, heavily laden, scaled the rocky ledge immediately below the one which flanked the entrance of the den, a shrill cry of mortal anguish fell upon his ears, and thrilled him to the very marrow. The cry came from the inside of the den above him, and he knew it for the cry of one of his children in extremity. That gave Finn the most piercing thrill of paternity he had felt up till this time. He dropped his kill, and leaped with one mighty bound clear over two boulders and a bare stretch of track to the ledge outside the den. And, in the moment of his leap, a figure emerged from the mouth of the den bearing between its uncovered, yellow tusks the body of Warrigal's last-born son, limp and bleeding. This figure which faced Finn now in the moonlight was the most terribly ugly one that the countryside could have produced. Gaunt beyond description, ragged, grey, bereft of hair in many places, aged and desperate, old Tasman, the Zebra-Wolf, had his tusks sunk in warm, juicy flesh for the first time in three months, and was prepared to pay for the privilege with the remains of his life if need be. Skin, bone, glittering eyes, and savage, despairing ferocity; that was all there was left of Tasman, three months after the death of his son Lupus. He had lived so long almost entirely upon insects, grubs, scraps of carrion dropped by birds, and the like. Desperate hunger, and the smell of young animal life, and of the proceeds of daily kills, had drawn him to the den on the first spur that night; and now, now he was face to face with the master of the range, and the outraged father of Warrigal's pups.

The gaunt old wolf dropped his prey on the instant, realizing clearly that his life was at stake. In his day he had slain many dingoes, but that was in the distant past, and this iron-grey monster which roared at him now

was different from the dingoes Tasman had known. With massive, bony skull held low, and saliva dripping from his short, powerful jaws, the old wolf sent forth his most terrible snarl of challenge and defiance; the cry which had been used in bygone years to paralyse his victims into a condition which made them easy prey for his tearing claws and lance-like tusks. But the horrible sound was powerless so far as Finn was concerned, and the Wolfhound gathered himself together now for the administration of punishment which should be as swift as it would be terrible and final. But in that moment he heard a scattering of loose stones behind him which delayed his spring to allow time for a flying glance over his right shoulder; and that glance changed his whole tactics in the matter of the attack upon Tasman. For, even as Finn glanced, an outstretched furry mass flew across his range of vision, and landed like a projectile upon the gaunt old wolf's neck. Warrigal also had returned; she also had dropped her kill in the trail below the den, and now Tasman had to deal with the dauntless fury of a bereaved mother. Warrigal was a whirlwind of rage; a revelation to Finn of the fighting force which had given her her unquestioned standing in the pack before ever she set eyes on the Wolfhound.

Tasman had his back against the side of the den's mouth now, and he flung Warrigal from him, with a slash of his jaws and a twist of his still powerful neck. But, in the next moment, the under-side of that scrawny neck was between the mightiest jaws in the Tinnaburra, and, even as the life blood of old Tasman flowed out between Finn's white fangs, the body of him was being literally torn in sunder by the furiously busy teeth and claws of Warrigal. It was little she cared for the thrusts of his hind-claws in the last muscular contortions which sent his legs tearing at her neck. She was possessed of the mother-madness, and so she fought like a wild cat at bay. Old Tasman was not just killed; he was dispersed, scattered, dissolved almost into the elements from which he sprang; he was translated within a few minutes into shapeless carrion.

And then, gasping, bleeding, panting, her jaws streaming, Warrigal wheeled about with a savage, moaning cry, and shot forward into the den. One son she had seen dead upon the ledge without. Two daughters she found dead within, and, while she licked at his lacerated little body,

the lingering life ebbed out finally from the other male pup, her sole remaining son. But Warrigal licked the still little form for almost an hour, though it lived for no more than three or four minutes after she entered the den.

Then Warrigal went outside to where Finn sat, alternately licking the one deep wound the old wolf had scored in his chest, and looking out dismally across the Tinnaburra. Warrigal sat down on her haunches about two yards from Finn, and, having pointed her muzzle at the moon, where it sailed serenely above them in a flawless dark blue sky, she began to pour out upon the night the sound of the long, hoarse dingo howl of mourning. Finn listened for some minutes without moving. By that time the melancholy of it all had entered fairly into his soul, and he, too, lifted up his head and delivered himself of the Irish Wolfhound howl, which carries farther than the dingo howl, and is more purely mournful than any other canine cry. Also, it has more volume than any other; there is something uncanny and supernatural about its piercing melancholy. So the sire and the dam sat and howled at the stars in their unclouded courses. And if you were to visit that den to-day, on the first south-eastern spur of Mount Desolation, you would probably find the skeletons of three of Finn's and Warrigal's children; for the Wolfhound and his mate never entered their old home again.

wolfhound and dingoes stalking kangaroos

CHAPTER XXX

THE EXODUS

It was rather an odd thing, this fact that neither Finn or his mate ever again entered the lair which had been such a happy home for them since the day of their first meeting. But so it was, and one is bound to assume, I think, that the reason of it was grief for the loss of their children. In the early dawning of a blistering hot day they paced slowly down the hill and into the rocky strip of scrub which divided Mount Desolation from the bush itself. Hereabouts it was that the rest of the pack lived; and, though Finn and Warrigal conveyed no definite news of what had happened during the night, the news must have spread somehow, because before the sun had properly risen every single member of the pack had climbed the spur and investigated for himself or herself the scattered carrion which had been Tasman. Whether they looked into the den or not, as well, I do not know; but I should say that some of the adventurous youngsters did, while their elders and parents probably refrained.

These same elders and parents were beginning to feel considerable distress over the absence of rain, the scarcity of water, and the poor results which attended their hunting. The wild folk of the Australian bush are, upon the whole, less dependent upon water than the animals of most countries, and such people as Koala, the native bear, seem to get along quite happily without ever drinking anything at all. Even kangaroos and wallabies can go for a long while without drinking, but there is a limit to the endurance of most of the bush animals in the matter of thirst, while, as for the dingoes, they want their water every day as much as they need their food. There was no longer any disguising the fact that a very large number of the wild folk, in whom Finn and Warrigal and the rest of the pack were interested, had recently migrated in quest of homes that should be better supplied with water than the Tinnaburra or the Mount

Desolation range. It was not that the pack felt the absence of these folk as companions, but as food. They were also beginning to feel keenly the burnt-up dryness of that whole countryside and the extreme heat of the season.

Even Finn's prowess as a hunter and a killer was of no avail in the absence of game to hunt, and during the few days which he and Warrigal spent among the scrub at the mountain's foot, after leaving their den, the Wolfhound sometimes travelled from thirty to forty miles without a single kill, being reduced then, like the rest of the pack, to eat rabbit flesh, and mice, and grubs. Already some of the younger members of the pack had begun to prey upon the flocks of squatters in the Tinnaburra, and this had brought speedy retribution in the shape of one young female of their kindred shot through the head, and two promising males trapped and slain, so that the pack now consisted of no more than fourteen adults and six whelps, who were hardly capable as yet of fending for themselves. Men with guns had actually been seen within a mile of Mount Desolation itself; and, owing to the attacks upon their bark of half-starved small fry, the trees of the bush were dying by hundreds, and thereby opening up in the most uncomfortable manner ranges which had previously been excellent hunting-grounds. The report about the men-folk with guns was most disturbing to Finn, and he was conscious, in sitting down, of a degree of boniness about his haunches such as he had never known since the horrible period of his captivity in the circus. A Wolfhound whose fighting weight is a hundred and fifty pounds requires a good deal more food than a dingo, whose weight rarely exceeds half that amount. Grubs and mice were not of much use to Finn; and when he drank, his long tongue had been wont to scoop up more than twice the amount of water which had served to satisfy any other member of the pack.

The growing restlessness and discontent which had been mastering the Mount Desolation pack for weeks now received an immense addition, so far as Finn and Warrigal were concerned, in the events which led them to forsake their den on the first spur. It culminated, in Finn's eyes, in the actual passage through the scrub beside the mountain's foot of a party of half a dozen mounted men with guns and dogs. This occurred in the late afternoon of a scorching hot day, when most of the pack were sleeping;

and if the dogs of the men-folk had not been incredibly stupid in the matter of sticking closely to the trail, and making no attempt to range the scrub on either side of it, the dingoes would actually have been hunted like hares, and some of them, no doubt, would have been killed. As it was, Finn felt as strongly, and perhaps more strongly than any of the elders of the pack, that this event had rendered the range finally uninhabitable. His nostrils twitched and wrinkled for hours after the men had gone; and, as soon as darkness fell, he rose in a determined manner, thrust his muzzle meaningly against Warrigal's neck and took to the open trail. With extraordinary unanimity the other members of the pack began to gather behind Finn. It seemed to be clearly understood that this was no ordinary hunting expedition, and the two mothers of the pack, with their half-grown whelps, whined plaintively as they gathered their small families about them for journeying. The whelps, always eager for a new move of any kind, gambolled joyously around their parents, but the mothers snarled at them, bidding them go soberly, lest weariness and worse should overtake them before their time.

One very old dog, who had always looked with grudging sullenness upon the great Wolfhound and his doings, refused point-blank to be a party to the exodus, and croakingly warned the others against following a newcomer and an outlier such as Finn. He gave them to understand that he had been born in the shadow of Mount Desolation, like his sire and dam before him, and that he would live alone rather than forsake that range at the bidding of a great grey foreigner. The pack paid little heed to the old dingo, and he sat erect on his haunches beside the trail, watching them file along the flank of the mountain. When they were nearly a mile away, the old dingo began to howl dismally; and when Finn made his first kill, seven miles to the north-west of Mount Desolation, old Tufter--he had a sort of mop at the end of a rather scraggy tail--was on hand, and yowling eagerly for scraps. The kill was a half-starved brush-tailed wallaby, and nobody got much out of it but Warrigal and Finn, both of whom growled fiercely while they ate, in a manner which said plainly that they were not entertaining that night, at all events before the edge had been taken off their own appetites. So old Tufter got nothing more nutritious than a few scraps of scrubby fur.

The poor old fellow took great pains to communicate his own discomfort and mistrust to all the other members of the pack, except Finn and Warrigal, whom he ignored, and pointed out with vehemence that they were heading in the wrong direction. He was right in a way, for they certainly were leaving the better country behind them, in travelling to the north-west. South and east of Mount Desolation lay the fatter and comparatively well-watered lands. Even Finn knew this, of course; but that way also lay the habitations of men, and the Wolfhound's face was set firmly away from men and all their works. Men had tortured him in a cage, the memory of which their hot irons had burned right into his very soul. And, after that, men, in the person of a certain sulky boundary-rider, had driven him out from their neighbourhood with burning faggots, with curses, and with execrations. All this had been brought vaguely to Finn's mind by the passage through the scrub that day of horses and men, and the north-west trail was the only possible trail for him because of that.

From this point on, the pack moved slowly in scattered formation, each individual member hunting as he went along, with nose to earth and eyes a-glitter for possible prey of any kind, from a grub to an old-man kangaroo. Towards morning, when they were a good thirty miles distant from Mount Desolation, they topped a ridge, upon the farther slope of which a small mob of nine kangaroos were browsing among the scrub. Finn was after them like a shot, and Warrigal was at his heels, the rest of the pack streaming behind in a ragged line, the tail of which was formed by old Tufter and the whelps. There was a stiff chase of between three and four miles, and only five dingoes were within sight when Finn pinned the rearmost kangaroo by the neck, and Warrigal darted in cautiously upon one of its flanks. In an attack of this kind two things about Finn made his onslaught most deadly: his great weight, and the length and power of his massive jaws.

Even Tufter got a good meal from this kill, for the kangaroo was a big fellow of well over five feet from nose to haunch, without mention of his huge muscular tail, the meaty root of which kept the whelps busy for hours afterwards. The whole pack fed full, and in the neighbourhood of that range they scattered and slept; for in the gully on the other side of it there was a little muddy water, and round about there was pleasant cover

which had sheltered the kangaroos for a week or more. Old Tufter forbore to growl, and the young members of the pack were enthusiastic regarding the advantages of migration in the trail of such a hunter as Finn. They did not know that, in a leisurely way, the mob of kangaroos they had flushed were also migrating, as the result of drought--but in the opposite direction to that chosen by Finn, who was heading now towards the part of the country which the kangaroos had forsaken as being burned and eaten bare, and devoid even of such food as bark.

When the dingoes had finished with the little chain of small pools in the gully on the afternoon of that day, there was little left but mud; one might have called it a creek bed, but it certainly was no longer a creek. However, that night's travel brought fairly good hunting, and always among game moving in the opposite direction to that taken by the pack. Finn and Warrigal and Black-tip shared a wallaby between them, and spared some portions of it for the whelps; though Warrigal snarled angrily when the young things came near her; the memory of her own family being still fresh within her. And the rest of the pack fared quite tolerably well, sharing between them a kangaroo-rat, two bandicoots, a wallaby-hare, and quite a considerable number of marsupial mice, besides about half of a big carpet-snake which Finn killed.

For a week now the little pack travelled on in a north-westerly direction, and every day old Tufter growled a little more bitterly and with a little better cause. Game was certainly becoming lamentably scarce, and the country traversed was one which did not at all commend itself to dingoes, being arid, shadeless, and dry as a bleached bone. It was the sort of country which, in Australia, is frequently covered by beautiful flowers and scrub during the winter, though perfectly bare in the summer. But the winter which had preceded this summer had been too dry to bring any growth here, so that it had not even the remains of a previous season's vegetation, and offered no trace of cover. A long and most exhausting chase did enable Finn to pull down a solitary emu, and of this the pack left nothing but beak and feathers when they passed on, still hungry, in quest of other game.

But for all the shortness of food, which was thinning the flesh over Finn's haunches now, it was another cause which led him to swerve from the

north-westerly course in a south-westerly direction. He paid no particular heed to old Tufter's continuous growls about the direction taken by the pack under his leadership; but what he was forced to notice was the fact that for two whole days no water had been seen, and the lolling tongues of the young whelps were in consequence so swollen that they could not close their jaws. Throughout one weary night, the pack loped along in dogged silence in a south-westerly direction, their eyes blazing in the keen look out for game; dry, dust-encrusted foam caked upon their lips, and fierce anxiety in the heart of every one of them.

Then, in the brazen dawning of a day in which the sun seemed to thrust out great heat upon the baked earth even before it appeared above the horizon, the pack checked suddenly as Black-tip drew Finn's attention to a pair of Native Companions seen in the act of floating down to earth from the lower limbs of a shrivelled red-gum tree. The bigger of these two great cranes had a stature of something over five feet, and his fine blue-grey plumage covered an amount of flesh which would have made a meal for quite a number of dingoes. Yet it was not so much as food, but rather as a guide and indication, that Black-tip regarded the cranes. He knew that they would not be very far from water. The way in which the pack melted into cover in the dim, misty light of the coming day was very remarkable. For several miles now they had been travelling through a country less arid than the plains they had traversed during the previous two days, and now, while seeming to disappear into the earth itself--even as Echidna actually could and would, though the earth were baked hard--the members of the pack actually found cover by slinking low amongst a sort of wiry scrub growth with which the ground hereabouts was dotted.

It was thus that Finn saw for the first time the strange dance of the Native Companion. To and fro, and up and down beneath their scraggy gum-tree, the two great cranes footed it in a sort of grotesque minuet. There was a strange sort of angularity about all their movements, but, withal, a certain grace, bizarre and notable. And while the Native Companions solemnly paced through what was really a dance of death for them, Finn and Black-tip and Warrigal stalked them as imperceptibly as shadows lengthen across a lawn in evening time. The three hunters advanced through the scrub like snakes moving in their sleep, and never a leaf or

twig made comment on their passage, as they slithered down the morning breeze, inch by inch, apparently a part of the shadowy earth itself. The prancing dance of the Native Companions--these birds mate for life and are deeply and devotedly attached one to another--was drawing to its close, when death came to them both like a bolt from the heavens; such a death as one would have chosen for them, since it left no time for fear or mourning, or grief at separation. Their necks were torn in sunder before they realized that they had been attacked, and within the minute their graceful feathered bodies shared the same fate, as the rest of the pack joined Finn and Warrigal and Black-tip. There was less of lordly generosity about Finn's feeding upon this occasion than he had always shown before. The great Wolfhound realized perhaps that his frame demanded more of nutriment than was necessary for the support of a dingo, and he ate with savage swiftness, growling angrily when any other muzzle than Warrigal's approached his own too nearly.

Less than half an hour later the pack was scrambling and sliding down the high banks of a river-bed, in the centre of which, surrounded upon both sides by a quarter of a mile and more of shingle and hard-baked mud, there was still a disconnected chain of small, yellow pools of water. The water was of something like the consistency of pea-soup, but no spring-fed mountain-rill ever tasted sweeter or more grateful to a thirsty traveller than this muddy fluid to the palates of the Mount Desolation pack. Finn chose a good-sized pool, and Warrigal tackled it with him; but when two youngsters of the pack ventured to approach the other side of that pool, Warrigal snarled at them so fiercely, backed by a low, gurgling growl from Finn, that the two slunk off, and tackled a lesser pool by themselves.

wolfhound and dingoes sliding down a bank

Scrambling and sliding down the high banks of a river-bed.

Where the pack drank they rested. As yet their great thirst was close to them, and the neighbourhood of water seemed too good to leave. But, in such matters, the memory of the wild folk is apt to be short. The banks of

the river-bed ran due east and west here; and, though the pack gave no thought to the question, it was a matter of some importance to each one of them whether they should eventually leave those banks to the northward or to the southward; a matter of importance by reason of the difference in the country to the northward and to the southward. But it was chance at last that decided the question for them. They drank many times during the day, and towards nightfall a small mob of kangaroos was sighted to the northward, and that led the pack to head northward, a little westerly, from the river-bank that night.

wolfhound and dingo drinking from riverbed

CHAPTER XXXI

THE TRAIL OF MAN

It was exactly a fortnight later when the pack turned despairingly in its tracks, animated by a forlorn desire to reach again the high ragged banks of that shingly river-bed, in which some trace of moisture might be left still, where the muddy pools had been.

But in that fortnight much had happened, and the character and constitution of the pack had undergone notable changes. The six whelps had disappeared, old Tufter and the oldest of the mothers of the pack were no more, and neither the carrion-crows nor the ants had profited one atom by these deaths. The pack had not wittingly hastened the end of these weaker ones, but it had left only their bones behind upon the trail. And, now, when one or other of the gaunt, dry-lipped survivors stumbled a dozen pairs of hungry eyes glittered, a dozen pairs of lips were wrinkled backward from as many sets of fangs, and consciousness of this had a sinister meaning for the stumbler; a meaning which brought a savage snarl to his throat as he regained his footing with quick, threatening looks from side to side and hackles bristling.

The pack was starving. Many times during the past week the thought of turning in his tracks and making back for the river-bed had come to Finn, but he had pressed on, fearful of the arid stretch of country which he had already placed between himself and that spot. He had no means of knowing that he was in a country of vast and waterless distances. But, acting without knowledge, Finn had turned in his tracks at length, after a fortnight's travelling in which food had been terribly scarce and water even more scarce. Such liquid as they had found would never have been called water by men-folk. Here and there had been a little liquid mud in old water-holes and stream-beds, and in other places the pack had

sucked up moisture through hot sand, after burrowing with feet and nose to a depth of as much as eighteen inches from the surface. Their food had been almost entirely of the grub and insect kind, and Finn, for the first time in his life, had spent long hours in trying to ease the craving within him by gnawing at dry roots. The great Wolfhound had more stamina than any of the dingoes; he had greater resources within himself than they had, and was endowed, by Nature and upbringing, with a superb constitution. But, as against that, he needed far more food than was required by the others, and at a full meal would have eaten twice as much as the biggest of them. Also, he suffered, though his body was the stronger for it, for the fact that he had never before known want.

In appearance, the members of the pack had suffered a wondrous change in these two weeks. Even Warrigal's fine coat had lost every trace of the gloss which had made it beautiful, and the iron-grey hairs of Finn's dense, hard coat had taken on the character of dry bristles, while his haunch-bones were two outstanding peaks, from which his back fell away at an acute angle to the root of his tail, where once a level pad of flesh had been. Now the tail seemed to sprout from a kind of well in his body, and a bird might have nested in the hollow between his shoulder-blades, which once had been flat as the top of a table. His back, too, which had been broad and flat, was like the ridge of a gunyah now, from one end of which his neck rose gauntly, and appeared to be of prodigious length. His ribs were plain to see on either side his hollow barrel, and over them the loose skin rolled to and fro as he ran or walked. The eyes of every member of the pack were deeply sunken and ablaze with a dry light, half wistful and half fierce, and more awe-inspiring than any form of full-fed rage could be. They ran in open order now, and when one happened to run unusually close to another, that other would snarl or growl, and, sometimes, even snap, with bitter, furtive, half-fearful irritability.

To this rule there was one exception. Warrigal ran steadily in the shadow cast by Finn's big, gaunt frame, her muzzle about level with his elbow. Black-tip kept about the same level on Finn's other side, but a good deal farther off, and the others straggled in fan-shaped formation to the rear, scouting at times to one side or the other in quest of insects and snakes,

or any other living thing that fangs could crush. As to digestion, the pack had no concern regarding any such detail as this. Their one test of edibility was swallowing. They even helped Finn to demolish a native porcupine, than which one would have said no creature of a less edible sort was ever created. Altogether, there was that about the survivors of the Mount Desolation pack which would have made any single creature sorry to cross their path, however powerful he might be. No animal with flesh on its bones and blood in its veins would have been too big or fierce for the pack to have attacked just now; for hunger and thirst had made them quite desperate.

It was Black-tip, and not Finn, who, on the afternoon of the second day of the pack's despairing return journey in quest of the river-bank they had left a fortnight before, called a sudden halt. (The dingo's sense of smell was always keener than the Wolfhound's.) Black-tip sniffed hard and long at the ground between his fore-feet, and then, raising his head, glared out into the afternoon sunlight to the south-eastward of the track they were following--their own trail. The whimper which escaped Black-tip when he began to sniff, brought the rest of the pack about him, full of hungry eagerness to know what thing it was that had been found. There was something uncanny and extraordinary about the way in which they glanced one at another, after, as it were, taking one sip of the scent which had brought Black-tip to a standstill. Had the scent been of kangaroo or wallaby, rabbit, rat, or any other thing that moves upon four legs, those curious glances would never have been exchanged. The pack would have been off hot-foot upon the trail, without pause for discussion. And there was the scent of a four-footed creature here, too; but it was merged in, and subordinate to, the scent over which most wild creatures cry a halt: the scent of man.

Now in ordinary circumstances the pack would not have hesitated a moment over such a trail as this. They would have turned in their tracks and made off in the opposite direction, or gone straight ahead on their own trail and without reference to the man-trail, save to get away from it as quickly as possible. But these were very far from being ordinary circumstances. The pack was nearer to starving than it had ever been before, and at such a time the rules which ordinarily guide life are of

precisely no account at all. The man-trail was the trail of living flesh, of warm, animal life; it was the trail of food. Also, there was merged in it the trail of a dog; and as each member of the pack acquired that fact, his lips wrinkled backward and a little moisture found its way into his dry mouth.

The pack desired food and drink so urgently that everything else in the world became insignificant by comparison with food and drink in their minds. The hatred and fear of man, as man, was blotted out of sight by the craving for animal food in any shape whatsoever. Here was a living trail, in the midst of a dead, burnt-up land of starvation and emptiness. What Finn's thoughts on the subject may have been I cannot say. But, of course, he had connected men with food all his life long. And now he was starving. I do not think Finn's thoughts could have been quite the same as those of the rest of the pack; but they moved him in the same direction none the less, and, without the smallest hesitation, the pack streamed after him when he took up a new trail, and loped off to the south-east, turning away diagonally from the old track.

As the new trail became fresher and warmer, the leader was conscious of the warring within him of various conflicting feelings and desires. In appearance Finn was now a gigantic wolf, and one mastered by the fierce passion of hunger, at that. Apart from appearance, there actually was more of the wolf than the dog in him now. He belonged very completely to the wild kindred, and, over and above the wild folk's natural inborn fear and mistrust of men-folk, there was in Finn a resentment against man; a bitter memory of torture endured, and of the humiliation of having been driven out into the wild. But Finn's sense of smell was nothing like so acute as that of the dingoes. Even a setter or a pointer cannot compare with the wild folk in this respect, and Wolfhounds have nothing like the educated sense of smell of the setters, or the pointers, or the foxhounds. Their hunting from time immemorial has been done by sight, and strength, and fleetness, not by tracking. Finn was not so keenly conscious as his companions that he was on the trail of man. He knew it; but it was not in his nostrils the assertive fact that it was, for instance, in the nostrils of Warrigal and Black-tip. There was in the trail for him a warm animal scent which gave promise of food; of food near at hand, in that pitiless waste which the pack had been traversing for a fortnight and

more. But every now and again, possibly in places at which the makers of the trail had paused, Finn would get a distinct whiff of the man scent, and that disturbed him a good deal. He wanted no dealings of any kind with man. But there was nothing else in him just then which was quite so strong or peremptory as the craving for food and drink; and so, with ears pricked, and hackles uneasily lifting, he padded along at the true wolf gait, which devours distance without much suggestion of fleetness.

When night fell the trail was very warm and fresh, and a quarter of an hour later a light breeze brought news to the pack of a fire not far ahead. This, again, brought pictures to Finn's mind of the encampment from which he had been driven with burning faggots. He smelled again the singeing of his own coat, and that gave him recollection of his time of torture and captivity in the circus. The pack advanced at a foot-pace now, and with the extreme of caution. A few minutes more brought them within full view of a camp-fire, beside which there were stretched, in attitudes eloquent of both dejection and fatigue, two men and a dog; the latter a large, gaunt fox-terrier. For the last ten miles of their trailing the pack had been passing through country which supported a certain amount of timber, and of the curious Australian scrub which seems to be capable of existence--a pale, bloodless sort of life, but yet existence--in the most arid kind of soil, and where no moisture can be discovered. The men had lighted their fire beneath a twisted, tortured-looking tree, in which there certainly was no life, for every vestige of its bark had gone from it, and its limbs were naked as the bones of any skeleton.

The pack drew in as closely as their cover in the scrub permitted, and crouched, watching the camp-fire. Suddenly, a movement on the part of one of them attracted the attention of the fox-terrier, and he flew out into the scrub, barking furiously. The pack, in crescent formation, retreated perhaps a dozen paces, saliva trickling from their curling lips. The terrier plunged valiantly forward, hopping the first low bushes, as a terrier will when rabbiting or ratting. It was Black-tip who pinned him to the earth, and Warrigal whose fangs next closed upon his body. But Finn smashed the terrier's body in half; and, in an instant, the snarling pack surged over the remains. By the time one of the men had risen and moved forward towards the line of scrub, there positively was not a hair of the dog

uneaten. His collar lay there on the ground, between two bushes. For the rest, every particle of him, including bones, had been swallowed, and was in process of digestion. From beginning to end the whole operation occupied less than four minutes.

One of the men had not troubled to rise at all. The pack withdrew to a safe distance while the other man rummaged about among the bushes for the better part of a quarter of an hour. The pack, meanwhile, were hidden among the trees a quarter of a mile away. Then the man found the terrier's collar, and walked back to his fire with it. He walked slowly and stiffly. When he announced to his companion that there were dingoes about, and that they had carried Jock off, the other man only grunted wearily, and turned over on his side. So the first man threw some more wood on the fire, and lowered himself slowly to the ground, moving painfully, and stretching himself out for sleep.

During the night the pack scoured every inch of the scrub within a radius of one mile from the camp of the two men; and for their reward they obtained precisely nothing at all, beyond a few, a very few, grubs and insects, the eating of which served to temper as with fire the keen edge of their hunger. The hours immediately preceding daylight found most of them sitting on their haunches, in a scattered semicircular line, in the scrub, glaring through the darkness at the two sleeping men, and their now expiring fire. I should like to be able to say exactly what they looked for, what they hoped for, in connection with the men; but that is not possible. In addition to connecting men-folk with guns and traps, and fear of an instinctive and indescribable kind, most of the pack also connected men with food, with sheep, and other domesticated animals which dingoes can eat. Finn, more than any of them, connected men-folk with food. But, as against that, Finn also connected them with torture and suffering, with hostility and abuse. Finn sat farther from the camp-fire than any of the others.

To your truly carnivorous animal, like the dingo, all things that live, and have flesh on their bones and blood in their veins, are a form of food, food at its best, living food. Therefore, the two men must have appealed to the pack as food. But, for their kind, man is generally speaking forbidden food, and unobtainable; so long, at all events, as he can

maintain his queer, erect attitude. But men have lain down in the bush to die before to-day, again and again; and of these the dingoes, as well as the crows, have given a sure account. Further, there is no other such reckless law-breaker as hunger. Rules and the teaching of experience--even inherited experience--are as nothing at all to hunger. Also, these two men beside the dying fire were not erect. But they moved uneasily in their sleep now and again. The man-life was clearly astir in them still; and so even the nearest and most venturesome among the dingoes sat a good hundred yards distant from the camp. And when daylight came, and one of the men stirred on his elbow, and looked up at the sky, the pack retreated slowly, backward through the scrub, till more than double that distance separated them from the living food at which they had been wistfully glaring. There was no anger, no savagery, no vestige of cruelty in their minds and hearts. Finn, it is true, cherished some soreness and resentment where men were concerned; but even in his case this brought only the desire to keep out of man's way; while the rest of the pack felt only instinctive dread and fear of man. But now the feeling which ruled the whole pack, the light which shone in their eyes, the eagerness which brought moisture continually to their half-uncovered fangs while they watched--this was simply physical desire for food, simply hunger.

The man who had been the first to stir, rose slowly, and stretched his arms as though his frame ached, as indeed it did, from a variety of causes. When the first slanting rays of the new-risen sun reached him, they shed their light upon a man on whom physical hardship had laid its searing fingers heavily. His face had a ten days' growth of hair upon it, and was gaunt and haggard, like the rest of him. His clothes hung about him loosely, and were torn and soiled and ragged. Under the bronze tan of sunburn on his face and neck there was the sort of pallor which comes from lack of food; in his eyes--deep sunk in dark-rimmed hollows--was a curious glitter which was not at all unlike the glitter in the eyes of the wild folk who had been watching him during the night. This glitter was of eagerness and want; the expression was wistful, longing, and full of a desire which had become a pain. It was the same expression that shone out from the eyes of the starved Mount Desolation pack. And the causes behind it were the same.

Presently this man woke his companion, who growled at him, as though he resented the attention.

"Time we were on the move, old chap," said the first man. "We can't afford to wait."

The other man sat up, and blinked wearily at the daylight, showing a face to the full as haggard and gaunt as that of his friend.

"By God, I don't know!" he said bitterly. "I don't know whether we can afford to do anything else. Afford! And us carrying a fortune! I said out there that I'd never had good luck before, and--it was right, too. Good luck's not for the likes o' me."

"Oh, yes, it is," said the other man, with an obvious effort at cheerfulness. "You wait till we get our legs under a dinner-table, my boy; then you'll tell another tale about luck. And it will be a dinner-table, too, mark you; no tin pannikins, but silver and glass and linen and flowers, and food----Man, think of the juicy fillet, done to a turn; the crisp *pomme risso  *, and--yes, a little spinach, I think, done delicately in the English way; none of your Neapolitan messes. I'm not certain about the bread--whether little crusty white rolls or toast. What? Oh, well, it's no use going the other way, old man; cursing and growling won't help us any. Come on! Let's have breakfast and get on. I think you're perfectly right about parting this morning. We can take that to be east, where the scrub gets thick, and that to be south. We'll toss who takes which, and one or other of us will strike something before nightfall, you mark my words; and after that it will be easy to pick up the other's trail. Better make the trail as plain as possible as we go along. Come; buck up, Jeff, old man; this will be our last day hungry. I'm going to take my breakfast now."

Imitating his companion, and with an attempt to look a little more cheery over it, Jeff stood up now and carefully uncorked a canvas-covered water-bottle. Each man filled his mouth full from the gurgling contents of his water-bottle, and stood, swishing the water in his mouth slowly, and allowing it to trickle little by little down his parched throat. In this way several minutes were devoted to the swallowing of a single mouthful of water, and that was breakfast.

"If we hadn't have chucked the guns away we might have got a chance at something to-day," growled Jeff, when his breakfast was done. "I could make a roast dingo look foolish this morning, and I'm none so sure I couldn't eat the brute raw if I got him. You said it was dingoes got Jock last night, didn't you?"

"I suppose it must have been," said the other man. "I don't see what else it could have been. And as to the guns; well, you know, it was that or the stuff. We couldn't carry any more."

"I know. And I'm not sure it's much good carrying that any longer. I reckon I'll dump mine somewhere to-day, before it dumps me. Sixty-six pounds don't seem to ride very easy on an empty belly. Sixty-six pounds--sixty-six solid pounds o' best pin-fire--and us dyin' for want of a crust. Come on, then! One more try!"

"You've got your revolver still, haven't you?" asked Jeff, as he fitted the straps of a big, heavy swag (which had served him for a pillow) about his shoulders, while his companion did the same with his swag.

"Yes," said the other man. "And I tell you what, Jeff; you shall take it to-day. I've got a jolly good stick here, and I've no use for the revolver, anyhow; couldn't hit a house at a dozen yards, even if I was likely to see one. Yes, you take the shooting-iron, my dear fellow; you might manage to pot something. I hope you will."

They gravely tossed a twig to decide the question of who should head south and who east; and then as gravely shook hands and parted, Jeff heading south and the other man due east.

"Well, if we've got a chance at all, I guess this ought to double it, anyway," said Jeff.

"Why, yes; and one of us'll strike pay dirt to-day all right, you'll find. So good-bye till then, Jeff," said the other man.

"So long, mate; so long!"

Away in the scrub to the northward of the two men a dozen pair of eyes

more hungry than their own were watching them; or, to be exact, eleven pairs were watching them. Finn lay stretched still at full length, beside a bush, at Warrigal's feet, while Warrigal peered eagerly through the scrub. Black-tip, followed by three strong young dogs and a bitch, loped off at once, without comment or communication with the rest of the pack, in the direction of the trail of the south-bound Jeff. Warrigal's eyes, as it happened, were fixed upon the shoulders of the other man, and it was his trail that she made for now, after rousing Finn with a touch of her muzzle. And so the wild-folk divided, even as the men-folk had done, five going south after Jeff, and five others, besides Finn and Warrigal, going east after the other man. But it was broad daylight, and none of them made any attempt to draw near the makers of the trails they followed. They merely followed, muzzles carried low, and nostrils and eager eyes questing as they went for any sign of life in the scrub--anything, from an ant to an emu, that by any possibility could represent food. Meanwhile the warm trail of the man ahead kept hope and excitement alive in them, though that man would have said that he was about as poor a source of hopefulness as any creature in Australia. To be sure, he had never thought of himself in the light of food. The dingoes had.

wolfhound and dingoes galloping through scrub

CHAPTER XXXII

IN THE LAST DITCH

It was in the midst of the pitiless heat which comes a couple of hours after midday, and is harder to bear than the blaze of high noon, that the man who was heading due east abandoned his swag. He had rested for the better part of an hour directly after noon, and had two mouthfuls from his water-bottle, one before and one after his rest. While he rested, the half-pack, headed by Finn and Warrigal, had rested also, and more completely, hidden away in the scrub, a quarter of a mile and more from the man whose trail they followed. Two of them, Warrigal and another, watched with a good deal of interest the burial of the swag beneath a drought-seared solitary iron-bark. No sooner was the man out of sight--he walked slowly and with a somewhat staggering gait now--than the pack unearthed his swag with quick, vicious strokes of their feet, and laid it bare to the full blaze of the afternoon sunlight. In a few moments they had its canvas cover torn to ribbons, and bitter was their disappointment when they came to turn over its jagged mineral contents between their muzzles, and discovered that even they could eat none of this rubbish.

It is fair to suppose that within a couple of hours of this time the man finally lost the brave remnant of hope with which he had set out that day. The pack did not reason about this, but they felt it as plainly as any human observer could have done, and the realization brought great satisfaction to each one of them. It was not that they bore the faintest sort of malice against the man, or cherished any cruel feeling for him whatever. He was food; they were starving; and his evident loss of mastery of himself brought food nearer to the pack.

The man's course was erratic now; he tacked like a vessel sailing in the wind's eye; and his trail was altered by the fact that his feet were dragged

over the ground instead of being planted firmly upon it with each stride he took. The pack were not alone in their recognition of the man's sorry plight. He was followed now by no fewer than seven carrion-crows; big, black, evil-looking birds, who circled in the air behind and above him, swooping sometimes to within twenty or thirty feet of his head, and cawing at him in a half-threatening, half-pleading manner, while their bright, hard eyes watched his eyes avidly, and their shiny beaks opened and shut continually to admit of hoarse cries. The pack resented the presence of the crows, but were well aware that, when the time came, these harbingers of death could be put to flight in a moment.

When darkness fell, the man lighted no fire this evening. But neither did he lie down. He sat with his back against a tree-trunk and his legs outstretched; and now and again sounds came from his lips, which, while not threatening, were certainly not cries for mercy, and therefore in the pack's eyes not signals for an attack. The man-life was apparently strong in him yet; for he sometimes flung his arms about, and struck at the earth with the long, tough stick which he had carried all day. The pack, when they had unsuccessfully scoured every inch of the ground within a mile of the man for food, drew in closer for the night's watch than they had ventured on the previous night, when there had been two men and a fire. But Finn showed a kind of reserve in this. He lay behind a bush, and farther from the man than any of the rest of the pack. He wanted food; he needed it more bitterly perhaps than any of the others; but all his instincts went against regarding man himself as food, though man's neighbourhood suggested the presence of food, and, instinct aside, Finn hated the proximity of humans.

The man slept only in broken snatches during this night. While he slept, Warrigal and the others, except Finn, crept in a little closer; but when he turned, or waved one arm, or when sounds came from his lips, as they frequently did, then the dingoes would slink backward into the scrub, with lips updrawn, and silent snarls wrinkling their nostrils. Towards dawn Warrigal set up a long howl, and at that the man woke with a great start, to sleep no more. Presently, others of the pack followed Warrigal's lead, and, staggering to his feet, the man moved forward three steps and flung a piece of rotten wood in the direction from which the howls came.

Warrigal and her mates retreated for the better part of a hundred yards, snarling aloud; not from fierceness, but in a kind of wistful disappointment at finding the man still capable of so much action, and by so much the farther from reaching them as food.

The man's shout of anger and defiance reached Finn's ears, and thrilled the Wolfhound to the marrow. The voice of man in anger; he had not heard it since the night of his being driven out from the boundary-rider's camp. The memories which it aroused in him were all, without exception, of man's tyranny and cruelty, and of his own suffering at man's hands. He growled low in his throat, but very fiercely. And yet, with it all, what thrilled him so was not mere anger, or bitterness, or resentment. It was more than all that. It was the warring within him of inherited respect for man's authority with acquired wildness; with his acquired freedom of the wild folk. The conflict of instinct and emotions in Finn was so ardent as almost to overcome consciousness of the great hunger which was his real master at this time; the furious hunger which had made him chew savagely at the tough fibre of a dry root held between his two fore-paws.

But the man had taken only three steps, and when he sank down to the earth again it was not in the place he had occupied before. He lay down where he had stood when he threw the billet of wood, and there was that in the manner of his lying down which boded ill for his future activity. It was observed most carefully by three of the crows, who had followed him all day; and upon the strength of it, they settled within a dozen paces of his recumbent figure, with an air which seemed to say plainly that they could afford a little more patience now, since they would not have long to wait.

collapsed man watched by crows

They settled within a dozen paces of his recumbent figure.

When full daylight came, Warrigal and her mates were closer in than ever; hidden in the scrub within forty paces of the man. Finn retained his old place, some five-and-thirty yards farther back, behind a bush. The

crows preened their funereal plumage and waited, full of bright-eyed expectancy. Finn gnawed bitterly at his dry fragment of scrub root. The splendid pitiless sun climbed slowly clear of its bed on the horizon, thrusting up long, keen blades of heat and light to herald the coming of another blazing day in the long drought.

Presently, a long spear of the new day's light thrust its point between the man's curved arm and his face. He turned on his side so that he faced the sun, and evidently its message to him was that he must be up and doing; that he must proceed with his journey. Slowly, and with painful effort, he rose as far as his knees; and then, with a groan, drooped down to earth again on his side. The crows cocked their heads sideways at him. They seemed full of brightness and life. But the sun himself was not more pitiless than the question they seemed to be putting to the man, as they perked their heads from side to side while considering his last move. Warrigal and her mates saw clearly the conclusion the crows had arrived at. They, also, held that the man was down for good at last. At length, it seemed to them, he was practically nothing else than food; the man-mastery, whose emblem is man's erectness, or power to stand erect, was gone for ever, they thought. The crows were safe guides, and one of them was hopping gravely towards the back of the man. Warrigal, followed by five of her mates, crept slowly forward through the scrub; and saliva was hanging like icicles from their parted jaws.

Finn saw Warrigal's movement, and knew precisely what it portended with as much certainty as though his mate had explained it all to him. And now Finn was possessed by two opposing inclinations, both terribly strong. Upon the one hand, instinctive respect for man's authority and acquired dislike of man and all his works bade the great Wolfhound remain where he was. Upon the other hand, two forces impelled him to rise and join his mate, and those two forces were the greatest hunger he had ever known, and the assertive pride of his leadership of the pack. There before his eyes his section of the pack was advancing, preparing for a kill for food, there in that bitter desert of starvation. And he, the unquestioned master and leader of the pack, master of all the wild kindred that he knew; he, Finn, was----Three seconds later, and the Wolfhound had bounded forward, his great shoulders thrusting angrily

between Warrigal and the big male dingo who had dared to usurp his, Finn's, place there as leader in concerted action.

For an instant the pack paused, no more than a score of paces distant from the man's shoulders, glaring uneasily. Then the man moved, raising his body slightly upon one elbow. The dingoes drew back a pace, even Warrigal moving back with them, though she snarled savagely in doing so. Finn did not move. Warrigal's snarl it was which told the man of his danger, and, with an effort, he rose upon his knees, and grabbed at his long stick where it lay on the ground. Again Warrigal snarled, less than a yard from Finn's ears, and her snarl was the snarl which announces a kill. It was not for others to kill where Finn led. And yet something--he could not tell what, since he knew nothing of heredity--something held the great Wolfhound's muscles relaxed; he could not take the leap which was wont to precede killing with him. Again Warrigal snarled. The man was rising to his feet. A great fear of being shamed was upon Finn. With that snarl in his ears advance was a necessity. He moved forward quickly, but without a spring. And in that instant the man, having actually got upon his feet, swung round toward the pack with his long stick uplifted, and Finn gathered his hind-quarters under him for the leap which should end this hunting--this long, strange hunting in a desert of starvation.

The Wolfhound actually did spring. His four feet left the ground. But, with a shock which jarred every nerve and muscle in his great frame, they returned to earth again, practically upon the exact spots they had left. His sense of smell, never remarkable for its acuteness in detail, had told Finn nothing, save that his quarry in this strange hunting was man. But the Wolfhound's eyes could not mislead him, and in the instant of his suddenly arrested spring--the spring which it had taken every particle of strength in his great body to check--he had known, with a sudden revulsion of feeling which positively stopped the beating of his heart, that this man the pack had trailed was none other than the Man of all the world for him; the man whose person was as sacred as his will to Finn; the Master, whose loss had been the beginning and the cause of all the troubles the Wolfhound had ever known.

There had been the beginning of the killing snarl in Finn's throat when he sprang, and as he came to earth again at the man's feet, possessed and

almost paralysed by his amazing discovery, that snarl had ended in as curious a cry as ever left the throat of four-footed folk since the world began. It was not a bark this cry, still less a snarl or growl, and it could not have been called a howl. It was more like human speech than that of the wild people; and, human or animal, there was no mistaking it for anything less than soul-speech. It welled up into the morning air from the very centre of that in Finn which must be called his soul--the something which differentiated him from every other living thing on earth, and made him--Finn.

And in that same instant, too, recognition came to the Master, and he knew his huge assailant to be no creature of the wild, no giant wolf or dingo, but the beloved Wolfhound of his own breeding and most careful, loving rearing. It was from some central recess of his own personality that the Master's cry of "Finn, boy!" answered the strange cry with which the Wolfhound came to earth at his feet.

But behind them was the pack, and in the pack's eyes what had happened was that their leader had missed his kill; that fear had broken his spring off short, and that now he was at the mercy of the man who, a moment before, had been mere food. For a dingo, no other task, not even the gnawing off of a limb caught in a trap, could require quite so much sheer courage as the attacking of Man in the open--man erect and unafraid. But Warrigal had never in her life lacked courage, and now, behind her courage and her devotion to her mate, there was hunger, red-toothed and slaving in her ears; hunger burning like a live coal in her heart; hunger stretching her jaws for killing, with an eagerness and a ferocity which could not be denied. In the next instant Warrigal had flown at the man's right shoulder with a fierce snarl which called those of her kind who were not cowards to follow her or be for ever accursed.

Warrigal's white fangs slashed down the man's coat-sleeve, and left lines of skin and blood where the cloth gave. For one moment Finn hesitated. Warrigal was his good mate, the mother of his dead children, his loving companion by day and night, during long months past. She concentrated in her own person all the best of his kinship with the wild. There was mateship and comradeship between them. As against all this, Warrigal's fangs had fastened upon the sacred flesh of the Master, of the Man of all

the world, who stood for everything that was best in Finn's two-thousand-years-old inheritance of intercourse with and devotion to human friends.

Next instant, and even as the biggest male dingo of the pack flew at the man's other side, Finn pinned his mate to earth, and, with one tremendous crunch of his huge jaws, severed her jugular vein, and set her life's blood running over the parched earth.

In that moment, the pack awoke to realization of the strange thing that had befallen them. They had been seven, pitted against a single man, and he apparently in the act of ceasing to be erect man, and becoming mere food. Now they were five--for Warrigal's life ebbed quickly from her--pitted against a man awakened to erectness and hostility, and their own great leader; the great Wolf, who had slain Lupus, their old fierce master, and even Tasman, his terrible sire. It is certain that at another time the pack would not have hesitated for one moment about turning tail and fleeing that place of strange, unnatural happenings. But this was no ordinary time. They were mad with hunger. Blood was flowing out upon the earth before them. One of them had the taste of man's blood on his foaming lips. This was not a tracking, or a killing in prospect, but a fight in progress. The pack would never turn tail alive from that fight.

The man had his back to the withered iron-bark now, and, besides the long stick in his right hand, he held an open knife in his left hand, as a long, fierce bitch found to her cost when she leaped for his throat, fell short, and felt cold steel bite deep in her flank as she sank to earth. And now the great Wolfhound warmed to his work, with a fire of zeal which mere hunger itself could not have lit within him. He was fighting now as never before since his fangs met in his first kill in far-away Sussex. He was fighting for the life of the Master, love of whom, long quiescent in him, welled up in him now; a warm tide of new blood which gave strength to his gaunt limbs and weight to his emaciated frame, such as they had never known when he fought, full fed, with Lupus, or with Tasman, on the rocky side of Mount Desolation. A tiger could hardly have evaded him. His onslaught was at once terrible, and swift as forked lightning. It seemed he slashed and tore in five separate directions at one and the same time. But that was only because his jaws flashed from one dingo's body to another with such rapidity that the passage between could not be

followed by the eye. This meant that his fangs could not be driven deep enough for instant killing. There was not time. But they went deep, none the less; and blood streamed now from the necks and shoulders of the dingoes that succeeded one another in springing at the man and the Wolfhound.

Two of the dingoes owed their deaths to the long knife-blade of the man; but even as the second of them received the steel to the hilt below his chest-bones, the man sank, utterly exhausted and bleeding freely, on his knees, and from there to the ground itself. This drew the attention of the three surviving dingoes from the leader, who in some mysterious manner had become an enemy, to the fallen man who was now, clearly, a kill. Mere hunger, desperate hunger, was uppermost in the minds of the three. They quested flesh and blood from the kill that lay helpless before them.

It was then that Finn outdid himself; it was then that he called into sudden and violent action every particle of reserve strength that was left in him. It was then that his magnificent upbringing stood by him, and the gift of a thousand years of unstained lineage lent him more than a Wolfhound's strength and quickness; so that, almost within the passage of as many seconds, he slew three full-grown dingoes, precisely as a game terrier will slay three rats, with one crushing snap and one tremendous shake to each. Starved though they were, these dingoes weighed over forty pounds apiece; yet when they met with their death between Finn's mighty jaws, their bodies were flung from him, in the killing shake, to a distance of as much as five yards.

And then there fell a sudden and complete stillness in that desert spot, which had seen the end of six lives in as many minutes; besides the final falling of the Master, which implied, Finn knew not what.

Finn fell to licking the Master's white, blood-flecked face where it lay on the ground. And at that, the waiting crows settled down upon the bodies of the outlying dingoes; so that their dead, sightless eyes were made doubly sightless in a moment. After long licking, or licking which seemed to him long, Finn pointed his nose to the brazen sky, and lifted up his voice in the true Wolfhound howl, which is perhaps the most

penetratingly saddening cry in Nature.

wolfhound sitting by collapsed man

CHAPTER XXXIII

BACK FROM THE WILD

Four men were riding together through the low, burnt-up scrub, and in front of them, holding their horses at a smart amble to be even with his jog trot, a naked aboriginal was leading the way on his own bare feet.

four riders following running man

Four men were riding together through the low burnt-up scrub.

"Blurry big warrigal 'e bin run here!" said the black-fellow suddenly, as he stooped to examine a footprint in the trail they were following. He counted the different footprints, and announced to the horsemen that seven dingoes had followed the trail they were following at that moment. "Five and two," the black-fellow called it, ticking the number off on the fingers of one hand. He explained that these dingoes, led by the "blurry big warrigal" aforesaid, must have been terribly badly in want of food; and that he did not think much of the chances of the man they had followed.

One of the riders--it was Jeff--nodded his head dolefully over this.

"I reckon all the plaguy warrigals in this country must 'a' gone crazy," he said. "You know I told you there was half a dozen on my track. But we're goin' right; you can be dead sure o' that, for that was his swag we found all right, and you could see the dingoes had been at that. My oath! To think o' them brutes scratching up a fortune that way, an' leaving it there!"

"You wouldn't expect 'em to take it into town an' bank it, would you?" said one of the other men, with a grin. "Hurry on, Jacky!"--This to the black-

fellow--"What time he make dem tracks, eh? He's fresh, you think?"

The black-fellow snorted contemptuously, as he explained over one shoulder that the tracks were of the previous day's making. "Still," said the rider; "he may not have got far. He can't have got very far."

And again Jeff nodded, with sombre meaning. He was always a pessimistically inclined man; and, in his rough way, he had conceived a good deal of affection and respect for his prospecting mate.

Another three miles were covered, and then, suddenly, the black-fellow halted, with one hand raised over his head, which was turned sideways, in a listening attitude. He explained, a moment later, that he could hear howling, such as a "blurry big warrigal" might produce. The party pushed on, and two or three minutes later they were all able to make out the sound the black-fellow had heard. But the black-fellow shook his head now, and informed them that no warrigal ever made a howl like that; that that must be "white feller dog."

"Well, that's queer," said Jeff; "for Jock was killed the night before we parted. But, say, whatever it is, that's a most ungodly sort o' howl, sure enough!"

Five or six minutes later the black-fellow gave a whoop of astonishment as he topped a little ridge and came into view of the Master, lying prone upon the ground, with Finn sitting erect beside his head. One of the riders pulled out a revolver when he caught sight of Finn's shaggy head.

"Well, may I be teetotally jiggered!" he growled. "What sort of a beast do ye call that?"

The riders galloped down the slope and flung themselves hurriedly from their horses. The leading man waved his whip at Finn to drive him off. And then it was seen that Finn's assiduous licking had been sufficient to restore the man to consciousness. The Master raised his head feebly, and said--

"For God's sake don't hurt the dog! He saved my life. Killed six dingoes in

front of me. God's sake don't touch the----"

And with that he lapsed again into unconsciousness, while Jeff propped up his head and another man produced a spirit-flask, and the black-fellow gazed admiringly round upon the dead dingoes, and the huge Wolfhound who sat there, with hackles raised and lips a little curled by reason of the proximity of the men-folk. But Finn was perfectly conscious that the Master was being helped, and he showed no inclination to interfere. He was watchful, however, and would not retreat for more than a few paces.

The party had brandy, and water, and food in plenty with them; and it was not long before the Master was sitting up and munching soaked bread, and sipping brandy and water, while one of the men cleansed and bandaged his arms where the dingoes had torn them. Another of the men tossed a big crust of bread to Finn, and, seeing the way the Wolfhound bolted this, realized that the hound was as near to starving as the man. After that, Finn had food and drink in modest quantities; and, presently, the Master called to him, and placed one arm weakly over his bony shoulders, while telling the men, in as few words as might be, something of the manner in which Finn had fought for him, and the origin of their relationship.

Exactly a week later, Finn lay on the balcony of a country town hotel, with his nose just resting lightly on the Master's knee. The Master was still weak. He lay on a cane lounge, with one hand on Finn's shoulder. Beside him, in a basket chair, was the Mistress of the Kennels, and now and again her hand was passed caressingly over Finn's head. There was still a good deal of gauntness about the great Wolfhound; but he was strong as a lion now, and his dark eyes gleamed as brightly as ever through their overhanging eaves of iron-grey hair.

wolfhound licking hand of reclining man

The Wolfhound raised his bearded muzzle, and softly licked the Master's thin brown hand.

"Well," said the Master, looking across at his companion, over Finn's head. "I'm not very certain about most things. It takes some time to get used to being rich, doesn't it? I suppose we may be called rich. They say the claim is good enough for half a dozen fortunes yet; and sixty odd pounds of gem opal is no trifle, of itself." (As a matter of fact, the Master's swag brought him an average price of just over £20 to the ounce, or £21,250 for the lot, apart from his share in a very rich claim.)

"One thing I am dead sure about, however, and that is that, come rain or shine, there isn't money enough in all Australia to tempt us into parting with Finn boy again. Finn, boy!"

The Wolfhound raised his bearded muzzle, and softly licked the Master's thin brown hand. It was his weakness, no doubt, that produced a kind of wetness about the man's eyes.

"It's 'Sussex by the sea' for us, Finn, boy, in another month or so; and, God willing, that's where you shall end your days!"

As he responded, after his own fashion, to the Master's assurance, there was small trace in the great Wolfhound's eyes of his relationship with the wild kindred of the bush.

THE END

back endpaper

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his son Jan.

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