

She turned the wooden button and let the whelp out



Bob Davis Recalls

*The she wolf that took her whelp from the
dog kennel*

By Bob Davis



COME with me to the far reaches of the Ouachita River, sixty miles north of Monroe, Louisiana, and sit by the glow of a camp fire. In the party of seven there was one Victor Berringer, a Southerner sprung from Huguenot stock and so molded in physiognomy and adorned with such locks that he might have been taken from one of Peter Newell's masterpieces.

Each of us put forth his best foot in

stories that had to do with forest and stream, of beast and fishes and weird and wonderful things with which we had come face to face. Victor, a contemplative man and a skillful listener, sat apart on a cypress log honing a trusty blade on the leather of his boot. After each liar had droned out his contribution and the conversation was beginning to wane, Berringer spoke up:

"If it hadn't have been for President Roosevelt calling somebody or other a nature faker I would have told

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this story before. But I didn't want to be advertised across the continent as a prevaricator, so I kept my mouth shut. But, gentlemen, it is true as Gospel and I'm here to say that I'm telling it to-night for the first time.

"Twelve years ago I was one of a party of men who organized a wolf hunt in the Richland parish along the Bœuf River. We had a fine pack of hounds and calculated to spend about ten days in the swamps and the timber ridding that section of its vermin. The expedition set out from the home of Mole Stevenson."

"I knew him," interjected "Pink" Reppard, our guide, who could sound with his naked throat and lips every forest call from that of the turkey gobbler to the hoot owl. "He was a dead shot and a good tracker."

"He was all of that," continued Berringer. "Well, before we had gone two miles from his house the dogs jumped a black wolf cub and ran him into the brush. We surrounded the thicket and captured the cub alive. Mole, who wasn't afraid of anything on four feet, got a clutch on the critter's throat and tied his jaws tight with a piece of string. We then tied his feet and suspended him from a sapling which two of us shouldered. We lugged him back to the Stevenson house, where we rigged up a crate with a door which was fastened with a wooden button. On the inside we drove a strong staple, to which we hitched a steel dog chain upon which was snaffled a collar with my name on the plate. We buckled this collar tight on the neck of the wolf, cut the string that held his jaws and left him a captive. Perhaps."

"Perhaps?" queried Travis Oliver, who runs a bank in Monroe and can't imagine how anything once captured can get away.

"That's what I said: Perhaps! A wolf is the smartest animal that roams the face of the globe. I'm coming to what happened in a short time. I want-

ed that wolf for the San Antonio zoo. They don't have black wolves in Texas, and it would have been quite a feature there. After we got him caged we told Mrs. Stevenson to open the door in the daytime so he could come out, and to turn the button at night, also what to feed him, and then rejoined the rest of the party on the trail. Looked like we had that pup sewed up for keeps. Maybe!

"Now you can believe this or not: The second night after we got away from Stevenson's house the mother of the prisoner began to circle the timber around Mole's place. She yapped and yelped and howled at intervals, the whelp responding from time to time. On the following night the she wolf came nearer, and the next night she entered the clearing, communicating all the time in wolf talk with her offspring. She was getting bolder, and on the fifth night she rushed in, drove three hog hounds under the house, and went to the kennel in which the whelp was imprisoned. With her paws and her nose she turned the wooden button, let the whelp out, and then, with her teeth, sprung the snaffle, leaving the dog collar still upon the whelp's neck. The pair disappeared into the cypress." Mr. Berringer whittled a few shavings and stared into the camp fire.

"Was that the last of 'em?" inquired Prent Atkins, who sells hardware and dog chains and such.

"It was not," declared the story teller with energy. "I'm here to tell you that six months later I was out in the same neighborhood with another party of hunters after wild hogs. The dogs jumped a small black wolf and drove him down a point of land toward some black water, where the animal disappeared. The dogs got rattled and didn't seem to know where the wolf had gone. We beat the brush and covered the ground carefully, but without results. I knew the wolf hadn't come back, and that he was still

there somewhere, possibly in the swamp water with the tip of his nose out for air. We sent the dogs in and they started him up again. That was his last affair with his common enemy—man. Three bullets cut him down. At last!"

Mr. Berringer, having whetted his blade to a razor edge, closed it with a snap and placed it in his pocket. We waited respectfully for the dénouement. It follows:

"Around the dead wolf's neck was my dog collar, so tight that it had been difficult for him to swallow the food he had been able to capture. The pres-

sure had increased with his natural growth during the past six months, but he was as thin as a rail and would ultimately have starved to death. I removed the collar and have it yet. And that, gentlemen, is a true tale as the Lord is my judge."

Mr. Berringer lifted his hand into the night and held it steady in the flicker of the camp fire. Enough.

I wonder if that she-wolf, when she came upon the body of her cub, had any interest in why the collar was gone, and whose hand had carried it away.



NATURE PITY

LITTLE darlings of the wood,
I would not hurt you if I could;
Have no fear as I pass by,
Stay and peck—no need to fly;
In my hand no gun I bring,
You are safe to peck or sing.
Squirrels, do not flit away,
Let me sit and watch you play;
Here's another reason why—
I don't care for squirrel pie!

Nicholas Breton



OVER MY HEAD

CUMULOUS clouds crisp
As though cameo-cut
Emboss the blue shield of the southern sky;
Over my head, oh, high,
Flashes a wisp
Less brilliant but
Alive, transporting me beyond
The tricks of tongue or eye—
A bird,
North-drawn by what bond?
Is there a word,
A phrase,
Precise enough to capture
The secret of its free yet clocklike ways,
Fleshbound duty merged with headlong rapture?

Richard Butler Glaenser