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Hawk

a novel

Also by Brian A. Connolly

Wolf Journal, a novel

Wolf Journal, a study guide (Sue Knopp)

Not Far From Town, short stories & novella

Allegheny River Christmas & Other Stories

Readers React to *Hawk*

“Brian Connolly’s sequel to *Wolf Journal* is a well-woven tale that carries the reader swiftly along with Hawk, Jimmy, and Sherry as they embark on a new adventure. Hawk is a multifaceted Native American who lives in two worlds. The stories of his tribe’s sorrowful history are riveting, yet Hawk is never overwhelmed by the burden of his heritage.

Hawk mentors the teenagers through a variety of outdoor excursions. Their experiences illustrate a tragic disconnect between modern life and the natural world, but there is always hope for the future. Beautifully descriptive passages teach without preaching too much. The reader is also treated to an uplifting view of two teenagers who are broadening their horizons. Their experiences range from the tentatively romantic, to the humorous, and ultimately to the dangerous – all essential components of a good yarn.

Connolly’s vivid descriptions of wolf behavior evoke fond memories in a fellow wolf watcher. It was a joy to relive, through the fresh eyes of Jimmy and Sherry, early morning observations of wolves on their own turf.”

Dorothy des Lauriers
Educator/Wolf Watcher

“I picked up *Hawk* to read the first few chapters and, hours later, finished the entire book. This is an adventure through wilderness and mind, cultures and time. You feel as if you are experiencing the thunderstorms first hand and you are seeing wild wolves for the first time. Hawk’s character comes alive. He is philosophical and approachable with an air of humor. *Hawk* is a book to be read and reread, each time gaining more insights into the magic that abounds in the natural world surrounding us all.”

Cindy Hartman
Wildlife Along The Rockies
Silver Gate, Montana

“I must say that I was in the pages of Mr. Connolly’s book. I felt the pain, joy, and anger as I walked in the literary shoes of each one of the characters. I found his book to be a jewel of pathos and comedy with some very pertinent messages for the reader if they choose to be receptive.

Hawk sends an important message to the reader as he repeatedly emphasizes the importance of conservation and that we all have an obligation to revere and honor all living things. I don’t know if there is too much hope for adults, but we can have hope for the children. Hawk gets the respect for life across effectively by telling his race’s history, the tender vignettes of his life, and by conversing philosophically with Jimmy. This is an appealing way to motivate and stimulate the interest in children, and hopefully adults too! Hopefully they will get involved in taking care of the flora and fauna, and learn that they are precious gifts from our Mother Earth to be respected and revered.

Reba is such a great character! She, in my estimation, added a lot of action and conviction to the book. Also, I like the way Mr. Connolly introduced the native plants and how they were used for food and medicine.

Lastly, the last chapter was so unexpected, so surprising, so wonderful! What a perfect ending for the book. It was hard not to cry as I read the last chapter. *Hawk* has been more than I really expected. It is a great book! I hope it will be in every home and school library.”

Ann Reisch
Ruby Creek Wildlife Preserve

“Bravo!!!! Once I started reading *Hawk*, I found it was impossible to put down. The plot of the book captures the reader at all times. Mr. Connolly gets an A+ for creating an introduction that captures the reader’s attention from the start. He makes the reader think about the ecological balance of our planet. These are global issues that students must be taught and need to discuss. There are many pages that foster critical thinking, an area that needs to be fostered but is too often left untouched. *Hawk* has much to offer, with so many of life’s lessons embedded within each page. As a teacher, the story brings learning to life for me by applying concepts from all disciplines to the events in the story. For teachers of literature, the novel is rich in skills that can be used in the classroom to improve writing. *Hawk* is an inspiration, one of the most thought provoking stories I’ve ever read. This novel should be in all school libraries. It will touch the hearts of all readers.”

John Pinto
Sixth Grade Science Teacher
McGraw Elementary School

“Mr. Connolly effectively conveys his own rich experience of wildlife watching in his vivid and sometimes poetic recounting of this story about two men – one still quite young, the other a seasoned mentor – trying to ensure the safety of a wolf pack against the threat of poachers. As the story progresses, we are

deftly taught numerous lessons about wilderness, wildlife, and the tenuous nature of their existence. In this story Mr. Connolly invites the reader, through vivid and often intimate vignettes of the natural world, to regard the landscape and its native occupants with a novel appreciation.”

Bill Wengeler
Educator

“What a wonderful story! As Hawk said: ‘Words that come from inside your own self, ones that aren’t born of the ear, but begin life in your heart have more power.’ It is obvious that this book came from Mr. Connolly’s heart! Readers need to be warned that once they pick up *Hawk*, they won’t be able to put it down. I can’t thank the author enough for providing a vehicle to slip away into the wilderness for a few hours. As Mr. Connolly knows, the wilderness of Yellowstone and its creatures hold a special place in my heart, and this book now joins them. What a treat!”

Mark Rickman
Physician/Wolf Watcher

“In *Hawk*, the sequel to *Wolf Journal*, Mr. Connolly once again educates his readers while drawing them into the story. They are learning without even knowing it. Woven into the fabric of the suspenseful journey of Hawk and Jimmy, are lessons in biology, ecology, and ethnology; fiction and nonfiction are seamlessly sewn together. Hopefully, *Hawk* will find its way into many classrooms.”

Bob Wiltermood
Wetlands Biologist/Wolf Watcher
Ruby Creek Marsh

“Thank you to Mr. Connolly for creating such a wonderful story! Initially, I took the manuscript to work one weekend, looking forward to reading a few chapters during some “down time”, but as soon as I started reading *Hawk* I realized that my work environment was not a “worthy” place to enjoy this book. The lab is much too noisy with the constant alarms of instruments to enjoy a story that takes one to places that are exciting, yet peaceful. So, I was very selective of the time and place in which I would allow myself to get caught up in Hawk’s world. I loved the way the author used some of the stories and places that have been passed down in “Yellowstone Wolf Lore”. My favorite story is the one about #42F trying to get the pups to cross the river. I think that story, more than any other, shows the intelligence, playfulness, and devotion to family that wolves possess. I also love the way that Mr. Connolly incorporates lessons in natural history, native culture, observation, and vocabulary into the literature; this book is a teacher’s dream, especially for those who teach with a “thematic” method. Each time I picked up the book, I felt the connection to the natural world that so many of us have come to cherish in our busy lives. It was welcome refuge for me.”

Carol Rickman
Docent, Pueblo Zoo/Wolf Watcher

“With his unique and poetic writing, Brian A. Connolly pulls us again into a story of excitement, adventure, and native wisdom. And like in his first novel *Wolf Journal*, the author teaches us a lot about wolves, their behavior, and their place in our world.”

Elli H. Radinger, Editor
Wolf Magazin, Germany

"Brian Connolly sure knows his wolves! If you can't watch wolves in the wild, you can have a wonderful experience watching them and learning about them through his words."

Dan Lyman
Educator/Wolf Watcher

Hawk

a novel

Brian A. Connolly

Virtualbookworm.com Publishing
College Station, Texas

Aldo Leopold quote: from p. 137, 58 words total from *A Sand County Almanac* by Leopold, Aldo, 1945, (2005). By permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

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Author photograph by Lena Cochran.

This novel is a work of fiction. The characters and events are products of the author's imagination. With the exception of Wind Wolf's story, which is loosely based on Susquehannock historical facts, any similarity to real people and events is coincidental.

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Manufactured in the United States of America.

For Bob Adam and Ed Porter

In Memory of

U Black & Wolf 375F

Acknowledgements

I have had many teachers and guides throughout the process of writing *Hawk*. Without their important contributions, this story could not have been written. Therefore, I wish to thank Rick McIntyre, a teacher to all wolf watchers, for his detailed answers to my questions and for making sure that I had many opportunities to observe wolves. Thank you to Dan, Cindy, Cassie, and Kelly Hartman for their enthusiasm for my writing, sharing it with others, creating cover photos for my books, and for inviting me to join in on their deep wilderness photo adventures. Thank you to Mark and Carol Rickman, in whose Silver Gate cabin *Hawk* was begun, for their encouragement, good humor, and for sharing their wolf knowledge. Thanks to Ann Reisch, who, after reading *Wolf Journal*, said ‘I think when you get around to writing *Hawk*, you’ll discover that he knows a lot about medicinal and edible wild plants.’ She was right. Special thanks to Bob and Susan Wiltermood, whose friendship and informed conversation permeates the pages of this story. Special thanks to my daughter, Heather, for her constant encouragement, insights into the written word, and careful proofreading of the manuscript. Special thanks, too, to Nate and Trish Connolly, my son and daughter-in-law, for literally creating a home for me in Oregon where my pen would always be free to move across the page. To my sister Judy Connolly and Kathy and Kate Reynolds for their hospitality in Oberlin, their research on medicinal/edible wild plants, and their valuable help with publicity.

Special thanks to Bob Landis for his wolf stories, his informed observations, and especially for teaching me (and many others) about the native residents of Yellowstone through his amazing films. I’d like to thank Carl Swoboda for always sharing his in depth knowledge of Yellowstone, and an added thanks to him and his lovely daughters, Elizabeth and Alexandra, for teaching me so much about wolf dens and helping me explore one. Thank you to Leathem MeHaffey for his dramatic

tales from the northwest shared around a kitchen table in New York. Thanks to Ed Porter for kind words and instant help with all things grammatical. To Ray and Darlene Rathmell, thank you for your friendship, knowledge of the wild, and for keeping a quiet camp at Pebble Creek where most of this novel and *Wolf Journal* were written: site 8 and site 11, respectively. And, likewise, a thank you to Dale and Bobbi Dempsey who enabled me to write at Pebble during the summer of 2006. A special thanks to Laurie Lyman for keeping so many of us informed daily about wolf activity in Yellowstone. Thank you to Steve and Lisa Schluter of Cooke City for making my books available to so many Yellowstone visitors. I have long valued their friendship and energetic conversation. Thank you to Dave and Sherryl Clendenen, who in exchange for showing them their first wolves in the wild allowed me to use the name of the refuge they oversee for one of my characters. In California, they are the caretakers and educational coordinators of the Wind Wolf Wildlife Refuge.

Dr. Beth Shiner Klein, at the State University of New York at Cortland, and John Pinto, a sixth grade science teacher at McGraw Elementary School in McGraw, New York, have been teaching *Wolf Journal* to their students for several years. Beth's science education majors work with John's students as part of a pre-student-teaching course. Months before *Hawk* was published, they began teaching it as well. They are pioneers, not only in teaching science through literature, but also in using podcasts, webcasts, virtual author visits, video conferencing, and techno lesson plans to educate young adults about wolves and the delicate world in which they live. For all their dedication, I applaud Beth and John, and thank them for using *Wolf Journal* and *Hawk* as stepping-stones for their students into the world of the wolf.

I am also indebted to the following for sharing their stories and wolf knowledge with me: George Bumann, Ralph Maughan, Linda and Marshall Glenn, Jim and Joellyn Barton, Jeanne Muellner, Mark Miller, Jeff MacIntyre, Chloe Fessler and Becky Cox, Craig and Joyce Hortman, Rich and Linda Yates, Bev, Rusty, and Kerri Quinton, Kathi Macaulay, Gerry Hogston, Calvin and Lynette Johnston, Lena Cochran, Larry and Linda Rabe, Ray and Lynn Marro, jr., Marlene Fiord, John Kerr, and Mike O'Connell and Emily Almberg.

Finally, months before *Hawk* was published, many wolf watchers and former readers of *Wolf Journal* agreed to read a rough draft of *Hawk* and write a few sentence for the *Readers React* section at the front of the novel. For their kind words, I'd like to thank Kathy Reynolds, Dan Lyman, Elli Raddinger, Cindy Hartman, John Pinto, Beth Shiner Klein, Dorothy des Lauriers, Ann Reisch, Bob Wiltermood, Carol Richman, and Mark Rickman. Also, for their quotes, corrections, and insightful editorial suggestions, a very special thank you to Kathie Lynch, Betsy Downey, and Bill Wengeler.

Author's Note

Just after sunup in Yellowstone's Lamar Valley, wolf #302M, a husky, black male, sat in a meadow with his head back and howled. His breath steamed in the cold air. The wolf's song carried across the wide valley, intended for the ears of the Druid Peak pack. Wolf watchers call him Romeo because of his success with the Druid females. He was a Leopold trying to join the Druids. It would take another year before he would be accepted. The date was June 22, 2004, just one of many amazing days I have been fortunate enough to spend with wolves in the wild. #302M howled for over an hour. I sat in my truck eighty yards away and listened.

Later that day, from the hitching post pullout, I was looking south across Soda Butte Creek to the Lamar River corridor. Just below an old cutbank was a bison carcass, an animal that may have died on its own and was later discovered by the five Druid wolves tugging on its rear flanks. Pulling at the bison's head was a large black bear. Every once in a while the bear would rush the wolves. The wolves would scatter, regroup, and rush the bear. He would dash away, but return as soon as the wolves retreated to their end of the bison. With each attack, we could hear snarls, barks, and growls, which came to us, across a half mile of sage, like whispers. I say 'we' and 'us' because as the feeding and conflict continued over many hours, the pullout and the roadway filled with wolf watchers and tourists, each fascinated by this rare glimpse into the secret lives of these two top predators.

We were wrong to think that what we were so privileged to witness was the full extent of this natural drama. Partway through the evening, with the sun well into its steep descent, a huge bore grizzly leapt from the cutbank onto the middle of the bison carcass. The black bear and all five wolves disappeared. Normally, the wolves and the black bear might try to harass the grizzly, but in this instance, so startled were they, they fled. The

grizzly rolled the fifteen hundred pound bison over, lifted the head end off the ground, and rolled it from side to side so that we could see all four stiff legs of the carcass flop back and forth. The great brown bear stood over the carcass and tore at its belly for several minutes. Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, it disappeared beyond the cutbank, across the sage flats, south to the tree line. I think the grizzly heard people talking or picked up our scent. Once he was gone, the black bear and all five wolves resumed their part in the play.

Meanwhile, howling from other Druid wolves north of the road could be heard. The mournful wailing was coming from the dense den forest spread across the lap of Druid Peak. We turned our scopes momentarily in the direction of those howls. Just below the ledge trail five wolf pups crossed a meadow and disappeared. I don't recall the number of grays or blacks, but I remember it was the first sighting of the pups for that year. What a thrill to see those little wolves, the promise of a new generation.

We could still hear the lonesome wolf calls from the den forest as darkness settled in around us. The crowd that had gathered dissipated. I had been watching with my friend Betsy. We had been asked to hang out in the pullout for a while to see if the wolves north of the road crossed safely to the south. Of course, the darkness was so complete that we could not see more than twenty feet. However, we stood there next to our blind scopes for some time, talking quietly as if in a church.

My attention was diverted from the conversation by a noise in the road behind us: a tapping, a scratching. The sound, still clear in my memory, was made by claws scraping blacktop. Out of the darkness appeared a black canid that walked right next to us. My first thought was that someone's dog had gotten loose, so I leaned forward to reach for the collar. I stopped short when I realized the collar was studded and had a radio attached. It was a wolf! Wolf #375F, a yearling.

Seemingly unaware of us, she continued a short distance into the sage, sniffed around, then turned back toward us. She hadn't taken more than a few steps before I spoke to her, saying something like, "Hey! That's close enough!" She froze, startled that we were there. And for a long moment she held us in the gaze of her yellow eyes. We had not entered her world, but we were looking in the window, as close as humans could get. After studying us, she turned south and disappeared into the immense dark.

I am not sure Betsy or I breathed during the whole brief encounter. Usually, if we know a wolf is approaching, we try to get into our vehicles to avoid any chance of it becoming habituated to people. Any wild animal that loses its fear of humans is dangerous and will eventually have to be destroyed. In our case, we never had a chance to move. As a young wolf, #375F had other things on her mind, food most likely, and seemed unconscious of our presence until I called out to her.

Intense experiences in the wild, like the ones I had on that June day, inspire us in many ways. They cause us to rethink our own part in the scheme of wild things. We are moved to learn more through continued conversation with biologists and other seekers of nature's secrets, and to learn more from personal observations and reading.

Once we are given and accept the gifts that nature offers, it is incumbent upon us to ask ourselves, 'How can I give back?' The response to that question is as individual as the person asking it. Some give back through scientific field observation, knowing that the more we know about wolves and nature, the better will be our efforts to teach others. Education is the enemy of ignorance. Some will return from the wild to become a docent at a zoo or join an environmental organization. Others may create a sculpture, take photographs, make paintings, compose music, or make a documentary film, all in celebration of the wilderness. A deep wilderness experience could be the foundation of a poem or the inspiration for a novel.

Seeing a wolf in the wild, hearing that plaintive howl, watching wolves interact within the pack, forms a deep emotional tie between us and nature, a connection that in the past may have been weak or missing. A seed is planted. As that seed grows, our choices are made with new courage. The distant dream becomes possible. A girl I know has changed the direction of her education so that it is now focused on environmental management. A couple, who oversees Pebble Creek campground during the summer, gives wilderness slide shows at schools in Pennsylvania in winter. An inner city teacher gave up her lucrative job to teach in a one-room schoolhouse near the Park. A young wolf research assistant has gone back to school to get her Ph.D. in wolf studies.

Finally, as our nature I. Q. matures, we realize how important it is to protect the natural world, and restore or repair what has been eliminated or harmed by man. If a young adult reaches this level of awareness, and reads about a public official who intends to allow old growth trees to be cut down, air to be polluted with carbon, water to be contaminated by mercury, the earth to be bathed in harmful pesticides, or wild wolves to be shot, they can write letters of complaint, contribute to organizations that are fighting to keep the planet healthy, and ask their parents to vote the offenders of wildlife out. It is a great honor to witness the drama and beauty of nature. It is an even greater honor to speak up on its behalf.

BAConnolly
Bend, Oregon

A deep chesty bawl echoes from rim rock to rim rock, rolls down the mountain, and fades into the far blackness of the night. It is an outburst of wild defiant sorrow, and of contempt for all the adversities of the world. ...Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf.

Aldo Leopold,
from '*Thinking Like A Mountain*',
A Sand County Almanac: and Sketches Here and There,
1945

An icy wind blew snow horizontally across the dark highway and shook a small delivery truck that lurched through the storm. The faded blue letters on the sides that read *Hoh's Furniture* belied the true nature of the truck's live cargo. The driver wiped the fogged windshield with a red bandana and peered through the slapping wipers. The headlights penetrated only a few feet into the falling snow like a pair of feelers, illuminating an occasional Route 6 sign, a mile marker, a strip of reflective tape on a guardrail, scant evidence that the road still existed where the driver thought it should be.

The engine moaned in low gear. The worried face of the driver was pale in the dashboard lights. As the truck plowed through a snowdrift at thirty miles an hour, the driver could hear yelps and barks coming from the cage in back. As he often did when alone, the driver talked aloud to himself, an internal monologue surfacing in the middle of a sentence. "...and, while we're on the subject, what halfwit numbskull came up with the bright idea of putting the whole wolf pack in one cage? They're each supposed to have their own! And them guys at Bradford told me these critters would be asleep for the ride. 'Sounds to me like they's moving around in the cage,' I says. 'They may be waking up some,' they says. 'The storm delayed the plane and the vet took his good ole time with the physicals, but they should be pretty quiet for most of the trip.' 'They need another dose of that sleeping potion,' says I. 'Oh, can't do that. Don't want 'em to have too much sedative,' they says. 'They'll get another shot when

they put on the radio collars.’ I says, ‘Why not collar ‘em before they get on the stupid plane! That’s the way I was told it was supposed to be done.’ That way they could be dreamin’ now; you save ‘em some misery and allow ‘em to sleep through this nightmare ride! But no, some peabrained imbecile accidentally shipped the collars to New York, not Bozeman, Montana, where the plane and the wolves was. I says, ‘Why, for cryin’ out loud, do they even need collars! They’re supposed to be wild wolves!’ ‘Can’t have no wolves runnin’ around the woods without collars. If you can’t find ‘em, you can’t study ‘em. Next time, maybe, we’ll do it your way,’ they says. Rats to you! There won’t be no more next time for me haulin’ wolves across the country, thank you very much, unless they’s knocked out cold. Put ‘em under, give ‘em an IV of juiced venison, and let ‘em sleep like babies so that when they wake up they’ll be in their new woods, refreshed, not a nervous wreck with their brains all disheveled, and their emotions drawn taut as a barbed wire fence.”

The driver switched his Pirates ball cap so that the brim was on the back, giving him an unimpeded view of the nearly opaque windshield. He was no stranger to talking aloud to himself. He did so in the barn, on the tractor, on the horse, and while repairing fence or fishing on the Allegheny River. Now, however, he wished he had someone riding shotgun to help him see the road and listen to his tirade.

“Why didn’t they fly these guys right to the Adirondacks? Oh, yes, I remember. The wolf vet had some family thing in Bradford and couldn’t be in Montana or meet a plane in New York. He had to do the physicals here in Pennsylvania. Collect that all-important DNA, draw some blood, the old thermometer up the butt, and who knows what other indignities. Of course, if the doc was in New York, I’d be out a job and out the money. But I didn’t sign me up for no blizzard!” He leaned forward and rubbed the window with his sleeve. “Where’s the blasted road gone to now? Oh, my god!”

The truck plowed through a deep drift and slid sideways so that the driver was looking through the windshield directly at the side of the road. A telephone pole passed, as did a mailbox, and a maple tree. There was no screeching of tires. Straddling both lanes, the truck glided silently on ice hidden under the snow. A long line of guardrails connected to each other by a pair of cables glided past the truck’s grill. Each landmark appeared like a ghost and drifted away as if in slow motion. The driver turned the steering wheel into the skid and tapped the brakes in an attempt to keep the lumbering vehicle on the road. His eyes were wide and his knuckles white. Thumps and yelps could be heard from the back compartment as the truck swung a quarter turn, so that the startled driver was looking where he had been rather than where he was headed.

One thing he did know was that the road followed the Allegheny River. Another thing he knew was that here, just beyond Burtville, the

river turned. Its thick ice cover was just a foot below road level. At the bend in the river where the road curved left, the box truck went straight. Old posts snapped like sticks and cables broke like string, each sounding like a rifle shot as the truck careened backwards through the guardrails. As it flipped over the low riverbank, its headlights cut an arc through the snowy sky. For a moment the driver was suspended above his seat, above the limp seatbelts he had failed to fasten, above the pale dashboard lights. He heard the animals in the back shriek their terror.

The impact was not the soft fall in the snow the driver had expected, but rather a rock-hard jolt that shattered the windshield and caused him to ricochet off the ceiling of the cab, off the rear window, off the passenger door before he lost consciousness slipping beneath the surface of a pool of searing pain.

When the truck came to rest upside down on the river ice, its fiberglass box was splintered open, its doors were off their hinges, and the large cage within was open. For several minutes all was quiet except for the voice of the wind and the low gurgling of water flowing under the ice. Snow fell through the one headlight that remained on, a single eye looking downstream. Then one by one, dark figures, ghostlike apparitions, began to escape from the broken cage. They gathered on the ice behind the truck, some limping, others shaking their coats as if they had just emerged from water. Eight in all. The largest of the wolves, a black with a sliver of moon white on its chest, returned to the truck, sniffed around the cage, and, seemingly satisfied that nothing more could be done, limped toward the far bank. Once on that snowy rise, he gave a long stare at the crumpled truck. The wolf gave a shallow bark and moved off south. The rest of the pack followed him single file into the white night.

Storm clouds gathered over Strang Hollow as Hawk and Jimmy began hiking through the deciduous forest following a rushing spring, the source of which lay among glacial erratics, granite boulders high above the valley on the Allegheny Plateau. The oak, maple, and shagbark hickory trees wore young leaves that created a canopy, filtering the already weak light of the sky. Dark green mountain laurel, sweetfern, and moss lined the deer trail they followed. Somewhere in the distant hills to the west, thunder sounded like a lonesome drum beat.

“If we’re lucky,” Hawk said, “we’ll make the rock cave before the sky opens up.”

Jimmy said, “I can only count to nine between the lightning and the thunder. I think we’re in for a drenching. The storm is coming on fast. The wind has already picked up considerably.” Both hikers extracted rain parkas from their packs. Jimmy’s coat was a lighter shade of green than the olive fleece still in the pack. He cinched the hood tightly around his face. Hawk wore a wide brimmed felt hat to deflect the rain. His coat was a long, leather, barn coat; one he had made himself.

The leaves began a rustling conversation, then branches moved in the wind, then trees swayed. A silver jag of lightning struck an oak across the creek, shattering its trunk and causing it to lean over on its neighbor, a head leaning on a shoulder. The instant thunder cascaded down the valley like an avalanche of sound, shaking the ground as it rolled.

Hawk and Jimmy froze. “You smell that lightning? Burned air. I don’t think you could squeeze a count between those two. We better head for shelter. Let’s go this way.”

Hawk led left into the deep forest. Jimmy followed as rain began to pelt the leaves and the wind howled among the hills. As they moved through the woods, Jimmy noticed gray squirrels disappearing into dark holes in tree trunks, juncos, chickadees, and a cardinal darting into low brush and clumps of laurel, and ants and beetles scurrying to holes in the ground. One crow squawked as it was swept off course by the wind. Within minutes the woods was a wild dance of motion, whole bodies of trees bending, bowing with their arms flailing as if in a ritual dance to honor the power of nature: the sweep of her breath, the electric touch of her finger, her deafening voice, her myriad tears.

Thunder exploded as Jimmy followed Hawk into a windfall, a pile of toppled trees over which leafy vines had grown, forming a dense canopy. The pair crawled on their bellies into the green light of the tree cave, where they had room enough to sit up as well as stash their canvas packs.

“This isn’t a very good sign, Hawk,” Jimmy shouted. “We’re only an hour into this hike, and already we’re in trouble.” Jimmy’s brown hair was matted across his forehead, and his hazel eyes absorbed the wet light of the green refuge.

Hawk thought for a moment, shook the water from his green felt hat, stroked the red-tailed hawk feather that protruded from the hatband, and said, “Actually it is a good sign. How many sunny days do you remember? We learn more, feel more, and think better in a storm. Calm is good for resting, but turmoil gives birth to understanding. On a quiet day you think of yourself in the here and now, you focus on the worries for that day and maybe the next. However, when the sky talks, your thinking reaches out; the questions you ask are more important. If this tossing storm rubs me out, have I lived well enough? Have I contributed something to the family of man so that they will remember? Or you might go back much further in your thoughts, find that your meditations are forged by the primitive thunder rolling around these hills. Back before our grandfathers crawled out of the seas and gulped their first breath.

“If you think about those early times once in a while, it helps you put your own worries in perspective. Maybe a problem you have today, a hardship you’re feeling like a thorn in the heart, is not so important if you think of where it lies in the long history of time. Yes, I think this storm is a good sign. If the journey were easy, the stories we’d have to tell when we returned would not be very interesting. As it is, we already have the story of this storm and how we holed up in a windfall with a snake.”

“Snake?” Jimmy said, shifting suddenly to the right to examine the ground.

“That one,” Hawk said, calmly pointing up.

In the branches above was a black snake as big around as a broom handle and draped over a three-foot section of the green canopy like a loose rope. The snake kept the black beads of its eyes on Jimmy. Its pink tongue darted in and out tasting the air, reading the air. The shiny black whip of its body tensed with each clap of thunder.

Jimmy smiled. "We have those all around the barn. They keep the mouse population in check. There are two black snakes over five feet long that live in the rock pile behind the barn. They are totally harmless, and still there are people who kill them on sight."

Hawk said, "That's because they don't understand snakes or know how important they are to the whole balance of things. Come to think of it, it's hard to believe that there are people loose in the world who don't realize that everything in the wild is important. Some still shoot coyotes and bald eagles just for target practice. Only very bad karma can come from such low behavior. When tragedy strikes their lives, I wonder if they can trace the origin of their bad luck back to the dark day when they blew the wing off a raptor, or shot a helpless, treed cougar, or put out poisoned hotdogs for wolves. All things deserve respect. All things are connected, even this snake. We are guests in his den. If we behave, perhaps he will let us stay until the storm passes."

Hawk and Jimmy were quiet for a long time listening to the rain drumming on the canopy, the trees creaking and shuddering before the forceful hand of the wind, the thunder rolling down the length of Strang Hollow like unseen boulders tumbling into a canyon. Jimmy thought about how often he and Hawk had been caught in the rain, about how Hawk was like a grandfather to him, about their long friendship going back as far as he could remember, about the past adventures they'd had together, and about this new adventure. After a while Jimmy slid to his left to avoid a trickle of water leaking through the ceiling of the leafy cave. The snake slinked off into a deeper recess of the windfall. Each of the stowaways drank from their water bottles.

Jimmy said, "Hawk, you know Sherry is going to join us in four days, as soon as she gets back from Cayuga Lake up in New York. Her folks fly fish up there for a week every summer. They have a camp somewhere near Seneca Falls."

"Good fishing there; deep water for lake trout, and there are some fine streams. How long you two been going together now?" said Hawk.

"Since the middle of ninth grade, so a year and a half."

"I hope you know how lucky you are. It's very tough to find someone who'll put up with all of your outdoor roaming and hardship. Where did you say we'd meet up with her?"

"Mr. Woolman will drop her off at Rock Run, and she'll hike in to the beaver ponds just south of Scaffold Lick Creek. I'm hoping we won't find the wolves before then. It's important to her that we find them together."

“She might find those wolves before we do. Did Sherry ever pass that driver’s test she was so worried about?”

“It turned out that her aunt was the trooper who gave her the test. Even though Sherry flattened one of the orange cones while parallel parking, she still passed. Learning the stick shift was her main problem. But I feel safe riding with her.” Then after a brief silence, Jimmy continued, “So anyway, she did promise me that she’d keep our trek into the woods a secret. Why do we need to be so secretive about this?”

“Well,” Hawk began, “it’s only a secret because we don’t want a lot of locals knowing we’re traipsing around the Plateau searching for a bunch of wolves, eight wolves to be exact. If word got out that we thought they were this close to town, the whole place would be overrun with people trying to get a picture of a wolf. And you can bet someone would show up in camo carrying a 30/40 Craig. Probably the same guy who shoots birds for fun.”

Jimmy asked, “Are these the wolves from the accident last January?”

“These are the ones. After the ten-year anniversary of the reintroduction of wolves in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, some seed wolves were selected to be relocated to the Adirondacks. One pack of eleven wolves from the Sunlight Basin in Wyoming was captured, as was a pack of eight wolves from the Sawtooth Mountains near Red Fish Lake in central Idaho. They were sedated and flown from Bozeman, Montana, to Bradford, just thirty miles from here.

“I know you already read all this, but there are a few details that didn’t make the newspaper. One thing, for example, is that environmental groups paid for half the project, and the other half came out of the pocket of Twin Bears. He wrote to me about it last fall saying that Romeo and Juliet’s pups and the two adults who adopted them were doing fine. The pups escaped the parvovirus that was claiming dogs in the area last summer. You remember how worried we were about that. The pups weren’t nursing, so they were very vulnerable because their immune system wasn’t in full gear yet. So when that danger passed, Twin Bears began looking ahead to the future. He wrote that even though the pack was doing fine, it was as though they were living on an island. He said they might as well be on Isle Royale in Lake Superior because there are no wolves from other packs for them to breed with. They need other wolves to broaden the gene pool. Otherwise, like the Isle Royale wolves, they can only breed within their own family. It’s not healthy when brother and sister or father and daughter breed together. Of course, it’s fortunate that the alpha male of the Adirondack pack is not related to the female pups. But they still need some diversity.”

“How did the Isle Royale wolves get out to the island?” asked Jimmy. “I thought wolves didn’t like water, and it must be ten or twenty miles to the Canadian shore from the island.”

“I asked Twin Bears that same question,” said Hawk. “He said that back in the early 1940s Lake Superior froze from the island to the main shore. Moose crossed the ice out to the island. Wolves followed. The ice melted, stranding both predator and prey. It hasn’t frozen again so they’ve been there ever since. But the real point is you don’t need water to make an island for wildlife. Many of our national parks and national forests are islands surrounded by private land. Bears, cougars, wolves, all the grazing ungulates who need room to migrate, to meet up with others of their kind, have no way of getting from one island park to the next without being harassed in some way by humans who think the animals pose a threat to them or their livelihood, or by hunters who believe it is their right to put a cougar’s head on their wall or the bear’s skin on his floor.

“Also, we build barriers animals have trouble crossing when they migrate, like super highways and barbed wire fences to name a few. To a wolf or coyote or fox, the road is just a long, flat rock. Some places, though, are building wildlife tunnels under highways or grass bridges over highways so that more animals can pass safely.

“I’ve been hearing rumors that other things are changing, too. Travel corridors are being mapped between isolated refuges so that the animal populations from one refuge can intermingle with populations from another. Some farmers and ranchers are selling safe passage rights to their land so that animals can pass through unharmed. A few hunting groups are doing the same with lands that they own or lease. Such corridors are planned along the west coast, through the Rockies, through the middle of the country, and along the east coast, which includes right here where we are on the Allegheny Plateau in northern Pennsylvania. Twin Bears is involved in mapping and acquiring rights for the Appalachian Corridor from Florida to Canada. I’ve even helped him out some by writing letters. But he said his wolves needed company in the Adirondacks right away. Because it will be many years before natural populations can move freely with limited obstruction, Twin Bears decided to bring new blood to his neighborhood, wolf blood, that is. But then there was the accident.”

Jimmy said, “If I remember correctly, we had a snowstorm that lasted several days.” He wiped rain from his brow. A muffled clap of thunder died in the distance. “Where exactly was the accident?”

Hawk shook more rain from his hat. “There were two trucks, each with their own wolf pack. Twin Bears had laid out the travel route through Smethport and Port Allegany staying on Route 6 to Coudersport, where they would then follow the same roads we took with Romeo & Juliet’s pups to the south slopes of the High Peaks of the Adirondacks. Both packs were to undergo a soft release. Eleven wolves would spend ten weeks in Twin Bears’ acclimation pen, and the other eight would do the same in a pen built by the Adirondack Wolf Coalition on the north slope of Mt. Marcy near St. Herberts. Only the truck with the eight wolves made it.

“The first truck with the smaller pack got separated from the second not long after they left Bradford. It took Twin Bears’ nephew, Eddie Bluefeather, three days to get to St. Huberts, and he had no idea what had happened miles behind him. You know Johnny Nelson from out Grimes District; his father’s farm is on the river there. Johnny was driving the second truck with eleven wolves. He held over in Port at the diner on Main Street nearly five hours waiting for the snow to let up. People were curious about what he was hauling, but he wouldn’t say anything except that it was top secret. Then around ten p. m. those wolves went to howling. The long, low notes escaped out the ventilation holes and leaked into the diner, so that everyone was looking at each other saying, ‘What in tarnation is that?’ Johnny paid his bill, and, even though there was a foot of snow on the road, he headed east toward Coudersport.”

“The wolves had arrived in Bradford in individual cages, but the box trucks were equipped with one large cage, one for each pack. After the vet did his thing, the wolves were still sedated and placed in the trucks. Before he left Bradford, according to Johnny, the wolves were already coming around. When his truck rolled over the bank and into the river just past Burtville near Card Creek, Johnny was badly hurt. He was at Cole Hospital until just a fortnight ago, and his dad says he still isn’t right, probably have the limp the rest of his life. That Johnny’s a strong boy; he’ll do okay.”

Jimmy asked, “How did Twin Bears feel about so much of his plan going wrong?”

“You know him; he’s so positive about things. When the vet and the collars weren’t in Bozeman, he said it was like the government was in charge. About the wolves that didn’t make it to New York, he said as long as they’re doing fine where they are, they should stay put.”

“So, what about the wolves?” asked Jimmy. “What happened to them?”

“Some of the wolves didn’t fare as well as Johnny. When the truck broke apart on the river ice, three of them were killed, two grays and a black, all yearlings. The cage busted open, and those wolves that could, headed for the hills. One of the wolf organizations brought in trackers a day or two after the storm let up, but the snow had erased any sign of ‘em. Not a track was found, no blood trail from injuries, nothing. The paper said three wolves escaped, but sometimes they get things wrong. Eight wolves got away. Three didn’t.”

“I remember you snowshoed all over that area, Hawk, and didn’t find a trace,” said Jimmy. “I wanted to go, too, but Pa wouldn’t let me miss school.”

The olive light in the tree cave began to brighten, and the rain let up. Thunder was like cannon fire from a battle in a distant valley to the east.

Hawk shifted his cramped legs and continued. “Since then, Twin Bears has heard from his cousin Ned Waters, a guy, by the way, I don’t

have much use for. He's always trying to trick someone out of something, a real fast talker, filled with bogus schemes he'd like you to invest in. Always check for your wallet after talking to him. But one thing he does do well, like you Jimmy, is read signs and track like a hound dog. He lives right over there by Wrights on Portage Creek. Says he found wolf tracks in the mud along the stream, about a month back, big ones, he says. He figured after the crash the wolves went up Card Creek and Nichols Hollow onto the flats, and hung out there for a spell before moving west through Hamilton Run, which drains into Portage.

"So Twin Bears asked me to take a look, and I did. They were wolf tracks, no doubt about it, and even some very old scat with pieces of bone and fur in them."

Jimmy interrupted, "I remember reading somewhere that wolves eat fur, which will wrap around bone shards so that the sharp pieces will pass through the digestive system without causing trouble."

"From what was left of the poop, I'd say it worked," said Hawk. "The tracks belonged to at least five different animals; two of them were injured. You could tell from the tracks that one was not using its front right paw at all, and another left a delicate print with his left hind leg. I'm hoping we'll see those tracks again."

"What do we do if we find them?" Jimmy asked.

"We just watch them, try to learn a little more about how they live, how they interact with each other and their new neighbors. But most of all we just want to make sure they're okay. Twin Bears thinks that if they're out here on the Allegheny Plateau, they'll be fine where they are. He's already negotiating for another seed pack from the west to replace these wolves in the Adirondacks. This pack, we'll call them the Plateau pack, has it made, if they decide to stay. Wild country stretches in all directions on the Plateau with dense cover, plenty of whitetail deer, and miles of streams. Not a bad place for a wolf pack to homestead." Hawk smiled.

Jimmy said, "One of the wolf websites, I think from Pocatello, Idaho, indicated that the reason the reintroduced wolves in Yellowstone didn't come from Minnesota was that those wolves fed primarily on whitetail deer. They needed wolves that were accustomed to elk, the main food source in the Park. The pack teaches the young to hunt a certain prey in a certain way, and, if that prey is not available, the pack will not fare as well. Does the Plateau pack know how to hunt deer?"

"You're right about all that, Jimmy," said Hawk. "Twin Bears called it 'prey imaging'. The young imprint on what the adults teach them to hunt. That's why you might see wolves walk right through a cattle herd without disturbing them. As long as there is wild prey, the wolves always prefer to tackle what they have been taught. These wolves are descendants of the Canadian wolves, but they lived in areas that were rich in elk, blacktail, and whitetail deer. They developed strategies for hunting deer,

the same deer that live in the Adirondacks, the same whitetail deer that populate this plateau. They won't go hungry. Plenty of venison on the menu."

The two friends sat in the leafy cave listening to the rain turn from the sound of applause to a quiet whisper. The wind calmed itself, and the shuddering of the leaves ceased. The black snake returned, curled among the high branches, and slept with its eyes open, watching the interlopers.

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