

The three men made their way to the stables, Alan in the lead, Travis behind him with his gun drawn and held low, followed by Craig who now wished he'd never signed on to this expedition...in fact, he wished he'd never come to Canada at all. The rough-cut timber that made up the fence around the stables had been kicked down near the southwest corner. The snow had covered any tracks, but Alan guessed that a horse or two might have made it out alive. Even so, he feared what they might find inside.

He had reason to fear. Two horses, dead, horribly mangled, lie in awkward positions inside the stall. The stable's straw and dirt floor was drenched with blood.

"Jesus, Almighty..." Travis muttered. "Ain't no one bear did this." He wiped his mouth and nose with a sleeve, and feared he might vomit. Craig beat him to it, stepping back outside and wrenching loudly as he heaved up the two meals he'd had today.

"What about two, Travis?" Alan asked.

"Two?"

"Yeah...remember in the early eighties in Yellowstone? Something about a bunch of hikers and campers being attacked, some of them killed, by a pair of rogue bears working together. Two big females, I believe it was. I think it was the first time something like that had ever happened."

"I remember something, yeah. I suppose two big ones might wreak this kind of havoc, but for the life of me, I just can't see it. They posed no danger and look...they haven't been eaten." Travis backed up from the carcass nearest him and looked down at the ground. What he saw chilled him to the bone.

"We need to go," he said meekly, his face pale.

"What? Why?"

Travis pointed down at the soft patch of dirt. His footprint from a moment ago was neatly pressed into the powdery soil. Next to his footprint, so close that it looked like he had

planted his right foot beside it for comparison, was a track that anyone in this part of Canada would know. It was a wolf track.

Alan stared. The problem with this track—and the others that they now saw all around the stable interior was the size and the depth of the print. A normal wolf track...a big one...might leave an imprint the size of a man's hand, fingers slightly curled at the top joint. This track was easily three times that size, and had a freakish elongation at the rear—almost like that of a human arch and heel.

Huge indentations in the dirt showed that the animal had claws larger and longer than any normal wolf. The claws dug deep into the soil. In places where the animal must have braced itself while attacking the horses, the claws had dug an inch or more into the soil.

"We need to go." Travis said again.

Alan was speechless. They were obviously much like a wolf but they *had to have* come from a badly deformed animal...and one much heavier than any of the wolves known to roam this area.

"Right after we take a look at the burn pile." Alan said, not noticing the shaky sound of his own voice as he stared down at the tracks.

"Fuck that," Travis said. "We need to get out now. This shit isn't right."

"You have a gun."

"I don't give a rat's ass. This shit isn't right."

"Okay, we got that. The shit isn't right. Now, calm down for a second. The wolf...whatever...it's gone now."

"You don't know that—and you think those tracks are simply wolf tracks? You ever seen a wolf with a six-inch human heel attached to it?"

Alan looked up at Travis as if the man had lost his mind. "Human heel print? Are you crazy, Travis? Are you suggesting that this was a man?"

Travis shook his head as he backed away toward the exit. "Uh uh. I'm not suggesting it was a man."

Alan furrowed his brow in puzzlement. "You just said *human heel print*."

"Yeah, I did. You figure it out. I'm going back to the plane, and if you don't bring your ass with me, I am going to figure out how to fly it myself."

Alan finally understood. "Tell me you are not saying this was some sort of a wolf man? A werewolf?" He actually smiled at the absurdity. "That's the craziest damned thing I've heard in all my days in these mountains." He pointed at the dead and mauled horses. "You think a walking *fairy tale* did this damage? You think a *myth* attacked whoever was in the cabin? You are out of your mind...this was a wolf. A big, fucked up, messed up...wolf."

Travis shook his head and went back outside. Alan followed him. "Think about it, Travis. A deformed wolf...he won't be accepted by the pack...not deformed like this one must be. He'd be a pissed off, messed up in the head...a rogue."

"You are missing the damned point, Alan," Travis said as he stormed past Craig and away from the stables.

"What point?" Alan implored, his arms spread in bewilderment.

Travis stopped, turned around and looked at Craig and Alan. He shook his head and chuckled nervously. "Do I have to point it out? Didn't you see it, Alan? It was walking on two legs. Upright—just like you and me—on TWO legs, Alan...TWO legs."

Alan did not know how to react...and found that instead of speaking, he was calculating how long they had until the sun began its descent into the Western mountain range. Maybe forty-five minutes. His spine prickled as he searched his mind for an argument that would quell this irrational line of thinking. His mouth was suddenly dry. After a moment, he shook his head, said nothing, and motioned in the direction of the dock and his Cessna.