

The old man sat looking at him. Then he climbed out of the truck and shut the door and adjusted his hat and walked around and stood at the edge of the bar ditch. He had on canvas pants and a blanketlined canvas coat with a corduroy collar and he wore boots with walkingheels and a full beaver John B Stetson hat.

How close can I get? he said.

Close as you want.

He crossed the ditch and came up and stood looking at the wolf. He looked at the boy and he looked at the wolf some more.

She's fixin to have pups.

Yessir.

Damn good thing you caught her.

Yessir.

Can you touch her?

Yessir. You can touch her.

The old man squatted and put his hand on the wolf. The wolf bowed and writhed and he snatched his hand away. Then he touched her again. He looked at the boy. Wolf, he said.

Yessir.

What do you aim to do with her?

I dont know.

I guess you'll collect the bounty. Sell the hide.

Yessir.

She dont much like bein touched, does she?

No sir. Not much.

When we used to bring cattle up the valley from down around Ciénega Springs why first night we'd generally hit in about Government Draw and make camp there. And you could hear em all across the valley. Them first warm nights. You'd nearly always hear em in that part of the valley. I aint heard one in years.

She come up from Mexico.

I dont doubt it. Ever other damn thing does.

He rose and looked off down the road to where the horse was grazing. You want my advice, he said, you'll let me fetch you

that rifle I see sticking out of the boot yonder and shoot this son of a bitch right between the eyes and be done with it.

If I can just get my horse caught I'll be all right, the boy said.

Well. You suit yourself.

Yessir. I aim to.

The old man shook his head. All right, he said. Wait here and I'll go get him.

I aint goin nowheres, the boy said.

He went back to the truck and got in and drove down to where the horse was standing. When the horse saw the truck coming it crossed through the bar ditch and stood against the fence and the old man got out and walked the horse down along the fence until he could catch the trailing reins and then he led the horse back up the road. The boy sat holding the wolf. It was very quiet. The only sound along the road was the faint dry clop of the horse's hooves in the gravel and the steady chugging of the truck where the old man had left it idling by the roadside.

When he dragged the wolf out to the road the horse backed and stood facing her.

Maybe you better tie the horse, the old man said.

If you'll just hold him a minute I'll be all right.

I aint sure but what I'd about as soon hold the wolf.

The boy paid out enough slack so that the wolf could get to the bar ditch but not enough for her to reach the fence. He dallied the rope to the saddlehorn and turned the wolf loose and she scampered for the ditch on three legs and hit the rope end and flipped endwise and got up and crouched in the ditch and lay waiting. The boy turned and took the reins from the old man and put one knuckle to his hatbrim.

I'm much obliged, he said.

That's all right. It's been a interestin day.

Yessir. Mine aint over.

No it aint. You mind she dont get that mouth loose, you hear? She'll take a chunk out of you you couldnt put in your hat.

Yessir.