

BAREE

Son of Kazan

By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

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WNU Service

THE STORY

CHAPTER I.—Part wolf, part dog— when two months old Baree had his first meeting with enemy, Papyuchiew (young owl). Fighting hard, the antagonists are suddenly plunged into a swollen creek.

CHAPTER II.—Badly buffeted, and half drowned, Baree is finally flung on the bank, but the water has destroyed his sense of direction and he is lost, lonely and hungry. For many days his life is one of fear and distress. He finally wanders into the trapping grounds of a halfbreed, Pierrot Du Quessa, and his daughter, Nepeese the Willow. Taking Baree for a wolf, Nepeese shoots and wounds him, but he escapes.

CHAPTER III.—The wolf blood in Baree becomes apparent. He rapidly learns Nature's secrets, though he finds no comrades and is desperately lonely.

CHAPTER IV.—Following Wakayoo, the black bear, Baree subsists royally on the caches of fish the big fellow leaves. He comes again into Pierrot's trapping domain. Pierrot shoots Wakayoo, Nepeese, insisting Baree is dog, not wolf, tries to capture him. Baree is strongly drawn to the girl, but cannot entirely overcome his dread of man.

CHAPTER V.—Baree makes friends with a colony of beavers, losing much of his sense of loneliness.

CHAPTER VI.—Bush McTaggart, factor at Lac Bain, Hudson's Bay company's post, man of evil life, has long coveted Nepeese, even to the extent of offering marriage, but makes no progress with his suit. On his way to Pierrot and Nepeese McTaggart takes Baree in a trap, and in a struggle is bitten. With the dog he comes to Pierrot's cabin.

CHAPTER VII.—Nepeese claims Baree as hers, bating the wounds inflicted by McTaggart after the dog had bitten him. Then, promising to give him a definite answer to his love-making, Nepeese jures McTaggart to the edge of a deep pool and humiliates him by plunging him into the water, at the same time taunting him for presuming to address her. Blood poisoning developing from Baree's bite, McTaggart and Pierrot hasten to Lac Bain to secure medical treatment.

CHAPTER VIII.—Nepeese has spent three winters at a mission, where she has learned to read and sew. On her seventeenth birthday she fashions a costume which properly sets forth her really great beauty.

In their big mud-and-stick stronghold the beavers held a council of war. They were distinctly puzzled.

There were four enemies which they dreaded above all others: The otter, who destroyed their dams in the winter time and brought death to them from cold and by lowering the water so they could not get to their food supplies; the lynx, who preyed on them all, young and old alike; and the fox and wolf, who would lie in ambush for hours in order to pounce on the very young, like Umisk and his playmates. If Baree had been any one of these four, wily Beaver-tooth and his people would have known what to do. But Baree was surely not an otter, and if he was a fox or a wolf or a lynx, his actions were very strange, to say the least. Half a dozen times he had the opportunity to pounce on his prey, if he had been seeking prey. But at no time had he shown the desire to harm them.

It may be that the beavers discussed the matter fully among themselves. It is possible that Umisk and his playmates told their parents of their adventure and of how Baree made no move to harm them when he could quite easily have caught them. However this may be, courageous old Beaver-tooth took it upon himself to end the suspense.

It was early in the afternoon that for the third or fourth time Baree walked out on the dam. This dam was fully two hundred feet in length, but at no point did the water run over it, the overflow finding its way through narrow sluices. A week or two ago Baree could have crossed to the opposite side of the pond on this dam, but now—at the far end—Beaver-tooth and his engineers were adding a new section of dam, and in order to accomplish their work more easily they had flooded fully fifty yards of the low ground on which they were working. The dam held a fascination for Baree. The top of it was high and dry, and there were dozens of smoothly worn little hollows in which the beavers had taken their sun-baths. In one of these hollows Baree stretched himself out, with his eyes on the pond. Not a ripple stirred its velvety smoothness. Not a sound broke the drowsy stillness of the afternoon. The beavers might have been dead or asleep, for all the stir they made. And yet they knew that Baree was on the dam. Where he lay the sun fell in a warm flood, and it was so comfortable that after a time he had difficulty in keeping his eyes open to watch the pond. Then he fell asleep.

Just how Beaver-tooth sensed this fact is a mystery. Five minutes later he came up quietly, without a splash or a sound, within fifty yards of Baree. For a few moments he scarcely moved in the water. Then he swam very slowly parallel with the dam across the pond. At the other side he drew himself up and for another minute stood motionless as a stone, with his

eyes on that part of the dam where Baree was lying. Not another beaver was moving, and it was very soon apparent that Beaver-tooth had but one object in mind—getting a closer observation of Baree. When he entered the water again, he swam along close to the dam. Ten feet beyond Baree he began to climb out. He did this with great slowness and caution. At last he reached the top of the dam.

A few yards away Baree was almost hidden in his hollow, only the top of his shiny black body appearing to Beaver-tooth's scrutiny. To get a better look, the old beaver spread his flat tail out beyond him and rose to a sitting posture on his hind quarters, his two front paws held squirrel-like over his breast. In this pose he was fully three feet tall. He probably weighed forty pounds, and in some ways he resembled one of those fat, good-natured, silly-looking dogs that go largely to stomach. But his brain was working with amazing celerity. Suddenly he gave the hard mud of the dam a single slap with his tail—and Baree sat up. Instantly he saw Beaver-tooth, and stared. Beaver-tooth stared. For a full half-minute neither moved the thousandth part of an inch. Then Baree stood up and wagged his tail.

That was enough. Dropping to his forefeet, Beaver-tooth waddled leisurely to the edge of the dam and dived over. He was neither cautious nor in very great haste now. He made a great commotion in the water and swam boldly back and forth under Baree. When he had done this several times he cut straight up the pond to the largest of the three houses and disappeared. Five minutes after Beaver-tooth's exploit word was passing quickly among the colony. The stranger—Baree—was not a lynx. He was not a fox. He was not a wolf. Moreover, he was very young—and harmless. Work could be resumed. Play could be resumed. There was no danger. Such was Beaver-tooth's verdict.

If some one had shouted these facts in beaver language through a megaphone the response could not have been quicker. All at once it seemed to Baree, who was still standing on the edge of the dam, that the pond was alive with beavers. He had never seen so many at one time before. They were popping up everywhere, and some of them swam up within a dozen feet of him and looked him over in a leisurely and curious way. For perhaps five minutes they seemed to have no particular object in view. Then Beaver-tooth himself struck straight for the shore and climbed out. Others followed him. Half a dozen workers disappeared in the canals. As many more waddled out among the alders and willows. Eagerly Baree watched for Umisk and his chums. At last he saw them, swimming forth from one of the smaller houses. They climbed out on their playground—the smooth bar above the shore of mud. Baree wagged his tail so hard that his whole body shook, and hurried along the dam.

When he came out on the level strip of shore, Umisk was there alone, nibbling supper from a long, freshly cut willow. The other little beavers had gone into a thick clump of young alders.

This time Umisk did not run. He looked up from his stick. Baree squatted himself, wiggling in a most friendly and ingratiating manner. For a few seconds Umisk regarded him. Then, very coolly, he resumed his supper.

Just as in the life of every man there is one big, controlling influence, either for good or for bad, so in the life of Baree the beaver pond was largely an arbiter of destiny. Where he might have gone if he had not discovered it, and what might have happened to him, are matters of conjecture. But it held him. It began to take the place of the old windfall, and in the beavers themselves he found a companionship which made up, in a way, for the loss of the protection and friendship of Kazan and Gray Wolf.

This companionship, if it could be called that, went just so far and no farther. With each day that passed the older beavers became more accustomed to seeing Baree. At the end of two weeks, if Baree had gone away, they would have missed him—but not in the same way that Baree would have missed the beavers. It was a matter of good-natured toleration on their part. With Baree it was different. He was still uskalis, as Nepeese would have said; he still wanted mothering; he was still moved by the puppyish yearnings which he had not yet had the time to outgrow; and when night came—to speak that yearning quite plainly—he had the desire to go into the big beaver house with Umisk and his chums, and sleep.

During the fortnight that followed Beaver-tooth's exploit on the dam Baree ate his meals a mile up the creek, where there were plenty of crawfish. But the pond was home. Night always found him there, and a large part of his day. He slept at the end of the dam, or on top of it on particularly clear nights, and the beavers accepted him as a permanent guest. They worked in his presence as if he did not exist.

He still could not induce Umisk and the other young beavers to join him in play, and after the first week or so he gave up his efforts. In fact, their play puzzled him almost as much as the dam-building operations of the older beavers. Umisk, for instance, was fond of playing in the mud at the edge of the pond. He was like a very small boy. Where his elders floated timbers from three inches to a foot in diameter to the big dam, Umisk brought small sticks and twigs no larger around than a lead pencil to his play-

ground, and built a make-believe dam of his own.

Umisk would work an hour at a time on this play-dam as industriously as his father and mother were working on the big dam, and Baree would lie flat on his belly a few feet away, watching him and wondering mightily. He could see some reason for nibbling at sticks—he liked to sharpen his teeth on sticks himself; but it puzzled him to explain why Umisk so painstakingly stripped the bark from the sticks and swallowed it.

Another method of play still further discouraged Baree's advances. A short distance from the spot where he had first seen Umisk there was a shelving bank that rose ten or twelve feet from the water, and this bank was used by the young beavers as a slide. It was worn smooth and hard. Umisk would climb up the bank at a point where it was not so steep. At the top of the slide he would put his tail out flat behind him and give himself a shove, shooting down the toboggan and landing in the water with a big splash.

One afternoon, when the toboggan was particularly wet and slippery from recent use, Baree went up the beaver-path to the top of the bank, and began investigating. Nowhere had he found the beaver-smell so strong as on the slide. He began sniffing and incautiously went too far. In an instant his feet shot out from



In an Instant His Feet Shot Out From Under Him.

under him, and with a single wild yelp he went shooting down the toboggan. For the second time in his life he found himself struggling under water, and when a minute or two later he dragged himself up through the soft mud to the firmer footing of the shore, he had at last a very well-defined opinion of beaver play.

It may be that Umisk saw him. It may be that very soon the story of his adventure was known by all the inhabitants of Beaver Town. For when Baree came upon Umisk eating his supper of alder bark that evening, Umisk stood his ground to the last inch, and for the first time they sniffed audibly, and plucky little Umisk sat like a rolled-up sphinx. That was the final cementing of their friendship—on Baree's part. He capered about extravagantly for a few moments, telling Umisk how much he liked him, and that they'd be great chums. Umisk didn't talk. He didn't make a move until he resumed his supper. But he was a companionable looking little fellow, for all that, and Baree was happier than he had been since the day he left the old windfall.

That friendship, even though it outwardly appeared to be quite one-sided, was decidedly fortunate for Umisk. When Baree was at the pond, he always kept as near to Umisk as possible, when he could find him. One day he was lying in a patch of grass, half asleep, while Umisk busied himself in a clump of alder-shoots a few yards away. It was the warning crack of a beaver tail that fully roused Baree; and then another and another, like pistol-shots. He jumped up. Everywhere beavers were scurrying for the pond.

Just then Umisk came out of the alders and hurried as fast as his short, fat legs would carry him toward the water. He had almost reached the mud when a lightning flash of red passed before Baree's eyes in the afternoon sun, and in another instant Napakasew—the he-fox—had fastened his sharp fangs in Umisk's throat. Baree heard his little friend's agonized cry; he heard the frenzied flap-flap of many tails—and his blood pounded suddenly with the thrill of excitement and rage.

As swiftly as the red fox himself, Baree darted to the rescue. He was as big and as heavy as the fox, and when he struck Napakasew, it was with a ferocious snarl that Pierrot might have heard on the farther side of the pond, and his teeth sank like knives into the shoulder of Umisk's assailant. The fox was of a breed of forest highwaymen which kills from behind. He was not a fighter when it came fang-to-fang, unless cornered—and so fierce and sudden was Baree's assault that Napakasew took to flight almost as quickly as he had begun his attack on Umisk.

Baree did not follow him, but went to Umisk, who lay half in the mud, whimpering and snuffling in a curious sort of way. Gently Baree nosed him, and after a moment or two Umisk got up on his webbed feet, while fully twenty or thirty beavers were making

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