

Winnie's Wolf

by

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Ten-year-old Winnie Sue Sutton sneaked out of the back door of the Single S ranch house right after dinner. She slipped stealthily along the back side of the house to the north side, where neither of her parents were likely to be at this time of the day. From there she trotted over to the barn where her expectant little Morgan mare was stabled. Squeezing through the fence, she let herself into the stall. Disappointed that Fudgie had not foaled yet, she petted the nervous mare affectionately. When the filly relaxed enough to nuzzle her, the girl fed it a lump of sugar she had snatched from the kitchen.

Winnie was just turning to leave when she heard a plaintive whimper from the darkest corner of the stall. Tiptoeing over to investigate, she found a small puppy crouched in the straw. She picked the skinny little white pup up and cuddled it in her arms. It snuggled weakly against her body, and looking trustingly at her face, it let out a soft whine.

Winnie slipped over to the milk cow's stall. She deftly coaxed a cup or so of milk from its udder into a shallow tin can that she found on a shelf. The puppy lapped up the milk and crawled back to its corner. The girl stooped to pet it, and it was soon fast asleep.

By this time the young girl was in danger of being found out. She scurried back to the house, and slipped into the kitchen. Dad was still sitting at the table and Mom was just starting the dishes. Winnie grabbed a towel to dry.

"Anything happening yet?" Mom asked

Winnie blushed deeply at finding she hadn't put anything over on Mom and Dad after all... Nothing but the pup, at least. "Nah," she replied, "But she's pretty nervous."

"So's Dad," Mom answered. "He'll probably check her every hour or so all night. He knows that colt means a lot to you."

"Thanks, Dad," Winnie squealed, running over to kiss him. "Can I watch with you?"

"Your Mother and I have decided that you can stay up until it comes, Honey."

Winnie went out with Dad to check on the mare three times before midnight. She held the lantern while he examined Fudgie. The child was rather discouraged, but Dad insisted that everything was going fine.

"Will it come tonight?" she asked.

"I'm pretty sure it will," he answered. "She's been waxing over a week now, and she's obviously in labor."

The child drifted off to sleep on the couch about midnight. Dad awakened her just before dawn. "Come on out, Winnie. It's coming pretty quickly."

Ten minutes later the foal dropped to the ground, and Fudgy turned to sniff it.

"She's not opening the sack so the foal can breathe," Dad hollered. "I'll hold her while you rip it off."

They rushed into the stall together. Mr. Sutton grabbed Fudgie's halter and held her away while Winnie stuck a finger through the sack and ripped it off the foal. The new baby kicked a bit and raised its head immediately. Fudgie began to lick it down, and within a few minutes it struggled awkwardly to its feet and began nuzzling at its mother.

"Everything's OK," Dad finally announced. "Let's thank the Lord and go in and get some hot cocoa." Winnie closed her sleepy eyes while Dad offered a simple prayer of thanksgiving, and they went back to the kitchen. She was asleep in her chair before the cocoa was ready, and Dad laid her gently on the couch without awakening her.

It wasn't until breakfast that Winnie thought of the puppy again. When Mom left the kitchen for a moment, she threw a sausage and some left-over scrambled eggs into an old bowl and ran out to the barn. When she opened the stall, Fudgie bared her teeth threateningly at her, and she had to take the time to soothe the new mother with her voice and hands before she could get into the stall. She found the pup under the hay where she had left it. It seemed a bit stronger, and squirmed happily against her as she picked it up. It wolfed the sausage and eggs down, and whined a bit when she put it down. Winnie slipped down to the cow and filled the bowl with milk. She barely had the pup back under the straw when Dad came in to check on the foal.

"Looks like a great one," he mused as he looked it over. "I don't see any obvious faults at all so far. What are you going to call it?"

"How about Cocoa?" Winnie asked.

"I like that," Dad replied, tousling her hair a bit.

All this time Winnie had been holding her breath, lest the puppy should reveal its presence. She had no intention of hiding it too long, but she wanted to wait for an opportune time to introduce the idea of a dog to her parents. When Dad left, she grabbed up the pup and moved it to a rarely used storage area at the back of the barn where it would be less likely to be discovered prematurely.

The Single S foreman dropped by the house to talk to Mr. Sutton later that day. In the conversation he mentioned that four days ago one of the hands had shot a wolf about a mile from the home place. "First one we've had around here for twenty years or more," he said. "I kinda' miss hearing them howl. This one was nursing a litter, but we couldn't find the den. I hate to think of a whole litter of cubs starving."

"One didn't starve," Winnie interrupted. "I found it in the barn."

"Let's go out and catch it," Dad suggested as they rose from their chairs.

"You don't have to catch it, Dad," Winnie answered. "It whimpered for me from the corner of Fudgie's stall, and it snuggled right up to me when I cuddled it."

"Let's go see it, Winnie," Dad said as he led the way to the barn.

"It's pure white," Winnie announced as she reached into the straw and gathered up the cub. It snuggled into her arms and started licking her fingers.

"Acts just like a pup," the cowhand commented as he took it from Winnie. "From its chest and shoulders I'm guessing it's going to be huge. How'd you tame it so fast?"

"I didn't have to tame it," Winnie explained. "It was this friendly from the moment I heard it whimper. I think it was begging me to feed and mother it."

"What'd you give him?" Dad asked.

"I gave him some milk last night, and some table scraps and milk this morning."

About that time the cub looked directly into Dad's eyes and whined softly. Dad's heart melted like butter, and he sent Winnie to get a bit more warm milk from the cow.

"It's definitely a wolf," both men agreed.

"Never saw a white one before," the cowhand remarked.

"Neither did I," Dad added, "But I've heard of them. We'd best just call it a dog so none of the neighbors will want us to shoot it."

"Can I keep it, then?" Winnie asked for confirmation.

"Long as it stays this friendly," Dad answered. "I think it might make a good watch dog."

"I'll never tell anybody it's a wolf," the cowhand assured them.

Winnie moved the cub back into Fudgie's stall that night, and the foal and the wolf grew up together.

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The next three years passed quietly on the Single S Ranch. There had been no unfriendly Indian activity, and no ranchers had tried to horn in on the government acres that the Suttons held. Winnie was thirteen years old and had finished as much schooling as her parents could provide her with. She was an avid reader and enjoyed algebra and geometry. She was absolutely adored by the cow hands. They taught her to wrangle cattle and shoot rifles. She loved the way the ranch butted up against the Medicine Bow Mountains to the East. She couldn't imagine living elsewhere, but her parents were educated people, and were planning to send her back East for a college education as soon as she was old enough.

Winnie had two loves besides the ranch itself—her wolf and Fudgie's colt. Cocoa was not only a show-quality Morgan, he was also a people horse. Winnie spent hours pampering him, and teaching him tricks. At her bidding he would follow her anywhere like a heeling dog. He would stand without being tied all day if she forgot to give him permission to move. She was constantly inventing new tricks that amazed everyone who saw Winnie put Cocoa through his regimen.

Winnie's wolf matured into a huge and beautiful animal. He was completely devoted to the girl, and was anxious to please her in every way. He never showed the slightest unwarranted animosity toward any human being, but he had to be taught not to bother the domesticated animals. He had killed several chickens before Winnie caught him in the act, but one remonstrance was all it took. Winnie was heartbroken when he killed a newborn calf, but this, too, was a single incident when he was quite young. After being shamed for it, he seemed to catch on to the difference between domesticated and wild animals.

Basically, Avalanche, as Winnie called him, seemed to consider himself part of the Sutton family, although he would not romp with anyone but Winnie. He never barked like a dog, but he occasionally howled at the moon. Those familiar with the howl of wolves generally remarked that he sounded just like one, except his howl was considerably deeper and fuller than any wolf they had ever heard. He always seemed to appreciate the friendly advances of the family's guests and hired hands, and was downright gentle with the few children that he came into contact with. Winnie's only regret was that her mom was always a bit uneasy about her having a wolf as a pet.

The only time Avalanche ever threatened a person was one evening when a drifting cowboy was invited to eat and bunk with the cowhands. After dinner, he got entirely too familiar with Winnie while she was in the barn teaching Cocoa to stretch. When the troublesome cowboy put his arm around the girl, Avalanche detected her distress. The snarling wolf backed the obnoxious visitor into a corner of the stall. The frightened girl bolted for the house while the wolf kept the cowering cowboy at bay until Mr. Sutton arrived to call him off. It was all the family could do to keep the hired hands from lynching the offender on the spot. That incident endeared the wolf to Mom, and she felt better about letting Winnie ride alone as long as the wolf was with her.

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In the height of that spring, Winnie had ridden Cocoa to the farthest reaches of the ranch to enjoy the delicate foliage of the trees along a forested bit of mountainside. Seeing a doe slip into the trees, she dismounted. Leaving her little stallion ground-hitched, she tiptoed into the forest in hopes of seeing a fawn. The cowgirl was thoroughly engaged in watching the deer when a strong dark arm wrapped across her chest. She let out a yell, and Avalanche flew to the attack. Before he could spring she heard the twang of another Indian's bow, and saw the animal go down with an arrow buried in its chest.

Within moments a half a dozen Indians had surrounded Winnie. She was quickly bound and gagged and tied on an Indian pony. The Indian who had grabbed her mounted Cocoa, and led the mustang Winnie was tied to behind him as they followed the rest of the raiding party.

Winnie's hands had been tied tightly behind her back, and they began hurting her as she rode; but she was determined not to show any signs of weakness or fear. When they stopped at a mountain stream to water the horses, her captor came closer and looked her over insultingly. She kicked him in the face with her riding boot, and he grabbed her hair and pulled her head down to his level. The angry Indians blindfolded her and switched her legs and back mercilessly with supple sprigs cut from young trees before they rode on. The kidnapped girl had no idea which direction they were going because of the blindfold. Come dusk, the Indians loosed her hands long enough for her to have a drink of water and chew a small amount of dried venison before tying her to a tree for the night.

Winnie spent a very cold and uncomfortable night without a blanket. Each time she woke up shivering, she prayed for the Lord's protection in her predicament. She prayed for comfort for her parents. She prayed that they would find Avalanche and help him if

he were not already dead. Most of all, she prayed that she would find a way of escape from these merciless savages.

The captive girl was kept blindfolded for the rest of the journey. She could tell that they were in the mountains because of the way the pony's back sloped upwards, sliding her towards its haunches or downward slipping her toward its neck. After about ten days of traveling they came to an Indian village, and the blindfold was removed. Winnie counted twenty-one wickiups in the primitive community which was little more than a camp site.

Winnie was bound hand and foot and shoved into a wickiup with a couple of older squaws for her first night in the village. She was loosed in the morning and allowed to eat breakfast with the squaws. Then she was put to work scraping deer hides along with her two companions.

The two squaws spoke a little broken English between them. "Little Fawn," the skinnier one said, pointing to herself as they worked. "Me Little Fawn." Then pointing to the other squaw, who was somewhat overweight, she said, "Pregnant Doe." The other burst out laughing, and threw her hide scraper at Little Fawn.

"Me Running Antelope," she said, still laughing. "Could outrun braves until right one try. Then catch me quick"

"I'm Winnie Sue," Winnie replied.

"No, you white woman, we Sioux," both squaws corrected.

"Just call me Winnie," the girl answered when she caught on that these were Sioux Indians.

As Winnie got to know the two squaws that she was assigned to, they became good friends. They taught her the ways of the Indian women, and soon allowed her to go out berry picking and foraging for edible and medicinal herbs with them. They constantly scolded her for leaving signs along the trails that might bring murderous war parties from enemy tribes down on their village.

The young white woman learned that these two squaws were widows whose husbands had been killed in raids on other villages. They were given their share of the game that the warriors caught, and were expected to cook and make clothes for the young bachelor braves who had not yet proven themselves as warriors worthy of manhood and marriage.

As Winnie became acclimated to the Indians' way of life she made herself a nice buckskin outfit. She was becoming fluent in the Sioux language, and her Indian-style

cooking became so tasty that she had to start purposely overcooking or under flavoring the food to discourage some of the bachelors from trying to court her.

One thing that bothered Winnie was that Screaming Eagle, the chief's son, ended up taking possession of Cocoa. Squaws were not generally welcome at the village remuda, so Winnie rarely saw her horse, but one day she saw Screaming Eagle beating the horse in the village. She flew at him tooth and toenail, and the young bully beat her up so badly that her face was swollen for several weeks. After that he took pleasure in mistreating the horse in front of her.

In the late fall the village followed the migrating game to its winter quarters in the forest by the lower meadows. During the move Winnie was careful to find out from the squaws how to pick safe camp sites, as she planned to escape when the opportunity presented itself. Often, as she lay awake praying for a way of escape, she would hear wolves howling in the distance. What others had told her was true; Avalanche's howl had been deeper and fuller than any of these wolves.

That winter turned out to be a bad one. Game became scarce and hard to find. Most occupants of the village became downright gaunt before spring uplifted everyone's spirits. After a couple weeks of spring buffalo hunting, everyone started filling out again.

By mid-spring the braves broke into several war parties and headed over the mountains to plunder other tribes and whatever other victims they could find. After the war parties left, Little Fawn and Running Antelope began noticing that Winnie was developing into quite a shapely young woman. The two squaws had evidently talked it over together, for on one of their foraging trips they approached Winnie with a warning. They told her that the chief's son had let it be known that he intended to win the status of a warrior this spring so he could have the beautiful white squaw as his wife.

"He is mean," they warned her. "You must run away before he returns."

"Where could I go?" Winnie asked.

"You could go north until you find the wagon roads," they suggested. "There you would find white men who would help you get home."

From that time onward, the three women began to plan a daring escape for Winnie. It would have to be at a time when she would not be missed for hours. It would have to be in a place where she could hide her trail from the best of Indian trackers for many miles. She would have to use guile to make them believe she had gone in a different direction that she intended to go. She would have to save up as many provisions as she could carry, and keep them hidden where no one would suspect her. Although the squaws had taught her how to make snares and catch fish, she would not be able to hunt the larger game that sustained the Indians because she would not have a rifle.

As hard as they tried, the squaws could never come up with the ideal conditions to help Winnie escape. And then one day, earlier than expected, Screaming Eagle's war party returned. He had three scalps on his lance, and announced that he would be taking Winnie as his wife on the next full moon, which was only a week away.

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When Winnie did not come home for supper on the day that she was abducted, Dad gathered all the hands and started a search. Darkness had settled in and the discouraged party had returned to the ranch house when Avalanche struggled in more dead than alive. The arrow had traversed his chest, and was sticking out both sides. Dad carefully removed the arrowhead and withdrew the shaft, sealing the exit and entry holes with rags dipped in lard. The beast's breath was terribly labored, and he seemed to be exhaling more bloody froth than air. No one expected him to be alive in the morning, but he actually blew less and less froth as the night progressed. By morning it looked as though he might make it.

The arrow pretty well convinced the searchers that Winnie had had an encounter with unfriendly Indians. After half a day's search, one of the cowhands found Cocoa's tracks where Winnie had dismounted, and they were able to piece together enough evidence to know that the youngster had been abducted. They followed the trail for two days before losing it permanently when a cloudburst wiped out all remaining signs of the Indian's pathway. The grieving parents' only comforts were their faith in the power of prayer and the fact that Winnie's wolf was recuperating.

When Avalanche was able, he returned to the spot where he had last seen Winnie. There had been several pelting spring rains since the kidnaping, and even the wolf's keen nose could not follow the Indians' trail. He returned to the ranch house as dejected as the parents were.

The deep and mournful howl of the wolf could be heard on the Single S almost any night, and no one resented it. Everyone on the ranch felt like howling out their own grief too. And then, about a year after Winnie had disappeared, the white wolf was gone.

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Avalanche had been in the habit of visiting the place he had last seen Winnie and Cocoa frequently. In the late spring, as he approached the area, he detected Cocoa's familiar scent mingled with that of other horses. The white wolf was instantly on the trail. His nose told him that these were the horses of the Indians that had taken his mistress. Winnie was not there, but she might be wherever Cocoa was going.

Within three days the wolf was in visual contact of Screaming Eagle's war party. Remembering his wound, he slunk behind the entourage as only a wolf can without being seen. In the middle of the night he slipped up and sniffed noses with Cocoa, but his presence disturbed the other horses so much that the Indians jumped up to investigate. Avalanche had to slink back into the trees. He stealthily followed the Indians all the way to their village, where he detected Winnie's scent. He hid out in the forest until the quietness of night had settled over the village before calling for her. Winnie was lying wide awake praying earnestly for the Lord to help her escape, when she heard Avalanche's deep howl. Recognizing it immediately, she was up and running for the forest in an instant. The squaws were peering into the darkness from the curtain over the opening of the wickiup as the white wolf rushed to meet her. The girl met him head on with a mighty hug, and the huge wolf groveled at her feet like a puppy.

When Winnie returned to the wickiup, the white wolf followed her in. Little Fawn and Running Antelope were cowering in the corner wide-eyed with fright. They obviously considered this very strong medicine.

Don't be afraid, Winnie encouraged them. I raised the white wolf from a cub. He will not hurt you or any of my friends. Screaming Eagle was riding my horse, and the wolf probably recognized the horse's scent. He followed them here to take me home. I will go now, with the wolf. He will protect me and show me the way.

The squaws quickly helped Winnie get her pack on her back, and after hugging them both, Winnie headed into the forest with the white wolf at her heel. Although Winnie would never have thought of it, the two Indian squaws were up at the crack of dawn, unobtrusively walking over the wolf's tracks to blot them out.

Screaming Eagle was unaware of the girl's escape until the next day. The squaws played innocent as to when she had left and where she might have gone. The cruel brave mounted Cocoa, and had little difficulty in following the white woman's trail. He came upon her as she rested on a deadfall about noon of her second day of freedom.

Screaming Eagle rode right up to Winnie. She knew it would be useless to run. He was reaching out to grab her when the white wolf sprang from his hiding place in the thicket. This time there were no other Indians to shoot the wolf, and the young brave went down with the vengeful beast's teeth deep in his throat. The struggling brave tried to draw his knife, but Winnie was on him in an instant. She was able to hold his hand long enough for the grinding jaws of the wolf to finish him off.

Winnie shed a few tears over the awfulness of the death she had just witnessed, but before long she felt Cocoa nuzzling her. She took the Indian's knife and its leather sheath that was tied to his waist and mounted the Morgan. There was a rifle that Screaming Eagle must have captured on his last sortie hanging on a scabbard around the horse's neck. Looking down at Avalanche, she said, "Let's go home." The white wolf started off at a lope without hesitation.

Winnie rode until it was nearly dark before veering off the trail into the forest. She removed the Indian bridle from Cocoa's mouth. The exhausted girl sat down on Screaming Eagle's blanket and leaned back against a large tree with low hanging branches to share some of her dried venison with Avalanche. She had intended to rub the little stallion down a bit, but her weary eyes closed and she was fast asleep before she had finished eating. The horse began cropping at the grass and weeds around the campsite, and the wolf lay down against his beloved mistress as if to keep her safe and warm throughout the night.

When Winnie awoke at dawn, she let out a shrill whistle for Cocoa. True to his training, the stallion came trotting right up to where she stood. She took the scabbard and the blanket-like Indian saddle off him so he could have a good roll while she visited the nearby mountain stream for a drink. She returned and rubbed the stallion down with a large pinecone she found by the stream.

Before replacing the scabbard on Cocoa's neck, Winnie pulled the rifle out to see what it was. She had not looked at Screaming Eagle's revolting scalps, and had supposed that the gun would be an ancient flintlock taken from another Indian. To her delight, this was a new Winchester "Yellowboy" repeating rifle that must have been taken from a white man. The rifle was fully loaded, so she had seventeen cartridges to last her until she got home.

Winnie made poor time for the next two days. The Indian trail she was following through the mountains was narrow, with many drop-offs that would have killed her if Cocoa had miss-stepped. Sometimes she was just as glad that she had been blindfolded on this part of her journey to the Indian village. There was nothing to do but travel at a slow walk, sometimes for hours at a time.

The next morning a low growl from Avalanche awoke Winnie. The wolf slunk into the foliage, and within seconds the young traveler was surrounded by Indians. She could tell that they were Sioux from their language, but they were from a different clan than the one she had escaped from. As they discussed what they should do with the pretty white woman, Winnie remembered how superstitiously the squaws had reacted toward her relationship with Avalanche.

"I am Winnie, the wolf woman," she greeted the Indians, rising regally in the best Indian tradition she could muster. "Sit down," she commanded them authoritatively.

When the Indians hesitated, she called Avalanche out of the ticket. The great white wolf came to her side, standing alert, ears forward, watching the Indians for the slightest threat against his mistress. "Sit," she ordered the beast, and he sat. "Shake," she ordered, and the wolf raised his huge paw toward the astounded Indians. "Careful now," she warned them, "Each of you shake hands with him."

When the Indians hesitated, she exhorted them, "Do not insult the medicine wolf."

One by one the Indians gravely shook the wolf's paw, and Winnie knew she had won the day. Just to top off her victory, she whistled for Cocoa. When the Morgan arrived, she made him bow to the seated Indians before commanding him to stretch. Cocoa preformed the old regimen perfectly, stretching until his belly was not over a foot from the ground. The wolf woman slowly and deliberately placed her tack and gear on the stretched out stallion. Mounting the animal, she commanded him to rise, and the little stallion raised into as pretty a show stance as she had ever seen. Raising her hand palm-forward, she said, "You may go now," and turned her mount toward Avalanche. The great white wolf trotted off in the lead. Winnie didn't dare to look back, and neither did the Indians.

Winnie was across the worst part of the Medicine Bows by the end of the second week of her journey. She had run out of jerked venison, and decided to try her luck at killing a deer. After trying unsuccessfully to sneak up on one, the frustrated girl wasted most of her ammunition trying to shoot one from too great a distance. Finally, she sent Avalanche to get one. The wolf took out after the deer, and came dragging it back to Winnie within an hour.

Winnie found what she thought would be a good campsite and began butchering the deer. She had helped with field dressed carcasses many times in the Indian village, but she had no idea how to handle a whole one. She found it a much more difficult task than she had ever imagined. It took her so long to get the carcass dressed and skinned that she had to hang it in a tree and wait until morning to start making a new supply of jerky. She roasted a hunk of shoulder meat for herself and Avalanche before curling up in Screaming Eagles blanket for the night.

That night the howl of the mountain wolves was deafening. Winnie awoke when Avalanche began to growl. She threw more wood on the fire, and counted a half a dozen pairs of eyes gliding around within thirty feet or so of the fire. The girl knew that wolves seldom attacked people except when starving. She finally concluded that they were after Avalanche rather than her. He was a stranger that had invaded their territory.

There were still several hours of darkness left, and Winnie feared that she did not have enough firewood to keep a hearty fire burning until dawn. She grabbed up her rifle and shot between a pair of eyes that had stopped moving. That wolf disappeared but the others still hovered around just outside the ring of firelight. She killed a second and third wolf before they moved back out of range. When dawn came Winnie climbed a

tree to relieve Avalanche's anxiety for her. As soon as he felt that his mistress was safe he dashed out and ripped the throat out of the closest wolf in a single slash of his teeth. The other two wolves fled into the forest.

When Winnie checked her rifle that morning, all the ammunition was gone. She whistled for Cocoa, and became alarmed when he did not show up right away. Ten minutes later he thundered up to the relieved maiden's side. He had apparently slipped away before the wolves had arrived, and survived mostly because Avalanche had been their main concern.

Winnie spent two days smoking as much jerky as she could carry. She left the camp site on the third day, glad to get away from the stench of the decaying wolves. She was now going downhill more than up, and figured that she'd soon be completely across the mountains. She had no worries about finding her way, for Avalanche had never faltered the whole journey.

Winnie was anticipating getting home within a day or so, and got careless about choosing a camp site on her last night out. She celebrated with a hearty fire, and couldn't seem to get to sleep until quite late. Suddenly she was awakened by human voices, and two disreputable-looking men were standing over her.

The pretty young woman felt more fearful in the presence of these uncouth men than she had felt at any other time on her journey. As she arose to face them, she could feel their lustful eyes appraising her every movement.

"Where's your guardian, sweetheart," one of the men asked.

She was about to answer, "Out there in the bushes," when the other exclaimed, "We're in luck, Jake. There ain't no other tracks here."

"She's a purty one, ain't she?" Jake laughed

"Reckon she'd do in a pinch," the other scofflaw laughed, reaching out to pinch the frightened girl.

As the ne'er-do-well reached for Winnie, she shrilled out a desperate whistle for Cocoa. At the same instant the big white wolf leapt into the clearing and sprang for the offender's throat, bearing him down to the ground with a severed jugular vein. Jake was drawing to shoot the wolf when Cocoa barreled into the gunman from behind. As the man hit the ground the furious stallion reared and stomped down on him again and again. It didn't require any professional skill to know that both the men were very dead

At dawn the shaken girl tied her gear on the heroic stallion and started down the trail behind Avalanche. In the late afternoon she recognized the spot where she had been abducted. By then the big wolf was running. When they topped the last hill, Avalanche

pulled up, and the girl reigned in beside him. The great beast gave a long, deep howl before trotting regally down to the Single S homestead.

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Mr. and Mrs. Sutton were finishing a late supper that evening. "I've been praying a whole lot for Winnie today," the man remarked to his wife. "It's been over a year since she disappeared, and somehow she's been especially on my mind today."

"Me too, Dear," Mom replied. "This morning I was finally able to give it all to the Lord and accept His will, whatever that might be," she continued through unbidden tears.

Suddenly they heard the howl.

"That's Avalanche!" Dad exclaimed, jumping up to open the door.

"I think you're right," Mom replied hurrying out after him.

Then, through the gathering dusk, they saw Winnie's wolf trotting proudly toward the house. And right behind him was a prancing Morgan stallion carrying their beautiful grown up daughter.

After a tearful greeting and a brief relating of Winnie's tale, Dad went to the bunkhouse and invited the astounded cowhands up to the ranch house to greet his long-lost daughter and hear her story. There was scarce a dry eye when Dad finally stood and thanked God for caring for Winnie. "And thank you, Lord, for Cocoa and Winnie's wolf," he finished.