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Never Cry Wolf

By Curtis Hanson

I just jumped at
the opportunity to go,
without even thinking about it, really,
because it opened the way to an old
and very naive childhood fantasy of mine.
To go off into the wilderness
and test myself against
all the dangerous things lurking there.
And to find that basic animal I secretly
hoped was hidden somewhere in myself.
I imagined that at that point
I'd become a new man,
with a strength and courage
that I'd never known before.
As I traveled north,
it was on about the third day
that the reality of what I was about to try
to do began to seep into my bones
and gather in a knot
in the pit of my stomach.
Then I finally reached
the end of the line, Nootsack.
The sheer bulk of the supplies
the department sent along set me back,
as I had to get not only myself
but all this stuff
another 300 miles into the wilderness.
So, you think north of here?
The place is crawling with 'em.
But you wouldn't wanna go up there, son.
Got nothing to eat up there now.
There's nothing but ice
and snow and trees and...
You would be
the only fresh meat around there.
They'll come after you, son.
Just for the ugly fun of tearing you apart.
I'd heard some of the tales
about the Arctic.
The mad trappers, Diamond Tooth Gertie,
the ice-worm cocktail and all that,
so I was prepared
for things to be a little weird.
You found the bayonets,

I knew you would.
Charlie.
That's much better, much better, Francis.
Keep practicing.
The only plane in Nootsack
belonged to a part-time bush pilot,
gambler and real-estate tycoon
named Rosie Little.
While negotiating our deal, he introduced
me to this drink that he'd invented.
Known locally as Moose Juice,
it consisted of equal parts
Moose Brand beer and ethyl alcohol.
Before I knew it,
my old fear of flying evaporated,
and I spent all the money I had left
on 24 cases of beer.
Too much weight, Tyler.
Hang on!
Whoa... Nelly!
Come on, Something else out of there now.
The big, heavy ones, Tyler.
I really had no way of knowing
exactly what of the department's gear
we donated to the people of Nootsack.
That big wooden box there.
Get rid of it. Go on. You don't need that.
But by our third attempt at takeoff,
it was a lot of what I might really need.
I tried not to think about it.
In fact, I tried not to think at all.
This one is it. I can feel it.
With my eyes still shut,
I realized that I was still alive.
But this was only the beginning.
It's funny how I keep thinking back
to that going-away party.
All the toasts by Dr Spivey
and Dr Showwalter,
and everybody singing
old Johnny Horton songs.
And the cake with all the coconut frosting,
with the plastic snowshoes on top.
But, then, why me?

Maybe this whole thing was a mistake.
Maybe my name just somehow
got onto the wrong page.
It might have been a typo, or maybe
somebody spilled a cup of coffee,
shuffled a couple of pages,
and there I was.
I can't go on with this. This is suicide.
But I can't turn around now.
I'd be a laughing stock.
Still, I wouldn't last six hours down there,
let alone six months.
Uh...
How do you...?
Don't worry about a thing.
I feel my way through these mountains
blindfolded all the time.
Tell me, Tyler...
what's in the Valley of the Blackstone?
What is it? Manganese?
Can't be oil.
Is it gold?
It's kind of hard to say.
You're a smart man, Tyler.
Keep your own counsel.
We're all of us prospectors
up here, eh, Tyler?
Scratching for that one crack in the ground
so we'll never have to scratch again.
I'll let you in on a little secret, Tyler.
The gold's not in the ground.
The gold's not anywhere up here.
The real gold is south of 60.
Sittin' in living rooms,
stuck facing the boob tube, bored to death.
Bored to death, Tyler!
Ah.
What was that?
Oh, Lord!
Darn!
-What's wrong?
-Take the stick.
Arrrrrgh!
What's wrong?

Boredom, Tyler.
Boredom, that's what's wrong.
And how do you beat boredom, Tyler?
Adventure.
Adventure, Tyler.
Where are you going? Rosie!
Rosie, what are you doing?
I can't fly this thing, What do I do?
Catch the updraft there, Tyler. That's it.
Right in the middle. Good.
-Oh!
-Ah!
Tyler, easy, easy, easy!
-Back the other way! Turn it the other way!
-What?
Tyler, back. Tyler! Tyler!
Easy! Tyler!
The other way. That's it.
That's it. Good, Tyler.
That's it. You learn fast.
Whoo!
Rosie, it's freezing.
Keep moving, Tyler. Gotta keep moving.
-You'll be fine.
-Gotta take it easy with some of this stuff.
Oh, uh...
Mind your toes!
Speed. Speed is of the essence, Tyler.
Especially when you don't know
how much fuel you got.
You got any last messages for the world,
Tyler, you better let me have 'em now.
That's sneaky, Tyler. Very sneaky.
Wait, Rosie! Rosie!
-Rosie.
-What?
Hey?
Remember my position, will you?
Sure, I'll stop by
for a drink sometime, huh?
Rosie! Rosie!
What?
-What is my position?
-It beats the hell out of me, Tyler.

I just hope I can find my way home.

Good luck, Tyler.

Yeah.

Well, interesting.

Now, what are the possibilities here?

The possibilities...

are many.

Gotta stay rational, be objective and...

plan out all the proper procedures

before doing anything else.

Make a list of priorities, remembering,

of course, to take into account variables,

and the fact that, inevitably,

some problems could arise that...

...inevitably, some problems could arise

that are completely unexpected.

Get a grip on yourself.

Section 3C of my instructions

reads as follows:

"You will proceed immediately, by means

of canoe and utilizing local waterways,

to establish a base camp."

Section 4:

that you have been provided

with the following material requirements."

"Food supplies, sufficient

until local sources can be utilized."

"Various appropriate requisition forms,

documents and vouchers."

"And all technical equipment

pertinent to the completion of the study."

Ooh! Eeh!

Hey!

March 23. 5 am.

First report from Project Lupine.

Spent the night in a crate.

At daylight I'll try to get off the ice.

But I'd like to go on record as stating

that those who planned this expedition

made significant misc...

...made significant miscalculations,

staggeringly incompetent...

Hello.

Uh...

Excuse me, You sort of...

Could you give me a hand
with some of this equipment, I wonder?

Ya!

I have a lot of equipment here.

I really can't leave it. If you could...

Hello?

Ootek.

Ootek?

Ootek?

There are problems recording the events
of the past day or days.

The man has disappeared, although
his face remains vivid in my mind.

I've decided to stay here
until I get my bearings
and I've sorted out what constitutes reality.

April 1.

Temperatures soaring
to 41 degrees Fahrenheit.

For the first time in three days
I emerge from my sleeping bag
and begin trying to do my job.

So far I've collected
the following specimens:
five baby mice, one millipede
and something that looks
suspiciously like fleas.

My instructions are to track down
a specimen of *Canis lupus*,
dispatch it with a rifle
and examine the contents of its stomach.

April 16.

Warm days bring
a kind of peace and stillness.
If there are any remaining fears,
they stem only from the recognition
of my own staggering insignificance.

May 3. In pursuit of phantoms.

I hear them every night, have seen
their tracks and collected their scat.
So they must be real.

Agh!

Canis lupus arcticus.

The largest and rarest of the wolf species.

And its den.

The rules of the game are to choose
an observation post downwind,
out of the animal's field of vision,
gain your position and maintain it
without ever revealing your presence.

Outmaneuvered on all counts,

I opt to change the rules.

Reasoning that we're suspicious
of what we don't understand.

I decide to reveal

as much as possible about myself,
make a display.

I haven't seen the wolf in two days.

I know I was violating the distance
principle, moving so far into his territory.

But since he hadn't seemed afraid of me,

I hoped that I could...

I didn't take it personally.

This was a matter of principle,
a territorial dispute.

And he had fired the first shot.

What never?

No, never

What never?

Hardly ever

Hardly ever, ever sick at sea

So give five cheers and one cheer...

Oh!

I am the very model

of a modern major general

I've information vegetable,
animal, and mineral

I know the kings of England
and I quote the fights historical

From Marathon to Waterloo
in order categorical

I'm very well acquainted too
with matters mathematical

I understand equations
both the simple and quadratical

About binomial theorem

I'm teeming with a lot of news
With many cheerful facts
about the square of the hypotenuse
27 cups of tea later, I completed
a two-acre circle around my tent,
including a 100-yard section
of the wolf's path.
What had taken me six hours
and 27 cups of tea,
he accomplished in just a few minutes.
At each of the places that I'd marked,
he made his mark on the opposite side,
indicating that my boundary
was acceptable to him.
And thus he granted me the space
for Lupus Base One.
I'm supposed to watch his behavior,
but all he does is stay
in front of his den and watch mine.
I can't remember ever being the object
of so much constant attention.
I now arise at 10:00 in the evening,
as everything becomes more active
during the long polar twilight.
In my notebook,
the wolf has become George.
The two are identical in color,
with the same contrasting
shoulder marking and long-legged gait.
But I've detected a difference,
and I've named her Angeline.
As George has become a family of five,
the reason for his long staring match
with me has lost its mystery.
It's well-known that wolves mate for life,
but knowing that has hardly prepared me
for their constant and varied
displays of affection.
Every evening George goes off
on his nightly rounds.
What he does on these excursions
remains a mystery to me.
Angeline always remains
behind with the cubs,

though I can see that she longs to follow.

It's perplexing.

The overall reason behind the study is that the government wants final proof that wolves are responsible

for the disastrous decline in caribou.

So far I haven't seen a single caribou, or observed the wolves eating anything.

My own food supplies are nearing exhaustion, and the local environment offers scant pickings.

Yet the wolves seem perfectly healthy.

I've done numerous scatological studies and only turned up a smattering of small mammal bones.

The whole question of sustenance around Lupus Base One has me completely mystified.

Angeline has given me the first clue.

In less than an hour she's caught and consumed 23 mice.

My rough calculation:

one mouse every ten square feet.

Over 40,000 square feet in an acre.

That's 4,000 mice per acre.

The idea that a large animal could live entirely on mice will be greeted with skepticism, unless I can perform an experiment.

Five wolves appeared today.

I expected one of the pack battles I'd read so much about.

It was Angie who was right in the middle of things, asserting her position as the dominant female.

The challenges and assertions were mostly symbolic.

There was no real fighting.

But Angeline got her point across.

George was never challenged.

He just stood there with his air of masterful certainty,

the alpha wolf of the pack.
Usually, only the dominant pair
mate and have offspring,
going to seek their own privacy
for that purpose.
Apparently, the time had arrived
to rejoin the pack.
There's a young brown wolf who seems
to be a particular favorite of the cubs.
I've named him Uncle Albert.
Now Angeline is free again
to join George on his nightly rounds.
July 12.
I wonder why it was that long ago
I became a watcher of things.
Always watching others do and feel things
I wouldn't or couldn't do myself.
Always standing off at a distance,
isolated, detached.
I envy the wolves
for how they experience the world.
Always in such direct contact
with their environment,
traveling through their territories,
alert and attuned to all the signs
coming in through their senses,
telling them where a rabbit
recently passed or the sweet water lay,
revealing a whole universe to them
that we can never really know.
But I sit behind glass lenses,
filling up notebooks and triplicate forms,
trying to capture the wolves
within the pages of my journal.
And what'll be done with the study
when I'm finished?
Once these wolves
have been exposed to my world...
what will happen to them?
There's a strange wolf
that I only see fleetingly.
He must be part of the pack,
but an outsider,
always following at a distance.

Perhaps another watcher.

Ootek thought you might need
some company.

Ootek?

Hello.

Really can't tell you how glad I am
to see the two of you.

It's been so long
since I heard another human voice.

You have any ketchup here?

No, I don't. I'm sorry.

I ran out a couple of weeks ago,
Here, have some fish.

Uh, no.

No, thanks. I don't eat fish.

What do you eat?

Actually...

I eat mice.

-You eat mice?

-Yeah.

It's an experiment, really.

You see, the wolves are supposed to eat
caribou. However, there are no caribou.

Basically, what the wolves
have been eating is mice.

So I'm conducting an experiment
to see whether a carnivore, a big animal,
can live on nothing but mice.

So I've been just eating mice,
and I'm doing fine.

-What does he say?

-He says, "Good idea."

Syringe.

There.

-What's that?

-Clamp. This thing? Yeah.

See the way this is set up here?

This is so it grabs ahold. You got him.

It's a gripper.

I know what that is.

They had them at the mines.

Yeah, that's right. It's a gas mask,
except that I use it for wolf scats.

The wolf scat has little tiny animals,

little tiny parasites.
And if you breathe these things in,
you breathe these little guys,
they go up into your brain
and they eat it out.
Scat? What is scat?
Uh...
Wolf droppings.
See, the idea behind this is
if you study what comes out of a wolf,
you get a pretty good idea what went in.
Hmm.
I got a whole bag of them down there.
I got a whole sack.
What did he say?
He says, "Good idea,"
And so they settled in with me,
as if nothing could be more natural.
For my part,
I'm glad to have the company.
A seven.
Mike had gone to school in the south.
When his parents died,
Ootek adopted him.
Traditionally, they are no orphans
among the Inuit.
I met a girl in a bar,
and she wanted me to buy her drinks,
so I bought her some.
And then after a while,
she wanted to come home with me.
But I made a mistake.
I smiled at her.
That's what happens when a meat eater
becomes a sugar eater.
Ootek has taken
a particular interest in the study,
though I've learned there is little about
wolves that he doesn't already know.
But I sense there is another side to Ootek,
some part of his nature
that he hasn't shown.
I try not to annoy him
with too many questions,

but there are many things I'd like to know.
When he was young
he used to follow the wolves on their hunts.
The wolf is his helping spirit: amarok.
-Ama...
-Amarok.
-Ama...
-The wolf.
He went 30 days without food
and without protection from the cold.
Then he saw the wolf.
He felt the wolf bite into his heart.
When he woke up, he was all in one piece.
That's how the wolf
became his helping spirit.
I wonder what makes them howl like that.
They howl when they're lonely.
Or to call their friends.
That way, the other...
the others will know where they are,
and then sooner or later
they're bound to meet up.
That's the way to catch wolves.
Go where they're howling.
Hide behind a rock,
and then howl like one of them.
And then... they will come to investigate.
Yeah?
When they get close enough,
you shoot 'em.
You shoot 'em.
Hopefully you hit 'em.
That's how you kill a wolf.
To me, wolves mean money.
It's a way of making a living.
One wolf pelt costs about \$350.
And I've got to feed my family.
My children.
Buy a snowmobile,
food, rifle, bullets, whatever.
You wouldn't...
I mean, you wouldn't kill these wolves?
These ones? Oh.
No. I don't think so.

Besides, you would get mad
if I killed one of them.
And your gun is bigger than mine.
Yeah.
I'd like to, though.
Last week in August.
The Arctic summer has almost ended.
As the time grows short, I'm reluctant to
even sleep, for fear of missing something.
It's hard to imagine
that soon I'll have to leave.
But this place doesn't belong to man.
It belongs to the wolves.
I can't really be sad, because it's here
that I've begun to feel wonder again,
like when I was a kid,
and this makes me deeply happy.
I wish I could say thank so,
just so, straight into the universe.
The rest of Ootek's family,
traveling through on their way north,
stopped by to spend the night.
He wants me to tell you a story
of when there was nothing in the world
except for a man and a woman.
The woman came to a hole in the ice,
and she reached in and felt something,
so she pulled it out.
And it was a tuktu, which is the caribou.
And it was this animal that the Inuit
needed for their food and clothing.
For many years there were so many
caribou that the people called them lice.
But soon all the hunting killed off
all the fat, healthy animals,
and the only ones left over
were the weak, sick ones.
Soon they began to breed and multiply,
and the herd got weak.
Sick.
So the people came back to the woman
to ask her what to do.
She went back to the hole in the ice,
because she needed a tool

to cut the sickness out of the herd,
and the amarok was born.

Amarok.

The wolves hunted the caribou
and they killed off all the weak, sick ones,
and the people had
all the caribou that they needed.

She says maybe you're like Ootek.

Maybe a long time ago
the wolf devoured you.

He knows, doesn't he?

He knows what they're saying.

The caribou are coming south
and the hunting will be good,
and the amarok will be there.

We broke camp
and went in separate directions.

Mike went south, while Ootek
led me on a three-day trek,
down out of the high country
and on to the tundra.

There will be wolves there,
he said, as well as the "tuktu",
the great caribou herds
that once had sustained his people.

His endurance
is very much greater than mine,
but there are no expectations of me.
Not, I think, because I am the "kabloona,"
the white man,
but because he doesn't recognize
such a thing as impatience.

Whoo!

Deep in the bone,
the marrow reveals the disease.
And she had found the tool
to cut the sickness from the herd.
Gunfire and the smell of gasoline.
Come on, right over here!

Hello, Rosie,

Is that you, Tyler?

They called off the search.

They wrote you off.

I even said a few Hail Marys for you myself.

But I never believed in ghosts.

How are you?

-You all right? You got all your pieces?

-I'm all right, yeah,

-You've changed.

-I've changed?

What the hell you been
doing out here, anyway?

Tyler, you wouldn't believe what's
happened. It's fantastic. I hit the jackpot.

Two new planes, a new hotel.

Have you seen an old Inuk?

Inuk? Eskimo? Drunk or sober?

Quite sober.

Join the party.

Altogether, 1400 acres.

Top of the mountain down to the lake,
including mineral rights.

But the real ace in the hole for us right now
is the hot spring right up there.

Amazing. Incredible. Steaming hot water
coming right out of the ground.

When I say hot water,
what are you thinking?

Sitting in the bath tub?

Japanese. A little bit of advertising,
plenty of raw fish.

Beautiful country all right.

Limitless possibilities.

Japanese. That's a great angle, Rosie,
Wait. You haven't heard the best part.

Listen to this.

Once they've soaked their little buns
in our magic, medicinal hot spring,
you bottle it up, stick a fancy label on it,
they take it home with them.

Before you know it, we'll be
shipping it outta here by the truckload.

And what does it cost us? Nothing.

Just bubbles right out of the ground.

I bet you we could figure out a way
to bottle the air up here, too.

Fantastic.

Gentlemen, here's to the future.

Watch the horns.
Come on, Tyler. Climb in.
I'm taking you out.
Look, Tyler, maybe you can't see it,
but you've gone round the bend a little.
I know. I've seen it before.
Come on. Get in the...
I know where your camp is, Tyler.
I'll meet you there in a couple of days.
We'll talk it over.
How could he have known about
Lupus Base unless he'd been there?
To get back would be
a three-day hike for me,
but for him, it's only minutes away.
Pups, where's your folks?
It's pretty lonely around here.
Don't you worry about anything.
Everything's gonna be just fine.
Get outta there!
Get out of here, Rosie!
I don't want you here! Get out of here!
Get away!
Mike.
What are you doing here?
I'm on my way north.
The snow is coming.
Have you seen Ootek?
No.
He just disappeared.
We were out there and he...
Yeah, I know. The old ones seem to have
a way of doing that, just disappearing.
Which is what I'm about to do.
Have you seen the wolves?
Have you seen George and Angie?
No, they must have gone north.
No. No, the puppies are still here. They
wouldn't go off and leave the puppies.
Stop worrying about the pups
and start worrying about yourself.
This thing that's happening
is too big for you.
It's a question of how you survive it.

Survival...
of the fittest.
In the end, there were no simple answers.
No heroes, no villains.
Only silence.
But it began the moment
that I first saw the wolf.
By the act of watching them,
with the eyes of a man,
I had pointed the way
for those who followed.
The pack returned for the cubs, as
there are no orphans among the wolves.
And eventually the losses of that autumn
became a distant memory.
I believe the wolves went off to a wild
and distant place somewhere,
although I don't really know,
because I turned away
and didn't watch them go.