

The International Collection
of Ecological Literature
By Shen Shixi

DOUBLE HOUND



Written by Shen Shixi Translated by Hao Lin & Zhi Limei



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Chapter 1 Prelude

gunshot scattered the dholes with a crash.

Behind the rocks rose a forty-odd man with large whiskers. He patted a big yellow dog squatting at his side on its back head, and shouted, “Come on, Loga!”

Suddenly a yellow blur whirled out from the steel-grey rocks.

If blue sheep, red deer or oxen suffered an ambush, they would always flock together and run into one direction, for fear that any deviation from the crowd would make them the target of hunters and hounds. Yet this habit of herbivores happened to provide hunters and hounds with an ever-correct hint about a hunting direction, so at last they could always get a quarry who was too exhausted to follow the crowd. Compared with

blue sheep, red deer and oxen, however, dholes acted in a much cunning way. They tended to scatter into every direction when they were ambushed.

Thus now in the green woods, from all directions came the dholes' woeful howls, and here and there flickered their red shapes.

If it was an ordinary rural dog, or a little inexperienced hound, it would definitely target its first chase at the nearest dhole. But when it found another nearer one halfway, it would drop the previous target and alter the former course. Several such changes of targets would enable all the dholes to run away out of sight. By fleeing into all directions, dhole packs intended to make chasers confused, faltering, exhausted and hesitating so that they could have a narrow escape.

Yet never would Loga be easily taken in by dholes' trick.

Loga was not the kind of stupid-looking rural dogs with short limbs and thick waists, common on the foothills of the Ritchecca Mountain. Instead, he was born in a noble family with his mother being an expensive imported Shepherd Dog in the State Farm of the Gamaar Prairie and

his father an army dog who graduated from Kunming Warhound School and now was in service at the outpost of the Ritchecca Snow Mountain. In his veins flowed not only the noble Western blood of English harrier, German miniature pinscher and Irish setter, but that of Yunnan alpine dog and local dog, and perhaps a tiny bit of wolf's blood as well.

His owner Amanstar, the head of Hunters' Stockaded Village, paid dearly — with a yak and seven winter fox furs — for him to the hook-nosed shepherd in the State Farm. A perfect embodiment of hybrid vigor, he was indeed worthy of the price. He boasted a magnificent physique, almost twice the size of local dogs. With slender limbs, wide chest, slim waist, and beautifully streamlined build, he could race so fast that few of long-eared, swiftly-running rabbits, once targeted by him, could escape. His lips were long and pointed, and his strong fangs were ice-white and cold-glittering, which could pierce tough bear skin with one bite. His yellow fur, so silky as if it had been polished by crystal stones, could amazingly change color: On red-earth mountain land, he would furl his hairs

with golden red hairtips pressed together, thus turning his whole body into reddish yellow; while on yellow prairie in the late fall, he would fluff his hairs with earthen yellow down beneath golden red hairtips exposed, thus helping him deceive his quarry. Loga, though as dignified as foreign dogs, was not finicky at all; though as tough and hard-working as local rural dogs, was not cowardly and wretched at all. He had hunted with Amanstar untold times in the past more than one year and hence gained rich hunting experience.

Among the fleeing dholes, Loga aimed at a female dhole with bright red fur and pursued her relentlessly. Resisting all distractions and sparing no efforts, he tracked her wildly up and down the hills and then into the bushes. Shortly, running closer and closer to the female dhole, he could hear her wheezing gasps.

At the point, the female dhole turned and trod over a poppy field at a desperate speed, yelping for her fellow dholes' help.

Suddenly, a black-eared male dhole, leaping out from a cluster of flourishing poppies, streaked past Loga diagonally. The male dhole

was so close to Loga that his tail almost brushed against Loga's muzzle. Seemingly worn-out, with his mouth frothing and one of his forelegs limping along, the male dhole was now tottering rather slowly. Loga could have gripped the male dhole's filthy tail by one bite. What a bargain for nothing! But Loga didn't alter his track course. For he knew that once he targeted the black-eared male dhole and altered the course, the dhole would run even faster than a rabbit. Indeed, dholes were crafty creatures with high IQs. Both his froth and lame foreleg were phony, and just intended to give Loga a false impression of easy catch so as to rescue the female dhole. Loga was already exhausted. So if he stopped chasing the equally-exhausted female dhole and turned to the energetic male one, he would never catch him.

Loga still kept chasing the female dhole. For perseverance was of greatest importance in chasing dholes. Gradually the female dhole slowed down, and her howls became bleakly deep and hoarse. Loga knew that if he kept chasing it wouldn't take much time for her to slump down to the ground and then become a

quarry in his mouth after several futile struggles against his fierce attack.

The idea that his master Amanstar would certainly stroke his back with his rough and callused hand and grant him a bone if he returned with the female dhole in his mouth gave him a boost to chase more vigorously.

Just at the moment, another two male dholes, popping out from the couch grasses, came blocking Loga's way, with their eyes glaring fiercely and their fangs wickedly bared, threatening to fling themselves at Loga for a desperate fight. Loga rushed forward fearlessly. For he knew that dholes, unlike wolves, were courageous enough to fight against hunters and hounds. However, dholes also knew that humans, especially their hunting rifles which could discharge fire and lightning, were formidable. So once the gunshot rang out and the pungent smell of gunpowder diffused around, dholes would be crushed spiritually and have no desire of fighting any longer. Besides, these two male dholes were no match for him in physique and strength even if they were reckless enough to fight against him at close quarters.

Just as he expected, when Loga leapt forward, the two male dholes cried out a weird yelp and ran apart into the grass.

Without tossing a single glance at the two cowardly dholes, Loga continued to chase the exhausted female dhole desperate for life, with his tail and backbone kept in a line and his feet seemingly taking off.

The dholes' tag-match tactics failed. And none of them was courageous enough to stand up and measure his strength with Loga whose physique was almost the same as that of a wolf. They all knew that this nasty hound had hunters and guns as his backup, and how could anybody be so brave as to offend him? Then the dholes retreated one after another and the whole pack fled off in a twinkle, leaving the female dhole alone behind.

The female dhole was still in full flight.

Loga was now only twenty-odd steps away from her when the female dhole made a sudden left turn and ran toward a red pine woods. Loga wondered why she herself ran toward her doom because there were neither bushes nor caves for one to hide in the sparse woods and it was un-

doubtedly a grave for the female dhole struggling to flee from her formidable enemy. Was it likely that she was already stupefied by tiredness? No. No way. Dholes were tricky in nature, and it was unlikely for them to do stupid things in a crisis. It must be some kind of trick. At the thought, Loga came to be on alert. Well, look at the female dhole! She inclined her head slightly to peek to the left while fleeing. Following her sight Loga gave a glimpse to the left, and saw through her trick right away. She was playing a diversionary game, pretending to run toward the red pine woods but actually intending to flee to the red slope at the left side of the Nujiang River! In camouflage, she might have a narrow escape.

Animals' fur usually grows to change color to match the color of their surroundings in evolution, which can help them take cover to escape from their predators for survival. The dholes on the foothills of the Ritchecca Mountain were mostly red or maroon because the earth of the region was red, and especially on the banks of the Nujiang River, vast tracts of land on the slopes having no vegetation due to serious soil

erosion exposed the maroon acid earth. Once they ran onto those slopes, the dholes would almost merge into the color of the earth. Even the golden eagle known as Clairvoyant could not pick them out against a blinding redness.

Once the female dhole was allowed to run onto that red slope, she would be like a fish in the water. It would take Loga a great time and effort to distinguish between the clods of earth and the back of the dhole if she jumped beside any of clods and suddenly stayed there motionlessly with her back arched. Before he could spot her, the female dhole would have regained energy after a good rest, and then run off swiftly again. Dogs had strong senses of smell and hearing, but their sense of sight was relatively weak. So his battle against the dhole who had a camouflage on the red slope would be just like his playing a hide-and-seek game with his quarry, with only one of his eyes opened, It would certainly be unfavorable to Loga.

Thus Loga would never let her trick work.

The female dhole, as expected, was playing a diversionary trick. Just before running into the red pine woods, suddenly she made a swift

L-turn and whooshed quickly toward the red slope on the left side. Fortunately, Loga was well prepared, otherwise inertia would carry him forward, and after he stopped and turned around, he would have lagged far behind and missed the optimum opportunity, and the female dhole would have run onto the red slope.

The moment the female dhole turned left, Loga lashed his tail to buck and then immediately turned left in midair. Rather than waste any time, he gained some time and there was only half the previous distance between him and the female dhole.

At the moment, the big yellow male dog and the small red female dhole were very close to each other, with the former's head almost touching the latter's tail.

Loga secretly pushed himself a little harder to get ready for a double pounce, which was his best hunting skill. Dogs' pounce and leap, though quite similar in posture, both with two hind legs thrusting backward hard and two forelegs lifting up forward, were entirely different in nature. For a pounce, a dog would arch and then straighten his spine, erect his tail, tight-

en his stomach and waist muscle hard, protrude his head forward as far as possible, and make his four paws ready to clasp and tear when landing. For a leap, however, a dog must restrain the movement of every part of his body. A leap could reach up to one meter at most, while a pounce two meters at least. A leap could be successive, while a pounce could not. When pouncing, a dog must concentrate all his thought, courage and power on his paws and fangs, and be prepared for an instant scuffling with his quarry after falling on it. If the pounce failed, a common rural dog would be deflated at once and could not recover for a long time. Even a well-trained hound, once the first pounce failed, could not continue to race neatly and vigorously until he recovered for the second pounce several seconds later. So few dogs could conduct two pounces without a break or halt. As one of the most outstanding few, Loga took some beating for sure. With agility and coordination, he could make a miraculous recovery the moment his four paws touched the ground after the failure of the first pounce, and in a trice dash forward again like an arrow, just even more briskly than

an Australian kangaroo. It is by the double-pounce skill that Loga had caught innumerable good-at-running blue sheep and barking deer.

Loga chased a few more steps, and suddenly pounced. He didn't bark, for a dog who was truly good at biting didn't bark at all.

The female dhole sped up all at once, and leapt forward fleetly, which was in Loga's expectation. Dholes were not so easy to be caught by a single pounce as stupid hedgehogs. So he launched a second instant pounce. Though already at her fullest speed, the female dhole raced rather slower than the dog pounced. With accurate calculation, Loga could fall exactly on the female dhole's neck. With his two front paws firmly clasping the dhole's skull and his two hind paws treading on her back, he could overturn the dhole and grip her neck with his fangs when she was struggling in panic.

However, Loga made a blunder that the strong were most prone to. He took his enemy lightly and underestimated the female dhole's ability of dealing with emergency.

The female dhole chased closely by Loga

was Darvia, the youngest and prettiest single female dhole in the Etis red dhole clan. She was just three years old — the golden age of dholes in terms of strength, energy and intelligence. Darvia had encountered hounds twice and smartly shaken them off with ease in both cases. Yet she did not expect that the big yellow dog was such an intractable and intelligent hound as to be induced or intimidated. Even dholes' tricks such as relay-flight maneuver and tag-match tactic couldn't take him in. What a haunting phantom! When Loga made the first pounce, she had run wildly with all her strength and luckily escaped from the attack. Then she thought that the big yellow dog would slow down after the first failure and that she could take the chance to widen the distance between them. But the dog's instant second pounce was really out of her expectation. Fortunately, she kept listening intently with her pointed ears sticking to her skull while darting like hell. She heard the air being ripped again behind and smelled the pungent odor of dogs wafting down again from midair. Just as the dog was about to catch her with his four paws stretching out like a

big net, with a quick wit, she abruptly halted. Swish — the figure of the big yellow dog swept past above her head and flew to the front. Oh! What was a close call! It was rather unsightly that the dog's ass now actually sat right on her head, but it would be a good chance to make a countercharge and it was high time to launch one of dholes' most fierce attacks on the nasty yellow dog! At the thought, she snapped at the yellow dog's hind legs with lightning speed.

Yet much quicker than her, the big yellow dog kicked up his hind legs backward abruptly and fiercely, quite like a bucking horse. Unprepared at all and got kicked on the chin, the dhole could not but topple backward. As she was running along the ridge of the mountain beside the Nujiang River, with a backward topple she tumbled all the way down the slope toward the river. Luckily, she was not hurt badly for the slope was gentle and covered with soft foxtail grass. Not until she rolled down to the riverside did she stand on her feet clumsily. But as she was still dizzy from the fall and trying to recover consciousness, the big yellow dog had already

gone running down the slope and borne down on her overwhelmingly. She had no choice but to go on fleeing toward the river.

The river was now in the flood season, with raging surges carrying plenty of red mountain earth and thundering in deep gorges. The river rose up so high as to totally submerge low-lying woods and grasslands. Flapping and biting furiously, the surges discharged muddy masses of red foams.

Of course, dholes could swim, but only in quiet pools rather than across the roaring Nu-jiang River. Being cornered indeed, however, Darvia caught sight of an exuberant pearl chestnut, with its root steeped in the shallow inlet, by the riverside, and jumped onto it desperately.

Darvia never expected that such a jump would alter not only her own fate, but that of the whole Etis red dhole clan in the future.

Loga regretted having rashly followed the female dhole to jump onto the pearl chestnut. He was so eager for success that he thought that he could catch the cornered female dhole at the end of the treetops as long as he followed her to jump onto the pearl chestnut, which reclined by

the riverside.

Loga never dreamed that the pearl chestnut, which anchored firmly to the river bank a moment ago, would move suddenly after he followed the female dhole to jump onto it. No sooner had he figured out what happened than the pearl chestnut pulled off the bank and swiftly floated toward the middle of the river, carrying both him and the damned female dhole along.

Actually it was not quirky at all. In the flood season, landslides were quite common on the banks of the Nujiang River, whole trees being carried into the river by the sliding mass of dirt and rock and floated away by grand torrents of water. The pearl chestnut was actually floated from upstream down to the river bank, happened to be hooked on a rock by the bank with one curved branch of its, and moored there like a ship tied to a stake. When the female dhole leapt on it, the loosely-hooked branch was pushed to unhook from the rock. And when Loga followed to leap on it, the tree came to float downstream again as if it was shoved by a bamboo pole.

The female dhole rushed to cling to a

Y-shaped branch on the treetops; while Loga lay prone on a big knob on the tree root. They were about 20 meters apart.

At the very beginning, finding the female dhole on the treetops was surrounded by water and got no way to run off, Loga still wanted to accomplish the hunting task assigned by his master. He stretched out his hooked claws, gripped the rough bark, and moved forward. However, he had scarcely crawled a few meters when the pearl chestnut floated out of the quiet tranquil shallow inlet, and entered the torrents in the middle of the river, swaying crazily. Tightly gripping a twig above the water surface with his teeth, and firmly clasping the trunk with his four paws, Loga narrowly escaped being swayed into the river. The waves came rushing incessantly, and the tree kept heaving violently. Despite an outstanding hound, Loga became dizzy soon for no training experience on the water at all. Even unable to stand steadily, let alone to pounce and bite, he had to give up the idea of attacking the female dhole. Anyway, the female dhole was now like a fish in a net, a bird in a cage, or a barking deer in a trap; he might as well let her

live for a while longer; he did want to kill her, but it could wait till the tree pulled back to the river bank.

May the pearl chestnut just joke with him wander for a while in the middle of the river, and then pull back to the bank.

Soon, his hope proved to be futile. After floating to the middle of the river, the pearl chestnut, tugged by the torrents like a cattle by a nasal rope, continued to sail downstream all the way along the winding river, with no slightest inclination to pull back to the bank.

The sun loomed in the dark blue clouds, ascending from the east, reaching its zenith, and declining toward the west.

Either because the pearl chestnut was sinking imperceptibly for having been soaked in the water for a long time, or because the torrents changed the position of the trunk, the root where Loga stayed gradually submerged into the water. At first the water rose up to his knees, and later to his neck. He had to find another safer place. A quick look-round led him notice the treetops, the highest place of the whole tree. But he was just uncertain whether he could climb there be

cause the delicate twigs were swaying fiercely. Apart from the treetops, the fork between the trunk and treetops was an ideal place. It rose about half a foot above the water surface, with several sturdy branches making a secure tray-like platform, and many a scar, knur and wart potentially serving as firm footholds and handholds. Then he clawed arduously into the bark, and crawled upward inch by inch. After a seemingly life-long time, he finally made it and crawled onto the fork of the tree.

At the point, the pearl chestnut just floated into steep gorges, where the raging surges were dashing upon the banks and roaring like thunder. The tree sailed at an increasingly faster pace. Now and then it was flung up into the air by the torrents, and when it fell down on the rocks in the middle of the river time and time again, its branches broke off in profusion, and the treetops became smaller and smaller, just as if being trimmed on and on with a big pair of scissors.

Now, Darvia was moving toward the fork, too.

Darvia was not blind, and naturally saw Lo

ga lying prone on the fork. Crawling over there would undoubtedly get her closer to the enemy, but she had no choice. She was already at the end of the treetops and the repeatedly surging water had drenched her through. Dholes, as terrestrial animals, like dogs, can not swim and have a phobia about turbulent rivers. She was terribly sick on the tree swayed by the waves. With her four claws digging deep into the bark, she narrowly avoided being sucked into the whirlpools by the waves. As time went on, however, her paws grew stiff and numb. She could not hold on too long and would perhaps slip into the river soon if she continued to stay on the treetops.

Confronted with more than two dangers at the same time, animals had an instinct to avoid the important and dwell on the trivial. As for Darvia, both the river and Loga were her enemies, and the former was much fiercer than the latter. Because once she fell into the water she would be swallowed by strong waves without any chance to struggle. Though the big yellow dog was also fierce, he became much milder and less dangerous, compared with the roaring Nu

jiang River. At least she could exert efforts to struggle if he really attacks.

The female dhole also climbed to the fork of the tree soon, just half a meter away from Loga. In Loga's mind, his quarry was now right in front of him, and merely a leap could help to catch her. Yet his interest in attacking had disappeared. Having crawled for over ten meters on the drifting trunk from the root up to the fork of the tree, which was more exhausting than running for two kilometers on the land, he felt nothing but dizzy and weak. Now the top priority came to be the survival, without which hunting would be impossible. Besides, the pearl chestnut was pitching and tossing in the turbulent currents, which made it difficult to launch effective pouncing and biting toward the female dhole. If he really grappled with her, maybe they would roll into the river together. Loyal as he was, he was not so stupid as to die together with his quarry. His master was not present and the chivalrous deed of perishing together would lose its meaning now that his master could not see it.

For Loga, he had no choice but to live with the female dhole in peace against his will.

The pearl chestnut was still floating ceaselessly.

They were half a meter apart, and as canines, they could not ignore the smell of each other owing to their sensitive sense of smelling. For mammals, the sense of smelling serves as a magician in that strange smells will trigger hostility, while familiar smells will foster amity. Gradually the female dhole's smell became familiar to Loga, and the yellow dog's smell was not so annoying for her.

The common fate made their mutual hostility naturally fade out.

Without that reef hidden in the water and thereby the fierce crash, maybe Loga and Darvia would keep staying face to face in stalemate and maintain their temporary peace in certain circumstances before the agreed rehabilitation of rivalry in the wake of pulling over. There once was a case like this in the roaring Nujiang River during flood season. Once on a floating island that was constituted by a couple of entangled trees, a snow leopard and an antelope drifted together in the turbulent torrents for two days without hatred and killing, like two passengers

taking the same boat of fate, and the snow leopard didn't even give a threatening snarl toward the antelope. However, when two days later the floating island floated into an L-shaped river bed and grounded on the beach, the previous peace ended, and the friendship of sharing the same boat had been written off. The moment the snow leopard jumped on the bank, he pounced toward the antelope and tore him into pieces without the least hesitation.

The fierce striking of a reef happened on the morning of the next day.

In between the faint light of the early morning, the pearl chestnut floated through the sharply-standing Copper Gong Gorge and sailed into a broad river where the flow of water was relatively smooth and mild. As for Loga, the sailing for almost one day and one night had worn him out. Especially during the process of passing through the Copper Gong Gorge when the pearl chestnut was moving between the crest of the wave and the bottom of the gorge like an arrow, he was tortured to the extent as if his bones were falling apart. Things went well now. The pearl chestnut was slowly floating on the

flat water, and Loga felt less dizzy and even had a sense of relaxation after nervousness. He loosened his claws that dug into the bark to stretch out his numb joints, rose up to be half crouched, and gave a lick of the wet hairs around his belly to get rid of some water drops. He felt not too bad now. An orange-rosy twilight appeared near the horizon and it became a little dim. It was right at that moment that the crash occurred. It was a hidden reef and nobody could see it. With a loud bang the pearl chestnut crashed right on the reef and the floating tree was forced to a halt suddenly. Fairly speaking, the crash was not quite fierce, but he didn't expect it, and his claws didn't dig into the bark, a strong inertia carried him to fall forward and right on Darvia. Darvia who stayed with her back toward the downstream was also pushed backward, and fortunately there was a thick branch behind her to prevent her from falling down. Her back was leaning against the branch, but her two hind legs became erect and her two forepaws were waving in the air. Just then, Loga rolled toward her.

If Loga still could control his direction, he would never have rolled toward the female

dhole. Because the branch was so narrow, small and slippery and he had been off balance, a single kick by Darvia would send him into the water to feed fish. And indeed, the female dhole was prone to kick him with her forelegs in her standing posture. The moment he rolled into her arms, he made a sighing and helpless wail, and then closed his eyes, waiting for the deadly kick in despair. However, after swaying for a while he found himself steady on the fork of the tree again, and the sharp claws of the female dhole did not land on him. He opened his eyes to find that the female dhole pushed her forelegs outward and stopped him from rolling with her soft belly. It seemed that her forelegs arched inward in the posture of a hug, in order to hold him into balance. Loga observed closely the expression on her face where her lips quivered and her eyes widened, obviously a look of astonishment. He could not spot any sense of disgust. Besides, he noticed that the sharp claw tips of the female dhole's forelegs did not stretch out, which was a very important friendly gesture.

In fact, the female dhole Darvia had already regarded Loga as a fellow sufferer who shared

common fate with her. Darvia was a female, who was more vulnerable to loneliness than a male. So for Darvia, in such a dangerous situation that one would sink deep into the water to feed fish at any moment, even an enemy's company would be much better than struggling alone in stormy waves.

Loga stood on his feet again, and took a step backward. Now the two opponents who were merely several inches apart drew much closer to each other in terms of not only their bodies but also their hearts.

After a while, the pearl chestnut floated away from the relatively calm section of the river, and into the steep gorge where the Nujiang River was pouring down directly from the huge rocks, and the river was just like a red waterfall hanging on the cliff. The pearl chestnut fell vertically down. With a loud boom even the remaining treetops was smashed into pieces. Because the hind part of Darvia was close to the treetops, her hind legs and the whole hip slipped into the river with the broken branches, leaving only two fore paws clinging to the trunk. She struggled desperately. Yet the currents ran

rapidly, and the trunk was round enough, moreover, long-time soaking made the bark a little soft and slippery. She struggled in vain for a while, but she only made it worse. Her body began to slip down slowly and soon her whole body was almost bathed in the water, only with her head and neck barely above the water. The impulsion of falling water was so great that she could not hold it any more. Letting out a weird cry of yo-yo, she turned her begging eyes upon the big yellow dog.

If Loga really meant to take her life, here came the best opportunity. He could have just stayed there, turned back and pretended to have seen nothing and heard nothing, and waited for two or three minutes. Then the female dhole's game in this world would be over for good. But it seemed too lonely for Loga to stay alone on this pearl chestnut, for that animals would have a mentality that a shared risk with a companion would at least make them feel much safer. Then he hitched his hind legs to the wart and dug his fore claws deep into the bark. Poking his head out, Loga held the female dhole's back neck quickly with his mouth. At that moment, the

habit of a hound gave him a mysterious impulse. Beneath his fangs was the soft skin of the dhole, under which were slippery veins, and behind which was the hard neck bone. Loga's favorite killing way was crunching the neck bone of his quarry, and he had killed many hares and squirrels in this manner. Right now he held the back neck of the female dhole in his mouth. What a good opportunity! He didn't have to worry about her counterattack and no demanding effort was required. Simply closing his mouth would break the dhole's neck with a snap. Besides, he had been hungry for a long time. The perishing float seemed never to come to an end. Though less delicious than the venison of barking deer, dhole's meat could also satisfy his hunger. But he felt that there was an invisible force driving him to give up the idea. Without the female dhole, he would have fallen into the water and died when the crash occurred. Well, well, never mind. It could be compared to "A gourd in exchange for two wooden dippers" — no one suffered losses. He bent his four legs with great effort, and pulled the female dhole up to the trunk.

After being pulled up by Loga from the wa

ter, Darvia huddled up around Loga, the dhole's body closely against the dog's. Only by huddling together, supporting, warming and relying on each other could they withstand the frightful billows and terrible waves. Actually, the center of the fork was the safest place of the whole tree. As it was too small, however, it was nearly impossible to accommodate both of them and at the same time allow them keep an alert distance.

Darvia leaned on Loga, and the last bit of hostile vigilance and hatred in her eyes vanished, too. Trustingly she pillowed upon Loga's waist, as if he were a male dhole on whom she could rely forever.

Actually, dholes and dogs were of different genera under the same species. They were not natural enemies like cats and mice or mongooses and snakes. And the reason why Loga regarded Darvia as his hunting target was that his master Amanstar was interested in dholes. Now that his owner was far away from him, this interest became vague. For the part of Darvia, her hatred of Loga resulted from Loga's threat of her survival, and now the hatred naturally disappeared as this threat was dissolved by the shared hard-

ship. Moreover, Loga had saved her out of the water, so her gratefulness naturally turned into tender affections, taking place of tenseness and hostility completely.

In fact, there was no so much hatred as supposed.

At midnight, the pearl chestnut finally landed on the bank. When the tree was passing an S-shaped river bend, it was washed away from the middle of the river and then into a tributary by a rapid current. In this way the water of both the tributary and the Nujiang River pushed the pearl chestnut from two sides, and cast it on the gravel of the bank without much effort.

Following Loga, Darvia crawled onto the bank in a staggering way. It was a place totally unfamiliar to her and she could not smell out even a bit of the familiar odor of Etis red dhole clan at all. Animals always harbored a mentality of fear toward strange places. She was at his heel, licking his dog tail with her tongue repeatedly, which served as a special body language that would be used when the weak pleaded for the protection from the strong among canines.

The minute they were on the land, a bolt of

lightening with booming thunder broke the dark sky, just like a sharp and cold sword penetrating through the night and lighting up the pale earth. It seemed that the thunder was exploding above their heads, pushing the cove into a slight quiver. Suddenly, an orange fireball flied from the sky, sliding into a lofty and straight pine tree at the top of a cliff. After a short silence, a ball of dazzling blue light burst out from the pine tree, and a loud boom introduced a pungently burnt smell from the gorge. It turned out that the exuberant pine tree, which was torn apart from the middle, rattled into the Nujiang River along with the broken rocks.

The uproar of the Nujiang River continued for a while and then the river quickly returned to its normal state.

That was an extremely powerful ball lightening at the gorges of the Nujiang River.

Darvia was thrown into deep horror. The dazzling lightening and the deafening booming thunder all made her give a weird cry of yo-yo repeatedly to express her extreme fear to her companion.

Though Loga was afraid of lightening and

thunder in nature, as a male he had no reason to show his cowardliness in front of a female. Thus he plucked up his courage to take the lead on the rugged and muddy mountain road in the pouring rain.

Luckily, after a while they found a stone cave on the mountainside near the river bank. They went into the cave, and immediately the odor of grass and sheep assaulted their nostrils. Thank God. It turned out to be a blue sheep sheltering from rain in the cave.

The sound of rain and thunder was so big that the blue sheep didn't realize he was in danger until Loga and Darvia got through the entrance to the cave. With its machete-like horns crossed in front, the blue sheep charged toward the entrance desperately. If there was just one of them, be it Loga or Darvia, the blue sheep would never be blocked and intercepted, for that a trapped blue sheep was crazy enough to risk anything to survive, and that pair of long horns were so sharp and hard that they could penetrate right through the skins of both dholes and dogs. Thus they would suffer a lot if they confronted it face to face, yet if the blue sheep was allowed

out of the cave then the possibility of catching it would be more than slim. After floating on the Nujiang River for more than a day and a night, Loga and Darvia had been very weak and faint, so they could never catch up with the blue sheep, whose species were known as excellent leapers, on this rainy night. Fortunately, the dog and the dhole worked as a team and thus got in the way of its escape. It was simply a miracle that they could cooperate in such an amazing way. Having smelt the odor of sheep, Loga leapt onto the left wall of the cave with a twist of his waist, and Darvia onto the right wall of the cave with a gentle jump. Then the minute the blue sheep poked its head out of the entrance, Loga threw himself swiftly on the back of the blue sheep. When the sheep intended to stand straight to throw him off, Darvia had gripped one of its hind legs with her mouth. The poor blue sheep couldn't bear the double attack and finally fell on the ground with a plop.

Unity is power. Long live the union!

They had been hungry for a long time. Warm goat blood. Glutinous and slippery gut. Delicious mutton. What a delightful and sound

feast!

Having satisfied their stomach, they fell into sleep soon in the warm and dry cave. Excessive exhaust lengthened their sound sleep right to the morning of the next day. What was waiting for them would be a series of tougher challenges.

Life would never go in a smooth course.

The place where the pearl chestnut moored was named Wild Monkeys' Ridge, a good 200 kilometers away from the foothills of the Ritchecca Mountain.

Wild Monkeys' Ridge was, as the name implied, the domain dominated by monkeys. They were a group of tough stump-tailed monkeys with red face and black body and whose tails were even shorter than those of rabbits. There were about seventy or eighty of them. Tigers, leopards or other beasts did not haunt around here. As the saying goes, the monkey reigned in the mountains when the tiger was not there. Soon Darvia and Loga learned about the monkeys' terribleness themselves. Once they stepped out of the stone cave, nasty monkeys would crouch on the abrupt rocky cliff and snarl loudly at them and would not give them any

peace at all. When they went outside to look for food, monkeys would follow them in groups on the trees behind them, and once a quarry appeared, to be it a river deer or a barking deer, monkeys would shout in chorus and shake the branches of trees fiercely to make rustling sounds, then the quarry would flee quickly. “We are not going to eat you monkeys, what are you fussing about?” Darvia whispered her anger in mind, but it was impossible for her to argue with these monkeys.

For several days, Darvia and Loga suffered successive harassments and disturbances from these monkeys. Lots of red deer and antelopes lived around Wild Monkeys’ Ridge, but they couldn’t catch anything owing to the disturbances of the monkeys. Desperate hunger forced them to chew the rotten and stinky animal carcasses soaked in the pond. Yet they were not hyenas who is accustomed to eating rotten carcasses for food, only two such meals had already made them have diarrhea as if their guts would be pooped out.

For this group of stump-tailed monkeys, they were determined to kick the two uninvited

guests out of Wild Monkeys' Ridge. It was a place that they had inhabited for generations, how could they allow the ferocious dhole and dog to take a share of it? Being basically vegetarians themselves, the stump-tailed monkeys had a natural aversion to all predators, especially dholes. They ranked dholes as the worst of all evil beasts and they would be extremely happy if all the dholes in the world were wiped out by a plague. The stump-tailed monkeys shared roughly the same standpoint with human beings on this point. Men also regarded "dhole" as the synonymy of cruelty and craftiness, and deemed dholes as more wicked than wolves for they usually said "chai-lang", namely, "dhole-wolf". The monkeys knew the terribleness of dholes well. Once the dholes got a chance to settle down here, they would be a threat for the monkeys' survival for good, and then this place would probably be renamed as the Dhole-dogs' Ridge. Therefore, they took the initiative to strike before Darvia and Loga settled down.

A life-or-death struggle was inevitable.

Being similar to humans in shape but only having one thirds of humans' height, these fel-

lows were as loathsome as humans. (These of course were Darvia's feelings. Loga, as a hound fed by men, would never desecrate them with such words.) In Darvia's thought, probably humans could be called enlarged hairless monkeys, and the stump-tailed monkeys could be called miniature hairy men. It seemed that there was no choice but to defeat these monkeys in order to survive on this land.

However, it was not so easy to deal with monkeys.

First of all, monkeys lived on the trees or steep cliffs, and they barely got down to the ground. Both Darvia and Loga were not good at climbing trees or climbing cliffs. Therefore, monkeys were in a dominant geographic position. In addition, monkeys were well-disciplined and they were ruled by a male monkey king whose hair on the head was long enough to reach his shoulder. The monkey king had a purplish red face and two insidious deep eyes, by which one could tell at first glance that he must be a crafty old scoundrel. Under the leadership of the Monkey King the Red Face, the monkeys worked as one and took concerted action, so it

was hard to deal with them one by one. On one occasion, at dusk Darvia and Loga found that a group of monkeys were dwelling upon a steep rock, so they intended to sneak into their camp for an unexpected attack after the night came and the monkeys fell asleep. However, hardly had they climbed onto the rock with tremendous effort when sharp screeches of monkeys were heard. It turned out that some monkeys were arranged to serve as sentry monkeys, who were obliged to bug their eyes to closely observe the surrounding situations when others were asleep, and alert others with loud screeches once something suspicious was found. In a flash, the group of monkeys disappeared from the steep rock.

They had not even got a monkey hair for the whole night's efforts. How humiliated they were! What was worse, a poisoned thorn stuck into one of Loga's hind claws when he was running through a bush. Even though Darvia pulled it out with her mouth timely, his claw still suffered from inflammation and he had to limp around for several days.

Before long Loga could not stand it anymore. All day long he was tailed and chased by

such a group of monkeys that he was almost driven crazy. He had been a hound and a spoiled one who had never suffered trouble and grievance like this. Men fed him regularly, so he was far less tolerant than dholes in the face of hunger. He was breaking down: His eyes were bulged; his shoulders grew bony; and his body became thinner and smaller. Besides, he became increasingly irritable. A single and little tease from the monkeys would make him bark in a fierce and frenzied way, which wore down his spirit and strength but didn't have any threatening effect.

While it seemed a little easier for Darvia. She was once a wild dhole, and she had even lived tougher life. Yet when she saw the frustrated look of Loga, she was more miserable than suffering it herself, and she didn't know why.

She must do something to give the monkeys a lesson.

God bless them, for that they finally got a chance to show the imposing nature of canines. One morning, Darvia and Loga went to look for food along the narrow mountain track below the

river-facing cliff. As usual, the monkeys were crying noisily and making troubles above them. They were walking in low spirit. Suddenly, there was a horrible screech from the cliff. An unknown object rumbled down from the abrupt cliff, and fell right in front of them. With sharp eyes and agile limbs, Darvia quickly pressed on it with a pounce. Aha, it turned out to be a callow little monkey.

It was not hard to imagine that this clown-like little monkey must be standing on a slippery rock watered by dew and gesticulating with its hands and feet to laugh at them. It did not expect that extreme joy would make it off balance and roll down.

The little monkey was not dead, but its two hind legs were broken. Lying on the ground, it squeaked sadly.

Wonderful! Evil would really be rewarded with evil.

Darvia immediately held the little monkey in her mouth to a clearing where it would be clear enough to show every monkey everything. She planned to slaughter and ate the little monkey in front of all monkeys, so that these nasty

stump-tailed monkeys would be frightened and driven away by the bloody cruelty. Killing a chicken in front of monkeys could be a warning to monkeys, so killing a monkey in front of monkeys must have better effect. As a dhole, Darvia grew up in the circumstance of bloody killing. So she would not feel ashamed or guilty at all.

She first tore off a piece of scalp of the little monkey, and then bit its nose off with one bite, which were called putting to death by dismembering the body.

With blood all over its face, the little monkey was crying bitterly and rolling about on the ground with great agony.

A female monkey crazily leapt around on the cliff with a pretty sad look. Suddenly she jumped in front of the Monkey King the Red Face, fell on her knees, and shook his shoulders fiercely with her two front paws, emitting a series of quirk jabbars from her mouth. For Darvia, it was not hard to guess that the female monkey who was almost tortured to the edge of lunacy was the mother of that little monkey, and she must be begging for help.

With bent head and a dispirited look on his face, the Monkey King was crouched on a bulging bluestone as if he was really kind of guilty of it.

Then two strong male monkeys were about to rush downward the cliff with angry howls. They looked very ferocious as if they were going to risk their life. Try me if you dare, Darvia gave a cold squeak. Those two male monkeys were so scared that they shrank back. Cowards! After all they were monkeys, and they didn't dare to confront the dhole directly. In addition, Darvia got Loga at her side who was almost as large as a calf, so no one was courageous enough to provoke her.

Soon another bite broke one of the little monkey's forearms. This was called organ-disassembling.

The little monkey screeched desperately, spreading horror and anxiety to every part of the cliff.

That caused a stir among the monkeys on the cliff. Several female monkeys held their kids closely into arms, and hid in the rocky nook.

Darvia was very satisfied with the white ter

ror she had created, and the fear of death had prevailed among the whole monkey group. They were already horrified and jumped into a panic. She thought she only needed giving further play to the artistry and interesting aspects of slaughtering, and the monkeys would definitely be frightened out of their souls and driven to the ends of the earth. Then she made a light pounce, overturning the little monkey on its back. With her back arched, she jumped to the little monkey's soft belly, and tore and bit for a good while with her claws and fangs. The little monkey was torn widely open alive in its belly. The light brown hair around its belly was dyed fresh red, and its entrails were totally exposed to the outside and of course the panic eyes of the monkeys as well. At that moment, the little monkey was not yet completely dead. Actually its eyes on the pink face were still blinking and its mouth was still twitching with a quite vivid expression on its face. Darvia wished that this very scene could scare the frail nerves of these monkeys into disorder, and distort, break, and scatter their nerves.

She was going to make it soon.

Look! The monkeys on the cliff were thoroughly thrown into a mess and they rushed around like a swarm of headless flies. A few female monkeys was about to turn round to flee with their kids in their arms. The whole group of monkeys fell into a tragic atmosphere, as if a funeral was going to take place.

“Ah-yo —” Suddenly the Monkey King the Red Face emitted a low roar which was perfectly overwhelming and powerful.

In a flash the noisy monkeys calmed down. The female monkeys who had turned round to flee returned to their original position again. All of them stood seriously, facing toward the Monkey King the Red Face. And their pessimistic moods were totally gone.

The Monkey King the Red Face sat firmly on the blue stone in a contemplative way, without any fear, compromise or hesitation in his eyes, just like an unshakable rock.

Bastard Monkey King! Play your game to see who is crueler! Being flustered and exasperated, Darvia bit off the quivering heart of the little monkey with one bite, and held it in her mouth to move around under the cliff, as if she

was holding a fresh red wild peach. It was just like an advertisement: It would be not good to be against dogs and dholes. Run off quickly, or your heart would also be dug out alive and serve as breakfast!

Darvia was complacent at that time. All of a sudden, she glimpsed that the Monkey King the Red Face raised his forearm, and then a rock fell down quickly, nearly falling upon her waist.

Then the group of monkeys imitated him at once. Showers of rocks began to fall down.

It was hard to tell what brought the idea of fighting with rocks to the mind of the Monkey King the Red Face. Maybe it was a whimsical inspiration, a crystallization of wisdom condensed from hatred. But indeed the stump-tailed monkeys were endowed with that gift. The fore limbs of primates, which are different from that of canines and felines, have broad palms and slim fingers, which, though are not as deft and creative as those of humans, are more developed than those of ordinary animals and have evolved into something that could be called claw-hand. The stump-tailed monkeys were capable of holding branches firmly and plucking fruits, and

of course they could pick up rocks and cast them away.

This sudden thing blurred the mind of Darvia and Loga, and they looked awkwardly at each other without any clue to react. Their claws were unable to pick up the rocks on the ground and fight back. With the abyss below it and the cliff above it, the trail under the cliff was so narrow and limited that there was no place for them to hide. Plop! A pebble that was as large as a monkey's head hit Loga's skull and there appeared at once a big blue lump as if he were bit by a hornet. Swish! A sharp stone piece flied down and fell onto Darvia's hip, slicing off a lock of dhole hairs.

They both cried out a wailing, and rushed to flee with their tails tucked between their legs.

From the cliff behind them came the monkeys' boasting and proud chatters.

They escaped in such an extremely embarrassing way that they didn't even dare to turn back their heads.

The situation became even worse hereafter. The stump-tailed monkeys had learned how to deal with Darvia and Loga, and they were totally

obsessed with that. All day long the monkeys waited on the cliff top outside the stone cave, and once they stepped out of the cave, the showers of rubble would be thrown onto them. On one occasion, several male monkeys moved a rock that was even larger than a millstone with concerted effort, and pushed it from above, aiming at Loga's head. If Darvia hadn't discovered it in time and pushed Loga away with great effort, he would have definitely become a heap of minced meat before knowing it.

They hardened their heads and rushed painstakingly out of the "rain of rocks" made by monkeys and into the woods. Yet they were far less powerful to get rid of their attack that came from above. Monkeys emitted loud howls, threw branches and wild fruits downward, peed and pooped on the treetops over their head, putting themselves into such an embarrassing situation.

Loga turned increasingly haggard and became care-laden all day long. A couple of times he just jumped out of his sound sleep in the middle of the night, and then barked like a crazy dog for a while for no reason at all. Darvia knew that even in Loga's dream those nasty monkeys