“Brown Wolf”

Walt Irvine and his wife Madge, who lived in a small cottage in the mountains, found a dog. He was thin and weak, but he did not let then touch him. He ate the food they gave him only after they had gone away. But when he was strong again, he disappeared.

A few months later, when Irvine was in a train between California and Oregon, he looked out of the window and saw his dog running along the road, two hundred miles away from home. He got off the train at the nearest station, bought a piece of meat, caught the dog and took him home again. So Wolf, as they called him, came a second time to the mountain cottage. There he was tied up for a week.

To win him became a problem, but Irvine liked problems. At the end of the week he tied a piece of thin bright metal round the dogs neck with the words: return to Walt Irvine, Glen Ellen, California. Then the dog was let go, and he disappeared. Few days later came a telegram. In twenty hours Wolf had run over a hundred miles to the north, and was still going when caught.

This time, he was sent back by express train. He was tied up for three days, and was let go on the fourth. And he disappeared again.

As soon as he was given his freedom he always ran north. He was always brought back weak and always ran away fresh and strong.

At last the dog decided to stay at the cottage, but Irvine and his wife had to wait a long time before they could touch him. When at last he them do it, they said it was a great victory. The man and woman loved the dog very much; perhaps, it was because it had been such a task to win his love.

One summer day, a man came to the cottage. He said his name was Skiff Miller. He had come from the North to visit his sister.

As soon as the dog saw him, he ran to the man and licked his hands.

“Wolf, Wolf, what are you doing?” said Madge.

“His name isn’t Wolf,” Skiff Miller said. “It’s Brown. He was my dog. How long have you had him?”

“How do you know he’s your dog?” Irvine asked.

“Because he is,” said Madge.

“The dog’s mine. Look here,” and Skiff Miller turned to the dog. “Brown! Right!” The dog turned to the right. Then Miller ordered the dog to do several other things that working dogs in the North are taught to do.

“He was my best dog,” Skiff Miller said proudly. “If he hadn’t been my dog, he wouldn’t have learned to do all those things.”

“But you are not going to take him away with you, are you?”

Madge asked nervously. “Why not leave him here? He is happy. And what can you give him that northland life?”

“Food, when I’ve got it, and that’s most of the time,” came the answer.

“And the work?”

“Yes, a lot of work,” Miller said. “Work without end, and cold – that’s what he’ll get when he comes with me. But he likes it. He knows that life. And you don’t know anything about it. You don’t know what you’re talking about. That’s where the dog belongs, and that’s where he’ll be happiest.”

“I don’t believe he’s your dog. Perhaps you have seen him sometime. Any dog in Alaska can be ordered to do things,” Walt said.

“Maybe Mr. Miller is right,” his wife said. “I am afraid he is. Certainly Wolf answers to the name of “Brown”. And he was friendly towards Mr. Miller and licked his hands. You know that’s something he never did with anybody before.”

“I suppose you’re right, Madge,” Walt said. “Wolf isn’t Wolf, but Brown, and I think he belongs to Mr. Miller”

“Perhaps Mr. Miller will sell him,” she said. “We can buy him.”

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said Skiff Miller. “The dog was a good worker. He’s done a lot of work for me, and maybe he has got a right to choose. He must decide for himself. I’ll say good-bye and go away. If he wants to stay, he can, stay. If he wants to come with me, let him come. I won’t call him to come and don’t you call him to come back.”

For some time Wolf watched Skiff Miller go, waiting for him to return. Then he ran after him and tried to stop him. Then the dog ran back to where Irvine and his wife sat and tried to make Irvine go to Miller. He wanted to be with his old master and the new one at the same time. At this moment Miller disappeared.

The dog lay down at Irvine’s feet. Madge was happy, but a few minutes later the dog got up and ran away. He never turned his head. Quicker and quicker he ran along the road and in a few minutes was gone.