

## **A SAMPLE FROM-EAST OF BLISS**

Only once in his short life had the ashen-one been out of the den. That was a few days before, when the vixen had led her small family up into the world of light where the cubs sprawled about in the glow of the setting sun. Now that world of desire had suddenly become something to shun for the ashen-one. Never before had he heard such terrifying noises. The barking of dogs, the shouting and yelling of men, the clash and clang of pick and shovel left him paralyzed in the grip of fear. Hitherto, in his short span of life, he had known food and warmth; learned the touch of tenderness and the hurt of pain. Now he knew fear - that awful something more repellent even than pain. It dried up the drool in his mouth and glazed his eyes. To make it more ominous, his mother lay as motionless and seemingly helpless as did he and the rest of the litter.

The old she-coyote was no longer pacing about, nor did she approach her cubs and stroke their faces with tender tongue. She did not even growl or snarl. She lay crouched upon the floor of the den, staring into the circle of light as if held by some fatal draw of oncoming doom. Thus she waited, without stir or noise, to sink into oblivion or to rise in triumph in defense of blood and love. As she waited, the earthly enclosure wherein she

and her puppies were trapped became a living horror.

To the ashen-one, life was suddenly transformed into a din of noises and threatening terrors. The men were shouting with the might of their lungs, encouraging the dogs to raid the den; and when the loud-mouthed but cautious canines refused to lay siege to the lair, the men swore the louder and attempted to force the dogs into the burrow.

The lair, an enlarged badger sett, was an almost impregnable stronghold for the vixen and her young. With renewed vigor, the men increased their attack. Whooping and yelling, they made the dirt fly to the clang of pick and shovel. Now that they were at the killing, it was great fun, even though they had been deprived of the excitement of a chase.

In the terror-stricken eyes of those inside the lair, life was grim and stark. For the ashen-one, the den had become a chamber of threatening death. At first, he did not catch the importance of the impending catastrophe which was closing in upon him. Not until he saw his mother slowly rise on her haunches, as if she were about to spring out through the tunnel, did he know the meaning of the sounds he heard.

Then something panting and howling suddenly rushed into the den, and the ashen-one's little world in the bosom of the earth became a bedlam of uproar and flying bodies. On the instant, the she-coyote was transformed into a slashing and crazed fiend, giving every ounce of her strength and cunning in defense of her young. In the turmoil which followed, the cubs were felled helter-skelter, and panic seized them. They raced wildly about. The breath was knocked from their lungs as they were crushed against the walls of the cavern.

Then as quickly as he had appeared, the first hound rushed out through the runway with the vixen snapping at his hindquarters. The hubbub in the world above became deafening, and the puppies continued to run around in circles, frantic with fear. The weaker ones dropped from exhaustion and lay panting where they fell. Their mother whined and nosed them and licked their quivering bodies.

There was no time in which to express her concern. The she-coyote had scarcely regained her own breath when another form shot into the den, and the valiant vixen went down with the hound at her throat. Chaos reigned.

The ashen-one was the only cub that had sufficient strength left in his body to stand, and in his terror to escape, he raced madly into the tunnel. The flaming eyes of a hound in the runway checked his flight in mid-air. The ashen-one scrambled back into the lair. The thrashing bodies of the dog and the coyote buffeted him about. He was suddenly flung into one of the small pockets which he and his brothers and sisters had made in the wall of the cavern. In his great fright he began to dig.

On and on he dug, tearing into the hard earth with his tiny claws. A great darkness closed in about him; but he did not stop - he could not stop.



**Copyright © 2016 by Gammon Irons**

**All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.**