

# *The* CANAAAN CREED

A NOVEL BY  
**L. P. HOFFMAN**



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**BY L.P. HOFFMAN**

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Published by Hope Springs Media  
[www.hopespringsmedia.com](http://www.hopespringsmedia.com)  
P.O. Box 11, Prospect, Virginia 23960-0011  
Toll-Free (866) 964-2031 Fax: (434) 574-2030

International Standard Book Number:  
978-1-935375-00-5

*Printed in the United States of America*

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*Cover design by Hope Springs Media and Exodus Design*

## PROLOGUE

*Canaan Island, Maine*

*Saturday, June 3*

Malcolm O'Neil did not want to believe the thoughts that had driven him to climb the cliffy shoreline of Canaan Island at dawn. But instinct fueled his trek. There was no time to waste. The acid taste of fear coated his tongue as he picked his way along a jagged outcropping. He slipped, nearly tumbling into the cold waters, but regained his balance and continued around the narrow point.

On the other side of the point, a small sandy cove came into view. Malcolm hurried along a short inlet to a hidden beach. There, he scrambled up a stair-step ledge of rocks that led to a cleft carved by centuries of wind. With agile fingers, he probed the upper edge of the polished granite as if it were a secret message written in Braille.

Sweat dripped from damp strands of Malcolm's gray hair and stung his eyes. Finally, he located the

narrow crevice. It was just as he had remembered—dry and safely elevated from the tide.

At his back, the rhythmic sound of the Atlantic's waves whooshed closer. The morning sun yawned across the ocean with a breathy golden mist, casting an eerie light upon the cliff.

Malcolm removed a plastic envelope from his belt, rolled it tight, and wedged it deep within the little cavern. "It's done," he said, and hurried from the sheltered cove to beat the tidal surge.

He lingered on the rocky point. His thoughts turned to Anna. Sorrow filled his heart as he envisioned his daughter standing on that very beach, sun kissed and full of life. "God help her," Malcolm prayed as he turned away. Behind him, the tide rolled in to guard his secret, swallowing all traces of his footsteps in the foamy mire.

## CHAPTER 1

*Oh East is East, and West is West,  
and never the twain shall meet,  
Till earth and sky stand presently at  
God's great judgment seat;  
Rudyard Kipling*

*Wyoming*

*Saturday, June 3*

As Anna O'Neil threw open one of the double doors of the Cedar Ridge community center, the moist, musky smell of sweat assaulted her—remnants of Wednesday's aerobics class. The moderate-sized building served as the town gymnasium, dance hall, and theater, however, on this particular evening, it was the epicenter of a controversy.

"All for the greater good," the young biologist said under her breath as she nudged past a cluster of locals. "Let the fireworks begin." The auditorium was crowded and unbearably stuffy on such a warm summer night.

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Anna glanced around for a place to sit and wished she'd come earlier. Her eye caught sight of some portable stairs in the rear of the room. A group of high school students had claimed the spot, but they gladly made room for Anna, whom they treated as a folk hero. She took a seat on the top step and engaged the youth on either side of her in a spattering of superficial conversation.

Tension electrified the atmosphere. Lively discussion undulated with anxious, sometimes angry words.

When a man in a uniform with a government emblem stepped to the microphone at the front of the room, all eyes fixed on him. He adjusted his bolo tie, flipped open a notebook, and cleared his throat. The field office rep switched on the projector. "Will everyone please take a seat so we can get started?" He pushed his wire-frame glasses up on his nose, fiddled with the remote control, and waited for the people to settle down.

"We've got quite a turnout tonight." He smiled, but few smiled back. "As regional director for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, I am here to gather public comments concerning our draft proposal for the reintroduction and management of gray wolves. Please direct your questions and comments to me and keep them short." The man slid a pen from his shirt pocket and, with the aid of colored maps, explained five alternative proposals. He droned on and on about existing policy, his voice flat and monotone.

The crowd, on the verge of stupor, stirred when the

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director switched off the overhead. The room grew quiet, except for a baby fussing in the back.

"Are there any comments?" The director looked across the pool of faces.

"I got a question." A heavy-set woman wearing a blue bandana stood. "The first two options talk about keeping the wolves in Yellowstone. Does that mean you're gonna fence the national park?"

The regional director picked at his finger. "That is really not feasible."

"Then why'd ya put those alternatives in there?" someone yelled.

"I must ask for raised hands so everything can be done in an orderly fashion." Avoiding the last question, the director called on a cadaverous-looking man holding a pen and paper.

"I understand that a wildlife group has offered to pay for any livestock killed by a wolf until the wolves' legal status changes in Wyoming. Could you please clarify when that will be?" The man's pen hovered above the notepad.

"Not until the gray wolf is no longer listed as an endangered species." He pointed to another audience member. "The man in the red plaid shirt."

"What can we do about wolves killing our livestock?"

The regional director's face flushed. "If you witness a wolf in the process of killing an animal, you may

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shoot,” he said cautiously.

“That’s crazy, mister,” the man said. “How am I supposed to watch more than four hundred head of cattle spread out over five thousand acres of leased range land?”

“Ship all the wolves to Washington, DC!” an angry man bellowed.

The director’s face went rigid. “Statements like that aren’t going to get us very far.” He searched the room and pointed to Anna, whose hand was in the air. “The young woman in the tank top and khaki shorts.”

All faces turned to Anna O’Neil as she sprang from her seat and hurried to the front of the room. She stopped at the microphone, looked over the tumultuous crowd, and ran her fingers through short, sun-bleached hair. “As a wildlife biologist, I have studied this issue. The reintroduction of the gray wolf to Yellowstone would not only be beneficial to the ecosystem, but these majestic animals would also support other wildlife. Bald eagles and bears feed on the carcasses they leave behind. Overpopulated herds of ungulates, especially elk, would be thinned making room for small plant-eating animals.”

From the back of the room a horse-faced woman yelled, “Yeah, you talking about rats?”

Anna leveled her gaze on the woman who seemed to shrink in her seat. “Small rodents and beavers to name a few.” She paused to collect her thoughts. “I appeal to you from my heart tonight.” Anna cleared her throat and did her best to ignore the cynical rustling among the



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townspeople. "Nature is in trouble and she needs our cooperation. Each of us should give back a portion of what we've taken from this planet. Since the ranchers appear to be ones most threatened by the concept of biodiversity addressed by the reintroduction of the gray wolf, I direct my appeal mainly to them."

The crowd started buzzing, gnashing angry words her way. Anna stubbornly pressed on. "Historically, wolves were a token of the West. This changed in the early 1900's with the implementation of predator programs. The wolves, already struggling from man-induced game shortages, faced extinction."

"I knew it!" A man in an orange hunter's vest shot to his feet and pointed a gnarled finger at Anna. "Pretty soon the government won't even allow us to hunt. Next thing we know, people like you will be taking away our guns!"

Anna fought to remain calm. "Wolves are part of a delicately balanced ecosystem, and as such, they are a natural tool for sound game management."

The crowd grew louder.

"We have a chance to redeem the wrongs of our past," Anna called out, "In order to do this, we must look past our own interests and bring the gray wolf home to Yellowstone!"

Hostile rumblings flattened cheers and hoots raised from the young people sitting on the bleachers.

An old rancher rose to his feet and pushed a bent

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straw hat back on his forehead. He raised his hand and motioned to the townspeople. A hush fell over the group. "Young lady, all your high talk about ecosystems doesn't mean much if those mangy canines are running my herd all over the range," he said scratching his leathered chin. "Think about that next time you sit down for a New York steak." Laughter rippled through the room.

Anna's face felt flushed and she hoped it didn't show. "I am a vegetarian." With head held high, she stepped from the podium and trailed through the crowd amidst a chorus of boos and hisses.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the director said with raised voice, "everyone here has a right to express his or her opinion without any outbursts. Please, show some respect."

"Awesome!" A high school student gave Anna a thumbs-up as she returned to the bleachers where her fellow environmentalists had congregated. They resembled a band of rag-tag mountaineers in their wrinkled cotton shorts, tattered wool sweaters, and Birkenstocks. Though mostly young, they had their share of white-haired zealots, like Addison Lee, founder and president of the Pristine Valley Nature Coalition.

Addison stood at the end of her row, leaning his thin body casually against the wall. His eyes met Anna's as she approached, and he extended a smooth white hand to her. "You stood strong, my dear." Addison bent close to her ear and lowered his voice, "although I'm afraid many