

One lies where cherry petals fall,

One, where hemlocks lean

One sleeps beside a singing brook,

One, where fields are green

But I have learned it matters not

Just where my old friends lie,

For all are buried in my heart,

And there, they never die

The Best Place

By Beulah F. Smith

No Greater Love

by Louise Berthold

This story was originally published on page 61 of the July 1955 issue of Popular Dogs magazine

This is the story of Mike, a dog which died of a broken heart. When his master, a herder from a large Montana sheep ranch, grew despondent one day because of ill health and shot himself, high in the mountains where he had been tending his sheep, Mike, his sheep dog and inseparable companion, could not understand what had happened to the master who was his all. For ten long years from that day



Mike shut himself away from the rest of the world, refusing all human kindness, while he waited in vain for the touch of his master's kindly hand on his shaggy head - for the sound of a beloved voice.

To appreciate Mike's story, one must know something of the training of sheepdogs on most large sheep ranches. Puppies are taken early from their mothers and placed in spacious pens. No one on the ranch is allowed to handle or pet them and their only contact with man the first few months of their lives is at mealtime when well-filled bowls of food and pans of fresh water are placed before them. Any overtures of affection made by the puppies are sternly repulsed, so that when the puppies are four or five months old and the time has come for their first journey into the mountains, they are only too eager for human love and understanding.

Each herder is supplied with a covered wagon in which he and his dog must spend the long summer months, when the sheep are taken high in the mountains to the National Forest Reserve to feed. The wagon contains a crude bunk, a small table and a stove. The loneliness of the mountain ranges, far from civilization, is indescribable. Except on periodic visits of the ranch camp tender, who takes supplies to the herders, the dog hears no voice but that of his master and the man has no companionship but that of his dog. Between the two grows a strong bond of affection although the man demands implicit obedience and hard work.

Mike's master, thoughtful of his dog and the responsibility to his sheep, timed his suicide on the day of the camp tender's visit. When the ranch owner and the sheriff were informed of the tragedy by the camp tender, they went at once to the dead herder's camp. Opening the door of the sheep wagon, they found Mike stretched across his master's body. When they attempted to enter, the dog growled menacingly, and force had to be used to take him from the wagon.

The herder's body was placed in a car and taken down the long, rocky trail, followed by his sheep wagon. Mike trotted disconsolately after the sad procession, his head drooping, a puzzled look in his eyes. Now and then he raised his nose to the skies and howled mournfully.

That night at the ranch he crawled under the sheep wagon, where he stayed for three days, refusing to eat, and when pitying members of the ranch household patted him or talked to him sympathetically he only lay there with his head on his paws and gazed with sad, unseeing eyes.

Mike always had been one of the ranch's best trained sheepdogs, obeying his master's orders implicitly, but from the day of his master's death he refused to work, and finally was given an honorable discharge.

Ten years is a long time in a dog's life but although repeated attempts were made to win him over, Mike refused to respond and wandered aimlessly about the ranch as he searched for his master, going to the ranch house only when driven by hunger. He slept under his master's sheep wagon in Summer and inside it in winter. Often in the lonely hours of the night his heart-broken howling voiced his protest to the inevitable, filling his listeners with pity and with regret that so little could be done to alleviate his suffering.

Mike grew old and crippled, his eyes dimmed, and he could hardly hear. But until the day of his death, his heart was the same loyal heart that could not forget, and in his dimming eyes was a story of love that surpassed understanding.