

Howls of Hope

As I lay under the stars watching four small two-legs sneak from their dens to dig holes in the ground and bury something small, my stomach rumbles in pangs of hunger, as does my fellow pack. It is the only sound that is heard these sad spring nights in the year 2030. The chirping of crickets and songs of the birds that once filled our days with their music have all been silenced. The rush of the river, rustle of leaves in the wind and thunder of hooves have long disappeared. I lick my little girl's head and nuzzle her close to me as she tries to nurse. She is my first pup that has made it past one season in the last five years. My infrequent diet of lizards, toads and insects is barely enough to keep myself alive let alone to supply my milk with the nutrition my pup needs to survive and grow strong. I wonder how much longer our small pack can survive in this barren dry wasteland. Their ribs are exposed, their bellies are distended from malnutrition, and their coats are scabbed and crusted. Last month we adopted two males into our pack. In the past we would have killed any intruding wolf for invading our territory. Instead we took them in hoping they would provide strength to our pack by increasing our numbers to six. Instead there are more mouths to feed as we are unable to locate prey in our dwindling territory. My alpha lay staring into the cold night, his eyes clouded over with defeat. His coat is tattered and gray, and his once strong body is weak with hunger. It wasn't always like this!

We were a strong pack of twenty back then, each member with a specific responsibility. There were many scouts that were sent out in search of prey over our abundant territory. Our hunting party took down bison, caribou and white tailed deer that kept our bellies full. There were nursemaids that stayed behind to keep our young safe from harm. Our alpha male, my father, traveled miles to spray and patrol our territory so others knew to dare not enter. He was powerfully built with a heavily muscled neck. He had long, robust limbs and ran swiftly to cast the first blow on our prey. His thick muzzle and strong jaws were built for crushing bones. His gleaming silver coat shone in the light as he raced across the prairie. To be a part of a hunt was both energizing and exhausting. From the first long, smooth howl signaling our scout's located prey to the high pitched yelps as the chase began our hearts thundered. The deep, beautiful bass

howl of our alpha male, our whole pack joined in to harmonize in a symphony of musical notes floating through the air, for a successful hunt was invigorating.

Our territory was full of lush green grass, rainbows of blooming flowers, the most beautiful butterflies and the fattest mice you would ever see. A dense forest went on forever and the tops of the trees disappeared into the clouds. A sparkling river of fish gently flowed beside our giant den and the new born pups, including myself, were just starting to come out of the den. We frolicked all over, chasing butterflies and tackling each other down in the tall grass. It was a beautiful May day and even the pack was playing with each other! Nothing could take away the beauty of this spring day, or so I believed!

Strange creatures that wobbled on two legs invaded our territory after my first year of life. They slept in strange dens built of magical glowing lights that hovered above the ground and moved about the skies as if they had wings to fly. A beam of light poured out the bottom and the two-legs would float up into the den each night. Father warned us to stay away, but as youngsters, we were intrigued by these unique creatures and wandered closer to them. We watched them catch fish at the river with beams of light that sucked the squirming fish right out of the glistening water. Unlike us they left plenty of scraps behind. We saw them catch rabbits, beaver and many other small animals. They only took the skins and left the meat, which seemed very strange to us. We dare not ask our elders why, for we knew what we were doing was forbidden. Father kept a keen eye on these strange creatures and moved us farther away from our open forests and meadows, deeper into our territory. Soon more two-legs came as I grew into adolescence. The dens of magical lights filled the skies. Trees were cut down by the dozen in a blink of an eye by a beast with teeth that circled around its body and zipped from tree to tree. They placed shiny mouths of sharp teeth under the brush that closed around our legs and killed our pups. On one of our adventures to watch these two-legs, my younger brother followed us into the forest. He was distracted by a butterfly and while chasing after it he stepped into one of the shiny mouths and was devoured by the creature before my eyes. I ran home shivering in fear and howled in

pain my sad story of my brother's death to my pack. My father and two scouts raced to where my brother lay dead and returned home to mourn his death in a long, sad, deep howl that filled the hollows of my soul that I remember to this day. My father quickly moved the pack further into the mountain range as winter came upon us. Food became scarce as we hunted into the deep snow of the mountains. Some of the young males began to grumble among themselves and decided to set out on their own to scare the two-legs away. Upon hearing the news my father sent out his fastest scouts to bring the adolescent boys home. Instead they returned with a horrifying story of the two-legs using long loud sticks that took down our brothers in a flash. Soon the loud booms could be heard across the land as our prey began to dwindle. Even the great and colossal bison were no match for the booming sticks. The worst was yet to come.

We were woken by a tremendous rumbling sound that echoed through our dens and shook the ground over our heads. As our home began to cave in, father drove us out the narrow passage of our back exit. I glanced over my shoulder and let out a shrill yipe as I saw a beast towering over the trees creeping towards us. Out of its horns spewed a dark cloud that made my lungs ache and my eyes burn as it swirled overhead and surrounded us. Black liquid poured out from the bottom and rained its poison down on us. Our elderly fell behind and were crushed under the thunderous feet of this creature. Their cries echo in my thoughts. More beasts came, crushing our dens and those of our prey without discrimination. Soon more monsters arrived, but they were different than the first. They were worse than we could possibly ever have imagined in our darkest nightmares. From the sky they ate our trees at lightning speed with never ending hunger, and everyday more kept coming. The poisons of the black smoke choked and killed our young with a slow and painful death. At rapid speeds our pack's numbers were decreasing more and more. Our world was in danger and our forest was being destroyed, along with the animals that lived there.

The balance of nature has shifted. Our prey has been driven into extinction by famine and disease from lack of food. Our once lush territory was desolate and bleak. What was once a thick forest of trees is now a barren empty land. The rains that came

and once brought new life into the forest now wash away the soil. Once a commanding pack of twenty, we were the top predator in a rich and fertile territory. I watched in horror as my family was taken from me one by one in agonizing deaths. I am now the top female alpha, the last remaining member of my family. My new pack of misfits are faced with famine, death and disease. We are homeless and have become a migratory pack in search of food. No longer do our harmonizing howls sing our triumphs after a hunt. Instead the night is filled with our howls of despair for those that we lost and will soon lose.

As I watch the small two-leg pups return to their dens, I spot a small green seedling breaking free from the dirt. I lift my head in song and fill the night air with a howl of hope. Somewhere in the distance I hear my song answered.