

Wolf Mother

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Dawn broke over the wailing beast's shrieks. Weary and bone-tired, its mother rose, the faint hope that the absent love for her yowling creature would finally emerge today. Her resentment towards the beast in the nursery had been growing since it had first clung to her; its incessant howls, its greedy demands for nourishment, its constant thievery of time. She lamented her hatred of the beast, the way her skin crawled at the mere sight of it, the way it felt as though every scrap of her body was estranged from it, an imposter grown from her own body.

"What a wicked woman must I be" thought the woman as she struggled to feed the beast, "for instead of a heart I have a stone."

And yet she could not bring herself to care for the beast. Every part of her soul that should have cared for it had been dissolved into a vat of simmering exhaustion, revulsion, and fury, and she despised herself for it. As the beast refused to feed, staring up at her hungry and expectant, the woman's husband called to her from the bedroom.

"Come, my dear, and oblige your husband."

The beast struggled against the woman, refusing to suckle, baring its teeth and gnashing them viciously at her.

"I have not much to give, do with this what you must!" exclaimed the woman, and in one fell swoop cut her breasts off, leaving them for the glutton.

Brushing the blood from her hollow chest, she hurried towards her husband's wailing demands. There he was, sprawled unclothed against the bed, lustful and expectant.

"Come, my dear, and perform your wifely duties."

He grinned and gazed at her figure, fixating on his awaited pleasure.

“I have not much to give,” the woman groaned, “do with this what you must.”

Reaching down, she carved her womanhood out, shoving a bloody pulp on the bed for her groom.

Leaving him satisfied, she sponged the blood from between her thighs, the cavern in her gored chest hollowing with every stroke. And the beast was still howling in the next room.

Washing her hands in the basin, she heard her father call out to her.

“Come, my dear, and prepare a meal for your father.”

Exhausted and bloody, the woman lipped downstairs to find her father sat at the table, plate empty and expectant, utensils poised.

“Come, my dear, and perform your daughterly duties.”

“I have not much to give. Do with this what you must.” the woman sighed.

Grabbing the meat cleaver from the table, she sliced her hands off, and left them to cook for her father.

“I have given you all you need, you could not possibly demand any more from me. Allow me some respite I plead you,” the woman beseeched, and fled the home into the village, a bloody trail marking her path. If she let herself listen, she could still hear the wails of the beast from afar.

Despite her empty prayer, the woman was hounded in the village. The blacksmith’s apprentice was the first to approach her, and demanded help carrying the furnace wood, strained and expectant.

“Come, my dear, and help me with these logs. Your back is all I would need.”

At the woman’s refusal, he grew angrier, demanding her assistance until she could resist no more.

“I have nothing left to give!” she cried. And so the blacksmith’s apprentice grabbed her back and tore it off.

The woman broke off with a wounded howl, and bounded through the village, as people hounded her with demands, requests, and expectations. The miller tore her legs off, demanding them to help walk the donkey back from the mill. The blind boy gouged her eyes from their sockets, demanding them in order to see. The baker ripped her arm off, demanding it to carry the flour bags. They grabbed and tore and clung and shredded the woman limb from limb until all that remained of her was a raw beating heart on the edge of the wood with nothing left to give. And so the villagers were content with what they took, and carried on with their days as normal.

The heart lay at the entrance of the wood, weakly spluttering and gurgling and waiting. As the blood around it dried down to brown, an aged she-wolf emerged from the wood. She was withered and wise, with piercing but gentle eyes. The fur around her snout greyed and faded as she gently sniffed the heart. Despite the tales of the vicious and devouring beasts who prowled the wood her father had warned her about, the woman's heart was not afraid. She called to the wolf, a simple exhausted sigh carried on the wind and into the she-wolf's ears.

"I'm so tired. I have truly nothing left to give. Please help me end my suffering."

The she-wolf gazed back at her, gentle and understanding.

"My time is over. I have lived free and unshackled and now it is time for you to do the same. Let me give you that which they have taken from you."

Softly, she wrapped the bloody heart in between her aged jaws, with a gentle embrace of understanding, and swallowed it whole. Consumed by the she-wolf, the woman's heart began to beat again.

With her new granted freedom, the woman turned to the vast expanse of the forest. Mighty trees beckoned towards her, embracing her in jade branches. The forest floor thrummed beneath her, welcoming her intimately. She felt her ears prick, nose twitch, and the moist dirt beneath her paws.

About to turn away for good, the wind carried over the struggling cries of the beast, again. Hesitant, she followed the cries back to where the beast lay howling.

“How foolish must I be. The creature could barely see me as a woman, how even more afraid it must be of me now,” the woman thought.

She tentatively stalked towards the beast’s crib, expecting cries of fear, terror, rejectance. Yet all she found was a baby, smiling at her joyously, fangs bared into a beastly grin. Hesitantly, she dipped down and clasped the cub in between her claws. She realised that its paws no longer grabbed at her skin, but playfully pawed at her snout. She brought it to her chest. Where a cold stone had once sat, a warm heart now beat furiously against it. Instead of crying, she only heard the syncing of their heartbeats. She sighed, now not out of exhaustion, but out of relief.

The babe had always been feral, but so was she. Gently picking up her child in her jaws, the woman and child bolted into the forest, now howling together, and their song could be heard from a great distance.