

—A FISTFUL OF—

*Short
Stories*

Mae L. Strom

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G R E A T

WOLF

Great Wolf

A lone, a young man hunts in the forest he calls home. Though much of the year is beautiful, the winter months come hard and cruel. The nights are long, the snow is heavy, and every step of the way, he is shadowed by wolves, who tear at his snares, steal scraps from under his nose, and howl his failures to the moon. Loudest of all the voices is that of the Great Wolf.

He is the Lord of the Night, the leader of all wolf packs. Bright are his eyes, and shining silver is his coat. While empires may bleed, forests fall to the

Great Wolf

torch and entire continents sink beneath the sea, his hunt will never end.

He is the Great Wolf.

It is he that the young man curses when weariness comes pulling at his eyes. It is he that the young man curses when emptiness comes gnawing at his belly. Failure can consume a man much the same way hunger does, and wherever the young man tries to hunt, the wolves are never far behind.

One day, when the moon is high and the snow is at its deepest, he leaves his hut to find the last of his traps in tatters. The wolves have condemned him to another sleepless night. Overcome with despair, he takes a flaming torch and marches into the heart of the forest.

The wolves are not hard to find. Their eyes glow white against the trees, teeth glinting as they crack open bones that should by all rights be his. Though they grunt and snarl and slaver fiercely, they do not make a move. Only stare, as the tall, hairless stranger trudges through their ranks. Atop a flat rock at the base of a fallen oak, the Great Wolf waits with all the patience of night itself. His terrible eyes shine

brightest of all.

Dropping his torch, the young man approaches, kneels, and places his head between the Great Wolf's jaws.

'What are you doing?' the Great Wolf asks him.

'I'm tired, and the snow is deep,' the young man replies. 'Every step of the way, you have dogged me at my heels. You bite through my snares, you pick at my successful hunts, and you howl my failures for all the forest to hear. At long last, I have grown weary of this endless winter. I do not wish to see it through. Come and claim your prize, oh mighty wolf of the forest. Just be quick about it.'

'Quick?' The Great Wolf's eyes burn brighter still. His silvery coat bristles. 'A wolf's jaws are not yours to direct. As well command the Great White Eye Above to close. Do you not see why I follow you so closely?'

'To mock my efforts,' the young man says. 'I am no natural born hunter. I have no silvery coat to shield me from the cold, no pads to smoothly stride atop the snow. My legs tire easily. My claws are short, my teeth blunt, and my senses dull enough

that sometimes, even when I am successful, your wolves still steal victory out from underneath me. This is why you follow me so. You wish for me to give up and to starve. You wish for me to fail.'

The Great Wolf growls. The young man closes his eyes, bracing himself for the worst. But the worst does not come.

'I chase you through the deep snow so you will grow faster,' the Great Wolf tells him. 'I tear through your snares so you will build them stronger, and I stalk you at your heels so you will know to check behind them. One day, the snows will fall, heavier even than these. If you are not ready, they will swallow you whole.'

'So you will not take me?' the young man asks.

'On the contrary,' comes the reply. 'All the creatures of this forest and beyond must needs one day be prey. But you are still too small, and still too weak. It will not be today.'

'Why not? I've watched you seize calves from their mothers before. Tiny bleating balls of fluff, terrified and kicking with so much life. That didn't make a difference to you then.'

Great Wolf

‘The kicking made all the difference. Do you think they sent for me? No creature that has ever jumped unbidden into my jaws belongs there. If a wolf pup climbed into your lap, would you put it to the knife?’

‘No.’

‘And so I release you.’

To his surprise, the Great Wolf’s jaws open up. The young man draws his head back. ‘A wolf is no dog, and he will not be fed his quarry. You must live and grow strong, so as to give me a worthy hunt. When you are old, and you have seen your fair share of winters, we will meet again. Until then, I will follow closely. Guard your heels. Many of my sons and daughters will be watching, under the light of the Great White Eye Above.’

One by one, the wolves vanish into the night. The Great Wolf is the last to leave. Bright are his eyes, and shining silver is his coat. While empires may bleed, forests fall to the torch and entire continents sink beneath the sea, his hunt will never end.

He is the Great Wolf.

Author's Note

Thank you for reading my short story. I hope you enjoyed it.

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Until next time, stay safe, stay kind, and as always, stay hydrated!