

The Winter Wolf Comes

Arktaris came from a part of me that lingered still in the void. It reminded me of everything I sacrificed in order to stand where I do. The cold of winter wrapped around me like a cloak, I could feel little Damir shiver and clutch to my coat tighter with his little fists. His eyes gave me the long suffering look of one fed up with their current existence. How could a little boy not even a few years old give such expression to me, not to mention the the wolfess that stuck her nose pressed against the ground giving me a look of expectation.

I looked around the clearing, I could recognize it for what Rowan described to me, I could see in my mind's eye the struggle of the little wolfess against the fisher, dragged and played with through the snow. Now as the wolfess stared on, she gave the look of a fierce pirate, one who wouldn't let the world best her again. This was a sad reminder of what the world took from me; a beautiful Melody.

Damir sniffed as I carefully found a tree with roots that would hold him, as the Wolfess stood beside him to comfort and warm him in the cold. It was adorable the way his fists balled in her fur. "Mama, cooo daaa" came his insistent cry of frustration. I gave him a long smile as I knelt before him, adjusting his snow suit made of dark sherpa.

"I know my little star, but mama wants to share a secret with you, and only you, is that okay?"

I got a sniff back before the little boy snuggled up to the wolfess and gave a lick of his lip and a toddle of his head. I stepped back and turned away with my back to the duo and breathed a thin winter air. I never knew what became of the cold or the sounds of the ruffled pines of the tree's as Arktaris answered the hesitant call. I knew better than to think I truly had the control I believed so I called with the simplest request, "Teach".

And I was pulled back into the void once more.

Arktaris stretched itself and gave off a long lingering howl into the wind, free from the confines of nothingness, and surprisingly warm. It turned itself and sat on its haunches, its gaze was cold and adjudicating as its eyes never left the small bundles of fur and sherpa. Damir looked up in awe as the Winter Wolf laid its length till its snout was mere feet from the little boy. The tiny wolfess' single eye stared as it moved to stand before the boy.

The boy smacked his lips as the wind brushed and frosted Arktaris' fur, "Mama".

A deep voice, sapping like the cold, yet still in its tongue lingered with the frost across the boy's face, "I am not, your mother, nor am I your friend, little black blood. Nor am I your enemy little wolf. A mere moment to a mere fancy. Are you cold little babe?"

The boy's face scrunched up, as the wolfess seemed cowed by the lingering drone of the Winter Wolf's words. "Coodaa" was his babish reply.

"You do not enjoy the cold nights? or that of the winter? no pup of my partner will act as such. The cold is more than simple pain and suffering, it is the righteous state of existence. It is the reminder that we are less than the stars, but more than the tiny heights we stand upon. And you little wolf, what is your name, speak!"

"I-i dont know", it was a sheepish reply as the little wolf open its mouth and came out as a whimper. Damir grinned and reached to touch the wolfess who jumped in fright.

"You do not know or do you not wish to remember, little song?", Arktaris turned its head, its gaze now staring beyond the tree's at the shrinking nebula within the sky. "The more you linger her the more you will be stranded, you must choose. I did not find you in that void and bring you home just so you could pretend"

The wolfess bowed her head, "The Others are coming..."

"The Others will always come, they are both alive and dead, both here and not, that is the haunting reality of life." Arktaris' eyes shifted to the wolfess and then Damir.

"Kiki, is she okay...?", the wolfess laid into the little babe who had fallen to sleep in the freezing clearing, his cheeks pale and his breathing harsh.

"The Kiara of tomorrow is here as well, or have you forgotten what her being felt as?"

Arktaris shifter closer till its head was pressed against the baby boy and the tiny wolfess. "Close you eyes little Melody, let us see what stands before us."

The dream lingered like taste to the tongue, words to the page, and notes to the melody, it was a sight of a future untold. Where Damir stood tall and protective, the suffering of black blood, and righteousness of joy. Beside him followed the void furred wolfess that was Melody. Her protective gaze searching the horizons as Damir gave her a encouraging smile, "We will find Mama, can't let Kiki do all the searching obviously. Plus Mother would be beside herself if she didnt have Mama with."

"Mama, is foolish, she should have never faced the Others alone, I wish she would understand she doesnt have to always be the hero."

"I dont know if any of us would recognize her if she wasn't Mel. You and I both know that her spark shines the brightest. What does she always say?"

"You are all my shining stars in the sky, when I need awnsers I look beyond myself" both their voices harmonizing, before Melody cackled and laughed as a wolf might.

Melody, took a few steps forward, her good eyes softening as the fields of flowers drift in the winds of the plains. "What if Kiki is right, what if Mama stands in our way, what if she doesnt let us stop the Others? she is the strongest thing I have ever met that even Arktaris has lost control of her"

Damir nods, his gaze lost in thought. He kneels down and runs his hand across Mel's head, petting her ears down. She glares in response before he sighs, "Then we fight, because sometimes love means you have to show each other the errors of our ways. She needs to know that the Others are not all there is anymore, she needs to know she doesn't have to linger in her memories of forever more. We don't need shepherds anymore. Mina has that under control, the storytellers are locked beyond their own planes. Now we just have to clean up this mess."

Damie looks out beyond the horizon, "and if we are lucky it will be before Starlight, cause Mother will not be pleased if we can't have dinner and presents this year."

The dream faded as little Damie stares at Arktaris his eyes droopy and tired, "Mama" is his tiny whisper.

Arktaris sniffs the boy, as the little wolfess, stares off at the shrinking nebula. "You aren't the most magical of babies, your wisest sister has that for herself, you are so frightened of the cold, perhaps we can start to understand where your strength begins, and perhaps you need a little help, little black blood."

Arktaris stands onto its haunches and releases a howl that echoes across the skies, the sound passing far into the mountains as frost begins to form across its jaws it draws in the cold of the world into its maw. Arktaris leans down and with a breath releases all the frost across Damie's tiny form, causing his skin to blue and his eyes to drop closed, but as he opens them again a small ball of ice floats before him and he reaches for it. His tiny fists clench it and as they do it cracks and a single mote of energy passes through his hands and into his chest.

"The winter is your's black blood, do not let it linger and do not let it fade. A gift from the void, perhaps you will be more than I would ever imagine, perhaps you are what your mother needs. You do not understand yet, but in time you will. Melody, have you made your choice?"

The wolfess turns her head, her single eyes set in determination as she growls at the Winter Wolf. "I will stay, I will help Mama, I will do what I need to"

Arktaris nods its large head and howls once more this time the frost burst forth from its form leaving slopes of ice in their wake. A rumble shifts in the sky as the nebula falls from the sky, its blue hue slamming into the wolf pup who howls in pain. The sound of Damie coldly crying, his hands reaching for the wolfess, and grabbing onto her fur sends the nebula between them.

"The bond is complete", Arktaris stares as the two star-children fall into sleep.

Arktaris turns and walks to the center of the clearing and turns its head to the sky.

Arktaris could feel its powers wane as it relinquished its place in the material to the void. The nothingness of existence lingering as the Last Shepard slipped back from the void. It knew better than to think it truly had the control it believed so it returned Gabriella back with the simplest request, "Learn".

And it was pulled back into the void once more.

I looked about the iced clearing, where the foot of snow had fallen, except a small cocoon of ice that held the wolfess and Damir. With a sigh of relief I stood and nearly stumbled to my face as the pain of the transformation lingered. As I stepped forward, placing a warm hand against Damir's cold face, I could here his breathes.

The wolfess awoke and stared at me with her single eye, before lifting something from the snow at Damie's feet. She turned her head and placed in my lap the ice crusted collar and there written in the jagged writing of a claw was the simplest memory; "Okay M-melody-- you ready to go home?".

The wolfess nodded and as I took one more look at the now permanent iced clearing, I questioned if I was ready for what had transpired here and the futures it changed.

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