

Earthpack

Wilderness

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Hulyalkar, and Silence.

(Cover here)

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Prologue

(Write Later)

_____ closed her eyes as the pups squirmed around her restlessly. She was quite surprised to see that they were blind and deaf, looking nothing like her. After all, this was her first litter. Her mate, _____, had gone to get some food for her. The largest clambered on top of the others and suckled on her mother's milk, kicking away the others who whined softly. *She would become a great alpha female*, she thought. Then she sighed. The collar on her neck was uncomfortable and she tried to paw it. No use. It reeked of human scents and made her think about the wire fence she had been cooped up inside. It brought shudders to her, just thinking about it. Those two legged creatures had shot her down from above, along with _____. They had just been hunting elk, when a metal creature flew down and before they knew, something whizzed towards them. The next moment she was on the ground, an invisible force keeping her from moving. She cried for her mate, but he too was paralyzed. They had seen the humans take them inside the metal creature, as they lay, useless. She howled for her pack, but the sounds made by the creature overpowered her calls. She had been taken to a strange place with a wire fence, and scents from different wolves hit her nose. She had been able to move again. For a month they were poked and prodded with these odd tools, and fed on frozen elk meat. When she and _____ were miraculously freed, they raced out, only to find that they were in a whole new territory. Of course, they had managed.

Chapter One

(Write Later)

“It’s too dangerous!”

“No, HERE is dangerous! Think of the pups!”

“What in the forest are you talking about?”

“There IS no FOREST!”

“Terra, please...”

Stoney blinked, her eyelids feeling like sacks of rocks, suddenly aware that her mother wasn’t in the chamber where the wolf pups slept. She shivered as wind drifted in and rose up to her paws, carefully avoiding her siblings, Rocky and Geo (who were blissfully sleeping). She heard angry voices and cringed away. But curiosity took hold, and she found herself getting up. Stoney stumbled over a twig before her eyes adjusted to the dark. Terra and Boulder were growling at each other, both stamping their paws in frustration. Stoney’s tail stiffened and tucked itself between her hind legs.

“You- you slobbering pampered pet pooch! If you won’t go with me, I’m taking the pups and leaving you behind.” Terra snarled.

Boulder swung his tail in frustration. “But we NEED you! You are the alpha female! And the pack needs pups! You can’t just leave the pack like that!”

“FINE, THEN!” Terra roared, hackles raised, her amber eyes blazing with anger. “Move the pack with me! The pups shouldn’t live in this wreck. Alpha female, am I? Then will you just *listen to me for once?*”

Boulder, who Stoney had thought was the biggest and most powerful of all wolves, suddenly looked like a deer tick that had been unfortunately crushed by a herd of bison as he continued to beseech his mate.

"Ma-mama?" Stoney whimpered.

Terra and Boulder stopped squabbling to look down, surprised to see their pup cowering from them.

“Hush, Stoney. Go back to sleep.” Terra gave her a comforting lick. “It’s getting lighter outside.”

Stoney looked up at the sky, realizing that her mother was right. The sun was making its way up, hues of violet and blue fading into lighter colors. Stoney meandered back to the pup chamber and flopped down on a pile of moss, tucking her tail cozily around herself.

Stoney must have fallen asleep somehow, because the next moment, Terra was nudging her awake. Stoney protested by rolling onto her back, but Terra snorted and pulled her up by the nape. Stoney yelped and crashed down on her siblings, who woke up, startled by the sudden interruption of their butterfly-chasing dreams. Something was wrong.

“Come on,” Terra said, her voice softer but having an impatient tone. Stoney gazed at the soft moss longingly, but reluctantly followed. Her siblings stumbled along, sleepiness weighing down their eyelids. They had not gone ten tail lengths away when Terra stopped, her tail slightly stiffening as if she was uncertain about this “threat” that was present.

“Terra?” A light voice echoed from the small den right next to them. A dappled gray wolf stepped out of the den, into the sunlight.

“Pebble,” Terra said in relief. She relaxed, letting her hackles flatten.

Pebble narrowed her eyes at Terra. “What are you hiding now?” she asked suspiciously.

Terra looked away, and Pebble’s worst fears seemed to be confirmed. She glanced at the pups, who were remarkably tired- Geo had already settled down again and was letting out monumental snores, and Rocky fell snout first into the dirt. There was a large piece of elk meat in Terra’s jaws- she set it down so her words wouldn’t be muffled by it.

“Sister... are you really sure about this?” Pebble whispered.

Terra snarled, spraying spit on the dirt. “Not you too. Don’t tell me about how dangerous it is! Don’t you remember Mother telling us about the wilderness?”

Pebble let out a low whimper. “But this *is*-”

“NO!” Terra screamed, but quickly caught herself and looked around to make sure no one else was awake. “No. I *will* find the vast forest that Mother told us, the ones that stretch for miles and miles- no humans, no roads, no risk of suffocating in the smog. I will start a new life. You should join us!”

Pebble considered it. Stoney, Rocky, and Geo looked from wolf to wolf, trying to comprehend what was happening. Pebble opened her jaws, then closed them, and looked down. “I-I can’t leave Granite.”

Terra peeled back her lips in disgust. “No wonder you take until dark to catch a simple fawn. Goodbye, sister.” Terra yipped at the pups who followed in a line, looking back at their beloved aunt, who turned away, her tail limp and her nose almost brushing the stone.

“Mother? Why are we leaving Aunt Pebble?” Geo said, snuffling.

Terra bristled. “We didn’t leave her,” she said frostily. “*She* left *us*. They *all* left us.”

Stoney and her siblings were still too young to understand such things, as their life was a bundle of food, fun, and long naps. But they would understand soon. Too soon.

Terra paused before the den was out of sight, looking back for a moment. She shook her head, sighed, and continued forward into the fir trees. The pups were more reluctant to leave- Geo even yipped and whined, tail tucked between her legs- but they too disappeared into the shadows of the trees... all but Stoney. Though she was the youngest of all, the runt, she had more wisdom than those in her litter. She depended on her mother the most, but her heart was also tied to the pack with loyalty. The line frayed on both sides.

Terra growled impatiently, and the fraying line snapped as Stoney slowly rose up from her sitting position, took one last look at the beautiful sun shining through the clearing at the den, then slowly walked to her mother and siblings. She didn't know that would be the last time she would ever see her family, her home, and the last time she would ever truly be a pup.

Chapter Two

(Write Later)

Before the chaos, Stoney had been given the most attention by the pack, not because of her personality and her beautiful dark gray and light underbelly, but because she was the runt. Being a runt apparently made her a tasty meal to some bears or rival packs... and a target for older siblings. Geo, the oldest, would be the one to pin her down when they played, and, if she managed to squirm out, Rocky would interfere and chase her until the adults came to the rescue, or in some rare cases, he got distracted and wandered off to chew on some elk bones. Other times she would peaceably be gnawing a bison bone, only to be rudely interrupted when Rocky butted his head in and took a place right next to her or (a far worse option) Geo would play a rousing game of *Alpha rules* in which Geo (the oldest and therefore always the Alpha) would get Stoney (the youngest and therefore always the Omega), through a fierce game of both wrestle and spar, to roll over belly-up. Geo would proceed to pin Stoney down annoyingly triumphant way, and would have a nice time licking out the marrow from the bone or rolling Stoney around almost curiously before Rocky got to attack the scraps, after which they would play a game of wrestle, except Rocky always bowled Stoney over rather unfairly so Geo could rush at her and pin her down. *Alpha rules* wasn't Stoney's favorite game- she preferred toss and fetch. It was something that she could play on her own by just tossing a stick or bone into the air. If Geo and Rocky did come by, they (thankfully) didn't harass her, just join in and toss it around before getting bored. To her disappointment, this game couldn't be currently played, as Terra was pestering them to move along. Geo and Rocky were bounding along as if nothing ever happened, bumping into each other before catching up once more. Stoney was exhausted, her little runt legs faltering beneath her.

"Mama, I'm tired." The former alpha female ignored her and trotted on. Stoney started to lag behind. She whimpered as she collapsed. That seemed to get Terra's attention, as she stopped and circled back to Stoney and bedded down next to her. Terra gave her daughter a quick groom before chewing on some of the elk meat she had in her jaws. Geo and Rocky bounced right back after the short respite, and started to dash away, trying to gain possession of a sturdy looking stick. Geo tossed the stick into the air and batted it towards Rocky, who growled appreciatively and leapt up

high, hitting it back at Geo with his paw. A fierce game of wolvisish baseball with a stick erupted. As of now, Stoney wanted to stay out of it. She knew that her older siblings would start the daily torment, *Alpha rules*. She made an attempt to do a play bow to her mother, but her mother lay down for a quick nap.

Geo bounded over, and Stoney shrank backwards. "I'm not playing *Alpha rules*. Not again. I'm done with that madness."

Geo looked hurt. "I wasn't going to. I was just wondering--"

"What? You want to play *Omega loses*?"

"No!" Geo said. "I just want to go snow-sliding, that's all! Promise."

Stoney felt a leap of delight. Geo knew very well that she had wanted to go snow-sliding ever since she was able to walk. The tales that Terra had told about her and her siblings tumbling through the snow had caught her attention, and she longed to see and feel the cold powder crunching underneath her paws, and the pure white of snow. But *Geo? Doing something nice?* That was more surprising than Rocky deciding to share.

"Please?" Geo asked with a hopeful yip and a play bow. "Rocky doesn't want to. He says frost isn't good enough, but really he just wants to be alone. And I'm bored! And I'm--"

Geo stopped talking, but Stoney filled the blanks in her head. *Confused. Lonely. Distraught.*

"Alright," Stoney said, and Geo leapt up, yipping and playfully nipping Stoney's ears, rolling around in the frosty grass.

"Here, here!" she said, practically bursting with energy. She chased her tail in a circle for a moment and then leapt up, circling Stoney. "I found the perfect hill!" Geo yipped, dashing off. Stoney followed, panting and yapping, "Wait up! I'm coming!"

Below them was a huge hill, covered in sleek frost. Not quite covered in snow, but it would do.

"Three, two, one!" Geo shouted just as Stoney caught up, and the two leapt forward, hitting the frost with their bellies and gaining speed, zooming down the hill. Stoney almost hit a tree and tried to dodge the next one, but ended up messing up her path and crashing into Geo. The two collapsed in a furry, wet pile at the foot of the hill, laughing hysterically before Geo shouted, "Again, again!" with Stoney quickly scampering after her. This time, they chose a higher peak, and got a running start. They began sliding down, and Stoney *enjoyed it*. She felt the crisp cold air in her fur and the slippery frost beneath her. It felt amazing... that was, until the frosty grass uncovered a black path. Stoney bumped her nose onto a coal-like ground. Geo stood up, confused as Stoney was. The path seemed to go on forever, and there was a choking scent that filled the air and made her eyes water. Stoney's tail raised up in

alert. She let out a short howl of fear. Terra's panicked howl came back in return.

"Um, Stoney?" Geo whimpered. Stoney looked where her sister was looking. A bright light was heading for them. Geo tried to look intimidating, but started to tremble as the light came closer.

"Get away from there!" Terra barked, pacing back and forth from the hill. Stoney and Geo yipped back in response. But why wasn't their mother coming towards them? Why wasn't she coming down to help them? Was she... scared?

Stoney grabbed Geo's nape and yanked as Geo stood petrified, staring at the huge, acrid smelling creature. It kept rumbling on towards them, getting louder and bigger by the second. Terra started to whine loudly. With a heave that could only have been powered by the strongest of adrenaline, Stoney yanked Geo off of the pathway. Geo stumbled forward and tripped on a rock, and the two catapulted forward into the frosty grass. The creature whizzed by them, leaving a terrible scent like burning carcasses. Stoney's pounding heart did not stop until the creature's scent was long gone. Terra and Rocky came down to greet them, and Terra gave a sharp nip, disciplining them for getting into such danger. Rocky, who had not been on the black path, teased them for being a wimp, but shut his snout when he caught Terra glare. She let out a low growl and trotted back, looking behind her to make sure her pups were following close behind. This time, she kept a close eye on Stoney and Geo. They walked in silence. Stoney opened her mouth to say something about saving Geo, but Geo growled at her with such ferocity, Stoney went into a submissive position once again. Geo seemed a bit more satisfied, but for most of the walk, she kept her head down. Perhaps she was embarrassed the runt had saved her, or the fact that she was the oldest and got into trouble. That Stoney would never know.

Chapter Three

(Write Later)

Terra stopped for a quick drink by the river, and the pups lapped the water vigorously, quenching their parched throats. Rocky made the first splash.

“Betcha can’t catch me!” he said, kicking up water into Geo’s snout.

“Hey!” Geo growled, her old demeaning disposition back once more, and splashed him back so he was soaked all the way to his claws. He yipped and splashed at Stoney with his tail- Stoney hesitated but leapt forward, slapping the water with her front paws and sending up a huge wave that drenched both Geo and Rocky. They both came up sputtering, then suddenly got interested in a school of minnows, their silver scales flashing brightly as to mock them. All three chased the minnows, dipping their snouts into the water and snapping their jaws. They all came up empty jawed. Having burned off their energy, the pups waded back to shore and shook their fur dry, flopping down onto the grass. Terra, while the pups were taking a break, focused on a shadow moving in the deeper waters. Slowly and carefully, Terra leaned forward, lowered her muzzle, and *snap!* She snatched up a huge salmon, throwing it beside her onto the grass, where it flopped around helplessly. The pups looked at it with interest, yet was not certain of what to do. Geo, the oldest, sniffed at the fish and pawed at it, but jumped back when it flopped again.

“Ack!!” Cried Geo in alarm as the fish flopped near her paws. She jumped back once more, to avoid being slapped by the salmon’s tail, which flung up bits of pebbles into Rocky’s face. The pups tried to attack the fish, but never having been on a hunt, their inexperienced minds were hesitant to bite, wondering if this was prey or not. Terra stepped forward, and let out a low growl and the pups took a step back. They knew better than to disobey Terra. Holding the salmon by the head, her powerful jaws decapitated the fish quickly. The pups watched in amazement as the fish now lay still. Rocky made a quick nudge with his snout, just in case. Terra ripped the head off and Stoney made a small whine of disgust.

“The head has fewer parasites than the skin on the body.” Terra explained as the pups cocked their heads. While Terra ate, the pups waited patiently, lightly sparring with their jaws and pawing each other’s snouts. After Terra had her fill, the pups gathered around her, licking her muzzle, and she regurgitated some soft meat.

“Hey, move it!” Geo shoved Rocky and Stoney as she ate. Rocky went to the opposite side and began to feast. Stoney tried to get close, but Geo and Rocky growled, greedily gobbling up the regurgitated salmon. Stoney got some licks but that was all. She licked her mother’s muzzle again in hopes of more, and after some persistent pestering, she got a mouthful. Stoney wanted to stay and relax a bit more, but Terra rose up and started continuing their journey. Geo and Rocky seemed to be disappointed, but the three pups followed their mother.

There was a howl in the distance- Stoney raised her muzzle to howl back, but Terra pawed her jaws shut. Her eyes were filled with hatred. The wolves howled back as if to beckon them home, but Terra moved them along. The pups were getting sleepy. There were no dens available. Terra spotted an old coyote den and poked her snout in, only to see that it was occupied by an angry badger that tried to scratch Terra. After almost getting mauled by a bear, chased by a grumpy wolverine, she finally found a small, partially caved in culvert pipe.

Right beneath one of the black rivers of stone.

A beast with lights for eyes roared past and the four ducked into the impromptu den. Geo looked around. “Home sweet home,” she said sarcastically before taking up almost half of it to sleep. Terra marked her scent on a portion just as big using the scent glands on her paws before growling in warning and leaving to hunt. Another beast roared by and Rocky flattened his ears and took up most of the remaining space and, sighing, Stoney curled up in a tiny area.

Something sniffed around the pipe. Stoney opened her eyes to greet her mother, ready to lick her muzzle and-

Stoney stumbled back. The creature was smaller than her mother, skinnier with blood-thirsty cunning eyes. His ears were larger and his snout slightly tapering down to his rather small nose. His coat had a reddish-tinge. It was a coyote. A malnourished one. His ribs were sticking out, and he was drooling, his teeth clacking. *Clack. Click clack.* He sniffed one more time. This time, he caught the scent of wolf pups and after confirming that the mother wasn’t around, he gingerly stepped in. He took one look at Stoney and lunged.

Stoney yelped and leapt out of the way, then ran back at him and bit his tail, hard. Geo streaked out of the makeshift den as Rocky ducked under the intruder’s stomach and raced out, calling for Terra. A moment later, Stoney followed, running as fast as her

paws could carry her. The coyote yipped, then grabbed Stoney's leg. The pain was excruciating. She let out a short painful howl and kicked the coyote in the eyes. Whining, the coyote pawed his eyes but resumed the chase. Stoney was limping and her energy began to drain. She let out a loud howl. From somewhere close, Terra howled back. Stoney was now at a slow trot, and the coyote was less than 15 tails away. Geo howled somewhere ahead. This time, Terra ran out of the trees to face the coyote. The coyote stopped. His ears twitched, and he licked his jaws as if wanting another taste of wolf pup blood. Terra padded closer to Stoney and the coyote took a small step back. He tried to nip Stoney, but Terra charged at the coyote, sinking her fangs into his flank. The coyote bucked, trying to shake the wolf off, but Terra was large and powerful. She chased the coyote and when he tried to veer back to the pups, Terra bit his tail. Soon the coyote ran away, tail tucked, yipping away into the bushes. Stoney lay there shivering, her left hind leg bleeding. Terra licked the wound and, though Stoney was not quite a small pup, managed to half drag-half stumble back to the culvert pipe. Geo and Rocky followed them back in. The pups tried to sleep, but the terrifying experience left them wide awake. They had almost been a meal. At last, Terra told them the story of her mother's pup hood, the pup's grandmother. As they closed their eyes, they imagined the vast forests with elk prancing around, the sky blue with white puffy clouds, and their grandmother as a young pup chasing a vole through the beautiful meadows with lush green grass and vivid flowers. But outside loomed something that spelled doom in giant, dripping red letters to every wolf and elk out there. Lawnmowers. Cars. Humans. And civilization.

Chapter Four

(Write Later)

Terra woke them up early and urged them to move. Though weary and half-asleep, the pups stumbled along. It wasn't long before they were fully awake and chasing each other around. Geo pounced on Rocky, who squirmed out and tumbled onto Stoney. Stoney, despite not liking playing so rough, joined in as there was not much else to do. Her leg had stopped bleeding, but her gait was slightly off, and she tried to lean onto her right hind leg and front paws to support her. Knowing that, Geo and Rocky played easier games, such as jumping into the foliage and trying to find each other. Stoney, being quite small, had the advantage for hiding. They attempted to get Terra to play, but their mother only flicked a leaf and continued walking. As they traveled further, Stoney noticed that the trees were getting more sparse. There was a stump here and there, and an interesting looking clear water-filled object lay on the decaying leaves. Geo went to investigate, pawing the object and biting, jumping back in surprise as water exploded from the item. The pups were bewildered at this sudden change. Terra seemed to notice this too, letting out a small whine of uncertainty, but surged forward with the pups trailing behind. If she showed even the tiniest hesitation, she knew that her pups would not follow. She must be confident. She must not falter. Terra passed a small stream, and the pups jumped over easily. *scccreeeech!* The pups cowered behind their mother as the beast with light for eyes suddenly zoomed past them. The pups were confused. They had only seen these creatures on the black path. What were they doing here? Terra got them to come over by luring them with a stick, and the pups claimed their reward. The pups were fine after that, nipping each other's tails and pawing at more strange objects, most of them shiny with some kind of sweet liquid in them. There was also a log that was oddly carved, and a long metal tree with no branches, but flickering lights. Stoney spotted a squirrel. Such nimble creatures they

were, yet so tempting to chase. The three pups sprinted after the little red creature who dropped its acorn and squeaked in terror. It scurried away and the pups followed it, unaware that the already sparse trees were getting thinner and shorter, until the trees themselves disappeared, and the leaves underneath their paws brushed away. They wouldn't have noticed if the squirrel hadn't raced past the black path and onto a small shriveled up sapling on the other side. Stoney jumped back onto the grass and growled at the black path as if she was facing off with a badger. It smelled unsettling, like the smoky residue of lizard carcasses. And every time she so much as glanced at it she felt the unmistakable sense of danger.

"Come on," Terra growled. "Quickly." The pups scrambled underneath their mother's protective shadow as a car whizzed by. Terra ushered the pups behind a bush. Another whooshed by with incredible speed, faster than any wildcat Stoney had ever heard of. Looking both ways (REMEMBER TO ALWAYS LOOK BOTH WAYS KIDS THAT'S THE MORAL OF THE STORY), Terra leapt up onto the black road and dashed across, tumbling into the bushes on the other side in her haste. Stoney thought it was unnecessary, until a car zoomed by not even a second later.

Terra popped her head up and barked commandingly. "Geo, you're the second biggest. You go next. Whenever I say for you to, you *immediately* need to go, *no* hesitation. Understood?"

Geo, shaking with fear, nodded. Her tail was tucked so far between her legs, it was difficult to see.

"*Now!*" Terra yowled, and Geo dashed across, throwing herself over the edge on the other side and catapulting into a large bush. It looked painful- Geo came out wincing and covered in leaves, dirt, twigs, and disgruntled caterpillars, but it was worth it as not a moment too soon a car rumbled past.

"Rocky, whenever I tell you!"

Rocky was paralyzed with fear and Stoney had to nip him sharply on the ear to get him to nod.

"*Now!*"

Rocky jerked forward and tripped- he looked around wildly, like a kitten who suddenly saw a huge wave of water and became aware of its impending doom, and dashed as fast as he could to the other side. He rushed forward, but he was too slow. There was a sickening *crack!*

"*ROCKY!*" Stoney screamed.

Rocky was lying on the road, miraculously alive- but his right front leg was mangled. The sight of it made Stoney's stomach twist and, without waiting for Terra's word, she lurched forward, dashing across the pavement, and grabbed Rocky's nape.

Whoosh. A car passed unsettlingly close causing Stoney's tail to wave furiously in the wind in its wake.

Stoney dragged Rocky to the other side, and looked up briefly- a car was just moments away. With a wowl of despair- Stoney was *so close!*- Stoney jerked backwards and dragged Rocky with her. The two fell, screaming, into a large bush as the car whooshed past.

Stab! Poke! Jab! The bush seemed to be scraping and attacking her with all its twigs and bark, leaves getting shoved in her snout and caterpillars flying through the air. The next moment, the two were on the ground. Stoney was scraped, bruised, and tired, but it was nothing compared to Rocky. His paw was dripping with blood, and the pads were covered in little cuts. Rocky's eyes traveled up the paw to his legs and he let out a surprised whine of both pain and panic. Stoney could not describe what she was seeing. There was a bone jutting out, and there was more blood. Lots of blood. Rocky looked faint as he lay down, whimpering at the slightest jostle of his paw. Terra carefully licked the wound, and seeing Rocky's condition, let him rest for a while. She knew that the bush wouldn't give them much shelter. There wasn't much to eat but caterpillars and a small robin with a broken wing that Terra had found. The little squirmy bugs were not the best food she had tasted, and the robin had too many little bones and only little bits of meat. Stoney longed for elk meat. She had not tasted it for weeks, and she craved this meal.

Stoney paused. She knew how to hunt. Perhaps not big prey such as elk or deer, but small critters she can manage. And surely Terra would appreciate it.

She nudged Geo sharply in the shoulder. "Geo," she hissed in her ear. "Geo, *wake up.*"

"Hmfrgirbl?" Geo asked unintelligibly. "What?"

"We're going hunting."

Geo grumbled about Stoney not being the alpha, but her stomach protested with a gurgle. It was after noon- the sun was slowly setting. No matter where the pups looked in the whole unfamiliar territory, it was completely void of prey. Where they have lived, rabbits have chewed the grass, mice have nibbled on seeds, and voles sniffed the ground to steal acorns from squirrels. But here... there was nothing. The grass was short and tamed, bushes and shrubs were trimmed into small bulbs, and there was no forest, only spindly little trees. The only creatures they saw were the birds taunting them from above and squirrels chattering from those thin branches, and even more caterpillars. Stoney was about to give up, when as she turned to face the breeze, she caught the scent of something... how could she describe it... savory? Sweet? Salty? She looked at Geo, whose nose was twitching, indicating that she had also got a whiff of this wonderful smell. Their hungry stomachs led them to a metal storage-thing that had been most certainly handled by the strange creatures. Stoney pushed it over. Then the smell came again, more powerful, making her drool. There were berries, almost intact, a head of a fish, slices of something fluffy that smelled as if it had been handled by the same strange creatures, soft potatoes mashed and sprinkled with parsley and

tops of carrots. They were about to dig in, when something stumbled on the metal lid. The pups turned around, teeth bared. It was a bear. A bear cub. Its dark brown fur must have blended into the shadows. The pups relaxed, but kept an eye on the surroundings. The mother bear must be close by. The cub sniffed at the hoards of food. "Hey!" Geo snapped, and the cub flinched. "This is our food pile!"

The cub sat down and raised both front paws to mean no harm. "Yours?" He asked with a little chuckle.

Geo glared at the cub.

"My name is Doug. Your names?"

Geo snorted. "Why would we ever tell our names to a silly little cub like you?"

"Because you may need my help. You guys are new, aren't you? You certainly don't look like huskies or any other street dogs I've seen." The pups stared blankly at the cub whose name was Doug. "You don't know what huskies...? Whatever. Point is, you two don't know what those foods are, neither do you guys know what's edible or not."

Stoney took a step forward. "My name is Stoney, and this is my older sister."

Stoney shouldered Geo who scoffed then snarled, "My name is Geo and I would love to rip that funny looking snout of yours."

If the cub heard the last part, he did not show any reaction to it. "Well," he said, walking towards the stash. He pointed to the fluffy squares. "This is bread, which is made out of grinded wheat and eggs." He licked a bit of the potatoes. "These are mashed potatoes, this is a strawberry jam sandwich, this is..." He listed more foreign objects as Stoney and Geo sat there, drooling, waiting to eat. At last, Doug explained what was edible or not, and Stoney bit into the steak. It was not like any other meat she had tasted. It was salty, slightly chewy, yet tore off easily and was dry on the outside and juicy and tender on the inside. Geo dove in for the strawberry jam sandwich, which she gobbled up in less than three bites. They continued to sniff their way through the heaps of food, avoiding the rotting orange peels and ones with thin clear covering. They were electrified with the sudden taste of sweet and saltiness from the bread scraps, and many more. There was so much food that they had almost forgotten they had to deliver some to Terra and Rocky. Geo got hold of a turkey leg and Stoney clamped her jaws on a large ham and they started dragging them away.

"Where are you going?"

Stoney and Geo were startled. They had forgotten the young cub had been there. "This is for my mother and brother." Stoney said, dropping the ham in her mouth for a brief moment to speak. "But you are supposed to be my friends!" He said, eyes shiny and tearful. "We've got to go." Stoney and Geo trotted away, leaving the cub alone. He bawled. Only if the two pups had stayed longer they would have heard the dreadful word.

"MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!"

Chapter Five

(Write Later)

Stoney thought that she heard Doug shouting something, but continued to Terra and Rocky. Geo was ahead of her, ears pricked and tail high and alert. Stoney quickened her pace to catch up to her. She was surprised to see how much she had grown. Stoney had once been smaller, her ears no matter how high she straightened them, only reaching Geo's eyes. Now, as they trotted side by side, Geo was only a claw or so taller than Stoney, and their build was almost equal. Plus, Stoney was carrying the heavier load, and still keeping up alright.

Crash!

Stoney froze and whipped around. Something huge was careening towards them, blocked from view by a few bushes, uprooting the grass and the smaller shrubs and snapping saplings as it ran.

Stoney could only think of one thing who roared like the creature did. The one thing that had broken her uncle Cliff's leg, terrorized the pups and even broke into the den once and almost killed Stoney and her siblings.

A bear.

Stoney screamed and ran. Geo pelted after her as Doug, bawling and shouting, "THOSE MEANIES JUST WENT HOME! DIDN'T EVEN STAY AFTER THEY'D EATEN, DIDN'T ASK FOR PERMISSION TO GO! MEANIES! BRATS!

MEANIES! THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE MY FRIENDS!" Doug proceeded to shout "MEANIES!" as if it were the only word he knew. They ran to Terra, who spotted them from the bushes. Her eyes lit up at the sight of food, but then her eyes filled with fear. She harshly jabbed Rocky with her snout, and tried to drag him out. Terra knew that she was no match for a full grown adult grizzly bear.

Especially those who had cubs. Terra was well aware that they were devoting parents like she was, but their temper was far worse. Stoney and Geo caught up to Terra and Rocky, and they all started sprinting for a small stone culvert pipe. All except for Rocky. In their haste, Terra had given him one last push before dashing away for

cover. He tumbled head first onto the grass and stumbled for a bush. He knew he couldn't make it all the way to the culvert pipe. Maybe he could hide until the bears were gone. The big female bear lumbered closer.

"Who dares to harm the son of Mound?" The bear roared, standing on her hind legs, swinging her paws around. They were equipped with five long deadly claws that made Stoney shiver at the sight of it. The three wolves hid under the protection of the stone pipe. Terra gazed at the bushes where Rocky hid, her eyes repeating *hurry hurry hurry*. But Rocky was too scared. He was frozen. His paws glued onto the dirt. Mound sniffed. Her eyes flitted to the bushes where Rocky hid. "Ahh..." she murmured.

"Wolves. They killed my first born cub." She growled, turning her body until she was facing the bush. "I will not lose another offspring." With that, she charged.

Stoney couldn't watch. There was a yelp, a painful bark, and a howl for help. A sickening snap and thud. Silence. She opened her eyes. Tears welled up. She saw her brother in the bear's jaws. Limp. Lifeless. Dead.

Recklessly, she lunged out of the bush, catapulting at Doug and knocking him into a bush- he yelped. "I HATE YOU!" she screamed. "YOU LITTLE COCKROACH! SNIVELLING, GROVELING DEER TICK! YOU'RE AWFUL!" She dodged a vicious swipe from Mound and leapt into a bush, panting and suddenly stricken with fear. As quietly as she could she crept quickly away from the place she had disappeared so obviously and dove into another culvert pipe, popping up on the other side and running as fast as she could. She tried to veer back to the bears, fury bubbling up inside her, when Terra yanked her back. "No." She said, stopping Stoney from wriggling out. "One pup is enough." Stoney flailed under her mother's jaws. It didn't hurt, the jaws. But her heart did, as a piece tore off. Geo sat there quietly, head down, sitting on her tail, mourning. Stoney sobbed as the bears carried away Rocky into the allies.

Terra mourned for the loss of her son, but she knew that she didn't have time for this. She still had two pups to care for.

"Up," She commanded to Stoney and Geo. They didn't budge. They stared at the trail of blood that led to where they last saw Rocky. "I said UP!" A growl escaped from Terra's throat. Stoney and Geo jumped. They have never seen their mother act so harsh before. "Get up and move." Terra's sudden brusque manner was felt by both Stoney and Geo. They both looked at each other, both questioning why. They followed Terra out of the culvert pipe. After checking once more for the bears, they rushed into the clumps of shrubs, slinking on their stomachs and lying as low as possible. The journey seemed to get harder as they continued. Even Terra started to get fretful, glancing sideways, marking spots more frequently, and looking behind to make sure the pups were following. There was also no reliable water source. They had been depending on the rain water that pooled up on the black paths. They were brackish and

the taste burned Stoney's tongue, but she was grateful to get water down her throat. There was also the fact that winter was coming- they could sense it. The leaves that used to litter the dirt floor were almost decayed, and the barks of the trees peeled off easily and were brittle as they fought the cold winds that tried to snap them in half. Terra's coat was thicker than usual, and so were the pups'. Another sign the winter was making its way through. Stoney wasn't sure if they should be excited. It was her first winter, and she could go snow-sliding properly. But neither sounded fun or ecstatic. Besides, with Rocky gone, nothing seemed bright and colorful. How she wished to have avoided the horrible cub. How she wished she had run away at the sight of him. She should have known better that his mother was close by. Of course, it was too late, and Stoney regretted everything. The landscape became flatter with smaller paths that cut through patches of grass. There were also these quire looking giant cubes that were made out of wood and stone, with little rectangles that emitted light from inside. Stoney's stomach growled- they haven't eaten a proper meal in days. She could see her own ribs sticking out, which made her hunger worse. Terra and the pups didn't want to score the small paths for food. The encounter with the two bears haunted their minds, and they shivered at the sight of the metal cylinder. But hunger drove them back. This time, they were more alert, and ran away with food in their jaws the instant they knocked the lid off. Shelter was also becoming harder to find. The best thing they could manage was a small hollow under a tree's roots, or under a fallen log, or the niche next to a boulder, which did nothing to protect against the harsh wind and the oncoming snow. There was one more thing. Humans. Two-legged creatures that made odd yelps and yips and made gibberish that they could not understand. The first time Stoney and Geo had seen one was while finding shelter. They had been walking on the small paths, when something shouted behind them. It was unlike any creature she had seen, with fur only growing on top of their head, and instead of fur on their bodies, they were clad in depressingly sagging drapings that looked exceedingly uncomfortable. The creature proceeded to scream in her high pitched voice and waved its unproportional arms around, pointing at them. More came to see what she was looking at, and one came out with a stick as long as Stoney's body.

It smelled like explosions.

Terra's eyes widened and her breathing became short and rapid. *Huff huff huff*. She knew what it was. Her mother had told her countless times. The stick. The bang. The pain that comes after it. Terra sprinted and squeezed into a gap underneath one of the giant cubes. The pups followed after her, just in time before the stick was blasted into the air. *BANG!* Terra closed her eyes shut and curled herself around her pups until the smoke faded and the noises of the humans were gone. They shivered under the little space and did not dare to venture out until the next day.

Chapter Six

(Write Later)

Stoney was so tired. Her paws were numb with exhaustion and she felt like lying down onto the ground and taking a long nap, perhaps forever. But with all the dangers swarming around her, she was restless. Hunger gnawed at her insides, which were anyway long gone. She munched on a caterpillar that seemed to have been dead for quite a long time. It was crunchy, but bitter. Terra looked outside from the gap from underneath the giant cubes, or the two-legged creature's dwellings as they have learned. After checking the coast was clear, she sprinted out with the pups behind her tail. It was dark, and they were well hidden under the shadows. Stoney couldn't hear the wolves anymore- in fact, she couldn't hear any wolves for miles and miles. Only the occasional coyote, and the haunting barks of horrible creatures that Stoney had only had described to her- hounds. There was a bark quite close to the high wooden fences where Stoney was. From the little slivers in the wood, she could see eyes- two pairs of luminous amber eyes. The creatures seemed to be drooping, their skin sagging off of them- even their saliva never seemed to touch the ground, but hung disgustingly in trails out of their mouths, which sagged partially open. Their noses were large and when they breathed, it was louder than an angry bison. Even Geo took a step away from the fence. Terra led them to a small clump of trees. It was snowing- the pups' first snow. It seemed so magical- so beautiful- so *fluffy*! Stoney yelped with delight and bounded into a clearing, rolling in the snow, sliding down a small hill and throwing big bunches of it at Geo, who responded with equal enthusiasm. But even the snow could not help them escape from all the dangers they had to face. Stoney sneezed as a snowflake landed on her snout. Geo's tail twitched. After hesitating, she pounced at Stoney- not to show who was the oldest, but for fun. Stoney let out a yip of happiness. They needed a break from all the troubles that were going on. They wrestled and jaw sparred, Stoney nearly pinning Geo this time. She realized how much bigger and stronger she'd gotten on this journey, and realized Rocky had been this big when he'd, well, died. She still couldn't stomach the fact that their beloved

brother was no longer alive physically. She knew, however, that she would never forget her brother, and so he would live on as a spirit.

Ambush- A pup hides in tall grass and creeps up behind another, and leaps up.

Toss and fetch- With a bone or a stick, pups (Or even adults) would toss the item into the air and catch it, or pass it on to another pup.

Catch me if you can- This is like tag, except the pups would aim the tail, or nip the rear, then take turns chasing each other. Many wolves are known to play this game, and an alpha pair would usually be seen playing this.

Wrestle- This game involves pinning the other down, or just rolling around until one is pinned down, or gives the submissive sign. (The pup or wolf would tuck their tail in and shrink itself in a submissive position. It is usually seen in runts or omegas.)

Snow sliding- When there is snow, pups would climb up to a hill and slide down.

Catch and release- When voles or mice are plentiful, the pups would pounce and chew on or shake it a bit before releasing them and going in for another catch.

Sparring- This game is similar to wrestling, but spars with jaws, not enough to harm the other, but just wrap their jaws on the other's snout. This game strengthens their bite.

Baseball- A pup would throw an item in the air (Frequently a vole or another small rodent) and leap and bat it with their paws.

Abate- To become weaker; to decrease

Unabated- Showing no sign of weakening; showing no decrease

Astute- wise and/or clever in a practical way

Derogatory- expressing a low opinion; intended to hurt the reputation of a person/thing

Admonish- to warn or to criticize gently

a ghast- a balloon-like creature found in the Nether

Devoid- not including

Dilapidated- in poor condition from neglect or age

Reprimand- To scold in a harsh or formal manner

Adequate- Enough; sufficient

Capitulate- To give in; surrender

Hovel- An unpleasant, cramped, and dilapidated place to live

Menial- of or relating to low-level humble work

Respite- A period of rest; a pause

Strenuous- Needing much effort; using a lot of energy

Toil- To work long and hard

Aspire- To have a strong desire to get or do something; to seek

Candid- Expressed honestly and without holding back unpleasant truths

Impunity- Freedom from being harmed or punished

Beseech- To ask earnestly; to beg

Consternation- Amazement of fear that makes one feel confused

Impetuous- Likely to act without thinking; hasty

Rapture- A state of great joy, delight, or love

Revelry- Noisy merrymaking

Acrid- Sharp, irritating, bitter to the sense of taste or smell

Pungent- a strong and unpleasant scent

Throng- A large number of people gathered together; a crowd

Grievous- Causing great grief or pain; hard to bear

Inundate- To cover, as with water from a flood

Placate- To stop from being angry; to calm

Docile- Well behaved; easy to handle (Tamed)

Plight- A difficult or dangerous condition or situation

WHAT DO GRAY WOLVES EAT?

Wolves are carnivores, feeding on a variety of large and small animals such as elk, deer, moose, bison, mice, rabbits and beavers. When hunting larger prey, wolves hunt cooperatively as a pack. Lone wolves rely more on small-sized prey.

SPRING

Most wolf packs in Yellowstone do not attack powerful adult bison. Wolves do prey on bison calves.



SUMMER

Small mammals like hares and ground squirrels can be a major part of a wolf's diet.



FALL

Although moose, mule deer, and elk are abundant in Yellowstone, elk make up 90% of the wolves' diet.



WINTER

Wolves often prey upon those weakened by the severe Yellowstone winter.

