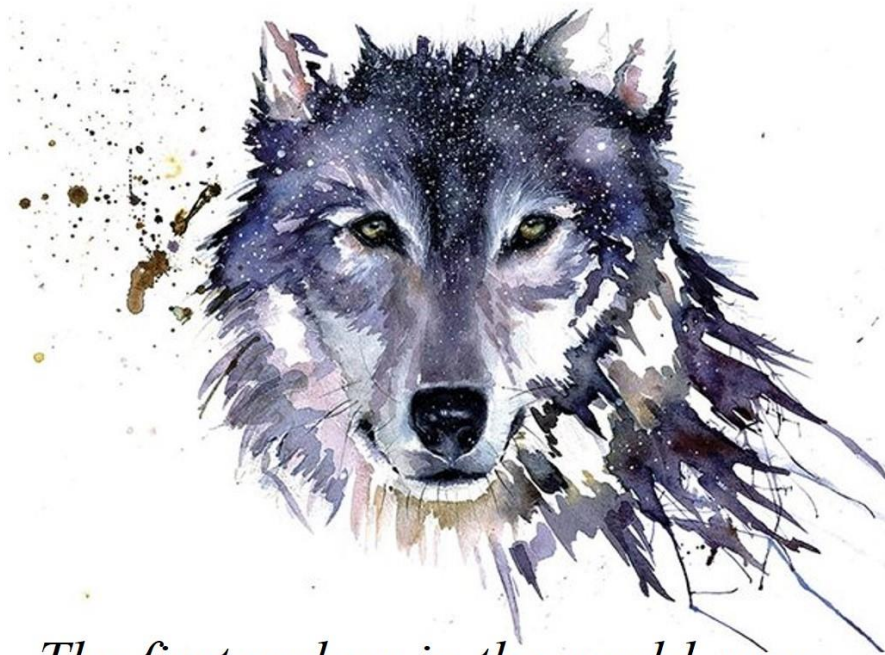


WOLF PADDOCK

- a short story by Brian McAleer -



*The first wolves in the world, were
joined as one... until the first Lone
Wolf emerged.*



Introduction

Before man, animals roamed the earth.

They lived in peace and solace, knowing they had no threat to their safety. The first inhabitants of the planet, had their own form of structure and society, and given many of the species lived in isolation, had no comparison to what they instinctly knew.

In this story, such one species that is known today as a predator in the wintry wilderness, began as a naïve, unaware animal, restricted by its own innocence to one field. To one side of their field, was a cliff, with a long drop down to a rocky coastline. To the other side of their field, was a dense, dark forest. The animals would only venture to the edge of the forest, rummaging for berries, and the wild fruits and vegetables that grew out of the ground, which was the only food source these animals ever knew and would be all they ever needed. These animals, would go onto be called the name man gave them – Wolves.

1

The first wolves lived together in a field, which they called Wolf Paddock. There was no leader, rather they moved together as one, having never seen another animal in their life. Not being able to see through the thickness of the forest, they never dared to venture more than few feet into the wooded area, relying just on the outskirts of it to feed themselves.

One day, like any other, the wolves were lying in their paddock, converging and watching the clouds in the sky. Sounds could be heard coming from the forest; the cracking of branches and the rustling of leaves. One wolf heard this and looked to the trees. The rest of the wolves there, which numbered around one hundred, also heard the noise and looked in the direction of the forest. The sounds became a sight, and out of the trees, emerged two strange beasts, the wolves had never seen in their life.

The beasts were the same height as the wolves, but white, and covered in a thick, hair that was curly and reflected the sun light. The two animals looked curious and stared at the wolves inquisitively. One wolf, who was laying down in the afternoon sun, slowly stepped up. His face at first was fearful, but when he saw no aggression in the visitors, he approached them. Something happened to this wolf, as his nose began to catch scent of something he had never smelled, but that of which he liked. It made his mouth water, and the hair stand up on his back. His tail shout out straight behind him, and he began to prowl towards the two white beasts. Suddenly, one of the white beasts make a sound.

“Baa...baa...baa” and he stood in front of the second white beast, to protect it. The first white beast who spoke that strange language, charged towards the wolf, and lowered his head, which rammed into the side of the wolf. The wolf was pushed back a few feet, and as every other wolf in the paddock was witnessing this, those who were lying down, stood up, and they all take a few strides towards the action. The wolf, lost all sense of control, forgetting who he was, and giving into the mystery of this visitor, of which its type he had never seen. But his insides were telling him, this animal was a threat, but also, brought food. The wolf growled, beared it’s sharp, yellow teeth and charged back at the white beast, biting its leg, and breaking it in two.

The white beast fell to the ground and let out a long, loud cry. “Baaaaa...baaaaaa...baaa...baa” it said, with each cry subsiding. It didn’t get up. The wolf walked over, and saw a red liquid pour out of the sheep’s leg. The wolf sniffed it, licked it, and its eyes widened with hate. The wolf then bit the white beast on the face, and began to tear it apart, as if it were just pulling wild carrots out of the soil like it had done so many times before. The second white beast, terrified at the sight of this, ran back

into the woods, and followed the path it had come by, until it had cleared the trees and entered another field. Once there, three hundred other white beasts, all in separate groups across the field, looked to the white beast who had returned. This animal, would go onto to be called a Sheep by man. And the sheep had made it safely home and ran to the centre of the field. In its native tongue, it cried and cried, recalling the horrible event it had just seen and explaining what happened to one of their own. The sheep then all converged into the centre of the field and remained as one group for the rest of the day, and long into the night.

Back in Wolf Paddock, the wolves watched on in awe as the wolf who killed the white beast, devoured its remains. Emerging with a red mouth, and a cloud of white hair which began blowing across the field from a light breeze, the wolf stood in the centre of the paddock, as every other wolf gathered around it in a circle. It spoke its native tongue to its kind, and said;

“My brothers and sisters. Today is the first day in a new era. For centuries, we knew nothing else but this paddock, and our own kind. We’ve had everything we needed, and until yesterday, didn’t know there were other beasts different to us out there. We can expect that if there was two of them, there must surely be more, like us. And we know we can eat them, and let me tell you my brothers and sisters... if you like the flavour of berries so sweet, you will love the taste of the white beast meat”

All the wolves howled in celebration, and their call signified the first leader of the pack. In a group of wolves, all covered in a silver fur almost identical to the other, one wolf was different. Covered in a brown fur, he felt somewhat different from his own kind before. But now, he felt he would be even more alone than ever. He did not howl in celebration as his brothers and sisters did. This was not noticed, due to the loud noise his brethren made, so the brown wolf, kept his head low, and his shame hidden from the rest. But he feared, he could not do that for long.

2

Two days after the visit from the white beast, the newly appointed Lead Wolf of the pack, speaks to this kind.

“Brothers and sisters, I now venture into the forest, to follow the scent of the second white beast. I will find its home and assess how many other of its kind there are. I will scour the site and return with a fresh kill. Who will join me?” said Lead Wolf. The pack was silent. They did not know how to be leaders themselves, only to follow. All the silver wolves looked at their leader, then at one another, glumly.

“I will” said the brown wolf. “I will come with you brother”

“Thank you. Stay close, I will not wait for you if you fall behind” said Lead Wolf, and he sprung off across the paddock, and stopped at the edge, where the trees met the grass. Lead Wolf sniffed the ground, then took a few steps into the forest. Stepping over berries and root vegetables it had gorged on so many times before, they had no appeal to the wolf now. They might have been weeds in his way. Sniffing for a few more seconds, he caught a whiff of something, growled and sharpened his eyes. He then looked back over his shoulder and said, “Now!” staring directly at the brown wolf. Lead Wolf began running through the trees and disappeared in seconds. The brown wolf, feeling as if he should protect his brother from potential harm, ran after him, catching up to him in the trees.

They ran together, the Lead Wolf stopping every few minutes to retrace the scent. He felt total exhilaration and freedom, never having engaged his senses in this fashion before. The brown wolf, just ran and followed his leader, overwhelmed by the tall trees, and lack of sunlight under their shade. The forest was a foreign land, and eerily silent, save for the snapping of twigs under the feet of the wolves.

Not long into their journey, the wolves could see clearing ahead and slowed down. Sunlight peered down onto long grass, deathly green and swaying in the wind. Lead Wolf, lowered his body and tip toed towards the new edge of the forest. The scent he discovered for the first time yesterday returned in full force, and the smell of the white beast was thick on the wind. Drool dripped from the Lead Wolfs mouth, and he was about to charge, when...

“Stop!” called out brown wolf from behind him. “We do not know what is beyond these trees”

“I do” whispered Lead Wolf, licking his lips. “Fresh white beast meat”

“Let’s take a look first. We could be severely outnumbered here, in fact I am sure we will be”

“No matter. You saw how easily I defeated that beast yesterday. If the rest of its kind are that simple, taking them should be no challenge”

Driven by his insanity and hunger, Lead Wolf continued walking towards the new field with no hesitation. A slight rise in the grass laid ahead of them, which the wolf walked up stealthy, and slithered through the long grass. It got to the top of the rise and froze on the spot. It’s tail shot out again, and it turned to beckon brown wolf to join him. A gleeful look was in Lead Wolf’s eyes. Brown wolf, hesitant, walked up to join his brother at the top of the rise. What the two wolves saw at the top, made the hair on both their backs stand on end; for brown wolf, this was fear. For Lead Wolf, it was the excitement of an endless bounty of meat.

Below them, a lush paddock, wider and longer than theirs and stretching to the horizon and beyond was laid out. And littered in that paddock were hundreds and hundreds of white beasts. They had all gathered in a large huddle, and to Lead Wolf this was a smorgasbord of flesh.

“So many of them” brown wolf said. “We can’t possibly take them all”

“No. Not yet at least” Lead Wolf said. “Just one. Food for our efforts today. Then we will return to our paddock and tell the pack what we have found. We will then return with many and feast”

“Their kind outnumber us by many. How can we expect to take them all” brown wolf asked, genuinely concerned.

“One by one of course. Just like pulling carrots out of the soil. It will be easy. Coming?” Lead Wolf said, taking one glance at brown wolf and running down the field. Brown wolf followed him but did not run. It chose to remain at a distance and had a feeling his brothers plan of attack would be short lived. Running across the new field, feeling free and more powerful than it had ever known, Lead Wolf set his sights on a white beast at the edge of the group. The familiar sound of the beasts crying returned and was loud and constant. The crying was music to Lead Wolfs ears, as it continued to run towards the pack. Then, the strangest thing occurred.

The pack, moved as one. Like the wall of trees at the edge of the paddock, the sheep had created a wall of white. They did not break their wall, and moved together, using their entire bodies to move and shield themselves. Lead Wolf ceased running and stopped just metres away from the wall of beasts. He didn’t know where to strike first, as they all looked the same, smelt the same, and he was certain would taste the same. Not only could he choose his next meal, but he couldn’t decide where to bite, as the beasts kept moving. He inched closer and closer, snapping and barking, hoping a beast would be frightened and break free from the pack. But they didn’t. They stood fast and worked as one. The best Lead Wolf could do was snap at some fur, yanking it off with his teeth, and scratching a few legs with the edge of his teeth. His efforts drew minimal red liquid, but the scent was nice.

“Get out of there” called out brown wolf from behind. Lead Wolf whipped around to see the sheep were circling around him, creating a wall. Lead Wolf was then trapped inside a circle of white beasts and continued to strike at the ones closest to him but couldn’t grab any of them. They were continuing

to cry their distinct “Baaa...baaa...baaa” sound, but only this time it sounded different. Brave and united, not the cry for help from the one Lead Wolf inflicted pain on. An opening in the wall presented itself, and lead Wolf decided to take it, running swiftly through the gap and re-joining brown wolf.

“Where were you? I could have been killed” Lead Wolf snarled.

“You raced off. Confident you could take one. They proved you wrong. They may be a weaker kind, but they have more numbers. You were a fool to think you could take any of them” brown wolf said, surprised at his own valour. Lead Wolf growled and pinned brown wolf down to the ground.

“How dare you! I am your leader outcast. You will respect me, or feel my wrath” Lead Wolf said, his eyes red with rage, and his breath stinking of white beast meat.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to doubt you. I was just trying to protect you. Come brother, I mean... my Leader... let ‘s leave. And return with more numbers. And a plan” said brown wolf. He felt he could be Lead Wolf’s next meal in compensation for not taking down a sheep. Lead Wolf’s eyes returned to grey, and it stood back.

“You’re right. I guess you being lone for so long has given you some wisdom from the pack. A wolf, lone, is wise. Thank you for your intervention. Let’s go, and come back” said Lead Wolf, returning to his tender, humble self the brown wolf knew. Lead Wolf ran off, returning to the forest. The brown wolf, bemused at the encounter he just had, composed himself. Taking one last look at the sheep, who remained huddled, he had no interest in them. He looked to the forest, watching Lead Wolf disappear into the trees, and before running off to join him said,

“Lone Wolf. I like that name”.

3

“Hundreds of them. Hundreds!” said Lead Wolf, surrounded by his followers in the centre of the paddock. Enough for all of us to feast on. We will never go hungry. No more rummaging for berries and carrots. And more importantly, food for the cold days ahead”. This gauged the interest of many of the pack, especially the mothers with their child wolves by their side. Slowly, more eyes turned from grey to red, tails pointed out and mouths began to water. The sight of so many white beasts, and the excitement in lead Wolf’s voice as he recalled the taste of the flesh, was enough to spark a new type of hunger in the pack.

“I need ten of you to join me as we launch the first attack. We will kill the beasts and bring them back here for the pack to eat”. This time, volunteers stepped forward quickly, and Lead Wolf had his pack. The newly named Lone Wolf, who had never left the side of Lead Wolf since they returned offered to go back as well and keep watch. His mouth did not water and he didn’t feel hungry, other than the usual hunger for the berries and vegetables he knew and loved. In regards for the hunger of something he’d never tasted, he did not share the tingle on his tongue his brethren seemed to be developing even without having tasted the white beasts themselves. But he saw the looks in their eyes, and the savagery start to show in the faces of them for the first time. Lone Wolf could see his kind changing quickly, and it was ugly.

The first wolf pack was formed, with Lead Wolf at front leading the way through the dark, dense of the forest and straight to the new field. Lone Wolf ran along at the same pace but kept to the back of the pack. Arriving at the field, Lead Wolf voiced his plan of attack. Smiles appeared in the eyes of the wolves, and the hair on the backs slowly stood up. The pack broke of into two groups, slowly walking down the slopes of the field and circling the sheep, which were still in a huddle. Lone Wolf went

further into the field this time, following Lead Wolf and four others. Still, he remained towards the back. The cries of the sheep began again, a defensive wail that called attention to the rest of the flock, and the huddle began to move in succession again.

Lead Wolf charged towards the wall, with three others and he signalled to them to go for a white beast. One of them grabbed one by the leg and dragged it down from the huddle. Two more wolves also grabbed its other legs and dragged it over to Lead Wolf. He did not hesitate, biting into the white hair and warm body of the terrified animal. "Try some" he said to his brethren, who looked at each other, then dove in. Each taking a bite, they shook all over; an explosion of senses in their mouths and bodies. Each of them howled happily and continued to rip the sheep apart. "More" Lead Wolf said and continued the attack.

The other half of the pack, had snuck up on the flock unnoticed, emulating the attack plan started by Lead Wolf. They managed to pull four sheep away, and manically began to devour them. The huddle closed in, not even trying to rescue their own kind, for they knew that would be futile. Their only defence was to stay together. As the other wolves were about to grab more sheep, Lead Wolf interjected...

"That's enough for today my brothers and sisters. We know this attack works. But let's save some for the rest. Take back what you can; our family must sample this new food. As you now know, it's taste is sure to win over every last one of them" he said howling in success, at which the others followed. They picked up limbs and chunks of flesh from the attack and carried them back across the field under the guidance of Lead Wolf. Lone Wolf was waiting with a watchful eye.

"Successful attack I take it" he said, looking at the red and white parts of the beasts hanging from the mouths of his brethren.

"Very. Thank you for keeping watch. For your patience, I will let you be the first of the rest to try some white beast meat" Lead Wolf said, signalling to another wolf to drop the flesh in his mouth. It did, and Lead Wolf urged Lone Wolf to take it.

"I'm not hungry right now. I'm sure it tastes good, but let's take as much as we can back to the group. They must try it as well. Then you will gather more volunteers for the next attack. They must have the taste before the attack"

"Agreed" said Lead Wolf gleefully, still heightened and excited from his kills. "Once again Lone Wolf, you have shown your wisdom" Lead Wolf said and bowed his head to the brown furred wolf. The rest of the pack darted through the trees, carrying their trophies of white beast meat back with them. This time, Lone Wolf just walked back, as he was not going to like the scene that would be unfolding when he got back.

4

The sun was setting on Wolf Paddock by the time Lone Wolf returned. He had deliberately taken his time to return, stopping to snack on some berries and mushrooms in the dirt. The setting sun was a brilliant orange and illuminated the paddock in yellows and golds. The only other colour to be seen was red. Every wolf in the paddock was sampling the flesh of the sheep. As there were a hundred wolves and the remains of perhaps five sheep, they each only got a small bite. But it was enough to set their mouths on fire, and the howling around the paddock was loud and chaotic.

With remains strewn across the field, Lone Wolf saw something he had not seen before amongst his brethren. They were not circled around Lead Wolf, or even gathered in one group. They were divided into ten small groups. Lone Wolf knew what had occurred right away; the taste of the flesh and the limited supply had created new packs amongst the family. Lead Wolf was munching away on the bone of his kill and hadn't noticed this splitting of the family. Lone Wolf walked over to him.

“Have you seen this my leader?”

“Seen what?” Lone Wolf said, crunching down on dry bone.

“You have new packs here. They have appointed their own leaders” Lone Wolf said, which was enough for Lead Wolf to drop the bone from his mouth and look up to the paddock. Sure enough, ten smaller packs of wolves were huddled, with one wolf standing in the centre of each group.

“What is this?” Lead Wolf yelled out.

“You were the first leader” said one wolf, emerging from his circle “But not the only one. You have brought us the food, but now, we must gather our own. We cannot rely on you and you alone to lead us all”

“I will lead you all and I can” Lead Wolf said, his eyes turning red.

“Your attack worked that time” said another wolf emerging from his pack behind Lead Wolf “but don’t be sure it will work again. These white beasts could learn from that and might be plotting a new defence. We need more packs to launch more attacks, and outsmart them”

“Nonsense” Lead Wolf said, circling the two wolves who had spoken to him. “My plan worked, and it will continue to work. And I am the only leader” he said. The silence in the field was broken, by the howling of a pack who were near the edge of the forest.

“Follow me” the packs leader said, and all the of them followed into the trees.

“No! Come back!” Lead Wolf said.

“It’s too late” said the wolf who had first spoken to Lead Wolf. “You brought the flesh, now it’s every wolf for itself” and he too, rallied up his pack, and ran off into the woods. Lead Wolf barked madly at them, and ordered his pack to stay behind, which they did. Lone Wolf surveyed the divide in his family, and as the sun set behind the trees, plunging the paddock into black, the darkness of the wolves had set in to. The new food had been tasted by all, and there would be no stopping the hunger now.

Over the coming weeks, each pack left for the forest, and returned with red mouths and full stomachs, each time bringing remains back. Then some packs didn’t return to the paddock straight away, vying to stay in the woods to be closer to the sheep. Many of the white beasts had been killed, halving their numbers in just a matter of weeks. After returning from his next kill, Lead Wolf, sat to the side of his pack, mulling over the mess he had created.

“We need order here again” Lone Wolf said quietly. “I have an idea. Let me bring back the other packs for a joint meeting. We must come to agree on a schedule, or I fear the food will run out quickly”.

Lone wolf said nothing. He rested his head on the grass, looking up to the night sky solemnly.

“Leave it to me my leader. I will bring them back” said Lone Wolf, and he ran off into the woods.

The next morning, Lead Wolf awoke to see every wolf in the paddock was there. He scanned his surroundings, and even though the packs remained together, they were all in the paddock, some resting with full belly’s after the nights kill, and others chowing down the last of their dinner.

“I gathered them all my leader. Time to set things right” Lone Wolf said.

“Well done” said Lead Wolf “You have proved your wisdom once again, and your loyalty to me. But... something troubles me brother” Lead Wolf said, staring Lone Wolf directly in the eyes

“What?”

“You have yet to make a kill. Have you even eaten our new food”

“Yes” Lone Wolf said, unevenly.

“Really? Describe the taste”

“Sweet, thick” Lone Wolf said, guessing his best.

“That’s plain to see, but how does it make you feel when you taste their flesh? I don’t see that look in your eye when you talk about eating them. You’re lying to me, aren’t you?” Lone Wolf said, his tail sticking out. Lone Wolf stepped back, as Lead Wolf and his pack circled him. “Eat some. Bring a piece” and one of Lead Wolf’s pack brought over a day-old chunk of flesh.

“I would rather eat one fresh than these remains” Lone Wolf said.

“Fair enough. I tell you what Lone Wolf. You have always been on the outside of our family. At first, I thought you were just odd, but you’ve come to serve your purpose in recent times. However, to remain in my pack, you must prove your worth. I don’t think the other packs would be so welcoming, and if you’re not one of us... you’re against us” Lead Wolf said smiling.

“What would you have me do brother?”

“Go to them. Go the field of the white beasts. Kill one, and bring it back here then, I want to watch you eat it in front of me. Then, I will accept you”. The paddock fell silent. Every wolf from every pack was listening to this confrontation. It seemed they had also developed a taste for conflict now, and they all watched on with glinting eyes.

“Okay. I will do that for you. I will return by morning”

“Make sure you do. And do not come back with nothing. Or I fear what the other packs may do to you. I cannot protect you anymore my brother” Lead Wolf said and walked away.

Lone Wolf, broke pace, and ran into the forest. Once out of sight, he stopped, and sat down. Looking up into the trees, an opening between branches revealed a bright, moon shining down on him. The sight was comforting, and unbeknownst to Lone Wolf, would also signify the arrival of a new kind of beast, that would change the course of both sides forever.

5

Lone Wolf sat up all night, contemplating what to do. He had not killed a white beast yet, nor had the taste for the meat. What he had always known was still good for him. And being different from the rest of his kind, he couldn’t so easily join them. If he ran off, he worried what lay beyond his paddock, the forest, and even beyond the paddock of the white beast. What other creatures were out there in the wild? The thought terrified him, as images of dark, macabre monsters with six legs and sharper teeth filled his mind vividly.

As the sun rose, Lone Wolf ventured down into the field, completely undecided as to what he would do. The first sight of the white beasts caught him off guard. What once was a large huddle of white hair and their distinctive crying, was now broken up into five smaller huddles.

“Packs. They’re making packs, like us” Lone Wolf said. “They’re adapting. But that will leave them open for attack. I must warn them” and he strolled down to the slope of the field and approached the white beasts. From behind one huddle emerged a new beast. Identical in size to the white creatures,

but black in colour, this beast spotted Lone Wolf. With no hesitation, it walked toward him and stopped just metres away. This beast was identical to the white ones, only it was black. A black sheep.

“I’ve seen you before. You’re the one who does not take our kind. Why?” said Black Sheep.

“I don’t feel the urge to. I am the only one of my kind who is that way”

“A shame. If there were more of you, we might stand a chance. And I feel to blame for all this. It was me who sent out those two sheep, to venture beyond the trees. More for my curiosity than theirs. They just do as they told. Not very smart the white ones”

“And you are?”

“Isn’t that obvious. I’m talking to you”

“True” said Lone Wolf, enjoying the connection.

“I believe you are not here to kill one of us?”

“I’m supposed to; kill one, take it back, and be accepted by my leader”

“And you came alone?” asked Black Sheep.

“Had to. Every other wolf has come and taken your kind. I’m the last. If I don’t return with a kill, they may kill me”

“I have another proposition. Return with no kill, but instead this message” said Black Sheep.

“What message?”

““Tell your leader and all your kind, they must reunite and agree to distribute the food supply evenly. Otherwise, they will kill off all the remaining sheep and have none left. The ones here are breaking off into groups and preparing to leave this land. I don’t stand with the rest of the sheep, I’m on outcast, like you”

“I tried to suggest limiting the kills to my leader, but he wouldn’t listen”

“If he wants to continue to feast on my kind he would do best to listen”

“You would allow them to kill your kind? Why?”

“Your kind has tasted our flesh. But I also realise they will want keep eating my kind, so if we offer up our old and sick as a sacrifice, they can eat what they like to taste. But not more than what we offer, or there will be none of us left for much longer. There is no going back now. I’ve been around long enough to see how other kinds react when they discover a new food source. They get greedy, eat too much too soon, and have nothing left.”

“Other species? Other than us and your kind?”

“Many more” said Black Sheep “Beasts that live in trees, beasts that move through the air at great heights. Wonders to behold”

“Where can I see them?” asked Lone Wolf. Black Sheep, turned and pointed his head to the end of their field, to the horizon that seemed to go on forever.

“Look as far as you can to where the land meets the sky and keep going. They are there. That’s where I came from. I was alone there, then found more of my kind here. Although, I was still different to them” said Black Sheep.

“I myself have always felt different to my kind. They all look the same; I alone have a different look, and I don’t know why”

“I’ve learnt the ones who are different are here to bring balance to their kind. That’s what I am trying to do. That is what you must do”

“Okay, I understand. I will go back and speak to my leader. I can’t promise you anything, so in case I fail, tell your kind to stand guard”

“We will meet again, and under better circumstances I hope” said Black Sheep, and it walked away into the field, and disappeared behind a huddle of white sheep.

6

With a new-found sense of purpose overriding his failed task, Lone Wolf returned to the paddock. Lead Wolf was waiting for him with a watchful eye.

“Well?” asked Lead Wolf “Have you brought your kill brother? I see nothing” with an evil smile and glowing eyes, Lead Wolf stepped forward, looking ready to lunge.

“I bring back something better my leader. A message. The white beasts have a leader, and he is black in colour. He speaks. He spoke to me. An arrangements has been offered”

“What arrangement. And did you say a black beast?” said Lone Wolf, his mouth salivating.

“The Black Beast has asked that you limit the kills. They will offer up a sacrifice of their kind to feed the pack. But you must not take more than they offer. Or their kind will be gone, and your food runs out”

“I would like to speak to this Black Beast and hear this myself. Then I think I will feast on him” Lead Wolf said, and ran past Lone Wolf, knocking him down. Every wolf in the paddock howled together, cheering their leader on. Lone Wolf got up and ran after him. Lead Wolf was fast, faster than his brother, but Lone Wolf did not give up the chase. He would race ahead, warn the Black Beast and do what he must to stop his leader. This was going too far, and how the future of their kind was at stake.

Lone Wolf raced ahead of Lead Wolf and towards the field.

“Traitor!” Lead Wolf barked at him.

Lone Wolf got to the field, and saw the Black Beast standing there hopefully.

“Do you bring back good news my friend?” it asked.

“He’s coming. My leader is coming to kill you. Get back” Lone Wolf said, and stood ready for the arrival of his brother, now foe. Through the long grass, which swayed violently side to side, Lead Wolf appeared and slid to a stop. His teeth were bearing and his eyes a fiery red.

“Show me this black beast. I demand it” ordered Lead Wolf.

“You will not take him. He is trying to help our kind and his. Can’t you see that?”

“I care not for their agenda. I care for my hunger. Move out of the way Lone Wolf, or must I take you down as well?”

“I will not move. Do what you must. I will do what I must”

Lead Wolf barked savagely and charged towards Lone Wolf. For a moment, time slowed down, as Lone Wolf gazed down on his former friend running towards him, all teeth sowing and drool whipping from the corners of his mouth. Something came over Lone Wolf in that moment. He felt...angry. He knew he was going to engage in a battle. Yet, he wasn't afraid. His courage had come to the surface because the survival of his kind was at stake. With a spring in his back legs, Lone Wolf ran towards his enemy, and leapt forward. This was met with a lunge by Lead Wolf, and their mouths of teeth were aimed squarely at the other.

Lone Wolf felt a bite on his shoulder, and he yelped in pain. He lowered his head, and hit the side of Lead Wolf hard, which caused him to shake. Hitting the place, the sheep had struck him weeks ago, the spot was tender and bruised. Lead Wolf didn't like this, biting down on Lone Wolf's tail and pulling him around in circles. Lone Wolf fell to his back, twisted his body around and managed to get his tail loose from Lead Wolf's mouth. Raising his front leg, Lone Wolf brought it down fast, his sharp nails extended, and scratched Lead Wolf's face from side to side. A loud yelp from Lead Wolf, and watery eyes signified the immense pain of that strike.

The scuffle continued, with each wolf ramming, scratching and biting the other. Blood was drawn, and the snarling was violent and filled with spit. All the sheep had reformed into one huddle and were watching this ordeal from a distance. Their scent drove Lead Wolf wild, and he looked forward to claiming one of them right after he took care of Lone Wolf. But as the huddle spread in the middle, a stranger sight befell Lead Wolf's eyes. He saw the Black Beast. It walked casually towards the wolves, keeping its wise eyes fixed firmly on Lead Wolf.

"It is real" he said, gazing upon the beauty of it. The smell was much stronger than the white beast, and Lead Wolf was completely taken over by his hunger. For that split second, he let his guard down, Lone Wolf took his chance. He sunk his teeth into the throat of Lead Wolf, bit down hard and tore away.

Lead Wolf's eyes rolled backwards, and it sounded off a weak bark, that signified defeat. For the first time in his life, Lone Wolf had tasted flesh, of his own kind. The taste was bitter and cold, and he spat out the meat at once. His anger subsided, as he saw Lead Wolf lying on the ground, a stream of red liquid pouring from its neck. Lead Wolf rolled its eyes over to Lone Wolf, its stare filled with terror, then sadness. Then, his eyelids closed. Lead Wolf let out one last whimper and was silent. His body was limp and lifeless, and Lone Wolf walked over and examined the kill. Then, Lone Wolf took his front paw, sore and bloody from the battle, and placed it on Lead Wolf's head, where he rested it.

"Forgive me brother. I had to. For the good of our kind" said Lead Wolf.

"A necessary action" said the voice of Black sheep. "I thank you for saving our lives today. But he was one leader of many in your kind. There will be others. Unless..."

Lone Wolf looked to the black beast, waiting for his next words.

"...you must return and claim leadership"

"How do I do that? There are nine other leaders with their own packs. They listened to Lead Wolf to a point, and they certainly won't listen to me"

"Take something to show them"

"I told you, I'm not killing one of your kind. I can't do it"

"Not one of our kind. Your own" said Black Sheep.

"What?" asked Lone Wolf, confused.

“You need to show that you are more powerful than your former leader. Take him back. You will have the respect of all your kind then. This is how it is done in the world of beasts. I’ve seen it before. Trust me”

“Strangely I do trust you. You’re not like any other beast I’ve met. Certainly not like your own kind” Lone Wolf looked down to the body of his fallen brother. Knowing he couldn’t carry the whole body back, he decided he would allow himself to taste the flesh of his own kind once more. Biting into the neck where he had caused the wound, Lone Wolf began to tear away at it.

7

Sometime later, Lone Wolf returned to his paddock. He would reiterate the message from the black beast and claim leadership over his kind. With the trophy he was bringing back, it was sure to work. And the trophy had been considerably hard to carry back. After the dust of the fight had settled in his mind, Lone Wolf remembered his fallen brother, and how he was before the day the two white beasts wandered into the wrong field. They would lie in the grass, rummage for berries, and stare out at the blue world beyond the edge of their field, and watch the clouds float by in the sky. He would miss his brother, but times had changed.

Lone Wolf walked into the middle of the paddock, and every wolf gathered around him. Dropping the trophy from his mouth, it fell to the ground with a slump and drew every set of wolf eyes upon it. The head of Lead Wolf looked back at them. Slain from its body, the proof of the kill was enough that every wolf in that paddock instantly and all at once, feared and respected Lone Wolf. One by one they started to howl up at the sky and salute their new leader.

“Hear me” he said as leader for the first time. “We have an arrangement with the white beasts. This is how it must be from now on...” Lone Wolf started and explained the arrangement.

Over the coming days, the packs became one again. The leaders of the packs, left the paddock, and were never seen again. They could not embrace one leader and decided to become Lone Wolves themselves. Scavenging the land for whatever they could find, eventually they all fell to the cold of winter.

Order and structure returned to the paddock, and the wolves kept up their end of the bargain. At least once every two weeks, a sheep was given up for sacrifice. Walked through the forest to the Wolf Paddock by two other sheep, the sick or old and frail sheep would meet their demise at the mouth of the wolf. The offering was distributed fairly amongst all the wolves, and in between the feast of white beast, the wolves returned to eating berries and the fruits and vegetables which grew out of the ground. Balance was restored, and the population of the sheep grew again. Soon there five hundred of them, then a thousand, but the population of the wolves remained the same. The pack became smaller and smaller, until eventually they all passed on from old age or illness.

Eventually, it was just Lone Wolf left in his paddock, and having never feasted on white beast, he kept himself satisfied on the foods of the earth.

And as the friendship began all those years ago, Lone Wolf continued to wonder into the forest on the night of the full moon. And joining him in the middle of the forest, under the tallest tree illuminated by the moon light, was Black Sheep.

The two of them talked, where Black Sheep recalled stories of all the other kinds he had met in his journeys. It was fascinating to Lone Wolf, and he dreamed of venturing off beyond the edge of the

land to discover them for himself. Maybe he would meet more of his kind, in another paddock, rummaging for berries, and none the wiser they had a hidden taste for the flesh of other beasts.

And as their full moon meeting would draw to a close, the sun rising slowly beyond the trees, Lone Wolf never felt the urge to turn on the white beasts, or even his good friend the black beast. But Black Sheep, having been well travelled and seen both sides of every kind of beast that roamed the land didn't take his chances. Yes, he met with Lone Wolf alone at the tree, but just off to the side, standing on the edge dividing the forest from their field, was a pack of white sheep, all of them standing guard and keeping a watchful eye on their Leader.

The End

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