**“Wolves Howl when Trees Sing”**

**1492**

It had been a dark and stormy night when I had lost her. Because that’s how it always starts. The clouds had covered the sky as the rain splashed down, bouncing off the metal roof and the wind had blown through the trees, creating a low and eerie whistle. Despite the clouds, the moon had been bright enough to see a very faint glow in the dark sky. The windows in our house had shuttered with the force of the storm that night, the kettle had screeched with the wind, and Mama had been in the kitchen.

“Red!” she called once the kettle was turned off, “Come to the kitchen please!” As I entered, I noticed my basket on the table, a sweet aroma drifting from it.

“I am not going to grandma’s again,” I said suddenly. A frown spread on my face as Mama handed me the basket.

“Red, your grandma is sick, you know she will only eat cookies with my healing tincture to get better.”

“But what about the weather; I can’t possibly go out right now.”

“You play in this weather all the time, don’t even try with that one,” she scolded, clearly not willing to drop it.

“But what about Raul? Can’t he take care of her?” I asked, hoping to not have to see him again.

“He can’t make the tincture, only I can, you know this, and he’s too sick to come get it from us this time,” she replied. I knew that there would be no getting out of this one. Mama turned away to clean up the kitchen as I went and grabbed my cloak. As I stepped outside, the rain poured down drenching me within seconds, making the red velvet cling tightly to my skin. I hurried through the dark, the ground splashing beneath me.

I learned how to navigate the woods in the dark from my grandmother. She taught me the different feels of heavy vegetation, soft untrodden dirt, and the hard beaten path in the woods and how to find your way in the dark. I did just that as I hurried down the path, the moon barely lighting my way. Grandma always taught me different ways to tap into my senses, especially when put in the forest. She believed that you could gain powers from Mother Earth if you were truly connected with Her. She did not believe in medicine and would spend hours at a time meditating in the deepest part of the woods talking with Mother Earth. I used to go on hikes with her through the woods as she taught me all about flora, fauna, track finding, and everything you could imagine that had to do with Mother Earth.

And then it all stopped when she met Raul. Raul was a haughty, sharp eyed lumberjack from the deep woods who lived alone. She stumbled upon his cabin during one of her excursions and they’ve been inseparable ever since. But, I didn’t like Raul from the start. I didn’t like the way he stared at our pigs every time he came over or the way he disappeared once a month for days at a time. He didn’t seem to care for grandma the way that I did.

There was a loud crack in the sky that brought me back to the forest. There in front of me was grandma’s house. The cabin was small, but was built expertly; the logs were interlaid, mud in between the gaps and holes keeping the cabin warm and snug on the inside. The rooftop was flat so that grandma could have her garden up there so that her plants would get a clear shot of sunlight.

Usually, even in the dark, the cabin was inviting with the glow of the fire seen through the window, and the moon beaming down on it as if it knew the woman that lived there. But that night, it was the opposite. The moon hid behind clouds, as if trapped there, no soft glow illuminated the windows, and the door was wide open, the wind banging it against the side of the house. I slowly walked up to the cabin and peered inside. There on grandma’s bed was a dark, unfamiliar silhouette.

“Grandma?” I called out. Silence. “Grandma?” I tried again.

“Yes dear?” A voice that wasn’t grandma’s called back. I stayed by the door frame, too scared to move.

“I brought you cookies and your medicine.”

“Oh goodie, why don’t you bring them to your old grandma?” I set the basket down at the door, not daring to step any closer than I was.

“Grandma what big bones you have,” I said, trying to distract whoever was in bed. The silence dragged on a moment too long.

“Oh yes, all the better to chop wood with my dear,” it finally answered. The figure turned its head in the dark, revealing an elongated nose as lightning streaked across the sky.

“Grandma, what a big nose you have,” I said, taking a step back.

“Yes, all the better to smell you with, my dear.” At that moment, the clouds rolled away, the storm leaving the valley, letting the full moon rays shine into the cabin. There in bed was Raul. But at the same time it wasn’t him. The gray fur covered everywhere that skin should be, his face contorted into a long jaw full of sharp teeth, and his eyes. His eyes glowed brightly.

“My, grandma, what big eyes you have,” I whispered.

“All the better to track you down with my dear,” he snarled in response. I turned and ran. As I ran, I heard the door burst from its hinges behind me, followed by a deep, dark howl that pierced through the night. The eeriness of it made my knees weak as I ran farther into the woods. I went off the trail and into the deep forest, branches appearing and disappearing as I tried to dodge them. Bushes tried to trip me, snagging at my red cloak as it swirled behind me, like they wanted Raul to catch me. I thought I was getting farther when I heard the padded footsteps running behind me. Terrified, I tried to keep going, but stumbled over a rock in my path. I only felt the dirt under me for a few seconds before something grabbed me. Raul picked me up and turned me around, staring deep into my eyes, his panting heavy, drool dripping down from his jaws.

“You can’t run away anymore,” he heaved. “You’re mine now, just like your grandma.”

“Where’s grandma?” I whimpered as his claws tightened around me.

“Ha! You think I’d tell you where she is?! Nice try, little Red, but I can feel you tremble and shake. I’m not as persuasive as you might think!” he roared. With fire in his eyes, he lifted me above his head and threw me across the clearing. I hit the ground hard, a crack coming from my arm as I landed, my head swirling, as the stars and moon blended together. I only faintly heard the howl and the snarl. I only faintly saw him get on all fours and slowly approach me. I closed my eyes then, too weak to move or run, accepting my fate as it was. Then I heard Her. I heard Mother Earth calling me.

*Don’t do that, you have strength left,* the trees whispered.

*No I don't,* I thought. *I let grandma down by abandoning her, and now she’s gone.*

*Sweet child, feel the dirt beneath you. Feel its softness. When your grandmother joins us you will feel the dirt get softer. But not yet. She’s still out there, you just have to find her.*

*I can’t move,* I kept thinking, a faint padding sound getting closer and closer.

*You are not alone, child,* the trees sang. *You are not alone, child.*

*I’m too weak. Help me Mother Earth, and I will find my grandma.* I resolved.

*We can do that child, just sit and be still.*

A flash illuminated the sky that was brighter than the sun, as the wind started to pick up, swaying the trees fiercely back and forth. The ground rolled and tumbled under me, rocks flying from the ground, a gaping hole opening in front of me. The world spun faster and faster, the colors and shapes all blending together. Nothing was correct. Then all of a sudden it stopped. I looked up and saw nothing had changed, only that Raul was gone, and I was now safe. I whispered a thanks as I started to faint onto the soft ground.

I had heard the trees that night. They whispered, sang, and chanted as the world went awry. Their furocity had scared yet soothed me as they had shown Mother Earth’s power. I have known ever since, the power that she exhibits is only truly seen by those connected with Her.