

Wolf Being



Celia woke up to the sound she loved—a chain snaking to the ground, the grid sliding back. A blast of cold air hit her face and she struggled to stand. Her legs were like rickety stilts, toenails clicking across the concrete. The kennel door was open. The air rushed in bringing a mixture of scents—rusty pipes, jet fuel, burning rubbish, ants, mud and urine. She took a deep breath and sneezed, her tail fanning back and forth.

She trotted out the gate, her shoulders nearly poking through her hide. Old bones ached and joints popped but Celia didn't care. She could smell Mother Earth and nothing else mattered. The second gate was narrow and she misjudged the path, clipping her ear on the post. She shook, a flurry of grey hairs levitating around her. Years ago, Celia could see like the

hawk but not anymore. When her mate was alive, he'd warned her away from drains and pits. Her tail stopped wagging. She had been alone for a long time.

Celia stumbled on the concrete, yelping more from surprise than pain. She held her paw off the ground, pressing forward. Nothing would stop her today. She climbed a corrugated bank and slipped down the other side. Once over the slab, her paws splashed into a pool of muddy water. She sniffed the ground, tail fanning again. *Mother Earth!* Celia sat on her haunches, tipped her nose to the sky and howled, calling in her young. She howled until her throat went dry and her body trembled. The rasp of air through her windpipe was like a wheezing bellows but still she called. Eventually her legs gave out, white fur sinking into the dank earth. Celia's young would never join her.

The wind blew rubbish past her face, powerlines swayed overhead; the scent of decay covered her like a threadbare cloth. In the distance, the sound of metal twisting under a compacter's jaws ripped through the air. She exhaled, no longer able to hold the memories back. They rushed up—the visions she'd received at her mother's death, the ones that had slept beneath awareness all her life. They were meant to be passed on. Alone, Celia could do nothing but share them silently with herself.

I am wolf being and I am of Mother Earth. My memories pass to you, my young ones, so that you may give them someday to yours, and they to theirs, as it has always been since the beginning of the world. She sighed and rested her chin on her forepaws. She closed her eyes and the memories flooded her.

In the beginning all the earth was warm to the touch. There was no ice over the ponds, no frost in the air and no snow in the highlands. There was barely a change of season between summer and winter, spring and fall. The oceans were shallow and covered much of Mother

Earth. They lapped around a single continent, a flat land that drifted on an endless sea. The sun and moon and stars marked the passing of day and night though few beings observed them. The sun was fierce in his brightness and the moon translucent, her surface smooth like reflecting water. In these early days, the rain of comets had not fallen, no mountains were born and the lands were yet to tear apart. This was our Mother Earth long before wolf being lived.

One hundred thousand billion suns rose and set and still the land of our ancestors lay beneath the sea. Over it swam a myriad of creatures. Some were small like lacy winged gnats, some larger than rivers and equally fast. Near the shore, thin wisp worms poked out of rocks and slow moving snails bigger than wolves crawled along the muddy floor. Worms, sponges, molluscs, sea weeds and urchins, and the tiny ones, the plankton that fed them all, bloomed and lived on, and on.

The fishes were many, diverse in shape and nature, all with spines and fins and scales. Some learned to breathe the air and left the sea, swimming up the rivers and finding lakes and ponds, others stayed behind and breathed only water. Giant lizard beings swam with them. They breathed the air and ate the fish.

A thousand million more suns rose and set and the land began to break apart. The seas rushed in to fill the spaces between the shifting continents. Ferns and palms scattered the landscape, the hills and valleys covered with plants that had neither seeds nor flowers. No birds graced their branches. Insects and gliding reptiles were the only beings that took to the sky though many small creatures scuttled beneath the leaves and fallen trunks. Large beasts stomped across the land, leaving footprints behind—pools for others to drink from. Still the land of our ancestors slept under the waves.

The high Sierra Mountains, the backbone of wolf being land, lay deep beneath the sea, stretched out flat like a hot summer's day. Sierra slept for another hundred million suns before stirring. When the shores spread wider and the vast oceans swelled between the lands, the edges of the sea floor met like two great elk. They locked horns and tore with their hooves, each pushing with all their strength. They did not stop pushing for over a million suns.

Finally the strongest elk won but at the last moment the other leapt high slamming down so hard upon its opponent that Mother Earth tore open. She bled freely and the red liquid rock rose to the surface of the sea. When it cooled it formed a mantle as long as all the land. One hundred million more suns rose and fell and the single rock mantel was pushed to the surface. Further and further it rose until the great mountain range towered over the lands of our ancestors. Because Mother Earth was sad for the shore that had suffered most, she leaned the mountain peaks towards the west, making the slopes to the sea smooth and gentle. To the east they were sheer and harsh as the land beneath them.

Eighteen billion suns rose and set, and Mother Earth grew cold. Seasons came in their order—spring, summer, autumn and winter. Ice formed in the far northern and southern caps of the world, drawing to them the seas. The land of our ancestors surfaced, feeling the cool sunlight for the first time. Glaciers formed, huge slabs of ice that dragged along towards the coast, knocking the mountains into new shapes, gouging out valleys and hills, leaving rivers to follow the path to the sea.

Giant ferns gave way to live oak, palms moved over for redwoods and sticky sapped pines. Flowers came to Mother Earth and with them fragrances to draw the bees. Ancient bird beings clawed and flapped in the trees, their brightly coloured feathers matching the blossoms and buds. Much larger birds also walked the land. They were flightless, covered

with feathers and bigger than Dire wolf who was yet to come. Rivers rushed endlessly back to the ocean, their frothy waves glittering red in the sunsets. They crashed like geysers when they reached the jagged coast, the sweet water mixing with the salt. Rains fell, and snow. Water filled every hollow in the land.

From one of those hollows, a creature appeared. She had come from the sea, as it is with all life, and she had learned to live in fresh water and breathe air. Her fish-fins fell away, replaced with sturdy legs, a long neck and tail. She walked out of the water onto dry land, and learned to run, to prey on the insects that filled the sky and to lay eggs—first in the water and then in nests of leaves and twigs. After a billion more suns rose and set, she learned to climb trees, hunt meat, and instead of laying eggs in her deep dens, she gave birth to live young. Her name was Canid, true ancestor of wolf being.

Canid was small and fast and she lived in the lands between the High Sierras and the long coast of golden sand and jade green seas. She hunted small mammals in the redwood forests and the rolling hills, living under the oak, sagebrush and cypress. She survived the great extinctions, the first that took nine of every ten species on Mother Earth, and the next which took the great giants, the dinosaurs, leaving only snake, lizard, crocodile, turtle and bird to remember their kind. Canid survived them all and she grew. Over sixty million summers she shifted form, becoming faster, thick-furred, sharp eyed and bright minded. Canid branched into our sister beings, fox, coyote, jackal and largest of all, Dire wolf. The last creature she became was Grey wolf, and we flourished.

For almost half a million summers we shared our territories with Dire wolf, hunting side by side. Dires' massive jaws crunched bones of mammoth while we fed on the flesh of deer, elk, whole mice and rabbits. The glaciers had come again bringing another time of ice. The land turned colder and the seas withdrew, sucked into the glaciers and the frozen poles.

When the sea level dropped a bridge of land appeared from far away west. Over it for thousands of summers walked many creatures—caribou, bison and mammoth, all in vast numbers. Following these great herds were the Ohlone people and slowly, over hundreds of summers, they hunted their way south into wolf being land.

On their arrival came another great extinction and many more species vanished—cave lion, sabre cat, giant beaver, ancient bison, horse, camel, mammoth and cheetah. Ohlone never saw most of these creatures, nor did they see our brother Dire wolf, but wolf being was here to greet them and the Ohlone loved us. We shared territories for many thousands of summers and winters and both our clans thrived.

Wolf beings were many, as were elk, antelope and deer. The herds grazed in the valleys from the knees of the mountains to the steep sea cliffs. Falcons and bald eagles flew under the clouds. Mountain lions, bobcats and jaguars roamed the redwood forests. Coyote and fox were as profuse as the yellow poppies and purple lupine. There was hunting for all, and grazing, and fish for great grizzly bears that lumbered down the mountain to swipe their claws through the rushing streams. This was a time of bliss for wolf being and for Ohlone and all other creatures on land and sea.

Ohlone lived much like we did, in large family groups. They were friendly to each other, tolerant of their young and their shamans kept them connected to Mother Earth. They built villages near the water, with huts for shelter and tame fire for warmth. Some made boats of reed to paddle the bays and sounds. They fished the rivers and sea, and hunted the same prey as wolf being. They gathered acorns, berries and shoots, living under the sun and stars and singing each night as is also our way. At sunrise their voices were heard chanting welcome to the new day. They called us tricksters and danced to our spirit. We called them long cubs and watched over their nights.

Wolf being sang under the moon to Ohlone, and the Ohlone sang back. We were one with Mother Earth and with each other. Our joy was full. This life in the wide territory between the mountains and the sea lasted for thousands and thousands of summers. It lasted while the ice melted and the seas rose again. It lasted while the smoking mountains went to sleep under blankets of snow. It lasted while the green waves carved out new shapes in the granite cliffs. It lasted until the coming of the *others*.

The first were harmless. They came from the far west, arriving in wide ships with high prows, many masts and baton sails. They anchored in the bay and stayed for one season, trading with the Ohlone. They swapped their bright clothes for hide and their spices for gold. Their leader planted a flag high on the headlands and it snapped wild in the wind. On the flag was a creature, red and green and yellow. The Ohlone did not touch it for fear it would come to life. It had a giant lizard body with a camel's head and elk's antlers. Its fours bent legs ended with five claws shaped like eagle talons. Its name was Dragon. The people from the far west did not return for more than a thousand sunsets and when they did, their Dragon was gone.

The next that came were like those who had crossed the land bridge only they had stayed on the far shore, building ships, trapping seals and otter and hunting whale. Their great ships moored in the coves and bays, their leaders in tall plumbed hats, their flags bands of white, blue and red. Some settled the valleys and planted grapes for wine, pushing Ohlone aside, hunting wolf beings for our thick pelts. They prized the sea otter fur above others and soon the little otters were all but gone. With no furs left to trap, these hunters returned home.

The Conquistadores came after them. They were like Ohlone in size and posture but their spirit was not one with Mother Earth. They loved a god who was against nature, against Ohlone, against Mother Earth and against wolf being. They rode horse beasts, taller and finer

boned than those that once grazed our territory, and from horseback the Conquistadores shot fire. They killed all the creatures that moved into their path. Their greed was not with furs like the traders from the sea, but with gold—the yellow rocks buried in Mother Earth's rivers and mountains. The Conquistadores searched for it with hungry hands that dug and stabbed and crushed.

They killed many Ohlone, many wolf beings, elk and deer. They poisoned the water with their gold hunt and destroyed what did not give way before them. When their supplies ran low they raided Ohlone villages, taking with them any they did not slaughter, forcing them to work the mines or selling them to men in ships. The winds that blew across the land in these days took Ohlone's joy and Wolf being's too. It never returned.

The Conquistadores came from the south in long hunting parties, shooting always the Ohlone, the buffalo, the deer, the rabbits, the fish and wolf being. They shot fire at each other too. Where they came from, the lands far to the east, there were no more wolf beings. All had been killed and their hatred of us was hard inside them. The Conquistadores also brought the Franciscans, their shamans, who followed like marching ants. They did not shoot fire but killed with sickness.

They forced Ohlone to build their missions—villages with high white walls and ringing bells. They made the Ohlone tend their crops and learn their god's requirement—separating them from their children, killing those who tried to run away. The Ohlone shuddered, unable to fight the illnesses that burned through them. Ohlone Shamans could not help. They cried in despair and as they did Mother Earth answered back. She shook the land, throwing down the buildings and uprooting trees, but the Franciscans made Ohlone build them up again. The wolf beings that were left ran away but the Ohlone could not run. They were trapped inside

the missions. Any who escaped were caught and dragged back. Before sixty summers came, from the hundreds of thousands of Ohlone sharing our territory, only a few packs were left.

With no slaves to work their land, the missions failed. Soon the Franciscans and Conquistadores were run off by the Californios, the clans from the south. More battle, more slaughter. Mother earth shook beneath wolf beings' feet and again the land slid. Trees fell but still more of the Californios came. They were a people not unlike the Conquistadores. When they arrived, they claimed the territories for themselves and wolf being hid. Ranchos rose up in place of the white missions and the land was fenced. Herds of horses and cattle and sheep and fowl were kept, fattened, bred and slaughtered. As fewer elk and deer survived, wolf beings stalked the new animals but we were trapped and killed for doing so. The Rancheros, unlike Ohlone, did not want to hunt side by side with wolf being. Deeper still we retreated, until there was war.

Pioneers and soldiers called Americans came from the east and fought the Californios from the south. The battle lasted two summers, both claiming the land we shared with Ohlone was their own. So many of us were hunted, we abandoned our home and went higher into the mountains. The remaining Ohlone became slaves to the pioneer Americans who won the war. Ohlone now planted American fields and dug for their gold, as they had for the Conquistadores, the Franciscans and the Californios. Ohlone daughters were taken away and not returned. Like the others before them, the Americans called the Ohlone savage and wolf being the Devil's dog.

The Americans were like the Californios; they fenced the land. They made crops grow, raised cattle and horses, and dug the gold that rushed along the banks of the rivers. The yellow rock brought hundreds of thousands of them and in only a few summers their camps and villages were everywhere. They came by ship, bearing red, white and blue flags with a

circle of stars. They poured over the High Sierras on horseback and in winding wagon trains. Many starved in the icy mountain passes, but others followed the trail of frozen bones, skulls crushed beneath wagon wheels. On they came. The Americans built their homes in wolf being territory and called it California. They planted a flag and claimed that history had begun.

For wolf being it was the end. We lived on the edge of their lives, keeping away from the soldiers and the ranchers and farthest away from the ones called forty-niners whose eyes glinted with gold and hands dripped with blood. The forty-niners blocked the rivers and tore into the land. They tore into each other as well, barely tolerating their own kind. The Ohlone they hated, and any still alive they massacred, pushing them from their hunting grounds, promising them their own territory but giving them nothing. Most of the remaining Ohlone starved or died of fevers.

The settlers and miners built villages that grew to towns that grew to cities. Again Mother Earth heaved, shaking her hardest since the raising of the Sierras, and much of what the settlers built was destroyed. Fires burned what was left, but still more of their kind poured in, coming on the steel lines that carried them by the thousands—the iron horse, the trains. These creations had rows and rows of seats and the Americans from the east sat on the benches, rifles pointing out tall windows. From far away wolf being watched them shoot the buffalo and leave the bodies to rot. If we crept down into the plains to feed, they shot us too.

The next hundred summers brought still more Americans—millions of them. They came on foot, by ship, by trains, wagons, horses and steamers. They filled the valleys and crowded the coasts ever building taller and wider towns and cities. They dug into the mountains, cut and burned the redwoods, dammed the rivers, pumped water to the desert and planted and fenced and controlled the land. They built roads of asphalt and cement, ships of iron and wood, factories of steel. They divided themselves by colour, wealth and gods, none

worshipping Mother Earth. The Ohlone were gone, their blood diluted. No one was left to dance to Mother Earth and sing the sunrise. Any wolf beings that had survived were caught and put in steel pens. Some escaped to the north. Their memories are no longer with us. Our clan was kept in a zoo, the environment made of plastic, a simulation for the visitors—the ones who came to stare through thick windows at our wild life. In this prison, we ever seek the feel of the earth beneath our feet. To find it is the greatest blessing.

One hundred summers passed with our clan trapped in the steel pens and my life as Celia began. My growth followed the memories of all before me. I was Mother Earth's first child, one celled protozoan without symmetry. All over again, the world was dark, a single continent with a single rushing sea, the depths of which surrounded my being. I swam freely as all such creatures before me until the one cell became two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty two, sixty four, hundreds, thousands. I moved from protozoan to a mulberry of tissue reminiscent of ancient sponges, haliclona, scyphi. The cells of my being became specialized, symmetry radial. I implanted in the hot sea bed and the ocean's pulsing waves supported my life. Like a flat worm I became bilateral with a digestive system, nerves and muscle layers building—an ancient trematode, a cestode, dogenea. The cylindrical form took hold, slender, resistant, striped with longitudinal muscle fibers, a worm without segments lived through me—like the nematodes, echinodermata, sipunculids. I evolved, transforming, finding segmentation, gill slits, a spinal column and appendages not unlike the cranita and cyclostomes that crept and crawled across Mother Earth millions of summers ago. From this arrangement of organs, nerves and tissues my vertebrae formed, and I was the first cartilaginous fish—the sharks, rays and skates. Bones appeared. I became the ichthyies that swam the seas, tied to my sea bed with a pulsing cord.

My scales fell away, fins became limbs with articulate toes—five, then four—and gills were replaced by lungs and nostrils—I was amphibian. Hair grew, a fur covering, and a four chambered heart beat life blood—hot seawater racing to every extremity—nose, tail and four long legs. I had warm blood, crawling motions, rounded head, short neck, long flexible tail and a single lower jaw with differentiated teeth, the old multiple jaw shrinking to form the bones of my ears—stapes, malleus and incus. The pounding of the waves on the sea cliffs became the beat of my mother's heart and I was born—blind, deaf and hungry.

I thrived, though my littermates did not. The Mother Earth that greeted me was a different world from our ancestors'. My land did not feel the sunshine—nor did I—and the skies were not blue or clear. Concrete covered the surface of Mother Earth until she could not draw breath. Beneath the weight of metal, bitumen, steel and cement, Mother Earth groaned and strained and rumbled. The air became thick and dull, the taste metallic. Rain, when it fell, burned the leaves and stung the eyes. Trees rotted, hills eroded and the seas died.

Our clan survived in the zoo, living out their days in walled enclosures. But one by one the other species vanished, the last of their kind dying alone. Lights were turned off, gates locked, runs shut down and exhibits abandoned, as it will be for wolf being.

With my last breath, this pen of concrete and chain-linked fence—the portion of Mother Earth that has been my lot—will be as vacant as my body, another exhibit closed. *I will die when the memories are told, and they are done.*

Celia's eyes opened briefly. The mud had seeped into her fur, draining the warmth from her heart. Her limbs shook. She couldn't feel them now. Her memories were told yet the singing of

her clan, the howling that would set her spirit free, did not sound. No one was left to see her off.

Her heartbeat slowed until it stopped. As the air left her lungs, she listed to the side, her face sinking into the small puddle of earth.

It was a mistake. The alpha female #34 wasn't supposed to have been let out. It was too cold—not worth the risk. A team had already been scheduled to euthanize her and harvest the DNA under sterile condition. Whoever had made the blunder—opened the gates without checking her chart—would get the sack. No one owned up to it though, even after intense questioning.

Fortunately, the team got their samples in spite of the lag time. The body had chilled quickly enough to prevent significant decomposition. The slides and swabs were tagged, cross referenced, catalogued and sent to archives. There they were dropped into a minus one hundred fifty degree Celsius tank to rest alongside the other extinct species from the twenty-first century. The vacuum seal closed and so did the Grey Wolf's exhibit.

For two hundred years the samples remained frozen until a quantum geneticist broke the seal on the cryo vat. He found the container he was after and held it to the light. 'Alpha female 34?' he said, rubbing his thumb over the ice crystals. 'We'll have to think of a better name than that.' He closed his eyes, a line from a sixteenth century play coming to mind.

Thy words are too precious to be cast away upon curs; throw some of them at me; come, lame me with reasons.

'I'm guessing you were no cur.' He smiled. 'I'll call you Celia, and if Mother Earth is willing, I'll bring you back.'

Quotation Reference:

Thy words are too precious to be cast away upon curs; throw some of them at me; come, lame me with reasons.'

Shakespeare, W. (1600). *As You Like It*, Act I, Scene III. Retrieved August 10, 2010
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