

Prologue

Hunted Diamond

"Wake up honey. Time to go," Mama said.

Back then I was just over a year old, and for the third time that winter we had to move to a new den. The hunters were coming after us again.

I opened my eyes and blinked a few times.

"Do we hafta move again Mama?" I asked.

"We have to keep moving or the hunters will get us. They almost got us last time," Mama said.

Mama always made sure we were safe. We had been on the run all winter. The same two hunters were chasing after us. Already my father and two of my brothers had been killed.

I got up and joined the rest of my siblings for a breakfast of field mice. I wished we could have some of those delicious blueberries but unfortunately they don't grow in the winter. After we were finished we walked out of the den. A cold wind blew through my fur sending chills down my spine; It was snowing. I huddled up against my Mama to stay warm.

Mama giggled and said, "Oh honey, you're so cute. When you're fur is longer you'll be warmer".

We looked around a bit and then started moving. Keeping an eye out for any mouse or rabbit that might become our dinner. We walked through miles of gray and white colored forest. I looked back at our tracks.

"Hey mama, won't the hunters be able to find us cuz of our pawprints in the snow?" I asked.

"The snowfall will cover them up. They won't find us," mama said.

After a day of seemingly aimless walking Mama stopped and her ears perked up. That usually wasn't a good sign.

"Children, move quickly," she whispered.

She started guiding us all toward a small empty den she found.

"Are the hunters following us?" I asked.

"I don't know dear, but I heard something and I want to be safe," she whispered back.

We all went into the small den. By siblings went to sleep in one corner, and Mama and I in the other. Soon everyone was asleep; except me. All I could think about were the hunters. After maybe half an hour I nudged Mama.

"Yes dear?" She asked as she yawned.

"Mama, I can't sleep. I'm scared," I said.

"Sweetie, don't be scared. No one's gonna hurt you. Mama's here to protect you," she said.

She patted my head and began to sing a sweet lullaby. Her voice was the most beautiful sound I've ever heard. Listening to her singing was like laying on a bed of cotton covered in silk. As she sang I slowly began to drift off to sleep. Mama was the world to me.

That night I dreamed that Mama and I were walking together in a beautiful forest in the spring.

"I'll always be there for you. I'll protect you forever," she said as we walked.

The next morning I woke up to Mama nudging me.

"Rise and shine honeybun," she said.

I stood up and gazed at the sunlight streaming into the den, and onto my brothers who were pouncing on each other. I backed up into the far corner to stay out of the way.

"Boys, you're scaring your sister. You know how shy she is. Calm down," Mama said sternly.

"Yes mom," they all said in unison.

All my brothers were three years older than me, and their games constantly scared me.

Mama laid down next to me and started grooming my fur.

"Did you sleep well?" She asked.

"I dreamed about you Mama," I said.

"Oh isn't that sweet," Mama said.

She began to hum a short tune.

After breakfast we made our way out of the den. It was snowing harder than the day before.

"Come on kids, let's go," Mama said as she pushed past my brothers.

"TICKLE ATTACK!" they yelled as they jumped on her.

Mama fell over and started laughing as their tiny claws scrubbed across her tummy. I stood where I was; motionless. Suddenly, off in the distance we heard a bang. Mama and the boys froze. The boys jumped off and Mama stood up. Mama perked her ears up and listened. The sound came again.

"Run," she whispered; a hint of terror could be heard in her voice.

We all ran as fast as we could. The sounds slowly became closer and louder.

"Mom, I'm tired. Can we rest?" One of the boys asked.

"Keep running. We're not safe," she replied.

"Mama, are the hunters gonna catch us?" I asked.

"No honey. We're going to be just fine," she said.

Then there was a loud bang and Mama fell. The boys screamed and kept running. I stopped next to Mama, who lay motionless on the ground.

"After them," I heard a scratchy deep voice say.

Then two muscular men, each armed with a rifle, ran by; they were chasing after my brothers. I looked at Mama laying in snow that was slowly turning red. I nudged her.

"Mama what's happening? I'm scared," I said.

"Hush sweetie. Mama's here for you," she said.

I began to cry.

"Don't cry honey. I won't let anyone..." she began to say.

I waited for her to finish, but she didn't.

"Mama?" I asked.

I waited but got no answer.

"Mama? Why aren't you answering?" I asked.

Still no answer. She appeared to have fallen asleep

"Mama? Why are you sleeping? Wake up Mama?" I wailed.

Still no response.

"MAMA!?" I yelled as I began to shake her.

Still no response.

Off in the distance I heard more bangs and yelps

"Got em' all," I heard one of the men yell.

I curled up next to Mama in the red stained snow; sobbing. I began to sing through my tears.

"Oh sweet foxy cary me so. Hold me close and never let go. I'll be here for you if you'll be there for me. I'll be here forever, with you. Oh sweet mother, care for me so. Stay in my heart and never ever go. I'll wait here for you if you'll wait here for me. I'll be here forever, with you," I sang.

I laid my head on her back and cried heavily into her fur; no longer able to hold back any of the tears.

"Mama...I love you," I cried.

I lay there sobbing for a long time. It must have been a few hours before I finally stood up. The red stains were beginning to fade. I looked at mama laying in the snow.

"Why...?" I asked to no one.

"Good-bye Mama," I said as I walked away; my eyes beginning to tear up again.

I was all that was left of my family. I did not know where to go or what to do with myself so I just walked. The wind began to blow again, and the snowfall became harder. As I walked the sun began to lower in the sky.

I was walking across a flat shallow patch of snow when I heard a sudden popping sound.

"What was that?" I said quietly.

I looked around looking for another animal that may have been the cause but I didn't see anything. Then I heard a low creaking sound and a shattering sound. Next thing I knew, I was in frigid water. I swam back to the surface and started trying to pull myself out of the water but my paws kept slipping on the ice. I started yelping and barking as loud as I could hoping that maybe someone would hear me and come to help. My movements began to slow as my body slowly froze in the water. As my strength finally ran out I slid beneath the surface of the water.

"Mama, save me," I mouthed as I slipped into unconsciousness.