

Every time my heart beats, I hear five more growls. I am outnumbered and I cannot breathe. I look around at the wolves. They escort death to my side. Every beat, every step brings me closer to my doom. Every second wasted not doing anything could cost me my life. I watch them approach, paralyzed. I have to do something. But, in reality, there is nothing I can do. The fence is lowering into the ground at an alarmingly slow pace, making every second that much more dreadful. But is this reality? Could I be dreaming? Are those just large dogs? Did they lie and tell me they were wolves to make me more afraid? Would that make a difference? Is fear taking over my brain? Will I see tomorrow?

"They haven't been fed," says O'Brien from behind me, "in over a week. A wolf dies of starvation after about fourteen days, and it has been twelve since the last time they smelled meat. You, my boy, are fresh meat. Juicy, fearful meat. Defenseless meat. A perfect meal, served on a silver platter."

Which isn't far from the truth, either. The polished table on which I'm being restrained is shiny and cold to the touch, as I will be soon.

"Please, I beg for your mercy. You can't do this to me, you can't! Let me defend myself! Give me something to fight with. Be it my fists if that's all I get, but don't just leave me here! Give me a fighting chance!"

"But then you will not learn. If you wish to live, you know what you must do. Farewell."

I do want to live, but I can't do what he's asking of me. She raised me. I can't wish the wolves upon her. I close my eyes and imagine her gentle voice being swallowed up by the deep. I would never hear her lullaby again. The gentle hands that once caressed my cheek would never hold me again. When I cried, she helped me see out of the darkness. When she cried, her face would glisten. I would never again see that one silver tear streak down her freckled cheek. I can see her long, auburn hair lying limp on the ground and it makes me sick. My mother is everything. She is all I have left.

"You know I cannot do it."

"Then it has been settled."

The fence lowers at a much faster pace. The top of the metal wire is almost low enough to jump over. The wolves stand and become rabid. Lunch is on the other side,

their meal is on the other side, it's living is on the other side. But they have no control over whether they get to it faster or not. It's infuriating. They claw and howl, but their actions do nothing. They want control. They are desperate. Their desire is driving them mad. My insides tighten as death comes nearer. I have no control, and I think that's the point. Torture to the point of succumbing. They just want me to suffer. There's no lesson here, only a cruel death. I am torn between two evils, but if I don't make up my mind soon, I will be torn between sets of teeth.

Save my mother, or save myself?

The fence lowers to where one of the wolves manages to jump over. I let out a shriek. My pitch cuts through the air like a blade and echoes around me. My palms bang against the metal. My legs kick and thrash like an angry child. I can't control it. The panic takes over my mind and body. I am losing myself. All I see is death and teeth. I need to avoid it at all costs. No other thought exists. My will has been handed to the wolves to make their own. My head is throbbing. My heart is pulsing, bursting with adrenaline. My death is coming.

"O'Brien, wait... take my mother..."

I whisper to myself as my consciousness fades. I cannot think. I am numb, every cell in my being fried. I could have saved myself, but I didn't. It is over. I chose this for myself. I am the dead.

Somewhere far away, I hear something whizz through the air, followed by a soft cry and a thud. I hear the echo of O'Brien say, "You let one out. Mistakes like that are not tolerated. She could have died."

"Forgive me, Comrade. It will not happen again."

"Correct. It won't." A heavy door slams.

Then my consciousness drifts away.