

The Wolf who couldn't howl

By : Annie H.

Shard was just a normal wolf, who wished for an extraordinary life. Her personality was a sign, her mother had said, that she was going to have an extraordinary life, just as she wished. But her life was already extraordinary, and she didn't even know it.

I opened my eyes for the time, and a blazing light struck me straight in the face. I wanted to close them again. "Hello, little one," the face of a bigger wolf appeared right in front of my eyes, and it was a relief, for they'd blocked the light.

I was about to jump back and growl, like my instinct said, but I stopped myself. She smelled like milk, so I immediately recognized her as my mother. I started snuggling close to her fur to get warm, and I felt her warm gaze as I started to close my eyes to nap again.

I thought that it was normal, only having mom and me inside the nest. But I was wrong. It took me a while to find out that I was an only child. Other wolves had littermates, but I didn't. Why, I'm not sure, but my mother was sulking when she thought I was napping.

Also, I heard a conversation outside the den about my mother and how her other two pups died of weakness. Now that I knew this, I sniffed around the nest, and I found 2 stale scents. They must have died a few minutes after they were born.

With new knowledge, I knew what I had to do. I nosed my mother, and she looked at me questioningly, asking me what I needed without words. I just whispered, "It's ok, Mother. I'll be right here for you if you're sad." She smiled, and responded, "I know you will."

And that's what I did. Whenever she was sad, I would distract her in some way. In the beginning, it really worked, but after weeks, it got old. With that done, I had one more idea to make her happy : howl.

The next day, when Mother went out to eat, I would practice howling quietly. When I tried, it came out as a wheeze, but that's what I thought it was supposed to sound like. When I thought I was ready, I sat in the nest and waited for my mom to come in.

When she did, I howled. Her eyes went from wonder to horror to sadness. I guess I failed. She walked woefully into the nest and curled up, her eyes droopy with sadness. She used her tail to sweep me closer to her.

"Shard," she whispered, "I should call you Shard, for you are a shard of a true wolf." I was hurt by her words.

This went on for, I don't know, weeks? Her sadness was contagious, and my cheerful demeanor soon matched hers. When I'd stopped drinking her milk, I made a decision. I would escape, learn to howl, then come back.

So one day, when everyone was fast asleep, I ran as fast as I could to the surrounding forest. I hid under a bush with gray moss draping over the edges. A few minutes later, I heard paw steps and my mother calling my name. "Shard! Shard!" Even though the sound of her heartbroken calling tore into my heart, I resisted.

Then, I slipped and fell into what seemed to be a network of tunnels. For hours, I explored them. After I stepped into the last tunnel, I saw a light. Drawn to it, I ran toward it, and skidded to a stop. It was a huge cave with glowing stalactites hanging off the ceiling.

A glowing, transparent wolf sat on a throne in the back of the cave. I decided to speak first. "I left my pack to learn to howl, then return." The wolf looked at me, then spoke, "The world isn't safe for a pup." "I want to make my mother happy," I responded.

"You already did."

"I made her sad."

"Really?"

"Yes."

The wolf thought for a moment. "You have a throat disorder that will prevent you from howling forever." I gasped in shock. Why did I leave, then? What's my purpose now? "Go back to your mother and tell her that you're unique and that you're stuck that way. That's your only chance."

I looked away. "How can I make my mother happy, then?" I asked her. "She has to accept it herself." The wolf replied. Dazed with what just happened, I wandered through the tunnels then out. "Tell her that Star Lupus

told you!” I heard her call. I hesitated a bit. Star Lupus! One of the many gods that the wolves worshipped!

When I returned to my pack’s home, my mother ran toward me with relief and love shining in her eyes. A wave of realization washed over me as she stooped to cover me with loving licks. “Why did you leave me? I was worried sick!” she exclaimed between licks. “Star Lupus told me that I was unique and that I’m stuck with my throat disorder.” I replied.

“Let’s talk in the nest.” She said, guiding me to the den with her tail. The other pack members were staring at me in awe and wonder. “I met Star Lupus in a network of tunnels and she told me that I was unique and that I had a throat disorder.” I told her once we were inside the den.

“I know,” she replied. “What? How?” I spluttered. “I have one, too.” I widened my eyes in astonishment. “I was hoping you wouldn’t inherit it.” She looked away. “It’s okay!” I said cheerfully, and snuggled against her.

The next years were amazing, and I had a fulfilling life. When I joined my mother in the Star Heaven, that’s when I knew : everyone is unique ; you just have to embrace yourself and accept it.