

Howl's Beckoning

Part one



Grade ~~4~~ 5
Fiction ✓
Poetry _____
Nonfiction _____

Prologue

The moon hung low in the starry sky as the Alpha, Bark, padded across the grass to the stepping stones. His pure black pelt was wet, for it had been raining since morning. It was as if nature was mourning for all that was lost. *The battle nearly destroyed the entire grey wolf pack.* Gingerly, he placed his paw down on one very gently as to not flip the stones. Urgently, he looked around. *The arctic wolves should be here by now. They wouldn't be that weak to abandon our meeting after the battle.* He thought as he stared into the murky blackness.

Eventually, the leader of the arctic wolves decided to reveal himself by releasing a deep, low, long howl that tore through the sky. "I assumed you'd come." Bark rumbled while kicking a pile of carrion that had been left on the bank. "I'm not a coward, and you know it." the wolf's voice echoed through the quarry, making Bark's ears prick. "You always were so defensive, Snow," the alpha said, narrowing his green eyes, "learn to loosen up and you'd be a better pack leader."

There was a harsh growling. "How dare you tell me how to lead! My pack is a forest's worth of might! We ar--"

Suddenly, there was a piercing howl that only increased the tension in the forest, which was so thick you could cut it with a claw. "Shut up, River! Remember, you aren't supposed to be here!" barked Snow as he whirled around and bared his fangs.

“Why did you bring more wolves?” Bark growled. “That wasn’t part of the—” he was cut off as half of Snow’s pack leaped the span of the river and surrounded Bark.

“Truces are made only when two sides respect them!” Snow barked. “Which I never did. So, therefore, I could bring as many wolves as I want.”

The air was filled with menacing howls as Snow bit Bark on the scruff. Snow was quick and cunning, so Bark had no time to react. “Prepare to drown, *Alpha*.” Snow thrust his head back, and tossed Bark into the churning black water. None of the wolves knew, but there was a traitor in the arctic wolves. She was called Blossom, daughter of Scratch and Hope, the two former pack leaders of the packs. And not even she knew that she had the fate of the entire three packs on her shoulders.

Chapter 1

Cherry Blossoms, Spring Clovers, and Forests of Cedar

Blossom sniffed the air. *No deer here. Prey has been scarce ever since... she shuddered. The murder of Bark. I hope that no wolf knows about my betrayal. I could be useful...* Blossom realized, *so I could be a useful tool to Snow if he ever decides to pin someone for the blame. I'd be able to recite the entire story, from when the truce was made to when the gray wolf pack went into pandemonium. At least the dog-wolves aren't in this conflict.*

"Cedar!" a familiar wolf's voice reached Blossom's ears. "Wait up!" Spring Clover, or Clover, as the pack called her, bounded through the lush ferns, grass, and heather that grew in the forested scrubland that Blossom was hunting in.

Moments later, Forest of Cedar crashed through the trees. "Owww...." he groaned, landing hard on the rocks. "My legs!"

"Oh, come on, Cedar! You've had a lot worse than this." Blossom said, with a wolfish grin. Then, Blossom heard a small rustle in the nearby fern bushes. A scent reached her nose. *Fox!* She whipped her tail against Cedar's muzzle. Seconds later, she did the same to Clover. "Shut up, you two! I scent fox!" Blossom whispered. "We'll trap it against those rocks. I'll make the killing bite."

The wolves slunk, their coats grey and black against the green ferns. "This way!" Blossom said softly. *The fox is on the move... I hope we reach it in time.*

"Arooooooo!" Cedar howled. The fox looked startled, but it ran to the rocky outcrop. "Don't let it scale the sides! It'll be

impossible to catch on it's own territory, and chances are, there are more foxes. We'd never be able to fight more than two, so get it!" Clover shouted.

The wolves had no need for the sudden warning, for Cedar had the fox's neck in his jaws. With a loud *crunch*, he killed the wolf.

"Cedar!" Blossom barked playfully. "I said that *I'd* do the killing bite!" Blossom leaped towards Cedar. Cedar slapped her away lightly. Blossom reared back and tripped Cedar. Cedar fell down with a thud. "Augh!" he moaned. "You've killed me!"

"Stop fighting, you rambunctious wolves, by the time we get back, the fox is gonna be cold!" Clover joked.

By the time they got back to camp, the fox was cold. The camp was a hollow in the woods. The hollow had fortified brambles and nettles around the top, and a floor covered in springy moss. The dens were caves hollowed out in the sides of the walls. There were claw scores across the top of each cave. One mark for the cub cave, two for the youngling's den, three for the hunter wolves and the fighters, four for the next-to-be, and five for the alpha and healer.

The prey piles were by the dens. There was usually a rabbit, few mice, and a fox on the youngling den, and the same amount on the healer's den, the leader's den, the next-to-be's den, and the cub cave. On the fighter's and hunter's prey piles, there was a deer, a ton of rabbits, and a mouse for each wolf.

“Let’s put the fox on the youngling prey pile. We can grab something later. For now we can check in on Stream.” Cedar said.

Stream was Bark’s son, and also was the new Alpha. He had inherited his judgement and fairness from his father, and his ambition and battle skills from his mother. However, he had a love for battle, and his bloodlust was unquenchable. This made him a dangerous opponent and a fearless leader, but he didn’t lead his pack into battles unless it was absolutely necessary for his pack’s welfare.

“Hey, you’re back!” shouted Red, a russet colored wolf with green eyes. “Just in time for battle training!”

Tensions had been high since the death of Bark, and the growing conflict between the packs was getting really bad. “Didn’t we just do that yesterday, though?” yapped Leaves of Maple, a small male youngling. “Let’s hunt or something!”

“Yeah!” said Little Alder, a she-wolf. “That would be much more enjoyable.”

“Alder and Maple will hunt with Night and Splash, then.” Stream said, emerging from his cave. “If you would be so bold.”

Black night and High Splash were the strictest wolves in the pack. They put up with no nonsense, and loved seeing the younglings fail at impossible tasks.

“Battle training!” said Alder and Maple in unison.

“Then that’s settled. Alder and Maple will hunt with me and...” Stream looked around at the wolves. “Me and Claw.”

The two younglings' jaws were hitting the moss as Snaggle Claw, the meanest wolf in the pack, smirked. "Try hard, little ones. I won't let you return until you master the backflip swipe."

"Oh, you won't have to master that until you're a fighter or hunter. Let's take it easy, we'll have you practice it when you're in your fourth moon of training."

Chapter 2

Cedar screws up

"Cedar! We are going to go to the prairie rose field in a few minutes. If you aren't coming, we can arrange a time slot for patrol with Claw!" Silver Moon barked jokingly. "Come on already!"

Cedar scrambled past the prey pile and promptly slipped in a puddle of frog bile. "Deer dung!" he cursed. "Why am I such a screw up?" he muttered.

Clover nudged him. "Probably because you have half a brain!"

"Oh, you'll pay for that!" laughed Cedar. He flung himself at Clover, but Clover dodged, so Cedar hit his muzzle on the youngling cave. "Owww..." he grumbled.

At that moment, Blossom walked out of her den. "Time to go!" she said brightly.

After a long walk to the prairie fields, Cedar and Clover decided to go to the clawrock to catch some voles. Blossom and Moon took the far left side of the field to hunt for marmots. *Eww... Marmots. They taste like a bunch of rats.* “My my, Cedar! You’ve gotten slower since the last time we spied over the border.” A unmistakable voice echoed through the boulders and outcrops surrounding the field. It was Snow, the arctic wolf Alpha. *What does he want? Didn’t he terrorize the forest and tundra alike enough?*

Snow looked malicious as he waltzed over the boundary. Soon after, Clover and Cedar were at their side. “The forest looks so prey-poor. Too bad *Bark* isn’t here to save you.” Snow’s voice dripped with false sympathy and scorn. “I’ve left a bit of a surprise for you to deal with at your precious camp. When you lose, remember *one thing*. The arctic wolves are nimbler, smarter, and stronger. My pack *never* surrenders.”

He looked over his shoulder. “Wolves, attack!”

And suddenly, all four of them were overtaken by a white and cream wave of whirling claws, snapping teeth, and fury edging the white wolves’ hearts.

Chapter 3

Pale Star

The first thing Blossom remembered after the ambush was sitting in a warm, soft, moss nest. The second thing was the odds they had been up against. *Those snake-hearts knew what they were doing. Why else would they bring so many wolves?* It had been a fight that convinced the dog-wolves that the arctic wolves were cruel and untrustworthy.

She remembered the opposition. Blossom shivered as she thought about how it had been at least ten to one in a fight for their lives. Why would they position this ambush so close to...

Suddenly, a sharp yap and a howl rose from the sky. "My leg! Help! It's going to fall off!" Cedar complained.

"Be quiet!" snapped Jay's Talon, an irritable hunter. "Crimson Sunrise should be with you soon."

Crimson Sunrise was the healer. Talon was her brother, and she had two more littermates. They were Blue Moon, and Crooked Pine.

Sunrise ran through the ferns to them. "Talon! Release them at *once!*" the nimble she-wolf screamed. "You'll make his pain worse!"

For the first time, Blossom looked at Cedar's leg. She had to stop herself from vomiting as she gazed upon the ragged fur.

It had looked like someone took the paw in their jaws and wrenched it so it was backwards, completely breaking the leg in the process. The rest of the leg had bloody scars and deformed twists and turns coursing the leg.

There were hushed conversations in the corner. Blossom could make out the words "broken", "outcast", "never be a hunter," and "might not live". She glanced at Cedar. He was shaking badly. His legs were twitching abnormally, and his face was wearing a expression of pure terror.

"I might die." Cedar said, his voice no smaller than a whisper. "You realise I might never see you again."

Nobody knew about Blossom and Cedar's secret love. They crept into the most abandoned parts of their territory and nuzzled each other until the morning broke. The love was forbidden and nobody within the Packs would accept them if their secret was discovered.

Besides, it would never work out. Blossom pondered the Honor Code of the packs. *The rule that a wolf cannot mate until they are both in the same role is stupid. That's prevented so many pups from joining our pack.*

Blossom was jarred from her thoughts by a sharp, hot, pain in her left leg. Some younglings, *probably Alder and Maple*, had stuck a rock point on her leg. She yipped. "Ouch, that really hurt!" Blossom bared her fangs and growled at the younglings.

A few days later, it was confirmed that Cedar had a twisted leg and a broken paw. He was expected to recover in the next five moons, though Sunrise thought he would have to become a elder early. Russet Pelt and Spring Tulip had been made hunters and fighters, so no more of them in the youngling den. Blossom's

injuries were minor, consisting of a scratch down her leg and a few bites.

“Let all wolves gather underneath the leader cave for a pack meeting!” Stream barked.

At once, all the wolves formed a large, grey, clump.

“The arctic wolves have become tougher. We must meet this change with strength of our own. So, border patrols will be speeded up. At least three fighters will remain in the camp at all times. The production of fighters will be boosted, and the arctic wolves will be met with harsh punishment if they cross the borders.

“In addition, I have good news.” Stream looked around and laid his eyes directly on Blossom. Blossom shall be made a hunter today!”

Blossom gasped and looked around in shock. “Stream, I—”

But Blossom’s voice was drowned out by the cheering.

“Blossom! Blossom! Blossom!”

“Her new name shall be not Cherry Blossom, but Pale Star. Star shall be accepted into the camp with the sacred ritual.” Stream looked at me. “Star must trek to the Starry Stones and dream with her ancestors.”

Star was dumbfounded as she gazed upon Cedar, who was sitting on some moss in the corner. He was wearing a mask of malice as he walked into the healer’s den.

Chapter 4

Comet gets a fish

Star had walked all the way to the Starry Stones. *I wonder if Pack of Stars will be happy.* Star rested her head on the stones and was immediately propelled into a dark, swirling mess. Star woke up in a large field. There were stars all around her, stars forming into wolves.

A familiar wolf walked forward. It was Burnt Pine, Cedar's father. Pine dipped his head. "Welcome, Star, to the Place of Stars. I will lead you to the place that you seek.

Pine and Star walked a long time, but finally made it to a large cave with three wolves in it. Blue Ice, Frosty Willow, and Strong Gale, Star's parents and littermate, were standing with a moose. "Want some?" Ice asked.

"Is that even allowed?" Blossom asked. "I've heard of wolves that get cursed or killed by eating the food."

Ice and Willow looked at each other and shrugged. "I believe that you'll be fine as long as you don't bring any back to the waking world." Willow assumed.

Gale was tucked in between a rock and some moss, snoring softly and twitching like a newborn pup. *Well, then again, she was one...*

"We should introduce her to the other wolves taking the trial." Willow said. "Cmon, I'll lead you there."

Star and Willow walked through green, lush ferns and prickly brambles with long claws that ripped at her fur and tore

at Star's muzzle as she trekked through the forested plains. Eventually, they reached a rocky cliff with outcroppings that went all the way down. There was a path that looked slippery and unstable, but there was lots of cracks and loose pebbles that would make for good claw holds.

Once the duo had scaled down the cliff, Star began to pick out other wolves. Some had black pelts, some brown, and some grey. Willow greeted them. "I have found another wolf for you to train with. Her name is--"

A white wolf with yellow stripes had interrupted Willow. "She looks like a arctic wolf!" he said.

A small silver wolf had come forward, probably to inspect the newcomer. "She looks tough!"

Willow rolled his eyes. "Her name is *Star*. She just became a hunter yesterday, so be easy on her." He gestured to the striped wolf and the silver wolf. "This is Buzzing Bee," the wolf called Bee nodded, "and Shallow Brook." Brook nodded too.

Three more wolves walked up. They murmured some snide comments, then laughed and padded away.

"Those are Running Horse, Half Moon, and Blue Nose. They aren't very kind to newcomers. They've been here for a quarter moon." Brook whispered. "I wouldn't push them if I were you."

Just then, Star heard a familiar voice from behind them. It was Clover!

"Clover!" Star howled. "I missed you!"

Clover ran towards Star. "I'm not clover anymore, my name is Flaming Comet now."

The night was cold as Star, Brook, and Comet talked with the other wolves. Horse, Moon, and Blue were sarcastic and acerbic brats. Horse was the most mordant of the three, Moon was the most futile, and Blue the most derogatory.

"Oh, don't let me anywhere near *Comet!* She'll give me a *burn!*" Horse said with fake shock.

"Star will blind me!" Moon said in anguish.

"And Brook will drown me!" Blue moaned.

"Shut up, you steaming piles of mouse dung, and do something productive!" Bee snapped, entering the cave with a enormous crow so large, that it's wing was dragging against the ground when Bee held his head up.

Once Horse, Blue, and Moon had left, Bee said, "Let's split this three ways. We can finish the rest tomorrow."

The three wolves had eaten their share and were about to head out when a howl was heard from outside the cave.

"*Bee happy!*" Horse barked. "*Bee smart! Bee sophisticated!*" Bee stuck his head out of the cave. "Don't *Bee* mindless idiots!"

After the encounter with Horse, Comet and Star decided to hunt by the river. "We'll look for voles." Comet had offered. The

walk was short and calm as they padded to the shore. Comet stuck her paw in and shook it around.

“Ahah! A *fish!*” Comet pulled her paw out to reveal a large trout. “Good eating tonight.”

Star wrinkled up her nose. “Who likes trout? Trout tastes almost as bad at marmots and rats!”

Comet clearly disagreed, and sank her teeth into the fish. “Yummy!” she said. “Tastes like rabbits and mice and—”

“Fine, fine! I’ll try this thing you call trout!” Star joked. She poked at the fish with her muzzle. Star hesitantly took a bite, and immediately gagged. She regretted it. The taste was revolting, and the smell was even worse. She had to run to the river and vomit, it tasted so repulsive.

“Ugh, fish taste awful!” Star said. “Who could ever like fish?” Star began to walk back to the cave when Comet shouted, “Me!”

Chapter 5 The Trial Begins

Star awoke the next day to a very excited Willow. “It’s time for the Trial!” He had barked, getting everyone up and in a disgruntled mood. (Except Horse, Moon, and Blue, who were prepared to terrorize their peers.)

“Come on, down the hill! Down the hill!” Willow gestured. “Down the hill!” The wolves were standing atop a hill, looking down on the lush landscape. To the east there were marshes

dotted with leafy green trees, much of an improvement from the harsh snowfall they were facing back home. In the west, there were rivers circling a rocky plain.

North held large boulders and rocky outcrops, much like the one Star was ambushed on. South's glories consisted of a gargantuan forest with birds chirping and deer prancing. Star licked her lips. "Good eating in that forest over there."

"You'd think so, but there's lots of adders and even a cobra in there." Willow warned. "The best hunting is probably in those rocks." He pointed with his tail. "There are so many fish and deer over there that most wolves fought over that territory when it wasn't used for training."

Willow turned around and spoke to the wolves. "That said, the rules of the trial are that you must stay in the borders, you must not harm one another, and you must stay in a rock circle with only yourself on the last day of the week, and will not be able to leave it to complete the trial."

Brook raised her muzzle, and asked, "What happens if we don't complete the trial?"

Willow laughed. "Easy, you stay a youngling for the rest of time." Horse looked paranoid. "I'm gonna fail..." she mumbled.

Down the hill the septat went, moving to the separate places they saw fit. Blue dragged Horse and Moon over to the forest, *No luck for them*, and Bee, Brook, and Comet to the rocky plain.

The trial wasn't a trial as much as it was just a fun jamboree to talk and laugh. Brook caught a deer every single time she hunted, and Comet a dormouse. Bee and Star caught twin hares.

As far as they could tell, Blue had made a dead wrong choice bringing her gang into the woods. They had figured either a snake had bit them, or they had eaten a poisoned deer, or *something*, because they hadn't seen anything of them since they had started.

On the third day, a bear was stupid enough to lumber into their territory. "Rah ba daa!" it had yelled on approach. A bear against four wolves? That would almost be guaranteed victory! Until they saw the size of the bear. It's shoulders were as broad as a wolf, it was as long as a small oak, and its meaty paws looked like lily pads.

Even if the bear might be dumb, it was big. But the good news was, the bear was dumb.

They had quickly made a plan to sabotage the bear from the front, and Star would leap on its back to claw it with no mercy.

"Rawr!" the bear ripped through the protective barrier to their camp and began to shred up the dens. "Now!" Bee leaped out from a bush and sliced his claws down the bear's flank.

The bear groaned in pain. Star waited until the signal... "Rhoop!" Bee yelled. *Time to jump...* Star thought.

Star jumped and landed square on the bear's broad back. She clawed, stratched, attacked, and did everything she could to

prevent the bear from breaking through the camp all the way. One vicious claw to the bear's side made it decide to run.

"Take that, smelly, stinky, unsophisticated bear!" Bee taunted as the stupid animal lumbered away. "And I wouldn't even *think* about coming back after the beating we gave you!"

A few days later, Star had made her rock circle to sit in by a large rabbit warren. Plopping down in it, she began to poke at the rabbit she had brought for the night. Comet had made her circle about a tree-length away, Bee's by the river, and Brook near the boulder.

"Brook! How are you over there? What if the river floods? What if another bear comes? What if—" Bee was interrupted by Brook's bark. "Stop worrying about me."

Star meditated for most of the day. Then she exercised, after that came talking with the others, and finally nightfall.