

Sleep, my son. Let the world rest a while from your interrogating blue eyes. Your dappled coat rises and falls with your breathing, occasionally I hear one of your paws scratch the ground in your sleep, big, heavy paws on thick, short legs. One day you will grow into your own footprints. One day those giants paws will be anything but ridiculous, but thus far they have only made you clumsier. You trip over your own feet in gracelessness that cannot answer for the peak your speed and agility will one day reach. But until that fateful day when you grow into yourself, you will chase your small rabbits and your hedgehogs even in those restless dreams which overcome you each night. Until then your coat will stay freckled so that the sun and shadows themselves can protect you where your needle-claws and feeble screams fail.

For the time your gargling and mews can scarcely worry the birds, but one day your voice will make the mountains tremble. Until then, I will lend you mine. I will send fear into the core of the paths you walk so that you may walk them without care.

Your tiny voice strikes in me a chord I did not know existed. I do not understand it, but it is powerful nonetheless. More powerful than the frenzied pain of hunger: I would starve for you. More powerful than the mind-numbing grip of fear: I would face man and all his hells for you. It drowns my pains and pleasures alike, this strumming chord, running the length of my body, giving me strength the likes of which I have never possessed. The warmth of the sun against my fur was once my greatest pleasure, the voice of man my deepest fear, but it pales now. Your mere existence is my greatest strength and weakness, my greatest want. What have I left in this world but the growl in your breathing while you sleep? What have I but the feel of your needle-claws in my calloused flesh or the color of your murky blue eyes?

Every day I have heard more strength in that struggling voice of yours. Just today those needle-claws first drew a drop of my blood where once they could scarcely comb my fur. You are getting stronger, stepping into what you are day by day. I have seen it with the ducks and deer and rabbits. I know how small turns to large, awkward to graceful, weak to strong. I feel that I can hear the echoes of the voice you will one day have when you sleep at night. Maybe it is the echo of your dreams I hear.

You do not love me, my beautiful, precious killer. You will watch the world while I watch you, you will crave a world where I cannot follow. You will leave me for it. And as I long ago forgot the feel and smell and strength of my mother, so too will you lose memory of me. Your scream will rip apart the nights, your fangs will steal the life of hundreds. Mothers, children, you will not care. Their terror will be nothing to you. It must be nothing to you. It is a difficult world that offers itself at your feet. You cannot simply step into the monarchy our proud race is due. We rule in blood, drenched in blood. You must learn to tear out the fangs and claws in your way. The defenses of the world are limited obstacles that you can and will overcome. I see you grow closer every day to understanding the ugly truths of this world you so adamantly love.

And yet I am afraid. I see those fragile, fragile veins pumping blood into your precious heart. No different from the deer, just as necessary, just as easily ripped open. So simple to lose you to one of those claws or fangs, so easy for it to rip you open as I have ripped open the children of more deer than I care to count. The muscles have not yet

looped around them like fluid stone, your own claws are not yet strong enough to stop them. And yet you are careless. Because of me you think we can never die, that we are to live forever, chosen somehow.

Once I threw a rabbit at your feet, one of the legs damaged. The creature grunted and lashed out, writhing. You knew it for what it was immediately and you came up to it slowly. You watched it try to run and you examined the damaged leg with learning eyes. But you thought too long and the creature's one good leg struck you hard. Anger taught you quickly. Caution to the wind you attacked it. It was tiny claws against tiny claws, and little teeth against little teeth until you saw it, that which the rabbits will never see. I saw your eyes widen in understanding. I watched as you jerked your head to reach them, the throbbing arteries under the rabbit's neck. It is this that separates you, this that shows that even when matched against your equal in strength you alone can see victory. Rabbits know how to run, how to struggle, but killing is beyond the capacity of their fearful eyes. It is a secret only our kind can understand.

There are many things in this world I have yet to understand. There are many things I learn every day, even as I watch you grow. In some odd way, you teach me about this world things I never would have understood alone. Some things I wish I had never come to understand at all. I have always known the cruelty of this world, have always known that a callous heart is as necessary as callous skin. We must be as cold as we are strong to survive. This truth was all I knew before your weakness, before your need for my protection. But now I am learning an empathy that is deadly to me. You will be my undoing, I can feel it. But if it means your survival, my son, I welcome that fate readily.