



FOX TALES

THE SWIFT-PAWED
MESSENGER

Writing Samples from FoxTales: The Swift-Pawed Messenger

Born Before the Dawn

The white-grass gale whistled through the vast prairie. Sheets of snow hovered over the grassland like bitter cold clouds. Staggering against it was the silhouette of a frail ochavix guiding her newborn kit to shelter. Shielding the delicate cub with her body, she gently wrapped him in her tails. They had been born early—far too early—and the sweet warmth of pink-grass tarried. He was the last of five and his only hope rested in the tenacity of his starving mother, that lonesome vixen gritting her teeth against the blizzard, silently pleading to find anything—anyone—that might spare them.

The baby tod's father was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps he could have helped when victuals inevitably grew scarce, or when her den snowed in, leaving them with no place to huddle and nowhere to dig. He did not attend the kit's birth, nor was he present when she announced she was to become a queen. No one knew who he was. The vixen—a dark hazel pelted resident of RoseTribe named Hazel—she carried the evidence and the shame. She'd courted a decent tod who nearly proposed to her before he learned she was already expecting. The metaphorical firepouncer leapt from the brambles, igniting a great clatter throughout camp, and for the wolf-tail scandal she was exiled on the brink of brutal white-grass. Without a tribe or mate, Hazel endured the tempest with no company except her freezing kits. Born in the relentless cold into the bosom of a famished mother, five soon became four, then three, then...*one*.

When it seemed the ochavix could not fare worse, she heard a most haunting melody, a howl that bid trembling among every creature of the prairie. She sprang to her toes, maw tense and back arched, ears pricked, frantically scanning her horizons. The gust calmed, then she smelt it and saw its silhouette—the mighty prowler of the red sun mountains in the flesh—a frostwolf. Crushing the brittle white blanket with each heavy pace, it seemed the howler was alone. Relief washed over the vixen. The wolf howled toward the stars once more before coiling its burly frame onto the glossy white beneath.

Now spared the terror of its gaze, a strange curiosity pricked the vixen. Its scent resembled that of a she-wolf, yet something was amiss. She puzzled further as the flash of a shooting star revealed a glimpse of the beast's pelt—it was not snow white or ice blue or any of the usual frosted grays; instead it was a brand of lavender. She approached the wolf, cautiously advancing so long as no frightening gestures were returned. As she snuck closer she smelt the she-wolf's fragrance more crisply, as if to invite her forward. Surely the

timid vixen was afraid of the beast, yet she was urged not to fear. Soon the ochavix found herself rubbing her nose against the stranger's lavender pelt. It was softer than the freshest moss, more ethereal than the first flurries of jewel-moon. Then she lay herself and the kit on the soft belly, its rhythmic ebbs and flows soothing like the gentle tide of the hot springs. The exhausted vixen nearly passed out.

"Are you so desperate as to beg from one of us?"

"Eep!" Bliss shattering in an instant, Hazel sprang to her toes. While rather delicate for a wolf, to the scrawny fox her voice roared like a waterfall. Before the hazel vixen could flee, the she-howler announced, "There is no need to fear." Hazel slowly glanced behind her, her caramel eyes staring wide. "Your plea has been answered," the frostwolf continued, "I am Lydia. While I may appear as a savage brute of the mountains, I am actually a fairy, a messenger of the nymphs. I bring you word from the celestial island."

The ochavix cocked her head and pricked her chestnut-tipped ears. "What is it?" she asked meekly, to which the frosthowler answered,

"The swift paws who carry the message of hope will receive a vast inheritance."

"But who is this for?" she inquired, "What is the message?" Lydia answered, "It will be revealed when the time is right. And this word I have delivered will fill your kit with hope. Even now, that hope echoes in the snow. Can you hear?"

Again the vixen cocked her slender face. She detected a faint patter, a scurrying beneath the glistening white. Her hunting instinct piqued. She felt the path of the auroras vibrate through her ears and whiskers. Sharpening her gaze and aligning herself with the sun's path at her back, she waited until the minuscule footsteps resonated with the auroras' vibrations...then she leapt and plunged her nose six paws into the snow. She climbed to the surface, clutching in her maw a squirming bloated rat. "Eat and rest a while," implored Lydia, "Your journey will end soon." That night Hazel would eat a decent meal. Then she would sprawl upon the sizable howler and pin the cub against her belly to ensure the same for him.