**Bunwolf (Working Title)**

*By Adept Omega*

The rabbit looked in the mirror, and saw a wolf. Convincing her older sister to do the braids had been the hard part; the grey fur had only required a few handfuls of ash from the fireplace. Mom and dad would be unhappy later, but that was in the abstract future. For now, she was the bad guy, the big bad wolf, the hunter, the loner and star seeker, the meat-eater. She threw her head back for a howl, red braids slapping her back, and then laughed at herself.

Isobelle smiled, her eyes half-lid, unconcerned for the chaos she was encouraging. The older sibling craned her head to peek into the living room, then turned her attention back to Vera. “I think they’re ready,” she said. “Bring me back a rabbit pelt.”

Vera flashed a grin up at Isobelle. Her toy bow taut, she crouched low to the ground and tried to imagine the night sky above her. The grass under her feet. The power in every fiber of her being. The coat rack became a tree, and she peeked out from behind the overalls, her eyes on the dark entrance of the pillow fortress. If she were a real wolf, of course, she would hear the beating of her quarry’s hearts, the sound of them huddled in darkness. Her eyes darted to the other end of the room, searching for her packmate.

Markus was anything but the quiet hunter Vera fancied herself to be. Instead the rabbit, who in contrast to Vera’s painstaking imitation of wolf fur had thrown himself into the ashes, lurched with a hunched-over gait and growled at the warren. She was Moonsong, he was Bloodfang. They were going to have their siblings for a midnight snack.

Vera wasn’t exactly thrilled to be on the same team, but it was a small price to pay. She tried to think of Markus as lame cub of the pack, his fate entrusted to her by their wise leader. Even an idiot was still family, and the blood bond of a pact was absolute. No families of twenty kids, packed into dirt rooms to while away their existences never seeing stars or feeling the comfort of a campfire on a cold night. In a pack, she’d know Markus’ darkest secret, his favorite food. She’d be willing to lay down her life for him. Even this slobbering idiot, painting a target on himself.

Her thoughts were derailed when a spear cut through the leaves beside her. Her ear flared with pain, but she hissed through her teeth and dashed for the ottoman. Markus released a howl, and leapt over the shoe rack, right into the open. She barked at him, then gestured wildly for him to get in cover, but not before Jacob pushed the lid off of the pillow-warren and speared him. That only enraged Bloodfang, who grunted, shouted, “Hey!” and charged straight at the pillow fort, snarling in what Vera imagined to only be a half-imagined rage.

Every stratagem went out the window. Vera leapt onto the Ottoman and fired at Jacob; she winced as it hit the family portrait behind him. She ignored the damage, running to avoid another spear. The right wall of the warren collapsed. “You’re dead!” Markus shouted authoritatively as he clawed one of the warren defenders. Six defenders countered with spears, keeping him at arms length. “You’re dead!”

Idiot brother. Vera grabbed a spear and threw it at one of her packmate’s assailants. Percy, bless him, twirled dramatically and fell like a sack of meat, making choking sounds.

The battle was hopeless. Five bunnies were up against the wolf who had barreled through the wall, a wolf who was very flagrantly ignoring the two-hit rule (ears don’t count, Vera reassured herself), and the rational thing to do would be to flee, lick her wounds, let the bunnies think they had won defending their little dirt prison, and then bring a pack down on them in the dead of night.

It would be, but her character, Moonsong, would never leave a packmate behind. It was not the wolven *way*.

She brandished her toy dagger and charged the fort. It was an inevitable, glorious death. If the boys had been keeping track of their hits – they weren’t – she would have felled three of them. The third hit (Vera reminded herself, ears don’t count) brought Moonsong to her knees. “Nooo!” she growls. “Bloodfang! Run! Tell the pack…!”

“You’re dead,” said Nathaniel. He poked her with the spear.

“I’m dying,” Vera explained.

“Nu-uh, you’re dead,” he replied, giving her a few more stabs for emphasis.

Moonsong’s soliloquy was never meant to be. She took the last spear with a flourish, rolled over, and died with Bloodfang’s name on her lips. Squinting, she saw Percy open an eye and smile at her blood offering to the performing arts. By way of response, Vera let out another death choke, convulsed, and died again.

The hacksaw was perhaps excessive, but after her parents had padlocked the ground-level windows, she’d not been left with many options. They would be cross, but the knot in her stomach didn’t care anymore. The rabbit tried to ignore the nervous prickling under her fur as she pulled it back and forth, much too loud for her liking. Perhaps the rattling bone jewelry had been poorly advised too, but she felt better with it on. With any luck, the next iteration would be with bones from her own kills.

The padlock clattered to the ground. Vera stashed the evidence, threw a look over her shoulder, and threw open the window. She drank in the night air, and already her racing heart began to slow. Vera’s feet were already half out the window before she remembered to unsling her pack, which was so full to bursting that it would be impossible to fit through still attached to her. Her hands fumbled with the straps as soon as it was out, throwing the pack, bow, and makeshift quiver back into place.

She raced for the tree line, thankful that her warren was uncharacteristically close to the woods, uncharacteristically close to the predators and dangerous creatures of the night that Vera, already a night owl, had been told to fear. She pushed forward, putting as much distance between herself and the elaborate earthen tomb as she could. Much more so than any of the scents of the warren, it was the crisp scent of leaves and the touch of cool air that made Vera feel at home.

Once she was certain she was out of the range of prying eyes, the rabbit unslung her backpack and made to set up camp. There was a certain excitement to it, knowing that out here, she really was exposed, that life was not docile, predictable, and frustratingly safe inside four packed earth walls. She conjured a fire through the witchcraft of flint and steel, then laid down, pulling out a worn leather notebook from her bag. Her bow came off, never more than an arm’s reach away.

The thought that whatever encountered her probably had more to fear from her than her from them brought a grin to her face, and for a moment, she was living her fantasy, she was Moonsong. She flipped through the book – illustrations and pages of notes and unfinished stories – until she got to a half-finished page near the end. She sighed wistfully, uncorking an ink flask and preparing her pen, when something caught her eye.

Golden eyes shone back at her.