*Roseblood*.

Vylith’s eyes never left the straggling Ink’Ink as she slowly, every so slowly crept up behind the dead blacknettle bush. Bow still strung over shoulder, she paused to take a knee behind the tangled mass of thorns. It would be months yet before it bloomed, or she would never have stepped so close to its brambles. She called again.

*Roseblood, do you see him?*

She waited, one knee sinking into powdered snow and ash, growing impatient at her companion’s slow progress.

*I see him*, came the beast’s reply.

*Finally. What took you so long?*

A mental growl and an impression of paws sinking into a pit of ash two span deep were all Vylith received in response. She stifled a chuckle and unshouldered her bow, forced to hold it parallel to the ground as its length would not permit holding it upright from a crouched position. A simple, yet dependable length of light brown, it was beautiful in the way that all well-made simple things were. Vylith felt it represented her well. It had certainly served her well and would hopefully do so again today.

*Are you ready,* Vylith sent.

There was a pause before Roseblood’s reply came.

*…Yes.*

*Which form will you take?*

Another pause, briefer this time.

*Wind.*

Roseblood always wanted Wind for hunting. Vylith obliged her, feeling the boundaries of her mind waver, her thoughts and impressions melding with those of Roseblood completely. At the same time, she reached out through the dream to take hold of the Wind.

Two became one and then became two again. *They* werethe Wind. And the *Wind* was them.

Their eyes still locked on the Ink’Ink, which was scraping aside some ash from the ground with a despondent hoof, they began their dance.

From a hundred paces away, they stood, eyes alight with a sharp crimson glow, and fired a single arrow at the Ink’Ink. He, of course, felt the snap of the bowstring before the arrow had crossed even half the distance toward his heart, and leapt to the side, spinning in the air as he did so, intending to land facing the direction the arrow had come from.

At the same moment that they had loosed the arrow, however, they had pounced from the gray bleakness fifty paces from the animal and lunged for his neck at the exact spot his jugular would be when he landed. When they were Wind, they produced no sound, and the ground below somehow had less purchase on them, allowing them to leap much further than was usually possible.

But Narzha smiled upon their prey, for as the beast landed on four hooves, he sunk into a shallow pit of ashen snow, and their fangs missed his throat by inches. Fumbling, they swiped out furiously with their paws, hoping to score a lucky blow. But the Ink’Ink was panicked now, and he rolled aside before lithely leaping back to all fours.

*Oh no*, they thought.

Knowing he was doomed, the Ink’Ink did the only thing left for him to do. He stood up proudly on all four hooves and looked up toward the sky. One last sending. An image of their bodies. One, a teenage girl with two thick brown braids framing almost boyish features, pale grey hood, pants, boots, and blouse covered by a bright crimson cloak. The same color as her eyes. The other, a great white tiger with massive shoulders and a thick red band of fur crossing her spine from snout to tail. Her eyes matched the girl’s. With this image, the Ink’Ink sent his last words:

*The Blooded Ones take me.*

Indeed, their arrow took him through the throat an instant later, but the damage was done.

Snapping back to individuality, Vylith’s eyes lost their glow as she released the Wind and shouldered her bow. Not three heartbeats later, Roseblood came skidding past her, her steely claws grating on the rocky ground as she slowed herself, a thin layer of snow poor protection from those wicked daggers. Vylith leapt up onto Roseblood’s back and gripped the crimson stripe of fur that ran down her spine. She flattened her body against her friend’s back, her cloak blending smoothly with that stripe, and in moments they were racing away from the scene through the dead forest as fast as Roseblood’s powerful strides would allow.

A few moment later, however, they heard the screams. Wails of sorrow echoed in their minds as the Ink’Ink’s brothers and sisters saw their slain kin.