

The Pride of the Prey

By Cassandra Humbert

Greg approached his possible demise with nothing but a spear and a flashlight. The mouth of the cave stretched out from the side of the cliff, engulfing Greg into instantaneous blackness. The smell of rotting animal carcasses combined with that of damp fur was enough to make him pull his shirt collar over his nose. With each rock he climbed, his flashlight illuminated less and less of the cavern.

“Five hundred bucks,” Greg said to himself. “Just stick that wolf, and it’s all yours. You can do it.”

As if on cue, something growled at him from the depths of the cave. The sound echoed off the walls, knocking a few pebbles loose. Greg’s grip on the spear tightened as he marched forward. Another sound began to manifest, this one causing Greg to freeze in place.

“Help.”

It was a woman’s voice, weak but loud, coming from the same place as the growl. Greg held his flashlight higher, but the cave still shrouded his view.

“Hello?” he called out. “Are you okay?”

“I can’t move,” the woman said.

“Just stay there, okay? I’ll come find you.”

“Hurry, please.”

Greg rushed through the darkness, nearly tripping over the uneven rock structure. Keeping his flashlight pointed at the floor, he eventually stumbled across a steep decline. This new pathway was even darker than the rest of the cave, though the walls and floor were smoothed out more, like it had been dug out.

“Ma’am?”

“Down here.” Her voice was clearer and closer, emanating from within the tunnel.

“Hey,” Greg said as he made his descent, “what are you doing down here, anyway? Don’t you know about the wolf?”

“What?”

“The wolf, the biggest monster in Woodson County. It’s been eating up everyone’s livestock. You really haven’t heard about it?”

“No.”

“Well, you won’t have to worry about it for long. I’m here to kill that awful creature.”

“No.”

“No? What do you mean? That thing needs to die.”

“No.”

That was all the woman said as Greg continued through the tunnel. She kept repeating it, saying it louder and louder until her weak voice became a deep shout. Her chanting stopped

when the thin walls of the tunnel expanded into a large den. Greg flinched at the sudden strength of the stench.

“Geez, this must be where it takes its food. Ma’am, are you in here?”

“Hurry, please. I can see it.”

Greg raised his spear, spinning around frantically. His flashlight caught nothing but the walls, stained with animal blood.

“Where is it?” he asked.

“It’s here.”

“I get that, ma’am. Where is he, specifically?”

The bloodstains on the wall changed from random spatters into a thick line, sloping down towards the floor. Greg followed its trail all the way to the furthest corner of the den, where two shapes sat. As he got closer, it became apparent that the shapes were bodies. Not animal bodies, but human bodies.

The one on the right was a man, several years younger than Greg, clutching onto a shotgun. The body next to him was that of a young woman, clinging to the man’s shirt with one arm, as the other one had been ripped from its socket. Greg stepped away slowly, backing up into something huge and hairy. He turned around and stood face-to-face with the wolf. He let his spear drop to the floor as the creature opened its mouth to speak.

“It’s here.”