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Adventure Writing

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Wolf Women

Some women, like my sister Katie, have always known about their inner wild. When Katie is forced indoors, required for whatever reason to spend the day as an inside-protector, her mood goes sour. She gets restless, pacing across the room and tapping her legs as she tries to pass the caged time. Even if the outside-world is shaking from wind, wet with rain, or cold with mounds of snow, her bones whisper, urging her to move her bodies into the woods.

Humans have become experts at building walls, enclosures to shield from the outside world. Women have often been relegated to be the protectors of inside places, domestic chores traditionally seen as the job of a woman in the household. But women have aptitudes other than the job as an inside-protector, and there was a time when humans didn't need to build walls.

One such tale of a time before domestication is the myth of *La Loba*, the Wolf Woman. *La Loba* is an old woman who lives hidden in the woods where few have ever found her. She spends her days roaming in search for one thing: bones. She collects bones from the carcasses of all types of dead animals, but in particular she always looks for wolves. By the light of a fire she sings to the bones and watches as they grow flesh, fur, face, and paws. By the end of the song, a wolf has grown from the pile of bones that used to be in its place. The wolf howls and bounds into the night. Somewhere along the way, in the midst of this wolf's bounding through the woods, it transforms into a woman, laughing and dancing in the light of the moon.¹

The tale of *La Loba* is a reminder that we all have a core; we all have indispensable parts of our beings that give us structure and life, otherwise known as a soul. At our core we have a

¹ *Women Who Run With the Wolves* by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés

relationship with nature and a call to be wild. This side of ourselves might become shadowed and hidden by tall city buildings or the comfort that comes along with the shelter of buildings. But it's never truly lost; wild exists in the framework of our bodies.

KATIE

Katie stands in the middle of a field, her head barely poking up above the tall grass. It's the kind of field where you can tell that there must have been a light breeze swaying the blades slowly back and forth, creating a faint whistling sound in the air. Katie's eyes are squinted into curved lines, her unbridled grin spreading over the rest of her face. Her head is haloed by a burst of curly wisps, entirely untamed. Even though she is six years old in this picture, framed on a shelf in our home, her likeness remains the same twenty-two years later. There are only a few differences; she is taller, her hair has turned from a dark blonde to a golden brown, and all of her teeth are now present in her unbridled grin.

Katie always heard the whispering of her wolf woman bones. My mom describes her as a "whirling dervish" when she was a kid, always running around the house at full speed. She *hated* watching TV; the concept of sitting still for such a long period of time was simply dreadful. One time she spent a whole day sitting outside and drinking water straight from the hose in our backyard whenever she got thirsty, refusing to come inside despite my mother's insisting.

As she grew older, Katie had to spend her falls, winters, and springs caged inside the four walls of a classroom building. But in the summers, her true wolf woman side could be unleashed. Every summer we would go to our cabin in the Adirondacks, nestled in the middle of a forest and just a few miles from all of the mountain trails. There are 46 peaks in the Adirondacks above the height of 4,000 feet, otherwise known as "the 46ers." Becoming a 46er is a goal that most people

pursue for many years, maybe not achieving it until adulthood. Katie, with the company of my dad and my cousin Sam, became a 46er at the age of 13.

My dad taught her a trick of the trade, a way to assuage your whispering wolf bones when forced to sit indoors on a beautiful sunny day: remember the smell of the balsam trees. Every time they went on a hike, my dad would stop near the end of the trail and give them a moment to take it in. Balsam is a smell that is not easily found in the suburbs, and for Katie the scent brings an instant reminder of the mountains where she found her true home. And so balsam served as a sort of talisman, a way to remember the feeling of running through the woods, even when she was stuck sitting in an uncomfortable metal chair and watching the time drag by on the clock above her teacher's head.

Katie found one way to hear the whispering of her bones even in the suburbs where she grew up: running. The rhythm of her feet hitting the ground over and over again gave her the same feeling of assurance she had when she walked, step by step, up a mountainside. She even found some hidden trails that weave through the rows and rows of houses in the suburbs, giving her brief reminders of what it feels like to be surrounded by wildlife. Most days after school she would go for a long run-- however long it took to forget the feeling of being caged inside and remember the smell of the balsam trees.

When she finally finished college, Katie was determined to let her wolf woman spirit run free. So she decided to take time before re-entering the world of inside-places. She bought a ticket to Nepal, and embarked on a mission to see the tallest, most wild mountain in the world from its base camp: Everest. This trip involved many weeks of backpacking through terrain unlike any Katie had seen before. After all of those days of hiking, when she could finally see the tents of the base camp in the distance, she broke out into a run. Her bones pulled her forward, closer and closer to the wild thing that called her. But her body wasn't as equipped as her bones, having spent so many

years forced indoors; and so her trip ended abruptly in an evac, her lungs in desperate need for more oxygen. Despite the abrupt end to her adventure in the Himalayas, this trip only affirmed her love of all things wild. She had never felt more free than she did in those moments she was running towards the mountain so big it pierced the clouds.

After this adventure, Katie faced a new challenge: living in New York City. Now, not only was she forced to be inside most of the time, there was very little outside space to explore. At least in the suburbs there were yards and patches of grass that could be turned into imaginary expeditions, places to romp around or take a breath of fresh air. In the city, she was surrounded by metal. She was inside of a cage so big, it had districts. She was able to find solace in the acres of Central Park, spending her Saturdays going on 10 mile runs to try and lessen the sting she felt in the infrastructure of her body. It was hard to be a wolf in the city.

And so, two years later, she moved to Vermont. Here she found miles and miles of open fields, with breezes just like she felt on that day when she was six. She found new mountains to climb, and a whole new aspect of the wild she had never fully embraced before: the wonders of winter. The piercing wind and crisp beauty of winter speaks to her bones more than any other season. Her hair is a little wispier now, and her eyes have an extra twinkle even on cloudy days with no sun. She has found a place that lets her be wild. She lives in a little red house in the middle of a field, with a wide open sky above her with a beautiful display of stars on the clearest nights. In the mornings, she wakes up to a view of the nobbly top of Camel's Hump Mountain in the distance. She can be found most mornings on the top of another mountain, Bolton, having skinned to the top in the dark. She bridges the peak just as the sun pokes out from behind the other mountain ridges. She stops, taking in the sunbeams for a moment before howling and tearing back down the mountainside, smelling the balsam trees as she nears the edge of the woods. Lately, she has been hearing more and more howls back.

HER HOWL

She takes a step off of the trodden path in front of her, turning instead into the woods full of an untouched dusting of snow. She walks deeper and deeper into the trees, making her steps as light and soundless as possible. She has no watch on her wrist and no intention of turning back anytime soon. As the sun dips lower in the sky, she uses her gaze to trace the sunbeams that lace through the branches of trees and create soft patterns on the snow at her feet. Soon she notices the arrival of darkness, but she is not afraid. As her eyes adjust, she can see the silhouettes of the trees around her, reaching towards the speckles of light that now paint the sky. With the darkness comes the noises, lyrical and full. She stops and stands still, her head swivelling to find the source of the sounds. She knows that she has company nearby: other wild beings, also doing their best to tread silently through the forest. She hears pitter-patters and the occasional hoot of an owl or flapping of wings. And then, through the silhouetted trees, she hears a piercing howl. She smiles, grateful for the kinship, and howls back before continuing on her journey deeper into the woods.

A REMINDER

Don't just look outside through the thin veil of windows; tear open doors and run outside in the pouring rain, or make a snow angel on a freezing day. Even in the most urban places, there are jungles to be found and adventures to be had. We have always been wild, but over time we have forgotten that side of ourselves. It is easy to get lost in the entertainment of screens or the comfort of the indoors. But this wild is always there with us, and we might be reminded of it when we see a brilliant sunset or the pattern of light on the floor of the forest. Even in the harshest weather, there is something in the infrastructure of our bodies that is urging us to explore. If we embrace it, we might feel something in our bones that reminds us where the wild things are.

The clouds have fallen
And covered the world in grey,
A whole inch of it between my feet
And the floor of the forest.
The trees are bent over,
Tired from the weight of the snow
Covering their branches.
The sun is muffled, a fuzzy circle
Hidden by the grey veil in the sky.
The air is cold,
Pinching my fingertips and my nose
With sharp prickles of pain
Every time the wind howls.
Through the branches I see
A blurred outline of *something*
Weaving in and out of the trees
With terrifying speed.
I hear a howl,
Strong and loud,
Reverberating through the forest.
I stand still, not daring to move my feet,
Frozen with fear
From the pure wild sound.

As it got closer, I squinted my eyes
To make out the figure moving
So swiftly and gracefully
And discovered it was a woman,
Her skis merely an extension of her feet
As she flew through the forest.
As she got closer I could see
Her hair blowing in all directions
Free from any containment.
Her cheeks were rosy
And she had a grin that filled her face,
Squinting her eyes
(eyes that I could tell even from a distance
Twinkled like when sunlight reflects off of water).
A moment later and she was gone,
Her blurred outline disappearing between the trees.
I stood still for a moment more.

Maybe the trees were not weighed down
But instead were donning coats,
The best way to enjoy
A cold winter's day.
Maybe the piercing feeling
Created by the winter wind

Serves only to make you feel

Everything with more intensity.

Maybe the grey all around

Is closer to white than I thought.

And how had I missed

That part of the sky

So blue?

I tried a howl

And listened as the sound once again

Reverberated through the forest around me

Before continuing on my way back home.