

Like Father, Like Son

By Kairui Ma

I was soon closing in on double digits. I had been alive twice as long as my siblings and as far as coyotes go, I would say all the joys I felt in life were righteous. I have found happiness in the evenly colored blueberries littered throughout the ground during the days where I went foraging, and watching the sun depart from its nightly routine as the moon pops into view and casts shadows on my face.

But I hated my den. I just detested it. Why should the otters get a nice lodge to stay at in the river, yet I get a pile of rocks in a mountainside? We all belong to the same small patch of land; the sun shines evenly upon all of us except for those that dwell underneath, such as one may see in the case of a mole. This is what led me to go out looking for newer, bigger, and better property. I found one, which was precisely that. I had my eye on it, and when my son left, it allowed me to save just enough to afford it. The new den had windows all around except for the side facing the window, and it provided nicely for the clarity of sun.

There was another, slightly smaller problem. Two full moons ago, my son suddenly vanished. I was assured that he would return just as he always did, but he didn't this time. Now I was all alone, as I always have been except for those two years when I was burdened with taking care of a child. Imagine! I had to share the precious blackberries and chicken I found myself. His mother died quite a while back, a common occurrence. She had gotten caught in a bear trap and died out alone in the woods with nothing but the company of the ravens flying overhead, waiting for her eventual doom. By the time I found her, she was in her dying breaths and she told me to take care of our son for us. I promised that I would buy the acquire the largest lot of property, and so I did. I believed I fulfilled my duties as a father, but even if I hadn't, at least I held up one end of the bargain.

It was a particularly stormy day, and the late night was approaching. Shards of rain pelted my windows as if something were being thrown at the glass. But the new house was splendid, it blocked the noise perfectly fine. I had just gone out hunting for new furniture for my shiny new house before I began winding down with a roasted cup of tea, the steam rising in puffs of calming smoke that receded into the air. Suddenly, a burst of lightning shook the entire house. The clattering of noise rang inside my house and rattled me. The nicely hung picture frames (featuring me) shook on the walls. Then, a rapping noise emerged from my front door. I peered out the window, to which I was greeted by an ominous figure making its way down the steps of mahogany wood. Good, they were leaving. I stood for a few seconds in anticipation, and then I could no longer hear the thumping of feet moving down my steps. The door opened in protest as I checked on what was waiting for me outside. All I was met with was the howling wind in my face, obscuring my vision. I was delighted to find a parcel sitting on my doorstep. Just mail. It read:

We have your son. Zoo before sun rises. Saturday. Bring Payment.

I scoffed at the strange note. What did I need to do to compensate for my son? It would be a shame to have to foster him again. He was always sicklier than his classmates; he couldn't run half as fast. He was simply physically lacking. I paid him no mind as he was always cooped up in his room anyways. Better to stand on business now when my brain was in full motion, gears spinning and all, and ponder later.

When I awoke from my slumber, I was no longer in my house. I immediately noted the tracks in the ground that looked oddly like a coyote and seemed somewhat familiar. The tracks led right through towards a dark colored building which I recognized to be the zoo. Once filled to the brim with animals in tight knit enclosures for humans to peer at, it is now a relic of the past, its rusty sign flimsily swinging in the wind, no animals in sight. The endless enclosures went on, rooms and rooms, each with its own story to tell. But I continued my journey, down and down, until finally, I reached a little hut. During my short years at this specific zoo, I never remembered anything about a crusty little shack at the end of all the enclosures. Perhaps, this would be where my child was. I reached for the polished doorknob, which had not a single scratch on it. Right as my reflection enlarged in the pristine metal, I hesitated. He was much more like his mother, always snooping around. During those awkward nights where the moon shone onto empty porcelain bowls and plates, there were never enough words to fill the air. Just as I made it outside of the metal barred gate, I heard a rustling somewhere out there. I looked about, and just as I was to conclude that there was nobody, I saw him. He looked at me from a distance, silently. The large, reflective orbs of the eyes that filled his sockets were glassy with tears, and just as I began to run after him, he turned, and sprinted as fast as he could, running off into the scorching distance. And then, once again. I was all alone, without any family to bother me.