

My Friend Lughnasa

Story by Pennsylvania Kite Weather

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“Hey, lazybones.”

The young woman’s voice in my ear startled me into sitting up. She was down on all-fours over my legs, grinning wolfishly with a fanged mouth. She wagged an off-white, fluffy tail the color of her straight and thick hair, with long, swept bangs. Locks fell down her willowy shoulders into strands that grazed my tunic. We were among a field of breezily blowing wheat stalks under an overcast sky.

She tilted her head and her locks faintly rasped against the simple spun brown shirt she wore—one that should have belonged on an overweight man instead with a neckhole that big. Her small breasts barely filled out the front. “Caught you napping again. If I told the elder you’re shirking work, what *would* she do with you?”

Her irises were blood-red, and her skin was pale and smooth like she never tanned at all in the late-summer sun. Her legs were hairless and bare, and she kept on a thin pair of bloomers hidden most of the time beneath the drape of her oversized top.

I relaxed a little. “She’d feed me to the wolves, I betcha...” I replied.

Lughnasa shrugged. “As if a wolf would want to nibble on a scrawny lad like you. Haa-ha!” She stood up over me and offered her arm.

When I was upright, she turned to look out over the last of the grown wheat between the couple of homes in the surrounding square mile. “Remember when you met me while I was sleeping in this very field? I was so very scared *you* would eat me. Turns out, humans are pretty nice after all.”

I snorted. “I was nine. And you were in some dirty rags.”

Back then, she had leapt to their feet in front of me all wild-eyed when I was just wandering through the wheat. We both screamed. I had never seen a wolf demihuman before, and I had an irrational fear of her at first from the stories the other villagers told about the predator animals she was akin to. My younger self ran straight to a neighbor’s home.

She didn’t reappear until a few days later, in the orchard with me with my stupid bowl cut and no ideas about how to talk to girls then.

“I was hungry,” she muttered lowly with her arms full of unripe apples. “...Where are we right now, anyway?”

Here in Ilmagour, we’re a plain-old farming village surrounded by plains and fields. Fields of green-to-gold spring wheat and barley, broken up by plum trees or pear trees if your property’s lucky enough. Our town’s also got an old apple orchard and a bunch of potato fields too, but my family’s planted wheat for generations.

Today it’s just me and my dad in a small straw-roof house, along with Lughnasa—the only individual around here with wolf ears and tail—when she wants to come inside.

My ma died when I was young, and I never had a sibling. My twentieth birthday is coming up. I just don’t know when, exactly.



When all of us farmers finish the harvests, we'll decide on a night to gather together for a big party, which also honors the man-turned-god who saved the land centuries ago—from ravenous packs of wolves that came from the wild forest to the west.

Ilmagour tradition kind of made things happen like this. All the future mas and dads get it on when the spring thaw begins, so most birthdays come at around the same time. Then's the only time for feasting and drinking before we all hunker down for winter.

All hundred of us households make a thing of food and light a giant bonfire made of the dried crop leftovers, the shrubs and sticks the kids collect, and animal bones of the livestock we slaughter. The grown folks do dances, tell tales to the young folks...

And if you're turning a multiple of 10 that year, you're not just celebrating your birthday with everybody else. You get to make a special wish the whole village will hear. It's said it'd come true, but only if the harvest is good, and the hero-god wills it.

The thing is: I'm the only living 19 year-old in this whole town anymore. So the people kind of tend to treat me special, and it's only getting more awkward for me as the end of this harvest draws nearer, and folks listen carefully to my every word, even when I'm trying to be plain-spoken. The only exception is Lughnasa, who never takes anything seriously.

She's also the person everyone sees me with the most. I try to be there because I often feel bad; she's always been this mysteriously-present outsider who fell into the flock, flitting around the homes of those who don't kick her out for being wolveren.

*"Does it really matter where I came from?" she once said daringly to me and my dad when we were investigating some noises in our shed. We found her one day in one of my fieldwork clothes with a few missing blankets from our home, surrounding her like she made a moat. "I'm neither harming nor helping anybody. What I **would** like is... some hospitality for once."*

Lughnasa looks to be my age, but she always just says she doesn't know when her next decade is happening. If she celebrated her twentieth birthday with me and made a wish this time, that'd pretty much make all the gossip a reality.

She stood before me with hands on her slim hips. "And so now that you've known me about half your life, are you finally prepared to pop the question to the beautiful woman you've witnessed me mature into...?"

My eyes went wide. "You know what the village is suspecting me to...?"

"Never doubt my hearing," Lughnasa smirked. She flicked one of her own pointed, soft eartips. They darkened naturally up there as the hairs thinned and the hide showed. "But why would I ever marry someone so helpless and uncharismatic? Seems beneath me."

"Ouch. Well..."

"Oh, what, you'd like to?"

"No! I just need you to come with me to the well and then the shed for the tools..."

"Hah! Nah, if you're so focused on your work today, I'll do what I want to do. I'll be climbing trees in the orchard picking apples for cider, perhaps. Maybe. But, you can't join me." A sly, foxlike smile appeared. "I wouldn't want you looking skyward into the branches and seeing up my—"



"Please, Lughnasa. Don't worry."

"Heh-heh! See you around dinner." She winked blithely and scampered off with her arms out to her sides to feel the wind pushing back against the large sleeves.

On the way to the well that a group of our homes shared, I saw a stout, middle-aged man named Gord coming down the road—the son of the elder. He wore a dark apron and he was pulling a small wagon with spare cooking pots to deliver to the neighbors. "There's the man of the year," he called to me jovially. "Tell your dad we've decided on the day of the festival! It'll be in four nights. ...Get that wish picked, y'hear?"

"Yes, sir," I replied as I prepared a bucket.

He was a man who was wise on the town traditions but oblivious to what they might do to a kid.

I remember one festival when I was around six, and he was telling a story to the others my age in place of his softer-spoken ma.

"You know," he once began, *holding his hands up, flexed like claws*. "When there used to be more wolves around, it's said there was a **giant**, buxom half-wolf warrior lady who would come 'round with a big 'ol hammer and just wreak havoc through Ilmagour.

"So year-round we'd hunt as many of her pets as possible, and they'd be the bones in the bonfire. Had to make it huge enough to scare even the giantess, or else she jus' reaches down and— **whoof**. Takes the burnin' pile in 'er hand and snuffs it right out in her fist.

"One year, the village was struggling to grow food, and the people weren't able to cull as many wolves. They feared the giantess would strike us when we were at our weakest.

"But we had a crafty hero named Callan with 'is family's silver sword. They say while the festival was about to commence, she rose up out of one of the bad wheat fields that hadn't been cut down yet... but Callan was lying in wait. He climbed her tail and plunged the sword into her back! Again, and again... And she staggered with him upon her, howling until she fell over defeated. And the impact of her falling over broke the ground up into the gorge that surrounds the one half of Ilmagour today...

"Callan, the sword, and the giantess tumbled into the rift in the earth. Our ancestors built the bridge y'see today to search for where they might've climbed out, but we don't go crossin' it ever since. ...Understood?"

Even with a mellow ending, I had nightmares about being chased by the giantess wolfess reaching to rake me with her pointed nails. Or swat the roof clean off my home, leering in with ghostly white eyes and her figure wreathed in bear pelts and wearing skulls as necklace- and bracelet-beads. Some nights I might be carried to the edge of the chasm in her grip and thrown in. For a time, in my dreams I'd be fleeing her wrath with Lughnasa, and she'd suffer first.

I don't tell anyone about those conjurings. And Gord was well-liked among everybody either way.

As fate would have it, I share a decade-turning with only a pair of other villagers, and the elder—the near octogenarian—Meluh.

Before I was born, there were two childhood sweethearts who got hitched when they turned 20; they're 59 now, and I'm sure their decade's wish would be to stay together forever.

Meluh is enigmatic, pious, and gentle. I can only imagine she wants to wish for good health for us all.



...And, I think I was going to wish to leave Ilmagour with Lughnasa.

That'd be a first. It didn't matter to me if she didn't love me or we weren't supposed to leave the village under threat of exile. There was just nothing to do here in this sleepy town, and I wanted to see the world. Find the ocean, scale a mountain, swim across a river. Here, there aren't even enough flowing streams to build a waterwheel.

To the west is the forest with many wild animals and horror stories. Not even Lughnasa mentions she would want to adventure inside.

To the east is a great, sheer-sided gorge that curves around from the northern and southern edges of the woods, as if some colossal bear had bitten a crescent out of the world. There's an ancient stone bridge that is falling apart, and many of us are still superstitious about crossing. It would take half a minute for someone young like me to sprint over, and those who go across it never have returned to Ilmagour. The bridge could collapse into the chasm any day now. A departure hasn't happened in many years.

Those who unwittingly come in over the stone bridge are so few—ordinary merchants, and the odd feline demihuman or centaur—they just integrate here; or, see so little and go back across, then never come back. The travelers talk of castle towns and verdant forests out there, cool lakes and spirit-rich glades too.

If I was going to do this adult thing, I needed to sit down with Lughnasa soon and brace for the idea to not go well.

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I left a small drumstick of chicken untouched on my plate that evening. I was tired after harvesting until night fell, but I knew this would satisfy someone else more than it would me.

My dad got up from his chair abruptly at the same time as me. He was pretty heavy too, but in a formidable way. Ever since ma died, he seemed somewhat hollowed, like there was someone else steering his broad-shouldered and neatly groomed frame.

"Son," he began quietly. "The reason you're so skinny is that you save some scraps all the time for that girl—who doesn't even work." I knew his decision before it came. "Know she doesn't have no parents of her own, but I know what you're thinking lately. I don't give you permission to marry her. Not yet."

I stood before him and couldn't stop shaking from this sudden tenseness I felt. He could at least say Lughnasa's name.

Squaring my jaw, I left wordlessly with the drumstick and wandered out into the dark field with a borrowed oil lantern from the shed.

Soon, her quick steps shushed and rustled until she hugged me tight from behind, resting her head against the back of my collar. "Hey..." She sniffed the air. "Oooh, is that for me?"

I held up both the lantern and food out of reach. "Let's talk in the shed first. There's something important I need to speak to you about."

"Oh my, here we go... I hope my heart can take it...!~"

"Lughnasa, it's not that."



Inside the outbuilding, she flopped back onto her den of sheets and sighed, playing with her shirt hem. She rose it over her navel, and she watched me not glancing at her drawers, but anywhere else. “I got a shirt-basket fulla apples for that older couple living a bit down the road. Flan and Wheldon? They’re nice.”

“Do you like living here?” I asked as I kneeled and offered out the food. Lughnasa sat up cross-legged and began scarfing it. The lantern on the floor beside me made her shadow grow to the height of the entire wall.

She finally answered after scrubbing her mouth with the back of her hand. “I guess here’s fine. Fate had me wander here, after all.”

“Did you ever start remembering where you might’ve been when you were younger?”

“Heh. ...Nope.” Another big bite.

“Would you... want to see more places now that you’re older?”

Lughnasa paused with her mouth open, her milk-white fangs hovering close to the depleting bone. “What are you saying?” She scooted closer and a little waver began in her tail. She tilted her gaze to study me. “I don’t really get all your silly human traditions, but, leaving behind Ilmagour for good—that’s what you want, regardless?”

“Yeah. ...I—”

“Shhhh...” Lughnasa held up an oily hand and put the bone aside on a scrap of cloth. She closed her eyes and her tail went still, her raised ears pivoting.

Then, she...

“OHHHH...! Ohhh, yeeees!~” She collapsed onto her back, wriggling like someone was on top of her. She panted wantonly and slid her bare feet around the floor.

“*Lughnasa!*” I yelped, lunging to cover her mouth.

My dad burst in through the shed door. “HEY!”

The wolfess began cackling as us men stared at each other in disbelief. Lughnasa’s laughing was high-pitched, genuine, practically howling up at me arched over her form.

He slowly shut the door, and Lughnasa came down from scaring us.

“He’s gone now,” she said quietly after a bit, propped up on her elbows. She raised an arm to beckon me. “So, here’s what I think. ...Come on. Seriously. Lie with me.”

I struggled to get comfortable with the hard floor beneath us and no pillows except for our hands. She snuggled right up against my front, slipping a shin between the pair of mine, nose resting near my collar, ears flicking occasionally like unpredictable flies in my face.

She smelled like apple tree bark and clean fur. I needed to wash the blankets again from the dirt dust settling throughout the shed.

And I had never slept with her prior. She’d find anywhere but beside me. She’d sleep in my dad’s armchair, or under the stars in the orchard, or at a widow’s house or one of the big families’ with a



guest room, or against the barrel of the huge-breasted centaur lady who's built like a draft horse—she especially mentioned to me whenever she got to do that.

But right now— “Why can't we just stay right here?” she finally murmured, her breath on my chest sending my heart further off-kilter. “The people are great. You're fine. You *listen* the best.”

I hid my eyes behind my lids. “So... So what should I wish for...?”

She didn't say.

When I turned ten, I wished for something that might have been too soon.

I was excited back then to have her experience her first harvest festival.

*“The food is amazing,” I said to her. “We're going to feast and play games all night by the light of the bonfire, **and** this year's festival might even fall on a full moon. I think it's gonna be the best time ever to make my first special wish.”*

“Oh, really?” She was looking up at the stars, distracted.

“Yup! Hey! Lughnasa, what would you wish for?”

She also didn't say.

“Has anyone seen Lughnasa?” I said to everybody I wandered past, trying to carry my voice over the steady beat of the drum; the crowd was whirling around me, gathering to hear the people of the year say their wishes. They wanted me closer to the center, but all I could do was mill about the edges.

Some adults tried to help. “Come on out, Lughnasa!” “Where is that girl?”

Thump-thump.

When the performance suddenly ceased, the whole village turned toward me. My dad had scooped me up and stood me on the little temporary dais, with the bonfire roaring at my back. I did one last sweep of all the expectant faces in their colorful clothes, but I couldn't find hers in her ragged outfit.

“I just... wanted to wish that Lughnasa and me would be friends forever...”

And because it fell on deaf ears, it was like it couldn't, wouldn't, ever come true. Beyond my ma's passing, I think that was the only other time in my life my heart was broken.

Resting beside her now, I was offering her again to be part of the wish. But, it had been a few weeks lately since she last disappeared.

Lughnasa always disappeared. Every full moon. And then always came back the next day.

The second time I discovered it happened was during the first dead of winter with her. She was nowhere in the shed.

“Dad! Dad, we have to look!” I was crying. “She might be freezing outside!”

“It's late, it's snowin', and I don't see a single track leaving suggestin' she ever left. That girl is completely crazy—coming and going, standing you up... But you gotta suck it up!”



“Are you okay?” She glanced up at me through her long lashes. I must have shuddered, recalling his echo over the stillness of the land.

I remembered the relief of seeing her trudging back to us in the morning sun, yawning with a warm cloak and fur shoes she found. And she cheerily refused to explain where she went or why.

It didn’t matter if I started following her around everywhere when the moon was brightest. If I slipped out when she did from the shed and watched her wade into the fields—she’d be a ghost to me.

She could outrun me barefoot down the gravelly roads into the orchard when she caught me following and bolt like a squirrel up a tree. I could be hurrying after the sound of her footsteps as we both rounded a corner outside of a home, and I’d suddenly be alone in silence. I could ask all my neighbors to watch for her, or cause a ruckus shouting her name... She never minded, because she always got away.

Once I thought I kept her in view all the way to the stone bridge, and when I climbed the small rise of steps before the span, I found I was left staring at the moonlit landscape that stretched beyond. The following full moon, I sat on the steps and never encountered her even as I fought exhaustion until dawn.

When I hung onto her once and promised I’d do so all night, she kicked and bit me, and then teased me afterward the full moon must have possessed me.

There was a blizzard one night when I was fourteen and we holed up together, the three of us. My dad and I witnessed in horror as Lughnasa got up without a word from the floor by the hearth and ran to unlock the front door. The wind flung it open—and still she ran straight into the swirling wind in nothing but one of my shirts and a blanket.

“I can’t stand her sometimes,” my dad paced and ranted as I sobbed. “My god above, why does she do what she does?!”

At sixteen.

“We’re a little old to be playing hide and seek,” I said to her as she led me out into the spring plants on a cloudless night, humoring me under the moonlight.

“This time I’m going to see if you can catch my trick. Turn around and count to three.”

Anxiously, I did. “O-One...”

“Wolf attaack!~” She jumped on my back and we fell over together as she dug her nails up and down against my ribs, tickling me.

We wrestled in the dirt until we were manically out of breath.

“Hahaaaa... Okay,” she sighed as she rested her slight weight on my front, her and all her charms inches from my face. “Roll onto your stomach and cover your eyes. Count to three.” She stood and stepped back once as I listened.

“One...” And I peeked. Lughnasa was already—somehow—gone.

I finally said something, slowly. “They said the festival’s in...”

“Four days,” she finished for me. “I heard. Is it okay if I’m not there?”



The ask was a change from when she'd just up and say she was going missing.

"Awww, hate to miss the roast dinner," she once grinned. "But it's the moon, you know? ...You know."

"It's... only not okay if you never come back, Lughnasa," I answered. While she huffed and smiled, I ventured softly, "Just this once, could you... stay?" I was kneading my bottom lip with my teeth.

"...No." Lughnasa dipped her head and extracted her legs. She sat up and fixed her shirt that had gotten twisted around. She had a lingering smile for my frown. "But someday, I'll think about it."

She went to the door with the drumstick bone and chose to fling it as far as she could, clearing my home's roof. Lughnasa stepped aside for me with her hands tucked behind her back, fidgeting with her fluff. "You're welcome to tail me again though. Fun little game. ...I'm sorry."

I shut the shed door and went to my room.

Meluh told me when I just turned into a teen, there might be something in Lughnasa's past that made full moons traumatic for her.

They were kind of getting that way for me, too.

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Arooooooooo...

I sat up in shock in my room that same night. It had been so hard to fall asleep, I thought I had imagined the howl of the animal that'd been eradicated until my dad flew out of his space. We met in the living room.

"Was that a wolf?" I asked.

"Had to be," he said shakily as he brushed off the dust on the stone club from beneath his bed. "Get a sickle from the shed. Let's go looking."

As we approached the shed together, Lughnasa eased the door open, bathing the dirt in the lantern glow. She rubbed an eye and her ears slumped.

I hurriedly asked. "Did you hear that?"

"I did. Are you...?" she let me brush past and I retrieved the one-handed tool with the blade.

"Switch with me," Dad insisted. When I got the unwieldy club, he looked at her next. "Follow us with that light. It came from the east."

Two other neighboring homes soon joined us in our uneasy patrol. Our group of eight was met by a panic-stricken young man with a cattle prod.

"Fellas...! Flan and Wheldon, they're... they're..."

They were mauled to death. It was my first time seeing that much blood—and the carnage was right in front of the older couple's home; both 59, days away from their sixth wish.

Gord was there, solemnly, firmly pointing us back toward the orchard. "The man's dagger's bloodied. Follow the trail with that light...!"



And a group of thirty of us eventually gathered around a lone, dead gray wolf with a big gash. A rigid corpse of a creature only in illustrations, fables and legend. The look of its soft, dense bed of fur on its body was contrasted by its eternal snarl.

"I don't believe it..." a housewife said. "Oh Callan, help us!"

"Is our feast fucked with, Gord?" a farmer asked.

"I've gotta ask Ma," the man answered hesitatingly.

Lughnasa had gotten the closest, then edged back to my side. "There's another set of tracks, see...?" she tried to say quietly, but then all eyes turned to her. "And they hunt in packs, so..." She shrank a bit behind me, uncharacteristically quiet.

Everyone saw her ears fold and tail hang still, down to the back of her calves. I decided to walk her back to the shed.

"I'm a bit scared," she forced a tearful little laugh as she bid me goodnight by the door. "Do stay safe, and get to sleep soon, and..."

"We'll all be alright, I hope," I said back. "Do you have any idea how this could have happened...?"

Lughnasa grit her teeth and protested softly. "H-How should I know? Just because I'm part wolf, is that it? ...I don't know much about the legends and all, but— I'll try to figure it out."

The door shut. I sighed, and felt something of my own hackles raise. I slipped inside the house and watched outside my bedroom window for hours.

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The tail-end of the harvest was completely disrupted by the ceremony. There had been livestock accidents and illnesses cutting things short sometimes to people—it happened to three others born in my year—but this was especially harrowing.

A pair of identical stone markers were being built by several men in a quiet field before the many scores of us, standing throughout the entire windy, drizzling afternoon. Most everyone had a weapon by their side—except Lughnasa, who watched us sullenly from the very perimeter.

Meluh stood from a wheelable chair with the help of her son and a gnarled walking stick. Her silver hair was receding up her forehead but locks hung down to her hips, along with a gray feathered coat.

Spine hunched and white skin mottled, the town matriarch coughed a few times before she addressed us. "There has never been a tragedy like this so close to our festival in my lifetime. We've never postponed this special day, so we must have faith we will all safely gather, and remember what's pulled us through before: gracious self-sacrifice from so many of you, and the sacred acts of our ancestors. Would you all be so kind to contribute and participate in the festival still—but not *just* for my sake?" She managed to spot me in the throng and nod as some people chuckled. "Wheldon and Flan's, too. All of us."

Soon after, people dispersed. When I turned and I thought I'd never seen Lughnasa looking so beat, Gord rounded us both up.

"Meluh wants to have words with you both. Nothing serious," he smiled.



We went inside her small home full of wooden and stone carvings; larger figures flanked the floor cushion seats, and smaller ones littered the shelving. I'd been here a few times growing up; it seemed ever more reverent now that she was the oldest person in the village.

I didn't like tea, but I accepted it from Gord anyway.

Incense had been burning, making the atmosphere stuffy. Maybe it was Lughnasa's nose, but her brow was knitted even more trying to breathe through the thick air. She tried to hide her bent knees beneath her huge shirt's hem, and once she tugged it down, she felt up her tail wrapped around her back.

The old woman smiled. "Open a window, Gord. Sorry, my friend. I didn't realize." She sipped her drink and looked up through the small window up near the roof's peak that cast faint natural light into her abode. "I've sought an explanation all day as to why fate would take two of us away at a time like this. But perhaps we haven't been productive enough, thankful enough, good to each other enough..."

Meluh was silent as she mused for a moment. "Or listening enough. So, Lughnasa, how are you? I don't mean to assume, but I'd like to hear what you think is happening."

My friend clutched at her head in irritation, some fingers stuck into her earholes. "Not you too," she hissed. "I really don't know—and I don't care about these stupid legends..."

"But you must understand our people's worries to have seen a wolf claim lives for the first time in... it must be centuries. How can that be?"

"Dunno," replied Lughnasa tersely.

Meluh was feeling at one of her bony knees through her skirt. "It was said, a long time ago, the wishes during the festivals were strictly for salvation. People who complete a decade now make wishes that are more... social—or selfish—rather than safeguarding. ...Lughnasa, can I request you join me to make a wish to protect your home and your adopted families from the wolves?"

"I can't."

"Why ever not?"

"..."

I looked around to realize Gord must have left the house entirely. Still, the south-facing window was open, swaying the drapes as the mist persisted. Lughnasa looked at the floor, but kept adjusting her ears.

Meluh tried again. "I can tell you what I'll wish for, if you'd like to share yours with me."

"I'm not wishing...!" she barked.

So Meluh turned to me. "What about yours? Have you told her yours?"

I shook my head and lied. "It's my secret, even to her."

"So be it..." Meluh's disappointment showed. "As you're both young, this time's importance may not be as dear to you. I just hope we don't have a hard winter."

The two of us rose. She kept talking as we ambled our way out. "In these upcoming days... Do what you can. Stay vigilant. Say what's on your mind. And take care, friends."



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"Everyone says she's a nice old lady," Lughnasa strode long and determinedly towards the orchard. "But she makes my hairs stand on end."

"I think she cares about all of us a lot," I said as I watched her tail vigorously swing with each step. "I'd get it if you'd think she's a busybody. But she's seen how us mortals are pretty powerless alone without our rituals..."

She abruptly stopped at the first tree and turned to me. "Don't you have to go and organize the food stores or something?" she snarled. "So the big bad wolf lady doesn't smash you up?"

"Lughnasa!" I gasped. "That's really pretty cruel of you to say..." I lowered my head to suppress another nightmare. That's when I noticed some of the bloodtrail still left behind by the dead wolf that the villagers had dragged off to strip of its hide and bones. The puddle was several dozen yards ahead, but I still imagined it drying into the dirt.

Lughnasa was silent for a time, and faltered too. "I do want to help... somehow. Alright?"

"So then where do you go on every full moon, huh?!" I shot out.

"It doesn't *matter*," she forced in reply. "I've been there for other festivals, right? If it were any other year I'd plan to pig out and... come out here and stargaze with you afterward. And tease you how I'd cuddle with you all winter to keep warm." She beamed with a film of tears in her eyes—my eyes, too.

"I wis—" I stopped myself and restarted slowly. "I hope I could spend some time with you before you have to go for the evening."

Lughnasa gave a fleeting grin, her mind made up. "Then, maybe we just beg the elder to move up the start of the festivities before sundown. Prevent anyone from being ambushed in the night." Her tail was swishing. "Or are your stupid traditions too rigid to move up a few hours?"

I scrubbed my aching eyes, and for the first time in a while, we hugged. I believed there was still a way to make the upcoming night special after all.

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It was another sunny and breezy mid-autumn afternoon as the setup around the open center of town continued in quiet. A group of four men carried the wooden circular dais through the maze of tables being arranged. The market was set up where two of the roads converged after stretching throughout our scattered homes.

The stage was set down a stone's throw from the prepped bonfire, where plant matter was being raked around the base and bone-dry logs had built up the squarish burn pile a story tall.

I was pretending to be busy while Lughnasa had scaled the bonfire in her bare feet and finest, least dirty, thigh-length shirt. She skipped down from the peak and hopped aboard the dais.

"Listen to me!" Lughnasa announced. "As a woman turning twenty this year, I wish for the festival to commence *now*!" She glanced about with a fanged smile as if that seemed a bit petulant.

One of the adults in front of her laughed good-naturedly. "It doesn't work that way, lass."



Gord came up and clapped him hard on the back. “It does *this* year, ‘less you want to be wolf food. Start up th’ instruments!” He bellowed to the bewildered folks.

Lughnasa hopped off the dais into my arms and I set her down. She looked up at me and poked at my chest with both hands. “Still finalizing your wish, silly?”

“Heh. I’d like to save it when there’s a break in the action from the build-up.”

A carefree sigh. “You’re a tool. Let’s see if anything’s ready to serve and eat now, shall we?” Then she gripped my shirt and steered me just as a drummer began a few steady beats. A recorder instrument warbled out a tune.

The crowd built sooner than anticipated and the mood lifted quickly. Perhaps the suddenness of it all made people dwell less on the bad; happy faces were still visible in the dwindling light of the sky darkening from orange to purple. The standing torches around the dirt clearing were lit, and the base of the bonfire began to smoke.

“Mmm, I wove dese feshtivals...” Perched on a table, Lughnasa wiggled her ears, shoulders and tail holding a grilled meat skewer in either hand. She swallowed in time to respond to the song. “Ho!! ...Hee-hee.”

Nibbling a cookie, I leaned on the edge beside her and just loved seeing her happy. I looked through the parade ring around the center and saw Meluh was seated in her chair closest to the giant fire building, her hands interlocked.

“Do you want to tell the elder thank-you for hearing you out?” I asked. “Oh...”

The half-wolf had taken the rest of my treat out of my hand with her mouth, and nodded with her cheeks full.

I weaved through the cavorting festival-goers with her and touched the back of Meluh’s chair. “Hoy there... We wanted to share our gratitude again.”

She responded with a wrinkling smile. “Isn’t this delightful? I believe just what we needed was a great idea from you, Lughnasa.”

Lughnasa chucked in her finished wooden skewers—needles in the smoking stack. “Mhm. I’m going to take some time alone in a little bit. Let the man and other woman of the year get some time in the moonlight, yeah?”

The heat kept intensifying. Meluh agreed to move back a few feet and I rolled her chair for her.

The old woman now faced the crowd. “All this activity is making me hungry. Before I speak to them, I could do with some bread and deer...”

Suddenly, a young man’s command broke through the revelry. “All of you, stop at once!”

The music, the dancing—everyone turned towards the eastward road to see a stranger on a white stallion. He had silver leg armor, a sword at his hip, and small shoulder pauldrons beneath a ruffled coat. His back was draped in a cobalt-blue cape. He had short-cut and glossy reddish-brown hair with curls by his ears. His round, rosy-cheeked face looked to be in early adulthood.



“He looks ridiculous,” Lughnasa muttered to me.

Walking his horse calmly through the people, he studied everyone. “I am Dwain,” His voice was slightly nasally; his big nose had two short, thin triangles of mustache hairs beneath it. “I am the son of the duke in the neighboring land to the east. Apologies for interrupting whatever this is. I just arrived from across the bridge; thing needs repairs. ...Could I ask for a moment of your time to solve a mystery I’ve been tasked with?”

Nobody answered him, but the village had surrounded him atop his mount and several of the men had stolen up to put themselves between Meluh, including my dad and Gord, and me. We thought the duke lived far, far from here. It could have been decades since we ever interacted with any noble’s land, men, or family.

Dwain folded his arms. “We have been plagued by what seems to be bandit raids for many years. The farmers and ranchers have complained persistently to my house, and, bless their hearts, they finally figured out a pattern. But even I was shocked at the precision and *level* of destruction that takes place, when I began to survey it myself.

“Last year, at the edges of one of the villages we govern, an entire grain silo had fallen over on a calm night. One family’s entire fields seemingly overturned. A flock of sheep vanished without a trace. Chickens and the coop—*pulverized* into the earth.”

Some villagers shuddered. The rider continued.

“...Last month, it was only a long strip of wooden fence. The people honestly braced for worse. And curiously, this last full moon, there happened to be a farmer awake to look outdoors and see a *giant* silhouette swiping away the fenceposts like ants. He hollered at her, and she turned west towards the rift that separates our domains.”

It was stupefying—the familiarity. People exchanged glances with one another, and I couldn’t turn around to see Meluh and Lughnasa’s reaction.

Dwain leaned over and rested his arms on his horse’s head. “Our people are *terrified*, you see. The horrors *must* end. And were a resident of—Illmagour, is it?—at fault, we expect some form of recompense. Hmmm. Half the wheat, perhaps? I will order some carts to cross over, if we can shake on it. Perhaps some tolls are in order to repair the bridge... We have skilled masons. This could be mutually a boon, mmm?”

“And what gives you the right to order us around, eh?” Gord challenged the noble.

Dwain just reached to his hip for a polished-gold handle. He drew his blade, glinting in the sky pockmarked by stars. “Why, believe it or not, this is my family’s blade.” It was as silver as the very moonlight above.

Gord staggered back a step. “*Callan’s sword*. It’s actually been found...”

The noble rested it on his left shoulder with a mighty smirk. “And so I ask you rabble again, as a descendant of your savior. *Whom* among you is a wolf in plain clothing?”

People began to part around me—and a shocked Lughnasa.

The wolfgirl balled her fists as Dwain’s eyes widened in triumph and he steered his horse to trot nearer.



He pointed the silver swordtip straight at my friend. “It is she! Her hair and tail match the description of the woman who has been appearing—every full moon!”

Lughnasa leaned forward and went stiff. She and I locked eyes.

But Gord and my dad moved quickly.

“Waiiiit...!” I cried as Lughnasa was grabbed on either arm by their sturdy hands.

They dragged her down and held her by the upper arms as she tried to twist her head, unbend her knees, thrash and shake.

I was frozen in place, with several other men reaching for me and hesitating. We all froze, in fact, as Lughnasa’s piercing laughter rang out, tinged by the tears slipping from her eyes.

“You’re all idiots...” she said in the quiet and the crackling fire of the centerpiece. “Do I *look* like a giant to you all?”

Dwain just quirked a brow. “Did anyone see you on the last full moon?”

Everyone—all of us who had first- or second-hand knowledge of Lughnasa’s quirks now couldn’t look at her, or watched with a bitter suspicion as she hung her head.

“Lughnasa, dear,” Meluh had a gentle hand raised over her. “You always seemed like you were keeping a secret from us. Are you in fact the half-wolf giantess spoken of in the legends?”

“...No.” She raised her head quickly. “But I can say I’m something of a messenger. ...You need to let me go, or... the wolves will kill everyone!” Some wild light flickered in her pupils as she landed on me.

“You’re lying,” Dwain scoffed. “At least about the consequences. I’ve never seen a wolf before. Call me a genius, or a brute, but I think the simplest solution is to get rid of *her*, and the beasts will leave you folk alone. And that way, both our lands will no longer be terrorized.”

“You rotten piece of...!” I lunged for anything—his leg—and had a plated foot and swordpoint wavered in my face like a torch to keep me back.

The noble was firm. “I say, I can come back with an army of a thousand to search for the culprit if now is a bad time.”

Meantime, there were murmurs, agreements, and objections carried among us few hundred. “This doesn’t seem right.” “Hmph, but it makes sense to me.” “We can’t just *behead* the poor woman!” “Exile her at once!” “Mommy, is she bad?” “We should hold a trial.”

“Nooo!” butted in the late Flan’s furious adult son, spittle flying from his sneering mouth as two other villagers restrained him muscling to the front. “I want her burned atop the bonfire!” More folks pushed the tow-headed man down. “I swear... I should’ve known a wolf demihuman was dangerous!”

But even like this, Lughnasa now grinned painfully wide—at him, at me, closed lashes glistening with tears. “I’ll show you dangerous...!”

Meluh raised her hand higher and cried out. “*Hush!*” And she kept it raised, staring up at the full moon, her arm trembling, but with a glow reflected on her palm as if she held some of the moonlight itself.

“I wish... to see what our friend Lughnasa does on full moons.”



The wolf woman's fearlessness evaporated immediately as she doubled-over and lurched. "Ghh...! Why would you say tha— ahh... Haaa-agh!" All her muscles were tensed, including on her face, straining her mouth open. Her eyes inexorably rolled up, head angled to the moon as she begged. "You have to let go of me...! Let go! Or else I can't... I will...!"

Krrrrkkkk... It sounded like an old, heavy door, or Meluh's rickety chair rolling. Deeper and louder this time it sounded, like being beside a dead tree leaning from an ominous wind.

GrrrrrooO000oooann... Gord and my dad staggered forward, needing two hands just to encircle her biceps. Then use tiptoes to grip those biceps.

On her knees, now head-level with the stallion, she drew her drooling tongue back in and reared forward onto her palms with the impact you'd hear from the dead tree collapsing. My dad fell to the ground and Gord ran to move Meluh away.

"Mmmrrrrraaaahhhnnnn..." Lughnasa pulled back the corners of her lips—bending over further, panting through bared teeth at the dirt—as her body lengthened towards the crowd and sent the women and children scattering.

Lughnasa's tail curled upwards to keep out of the bonfire, shuddering from the base to the tip with every pulsation of growth. Her underwear broke apart and her broadening waist filled the hem of her shirt. The startled horse retreated haltingly from the swelling shadow as Dwain called for the villagers to run, and he floundered trying to dismount with his weapon.

And I stood motionless. I watched her kneel up while still in her throes as she covered her sex, and clasped at her stomach. Her shrunken shirt split up the sides into many fibers like a corn cob husk peeling back over her ivory skin. Her bust began to fill out, heaving as it emerged into full view, rising and dropping each time bigger and bulkier. Her bones, her skin, the muscles, the fat, all taking turns to expand as her dimensions grew and grew until her ears cleared the bonfire and the roof ridge of the biggest home in Ilmagour.

The curves of her chest plumped and sagged with the low noise of sloshing milk pails, and the patches of her pinkish areolas crept wider in diameter, rising in arousal against the night's chilled temperature. She cradled one blindly as she stared slack at the moon. By proportion, she was nearly outsizing the one centaur woman's bust—and I fantasized enough about what that might look like bare.

Lughnasa continued to shudder and bounce on her knees and toes, wincing sightlessly as she kneaded just that bale-like breast and filled the clearing with her subdued moans and rumbles.

And then, she crashed back down onto her elbows and forearms against the dirt, exhaling a long sigh that ceased the din altogether. Her tail swept over and toppled the bonfire with a rattle of wood and animal bones as she tucked the big brushlike plume around her hip. Her irises returned, shield-sized and searching.

Wide-eyed, silent, our gazes only broke from each other when there was a muted *puff* and she *vanished* exactly like a lightning flash—a bolt from the heavens—just without illuminating anything. The smoldering bonfire's smoke straightened out as the air settled from the wave.

I let out my breath after so long and fell to my knees.

My dad still hadn't picked himself up from a few yards away. "Did you know she would do that...!?" he asked accusingly.



“No...! I need to know why!” I got up and saw villagers wandering in a daze.

“Where did she go?” “Is anyone hurt...?!” “The fire! Put more kindling on the bonfire!” “If she comes back, she’ll destroy us! Callan, help us!”

Meluh was stopped near some overturned tables, dabbing at her eyes with a cloth. Cooked food was wasted. A few instruments were trashed, and Flan’s son was keeled over stricken in shock.

The duke’s son hobbled into my way, fussing with his get-up with his non-sword hand as he seemingly fell off his horse in the end. Before I passed, he extended the sword of Callan like an arm to bar me. “Hold there. What’s she got to do with you, hmm?”

I pushed the flat of his blade away, leering at his round, oafish face. “You stay out of this.”

And so I ran east, stuck my head into the family shed, grabbed a blanket of hers without thinking, and kept going.

I summited the bridge’s steps with the bundle under my arm. I braced myself as I stood right in the center of its width, maybe thrice the breadth of a horse-drawn carriage.

I turned back towards the quiet of Ilmagour, and then to the even emptier fields across the span with the full moon above, like a landmark I could never reach. The old, cracking rocks of the structure were too dirty to gleam anymore.

My worn shoes scuffed the ancient stones as I ran some more. I tripped over uneven surfaces, kicked a few pebbles that rolled ahead of me, and watched them trundle right into the void. I didn’t look down—not until I collapsed onto foreign land and thanked my ancestors for holding the bridge up for me.

...Then, I got my bearings a bit in the dark. It got hillier if I were to march maybe half a day. Some distant clusters of fallen pines dotted an otherwise featureless plain. I tried to scrutinize any farmhouses at all. Where would I go?

But I had to find Lughnasa. If I could hear anything being smashed up in a rampage, then I’d know.

Although, I probably should have gotten a horse. I traveled in spurts for an entire hour, straight east, across the stretches of fields with short grasses and no human activity. I went across a dried-up stream of a ditch, further aimlessly into roadless areas and so many downed, decayed trees.

When I paused nearing a standing copse of evergreens and checked, Ilmagour was invisible to the eye out here. But then when I turned—

Lughnasa’s knees, the height of half of me, were suddenly in my way, with the shadows of her bare loins between them. I looked up quickly and her hands darted forward to cover me, and rested just to my sides, like she caught a bug indoors.

“What are you doing here...?” she whispered as she peered into the hollow of her hands, her voice projecting effortlessly.

I straightened up within the small pen of her fingers. “L-Lughnasa, *this* is what you turn into every full moon...?”

She nodded slowly, and drew back to fix her hair over her hand-filling breasts. Her palms did the rest as she looked down at me over their tremendous shelf, locks spilling from them like clinging ivy.



I gazed up at her trim belly and faint ribs, which towered over me like the face of a looming watchtower. Her hips had flared and thickened from her transformation and she had tucked her tail underneath them. “I’m a monster. Now everyone knows...” She sniffled. “I’ve wrecked everything the duke’s son says—countless structures and natural life for years.”

“But why...?” I urged, resting a hand on a knee of hers.

“I’m supposed to kill something. ...Whatever’s closest. I just have this... itch to destroy. To ruin and let it make anew. But you have to believe me—I wouldn’t harm that couple...! Please...”

She never said please in my lifetime. Lughnasa slumped to one side onto her stomach and tears leaked like a spring of water onto her arms under her chin. “All the bad things I do to shield IImagour from the bad things of the world—I’ve done it in a place most of you would *never look!*

“And it’s so *thankless*, and I *hate* doing it when I must risk so much, but I’ve been made the protector of the land now, and I have to... I *have to!*”

Her volume could shake me apart. “Lughnasa, look at me, okay?” I had gone up and leaned myself against her folded arm, and threw the blanket over it like it was bandaging a wound. I stroked her hair near her temple until she peeked through her bangs. “Help me understand... I feel like... some would forgive you if this *has* to happen.” Terrifying as it was.

“It does. Otherwise, the land starts to rot, more predator animals begin to prowl...” She took a breath. “I chickened out the last full moon. That farmer’s fence. Didn’t change nearly as much. So the wolves must have gotten antsy and...” Her big furry ears bowed flat, hardly shading the moonlight.

I hugged an armful of hair. “But you said kill ‘something’, not someone...?”

“Right. ...What is this blanket for, anyway?”

I fixed it from slipping. “I thought... if I found you back to normal, this would cover you since you’re naked.”

“But I’m huge, ya eejit...!” Lughnasa shifted and snickered so I backpedaled for balance. “Nevermind. Let me see this.”

I watched her gradually sit up, legs out straight. She daintily held up the sheet and ripped it in half, several times over, until it fell as messy squares meant for quilting. As the scraps rained down, she fluffed her breasts, arching her spine and—catching me staring.

“...What?” she asked coyly. “Did you see them get a little bigger?”

“Nooo... Why would they—?”

“It’s where a woman’s power is stored, y’know...” Lughnasa waved a hand and laughed. “At least, for me. The cycle of things breaking down—it flows in, flows out over time.”

She encircled her knees. As I stood to her side, I guessed I was only half as tall as the length of her shin to the ankle. The tent that the crook of her legs made above me hovered at around my hairline. And her foot was about the length of my bed.

Lughnasa sighed and continued, breasts crushed against her upper legs. “I’m just scared to touch anything. As soon as I transported myself to this side of the gorge, I’ve been... trying to calm down. Bracing myself... to leave this land far behind forever.”



I smoothed over her lower leg. “Lughnasa, you can’t...”

“The duke will want my head, won’t he? I’m not immortal even if I live a long time. I should just go away. ...You could... come? You wanted to go, too.”

“But if you do that, people will die, one way or another,” I pleaded softly.

“...”

I knew now that if Lughnasa stopped with her powers, Ilmagour would never have a fruitful harvest again. And perhaps selfishly: “You matter to me more than anything.”

She peered around herself. The *tshh-tshh-tshh* of her giant, furry tail sweeping to and fro over the grass told me plenty.

But then she moved to twist onto her side. I moved closer to her head before the bridge made by her knees turned into a hammer. She offered a curled hand, and I let the tip to the knuckle of her index finger cozy against my head and chest. “...You’re so nice to me.”

I grinned like a fool. “Yeah, but you could stand to chew some mint leaves.” I reached out and raised part of her upper lip to inspect her fang.

“Oh, stop,” she bashfully faced the ground and trembled with mirth.

“And you should really wear a brassiere sometimes.”

“I’m about to smother you with these things...!” she warned me as she repositioned with a tremor of the earth.

“Gladlyyy—ee—ee...!” And then, she was on her back, her bountiful hills trained skyward, tucking me into her chest with my arms scrabbling at the topside of them for a bit. I was tilted against the inside of one boob while the other leaned firmly on my back, with her hands folded contently to thumb-play with my legs sticking out, and arms narrowed to squeeze me lovingly.

“How glad are you now?” she tittered.

“...Grateful you’re gentle,” I answered, pulling myself up and out a fraction.

When I got on my side, still trapped in her skin, I worked my hips and swept out my arm, grazing the bumpier flesh; both my fingers and loins squeezed, mashing into her suppleness with all my strength.

“Aaahhh—fffff...!” she reacted. “That feels good. ...Do you have other giant friends I don’t know about?”

“No way...” Grunting, I managed to sit up into a spread-legged squat with the flats of my shoes on her ribs beneath me. “If my dad knew, he’d never let me leave home. Unless some very tall woman came and took me right through the roof.” It was only when I climbed up and sat across her cushy curves, I realized how safe I felt with her. Lughnasa was the spitting image of the creature I’d feared as a child, and yet I’d never felt less afraid of her. “Speaking of him... I am a little worried about everyone back home.”

Lughnasa raised her head with a half-smile. “Should we return...?”

“We really need to. Isn’t nobody safe until... what, your chest is even... larger?”



“That is true...” She moved up onto her elbows, and I essentially half-laid, half-stood on her collar facing her, with my back against her hulking breast, as she surveyed the direction west. “There’s a long time until I shrink again, unless I go back early to where I shifted. ...Mmm, what do we do...? I’ll have to carry you, since I can’t transport both of us together.”

“You should flash on ahead. Explain yourself to Meluh, the duke’s son, the others...”

“But when I’m like this, it’s dangerous if someone happens to be in the same spot as I’ll be.” She prodded my entire forehead. “Which also made you quite lucky a short time ago.”

“I’d chance it if I were you, Lughnasa. There has to be chaos without us.”

“I don’t want to leave you... I want us to spend time together—which... .” She narrowed her eyes. “Had I known you wouldn’t find having a big friend so terrifying, I could have found plenty of creative ways for us to get to know this body together...” Lughnasa cradled me in her forearm and palm and settled me onto her lap for a moment.

The wolfess then closed her eyes, hugging herself lightly. “Okay. I’ll just appear in the orchard. As soon as it’s safe, I’ll come to get you. Until then, you run west. Understood?”

As I dropped from her lap and received a reassuring touch on the back of the head, I spun around and gave her set of fingertips a strong embrace. “Be safe.”

The ground grated beneath her weight as she pushed herself to a stand. I really could only reach up and touch her knee. Modestly covering her genitals again, she grinned. “Close your eyes.”

I just blinked slow, and Lughnasa was gone.

So I tore off in the direction opposite the moon, following vague landmarks I remembered.

It was exhausting and the longer that I traveled, the more I thought, and the more I worried that the time Lughnasa was taking was a bad sign.

Would I even be wanted back by my own father for crossing the bridge? No—some of these traditions were real; others pure superstition. I just hoped the duke’s son wouldn’t do anything rash.

As the line that the gorge drew across the horizon neared, my chest and legs had been hurting, my feet were blistered in my shoes, and I began to feel hopeless. Did she really leave me or did the town really punish her?

I slowed my walk as, descending down the steps on the foreign side of the bridge, was Dwain walking and leading his horse. He spotted me from a distance, remounted, and galloped to me.

“Ah, we were wondering where you went before things broke loose...” the noble said insincerely as he halted. “You knew the plan, I presume?” His face was drenched in sweat, now glowering at me and my surprise. “You did not? In that case, I wouldn’t cross that bridge if I were you. I only just made it out alive.” He inexplicably began to unfasten his blue cape, and let it fall to the ground beside me—a dark stain reeking of blood splotched it.

Before I could look up at the man, the sword of Callan fell flat upon the cape. It was unpolished and caked with blood. He looked down at me, amused. “Well? Are you going to pick up that blade and charge into the village? It’s being mobbed by wolves at the moment. The pack is *clearly* famished, having been starved for so many years of human flesh.



“Perhaps your friend was puppeting them after all. Sought to kill all witnesses in her shame, maybe. I will be returning home to bring a party that may clear out your hometown, don’t worry.”

Nothing made sense. Breathing hard, I picked up the sword, feeling just as impossible to raise as a club in my fatigued hands. More tears than ever before fell from my eyes. I had to drop the sacred weapon to press in my palms and stop them from dripping on my fingers.

“I can’t stay here...” Dwain said to me. “If any of those beasts or that giantess come across, it spells a lot of trouble. If you can get on quick, you can ride with me.”

“No,” I finally choked out. “Lughnasa’s my friend... She wouldn’t do *thiiiiis*...!”

“You’re doubting me? ...How pathetic. Shove off, then, but hand me the sword.”

With hardly a choice, I took the handle again and lifted it for him.

“Thank you.~”

The blade was pulled right out of my hands. In my foggy vision, I made out Lughnasa laying on her stomach, her feet dangling over the void as if she just climbed out of the gorge. She glanced at the sword like it was an ordinary toothpick, and smugly tossed it nonchalantly over her shoulder, like a picked-clean bone, sending the treasure wheeling down into the gorge.

“You...!” Dwain shrieked.

“You.” Lughnasa pulled herself closer and reared up, hunched over on her knees. “The *both* of you.”

She seized me in her left hand and took the duke’s son in her right. The horse sprinted off again as we flailed in the air, up in the shackles of her fingers that held me steady from my chest to my hips.

She sat back cross-legged, observing us squirm. “Am I happy to see you...” Lughnasa whispered sinisterly to me as I heard Dwain bawl in fear. “I knew I was missing one for the sacrifice...~”

“Lughnasaaaa...!” I sobbed.

“Shhh! Enough out of you,” she growled, bringing me nearer to her fangs, and slowly pressed a kiss to the top of my head.

Then she... winked.

She pressed me and her closed hand against her breast. I turned away as a pillowy, warm wall of chest met me and I glanced up at the hapless hero. “Now then,” she told Dwain. “It would send quite the message to give the duke his son back... with his head bitten off, wouldn’t it?”

“Pleeeeeease, pleasepleasepleasepleeeeeease don’t kill me!” he squealed like swine demihumans were real. “I should never have tried to strongarm the good people of Ilmagour...!”

“Oh, so you admit it? Then, how about this message?” She shook him lightly and shouted. “*Tell my mother I am doing my best!*”

As her voice echoed across the fields and down into the recesses of the gorge, Dwain slowly got his voice back. “I-I-I have no idea who your mother is...! Who are you talking about? What mother?!”



Lughnasa laughed—she threw back her head and folded her ears and her bosom trembled against my face. I still had no idea what this all was for, either.

“Ohhh, maybe look harder? I’m sure she’s among you, still.” Lughnasa dropped her hand holding Dwain and let him roll out of her grasp. “Get out of my sight!” The panicked noble hauled himself up and ran as fast as his armored legs could carry him, panting and clanking.

“I *will* return if you ever show your face on this side of the realm again...!” Dwain swore over his shoulder.

She stood with me, and laid her other hand over hers in a quick embrace. “I’d like to see you try,” she told his retreating speck.

Lughnasa turned, skipped onto the foot of the bridge, and in a short leap landed deliberately with her opposite foot in the middle of the span, cracking it in half instantly. “Hup...!”

As I yelled, she launched herself forward and cleared the collapsing structure, stumbling and thudding onto her knees as the quaking of the fractured bridge slid into oblivion.

She held me up to her enormous chest. “See? Now they can’t... cro... aah... uuuaaAAHH...!~”

Lughnasa’s breasts seemed to carry on the rumbling racket long after the bridge was gone for good. They *ballooned* forth into her hands, her nips swelling and diverging to swallow me into a different gorge of toasty cleavage.

She collapsed onto her front, and that buried me like I was a mouse squeezing under a door. I inhaled her, heard her sloshing contents, and made myself push up on the undulating girth blanketing my body and face. She immediately leaned up on an arm and a knee to give me space to breathe against the dusty earth.

I scooted back, and back, away from the shed-sized globes she now sported—and we laughed again.

“At least...” she smiled as she leaned up, and one mammoth mammary went down to the top of her thigh as she knelt. “I shouldn’t have to do anything for at *least* three years. ...I hated working anyway.

“Now come on. Are you okay? There are dozens of wolves prowling the roads since the sacrifice had sucked until now. I think everyone’s safe inside or by the bonfire; I told them to stay in the light. Now that I have enough in me to make the pack retreat into the woods... I still want to hurry.”

I let her take me in-hand again and start to jog. I swung about like a doll with a noisy bounce beside me of her every step. “Can’t you... move your... arms less?” I called out to her.

“You try balancing with these giant things...!” she panted back as she stomped along the roads. Wolves that had been scratching at the locked doors of homes began to flee at the sight of her shadow, yelping and staying low like nervous kittens. Some of the wolves had been slain by the duke’s progeny.

No matter how rattled I was becoming in her grasp, I knew I was blessed to have her; we all were. I clasped her hand around me as we neared the center of Ilmagour.

We came upon the thinning pack that ceased after circling them for a time. The dozen men—including my dad, Gord, and Flan’s son—visibly relaxed, their backs to the shrunken but defiant glow of the bonfire. Their cooking-pot helmets and makeshift weapons—farm tools and instruments—dropped from their hands, and Meluh sank back in her chair in relief.



They looked up at Lughnasa's immensity, and she tried to peer down at the group of them past two spheres that protruded out to her wrists.

"Thank goodness I made it..." she said as she set me down, and I ran to embrace my dad.

He returned the gesture tight, but didn't look at me—but in fairness, who *couldn't* stop looking at Lughnasa?

"Agh, quit ogling me...!" she squeezed her thickened thighs tight and did her best to bar an arm and press her girls together.

I averted my eyes to hers. "Lughnasa," I said up to her. "The duke's son told me you sicced the wolves on us."

"Hah. That dumb mistaken coward?" She rose and looked out towards the woods, swiveling her ears for any stragglers. "I guess I can't keep any more secrets, can I?"

Arms akimbo, she let her tits show freely while her tail was curled in under and through her thighs. "Yes, the wolves come from the forest when the land's people or me as its guardian are at their weakest. It's been that way for millennia. I don't control them, but I had a feeling... someone's been meddling with the balance. And people just don't wish for everyone's well-being as they once did. The land *does* hear."

She lowered herself down to Flan's son, taking tender armfuls of her chest. "Now, I acknowledge I didn't fully do my part for your family member and for the village. I am so, so sorry."

The man ripped his gaze away from her cleavage to stare at his shoes. "Hard to believe any of this when you're shaking about so much," he clenched and unclenched his hands. "But I get it."

"So," I ventured. "You're *not* the giantess from old?"

She sank a pointer near the top of her right breast. "I'm her daughter. Of a father... named Callan."

About everyone gasped but Meluh and I. I knew Lughnasa considered her mother must still be around somewhere in the land across the gorge. But that she, the first giantess, and that oaf might be distantly related, and yet... It challenged all my perceptions about the stories.

"Now, hold on." Gord inclined his head. "How can all three of the main things in the founding legend of Ilmagour still be persistin' to this day?"

Lughnasa had settled on her knees. "Who taught you the legend?"

"My ma..." he nodded at Meluh.

"Okay," the wolfess said patiently. "Where do you think the giantess' hammer is?" She cracked a small smile and held up a fist. "I have a replica of it right here—and feet, too."

"Was the sword real?" I asked. "You tossed it into the gorge, I thought..."

Lughnasa's tail wagged. "Oh please. You *really* think a little splinter could bring down a big lady like me? Callan's sword was actually... aheh." The laugh from her nostrils buffeted me gently. "I'm the result of his tip plunging into her. And I'm thankful someone sensible made the story safe for all ages, ages ago."



“Hah! I figured I cracked it...” Meluh slapped her thighs. “Was planning to tell someone before I passed, believe me. I think there’s a few mysteries still of our traditions, though.” She counted on frail fingers. “Why our former guardian messed with the people, hitched with the first man brave enough to bed her, and left us hoping we’d all get along—and stay put.”

“And why we worshipped the man, and not his goddess or a wife or his daughter who’s now in charge,” Gord added, scratching thin hairs behind his head.

“Or how Callan’s descendants grew so vain...” Lughnasa sighed, and looked at us all. “And you should know: I’ve been doing this for so many years invisibly. My mother dropped me into a body in a field when she must have decided it was time for me to harness some sacrifices myself. Or...” She settled her hooded eyes on me. “That I needed to make a friend. ...Are any of you mad at me that I’m actually a lot older than twenty?”

“Ho ho ho,” Meluh rapped her wheelchair arm. “Let’s just say you are now. ...Thank you, Lughnasa. I hope you can protect us for a long time to come.”

“Hear, hear,” Gord nodded. “Sounds like we need to work on building some temporary structures to keep our guardian busy and... busty. You wanna make some lean-tos, lass?”

“Hee hee...” Lughnasa’s tail went quicker. She leaned up and her nipples peeked from against her thighs. “I guess I’d prefer to flatten unneeded stuff. Especially with these things. I’ve got to make them... uhm. Something large enough to wear.” I knew exactly what she wanted, even if each being larger than her head wasn’t enough.

At last, she rose again and stood over the pyre still snowing flakes of debris. “I have to extinguish this. It’s feeding my urges.”

We cleared the way and Lughnasa stooped and reached for it, wavering her hand in and out to test its temperature. I thought her hands might not be big enough, or her boobs were in the way at first. She shook her head and blew out the bonfire unceremoniously like a candle, scattering embers and ash.

We had mostly the moonlight to see each other. Her tail flicked to one side and she pulled in her shoulderblades like she felt something in her back. Then, with a long, sleepy sigh and the sound of tumbling gravel, Lughnasa began to descend.

“Oh *no!* Wait!” She rotated to me with a sway and smack of her swells—albeit rapidly shrinking—along with her height. “Your wish! You must tell me your wish...!”

I had it. “I wish we could stay here together forever.”

Lughnasa beamed with a bit of fang before her eyelids fell peacefully. “Good...” She then dropped heavily onto her knees.

Me and some men rushed backwards, then forwards, as her naked body pitched over. I caught her shoulders and stooped down to keep her from faceplanting.

Back to her usual five feet, she was already fast asleep, her flatter chest rising and falling slow as I petted her bangs and the flat lie of her tail.

My dad tapped me on the scalp. “Get Lughnasa some rest, yeah?”

I nodded and smirked. Straining all of my muscles, I hefted Lughnasa up across my two arms. I wouldn’t have believed this woman was earthshakingly, bridge-breakingly heavy not more than two minutes ago.



I carried her slow down the silent road. I shouldered into the shed. I clumsily plunked her down on her sheets, and covered her as uniformly as I could.

She looked so beautiful in the sliver of moonlight that cast itself weightlessly across her form. I wanted to watch her all night, down here on my hands and knees.

I saw her ears slowly adjusting. I felt this warmth in my chest and said the first thing that came to mind.

“Hey, lazybones.”

And my friend Lughnasa smiled.

Like the last Swell Tales contest entry I made (Tails Never Fails), so much of this story’s premise fell into place around ongoing life circumstances. The harvest-festival mythical-creature angle called me back to one of my first brushes with fictional worlds I was captivated with: that of Spice and Wolf, for which I had the biggest crush on Holo in high school. I did some Irish legend research and took some liberties with this one.

For better or worse, I turn 30 this October (hence the decade element) and have to reckon with the fact that I’m no longer as spry, and my tastes for expansion feel tamer and less sex-driven, and explore affection and romance and solving the tension between the way things are vs. what they should be in these realms I’m writing about. I liked the challenge of trying to structure this, despite how much my mentors would hate me using sooo many flashbacks.

This also isn’t a very climactic tale, but I hope this heals somebody out there.

Thank you so much for reading.

[Project: Ты подпрыг? / the tropaic and atrophying path / the machinist’s wheel]

