

Come! And I'll tell you a story, a story that will make you listen, a story that will make you think, a story that will make you, feel. Now, have you ever wondered who makes the trees shake, or who makes the howling in the wind as it blows through the leaves? Have you ever just, wondered? Well if the answer is yes, then I guess the only place to start would be the forest.....

Some say in the forest they feel safe for some reason, some say when they enter the forest they feel fear. Some say that they have heard things in thoes woods things that don't sound animal or human. Some say all they hear is whispering of trees and birds. But I tell you, they only feel and hear thoes things depending on if he's in the forest or not. He has different names and diferent callings. But I know him as Otso, King of the forest and protector of nature. He is as big as house and yet as quiet as a lamb. His roar is silent and shakes the trees, he howls in the wind as the trees speak to him, he takes the form of a large bear, a bear as dark as night. They say if you see him he will forever watch you, they say if he sees you he will forever protect you, they say if he looks into your eyes and you to his he will forever call you a friend and keep you in his heart always. But they say if he sees you damage his forest, leave stuff that wasn't there before, take more then one life from his forest then needed in your home, then he will forever make your time miserable. He will send the deer away, he will send all prey from your path, he will take your path from you and you will get lost and never return home. So my darlings, take care how you treat your forests of green, orange, red, purple, and brown. For you never know when he may be there.

Now they say with out him in the forest, it will soon die, they say the prey will disappear and the chirping of birds will cease and you will only hear the creaking of the bones of the once beautiful trees. They say anytime you kill him in your forest he can never go back and he will move on to another to protect. He may never go back, unless someone makes a reason for him to, if the trees are replanted then the birds will soon be back, when the birds are back the grass will grow, when the grass grows the deer, elk, and moose will return and when they return so will the predators, and then a new circle of life will begin. I remember a forest I would call my second home, I would play and sing and run, I would watch the birds make nests and find food. I would watch the deer quietly as they napped, and one day I saw him. He was as dark as a raven and as big as four grizzly bears, he was walking slowly and carefully, he would watch every step to make sure he didn't crush anyone underneath his large paws. I saw him raise his nose in the wind and sniff the air, he then made a howl but no sound came out of his mouth, but in the leaves above. I couldn't help but smile at the feeling it gave me, and thats when he saw me, his black eyes peered towards me and he crept over slowly. I knew I should have been scared but I didn't feel fear at all, only curiosity and wonder.

He was inches from my face and just stared into my eyes, my heart felt as if it would beat out of my chest from excitement. He then turned his head down after staring into what felt like my soul. And he pressed his head against mine, I closed my eyes and just felt, peace. When I opened my eyes he was gone, I looked around for him but I didn't find him that day. I went back to the woods the next morning and there he was at the front of the path, waiting for me. I followed him and I saw parts of the forest I never new of, there was a stream with fish and stones, I went and sat by it for I was a curious child and I put my bare feet in as I watched the life under my toes. The water was as cold as the air around me for it was mid autumn, Otso just watched me and he did a silent roar and the water around me rippled and tickled my legs, I laughed and for a minute I thought I saw him smile.

I went to thoes woods ever since I was a child up until I was seventeen, and that my darlings is when it happend. I went to the woods and he was there waiting for me just like always, it was mid winter and the forest floor was full of snow, my bare feet felt like ice as they made contact with the soft flakes, and as I followed him I was having trouble keeping up. The snow went deeper the farther we went in the woods, I fell and sank deep into the snow and he looked back with worry and he came over and nudged my face and then gently picked me up with his teeth on the collar of my shirt, and flipped me onto his back. I sat tall and high and then he took off at a run and I hung on to his neck and the wind danced in my hair. I couldn't help but laugh at the tingling on my face, we ran for a while until we came to a clearing in the forest, where you could see mountains after mountains and frozen rivers running through the forest like veins. It was beautiful and I can still smell the crisp air and how fresh it tasted. Oh how I long for that

Otso

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feeling again, the feeling of perfection, and peace, and joy. But sadly that day that feeling couldn't last, I got off of him and just stared out and thats when I saw it, there were trees falling left and right and they made horrible hollow thuds in the snow. I looked up to him and again he wasn't there, I looked down the vally and saw him running, and for the first time since I entered thoes woods I felt fear.

I ran as fast as I could bare footed and in the deep snow, I ran and ran and my legs and feet were burning from the cold, untill I finally got to the bottom and the sight of the trees on the floor made my heart sink. I looked for Otso and then I heard him, finally his roar mad a sound, a deep, loud, woeful, type of sound as he stood up on his hind legs. The men where frightend and one grabbed a bow and shot an arrow at him. I screamed for them to stop I begged them, I ran and tried to grab his weapon, but the others had some of their own. They threw knives and came at him with axes. As he roared the wind swirled and howled the trees shook and birds and animals whent running and flying. Twenty arrows where in Otso's back and chest and gashes were everywhere, I begged and yelled and screamed and tried to stop them, but it was to late I couldn't do anything. The final arrow peirced his heart and he fell to the ground and the white snow

turned crimson and when he hit the floor, the wind stopped and the whole forest went silent, it was an eerie feeling, not a chirp from a bird, not a breeze from the wind, it was just still. I ran and dropped to my knees and touched his once shiny coat which was now dull and sparse. I cried as I saw the last bit of light in his black eyes go out, I hugged his massive head as the forest around me seemed to already decay. The men around me didn't know what to think, or what to do. And so Otso the creature of love and protection died in the snow, and the forest soon followed.

I never dared to go back in that woods, for I knew it was now chaos by predators and prey and I could see the trees dying from the outside. I could see the birds leaving and I could hear them singing grave songs as they went away. A year after Otso, King of that forest died, the whole forest was a graveyard of lost dreams and life and joy. The trees were skeletons and the rivers dry as a bone, the floor was made of the bones of animals and dead leaves. I walked there one day and I went to the clearing and all I saw when I looked down the valley was a print of where the giant bear was killed. I walked down the hill as the forest felt empty for it was, it felt sad, for it was, and I felt miserable, for I was. I stood at the grave of Otso, and I pulled out a seed from my pocket which I saved from an apple, and I planted it where his heart would have been in the print. And as I cried my tears watered it, I shook and prayed that the little tree would grow, I cried and shook and I stopped instantly as I felt a pinch of joy in my heart, I looked around but there wasn't anything there, I didn't know where that joy came from, but it was quickly taken away as I walked back home.

And for many days I would come with water and I would care for that seed. And as the seed grew so did my joy and when the seed became a strong young sapling I started planting more around Otso's print. And as they grew my joy came back and I felt on the way to peace. And one day when I was full grown I came down and I saw my adult trees large and beautiful and covered with red shining apples and in the circle, was a large bear as dark as night with eyes that seemed to smile. The forest came to life after Otso the king came back, the birds flew home and the deer came and soon did the foxes and wolves. Our forest then grew and grew and all because of one small apple seed. So my darlings, keep in mind that one small deed can be the start of thousands. And my darlings never forget to always stay wild and always stay free.