

Turning to Love

Wendy, a six-year-old hyena, sat alone, far far away from her mother and her siblings, hiding from everyone.

"Hey, are you okay?" asked Peter, her half baby brother, a leucrotta (half hyena, half lion), as he came around and sat right beside her. "Well, no," Wendy said, "I have a lot on my mind."

Peter looked at her, begging her to go on with his adorable lion eyes.

"It's as if I can see his heart through these eyes," Wendy said to herself, so she decided to tell him the story -

"Pete, you know that mommy had been an ordinary hyena before she met your father Mark, the lion, right? A year after I was born, mommy met your father and since then she has only given birth to leucrottas. And we, as children of pure hyenas, who were born to hate lions, killed them all except you. It was mostly because of my brother John that you survived. That day, we quickly killed your brother and sister, who had been born minutes before you were. Then you slid out, and my brother John took one look at you as mommy was still licking you dry and fell deeply and hopelessly in love with you. It was the way you looked, your deep-set lion eyes, although shut tight at the moment, conveying your angelic fragility, your little half smile portraying your unusual sensitivity and your little catlike purr. Actually we all fell in love with you the moment you were born so we didn't make much of a fuss when John stepped between you and us and proclaimed, 'This one lives! I ask of you all one thing in this life, spare him, for me!' Soon you grew to be our joy. Then you knew what happened -"

"Oh, yes, of course, when I was still a little baby, " Peter finished his half sister's sentence, "I got cornered by a group of hyenas from another clan. John defended me but they chased him away from this region. Then a few months later, we found him dead deep in the desert, far beyond our territory, obviously killed and half eaten by lions." At this point, Peter choked on his own tears so he had to stop talking.

"Well, you see," Wendy continued, "after that, we were even more convinced that lions and hyenas were born enemies—all we could ever do to each other was to kill one

another. Except mommy didn't agree with us. We used to think that mommy was out of her mind. She loves your father Mark. As a matter of fact, she became so enchanted with him that she started to tell us wonderful things about lions. So we ignored her and her weird new ways of relating to lions until, well, until last month -"

Wendy suddenly stopped.

Peter knew better than to ask her. He wanted her to go on, badly, but he also knew that if he took too deep a breath, he could scare her, and stop her from continuing. He resigned to look at Wendy, tried very hard not to look too anxious for her to go on. After a long while, Wendy smiled at him, stroked his cheeks and continued, "Last month, I met a lion. His name is Adam. I ... Ah ... I ... I must say that I am in love with him."

"Like the way mommy loves my daddy?" Peter felt as though he was going to die of joy.

"Well, yes, " Wendy said. Then she immediately signed, "But no, it is more complicated than that. Your daddy is a brave lion. He does not live in a pack. He is a free man. Adam lives with a clan. They are his family. He loves them and he could not just leave them. And we will not be able to be with each other, not in the foreseeable future anyway."

Wendy was weeping then. It was Peter's turn to stroke his half sister's cheeks. He waited, again, in silence.

"I thought about how unnatural this all is. Me, a hyena, falling in love with a lion, like my crazy mother, " Wendy spoke after regaining her composure, "and it's against all traditions and instincts. So I tried to talk myself out of it. I even tried to hate Adam. But none of it worked. My heart tells me that no matter what the outcome of our love, I cannot stop loving him. And I don't know what I'm going to do with all this." With the last words, big tears dropped down in the sand. This time Peter wept with her.

Soon the night was fallen and they drifted off to sleep in each other's arms.

The next morning when the warm sunlight woke Peter up, Wendy was nowhere to be seen. He immediately started searching. In a few days, he caught up with Wendy—as a leucrotta, he could sense Wendy from miles away so it was no difficult task to find her. Catching his breath, the two of them ran towards each other, ended up in a long and tight embrace.

"Wait, don't tell me," Peter finally eased himself out of their hug, breathless still, "but do tell me! Well, let me guess. No! Tell me -"

Wendy laughed, "O, boy, you are more nervous about this than I am. Well, okay, I've been thinking and decided to listen to my heart, 'turn towards love', as our crazy mother often says and -"

Peter cut her off, "And next you are going to tell me, as our brother John used to say, '... come what may....'"