

Stepping off the plane in Walloon, Belgium, I realize how far I've traveled and how much I've put in to my life's work to get to this point. I started off as a curious kid in high school, always taking extra biology classes to the point where every other day I would hear somebody say, "Why the hell do you like science so much?" Most of my peers thought I was strange, but I knew that science was my calling and that most likely I wouldn't see any of these people ever again.

I was accepted in to John Hopkins University on a full ride for biological studies with an emphasis in endangered/extinct species. I continued to work on my thesis, which by the time I graduated was recognized to be one of the best research assignments in the history of the school and caught the attention of many well known scientists. After I graduated, I was offered a job as a researcher on extinct animals. My main focuses (which my thesis was based on) were wolves. Specifically the *Canis Lupis Lupis*, which is not to be confused with the basic American grey wolf (*Canis Lupis*). *Canis Lupis Lupis* was the European Grey wolf, with large incisors and thick grey or white fur, and it was said to have been extinct since 1894.

During this research-and several documentaries later-I had discovered small traces of the animal in current locations in Europe today. Teeth were said to be found and missing small farm animals had been reported. That's what I tried to convince my fellow scientists of anyway. Responses to my claims would most of the time end up being,

"Lisa, you're an intelligent scientist and have made many strides in your field, but this isn't one of them. Give up." But of course I refused. I kept trying to dig up clues as to prove that the European Grey Wolf still existed.

The original reason why they became extinct was because of poaching and the fact that their food supply was diminishing due to the urbanization of cities, which got me to thinking. With the growing of population and cities in Europe, where would the *canis lupis lupis* be able to go but try and follow the food and wooded area? With new found hope and with the money I have earned from my research and published documentaries, I was led to where I am now. Belgium.

Backpack on and bag in hand, I walk down a plethora of escalators to get myself out of the airport. It's in the middle of winter and I made sure to bundle up. With layers and layers of long sleeved shirts, a jacket, coat, and extra long socks on under my pants, I felt like a stuffed sausage. The long plane ride had made me a little woozy, and I was exhausted. I hailed a cab and was taken to the outskirts of Walloon near the border to Flanders Belgium. This little town was

beautiful. Filled with old houses and snow covered streets, I felt like I was in a world that I had only dreamed about when I was a kid, back when I didn't know what it would be like to witness snow. Brick houses lined the sides of roads and not far away was a pub. You could smell sea food cooking through the cracks of someone's window, and the sky seemed rich with color.

Making my way to the local inn an old outside the door stopped me and just looked at my face. Because of the fact that I was in a country completely foreign to me, I didn't want to cause problems.

After a few awkward moments she finally said in a drawled out Dutch accent, "Witte Wieven..." as she pointed her skeleton like finger at me. Looking at her I felt like I was staring at death. She was so pale and frail looking that if anyone touched her, she would immediately turn to ash.

"I've been expecting you," she said in a quivering voice.

"Excuse me?" I said.

"You made a reservation to stay here, didn't you, Witte Wieven?" she asked.

"Well, yes. But, that's not my name." I replied confused.

"I know perfectly well that that's not your name. You are Lisa Paksley, correct?" she inquired.

I nodded my head while she continued to scrutinize every single detail of my face.

"I could tell by the way you carry yourself. You walk like a self assured wise woman." She said.

"Excuse me?" I retorted, not believing what I was hearing yet slightly flattered at the same time. The way she spoke just oozed with assumptions of my character, but she doesn't know me.

"Witte Wieven. Wise Woman. Pale woman. It is a part of our past," she remarked.

"Oookkaaay. Could I see my room please?" I asked. After this experience with her I learned that when dealing with her it was best to either avoid her or be very direct.

After a night's rest I woke up bright and early to get breakfast and head out on my search for the European Grey Wolf.

I was joined at my breakfast table in the inn by another woman my age who immediately said, "so, you're the infamous scientist Paksley come to make our little town famous!"

"I don't know about fame." I giggled awkwardly.

“I researched you. You must be here looking for the Grey Wolf.” She stated. I guess it wasn’t that hard when researched to find out what my biggest obsession is.

“Yes... I am.” I said.

“You better be careful. It’s really easy to get lost in the bordering woods.” She started. “And make sure to be warm and when it comes to food, carry light. You don’t want to attract more than what you’re bargaining for.”

“You’re going in to the woods? No... *no!* You mustn’t do that. Unless you want to come face to face with Joost or be greeted by “The Mark” in the midst of shadows. It’s always dark in the forest. Makes you easy prey for them. Their red eyes and howling screams will catch right when your back is turned. These demons will take you quick. So fast, you won’t even have time to pray for your sins.” Said the innkeeper who had just happened to walk by the door during our conversation.

“Oh, Momma! The forest isn’t *that* bad. Don’t listen to her. Those are just stories told to little kids to make sure they stay out of the woods. You know, like all the Grimm tales. It’s no big deal. She’s just getting a little crazy in her old age. Said the woman sitting across from me.

“I’ll take your word for it-”

“Emma. My name’s Emma,” she said.

“I’m not crazy. I’m just as wise as Whitte Wieven over here,” the inn keeper said with a small smirk. I hadn’t noticed it before, but she had a missing tooth, her bottom incisor. That automatically triggered what I had discovered in my recent studies. The specific European Grey Wolf I was tracking has a missing bottom incisor. I have pictures of bite marks on animals to prove it.

I had made my way to the forest where Walloon bordered Flanders and was amazed at how right the old woman was. It was a little piece of darkness during the day.

I took a deep breath and uttered to myself, “Time for Lil Red to go find the Big Bad Wolf.” I walked for hours finding nothing. I even sat down and placed bait. Nothing. By the end of the day the forest’s eeriness began to sink in. Sounds of small animals skittering around and the old hag’s story kept popping back up in my head, which didn’t help. She made it seem that this forest was cursed for a reason. It was as if she really didn’t want me to come here. Thinking back to our conversation, her heavy blue eyes seemed stern and definite. It was only when I was

about to leave the forest when I heard a howl, a tree limb snapping, and a gunshot off in the distance.

I bolted. I hadn't ever ran this fast even when I participated in track during high school. The stray blonde hairs from my bun whipped my face as I ran. Sweat was starting to roll down my face and more gunshots were heard. My heart had beaten faster and faster the closer I got to my destination. Before I had left the inn, Emma had given me a transmitter that if I pushed the red button would signal for help at the Forest station nearest me and give my location. And boy was I glad that she did.

There it was. I had researched the animal and looked at its pictures enough to recognize it. The European Grey Wolf. I knew it as much as I knew myself. To my horror, it was caught in a net and was held gun point by a man who was probably only looking to make a profit. Poachers, they were the main reason why beautiful animals like this were considered extinct in the first place.

"*Stop!*" I yelled.

Startled, the man jumped and turned towards me with his gun pointed at my face. My hands shot up in front of me and I said, "Don't shoot... Just leave the animal alone."

"Who are you to tell me how to deal in my line of work eh? I should probably just shoot you and then the money maker." He said with a thick accent and smirk on his face, obviously getting over his initial shock.

"No. You don't understand. That breed of wolf is very rare-" I started.

"*Oh!* The more reason for me to shoot and get its fur for a profit then. The more rare the more money." He interrupted.

"You *can't* do that. It's wrong to kill such an amazing species. Looking for this breed of Grey Wolf has been my entire life's work." I said as I was slowly inching forward.

"Well, too bad then." He said, and then turned the gun back towards the animal. As I heard the click of his gun getting ready to shoot, time seemed to stop. The wolf, *my* wolf, was looking right at me. Her big eyes were a sort of cobalt blue that stood out against its snow white fur. What was strange was that it looked at me with a strange sense of familiarity, and in this hysteria it almost seemed to have smiled at me, revealing her missing bottom incisor. I had to have been hallucinating. Before the man could shoot, several rangers arrived with guns in hand,

and once they saw what was going on, pointed them at him. The poacher immediately dropped his gun and was arrested.

I took my small pocket knife out of my pocket and neared the beast with caution. I was afraid to startle her but she didn't stir. She just looked at me, cobalt blue staring into my icy blue eyes. We had seemed so similar. I had cut her free of her traps and, yet she still didn't move. I was face to face with the animal that I had been searching for my whole career. I was inches away from it, and I wasn't scared. I was too filled with amazement to be. She was still smiling at me, and along with her panting, it almost seemed like she was laughing at me. For some reason that reminded me of the old lady at the inn. I could picture her now saying to me,

“Now do you see why you shouldn't be going in to these woods Witte Wieven. They're nothing but trouble. Demons! I told you. But, then again, demons are everywhere...”

She let out a howl to the moon above, thanking it for allowing her to live. She looked at me again, and then ran off. Knowing that I was able to prove to myself that the European Grey Wolf actually existed was the only satisfaction I had ever craved.

When I got back to the inn, before I could say anything, the first thing the old inn keeper said to me was, “So, what'd the old wolf look like?” I smiled.

So, Lil Red found the Big Bad Wolf, defeated the Huntsman, and crazy old Gran Gran was safe.