



Not Another Allegory

Alexis Williams
Retold Fairy Tales

Mother

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who lived in a small village...oh, fuck this. I can't tell my story this way. Not with the truth of it all hidden beneath symbols and metaphors and implications.

Let's just tell the truth bluntly, shall we?

I live at home with my single, working-class mother. She has a new boyfriend. I call him the Worst Wolf. You'll find out later, to your chagrin, why. His real name is not important. Rather, who he is at his core is. Like many men out there, he preys on the weak, the isolated, the disenfranchised. Like a wolf desperately driven by hunger on cold, winter nights. He found (or should I say targeted) my mother one Friday night at a local bar. The work week was done and dusted, Happy Hour drinks were flowing, and my mother, as usual, had no guards up. She always left herself completely free and open to the world, ready for anything, good or bad.

You know the rest of this story: their eyes met from across the room, the attraction was immediate, palpable, yadda, yadda, yadda. My mother was in love (again), the relationship was a whirlwind romance fated by the gods (her words, not mine), and what could she do but immediately and completely allow him into her life? The thing is, she never once realized that whoever was in her life would also be in mine, and, as it has been since the First Wolf, the results were to my detriment.

Here's my story, reader, and just to warn you, it's not for the faint of heart:

The First Wolf

The first boyfriend I remember in this endless cycle of lovers moved into our home after “dating” my mother for about two weeks. Again, let’s be frank: they weren’t in love; they just both liked sex. Well, he really liked sex while my mother had other attachments, but this story is not about her issues. It’s about how her inability to deal with them led to some of the worst years of my life.

As you may have suspected, over time, the First Wolf’s need for sex extended beyond my mother’s bed to me. I was six-years-old.

The First Wolf didn’t start out creepy. I actually liked the guy when I first met him. He was funny and brought me little treats whenever he came home. He loved watching cartoons and eating sugary bowls of cereal with me on Saturday mornings. First Wolf even got my mom to stop partying so much and helped around the house: he paid the bills, cooked meals, bought groceries. Little did I know he was grooming us, stalking us, getting familiar with our personal ticks in order to strike with more purpose. In order to take us both down with greater ease.

After about three months, mom could tell that we were in a pretty good groove. She started to trust him more, and so did I. That’s when the shit hit the fan. One day, mom got called back into work to sort out some issue, leaving me and First Wolf alone in the house. When mom’s car pulled out of the parking lot of our complex, he suggested we play hide and seek to pass the time. We’d been playing this game a lot recently, so it seemed like a good idea. He would hide and I would seek, and if I found him quickly, I’d be rewarded with a special treat, a new part of the game he added in on a whim. I started counting...

...Nineteen...Twenty. Ready or not, here I come!

I looked in the usual places: behind the couch, in the hallway closet, in the tub in the hallway bathroom, but he was nowhere to be found. I checked my room with no luck. Then, I went into my mom’s room. I looked in the bathroom and the closet. Again, no luck. That’s when I noticed movement under the covers. My mom wasn’t the most tidy person, so she normally left the bed unmade. That’s why I hadn’t noticed at first that that was where First Wolf was hiding...

I jumped on top of him and yelled, “Gotcha!” with a loud squeal. He laughed and threw his arms around me, rolled me over and maneuvered me so that we were both under the covers. He tickled me throughout this

process, and I was so deep in laughter, it took me a while to notice something else, something odd. His shirt was off. As I furrowed my brow, he smiled calmly and told me that he wasn't allowed to wear clothes in the bed. That's when I noticed that he was completely naked.

Heart racing and feeling too confused to know what to do, he gently whispered to me that everything was okay, that this was a new special part of the game that he wanted to be just between me and him. That he loved me so much, and wanted to be my dad, and part of that meant that we would need to be closer. And didn't I want a dad? Though somewhere deep down inside me, I knew that what was happening was wrong, I also really wanted a dad. I'd never had one before.

I shook a little while he slowly took my hand and led it down to his legs, to feel something hard. The new treat. I cried a little when I felt something painful pushing into my body. He kept saying that he loved me, that I was doing such a good job. All I remember is fear, shock, pain, blanking out, guilt, shame. When it was all over, I threw up all over the bed.

"Shit, Lanny," he said, agitated, "Let's clean this up before your mom gets home."

The Worst Wolf

Though it took six months, Mom finally caught on that there was something odd between me and First Wolf. Our dynamic had changed. None of us played together anymore. I didn't laugh as much when he was around. He and my mom were fighting more. He was drinking more. The fun-loving person he used to be changed to someone more angry, secretive, territorial.

The day she confronted him, I felt immediate relief. I was finally going to be free from our secret games. At that point, they were not as gentle as the first time. He had seemed to start hating them, though it never stopped him from playing. He told me I was bad for letting him do those things to me, that if I ever told my mom, he would kill her and me. I also felt a deep fear. I was terrified of what he would do, even though he promised my mom he would leave right then if she didn't call the cops. Would he come back? Would he kill me and my mom like he promised?

I was ashamed for causing so much pain and trouble. Mom kept telling me I'd done nothing wrong. That she was the one who was sorry. She said she was going to get her act together. We were going to move. Her mother, my Gran, had a spare bedroom we could stay in at her house, and Gran lived a few towns over. Far, far

away from the First Wolf. I was consoled. We would start over. I would never see First Wolf ever again. Gran would take care of us both.

The move to Gran's house was fairly seamless. Gran was happy to have us live with her. Though she never knew the full story as to why we made the sudden move, she had her suspicions. She ignored them, though, because she was happy to not be alone anymore. Her daughter and grandbaby were with her now. All was good.

I wish that was where my story ended. I truly do.

True to her nature, my mom got caught up in the local party crowd, met other "true loves" and dated other Wolves. I was luckier this time because I had Gran. She could smell out the predators and drive them away with vigor. The abuse never lasted as long because of Gran. Blinded by guilt from our time with First Wolf, mom let Gran take charge in this arena. I knew she was ashamed about what I went through with First Wolf because of her choices, so at this period in our lives, it was like her brain shut off. But we had Gran to fill in the gaps.

That is, until mom met the Worst Wolf.

Pretty soon, we were all neck-deep and nearly drowning in life with the Worst Wolf. Gran hated him. Truly, hated him. They fought and yelled and tried with equal effort to mark their territory around mom, but this time around, Gran couldn't fight him off like she had with the others. Eventually, he won. We moved in with him, and the cycle of abuse, for both me and my mom, began.

As I said before, the Worst Wolf got this name from me for a reason. Though he was pretty innocuous during the day – drinking, sleeping and watching TV – at night the true beast would come out. He and my mom would be stupendously drunk by nightfall and they'd swing on a pendulum between overwhelming displays of affection and furious screaming matches. Most of the time, after fighting and loving for the better part of the evening, mom would storm off to her room or leave the house in a huff to go out to the local bars. And that's when he preyed on me. I was sixteen at the time, ripe for the picking in his eyes.

There were no preliminaries. There were no soothing words or gentle encouragements. But like First Wolf, there were pointed threats to my life and my mom's. I knew he wasn't kidding around; I'd seen him beat my mother to a pulp enough times in their drunken rows to know he meant what he said. He wouldn't hesitate to kill me if I resisted, protested or ratted him out.

After months of abuse, I just couldn't take it anymore. I had to get out of there. One night, while they were deep in one of their torrential arguments, I hastily packed a backpack. I stole the gun hidden under Worst Wolf's mattress. (He'd used it once as a threat while he raped me.). I put on my black zip-up sweater, pulling the hoodie over my head, and I snuck out the back door into the dark. I was going to Gran's. I was going to call the cops. I wasn't going to be a victim anymore. The road to this moment had been long and hard, full of pain, shame and self-hate. Mom wasn't going to protect me. She wasn't going to accept the full reality of my situation and her part in it. Mom chose ignorance, but I couldn't do that anymore.

I kept the gun in the pocket of my hoodie, prepared to defend myself should he notice my absence and come stalking after me in the night. Fortunately, I made it to Gran's house with no incidents. I was finally going to be safe. I would be free from that monster, I would free my mom from him too, and I would finally be able to heal and move on with my life. When Gran opened the door, one understanding look from her tore me to shreds. The tears flowed out of me like water spewing from a broken dam. Without saying a word, she hugged me and led me into my old room. The bed was made and there were clean towels folded neatly on a chair in the corner. She knew I was going to come back to her at some point. And she was ready.

The End

After a few days of sleeping away the pain, Gran and I got in touch with the cops. I filed my complaints, wrote my statements, jumped through all the hoops. Unfortunately, there was no trace evidence to prove the sexual assaults with a rape kit, but there were enough bruises on me to prove that something bad was going on in the Worst Wolf's household. They told me they would be in touch while they began the preliminary processes in their investigation into my claims.

I believed the justice system would work for me. But then the Worst Wolf found me again.

The police followed up on my report by visiting Worst Wolf's home to interview him. I'm sure they saw my mom, and I'm sure they saw similar bruises on her that they had photographed on me. He was given a warning

by the police to stay away from me while they continued their investigation. But they didn't know Worst Wolf like I did. If threatened, he would lash out.

Up until that point, he thought that I'd just run away for a little while. He thought I intended to come back. Now, with the memory of the cops' warning fresh in his mind, he was angry and ready to do something about it. He knew where I'd be.

Gran and I woke up on the living room couch to loud banging on the front door late one night. We knew it was him. He'd finally come for me, and he was here to keep his promise. Though I pleaded with Gran not to, she went to answer the door. He and Gran exchanged some heated words, while I tentatively made a move to escape to my room. To get the gun.

The hallway leading to the front door is the same hallway that leads to the bedrooms. I figured that if he and Gran were fighting intensely enough, he may not notice me walking quietly to my room. But I made the mistake of knocking over a vase while creeping out of the living room and into the hallway. When our eyes met, I could see his composure rapidly transition from shock at the sound of something breaking to pure, hostile anger. He pushed Gran aside and barrelled into the house, straight for me. I turned on my heel and ran as fast as my legs could take me to my room. Fortunately, I got the bedroom door closed and locked just as he slammed into it, trying to grab me.

"Open up you bitch!" he shouted, banging the door and aggressively turning the door knob.

"You better get outta my house now. I'm about to call the police," Gran warned.

He didn't hear her. I could feel his menacing rage seeping through the door. When he started kicking it in, I hid in my closet, gun cocked in my trembling hands, hoping he wouldn't get into the room, hoping he'd give up, hoping the cops would come before anything happened. But my story didn't start with much hope, and, by the looks of it, it probably wasn't going to end with it either. He kicked in the door and went straight to the closet, tearing it open.

In a flash, he saw the glint of silver in my hand, and with a fearful, snarling look, he lunged at me. Then came the loud banging pop of a bullet flying out of its chamber.

He fell back, and I thought it was all done, but then he started rolling on the ground, trying to get back up! He growled angrily as I stood up, hands still shaking, gun still in position to shoot again if needed. Blood was

saturating his shirt, and our eyes met again as he fell back on the floor, incapacitated.

And then he smiled at me. A rueful, spiteful smile. And I was engulfed in a deep, red rage.

I shot him over and over again, thinking of every assault I suffered at his hands, feeling every painful moment of every time he raped me. I shot him over and over, thinking of all the other wolves who'd crossed my path at more vulnerable times in my life. I shot him over and over, finally pushing back instead of giving in. I shot him until the chamber was empty. I screamed out as the bullets flew, releasing all of the pain and guilt and anger I'd collected over ten long years of abuse and neglect.

And then the cops arrived.

I am now the primary person of interest in the case of Worst Wolf's murder. There is some speculation that what I'd done was premeditated, not self-defense. You and I both know the truth. I had to protect myself and anyone else who would have been unlucky enough to cross paths with that sinister monster in the future. The cops told me to stay put: don't skip town, don't talk to the press, yadda, yadda, yadda. I just hope they do their job and use their conscience when establishing who the real victim is in this case.

Watching TV, I see the angry faces of people on both sides of the debate. There are some who question why I didn't report the abuse to the cops sooner, why my mom never suspected or intervened, why I really ran away from home. There are others who question the system and wave picket signs, showing a sea of outed abusers displayed for the world to see and remember: Jacob Anderson, Brock Turner, Owen Labrie...were their punishments just?

When you push someone far enough, when you give them no options, no way out, how do you expect their stories to end? I knew my story with the Worst Wolf would have only one ending. I chose to survive. I chose life. For myself and for all victims of sexual abuse.

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