Wolf Spirit

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by JungleDrums

Summary

Chihiro returns to the Spirit World seeking Kohaku, only to become lost in a mystical forest, the savage realm of a pagan god. There she encounters the Wolf Princess San, who takes it upon herself to protect Chihiro. They couldn't be more different, but in working together they find that which they've really been seeking all along...

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1

Chihiro stood before the Gate befuddled. When she and her parents passed through the first time, the gate was brittle red plaster. Upon returning to the real world the walls were stone and overgrown with leafy vines. Now the Dousojin was gone. The vines had grown even thicker from the last time. The walls may well have been made of plants. But most alarming was the horrid effigy that stood in the Dousojin's place. It grew out of the dirt, a skinny but sturdy tree. Vines budded with sweet smelling white flowers coiled up its length. The head of the tree was capped with a hateful deer skull, crowned with majestic antlers from which random bones dangled. They swayed in breeze, clacking like some hellish wind chime. The bones were marked with stomach churning red runes; primitive spirals and arrow heads, or perhaps fangs.

Chihiro clenched her teeth, bringing her toes to point inwards, and shrunk back from the grim totem. Was this really the same gate to the Spirit World? Where as before a cool wind seemed to pull her in, a warm, stale, stinking air exhaled from the gate. Chihiro tip toed in place unsure how to proceed, terrified of the totem. Weekend after weekend she had scoured the town for the secret path her parents had stumbled on the last time. She risked curfew, mean dogs, meaner old ladies, and her grades to find this place. What if this was the wrong place? If so, where did it lead? The gate's foul breath did little to put her at ease.

"Haku…" just saying his name replenished her courage. She clenched the straps of her pink backpack. For a moment she stood indecisive. The impulse to give up the hunt was strong. She instead took steps forward, passed the evil totem and kept her gaze forward. Her eyes went cold and steely. She reminded herself she wasn't running away, she was going to see Haku. She was going to find him no matter what it took.

She winced as she approached the dank smelling gate, the stench of earthen decay grew stronger. She pulled out her flashlight and held her nose as she ventured into the black tunnel. The light was meager, but enough to carve out a path. Emerald leaves blanketed the walls all the way around. But the stone floor soon gave way to mud. Piece by piece the stones disappeared until water and moss squished under her shoes. Chihiro groaned and hunched her shoulders. She bent down to slip out of her shoes, standing on them a foot at a time to peel off her socks. She pressed her bare left foot into the wet moss, revolted by its squishy surface. Then the right, picking up her shoes, and stuffing her socks inside them. She resumed her pace undaunted, as she had endured worse than this!

She came to a wall of skinny, crisscrossing vines. Alone they were stringy looking, but bundled up they were impenetrable. Chihiro's brow furled as fury puffed up her hair. She

stomped up to the wall, and grabbed at the vines, tugging with all her might. She'd rip them out by the root if she had to. She pulled and pulled with all her merger strength, but the vines held fast, strong as steel cables. When she tried to pull them up from the floor she slipped, tumbling backwards onto her bum with a little yelp.

Undeterred, she got right back up. This time she tried to slide her body through the vines, leaving her shoes behind. She reasoned she was skinny enough, and should be able to slide through. Indeed she slid into the vines easily enough, only for her right arm to get tangled. She tried to get free by stepping to the side with her left foot, only to slide and become entangled by the ankle. She jerked her shoulders left and right to try and get free, but was held fast.

The danger of being trapped here permanently was very real. With an impotent scream she flailed her body all about. The vines creaked some, but did not break. Her scream softened into desperate wailing, half crying, half angry. How could she had been so foolish to come here alone? There was no guarantee that she'd even find Haku. What if she could not get out of this mess? What if she died here?

With a sudden urge of primal fury, Chihiro gnawed at the vines forgetting all reason or child's terror. This was her only hope now. No one knew where she was, not even her Dad. No one was coming to save her. She would only escape, and see Haku again, if she wanted it bad enough. She snarled and tugged at the vines until one around her arm finally snapped. The grip on her arm slackened, but she was not free yet. Nevertheless an excited yelp escaped her lips as she bit at the vines again, this time at the clutch holding her leg. Her jaw was growing sore, and the vines tasted bitter. That she would soon be free made it all endurable. Vines popped as she was able to plow her way forward. She was half way through, when her backpack got caught. With a renewed effort she ran forward against the pull of the vines until they snapped, careless of the slick of the mud beneath. Her footing slipped and Chihiro went tumbling down a steep hill.

Down the gullet of the leafy tunnel she went, shrieking all the way. Faster and faster she flew as the incline grew steeper and steeper. The flashlight's beam revealed another wall of vines at the very end. Chihiro screamed as she burst through the leaves and shot out of a titanic tree, landing in a painful heap upon its massive roots. Her heart was pounding and gasped for breath. The air was now fresh and clean. Birds and insects sang sweet nothings as if nothing had changed in their world. Chihiro shook her head to clear her fuzzed vision. What she saw around her was a grand and glorious vision. She was in a forest of trees of mammoth proportions. They were taller than skyscrapers, and just as wide. She marveled at their ancient girth, staring miles upwards into the green canopy. Sunlight could not pierce the leaves completely, shading the earth below in an emerald haze. What looked like dust hung in

the air. It sparkled and swirled igniting into green, gold, and pale blue will o' the wisps. Like fireflies they danced in the air, swirling, expanding, and bursting.

Chihiro watched with awe as the lights collided with one another, exploding into dust and nothingness, only to swirl back to life over and over again. She reached out to touch them with her fingers only for them to dissolve like vapor. Her heart gladdened, this was surely the Spirit World!

A hungry shadow stirred in the canopy, roused by the sound of the young girl's screams.

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A child's cry gnawed at the ears of San. She sat atop her Direwolf brother Ruh, whom stopped and turned his head in the direction of the odd sound. Her other brother Tao also looked, then looked to San for her consideration. The other five wolves, whom were normal sized, panted and padded around impatiently. One of their number howled, mistaking the cry for one of their own.

Gone was San's simple dress of old, as The Lost Hallow was a place of blistering summer haze. Though she still bore her white fur pelt, bone necklace and mask, she was now stripped down to a breechlout and bandeau top made of white hemp cloth. Her bare belly was painted with a red dot, surrounded by four red triangles in shape to a paw print. Likewise she still bore fang marks on her face. She painted herself in memory of her wolf mother Moro.

She went barefoot, like the savage tribes of Fae did. She took queer pleasure from trodding the earth so, feeling a connection to it. Her crystal dagger still shined with azure light from the red string around her neck. It went well with the fangs that accompanied the necklace, as did her hemp woven armlets, bracelets, and anklets. These primitivist trinkets were gifts from the Fae creatures, both rewards and trophies from battles and adventures past. She kept Ashitaka's shortbow and arrows tucked away in a rawhide quiver tied to Ruh's side. Otherwise she favored her spear, still tipped with a beast's mighty fang from long ago. Now she truly embodied the savage title of Wolf Princess!

San sat befuddled. *A human cry?* she thought. She gripped her spear tightly. More likely it was just another Fae trick. Wild Elves, Goblins, Satyrs, Wulven, or even Puka looking to ambush her. Even if it wasn't, what was human life to her? She was a Wolf. When it came to

Man, vengeance for her lost mother and forest home came screaming to the forefront of her mind. Were it the scream of a man, she would have turned tail without a second thought. *Let the savages who worship The Manitoba hunt and kill Man. The fiends deserve each other.* Yet this scream was shrill and panged of innocence. It made her think of the squeal of a baby bunny. The sound tugged at her heart like vines hugging a tree. Why should she care indeed? She bit her lip amid strange surge of faceless guilt.

“What will you do San?” said Tao. “The tribe is restless.”

“Let us attack!” Ruh snarled with glee. “I hunger for battle!”

“It’s probably an another ambush,” San ran her fingers through Ruh’s fur reassuringly. “I tire of Manitoba’s games. Perhaps the Oracle deceived us. Mother isn’t in these lands.”

“Even so, without wings we cannot escape this wilderness,” said Tao. “We must hunt or starve.”

San’s stomach growled, causing her to blush. She fingered her crystal dagger for reassurance, imagining the ghost of Ashitaka in its glimmering surface. She let her precious trinket fall to her breast, then raised her spear. “We attack!” The wolves barked with excitement. “Be it wild beast or savage Fae, we will feast!”

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Chihiro winced when she tried to stand up. Her knee stung from a slight gash, but there was little blood. Her right palm, arm, and chin were also bruised from her tumble. She chewed her lip as she un-bundled her backpack for the box of band-aids she brought. She stowed her flashlight away as well. As she mended herself, her ears perked up at a distant forlorn cry.

So too did the lumbering mass that clung to the tree trunk.

Chihiro had never even seen a wolf before, much less heard one howl. But primordial instinct remembered with clarity. That sound meant danger. Chihiro fumbled to her bare feet in spite of the treacherous terrain of the gigantic tree roots. She cursed herself for forgetting her shoes.

“Haku?!” Chihiro cried out, as if his name alone could cause him to appear. “Hakuuu!” *If* Haku heard her mattered not. But the Gohma creeping down the tree did. Chihiro heard the creaking and clacking of the arachnid’s massive joints before she saw it.

It was a horrifying mass of black and thorny carapace. Moss and other bits of vines and greenery laid across the surface of its body, giving it the appearance of a ravenous plant. Eight bulbous ink black droplets for eyes gazed stupidly at her as its eight legs carried its fat abdomen down the tree trunk. It reared its abdomen up on those powerful legs, firing a long stream of sticky webbing. The salvo landed mere inches from where Chihiro stood. With a shriek she took off running down the tree roots and into the endless brush. The Gohma fired again and again, hitting the spots to the girl’s left and right. It crawled after her in coy pursuit.

End Notes

I started this all the way back in 2024, and have still made no headway on it. I have a concept of what should happen after the spider attack, but I am stuck. Add to that I have other projects I'm working on.

I do want to fulfill this story. The idea of San and Chihiro hanging out is too cute to ignore. We're just going to have to wait and see.

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