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A Night Alone

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A NIGHT ALONE

The young fawn sat stiff with fear. The logs and brush hid her well but it wasn't her safety she was worried about. She had never been left alone before—her mother and twin brother were always at her side when she was frightened. There it was again—that strange strong smell. She was only two or three weeks old but she knew the smells of the squirrel, the bear, and all the other forest animals. This smell was different—it wasn't the soft smell of a forest animal that made you feel at home but it penetrated and almost hurt her small nose at every breath.

Just an hour before the fawn had been romping about in the meadow with her mother and small brother stopping here and there to observe how a butterfly flew or how sweet the lavender clover flowers smelled. She had been tasting bits of clover when the noise came. It was loud, booming and painful for her tender young ears that had never heard anything louder than a blue-jay's cry. It didn't stop and as the fawn raced after her fleeing mother it became louder and closer. Her mother had stopped when they were in the grove surrounded by brush that held the bed of tender green moss they slept on. Her mother, panting, had looked worriedly around and for the first time the fawn noticed the absence of her brother. The fawn had followed her mother's hasty instructions and now she still lay in the same place her mother had left her.

The moss was soft and cool but the fawn was tired and hungry. There was a small stream that came through the grove, and she would have liked a drink but the frightening smell came from that direction. She would wait.

The forest was silent and still. The usual bickering of the blue-jays and other forest birds had ceased. Even the squirrels who were always scurrying about and scrambling noisily up the trees were gone. Night came and the fawn fell into a weary sleep.

It seemed that she had slept a long time when the hooting of an owl awoke her. Mountain nights were cold and she missed the warm side of her mother. The smell was gone. Hunger burned at the walls of her small stomach and tore through her sides. She was so thirsty that her small tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth. Oh how good her mother's warm milk would taste right then.

The fawn struggled to her feet and drank thirstily from the stream. The water was bitter and cold and it chilled her insides. She looked about. It seemed as if the forest was reaching out for her—trying to suck the life out of her small weary body.

Once in the night she woke up and ate some small forest greens to ease her hunger. They were heavy in her small stomach that was so used to warm milk and it felt as if she had swallowed a rock.

At daybreak the darkness floated up in a mist and light flowed into the forest. The fawn had been sleeping soundly when she was awakened by a gentle pushing movement against her body. Her mother's face smiled wearily down at her. Her brother was not there. Somehow she knew she would never see him again. They would never again dance together in the sun under the guarding eyes of the mountains.

Her mother told her of the landslide and of the man who had carried the limp body of her crushed brother out of the rocks. The fawn didn't hear. The warm milk of her mother tasted too good for her to be disturbed.