

The Black Moshannon Forest in southwestern Pennsylvania is not the "big woods" of northern PA, and is a mere neighborhood woodlot compared to the vast wildernesses in the upper portions of the North American continent. Still quite large, it is 150,000 acres of state forest land surrounding a scenic gorge created by the Little Kittanning River. Snowmobile and ATV trails crisscross the relatively narrow western section of the wood, but across the river on the eastern side, one could almost believe that he is in a trackless pre-industrial wilderness. Sometimes people get lost on the east side (or Calumet side, as the locals call it), and more than one adventurous hunter has lost his way, only to have his bones discovered years later.

A beast roams the Calumet side of the gorge. It is not indigenous to Pennsylvania, the last of its kind hunted out of the state over a century ago. Far from the north it has come, traversing wilderness and macadam, living off small game, road kill, and the occasional garbage leavings. As it moves south, lonely 2 AM truckers fueled with amphetamines and Red Bull blink and shake their heads at the grey form trotting along dark road shoulders. The animal fords small streams and swims large rivers, on and on, inexorable, without a choice. Over sixteen months, and interrupted by a number of minor adventures and sidetracks, she arrives in the Black Moshannon.

Game is plentiful, human presence minimal. A hunter trailing a fifteen point buck spots her in a laurel thicket, but his buddies will not believe his yarn of a huge wolf that roams the Little Kittanning gorge--and he misses the buck. The beast does not, and drinks the deer's hot blood with relish.

She waits, though she knows not the purpose or the object. Images of a mate haunt her, and when she comes into season, it is an agony of hell. She is alone, and correctly assesses she is the only one of her kind for many hundreds of miles.

One day in early October the beast glides through the forest, stops suddenly, and sniffs the air. Something is coming. A great roar like a strengthening gale fills her mind. Now, a silence, but filled with knowledge. Suddenly, the wolf's existence and purpose adopt new dimensions as she comes to understand she is a sentient, thinking being. It is like waking from a dream, and all at once she knows that the word "dream" is the correct human word for the visions that disturb her sleep.

The grey timber wolf, who thinks of herself as "Tyka," has become a fully conscious entity--knows that she is "wolf," but has been made unique. Her new found consciousness does not burden Tyka with thoughts of morality, of right and wrong.

As the season advances, and dead leaves carpet the forest like a shroud, a sense of urgency and purpose grows in Tyka.

She has been called.

