

### **The Hard Crossing (Short Story) by Linda Maria Frank**

Pop! Pop! The woods fell silent. A soft plop sounded as snow fell from a pine bough I pushed away as I sank to my knees to shelter my fawn. The grazing sounds of deer swishing through drifts to reach a tender branch on a tree had ceased.

The large ears of my white-tail kin twitched as did mine, straining to locate the source of the popping sound. It's close. I could tell. I nuzzled my little baby, and burrowed further into the snowy hollow, to become as invisible as possible. She never moved, nor did a sound emerge from her small spotted body. Thank you, Great Being, I prayed silently, knowing my fawn's built-in self-preservation is serving her well.

A few seconds went by and the sound did not repeat. The herd began to forage again.

Pop! Pop! This time the sound seemed farther away. Those sounds conveyed only one message. The up-right creatures with the killing sticks are back, and the herd will need to move.

I nuzzled my little fawn, her eyes wide and alert. With a swing of my head in the direction away from the Pop Pop, we trotted into the woods. Girl Fawn kept up. The snow in the woods was not too deep. I stopped, listening. Pop! Pop! Did I go the wrong way? I found a hollow under a clump of pitch pines and dense tall grass. Girl Fawn followed, and we did our best to become invisible again.

In the quiet I heard the Shush-ruhsh and deep rumble of those huge metal things, like bison, only bigger with no fur. We're near the hard crossing. It could be a way to get to a safer place.

The warm orb was beginning to sink towards the place of disappearing. Soon it would be dark.

Thump!

Rumble!

A metal bison was on the move, coming towards us. Girl Fawn's large eyes shot open, peering at me for direction. I didn't know what to do. Run! Run! I remembered the killing sticks. I leaned against my fawn so she would know not to run. The ground began to shake. My inner sounds were so loud I was sure metal bison would find us. Girl Fawn struggled to get up, following her need to run. I pushed her down. She whimpered.

The metal bison passed with a Shush-ruhsh.

Girl Fawn whimpered again. I was lying on her leg. I made her stand. She whimpered again. She stumbled back to me and laid herself down. I licked her leg and she slept. The scant warmth of the day was fast slipping away.

I had to wake her, and see if Girl Fawn could walk. I wanted to use the dark time to travel to the other side of the hard crossing. I never heard the Pop-Pop there. Never saw the up-right creatures with their killing sticks

I nuzzled Girl Fawn awake. She stretched, not whimpering. A good sign. The only light came from the hard crossing. I licked my little fawn's face and poked her with the "stand up" signal. She rose, and picked up the injured leg. Fear clenched my insides. Maybe her leg was just stiff.

We must go! I led the way. Again, my inner pounding increased to a roar in my ears. Girl Fawn was favoring her leg. We came out of the woods onto a grassy area where many others were grazing. Here the food was tender and salty and very good to eat.

A metal bison appeared in the distance, its great yellow eyes poking through the dark. It rumbled by, causing a strong breeze. Girl Fawn searched my eyes for her cue to move. My sweet smart girl seemed to know I needed her to listen. There was nothing but the chewing sounds of my kin. I swung my head toward the crossing and trotted off. Girl Fawn followed, slowly. We were on the hard surface now. Hesitating, I blew air out through my nose, she caught up, and I pushed her.

Just then another pair of metal bison eyes bore over the hill. The bison roared past. What a cruel creature it is, killing everything in its path.

Girl Fawn made a small sound as she stood on her three good legs. No more Pop Pops from the up-right creatures, but now we had to make it over the next hard crossing to the other woods. I swung my head again, and we came out on the low grass next to the hard area. Bison eyes appeared immediately. Girl Fawn stared into the lights. I held my breath, knowing if she didn't look away, she could be drawn into that yellow glow.

I blew air through my nose again, trying to get her attention. She moved toward the lights. I breathed through my nose again, louder, making a little squeal at the end. She continued to stare. Nothing to do but to knock her down again, and hope her legs could take it.

The metal bison was near enough to hear its treacherous breathing, to smell its foul scat. Girl Fawn took another step forward. I lurched at her. She fell, as the bison went by, so close it splashed us both. Girl Fawn jumped to her feet, and with a swing of my head we crossed to the safety of the woods.

But this time, my little girl was limping badly. I found another hollow to shelter in, and she whimpered as we lay down. I licked her leg to comfort her, and we slept.

The warm orb came up in the appearing place. Waking, Girl Fawn seemed better. She didn't whimper

when she stood, but I knew we couldn't go far. We grazed, moving on, because staying in one place is not what we do. She lagged farther and farther behind. We stopped to rest, and I licked her leg. We slept. The sound of the up-right creatures woke me, two tall ones and three short. They moved past, not seeing us.

When I thought it was safe, I nudged Girl Fawn. She got up, hobbled, and fell over with a whimper. I blew air through my nose.

I heard the up-rights make their high-pitched sounds, coming toward us. Run! But my little fawn would not be able to keep up. I stood my ground and blew air through my nose as hard as I could. The creatures stopped, and one of the little ones pointed at Girl Fawn. She came forward, and reaching in her basket held something out to me, and then to Girl Fawn. She made a soft sound, and stroked my baby's head. Girl Fawn was not yet afraid of the up-rights.

I fled to the woods to watch. My insides pounded in my head, and my breath came out in puffy clouds. I knew I could not help my baby's bad leg, and without walking she would die.

I heard her whimper as I ran off. I hid in the woods until the dark time came again. When I returned to the place where I left my fawn, I searched for her scent, and followed it to the square cave where up-rights sheltered. I could see Girl Fawn and the up-rights. She was standing, her leg was a different color. She was not afraid of the up-rights who were feeding her.

I blew air again, and she stopped, searching for me. When she caught sight of me, she came as the up-rights watched, and with a swing of her head led me to a pile of corn and a salty stick.

What place is this? My little fawn butted up against me and nursed. I heard one of the little up-rights sound something

"Daddy! Mommy! Can we keep Fawn? And her mommy?" said Eva.

"Only until they want to leave," Dad replied.

"And hunting season is over," Mom added.



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