

SERVICE

by Bud Smith

The girl is crushed by a falling tree. Her father digs her out from under, saves her. She grows up, but unevenly.

Mostly she is indoors and can roll herself around in a wheel chair made from part of the tree that crushed her. She reads a lot. She writes a lot too.

When she goes out into the snow, she is pulled in a sled by a strong dog.

The dog is attacked bringing the girl into town.

Wolves.

The wolves do not attack the girl. They are full from eating the strong dog.

She drags herself back to the cottage. A trail in the snow in the shape of a girl.

The father, who is always leaving, comes down from the mountain with two dogs, even stronger. Within a month, they're eaten by the wolves too.

So the girl decides to set a trap and catch one of the wolves. Partly for revenge. Partly because she likes to try to do things that she is not supposed to be able to do.

That old story.

A wolf in the pit! Look at that! The girl smiling from her wheelchair.
And then at night with the lantern looking down into the pit while
the wolf howls. And howls. And howls.

And her feeling so bad.

The next morning she helps the wolf up out of the pit by lowering
branches and nets. The wolf does not attack her, it runs back into
the snowstorm. But in the bottom of the pit, the girl sees three wolf
cubs.

She raises them to pull her wheelchair sled.

Fine.

Friendly wolves.

But her wolves are attacked by a bear. Eaten. The girl is able to
escape, dragging herself through the snow back to her cottage
because the bear is full from eating those friendly wolves.

The inconsistent father comes back from an expedition with an
elephant gun.

He teaches the girl how to shoot it. How to brace herself like a tree
shouldering the wind.

Of course she shoots the bear.

But the bear is only wounded.

And it moans in the snow as it dies.

And of course the bear is pregnant. All the wild things in this story
are pregnant.

The father teaches the girl how to use a knife. They cut a cub out of the dying bear.

And that is that.

The girl is no longer pulled in a sled.

She is carried by a bear.

Carried through the snow.

Carried up the mountain.

Carried to the village.

The people there are frightened of her bear.

But they can do nothing.

The bear has a vest it wears. The vest says, "SERVICE ANIMAL."

She burns the wheelchair made from the tree that crushed her. She leaves her father wherever he is today.

She goes to the library with the bear. She goes to the movies with the bear. No one can stop them. The bear carries her in its arms. Or she rides the bear, up on the shoulders.

Up in an airplane. Up over the mountains. Over the frozen sea, until the sea thaws, until the sea is surrounded by green places that the girl has never seen in places besides the library.

The people on the airplane are not complaining about the bear.

Things are often eaten in this story, these people don't want to be the next things eaten.

The girl goes to a university, not to study. To teach.

Someone who is carried around lovingly by a bear has nothing left to learn.

The girl is carried to the center of the lecture hall.

Everyone is quiet.

Alright.

Brace yourself.

Listen.

