



Hunter's Moon

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Evil is on the hunt, deep in the Adirondacks.

Vuk:

I wake disoriented, trapped inside a body that isn't mine and caged in a strange forest. Determined to find the one responsible, my search instead uncovers a most distracting, delicious scent coming from a female of a race I'd typically consider my enemy. I try to fight the unexpected attraction, but everything I do, everywhere I go, every clue I follow, just leads me back to her.

I'm not the only hunter in these woods; there is another, and he wants to take what is mine. He can try, but I'll stop at nothing to keep her.

Hana:

It was just supposed to be a couple days of camping with my best friends, but when the wildlife preserve closed early we snuck in anyway.

Right away, I notice something watching me from the shadows and stalking me through the trees—a beast that thinks I'm his.

There's something about him that draws me in. He's huge and terrifying, and so I do the only sane thing—I run.

He chases me like I'm prey, separating me from my friends only to push me right into the crosshairs of an evil hunter who wants to use me to get to my beast.

Now, I'm fighting for my life, and my heart, to protect my beast who isn't what he seems.

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The Hunter

FIVE DAYS UNTIL THE FULL MOON

My arms are folded across my chest as I lean against the grill of my Landrover. Turning my wrist, I check my watch for at least the dozenth time since I pulled up outside of the Municipal Wildlife Preserve.

The wildlife preserve I own.

Well, officially it's owned by a trust fund—which also happens to belong to me—but it exists purely as a front so I can hunt the exotic animals I bring in without having to go through the proper legal channels.

Some might call it poaching, but since the animals are technically bought and paid for by me, I prefer the term hunting .

The preserve is closed for winter, but during the spring and summer months it's a popular public destination, drawing in outdoorsy types with miles of hiking trails and dozens of waterfalls.

Only a fraction of the preserve is available to the public, though.

Hundreds of acres of untouched forest and mountains are strictly off limits to everyone except me.

Where I can do what I want without anyone being the wiser.

I'm impatiently waiting at the unmarked gate leading to the only road in and out of this part of the preserve, where I bring my trophies to hunt. But today I'm bringing something special.

A gust of bitter October wind hits me, sending a chill down the back of my neck as I pull the lapels of my jacket closed and check my watch again.

The consultant was supposed to be here by now.

The sun set hours ago, and the mild autumn temperatures are dropping faster than my excitement turning to irritation.

I let a few more minutes pass and when there is still no sign of him, I push myself off the front of my SUV. Rubbing my hands briskly together. "Fuck it."

The consultant can catch up with me .

My heart beats with a giddy anticipation as I circle around to the back, pressing the key fob along the way. As soon as the hatch starts to open the muffled sounds of screaming fills the quiet night.

Curled on his side with his wrists, ankles, and mouth duck taped, is my not so willing victim.

The twenty-something computer hacker's face is bright red from screaming and his dark eyes are bloodshot and terrified as he looks up at me, pleading for mercy.

Too bad for him I'm lacking that particular emotion.

The psychiatrist my parents forced me to see when I was a child called it an antisocial personality disorder.

“Settle down, Billy.” I tsk, reaching into the back of the SUV.

He barely weighs anything as I sling him over my shoulder like a sack of potatoes before slamming the hatch shut and making my way through the gate leading the backside of the preserve.

It’s a ten-minute walk through the dense forest, along the rarely used dirt road that’s mostly uphill.

Forced to listen to Billy’s sobs as he begs through his taped mouth, while he leaks tears and snot down the back of my \$9,000 Brunello Cucinelli jacket.

There had better be a good reason the consultant insisted Billy arrive alive and unharmed.

The pre-arranged destination is an ancient oak tree in the center of a wide clearing on the top of a hill.

Except this forest is filled with old oak trees and one looks much the same as another, as far as I can tell.

I’m about to walk past a particularly gnarled looking one when the shadow of a man seemingly steps out of thin air, directly into my path.

I freeze and reach behind me for my Glock. Pulling it free of the holster, my hand is steady as I aim it at the man’s head.

Unbothered that I could end him with a squeeze of the trigger, he lifts a lit cigarette to his lips.

“Took ye long enough,” he drawls with a heavy Irish, or maybe Scottish, accent, then

takes a long drag off the smoke. The end flares red, briefly lighting up his round face.
“My balls were tryna crawl up my taint.”

“Who the fuck are you?” I demand, keeping the gun on the man and shifting Billy’s sniveling weight on my shoulder.

Canting his head to the side, he arches a fuzzy eyebrow.

This guy is several inches shorter than me and looks like he’s barely old enough to be smoking.

“I’m yer wizard,” he says.

The consultant called himself Wizard, but this fucking kid can’t be him. Except, how else would he know to meet me here?

Wizard takes another drag before stepping out of the shadows, directly into the silvery glow of the nearly full moon.

He’s wearing a worn leather jacket over a faded flannel shirt and dirt-stained baggy jeans.

Bright orange hair sticks out around his head in wild tufts, like he has a habit of constantly running his fingers through it.

His face is round, with full cheeks that are bright red from the cold.

He’s short and stout and looks every bit the stereotyped Irishman he sounds like.

“ You’re Wizard?” I snigger.

He takes another drag and blows the smoke out of the corner of his mouth. “Were ye expectin’ some old man with a long beard and silk robes?” When I don’t answer him, he points the end of his cigarette at my shoulder. “That must be yer sacrifice, then.”

Billy has been hanging limp over my shoulder, but at sacrifice he starts screaming and squirming with renewed strength.

I narrow my eyes at the man standing before me. Tonight is the culmination of over a year of planning. Even before, I spent decades searching the darkest parts of the dark web to find someone who could truly give me what I wanted. Someone who could do what no one believed was possible.

“Prove it,” I insist. “Tell me why we’re here.”

Wizard rolls his hazel flecked eyes like a fucking pre-teen. “I’m here to bring somethin’ into this forest that has never been seen in this plane before. A lycan. Cunning and deadly, a worthy adversary to hunt for the sport ye crave. Does that sound right?”

My pulse flutters with excitement, knowing the thing I desire most in the world is going to happen. I only wish I could tell someone, but they would only think I was crazy. Maybe I am. But we’ll see how crazy I look when I have a mounted lycan head to prove what I’ve done.

“Where do you want him?” I ask, tucking my Glock back into its holster and hiking Billy’s writhing body higher up on my shoulder.

Wizard points his cigarette behind me at the gnarled old oak I’d passed. “Over there. Strip him down and then we’ll hang him up.”

Billy is screaming and thrashing with everything he has when I drop him to his feet

beside the tree.

He's putting up a good fight, but it's not enough to stop what's happening.

Grabbing the front of his shirt, I rip it down the center and peel it off his arms. Then I go for his pants and do the same.

"Here." Wizard hands me a wicked-looking hunting knife to cut the rest of Billy's clothes off. Leaving him huddled on the ground, shivering, bound, and naked.

Taking one last drag before putting his smoke out on the bottom of his boot, Wizard steps in front of Billy and pulls him up by his taped wrists.

Lifting the lankier man over his head with unnatural ease, Wizard hooks his wrist over a short branch and leaves him to dangle as he steps back to examine his work.

Billy isn't much to look at. His skin is pallid and covered in a fine sheen of sweat.

His dark eyes are feverish, and they dart back and forth between me and Wizard.

He's skinny enough that I can count every one of his ribs, but his belly is soft, and he has the beginning of a beer-gut.

His unwashed black hair shines under the moonlight, with more wiry strands dusting his chest and between his legs.

With his hands on his hips, Wizard slowly walks around Billy's writhing body. Eyeing him up and down, like a butcher sizing up where to make the first cut. Billy frantically pleads with us to let him go. Begging for someone, anyone, to help him.

"In the movies, it's always virgins that are sacrificed, but I've always found that to be

problematic.

” I’m not sure if the wizard is talking to me or Billy until he stops, and his strange hazel eyes flick up to meet mine.

“First of all, good luck findin’ one under the age of twelve these days.

Once puberty hits, and they get all those urges , it mucks everythin’ up.

” He shakes his head like it’s the biggest of inconveniences.

“Then there is the whole morality issue,” he explains with a heavy sigh before continuing to circle Billy.

“People tend to get their knickers all in a bind when their precious innocents disappear.” When he makes his way around to face Billy, he stops again, and his tone turns serious.

“But in order for a proper sacrifice to work, there must be something pure exchanged.”

Without taking his eyes off Billy, he reaches out to me and curls his fingers in a come here gesture.

I hesitate before stepping closer. The moment I do, Wizard reaches out and grabs my wrist with the hunting knife.

With a strength that surprises me, he stretches my arm up to press the sharp blade to Billy’s throat. Careful, so not to break the skin.

“Look at ‘im. Completely unblemished. Absolutely pure,” Wizard says as he admires

the hysterical man like he's fine art to be appreciated.

He turns to me. "Hunter. Ye wish to hunt something that has never been hunted before, aye?" While Billy squeals like a pig at market, Wizards' eyes catch the moonlight and flash an eerie silver.

Like an animal caught in headlights. "Te do that, a payment must be made for the portal to be opened. Is this what ye want?"

"Yes, yes. Can we get on with it?" I'm growing tired of his questions and how he keeps drawing this out.

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I could not care less about why this pathetic specimen was chosen as the sacrifice.

The only details that mattered to me were how to find him and where I was supposed to bring him.

That's it . I didn't give a shit about his personal life then, and I don't care right now.

I'm growing impatient with this production and only want what he can give me.

Wizard ignores me as he uses my arm to slowly drag the knife from Billy's throat down the center of his chest. Humming softly as he strokes the blade across his soft stomach, almost lovingly, before stopping above where his dick hangs limp against a thatch of dark pubic hair.

“Your skin's the only part of you that's pure, though. Isn't that right, Billy? ”

Billy moans against the tape covering his mouth as Wizard slowly drags the tip of the knife down his shriveled length.

“You like to hide behind yer computer screens, safe in yer parent's basement where ye terrorizes little girls, don't ye? And the underage kind are yer favorite, aren't they.”

Billy frantically shakes his head, but otherwise stays still with the threat of the knife so close to his sorry excuse for a dick.

“That's right. Billy here likes em' real young.” Wizard clucks his tongue. “And you

don't just like to look, do ye, Billy-boy."

No one is going to call me an upstanding citizen.

I've been told more than once I have a complete disregard for the well-being of others, and I'll certainly be answering for my fair share of sins if I reach the pearly gates, but there are some things even off limits to me.

Kids are one of them. I didn't have any qualms about ending Billy's miserable life in the first place, but knowing I'll be doing the world a favor kind of feels like my good deed to society.

"I'll spare ye the details," Wizard continues. "But trust me, it's the devil who's waitin' for him. It's not impure thoughts he's guilty of."

I'm no longer listening to him, something in the trees drawing my attention. One by one, strange symbols carved into pale birch bark begin glowing an eerie, icy blue. Except for the tree Billy's hanging from. Carved into the rough oak is a slightly different symbol, and it's glowing blood red.

My heart is pounding with excitement as I watch the unbelievable scene unfolding around me. When the knife drops away from Billy's junk, he starts to scream. Twisting and kicking out with his taped ankles in a useless attempt to break free.

I'll admit, there was a part of me that expected this not to work, but it's happening! Magic is real, and there are other creatures out there. Maybe not in this world, not yet. But soon.

"What are you?" I slowly turn to look at Wizard, realizing he isn't human. He can't be.

“I’m exactly what I am,” he tells me, flashing an unhinged grin before he focuses back on Billy.

With the trees glowing with their eerie symbols all around us, Wizard uses my arm to press the knife back to Billy’s throat, holding it there for a moment before he releases my wrist and begins to chant.

His voice is unnaturally deep, with a heavy echo cutting through the sounds of Billy’s terror.

The words aren’t in any language I’ve ever heard, and the alien sound sends gooseflesh scuttling up the back of my neck and down my arms.

The night has been mostly clear, but now thick bands of clouds slowly stir overhead.

Swirling until they somehow focus the moonlight into a silvery beam that illuminates the wizard—because I realize it isn’t his name, but what he is—like a spotlight that exposes a shadowy tableau overlapping his form.

The tableau is a much larger and older version of the actual man.

Instead of leather and flannel, he’s wrapped in a cloak the color of midnight and his face is hidden by a deep cowl pulled so low only his long red beard is visible.

I’m frozen in place. The knife I have pressed to Billy’s quivering throat is all but forgotten as the wizard lifts his arms to the moon.

The movement is followed a moment later with a strobe-like motion by the tableau.

With his face lifted to the sky, the wizard’s silvery glowing eyes flash again before changing to the same icy blue as the symbols carved into the trees.

The air surrounding me grows thick and heavy as his chanting rises to a crescendo.

A single sharp word cracks through the still night, and he spins, swiping his hand in my direction.

Without needing to be told—or perhaps because I am compelled—my fingers tighten around the knife, and I press it into the side of Billy’s throat.

The blade cuts deeply, and in one smooth stroke, I drag it across his throat to the opposite side, severing his carotid and trachea in one slice.

Flesh and sinew part and I stumble to the side, barely avoiding the initial spurts of blood.

Billy’s eyelids peel wide as he chokes and coughs on the five liters of bright blood pouring from his neck. My mouth waters at the sight, and I cup myself through my pants at the sight of so much blood coating his naked body, pooling at his feet.

The air is thick with the coppery scent, and I can’t stop my groan of pleasure at the macabre sight. It doesn’t take long for the spurting blood to slow to a trickle. Billy’s eyes lose their luster, and his expression goes slack before his head falls forward and he loses consciousness.

The wizard takes up his chanting again as he strides over to stand directly in front of Billy’s lifeless body.

The tableau mimicking his every move a second behind him.

He steps into the pool of steaming blood and slaps his bare hands against Billy’s chest. His body jerks like he’s been electrocuted before going limp once more.

With his hands coated in blood, he lifts them up, as if to show them to the moon.

When the silvery moonlight hits them, his red stained palms turn a brilliant white that flares in time with the rhythm of each strange word.

All around me the air grows heavy, as if an unseen force is sucking the oxygen straight out of my lungs until I find myself struggling for every breath.

No! What is this?

The knife falls from my fingers, and I bring my hands to my throat as I gasp.

What is happening? My mouth opens and shuts as my eyes burn into the wizard's back as he continues chanting, ignoring me completely.

My throat continues to close until it's like trying to suck air through a stir stick.

My vision starts to tunnel, forcing me to my knees.

The wizard turns to look at me over his shoulder, and the last thing I see is a too wide grin stretching across his mouth before I fall forward, and everything goes dark.

Something tickles my cheek and I bat it away, but it keeps coming back until I'm jolted awake with a sharp slap across my face.

My eyes snap open.

"Oi, there ye are. Welcome back," Wizard says with his harsh lilt.

He's crouched over me. The shadowy tableau is gone, and he's once again wearing leather, flannel and worn jeans. I glance up at the trees, but there are no glowing

symbols. Sucking in a deep breath, there is no tightness blocking my airway and the coppery tang of blood is gone.

Did I dream all of that?

“What happened?” I ask, pushing myself to my feet, shaking off Wizard’s helping hand.

I turn around to face the old oak tree. The mutilated body hanging from the branch is gone. So is the pooled blood that coated the ground.

“I brought yer wee beastie through,” Wizard tells me nonchalantly. “Yer welcome.”

My stomach flips and my heart jumps excitedly. It wasn’t a dream, then ?

Scanning the trees surrounding the clearing, there are no signs of anything out of the ordinary. There certainly isn’t any sign of the creature I am paying him a small fortune to produce .

“Where? I want to see him.”

Wizard looks up at me like I grew a second head and scoffs. “Yer daft!” Then he turns to walk away. Before he can make it more than a few steps, I grab his elbow and pull him to a stop.

“No money until I have proof.”

The wizard rolls his eyes, which are back to their normal, unassuming hazel. “My bank account is already bloated with yer money. Thank ye, by the way. Ye’ll find your beastie on the night of the full moon, just like we agreed.”

Without another word, he pulls himself from my grasp and disappears into the trees. Leaving me alone in the middle of the dark woods with only the light of the moon overhead. I'm torn with going after him or turning back to the forest and searching for my monster on my own.

My hands are shaking with excitement as I rush into the trees, going the opposite direction Wizard stomped off in when a mournful howl pierces the air and stops me in my tracks. The forest goes silent and all the hair on my body lifts as the reality of what I've done truly sinks in.

I'm going to hunt a lycan.

I force myself to take another step, but it's punctuated by a second low howl, and reason catches up with me.

I'm unarmed. Unprepared. The lycan is probably not fit for hunting either and the point isn't just to kill it. The whole point is the hunt. The sport.

Gritting my teeth, I take a step back. Then another.

I want to see my lycan, but Wizard is right. It's best to wait. Besides, I have trail cameras set up all over this forest. I can watch my beastie through them until the full moon. The Hunter's Moon . Then we will meet for the first and last time.

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Vuk

FOUR DAYS UNTIL THE FULL MOON.

My head is pounding as too-bright sunlight hits the backs of my eyelids, dragging me from a deep sleep. A moan rumbles out of my throat, coming out strangely pitched. When I try to roll away from the offending brightness, my body doesn't move like it should.

My growing confusion isn't helping the headache pounding behind my eyes, and it takes a moment to pry them open, only to find I can't focus. No matter how much I blink, everything is flat and gray.

It's all wrong. The forest. The scents. My body— especially my body.

I shake my head, but that only makes my vision swim, and the headache intensify. When I try to push myself to my feet, I can't find my balance and topple to the side because my feet are gone. So are my hands.

Another high-pitched whine rings in my ears when I stare in confusion at... paws . My hands, with their four fingers tipped with razor-sharp claws, are now fluffy nubs, covered in a thick reddish coat of fur.

The sound and scent of a nearby stream draws my attention and I struggle to the edge.

A wolf.

I can't believe what stares back at me in the slow-moving water.

I'm a wolf...

My back legs give out and I sit on my haunches, trying to make sense of how this happened.

The last thing I remember was hunting for the coming moon ceremony.

It was a clear night with the waxing moon throwing silvery light across the meadow as I ran with the other hunters.

The air was brisk, scented with the tang of woodsmoke and evergreen as we chased down our prey.

One moment I was howling with my pack, the next I'm waking up in a strange forest, confused and disoriented, trapped in a strange body.

How can this be? I am not a wolf. Not an animal. I am lycan .

A deep growl rumbles through my chest as I push myself to my feet—paws. I lift my nose—snout—and breathe in the myriad of scents brought on the wind. Many of them are different, although still familiar enough to recognize. Plants, animals, and... humans .

I snort to get the bitter scent of those foul creatures out of my nose.

Humans have long been our enemies. They attack us for every perceived slight, believing we are somehow evil because we were created to be stronger than them.

We do our best to stay up in the mountains and forests, away from their sprawling

villages that scar the valleys and poison the water.

They breed like vermin and judging by their prevalent scent on the wind, they are all over this territory, too.

Are they responsible for bringing me here? If they are, then how? I didn't think humans had magic, another reason for them to hate us. Why trap me here in the body of a wolf?

My nose twitches as I catalog the many scents in this strange place slowly moving away from the stream.

The trees here are strange, with bare trunks and colorful leaves that fall to cover the ground where they dry up and shrivel.

I'm unused to walking on all four limbs, so it takes a bit to get control of my new gait.

The dried leaves coating the ground are a hinderance as well, keeping me from moving silently.

My home forest is filled with needle baring trees that do not shed, making traveling silent and effortless.

As I make my way through the strange forest, I become more and more familiar with this new body. Picking up my pace until I'm loping through the morning brightness while my nose works to understand all I can about this place.

This forest is thriving. It's alive with clean streams and thick foliage.

Doing its part to protect the balance between predator and prey.

Where I am from, the humans have no regard for this balance.

They only care about their comforts, ignoring the destruction they leave in their wake.

So, it's a surprise to see such well-cared for land saturated with human presence.

Making my way through the trees and narrow trails, I capture sharper notes of magic under the bitter human stink.

I change course and soon I'm running at full speed toward where the vibrating scent is growing stronger.

Hope blooms in my chest that the source of the magic will give me the answers I seek.

That is, until I run headlong into an invisible barrier, and I'm knocked back with a sharp yelp.

With a shake of my head, I slowly get back on my feet, scanning the space in front of me, but there is nothing except the heavy scent of magic crackling through the air.

I slowly approach an area that stops me in my tracks.

An invisible barrier hums with power. Edging closer, the hum grows stronger until a sharp electrical zap reaches out to snap at me, warning me I've reached the threshold.

My weak wolf vision searches for the cause of the strange force. When my head tips back, I see them. A line of runes carved high into the trees.

The fur along my back lifts as I stumble back with a growl.

These aren't the sorts of runes my kind use for protection or divination.

These are something ancient only our elders might know anything about.

I've been taught to believe magic is neither good nor evil.

Rather, it's how you use it. However, if I had to choose a distinction now, I would consider these to be made of foul magic.

The skin beneath my thick coat itches with the warning to stay away.

But that only makes me want to get past them even more.

Keeping an eye on the trees carved with the runes, I follow them.

The sun makes its way across the sky while I follow the barrier, testing it every several feet without any signs of weakness. Just as the sun sinks below the horizon, I find myself right back where I started.

I am surrounded. Caged.

Panic coils in my stomach. Am I the reason for the runes? Were they carved to keep me captive? But who would do this? And why? Questions run through my mind as I puzzle over what to do next.

With the fading light, I'm surprised to find my vision vastly improves. It's still monochrome, but the clarity sharpens dramatically. I'm pacing back and forth when a rabbit suddenly darts past me, triggering my prey instinct. My stomach clenches with hunger and I'm after it without a thought.

The rabbit takes me on a good chase, but in the end it's no match for my speed.

It's not much of a meal, but it quiets the gnawing in my stomach I've been ignoring.

After the meager meal, I turn my attention back to the barrier when I'm hit with a new scent.

A bouquet that draws my complete attention. It's sweet, clean, fresh...

Lifting my nose higher, I breathe in more of the compelling scent then sneeze. The fur along my back bristles and my lips peel back from my teeth with a snarl. Human .

That can't be right. My heart starts pounding at the strangely appealing human scent. Confusion muddling my thoughts as I turn away from the barrier and start toward its source.

Is this human to blame for bringing me here? If it is, I will make it send me back.

As the strangely sweet human scent lures me deep into the forest, the last of the sun's light fades to night, plunging everything into inky darkness.

With each step the scent grows stronger. As I make my way up a slight rise, my hackles raise and when I reach the top, I come to an abrupt stop. On the other side of the rise is a clearing, with a small group working together to make camp.

They look nothing like the humans I'm familiar with.

The shelter is unlike any I've ever seen before.

Made from a lightweight material that doesn't look like it would protect them from so much as a slight breeze.

The light color contrasts rather than blends into the surroundings, making them far

too easily seen.

The two working on the shelter talk loudly to each other while a third human builds up a fire that will draw even more attention to them.

I'm stunned by the complete disregard for their surroundings they are showing.

The way they are completely oblivious of the fact an enemy is lurking a dozen yards away.

Have these humans become so arrogant they think they are the most dangerous creature in the entire forest?

It would be so easy to attack. They wouldn't see me coming until it was too late. I doubt they would even fight back.

I crouch down, digging my claws into the soft ground. I've never come across a group of humans less watchful. It would serve them right to attack while they are unaware and end their pathetic lives. My tail sways back and forth as I prepare to lunge.

Except, attacking them when they have no idea of the danger would serve nothing, and teach them even less. And if I kill them, I'll lose any chance to find out if they have something to do with bringing me here.

That's what I tell myself, ignoring the reality that the appealing scent has my curiosity piqued. Because it's coming from one of the humans below.

A low growl slips past my teeth and one of the humans setting up the strange shelter lifts her head. Her hair is dark and pulled back from her face and into a twisted rope that drapes over her shoulder. Onyx eyes narrow as they stare in my direction. My

body tenses.

Something about this female draws my attention.

When I look at her, my heart speeds up. There is something alluring about her, something I don't feel when I look at the others.

Perhaps it's the darker tone of her skin, especially compared to her companions.

Or the way her dark eyes sparkle as they slowly scan the darkness.

Dragging more of their scents into my nose, I realize the scent that had me running here is her's .

I drop to my belly with a huff. What does that mean?

I've never come across another human—or lycan for that matter—who's scent grabbed me the way hers has.

It must be something to do with this world.

Just like it's nothing more than curiosity has me watching them, instead of attacking like my instinct would normally be riding me to do.

The darker female turns to speak with another female.

This one's brown hair and pale skin are not as appealing to me.

The third human is male with swarthy skin and a thick, dark beard.

He leans back from the fire he's been feeding, brushing his hands on his thighs before

turning his attention to the brown-haired female.

I sniff the air again and realize their scents mingle. They must be a mated pair. My attention returns to the dark female. She shares no other odor besides her own. This pleases me. My tail begins a slow wag that I cut off abruptly, because it shouldn't.

Humans are filthy creatures, evil to their core. I must remind myself I have no reason to think these are any different.

A frustrated growl rumbles out of me, and I cut it off sharply when their heads snap up and turn in my direction.

I'm hidden by shadows and when it becomes clear they can't see me, the mated pair goes back to what they were doing.

However, the dark female continues to stare.

Her eyes don't lock with mine as she searches the tree line, but something in the way she holds herself suggests she can sense I'm watching her.

When she finally drops her attention back to her task, I push myself to my feet, intending to loop back into the forest, but instead I find myself circling their small camp. I'm careful to keep to the shadows as I search for anything that might suggest their reason for being here.

Are they hunting me? I see no weapons to suggest they are hunting at all. But then why would they be here?

I decide to keep a close eye on them so they can't catch me off guard.

Perhaps I can flip our roles and use them as leverage to escape this trap I've found

myself in.

Yes, I like that, I decide using the shadows to circle the small camp.

I return to my original spot and drop to the ground, where I can watch them without being seen.

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Hana

“ G od, Hana. I needed this so bad,” Amber says, breathing in a deep lungful of brisk forest air. Her curly brown hair is piled up on top of her head in a messy bun and her cheeks have a rosy glow from the autumn chill.

Kneeling across from her, I grunt my agreement as I wrestle with the tent pole I’m trying to thread through the small slot.

It’s our senior year of university and with the promise of our degrees only a couple semesters away, the pressure to keep up our grades is weighing heavily on us.

So, Amber, Mateo, and I took advantage of the unseasonably pleasant fall weather and decided to go on one last camping trip during break.

We only have a week off, so decide to stay close. Choosing a nearby wildlife preserve nestled at the base of the Adirondacks.

“Are you sure we won’t get caught sneaking in here?” Amber whispers, as if someone might hear her.

The website said the preserve was open to day camping and hiking until November, but upon arrival were disappointed to find signage announcing it was already closed for the winter.

A full month earlier than it said online.

I could understand closing early if there was a storm coming, but the weather is supposed to be mild for the next few weeks.

We'd gotten a late start, so the sun was already setting when we arrived. Since there wasn't anywhere else nearby to go, and we already planned to break the rules and camp overnight anyway, after some debate, I talked my friends into ignoring the NO TRESPASSING signs.

"Since it's closed there shouldn't be anyone patrolling," I assure her. I didn't notice any surveillance watching the parking lot or entrance, so that's my hope. "If they want to kick us out, they'll have to come and get us to do it."

Amber bites down on her bottom lip and nods nervously.

Growing up an Army brat, we moved all over the country as my dad moved up the ranks.

I met Amber my first year in high school when we moved to Arlington and Dad got a job at the Pentagon.

Since he was getting close to retirement, my mama declared this would be our last move.

She wanted my younger brother and me to finally be able to grow roots and make some lasting friends.

My dad might be a big, intimidating black man and a high-ranking Army officer used to giving orders, but when my five-foot nothing Japanese mama puts her foot down, her word is law.

My parents met when my dad was just a corporal, stationed in Okinawa.

To hear them tell it, it was love at first sight.

Her family wasn't pleased, especially when they eloped at the embassy, but my parents didn't let that stop them.

When dad's tour overseas was over, and he returned stateside, she moved with him, and I came along just under a year later.

"Who packed the pans?" Mateo, asks from where he has a good-sized fire burning within a ring of stacked rocks to form a pit .

"I did," Amber calls over her shoulder, pointing to her backpack with her chin. "Is that your way of offering to make dinner?"

We both laugh at the face he makes. Despite his Italian heritage, Mateo Moretti is not known for his culinary skills. However, according to Amber, he makes up for it in other areas. Which is something I'll have to take her word for.

A strange sound comes from the darkness, catching my attention.

Scanning the trees surrounding our little campsite, I don't notice anything out of the ordinary, so I go back to listening to Amber and Mateo's banter.

They've been dating since our freshmen year of college.

Much like she scooped me up and befriended me on our first day of school, they gravitated to each other like magnets and have been inseparable since.

"I was going to get some water from the stream and start boiling it," he explains, rooting through Amber's backpack then lifting the pot victoriously.

The nearby water source was the main reason for choosing this spot to make camp. That and it wasn't near any of the trails that cross through the preserve, just in case I'm wrong about there not being any patrols this time of year.

I finish with the tent poles, and I'm about to offer to get the water, when a deep growl echoes from the darkness. All three of us freeze and turn toward the sound as a cold chill rushes through me.

"That sounded big," Mateo whispers.

I agree with him, expecting some large predator to come charging at us from the darkness any moment.

"What kinds of animals might be living in this preserve?" I whisper, dragging my eyes away from the darkness to glance at Amber, who looks spooked. She's the forestry major and the one who would know better than Mateo, who is majoring in IT, and me who is going for business .

"Just the usual kind," she whispers back and I start wracking my brain for what the usual kind are.

"That sounded like a dog," Mateo hisses. "There aren't wolves out here, right?"

"Wolves haven't been in these mountains in a hundred years or something," Amber tries to assure us.

"Maybe it was a coyote," I say. Although, whatever made that noise didn't sound like any coyote I've ever heard.

I strain my ears for any other sounds, but the forest has gone eerily quiet. Has it been like this the whole time? A chill runs down my spine as I get the feeling that

whatever made that sound is still out there, watching me from the shadows.

Amber and Mateo go back to talking quietly, but I keep my ears strained. Listening past the crackling of the fire for what might still be out there.

Quit it. You're just freaking yourself out.

I tell myself as I unroll the sleeping bags inside the tent while Amber starts dinner.

She seems to have forgotten all about the creepy growl, but decided to skip heading into the dark forest to get water, and is teasing Mateo about the size of his fire as she fits the skillet and saucepan over the grill we brought with us.

Their easy banter is reassuring, and my heart eventually slows back to its normal rhythm as we settle into a normal routine. The rest of the night is uneventful as we enjoy the relaxing quiet.

It's late when I crawl into my sleeping bag. The normal nighttime sounds are soothing, and they quickly lull me into a deep sleep.

I'm enjoying the beautiful scenery as we hike through the thick forest. Amber and Mateo are walking slightly in front of me, holding hands and talking quietly. The silence surrounding us is the comfortable kind. The kind you don't notice right away.

Dappled sunlight filters through the leaves as early morning mist swirls gently between the trunks of beech and oak.

A gold and black spotted butterfly captures my attention when it flutters across the narrow game trail we've been following.

It's awfully late in the season for them to be out, and I frown as my eyes follow its

chaotic trail around trees and over bushes until it eventually disappears.

“Hey Amb, isn’t it kinda late for butterflies—” my words die on my tongue when I drag my eyes away from the insect to find my friends gone. They were just there, no more than three steps ahead of me.

“Amber?”

My head swivels from side to side, trying to find a sign they detoured from the path for a make-out session; it wouldn’t be the first time, but there is no sign of them. The trees that line the game trail are dense, but I should still be able to see Mateo’s orange Patagonia jacket.

I shuffle to a stop. Where did they go?

Cupping my hands around my mouth, I shout. “Amber? Mateo!”

The only reply is the gentle sound of the wind through the trees and cheerful bird songs.

“Come on, guys. This isn’t funny,” I complain, straining my ears for the sound of Amber’s tittering laughter, but there’s nothing.

Unsure what else to do, I turn back the way I’ve been walking.

Maybe they went back to camp? Except, I know they wouldn’t have taken off without letting me know .

I’m walking back the way I just came when suddenly the trail I’ve been following disappears. Coming to an abrupt stop, I scan the thick underbrush, trying to pick up where I lost it. My confusion turns to fear when I realize the sun is starting to set.

What the fuck is going on?

What is happening? How can everything be as it should one minute, then the next I'm standing in the middle of an unfamiliar woods, alone, with the shadows lengthening hours early, like someone hit a fast-forward button.

My fear turns to panic. I've never gotten this turned around before.

Ok. Calm down, Hana . I take some deep breaths to calm my racing pulse. I'm not a novice hiker. Even if I've never found myself in a situation like this, I know what to do.

Taking another deep breath, I mentally go through the list, the rules my dad has drilled into me since I was a kid, and we started hiking together.

Stay calm . Panicking only distracts you from thinking clearly.

Stay put . No one will be able to find you if you're wandering around getting yourself even more lost.

Assess the situation . I take another look around me trying to find something I recognize. A landmark, anything. Except there is nothing, so I move on to the final rule.

Orient yourself.

I always keep a compass clipped to my?—

I reach across my body to my shoulder where my backpack strap should be—only to realize it's missing, too.

No! No no no ! I had it when we started this hike, I'm sure of it. I never go anywhere without it.

Shit, no gear means no compass. Or supplies. The sun is sinking behind the trees like it's being pulled below the horizon, taking the last rays of daylight with it. No supplies mean no shelter to keep warm if I end up stuck out here overnight.

My breaths come in short pants, my heart racing.

Don't panic. Rule one, remember? Stay. Calm.

Cupping my hands around my mouth, I yell as loud as I can. "Aaaaaaamber!!! Mateoooooooo!! This isn't fucking funny!"

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Tears sting the backs of my eyes when my screaming is met with nothing but heavy silence. When did the birds go quiet?

Worry that something might have happened to my friends gnaws at my gut. What if they are hurt? They could be mere feet away, and I may not be able to see them through the thick underbrush.

Deciding I can't get more lost, I start searching through the bushes and brush, shouting and begging for my friends to hear me and answer. But there is nothing. As the last bit of daylight slips away, an icy feeling, like cold fingers walking up my spine, curls around me.

Spinning around, I squint into the darkness, half expecting to see a pair of reflective eyes staring back at me. Instead, I'm met with nothing but an ominous feeling of being watched, which is enough to catapult me into doing something I know better than to do.

Disregarding everything I've ever been taught about the outdoors, I run.

I choose a direction at random and put as much space between myself and whatever is out there. Almost immediately, the thing stalking me gives chase. The loud crunch of heavy steps and harsh animal panting is so close I can practically feel it on the back of my neck.

I scream my terror. Pumping my arms, pushing myself faster as I crash through saplings and bushes. My lungs burn, my toe catching on an exposed root, sending my body pitching forward?—

Even though I fall forward, I land on my back. Staring up at the inky black sky. When I realize the black expanse above me is completely lacking stars, I squeeze my eyes shut.

This isn't real. It can't be real.

A soft wuf comes from right next to me and when I pry my eyes open, I come face-to-face with a giant red wolf looming over me. It's standing at my feet, staring down at me with strange yellow eyes. Black lips peel back from gleaming white teeth with a menacing growl.

My heart is beating hard enough to break through my ribs, but it freezes in my chest when the wolf begins to change.

Its snout shortens, its forelegs turning into arms that cage my body.

Long fingers tipped with sharp claws dig into the soft ground on either side of me.

It's head— his head—changes to resemble something more humanoid. But not human. Not at all.

A high-pitched whimper squeezes past my throat when he leans down. He's mostly shrouded in shadow, making it hard to get a good look at him, but his yellow eyes cut through the darkness. I watch his nostrils flare as he scents me, dragging those glowing yellow eyes over my body.

"Please..." I whisper.

It's all I can think to say. Please... Please what? Please don't hurt me? Don't eat me? Let me go?

The monster presses his face against my stomach and growls, low and deep. My muscles tense as I anticipate his bite. But he looks up at me and his eyes flash from gold to an eerie blue.

“Mine,” he says in a deep, raspy voice.

He raises his hand, and four sharp black claws glint in the moonlight just before he slashes his arm down at me.

I scream and squeeze my eyes shut, expecting to feel the searing bite of his claws swipe across my flesh. Instead, the chill night air rushes over me as my clothes are sliced away, leaving me naked but otherwise unharmed .

At first, I’m too shocked to move. I lie motionless under him as he stares down at me.

His eyes are golden again, and a long tongue slides across his bottom lip as he slides his hands between my thighs.

Wet heat floods my panties as I snap my knees shut with a sob, but he wrenches them apart effortlessly.

A shocked cry leaves my lips as his shadowy face hovers above my spread legs, and I can feel each hot breath against my skin. A moment later his deep groan of approval vibrates against my sensitive center, before he rocks forward and strokes his hot tongue through my moist folds.

Oh! Oh, God!

My back arches like I’ve been hit with a livewire, and he growls softly as he laps at me.

Stroking through my folds and over my clit, he hums with approval when I moan.

Curling his tongue, he shoves it as deep into my channel as it will go.

Igniting sparks of arousal, making me forget my fear as I press my hands to the top of his head.

I sink my fingers into his thick fur. Pulling at him as I arch against him as he thrusts his tongue deep inside me. Much deeper than a tongue should go.

Lifting my hips with a whimper, I pump in time with his thrusting tongue. Pushing and pulling at him. Oh, God. I should be begging him to stop, not crying out for more.

More . Definitely more.

My mouth falls open and I moan as the first flutters of my orgasm ripple down through my belly. Suddenly he pulls his tongue from my pulsing channel. My head snaps up, and my fingers tighten around his thick hair.

“No,” I whine, trying to pull his face back. Needing him to finish me. “Don’t stop. I’m so close.”

He laughs, deep and low as he prowls up my body. His eyes stare into mine and his laugh turns to a growl that rumbles from his chest as he wedges his hips between my spread legs. One arm pressed beside my head, the other ...

I drag my gaze away from his mesmerizing yellow eyes to look down my body.

His other hand is slowly stroking the biggest cock I’ve ever seen. It’s big and red and his fingers barely circle his girth, as his length extrudes from a foreskin-like sheath

where it curls toward his stomach with every stroke of his hand.

My mouth goes dry, and I force myself to look back up at him. His mouth spreads into a wicked grin as he notches the spongy tip at my entrance...

“Oh. N-no. Nononono. That’s not gonna fi?—”

He cuts off my words with a firm thrust, sinking his huge cock deep inside my clenching body as he arches his back and roars his pleasure to the sky. He fills me completely, stretching me past anything I’ve ever had before. My head falls back, and I scream as an orgasm rolls through my body.

My pussy is pulsing around nothing when I jackknife upright with a strangled scream. I’m covered in sweat and my heart is pounding in my chest.

It takes me a moment to realize I’m back in our tent and tangled in my sleeping bag. Not in the forest and definitely not being ravished by a monster.

“You okay, Hana?” Amber blinks at me sleepily from where she’s peeking over Mateo’s curled up form. Her hair is a wild brown mess around her face and her eyes are barely cracked open.

“Yeah.” I scrub at my burning cheeks, trying to shake off the memory of the erotic dream while also wishing I could go back to sleep and finish it. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you.”

Amber makes an “it’s fine” motion with her hand and settles back beside her boyfriend. As soon as she lies back down, Mateo turns toward her and gathers her against his body before dropping back to sleep.

I’m more than happy for my bestie. She could not have found a better guy.

Sometimes it's hard not to be jealous. Especially after being left needy and wanting after that dream.

Holy shit, what made me dream that in the first place? I've had sexy dreams before, but I've never woken up mid-orgasm after dreaming of being railed by a literal monster.

What kind of head space am I in to even come up with that?

I've dated and done the app hook-ups, but none of those guys were ever able to meet my expectations.

Amber once told me Mateo never felt like a stranger to her and the way he made her pulse pound was how she knew he was the one.

I've never had a guy make my heart do more than a flutter.

Hell, more than half of them couldn't even give me a decent orgasm.

But the monster in my dream had all my parts pounding.

I lie back to stare up at the canvas ceiling, wondering if my perfect guy is out there somewhere.

I glance over at the well-read copy of "Getting it on with Gargoyles" by Hazel Mack.

It's set within a small town filled with monsters who know how to treat a girl right.

Ugh! I need to lay off the monster romance books.

Especially if they are going to give me those kinds of dreams. Except there was

nothing sweet about the way the monster drove himself between my legs.

Rolling to my side to face the tent wall, I pull my sleeping bag up around my ears and force my eyes to close. Hoping sleep will claim me for the last few hours before daylight.

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Vuk

The soft sound of one of the female's sharp gasps has my head snapping up from where it was resting on my paws. Her startled sound is soon followed by the sweet scent of arousal, and I take a deep, greedy breath. There is no trace of the male's musk, so I must assume this is from the dark female.

My tail starts to wag, and I force the annoying appendage to the ground angrily.

I hate that it thinks it can do whatever it wants and that I'm trapped in this small, cumbersome body.

Whatever foul magic brought me here, it's beyond anything I've ever encountered.

Lycan's do not usually dabble in such things.

We cannot shift like some creatures and rarely attack unless provoked, so it makes no sense to me why I was targeted.

I hadn't planned to spend the night lurking outside the human's camp. Mostly, it's curiosity. I want to find out more about them. What differences there are between these humans and the ones I've learned to hate on my home plane.

They aren't hiding from anything, with their smoldering fire and light colored enclosure. They behave as if they are impervious to dangers they know little about and might as well light a beacon advertising to all where they are.

My ears tilt forward as soft voices drift from the tent. I pick out her voice easily. It's deeper, huskier than the mated female's and I find its sound appealing.

Appealing! What am I thinking? Shaking my head with a snort, I jump to my feet and retreat into the forest.

I need to find a way to escape this place. I had hoped the humans might be the key, but now I'm not so sure. I can sense no magic on them, and they have no useful survival skills I've witnessed. So, I will have to find the way out on my own.

Working through the dense foliage, I make my way to the tree line carved with glowing runes. After carefully inspecting each one, I realize they are all the same pattern repeated tree after tree. But what do they mean? I'm hardly fluent in rune magic, my skills are used to hunt for our village.

Staring up at the trees I wonder... if I damage one of the symbols, will that break the spell keeping be trapped? Crouching down, I sweep my tail behind me before leaping up, digging my claws into the bark, trying to get as high as I can, but they are too high.

I try again and again. Jumping, stretching, scratching, but never get close enough to reach them.

I back up for a running start, but it's still not enough to reach.

Over and over, until I miscalculate and fall against the invisible barrier.

Electricity shocks my system and freezes my muscles as I yelp loud enough it echoes through the forest. It takes me a moment to get my breath back, and then I slink away until I come across a shallow cave that doesn't appear to be in use.

Curling up inside, I drop my chin on top of my paws and let out an annoyed huff.

As I wait for sleep to claim me, my mind wanders back to the humans.

Or rather, just the one .

I don't understand why I'm so drawn to the unmated female. I can't pinpoint the appeal, but as I lie curled in the shallow shelter my mind keeps circling back to her, no matter how hard I try to think of something else. Anything else.

Her scent, I decide, isn't as foul as the others. And the sound of her voice is rather pleasing to my sensitive ears.

My eyes drift closed and her image forms in my mind.

Recalling how she looked when she was kneeling before the shelter, not paying me any attention.

Her black hair pulled back, with a few escaped wavy strands framing her face and the rest twisted in a tight rope that falls over one of her shoulders.

What would it feel like between my fingers?

I find myself imagining combing through the coil with my claws, being careful not to nick her fragile skin as I fan the thick waves down her back. Then I'd gather it up and wrap it around my fist, pulling her head back so she's forced to look up at me.

Her dark eyes would flare wide with surprise.

Her plump lips parting. Using my other hand, I'd drag my thumb over her smooth cheek.

Would it be as soft as it looks? Cupping her jaw with my palm, I'd slide it down to the front of her throat.

Squeezing just enough, hard enough, I can feel her throat constrict when she swallows.

Leaning over her, I'd scent her properly. Committing her sweet musk to my memory so I could always find her. I'll start at her neck. Pressing my nose to the spot behind her small ear. Do humans have a scent gland there, like my kind do? I've never been close enough to one to find out.

Turning her so she's facing me, I'd work my way down. Tasting the hollow of her throat before pressing my nose between her breasts. I'd flick my tongue against her nipples, then pull them into my mouth when they pebble into hard points.

The sounds she'd make will be deep and husky. She'd arch against me, tipping her head back, encouraging me to keep going with more of those throaty sounds. Digging her blunt fingers into the thick hair at the back of my head as I make my way down her belly toward where her scent is sweetest.

A low growl rumbles through me, I should not be thinking these thoughts. She's human . An enemy to my kind. And yet... I keep going, imagining following her pleasing scent to its source, tasting her where I'm certain her flavor will burst across my lycan tongue.

My claw-tipped hands pull her thick thighs apart. My short nose, not a muzzle, parts her slick folds and my long tongue tastes the sweet honey she's making for me.

When she's squirming under me, breathlessly begging, it will be my thick cock that sinks deep inside her tight channel.

Pumping between her thighs until we're both panting and gasping from the pleasure.

Then, as I come for her, I'll sink my fangs deep into the side of her throat.

Marking her. Claiming what is mine. Turning her?—

With a violent shake of my head, I force myself back to the present. Lunging to my feet, I bolt out of the cave and into the forest.

I will be doing no such thing! Especially to a human ! I'm horrified at even conceiving such a taboo thought! Lycan's and humans are not meant to mix.

Breaking into a run, I push this wolf form to its limits. Racing through the forest, dodging trees and leaping over obstacles, putting as much space between the human's camp as I can.

The pregnant moon hangs low over the trees. It will be full soon and a heavy feeling in my gut tells me that is important. Maybe even why I was brought here.

The last thing I need is to be distracted by this human, no matter how appealing she is. I need to focus on how to get past the runes and back home. Except, these humans could still be the key to my freedom. Perhaps something will happen that will allow me to use them as a bartering tool.

My strides slow to a quick walk and my heart pounds from the burst of energy as I decide I'll need to keep a very close eye on them.

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Hana

THREE DAYS UNTIL THE HUNTER'S MOON.

After the nightmare, and unexpectedly spicy dream, I slept fitfully for the rest of the night. When morning finally comes, I'm up and at 'em like usual. Excited for our planned hike.

Mateo brought a map of the preserve with him, and our plan for today is to take a trail to a place called Lace Curtain's Falls . I'm working through my second cup of strong camp coffee when I sit down with my pack.

I feel the need to double check that I have everything. Especially with last night's nightmare still fresh in my mind. Making sure there is no way I'll end up lost and completely unprepared, I take everything out and inventory it before putting it back.

Emergency blanket, rain poncho, and an extra change of clothes. Check.

A small first aid kit, multi-tool, fire starter kit, and headlamp. Also check .

At the top, and within easy reach, is a package of jerky and trail mix, a whistle, and my solar powered charger. Checkity-check.

I shove my water bottle with the built-in filter—for stream drinking—into the side pocket and triple check my compass is secured to one of the straps like it should be.

Slipping the small nylon pack over my shoulders, I pat down my pockets to make

sure I have my cell phone.

Reception is spotty, but it's not so bad that I couldn't find a place to get a message or call out if I needed to.

The sun is warm on my shoulders as we make our way through the forest toward the falls.

Songbirds serenade us as chipmunks follow along playfully.

Amber points out numerous signs of wildlife along the way, including a fox peeking at us as we pass.

But it's signs of predators that make the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

"Bear!" Amber announces excitedly, rushing to examine some deep scratch marks on a tree that's not far off the trail. A cold chill rolls down my spine when she causally mentions they don't look very old.

Realizing there are dangerous animals here reminds me of the feeling that we were being watched as we set up camp. My skin goes itchy just thinking about it, and the feeling follows me the rest of the way to the falls.

Despite my misgivings, the well-used trail makes for an easy hike, and we make it to the horseshoe shaped falls in a couple hours.

Surrounded by a vibrant collage of orange and red leaves, the frothy curtain of water cascading down the smooth rock walls to a shallow pool below is the stuff of postcard pictures.

The beauty surrounding us overwhelms the last of my anxiety and I'm able to settle

down and enjoy the scenery. Forgetting all about bears and being watched as Mateo spreads out a blanket on the grassy shore. I set out our picnic and Amber leans back on her elbows with a contented sigh.

We eat and talk, enjoying the warm autumn afternoon. Amber moves, resting her head in Mateo's lap, and he mindlessly strokes his fingers through her hair. I pick at my sandwich while enjoying the relaxing sound of the falls.

A happy smile teases my lips when I catch movement out of the corner of my eye.

My head snaps to the side as something reddish brown and big dips out of sight across the pool and around the side of the falls.

Squinting to get a better look at what I thought I saw, I push myself to sit up straighter.

"Hey, Amber?" I ask without taking my eyes from the spot where the mystery animal disappeared.

"Hmm?" she replies sleepily.

"Are there red wolves in these mountains?"

"Red wolves? No, they are much farther south." She cracks an eye open. "Why?"

"I could swear I saw something." I scan the spot where it disappeared.

"It was reddish and big. Are there grizzlies?" Even as I ask, I know for sure that's not what I saw.

It wasn't that big, and much too sleek. I know she already told us there aren't any in

this part of the mountains, but it looked an awful lot like a wolf.

“No, no grizzlies.” Amber’s brow puckers into a slight frown. “Maybe it was a fox?”

I shake my head. “Whatever I saw was way too big to be a fox.”

Rubbing at the sudden prickle of gooseflesh across my arms, eerie feelings rush over me. It’s the same feeling I got last night, warning me something has its eyes on me again.

I trust Amber to know what is or isn’t in these woods, being a forestry major and all that. But I know what I saw. Or rather, I know what I didn’t see, and it wasn’t a fox.

We hang out at the falls for a bit longer, but I can’t shake the eerie feeling.

The hike out is as uneventful as the hike in and the last of the sun’s golden rays are dipping below the horizon when we return to our campsite. Mateo gets straight to work building the fire up and Amber heads for the tent when her blood-curdling scream freezes me in my tracks.

Mateo moves first and I immediately follow him over to where my friend is stumbling back from our tent. Where, laying across the entrance is a deer. A very dead deer.

“What the fuck—” Mateo hisses as I come to a stop beside him.

It’s a young buck with a small rack of antlers. His dark eyes stare lifelessly at us with a dull sheen. A jagged slice runs the length of its belly, and all the organs have been removed or eaten. Probably both.

“What could have done this?” I ask.

“Other than a person?” Amber shakes her head. Her eyes are wide and panicked as she looks over at me then back down at the deer. “Maybe a bear? But it makes no sense why it would leave it in front of our tent.”

“Whatever it was, was probably just dragging it through our campsite.” Mateo motions to the obvious grooves in the dirt. “It must have heard us coming back and dropped it.”

“So, you’re saying whatever it is could still be close by?” I try, and fail, to keep the quiver out of my voice.

“Those aren’t bear tracks.” Amber points a shaky finger at where there are several sets of really fucking huge paw prints. “They look like wolf tracks.”

“I thought you said there weren’t wolves here?” My heart is pounding hard against my ribs as I think back to what I thought I saw at the falls .

“This doesn’t make any sense. These are way too big to be a dog or coyote.” Kneeling, Amber spreads her hand out over the top of one of the prints, where it fits easily inside. Her eyes are round when she looks up at me. “These are too big to be a wolfs, too.”

“ What the fuck...” Mateo repeats under his breath. “Okay, let’s look at this logically.”

The hair on my arms prickle as I stare down at the partially eaten deer.

Besides its guts being cleaned out, it’s otherwise untouched.

Wouldn’t there at least be bite marks where the animal took it down then dragged it?

Then I see them. Just under its jaw, a row of small punctures and the unnatural angle of its neck.

“Do wolves break their prey’s necks?”

“I’m not a fucking biologist, Hana!” Amber snaps at me. Then she quickly squeezes her eyes shut and sighs. “I’m sorry. I don’t know the answer to that. A deer this size, verses a regular wolf, I don’t think so. But, going by the size of these tracks... I wouldn’t rule out anything.”

Mateo and Amber start arguing over whether the prints are as big as they look when all the hair on the back of my neck stands up, sending itchy chills racing down my back. Indicating whatever has been watching me... is back.

“I think we should go!” I exclaim, interrupting their argument.

Mateo lets out a long sigh. “But we just got here. I’m sure there is a reasonable explanation for this.”

I shake my head as an intense feeling I can’t name hits me straight in the chest.

Whatever is out there does not want us to leave. Or maybe it doesn’t want me to leave.

“I’m with Hana,” Amber says, backing away from the prints. “I don’t think it’s a good idea to stay. We should at least move our camp in case...” She waves at the deer. “It might come back looking for its kill.”

“It’s already dark, though,” Mateo argues. “Look, what if I move the deer. That way if it does come back, it won’t come into our camp.”

While we've been standing around, the sun has disappeared completely behind the horizon and the forest has fallen into shadow.

It took us hours of hiking from our car to reach this place.

Add to the feeling we're being watched, maybe walking back through the dark forest isn't a good idea after all. Especially not with a predator nearby.

"What if there is a serial killer out there watching us?" Amber whispers.

"A what?" Mateo and I look at Amber with puzzled looks.

Amber shrugs.

"You watch way too much true crime." Mateo shakes his head with a soft laugh. "We're turning this into something it's not. I'm sure there is a reasonable explanation, but running through the woods at night, drawing the attention of predators, is reckless and stupid."

"He's right," I agree, already coming to the same conclusion. "We're safer staying here for the night. But I think we should pack up everything so we can leave first thing in the morning."

Amber scrunches her face up as she glances from me to Mateo, then down at the deer before letting out a huff. "Fine."

"Alright." Mateo looks around the campsite and then starts giving orders. "You two finish getting the fire going again and I'll—" Mateo looks over at the deer carcass. "I'll drag that away."

Amber chews on her bottom lip as she stares down at the deer then into the shadowy

forest. Slipping her pack off her shoulder, she digs inside for her firearm and hands it to Mateo. “Be careful. ”

His eyes soften and I turn away when he leans in to kiss her.

While he’s gone, Amber and I work silently as we get the fire built up, probably bigger than necessary, before we pack up everything we don’t need for tonight. That way, as soon as the sun rises all we have to do is break down the tent and hike out.

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Vuk

A n irritated growl rumbles up my throat as I drag my kill deeper into the forest.

Wasted meat.

Not only were the humans ungrateful for my gift, but the male left the deer far too close to their camp when he dragged it away. By the time I came along to rectify his mistake it was already attracting several small predators, including a bear that caught the scent and was coming closer.

Why did I even bother with trying to feed them? Not them. Her— Hana. That's what the other humans called her.

With a shake of my head, I drop the carcass with a snort. I already ate the soft internal organs, assuming these humans also don't care for that part of the animal. Stupid creatures. How often have I seen the humans from my home waste the best part of a kill.

The way the curly headed mated female screamed and them looking at what I left them with fear and disgust tells me these humans are no different. The sharp disappointment that Hana shared their reaction...

She is no different I remind myself bitterly as I tear into the now cold meat. None of them can be trusted. I need to focus on using them to get what I want—my freedom.

After I've eaten my fill, I leave the rest for the carrion feeders, and stalk back to the

human's campsite.

I'm careful to keep to the shadows, where their weak sight cannot detect me. Except that doesn't explain why Hana always seems to feel my stare. How her sharp, dark eyes snap to where I'm hiding. How she can tell when I get close.

I followed them through the forest, hoping they might reveal something that would help me escape this place. But they didn't go anywhere near the barrier.

The humans built up their fire while I was gone, big enough so it casts a wide circle of light around them.

The flames are a good deterrent, but also careless.

There hasn't been much rain in this forest, and all it would take is an errant ember to ignite it.

I curl up with a disapproving huff outside the clearing where I can keep watch over them.

The human's moods are subdued as they cook their strange food over the fire—some kind of sausage they eat in rolls—while they speak in hushed tones. Growing drowsy, I rest my chin on my forelegs.

“We'll leave as soon as the sun is up...” The male's words catch my attention and my ears snap forward.

Leave?

No! She cannot leave this place.

Lifting my head, I focus on their hushed conversation.

“I still think we should leave now,” the male’s curly headed mate grumbles. “What if leaving dead animals for his victims is some kind of serial killer calling card or something.”

“Oh, for God’s sake, Amber.” The male shakes his head. “There are no serial killers out here. We probably scared off a coyote that was only dragging the deer through our camp.”

If I hadn’t been watching Hana, I would have missed the way her eyes rolled. “Must’ve been a big fucking coyote. ”

I have no idea what a coyote is, and I don’t care. My focus is on Hana, or rather the way the fire’s flames flicker across her smooth skin, turning it from brown to molten gold. Several strands of her dark hair have escaped her braid, freeing them to curl softly around her round cheeks.

I have the strangest urge to pinch one of her curls between my fingers. I want to pull it until it’s straight then let it go, so it bounces back into a coil.

I get up and pace. Reminding myself they may be the key to escaping. If they leave, I’ll lose any chance I might have of getting back home.

The humans don’t linger after they finish eating.

The moon isn’t even halfway across the sky before they bank the fire and disappear into their shelter.

Just like the night before, I head out into the forest while they sleep.

Following the barrier, I continue my nightly habit of searching for some kind of clue to tell me why I'm here, or how I can escape.

Something to explain the strange pull inside my chest increasing with each night.

Is it because of the moon? It's very nearly full, I'd give it another day, two at the most, before it reaches its zenith. Or is it the humans? The strange way I am acting toward the one called Hana especially has me confused.

Humans cannot be trusted. They are a vile species that have earned my hate. And yet today I hunted for one. Left the choicest parts of the meat that I selected for her with care—like I would for a female I was courting.

Shaking those thoughts from my head, I force my way deeper into the forest, away from the human's camp.

I have no room for sympathetic feelings toward them.

I need to focus on how I can use them to get myself free from this place.

Not wonder what Hana's pretty hair would feel like pinched between my fingers.

Or how potent her heady scent is at her core. Will she taste as sweet as I imagine ?

I stop with a snort. Where are these thoughts coming from? I'm not even in my true form, but trapped as an animal that isn't in any way compatible with her.

Dropping my nose to the ground, I mean to find my way back to the den I found the previous night. Instead, I find myself back at the clearings where the humans sleep.

Creeping into their camp, I check where the fire smolders harmlessly within the circle

of stones before moving to the shelter. My nose twitches as I breathe in their thick scents. Despite their worry from earlier, the breathing coming from inside is deep and regular with sleep.

I marvel at how they manage to feel safe with such a thin bit of material between us. It would be nothing to puncture it, slit the fabric, and open it up. I would only have to reach inside and pull her out.

Why do I keep thinking such things?

I circle the shelter again and then the camp before finding a spot outside of the clearing where I drop to my belly and curl up to sleep with my nose tucked under my leg.

They think they will try to leave in the morning, but I'll track them. I must be careful though, if they make it past the runes, I'll be trapped behind. So, I'll hunt, making sure they are trapped like I am until I can figure out how to use them to set me free.

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Hana

TWO DAYS UNTIL THE FULL MOON.

The sun is starting to brighten the horizon when I wake.

Unlike the night before, I wasn't plagued by any nightmares or wildly erotic dreams. In fact, I didn't dream at all.

I dress and pack up my sleeping bag while Amber and Mateo are still waking up.

We don't bother building up the cold fire, so we eat a quick breakfast of granola and the last of the fruit we brought.

The forest is quiet this early, the sky speckled with stars fading quickly with the rising sun. None of us speak much as we load up our gear and start the hike south, back to where we snuck into the park.

The farther we move away from our camp, the more everything that happened the night before starts to seem like an overreaction.

"What's so funny?" Amber asks when I can't hold back a giggle.

I glance over at her with a smirk. "We probably interrupted an animal dragging that deer through our campsite," I admit, doing a terrible job of holding back more giggles. "But your knee jerk reaction was assuming it was a crazy stalker serial killer."

Amber wrinkles her nose, and her cheeks turn pink with embarrassment.

“It seems silly now, doesn’t it?” She sniggers and then grows serious. “It didn’t help that I’ve been feeling like something’s been watching us ever since we stepped foot in these woods.”

My breath catches and my blood turns cold at hearing her admission. Especially since it aligns so closely to what I’ve been feeling too. Before I have a chance to say anything, Mateo lets out a mournful sigh, clearly irritated at cutting our camping trip short.

“We still have two days before classes start again. Now what are we going to do?”

“We’ll think of something,” Amber says in a low, sultry voice leaning against him.

I roll my eyes when Mateo wraps an arm around her and nuzzles the ticklish side of her throat. Amber lets out a screech and pushes him away with a laugh.

We’re making good time, and my mood is lightening along with the rising sun. We’ve been hiking for about an hour when we decide to stop to rest. A fallen log makes a convenient bench, and Mateo hands out the last of the breakfast burritos we made for the trip.

We’re laughing and joking as we eat, sitting in a row on the fallen log.

I push my shoulder into Mateo when he teases me, which shoves him into Amber.

In retaliation, he reaches around me and grabs my shoulders.

I let out a loud shriek when he pulls me backward, like he’s going to let me fall off the log.

He's pulling me upright again when a massive red wolf comes crashing through the bushes and skids to a stop less than a dozen feet away. Head dropped low, bright yellow eyes watching as a steady growl fills the silence around us.

Oh shit!

I know what to do if I run into a bear, but what is the protocol for coming face-to-face with a pissed off wolf?

"Amber?" I whisper, without taking my eyes from the snarling beast. "I thought you said there weren't any wolves in these mountains?"

"Yeah..." she whispers back. "...I was wrong."

No one moves. We don't dare, especially the way its nose is wrinkled, and its lips are pulled back to show off white fangs. Beside me, Mateo shifts his weight, and the wolf's eyes flit to him, snarling even louder and snapping its sharp teeth. Then, without any warning, it lunges.

My heart freezes solid in my chest, and I jolt back at the same time my arm shoots out, but I can't stop myself from toppling backward off the log. After that, everything happens in slow motion.

The wolf hits Mateo, throwing him backward where it snarls and snaps its teeth inches from his face.

Amber screams and I'm scrambling to find my feet.

Mateo cries out, his hands buried in the wolf's fur using all his strength to hold him back from mauling his face.

My hand closes around a fallen branch and I come up swinging.

It's almost too heavy for me to lift, but adrenaline, and seeing the wolf's jaws so close to Mateo's face lends me strength.

I squeeze my eyes shut and swing like I'm going for a home run.

The branch connects with the side of the wolf's head and I feel the jounce all the way up to my shoulder. The wolf lets out a yelp and staggers back.

"Come on. Come on! We gotta go!" Amber gasps, rushing to Mateo's side, pulling him to his feet.

The wolf shakes his head and when it realizes its prey is getting away, it comes at us again. Nose wrinkled and growling, its teeth and gums on display, I stupidly step between it and my friends.

"Go! Get!" I shout, swinging the branch back and forth.

"Hana, let's go!" Amber yells at me.

I take a step back as the wolf lunges at us again.

With a scream, I swing the branch with everything I have, but I miss when it darts to the side going straight for Amber.

She and Mateo turn and run, but the wolf is faster.

Her scream will echo in my ears forever as I watch helplessly as the wolf sinks its teeth into the back of her thigh.

Blood blooms around the bite, soaking through the thick denim as Mateo turns and kicks at the wolf's head. It works, and it lets her go, but only long enough to change direction and go for him again.

Lifting the branch over my head, I bring it down across the top of the wolf's head with a battle cry. "Amber, get your fucking gun!"

"I can't!" she shouts back. "It's in my backpack."

I want to berate her for insisting on keeping it in her backpack, instead of on her fucking hip where she could reach it, but the wolf turns away from Mateo to come after me.

Its bright yellow eyes flash in the sunlight as it stalks toward me, head low, teeth stained red with my best friend's blood.

"Run!" I shout, chancing a glance at where Mateo is helping Amber as she hops toward the trees. "Go! Get help!"

Amber turns from Mateo to me and shakes her head. "No, we are not leaving you."

I catch Mateo's eyes, begging him to get away while they have the chance. "Fucking go !!"

He gives me the smallest nod and pulls Amber toward the trees.

"No! We can't leave her!" Amber pleads, digging her heels into the ground, only to cry out in pain as her injured leg buckles. "Stop... don't!" she sobs, reaching out to me as Mateo lifts her over his shoulder and runs.

I'm holding the branch against my shoulder like a bat, keeping watch over the wolf,

who is no longer interested in my friends, now watching me intently.

“Be a good boy and don’t come any closer.” My voice quivers as my hands tighten around the rough bark.

The wolf is no longer snarling as it twists his head to the side, as if my words puzzle him. Then he drops his head low again and takes a step toward me. Lifting the branch, I throw it as hard as I can. I don’t wait to see how good my aim is, before turning to run after my friends.

But before I can make it to the trees the wolf darts in front of me, cutting off my escape.

Spinning on my heel, I change direction and keep running. When I haven’t heard any signs of the wolf chasing me for a minute, I chance a look behind me to discover he’s not there.

Worry creeps up my spine at where he went. What if he went after my friends again?

Bracing my hands on my knees, I give myself a moment to catch my breath before heading back the way I came.

I don’t make it far before the wolf jumps out to block my path again.

The hair down his back stands straight up while he snarls and growls at me, forcing me in the opposite direction once more.

It’s fine, I tell myself, even though it’s not! I’ll double back farther ahead and meet up with Amber and Mateo back at the gate where we parked.

It feels like I’ve been running forever as I focus on staying ahead of the wolf.

When I'm sure I've lost it this time, I circle back the way I came.

Keeping my steps light and my breathing shallow, I almost make it all the way back to the fallen log when the wolf appears in front of me and cuts me off once more .

I let out an infuriated wail and start over.

We do this dance over and over as he forces me farther and farther away from the direction my friends disappeared in.

Soon my steps start flagging, my lungs burning with each breath.

Tears burn the backs of my eyes as I realize I'm not going to be able to outrun this wolf.

A small clearing opens ahead where an old beech with low limbs appears like a gift.

Praying it's sturdy enough to hold my weight and that wolves can't climb; I change direction and head straight toward it.

Grabbing the lowest branch, my arms shake as I use the last of my energy to throw my leg up and over so I can shimmy up into the tree.

A low growl from below makes me pause. The wolf is back, and he's staring up at me. When he jumps up to brace his paws against the thick trunk, I climb higher. Eventually, he drops back down, but keeps his golden eyes fixed on me.

Halfway up the tree I find a sturdy branch with enough of a natural curve that I can sit comfortably on it. My breaths are coming in sharp pants and my hands and legs start to shake from fatigue and adrenaline. Tears spill down my cheeks as I collapse against the thick trunk.

Meanwhile, the wolf paces around the base of the tree, staring up at me with his creepy yellow eyes.

“Leave me alone!” I shout down at him.

He pauses long enough to chuff, then keeps circling.

I tell myself I just have to wait him out, then I’ll meet back up with Amber and Mateo. More tears fall from my eyes when I think of how the wolf attacked and hurt them.

I slide my hand to my back pocket. I need to send Amber a text.

I need to know she’s okay and to tell her, at least for the moment, I’m safe.

My stomach drops when I slide my fingers into the empty pocket.

Reaching behind me to the other side, I discover that pocket is empty, too.

My hands go to my hips and then my jacket pockets as my blood rushes cold through my veins.

My phone is gone. I must have lost it while I was being chased.

A sorrowful whine squeezes through my throat, and I squeeze my eyes shut. I’m well and truly fucked until this wolf decides to go track something else.

Turning my head to the side, I glare down at where he has parked himself on his haunches and stares up at me. It’s probably my imagination, but he looks smug. Like he’s perfectly happy about treeing me and has no intention of letting me down anytime soon.

I narrow my eyes at the wolf, wishing I had Amber's gun. "Goddamn you," I grit through my clenched teeth. "You... you fucking dog!"

The wolf's ears flatten against its head, and it growls up at me. As if it can understand me and has the audacity to be offended at being called something as lowly as a dog.

More tears pool in my eyes and I turn away to curl up against the tree trunk. While I'm stuck here, I might as well get some rest.

Vuk

ONE DAY BEFORE THE FULL MOON

My little human slept fitfully up in her tree for the first half of the night.

Startling herself awake every time the wind blew then blinking owlishly until she remembered where she was.

She would move around a bit, find a comfortable spot, then glare down at me, where I watched her from below.

As if it was my fault she climbed up there in the first place.

I've been watching Hana carefully, worried she might fall from her precarious perch, even though the branch she chose is wide and sturdy. It seems my worry was unnecessary, once she fell into a deep sleep her restlessness ceased.

The morning dawns bright and cloudless, with my stomach growling. Hana is showing no signs of waking, so I let her sleep. Making my way to a mountain fed stream, I'm lapping at the cold water when a rabbit bolts from the underbrush.

I'm after it in an instant, but it's quick and manages to escape my jaws before it takes me on a good chase. In the end, I'm victorious. With its limp body clutched between my teeth, I find a sunny spot to enjoy my meal.

An unexpected sense of guilt hits me as I pick at the stringy rabbit meat. I should be

sharing this meat with the female.

The humans rejected your last gift, I remind myself as I start on the rabbit's tender organs and innards. Leaving the best part for last, I savor the richness of the delicate meat, then lick the taste from my chops.

Forcing my thoughts from the humans, I focus instead on escape.

Despite all my efforts, I cannot get through the barrier. The runes are still a mystery. My plan to use the humans to bargain my freedom is flawed as well. Now I only have Hana, who am I going to bargain her to?

Throughout the morning, I make sure to periodically check on Hana, in case she wakes and tries to sneak away. Each time her position shifts a bit, but she remains asleep. The hours pass and it's late in the day when I do another cursory pass, only to find her gone.

Chiding myself for not staying closer and checking on her more often, I drop my nose to the ground.

Her scent is fresh, and relief floods my system, assuring me she can't have gone too far.

Following her trail away from the tree, I'm surprised when she leads me in the opposite direction from the other humans she's been so determined to get back to.

Keeping to the thick underbrush, I creep up on where I find her perched on a flat boulder beside the fast-moving stream I was at earlier.

The sun hits the side of her face tilted up and I'm fixated on the way her throat works as she swallows down her drink, the setting sun changing her dark skin to a fiery

shade of crimson and gold.

My eyes slide closed and I breathe her warm scent into my lungs, only to be hit with the salty tang of her tears.

She is crying and upset over her friends.

Although I don't understand why? They were alive enough to escape and have likely made it out of the forest by now.

I should have killed them. I wanted to, but I didn't want Hana to make it to the barrier, where I wouldn't be able to go after her.

When I open my eyes again, she's vanished.

Jumping to my feet, I twist my head to the side as her shadow disappears over the hill, heading back to her tree.

She doesn't get far before I catch up to her. Peeling my lips back from my teeth, I let out a low warning growl.

She stiffens and I expect her to run faster, knowing I'm coming after her.

My heart starts pounding, craving the prey drive pushing me to chase.

To capture. Instead, she freezes and slowly turns around.

When she sees me, her eyes widen, showing white all around the dark orbs, and her plump lips part.

My chest constricts as I take a moment to appreciate the way the fast-setting sun

filters through the trees to cast all of her in fire. Savoring the way her sweet scent is peppered with the sharp scent of her fear. If I wasn't trapped in this animal body, I would have groaned at the deliciousness.

I take a step toward her, and she rolls her shoulders back, standing up straighter.

“What the fuck do you want with me?” she shouts. Her hands are clenched into tight fists at her side. “Huh? Why won't you leave me alone?”

Ignoring her, I move closer.

She staggers back a step and I'm about to advance when she suddenly spins on her heel and sprints away.

Yes .

I let out a happy yip at the chase this female is taking me on. Letting her lead while I stay back enough to let her think she has the advantage. She changes direction at random, trying to lose me, or maybe confuse me. Silly female, I could hunt you blind.

Content to let her set the pace and direction, I'm enjoying the chase until she comes too close to the barrier. With a burst of speed, I overtake her, cutting her off and turning her so she's forced to run back the way she was going.

Once she's a safe distance, I fall back again, letting her set the pace once more.

We play this game until the shadows start to stretch as the sun sinks below the horizon.

I let her run, only redirecting her when she gets too close to the barrier.

Nipping at her heels with just enough force to move her back to a safe distance.

“Oh, come on !” she pants when I cut her off once more.

Her exasperated huffs amuse me. I’m quite enjoying our dance. At least I am until her steps falter. A few steps later, she manages to trip over her own feet, nearly tumbling to the ground.

Worried for her safety, I reluctantly back off to give her time to catch her breath so we can restart our chase. Instead, she takes the opportunity to scurry up another tree where I can’t reach her.

Circling the base, I let out a frustrated bark.

She looks down at me and sticks her short, pink tongue out.

This time my growl is low and deep, followed by an unbidden image of how I would put her pink tongue to work if I were a lycan and not a wolf.

I’d wrap her thick braid around my fist and guide her while I pressed my member between her pillowy lips.

Stretching her jaw with my girth. Making her taste me as I sank into her warm, wet mouth.

Gods, she would feel so good wrapped around my hard flesh.

I whimper, aroused and disgusted by the imagery. I stalk into the trees, but not so far that my human thinks she’ ll be able to run from me again. What is wrong with me? Why do I keep imagining these things?

Dropping to my belly, I watch Hana fold her arms across her chest and curl up against the trunk with a humph .

A moment later, her stomach lets out a horrendous groan loud enough to make my ears twitch.

She covers her stomach with her hands, then pulls her pack around her to rifle through the contents.

Pulling out a small clear bag with barely a handful of nuts and dried berries, she sighs at it, then takes out a couple of the nuts.

Popping them into her mouth, she chews slowly, putting the rest away.

Realizing she is hungry, but has no food, bothers me. I shouldn't care, but?—

My nose twitches, catching the scent of a rabbit before my ears pick up the sounds of it moving through the brush.

Without another thought, I'm after it. This one is slow, and I catch it quickly and easily.

Snapping its neck with a single bite, I make quick work of peeling its pelt from its flesh, then treat myself to the tender organs, making sure to lick the cavity clean.

With the rabbit's still warm body held carefully in my jaws, I hurry back to the tree where I left my human, catching her as she's trying to sneak down from the tree.

Growling around the rabbit in my mouth, I cut off her escape.

“Damnit,” she hisses under her breath.

Keeping my head down, I take a step toward her, forcing her to stumble back.

“Nice, wolf.” Her voice quivers as she takes another step back. “That’s a tasty-looking rabbit. You’d much rather eat that than me, right?”

I snort. If she knew where my thoughts have been lately. What would she think? Surely she would be horrified.

I back her up until her back is to the tree, then, without taking my eyes off her, carefully set the rabbit on the ground. She stares down at it and then up at me.

“Did you—how the hell did you skin it like that?” she slowly shakes her head. “I don’t think wolves are supposed to be able to do that.”

I snort, wishing I could tell her I’m no wolf. Instead, I nudge the rabbit with the end of my nose, then sit back on my haunches. Behind me, my tail moves back and forth across the leaf strewn ground.

“This...is for me?” She frowns hard at the rabbit, then turns another questioning look at me. “What the hell kind of wolf are you?”

I’m getting frustrated with her questions, so I stand up and give the rabbit a hard nudge with my nose before stepping back again.

“What in the Twilight Zone is happening here?” she mutters to herself, shaking her head in disbelief. Very slowly, she creeps forward until she’s close enough to reach out and pinch what’s left of the rabbit’s brown fur with her thumb and forefinger.

My tail wags harder as I pant happily when she takes the food I hunted for her.

Hana gives me a wary look and takes the rabbit back to the tree. She sets it on a pile

of leaves, and I watch her curiously as she works to build a fire.

“I can’t eat this raw like you,” she tells me as she uses something from her pack to light the kindling.

Eyeing me carefully, she builds up the flames, then makes a tripod with some green branches.

I watch her, fascinated, as she sets the twigs over the crackling flames.

They are tall enough that the wood doesn’t catch.

The whole time she talks quietly. “I’m only eating this because I need protein to keep my energy up, so I can keep running.

I’m not much of a hunter. Water will keep me alive, but meat will keep me strong. ”

While the small fire crackles, she takes a knife from her pack to cut strips of meat from the rabbit that she lays over the tripod to cook.

I’m captivated with her efficiency as she works.

When the smell of cooking meat has her stomach growling again, I cock my ears toward her, but she doesn’t seem as bothered by the sound this time.

Using two long twigs like a utensil, she pinches the strips of meat, turning them so they cook evenly over the fire.

When she notices me watching her, she clicks the ends of the sticks together.

“Chop sticks,” she explains, like I should know the strange phrase.

“Handy when you find yourself in the forest without any of your cooking gear.”

The smell of the cooking meat has my mouth watering. She catches me licking my chops and tosses me the rest of the rabbit, which I accept gratefully.

“It’s too bad you couldn’t have hunted me a pot and some veg to go with this rabbit. I could have made suimono,” she says as she watches me gnaw on the bits of meat left on the bones.

When she decides the meat is properly cooked, she uses the twigs to hold one of the steaming strips of meat. Pursing her lips, she blows on it before taking a small bite, humming appreciatively.

“Not bad for not having any seasoning,” she says and eats the rest of the strip.

After all the meat is gone, and the fire is crackling cheerfully, she leans back against the tree trunk where she watches me with her dark eyes.

“What are you? And what are you doing here?” It’s a rhetorical question, of course, since she knows I can’t respond. “Maybe you’re trapped here like I am.”

I let out a soft chuff, and she nods, as if she understands. Letting out a long sigh, she looks up at where the nearly full moon is almost directly overhead. The silvery glow battles with the warm, flickering firelight across her skin. Silver and gold. Hot and cold.

“Why won’t you let me get back?” she whispers to the sky.

Even if I could answer her, the answer I would give her isn’t the one she wants. I keep telling myself I’m only using her as some kind of leverage, but the longer I keep her here, the less I want to let her go. I don’t want to be trapped in this cage alone,

and I am beginning to crave her company.

The silence stretches between us as the fire dies down and her eyes grow heavy. Soon her breaths start to even out and finally her eyes fall shut. I watch the steady rise and fall of her chest and the way her folded arms fall into her lap.

When the fire is little more than a smoldering ember, she starts to shiver.

Letting out a soft huff, I stand up and make my way over to her.

I start with her boots, sniffing the strange material.

Watching her for signs she might be waking, but she continues to sleep.

Creeping closer, so I'm standing over her, I fold my legs under me and drop to my belly so my head rests across her lap.

She stiffens under me and for a moment I think she might wake, but then she relaxes with a sigh and drops back into a deep sleep.

Closing my eyes, I let myself relax too.

The Hunter

THE HUNTER'S MOON

T onight is the full moon. The Hunter's Moon.

Tonight, all my waiting and planning will finally pay off, and I'm giddy with excitement.

I've been watching my prey through a series of trail cams I set up throughout the park. At first, I was puzzled over the giant red wolf that kept showing up in the images and videos. It wasn't until I caught it throwing itself at the invisible barrier to realize he was my lycan.

At first, I was furious. If I wanted to hunt a wolf, I could do that anywhere and anytime. But that's why I'm waiting for the full moon—the Hunter's Moon . Maybe Hollywood got something right and as soon as the moon rises my lycan will be transformed.

I've tried contacting Wizard again, to clarify this is the case, but the little fucker took my money and ghosted me. So, I study the wolf. Learning. Planning.

The day I noticed the unauthorized campers a rage like I've never felt washed over me.

Of all the times to have to deal with trespassers.

Lucky for me, my lycan picked up their scent almost immediately and quickly began hunting them.

I expected him to dispatch the campers with swift, if messy, efficiency.

More than happy to let him take care of my little problem so I wouldn't have to fake the animal attack the authorities will inevitably find.

But he's been playing with them. Even going so far as to separate one of the girls from the group.

And now I have a half dozen inquiries into the missing woman from the authorities as well as the Army. Because the girl my lycan has taken a liking to turned out to be an Army officer's brat.

I've been holding them off, going so far as to fabricate some of the trail cam footage so it showed the girl leaving the park. That will only buy me so much time before they send out a search party. I just hope I can keep them off until after my hunt.

Leaning back in my chair, a smile spreads across my lips as I imagine the chaos a full-scale search party would cause with a rabid lycan on the loose.

Reaching across my desk, I tap a key and pull up a screenshot from one of the trail cams. I've been staring at since I saw it this morning. The girl is curled on her side next to the remnants of a small fire that's long gone cold. Curled around her back, so she's tucked against him, is my lycan.

I'm curious as to how this truce between them happened, and furious the lycan would stoop to warming something so inferior to it as this female.

Not that it matters. If the Lycan hasn't taken care of the girl by the time I take my

trophy, I'll deal with her myself. I already have a statement ready for the authorities and an airtight alibi.

It's such a shame. A senseless accident. Don't these kids know there are dangerous wild animals that live in the forest? The bears can be especially dangerous this time of year as they prepare for hibernation.

"What will you think of your pet wolf tonight when the moon rises, and he turns into a blood-thirsty monster?" I snigger under my breath.

If the lore can be believed, as soon as the first rays of the rising moon hit him, he'll change from wolf to something monstrous and vaguely humanoid.

With sharp fangs and claws. He'll be crazed, especially after being forced into the shape of a wolf for so long and will likely lash out at the little human, and anything else he comes across.

I hope I'll catch the moment she first sees him in his true form.

Just thinking of how her pretty features will contort with terror has me shifting in my chair, adjusting my cock.

Maybe there will be time for some fun before I dispatch her.

It's been a long time since I've been able to let myself truly enjoy some of my more wicked tastes.

I adjust myself once more, then reluctantly turn the screen off.

Perhaps I should go after the girl first. Use her to get my blood pumping for the main event and then get rid of her so the lycan is focused on me, rather than her.

Bracing my elbows on my desk, I steeple my fingertips and let my smile widen into a grin.

Yes. That's what I'll do. I'll bet her body will be soft and responsive when she thinks I've come to rescue her.

Her screams will ring sweetly in my ears when she realizes I'm not taking her home.

Just imagining the look of horror and betrayal on her face turns me the fuck on.

I can't wait to hear her choked breaths as I cut off her air with my hands.

With a push, I roll back from my desk. My weapons are already packed. Guns and ammunition, my knife. Not that I'm planning to use them, they are only for a worst-case scenario. This hunt is for sport, so I'll be using my compound bow to take down my prize, rather than high-powered rifles.

Excitement sings through my veins, and there is no sense wasting time waiting for nightfall.

The lycan will be at a disadvantage if I come after his plaything during the day rather than after dark when he'll be at his full strength.

Besides, it'll give me something to do instead of anxiously waiting for the moon to rise.

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Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 2:20 pm

Hana

Something is wrong.

I mean, besides everything being wrong. Coming here in the first place was a terrible idea and I regret ever talking my friends into it. I'm hopeful they made it out but worried they didn't. Unsure of what to do about either. But this something feels wronger.

When I woke up this morning, I was curled up, little spoon style, with the wolf curled around my back. Biting back a scream, I rolled away, jumping to my feet before breathing out my relief when he continued to sleep as I backed away.

It's cooler this morning and I dig my extra jacket out of the bottom of my pack.

Trekking through the misty underbrush, I can't stop thinking of how soft and warm I was curled up against the wolf's thick fur.

I'm tempted to turn back and cuddle up with him again, which is insane. And probably suicidal.

Something is wrong.

I can't shake the heavy feeling eating at me, and when I pull out my compass to check my location it spins in circles, which has never happened before.

A thin layer of gray clouds rolled in overnight, obscuring the sky enough so I can't

get a good beat on where the sun is. Which means I'm walking blind.

Picking a direction I think is the right way, I start walking. My muscles are sore from sleeping on the hard ground, not to mention running and climbing. My mood is dismal, and I'm certain I've passed the same tree three times.

Goddamnit! I need a better vantage point. I need to get up high.

If there is one thing not lacking in this forest, it's tall-ass trees and luckily, I'm not scared of heights.

So, when I find a tree that looks like a good candidate, up I go.

I climb as high as I can then look out over the mountainside and valley.

With the low cloud cover, my visibility isn't great, but it's clear enough I can tell which way is south.

I also realize the entrance we used to sneak into the park is much farther away than I expected.

My disappointment is a solid mass in my gut as I shimmy back down the tree. Going down takes twice as long as climbing up did, but eventually I make it safely to the ground and head in the correct direction.

I haven't gone far before the itchy feeling of being watched settles between my shoulders. I'm growing used to the feeling by now and even though I can't see him, I know wolf is close by and following me.

Except, I'm in no mood to deal with his hovering today. Despite sleeping incredibly well, I'm cranky. I'm sick of being trapped in this goddamn forest. I wanna go home.

I wanna curl up in my bed and sleep through what is left of my school break.

Thoughts of home make me think of Amber and Mateo and a lump forms in my throat as I replay the wolf biting her.

The echo of her screams... I hope they were able to make it out of the forest—I squeeze my eyes shut and take a deep breath.

Stop thinking like that! There is no way Mateo didn't get them safely out. He is unequivocally devoted to her.

Amber has probably told my parents by now, which means they'll be worried about me, too. Mom will try to be the voice of reason and logic, but Dad will be on the phone to everyone he knows, pulling whatever strings he has to.

Except... what if they never made it out of the forest? What if Amber is hurt worse than I think, and Mateo isn't able to get her to the hospital? We technically aren't even missing yet. No one is going to notice we never came back until classes resume and we don't show up. Probably not even then.

I start walking again, with more purpose. I have to get out of here!

By afternoon—at least I think it's afternoon—the clouds have grown even thicker, casting a gray, gloomy hue over everything. The forest is eerily quiet, and almost completely bereft of sound.

But the strangest part, and what has me concerned, is I haven't seen the wolf. I know he's nearby, I can feel him watching me, but he hasn't tried to get me to change directions, which means I must be heading in the direction he wants me to go.

I don't care anymore. I'm too tired to keep climbing up and down trees to see where I

am, so I'll go in whatever direction he wants me to, so long as it leads me out of this damned preserve and back to some form of civilization.

A paved road sounds wonderful right now, I think as I step over yet another clump of bared roots .

My stomach rumbles, and I finished the last of my trail mix this morning.

Thanks to my filtered canteen, I don't have to worry about drinkable water, but the food situation is going to make things uncomfortable if I don't find my way out of here today or tomorrow.

I'm not about to expect my wolfy friend to bring me rabbits every night.

Although, when my stomach lets out another gurgling rumble, I'm kind of hoping he will.

Shuffling over the uneven ground, I force myself to keep going forward.

Praying the next hill might show me something other than the cold, misty forest. My mood is turning more dismal by the hour as I trudge onward and I'm so caught up in my morose thoughts I don't notice the deep, bassy throbbing right away.

It's not until the wash from the sleek helicopter's blades sends the treetops swaying that I notice it.

It flies overhead, low enough I can clearly see the two figures seated inside the cockpit and I let out an excited whoop!

"I'M SAVED!!" I shout, jumping up and down, waving my right arm over my head. Amber and Mateo must have been able to send help after all.

Relief, like a soothing balm, washes over me as I turn around and follow the drone of the helicopter quickly fading away.

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Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 2:20 pm

Vuk

I've been following the female since she thought she snuck away from me.

I hadn't planned to sleep next to her, but shortly after she drifted off, she began to shiver.

At first, I was irritated by the constant movement of her quaking body.

I huffed and tried to nudge her away, but she turned toward me, seeking my warmth and closeness.

Curling around her, I told myself I was only keeping her warm.

I never expected her to welcome my closeness, or to like having her pressed against me.

I still have the scent of her hair in my nose. Earthy. Feminine. Sweet and flowery. Like the night blooms on my home plane that only open under the silvery light of the full moon. They'll be blooming tonight.

My kind are not ruled by the moon like werewolves and other creatures, but we aren't completely unaffected by its silvery glow, either. If I were back in my home, I would be preparing for the pack run. A ceremony where the lycans in our village run into the forest to hunt and fuck and howl.

It's a special time for my kind and we take advantage of the brightest night of the

month. Couples pay homage to our fertile goddess and many pups will be conceived. Hunters will work together to fill the stillrooms and pantries with meat for the winter.

It will be a night of revelry for all.

And I will miss it, because I'm trapped in this strange forest, chasing after a human that is confusing my ingrained hatred for her kind.

I've been letting Hana move through the forest without intervening.

She's far enough from the barrier that I'm content to let her have her space.

I need some space, too. Ever since I woke, I've felt...

strange. My fur is itchy, my joints are stiff, and I can't shake a sense of impending doom that is strengthening as the day goes on.

It's mid-day when my sensitive ears pick up a deep, bassy sound traveling through the forest. My ears flatten against the top of my head as I watch a strange machine fly low over the treetops.

The blades stir up a whirlwind of dust and leaves, sending me into the thick underbrush to watch as it slows then hovers over a nearby clearing.

A door in the side slides open and a rope is tossed out, followed a moment later by a human with a pack like my female's, but much larger.

He rappels to the ground and as soon as his feet hit the forest floor he unhooks the rope and gives the machine a signal that sends it, and its deafening roar away.

The human is old, with gray hair and face fur, although he carries himself like a much

younger man.

Where my female and her friends dress with light colors that contrast with their surroundings, the clothing he wears are meant to blend.

My nose twitches as I drag his scent through my sensitive glands, then snort at the foulness of it.

This man's scent is all wrong. Nothing like my female's or even her two companions.

Where she is sweet and fresh, he is dark and bitter. Sour. Putrid.

A dark aura encircles him. Tendrils of oily, evil curl and lick at the air surrounding him, giving off warnings.

Despite his outward appearance, this man...

is no longer human. Once perhaps, but no longer.

I'm not sure what happened to him, or why, but he has become...

something else. What the else is, I have no idea and no inclination to find out.

A throaty growl rumbles over my tongue, and the man spins around. His eyes scan the trees where I'm well hidden, but his black stare finds me anyway. Easily.

Slowly, his thin lips curl into a smile that makes my skin crawl.

Crouching low, I keep my eyes on him while he cocks his head to the side and looks me over. There is a sense of excitement. Anticipation. This male has something to do with my being here.

I forget that I'm trapped in this much smaller and less deadly shape. Digging my claws into the soft ground, my muscles bunch as I prepare to lunge.

"Save your energy. I'll be back for you once the sun sets," the man promises. His voice is deep and flat. Then he gives me a wink, and my fur stands up on end. "But first, I need to take care of your little girlfriend."

He is completely unbothered by the fact I'm seconds away from ending his worthless life as he turns and walks away. I don't know what a girlfriend is, but if he thinks I'll let him get anywhere close to what is mine, he's mistaken.

With a deep, gut rattling snarl, I lunge at him.

The humans I'm used to are slow and weak.

Inferior in all ways to the mighty lycans who rule our plane.

They are also primitive. The moment I break free of my hiding place, he turns and points a strange weapon at me.

It's small enough to fit easily in the palm of his hand, so I don't think anything of it.

Until it makes a deafening noise, and something hits to the side of my chest with enough force to knock me off my feet.

I let out a high-pitched whine as heat and pain flare from my shoulder. Followed by a rage that sends me lunging at the human again. This time, when he fires his weapon at me, I avoid being hit, but the movement sends screaming pain to my injured shoulder.

"Now, now," he taunts. "Go tend to that scratch and I'll see you when the moon

risers.”

I’m limping badly but determined to get to my female before this man finds her. I must keep her safe. Gnashing my teeth, I’m forced to flee into the forest where I can tend to my wound.

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Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 2:20 pm

Hana

I lose sight of the helicopter almost immediately. Taking off at a jog, I follow a narrow game trail, moving as fast as my exhausted legs will let me, as the throaty drone eventually fades to silence.

Don't panic. Don't panic. Don't panic.

They saw me.

They had to have. They are probably alerting the search party right now. They couldn't land because the woods are too dense.

Don't panic.

But wouldn't the people in the helicopter give me some kind of signal that they saw me? Aren't they supposed to tip the blades or something to show acknowledgment?

Hana.... Don't panic.

They have radios. They could have told the others my GPS location and then circled or... or something...

Don't fucking panic.

My mind is racing with a million different scenarios when the splitting crack of a gunshot stops me in my tracks. The sharp discharge echoes through the still forest

and my heart freezes for a second before it starts pounding with worry for my wolf.

What if the search party are closer than I thought, and they ran into him? He's a lot bigger than an average wolf, so they might shoot first and ask questions?—

Another gunshot makes me jump and my heart drops into my stomach.

Oh, no.

I start running. "Stop! Don't shoot!" I scream. "Please..."

Forcing a quick pace over the uneven game trail, I pray it wasn't my wolf they were shooting at.

The sun chooses that moment to break through the cloud cover, beaming directly into my eyes and blinding me as I come over a small rise where I nearly run straight into a man walking up the opposite side.

He's older, maybe in his sixties, lean and appears to be in good shape.

He's wearing head to toe camo, but none of it is military issue.

Amber would call him a silver fox, with his full head of salt and pepper hair and close-cut beard heavily sprinkled with gray.

But it's his gunmetal gray eyes that make me pause. Something about them comes across as... flat. Dull. Dead. Evil.

"Ah, there you are," he says with a joyless grin that doesn't reach those soulless eyes.

I take a step back. "Oh? Have you been looking for me?" Something, an anxious

feeling in the pit of my stomach, is warning me not to trust this guy.

His smile never falters. “Sure have. Your father, Colonel Jeffries sent me.”

Something about the way he says it tells me he’s lying. Or maybe it’s the way his expression never shifts. Even if he’s not lying, there is something off about this man.

“I heard gunshots.” Shifting my weight, I try not to be obvious as I scan him for weapons. He’s wearing a large backpack that could hold any manner of dangerous things, but his hands are loose at his sides, empty. “Was that you?”

The man’s smile vanishes, and his eyes practically burn with their focus on me. “There are dangerous animals in these woods.” He drops his voice to a low growl. “You should always come into the forest prepared.”

None of that was a “no.”

Run. Get away!

“What were you shooting at? I’ve been here for days and haven’t seen anything more dangerous than a rabbit.” The words spill from my lips as I take another step back, folding my arms across my chest defiantly.

O-M-G, Hana! Shut up! You’re going to get yourself killed.

“Well, then lucky you,” he drawls and reaches his hand out to me, “Come on. Let’s get you back.”

My eyes snap to where he shoves his other hand into the deep pocket of his jacket. There shouldn’t be anything threatening about his action, and yet I can’t tear my eyes away from his pocket. Does it seem bulkier than the other? Could there be more than

just his hand hidden in it?

That's where he's got his gun. You stupid girl, he's going to shoot you next!

The man lets out an exasperated huff when I don't move. "Your friends are worried about you."

"Wait. They're here?" I can't help perking up at the mention of my friends, because what if he's telling the truth and I'm being paranoid? "They're all right?"

"Yup. They're fine and waiting for you back at the parking lot." He motions over his shoulder with his chin. "Your parents are probably there, too. They've been worried."

My stomach lurches and bile races up my throat, dispelling my hope this man is an awkward kind of guy and not dangerous at all. Now I know for fact he's lying, because Amber wasn't fine when I last saw her .

He's still holding his hand out to me. His expression blank. Bored almost. Or maybe calculating. Waiting for me to go along with him so he can?—

His eyes dart to the side, as if he's watching for something out of his peripheral. Like he's expecting something. When he turns his attention back to me, his flat grin returns.

"Um, you haven't seen any wolves around here. Have you?" I ask him before I can stop myself.

He cocks his head to the side. "I thought you said you haven't seen anything but rabbits?" his grin falters and this time when I take a step back, he takes a step toward me.

“Uh, right. I thought I heard howling last night and then when I heard gunshots... You did say there were dangerous animals in here...” I take another step back.

He steps forward again. “There aren’t any wolves. Just coyotes, that must be what you heard.”

“Oh. Well, that’s a relief,” I say with a shaky sigh. My eyes dart to the trees, where I’m hoping I can lose him.

I move to step around him, but he grabs my arm hard enough to make me yelp in pain as his fingers dig into my flesh. His grip is hard enough to leave bruises, and he pulls me so my back is pressed to his chest, pressing the cold barrel of a gun into my cheek.

“Shut the fuck up,” he snaps. I turn my head in disgust at the spray of spittle hitting the side of my face.

I’m frozen in shock by how fast it happened. Unnaturally fast. Inhumanly fast.

“Now. Walk.” He squeezes my arm harder, so hard my fingertips start to tingle from the lack of circulation. Then he pushes me forward with a force that nearly takes me off my feet.

“Where? Where are you taking me?” The words are barely a whisper as they squeeze through my tight throat as I try to keep up with his long stride .

When we reach the bottom of the hill, he pulls me to a stop and spins me so I’m facing him. He looks me up and down, his dead gaze rolling over me like a slimy touch, making my skin crawl. Thin lips peel back from straight, white teeth in a sneer.

“Well, I was going to take you somewhere a bit more secluded, but I suppose here will do.”

Before I can react, he spins me again and slams my back against a tree hard enough to drive the breath from my lungs.

“You—you know you can just let me stay lost. No one would know....”

He laughs. A deep, from the belly evil muahahaha kind of laugh.

“I’m afraid it’s too late for that, my dear.” He gently strokes the cold barrel down the side of my cheek. Almost lovingly. “Your fate was sealed the moment you snuck into my preserve and caught my lycan’s attention. Now I’ve got the military and local PD making my life hell.”

Lycan? Did he just say lycan? Like a werewolf? My mouth goes dry. Oh, my lord, this dude is off-his-meds crazy. The dangerous kind.

The man gently strokes his gun down the side of my face again, and I can’t bite back the terrified whimper that squeezes through my tight throat.

“I’ve bought us some time, though. Just this morning, I sent them a file showing you leaving the park to get them off my ass for a bit. At least long enough that when they do find you, you’ll be the victim of a tragic and vicious animal attack. That should shut everyone up.”

My hopes bolster a little. If the police are involved that means Amber and Mateo made it out. At least I know they’re all right.

My breath catches when he steps closer, moving the gun from my cheek to press against my temple .

“I’ve been watching you with him but he’s mine .” He presses the gun harder, until my head is tilted, my ear almost touching my shoulder. “I went to a lot of work to bring him here and I don’t want you distracting him while I have my fun.”

My breathing goes fast and shallow, realizing he must think the wolf is some kind of monster. I’m definitely dealing with an insane person who’s apparently been stalking me this entire time. Maybe that’s what the wolf has been protecting me from. Animals can sense crazy, right?

“On your knees, bitch!” Keeping the gun pressed to my temple, he grabs me by my throat with his other hand, squeezing hard enough for the blood to start pooling behind my eyes.

With a choked sob, I grab his wrist with both hands and pull. Trying to pry his fingers from my throat, but his arm might as well be made of steel. The more I fight him, the harder he squeezes until his nails are digging into my skin as he presses down, giving me no choice but to sink to my knees.

A sob sticks in my throat as my knees hit the hard packed ground. Keeping the gun pressed to my temple, he releases his grip from my throat, and I suck in deep gulps of air.

The hand that was around my neck moves to the top of my head where he grabs a fist full of my hair. “Open my pants and take my cock out.”

When I don’t move fast enough, he slams the back of my head against the tree hard enough for me to see stars.

“Now!”

My hands are shaking when I lift them to the front of his pants and it’s all I can do

not to gag at the sight of his bulge pressing against the zipper.

A rustling sound comes from my right, and I start to turn my head, but he smacks the side of my face with his gun.

“What did I tell you? ”

Blinded by the tears pouring from my eyes, a sob works its way up my throat as I work to unbutton his pants with my numb fingers. This can't be happening. How do I get out of this?

“Fuck, you're useless!” His grip on my hair tightens enough to make me yelp, and he uses the hand still holding his gun to rip open the front of his pants.

A deep, throaty growl vibrates the air around us.

If my attacker heard the growl, he doesn't acknowledge it. With his pants wide open, he presses the gun to my forehead, and I can't take my eyes off the sight of his finger resting on the trigger. My heart is beating so frantically I worry it's going to break through my ribcage.

“Now, take my cock out and open your fucking mouth.”

Before I have a chance to move, a blur of movement catches the corner of my eye.

Everything happens fast after that.

The man swings his gun to my right and fires before I can move out of the way.

The flash from the muzzle blinds me. My ears ring painfully from the discharge, and I fall back with a scream.

Blinking my vision back, it clears just in time to watch the wolf's teeth sink into the man's arm as he screams like I've never heard a man scream before.

Run! Get the fuck out of here. Now!

Rolling to my hands and knees, I crawl as fast as I can, until I can get my feet under me. Then I run.

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Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 2:20 pm

Vuk

How dare this piece of filth human touch my female.

I bite down on the man's arm until the bones snap easily between my jaws and his arm turns loose and unnatural in my mouth.

Being this close to him, his acrid scent floods my nose, and I want to shake it away.

He smells all wrong. Worse even, than the humans from my home plane.

It carries a foul magic I cannot place but burns the inside of my nose.

It's unlike anything I've ever come across before.

The magic that's surrounding him isn't just dark but pitch black, oily and slick.

It fouls the air surrounding him. I'm not sure what he has done, but it's corrupted him to his very bones.

His screams echo through the quiet forest and for a moment I debate severing his arm altogether. Instead, I release him with a rough shake.

The human sinks to his knees, panting and sobbing as he curls his body around his mangled extremity.

Pathetic. Weak. Just as I thought.

Turning my attention from his crumpled form, I focus on where my Hana disappeared into the trees. Lifting my nose, I capture her scent easily. Sweet and light, with the slight bitter tang of her fear. My little female is fast, but I'm faster. It won't take me long to catch up to her.

A glint of silver catches the corner of my eye.

With his injured arm cradled close to his body, the human gives a pained shout as he throws his body toward me.

His opposite arm pulls back and the metal blade he's gripping comes at my neck.

His aim is clumsy, or my inattentiveness would have given him a chance to land his strike.

Luckily, I'm able to jump out of the way, but not before the blade grazes my uninjured shoulder.

My skin burns where the blade cuts, and I dance away with a whine.

Stunned momentarily at the searing burn it leaves behind.

"This blade is silver, motherfucker." The hunter laughs as I lick at the wound, trying to calm the shallow graze that burns like fire.

Shaking off the unexpected pain, I drop my head to stare down the hunter. Peeling my lips back from sharp teeth, I let out a menacing growl as he lumbers to his feet. I was careless to dismiss this human so quickly.

With his injured arm hanging limply at his side, the man places the blade between his teeth and reaches into a pocket for the weapon he pointed at my female and used to

shoot me.

“Stay back,” he grits around the blade. His eyes flick to the sky then back to me before a deranged grin pulls his lips up from around the blade. “It’s almost time.”

Dusk is coming fast. Most of the clouds have cleared away and the first stars are flickering to life. The fur along my back bristles.

Almost time, for what?

A sense of impending doom flares in the center of my chest. What does this human know that I do not? Whatever it is, the way he keeps looking up at the sky makes me suspect it’s going to happen soon .

Grinning manically around the blade still clenched between his teeth, his eyes shine oddly in the dimming light.

“I wanted a fair hunt between us.” He is holding his weapon oddly, shifting it as he looks down at his useless arm with disgust. “There is no honor in hunting with bullets, but since you took away my ability to pull back on my bow, you’ll die with dishonor,” he glances to the sky once more, “but not like this.”

I snort. He thinks I’ll give him a chance to kill me.

“I have too much on the line to fail. Did you know that one can bargain their soul to get what they desire?” He lets out a short chuff then steadies the weapon pointed at my head.

“That’s not all I’ve bargained. I’ve been planning this for a very, very long time.

I will win, and you will become my ultimate trophy.

A creature no one has ever hunted, stuffed and mounted in a place of honor. ”

He’s rambling gibberish. This strange male is clearly delusional if he thinks he has any chance of winning against me, especially injured as gravely as he is.

Still, I watch him closely as he slowly circles me.

The way he keeps his weapon trained awkwardly on me, I think I must have damaged his dominant arm. Another strike in my favor.

The hunter and I continue our stare down as the sun sinks below the horizon, dragging the last of the daylight with it. His eyes slowly lift to the sky behind me and a sinister smile pulls at his lips.

“It won’t be long now,” he says with a sneer.

I agree with him as I growl, deep and low. I’m growing tired of this game. My muscles bunch and coil as I prepare to end this.

I’m about to let loose the energy building when something hits me from behind. It’s a heavy, searing feeling that sends me sprawling from the force of it. A whimper squeezes past my throat as I crawl forward, trying to escape—whatever is happening.

The dim sound of the hunter chuckling drifts from far away as searing pain flays away my skin. I snap my jaws at him, but he’s backing away and slipping into the tree line. Coward!

Where is Hana? Where is my female? I want to yell at her to run! Hide! But only hoarse barks are squeezed from my throat as the pain licking across my back melts into my joints. My forelegs stretch out in front of me, and I crawl on my belly, trying to escape the agony that has its grip on me.

My joints are popping as they stretch and lengthen. The digits at the ends of my paws stretch and cramp. My head feels like it's going to explode.

Falling to my side, I look up as a full, orange moon crests the tops of the trees. It drenches me in bright moonlight as waves of agony crash over me and my body breaks apart. Bone by bone. Muscle by muscle. I shatter like glass.

It's the worst kind of torture, and it lasts for hours.

Days. Eternities. Breaking me apart and making me new again before finally leaving me limp and panting.

Coated in sweat and aching in a way I've never ached before.

When I'm able to pry my eyes open, I'm surprised to find the moon has only moved enough so it's now fully visible above the trees. I blink, and my vision clears.

My nose twitches. The scent of soil and leaf rot sharpens.

Drawing in a deep breath, I hum at the appealing scent, Hana is nearby.

Her scent is more pronounced as well. I breathe deep, filling my nose with night-blooming flowers and fear.

A deep groan rolls across my tongue at the strange hold the human female has on me.

The way my body reacts to her as if she... as if she really is mine.

My hand drops to my cock, and I find it thick and straining against my palm?—

I freeze .

Slowly, I drag my eyes down to where my fingers are wrapped around my length.

My fingers... not paws.

The thick coat of fur is gone, replaced by the short dusting that is supposed to cover my skin. I drag my hand away from my cock and up over my tight stomach and chest before exploring my face. No muzzle. Then up into my hair... not fur.

I look down at my hands and flex my claw tipped digits into fists.

I'm back. No longer am I trapped in the body of a wolf. I'm me again.

I sway a bit when I leap to my feet. After spending days crawling around on four legs, it takes me a moment as I regain my equilibrium. My chest pumps as I draw in a deep breath. Then I tilt my head back and let out an earth-shaking howl.

Warning the hunter, my human, and this entire forest that I'm coming for them.

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 2:20 pm

Hana

THE HUNTER'S MOON

Bent over, with my hands braced on my knees, I listen for signs of the maniac with the gun coming after me, but all I can hear are the ragged sounds of my breathing and the thunder of my racing heartbeat.

That man was going to shoot me!

No, Hana. He was going to rape you first, then shoot you!

My hands shake as everything starts to hit me. If the wolf hadn't come to my rescue and knocked his aim off?—

I push myself upright. I haven't heard any more gunshots, but I can still hear the man's screams. Did the wolf kill him? What if that monster hurt my wolf instead?

I need to go back. I need to make sure my wolf is okay.

I turn around, but then stop. Girl, what are you doing? You need to get the fuck out of this forest.

My ears are still ringing from the way-too-close gunshot and anxiety is squeezing my chest like a vise. Leaning against a tree, I press my palm over my sternum and force myself to take deep breaths .

The wolf is fine. And thanks to him, I'm all right, too.

I take another deep breath.

Everything is okay now.

Except, it's not. I can't stop worrying about the stupid wolf. Why do I even care?

Something bright catches my eye and I look up as the biggest, fullest moon I think I've ever seen rises from the treetops.

With my head tipped back, I push myself away from the tree as a howl like nothing I've ever heard freezes me in place.

It's a tortured sound that lifts the hair on the back of my neck.

Instinct warns me to turn around and run away .

But worry for my wolf has me rushing toward it instead.

By the time I reach the clearing, my breaths are coming fast and when I see the reddish body lying limp on the ground my hand flies to my mouth as a sob chokes me. Where is the hunter? I scan the trees, but there is no sign of him. Biting down on my lip, I inch closer.

Oh God, he's not moving.

But then— there —his chest rose. He's breathing.

Relief floods my veins, and I start to move toward him, only to stop again, something's not right. The way he's lying, he's curled on his side, but not like an

animal. I move a little closer. Is he bigger than I remember? His fur is shorter, too. And?—

I don't know what I'm looking at, but this thing is definitely not a wolf.

Huge claw-tipped hands cover his face as he begins to twist and writhe on the ground. This thing is the same reddish color as my wolf, but his coat is shorter, sleeker. Curiosity has me stepping even closer, needing to get a better look.

Suddenly, he explodes up and I stumble back against a tree. The monster pulls his hands away from his face and looks down at them. Turning them from front to back, flexing his fingers. Standing upright, he must be close to seven feet tall and packed with solid muscle.

The fact he's standing on two legs, has two arms, and similar stature is where any resemblance to a human man ends. He has pointed ears on either side of his head and a face that belongs in a horror movie, along with glowing yellow eyes, a flat nose, and wide mouth filled with sharp teeth.

His arms are thick with muscles and his wide chest flexes with his movement.

An angry patch of puckered skin high on one shoulder shows where he was shot.

An angry gash cuts down his other side. Rippling abs roll down his stomach to where a pronounced V draws my eyes to the thick patch of fur between his legs the size of tree trunks.

My eyes hover there. Do not wonder what's hidden under that fur.

I lick my lips. I'm so wondering. Especially when he grabs it.

Squeezing my thighs together, I shift my weight, causing the leaves under my feet to rustle. I barely notice the sound, but the monster's head snaps to the side and his eyes narrow when he spots me.

I go still. His nostrils flare and his lips curl up at the corners as he takes a step in my direction.

With my back pressed to the tree, I have nowhere to go.

My heart pounds in my chest as I watch him come closer and closer...

and closer... until he's directly in front of me.

Slowly, he crouches until we're eye to eye.

Surprisingly plump lips spread around a dangerous pair of fangs into something that could almost be called a smile.

He's so close I realize his eyes aren't yellow at all, but gold with striations of bronze and ink.

Round pupils flare suddenly, until the dark depths eat up all but a thin band of gold.

Reflecting the moonlight streaming down from above us, he leans in until he's so close the heat from his breath burns against my skin.

He closes his eyes and inhales deeply.

"Mate," he growls.

When he opens his eyes again, they lock with mine. My mouth falls open to—to

what? To ask him what he just said? What he means by it? Did I even hear him correctly?

Before I can do any of those, something bounces against my leg. I glance down and— Oh my .

A whimper squeezes past my tight throat at the sight of his massive cock jutting out from his hips. It's straining and hard and freaking huge! My cheeks burn hot and when I try to swallow, my mouth is dry.

My cheeks burn with embarrassment—and arousal as I snap my thighs shut, trying to smother the sudden flare of heat igniting between them.

The monster leans in, pressing his nose to the side of my face as he sniffs.

My eyes slide closed at the soft puff of his breath sending shivers skittering across my skin before he drags his tongue up the side of my cheek.

It's longer than a human's, warm and damp, and I whimper at the soft touch across my skin.

"Mmm," he moans as he pulls back enough to look at me again.

"Please... please, don't," I beg. Although I'm not sure what exactly I'm begging him not to do. Eat me? Fuck me?

An uninvited memory of the dream I had of him parting my thighs and dragging his tongue through my throbbing pussy has my core clenching and a moan slipping past my lips. I want to press my palms into my eyes and hide from the sudden erotic daydream. This is not the time or place for fantasies.

The monster drags another deep breath through his nose and when his eyes snap to mine they are nearly all pupils. “ Mine ,” he growls.

Before I can do more than shake my head, his arms curl around me and he lifts me off the ground. My scream falls on deaf ears as he drapes me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes and runs off into the forest.

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 2:20 pm

Vuk

I need to find somewhere safe to tend to my female. My mate. I still don't fully believe this is possible. Lycans and humans have never mixed. I always assumed we were incompatible. Stroking my hand down her back, I grab a handful of her ample bottom, grinning at her incensed squeal.

The moment I returned to my body, her scent called to me in a way I knew she could only be mine.

All the strange feelings I've been having about her suddenly make sense.

The cool air caresses my skin and the moon lights my way as my long strides take me through the forest. I'm so much stronger like this. Faster. My vision sharp and keen.

Tipping my chin up, I breathe in deep. The scent of pine and mud surround me, but it's the heady scent of her arousal so close, it goes straight to my erect cock.

It sways with each long stride and throbs with unfulfilled desire.

I need to get somewhere safe. Somewhere I can sate this ache riding me to claim her.

But first, I must eliminate the threat of the hunter.

Breathing in again, I search the air for a sharper scent. It's putrid and wrong, belonging to the evil hiding from me. My nose wrinkles when I find it. The acrid smell of pain and suffering is far off and drifting farther.

Relief loosens my muscles. The hunter will need time to tend to his wounds before he comes after us again. That will give me time to hide my mate somewhere safe.

Holding her small, squirming body over my shoulder, I can feel her heart beating rapidly as she fights me. Her voice is harsh as she pleads with me to put her down, but it's not safe. Not with the hunter still alive and out there. Not after he threatened her.

I'm crashing through the underbrush, scanning the forest for some place I can hide her when a breeze kicks up bringing with it a bitter scent.

I came across the small cave, with its strange scent, while searching for a way out of the forest. It didn't occur to me then, but now I realize it will make a perfect hiding spot for my mate.

Picking up my pace, I turn toward the scent, following it to the base of a steep hill and up a rocky incline to the mouth of a cave. The scent of sulfur is thick and cloying and I wrinkle my nose even as I check for other scents. When I determine the cave is empty, I duck inside.

"Where are you taking me?" My mate squirms and twists in my arms, but I have a good hold of her.

Inside the cave we're surrounded by warm, moist darkness. The smell of sulfur deepens when we reach a small pool at the back. Above it, a small opening in the ceiling allows the moon's silver rays to filter down where they reflect on the water.

"Oh." My mate lets out a soft gasp, going still in my arms as she takes in the sight.

It's lovely here. Even more than I remember. I set her upon the thick layer of moss that covers the ground. Marveling at the sight of her among the lush greenery

surrounding the warm pool .

“This is beautiful,” she breathes, slowly taking in the cave. She tips her head back and looks up at me. “How did you know this was here?”

I tap the end of my flat nose with a claw-tipped finger. “Smelled it.”

Her eyes widen. “You can speak?”

“Of course I can.” I’m not sure whether to laugh at her surprise or be offended. I’ve spoken to her twice already, did she not notice?

“Sorry,” she apologizes quickly. “It’s just... You were a wolf and now you’re a... a... what are you? ”

I frown down at her, surprised that she doesn’t know. Then I remember my kind do not populate this plane.

“I am lycan,” I growl, dipping my head so I can breathe in more of her sweet scent.

Her eyes are wide as she pulls back from me. “You’re a werewolf ?”

A deep growl slips past my teeth before I can stop it. “Not a werewolf. Those beasts are little better than the wolf I was trapped as. They are ruled by the moon and their base instincts. Violent. Stupid . Lycans are superior in every way. Smart. Cunning. Strong and faithful.”

“Oh.” She squirms, trying to back away, but I pull her small body closer, so I can feel her soft curves against me. I need to go take care of the hunter, but with her so close—I’m finding it increasingly harder to leave.

She goes rigid as I curl my much larger body around her. Tucking my face into the side of her neck, where her scent is rich and soothing.

“Are there no lycans here?” I ask.

“Like, for real ?” Her words come out breathy and I groan as my cock jumps, wanting to hear her make more sounds like that. “No. They only exist in fiction. Books and movies. They don’t—they aren’t real. ”

I chuff and pull back to look down at her pretty face.

My pack would never let me hear the end of it if they knew I considered a human pretty.

The humans I’ve known are pallid and filthy.

Ugly, noisy things that are barely above vermin.

But not my Hana. My female is beautiful.

Her dark skin is rich and smooth, flawless.

Her round face is surrounded by a cloud of wild curls my fingers ache to sink into.

Her wide-set eyes turn up in a pleasing way at the edges and glitter in the dim light like dark gems. She is perfect.

“Am I not real, then?” I ask her.

She lets out a dry laugh. “This is all pretty unbelievable, I’m not gonna lie.”

Banding my arms around her, I pull her against me. Hard.

She lets out a soft gasp as I dip my head so I can press my nose to the column of her throat. I can smell her blood singing through her veins here, the soft lub-dub of her heartbeat is a drum beat my own heart aches to match.

Her pulse flutters rapidly against my tongue as I taste her warm flesh. It's soft with a hint of salt. A groan ripples through my throat as her sweet arousal surrounds us. It teases my senses and fogs my thoughts, changing my groan to a deep purr that rattles through my chest.

Hana presses her palms against my chest and gives me a weak push. "Wait. L-lycan, please."

I reluctantly pull back from her, just enough so I can capture her gaze.

"Vuk," I say. "I only want to hear my name whispered from your lips, no others."

"Vuk," she repeats softly.

My cock jumps at the sound of my whispered name rolling off her soft pink tongue. I bite back a groan, but I can't stop my hips from pressing against her soft belly. The way she feels pressed against my aching cock is bliss .

Instead of melting against me like I want, she pushes at my chest to put more space between us. "Vuk, stop."

The word is a sharp contradiction to the breathy way it comes out.

Or the way her scent flares so sweetly as her eyes slowly slide down my body.

I groan when they flare wide and her plush lips part on a sharp inhale when they pause at my hips.

My cock is reaching for her, painfully stiff and leaking beads of pre-cum from the tip.

Having her close like this, standing in the circle of my arms where her scent is all around me, her eyes grazing over my body, flips something inside me.

Triggering an instinct that is already riding me to claim her.

Now, under the rays of the full moon. To mark her, so that everyone knows she is mine before the hunter finds us.

The hunter.

I clench my teeth. They ache to bite, to claim. My cock throbs with the need to take her roughly. To fill her with my seed and scent. I'm falling into rut, which is not ideal and will leave us exposed to the threat still out there. But I don't think I can stop now.

I drag a deep breath through my nose. It's filled with sulfur, water and moss, my mate's sweet sex, and faintly, the hunter.

"Too late, Hana." I snarl.

"How—how do you know my name?" She stumbles back a step, but before she can escape the cage of my arms, I draw her back.

"I've been watching you. I heard your friends call you by your name many times.

" I curl my arms around her so she's pressed to my solid chest. "I wondered if the hunter trapped you within this forest, too. Then I thought you might be the key to my

escape when your scent triggered something in me. Now I can't stay away. ”

Holding her tightly against the part of me that aches for her, my other hand reaches back to pull at the pack she's wearing. Sliding it down her back so it tangles around her arms.

“Will you stay here long enough for me to take care of the hunter?” I ask.

Her eyes dart to the entrance behind me and I can see the calculation in them, giving me my answer. My female will run at the first chance. My cock jumps, imagining the chase she'll take me on—except it's not safe.

“Maybe I should tie you up so you can't run?” A vision of her body intricately bound and spread wide for my use drags a low moan from my chest.

Her eyes dart back to mine and narrow. “You wouldn't dare—” When she starts to struggle, her body rubs against mine.

My cock grows even harder, and I can't hold back a deep moan at how good she feels touching me like this.

If she doesn't stop her squirming, it'll send me fully into rut, and I'll have no control over how hard I'll take her.

“Enough,” I bark. Pulling her pack free of her arms, I drop it behind her with a soft thud. Reaching behind her once more, I grip the back of the lightweight covering she's wearing. Pulling it down over her shoulders and pinning her arms at her sides with it.

Beneath the jacket are more clothes. I growl at how many layers I need to peel away before I can get to her soft body. I want to shred through the strange material with my

claws, but my female's weak human body has no fur and needs these layers for warmth.

"Stop! What are you doing?" She struggles uselessly as I push her to the mossy floor and pull her leg coverings down her thighs.

The scent of her weeping sex hits the center of my chest like a fist. The rut I've been holding back comes barreling forward.

I have just enough presence of mind to stagger back toward the cave entrance.

A quick sniff assures me the hunter is still far off, but to be sure he won't be able to find us easily I channel some of my sexual aggression into pulling down trees and uprooting bushes to cover the entrance, giving us a modicum of privacy.

When I turn back to face my mate, she's wiggled her arms free. Her eyes are wide and frightened as she works to pull the jacket back into place.

"Don't—don't come any closer," she warns.

Letting out a low huff, I ignore her striding across the cave to crouch down in front of her. Reaching out, I push the jacket off her shoulders once more, then I use my claws to shred her thin shirt underneath.

"Vuk!" she shouts, but I cover her mouth with my hand, pushing her back into the soft moss, continuing to peel away the ruined fabric.

"We must be quiet," I warn her, even as I'm planning to make her scream my name again. This time, with less indignation and more passion.

Reaching down between us, I drag her pants the rest of the way off her legs, pulling

her shoes off with them. Then, crouching over her, I get my first good look at her.

She's beautiful. Her skin is smooth and dark, glossed with a slight sheen from the humidity in the cave.

Her breasts are round and full, tucked into thin cups that push them up enticingly.

The material is thin enough I can see her tight brown nipples centered within large dark circles through it.

My mouth waters at the sight of her nipples pressing against the material and I lean in, closing my lips around one, circling the tip with my tongue before sucking it through the silky cloth.

She arches up with a gasp, pressing more of her deliciously soft breast against my mouth. Her fingers curl where she pushes against me, and she digs her blunt little nails into my skin as I move to suckle her other nipple .

I need more. Biting through the front closure, I hum as the material falls away, giving me unrestricted access to drag my tongue across her sweet tasting skin without any barrier.

I move back and forth, licking and sucking before making my way up her chest to lick a salty path up her throat. My sharp teeth nip at her jaw before capturing her lips in a fiery kiss.

She doesn't move, keeping her lips tightly shut against the slant of my mouth.

Moving over her body, I shove a knee between her legs, forcing them to open.

My tongue flicks out to taste the seam of her lips as I rub my knee against the

juncture of her thighs.

When she parts her lips for me with a gasp, I sink my tongue inside her warm mouth.

Hana stiffens under me, but then she meekly meets my seeking intrusion.

The first brush of her soft tongue against mine sends a flare of heat searing through my veins. Her unique flavor explodes across my tastebuds, and I melt against her with a sigh as I delve inside her sweet mouth again.

Bracing one hand beside her head, I cup one of her heavy breasts with the other. Rolling and pinching her nipple between my fingers as she drags her nails down my chest, over the thick pads of muscle before sliding them back up to my shoulders where she grips me, pulling me closer.

Sliding my hand between us, I drag my fingers down her soft belly to the scrap of silk wrapped around her hips. Tucking my thumb into the band, I pull.

“Wait!” she gasps against my lips, reaching down to wrap her small hand around my wrist.

It’s too late, the fabric rips and I toss it aside so I can cup her bared cunt in my palm where she’s warm and wet for me.

“Oh...!” She pulls back from my kiss, pushing at my shoulders even as her hips lift to meet my seeking fingers. Her eyes are wide as I slide through her slick folds to tease at her center with a claw.

“Vuk, careful!” she gasps when I slowly ease the tip of my claw into her soft channel.

Pulling my hand from between her thighs, I bring my fingers to my mouth where I

make a show of sucking her sweet cream from them.

Then I place the claws of my first two fingers between my teeth and bite them off, all the way to the quick, before returning them to her drenched slit to tease at her entrance again.

Using my thumb, I draw a light circle around the tight little pearl pulsing near the top of her slit.

She gasps and squirms and I'm pleased to find this pleasure button is one sameness the females of our kind share.

When she is panting and restless, I watch her intently as I press my declawed fingers inside her. Pleased when her mouth falls open with a breathy moan and her eyes roll back.

“That’s right, my female. Moan for your mate.”

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Hana

Mate ? He keeps calling me that. What does he mean, and what am I doing? I should be fighting this monster, not melting under his touch. And I definitely should not be encouraging him to make me come. Except, oh God, the way his magic fingers plunge in and out of me... I'm so close.

"Vuk, please..."

I let out a choked gasp when he hits something deep. Heat flares through my core and I thrust my hips up, humping them against his hand. The dark silhouette of his huge body stretches over me, blotting out the bright moonlight shining down.

"That's it, Hana," he says, circling my clit with his thumb with just the right amount of pressure to make me whine. "Let me watch you come apart. I need you nice and slick so you can take me."

His voice is deep and throaty. I'm not sure if it's an accent or simply the way his sharp teeth impaired his speech. It doesn't matter, the way he growls his words sends another rush of heat flooding my pussy, coating his fingers .

Watching me with animal-like golden eyes, Vuk's full lips curl up into a menacing smile, exposing a mouth full of sharp fangs. I should be terrified. He's horrifying to look at, and yet...

I tighten my grip around his wrist and pump my hips to meet each thrust of his fingers. "More," I beg him. "Vuk, I'm so close."

Oh, God . The way he's touching me makes it hard to think.

The pleasure he coaxes from my body has my head spinning and a shiver goes through me when he dips his head to capture my lips against his again.

This time I open for him, greedily meeting each slick glide of his tongue as it delves inside my mouth.

Recalling how it felt lapping at my nipples.

Slanting his mouth over mine, Vuk pushes his fingers deep, curling them, grinding his palm against my clit as he presses against something deep inside that has my core going nuclear.

If he didn't have his mouth clamped over mine, swallowing my sounds, I'd be screaming loud enough to echo through the entire forest.

I'm writhing underneath him as searing heat rolls through my body, and he swallows each of my whimpers and moans. Stealing my breath as his touch sets me on fire until all I can focus on is the pleasure he's wringing from me.

"Mmm, beautiful female," he says as I come for him, watching me through heavy lidded golden eyes as I twitch and buck with the orgasm rolling through me.

My throaty moans echo through the small cave as he pets me through the last shudders of my orgasm, until I'm limp and boneless. Then he drags his hand from between my legs and licks away the wetness coating it. I watch raptly as his eyes slide closed, humming at the taste.

"Delicious." His golden gaze focuses on me once more, and he licks his lips. " More ."

Before I realize what he means, he's between my legs, prying them open so I'm spread wide for his hungry gaze. He moves fast for being such a large creature.

"Vuk, wait," I gasp as he wedges his shoulders between my thighs and curls his arms under my legs to grab my hips, pulling me onto his face. "I'm still sensiti— ah !"

The first stroke of his tongue ignites me anew.

The way he teases at my seam, alternating between fast flicks and long, languid licks steals my breath and makes me squirm.

When he delves his long tongue deep inside to taste the most intimate part of me, I drop my hands to the top of his head.

Digging my fingertips into the silky hair the covers him, grinding my pussy against his mouth.

"Vuk—Oh, Vuk!"

He grunts, stopping long enough to drape my legs over his wide shoulders, before driving his tongue even deeper into my channel, giving me the best oral I've ever had.

His tongue plunges in and out of my tight core, fucking me with long, hard strokes before he drags it up my center to tease my clit, then plunging it back inside my slick channel.

"Yes, yes, just like that." Clenching his hair in my fists, I rock against his face in time with his tongue.

He alternates deep thrusts that steal my breath with playful flicks to tease my clit.

Vuk has me so mindless I don't notice when he moves lower. Dragging his tongue down the crease of my ass. It's not until he laps at the tight pucker of my back entrance that I'm snapped out of my reverie.

"No! Not there," I squeal, when he presses the tip against the ring of tight muscle. Frantically pushing against his head, it's like trying to move a building. I've never let anyone touch me back there, and I don't trust this monster enough to be the first.

Vuk looks up from between my legs. His golden eyes are playful as he gives my back entrance one more teasing lick.

The soft touch of his tongue there is surprisingly pleasurable, and I'm startled when a moan slips past my lips.

Before I can process what that means, Vuk returns to my clit, drawing it between his lips, making me forget all about my forbidden hole.

My head falls back against the soft moss and soon he has my legs shaking as he fucks me with his tongue. He works my body until my breaths are ragged and I'm lost to the throes of another immanent orgasm.

"Oh my god, just like that. Don't stop!" Arching my back, I beg as he replaces his tongue with his fingers once more. My belly tightens as they stretch and curl deep inside me, while his tongue sets a maddening pace against my clit. "I'm close. So close..."

My whole body goes taut and I forget to breathe as I come around his fingers and against his mouth.

The vibration of his grunt against my sensitive pussy sends more sharp waves rocking through me and he doubles down, dragging my orgasm on and on and on until spots

flash before my eyes and I think I pass out.

I don't know how long it takes for me to come back online. When I do, it's to Vuk staring down at me with a concerned look.

"Hana?" His head tilts to the side as he gently strokes the pad of his thumb across my cheek. The sweet scent of my natural musk lingers on his fingers and I have the strangest urge to turn my head and draw them into my mouth, so I can taste.

Instead, I smile at him shyly. "That was...that was..." I can't think of the right words to explain what that was. Incredible falls flat and sounds cliché.

Concern for me haunts his eyes. "I was too rough. I forget you are human, and I must be careful."

Reaching my arms over my head, I stretch languidly beneath him. "You won't hear me complaining," I say with a contented sigh.

Gazing up at him from under my lashes, basking in post coital, he doesn't seem quite so hideous anymore.

He's got some serious RBF, and the fangs are a bit off-putting.

Especially considering how close they were to my most delicate lady-parts.

But the way his hair falls across his golden eyes gives him a boyish look and the concern he is showing me is attractive as hell.

Reaching up, I cup the sides of his face between my hands and stare directly into his strange golden gaze. "You weren't too rough."

Stroking my thumb down his cheek, I savor the soft texture of his fur.

It's much sleeker, more of a cream color than the red covering the rest of him.

Vuk closes his eyes, leaning into my touch as a low growling purr rumbles through his chest. It reminds me of a cat, if cats purred like wolf-monsters.

A moment later he snaps his eyes back open. His pupils are small pinpoints that flare until they eat up all but a thin band of his gold iris. When he clenches his jaw, his fangs still peek out from his lips, reminding me he's not sweet and cuddly, but a very dangerous monster.

"Hana," Vuk groans, dropping his forehead to mine. "I need you. Need to claim you."

My pussy flutters happily but my mind is trying to pump the brakes.

"Wha—what do you mean?" I ask, and I drop my hands from his face to press my palms against the thick pads of his chest.

Pushing himself up, he then rolls away, taking me with him. He cuts off my scream with his hand across my mouth and settles me so I'm straddling his legs, and we're face- to-face. I'm breathing hard as I brace my hands against his shoulders, his cock sticking straight up from his hips between us.

"You must be quiet," he warns me softly. A muscle in his jaw jumps as he stares into my eyes with deadly seriousness. "My rut won't let me leave you, even though there is still a threat out there."

Mating? Rut? Threat? He's not making sense.

Slowly, to make sure I'm not going to start screaming, he lowers his hand from my

mouth and strokes the back of his fingers down the side of my face. “You’re mine, Hana. My mate. And I’m yours.”

“That’s not how it works,” I say with a shake of my head.

His eyes crinkle at the outside edges with a lopsided smirk, and he leans in close enough that our noses nearly touch. “That’s how it works for lycans.” Then he claims my lips, distracting me with another toe-curling kiss.

For being a monster with a mouth full of knives, he’s a hell of a kisser. My fingers curl over his shoulders, tangling with the hair at the nape of his neck. His arms tighten around me, pulling me so we’re chest to chest and my pussy melts where it’s pressed over the thick bar of his cock.

One hand slides up my spine to grip the back of my neck while the other digs into my hip, urging me to move over him.

Showing me how he wants me to slide back and forth so I’m grinding over his cock.

Already soaking wet from two orgasms, it’s not long before I’m coating his thick shaft with even more of my cream and yet another orgasm begins to build.

“Hana.” He presses his face against the side of my throat, and I shiver when his warm, wet tongue drags over the spot where my shoulder and neck meet.

We’re both panting and rocking against each other when he flips me, so my back is pressed to the soft ground. Stretching over me, he presses my left hand over my head and wedges his knees between my thighs, spreading me open .

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“Touch me, Hana,” he rasps. Taking hold of my free hand, he guides it between us. Pressing it against his throbbing length where his skin is hot to the touch, but also velvety soft, and hard as steel.

My breath stutters as I curl my fingers around his cock and, Jesus , he’s so wide around my fingertips barely touch.

He growls, grinding his hips against my palm that’s slick with his pre-cum.

Curling my fingers around him, I notice strange ripples running along the length of his shaft, then a ring of flesh around his base.

When my fist bumps it, it starts expanding. .. like a fleshy balloon.

“Hana,” he groans softly, staring into my eyes. “Yes,” he hisses as he rocks against my grip, “just like that. Stroke me.” A muscle in the side of his jaw ticks when he clenches his teeth. “I need to claim you. I can’t put it off any longer.”

My breaths go shallow as he uses my hand to line his tip up with my center, notching it at my entrance. I’m suddenly nervous. I’ve never taken anything close to his size before. What if I can’t?—

He presses forward and thrusts deep, sinking his entire length inside me in one push.

The unexpected shock of it forces a pain cry from me, along with all the air from my lungs.

I tighten around him as he stretches me to the point of pain and then past it.

My body fights him as he fills me with every inch, all the way to the strange band circling the base of his dick.

Squeezing my eyes shut, a strangled sob tears through my throat and Vuk stills above me.

“Shhh,” Vuk hushes me. Pressing his forehead to mine, he holds himself still for a moment. Giving me time to adjust to his size.

Holy shit, I’ve never felt so full before. Tears sting my eyes at how impossibly wide my pussy is stretched around him. My breathing hitches and I focus on relaxing. Urging my body to go soft and slick to take him.

Hovering over me, Vuk’s face is lined with harsh concentration and his eyes lock with mine as he moves his fingers to gently circle my clit.

Hot pleasure flares through my core, helping me forget the initial shock of his intrusion.

Turning the dull ache of him lodged deep inside my body to delicious pressure.

He feels good. So good . I’m not ready to let it end, but he doesn’t wait.

Vuk’s eyes slide closed, nostrils flaring with a deep breath as he slowly pulls back. Dragging the ridges of his thick shaft against my walls until the thick crown is wedged inside.

“Vuk,” I whimper. Curling my fingers around his shoulder, I dig my nails deep into his thick coat as he thrusts inside me again. This time, my body takes him with ease,

but it still drives a choked moan from my throat.

“That’s right, my Hana. Let me hear my name on your sweet tongue.” He pulls back and thrusts again.

His breath is hot against the column of my throat as he sets a rhythm that edges me closer and closer to bliss. Lifting my hips to meet each thrust, I cross my ankles against the small of his back, locking him between my legs. Taking everything he’s giving me. Needing more.

“Vuk!” I moan. My heels dig into the top of his ass and his fingers circling my wrist tighten, pinning it to the ground above my head.

I press the fingers of my other hand into his fur, holding onto him as he rocks his hips in and out of my clenching channel.

Tipping my head back, I beg, “ Please .”

“Yes. Beg me. Mark me with your claws.” His groan vibrates from his mouth, tickling the side of my throat.

Whimpering nonsensical things, I use all of my strength to claw at him harder. Curling my fingers and raking my nails down his back and then back up again. Pressing hard enough to leave behind long, raised scratches through his thick coat.

Vuk presses his face into the side of my neck.

A soft growl rumbles through his chest, sending gooseflesh prickling across my skin.

My nipples tighten and I moan as I lift my hips to meet each of his pounding thrusts.

It's not enough, though. I need more. Lifting my legs, I hook them around his hips and cross my ankles at the small of his back.

Spreading wider, so I can take more of him.

Pressing my heels into him, urging him to fuck me harder.

With a soft grunt, Vuk flicks his tongue across the sensitive skin under my ear, sending chills across my skin.

His body arches over me with each rock of his hips as he drives his length in and out of my clenching channel.

Chasing the ripple of gooseflesh that rushes across my skin with the scrape of his teeth.

Following it down the column of my throat and over the place where my neck and shoulder meet.

"You're taking me so well." He nuzzles the side of my jaw before circling his wet tongue around the spot he keeps coming back to. Each surge of his hips brings the thick ring at the base of his cock against my entrance. "And you'll take my knot, too."

I don't know what he means by that, but the erotic way he says it has heat flaring between my legs. He has my mind so muddled with pleasure I'll take anything he asks me to, so long as he never stops.

Vuk

My little human is impossibly tight around my cock. The way I'm stretching her must cause her pain, yet she takes everything I give her without complaint. Even when I press my knot against her tight little opening, testing her to see if she'll accept me.

She whimpers softly against my chest as I drive into her again and again. With her legs wrapped around my hips, she uses her heels to guide me. I should be gentle with her, but the moment I sunk my cock inside her tight heat, I was lost. When I tried to pull back, she begged me for more.

Because she's my mate. The fates would not have matched us if she couldn't take me as a mate should.

The cave is saturated with the rich scent of our combined desires, and my heart pounds as I curl myself around her, fucking her into the spongy moss. I worry I'm hurting her, but the soft sounds she's making aren't from pain.

When she drags her fingers down my back, it sends my hips driving into her even harder. I want her to do the same to my chest. I wish her fingers were tipped with sharp claws so I could see the marks she's leaving on me.

"Vuk," she moans. Her soft skin glistens with sweat, and she lifts her hips to meet each of my thrusts. Scratching and digging her blunt little fingers down my back, then back up again.

My focus drops to her heavy breasts. Entranced at the way they bounce enticingly with each slap of my hips. My mouth waters, wanting to suckle her stiff nipples while I fuck her, but our size difference makes it difficult like this.

Next time. Next time, I'll take her on my lap so she can bounce on my cock while I lick and nip at her breasts, teasing her tight little anus with my finger.

My cock swells thinking of how impossibly tight her back entrance will be and my sensitive little female moans for me.

I doubt she'll moan so sweetly the first time I take her ass, even if I go slow.

I'll be careful with her, show her how delicious it can be for both of us.

"Vuk, I'm close." Her breath hitches as her hips drive sharply to meet mine.

My instinct flares. Mine. My mate. Must claim.

"You're mine, little Hana." I snarl, guiding her into a fast-paced rhythm. Shuttling in and out of her small, soft body. She's beautiful like this, staring up at me with her dark eyes glazed with desire. Plush lips parted, panting out her moans.

"That's it," I grunt. "Can you feel how well we fit? You were made for me."

Moonlight streams down from the skylight and when she looks up at me, her eyes catch one of the beams and flash silver. My breath catches and a rush of pleasure sears a path up my cock, drawing my balls up tight.

"That's it. That's my sweet little Hana," I pant. "I'm going to fill you up. Knot you deep and fill you with my seed, until you're round with my pups."

Hana makes a strangled sound as her cunt ripples around me before clenching tight.

My mate likes talk of breeding her .

“You want my pups? Want me to breed you?” I growl against her ear as I fuck her.

“No,” she moans, but she pulls me closer, as her cunt tightens around me again, suggesting otherwise.

I drop low over her so my mouth is next to her ear. “I’m going to breed this tight cunt every chance I get. I’ll fill you with my cum and knot you deep. Over and over until my seed takes and your belly is round with my young.”

“Vuk, fuck !” A keening wail tears from her throat, and she clamps down around me as her orgasm crests and ripples through her.

The way she gasps my name through her pleasure is enough to drag me over the edge with her.

As if I needed more proof this female is my mate, the knot at the base of my cock fills with seed.

Lycan’s can only knot their mates, and I howl with victory as I press my expanding knot against my little mate’s cunt.

My cock by itself is a tight fit, and I’ll need to stretch even more, so she can take all of me.

Her dark eyes fly open, and she presses her hand against my chest as she tenses up.

“Relax for me,” I groan, pressing my knot harder against her tight hole.

Hana stares up at me with panic shining in her eyes as she tries to push me away.

“ Let me in ,” I plead, then let out a low, rumbling purr.

The bassy sound flows from my chest into hers as I will her to calm.

I’ve heard stories of males purring for their mates the first time they knot them.

How it helps to calm their female, so they soften enough for the thick knot to slip inside their tight channel.

It works. Her breathing slows and her muscles unclench around me enough to allow me to press deeper. I bark out a curse as my knot pops through her tight opening and expands, locking us together .

Hana arches against me with a hoarse wail as I drop my face to the place where her shoulder and neck meet, dragging my tongue over the spot I’ve already chosen for my claiming bite.

“Mine. My Hana .” Stretching my jaw wide, I bite down, sinking my sharp teeth deep into the side of her neck.

My eyes roll back when the first taste of her coppery blood hits my tongue.

Devine. It’s rich and warm as it fills my mouth before sliding down the back of my throat when I swallow.

The heat that’s been collecting at the base of my spine flares and my hips snap against her.

My cock lengthens, hardening to fucking stone.

Tearing my mouth from the side of her throat, I let out a deafening roar as I fill my perfect human mate with lash after lash of my seed.

Hana lets out a soft sob and I drop my gaze and see...

fear. Or shock from my bite, I think. Her brow is furrowed, and I worry it's from pain, not euphoria, turning her body tight and still under me.

My cock is still pulsing, and I slowly rock my hips, rubbing her with the thick knot that's binding us together. The wrinkles along her brow soften, followed by a soft, breathy moan as her eyes flutter closed.

Dropping back down to nuzzle the side of her throat, my tongue flicks out and I drag it over where she's still bleeding from my bite.

Lapping up every drop of spilled blood while my hips slowly rock against her.

Her breath hitches and she shudders, clenching around me as a soft moan warms the side of my face and her cunt milks the last of the seed from my knot.

More of her shuddered moans fill the quiet cave as I pump the last of my cum deep inside her clenching channel.

When she tries to push me away, I clamp my teeth down around her shoulder again, growling when she tries to move.

I hold her still until her cunt finally relaxes its grip around me and her body goes loose .

Neither of us moves for a long time. With my body curled over hers and my teeth and knot locking us together.

Hana draws in a shaky breath. “Please, you’re hurting me.”

I growl against her throat, softer this time, and relax my jaws as I gather her in my arms. After I release my teeth from her, I lap at the mark I’ve left so my saliva will stop the bleeding and seal the wound.

Then carefully, trying not to pull at where we’re knotted, I roll us to my back.

She’s draped across my front, my cock buried deep inside her warm cunt.

When she doesn’t move at first, I worry I might have damaged her.

She’s so small in my arms, it wouldn’t take much to break her.

But slowly, she rests her cheek against my pectoral while she softly pets me with her hand.

Stroking her small fingers over the soft fur across my chest to my injured shoulder.

She’s extra gentle as her fingertips skate over the nearly mended hole left from the hunter’s weapon.

Letting my eyes fall closed, I release a pleased sigh, luxuriating in the warmth of my mate pressed against me.

Her tight little cunt pulses occasionally around my softening cock and I would be perfectly content if my knot keeps us locked together like this for the rest of the night. Maybe even forever.

The contentment washing over me is like nothing I’ve ever experienced with a partner before. The way Hana’s warmth seeps through my chest to curl around my

heart is... is a feeling I can't describe with mere words.

It isn't long before the quiet trickle of the spring and normal nighttime sounds outside the cave lull me into a doze. I'm so comfortable I don't notice the change in the air or hear the footsteps coming up to the cave's entrance until it's nearly too late.

My eyes snap open when a sharp scent of sickness hits me.

A warning growl rolls off my tongue and without giving her any warning, I flip us over.

She's still locked around my knot as I press her back to the mossy floor, covering her with my body as a loud crack echoes through the cave.

Hana lets out a sharp scream, followed by the sound of the projectile ricocheting off the stone at the back of the cave.

My body is tense, expecting the bite of the bullet. When it never comes, I let my head drop and breathe a sigh of relief.

Huddled under me, Hana looks up at me with eyes wide with fear.

I'm still locked with her, although my knot is deflating quickly enough.

I worry about hurting her. If I need to protect my mate from the hunter, I will have to pull it out before it's ready.

The idea of tearing her is enough to send me into a rage, especially when the hunter's stench fills the cave, telling me that he's close by. Too close.

Dropping my forehead to hers, I silently beg for her forgiveness before I gnash my

teeth and pull my knot free.

The sound she makes when she cries out breaks my heart. Nuzzling the side of her face, I hope I haven't damaged her. "I promise to make it up to you, but first I need to deal with the threat outside the cave." For good.

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Hana

My ears are ringing all over again from the gunshot. Making everything sound dull and fuzzy again.

What's even more troubling is the way my pussy feels, like it's on fire from where Vuk ripped his knot free. Pushing myself up to my knees, I whimper when thick, warm fluid drips down the sides of my legs. Fluid I hope is only Vuk's cum, and not blood.

"Stay down." He pushes me to my side, then gently nuzzles the side of my face. He lets out another quick burst of the purr he used when he knotted me, and it helps soothe away some of my hurt.

As soon as he crawls over me with a predatory grace, I scurry over to a rocky outcrop, tucking myself behind it where I watch as he stalks toward the entrance of the cave. Even though I can't see them, I know his eyes are bright as he scans for danger.

I don't need to guess who shot at us.

Vuk makes short work of tearing down the crude barricade he piled in front of the entrance. Reminding me how much stronger he is than a human ...

Because he's not a human. He's a lycan .

Oh my God, I just fucked a werewolf. And he bit me under the full moon.

Despite the humid warmth from the thermal pool, I begin to shiver at what I've done.

Vuk is completely fixated on the caves entrance as I quickly gather my clothes.

My thermal undershirt is ruined, so are my panties and bra, but my flannel and jeans are fine.

My pussy is still throbbing, and I do a quick sweep of my fingers to make sure I'm not bleeding.

Sagging with relief when my fingertips come away wet, but not with blood.

Staying tucked behind the rocks I dress quickly, wrinkling my nose at having to go commando under denim.

Keeping my eyes on Vuk's shadow, I duck from the safety of the rocks long enough to grab my boots. I'm shoving my foot into the second one, when another gunshot has me dropping to my belly and covering my ears.

My thoughts immediately go to Vuk, hoping the shot missed him as I pop my head over the rocks in time to watch his massive body bolt out of the cave with an ear-splitting roar. The moment he drops out of sight another gunshot echoes through the night, followed by an eerie silence.

He's fine. I tell myself as I scramble to the front of the cave. He's faster and stronger than the hunter. Peeking out from around the entrances edge, I scan the darkness for— there .

Vuk and the hunter are probably a hundred yards away.

The hunter's right arm hangs uselessly at his side.

Waving his left arm around wildly, the gun's dark metal glints under the moonlight as he slowly circles Vuk.

Even from here, I can see the wild look in his eyes and the flash of his white teeth with his unhinged grin.

My lycan merely watches, his body tense as he pivots to keep the hunter in his sight. Prepared for whatever he might do. From the cave I can see the hunter's mouth moving, but they are too far away to hear what he's saying.

The hunter lunges. His movements are slow and uncoordinated compared to the way Vuk's arm snaps out. Wrapping his much larger hand around the weaker human's wrist, he lifts the hunter up until his toes are touching the ground. Keeping the gun pointed to the sky and away from the cave.

The hunter reminds me of a puppet, the way he's barely balanced on his toes as he kicks out, trying to sweep Vuk's legs out from under him.

He'd have better luck trying to take down an oak tree.

After several useless tries, the hunter changes tactics and twists his body, stepping backward to try to flip the much larger monster over his shoulder.

There is a small part—like teeny tiny—that feels bad for the hunter.

These moves might work with humans, but Vuk isn't anything like a human.

And the hunter is clearly delusional if he thinks he has any chance of winning a fight between them.

Injured as he is, he's in no shape to do more than bleed on my lycan.

When his martial art moves fail, the hunter lets out a loud howl that carries all the way to the cave.

With Vuk still holding him by one arm stretched over his head, the hunter lifts both legs off the ground and kicks out at Vuk.

The blow lands against his hip, with enough force Vuk loosens his grip, and the hunter drops to the ground.

He pops right back up. It's so fast it looks like he suddenly reappeared.

Slowly, he lifts his arm to aim the gun at Vuk and my heart jumps into my throat.

Opening my mouth, I start to scream for Vuk to watch out, but he doesn't need my warning.

His body is a blur when he launches himself at the hunter.

Except, just before Vuk's giant form would have barreled into him, the hunter steps—no, he glides to the side—and Vuk crashes to the ground behind him.

The hunter's maniacal grin is gone as he slowly turns to face Vuk. His eyes have changed to a frightening black that bleeds over his entire eyeball. Demon eyes.

Vuk is already back to his feet, his eyes narrowing to slits of gold as he stares at the hunter's sudden change. Glancing down at his hand, Vuk tosses the gun aside.

Without taking his ink black eyes from Vuk, the hunter crouches low. Holding out his hand, crooking his fingers at my lycan.

Wait. Was he faking this entire time? Was he really crazy?

His right arm still hangs limp at his side as his lip curls up into a sneer.

He says something to Vuk that makes my lycan bristle, then with a burst of speed I couldn't have expected, he attacks.

This sudden change takes Vuk by surprise, and he stumbles back when the hunter slams his fist into his stomach, but he isn't taken off guard for long.

Now the fight between them is well matched and I catch myself holding my breath as I watch them alternate attacks. Despite the hunter's much smaller size and injury, he's quick on his feet and the punches he lands have much more strength behind them than they should.

In a move that almost looks like he can fly, the hunter manages to get behind Vuk.

He grabs a handful of hair and this time when he tries to sweep Vuk's legs out from under him, the move works.

Vuk lands on his back with a deep groan and the hunter is on him in an instant.

Digging his knee into the lycan's chest, the hunter lifts his arm over his head.

His fingers grip the base of a menacing hunting knife and the sharp silver blade glints in the moonlight.

My hands fly to my mouth with a sharp gasp.

Before I can stop myself, I rush out of the cave with a warning on the tip of my tongue.

But before I make it more than a couple feet, Vuk bucks under the hunter, sending the

much smaller human flying.

Lifting his legs up, he arches his back and jumps back on his feet.

Upright, Vuk wastes no time. He dives for the hunter, who rolls out of the way, but not before Vuk braces his hands on the ground and pivots, kicking his legs out, slamming his feet into the hunter's side.

After that, it's hard to keep track of limbs and bodies. Vuk and the hunter are a tangled mess rolling across the ground. Each gaining the upper hand then losing it.

An arm lifts the hunting knife high into the air. The way the moonlight hits the blade makes it look like it's glowing, before whoever is holding it stabs it down, hard and fast.

A scream rings out, followed by silence.

My heart gives a sickening lurch when the seconds stretch, and neither of them moves. A moan slips past my lips and, I can't help thinking the worst as I race down from the cave.

As I run, I watch as one of them rise.

My chest squeezes around my heart, fearing the worst. Until I realize Vuk is the one kneeling. I let out a breath, and my steps falter with relief.

Slowly, he turns his body toward me.

His face is smeared with bright red blood. Beneath him, the hunter lies motionless with the knife handle sticking out of his chest.

My stomach flips at the grotesque sight and I turn my head away. I'm not normally queasy at the sight of blood, but I've never seen someone killed in front of me before, either.

My stomach twists and I vomit into a bush. When I finish, Vuk is standing over me. The white fur around his face and chest tinted red with the hunter's blood, his breaths harsh and fast as he stares down at me with concern in his bright yellow eyes.

I should be horrified. I should run. Get as far away from this creature as fast as possible. The way he killed the hunter, I should be afraid that I'll be next. But instead, my pussy pulses like seeing the enemy's blood on my mate is the most erotic sight I've ever seen.

Where the fuck did all that come from?

Vuk's nostrils flare and a low growl ripples from deep in his chest. The sound makes my stomach jump, but then it suddenly twists and turns into a cramp. It radiates from low in my belly until I'm doubling over from the pain. Wrapping my arms around my waist, I drop to my knees with a groan.

Oh no. What if I'm getting sick? Could it be from the other day? What if I didn't cook the rabbit enough. Shit. The last thing I want is to be sick with food poisoning in the forest and in front of Vuk.

Before I can react, Vuk lifts me into his arms and takes me back inside the cave. At the edge of the pool, he sets me back on my feet and pulls my shirt over my head.

"Stop it! What are you doing?" I try to bat his hands away, but another cramp starts low in my gut. It increases in strength until I double over with a moan. My legs go loose, threatening to go out from under me.

Taking advantage of my weakened state, Vuk quickly strips me down, then lifts me into his arms and carries me into the warm water as another cramp ripples through my stomach on the heels of the last one.

What is happening?

He sets me on a natural rock ledge against the side of the pool and I curl into a ball while he begins washing the hunter's blood from his face and body.

The warm water helps ease the cramps. Enough, at least, that I don't feel like I'm going to be sick again.

But now my skin feels hot and tight all over, and my muscles are quivering like I just ran a 10k marathon.

Leaning back against the edge of the pool, I watch as Vuk washes away the last of the blood.

Admiring the way the water coats his fur to his body, exposing deep grooves and strong muscles.

I drag my gaze over his powerful shoulders, across his thick chest and down his washboard stomach to his hips where his cock juts out from the patch of thick fur between his legs.

It curves proudly toward his stomach and my mouth waters as I imagine taking his length into it.

Curious what he would taste like and how much of him I might be able to fit .

I'm so fixated on him that I don't notice another cramp is creeping up on me. This

one comes on faster, twisting my abdominals into a tight knot. Letting out a gasp, I curl around my drawn-up legs while my body breaks out in a cold sweat.

Moaning in pain, I start to climb over the edge of the pool. I need to get out of here. I'm about to be very sick, and I don't want Vuk to see me like this. I'm trying to crawl over the moss when Vuk's arms band around my waist and he lifts me into his arms.

"No, please. I need some privacy," I beg, but there is no fighting him as he switches places with me on the ledge and sets me on his lap. "I'm going to be sick, and you don't need to see that."

Vuk grunts, presses his nose to the side of my neck where he bit me. When he breathes in deeply, my skin begins to throb and tingle. And when he pulls back to look down at me, he looks... surprised. "Not sick," he says. "Changed."

My whole body goes still. Even the cramps ease for a moment and my heart starts to pound.

"What do you mean, changed?"

Vuk presses his face against the side of my neck again. When he teases his tongue against the bite mark, my breath catches as unexpected pleasure ripples across my skin. The pleasant sensation is enough to distract me until another cramp curls through my center. Reminding me what he said.

Gnashing my teeth, I reach over his shoulder, gripping a handful of the short hairs at the back of his head. Vuk yelps in surprise when I pull with all my strength, forcing him to look at me.

"Did you turn me into a fucking werewolf?"

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Vuk

I snarl at the insult. “No. Not a fucking were . A lycan.”

Other than some of the more obscure lore my kind has passed down as cautionary tales, I’ve never heard of a lycan bite ever changing a human. But then I’ve never heard of a lycan mating one either.

The claiming bite is mostly symbolic. A mark to show others they are mated. Although, in cases where it’s between a fated pair it’s often followed by an intense heat. My breath hitches as I look down at Hana.

The more of her scent I draw deep, the more I’m certain this is what has happened.

She struggles to free herself from my grip, whimpering when another wave of pain rolls through her. These pains are growing stronger and this one leaves her panting before it ebbs.

“Please,” she begs. “I don’t want you to see me like this.”

Oh, my sweet mate . I press my nose to another of her sensitive spots, this one behind her ear.

She shivers and I breathe in the sweet burst of her arousal.

My poor little mate is showing all the signs of a triggered heat.

Add the way she took my knot, it can only mean I truly have found my fated mate and changed her into a lycan.

I shift Hana so she's straddling my lap, pressing as much of her against me as possible. Thanking the Gods the hunter has been dealt with, so I can give her my full attention while I ease her heat. Because I'll be the only one able to give her relief in the coming hours.

Hana whimpers as another wave of pain starts. Her hands go to her stomach, and she curls her knees up to her chest.

"Vuk, please..." she pants.

"Shhhh, my sweet little mate," I whisper against her ear. "Let me ease you."

Even through the water, I can smell the sweet scent of her cunt growing slick for me.

Holding her carefully in my arms, I turn us so I can bend her over the ledge. Exposing her tempting backside above the waterline.

"What are you—Vuk!" she gasps as I kneel behind her and spread her cheeks, exposing all of her to my hungry gaze.

The petals of her sex are pink and swollen, glistening with need. Licking my lips, I press my face between her thick thighs so I can lap at the source of her heat. Letting her sweet nectar coat my tongue before drinking it down.

Hana lets out an adorable squeal, jumping at the first lap of my tongue. "Vuk, please," she whines, turning her head over her shoulder so she can watch me.

Holding her still, I spread her folds with my thumbs and drive my tongue deep into

her hot little slit. My eyes roll back, and I hum with approval. Gods, I could do this all night and never get my fill.

“Oh! Oh, my god,” my Hana moans as she lifts her hips to give me more access to her hot core. “Right there ...” Her fingers curl into the soft moss along the edge as I drag my tongue over the spot she likes. “Yes, oh, I’m close !” she gasps, rocking against my mouth.

Her body trembles before she gasps and floods my mouth with her thick cum.

After I’ve licked all of it away, I lean back, enjoying the sight of her sprawled across the edge of the pool.

Her cunt is soft and wet from my mouth and her ass is reddened from my grip.

Bracing one hand on the ledge beside her, I grip my engorged cock with my other.

Curling my fingers around the thick length, I give it a tug.

“Spread for me, Hana.” Using my knee, I push her legs apart as I lean over her. Fitting the head of my cock against her entrance. Her orgasm has eased the pain of her heat for now, but it will be back and soon. Only one thing will ease her cramps for more than a few minutes. My cum.

“Such a good little mate,” I groan as I slide into her hot grip. “Gods, Hana you feel so good.”

“Yeah! Yes, oh, fuck !” she gasps. Pressing her ass back to meet each pump of my hips. I fill her. Going deeper with each press until she’s taken every inch.

Once I’m fully seated, I twine my fingers through the springy curls at the back of her

head. Winding them into my fist, I gently pull her head back, wishing there was a mirror so she could watch me take her like this. I want to see how her breasts swing and sway with each thrust.

With such a tempting image in my mind, I drive my hips forward. Forcing my entire length in and out of her clenching cunt. My heavy balls swing and slap against her clit, making her gasp and moan.

I pull her head back to meet each pounding thrust. Her mouth falls open with a gasp and she takes everything I give her. Driving her hips back to meet me pound for pound, fucking me back, just like a lycan mate .

I shout my pleasure as cum sears up my shaft and my knot begins to swell.

“Are you ready for my knot?” I ask through gritted teeth.

Hana whimpers her answer.

But before I can lock us together, the moon slides into the center of the opening overhead, casting us fully in its silvery glow. I’m not expecting the feral cry Hana lets out, or the way she arches her back and claws at the moss under her hands.

I turn her head so she’s looking at me over her shoulder. Her eyes flash and she bares sharp teeth at me, giving me a soft little growl.

My heart jumps in surprise at the first look at her change. My cock turns to steel, and I fuck her even harder against the edge of the pool.

“Show me your pretty little fangs,” I pant, driving my hips into her. “Growl again for me.”

Her nose wrinkles as she snarls at me, snapping her sharp new teeth. My cock gets even harder, imagining how those teeth will feel biting into my neck, my chest, my cock.

“When lycans mate, it’s not always an act of love,” I tell her, tightening my grip in her hair, “but one of battle.”

She gasps. Confusion and fury flickering in her dark eyes.

“Are you going to fight for me, Hana?” I growl. “Will you make me fight you for the right to have you?”

Her dark eyes flash gold and she shudders under my much larger frame.

“You want a fight?” Pushing me back, she lands in a crouch on the edge of the pool. Her dark eyes and hair are wild, her skin now covered in a sleek sheen of black tipped with silver. “Then let’s fight.”

I barely have a chance to draw breath before she lunges, taking me down, pushing me beneath the pool’s surface.

Hana

I have never felt so strong.

Or so powerful.

Crouching over the monster, I feel like I could actually take him, and the cautious way he's looking back at me from under the water suggests he might think so too.

I'm holding him down with my hands, but these hands no longer look like mine. They are bigger, with longer fingers tipped with razor-sharp claws. Claws that dig into Vuk's chest deep enough to make little blooms of red blood float to the surface.

I'm distracted by the sight of the fine coat of black fur tipped with silver running up my arms when a burst of bubbles drifts up from Vuk's lips before he surges upright. Catching me off guard, he pushes me back with enough force that my back slams against the opposite side of the pool.

My chest pumps with each breath, my body is on fire. Muscles I didn't know I had quiver. Teeth that feel all wrong in my mouth even as they ache to bite, to sink into flesh. His flesh.

A contented purr rumbles from deep inside my chest as I lick my lips, running my eyes up and down his muscular body.

I want to taste his coppery blood. To lick it.

Drink it down so it becomes part of me. Heat flares low in my belly and between my legs as I watch the water lap at his narrow waist. I want this male.

The monster's eyes flash gold and his lips curl up at the corners. "Tell me, what does my mate want?"

Shifting my weight from one foot to the other, I growl at him in response. "I want to devour. To bite and lick and suck. To fight and win. And then..." My eyes drop back to where his cock is now bobbing above the water. "I want to fuck."

Across the pool, Vuk shudders then crouches down. His gold eyes are locked with mine as the reddish fur across his back bristles.

"Then come at me," he says.

When I bare my teeth, I feel a strange tickle down my back as my own fur bristles. It's the only warning Vuk gets before I lunge. Powerful legs catapult me forward with more speed than I expect, but he's ready for me.

Before I have a chance to grab him, Vuk catches me around my waist, flipping me off my feet. He's so fast I don't have a chance to defend myself. I land on my back at the edge of the pool, hard enough to momentarily knock the breath from me.

"Mmm, nice try," he chuckles as he leaps out of the water to crouch over me. Snapping his teeth less than an inch from my face.

Baring my teeth right back, I let out a higher pitched, but no less menacing growl, and his lips curl up into a grin.

"Good girl. Show me your fangs and claws. Make me earn the right to be your mate."

Curling my sharpened black claws, I lash out at him with a sharp hiss. I expect him to jump away, but when he doesn't, I leave four bloody gashes across his chest .

He looks down at his shredded chest with a grin. "That's it, mark me. Make me bleed so I can coat you in my blood when I fuck you. Then I'll paint you with my cum."

A shudder runs through me, going straight to my quivering pussy. I want that. Want to be soaked in his scent and fluids so bad I think I'll come from the thought of it.

"Yes," I moan. Arching up. "Please!"

Vuk lets out a chuff. "That's right, beg me ," he says, stretching out over top of me.

My hands slide up his sides and into the short pelt running down his back. Digging my claws into his skin until they pierce, making him hiss at the sting.

"Please, Vuk!" I beg, spreading my thighs so he's cradled between them, his cock hard and throbbing against my core.

"Hmmm," he purrs in my ear. His breath is hot against my cheek, and I turn my head to the side, offering him the place he's already marked me.

He brushes his lips there then licks me, right over top of his bite.

Pleasure burns across my skin and I moan, but it's cut off when his weight suddenly disappears.

I blink up at the moon in surprise. Lifting my head, I look down my prone body at where he's now several feet away.

Crouched low to the ground. His cock jutting out from the fur between his legs.

It's dark red and wet with his arousal. I imagine how it'll taste against my lips.

Rich and salty. I doubt I could take more than his crown as a human, but now...

I wonder if I can take him all the way to the back of my throat.

I make a show of licking my lips, then moan when he jerks for me.

“Run , Hana,” he orders. “Run for me. Show me how fast you are.”

My brows crease into a deep frown. I don't want to run.

I want him to fuck me. Why is he stalling?

Leaning back, I spread my legs for him. Sliding a hand down my tight stomach to cup myself where I'm so wet for him.

Wet and aching. My other hand covers one of my heavy breasts, pinching the sensitive nipple into a beaded tip.

“No, need you,” I moan.

Pre-cum drips from his swollen tip as Vuk digs his claws into the soft moss letting out a furious snarl.

“Fucking RUN , little mate!” He bellows so loud I jump. “Run so I can catch you.”

Adrenaline floods my system as I push myself to my feet and scramble for traction.

“Ruuunnnn !” he howls after me.

I'm gangly and uncoordinated as I half run, half slide down the steep hill outside the cave.

My heart is thundering against my ribs and my bare feet eat up the moon dappled forest floor.

My center of balance is all wrong. Everything is bigger than I should be.

My feet are wrong, too. I'm running on toes tipped with thick claws that dig into the soft ground, moving me over sharp rocks and needles without trouble.

The uneven terrain should slow me down, but I'm eating up the distance between the cave easily.

Because I'm fast. At least, I thought I was.

A loud howl echoes through the forest after me, sending all the silver fur across my body standing on end. I've barely made it down the hill before Vuk's hot breath is on the back of my neck.

A strong arm snakes around my waist and I scream as Vuk lifts me off the ground. My feet kick and I scratch, but it does nothing to stop him. With me cradled against his chest, Vuk continues running without stopping until he reaches an ancient-looking oak.

Dropping me to my feet, he presses my chest against the wide trunk. With his heat at my back, my skin tingles the moment I touch rough bark, and I can't hold back my moan at the way it scrapes across my sensitive nipples .

"Vuk," I whine, turning to look at him from over my shoulder, noticing strange symbols glowing against the white bark of the birch trees behind him.

Before I can ask him if he sees them too, he slides his hand up under my hair and palms the back of my head, pressing my cheek against the rough bark.

“Spread,” he orders through clenched teeth.

I step out, but it’s not wide enough for him and he kicks my feet wider.

Leaning into me, he presses his mouth against my ear, the glowing symbols forgotten.

“Good girl.”

I melt at his praise then shudder when his cock prods at me from behind. That’s what I want. Teasing him with a sultry moan, I wiggle my naked ass for him.

“Please, Vuk.” I try to look back at him, but his grip has me pinned.

He runs his nose up the side of my cheek to my temple, where he places a soft kiss.

“Please what, Hana?”

“Stop being such a fucking tease and fuck me!” I growl, rubbing my ass against his cock.

“Yes,” he growls. “Beg me to fuck you.”

My pussy quivers, making my breath hitch. “Please...”

He hums against my ear, sliding his hand down the crease of my ass to my pussy, where he shoves two of his declawed fingers deep. “Like this?”

I nod and a shuddery breath falls from my lips.

He pumps his fingers hard, but only for long enough to coat them in my slick before he pulls them away. Sliding them up my crease to tease at my asshole. My body tenses.

“No!” I gasp. I’ve never been fucked there and right now, with both of us in the throes of... this heat or whatever this is, frightens me.

“No?” He chuckles darkly, circling fingers wet with my arousal around the tight crinkle. He presses them against the tight ring of muscle, and I clench tight against him. “Hmm, maybe not now. But someday.”

My body sags with relief when his fingers disappear, and he lines up his cock with my pussy.

That’s all the warning I get before he slams deep.

Sheathing himself in a single thrust. It’s not as painful now, after stretching me around him multiple times.

But it’s no less intense, and I dig my fingers into the rough bark of the tree with a scream.

“This is what you want?” he pants, drawing back and shoving deep again. “This is how you need me?”

“Yes,” I gasp scratching long gouges in the bark. “Yes, yes yes ... oh, God, Vuk. Don’t stop.”

He’s hitting me so deep. Punishing the spot deep inside that none of my other lovers ever bothered to even try to find, but his massive cock hits it perfectly with each punch.

His panting breaths are loud and erotic in my ear.

The hand not gripping the back of my head reaches around and cups my breast. Pinching my nipple between his claws until my pussy starts to flutter.

“Vuk, please!” I gasp. “I’m close. I’m so close?—”

Suddenly he pulls out of me, leaving me empty and cold.

“Wha—?” Before I have time to do more than gasp, he spins me around.

His hands grip the backs of my thighs and hikes me up so the rough bark digs into my back. My legs are spread wide around his hips, and I curl my fingers around the back of his neck.

Planting his feet wide, Vuk thrusts back inside of me.

“That’s my good little mate,” he groans as he fucks me roughly against the tree. “Come for me. I want to feel you strangle my cock with your needy cunt.”

My head kicks back as my denied orgasm crashes into me, stealing my breath and sight. If it wasn’t for Vuk holding me up, I have no doubt my legs would have collapsed, and I would have melted into a puddle at his feet.

His hips slam in and out of my pulsing core, pinning me as his knot begins to swell.

Pulling back, he slams deep again. Pressing and pressing, forcing the thick ring through my abused little pussy where it stretches me past discomfort locking us together.

I whimper as he fills me with lash after lash of scalding hot cum until we’re both

panting and soaked with sweat.

His legs shake and he sinks to the ground, turning us so he's leaning against the base of the tree, and I'm curled like a kitten in his lap.

Pressing his nose to my damp temple, a soft growl rumbles through his chest and into mine. The sound and vibration soothing us from the incredible high we just had.

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 2:20 pm

Vuk

The moon has long since disappeared from sight, leaving the cave without its ethereal silvery glow when my knot finally slips free of Hana's tight body. Whining softly at the loss, she curls up in my lap so all of her is pressed to all of me.

I lost track of how many times I took her throughout the night. Even now, my cock is trying to rise for her, but when I knotted her this last time, she moaned from pain, rather than pleasure. So, I'm careful with her as I gently stroke my hand down her back. Her silver back.

My mate is a beautiful lycan. Her hair is still a wild cloud of dark curls.

Most of it has escaped her braid, falling around her shoulders and down her back.

Her eyes are still dark and sharp, although they reflect gold in certain lights now.

She is strong and has adapted much faster to her new form than I expected.

She's much larger now than she was as a human, but her head still barely reaches my shoulders.

What surprises me the most is the small part of me misses the small helpless human I've grown to adore.

"This is nice," she sighs, snuggling deeper into my arms .

I rest my cheek against the top of her head and grunt my agreement. This is nice.

“Oh.” Her head pops up so she can look at me. “I meant to ask you. What was up with the glowing trees?”

My brows drop into a deep frown. “What glowing trees?”

“You know. When you were...” she waves her hand and her eyes dart shyly to the caves entrance. “When you had me up against the tree, behind you there were strange shapes glowing in a line along the tr?—”

I’m on my feet and pulling at her before she can finish. Racing with her trailing behind me through the forest and back to the tree.

I’ve been so focused on my mate I forgot all about the barrier and the strange runes. Even when I was fucking my mate practically right on top of it.

“Vuk! What’s going on?” she shouts at me, but I don’t stop. I can’t. I need to see if it’s still intact. I need to know if we can get out.

The forest goes by in a blur until I skid to a stop in front of the gnarled tree. Nothing is out of place. The line of birch trees are all dark, with no sign of the glowing runes.

“Vuk, if you don’t talk to me, I’m gonna?—”

I spin around to face her. “Can you see them?”

“Can I see—what?”

“The runes,” I point to the trees. “Can you see them?”

She scans the trees, and slowly shakes her head. “No, there’s nothing. But I swear I saw them.”

I turn to face the trees again and let go of her hand. There’s only one way to test if the barrier is still intact then.

Taking a deep breath, I start walking.

“I wouldn’t if I were you,” a voice calls from the darkness.

I freeze, my nostrils flaring, but I detect no scent. That alone should be cause for concern, added that whoever the voice belongs to is also not triggering any kind of instinctual warning. Which has my hackles rising.

“Who’s there,” I snarl, backing up to place myself in front of Hana.

Something in the shadows move, but I can’t get a good look at whoever—or whatever—is hiding in them. It’s as if the darkness itself is shrouding it from me.

Baring my teeth, I growl loudly in warning.

“Oh, calm down ye big growly beast.” A stocky human with wild red hair wearing worn human clothes steps out of the trees, rolling his eyes dramatically.

My nostrils flare again and this time I catch his strange scent. I step closer to Hana, giving him another warning growl. This is no human. Whatever this creature is, he’s wasn’t hiding within the shadows, he was a part of them.

“Who are you?” I demand. Or should I be asking what ?

The figure cocks his head to the side. “Oh, I suppose ye wouldn’t remember me.

Since ye were havin' a wee nap when I took ye."

The fur across my back bristles and I bare my teeth at him.

This is the creature that took me. Who stole me from my home.

I want to attack. To tear him apart for what he did, but Hana's hand against my back soothes me a bit.

At least enough so for me to realize I need to get some answers before I end him.

"Explain," I grit through my clenched teeth.

"Well, there was quite a lot of money bein' offered for ye. And a soul fer me troubles!" The strange man shoves his hands in his pockets, rocking back on the heels of his beat-up work boots. "It's rare te get those offered up freely, so you can imagine why I couldn't pass it up."

At his mention of a soul, I realize what I'm dealing with. The hunter mentioned losing his soul, but I didn't realize what he meant at the time. This creature is something far more sinister than I could have expected.

Reaching behind me, I draw Hana closer.

"What would a soul eater want with a lycan?"

The creature tips his head back with a laugh, "Figured me out so fast? And I thought I was bein' canny. It's not yer soul I was after. Ye'r just collateral, I'm afraid."

My fur bristles again and Hana smooths it down. Lending me her calm strength before I do something stupid.

The soul eater blows out a breath, “Fer what it’s worth, I’m sorry ye were caught up in this.

” He looks past me. “And yer girl here. Ye were in the wrong place at the right time when I opened the portal for the hunter, lest ye think I was goin’ for ye specifically.

" He drops his head and kicks at the ground before looking up again with a sheepish smile. "Sayin’ that, I owe ye my thanks for disposing of that hunter fer me.”

“You’re not angry that I got to the hunter before you did?” Relief washes over me. The last thing I need, especially newly mated as I am, is to anger a soul eater.

The strange little man shakes his head. “Ye see, he voided his contract by offerin’ me a corrupted soul.

He’d already poisoned it with black magic, makin’ it useless te me.

That kind of dark magic latches on like a parasite, infecting everything it touches.

If I would have tried to draw out his soul, I would have ended up just like him. ”

Behind me, Hana lets out a soft gasp, fingers tightening against my back. Reaching behind me, I press my palm reassuringly against her hip. I know what she’s thinking. She’s worried I could have been infected too, but I was never in any danger, I cannot touch another being’s soul.

“I appreciate the apology,” I say, turning back to the soul eater. “But why bring me through the portal if you knew he was corrupted? And how do I get back?”

“I didna know until ye were already through.” The soul eater scuffs his foot against the forest floor, then looks up at me from under his lashes.

“As for sendin’ ye back, that’s not usually part o’ the gig.

Although, seein’ as I owe ye, for doing the dirty work of dispatching that human for me. I’m willin’ te grant ye a favor.”

I lift my brows in surprise. Soul eaters are wily demons, known to be tricksters, but if you can gain one’s regard it’s believed to be good luck. But can I trust this one?

“And what favors can you offer me, soul eater?” I ask cautiously.

Pulling his hands from his pockets, he steps away from the trees and into the clearing revealing full, ruddy cheeks under a set of laughing eyes that dart behind me to my mate. Leaning to the side, he winks at her.

I snarl in warning and take another step to block her from his view.

Unfazed, he rocks back on his heels again.

“Why don’t I send you and yer little sex pot here, back to yer home plane?

She can’t very well stay here now that ye’ve bitten her and changed her into a lycan, anyway.

” His eyes flash with a kaleidoscope of colors as his lips quirk up into a smirk.

“And I don’ think being trapped in these woods as a wolf except durin’ full moons holds much appeal to ye. ”

I huff. “That doesn’t sound like much of a favor, more like fixing a mess you created.”

The soul eater shrugs. “That’s the favor. Take it or leave it.”

It’s not much of a choice. Especially when put like that. Hana’s hands tighten around my upper arm and her breathing has started coming in quick pants. Before I can stop her, she steps around me.

“Who the fuck do you think you are to play with our lives like that?” she shouts, stabbing a claw-tipped finger at the soul eater .

His brows lift into his hairline, and I grab Hana around her waist, pulling her back against me. “He’s a soul eater, Hana. Be very cautious of your words,” I whisper harshly into her ear as I wrap my arms around her to hold her still.

The soul eater rolls his eyes. “Actually, I’d prefer ye call me Wizard. Sounds less... murderous.”

Hana takes a deep breath and completely ignores my warning. “I don’t know, nor do I care, whatever the fuck you are or what you want to be called. I want to know why you would help the hunter trap Vuk here?”

“Hana. Stop. Talking!” I grit at her. Tightening my grip on her and backing away while silently begging the soul eater not to take offense.

To my surprise, he laughs, long and loud, before wiping imaginary tears from under his eyes.

“Ye’ve got yerself a firecracker there, lycan.

” Then turns a serious look on Hana, “Aye. I played my part in takin’ him and I’ve said my sorry’s.

Ye can take the favor or not. But the offer won't stand, so choose. ”

“Oh. You motherfucker...” She lunges forward, nearly breaking free of my grip, but I'm able to wrangle her back into my arms where she vibrates with fury.

Luckily, the soul eater only laughs again at her angry reaction.

“Look, luv, if yer gonna be mad at someone, maybe ye should remember that it's yer new boyfriend here turned ye into a lycan.”

My little mate goes completely still and slowly lifts her hand to the side of her neck.

I growl a warning at the demon as she brushes her fingers across my bite mark.

Will she truly be angry with me for her change?

I suppose I can't blame her, but it's not like we were given much choice.

Lycans are ruled by their instincts, and it was riding both of us hard through the night.

When she starts to turn in my arms, I loosen my grip so she can face me. Her dark eyes flash golden as she tips her chin, looking up at my face, then down across my shoulders to my arms wrapped around her. She lifts one of her hands up, examining the change in them, as if she's already forgotten.

I expect her to scream at me. To funnel her anger into violence, like she did earlier. Instead, she does the opposite. She's utterly silent as she compares my form to the changes in her.

“Look, Hana,” Wizard says softly. Slowly, Hana turns back to face him.

“I’m giving ye both a chance at yer happy-ever-after in Vuk’s world.

The other option would be for ye both stay here, where Vuk will be trapped in this forest as a wolf except during the full moon.

” He points to the tree’s that are once more glowing with the strange runes.

“That kind of magic is one time use. Once its cast, it can’t be undone.

And, Hana, now that ye’ve been changed, there’s no changin’ back fer ye either.

Ye would be free to leave the forest, the barrier wouldn’t affect ye, but ye’ll never be human again.

Yer only real option is for both of ye to return to Vuk’s home plane. Where ye can be lycan’s together.”

Hana goes quiet and I rub circles into her back as she mulls over everything. She’s quiet for a long time, before she takes a deep, shaky breath.

“This sounds like a fucking Grimm’s fairy tale,” she mutters under her breath.

Wizard snorts. “Where do ye think Grimm got their ideas?”

“That’s a pretty shitty choice,” she grumbles, then looks up at me and gives me a sad smile. “No offense.”

So far, she’s being much more reserved than I would expect. I’m about to ask why she’s not tearing into me with her teeth and claws, when Wizard chuckles.

“Ah, Lass. I wasna expecting you, and I suspect your beastie here wasna either, but

yer perfect for him. I can tell.” He claps his hands in front of him then rubs them together. “So, what’ll it be, luv? Stay here or return with yer lycan?”

Hana is quiet for another beat before she asks, “What would happen if he went to his plane, and I stayed here?”

My stomach drops. Before I have a chance, the demon slowly shakes his head.

“That’s a terrible choice, I’m afraid. I’ve been told its agony when mates are separated. Ye’ll be half mad in less than a week. Fully mad and murderous in a fortnight,” Wizard explains gently.

She twists around to look up at me and I nod my head. “It’s not often it happens, but if a mate dies the survivor often chooses to follow shortly after.”

She drops her head against my shoulder with a huff, and I tighten my arms around her.

“What about my family?” I don’t miss her soft snuffle or the salty scent of her tears.

“My friends. School?” She steps out of my arms so she can look up at me again.

The pain in her eyes guts me and I want to reach out and pull her back into my arms. “Tell me the truth. Did you do this— ” she curls her claws at me “—on purpose or was it some kind of compulsion or instinct or something.”

“It was not on purpose.” I assure her, reaching up to wipe away the moisture collecting under her eyes.

Where the fur covering my face is lighter, hers is dark.

The consequences of claiming her were the farthest things from my mind.

If I'd given it any thought, I never would have bitten her.

But instinct took my rational thought from me.

She nods her head. "Okay."

Okay?

Just... Okay?

Even the soul eater gives me a curious look, not quite believing she would accept her fate so easily. "Aren't ye... ma d?"

"No, I'm not mad," Hana says, turning sharp eyes on him and curling her lips up over her sharp teeth.

"Mad doesn't even come close to expressing how I feel right now.

I'm furious. No, I'm pissed the fuck off!

"She turns her steely look on me. "But I can't change what is done and I'll protect my friends and family at all costs, even if it's from myself. "

I crush her against my chest and tuck my face against the side of her neck. I nuzzle at my bite mark, loving how the gentle touch makes her shiver against me. "I don't regret claiming you, my beautiful mate. Although I'm sorry for it too."

She sighs against me and pats her hand against my chest. "Good. I'm gonna be mad about this for a long time. Probably forever. So, I expect lots of groveling."

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Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 2:20 pm

Hana

O h my God, I want to scream! And then, I want to sob and wail and curse. I want to beat my fists against Vuk's rock-hard chest then turn around and throat punch the Ed Sheeran look-alike that keeps grinning at me.

But I don't. Because acting out won't change anything.

If there's one thing I've learned from being an Army brat, when you get delt a shitty hand and things happen you don't like, you can kick and scream and be bratty, but that's only going to get your ass whooped.

So instead, you handle the situation with maturity and make the best of it. Often, it's not as bad as you might have initially thought.

I'm sitting in the back of the cave, on the far side of the hot spring.

I told Vuk and the wizard I needed some time to get a handle on this.

Unfortunately, time is quickly running out.

No one has said so, but somehow I instinctively know I have until the sun rises to get my head on straight.

Thanks to my new lycan-senses I know how close to the horizon the sun is, and it's coming fast .

I have a feeling this situation isn't going to fall into the category of not as bad as I think . I'd say there is a good chance things will get much worse before they get better. But what exactly am I going to do about it? Throw a tantrum? Or protect the people I love.

So, I focus on the second part. Not because I'm trying to be a martyr, but because I could never live with myself if I put my family in danger because I was being selfish.

I only wish I had some way to get a letter or a message to them.

To let them know... Know what, I'll be okay?

Will I be? I have no idea what this new future has in store for me.

What would I say to them if I could? I could tell them not to look for me, but I was last seen being chased by a wolf. There is a mauled billionaire somewhere in the forest that someone is eventually going to find.

Of course, my family and friends are going to think the worst. I wish there was a way I could make this easier for them. The thought of my parents grieving for me, worrying I suffered some horrible death, sends more tears spilling down my cheeks.

Time to get it together, girl. Closing my eyes, I fill my lungs with a deep breath. I hold it for as long as I can before slowly letting it out in a steady stream.

With quick strokes, I wipe the fresh tears from the short fur covering my cheeks, stilling when I catch sight of my unfamiliar hands.

I hold them out in front of me and wonder if I'll ever get used to having fur and claws?

Being six feet tall isn't bad, though. Although walking around butt-naked is something I don't think I'll ever get used to.

When I asked Vuk about that, he assured me his people wear clothes, and our nakedness is only temporary.

He promised me he'll make sure I'm properly outfitted as soon as we get back to his plane.

I crawl to the edge of the warm spring and look down at my reflection. The first time I saw my reflection was a shock, and I rocked back on my heels and cried. Now I lean in, examining my reflection closely. Hoping it's the darkness and water distorting my features making me look hideous.

Vuk likes how you look.

Vuk doesn't get a vote, I snap at my inner voice that's only trying to be helpful, but is choosing the wrong damn side.

Leaning closer to the water, I examine every inch of my new face.

My hair is still the same, although a wild mess after a night of rough sex and being chased through the forest. My face...

is still my face. My eyes and nose and mouth, all familiar while being slightly different.

My claws are much smaller than Vuks, more feminine, but still deadly. Same with my feet.

"Hana," Vuk's voice is soft, yet carries clearly across the cave.

Times up.

I let out a shaky laugh when I realize that not once, while I sat here, did I contemplate what might happen if I didn't go with Vuk to his home plane.

Because I've already made my decision, and it was surprisingly easy.

I needed to... mope about it, I guess. Or maybe I needed some time to mourn my old life.

Pushing myself to my feet, my unhurried strides take me back around to the mouth of the cave where Vuk and Wizard are waiting for me.

"Alright, lass. Are ye ready to go, then?" Wizard asks as I stop beside Vuk.

Looking up at the giant beast beside me, I reach for his hand and thread my fingers between his. "Yeah."

"Wonderful," Wizard says with a clap.

There is a flash, and the hunter's severed head appears, clutched by his hair in Wizard's fist. His face is twisted with pain, blood dripping to the ground from his neck stub.

"Oh, shit!" I groan as a wave of nausea threatens to choke me. Vuk pulls me against him, shielding my eyes from the grisly sight.

Wizard gives me a sympathetic look. "Sorry. The portal needs blood, and since we don't have a sacrifice this time, there must be an exchange." He holds up the head. "He'll have ta do."

Wizard turns away from us, waving the arm not holding the severed head as he chants. The words are foreign and creepy, but it's the way the air around us begins to thicken, sending my hair standing up on end from an unseen energy.

Vuk holds me tight against his chest as Wizard's voice crescendos and his words come faster. Whipping up an icy wind, stirring dirt and leaves into a cyclone that dances around us. Turning my face into Vuk's chest, I close my eyes against the swirling grit.

And then all at once it all stops, leaving the forest deathly silent, not even the wind dares make a sound.

Slowly, I peek one eye open, then the other one.

Wizard is nowhere to be seen, but in his place is a swirling portal of blue and black and silver.

I look up at Vuk the same time he looks down at me, and a wordless conversation happens between us.

Are you sure? He asks.

Yes, I'm sure. Is it safe? I reply.

I'll keep you safe. Whatever it takes. He promises.

Then we're moving forward, together. Hands clasped tightly. When we are right in front of the portal, something reaches out for us. It grabs us, sucking us inside so fast I don't even have time to open my mouth to scream.

Then everything goes black.

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Vuk

I 've got Hana's smaller hand gripped in mine as I pull her behind me across the village center, toward the central fire.

It feels strange to be wearing trousers again, after going naked for what felt like an eternity.

The sturdy material encasing my thick legs is new, not yet broken in.

Wearing pants is more constricting than I remember, as I look down to watch my long strides eat up the ground.

I run my free hand down the careful stitching that decorates the tunic.

I've been saving it for exactly this occasion and I'm more than a little surprised it still fits.

Glancing behind me Hana is a vision wrapped in a gown of blue velvet. The dress is another item I have been saving for today. Of course, I couldn't have expected my little mate and had to ask the village seamstress if she could alter it to fit her much smaller size.

I look over her appreciatively, but she looks anything but happy as I pull her along behind me. Her wild curls have been tamed into a crown of intricate braids that circles her head before falling to the center of her back.

“Vuk!” she hisses at me, when she catches me looking. “Shouldn’t we talk about this first?” Her eyes grow wide when she looks past me at where more and more villagers gather around the fire. Her voice drops to a harsh whisper. “What if they don’t like me?”

Pulling us to a sudden stop, I turn back to her with a deep frown. “Of course they’ll like you,” I assure her with a huff. How ridiculous she would think otherwise.

“Damnit, Vuk! Are you even listening...” Her words fade out as our chiefess, Deidre, steps out of the gathered crowd.

She’s wearing a cream gown accented with gold embroidery. It contrasts pleasingly against her rich, chocolate brown coat, making her icy blue, nearly white eyes appear to glow. Her shrewd gaze skims over me before softening when she shifts to Hana.

Without taking her eyes from my mate, she crosses the short distance to where we’ve stopped.

I haven’t introduced my mate to the village yet.

Instead, I shut us away in my hut, keeping her to myself.

Fucking and talking, explaining everything about her new life.

Now I see that was the wrong move. I should have introduced her right away.

So she wouldn’t think I was hiding her from the people who will become her new family.

“Welcome,” Diedre says quietly to my mate.

Hana's dark eyes grow wide as she stares up at the female who towers over her. Apprehension leeches through her scent, showing clearly on her face.

Deidre's eyes crinkle in the corners. "There is no need to be afraid, little one."

Hana glances nervously at me, then back. "Okay. Then can someone explain to me what all of this is? "

Deidre's icy gaze snaps to me, and her eyes narrow to slits. "She doesn't know?"

Worry tightens my chest, and I realize I've been the biggest idiot.

It's not apprehension in Hana's tight stance, but fear.

Because I never once explained to her why I was dressing her like a doll and dragging her to where my entire village has gathered.

Her dark eyes dart back and forth between my chiefess and me as she grinds her molars nervously.

Her small hand captured in mine is slick with nervous sweat.

Dropping my head, I look away from the high-ranking female. "I—well, I assumed she knew..."

She pins me with her icy glare, a glare I don't need to see to feel, and she steps beside Hana, where she curls a protective arm around her small shoulders. "Does she look as if she knows what you've decided for her?" she asks, drawing my mate against her side.

When I glance up through my lashes, Hana is visibly trembling now, likely imagining

the worse, and I slowly shake my head.

“What’s your name, dear?” Deidre asks, turning my much smaller female around to face her.

“Hana,” she answers softly.

“Hana. You are a lovely thing, no wonder Vuk is having trouble thinking around you. I am Deidre. What your boneheaded mate is trying to do is handfast you to him. It’s a simple ceremony that couples can partake in if they wish to.”

“Oh,” she says softly. Her tense shoulders relax, sending another stab of guilt into my gut. Hana cants her head to the side, turning questioning eyes on me. “But we’re already mated.”

Deidre waves her claw-tipped fingers dismissively. “Ach, that’s just biology. Handfasting is for hearts.”

I’ve never asked her what kinds of ceremonies her kind do, if they even do them.

Will she be angry with me for wanting to bind her in a ceremony of my choosing, rather than what was proclaimed by the Gods.

My heart is suddenly pounding in my chest, as I worry she might not want to tie her heart to mine.

I’m the biggest fool for assuming our minds were in agreement.

Because how could they be, when it never occurred to me to simply ask her.

I’m so focused on what she must think of me, I jump from her light touch on either

side of my face.

I hadn't even noticed she moved to stand in front of me.

My eyes snap to meet hers, and my heart melts.

My mate wears her feelings clearly on her face, with the same love I feel for her shining through her eyes.

"Is this true?" she asks me softly. "Do you want to handfast with me?"

I lift my hands to cover the backs of hers where they lightly cup my face. "I do."

Beside us, Deidre clears her throat. "And Hana, do you wish to handfast yourself to this male? Even though he's not very smart."

She lets out a sharp laugh then nods her head. "I do."

"Then hold out your arms."

All I see is Hana, as my chiefess drapes the ceremonial cloth over our joined hands. I gave Deidre the cloth earlier in the day, when I asked her to perform the handfasting with the entire village to witness.

I can't look away from Hana as our joined hands are wrapped.

Enjoying the way her eyes flare, the sharp intake of her breath when she sees the woven cloth embellished with my family crest and the moon phases.

My mother made it when I became a man, for my future mate.

Just like she made the dress Hana wears now and my tunic.

“As this cord binds your hands, so does it bind your hearts.” Deidre’s words are soft, meant only for us, despite the crowd surrounding us.

“This is a pledge to each other; to honor and cherish one another for all your days.” She wraps the woven cord once more and knots it.

“Let this knot be an eternal symbol of your bond, as mates as well as your chosen partner and of the love that you share.”

I barely hear the words, words I know by heart after attending so many in my long lifetime. I know I should be paying attention, especially since this is my handfast, but Hana has my whole attention.

She lifts her glittering eyes to meet mine, and everything stills.

The sound of Deidre’s voice. The sounds of the fires crackling and the wind through the forest. There is nothing but the swirling depths of her umber eyes, with their gold flecks reflect the setting sun’s rays.

The way her dark gray fur blends to silver tipped onyx.

She’s the most beautiful creature I’ve ever laid eyes on. And she’s mine.

Deidre finishes the knot binding our wrists then turns to face the crowd. “You’ve come to witness this ancient tradition that joins Vuk and Hana to each other...” bla bla bla...

My cock is straining against the front of my trousers and all I can think of is getting my female underneath me. Claiming her over and over. Promising her I’ll do better,

and if I don't, I'll make it up to her.

A great cheer rises around us.

Hana looks away from me and a wide grin spreads across her plush lips. Lips I can't wait to cover with mine.

I can't wait any longer. Lifting our joined arms, still bound and knotted, I take off across the courtyard, heading for my small hut.

This time, Hana runs with me. Her soft laughter makes my cock ache as she holds her skirt with her free hand.

When I look over at her, keeping up beside me, my heart jumps when her eyes flash gold with the wanning moon rising above the trees.

Pulling her into our hut, I slam the door behind us then push her up against it. She's panting as she looks up at me. Her lips full and red in the dim light. I hadn't thought to light a lamp when we left, but even in the darkness I can see the way her eyes flash with desire.

I press our linked hands against the thick door, so her arm is stretched over her head. We'll keep our arms bound like this until morning, which reminds me of the first time I fucked her as a lycan, one hand pinned above her head while the other raked me from nape to ass.

A deep groan slips past my lips as my cock threatens to burst through my trousers.

"I want you on your knees, little mate," I growl, rocking my hips against her. Trying to ease the ache with friction, but it only makes it worse.

Her nostrils flare and her eyes flash in the low light. With her eyes holding mine, she sinks to her knees before me.

“Mmm, good girl,” I moan, keeping our joined hands pressed above her head. “Now, take me out. I want to feel your soft hand wrapped around my cock.”

Her pink tongue darts between her lips as she pulls my trousers open with one hand. Reaching inside, she wraps her palm around my turgid length and slowly pulls me out. Her hand is soft and warm, but I’m looking forward to how her hot little mouth will feel.

“You know what to do,” I groan, watching her through heavy lidded eyes as she slowly drags her warm palm up and down my length.

There are few things better than my mates mouth wrapped around my cock. Namely, her cunt and... Gods, I pray someday she’ll let me into her tight ass. So far, she’s been hesitant, but I’m nothing if not a persistent male.

She licks her plump lips again, and my cock kicks in her hand as I imagine her soft tongue lapping up the pre-cum leaking from the tip.

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“Please, Hana,” I beg.

Her dark eyes flick up to mine and she smiles mischievously, before leaning forward, sticking the tip of her tongue out. It’s longer now, and I nearly come when she curls it around my weeping crown. Stroking just under the flared head before she moves closer to lap at the tip.

“I love the way you taste,” she moans, taking the time to savor the way I taste.

Bracing myself against the door with our bound hands, I drop my other hand to the top of her head. Sinking my fingers into her crown of braids, I grip her roughly.

“Open your warm mouth, my love,” I growl.

Hana’s eyes flick up to mine, then back to my cock, her lips twitch at the corners and she parts her lips around my tip.

“Good girl,” I groan, rolling my hips forward. “Lick me. Get me nice and wet so I can slide down your tight throat.”

She shudders, closing her lips around me, dragging her tongue up and down the sensitive underside of my cock where she teases the ripples running the length of my shaft. When I press deeper, she hums and leans forward. Taking me all the way to the back.

“That’s it. You love it when I fuck your throat, don’t you?” My hand tightens in her hair as I rock my hips, sliding in and out of her mouth, hitting the back of her throat

with each stroke. “Good girl,” I grit through clenched teeth. “Now swallow. Swallow all of me.”

Her fingers curl around the side of my thigh, and I grunt at the sharp sting when her claws pierce through my thick hide. Holding onto me, she bobs forward, her throat squeezing my cock as I slide deeper.

“That’s it,” I pant. The tight grip drags a deep groan from me, and it takes all my strength not to thrust my hips.

“Again, my love,” I croak, pulling back so she can suck in a sharp breath.

She meets the next roll of my hips and swallows again. This time she doesn’t stop until her nose is pressed against the base of my cock. When she looks up at me, it’s nearly my undoing. Her eyes are glazed and fuck drunk.

“Fuck,” I gasp. I’ve picked up my female’s favorite curse, and now use it almost as often as she does.

The sight of her mouth stretched wide, with her little fangs pressed into the sides of my cock, is all I need to send me over the edge. With a horse cry, I rock back then slam my cock back down her throat. Emptying my balls straight into her stomach.

Hana keeps her eyes on me, her chin wet with saliva as I finish using her for my pleasure. As soon as I’m done, I pull out and sink to the ground in front of her.

“Are you all right? Was I too rough?” Fuck, I need to remember that even though she’s lycan now, Hana is still small and fragile.

She wipes the back of her hand across her chin and gives me a soft smile. “You worry about me too much.”

Perhaps, but I can't help it.

"I'm fine," she tells me, although she's shifting restlessly. Rubbing her knees together. Thick scent of her arousal has my cock already stirring back to life.

"Hmm, you don't seem fine," I say, breathing her in. "Is my mate needy now?"

She spreads her knees and rolls her hips. Her nipples are tight and pressing lewdly against her dress. "You know I am."

I do, but I also enjoy watching her squirm. "How would you like your male to fuck you?"

She sucks in a sharp gasp, rocking her hips against nothing. "I don't even care. Vuk, I need you."

Pushing myself to my feet, I stroke my hand up and down my already stiffening shaft. "Tell me."

The sight of her on her knees before me... With her bound arm stretched over her head, as she lets out a needy moan... Pre-cum beads at my tip, to roll down my shaft.

"Oh my god," she moans, rubbing her knees together. "You've got me so fucking turned on you could probably blow on my pussy, and I'll come."

I reach behind me and pull my tunic over my head. I need to feel her against my skin. But I forgot that our arms are tied and now my shirt is trapped between us. Oh well.

Pulling Hana to her feet, I shove my trousers down my legs and kick them to the side. Then I turn her around and work to remove her dress. At least it's not made so it can get trapped around our hands like my shirt.

My cock kicks, sending another drop of pre-cum to the floor, and I thread our fingers together as I pull her to our bedroom is.

We've already spent days fucking in my bed, a bed that was fine when it was just me but is far too small now that I have a mate.

I've already spoken with the wood smith about a new frame for us.

"Lie back," I command her.

Hana sits down at the edge then does as I ask. Scooting back until she's stretched out across the center, and I'm forced to prowl across the lumpy mattress after her. Another item I've ordered for her. The straw filled pad was fine for me, but my mate deserves the softest feather padding.

"Spread your thighs, my love." Her pink little tongue darts out to tease her plump bottom lip as she parts her knees for me. "Mmm, good girl. Look how wet you are. Is all of this for me?"

She nods her head then cries out when I grip the back of her thigh and push her leg up and out. Giving me more room so I can drop my mouth to her warm, wet cunt.

Fuck. My mate is dripping for me.

As much as I would love to edge her for hours, to tease her until she's screaming for me to fuck her, and despite the orgasm I had, I'm already dangerously close to coming again.

I give her one last lick between her legs and move so I'm wedged between her thighs. "Beg me, my beauty."

Hana turns her bound wrist so she can thread our fingers together. "I need you, Vuk. I

need you to fuck me, and then I want you to knot me.”

A choked sound squeezes past my throat, and that’s all the restraint I have.

I notch my aching cock against her entrance then drive myself deep inside her welcoming body. And my mate, my perfect female, takes every inch of me.

“Yes,” she sighs, digging her claws into my back. “Harder, Vuk.”

My hips pound against her much smaller body, until I’m certain I’ll bruise or damage her, but she only begs for harder. Sweat coats our bodies, and still, I pound her into the mattress. Driving my cock in and out of her tight cunt until she’s only making breathy gasps.

“Come for me, Hana,” I groan when she tightens around me. My seed is burning a path up my shaft as my knot begins to inflate. “Come for your male.”

Her claws sink deep into my back, and she arches against me with a tight cry, before her body clenches down around me, milking the seed from my cock.

I thrust once more. Again, then press my knot deep.

Even after knotting her countless times, it still spreads her small little cunt past her pain threshold, but she takes it anyway, sighing with relief when it’s seated, and we’re joined together.

I try my best to keep my full weight off her, not wanting to crush her.

“I like feeling your weight on me,” she sighs sleepily against my ear.

“That doesn’t change the fact I’m too heavy,” I tell her. “ Besides, I doubt our cub will appreciate my weight crushing him before too much longer.”

Hana's eyes snap open and her body goes rigid. "Our what , now?"

"Shhh," I hush against her temple as I roll us so she's lying across my chest.

"Don't you shush me, what did you just say? You can't possibly know?—"

Lifting my hand not bound to hers, I tap the end of my nose. "I can smell him. He'll be big and braw, like me. And smart like his mother."

Hana blinks owlishly at me, before slowly resting her cheek against my chest, where my heart pounds with excitement. "You better be kidding."

I chuckle but say nothing more. She'll realize I'm not joking soon enough. Then I'll make sure she'll forget she was ever mad at me.