

The background of the book cover features a woman with long, flowing red hair looking upwards with a thoughtful expression. To her left, a large, close-up image of a wolf's face is partially visible, showing its intense yellow eye and dark fur. The scene is set against a backdrop of a dense forest with bare trees and a bright full moon in the sky.

*“When the full moon rises  
and the wolfsbane blooms,  
you will be as cursed as I am.”*

# CURSED



PETER GRAY



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PETER GRAY

Cursed

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*This book is dedicated to all of my friends and online fans that have been reading my work for years. Thank you for encouraging me to become a self-published author and believing in my work. This one is dedicated to all of you.*



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## The Caretaker

**T**here was something wrong even *then*, and I shouldn't have turned a blind eye and ignored it.

It was pure folly.

Pure folly to convince myself that I could change the situation, that my influence over him could have steered the course of our fate.

But I was wrong.

\*\*\*

“You’re an idiot!” The loud scream behind me startled me. Ben was standing out of his car seat, pushing his head through the sunroof to let the cool autumn breeze blow hard upon his face. His screams echoed through the car before trailing down the old country road. His boyfriend, Taylor, did his best to pull on the side of his jeans while chuckling in hysterics.

“Ben, get down!”

“This is crazy!” Ben happily responded. He stretched his neck back all the way before letting out a long howl like a wolf. Ben was having the time of his life, but unfortunately for him, his sister had the good sense to slow down the car and pull over.

“What are you doing?” Ben complained to his sister, Ashley. “I was having fun up there.”

“I’m not getting pulled over by the cops because of you,” Ashley snapped. “Sit your ass down.”

Ben grunted at his sister in annoyance, but he was obedient enough to slip through the small sunroof and plummet back into his seat. Taylor did his best to hold back his giggles with the palm of his hand, knowing Ashley would lash out her anger at him as well if they didn’t behave.

Ashley pulled up her dark shades and settled it over her wavy brown hair with golden blonde highlights. “Will I regret inviting you guys to the campsite?” she sighed out with a hint of worry.

“No,” Ben and Taylor answered back at the same time as if they were misbehaved children. It often felt that way when they were together, it was rather hard to believe that there was a five year age gap between them. Taylor was the older, he was just a few weeks short of reaching an unbearable quarter life crisis.

Turning twenty-five would not feel like such a big deal if it wasn’t for the fact that Taylor was the oldest one in the car. In normal situations, Taylor with his shortly trimmed brown hair and large black eyes would give off a mature air about him, especially when it was accompanied with that famous brooding look of his. Once his long-time boyfriend Benjamin Shaves was around him, Taylor’s behaviour would entirely change. Whether it was for better or for worse, sometimes it was so hard to tell.

Apparently, Ashley didn’t have the patience for their childish behaviour today. “You know, I didn’t have to invite you,” she reminded them harshly. “I was fine with just going on this trip with Sara.”

“You need a man with you,” her brother jeered. “Who else will protect you out in the wild?”

Ashley pressed down on a button to close the sunroof. “I would hardly call it the wild,” she shot back as she looked overhead to make sure the sunroof was closed all the way. “It’s a campsite.”

“Yeah, an abandoned one,” Ben shot back, which immediately brought another fit of giggles from Taylor. “Why else would you get it so cheap?”

“Look!” Ashley turned around in her seat with her finger pointing at her younger brother. “Money is tight and I’m on a budget.” Her arm stretched outwards with her finger hovering over her brother’s chest. “I don’t need you to make snide comments. You know I just bought a new place.”

“Yeah, I know,” Ben drawled out with boredom, while he brushed his fingers through his curly honey blonde hair.

“And unlike you, I don’t have a partner to help pay for it.” Ashley made sure to turn her head to Taylor now that he was in control of his emotions. “So, the two of you shut up and behave.”

Ben smiled at his sister playfully, and then gave a slight nod of his head in open submission.

Ashley was satisfied, so she turned in her seat to start up the car.

“How much longer, Ash,” I finally spoke up, “until we get there?”

She glanced down at her phone and rapped out, “Fifteen minutes.”

“Good, because I have to use the bathroom at some point.”

“It won’t be as nice as the ones we have back home,” my friend reminded me. “But that’s country life for you.”

“More like, camp life,” I teased, and then rolled down my window to let in some fresh air. It was a cold October day, but I was tired of feeling the heaters blow all over me. My hand stuck

out to feel the frigid air, noticing how the small hairs on my arm flickered upwards with goose bumps prickling my skin.

My black nail polish matched the sleekness of Ashley's vehicle; a jetty black shade that reflected the sad grey lighting overhead, as if the sun had given up shining for the day. A lone road stretched before us, curving and winding through deep forestry, a world where only crimson coloured leaves shone in the shallow sunlight. An occasional yellow would peep into view, fading leaves that warned of a bleak winter fast approaching.

It was my idea to get away, wanting to escape the mundane existence of my all too repetitive life. It was as though something snapped within me, and next thing I knew I was pulling out my warmest winter clothing and calling up my parents to dig up my old sleeping bag. Ashley reluctantly agreed to go away with me this weekend, and it was by pure accident that her brother and his boyfriend decided to tag along with us.

"There's a sign," Ashley piped up with hopefulness. "Finally."

"Blackthorn Campground," I read aloud. "We made it."

"Finally," Ashley repeated. "Alright boys, you better behave yourself when we get there." She tilted her head in my direction. "It's like they are *children*." I chuckled at my friend's snide comment, knowing a portion of her words were true. "Sara, can you grab my purse next to your feet? My credit card is there."

"Yeah, sure."

"I think I have everything," Ashley fretted as she pushed back her long-tousled curls. Strands of light honey blonde highlights blended well with her warm chestnut coloured hair; an alluring shade that often captured many a man's attention. "I'm worried, you know. I have never done anything like this before."

"Don't worry. Camping isn't as hard as it sounds." The road

widened to show a gravelled parking lot with only an old black pickup truck in front of a wooden building. “Besides we have a cabin! No worrying about putting up a tent and wondering where to go to the washroom.”

“Yeah.”

“It will be nice.”

“Sure,” my friend answered me with less enthusiasm than I would have liked. “But it will be cold.”

“We have sleeping bags,” I reminded her. “And they probably have cots set up for us.”

“Ashley!” Ben called out from behind her. “Why are there no cars here?”

“Because it’s Halloween weekend,” Ashley drawled out as if it were fairly obvious, “and we are the only ones stupid enough to camp out here.”

She parked the car next to the old pick-up truck before she eyed it with disdain. I hardly batted an eye at the ancient truck, since it was a normal sight where I grew up.

Taylor propped open the door first, letting out a relieved sigh once his brown leather boots hit the gravelled ground. “Fresh air,” Taylor teased, as he closed his eyes with pure bliss to truly breathe it in. “Am I right, Ben?”

“Yeah,” his boyfriend agreed, and then opened the door on his side of the car.

Ashley had her car window rolled down to reapply her lipstick, while I was opening my backpack to unearth my fall jacket.

“You coming?” Taylor rapped out with impatience. “It’s cold out here.”

“Its fall,” I replied without sparing a glance in his direction. My left hand offered Ashley her purse, before I began to get out of the car. “It’s not like we’re in Florida.”

“I was just saying it was cold, hun.” Taylor put on his classic aviator sunglasses before he brushed back his short black locks. “No need to get all testy.” He shook his head at me in a naughty way before muttering, “time of the month.”

“It’s not, actually.”

Ben was laughing from the other side of the car and a part of me wondered why we even bothered inviting the two of them.

Ashley shut her car door loudly to get our attention. “Alright, sunshines!” she called out, “time to get moving.”

“Where?” he asked, with his large hands raised high in the air. “All I see is this car and that building over there.”

“This is where we sign in,” she stated with half a smile. “Come on.”

Taylor went around the car to get to Ben, both reaching for each other’s hands as they quietly walked behind Ashley. I was too busy tying up my hiking shoes to keep up with them, taking a moment to truly enjoy the peace and quiet. The wind was blowing through the leaves, creating a soft rustling sound that almost lulled me to sleep. Dark red leaves scraped against the ash white gravel as it blew away from me, following the wind that led to the abandoned forest.

I let my eyes sink into the darkness of the forest, noticing how eerily silent this whole place was when I listened to it. I swallowed hard nervously, feeling like something wasn’t right. The sound of Ashley calling out my name brought me back to the present, and I turned away from the spot to run after them.

“What were you looking at?” Ashley demanded, once I approached the three of them.

“I was thinking.”

“Took a long time thinking,” she noted. “Everything all right?”

I nodded my head as I stared past them to glare at the scratched wooden pine door. “Yeah,” I lied, and brushed past them to take in the deep marks over the doorway. “You think there are wild animals out here?” I looked over my shoulder to take in the curious looks from my three friends. “Bears? You know, something big enough to make marks like this?”

Taylor pushed himself past Ben to stand next to me, letting the tip of his fingertip drag along the grotesque black marks. “Ashley? You sure we are at the right place?”

“I’m not an idiot,” she shot back irritably. “Of course, this is the right place.”

“It’s only ...” Taylor let his fingers reach the very bottom of the jagged line, only to pull away once he noticed the splinter of wood sticking out at the very end. “The place looks abandoned and there is no one here.”

“A truck,” she reminded us all.

“Yeah, but someone could have dropped it off here.”

“You want to go back home, is that it?”

“I don’t want to be in a place where something ...” he pointed at the jagged lines at the bottom of the door, “... is so determined to force itself inside of there.”

I ignored them all to rap on the wooden door, deciding this was the only way to find out if we are in the right place after all. I knocked for a solid minute before I heard a lock sliding on the other side of the door, and then quickly took a step back before the stranger could open it. A hand was held over the front of his face, doing his best to block out the pale sunlight that was creeping its way inside of his darkened home.

“Hello,” I quietly offered. “Umm ...” I looked behind me to catch my friends’ reactions, “we booked two cabins at this campsite. It’s—it’s ...” I felt nervous once the man lowered his

hand, letting dark green eyes settle over me with an enchanting gaze. I bit down at my lip, feeling irrationally nervous under his lengthy stare.

“I thought I sent you an email that it’s cancelled,” he drawled out in a low voice.

“We didn’t get that.” I looked over my shoulder to catch sight of my best friend. “Did we?”

“If I had data,” Sara mused aloud, “I could check, but we are too isolated to use it. It’s like we are in the middle of nowhere.”

“I did send that email,” the man insisted with a sharpness to his voice. “The four of you aren’t welcome here.” The door was beginning to close, so I stuck my shoe in the tiny crack to prevent him from closing it completely.

“Hey!” I called out. “We paid for this.”

“Then I’ll cancel it.”

“How do I know you will keep your word?”

The man became silent, which wasn’t exactly a good sign. He let his hold over the doorknob loosen, placing his long fingers over a corner of the wooden door to prop it open. He glared at us long and hard, and then through barely parted lips ordered us inside.

I was the first to step in, noticing how black his living room was since there were no open windows in sight. We passed an open area, and then followed him past an open doorway that showed his kitchen. Ben was whispering something to his partner, but aside from that there was no other sound. I took the lead, following this man’s sure footsteps until we reached the back of his house. He turned on a lamp by pulling on some clear white string, letting a pale light-bulb illuminate his small office space.

It was only then that I could take in this man’s rugged

appearance; his dark brown hair was significantly curly and wild in a strange sort of way; his jawline was scruffy with bristles of brown hair peppering its way over his chin. The goatee was the only thing that was kept neat and orderly, and I imagined if he shaved away his scruff, he would be quite a handsome man.

“Take a seat,” he ordered, once he realized I was looking at him too hard. An old desktop computer was turning on in front of him, allowing him to sit over the edge of the table so half of his body was facing my direction. “I thought I sent you the damn email,” he grumbled out tiredly. “We don’t have visitors this time of year.”

“Why not?”

“Because all of the caretakers are away. I’m the only one left to take care of the grounds.” He pulled up his baggy navy-blue sleeves, crumpling them over until it rested over his wiry biceps.

“Can’t you let us stay anyways?” I asked him politely. “Since we came all this way.”

Ashley felt the need to put in her two cents. “Over two hours to be exact.”

“City folks?” the dark-haired man in front of me inquired. “Can hear it in your accents.”

“You do?” I asked out with surprise.

“Yeah.” He turned his gaze to the royal blue screen in front of him and typed in the necessary password. “I’m opening up my email now.”

“To see if you cancelled it.”

“Yeah,” he replied without emotion. “Move your chair back a bit.” He waited until I rolled his chair away from his desk to stand in front of me. He bent over, giving me a prime view to check him out if I really wanted to. I wasn’t sure if I really wanted to, so I swiveled my chair to face Ashley to see she had

no qualms to do so. *She's interested*, I realized, and couldn't have laughed at the irony of it.

A deep voice broke the silence of the room as the man in front of me uttered, "Thanks for that. It will be a few minutes, and then we can solve the problem."

Ashley walked over to the right side of the desk, dropping down her purse to show she didn't intend to leave. "We won't be in your way if we stay here, you know."

"This place is closed," he replied quietly as his fingers briskly moved about the keyboard.

"We will pay you more," she cunningly answered him. Ashley made sure to stand next to him, uncomfortably close as she uttered, "Twice as much."

"For this dump?" the man questioned her from the corner of his mouth. He lifted the computer mouse to navigate his way across the screen, choosing to ignore my friend's close presence.

"Look!" Ashley exclaimed in a loud tone of voice. "There is no way I am driving two hours back home."

"Then go find a motel."

Ashley was not finished with him yet, for she leaned forward and argued, "I don't think you understand—"

"Oh, I understand perfectly."

She huffed at him, and I couldn't help but smile at the man that was steadily getting on my friend's nerves.

"Damn!" The computer mouse dropped on the table. "I didn't send it after all."

"See!"

"You are still not welcome here."

Ashley turned in a way to lean her back against the table. She made sure to look at me before she shot me a playful wink. "You really going to turn away two single girls," she stated in

a sensual voice. “Two woman that are willing to pay you extra. You must get lonely out here all alone. Why, you can have some company for the night.”

“Not interested.” The man stood to his feet and walked to the darkest corner of the room to create some space. “I’m asking the four of you to leave.”

“I don’t understand,” Ashley complained. “Why can’t you possibly let us stay?”

“I already gave you a reason,” he answered her in a loud tone of voice. “Now, leave.”

Ashley picked up her purse with an undignified huff at the man, and then stormed down the hallway to get away from him. I decided to stay in my seat while my two other friends were steadily leaving the office space as well.

“I’m leaving,” I assured him once he stepped into the light with a darkened expression about him. “I just want to make sure we get our money back.”

“Right.”

“What?”

“Not sure how to do that,” He sheepishly replied. “That’s the administrative staff ... higher up people than I.”

“So, that means?”

“I will have to send them an email.”

“You sure you will remember?” I teased him, which brought a large smile to his face.

“Stay here, so I can type it up now,” he suggested. I pushed my chair closer to him, watching him open a new tab so he could type up an email. There was a faint pine odour eradiating from him, as if the deep forestry was in his very essence. He was rugged in his appearance, untamed in a sort of way that matched his brutish mannerisms. I was sure he wasn’t always like this, but

I suppose living alone for so long a time would make him that way. “Your friends are always that annoying?” he unexpected rapped out. “Especially that little Miss. Princess?”

“Ashley,” I clarified.

“She thinks she owns everything.”

“It’s her way.”

“She’s rich?”

“Not really, but Ashley comes from a rich family,” I explained.

“She comes in here with designer clothing and waving her wallet at me like she owns the Goddamn world.”

“It’s her way,” I repeated, after I picked up a random pen and let my finger run down it idly. “She doesn’t like the fact that you didn’t cave in.”

“I won’t cave in for nothing,” he jeered with something of a smile. “I like you, though.” He paused his typing to turn his gaze in my direction, letting his mossy green eyes radiate before me. “You’re nice.”

“Thanks.”

He nodded his head slowly at me, and then moved back to show the email that he had just composed. “Read it,” he suggested, and then moved backwards to seat himself at the edge of the desk. His eyes continued to gaze at my face as I read the bright screen, captivated for some unknown reason. “So?”

“It’s fine.” I pointed at the bright screen. “But you might need more details, like how you forgot to email us.”

“Oh.” He let his hand fall over his upper thigh, letting a single finger draw a line from side to side as he looked at me. “Why?”

“We might get compensated for that extra-long drive we took to get here.”

He smirked at me, liking the sassiness I was currently exhibiting in front of him. “I like you,” he stated for the second time.

“If I let you folks stay, you will have to promise me one thing.”

“What?”

“Don’t leave your cabin at night.”

\*\*\*

Ashley was in a state of disbelief when I transferred the good news to her. “Okay, so what did you do to him?”

“Excuse me?” I said in a questioning tone of voice.

“He was so adamant for us to be gone and then you spend five minutes up there and suddenly he changed his mind.”

“I worked my charm.”

Ashley cast me a wicked grin. “Sure you did, Sara”

“I didn’t do anything like that!”

“Will I have the cabin all to myself tonight?”

“You’re an idiot!” Ashley laughed at me in good humour, before she went around her car to prop open the trunk. “What are you doing?”

“Grabbing our stuff.”

“We still don’t have the key yet.”

“Oh.”

“He needs another five minutes,” I explained. “I will go get it, and after that you can pull out our things. Besides, we are nowhere near the cabin yet. It’s out back, you see.”

A loud yawn broke through the air, and I turned to see Taylor leaning over the hood with his hand hovering over his open mouth. Ben was rubbing the top of his back, sensing his partner’s drowsy mood. *It’s the sky*, I thought, noticing how pale it was over our heads. *And the cold*, I noted, since the chill only made me want to curl up in a blanket and sleep the day away.

“I’m heading inside,” I announced to the three of them, and turned around to make my way to the top of the hill. The

front door was ajar when I approached it, giving me another opportunity to look at the claw marks that worked itself into the pine coloured door. “Hello!” I called out once I stepped inside, feeling uncomfortable with the never-ending darkness of this man’s house.

“In here!” was yelled from the back of the place, so I followed the sound until I reached his office space again. “Took me a while to find the keys,” he explained. “It will be in quite a state.”

“That’s alright, I’m used to roughing it,” I joked, which only made his green eyes sparkle. “So, I noticed there are claw marks outside of your door ...” Our gaze was instantly broken, and the man in front of me became extremely uncomfortable. “Bears?”

“Wolves,” he mouthed quietly. “Lots of them.”

“Oh.”

“I warned you not to go outside at night.” He stood to his feet, making sure to avoid eye contact with me. “And if you and your friends are smart, then you will take my advice.”

“They were hungry?” I joked, but he chose not to respond. He reached into his black pants to hand me two sets of keys with a white tag dangling over them both.

“One and two,” he explained. “Those are the number of your cabins.”

“Okay.”

“It’s a bit of a drive, so you will have to follow me.”

“Far?”

“Two-minute drive, but its rough terrain.” He reached for a long black coat at the back of a wooden chair and threw it over his shoulders. “And I will have to look at the cabin myself since it’s been so long.”

“Alright.”

He snatched at his car keys and then deposited them in his

coat pocket. "Let's go," he suggested, He pushed in his office chair and left the eerily dark room first. Silently he led the way, not wanting to speak to me until we reached the front of his house. "Let me lock the door." The heavy door was shut harshly, and I noticed how he had two locks to secure it. He looked nervous doing it, doing his best to ignore the claw marks over the doorway as he did his task quickly. "You guys brought food?"

"Yeah, but we were hoping for a fire."

"No fire."

"How else are we supposed to eat?"

"Use my kitchen," he declared. "But *no* fire." He pulled on the doorknob to make sure it was secure. "Understood?"

"Yeah." He took a step away, so sudden that I was compelled to follow him. "Nervous of someone breaking in?"

"No," he said over his shoulder before he hopped down the steps two at a time. He was in a hurry to get to his car, looking at the skyline as if he was searching for something. By the time he jumped inside of his car I was still walking down the pathway, unable to keep up with his fast pace. "I haven't got all day!" he jeered, which made me narrow my eyes at him. His car engine roared with impatience, so I told my friends to get in the car and follow his run-down truck.

"Sara, you upset him?" Ashley asked with some hesitation.

"I think that's just his mood," I teased. "Just drive."

Ashley reversed out of the parking spot and slammed down on the pedal to keep up with the large pickup truck. It was the right vehicle, for it drove over the steep gravel road with certain ease. Ashley's luxurious sedan was not meant for such road conditions, so she slowed down and softly prayed that she wouldn't get a flat tire. It took us some minutes to reach a long

stretch of cabins, spread out enough to give each occupant some privacy.

The man's car jolted to a stop and before a second passed by, he jumped out of his car and slammed the door behind him. He reached into his pocket, and then visibly looked frustrated to find something was amiss.

"He looks pissed," Ben observed behind us, taking note of how the man was quickly striding his way towards us. "What did we do?"

Ashley rolled down her window, expecting the man to yell at us the second he stood in front of her car. "What is it, love?" she teased out lightly, hoping that would diffuse the situation.

He dragged a heavy hand over his mouth, letting it settle over the dark threads over his chin as he glared past Ashley to stare straight into my eyes. "You have the keys, right?"

"They're in my pocket," I sweetly replied, hoping that would soothe his temper.

"Right."

I opened my door first and gave him a skeptical look. "You forgot?"

"I have a lot of things on my mind," he drawled out lifelessly. He dropped his gaze away from me as he uttered, "can I use it?"

I walked around the hood of the car, wondering how I was able to tame this man so easily. It was clear I had an influence over him, making him more civilized if that was the proper word. The man held his hand out in front of me, making sure to have eye contact with me as I placed the keys into his hand. "Thanks," he muttered out softly, though it sounded almost sad-like in a way.

"Should we leave our stuff in the car?"

"For now."

He turned away from me, waving his hand as a small invitation for me to follow him. My friends were unsure whether to come along or not, so they stayed in the car since I was the only one that seemed to have any power over him.

The caretaker opened the first cabin door, holding it open for me until we both walked inside. He made sure we walked at the same pace, slowing down a little so I could be at his side. His hands were awkwardly held in front of him, two fingers playing with a ring on his right hand. “This is it,” he observed, and then stretched out his left hand to show the bleakness of our small cabin. “I’ll get you some new sheets, since I don’t know when last it has been changed. He cracked open a door to the left of him and flickered on a light. “Here is the bathroom. I’ll get you some fresh towels as well.” His voice was softer as he added, “You take baths?”

“Sometimes.”

“I will grab you some of those nice bath bombs we save for our special customers.” He winked at me slyly, so sudden it was gone before I took note of it. “May have some wine for you as well.”

“Are you planning to join me?”

“Never thought you’d ask,” he teased, before he leaned against the bathroom door. One hand was shoved into his pocket as he took a good long look at me. A tiny smirk crept over his face. “Usually the man that does the asking though.”

“And yet, you are the one that offered to bring me wine.”

“Ah.” He raised an eyebrow at me playfully, obviously feeling in a flirtatious mood. “Well, your friend did say you were single.”

*Damn.*

He turned his head to the left, looking at the closed blinds over the bathroom window. “You will keep your word, won’t you?

Not to go outside at night.”

“I won’t.”

“Even the folks that work here won’t go outside,” he commented. “They know how dangerous it can be. I swear to God, even if I hear your screams, I won’t come out to save you,” he warned in a dark voice. “I’ve seen too many things to do that.”

“Like what?”

“Might as well not tell you,” he slowly uttered, “I’m starting to like having you around.” He tilted his head downwards to rest his chin over the top part of his chest. “Even though it’s a little selfish of me.” His lips curled downwards, and he became sober as unknown thoughts flickered through his mind. “I will go get your towels and stuff then.”

“Is it at your place?”

“Yeah.”

“I will help.”

“It’s light, you know,” he replied in that strange northern Canadian accent of his.

“I can still help.”

“Thanks,” he replied with a lighter expression. “My name is Damian by the way.”

“Sara.”

“Nice to meet you Sara,” he said with sudden glee.

“Nice to meet you too.”

He pushed himself off the doorway and slowly strode away, using a much lighter step than I was used to. Once we stepped outside, he blocked the grave sunlight with the back of his hand, looking less than pleased that it should hover over him. He never let his arm go downwards until he stood in front of the car, and then inserted his key into the car door to swing it wide open. I walked past his pick-up truck to let Ashley know what was

happening, assuring her she could take out our stuff to put it inside of the cabin. The second key was tossed in the backseat between Ben and Taylor, knowing the two of them would fight over it like they always did.

A small chuckle escaped me after I shut my car door, and then I strode towards Damian's pick-up truck where he was still waiting for me. "It's open," he mouthed, so I pulled on the handle and heaved the heavy door open. The first thing I noticed was the overwhelming scent of mint from his car air freshener, and the second was the bundle of clothes stashed at my feet. I was going to point out the absurdity of it all, but the sternness of Damian's profile made me change my mind.

He reversed backwards with ease, using the manual stick without having to look down at it, before he did a sharp U-turn and let the car drive down the bumpy road. I looked over my shoulder to look at the back seat, taking note of the long gun case that laid over top of it. There was an emergency first-aid kit in there too, and a large flashlight that must have been extremely heavy.

"What made you want to come here?" he asked as a way to spark a conversation.

"Get out of the city," I simply replied, since it was the painful truth. "What made you want to live out here?"

"I like the isolation."

"Why?"

"I don't like people," he stated, but something in my heart told me it was all a lie.

"Why not?"

"I just don't," he replied in a bored voice. "What do you have planned for dinner?"

"Hot dogs."

“Over the fire?”

“Well, not anymore,” I replied with attitude. “Since *someone* told me I couldn’t have it.”

“You can use my kitchen.” I knew he was ignoring me, but I was expecting at least some kind of reaction from him. “But you will have to be out of there before sun-down.”

“Why?”

“You just have too.”

“Okay,” I said with curiosity, just before he pulled into the car driveway. “What do you have for dinner?”

“Some fish.” He put the car in park, and for once in his life took his time to undo his seat belt. “Not enough for the four of you though.”

“What about two?” I teased, since I wanted a reaction out of him.

“One.”

I rolled my eyes at him, which earned a dark chuckle from the man beside of me.

My seat belt was undone at this point, and I cracked open the door to step outside. The air was brisk, showing the drop in temperature as the day gradually drew itself to a close. The car shook after Damian slammed his door, proving he was stronger than he looked. He stalked his way up the hill without me, letting his hands fall deep inside of his coat pocket. I liked the way his high collar just brushed against his chin line, taking note that his coat was the only expensive thing he owned so far. He stepped inside of his house without me, leaving me to follow him only by the sound of his footsteps. I met the back of him around a corner of a wall, realizing he was standing in front of a narrow staircase.

“I realized ...” He removed his hands from his pocket and

turned around to face me. “I shouldn’t bring you upstairs, since the two of us don’t know each other very well.” He licked his bottom lip meditatively. “I will grab the bed sheets— my bed sheets to be exact. *Umm* ... it will be too much work opening the other place, and I have no idea where they store the stuff for the rooms are kept. Just make sure you keep my sheets clean.” He blushed slightly, realizing that he was implying something that he really shouldn’t. “I’ll—I’ll be back,” he stammered out, and then crept up the stairs silently.

Damian really was a curious person. I would say he was a hermit, but he didn’t strike me as that type of guy. He was isolated to be sure, and nervous, but for what reason was still a mystery to me. I took the liberty of turning on the hallway lights to see the empty hallway was a creamy shade of tan brown. It was odd to see no pictures up, or even paintings for that matter. This place didn’t feel like a home, and I was starting to wonder why that was the case.

He came down the stairs eventually, carrying clean white sheets with a heavy blanket in tow. Damian instructed me to put it in the truck, assuring me it was still unlocked before he headed up the stairs for more blankets.

The short moment in the truck alone allowed me to investigate his backseat more, taking note of the hunting knife on the truck floor. There was an open box of fishing hooks and other items that Damian must have used for fishing. I couldn’t see a fishing rod though, a curious thing, unless he laid it out in the trunk. The mint smell was alluring to me, making me not want to slink out the car but eventually I did. Damian was waiting for me outside of the front door, holding up another handful of blankets with a suspicious gaze.

“Looking around?” he darkly remarked, since he must have

caught me snooping.

“I was ...”

“Yes, I know what you were doing.” He dropped the heavy items into my arms and then closed the front door behind him.

*It's like he has something shoved up his ass.*

I stormed down the steps and turned to the grassy hill where his pick-up truck was waiting for me. I dropped the items in the backseat since there was no more room in the front and made sure to move the heavy gun case until it was no longer touching the blankets.

Footsteps came from behind me, and Damian came into my view with a heavy cardboard box in hand. “Towels,” he commented. “And some snacks that you guys might want to eat.”

“Wine?”

“Wine,” he confirmed with every attempt to not smile at me. “You can get in.”

“Thanks,” I said with sudden sarcasm, and walked past him to get around the front of the car. “You have everything?”

“Just have to lock the door.”

“And then triple check it,” I quipped.

Damian ignored me once again, simply shutting the door with a loud sound before he strode up the hill as fast as he could.

*Maybe I shouldn't have said that.*

I propped the door a little to let in some fresh air, hearing an unfamiliar whistle from a bird that was native to this area. The sound of heavy boots pounding against the gravel made me look upwards and to my left, seeing Damian opening the door with a lengthy gaze on my person. “Okay, we can go,” he muttered, and then climbed into his car seat beside me.

“Sorry about what I said earlier,” I apologized, hoping that

would ease away the tension between us.

“I just want to be *safe*,” he uttered with uneasiness.

“That’s why you have a gun?”

He nodded his head slowly, while he let his hand hover over the key ignition.

“Bears?”

“Yes,” he said in a thin voice. “A lot of wild animals out here.” He placed the key into the silver ignition. “Coyotes, foxes, and sometimes moose.”

“You said wolves.”

“Wolves too,” he replied in barely a breath.

“You’ve been attacked by them?”

He wore a smile, but it was false looking. He sharply turned his head to me, letting his gaze search all over my telling visage. “No,” he exclaimed. “I haven’t been attacked by them.”

“Okay.”

“But others have,” he warned. “So, you ...” he raised his right hand to point a finger at me, “stay inside tonight.”

“I will.”

He made no response, only turned the key to make the engine roar. A long arm stretched over the back of my car seat, bringing his body closer to me as he reversed out of the spot. I took a moment to truly look at his face, wondering why his eyes looked so eternally sad.

“Hey!” I called out, which made him stop mid-way to lock the storminess of his green eyes onto my pale blue ones. “You should join us for dinner tonight.”

“I already offered you guys to make dinner at my place.”

“Yeah, but we should spend the evening together,” I quickly replied. “My friends aren’t so bad.”

Damian continued to reverse out of the parking spot, only

stopping to put the car in drive. He hadn't responded to my statement, which made me regret my words. "Sure," he replied through barely parted lips.

"It should be a good time."

He nodded his head, though he looked like he didn't believe it.

"I don't want to force you."

"It's fine."

"You don't seem—"

"It's fine," he interrupted in a somber voice. "I'm not used to company, that's all."

"I see."

Damian slowed down on a particularly bumpy track, not wanting our ride to be more uncomfortable than it needed to be. "As long as I sit next to you," he piped up suddenly. "Only condition."

"That works."

The corner of his left lip curled upwards, compelling him to turn his face away so I could no longer see it.

"And Sara," he began in a much more agreeable voice. "You can have some of my fish." I laughed at his remark, glad that Damian was finally warming up to me. "But no one else."

"Understood."

"I like to go fishing." He slowed down once he noticed Ashley's car parked outside of the small cabin. "You could join me tomorrow, if you'd like."

"I think my friends and I are going for a hike."

"Yes," Damian breathed out. "Friends."

"But ..." I let my voice trail away, unsure what I could possibly add to that.

"I'll give you guys a map for the best trails."

"Thanks," I sadly droned, feeling like I rejected his subtle

offer.

“First-aid kit since the trails will be rough at this time of year. I maintain it the best I can, but I’m only one person.” He parked the car and let his hands drop to the side of him. “You will stick to the paths.”

“Okay,” I smiled, since I liked that fatherly tone to his voice.

“If you are lost, it will be next to impossible to find you. These forests are *deep*.” He blinked at me with pain. “Very deep.”

“I’ll stay on the path, but just in case ... can I have your number?”

“Why?”

“My friends might do something stupid.”

“Umm ... sure.” Damian waited until I pulled my phone out of my pant pocket and then relayed the information, half smiling once I told him I got it all. “So, it’s only for emergencies?” he teased, after he stretched out his arm to lay it over the back of my headrest. “Or—”

“We’ll see.”

“Okay,” he said with a grin. “We will see.”

“We should take the stuff out of the car,” I suggested. “It’s going to get dark.”

Damian’s eyes widened at that statement and then he turned to the front window to look at the skyline. “No, not yet,” he breathed out with relief, and then pushed open his car door to step outside.

## 2

### Secrets

Damian came down the last step with his hand dragging down the handrail. “Where is everybody?” he asked, after he scanned the empty living room. The interior was set in a warm glow, a set of three lamps had finally allowed me to see his living space. I chose not to answer him and curled up on his couch more, pulling a sandy beige pillow over my chest like it was a stuffed animal. “Your friends,” Damian clarified, only seconds after he stepped into the living room.

“The front,” I answered him casually, while I let my eyes scan his appearance. “You changed.”

“I was cold.” He dragged his hand down his woolen jumper, a dark midnight blue shade that went well with his tanned skin. “Fall is nearly over.”

I gave him a look then, a silent question as to why he was allowing so much space between us. It was obvious that we were attracted to one another, the tension at the dinner table was enough for my friends to put two and two together. There was a reason Ben and his boyfriend were out smoking their cigarettes, and it was only because I practically begged Ashley to leave that

she was forced to stand outside in the cold with them.

Damian foolishly looked around the room as if he expected one of my friends to show up. It was clear he was putting up a guard. “Are they coming back?” he questioned with a strange tenor to his voice.

“They are out smoking.”

“Oh.”

“I don’t smoke,” I clarified, just in case he could not reach that natural conclusion. “You can sit, you know.”

He rubbed his hands together nervously, and then strode towards me with determination. He took a seat on his couch, ensuring there was enough space before he settled his hands over his lap. An awkward silence fell over us. I didn’t want to force a conversation from him, so I decided to wait.

*I will wait until he says something,* I decided, looking to the wall furthest from me where a lamp illuminated a full bookcase. There were no personal belongings though, as a matter of fact the room felt sparse the longer I examined it. I began to wonder if this was a temporary home for Damian, or if it was a mere reflection of his strange personality.

“The salmon was good,” Damian piped up out of the blue.  
“Did you like it?”

“I did.”

He fidgeted nervously on the couch, letting his finger rub over his silver ring. “It’s getting late,” he surmised, a sure sign that he wanted me to leave. “Nearly dark.”

“You scared of the dark, Damian?” He never answered me, only fidgeting in his seat more. “Is something the matter?”

“Not feeling good,” he muttered. “Probably turn in early for the night.”

I let go of the pillow, feeling like a fool for entertaining that

he felt some affection for me. There was a spark, I knew, but maybe it was nothing more than that. *It was just my imagination.*

“Are you cold?” he suddenly asked, once he watched me toss the pillow to the end of the couch.

“No.”

“I could get you some blankets,” he offered. “Your friends must be cold out there too. There was frost this morning, did you see?”

“No.”

He lowered his head, while his lips twitched awkwardly.

*A fool*, I decided, and then rose to my feet.

“Sara!” he called out, realizing I was ready to go. “I’m not acting myself,” he explained. “I’m sorry.”

“No, you aren’t.”

“I just don’t feel good,” he muttered with a hand over his stomach. “Like I’m coming down with something.”

“It’s not the food,” I assured him, since we had the exact same meal.

“I really should go to bed.” He rose to his feet slowly, staggering forward as if his entire body was in pain. “Maybe some Advil,” he deliberated aloud. “It’s going to be a long night.”

“Let me help you.” I positioned my body next to him, grabbing a hold of his arm to string it over my shoulders. He fell into my body naturally, letting his hand cover a portion of my arm as he kept a strong hold over me. He staggered forward, making me wonder what kind of sickness could have suddenly come over him. I could hear his teeth chattering, like he had the chills, and his face was becoming paler by the minute. “You have the flu maybe?”

“Huh?” he uttered, while his eyes became hazy.

“Flu.”

“Flu,” he mouthed out, as though he couldn’t concentrate on the word.

“Damian, you are unwell. You want me to take you somewhere? Do they have a health clinic around here?”

“Nothing for miles,” he told me. “Closest town is ...” He paused once he had to raise up a leg to go over the first step. “... miles away.” He gripped onto the handrail and let out a deep shudder. “I can’t go upstairs.”

“Nonsense.”

“No,” he whimpered. “Let me stay on the couch.”

“You sure?”

“Yes,” He replied quickly with a short nod of his head. “It’s ...” He stopped himself and simply shut his eyes with pain. “I think you should just leave me.”

“But it’s not contagious,” I assured him. “Besides, I can’t leave you this way. Let me get you something to drink. You have herbal tea?”

“Mint,” he wheezed, and then placed a foot down as a firm warning he had no intention to climb the stairs this evening. “I’m cold.”

“It is a cold night,” I surmised, and then rubbed my hand down his lower spine to cheer him up. “I’ll take you to the couch.”

“Thanks.”

He let me rotate him around, and then we slowly made our way to the couch where he could rest. I left him to boil the kettle for some tea, and then went to the front door to tell my friends they could come back inside.

“Think something died,” Ben piped up, the second he walked through the door. “Vultures everywhere.”

“Most likely.”

“So,” he grabbed a hold of my hand and pulled me into him, “the two of you made out yet?”

“Damian is sick.”

“He chickened out?”

“No, he is *really* sick. I think he needs a doctor.”

Ben let go of my hand and strode down the hallway, leaving me to wait in front of the doorway for his sister and Taylor. Taylor stepped through first, his clothing reeking the most of cigarette smoke out of the three of them. He unexpectedly hugged me, kissing the side of my cheek playfully before he let me go. “You had fun, Sara?”

“No.”

He quirked an eyebrow at me playfully and then shook his head in disagreement. “Lies.”

“Nothing happened.”

“Out there for ten minutes and nothing happened?”

“He’s sick,” I explained, and then flickered my gaze to the moving shadow that Ashley had created as the last of the sunlight fell over a portion of her small, roundish figure. She stepped through the doorway with a lethargic look to her, offering me a lazy smile that told me she was still in a good mood.

“He’s sick,” I told her, before she could even ask me the dreaded question. “Nothing happened.”

“The way the two of you were making eyes at each other over dinner, and then I hear this?”

“I don’t know.” My shoulders raised up with a careless shrug. “I really don’t know what happened.”

“How bad is he?”

“Come see,” I suggested, and then led the way into the living room where Ben was already lingering. He covered his mouth

with his hand as he took note how much Damian's teeth were chattering in front of us. "Ben!" I called out. "The kettle probably boiled by now. Go in the kitchen and see if you can find some mint tea. Taylor, keep an eye on him." I took a hold of Ashley's sleeve and added, "you are coming with me."

We crept up the staircase, entering the small hallway that was completely dark. I felt my way through the darkness, walking down the short hallway till I reached a single door. The knob opened easily for me and I found the light switch to turn it on.

His bedroom was just as scarce as downstairs, though I found it odd that his window was wide open. I walked forward to shut it, while Ashley let her hand drag over a smoky grey blanket that had a busy pattern over it.

"His room is so empty," I observed, noticing there was only a bed and an open closet in line of my sight. "Talk about being minimalistic."

"And you like this guy," Ashley teased. "I guess you can say this room lacks a feminine touch."

"I can't believe nothing happened downstairs," I moaned. "I mean, did you see the way he was looking at me earlier?"

"Yes."

"Ugh," I grunted. "We finally have alone time and then he suddenly gets sick." I lifted the blanket Ashley was inspecting earlier and threw his pillow atop it. "His blanket is warm."

"It looks hand sewn," she noted. "Where do you think he got it?"

"Not sure."

I scanned the room one last time, and suggested Ashley pick up the second pillow just in case. She shut off the lights and then we went down the short staircase to find the two men standing in front of Damian's couch. Damian was trembling with his

hands over the tops of his arms, shutting his eyes closed to not reveal the pain he was currently experiencing.

I was quick to throw the blanket over him, lifting his head to lay the fluffy pillow behind his head. The other pillow I received from Ashley, allowing me to lean it against the arm of the couch in case he needed it. The palm of my hand laid over his forehead, feeling his brow was cold and somewhat dewy.

“Sara, what do you think it is?” Ashley asked behind me.

“A chill?” I suggested. “A flu?”

Taylor joined the conversation with, “a bit too soon for that.”

“You think it’s an allergic reaction?” I piped up.

“What kind of reaction is that?” Taylor sarcastically asked.  
“Sara, did you do anything to him while we were gone?”

Damian groaned aloud with clenched teeth, doing his best to bury the front of his face into the pillow.

“Ben!” I called out. “The tea?”

“He didn’t want it.”

“Only a few minutes ago he said that he wanted it,” I exclaimed. “Are you sure?”

“He won’t open his mouth,” Ben answered back with a raise of his hands. “I’m helpless.”

Taylor knelt on the floor beside me. “Hey, it’s getting dark,” he began. “We should go.”

“I’m not scared of the dark, unlike *him*.” The man I was implying had turned his entire face inside of the pillow, shielding himself from us. “I’m not leaving him this way.”

“But he told us—”

“I know what he said,” I argued back in a firm tone of voice.

Ashley came to the rescue, pulling Taylor aside to give me some space. I heard her arguing with Taylor in a hushed voice, and after a minute she returned to my side to whisper into my

ear, “I’m taking him to the cabin. I’ll come back for you.”

“Okay.”

“My brother is going with him.”

“Thanks.”

“Be back in fifteen,” she assured me, and then rose off the floor to shoo the men out of the room. A few quiet minutes passed by and all I could hear was Damian’s teeth chattering as he trembled under the blanket.

“Damian, I am right here,” I assured him, and smoothed my hand over the whole of his back. “You’ll be okay.”

He was silent next to me, only the frequent chattering sound filled up the room. I let my fingers smooth over the blanket, taking in the intricate design of black and white. I let the tips of my fingers smooth over the bright red thread that captured my attention. My hand smoothed upwards, gliding over his back until I let my fingers slip through his dark curls. They were soft to the touch, sliding through my fingers with ease as I went through the very tips. My fingers dipped downwards to rest over his scalp, massaging his head until his trembling subdued.

A low groan escaped his mouth, while his fingers tensed over the pillow. “Sara,” He breathed out huskily. He turned ever so slowly, and then looked at me in a strangely compelling way. His green eyes looked darker than ever before; lips tightly pursed as he tried to hold something back. I let my hand cup the side of his warm cheek, while waiting for him to open up.

“Damian,” I began. “Tell me what’s bothering you. I can help you.”

A portion of his face flinched, and then he closed his left eye with pain. He tilted his head downwards and then away from me, before he brought up a hand to cover his mouth.

“Damian?”

The trembling of his body gradually stopped, and then he used his arms to raise himself out of the couch. I knew there was something wrong about him; I could sense it, but I couldn't pinpoint my finger on it.

"Do you have a sickness?" I inquired. "A disease that you don't want to tell me about?"

"Something like that," he lied in a hushed tone of voice. "It will come back though." He finally let his eyes rise upwards to rest it over mine. "You should go."

"But will you be alright?"

He lifted a hand to lay it over my shoulder that was closest to him. "I'll be fine," he lied for the second time this evening, and offered me a tight-lipped smile that seemed so false I wouldn't dare believe him. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"Taking care of me."

"Well, I like you," I confessed with uneasiness. "And it was hard seeing you that way. You were shaking so violently."

"I know."

"Is it a condition?"

"Sort of."

"You said it will come back?" He nodded his head gravely, and then looked over his shoulder to see his drapes were closed. He lifted a small portion, taking in the last of the sunlight that reflected off the leaves of the trees. "Why does it come back?"

"I don't know," he grievously replied. "It is getting late, you should leave."

"Ashley is coming to pick me up."

"Your friends ... what will they think of me?"

"You were sick, everyone could see that." I rubbed a hand over his upper back. "You shouldn't live alone if you have a condition

like that,” Damian pouted at my words, “it’s not safe.”

“It wouldn’t be safe for someone to live with me,” he noted with a lowered eyebrow. “Believe me, it is better this way.”

“You caused no harm to anyone,” I pointed out. “It would be better that someone stays with you. Damian? I hope you don’t take this the wrong way but ... I could stay with you, if you’d like.” He turned his head away from me, dismissing the thought instantly. “I never meant sleeping with you,” I clarified. “I only thought someone should stay with you.”

“I’ll be fine,” he uttered from the back of his throat.

“You didn’t look fine.”

He let the right side of his mouth curl upwards with amusement, and then used the palm of his hands to rise from the couch. He looked strong suddenly, an unusual characteristic from only moments before. He stretched out his arms tiredly and then strolled across the living room floor with his hands over the bottom of his woolen sweater. He pried it off his body with ease, tossing it to the ground before he continued his wandering jaunt that led him out of the living room.

I followed him, unnerved by his sudden behaviour, wondering how someone could come down with a sudden chill to shedding off their clothes. Damian walked to the front door in a thin black t-shirt. I heard a deep sigh escape him and sensed that something inside of him had come alive.

*Something isn’t right.*

“Sara, come,” he instructed in a pleasant sort of voice. A hand outstretched towards me, and he waited for me to ardently grasp it. The last of the sunlight made his tanned skin glow in a sunburnt orange shade, his chestnut brown hair illuminated in the flavescent light to cast it in a strange auburn glow. He gazed into my eyes fervently as I stepped beside him, and then moved

to position himself in front of me.

Damian let my hand go to rub the tips of his fingers up the length of my arm, going upwards as he felt the soft material of my sweater. His gaze wavered away from my pale blue eyes and onto the brightness of my loose curls of ginger hair. Damian focused on my lips next, leaving his focus there for a long time. I could sense what he wanted then, and only waited for him to pursue it.

“I feel ... *different*,” he uttered from the back of his throat.

“I can tell,” I mouthed out slowly, knowing he was watching my lips move attentively.

“Did you know?” he said rather seductively. “It’s supposed to be a full moon tonight.”

“On Halloween weekend, how appropriate,” I teased.

He leaned forward with his gaze hardened over mine. Damian was timid before, maybe even nervous, but now I could sense his confidence rising. A heavy hand was laid over my cheek, a harsh stroking of his thumb over my skin as he continued to gaze into my eyes. “I want to kiss you,” he exclaimed confidently. “Will you let me?”

He saw the answer in my eyes, and instantly leaned forward to press his lips hard over mine. I took it gratefully, liking how fierce it was, as if I was seeing a side to him that was hidden until now. His left hand hooked itself around me, laying over my lower spine to push my body into him more. Damian’s lips were greedy, kissing me with energy that felt almost like a dream. His right hand smoothed over my cheek to lay itself against the back of my head, holding me in, so he could kiss me even more. I rubbed my hands wishfully over his upper back, hoping he wouldn’t stop anytime soon.

The faint sound of a car engine rushed through the air, carried

by the cold autumn wind, an unwelcome sign that my friend was about to return. Damian parted his lips from mine but maintained a tight rein around my lower back, offering me a look to show he had no intention of letting me go. He smiled at me with pride, letting unknown lines crease over his cheeks. It was the first time I saw him truly smile, though I felt there was something sinister about it as well.

“Will I see you tomorrow?” he asked in a clear tone of voice.

“Yes.”

“After your trail walk,” he suggested, “come over.”

“Okay.”

He narrowed his eyes at me, looking like he wanted to kiss me again. “You ever feel like you get the most energy at night?” he suddenly exclaimed. “Like your body was asleep the entire day, and then you get this sudden rush of energy?”

“Not really.”

“I get that sometimes,” he deliberated aloud. “I feel it now.”

“Damian, you’re odd.”

“I guess,” he laughed lightly, “maybe.” He let his hands slip around my hips, trailing over the last of my figure before he let me go. “Your friend is here, and it is late.”

“Will that thing happen to you again?”

“If it does, I’ll be fine,” he assured me. “Really.”

“It was scary.”

“It comes every now and then … the fits.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know.” He stepped around me, only stopping once he stood outside of his front door. “I’m feeling overheated so I’m going to take a shower.”

“Hot?”

“Yeah.”

“But you were cold.”

“I know.”

“Damian, there is something wrong with you.”

He lowered his head, letting it fall over the carved lines over the front doorway of his house. “No,” he breathed out. “No, I’ve never felt better.” He stepped over his threshold and let his hand rest over the corner of the door. “Goodnight, Sara.”

“Damian?”

“Goodnight,” he repeated in a mystifying voice, and then closed the door between us.

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“So, you are telling me he went from that shaking fit to being fine again?” Ashley turned on her high beams, wanting to see the gravel road better. “But he looked so sick!”

“He said he gets those shaking fits every now and then.”

“It was scary,” Ashley proclaimed. “Like something out of a movie.”

“I know, but apparently it’s a condition.”

“He’s a real nutter!” My friend laughed aloud, thoroughly amused by the news I relayed to her. “And here I am stressing about you and him. So, he’s fine?”

“He looked healthy when I left him,” I assured her. “Too healthy.”

“What do you mean?”

“He was talking about having a sudden surge of energy,” I explained as I scratched at the top of my head. “Watch that pothole!”

Ashley managed to evade it, though she was less than pleased by the state of the road. “I swear they want me to get a flat tire,” she grunted.

“Anyways, he had all this energy. He was different, you

know.”

“No.”

“It’s an expression,” I clarified, “like he suddenly became confident and took charge of the situation.”

“He finally kissed you.”

“He threw rationale into the wind and just went in.”

“Yeah, but it makes you wonder why he was holding back for so long.”

“I guess he got his heart broken,” I suggested, as Ashley pulled up to our cabin. “What else could it be?”

“He has a secret wife locked away somewhere.”

“No.”

She cracked open the door and slipped out the car, striding towards our front door confidently. A blackened sky hung over us now, the bright lights of the stars was a sure sign that night had finally fallen upon us. “You think we should visit the boys before we turn in?”

“I’m sure they want some alone time,” I assured her. “You know how Taylor is.”

“Super affectionate,” she laughed as she thrust the key into the lock. We entered the small cabin, prying off our shoes to slowly make our way into the small living space. It was tiny, a meagre couch that could barely fit the two of us together. I opted for sitting on the edge of my bed, allowing my friend to have the whole couch to herself. I sniffled into the air, taken back by the coldness of the cabin. There was no television present and no Wi-Fi, so my mind suddenly became stumped on what to do next.

“He is weird though,” I suddenly rapped out. “Damian.”

“Yeah.”

“Like he is hiding something.”

“You think?”

“Does he strike you as the kind of guy that goes hunting?”

“Not really.”

“That’s what I thought too.” I hopped off the bed and went over to my small bag of belongings. “He’s got this huge gun case in his back seat and a hunting knife.”

“Maybe he does hunt,” my friend offered.

“I know he fishes, since he asked me to do it tomorrow.”

“How romantic,” Ashley teased, which made me roll my eyes at her. “A fishing date.”

“He’s country folk,” I taunted back, which made Ashley burst out in laughter. “Okay, I admit that would be a pretty bad date.”

“Well you would be stuck on the boat with him for hours so ...”

“Oh, don’t get any ideas!”

“When’s the last time you got fucked Sara?”

“Mind your fucking business,” I argued back, ignoring her laughter as I strode over to the bathroom with my pyjamas in hand. “And I’m not answering your question.”

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The bath was just as soothing as I imagined it to be, tiny rose petals flaked off the bath bomb to go fluttering over the glossy water. I leaned my head against the tiled wall and breathed in deeply, feeling like I could finally unwind after a long day. It was difficult though, I kept picturing the way Damian was violently shaking, it left me feeling uneasy about the whole situation.

A knock on the door was a blessed relief. I turned my head to the right only to see the corner of the wall obstructing my view.  
“Yes?”

“I have the wine ready for you,” Ashley called out from the other side of the doorway. “And he gave us this nice tasting

baguette.”

“Oh?” I mouthed out with surprise.

“It is really fresh! He must have bought it recently. Do you think he baked it?”

“I don’t know.”

“It’s really good,” Ashley said with a stuffed mouth. I nearly chuckled at her, knowing she was probably eating it on the other side of the door. “Enjoy your bath!” she called out, and then she left me to my own musings.

*That was nice of him, I thought. He obviously likes me.*

My wet hand rested over the top of my mouth, sliding across my bottom lip. *God, I haven’t been kissed like that in a while.*

There was another knock on the door, which made me laugh in good humour. “Yes?”

“He brought us ham.”

“Okay?”

“Like the good kind,” Ashley exclaimed with happiness. “And cheese!”

“Okay,” I chuckled, for I found her so amusing.

“You told me Damian only brought us snacks.” I rolled my eyes and decided it was best to get out of the tub, seeing I would not have a moment to relax anytime soon. “This isn’t snacks, Sara!”

“That is what he told me,” I fought back as I began to towel myself off.

“Snacks are chips and candy.” I couldn’t help but laugh at my friend’s statement. “You think Damian is rich? I mean, he is old enough.”

“I don’t know.”

“What if this is all a disguise, you know, and he is sitting on a wad of cash.”

“I don’t know.”

“It would make sense.”

I attempted to look in the mirror, but it was too foggy from the heat. My bathrobe was thrown on instead, and with some reluctance I propped open the door. “Yes, I am here,” I sighed out, since Ashley had no intention of leaving me alone tonight.

“That was fast.” I strode past her to get to my rucksack bag, zipping up a small flap to unearth some body cream.

“Have you seen all the stuff he gave us?”

“Yeah,” I drawled out listlessly.

“Damian likes you, Sara.”

“I can tell,” Ashley lightly laughed to cover up her nerves.

“I mean, *really* likes you,” she said with extra emphasis. “Who cares if he is a little weird, I say this one is a keeper.” She picked up the bottle of wine and strode towards me, ignoring the fact that I was applying the cream to my legs. “Look!”

“Wine.”

“Yes, wine.” She shook her head at me. “You see this! It cost money, and I mean a lot of money.”

“Alright,” I giggled with my hand over the front of my mouth.

“And he gives it to you willingly, and he isn’t even here to share it.” Ashley placed the bottle down on the bed stand and took a hold of my hand. “Listen to me! You can go on a trail walk any day.”

“Ashley,” I groaned in a dangerously deep tone of voice.

“Let me stay with the boys!” she shouted out. “I want you to have some fun.”

“But you’re my friends.”

“Look!” She pointed at the things Damian had gifted me. “What kind of guy does this on day one?”

*She has a point.*

“It is not even twenty-four hours yet,” Ashley said with glee.  
“Think about it!”

I turned my head away from her to cover my quick eye roll. “Okay,” was muttered from the corner of my mouth. I knew Ashley had to have her own way. She was the type of person with a Type A personality, a desire to control every feature of people’s lives, and quite frankly I did not have the strength to fight her on this one today.

“You like him,” Ashley gently reminded me with a gentle squeeze over my hand. “And you said the making out bit was hot, right?”

“Yeah.”

She tilted her head at me and it was enough to get me to submit to her whims.

“I swear it’s like pulling teeth with you.” She grabbed a hold of the wine bottle and settled it somewhere safer. “Join me at the table,” she suggested, and then pointed at an empty paper plate where she laid out food for me. “It’s a feast, Sara! As if you didn’t have enough with that big slab of salmon.”

“You saw that, did you?”

“It was bigger than his,” she pointed out with disbelief. Ashley appeared happy once I sat down beside her, offering me a tall glass of wine in celebration. “Who knew what bright blue eyes and gorgeous red hair would do to a man?”

“You are one to talk.”

“Why thank you,” she teased, and tossed out her long, brown hair with newly dyed golden highlights to prove a point. “But clearly I have no effect on Damian.”

“He isn’t even your type!” I yelled back. “You can’t have them all.”

“Nope,” she mouthed over the rim of her glass. “Tell me what

you think of the wine.”

“Alright.”

Ashley kept a careful eye on me as I sipped on the dark substance. I let it slide over my tongue to feel the weight of it at the back of my mouth. “A bit tart,” I unexpectedly pointed out. “Has a sweet fruity taste to it as well.”

“Pomegranate?” my friend guessed. “It isn’t bad though.”

“It’s seductive,” I teased with an arched eyebrow. “I think Damian is trying to tell me something.” We both laughed at that, and then set aside our glasses to try the food as well.

We were well into our meals when Ashley gave me some unexpected news. “You know how I suggested you don’t look this place up online?”

“Yes.”

“I did it for a reason.”

“Go on,” I urged her with a stuffed mouth.

She nibbled on the end of her bread, deliberating something in her mind before she swallowed it down with a cautious air about her. “This place is known for having gruesome deaths.”

“This is a joke.”

“No.”

“You’re joking.”

“No.”

I laid my food aside and carefully looked at her. “What kind of gruesome deaths?”

“There is this running joke that its bigfoot, but it’s not.”

“Go on.”

“People are basically mauled to death.”

“And you took me here because ...”

“It won’t happen to us,” she said with energy. “As long as we don’t go outside.”

“I don’t understand you! Why would you bring me here?”

“Because it’s Halloween, Sara!” She used her hand to lightly push me away from her. “What is better than that?”

“So, my life is in danger?”

“We are safe here.”

“Yeah, but ...” I heard a howl coming from outside our cabin, a distant one that was eerie as well as thrilling to behold. “Wolves.”

“Wolf,” she corrected me. “That was one howl.”

“Damian said there were *wolves*.”

“Oh,” she mouthed with a guilty look.

The two of us became rather nervous, neither of us holding eye contact for very long. “You took me to a place where people get mauled to death,” I reminded her. “I’ll never forgive you for this.”

She offered me a sheepish grin, all too happy to see me in an irritated mood.

“So, you want to go outside and check it out?”

“I’ll let you go out, and then *lock* the door behind you,” I warned.

“It could be fun.”

“You’re an idiot,” I realized. “Taking me all the way out here and—”

“You said you wanted to go camping!” she quickly interrupted.

“Yeah, and not get attacked by some wild animals.” Another howl sounded through the forest, but luckily it was far enough to not have me worried. “I like being in nature, it’s all I’ve ever known growing up. You know how sad I am to be so far from home, so you know how much this means to me.” Ashley sighed, realizing how truly angry I was at her. “Is this why you were so

determined to stay here when Damian told us to leave? There was more to this story than you led on! Is your brother in the loop too?"

"A little."

I shook my head at her and then raised up my glass of wine. "I can't believe you."

"It doesn't happen that often," she complained. "Only in the woods, and we aren't in the woods, are we?"

"No."

"We are safely tucked away in our cabin, so there is nothing to worry about." Another howl sounded after her statement, a different kind that we weren't used to. "I think there are two of them."

"Eat your food," I ordered. "Leave no trace of the food and then bed. You remember those claw marks on Damian's door? I'm not letting that happen to us."

"We can stay at his place if you'd like," she teased, and I never felt more of an urge to slap her as I did now. "Okay, I will stop talking. Geez, you should see the look in your eyes."

"You know I don't like scary things."

"Yeah, yeah."

"You know this," I emphasized with a shrill to my voice.

"You and your fairy tales," she deeply sighed out, and then excused herself to go to the washroom.

*I like my fairy tales, I thought, although she does have a point.*

\*\*\*

Damian was at his back porch with a hot mug resting in the palm of his hands. He had spotted me long before I had the chance to observe him standing on his back porch I was strolling down the steep gravel road, and now that I was near the back of his house, Damian called out my name.

“Morning, Sara!” he yelled out in an agreeable voice.  
“Morning!”

I skipped over a few large rocks and trailed over the high grass that was just outside of his property. I smiled up at him, liking the tight-fitting grey Henley shirt that stretched out over his lean, muscular frame. He took his time watching me, wearing a lazy smile until I was standing underneath his porch.

“Hello,” Damian piped up in a soothing voice.

“You are looking better,” I observed with a quick point of a finger in his direction.

His lips twitched upwards for a moment. “I feel better,” he assured me, with something strange and mysterious lying behind the darkest regions of his fern green eyes.

There was an exchange of looks between us, and I felt a strange sensation traveling down the center of my spine. Damian slunk off the wooden porch and laid his mug down on the ground. A strong hand pushed himself upwards and soon he was standing on the wooden banister only to drop down onto the ground. I gasped when he landed, surprised at his agility to land on his own two feet. I ran over to him to make sure he was okay, but he hardly seemed bothered by the staggering drop.

“That wasn’t safe,” I chided the second I laid a hand over the front of his chest.

“I’m fine.”

“You could have killed yourself.”

“I told you I’m fine,” he laughed, clearly enamored by my display of concern. “I’ve done this kind of thing before.”

“Hop off your back porch?”

“No, but I did a lot of mountain climbing when I was younger.” He smiled at me beautifully and then took a hold of my chin to prop it upwards. Lips were heavily crushed against mine, tasting

me this morning with all his delight. I slipped my arms around him, enthralled by the way he was kissing me so deeply as if he couldn't get enough. "Wow," he uttered after a moment, once he broke our lips apart.

"What?"

"The feeling I get with you," he simply replied, before he leaned forward to seal our lips together again. His kisses were not hurried like most of the men I had kissed before, it was slow and steady, as if Damian intended to treasure every kiss he gave to me. Perhaps it was because of his age, for he was in fact older than most of the men I had previously dated. Damian drew his mouth away after a few moments, and then let out a long exhale.

"When is your walk with your friends?"

"I was hoping you could take me on some of your favourite trails instead?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you," I exclaimed with a twinge of a smirk. "If you are free."

He nodded his head eagerly. "I'll be free."

"Have you had breakfast yet?"

"You saw me have it," he earnestly replied after he dropped his arms away from me. "My cup of coffee."

"That isn't breakfast."

"How about you come inside, and I'll make something for you?"

"Only if you eat it too."

"Sure," he half-teased, before he pecked his lips against the tip of my nose. "You look so cozy in that scarf," he noted, and then let his fingers trail over the soft fabric of a light azure blue. "What material is it?"

"Wool and cashmere."

“Warm,” he noted. “Good, you will need it on our walk.”

He took a hold of my hand to lead me around the house, taking the high road where the grass was unruly to my secret delight. “It’s not supposed to be cold today.”

“Yes, but it is windy in some parts of the forest. I want to take you to the waterfall.”

“Waterfall?”

“You’ll like it,” he assured me. “If it wasn’t so cold, I would suggest a swim, but it is not summer anymore.”

“Too bad.”

He smiled at me kind-heartedly. “I’m sure we will find our own sort of trouble,” Damian assured me before he stopped in his tracks. “Wait here.” He hopped down a large drop, landing in a dry patch of dirt, sending dust in the air everywhere. Two arms were stretched out to catch me, so I eagerly leapt into them. Damian caught me as I expected and then settled me down with a feeble attempt of containing his grin. “There we are,” he observed once I stood before him, and before I even had time to react, he laid his lips over mine again. His kisses were quicker this time, eager, reminding of those blissful moments when everything felt new. It was my turn to break our lips away, needing a moment to at least catch my breath. Damian leaned into me again, but I tilted my head away and asked him to wait.

“What’s the matter?”

“I can’t keep up.”

“Oh.”

“I like it though,” I shyly confessed. “You’re a good kisser.”

He smirked at me fiendishly, and then darted his eyes away to hold back a secret thought. “Hmm ... so I’ve been told,” he taunted in a silky voice, before he stepped away. “Breakfast?”

“Sure.”

He held my hand tightly, letting it swing in between us in a playful manner. It was like night and day with him, and I wasn't sure what brought on this cheerful mood. Damian's frigid mannerisms reverted to its normal state once he caught sight of the front door, and then everything became fresh for him again. His voice cracked when he uttered, "How did you sleep last night?"

"It was okay."

Damian fished for his keys, only to realize that it was not in his pant pocket. "I might have to go back around."

"Why?"

"The front door is locked."

"You don't have the key?"

"No," he groaned, and then closed his eyes with regret. "I should have gone through the front like I intended too."

"Showing off?"

"A little," he confessed with a shrug of his right shoulder.

I pecked him on his cheek with my lips, somewhat happy to hear his small confession. "Can you climb back up on the patio, Damian?"

"Would you believe me if I say that I can?"

"I believe you."

"Wait here for a few minutes," he asked of me, and then quickly retraced his steps to make his way to the porch at the very back of his house.

*You would think he is a gymnast, I thought, remembering how far he dropped down just to be with me. Ashley was right, he really does like me.*

I smiled at that secret thought, feeling a strange fluttering at the bottom of my stomach. It wasn't until I idly looked down at my feet that I noticed a set of footprints leading up to the front

of his house, soft brown spots that were chalked over from the dusty earth. I crouched down lower, finding it odd that it was clearly defined footprints.

*He walks around barefoot, I wondered, but it didn't make sense. Why would he walk around without his shoes?*

I tried to follow the footsteps, but it became lost once I got to the bottom of the short staircase, blending in with the rest of the dusty earth that settled over the hill where Damian's house was positioned. The creaking of a door caught my attention and I looked upwards to see Damian watching me attentively.

“Everything alright down there?”

“I was looking at footprints,” I told him. “Not many squirrels around here,” I said as an excuse, to lead him astray.

“No, not really. You will see them once we get into the forest.” Damian widened the front door, wondering why I was not making any effort to come inside of his house.

“Hey!” I called out nervously. “You walk around barefoot sometimes?”

“Umm ...” I could not help but swallow hard at the awkward pause, noticing how he was having trouble looking in my direction. “Sometimes, why?”

“I saw footprints leading up to your place.”

“Oh, yeah. I must have done that.”

“Why?”

“Probably to get something from my truck,” he replied in a smooth tone of voice. “I’m going to start breakfast.”

“Alright, I’m coming.”

“Close the door behind you, alright?”

“Alright.”

I took one last look at the footprints, finding it rather odd, before I retreated to the front door of his house. I stared over

the horizon, taking in the morning sun that shines over the top of the trees to where I stood. It was a beautiful morning and I would spend it with Damian, a thought that made my heart glad, but still a part of me felt that something wasn't quite right about him.

# 3

## The Lone Wolf

There was a single toothbrush in the plastic white cup, a confident sign that Ashley's suspicions of a secret wife were false. I nervously combed my fingers through my hair, doing my best to shake the uneasy feeling that something was wrong. There was a dull white shelf behind me with a full shelf of bleach, enough to make me question whether Damian had OCD. Another warning sign was the scent, it was musky and damp like the forest floor, but I couldn't see anything that would bring about that keen fragrance. I pushed back the grey shower curtains, seeing a ring around the tub to show he must have recently taken a shower.

*That's pretty fucked up, I thought, seeing the amount of grass and small grinds of dirt settled over the ring.*

*Did he go out this morning? How did he managed to get himself so dirty?*

A clanging of dishes sounded outside of the bathroom, reminding me that I had stayed in this room for far too long. I was just about to leave when I noticed a large red first-aid kit shoved underneath the sink, making me bend down to investigate the

matter. He had an excessive number of linen bandages at the top. When I moved the items downwards, I observed a full box of plastic blue gloves had been ripped open with force.

I shut the case closed, and abruptly stood to my feet, pressing on the corner of the bathroom mirror to pry it open. There were containers of headache medicine there, but the thing that caught my attention the most was the small container of antidepressants.

*Poor Damian, I thought, as I lifted the jar to look at the fine print. He is worse off than I thought he was.*

Guilt overwhelmed me to the point that I put the container back and left the bathroom as quietly as I had entered it.

Damian was nowhere to be found, but the sound of boiling water brought me into his kitchen. Six eggs bubbled to the top, bouncing up and down as Damian had set the water in the steel grey pot to boil. I noticed an open bag that contained freshly made bread with blue printing on the front cover, a small detail that let me know he purchased it from a local bakery. I let my eyes glance over his clean looking kitchen, taking note of the hanging knives he left on display over the white tiled wall.

Thirsty, I turned on the tap to fill up my glass with water. I examined the foggy water, and then poured it down the drain, thinking it was best to have filtered water since we were so far up north. Damian was nowhere in sight, so I went over to his fridge and propped it open.

“What the hell?” I mumbled, startled by the shelves of fresh meat that lined the entire fridge. “He’s like an animal,” I mouthed under my breath, noticing how this wasn’t just your standard meat. It was hunting meat; entire jugs of red meat that were cut into large slabs that were two times bigger than the palm of my hand. I bent down to see the labels Damian scrawled

over the front of the plastic containers. *Deer. Moose.*

“There’s some fish in there too,” a deep voice said behind me, making me startle so much that I lost my balance and fell at his feet. “You alright?” Damian laughed, as he gently lifted me up off the floor. “It’s just meat.”

“You have so much!”

“I live out here alone,” he reminded me.

“It could feed a family of four,” I pointed out. “Maybe even more than that.”

He let his hand rest over the top of the fridge, offering me a smile that did not reach his eyes. I felt unnerved under his relentless gaze and thought it best to take a step back. “I suppose,” He deliberated aloud, and made a show to close the fridge door for good.

“You don’t eat human ...” I licked my lips nervously. “I mean ...”

“You think I’m a cannibal?” he stated with a hint of cynicism.

“It’s just ... that’s a lot of meat.”

“Hunting meat,” he clarified. “Not human body parts.”

“It was just a question,” I rapped out nervously. “It reminded me of Hannibal, you know.”

Damian pursed his lips at me, hardly amused by my statement. “I’m *not* Hannibal.” He drew himself away from the fridge and took to the bag of bread where he stealthily pulled out the delicious looking loaf.

“I have an overactive imagination,” I tried to explain. “I’m sorry.”

“It is forgotten,” he lied, as he reached for a long bread knife.

“Do you need any help?”

“No.”

“I messed up,” I admitted aloud. “I wasn’t thinking straight.”

"It is not every day that you see tubs of meat in people's fridge," he reminded me.

"Yeah, there is a lot in there." I stepped beside him, watching his large hands adjust the loaf of bread over the withered brown cutting board. "I would have put half of that meat in the freezer, so it doesn't go bad. You hunt then?"

"I like to hunt," he admitted, after he let the knife slip over a portion of the bread. "It is not exactly safe doing it alone, so often times I buy the meat from local hunters around here."

"But you fish?"

"I like to fish," he admitted. "I'm trying to learn to live off the land." He tilted his head in my direction, locking eyes with me for the first time in a while. "We're on native land, did you know that?"

"I didn't."

"I used to work with someone here that was Indigenous," he explained. "He taught me a lot about hunting and fishing." Damian smiled as memories came back to him. "How to forage for food; eat the right mushrooms and berries." He let the knife be placed over the bread again. "To be independent."

"And that is why you can live out here alone?" I pondered aloud with a slow nod of my head in understanding.

"Yes," Damian quipped with a steady gaze on my person. He lifted a sliver of bread and let it hover in front of my chest. "Try it?"

"You didn't bake it?"

"Unfortunately, no." I took the peace offering he gave me and let it slip inside of my mouth, smiling at him agreeably as I enjoyed the soft bread. "You like it?"

I nodded my head, since my mouth was currently full of food. "They have a bakery in a village closest to us," he informed me.

“It is where I bought that baguette that I gave you yesterday.” He resumed the cutting of his bread with a steady hand. “And there is a deli in the village too. That is where I picked up the cheese and ham.”

“You couldn’t use the meat in the fridge,” I teased.

“There are no boars running around,” he snarled out with resentment. “I only wish that was the case.” He licked his bottom lip greedily, eyes darkening with desire. “This habitat isn’t designed for such creatures.”

“It wouldn’t last a day,” I teased, after I leaned against the countertop to see the front of his face. He was handsome, and a part of me wanted to kiss him. I squinted my eyes at him playfully, knowing he could feel my arresting gaze.

“Night,” Damian clarified under his breath, and then laid the knife down on the table. “You didn’t go outside ...”

“I stayed indoors,” I interrupted him quickly, so he would not have any cause to worry about me.

“Alright,” Damian softly replied. “Are your friends staying here for the whole weekend or ...”

“We leave Sunday.”

“So, I will have you around for a little bit,” he piped up excitedly. A hand was placed over the side of my arm, and then he took a moment to look deeply into my eyes. A twitch of his lips went upwards, before he forced it to fall back in place.

“Only for the weekend though.”

“Right,” he said in a depressing way. “I wasn’t thinking that far ahead yet.”

“Would you ever come into the city?”

“I’m a caretaker here,” he reminded me. “I can’t ever leave.”

“I could come up one weekend,” I suggested. “Rent a cabin ...”

His eyes darkened at the statement, since both of us sensed that was not needed. “Free of charge,” he slyly relayed with a tightened grip over my arm.

He pulled me over to him, bringing me dead center in front of his chest before he placed heavy lips over mine. He kissed me without reserve, overpowering me in a way that was full of aggression. Hands clasped over the back of my shoulders to keep me close, nails nearly barring itself into my skin as he took more of me in. I was left frozen by his touch, caught off guard by the headiness of his kisses that overpowered my own.

He was moving me backwards, gently urging me in that direction until I bumped into his kitchen chair. Damian released me, finally; watching my chest heave with amazement as I tried to catch my breath.

*It's like he had the strength of a man that is two times his size.*

Damian continued to watch me, taking in my open mouth that was desperately trying to catch my breath. His right hand fell off my shoulder, and then cupped the side of my cheek possessively. “Are you alright?”

I nodded my head at him while instinctively leaning a hand over his chest to prevent him from kissing me again.

Damian looked down at my hand that had applied pressure to the top portion of his chest. “Sara,” he hushed in a soft voice. “Was it too much?”

“Not really,” I lied. “It was intense.”

“I’m not one to shy away from my feelings,” he assured me. Damian’s hand glided away from my cheek and dipped inside of my hair, letting it get lost in the red glow of shiny hair that fell down my back. “Especially when I know what I want.”

“What do you want?” I carefully asked him, which immediately brought a smirk to his face.

“I am staring right at it,” he confidentially told me. “If you didn’t know already.”

I lowered my head to reflect over his words. “You’re so sure of it?”

“Never more so, than now.” He took a step back, and then turned around to turn off the stove. Damian went over to the fridge to lift up a small container, taking out freshly made cheese and ham that looked like the last of the package. “Have a seat,” he instructed, and quietly prepared our breakfast with his back to me. I took in the only painting I’ve seen in his house so far, a scenic forest with a large river in the center of it. It was peaceful, and I thought it reflected Damian’s personality well.

He approached the table with a bowl full of eggs and then turned around to retrieve more things. A container of freshly made coffee was next, an alluring aroma that made me wake up a little more. Damian kindly set the sugar container closest to me, and the cream on the other side. “Let me get a few more things,” he suggested, only to return to the table with a plate nicely decorated with cheese and ham. “Oh, what did you think of the wine?”

“I liked it.”

“A bit different, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Raw,” he unexpectedly said. “Full-bodied flavour.”

“Yes,” I agreed with him.

He let his finger stroke up and down his chest, trying to hold back something he was dying to reveal to me. “I like it with my dinner,” he quietly revealed, though I felt he was going to say something else. “You should join me for dinner sometime.”

“I did last night.”

“Just the two of us,” he clarified with a meaningful look.

“Oh.”

“But your friends might be insulted.” His mouth crooked upwards with amusement as he stroked his fingers deeper into his Henley shirt, revealing the toned chest that laid underneath the smooth fabric. A lustful look escaped him, one that he couldn’t keep under control. “Umm ...” he nervously laughed and then pulled out a chair, deciding to keep that thought to himself as well.

“What were you going to say?”

“Tonight,” he awkwardly relayed. “Would that work?”

“What are you cooking?”

He looked behind him, staring at the closed fridge. “You’re not a vegetarian, are you?”

“I wouldn’t be sitting at the table with you if I was,” I retorted with a most wicked smirk. “I’d be running out the door as fast as I could.”

“Because of the meat in the fridge,” he knowingly replied.

“You are like an animal, Damian.” His face darkened at that, significantly wounded by my words. “I was only teasing you.”

“There is nothing wrong with being an animal,” he muttered in a low tone of voice.

“I never ...” Damian grabbed hold of a boiled egg and harshly slammed it against the side of the bowl. “Damian?”

“What?”

“I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“I know you didn’t mean it,” he lied through barely parted lips. His bottom jaw jutted to the right, and then his eyes darkened with anger.

“It was a joke.”

“But I’m not laughing, am I?” he sneered.

“Fine.” I responded, deflated. He darted his gaze towards me,

realizing I was at a loss of words. “I’ll keep my mouth shut from now on.”

“You make me feel like a savage,” he admitted aloud. “And I’m not.”

“I know you aren’t.”

Damian broke apart the eggshell with his hands, tossing it to the corner of his plate before he set it down neatly. I felt like there were two conflicting gestures to him; the neat and orderly kind, and then the one that was wild and unruly.

I reached for a loaf of bread, piling the cheese and ham over it with some relief. Damian’s food was thankfully good, much better than what my friends were supposed to be making this morning.

Damian’s voice was unexpectedly sharp when he asked, “are you going to keep bringing up the meat in the fridge?”

“What? No!” Damian had abandoned his food to simply glare at me. “I’ve forgotten all about it.”

He dropped his gaze, believing my words enough to continue with his breakfast.

My voice was rather shaky as I inquired, “did you have another fit again?”

“Last night?”

“Yes.”

“A little,” he replied in a low tone of voice. “The shower helped.”

“You took one this morning too?”

“I did, why?” He looked down at his grey shirt. “I smell?”

“No, Damian,” I nearly laughed.

“I like to go on long walks outside,” he informed me. “But when I come back I smell like the forest.”

“I know.” I was hovering my spoon over my cup of coffee as I

questioned him, “you went out this morning?”

“Sort of.”

“Sort of?” I questioned Damian while squinting at him.

“Not far.”

“Oh.” He noticed how determined I was in my stare, not fully believing the lie he cleverly gave me. “I *know* you went for a walk, Damian.”

He smiled at me cunningly, letting an eyebrow arch upwards.  
“Watching me, sweetie?”

I blushed at the sudden nickname, not sure what it implied.  
“No.”

“How do you know?”

“I just know.”

He nodded his head carefully, looking a bit uneasy about my confession. “There was sunlight, so I was safe.”

“I already know you are scared of the dark.”

“You would be too, if you knew what was out there.”

I dropped the spoon into my coffee cup. “And what is out there?”

He smirked at me, an evil one at that. “Things you only want to see in your nightmares.”

“You don’t know my nightmares.”

“Stay here long enough ...”

“What?”

“Let’s just say, there is a *reason* I am the only one able to survive out here alone,” he darkly replied, and then covered up anything else he wanted to add by stuffing a piece of ham into his mouth.

Less than an hour later we were hiking through the forestry. Damian was taking the lead, almost behaving like a tour guide as he shared interesting information about the wildlife that lived

throughout Blackthorn Campground. There was a passion to his voice, an energy that was felt with every gesture and look. He had become a changed man, as if the beauties of nature had stirred something deep inside him.

Damian's steps were light and confident as he walked up the dusty brown trail. I trailed close behind him, enjoying the deep sonorous sound to his voice and the cool autumn breeze that gently blew against my face. I felt an overwhelming sense of peace here, and by the happy glow of Damian's face, I knew he shared a similar feeling.

"In my past life I was an accountant," he explained, "but life took a new turn and I wound up here."

We were trailing over a smooth pathway, a sharp contrast to the one we would eventually find in the woods. "But I like this job," he admitted. "It is peaceful here ... quiet."

"Lonely though."

"At times," he confessed. "Sometimes I think I'm going to go mad," he laughed as he rested his hand over his gun strap. "But I think it's natural considering the circumstances."

I unzipped my outer jacket, aware of how overheated I was becoming because of the harshness of the sun. Damian's eyes followed my movements, and soon he did the same to his black coat. "Give me a sec," I begged of him, stopping in my tracks to pull down his borrowed backpack to stuff my fluffy toque and scarf inside of it. "I'm overdressed."

"It was cooler earlier," he noted, as his eyes watched a chipmunk that scuttled across the narrow pathway. "It will get hotter by noon."

"Oh."

"I tend to take naps during that time."

"Such luxury."

“I have trouble sleeping at night,” he admitted with a lost look about him. “It’s the nightmares,” Damian lightly teased, before he undid his scarf and handed it to me. “Do me a favour and stick this in the bag as well.”

“Sure.”

“Thanks.” He bent down and pulled out his reusable water bottle from the side pouch of the bag and took a deep mouthful. “We can fill this up by the river.”

“Is it safe?”

“Perfectly safe,” he assured me, before handing me the bottle. “Try it?”

“You took it from the river?”

“No, I want you to compare the two,” he explained. “Taste the difference.”

I took a sip, and then another one since Damian was keenly watching me. A small shrug of his shoulders was his sole answer before I handed the water back to him.

“You’re beautiful,” he said out of the blue.

“Thanks?” I said with pure confusion, wondering where this all came from.

“Yeah.” He rose to his feet, and then let out a long exhale as he looked down the far distant path. “We should keep moving.”

“I’m not tired,” I assured him, after I pulled the backpack over my shoulders. “Let’s go.”

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By the time we climbed up the first set of hills I was exhausted and pulled on Damian’s sleeve to get him to stop. “I can’t.”

“Tired?”

“Let me take a breather.”

He smiled at me kindly, and then motioned for me to turn around to pull something out of the backpack. A small hand

sewn blanket of red and white was unearthed from the bottom of the bag and he laid it out neatly on a rough patch of grass. Damian took a seat first, letting his eyes hover over the tops of the trees. “Not much of a view here.”

“I know you wanted to take me to the falls.”

“You aren’t used to this,” he surmised. “But this is my life.” He closed his eyes to breathe in the air, letting the cold autumn breeze tousle through his dark curly hair. The stubble along his jawline was darker this morning; shaving was completely off the table as of now, not unless I had something to say about it. Damian looked divinely peaceful, so I decided to hold my tongue and reach for our shared water bottle instead. “Focus.”

“On what?”

“Everything,” he breathed once he opened his eyes. “On this moment.”

I looked around in a taunting manner, knowing he would not like it one bit.

“Really take it in,” he entreated.

“You’re a hippie, Damian.”

“I’m not a hippie.”

“Take it in,” I repeated with a naughty grin. “What am I supposed to take in?”

“The scent of the earth,” he told me as he pointed at the wild grass in front of our shoes. “The distant sound of the waterfall. The eagle that flies through the sky.” He noticed my amused grin, and simply glared at me. “Or be like everyone else and not enjoy it.”

“You belong out here,” I told him. “In the wilderness.”

“It is not like I have a choice,” he admitted to himself, “but I make the most of it.”

I kissed the side of his cheek unexpectedly, but moved back

once I sensed he wanted something more. “Why did you kiss me that way in your kitchen earlier?”

“I don’t understand.”

“It was different from all the other ones before.”

“I told you why ... I know what I want.”

“Yeah, but ...” He batted his eyes at me curiously, uncertain where our conversation was going.

“What are you trying to tell me?”

“It was different,” was the only thing I could stammer out.  
“You were different.”

“If you don’t want me to kiss you then—”

“That’s not what I am trying to say,” I interjected. “I feel like there are different sides to you and I am trying to figure it out. You were meek when I first met you, no, frigid ... cold.” He lowered his gaze as if I wounded him. “And as the evening drew on you became more confident, and now ... I don’t know what to make of you.”

“How you ever thought that maybe I am opening up to you more?”

“You keep changing,” I told him. “It is like there are two of you in there.”

“Two of what?”

“I don’t know.”

Damian closed his eyes with regret, and then lowered his head with grief. I sensed his troubled thoughts, so I lifted a hand to rub it along his upper spine, smoothing it over his shoulders to make him feel better.

“I know what you mean,” he relayed softly.

“It doesn’t bother me. I only wanted to know the reason behind it.” I moved forward so my face was close to his. “And why you kissed me like that in the kitchen.”

A smile escaped him, as if recent memories were suddenly flooding back to him.

“Overpowering me in that way,” I explained. “Dominant.”

“An alpha male,” he chuckled under his breath.

“Yeah, and you aren’t like that.”

He turned his gaze in my direction, letting it sink into my pale blue eyes. “I could be.”

“With that gun attached to your hip I guess you are.”

“It’s used for emergencies.”

“Like what?”

“I already told you outside of my house.”

“What animal can attack us in broad daylight, Damian?”

“It’s more of something happening.” He licked his lips nervously. “I’ll feel safer with the gun on me.”

“How many guns do you have?” I interrogated him. “And knives?”

He swallowed hard, looking nervous suddenly.

“You would never hurt me, would you?” I asked in a trembling voice. “I don’t know you so well, the number of weapons I’ve been seeing is kind of alarming.”

“Protection.”

“From what?”

“These forests are very old, Sara.” He stopped himself, and let his eyes graze over the distant horizon, taking in the tops of the pine trees. “Sacred.”

“For whom?”

“To some people,” he relayed with uneasiness. “I feel safe here, but at the same time I know the dangers that lurk in these forests.” He inched his face closer. “And not even I can protect you from some of them.”

“What are you hiding from me, Damian?” I demanded. “My

friend, Ashley, told me last night that people get mauled to death here. What is it?" Damian had moved his head back, frowning suddenly. "You know something, don't you?"

"I know it's not safe to be here out at night," he told me in a steely voice, "and if people are too stupid to listen to my instructions, I feel *no* pity for them." Damian sharply turned his head to me, wearing a dangerous look that startled me. "Let them die."

"They are human beings."

"They know the dangers here."

"Damian."

He licked the bottom of his lips unexpectedly, and then used the tips of his fingers to partially cover his mouth. "I need water," he said as an excuse, and guzzled half of the bottle down like there was no tomorrow. He sprung up to his feet suddenly, complaining he had to piss and sauntered off into the forest to give himself some space.

*Ashley is right, I reflected. He really is a nutter.*

I seized the quiet moment to investigate his bag, seeing another first-aid kit in a tiny box at the bottom. There was a hunting knife stealthily shielded in a side pocket and a rolled-up piece of linen that was curious.

*If Damian wanted to kill me, he has the right weapons to do it.*

*Damian isn't a murderer though, but how can I be so sure of it?*

*What if he is bipolar,* I thought, but sensed he hadn't displayed such symptoms.

*There was that anti-depressant bottle.*

I closed the bag and pretended I was staring out into the distance once I heard his boots pounding on the solid ground. It had not escaped me that there were no traces of the brown dust on his shoes this morning, unlike the footprints that he left on

the staircase and the small front porch of his house.

*What if he lied to me, I wondered, and he really didn't take a walk this morning?*

*But there was dirt left at the bottom of his bathtub, I remembered, and tried to recall if I saw any footprints throughout his house. He has a mat at the front, I reflected, Damian could have easily dusted off his feet there.*

“Sara,” immediately broke through my thoughts. “You look worried.”

“Do I?”

His voice was full of concern as he emphasized, “yes, you do.”

“Oh.”

“I’m sorry about what happened to those people, but they knew the risks of coming here. In fact, those are the kind of people that go out of their way to look for trouble.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I am usually the one that finds their dead bodies in the morning.” He dropped down to the ground and took a close seat next to me. “All I have to do is look up at the sky and see a ring of vultures and know ...”

“That someone’s been killed.”

“That there is a feast left for them.”

I turned my gaze away from him and let my fingers glide over the front of my hiking shoes. “How often does it happen?”

“Not that often.”

“How often?”

“At least once every month,” he deliberated aloud. “It’s worse in the summer season.”

“So, it’s normal here.”

“Normal enough.”

“They should close this place down,” I deliberated aloud with

lowered eyebrows.

“They’ve been trying too,” Damian assured me. “But this place generates a lot of money, and besides, people flock here when they hear how dangerous it can be.”

“Why do you stay here?”

“It’s my home,” he told me as he raised a hand to reveal the expansive forestry around us.

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Damian had his pants rolled up as he dipped his feet in the cold water. A happy sigh escaped him, before he slid downwards and let his ankles plummet into the frigid water.

I was standing over him, carefully removing my socks and shoes. Damian assured me it was perfectly safe to sit over this cliff, so I took his advice and took a seat right next to him. “This river goes on for miles,” he informed me. “And then it opens up into a lake.”

“Is that where you fish?”

“I do.”

“You seem happier here,” I noted.

There was a slow drawl to his voice as he said, “I feel alive.”

“Like you did last night?”

“Yes.”

“Night owl?”

“I don’t think that is the right word,” he chuckled. “But I guess so.” Damian pulled his feet out of the water and went on his knees in front of me. I was caught off guard by his stare, the desire emitting from his eyes. A hand gently rubbed the side of my jawline, tilting my head forward until I was facing him completely.

He tried to kiss me gently, but I could tell how hard it was to hold back his carnal desire. I tilted my head downwards and

quietly asked for him to wait, slipping my legs out of the icy river until I could sit in front of him. A small breath escaped his open lips with anticipation, only satisfied when my cool blue eyes lifted upwards to settle over his own darkened orbs. Damian bit down on his lip unexpectedly, looking like he was doing his best to hold something back.

"You want to kiss me that way again," I observed aloud, since I could sense his silent thoughts.

"I do," Damian cooed out softly. "And more."

I smiled at him nervously, knowing what he was implying.

"You ever hear what happens to a lone wolf when it meets its mate?"

"No."

"They mate for life," he breathed out softly, and let his hand hover over my shoulder that was furthest from me. "*Life, Sara.*"

I was the first to press my lips against his, making him react in kind to push me hard against the rocky floor. He straddled me suddenly, kissing my lips with a flurry of energy that came out of nowhere. It was irresistible, the pure carnal desire, the strength of animal instincts that wanted to take me as his own. I couldn't even keep up with his kisses, feeling my eyes close with ecstasy the more he squished his face against me. The hairs along his chin and jawline brushed against my face, his hands were clenching the side of my waist and hip as he demanded more from my body.

I tilted my head away to simply catch my breath, feeling his nose and mouth pressed against my cheek as he kissed the hollow concave. I felt so heavily aroused, aware of the burning sensation down below by the way he was touching me. "Damian," escaped my lips before I could hold it back, which made him lift a hand to tilt my head in his direction.

“Yes, love,” he said in a husky voice, low and raspy. He crushed his lips against mine before I had time to respond, while the other hand worked on the zipper of my sweater. I let him zip it downwards, keenly aware of his mouth steadily creeping its way over to my left jawline hitting the most sensitive spots with his lips. I groaned mercifully, knowing even if I wanted to hold it back I couldn’t. My sweater was shed and Damian instantly brought his hand underneath my long sleeve shirt to drag it up my abdomen.

“Damian,” I whispered, aroused by his hot hand gliding over my skin. He brought our lips together again, sealing our fate before I had a chance to change my mind. A hand fisted my shirt to drag it upwards, only stopping so he could part his lips. He dipped his head downwards to get at my freshly exposed skin, letting his tongue dap at the area occasionally between randomly placed kisses.

“You smell so good,” he breathed out, making me think of the rosy bath bomb he offered to me last night. “And taste ...” He paused to bring his face downwards, kissing just over my beltline. “You taste amazing, sweetie,” he uttered in a strangely dark voice.

I swallowed hard, finding Damian’s statement rather odd. I was distracted by the way he was undoing my belt, so I stopped him to grab a hold of his attention. “You never asked!” I yelled out, quite angry at that fact. “Never!”

“I thought.”

“You thought, *what?*”

“The way you looked at me,” he quickly explained. “I thought you wanted to.”

“Do you even have protection?”

“No,” he stammered out, after he moved back to create some

space.

“Geez, Damian!”

“I’m ... I’m sorry,” he stammered out nervously. “I wasn’t thinking.”

“No, you weren’t.”

He went on his knees in front of me, realizing he messed up. “I wasn’t thinking,” he repeated, before he brushed back his messy curls.

“No,” I bellowed out resentfully. “You just *assumed*.”

“I sensed ...” He blinked slowly, noticing how cold I had become towards him. “I thought you wanted it too.”

“We’re not animals, Damian.” He frowned at my words. “We have to talk about it.” He avoided my gaze, clearly unable to reply to my statement. “I don’t know! Something like, *do you want to sleep with me?*”

“Sleep?”

“Damian,” I groaned. “You ask first!”

“Okay,” he mouthed out sorrowfully.

“Haven’t you had this conversation before?”

“No.”

“So, you did it against their will?”

“No, it was mutual,” he assured me. “I just thought ... I *sensed* that you ...”

“Not everything is about instincts, Damian,” I chided. “Yes, I wanted it! But I was hoping you would ask, or at least saying something instead of just plain fucking me.” Damian scratched at the back of his neck nervously, realizing that he was in the wrong. “Now, I am second guessing everything.”

“I made a mistake.”

“You did,” I assured him. “I didn’t come on this trail walk just to get fucked by you.” He grimaced at my words, not liking

the harshness of my statement. “I wanted to get to know you better.”

“Should we just go back?”

“I want an apology.”

“I’m sorry.”

I shook my head at him and then rose to my feet, unsure if I wanted to be around him anymore. “You’re a typical guy, you know that?”

He licked his lips at me timidly, knowing I was quite done with him.

“Is this over then?”

“No,” I answered in a small voice. “I like you, but ...” I shrugged my shoulders at him idly. “I think you need to rethink a few things.”

He watched me take a few steps away before he yelled out, “I wasn’t wrong though? Was I?”

“I do want it,” I confessed over my shoulder.

“I know you did,” he quipped out sharply, before he let me wander away from the rocky cliff.

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The walk back to Damian’s cabin felt long. It didn’t help that neither of us were speaking to each other. A mutual silence transcended upon us the moment I walked away from the falls; an enormous rift seemed to develop between us.

*What did he mean I taste good?* I looked over my shoulder to see him staring dead ahead of him, unaware of my lingering gaze. *Is it normal to say something like that?*

I rubbed my hand over the back of my neck, feeling weary from the long walk.

*I’m hungry too,* I noted, since it was well past lunch time. Damian didn’t look in the slightest exhausted, more focused on

the wildlife around him than anything else. He could not help but let his eyes follow a stray robin darting through the trees, or slow down once he spotted a green plant with prickled leaves. *He belongs here*, I surmised, but I couldn't safely say the same thing about myself.

I let out a huff unknowingly, letting Damian revert his attention back to me. "You want to rest?"

"How much longer?"

"Another thirty minutes."

"Are we in the heart of the forest, or something?"

"No."

"I honestly want a shower," I mused aloud. "And then take a nap for a little bit."

"You can use mine," he suggested without looking at me.

"Or I can use my own," I countered through barely parted lips.

"Yeah," Damian lightly replied in a breathless voice.

"I didn't mean to put a wedge between us," I acknowledged aloud, "but I would have appreciated you asking me first."

"I understand," he muttered.

"At least you know for next time." Damian let his gaze fixate on the hanging tree branch ahead of us, taking note of the large black raven perched over top of it. "Right?"

He nodded his head at me, but I could tell his focus was diverted to the bird in front of him.

"It's just a raven."

Long black wings fluttered as we slowly approached it. The black creature eyed Damian with interest once we were only a few steps away. It dove into the air suddenly, swooping just over our heads which forced us to bend lower to avoid getting hit. Damian turned around to face the black raven, letting out heated breaths of aggression as he watched the bird swoop around to

come at us again.

“Stay down,” he ordered, and went to the ground to pick up a rock. The raven squealed at us threateningly, and then flew sharply to the left to slip through a thin crack between the trees.  
“You can stand up now.”

“Why did it do that?”

“What?”

“Why did it attack us?”

“It wasn’t attacking us,” he firmly stated, and then strode ahead as if it was an everyday occurrence.

I ran after him yelling, “It flew right at us!”

“It did.”

My voice was full of sarcasm as I stated, “but you are saying it wasn’t trying to attack us?”

He looked over his shoulder as he shot back, “it’s just their way.”

I took a hold of his arm, not wanting him to walk ahead of me any further. “Listen!” I screamed out at the top of my lungs. “I grew up in cottage country, so don’t lie to me. I know what ravens are like, and that behaviour is *not* normal.” The very same raven made short screeches between the trees not far from us. “So, what exactly is going on?”

“Ravens are like that here.”

“Taunting us?” I questioned him. “It flew at you on purpose!”

“Sara,” he growled, “what do you want me to say?”

“Tell me the truth,” I demanded with a hard tug on his sleeve.  
“That there is something wrong here!”

The ravens call grew louder, irritating the man beside me. He pushed my hand off his sleeve and stormed away, determined to not say anything else.

I followed him reluctantly, aware of how the raven was

stealthily following us through the trees. Damian's grip over the rock tightened, looking into the forest to find the fiendish creature. It was clear the raven was playing a game with him, toying him in a certain way that was strangely odd. Damian wiped his brow with frustration with the back of his arm, knowing it was impossible to find the raven in the denseness of the forest. I simply stopped in my tracks to watch him, seeing this man for what he truly was, and none of it made any sense to me. "Leave me alone!" he finally called out to the left of him, hating the raven that was squawking loudly as it stalked him through the impenetrable trees.

*There is something not right about this at all.*

# 4

## The Big Bad Wolf

**L**ight flecks of snow nuzzled into my thick ginger coloured locks, forcing me to pull up my hood to cover myself up from the cold. The day had been bright and sunny, but as darkness approached, the weather turned more sinister. The ash white gravel crushed under my feet, a lonely sound that accompanied me down the steep hill.

Damian's large cabin was in view, a few bright lights shining through his open windows that assured me he was home. Our separation earlier had been rather awkward, both of us conflicted with unsaid words. *Where do we go from here?* was communicated through our eyes alone and unfortunately, I could not come up with an answer.

A few hours of solitude in my bare cabin was enough to knock some sense into me and I ended up texting Damian to see if the invitation to dinner was still open. Fortunately enough it was, which leads me here, trailing down the dangerous roadside with an unnerving orange glow from the autumn sun illuminating my pathway.

I abandoned the roadside for the soft patch of dirt, watching

the snowflakes fall over the dewy grass only to melt a few seconds later. It was cold enough to snow, but not enough for it to last. In another month this rugged field would be covered in a thick layer of ice, but for now I could simply walk through the high grass with certain ease.

The sky was enchanting in a way, a deep fusion of fluorescent pink with a pale shade of blue simply hovering over Damian's cabin. I almost wish I could take a picture of it, or maybe even paint it so that the image could be engraved in my memory forever. The problem with Damian was that I was so amazingly attracted to him, but I couldn't fight back the flurry of red flags that there was something seriously wrong with him. I had known him for a day really; no, technically two, but already I could sense how attached we were to one another.

*But the red flags*, I thought, and even when I shook my head in denial, I could not put that part of my mind to rest.

There was something wrong with Damian; something strange.

The light over his front porch flickered on, bringing me back to the present moment. He was probably busy preparing dinner for me, all too excited that we should spend the evening alone. I knew we would have to talk about what happened earlier, a sensitive subject since Damian was so insistent on ignoring my questions. He could not ignore me forever, at some point Damian will have to reveal the truth.

I trudged down the high hill, searching for a comfortable pathway that would take me to the front of his house. The last of the bird calls sounded through the air to signal the end of the day; the wind biting through my puffy black coat to make my hands numb from the cold. I pushed the straw basket behind me, hoping it would be enough to block the frigidness of the head wind.

*I'm nearly there,* I thought, before I hopped over one large grey rock to another, only to land on the solid ground just outside of the front pathway of his house. Bending low I brushed away any residue of the high grass, plucking it off my dark stockings so I would look more presentable.

Damian would get a shock, and I was all too eager to see his expression. Giddy, I lightly jogged towards the front door, hopping up the steps two at a time before I knocked on it loudly. I took a step back, pulling down my hood and adjusting my hair quickly. A tiny smile played upon my lips as I held the basket in front of my waist, arranging the fake flowers to my liking as I waited for the door to be opened. It felt like a full minute went by before I finally heard the lock sliding open one by one, and then the familiar creaking as he inched it back slowly.

“Trick or treat!” I yelled out once Damian came into view. I bobbed on my toes excitingly, too anxious to see his reaction to my costume. “Do you like it?”

He looked at me without blinking, almost numb by the sight of me.

“Do you know who I am?” I asked nervously, and then pulled my red hood over my head so he could get the picture. “Guess?”

Damian swallowed hard, making his Adam's apple rise upwards. His mouth opened partially, but no words would come.

“Do you want a hint?” I piped up quickly. “I thought it would be obvious.” My hood was pulled down with an overwhelming sense of disappointment. “You don’t like it.”

Damian finally blinked, and then I noticed how much sadder his face had become.

“You don’t,” I surmised. “I thought it would be fun. Its Halloween tomorrow, but I don’t know if I will be here for the whole day and I thought ...” My straw basket lowered itself past

my waist and then I let it hang on the right side of me.

“What are you doing out here, little girl?” he asked in a deeply sonorous voice. I perked up instantly, realizing he knew who I was dressed up for Halloween all along.

“I’m on my way to see my grandmother,” I teased, which brought a shadow of a smile to his face. “Who lives through the forest, near the brook.” Damian shook his head at me, somewhat pleased to find I knew the nursery rhyme so well. I took a step forward, barely hovering over the threshold of his doorway before I added, “could I come in?”

“Is that wise?” he drawled out cunningly. “Aren’t you a little scared?”

“Well, you aren’t a wolf, are you?” Damian closed his eyes at my words, shaking his head in silent disagreement. “And you’re not dressed as my granny.”

“No.”

I laid a hand in the center of Damian’s chest, looking up at him as if I wanted a kiss. Damian followed my movements with his eyes, watching my hand shift downwards until it rested over his firm abdomen. I could feel his body stiffen by my touch, hear the air going through his nostrils as if he was breathing me in. Damian suddenly took a step back, creating a large gap between us, and then wordlessly opened the door wider so I could come in.

I turned my back to him as I unzipped my jacket, letting the straw basket rest at my feet. I sensed his presence; Damian was waiting for me like a dark shadow that ominously loomed behind me. “Sara,” he breathed out softly. “What gave you the idea to dress like that?”

“Little Red Riding Hood?” I questioned him, as I worked on the last of my zipper.

“Yes.”

“I’ve always liked fairy tales,” I told him in truth. “Do you like my surprise?”

There was no answer as I shed off my heavy jacket in front of him. I handed the heavy garment to him, supposing he would find somewhere appropriate to hang it up.

“You don’t have to like it,” I assured him softly. “When my friends come later, they will be dressed in costume too. Do you have anything to wear Damian?”

“No.”

“I guess we sprung it on you,” I admitted aloud. “I know we are all a little too old for that now, but it’s Halloween, even if it’s snowing.”

“Yes, it’s cold,” he agreed. “But that’s Canada for you.”

“You don’t have a heater?”

“I don’t like heaters.”

“What about in the winter?”

“I like the cold,” he stated with a clearness to his forest green eyes. “Take your shoes off, and then come in.” He turned his back to me with my jacket under his arm and went to put it away.

They were fashionable boots and took a lot longer to undo, forcing me to lean against the wall as I attempted to pry them off. The long hem of my cloak kept getting in the way, making me rethink my fashion choices. By the time Damian returned I had my boots lined up to his hiking ones and picked up my basket eagerly as I approached him.

Damian was quick to hook an arm around me, pulling me straight into his chest before he kissed me without reserve. I wasn’t one to fight back, dropping my basket instantly so I could curl my arms around him, digging my fingers into his olive-green sweater. There was an alluring smell to him, like charred

meat by the fire mixed with the grass of the earth. He smelled differently and tasted differently too as he grounded his lips harder against mine. A tongue slipped through, making me part my lips with a gasp. Damian smirked at me fiendishly, biting his bottom lip so hard it was turning white. I had no time to react when he slammed his lips against mine again. I made a low moan with surprise, clearly aware of how hard he was gripping my body as he kissed me open-mouthed. My eyes were shut tightly, feeling like he was taking something from me, as if all my self-control was being drained at that moment.

A hand shoved itself through my long dress, pressing between my thighs as it worked its way upwards. I made a moan in protest, not certain if I wanted it to get that far, before Damian simply worked his hands to cup the front of me. I groaned into his mouth as a single finger fondled me, making me lean into his hand as soon as the arousal hit me. I forced my face away to catch my breath, but Damian leaned forward with eager lips to take a hold of me again.

I slammed heavily against the wall, unable to take anymore, before Damian removed his hand to squeeze the front of my hip and pelvic muscle. My head was tilted to the side as he kissed the corner of my lips, giving me enough time to at least catch my breath. His left hand was desperately trying to push back my hair, not wanting it to get in the way of anything.

“What a naughty girl you are,” he unexpectedly said, before he used his left hand to tilt my head forward. “Coming into my house.”

I laughed at him lightly, liking the unfamiliar tone to his voice. “You did invite me,” I reminded him playfully, while squinting at him with pure happiness. “Or don’t you remember?”

He tightened his lips, letting his eyes fixate on my kiss-

swollen lips in an unnerving manner.

“Are we ever going to eat dinner, Damian?”

“You’re the Little Red Riding Hood,” he uttered in a deep tenor.

“You *are* my dinner.”

I bit my lip at him, unsure if I liked the way he was looking at me right now. *Why do I get the sense that what Damian said is true?*

“I’m not edible,” I teased after I bit my lip at him.

“I disagree.”

I nervously laughed at him, noticing how focused his gaze was on my lips still. Damian cut off my laughter by suddenly slipping an arm around the back of my neck, bringing me forward to crush my lips against his. I was lost then, excited and exhilarated by the way he was touching me. I kissed him back as much as I could, knowing it was a losing battle. I could hear the heavy breathing from Damian’s nose, startled by the way he so harshly pushed me against the wall. “What are you wearing underneath,” he breathed out sharply.

“What?”

“Underneath.”

“Damian?”

A hand reached downwards to hike up my dress, revealing my tight black stockings to block out the cold. Damian was unsatisfied, dropping to his knees dramatically before he flapped up the front of my dress and dove his head inside of it. I was too startled to do anything, only gasping as I felt sharp nails dig into the top of my pelvic muscles to unlatch the stockings from my bare skin.

“Damian!” I cried out, still frazzled with everything. “Wait.” It was too late, I could feel his bare hand rubbing harshly at my bare skin on my inner right thigh. His breathing was alarmingly

heavy, as if he couldn't keep himself under control anymore.

"Sara," he wailed, almost begging as his thumb stroked the curls of hair of my most sacred part of my body. A second passed before his other hand brought the last of my stockings down between my ankles. Another second passed, when I felt his thumb rover downwards to rest over my clit.

"Shit," I cursed, knowing I couldn't fight back even if I wanted too. Damian took it as a sign and began stroking it slowly, his breathing echoing darkly underneath my dress. I shut my eyes as it hit me, that heavy level of arousal that was just begging for more. A hand fell over the top of his shoulder, forgoing my prior pretenses of him simply asking me. *Fuck*, a part of me cursed, but the way he was using his finger made me forget my train of thought.

"God, I can smell you," he said with pure desperation. "Sara," he growled underneath me. My hand rubbed hard against the curve of his shoulder blade, working up his broad neck that became tense under my touch.

"Do it," I commanded, and Damian obliged instantly by pressing his mouth against me. "Ugh," came from the back of my throat, hating the hot tongue that was steadily licking up my drippings that nestled between my thighs. A warning growl told me he would want more than that, and soon a finger was used to pry me open so he could settle his mouth over me more. I let out a sound, feeling my chest heave downwards from the thrill of it all.

"Damian," I wailed, knowing it was the tip of his slick wet tongue that was setting me on high. His left hand snaked around the curve of my ankle, worshiping my toned calves as it massaged its way upwards. I felt helpless from his touch, hunching over till I could rest my hand over the top of his head.

Damian grunted once he had his fill, and then brought his lips downwards to kiss each part of my inner thighs.

“Sara,” he chanted endlessly, while his wandering hands went high enough to cup each cheek of my ass. I moaned in response, not able to mentally cope with what he had just done. “I want more,” he said in a throaty voice.

I moaned in response, and then bent my knees so I could get at the same level as him. It was hard to believe we were still in front of his door, not even making our way into the inner rooms before all of this happened. Damian was at eye level with me now, his green eyes had become so dark they almost looked steely grey. It was hard to see him in the dimness of the house, but I knew he was staring at me hard.

“I’ve slept with my ex-boyfriends in the past, but none of them have ever given me oral sex.” A breezy laugh escaped me from embarrassment. “It’s usually the other way around, isn’t it? They want it, but they aren’t willing to give it to you as well.” My fingers fluffed up the top of his sweater, feeling the soft fabric beneath my fingers. “And you willingly give it to me for our first time together … being *intimate* that is.” I sucked in my cheeks for a moment. “As odd as it sounds, you were really good at it, Damian.”

He was silent, unnervingly so.

“I …” My mouth felt dry just as I tried to communicate my muddle thoughts aloud. “Okay,” I stammered out nervously. Damian remained silent; the aching down below only intensified as we retained eye contact. “Fuck that was good,” I laughed out nervously, not sure if I wanted to touch him any further.

His hands were still over my ass, cupping them enough to keep me right in front of him. He was as immovable as a statue, but I sensed all his attention was solely on me. He inched forward

suddenly, and I knew he would kiss me again. I closed my eyes and submitted, feeling myself flutter away mentally for a moment as he drew out our kisses slowly. I could taste myself on my lips.

A few stray fingers stroked the back of his neck wishfully. Our bodies rocked forward and backward; Damian doing his best to not be too overwhelming, but I knew it was only a matter of time before he had me flat on my back. He pulled his hands out of my dress to bare his nails into the back of my scalp, while I did my best to sculpt the tense muscles at the back of his nape.

The sound of our kisses ignited the air, each like a spark of fire that was sending us closer to our doom. Damian tucked his head to the right, forcing my hand to fall away from his neck. I felt him graze the front of my collarbone, probably thankful that my dress had such a deep V-neck.

“I know you want it,” he hushed against my skin.

“I do.”

He pushed me down on the ground slowly, letting a stray finger stroke through the thick cloth of my dress from the bottom of my waist to just over the valley of my breasts. A knee raised slowly, straddling me with a determined look in his eyes.

“Do you have protection?” I breathed out carefully.

“No.”

“Do you have anything I should know about?”

“No.”

“I don’t,” I feebly assured him, after one of his fingers pulled a thick strap off my left shoulder. “And you didn’t ask you know?”

“Will you let me?” he breathed out sharply.

“Yeah.”

He blinked slowly as he used his other hand to pull down my other bright red strap. He hunched forward like a dog, grazing

the top set of his teeth against the rounded curve of my shoulder blade. I exhaled frantically, taking note of the hot heat of his breath. He bit into the curve of my shoulder, making a mark that would last for days. I turned my head to see the tip of his nose trailing over the mark he gave me and then he kissed the spot profusely as a way of apology. I rubbed my fingers through his thick mane, feeling the softness of it over my fingers. The floor was cold and bare, but there I was, letting this strange man hover over me with his desire on full display.

“Damian,” I mouthed, “could we do this in your bed?”

He turned his head to me slowly, taking in my words with an empty look.

“It is more comfortable there,” I tried to explain in a way that would not break the sexual tension.

He nodded his head stiffly, and then gave me one last kiss on my lips before he pulled himself away. I laid a hand over one of Damian’s bent knees, rising myself upwards with my weight placed over his strong leg. He watched me tower over him, looking slightly amused at the way I was readjusting my dress in front of him. Damian was still half seated on the floor as he gazed up at me with fondness, though his face was so impassive it was hard to read his thoughts.

“I hope you know I don’t do it with just anyone.”

Damian took that as a sign to stand up, and then took a hold of my hand once we were standing face to face.

“I’m not that kind of girl.”

He answered me by tugging on my hand, leading me down the stretch of long hallway until we got into the kitchen. He briefly let go of my hand to turn the oven off, removing a few pots from the hot stove-top with a quiet air. His hand returned to mine tugging more harshly, bringing me around a bend until we

reached the bottom of the pitch-black staircase. His foot creaked over the first step, leaving only a second for me to change my mind.

I was nervous since I didn't know Damian that well, but I felt that this was something that I wanted to do. I squeezed onto his hand harder and found myself becoming excited that we were taking things to the next level.

I quickly followed after Damian, trying to contain my smile as we worked our way up the narrow staircase. The light finally flickered on, bright enough for me to see the room that Damian slept in. The window was wide open, bringing a strong chill over me from the frigid temperature. Damian let go of my hand to smooth his hands over the plain white bed sheet, looking at it carefully to make sure nothing was amiss.

He glanced upwards to see me shivering, and then turned around to walk to the far end of the room where a wooden casing was propped up against a wall. Damian removed the first set of blankets, the same one I put on him last night when he was cold. He removed a second one, and only seemed satisfied when he pulled up a rugged fur blanket that looked soft to the touch. It was only then that he looked in my direction and seemed satisfied with his findings. The case shut loudly; soft footsteps padded in my direction before he strung the heavy blanket around me with unblinking eyes.

"I forgot to lock the door," he uttered softly, and then walked past me to make his way downstairs again. I felt the whole thing rather odd and chose to sit at the edge of the bed with the warm fur blanket wrapped around me. I stroked the material aimlessly, staring at the blank wall that lacked any detail or personality. His closet was tightly shut, few items of clothing that looked like dirty laundry were hanging out of a straw blanket. My legs

stretched out against the wooden panelled floor, noticing how cold it was underneath my feet.

I got up to shut the window, taking in the sunlight that fell over the lush green grass near the front of Damian's house. A stray raven flew in the air, circling around Damian's house idly, reminding me of the events that happened earlier on today. I suppressed a groan and decided to push my worries away to simply enjoy this moment. I knew I liked Damian, it was probably foolish, but I really did like him a lot.

Common sense forgotten, I leaned against Damian's bed to remove my warm stockings, bunching it up neatly for tonight's party. I untied the strings to my red hood next, folding it over until it was placed over my stockings. I was about to work on my dress when I heard a creaking of a staircase and then decided to greet Damian outside of the doorway.

A looming shadow moved before me, his well carved figure only becoming visible as he stepped into the bedroom lighting. I bit at my lip with expectation, sensing the high level of sexual tension that charged between us. Damian took a step forward and I immediately backed away. He shut the door behind him, eyes never leaving mine. I took another step back, feeling my bare feet crush the fur blanket that I neglected on the hardwood floor. Damian gripped at the bottom of his sweater and briskly pulled it off, revealing a tight white tank-top that went well with his toned body. I could feel the throbbing below; the heat, the desire to lay my hands all over him.

Damian undid his belt buckle hastily, still following me as I walked backwards in his room. His lip twitched upwards once I hit the bed, and it went even higher when I surrendered before him and sat up on it. The black leather belt slipped through his belt buckles with ease, sliding around his waist until he gripped

it in the palm of his hand.

It was only when he stepped under the single light in his room that I noticed a jagged scar over his right shoulder. There was white linen wrapped around his left arm as well, blushed with a shade of pink to show his wound was still fresh. I was tempted to ask him about it, but I knew now wasn't a good time. As a matter of fact, there were a lot of tiny nicks and bruises and even a gruesome scar over his upper right arm, which made me wonder what had happened to him.

His hands gripped over his lower torso to pry his shirt off, bringing it over his head before he dropped it on the floor. He bent down to grip the blanket in a single hand, laying it beside me on the bed with a mysterious look in his eyes.

"We haven't much time," he said out of the blue. "Take off your dress."

"I can ask my friends to not come," I pointed out. "We don't have to rush."

He looked over my shoulder to see the orange skyline, and I knew he was disagreeing with me.

"I can stay here," I reminded him. "Tonight."

Damian responded by undoing the top button to his jeans and unzipping it in front of me. In one swift movement he pulled his pants and briefs down at the same time, making me realize his summer tan was over every inch of his body. Nervous, I brought my hands behind my head to undo the zipper, aware of how keen he was to watch me. He was unbelievably hard, and I couldn't stop staring at his erection.

One foot moved forward, and then the other, and then he sat down on the bed to lean his body into mine. He reached over to zip down the last of my zipper and used two hands to pull the smooth garment downwards till it rested over the top of my lap.

Damian never wavered to undo my bra as well, hardly paying attention to the scarlet red material before he tossed it to the ground without a care. Damian slid forward to let his bare feet hit the ground and used his hands to arrest the sides of my waist to lift me off the bed.

“You don’t have to be afraid,” he whispered. A hand reached downward to drag the last of the red material from my body, and then he tilted his head slightly as he watched me step out of my dress. He stretched out his left hand to move the fur blanket upwards, letting it fall over every inch of his bed before he walked in front of me, turning around the corner of the front bedpost to make his way to the window.

“I’m hot,” he uttered under his breath, pulling the window open to the max, letting tiny flakes of snow flutter through the window. Damian stood in front of it for a moment, looking like he was breathing in the fresh air.

Feeling useless, I crawled over his bed and then sprawled myself out with nervous anticipation. *He won’t go easy, I thought, or slow.* I cranked my head in his direction, wondering what on earth he was doing.

“Damian?”

He reverted his gaze to me, abandoning the windowsill to crawl over the side of the bed. One leg hooked over me quickly, straddling himself over with a satisfied look in his eyes. I raised my head off the bed to kiss him, nearly smiling against his lips as he kissed me back. His skin was rough to the touch, and yet, the hairs over his chest were soft enough to play with. Damian’s kiss was overpowering, I felt like he was devouring me in his bed.

“I’m staying the night,” I told him, which made him growl in reply. I took it as a good sign and hooked my hands around

his hips to bring him downwards. Damian submitted instantly, easing himself inside of me to our relief. A warm hand rubbed the side of his arm, feeling the light bindings that covered up an open wound. My fingers trace the outer surface of his cloth bandage and then claw his skin as I stroke them upwards.

“Riding Hood,” he randomly uttered in between a kiss, clearly amused by my Halloween costume.

“You like it?”

“More than you know,” he darkly replied.

“You could have dressed as the wolf,” I teased. “You have this blanket—” My words were cut off when he pushed himself inside of me, eliciting a moan that I couldn’t hold back.

“Oh, Damian,” I wailed, closing my eyes as the feeling hit me. A low grunt escaped him, a tilt of his head to bite at the side of my neck. I could feel the bed going downwards as he pushed himself further inside me. I couldn’t help but chant out his name, knowing that was only the encouragement he needed to keep going.

“Big bad wolf,” he droned deeply, and then took another bite into the side of my neck. He heard me wail and I knew he loved it, probably one of those fetishes that he couldn’t hold back on our first night. I was right about one thing, he was intent on fucking me hard.

Thankfully, he was no longer concerned with my lips, enough for me to let out an uneven breath as he thrust himself inside of me. I could barely breathe at one point, startled with the way his nails clawed itself into the sharp grooves of my waist.

The cold wind blew harder on us, sweeping over Damian’s bare back in a swift moment. He was making me reach a high I never anticipated. Damian leaned forward to silence my deep moans with his lips, kissing me through the last of it until I felt

like I was in some perverse dream.

I briskly stroked my fingers through his thick hair while Damian spent his time rubbing his own fingers through the soft fur underneath us. I still could not breathe properly; I was entranced by that gaze he couldn't hold back any longer when he looked deep into my eyes.

"What is it?" I finally asked. His only response was to lean down to simply kiss my lips. I returned his gesture, for I was all too eager to return the favour. "Can we do this tomorrow?" I asked him without reserve. "Before I go?"

Damian strengthened the kiss, making me smile against his lips even more.

"Please, Damian."

"Yes," he stated in a deep tenor, after he shifted his gaze downwards to take in my heaving breasts.

"I don't want to go back to the city."

He never answered me, only letting his fingers drag against the rounded curve of my left breast in deep meditation.

"Do you think they have an opening here?"

"Not until the summer."

"Its fall," I moaned. He let his thumb flick my perk nipple, glancing upwards to catch my reaction. "Are you even listening?"

"Yes," he answered me through partially opened lips. I raised a hand and stroked the dark hairs along his chin, wondering why he wouldn't fully open his mouth at the moment.

"You are handsome, you know that?"

Damian tucked himself downwards to suck my nipple in his mouth, suckling it like a newborn babe with closed lids. I had no choice but to watch him, wishing I didn't have to feel a throbbing down below when he was still in me.

“Damian,” I complained, knowing if he didn’t stop soon, I would lose it. A random tooth grazed my nipple, making me twitch and then push the top of Damian’s head to let me go. “That hurt.”

He closed his eyes for a moment, and then settled over me like a puppy would when it was tired. Two arms encircled my frame and then he laid his head gently over my chest. I wasn’t sure what to make of his behaviour, but I knew his actions meant a lot to him. “Will you let me stay with you?”

Damian let his chin rub over the valley of my breast and kissed the curve of my breast with adoration.

“Damian?” He moaned in response peacefully and then settled his head over the left side of my chest again. I decided to wrap my arms around him, knowing the warmth of his body was the only thing from preventing me from catching a chill. “Can you pull the blankets over us?”

He nodded his head lightly, and then raised himself upwards to ease himself out of me. It felt weird once his body left me, like a part of me was missing. I was quick to take a hold of his arm as he used his other hand to clean himself up. Once he felt me tug at him, he lifted a corner of the furry blanket and wrapped our two bodies around it.

Damian made a weird groan, but it sounded peaceful. He let his entire arm curl around me to pull me in and placed a small peck over my cheek before he nuzzled himself tightly against me. I closed my eyes with drowsiness, since my body was still trying to come down from the high Damian had given me. I would feel sore in the morning, I knew, but I wouldn’t change it for the world.

It was my turn to kiss his cheek, making Damian react by turning his head to reach my lips. We took turns kissing each

other, snuggling in the warm furry blankets over his bed as our hands ardently stroked over the other's bare skin. Feeling naughty, I ducked under covers and peppered my lips against his chest. Damian pulled me hard against his body, rolling himself over until I was on top of him. I should have had enough of him by now, but I didn't.

"You're the best fuck I've ever had," I told him under the darkness of the covers. Damian pushed himself downwards, slipping under the shade of the dark furry blankets as well. "The best."

I felt his hands explore my body, pressing the palm of his hands in between my thighs. "It will be like this every time," he hushed into the side of my ear.

"Every?"

He answered by biting the tip of my ear, while his other hand mischievously fondled my clit.

"Damian," I whined, wishing he could at least take a break for once. He chuckled darkly under the covers, letting his tongue lick over the tip of my ear only to maneuver himself over me. His fondling increased, making me whimper with closed lips. I knew if he didn't stop I would have him make love to me again. "Damian!" I said with more determination, only for him to answer me by finding my lips in the darkness and kissing me open mouthed in the hopes of dominating me further.

I couldn't win, I found my hands gripping around his throat in warning. Damian's finger slipped in, making my hips naturally buck forward in response. I tightened my grip around his throat for him to stop his playful gestures. Damian responded with a low moan of secret pleasure; he knew how easily he could make my body respond to his seductive touches. Our sexual chemistry was undeniably strong, but right now I needed a moment for

Damian to stop his incessant teasing so I could at least catch my breath.

“Damian,” I gasped out quite desperately. The tone of my voice compelled him to part his lips and avert his full attention to me. He had enough sense to remove his finger and let his hand affectionately cup the side of my right hip instead.

“Yes, Sara” he soothingly replied, almost in an apologetic way.

“I need you to take a break for a moment.”

“Okay,” he sighed in pure exhaustion.

“I love it!” I reassured him, while gently stroking my fingers over the side of his neck. “But I can’t keep up.”

“You still want it,” he knowingly replied, sending a fiery red glow to the sides of my cheeks.

“No,” I lied to the best of my ability, hoping the small crack to my voice didn’t give myself away.

“You do.”

“Damian,” I warned. “We just did it.”

He immediately responded with a dark chuckle. “I know.”

“It’s hot under here.”

“Yes. My fur blankets can be very warm.”

“But it is cold out there,” I whined childishly. “Why did you have to open the window?”

“I like the fresh air,” he muttered softly. “It gets stuffy in my bedroom.”

“You should sleep outside then.”

“I might,” he replied in an even softer tone of voice, almost gentle in a way. “Do you know what time it is?”

“Why?”

“I was ...”

“Are you so eager to leave the bed?” I cupped the sides of his

cheeks with my hands, knowing that question would put him in a hard spot. “I can stay.”

“Not tonight.”

“Ashley will understand.”

“Not tonight,” he repeated in an even firmer voice.

“I thought my little wolf liked to misbehave.”

“I’m not a *little* wolf,” he barked back sharply.

“Big wolf.”

Damian was submissive for once, leaning forward to kiss my lips sweetly. I knew he was pleased, so I stroked large circles over his back in the hopes that I could change his mind.

“You still want it,” Damian observed. He heard me curse under my breath and then returned his lips over mine. I let my hand drag downwards, feeling the smoothness of his back till I reached his lower spine. Damian was right, I still wanted him.

“We haven’t much time,” he muttered, as if he could read my thoughts.

“No.”

“I swear you taste so good,” he mouted into the corner of my lip. He pressed his nose into my skin, possibly breathing in my very essence before he peppered short kisses all over the side of my face. “I don’t want to let you go.”

“Then don’t.”

He raised himself upwards and suddenly blinding light came over my face. I blocked the lighting overhead with my hand, not at all pleased that he pulled the blankets from over our heads. I watched him lift a leg to no longer straddle me, and soon he was crawling down the bed only to land to the floor. “Get up.”

“What?”

“Get up,” he repeated, and then walked away from me to go to

the washroom. A light flickered on and I heard him rummaging through a closet to find something. The abandoned blanket was wrapped over my shoulders and I lazily walked over to the bathroom to see what he was doing. Damian was standing in front of the mirror inspecting his face, only stopping once he caught my reflection.

“What are you doing?”

“I was looking,” he answered me through the reflection. “I didn’t bite you hard, did I?”

“No.”

He turned around and handed me a towel that he must have taken out of the closet. “Shower?”

“If you insist.”

“Before your friends come over.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll join you,” Damian mumbled lightly. He walked towards the shower and pulled away plaid, blue and white curtains. He stepped into the tub and turned on the facet to get the right temperature. “Hand me that bar of soap,” he remarked, pointing at one he left on the bathroom counter. I went over to him to place it in his hands, and then watched him rinse it over the pouring water from the faucet as he slowly readjusted the temperature. “Get in.”

“We are doing it together?”

“Yes,” he said with utter severity.

I laid a hand over his shoulder to step over the high tub. My hand remained there as he adjusted the water, watching him attentively as he found the right temperature. “Do you like it hot?” he questioned over his shoulder, “or cold?”

“Who likes it cold?”

“I do.”

"Damian, there is a reason you got that chill last night."

Damian ignored me and set the faucet temperature to warm.

"So, we meet in the middle then."

"I don't like hot water."

"Okay."

He turned it on and immediately took a step back. He rubbed the bar of soap all over his chest, making me think he was a cave man. I turned my back to him and let my hair get wet first, and then let the lukewarm water sprinkle over the front of my face and chest. It was hard to get used to the temperature of the water, so when Damian hooked one arm around me to pull him into his chest, I was grateful.

He kissed the side of my neck as he rubbed the bar of soap into my skin, lathering his wet lips all over me in an intoxicating manner. I turned around in his arms, applying kisses to the side of his neck as I gripped his back hard. It was amazing how he was bathing me, showering me with continual affection under the heavy showerhead that pelted our bare skin. My body was slick from his soap, shining from the dark brown bar that he applied against me.

Damian placed the soap in a container and pressed his hands over the side of my face, kissing me endlessly under the showerhead in a ridiculous manner.

*You ever hear what happens to a lone wolf when it meets its mate?*

Damian pressed his aching cock against me, silently begging for me to take it once again.

*They mate for life.*

"Sara," he moaned from the back of his throat, while the water beat the side of his head.

"Only if you let me stay the night."

"I can't," he wailed.

“Why not?”

He reached down to turn off the showerhead, leaving us with only the water running down the drain.

“Because,” He began. “It’s not safe here.”

“You have those guns and knives, Damian. Where else would I be safer than here with you?” He lowered his chin to his chest and let his cheeks suck in uneasily. “Damian?”

“The safest place you can be is with your friends.”

“I want to be here with you.” He watched me rub my finger down his scar over his shoulder, wishing he would open up with me more. “How did you get this?”

“I was attacked,” he bluntly replied. “Which is why I want you to stay with your friends.”

“I want to be here with you.”

“I’m not arguing with you about this,” he stated with feeling. Damian leaned forward to kiss the front of my brow, and then brushed the wet strands of red hair away from my face to see me more clearly. “We haven’t much time. Let’s get dressed and be downstairs in time for your friends.”

I nodded my head reluctantly and watched him step out of the tub first.

*He’ll change his mind, I thought, knowing his willpower was much weaker than my own when it came to having sex. Another hour and he will be begging me to stay.*

# 5

## A Full Moon

I was sitting on Damian's lap when he wrapped two long arms around me; his breath hot against my neck before he kissed the back of it. Ashley made a cooing sound from across the room, fishing her phone out of her pocket to quickly snap a photo of us. "Hold still," she demanded as I closed my eyes to enjoy this blissful moment.

Damian paid no mind to the intruding photographer, bringing his hands upwards to rest it under the curve of my breast, relentlessly teasing me. I felt the tip of his teeth pierce the side of my neck, making me shudder enough to lean into him more.

"Ohhh," Ashley teased, hoping she would get a few risqué photos. "Show those teeth Damian."

"Oh, shut up!" I yelled out, only encouraging my friend to creep her way towards us.

Damian laid the tip of his tongue onto my neck, making my eyes widen with alarm. Ashley laughed at the whole thing, realizing even her presence couldn't dissuade Damian from giving into his desires.

"Damian, haven't you had enough?" I cried out, after he licked

the side of my neck for the second time.

“No,” he growled, which brought my eyebrows upwards with surprise.

The front door opened with a loud slam; Ben and Taylor were making enough noise to let us know they had just entered Damian’s household.

“Party time!” Ben screamed at the top of his lungs.

Taylor appeared over the living room doorway with his hands full of a large crate of beer, matching the ambiance of his punk rock star outfit. His neatly combed hair was now sticking up, and he had fake ear studs of sable black in each of his ears. A brown and black galaxy-styled shirt was loose across his chest, though most of it was covered by his heavy leather jacket with a slouchy hood on the back.

For once Taylor was able to let loose; it was the perfect opportunity to embrace his secret love of heavy metal and the occasional punk rock. Taylor grinned from ear to ear once he saw the way Damian was cuddling with me, knowing all too well how my evening must have gone by a single look.

“The two of you have fun?” he observed, after he casually strutted into the main living room.

His boyfriend, Ben, walked into the room proudly in his distinguished knight’s costume, his hand over the hilt of his plastic sword to keep himself in character. “Happy Halloween!” he announced to Damian with a princely look to him. “I see you aren’t in costume.”

“I didn’t get the memo,” Damian lied with his cheek resting over the side of mine.

I tilted my head to look at his side profile. “That’s a lie!” I reprimanded him. “I asked you to change.”

“I am in costume,” Damian teased. His arms grabbed a hold

of me more, and then he slammed his lips against the side of my cheek to shut me up.

Ben bit his lip at the scene, and then sauntered over to his partner to get his attention. I watched Ben whisper something into Taylor's ear, making him turn his head sharply with a look of desire. Ben sauntered away with a quick swivel of his foot, offering him a wink before he walked out the living room.

"My brother is disgusting," Ashley complained, clearly annoyed that she was the only one without a partner tonight. Her statement didn't dissuade Taylor from hurrying after him, unzipping his heavy leather jacket before he hurried out the room.

"Let them have some fun," I piped up. Ashley disagreed with me, letting her hands run down her frilly black dress with annoyance.

"I need a drink," she surmised, and then strutted towards the crate of beer to pull out a can. "Want one?"

"Not right now."

She let her eyes glance upwards to the man behind me, staring at him for a moment before she offered him one as well. Damian flat out denied her offer and made a show of leaning back into his couch, bringing me with him.

Ashley opened her can of beer and then took a quick swig. Her eyes lazily took in the empty living room that we were currently sitting in, letting her eyes fall over the three lamps on the wall before she settled her curious gaze over us. Ashley offered me a sad smile, still not used to losing her best friend out to a guy. By all accounts, it was usually the other way around. Nevertheless, I had not seen Ashley all day, so I did miss spending time with her.

There were some muffled sounds coming from a far room, a

sound that instantly brought a bright shade of red to Ashley's cheek. "Great," she said with utter sarcasm, obviously sensing what her brother and Taylor were getting up too. Her phone was instantly fished out from the small pocket of her black dress and she turned on some music to cover up the sound of them making out.

Damian nuzzled himself against me as we heard a series of howls of nearby wolves coming from Ashley's cellphone speakers. I was startled by his inexplicable body language, the way he curled his arms around me in a tight embrace. His puzzling behaviour was soon forgotten once I realized Ashley was playing a classic Halloween tune.

"Thriller!" I shrilled out with surprise.

"Yeah," she casually replied, and then turned up the volume to get us in the mood. She took another swig of the beer, lazily walking towards the couch before she took a seat beside me. "Halloween," she pointed out, "my favourite time of the year."

"We should have a picture together," I suggested, knowing she put so much time effort into making her sexy witch costume. "We can post the pictures once we get home."

"Since there is no internet," she observed, and then suggested I use my camera on my phone to do it. I pulled it out of a small pocket, telling Damian to turn his head to the right to look at the camera. He decided to press his lips against my cheek instead, making me laugh as I took a picture of the three of us. "Can you take one of just us girls?" I politely asked of him.

Damian patted me on my thigh to get me off him, and then slowly eased himself off the couch to stand to his feet. I thought he looked delicious in his dark blue plaid shirt, making me happy I picked it out for him after dinner. It was the closest attempt of a costume I could find, imagining he was some rugged lumberjack

that little Red Riding Hood stumbled upon in the forest.

Ashley took a hold of me, pulling me into her body with a happy smile. We looked giddy when Damian took the picture, and then we quickly asked him to sit in the middle so we could have a picture with all three of us. Damian obliged, squishing himself between the small gap, before he snapped a quick photo.

“Sara, I might have some wine,” he suddenly prompted up.  
“Do you want any?”

“Yeah, sure.”

He removed himself off the couch silently and strode down the hallway with a determined gait.

“So,” Ashley began, “how did it go?”

“Amazing,” I quickly replied.

“The two of you did it then?”

“Yeah.” I blushed instantly, trying to contain my guilty smile.  
“Ashley, he was *amazing*.”

“I can tell.”

“How?”

“Watching the two of you together.” Ashley scooted herself closer to me, closing in the last of the space between us. “How is it going to work when you get back home?”

“Long distance?” I suggested in a questionable air. “I mean ... I don’t know him well enough to move in with him.”

“God, no.”

“And it’s so soon.” I shrugged my shoulders at her. “What if it’s a fling?”

She shook her head at me in open disagreement. “Not for him.” She removed her witch hat, laying it on the couch next to her. “He doesn’t seem like that type of guy.”

“I think he’s committed,” I sighed with worry. “I should be happy, shouldn’t I?”

“You don’t want commitment?”

“It’s like he’s chosen me,” I deliberated aloud. “It is hard to describe.”

“He thinks you’re a keeper,” she teased, before she lifted her beer can off the ground to take a leisurely sip.

“I think he considers me as even *more* than that,” I breathed out softly.

“Oh?” She let her beer can settle over her lap. “Like what?”

“Like ...” I paused once I heard a set of feet quickly scampering down the hall, and then Ben and Taylor appeared with guilty expressions. “What did you do?”

“I don’t think he likes us taking advantage of his office space,” Taylor chuckled softly, while combing his fingers through his spiky hair.

“Oh, I wonder why,” I said with utter sarcasm. Ben gave his boyfriend a side-eye look, and then turned away from him to retrieve a can of beer.

Taylor took a seat beside Ashley, gently tossing her witch hat in her direction. “Thriller,” he noted, and then mimicked the famous dance moves with his hands which made the room break out in laughter.

Ashley’s brother took a seat next to me, handing me a beer I quickly denied. “Pass it to Taylor,” he suggested, and it felt like we were playing a game of hot potato until it landed over Taylor’s lap. Ben’s voice was full of cunningness as he inquired, “have fun today, Sara?”

Ashley answered him before I had a chance to respond. “Sara had a very nice time!”

“I did,” I admitted with a smug smile. “More than the three of you.”

“Go on!” Ashley taunted. “Boast about how great Damian

was!"

"I will."

Ben bumped his shoulder into mine. "I want to know all the details," he teased, which only made me roll my eyes at him.

"So, what?" Ashley spat out with jealousy. "Sara got fucked! Who else in this room hasn't?"

"You," Taylor sneered with a mocking smirk in her direction. "I assume Sara will be spending the night with her new boyfriend."

Ashley turned her head sharply in my direction, realizing she might have to sleep in the cabin all on her own. "Will you?" she asked nervously.

"No," I answered her in a low tone of voice. "Damian won't let me."

The man in question suddenly walked into the room with a wine bottle in hand and two empty glasses in the other. He wavered over the doorway, unsure where he could sit since most of the couch was taken up. Ben was gracious enough to leave his seat, walking past all of us to sit next to his boyfriend.

"Did anyone else want wine?" I asked aloud. My friends shook their head in silent reply, which left Damian confidently striding towards me before he took a close seat next to me. "Thank you."

He kindly offered me a wine glass, making sure to look deep into my eyes as he brushed his fingers over mine. His gaze was lowered to pull out a corkscrew from his pocket, and then he quietly twisted it inside of the cork to open the bottle. The soft sound of wine gushing into an empty glass filled the room as Ashley turned off her Halloween playlist. I could feel Damian's heated gaze following the blood red liquid passing through my lips before I swallowed it down.

"Hot!" Taylor exclaimed into the silent room. "The two of

you,” he teased with a pointed finger toward us. “So, when is the wedding?”

“Funny,” I quickly retorted with narrowed eyelids. Damian was silent beside me, which suddenly made me worried. “He was joking,” I reassured him, so he would not feel uncomfortable around my friends.

Damian nodded his head stiffly. “I know,” he hushed into the air, before he stretched out his arm to retrieve the empty wine glass in between his feet.

“We aren’t getting married,” I told the three of my friends.

Damian raised himself off the couch to place the wine bottle on a nearby table, making sure he had his back to me for some strange reason.

“Anyways,” I exclaimed nervously. “When are the two of you getting married?”

Taylor smiled at his partner before returning his gaze to me. “We are taking it slow.”

“It’s been two years.”

“Slow,” Taylor answered back with a harmless shrug. “Ben is only twenty. You forget that he is the baby here. And besides, where is the rush?”

Ashley raised her beer can into the air as she shouted out, “cheers to that!” They knocked their cans together, and then brought it against my clear wine glass to include me into their celebration.

“Sara,” Damian piped up woodenly, “can I speak to you for a moment?”

I swallowed hard, not used to the sternness of his voice. I nodded my head at him in open submission and then quietly followed him out of the room. Damian took me into his kitchen, and then opened the back door to take a step outside onto his

patio. The sky was dark by the time we strolled over to the wooden banister of the porch, letting me know we had less than an hour together before he would send me away for the night.

Damian took a gulp of his wine meditatively, strolling over the last of the wooden floor until he leaned his left elbow over the wooden banister. He took in the scenery around him, wearing an expressionless look as he watched the snowflakes flutter in front of him. Wind blew through his dark hair, tousling it wildly behind him as he gazed at the distant trees. He looked over his shoulder for a moment, wondering why I wasn't at his side, and with that single look I felt that he was asking me to step forward. I wondered when we learned to communicate with our eyes alone and was answered when he reached up his right hand to stroke his fingers over the thick fabric of my red dress.

"What you said back there," he began. "was it true?"

"What did I say?"

"We won't get married."

"Damian," I laughed. "You aren't seriously considering it, are you?"

He licked at his bottom lip, and then let his gaze waver away from mine.

"We haven't even known each other for a week yet."

"I know that."

"How can you even consider that—"

"I wasn't," he shot back darkly. "But I didn't like the way you spoke back there."

"What do you want me to say, Damian?"

He chose not to answer me, turning his head away to look at the tops of the faded golden leaves of the forest that shook ahead of us. He was holding his tongue, but I wished he would tell me the truth and not hold everything back for once.

“You want us to get married?”

“I don’t want you to leave,” he admitted to me. “I want you to stay.”

“Well I have a life back home. A family ... and friends.” He looked over his shoulder to take a good look at me. “Things you don’t exactly have, so you wouldn’t understand.”

“What about a partner?” he questioned me. “A mate.”

“A mate,” I repeated with a questionable look. “Is that what I am to you?”

Damian let the wine glass rest on the wooden banister and turned his whole body in my direction. “Yes,” He stated with feeling. “You are.”

I was confused at the very least, never having a guy say that to me before. “You know most people say girlfriend.”

“Mate,” he said with his shoulders rolled back defensively.

“Damian ...” My mouth remained open, but no words would come.

He stepped forward, lifting his hands until they rested on either side of my shoulders. He gave me a look that I could not understand, but I felt it meant something by the clearness in his mossy green eyes. “You should go,” he insisted, after he broke his gaze away from mine.

“We still have time,” I gently reminded him. “It is not dark completely.”

“Go Sara,” he uttered in a somber voice. “I was *wrong* about you all along.”

“Wrong about what?”

His facial expression darkened; the lids of his eyes lowered with a sudden graveness to him. “I sensed there was something between us, but I was wrong.”

“Damian! I do like you,” I extolled with a world of feeling.

"And besides ... you know how much I want to stay the night."

"No, Sara." He turned around to retrieve his wine glass and then suddenly left my presence. I watched him walk away from me, dumbstruck by the suddenness of it all.

*Is he really leaving me?* Damian strode through the kitchen with his wine glass in hand, abandoning it over the countertop before he made his way out of the kitchen.

"Damian!" I called out, but he chose to ignore me. "Hey!" He walked into the living room, making me nearly bump into his back when he suddenly stopped in his tracks. I walked around him, noticing how intent he was on avoiding my gaze. "What is wrong with you?"

My friends stopped chattering among themselves, realizing Damian and I were having an argument.

"I don't understand!" I admitted aloud. "What do you want from me?"

"To go back to your cabin and lock the door," he sternly replied. "All of you!"

My lip trembled with frustration, wondering what came over him suddenly. I took a step away and found my shoulders hunching over as I walked around him. It wasn't until I was standing over the doorway that I uttered, "just because I don't want to marry you, doesn't mean I don't have feelings for you."

Damian chose not to reply, letting me walk out of the living room to head to the front door. My friends thankfully followed me, whispering a small goodnight before they took their leave. I was the last one to stand outside of his front door, letting it remain open as I hoped against hope that he would come and wish me goodnight.

The sounds of my friend's boots pattered against the gravelled parking lot, letting me know they were nearly in front of Ashley's

car. I knew I had to leave him, but I didn't want too, especially not in this way.

"Aren't you going to kiss me goodbye?" I yelled out, knowing he could hear me from the living room. Light footsteps echoed down the hallway, and Damian lurked in the shadows just within my line of sight.

"I want you to stay with me," he hushed softly. "But I know that you can't."

"I can."

"No," he entreated in a deep tenor. "And you aren't ..." There was a long pause that made me feel concerned. "I thought you were something to me, but I was wrong."

"A mate," I knowingly replied. "Damian, I want to take things slow with you. I know we just slept together this afternoon, but that doesn't mean I want to suddenly move in with you and start all over again. I have a career, you know. A future!"

"A future," he uttered out sinisterly. "A future you could have with me."

"I like you."

"Just ... like?" he drawled out the words.

The lighting changed and I looked over my right shoulder to see the last of the sun dwindle away. There was a change in the room, I could feel it, and suddenly Damian briskly walked to physically push me out of the doorway.

"Go home," he shot out before he slammed the front door in front of my face, making the locks clang loudly against the hinges in a maddening way. I stood there horrified, staring at the door he had suddenly closed on me.

"Damian!" I yelled out angrily, unhappy with the way he just kicked me out of his house. "Damian!" I banged my fist into the door with frustration. "Fine! But don't expect to see me in the

morning.”

I stormed away from his front door and stepped down the short staircase to get to Ashley’s vehicle. Her car was running when I approached it. The lights began to dim outside of Damian’s home as he turned off the patio lights one by one. I watched the curtains to his kitchen room window swoosh close sharply, knowing he had a clear line of sight of me for one final time. “Damn him,” I cursed aloud, still unhappy with the way he was treating me. I swung the passenger door open with a sharp, violent gesture.

“What happened?” she demanded, after I took a seat beside her. She turned off the engine and laid a comforting hand over the top of my knee. “Sara?”

“He is so committed, but I can’t do it!” I wailed out. “I hardly know him, and I feel like he is asking too much of me.”

She shushed me fervently, seeing how my chest heaved wildly as I did my best to control my temper. “He is,” she assured me, and then brought her hand upwards to pull me into her chest. She gave me a comforting hug while my other two friends offered reassuring words from the backseat. “You hardly know him,” Ashley reminded me.

“I don’t understand him,” I fretted aloud. “What does he want from me?”

“He wants you, love,” she murmured. Her hand stroked the top of my back, and I felt so thankful to have a friend like her. “You should talk to him.”

“I tried, and he pushed me out the door and locked it.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s Damian,” I bitterly replied. “I swear something terrible could happen to me, and he wouldn’t even come outside to save me.” I squinted my eyes and wiped the corner of it with

my fingers, suddenly aware of how pitch-black it was outside. “Why are all his lights off?” I questioned aloud.

“I don’t know,” Ashley murmured beside me. “I didn’t even notice he turned them all off.”

“I can’t even see what’s in front of me,” I joked, before I shifted in my seat to look at my friends. “I’m sorry about that.”

Ben was busy staring out the window beside him, so it was Taylor that took on the role as a comforting friend. “He’s a bit intense, Sara. No guy should demand that much commitment from day one.”

“I think that is just how he is,” I sadly relayed. “He can’t help himself.”

“Hey guys,” Ben piped up nervously. “I think I see something.”

“What?” I demanded, and then reverted my gaze to Ben. He had his face pressed up against the glass window. “What do you see?”

“I don’t know.” Ben squinted into the darkness, looking totally transfixed at what was in front of him. “I think it’s ... Damian?”

“What?” I was the first to open the door, but Ashley took a hold of my hand and told me to stay. “I want to know why he is outside.”

“Listen to me!” Ashley yelled out. “We are not going outside.”

I shut the door closed and sneered, “you aren’t scared of the dark too?”

“I just want to go back to our cabin,” she lied to me. “And you should too.”

“I want to talk to him,” I moaned, turning my gaze back to Ben who I caught staring at Taylor with a horrified expression. “What is it?”

Ben's voice was shaky as he answered, "he ... I think ..."

"What?"

"Sara ..."

"What is it?" I demanded.

"I think he was running."

"Where?"

"I think ..."

"Ben!" I screamed out, clearly having enough of his stammering.

"He was running really fast, but it was like ..."

I opened the car door again, but this time all three of my friends told me to stay inside. I shut the door a second time, hating them for being so stubborn. "Tell me!" I screamed out, having enough of them not keeping me in the loop.

"He was running towards the forest."

"Okay." I shrugged my shoulders at him, not sure what Ben was implying. "So what?"

"Why would he be running into the forest, Sara?" he questioned me with a look of pure scrutiny. "At this time of night?"

"Something must have happened?" I alternated my gaze to Ashley since she was so uncomfortably silent. "And we don't know if it was really him."

"Is there anyone else living on this campsite that you know about?" Ben demanded.

"No," I answered him in an empty voice. "What are you trying to say?"

"Red flags," Taylor piped up nervously. "I think it's a good thing he kicked you out of the house."

"Oh! So, you are against him too?"

"No," Taylor said with his hands raised into the air defensively. "I am only trying to point out that there is something

odd about this man you are interested in.” He moved upwards in his seat to bring himself closer to me. “Don’t you think it’s strange how intense this guy is? Sure, he could be lonely.” He turned his head to Ashley and then let it flicker to his boyfriend to see if they agreed with him. “I think him wanting you to commit so soon is a bad sign.”

“He likes me,” I reminded all three of them. “A lot!”

“Is he in love with you?”

“I don’t know,” I stammered out with frustration. A lone howl struck through the air, forcing a shiver down my spine once I realized how close it was to our car. “We should go.”

Ashley immediately flickered on the high beams since a strange fog had suddenly surrounded her car. She turned on the windshield wipers to block out the snowflakes, and then she reversed out of the parking lot slowly to make her way back to the main road.

“It’s only a wolf,” Ashley reminded us all. “And besides, our cabins aren’t too far away.”

“Ashley!” her brother called out. “Maybe we shouldn’t have come here.”

She turned onto the main gravelled road, letting our car drive alongside Damian’s cabin as the car drove up the steep gravelled hill.

“The potholes,” my friend murmured under her breath. “I’ll have to take it slow.”

“No hurry,” Taylor reminded her. “Take your time.” Another howl rang behind us, making all four of us look over our shoulders as we realized how close it was. “I changed my mind,” Taylor nervously laughed.

“Go faster!” Ben screamed out, clearly the most freaked out of the four of us.

"I have to take my time. Unless you want to change a flat tire in the dark."

"It's a pothole!"

"More than one," she reminded her younger brother. "And you know how bumpy this road is."

I pulled out my cellphone, wondering if Damian left me a text message, only to find my charger was on the last bar. *No, of course he wouldn't message me.* I looked to my right to see the darkness of the fog in front of the car, hating how I was still replaying our argument at a time like this. *I wanted to be with him, but I feel like he was demanding too much from me.*

"Why did you think you saw Damian?" I questioned Ben, after I turned in my seat to catch sight of him.

"Sara!" he yelled out. "Are you asking me this now?"

"Yes!"

"Who else could it be?" Ben shrilled out with a dramatic wave of his hands.

"An animal?"

"What kind of animal runs like a human?" he shot back harshly. "I know what I saw!"

"How was he running?"

"He was running," Ben fought back fiercely.

"Yeah, but was it a scared run?"

"He was running," Ben said in a steely voice, "towards the forest."

"Why?"

"I don't know!" he screamed out in frustration.

The car suddenly jerked to the side once Ashley hit a pothole, making her curse under her breath. "Shut up everyone!" she cried out. "I can't concentrate when you are all screaming at each other."

“Your brother is a liar!” I yelled back. “How am I supposed to sleep when I am worried sick about Damian?”

“The man can take care of himself.”

“Admit it!” I charged out. “You *all* hate him!” The car went into a pothole again, the same front wheel as last time that made Ashley groan out with worry. “I like him. I don’t know why I like him, but I just do. And no, this isn’t like my past crushes.”

“Or boyfriends,” Taylor jeered behind me. I was about to turn around to give him a piece of my mind when the car suddenly reared to the left, making us all scream out when something hit it.

“Oh my god!” I screamed out as I spotted something rubbing harshly against the side of the car, making Ashley slam down on the pedal to avoid whatever it was trying to ram the car. The tires screeched under the loose gravel, going up the hill frantically as it lifted itself off the ground nearly creating a wheelie.

We all screamed at the same time, growing louder once we felt the car being rammed at the right side again. The car nearly tipped over, but Ashley’s quick maneuvering of the wheel sent the car onto the right, striking the blackened creature hard, enough for us to drive up the last of the hill. Her bright headlights illuminated our cabin, making Ben scream out in pure joy to see the wooden lodges.

“Get inside!” Ashley yelled out. “That includes you boys.”

We were already undoing our seatbelt’s as Ashley pulled up to the front of our cabin. Ashley parked the car, nervously letting out quick breaths as she debated whether we should leave the car right away.

“What was that thing?” I demanded. “Someone please answer me!”

“It’s the thing that killed all those people,” Ashley fretted. “It

doesn't make sense."

"What doesn't?"

"We aren't anywhere near the forest."

"You're an idiot!" I screamed at her in pure fury. "You took me all this way—"

"Shut up!" she fought back. "This wasn't supposed to happen."

"Oh, and what was supposed to happen then?"

"It must be a joke!" she nervously stammered out. "A prank."

"A prank?"

"It's Halloween, Sara."

"You think this is funny?" I exclaimed, as I saw a moving shadow pass over the side mirror at my right. "I think it came back."

"It's not a prank," Taylor told me from the back of the car.  
"At least, I'm not in on it."

"Neither am I," Ben grunted with indignation. "Unless it's your precious little Damian."

I turned in my seat to have a go at him as well when I suddenly felt the hairs at the back of my neck rise. I fell back into my chair, letting my hand rest over the back of my nape and then slowly turned to the right. I held my breath as I saw two piercing green eyes reflecting the moonlight, and then shuddered when I felt they so closely resembled Damian's.

My eyebrows lowered with confusion as I stared harder at the thing just outside of my window. "Damian?" I mouthed, which made Ashley look in my direction.

She let out a blood curdling scream, slamming on the pedal to reverse backwards at blinding speed that made me grip onto the inside side of the car door. A grinding noise shrilled at the top of the car; the headlights suddenly blocked by a large creature that

drove his claws into the front of the hood. I let out a scream as we could hear the front half of the car lowering, a low groaning of the engine as the heavy creature brought its claws over the hood of the car.

Ashley suddenly slammed on the brakes, forcing the creature forward and off the car. Before she had time to ram the car over it, the creature jumped straight into the window which created crazed lines over the glass surface.

"He's trying to break in," Ashley fretted, and had no choice but to reverse the vehicle again. The creature stalked us, the bright headlights revealing its whole frame.

"It's a wolf," I mouthed aloud with fascination. "A wolf!"

"He's huge," Ben breathed out with amazement.

"And he's trying to kill us!" Ashley screamed out to bring us back to reality. "Let's get out of here." She did a sharp U-turn while reversing, letting the wolf fall back into the endless darkness once the headlights shone away from him.

She hit the brakes to set the car in drive, but her sedan got slammed into again from the rear right corner, making Taylor scream out when he realized the creature was so close to him. The back half of the tire leaned backwards and into the right, the sound of air bursting out of the tire set us into a state of alarm. The car was hit on the side again, making Ben cry out in terror as he realized we were trapped.

"Anyone have a gun?" Ashley screamed out, since she was the only one still in the right frame of mind. "I think we have a flat." The car heaved to the left suddenly, it was clear the wolf was trying to break in.

"Let's get out now before it is too late," Ben suggested. "We can still make it inside."

"Are you mad?" Taylor screamed out. "It will kill us all before

then.”

“I didn’t reverse that far,” Ashley pointed out. “Sara, are you in?”

“I’m staying,” I said with a terror-stricken voice, hating this thing that continually rubbed the front of his head against my side of the car window. “I don’t understand. What does it want from us?”

Taylor’s couldn’t hold back his sarcasm as he pointed out, “this is what you get for dressing up as Little Red Riding Hood.”

I turned sharply in my seat, and yelled out, “I swear to God if that thing doesn’t get you first—”

A loud howl shrilled in front of us, making the hairs over the back of my neck rise so much that I turned to look at the enormous wolf next to my car window. The creature growled low as he crept its way to the back of Taylor’s seat, making him tremble with nerves as he felt the eyes of the wolf pay attention to him.

“Taylor ...” I mouthed out with worry, before the creature rammed itself into his side of the window. The car heaved high into the air, making me think we were about to tip over.

“Get out!” Taylor screamed with a hard push against his boyfriend. “Get out!” He screamed at the top of his lungs, forcing Ben to unlock the door and sprint outside with his plastic sword flinging in his hand.

“Ben!” Ashley screamed out with horror, but she was too late, her brother was sprinting into the darkness of the night. The wolf growled out aggressively, making us all scream as we watched it stealthily walk around the back of the car.

“He’s coming through the open door,” Taylor yelled out, and quickly scampered to the left side of the car to shut it. “Stay out,” he demanded after he slammed it shut, which only provoked the

wolf into a state of anger. “Let’s go through the other side.”

“Ben is out there!” Ashley cried. “Help him!”

“I’m trying,” he grunted, and then moved to his usual seat before he pried it open. “Argh!” he screamed dramatically as he burst through the open door and sprinted out as fast as he could towards our cabin.

“They don’t have our key,” I suddenly realized, as I moved backwards to desperately try and reach for Taylor’s open door.

“Sara,” Ashley uttered with pure misery, only for me to look over my shoulder to see the wolf was standing dead ahead of the vehicle with the car headlights illuminating his face. “The wolf is looking at you.”

“Shit,” I mouthed under my breath, before I crawled over the car seat to make my way into the back. I shut the door before the wolf realized it was wide open and locked it with a satisfied grunt. “Okay, now what?”

“We can’t drive.”

“They are out there,” I reminded her.

“I know that!”

“We have to let them into our cottage.”

“They have a key for theirs,” Ashley reminded me as she watched the wolf unhurriedly make its way to my side of the car door. “I only hope they can find it in the darkness.”

“And the fog,” I reminded her as I kept my eyes on the wolf that was hovering low over the ground with its eyes intently on mine. “What does he want?” The wolf pressed his nose against the glass window, sniffing it curiously with his eyes solely on mine. There was something wrong with this picture, why was all his attention on me.

“A surprise attack would be great right now,” I muttered under my breath, but I knew Taylor and Ben were not the type to do

that. I was almost certain that not even Ben's knight in shining armor costume was enough for him to come back here and save us, even if he did have a plastic sword. "What should we do?" I moaned out in misery.

"The wolf wants you," Ashley whispered from the driver's seat.

"What?" I mouthed out with disbelief. "No, it doesn't."

The wolf turned away, and then began to circle around the car slowly. I kept my eye on him, taking in the darkness of his fur whenever he passed the front headlights of Ashley's car. I could tell he was waiting, buying his time, but I wasn't sure why he was so interested in me.

"You think the boys will call the police?" Ashley inquired.

"And tell them what ... a gigantic wolf is out attacking people?"  
"Sara?"

"No one is going to believe us," I protested.

"We have proof," she shot back. "My damaged car."

"Relax, at least it's not your life."

"Says the one that is attracting wolves out of nowhere."

"It's only *one*," I argued back, after I reverted my gaze to the uncommonly large wolf. "I don't think it wants to hurt me."

"It wants you."

"I'm not sure why ..." I laid my hand against the glass in front of him and watched as the wolf raised his head to sniff at the glass surface that stood between us.

"What do you want?" I demanded, unsure why this creature was so fascinated with me. "Why are you so desperate to get inside of here?"

"I say we split," Ashley proposed. She offered me a false smile once I turned my attention to her. "Or do you want to stay here all night?"

“Yes.”

“Sara, it’s cold.”

“It is better than being eaten to death.”

“It won’t do that to you.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’m not leaving this car until it is safe.”

She rubbed her finger over her bottom lip and then dropped it against the steering wheel. “I’m going to risk it.” She took the key out of the ignition, setting the whole parking lot into darkness. “Are you coming or not?”

“Ashley?”

“It didn’t chase after Taylor or Ben.”

“Yeah, but ...”

“It stayed here.”

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean we will be as lucky as them this time.”

“I’m going to risk it.”

“Based on a hunch?” I reminded her. “Don’t be—”

“Are you coming or not?” she interjected.

“Damian could come rescue us,” I suggested in vain. “Maybe the boys ran down the hill to his cottage.”

“You can’t be serious right now, Sara,” my friend complained.  
“Damian?”

“He has guns,” I pointed out. “Knives.” I raised my hands in the air helplessly. “I know he would do anything to protect me.”

The car rocked beside me, making me revert my attention back to the wolf that backed up a little before it struck his body against the sturdy car door. He started to growl out angrily, snarling on the other side of the car door since he could not break in. I sensed his desperation and slid over to the left side of the car

seat to create some distance.

“Damian isn’t coming!” Ashley yelled out. “We saw him run into the woods.”

“Your brother did,” I reminded her. “Which is a lie.”

“Why would my brother lie to you?” she remonstrated, before the car rocked harshly to the left again. “If we don’t get out now the car will be tipped over and then we are screwed.”

“It’s fine.”

“I’m leaving.”

“Ashley!”

“3 … 2 …”

“No!”

“1!”

“Nooooo!” The door cracked open and I watched in horror as Ashley sprinted out of it, she ran around the back of the car, attracting the wolf’s attention and he sprinted after her.

“Ashley!” I yelled out, but it was too late, the wolf pounced on her from behind and took her down to the ground. “Ashley,” I screamed in terror as I heard her blood curdling cries mingled with the furious growls of the beast that was digging his claws into her. I couldn’t see anything once the wolf’s body covered hers, but I could make out her scream at the top of her lungs for a few moments until the parking lot became deadly silent. I rolled into a fetal position in the back seat, wailing lowly as I shivered in the cold.

“Ashley,” I hushed through the crack of my lips, knowing she was dead. “I told you not too ...” I sniffled loudly and used the back of my hand to prevent myself from crying. “I told you ...”

I could hear the low growls of the wolf, knowing he was eating at her dead corpse. I felt sick to my stomach, wanting to throw up. My eyes were shut as I tried to drown out the sound, knowing

it was only a matter of time until the wolf would return for me. I had the option of running, but I feared I would have the same fate as Ashley.

*But if I don't leave now, he will come back for me ...*

*The wolf's distracted*, I realized and came out of the fetal position to look through the glass window. I could see the back of the wolf under the pale moonlight, watching his eerie shape under the heavy fog and tiny flakes of snow.

*Damian could come*, I thought, but the last warning Ashley gave to me was disheartening. There is no way he would come out the house in the dark. *I know him! He would never do that sort of thing.*

*Ben isn't one to lie though*, I remembered, especially when he knew how upset I was over my argument with Damian.

*But then again there were those footprints outside his door*, I recalled, and then suddenly turned my head to the wolf's direction. *And the dirt in his bathtub.*

*And the cuts across the sides of his arms*, I remembered, knowing there were fresh enough to be incurred over the past few days. The wolf abruptly lifted his head and turned his gaze to me. I moved back in my seat, sensing his attention had suddenly reverted to me once again.

"Oh no," I muttered under my breath, as the large creature quietly stalked his way towards me. In the pale moonlight I could see blood dripping from his open jaws; the steady paws that padded heavily against the gravelled parking lot with a determined look. "He's coming back."

The wolf moaned once he sat outside of my car door, peering through the clear glass to have a good look at me. The look was unnerving, he never wavered his attention from me. "What do you want?" I cried out, finally losing it when I could see the

blood dripping from its jawline. “Go away!”

The moan grew louder, making me think of someone else. I blinked my eyes weakly and then shifted myself closer to the car window to have a better look at the creature.

“Your eyes are green,” I mouthed aloud. “Green like ...” A sick pain shot itself through my stomach, once I realized what I was about to say. I shook my head at the creature, wishing he would just go away from me.

“Leave me alone,” I begged of him.

The wolf titled his head downwards and let out a miserable moan. He moved to the side, and then pounced upon the hood of the car. His neck stretched out to the fullest and then he let out a dreadfully long howl. I closed my eyes at the sound of it, feeling like it was striking a chord inside of me.

When I finally opened my eyes, I caught the wolf staring at me entreatingly, feeling like he was trying to communicate to me somehow. A low whimper escaped him, though the wolf’s mouth was closed and then he laid a paw onto the front glass of the car window as if he was reaching for me. My eyes watered at the interaction, knowing I should be horrified since it just killed Ashley, but for some reason I wasn’t scared.

*Why am I not scared?* I crawled over to the front seat of the car and leaned forward in the driver’s seat to lay my hand over his large grey paw, allowing physical touch without us ever truly touching the other because of the thickness of the glass window.

“What do you want?” I softly pleaded.

The wolf made no reply, only lowering his paw until he could stand over the car hood proudly. I turned my head away with distrust, not sure what to do now that I was left alone in the car. There were no sign of Ben and Taylor, and who knows what their plan of action would be.

*And then there is the question of Damian, I remembered, before I let my gaze move upwards to look at the wolf again. Where was Damian when I need him the most?*

The wolf glared at me, and in my heart, I could come up with no reply.

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I looked at my cellphone, the battery was completely dead. Annoyed that it ran out of juice, I rolled over in the back seat, mindlessly staring at the grey ceiling as I tried to come up with a plan. There were low howls across the forest, but they were far enough away to inform me I was in no real danger. My main cause of concern was still perched over the hood of Ashley's car, curled into a comfortable ball with only the tips of his pointed ears illuminated in the pale moonlight.

*What time is it? Will I have to wait here the entire night?*

I jammed my phone back into my pocket, and tiredly stroked my fingers through the length of my hair. The wolf's nose perked up, lifting off his arm as it sniffed the air. A low moan escaped him, before he rose upwards, and then lazily hopped off the hood of the car to work his way around to my side of the window.

"Please go away," I murmured, knowing that look of longing was tearing me apart. The wolf lowered his head, and then padded forward, moving ever so softly under the moonlight to return to Ashley's corpse.

"Ugh," I grumbled, since I knew exactly what the wolf intended to do next. I covered my mouth in disgust, not wanting to be in this car anymore. I only wished I had the keys, although I would not get very far with a flat tire. There was no point running to my cabin as well, the key was in Ashley's pocket and there is no way in hell I would get that back.

My only option was to run an even further distance to Taylor, and Ben's cabin; but could I guarantee that my friends made it there safely? And how would I be able to find their small cabin in the dark?

A howl echoed through the dark forest, making the wolf in the center of the parking lot perk up his ears and turn around. He seemed consumed by the chorus of sounds vibrating through the forest, hauntingly echoing in the wind as it blew across the empty parking lot.

*I could go to Damian's, I thought, I know he will open the door for me.*

*I could climb up his front porch, I convinced myself, even though I knew not one word of it was true.*

The fog was lifting, letting my eyes scan the empty horizon to make out the cabin that I could have run too if it hadn't been for a missing key. I looked further to the right, seeing the crumbled form of my friend that I was helpless to rescue. I closed my eyes at the sight of it, knowing I was only looking at a few remains of her dismembered body now. It was clear enough for me to see a flock of birds descending over her body, their black wings flapping energetically as they ...

I turned my head not wanting to see anymore, forcing the rest of my lingering thoughts from my mind. I looked straight ahead of me, seeing the tip of Damian's cottage. *It's not so far, I lied to myself, if I run fast I might make it.* I foolishly unzipped my boots, knowing it was next to impossible to run in them.

The wolf was momentarily distracted, seemingly bothered that the ravens were taking up the last of his food. I unlocked the driver's door and waited until I sensed I had a clearing. The wolf turned around and made his way to the dead carcass, and that's when I creaked the door opened gently and slipped through the

narrow crack. I froze, peering through the two glass windows to see the other side where the wolf was currently padding his way to the flock of ravens. *I think I got it*, I told myself, and then left the door ajar in case I had to sneak back inside.

My dress hiked up higher, and I tipped toed around the front of the car. A part of me wanted to flee into the forest, but I knew I would get lost in there. The safest route to take was Damian's cabin; and maybe, he might open the front door for me.

I tip-toed a bit more, passing the damaged hood of the car that had a deep concave from the wolf's weight. *I can make it*, I thought, and walked a bit faster, noticing how the wolf was too consumed with eating the last of his meal.

*I'm free.*

I took larger steps, feeling the jarring pain of the sharp rocks underneath my bare feet. An excruciating feeling was felt with every step, but if I wanted to make it through this night alive it was something I had to endure. A stray raven flew into the air, and decided to hover over me, making me look over my shoulder even more in the hopes that the wolf had not notice my absence.

A strange flashback of Damian's interaction with the raven earlier today came into my mind, but luckily this one didn't seem interested in antagonizing me. I skipped over the jagged rocks faster, realizing I had created more distance than I could have ever imagined. The stray raven continued to make large circles around me, squawking randomly to my dismay.

I could make out the outline of Damian's cabin, catching sight of his wooden porch where I could find some refuge for the night. The fabric of my black stockings were tearing at my feet, flinging to the sides of my ankles as if it had enough of my ill-treatment.

The sharp gravelled hill appeared in my view, and I nearly smiled once I realized I was almost there. A low growl made me

stop in my tracks and in horror I looked over my shoulder to see the wolf was circling the car.

*He realized I that am gone.*

I was too scared to move, frozen still as I heard a low moan escape the creature's parted lips. I held my breath with anticipation, knowing it was only a matter of time until he spotted me.

"Please don't," I whispered under my breath, while a sharp wind blew at the side of me, sending a painful shiver down my spine. "Please."

The wolf visibly sniffed at the air, and then suddenly turned his gaze in my direction.

I closed my eyes with regret, knowing he could see my outline in the empty parking lot. I opened them to see the wolf padding his way towards me. Without thinking it through I broke out into a sprint. I abandoned the last patch of gravel to make my way down the grassy hill, forgoing the obvious path to move over the slick wet fern with careful steps. I slid over a portion of mud, sliding downwards to mess up my dress before I scampered back to my feet.

The heavy padding of the wolf sounded behind me, coming faster than I anticipated. I sprinted over the grassy field, hating myself every time I tripped over unsuspecting loose gravel that was peppered across it. I looked behind me to see the wolf sprinting towards me, hopping downwards with lighting speed with his face close to the ground. I held up my dress, keeping one arm out in case I fell again and sharply turned to the right where I knew the pathway to Damian's house would be.

"Damian!" I yelled at the top of my lungs, knowing he would be able to hear me from his open bedroom window. "Damian!" I screamed, before I looked behind me to see the wolf was nearly

upon me.

I slipped on a puddle of thick mud, losing my balance before I fell forward. I had no time to get up before the wolf pounced on top of me, making me scream at the top of my lungs. He brought its jaws into me, gripping on the back of my red cloak to lift me off the ground. I cried in horror, too startled to take in that he hadn't harmed me yet.

"Let me go!" I cried out, only for him to lift me up higher till I was back on my feet. I tried to move back but the wolf kept a firm grip around my cloak, ensuring there was no way for me to escape. I gasped at the sight of this great beast, realizing it was almost as tall as I was when resting on all fours.

The wolf opened his mouth to release my cloak, causing me to take a large step backwards in utter fear. I noticed the bright red blood glossing the fur around his mouth, knowing it was Ashley's blood dripping down onto the patch of mud at my feet. I whimpered helplessly, walking backwards with my hands clenched together in two fists. A quick glance over my shoulder told me Damian's cabin wasn't too far off, but there was no point even running there when this wolf was right in front of me.

A sharp wheezing sound shot my eyes back to the beast, who had curiously lowered himself to the ground to take a better look at me. He should have killed me by now, but he hadn't. I was confused as to why he decided to keep me alive. Peaceful green eyes weighed heavily upon me; his chin lowered ever so slightly in humble respect. I could see a long stripe of black going up his brow, marking the spine of his back while the rest of the wolf's fur was a warm dark shade of brown. The wolf closed his lids at me, making me wonder what he was trying to communicate.

I looked past the wolf to see the curve of the grassy hill; beyond it was an array of snowflakes reflecting the clear moonlight. It's

*a full moon*, I realized, after the clouds had been cleared from the autumn fog. The stars were just as bright as the moon tonight, distracting me for a moment before I felt a cold sensation at the back of my hand.

I looked down to see the wolf was pressing his nose against my skin, making a tiny sound before he pushed it forward and nuzzled the side of his face against my body. I froze at the touch, knowing it was strong enough to take me down and eat me alive. The remains of Ashley's blood were brushed against the side of my red cloak, making me sick as I could almost smell it in the air.

The wolf's nose pressed itself against my side, and then let out a tiny moan that made me take a step backwards. He followed me with a lowered gaze, using the tip of his nose to push me in the direction he wished me to take. Oddly enough he led me back to the gravelled pathway of Damian's house, and then abandoned my side to sniff along the pathway with a curious air. I watched the large wolf move around in a zigzag pattern, occasionally looking back at me to make sure I had not escaped.

He hopped over the wooden staircase, and then stopped in front of Damian's door. Two front paws were raised, and then he stood on his hind legs in front of Damian's doorway, making me feel terrified that some harm should come to him as well. The wolf was busy sniffing the doorway and then he crashed back to the ground, and before I had time to process anything more, he let out a harrowing howl that shook through the air.

I took a step back in horror, wondering why the wolf was so tame in front of Damian's house. Clear green eyes reflected mysteriously in the moonlight when the wolf averted his gaze back to me, and without warning he pounced off the staircase and kept his nose close to the ground as he sniffed the pathway

that ultimately lead to me. The wolf's jaws open wide to take a hold of the bottom of my dress and tugged me forward.

"Hey!" I yelled out, not wanting to be dragged this way, but the wolf ignored me and took me down the gravelled pathway. It felt strange walking past Damian's pick-up truck, even more so when I scanned his pitch-black cabin to see no lights were on inside of his house. The wolf let me go to circle himself around me, and then burrowed his nose into the back of my spine to send me forward.

"Okay!" I yelled out, sensing he was telling me to move forward. "I get it."

We walked down the last of the parking lot, before the wolf padded ahead and looked to the left and the right of the empty road. He sniffed the air curiously, and then seemed satisfied once he lightly trotted its way back to me. I knew he was leading me into the forest, and a part of me was trying to come up with a plan to not let that happen.

*Why didn't Damian at least turn on a light when he heard me scream? What if Ben is right, and Damian isn't at his place after all?*

I was losing faith in Damian, maybe even my own sanity.

The wolf opened his mouth to reveal his pink tongue, letting it hang out slightly as he lifted his head playfully towards me. He drove his face into my side, rubbing it incessantly in an overly affectionate manner. I found my fingertips spreading out wide to feel the thick fur over the curved back of the wolf, marveling at the soft texture that brought a tiny smile to my face.

The wolf moaned in happiness, making a sound I had heard before. His jaws opened wider to take a hold of my cloak, tugging on it playfully to send me into the outer regions of the dark forest. I was scared, trying to pull back since I didn't want to go inside, but the wolf's warning growl made me rethink it. I stepped over

the dirt pathway, finding my feet were eternally thankful to not be on the gravelled roadway anymore.

The wolf's ears perked up once we reached the entrance, scanning the forestry as if he was hearing something. Satisfied, he took a tighter rein of my red cloak and pulled on it harshly to keep me moving. I found it odd that the wolf was taking an open path, a pathway that was very familiar to me since I had taken it this very morning with Damian.

Another pang at the bottom of my stomach hit me, a wave of suspicion that I couldn't put into words. The wolf continued to move me forward, and soon I passed the spot where I once took off my coat because of the sun's heat.

*None of this is making any sense.*

An occasional howl from a wolf would ring through the air, sending the wolf in front of me to step forward and let out his own prideful howl. He was the loudest of them all, the most powerful one. *The alpha-male*, I thought, before my cheeks turned red as I remembered hearing that word earlier today as well.

*This can't all be a coincidence, can it?*

Eventually we passed the spot where Damian and I sat down to drink water, making me remember how upset he was when I mentioned the people that had been mauled to death at this campsite. This very same creature was in front of me now, keeping a tight rein over the side of my cloak to keep me close to his side. I thought it was poetic irony for me to be dressed as the Little Red Riding Hood, even more so, when I thought that I was taking the very same path that Damian showed me this morning. The two of them seemed to be so in-sync, so in tuned with the other that it made me wonder if Damian and the wolf were one and the same.

*It's like there are two people in you, I recalled myself saying after I passed that familiar spot. What if I wasn't wrong about that after all?*

"Damian," I spoke aloud, but this strong, enormous beast did not respond to the name. "Damian?"

The wolf continued to move forward, letting go of my cloak with the clear assumption that I would follow him anyways. A part of me thought of running, but then I remembered what happened to Ashley. We walked on for another twenty-minutes, tired to the bone and insufferably cold from the frigid temperatures. It was colder in the forest and, without the consistent lighting from the full moon rays, it made everything so much harder to see. The wolf must have sensed my difficulty, for he took a hold of the bottom of my dress to tug me forward.

Eventually I heard rushing water from a waterfall, recognizing that sound instantly as I trudged across the forest floor. *Damian was so desperate to take me there*, I remembered, and recalled how happy he was to dip his feet into the icy water. I blushed when I remembered what he tried to do afterwards, recalling how abrupt his sudden change of mood was.

*I sensed, echoed in the back of my head, I thought you wanted it too.*

*We're not animals, Damian.*

A part of me wanted to run at this point, not wanting this wolf to drag me any closer to the falls. I tugged on the end of my dress, making it shred upwards with a loud rip. The wolf growled at me in resentment, making me swallow hard under his unsettling glare. "Where are you taking me?" I demanded, not caring one bit that he couldn't understand. "I want to go home."

The wolf took a hold of the other side of my dress with his fangs, dragging me deeper into the forest whether I wished it

too or not. I considered fighting back, but I knew it would be in vain. The deeper we went, the darker the forest had become. Soon enough it became impenetrable, letting me know it would be next to impossible to escape the wolf's grasp and find my way out of the forest alive.

The wolf let me go suddenly to scamper forward, pouncing over a large rock to duck himself deep into the thick forestry. A sharp sound ignited through the air, and soon enough he came trotting back to me with a small hare in between his jaws. The wolf dropped it in front of me, making my eyelashes bat at him curiously.

"Are you giving it to me?" I questioned him.

The wolf tilted his head upwards, expecting something, but I was not sure what he wanted me to give him. A minute passed, and then he made a tiny moan before it ripped off the head of the hare for good. He ate the rest of the body steadily, making me look towards the towering silhouette of trees as I wondered what I had gotten myself into. The wolf ate the last of the animal, and only when his pink tongue licked around his blackened mouth that I knew he had his fill.

White fangs clamped onto the side of my dress right next to my hip to pull me forward, sending me into the depths of the forest where a heavy mist came into my view. The sound of the waterfall grew louder, making me squint my eyes into the darkness as the pathway became more obscure. The wolf let me go once we reached a clearing, and quickly scampered forward with a happy gait.

He circled a large plastic Tupperware container and then dug his face into it greedily. I stood at the edge of the opening, recognizing that green container all too well. A flashback of me seeing it in Damian's kitchen came into my mind, the labels

of moose and deer had suddenly made more sense to me.

*It was intended for the wolf*, I realized as I watched him munch happily away at the food, *Damian is feeding this thing ...*

I stepped forward, examining the area as if Damian would suddenly appear in my line of sight. *He must have dropped it off in the afternoon*, I surmised, remembering how adamant he was for me to not open the door of his fridge this evening.

I could hear Damian's voice in the back of my head as he once uttered, "Let's just say, there is a *reason* I am the only one able to survive out here all alone."

*Why would he feed the wolf?*

I crept forward, looking down the icy cliff where Damian had dangled his feet inside of the water. The spot where he kissed me was unfortunately where the Tupperware container was positioned.

*You smell so good*, echoed in the back of my head, *taste so good*.

The wolf lifted his head to take a long look at me, and then plucked up a slab of meat to carry it towards me. He dropped it at my feet, and then waited for me to take it up.

I felt conflicted at the sight of it, knowing I couldn't eat raw meat like the wolf. "Why are you giving this to me?" The wolf opened his jaws to take a hold of the meat, letting it dangle in front of my waist for me to take. "I can't eat it."

The meat was dropped down to my feet, and then his ears pointed backwards defensively. He let out a snarl as he turned around, and then bent down low to the ground with his eyes peering into the darkness.

"Damian?" I asked into the darkened forest, hoping that he had suddenly showed up to save me. "Ben?"

A growl was my answer, and then a scraggly black wolf appeared from the darkened forest to creep its way towards

the rushing falls. The wolf next to me growled louder, opening his mouth to let out a fiercer noise. The intruder attempted to respond in kind, but it wasn't as loud or as fierce as the one next to me. An aggressive growl came from them both, and then they sprinted towards each other to nip at the other's side, one arm brought the black wolf down, and then its leg kicked harshly at it.

I stepped away realizing I was in the middle of a fight and thought it best to stay out of the way as their growls grew louder. *It's the food*, I realized, knowing it must have attracted the other wolf.

The brown wolf suddenly stood on his hind legs, towering over the other wolf so much that it tried to scamper away, but it was too late for the front paws landed on top of him and a sharp set of teeth barrelled its way into the black wolf's neck. There was a painful sound in front of me, making me hide against a rocky wall until the worst was over. The black wolf was soon dragged over to the bucket of raw meat, and then the larger brown wolf stalked its way towards me in the darkness.

I fell to my knees in fear, trying to figure out what this thing wanted from me. A whimper escaped the wolf with an open mouth and then he nuzzled the front of his snout into my chest. His front paws padded over my shoulder which made me scream out in pain once his razor-sharp claws dug its way into my skin.

Without warning the wolf pressed his cold nose against the side of my arm, sniffing my clothing with interest, and then he brought his nose up to my neck where he sniffed it even longer. A low moan escaped him, and then it let the tip of his tongue trail up my neck. I closed my eyes knowing someone had done that to me a few hours earlier.

"Damian," I whispered with worry.

The wolf let his nose sniff at my collarbone, brushing the front of his snout into the side of my hair. I was too scared to move and only when he opened his jaws wide to bite at the curve of my shoulder that I let out a frightened wail. I could feel my skin being torn from me, the searing pain as his fangs dug their way deeper into my shoulder blade. I tried to push him away with my left hand, but it was to no avail; the creature's fangs were too deep in my shoulder for me to shove the massive creature away.

When the wolf finally released me, I fell to my side in utter pain. I cried out with agony, feeling the blood pour out from the open wound as I watched the wolf scamper away from me. I couldn't move, too shocked to think clearly. My legs curled into the top of my chest and I let out a low cry, trying to fight back the pain that was throbbing over my right shoulder. I laid my cold fingers against it, wincing once it touched the throbbing area.

I knew I had to bind up the wound, so I removed my shredded red cloak and pressed it against my aching shoulder. I would have to wrap up the open wound, but right now I needed a few more moments to regain my breath. The large wolf was perched against the rocky cliff howling to the moon, not even bothering to look in my direction. I could see the silhouette of him through my foggy eyes, watery from tears that I was trying to fight back.

"I'm so scared," I muttered under my breath, feeling like I had been kidnapped against my will. I tied the red cloth as tightly as I could against my shoulder blade, then went onto my knees to glare at the back of the wolf. A part of me wished I could just shove him off the cliff, but then I remembered that he did save my life.

*And then he bit me,* I thought, and looked at the red cloth

awkwardly tied around my collarbone and shoulder.

I rose myself to my feet and tiredly walked towards the wolf, noticing how he stopped howling once he sensed my presence. I glared down at him heatedly, spiteful that he caused me so much pain. The wolf sensed my negative energy and brought the front of his head against my belly.

“No,” I growled out, so the wolf moved his head downwards to a spot that was even worse. “Get out of there.” The wolf shifted his head to the side and leaned against my hip.

I found my left hand stroking his fur reluctantly, somewhat enamored by the soft texture of his fur. *It almost reminded me of Damian’s blanket*, I realized, and then bit down at my bottom lip once the thought crossed my mind. I had enough and bent low onto my knees, being at eye level with the creature that was steadily breaking my sanity.

“Are you Damian?” I questioned him and received only a blank expression. “Are you?” I paused to lay my hand over the side of the wolf’s jawline. “Damian.”

The wolf mistook my gesture as something more and began cuddling up with me. “No,” I groaned, but he had already pushed me down onto the rocky slab and prodded his head into the side of me. I lay helplessly, knowing he was too strong for me to overpower him. The wolf took a seat next to me, and curled his body beside mine, letting his chin rest next to my wounded shoulder with his nose sniffing the air slightly.

“I hope you can smell my blood,” I jeered at him. “Since you gave this to me.”

The wolf closed his eyes and leaned more of his weight against me, a thing I was slightly thankful for, since he was so warm. There was an occasional cry of black birds overhead as they could see the last of the wolf’s dinner, and a chorus of howls

from wolves that were leagues away, but aside from that, the area was thankfully quiet. I squinted my eyes to see the heavy mist hover over the rocky cliff under the moonlight, and the furry creature beside me that was keeping me warm. My fingers stroked his fur thankfully, and without realizing it I somehow slipped out of consciousness because of the pain and fell into a deep sleep.

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When I woke up the next morning the spot was empty. The container that once held the raw hunting meat was covered up with a sturdy lid. I raised myself higher, taking note of the squawking of a raven that circled over the raging waterfall. I then looked behind me and saw nothing but the bleakness of a rocky wall. I immediately felt pain as I tried to sit up over my entire right shoulder where the wolf brought his fangs into me.

“Ahh,” I groaned in agony. It took a few moments to sit up properly, and eventually I was able to look around the entire area in search of the wolf. The raven must have saw me moving; it fluttered downwards and landed on a slab of rock that was near me. Black eyes focused on me intensely, and then it let out a screeching sound that was on the verge of being annoying.

“I have no food for you,” I yelled at it, and used my hand to shoo it away. “And I’m not Damian.”

Feeling weak, I slowly raised myself to my feet and moved closer to the water’s edge. *I need to clean up this wound*, I told myself, knowing it would be infected. *I will have to see a doctor too.*

“Sara.”

I turned around to see the opening of the forest where the wolf once led me, seeing Damian standing there completely naked with a nervous look about him. He was completely grimy, a fresh

scratch in the set of claw marks trailed over the front of his left arm as he placed a hand over it.

I should have asked what he was doing here naked, or why he was not surprised to find me in this spot alone, but I didn't. I lowered my gaze as the truth slowly hit me, and then I turned my back to him as I let out a stifling cry. Damian approached me slowly, hovering just behind me with a sense of worry.

"I'm sorry," he mouthed out pitifully.

"Ashley."

"I know."

"Damian are you ..."

"Yes."

I turned around to face him, seeing the truth in those eternally sad eyes of his. He saw how much I faltered before him, and immediately wrapped his arms around me in silent comfort. I allowed myself to cry against the side of his neck, so overwhelmed with everything that I could not control my emotions any longer. Damian gingerly rubbed an arm against my solid back and chose to remain silent so he would not disrupt my troubling thoughts.

"I have no control over it," he finally relayed. "It all comes back to me in pictures, like dreams. I am sorry about your friend, Ashley."

"You killed her!" I said with spitefulness.

"He did."

"No."

"The wolf, Sara," he insisted with a tenseness to his voice. I curled my arm around him more, so distraught to do anything else. "I would never hurt you, even the wolf knew that."

"He bit me," I complained, and slunk out of Damian's arms to show him. I carefully removed the cloth binding to reveal the ghastly wound to him. My top set of teeth pierced my bottom

lip to suppress the series of groans that escaped me as the cold morning air kissed my sensitive skin. “Damian, I will have to see a doctor.”

“It’s infected.”

“I know,” I blurted out. “It killed Ashley and then it bit into all that red meat and—”

“Sara,” he cut in sharply. “That is not what I meant.”

“What do you mean?”

He let out an uneasy sigh and deliberated laying a hand over the side of my arm. Damian decided to take a step back and closed his eyes partially as he revealed, “it is infected by a werewolf.”

I blinked at him, trying to recall the folklore that I heard as a child. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying when the full moon rises and the wolfsbane blooms, you will be as *cursed* as I am.”

A long silence descended between us, one in which neither of us could look each other straight in the eyes.

“You did this!” I finally spat out. “You did this to me on purpose.”

“No.”

“You did!” I exclaimed with a shaky breath. “Didn’t you?”

“Why would I want you to put you through the same misery that I suffer through?”

“Because you wanted me to stay.”

“I do.”

“So, you ...”

“No,” he cut in, before closing the large gap between us. “That isn’t true.”

“You infected me with this thing.”

“The wolf did.”

“Oh! You’re blaming the wolf now.”

“I am.”

“Damian.”

“I would never do that to you,” he pleaded. “Believe me, Sara. Never!”

I could see the truth in his eyes, the pain.

“I told you that I wanted you to be my mate, and the wolf sensed it. Why else would he bite you?”

“What?”

“He must have smelt me on you,” he deliberated aloud. “And since we share the same conscious being, my feelings for you would have ...” Damian paused to lick at his lips nervously, “would have been transferred onto him as well.” Damian’s forest green eyes were full of expression as he uttered, “You mean the world to me, Sara.”

I was overwhelmed with feelings at this point, so I simply took a step away and let myself sit at the edge of the cliff alone. Damian took a seat next to me, making a small sniffling sound as the cold mist from the falls rested over his bare skin.

“Were you ever going to tell me the truth?”

“One day.”

“Did you know the wolf would do this to me?”

“Bite you?”

“Seek me out like that,” I voiced aloud. “With such determination.”

“The car,” he murmured. “I only see fragments of it in my mind, but I know the wolf did something to the car.”

“I care less about the car and more about Ashley.”

Damian’s voice was fraught with pain as he muttered, “I know you do.”

“She was my friend.”

“I know.”

“One of my best friends,” I droned out without a hint of emotion. “And now she’s gone because of you … and me.”

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“I got close to you, Damian.” He pursed his lips with regret, knowing the things I was saying were correct. “No matter. Speaking of the past won’t change anything.” I lowered my head to stare into the falls. “When will I become like you?”

“Could take weeks,” he mused aloud, “Months maybe?”

“But I will become a werewolf.”

“Yes.”

I nodded my head soberly, realizing it was a fate that I could not escape.

“Pure folly,” I uttered under my breath. “Coming here.”

“I wouldn’t have met you,” he began, but decided to drop the subject once I gave him a troubling look.

“What if I just drop off the edge of this cliff and end it now?”

“I tried to kill myself.” He felt my gaze on his profile but chose to not look in my direction. “The first victim was terrible, but after a while you just become numb. It’s the coldness, the icy feeling you get when you see families cry over their dead loved ones and not feel anything because deep down inside you know that you did it, and there is nothing you could have done to stop it.”

“Like how you feel about Ashley?” I suggested.

“Yes,” he breathed out mournfully. “I took a gun to my head and wanted to pull the trigger, but I couldn’t.” He turned his head in my direction. “I carry those weapons to protect me from myself. I know the kind of monster I am inside.”

“Why didn’t you kill yourself?”

“Because I wanted to live,” he told me. “Because I knew the

only place I could truly be safe was in the wild ... a place like this.”

“I don’t want to become like that.”

“I didn’t want to become a werewolf either, but we’re not alone out here.” He lifted a hand and laid it over my own. “Especially now, Sara, since we can suffer through this together.”

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An officer was biting down at the tip of his pen as he glared at me, taking note of Damian’s looming presence as he stirred a cup of hot cocoa behind me. “Tell me one more time,” the officer clarified in a strong northern accent, “why did you let these young folks stay here when you knew the place was closed for the fall?”

“Because the woman who got killed offered me extra cash,” Damian rapped out spitefully. He took his seat next to me and offered me his mug for me to drink. “It would have been fine if we didn’t have this accident.”

“It would have been.”

“I suppose I will lose my job over this.”

“Damian, you are in some serious shit!” I raised my eyebrows at the officer’s statement, and even more so once the man beside me laughed in amusement. “You know that.”

“Nothing you haven’t dealt with before.”

The man nodded his head cunningly at Damian. “It will be harder this time, since the place wasn’t supposed to be open. Wait till the press gets a hold of this.”

“Harris,” Damian coed out mischievously. “You can make it go away.”

“Why is it always you that causes trouble?”

“I have taken up your methods and see how it still does very little for me.”

“Didn’t you tell those people to not go outside?”

“I did.”

“And?”

“They simply did not listen,” Damian lied through his teeth.  
“I think we might have to have some extra security force put up  
near the campers.”

“Or we could simply relocate you.”

Damian pouted at the man’s words. This conversation was far too interesting for me, so I took a long sip of Damian’s hot cocoa in gratitude and sat back to enjoy the show.

The officer removed his hat and let his sleek black ponytail rest over the back of his tanned brown uniform. He had an interesting look about him with his sharply defined nose, and sharp sable eyes.

“How is your wife?” Damian piped up agreeably. “She’s fine with the two of you in separate beds?”

“Very funny.”

“Oh, but you can make fun of me.”

“That young boy, Ben, wants to bring in police enforcement from the city.”

“Because you want to keep it all hush-hush.”

“And you know the exact reason why!” the man pointed out with his finger raised over Damian’s chest.

“Invite your wife over,” Damian suggested. “I miss her cooking.”

“You just want another blanket from her.”

“I like her blankets.” The man shook his head at Damian irritably, which brought a fit of laughter from the man beside me. “What do you think of Sara?”

The man looked me up and down with scrutiny, and then darted his eyes in Damian’s direction. “You found yourself a

mate?"

"I did."

The two of them exchanged curious glances, and I felt unnerved by the long silence that stretched between them. The officer, Harris, rose out of his chair and offered me his hand. "It is nice to meet you. I am sure I will be seeing you again someday." He darted his eyes quickly to Damian. "And thank you for cooperating with us earlier."

"It's a cover-up," I finally blurted out with resentment. "But you can't hide the truth forever."

"Oh, our people have been hiding it for a mighty long time." He winked at me playfully before he took his leave, offering a wave to Damian as he leisurely strode out of the kitchen. "Better keep her in the house for tonight, eh!" the officer called out over his shoulder.

"Give the same message to your wife, will yeah?" Damian shot back. He wore a sinister grin once he turned his gaze to me, only letting it fade away once he saw how upset I was. "Sara?"

"It will all be a lie."

"Sara," he groaned, seeing how distraught I was.

"No one will believe what truly happened."

"You were attacked by a wild animal, and the three of you are very lucky to be alive." He watched how I slowly closed myself off from him, turning away to walk towards the glass door to open it sharply. I let my bare feet pad against the wooden floor of the patio, looking over the mountainous region that could be perceived from Damian's backyard. "You can come back here when it's time," a low voice uttered from far behind me. "You will be welcome here."

"I don't want to come back here."

"I don't think you'll have a choice," he surmised aloud.

“Believe me when I say, it’s for the best.”

Damian appeared at my side with a cozy white turtleneck. He offered me a smile as he brushed back his bushy hair, so wild in appearance you would have never known he had just taken a shower. A long arm wrapped itself around me to kiss the side of my neck, and I hated the warm fluttering feeling at the bottom of my stomach the second he touched me.

“How was the hot chocolate?” he asked me lightly.

“Sweet.”

“I thought you would like it.”

“Ben won’t drop the case,” I told him. “They won’t let this be another cover up.”

“Then I’ll leave,” he told me. “Go into hiding further up north.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to be safe,” he told me, “and I want you to be safe too. I can help you, Sara. I’ve gone through this for many years and now I have the chance to make amends.”

“How?”

“Offer you strategies to make the transition easier,” he suggested. “Help get enough raw meat for our wolf selves to find at night and feast on it. It doesn’t have to be human flesh, Sara, along as it’s meat we can keep our cravings under control.”

“I’m scared.”

“I was scared too.”

“You aren’t anymore?”

He kissed the top of my shoulder where my sturdy linen bandage was placed. Damian smelled the fabric with closed lids, but I felt he was inhaling something more than that. “Not when I have you near,” he told me with confidence before he lifted his gaze to my own. “Stay with me, Sara. You don’t have

to go through this alone.”

“I know.”

“Let me help you,” he entreated, with a finger tilting my chin upwards in his direction. “Please.”

I shut my eyes at this awful feeling, knowing the path was laid out for me already.

“I’ve waited so long for you,” he told me. “Don’t let me wait another day more.”

“Who is saying that?” I questioned him. “The wolf or you?”

“Both,” he whispered, before he leaned in to kiss me. I closed my eyes the second I tasted his lips. He wrapped a strong arm around me to pull me in, and soon our tongues were pressed against each other before Damian slipped his inside my mouth. I let him have his way with me, exploring my deeper regions before he slipped it out and offered gentle kisses to my lips. His arms curled up against me and then he nuzzled his cheek against my own. “This could be your home, Sara.”

“It already is,” I assured him, which brought his face dead center to kiss my lips again. He took a step back to tug at my hand frantically, making me giggle with excitement once I sensed what was coming next. “The bed!” I shouted after he closed the back door of the patio. Damian shut the drapes behind me, sending the kitchen into darkness. “I mean it,” I warned him with a sternness to my voice.

“You might change your mind one day. Might even want to do it outside.”

“But not today.”

He tugged on my hand in a playful manner, bringing the side of his body against my own as he led me through the darkened hall. “Call in sick tomorrow,” he entreated, after we took the first step up the staircase.

“I really shouldn’t do that.”

“Today is Halloween,” He pointed out. “Who wants to go to work on a Monday morning anyways?”

“I’m supposed to catch a ride back with Ben and Taylor this evening once the investigation is complete. Besides, I have to see if he is okay again.”

“He has Taylor!” Damian pointed out. “I can take you back to the city.”

“Oh?” I questioned him as we made our way deeper into the darkness. “And how exactly will you do that?”

“Driving you, of course.”

“The moon.”

“I will take you first thing in the morning,” He assured me. “Tuesday morning to be exact.”

“Tuesday!”

The bedroom door swung open, revealing the open window with the sunlight shining through. “Wednesday?”

“No.”

“How about … next Sunday?”

“No.”

“Or a month from now?”

“You want me here all to yourself, don’t you?”

“I’m a lone wolf, Sara,” he uttered in a mischievous manner. “What else do you expect?”

“Really?” I cried out with disbelief. He removed his creamy white turtleneck and folded it neatly in his hands.

“And you will need help during your transition. It will be painful, especially the first time. I can help you through it.”

“How?”

“I’ll be a werewolf too,” he reassured me. He rubbed his hand over his scar mournfully, looking down at the jagged black

marks that pierced his tanned skin. “I was bitten on my shoulder as well,” he shyly revealed to me. Damian drew a finger down a lone scar that ran down his upper right arm. “This is what the beast did to me.”

“How did you survive?”

“I wasn’t alone in that forest that night,” he hushed. “Many times, I wish I had died, but right now... staring at you... I am so happy I didn’t.” He took a step forward and rested a hand over my cheek. “I love you, Sara.” I blinked at him with something akin to happy feelings, but I couldn’t say those words to him—not yet.

“I know this is hard for you, since you lost your friend last night, but I can help you through it.”

“The grief hasn’t hit me yet. It should, but it hasn’t yet. To be honest, I think I am still in shock more than anything else.”

“I know,” he hushed out lightly. “And you will find your behaviours, the way you look at the world, change as your wound begins to heal.” His hand cupped the side of my cheek tenderly. “I can help you with that, Sara. Let me be your mentor. Your guide.” He puckered his lips meditatively. “Let me love you. Can you do that for me, just this once?” He noticed my silence and continued, “I knew you meant a lot to me the first time I set eyes on you. There was a reason I let you and your friends stay here.”

“Even when you knew of the dangers?” I questioned him with a hint of bitterness.

“Yes,” Damian admitted with a sudden shyness about him.

“And you did it anyways,” I pointed out with a tenseness to my voice.

“Yes.”

“The wolf side or ...”

“Human,” he informed me, “but is it wrong that both sides of me wanted you so badly?” He laid his lips over my own soothingly, kissing me with profound passion. “Stay,” he hushed over my lips after he lifted me into the air. “Stay with me, I beg of you.” Damian dropped me into his bed and kissed me harshly on my lips as he did his best to persuade me to stay for one more night. “He won’t hurt you,” he promised. “I swear, that part of me will never hurt you.”

“I know,” I reassured him, which brought his lips over mine again.

“I’m not alone anymore,” he breathed out with ecstasy, before he rolled me over in his bed so we could cuddle. “Not alone.”

“No.”

We laid on our sides, staring deeply into each other’s eyes. Damian let his thumb stroke the firm groove of my high cheekbone in silent wonder. “I’ll have you here with me.”

“You will.”

“We could be together?” he mouthed over my lips.

I brought my fingers upwards to stroke it through his thickly tousled locks. “Yes, Damian,” I said softly. “You’re not alone anymore.” A smile travelled across his face in pure delight. “We can face it together.”



## About the Author

Peter Gray was born in Toronto, Canada. He holds a bachelor's degree in History and Education but has always felt the lure of classic English literature. Peter published his first story in 2020; a paranormal romance called "Cursed." His first full length novel "The Tragic Tale of Teddy Woven" was released in the month of September 2020. As a self-published author, Peter specializes in the genres of Gothic horror, paranormal romance, and historical fiction. His first historical romance novel "Awakening" will debut in the month of March 2021.

In his spare time Peter loves to read and write poetry. He also enjoys going out into the wilderness with his trusty camera and his well-withered book full of John Keats poems on those treasured grey over-cast days.

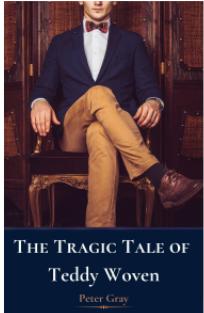
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