

I opened the door, and there it was. The huge figure slipped silently through the room, its massive form crowding the stuffy cabin. Flakes of freshly fallen snow clung to the beast's fur like a blanket, but were shaken off as it prowled deeper into the cabin. My hand groped for the door handle, but I was shaking so hard my hand slipped off the freezing metal. I saw the figure turn towards me, and a drop of blood dripped from the corner of its mouth. I froze, rigid in fear of the monster.

The creature's yellow eyes found me, and then I was running. I trampled through the icy forest, running for my life. My heavy backpack slipped from my shoulders, forgotten, onto the ground. I kept running, and I heard something crash behind me. I was being chased.

My breath came out in ragged gasps, and my legs felt like concrete as I stumbled aimlessly through the forest. The frigid night air and the sound of my pursuer were the only things that kept me going. Minutes later, my dash slowed to a crawl. I saw my pursuer behind me, fangs bared. I shivered, unable to carry on any further. The beast stopped in front of me, its hot breath fogging the air.

I closed my eyes tightly shut, and waited for the pain. I felt a jolt of pain as teeth bit down on my chest. I blacked out.

Awoken, I breathe heavily. Why am I not dead? I should be dead. I turn, and feel the covers shift. Covers? Was it all... a dream? I sit up, eyes wide. Shafts of golden morning light peek out from behind the clouds.

I exhale slowly, pulling up a side of my shirt. On my chest are four red scars. It wasn't a dream. It was *real*. I bite my lip. How did I get back here? How did I heal so fast? Questions pummel my mind as I try to sort through the mess of my mind, trying to remember who had carried me all the way back.

I slowly stand up and walk outside. Girls are walking around, laughing and gossiping, oblivious to the horrors that unfolded last night. They all walk towards the cabin to get their plates for breakfast. I take a deep breath, trying to reassure myself that nothing is wrong. I turn to the cabin.

I force myself to calm down, but whenever I see someone close to the cabin, a growl hitches in my throat. Trying to think clearly, I come up with the most obvious solution to my problem. I must be crazy. How could that... beast... be real? Deep breaths, Cali. Calm down.

Biting my lip, I know there's only one *real* way to find out what happened last night. I have to find that monster. If I don't, I'll be left wondering forever. My jacket slips over my shoulders and I tighten the zipper, a mischievous smile crossing my lips. This could be fun. I dash outside and feel the chilly night breeze nipping gently at my face.

I fill my lungs with the crisp night air, and take off running into the woods. Branches full of bright green leaves scratch at my face and tear my clothes. Coming to a stop, I see my neon green backpack hanging on a branch above my head. How in the world did it get up there? My question hangs in my mind until I see a massive beast crawl out from behind a tree and into the clearing where I stand.

My mind immediately registers this, and tells me, *Flee! Run! Get out of here!* I don't listen to my mind's urgent protests. They don't matter at all to me. The beast lifts its head and lets out a wailing cry. I notice something odd. Amidst all the fur and fangs is a large patch of skin. *Human skin.*

I don't want to turn, but I have to. This is crazy. I must be hallucinating. Taking a deep breath, I walk slowly into the forest. After a little walking, I find myself back in the clearing. A... boy? He stands with his eyes trained on the moon. I, too, feel a strange pull to that white orb in the picturesque night sky.

My head seems to move by itself, turning towards the light. Eyes fixed on the moon, I begin to feel a tingle at the base of my spine. It travels upwards, filling my veins with an adrenaline I've never felt before. My back stretches up and back, but no pain comes to me. I hear my legs snap, and I drop down on all fours, newly-grown fangs and claws shining in the moonlight. My clothes tear away as my body grows muscular and tough-skinned. Shining silver fur travels across my skin as a lightning-fast wave, encircling my body.

I am transformed. I am no longer a filthy human. I am a wolf. As my paws beat steadily across the weather-beaten human trail, I begin to feel like I belong in the forest. I take a small step into the unknown, and my senses are overpowered. A squirrel races down the trunk of a tree. Dew specks the spiky weeds and drip-drops down the tree's leaves in a lacey train.

The scent of prey fills my nostrils, and I howl, not like a human, but like an animal.

I AM A WOLF. NO ONE CAN STOP ME.

I RULE THE FOREST.

I

AM

FREE.