

[SFX: Heavy rainstorm ambience outside with occasional rolling thunder; a persistent knock at the door, followed by the LISTENER's footsteps approaching; opening the door]

“(sigh of relief, speech slightly strained) Oh thank hell you’re awake.”

“Yeah - listen, you... uh, still got that first-aid kit under the sink?”

[SFX: The WEREWOLF's footsteps down the hallway; front door closing; sound of rummaging around beneath the bathroom sink]

“Hey, hey, whoa now - don’t freak out. Don’t freak out. My bad, probably shouldn’t have led with that. I promise it ain’t nothing serious. It looks a lot worse than it is. I’m real sorry, I know I said I’d get better about this, I’m always worrying you sick - I woulda texted first, but I can’t get no service out here when the weather’s acting up.”

“Yeah. I just, uh... I was trying to cut through the woods out to my Maw-maw’s place. You know how she’s been getting real forgetful lately. I wanted to make sure she remembered to bring in the animals before the storm got bad. She won’t ask nobody for help, don’t want nobody fussing over her, so I figured I’d just head out that way and check on her real quick. She’s got them new neighbors now, the ones that bought the old Hudgens’ place next door? They already came by once complaining about the goats wandering over to their property. Anyway, I head out that way, and something big came out of the treeline - big. Thought it was a black bear at first, but was snarling like a dog. Maybe a coyote? I don’t know. I ain’t never seen a coyote that big before, so - I don’t know what it was. It was dark, and it happened real fast, and I didn’t exactly stick around to get a good look at it after.”

“Maw-maw and the animals are fine, though. And I got away clean. (snorts). Well, mostly clean.”

[SFX: Rummaging continues, retrieving first-aid kit]

“Ah, here it is. You, uh... you mind takin’ a look at it for me?”

“Yeah, yeah, of course - I’ll go to the hospital in the morning, get a rabies shot or whatever. I know. I ain’t gonna argue with you about it. I just - it’s forty-five minutes to the hospital in town on a good day, and I wasn’t about to drive that in this storm just to sit in the waiting room for four hours, bleeding. You know?”

“...Thank you. Let me just - “

[SFX: Removing wet shirt]

“Stop - don’t make that face. It ain’t that bad. It’s just the one bite that hurts, mostly - got me good on the shoulder, right up - yeah, (*sharp intake of breath, speaking through gritted teeth*) there. And then I think when I pulled away it caught me again down the side, but that one ain’t

as deep. Here. See?"

"..."

"It came out of nowhere, I swear. I didn't even hear it coming - just came at me from one side, knocked me clean off my feet. And then when I got back up it just... backed off. Stood there looking at me for a second and then turned around and went right back into the trees. Never seen an animal act like that."

"I don't know - it was weird. Whole thing was weird."

[SFX: *Spraying antiseptic*]

"(hiss) Is that the antiseptic? Goddamn, it stings. Do you gotta use that much?"

"..."

"Okay, okay - that's fine. Keep going. Do what you gotta do. You're the expert. Speaking of, still thinking about going back to school? What was it you were saying last time - not nursing this time. You didn't like nursing. Vet school, right?"

"...Well, you ought to. You'd be good at it. You're smart."

"...No, I mean it - think about it. What's there here for you? Same people doin' the same things they been doin' since high school, half of 'em ain't never left the county. That was never gonna be you."

"..."

"You're just talking yourself out of it before you even try. Come on. If that [guy/girl/person] you're seeing won't wait for you to finish school and make a better life for yourself, [he/she/they] sure as hell ain't worth sticking around here for. Mountains ain't goin' nowhere. I'll still be here, my Maw-maw'll still be here. We'll help you with the money, if you need it."

"My folks set some money aside to send me to school, but, well (*snort*) that wasn't gonna happen, so it's just sitting there, not doing nobody any good. Somebody ought to use it. Lord knows I never wanted to stay in this town my whole life, but... I'm not smart like you are, never was. And somebody's gotta stay and look after Maw-maw, so. That's just - that's how it is."

"..."

"They loved you, you know. Ma especially. You were over at our place so much growing up she'd joke you were like her second kid who just slept somewhere else. They woulda wanted to help you with this, if they could."

[SFX: *Another spray of antiseptic*]

"Ah - fuck. That stings. Was that on purpose?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'll drop the subject. For now at least. I just - I don't want you to look up in ten years and wonder why you didn't get out of this town when you had the chance. That's all. You know? Just... don't be afraid to ask for the help, if you do end up deciding you need it."

"..."

"You almost done?"

"Yeah - that's good. Least it won't get infected now, hopefully..."

[SFX: *Creaking as he stands up, footsteps*]

"Hate to ask, but is there any chance I could take that couch tonight? I don't wanna drive in this. And - and I know I'm pushing my luck here - but could I also possibly borrow something dry to sleep in? If you got anything that'll fit."

"No - I don't care what it is. Anything. I'll wear your old nursing school uniform or one of those weird band shirts you always wear, I do not care at this point."

[SFX: *The LISTENER's footsteps leaving the room; rummaging through closet and hangers; LISTENER's footsteps returning; clothes being tossed over*]

"Thanks. Is this - this ain't yours, is it? Is this your [boyfriend's/girlfriend's/partner's]?"

"(laughs) Oh, [he/she/they] is not gonna like that. [He/she/they] already has it out for me, you know [he/she/they] does. I don't know why. [His/her/their] problem, not mine."

[SFX: *Shirt being pulled on*]

"You gonna head back to bed right away, or...? Good, good. Sit with me a while, then. We can find something to watch. Come on, it'll be like - (*trying to keep self from laughing*) - remember when we was kids and you'd stay over, we'd wait for my ma and pa to fall asleep and then sneak back out to the den and turn the TV back on? And that late at night all that'd ever be on was those old black and white pictures. We'd turn the volume all the way down so nobody'd wake up and just try to guess what they was saying. (laughs)"

[SFX: *Footsteps; LISTENER sitting on the couch with the WEREWOLF*]

"...Wonder what's on right on."

[SFX: TV clicking on, static; clicking through a few channels that are all static]

"...Huh. You forget to pay the cable bill or something?"

"Oh, right. Probably the storm."

[SFX: TV clicking off, shifting on the couch]

"Oh well. Guess we're listening to the rain, then. Could be worse."

"..."

[SFX: Wolf howling in the distance]

"You hear that? Wonder whose dog that is. Been hearing it at night lately. Real close to the house, too. Maybe same one that got me. I don't know."

"Somebody oughta call animal control or something. Can't just have some big, wild dog running loose biting people. What if it'd been a kid, or my Maw-maw or something. (*sharply*) And it's so loud. Why is it so loud?"

[SFX: Shifting on the couch, sitting up, howling again in the distance]

"..."

"...sorry - what? What were you saying?"

"(*irritably*) No, nothing's wrong - I just... thought I heard - never mind, never mind. Feeling... I don't know. Kinda antsy. Probably just the whole night catching up to me. Sorry."

[SFX: Standing up abruptly, floorboards creaking]

"..."

"I - I think I need some air."

"Yeah - I... I can't really explain it. I just... it feels like I'm gonna crawl outta my skin if I sit still much longer. Nerves, I guess - or the adrenaline from earlier wearing off."

"No, no - I ain't driving nowhere in this, don't worry. Just gonna step out on the porch a minute. Get some air, clear my head. I'll be right back, I promise."

[SFX: Footsteps moving toward the door; door creaking open; rain and wind rushing in]

"I'll just be a few minutes. Go on, don't wait up on my account - I know it's late. I'll lock up when I come back in. Promise."

[SFX: *Stepping out onto the porch, door closing, muffling the rain slights; the WEREWOLF's footsteps on the porch boards, pacing slowly; wolf howling continues in the distance, feel free to ad-lib some kind of irritable expletive from the WEREWOLF***]**