

Woodmire was a cozy village. The type where people came to get away from the world. Or so said his dad, Arcenian wasn't sure what he meant by that. He didn't really know what the world outside was like. All the world he knew was just the nearby woods, where they weren't allowed to go alone. The creek where they would splash and play during the summer, the grass fields where they would hunt for fireflies at night. To Arcenian, this was his whole world, and it was wonderful.

Of course, he was curious about the lands beyond. The odd caravan or pack of adventurers would sometimes frequent the roads that led to the village were a window to the wider world. Arcenian knew of an old mage who would sometimes pass by and tell stories of heroes and monsters with a show of magic, figures made of water and smoke, detailing epic battles and adventures aplenty.

He and Mira would often play in the field with sticks, pretending to be the knights of the kingdom, fighting dragons and villains of all types.

They laughed as the grass rustled under their feet, the swings of their pretend weapons 'carving' through the taller blades of grass that got caught in the way of their wings. The sticks hit each other with thuds, their laughter carrying into the wind as they played.

The way Mira smirked, showing that little tooth at the corner that was a bit sharper than the rest, a result of her having chipped it earlier this year. It inspired a new favorite nickname from him, 'Little Fang'.

"So you always know you're smaller than me!" He bragged, very proud of the two inches he had over her.

"Not fair!" She cried out, balling her fists next to her skirt. "The old ladies tell me I'm gonna grow up lots!"

"They're just saying that cause they know you'll always be a shorty!"

"Your parents say so, too!"

"That you'll be a shorty?" He teased her with a grin.

"Stop making fun of me!" She stomped her foot petulantly.

He couldn't help but tease her, it was so easy to rile her up. Mom and dad said that now that she was living with them, he had to act as a big brother would. And he always saw older kids tease their siblings like that.

Though Mira wasn't his sister, not really, he was meant to treat her like one. So if he teased her, then that meant he was doing a good job!

Still, he was also meant to encourage her, according to his dad.

"I'm just joking." He patted her head a few times. "I bet you'll grow up in no time and get huge!"

She gasps in wonderment. "Like one of those orc ladies we saw that one time?!"

"Sure!" He said, happily feeding her fantasies. "You'll be so big you'll scare all the beasts!"

"Rawr!" She clawed her hands at him, imitating a fearsome creature.

"Ahhh, she's coming to get me!" He playfully shouted as the two tussled around in the grass, laughing the day away.

The lights of the fireflies dancing over the grass fields caught their attention, and while they would sometimes chase after them, his parents made it clear they were to return home as soon as it started getting dark.

"Come on, we'll be late for dinner!"

They ran toward the village, the sky turning orange as it settled on the horizon.

But... the closer they got to the village, the more they began to smell smoke.

And the glow coming from it... that wasn't the sun.

Smoke, darker and far larger than any chimney, came from the village as their home burned.

Arcenian and Mira watched with horror as the alarm bells rang; the sounds of people running, panicking, were accompanied by the clatter of metal and the sound of people fighting.

And... the growls, the howls.

The sounds of animals.

They were only youths; they didn't know what to do. All they knew was that they wanted to find his parents. So they got closer and closer, shouting after them, trying to find them among the chaos.

The traveling adventurers were fighting against wolves. Not the wolves that threatened livestock, no, these were tall, hulking things that stood on two legs and swiped their sharp claws at them with long arms. They snapped their fangs at them, seeking to bite into their flesh while their claws threatened to cut them to ribbons.

"Dad!" Arcenian shouted. "Mom!"

A blur barreled past him, so strong and fast it knocked him down.

His world rattled, his vision blurred.

Among the sounds of fighting and flames, he heard Mira crying out in fear.

And he saw the wolf thing, holding her up by the collar of her dress, caught in its sharp fangs.

*Her blue eyes were so afraid, begging for help as her arms futilely reached out for him.
"Arcenian!"*

The wolf turned and ran.

Mira kept screaming.

"Mira!" He shouted, trying to follow them. But the wolf was far too fast. "Mira!"

"No!" He felt his father call out to him, strong arms wrapping around him. "Stay here, please!" He begged, voice breaking. A sound so unnatural for a dad to make. "Can't lose you, too!"

He dragged him away from all the fire, from all the fighting.

Mira's screams dimmed until he could no longer hear her anymore.

Arcenian would never see his friend again.

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His mind would often go back to that fateful night, sometimes in the most random moments.

Ten years, and Arcenian still remembered that day like it had been yesterday. The smell of grass in the field, the morning dew, the sound of Mira's laughter as they played pretend with their wooden swords. When childhood was a dream filled with endless possibilities, when the world seemed so bright and full of wonder.

Now, as an adult with his own responsibilities, Arcenian had a broader grasp of the picture.

In a world of magic and mysteries, the mundane was saddled to the people who had to live day by day. A farm, a bakery, a smithy, a butcher, those were the things regular folk had to pursue if they wanted to subsist.

Now, as his features had matured, his dirty blonde hair having grown longer, his face rugged with the passage of time and hard labor, washing away the roundness and softness of his childhood years, Arcenian understood what his lot in life was.

And he was fine with it, really, he *was*.

Adventures... were better left off to other people. To the brave and the daring, those who actually had the strength to take on the world and all its challenges and dangers.

He knew for a fact he wasn't that sort of person. He did not have the strength or courage to endure such dangers.

He certainly hadn't had the strength to save Mira that night.

It was okay, he told himself, he was the son of merchants and a merchant he would remain. It was a respectable profession. One where he strived to conduct himself with dignity and fairness. He had met many a swindler and greedy sods who would sell water laced with honey and lemon juice and pretend to be a cure-all for everything. He scoffed at the disgusting practices some men would stoop to to take the coin out of a less-well-off person for the sake of a bit more weight in their purses.

As he learned the trade from his parents, he opened up his own personal trade store in Woodmire. Odds and ends from multiple corners of the realm. Potions, the odd weapon or two, mostly necessities, and other items people would use in their everyday lives.

The Little Fang, he had called his shop.

A reminder of simpler times, to always keep close the memory of Mira.

That silly nickname was a comfort to him, a constant reminder of the girl who was as family. A reminder of how to live his life, peacefully and quietly, safe in the village. To trade not just for his own sustenance and that of his parents, but also to fairly provide for the villagers as well with all sorts of supplies.

Supplies that he was running low on, actually.

A trip to the city was in order.

He had loaded up his cart and his horses, bidding farewell to his parents and letting them know he'd be back home in a couple of days. The city of Kynath was far from being the kingdom's capital, but it was sizeable enough to be considered a cosmopolitan place, with more people and races than his young childhood mind had been able to comprehend back then when his father first took him there.

He had asked so many questions, stared at so many elves, dwarves, and the lizard-folk. Heh, his father had reprimanded him so many times not to stare like that, but he couldn't help it. Not even when the random group of adventurers passed by Woodmire had he seen so many different people from different backgrounds.

He still fondly remembered those days. The sights, the smells, the stores, the libraries with so many *books*. Books about adventures, of history and legends, of distant lands and magic, windows into the world beyond.

Books that Mira would have loved.

Arcenian had made it a point to hoard as many of them as he could and read them for Mira's memory. It was enough for him to look upon those words and be carried out by the fantasies of his mind to new lands and places. An indulgence, some... remnant desire of his youth.

Heh, more than anything, he liked to imagine it was *Mira* in those fantasies, living out the life she wanted. The life she *deserved* for those wretches, those vile, godless, abominable *monsters-!*

Arcenian took a deep breath, steadying his shaky hands by tightening his grip on the reins of his horses.

He... still had nightmares about werewolves, from time to time.

The image of that *thing* taking Mira away haunted him to this day.

It was okay, he was *okay*.

He was still a day away from reaching home with his goods. He'd make a stop at the inn a few miles outside the forest, rest for the night, and then continue his journey. Arcenian trekked through the woods that lay between Woodmire and Kynath, his cart shaking and shuddering as it marched over the dirt road. Idly, he reached out next to him to the new book he had purchased and began reading to pass the time. At this point, he'd boast that he mastered the art of reading even while the cart shook so much that his eyes were able to follow the sentences perfectly. He didn't need his eyes on the road; it's not like there was anyone here, and his horses knew this route from memory now.

“Ho there, friend!”

Arcenian tore his gaze from the book, looking up to see a man standing in the middle of the road.

“Hoooo!” He yanked the reins and made the horses stop with a neigh, a few feet away from the man.

He gave him a closer look. He appeared to be a decade or two older than him. He was armored in leather and held an axe at his waist. The scars on his face spoke of experience, his nose looked like it had been broken and mended one too many times.

“Are you... lost, my good sir?” He tentatively asked.

He could be an adventurer. But... his smile.

He didn’t like that smile.

He’d seen it before in many a greedy merchant he’d been forced to do business with.

The man scratched his stubbled chin. “Oh, I’m not exactly lost, but I am *missing* something.”

Arcenian frowned. “And... that would be?”

The man’s grin widened, and he whistled.

Branches broke under feet, bushes shuffled loudly, as multiple figures emerged.

Men in similar patchworks of leather armor, all carrying different weapons of low quality. One carried a crossbow, another a bow.

And *both* were aiming at him.

Arcenian instinctively raised his arms, the horses neighed and kicked the air as the sudden presence of these clearly dangerous men unnerved them. But they could not run as they were still bound to the cart.

"What do you want?" He muttered, trying to keep the fear away from his voice.

"Nothing much," The bandit leader said with a fake, charming smile. "All your gold will do."

"I... have little on me, I just came back from buying supplies in the city." He tried not to give them any reason to kill him.

"That's fine, then." He shrugged. "Will just take your horses and your cart. Happy to do business with you!" The bandit suddenly snapped his fingers and ordered one of his men to move. "Get him off."

The horses kept neighing, even louder than before, reeling back and kicking the air incessantly as they obviously tried to run away.

"Keep your damn beasts calm!"

"Woooah, woooah!" He tried to snap the reins to hold the horses steady. "Heel, heel!" He commanded. But the horses wouldn't listen.

"I *really* don't want to put down two perfectly good horses." The bandit growled at him. "So you better keep them calm or-!"

"I-I can't!" He shouted, desperation mounting in his voice. "They only get like this when...!"

He cut his words short, as a terrifying realization dawned on him.

"When there are beasts nearby..."

The bandit barely had time to demand an explanation... when they all heard a howl.

A wolf's howl.

His skin crawled, his hands shook.

Years later, and the thought of wolves still made him shiver in his boots. His horses would not remain calm. They could *feel* something that he and the bandits could not.

"No wolf pack would attack a group of people out in the open." One of the bandits pointed out. "Unless they were extremely hungry. But we're in the middle of spring, there's plenty of game."

"Yes..." The bandit leader narrowed his eyes as he looked around before giving Arcenian a piercing glare, pointing at him with his gloved finger. "You. *Stay put.*"

There was a shuffle among the trees, the sounds of leaves ruffling and branches snapping.

Then, a blur.

"AAAAaaah!" One of the bandits cried out, his voice lowering in volume as he disappeared into the woods, dragged by *something*, before falling completely silent.

The bandits all made sounds of shock and fear; even their leader looked completely frightened that one of his men had suddenly disappeared, drawn into the woods by some unseen creature.

"Keep your fucking eyes open!"

Arcenian was too terrified; he could only remain sitting on his cart, hoping he wouldn't be next. Praying to the gods that the beast would not take him like they took Mira.

"AHhh!" Another cry, another bandit who disappeared into the woods.

One of the remaining four dropped his weapon and began running, drawing the others' attention in this critical moment.

"No! Don't you fucking run, you moron!" The bandit leader called out, his confident demeanor crumbling under the mounting fear.

Only three of them remained. One by one, the beast was going to take them out one way or another.

"Fuck..." The bandit shuddered, eyes darting around wildly. "Show yourself, you coward!"

A low, deep chuckle.

"*Heh*, if you insist."

The blur jumped from the trees and landed in front of them.

A wolf. Not a beastfolk, for it was far too large for their kind. Too tall, too bulky. A werewolf, Arcenian realized with dread. A beast of bloodlust and animalistic instinct, lacking in rationality and morals. Yet the presence of armor, the large double-edged sword strapped to its back, showed more intelligence than the usual were-creatures.

The werewolf landed in front of them with a crouch and drew to full height, easily towering over the men. The muscles were sinewy and prominent, highly defined even with the peerless white fur covering everything from head to toe. The curvature of the upper body and the undulations of the chestplate indicated this was a female. She wore armored plates around her digitigrade legs, exposing the impressively wide calves. Her arms were wide and sinewy, with leather around the thick forearms and armor plating, along with large pauldrons covering her strong shoulders.

It could not be understated how white her fur was, like the petals on a daisy. Her mane was a vast and wild thing, long and curling in every direction with multiple bangs. Her ears were flat against her skull, a clear sign of aggression, accompanied by the slow sway of her tail.

To most, she must have looked like an outstanding warrior, a beaming beacon of courage.

All Arcenian could see was a beast.

That lupine grin terrified him.

"Looks like I got myself a few bad men," She sniffed, "Preying upon an innocent..." Her voice, rough and dangerously playful, trailed off as her confidence seemed to give way to surprise. "Wait..." She sniffed again, looking at *him* directly. "You're-"

No, no, no, no, gods now.

"Kill her!" The bandit shouted the moment she got distracted.

And Arcenian took the opportunity to *run*. He jumped out of the cart, leaving everything behind and taking his chances with the forest. He ran as fast as his legs could take him, ignoring the sounds of fighting growing more distant. He panted in desperation, nearly tripping a dozen times with fallen branches and uneven terrain.

Even as his lungs and legs burned, he pushed himself even further when she heard the beast running after him.

"Wait, I need to talk to you!"

Oh gods, she was chasing him. She was after him.

"Please just stop!"

She sounded so close. He wouldn't escape. He couldn't; she'd catch him. She'd grab his neck with her teeth and tear him to shreds.

Arcenian heard her coming up behind him, the sound of her bestial paws reaching his ears. Panic was the only thing keeping him going.

Until his legs kicked nothing but the air when two powerful hands grabbed his arms and hoisted him up.

"No!" He begged, squirming in her grasp. "Please, don't hurt me! Gods, I beg you!"

"N-No! Just listen-!"

"Oh, gods!" He prayed to them, to his ancestors, to anyone who could save him right now.

"If you could just let me-!"

"Not like this, please, not like this!"

She suddenly turned him around, and he was forced to confront a very irate lupine face.

"Arcenian!" She shouted, baring her teeth.

His struggling ceased, and shock replaced the terror.

She... She knew his name?

"Look at me," She begged. Her voice was desperate and hopeful. "Look at my eyes."

He did, too stunned to do anything else.

Her eyes were a soft blue, so pure and radiant like gems.

So... kind and full of life.

It reminded him of-

"...Mira?"

The werewolf sobbed. "Hey... It's been a while."

Arcenian's hands trembled, torn between the webs of fear still holding him back and the blooming warmth of hope still beating in his chest. He knew those eyes, he *knew* the girl they belonged to.

She slowly set him down, knowing he could use this chance to run. But she merely stood there, looking down at him from her impressive height, the vulpine lips stretching into a heartfelt smile filled with nostalgia and old love.

The young man looked at this creature, this werewolf... this friend he had lost, returned to him at long last.

And threw her arms around her, sobbing uncontrollably as the pain of years washed away with his tears. The werewolf bent over, placing his arms around him, protectively this time. Holding him close with great longing as her tears spilled down her cheek.

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They didn't know how long they had been there, just holding each other, seeking comfort in each other's presence. They treasured their embrace for all its worth, but as they wanted to, they could not remain there all day.

She promised to answer his questions, but first they had to deal with some... unsavory business.

Taking care of the bandits for one.

Arcenian tended to his horses and decided to prepare a fire as night approached. They decided it'd be better to spend the night here rather than reach the inn, as it'd be too late by then. Plus, Mira was not exactly... presentable.

He had watched her dig an enormous hole in the ground with a shovel she borrowed from his cart. It was impressive how fast she was able to dig one; her arms flared, coiling with sinewy flesh as her dense biceps bulged with each swing. It disturbed him a little to see how effortlessly she just buried the criminals, like she was used to it.

"Better in the ground than out there rotting on the road." She said, dusting off her hands as she finished feeling out the hole. It was nighttime now, the crickets and an errant owl sang to the stars as the veil of night descended upon them.

"I know they most likely deserved it," He muttered. "You do not become a bandit without harming the innocent. "But it is... hard to see you like this?"

She arched a brow at him. "Like this?" She waved a hand at her furry figure. "Or..."

"How easy it was for you," He clarified. "Killing them, I mean."

"It's a harsh word out there." She replied, taking a seat in front of the fire he had set up. She reached into a bag hanging from her waist. "Sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do," Arcenian's brows raised a bit as half her arm disappeared into it. "Yup, bag of holding," Mira said, noting his surprise.

"You're an adventurer now, then?"

"Of a sort." She chuckled, pulling out a fresh piece of bread and handing it to him over the fire, which he gratefully accepted. "I know I'm... not what you expected."

"Expected?" The young man muttered, voice rising as an incredulous smile formed on his lips. "Ten years, Mira... Ten years thinking you were dead and-!" He caught himself as anger began seeping into his words. "We all moved on, my parents and I. And now you show up, looking like the beasts that attacked our town!"

"It... wasn't an easy choice for me, I didn't want to avoid you all." She grunted; the sound was rough in her throat. "The wolf bit me as it took me. Far away from the village, the first night I transformed... it was bad. I barely had any control of my instincts and my hunger."

She bit into the bread, and Arcenian for a moment wondered if she was picturing she was biting a juicy piece of meat. "We would have helped you."

"There was nothing you could have done!" She firmly replied. "Not without risking your lives. And I couldn't live with myself if I ended up hurting you on a bad moon night."

"But, you're in control now, obviously." He pointed out, gesturing at her lupine form. "You speak like a person, you act and think. You're not feral."

"I was feral once." She says, ashamed. "Just a beast lost in the hunt. It took me a few years before I finally managed to rein in the beast, to embrace the wolf spirit and make it my own. The woman you see now was nothing like the pup who lost control on the first nights."

Arcenian fell silent for a moment, watching her. "But you still didn't return."

"I tried, once." She muttered distantly. "By the time I mastered the wolf. I saw you... you were grown up. You moved on, life in the village moved on. I didn't... want to remind anyone of that day."

She stared at him deeply with those beautiful blue eyes.

"I... enjoy what I am now, Arcenian." She said without a hint of shame. "I am Mira the White Fang, now. I journey to lands far and broad. I strike down at villains and face beasts of nightmare incarnate. And it is all thanks to my nature," She looked down at her clawed hand. "The power of the wolf." Her fist clenched slowly, making the joints pop. The act made the forearms widen under her bracers and the bicep jump with an outstanding display of muscularity.

Her white fur stood out even in the darkness of the night. The campfire's flickering lights cast shadows that highlighted the unrivaled definition in her frame.

Such a sight she was, so raw and untamed. No, untamed wasn't the right word. She had mastered herself and was reborn under the moonlight as a warrior of steel and claw.

"But I know others do not understand. I know many rightfully fear my kind." She let out a rueful smile. "Even now I see the pain my appearance brings out of you, how you must fear me..."

"I don't."

The surprise in her eyes was shared by how he felt at saying those words. He walked around the campfire to sit next to her, unafraid of her enormous stature as his head barely reached past her shoulders. His limbs were sticks compared to the thick broadness of her body.

She was so large and mighty that, even without her claws, she could so very easily destroy him. But he did not fear her.

He let her know by reaching out with his can and cupping her snout, a small press of his fingers let him know the sharp fangs lay underneath, ready to snap at a second's notice if she wanted to.

"I don't see the beast who took my friend." He muttered. "I see the friend I lost, returned to me at long last."

Mira let out a soft whine, leaning into his touch.

"The gods are kind, sometimes." He smiled. "I want to hear everything. All your adventures, your struggles. I want to know what my sister in all but blood has done with her life."

She held his hand, smiling very gratefully at him. "We can talk more tomorrow. It's... late night now. It's enough that you're here."

He accepted, and the two fell into comfortable silence.

Mira bent over and unclasped the straps of her leg guards. Arcenian looked over the armor she still wore. How cumbersome it had to be, taking it all off just to sleep. "Do you need help?"

She looked at him, surprised. Clearly, she didn't have many offers like that before. "It'd certainly speed things up." She finished removing the leg guards and pointed at the clasps on the side of her chest piece. "Here, please."

He began undoing the straps and knots, loosening the armor parts and carefully removing them. The leather and chainmail underneath were strained tightly by the presence of solid, burgeoning muscle. He felt his breath caught in his throat at the sight of her. The armor pieces coming off did little to 'reduce' the sheer scope of her. Her mass was outstandingly prominent and defined, a landscape of white carved with deep valleys, visible under all that pearly white fur.

She removed the forearm guards and then pulled the chainmail and leather over her head, shaking her long mane as it came free. Arcenian felt he was doing something indecent by staring at her like this. The wrappings around her chest did little to hide a notable cleavage of ample and very soft-

He had to pinch his leg to avoid this line of thought. This was *Mira*, the girl her parents had taken in. She was his childhood friend, basically his sister. These... thoughts were indecent and wrong.

"I don't mind the stares." She grinned at him, as though she could read his intentions. "Not often people get to see a werewolf up close without fearing for their lives."

"It is... impressive." He muttered, tentatively reaching out to feel her shoulder. The fur was soft, but the mass underneath certainly wasn't. "Is this what the blessings of the wolf do?"

"Partly," She grinned with palpable pride. Her blue eyes sharpened into gemstones as she pulled her lips slightly, beaming at him. "This is also the product of swinging around a huge sword."

As if to demonstrate, she flexed her bicep and the muscle *jumped* at her command, coursing with thick veins visible as the fur seemed to flatten against the skin. The mound split in two, with a notable peak at the center rising like a hill upon a larger hill.

"Gods..." He breathed out in awe, unable to contain himself as his hand grasped the muscle; it was so large that he couldn't even wrap his hand around it. He wagered the combination of the bountiful bicep and the horseshoe-shaped tricep had to be as large as his entire head.

So powerful, so beautiful...

The two seemed to realize what they were doing, as they swiftly ended all contact and tried to avoid each other's gazes.

Gods, what was happening to him?

"I... must have a blanket or something in the cart." He cleared his throat. "Or, perhaps a carp will fit you," He weakly jested to distance himself from that burning sensation in his stomach.

"No need, my fur keeps me warm."

"Ah," He scratched his head and moved to stand. "Well, I'll still need--"

His words died in his mouth as those magnificent arms he had become familiar with embraced him from behind. He felt two amazingly soft mounds press against his back as her muscular limbs pulled him close.

"I can keep you warm too..." She muttered, and her breath burned against his ear.

"...Alright," He replied, unable to mount any resistance as the two slowly leaned against the ground.

She was true to her word, as her body heat was more than enough to keep him warm tonight... but that was not the only source of heat. And he wasn't talking about the campfire.

The way her muscular arms wrapped around him in a protective--*possessive*—hold, how her outstandingly wide legs perfectly settled under his hamstrings, her entire muscular frame just molding around his back...

"Is this okay?" She muttered, her voice low. Not sleepy, *husky*.

"Yes," Arcenian replied, voice sharp and almost breathless. "This is more than okay."

He didn't know what to do with these feelings. Things had just happened so fast.

Mira was gone for years. And now she was back.

Not only that, she had become a beast- in the best sense of the word. Exuding such mystery and allure that he couldn't ignore, no matter how much he wanted to.

He only hoped that sleep would clear his head come morning. Even as the erection painfully strained his pants.