

## The New Shifter

The young man stared at the letter as the rumble of the twin-engined plane casually shook his body. The paper was lined, written in a delicate fashion. He knew who had written it; it was his mother, and he knew she cared... he knew what she thought about all this. This letter was just an apology even if the word sorry was never once penned. It said as such:

*"Finley, I know this is your decision, and while your father and I had some choice words when you told us you were flying to Alaska. I understand why you made this decision. I support it wholeheartedly now. Your father is still being stubborn, but he'll come around eventually. We know what caused you to be like this wasn't your fault, and we know what you did after everything was not what you had hoped for. You just weren't in your right mind. We hoped it was just a phase but it might be more difficult to admit that perhaps it isn't. We still love you, and we hope that you stay safe at your new job. You're always welcome home, no matter how you look, or how you are..."*

*Love, Your Worried Mother."*

He could see the matted dots of dried tears within the paper. Most were his mother's, but ever since reading the thing a few days ago, a few of his joined it.



Finley did not usually have orange streaks running through this brown hair, similar to that of a hot sunset... or fur of a fox. He used to not have so much hair either, with new clumps around his groin, belly, and face. No no no, he was much more normal back then. Normal... his body used to be normal too. He never felt so athletic in his life. It was not the muscles of an intense bodybuilder, but someone in much better shape than the couch potato he was not even two months ago.

Everything changed when he got attacked by that Werefox, the curse, the hormonal changes, and with all of the physical changes of his body. All thanks to that damn shifter and the curse it gave him.

Nobody knows of the origin of the Shifter “curse.” The existence of shifters or werecreatures was first discovered by the wider population at the end of the 19th century when the spread of communications and organizations were too much for the governments of the world to censor. The rumors, the legends, the stories, and arts created from the sparse knowledge of the affliction perpetuated it as only a myth for those who did not see such a creature in person. Back in the day every kingdom would have their own court shifter disguised as a council advisor, every spy ring needed a good nose, and some Victorian-era boss needed a thick pair of muscles to do the job of three laborers worth with hefty wage deductions as a threat to keep those cursed employees from ever being found out. It had a lot of history, and now Finley was part of it.



The sudden spark of radio interference kicked into his headset, making his ears hurt with hyper-attuned hearing. "This is your captain speaking," said the pilot. They were the only ones on board, the pilot himself directly behind Finley in the backseat. "We will be landing in about ten to fifteen minutes. I hope for our furry passenger the wait was not too long nor the ride too unpleasurable for any complaints should be delivered to the feedback box that was... unfortunately left behind because we couldn't fit any more room on the plane. I *advise* the soul passenger that taking a chunk out of my neck is not proper criticism."

The Werefox could hear the man laughing even though the feed cut, even through his headset and the rumble of the plane. He didn't know if the pilot knew that these jokes were messing him up more, but he figured the man didn't care. In the modern day, shifters are just another fabric of society, another statistic, another part of the demographics. They were employed as grocery clerks, in the military, and one had even tried to run as president, but each would have their own pros and cons based on wider population viewpoints. There were anti-shifters and pro-shifters and shifter rights groups, shifter hate groups, the whole nine yards .

It did not take long until the plane settled on an icy runway, the wheels sliding along the frost longer than Finley liked. The stress of the landing made his teeth clench as they grew slightly, his claws appearing and inching out until he controlled himself and



let them fade away, but never permanently. They would always be there, waiting for the next moon.

The college-aged male stepped out of the plane, his boots crunching against hard snow, the chill of the air cutting against the skin of his face. He didn't want to admit that the places that had grown more hair were rather warm, especially the mustacheless furry lamb chops he had now. The corporate complex was in one of the most remote places in the world, and it looked as remote as the brochure had detailed out, but there was a homely feeling to it.

The entire thing was like a spider's web, one main hub with a single floor, a wide foundation, and a domed roof that was as wide as the university he attended before dropping out. Then each strut connected to another hub all in outward angles until each line stopped one by one with another hub. Some extensions were longer with various small facilities while others only had one building before ceasing.

Other than a few other objects like storage containers acting as adhoc freezers and the various snow vehicles, that was it. Finley knew that this was just the base of operations, the center of a hundred mile radius that was in range of oil refineries and fields, ranger stations that were meant to be manned 24/7, like the one he was going to, and whatever else was needed in a frozen wasteland like this.



The young male entered the complex through its front entrance, the initial area everyone had to go to in the beginning to get their feet wet. At the front desk was a bright woman with ginger hair and smart glasses. She wore casual clothing, the heat of the room abundant once Finley moved through the airlocks. She was chewing gum, and she smiled as he approached her.

“Well you look like quite the character.” The snaps of small air bubbles within her gum were as loud as needles falling onto the ground. “Name and profession? Also your ID card.” It seemed that while she could be playful, professionalism was at the top of her importance.

The newest recruit slid her the identification card. “Finley Craven. I’m meant to be what is uh... a junior operational security specialist?” The words were mouthful, and it didn’t help that there was so much warmth in his chest that merely speaking let out a puff of steam. A notorious feature of most shifters unfortunately.

The receptionist’s eyes went wide for a small moment before readjusting into a smile, the title of the occupation giving away his true nature. “Oh yes! You folks are in a different tab here, hang on a second.” Finley scratched his thick hair as even the clicks of her mouse bothered him. “There we go, found you.” Her hands clapped together loudly as she stared directly into his eyes. “Just as a reminder, the A.W.S.S.P. dictates that if you happen to be discriminated against at any time while in the workplace you



have the legal rights and protections to use at your discretion to immediately cease all provocations for the safety of everyone involved. Do you understand this?"

The **Association** for the **Well-being** of **Shifters** and **Shifting People**. It was a way to stop any more violence and possible infections. It was a two-way street on who could be punished for any attractions. It wasn't perfect, but it was better than nothing. "I do." One bite. That's all it took. And now he too was a... *shifting* person.

For what was only twenty seconds but felt like minutes, the secretary behind the front desk continued filling out forms that Finley could not see, a weird sense of anxiety overtaking him. Thankfully it all ended when she spoke for the last time, handing out a set of documents and paperwork as she welcomed him to the base. "Your tour is going to be 60 days. The senior specialist's name, the man in charge of you, is Barrett Coleman. He is another shifter, and don't worry, I know how you all like to be around each other." She meant it in earnest, without any malice, but it would have made a stint in HR had anyone reported it. It could even be something she'd be biting her tongue about five minutes from now. "Your badge is with the rest of the stuff I just handed you. Other than that sweetheart, you're good to go!"

Finley had walked further into the base, the metal tube of steel he went through not doing much to make him feel calm. He tried his best to ignore all the smells wafting up his nose — already he could smell the pheromones of nearby shifters who were



relaying coded messages only he could detect. Some were asking to meet him, others wanting to know what he was doing here. It was as if his cell phone was being texted to by ten people simultaneously. He ignored them as he tried his best to look through all of the papers he had now, making sure that his triangular nails didn't rip through any of the documents. Medical forms, insurance records, informational reports, so much content to digest at one time. In a level of irony that he didn't want to admit, Finley would have preferred to take in all this knowledge through his nose.

One of the aromas cut through the rest, the message relaying itself as – “I'm in the cafeteria. We need to move out. Try not to slow me down.”

With the infection that he received, one of these was the fluency in this new language that he was never aware about. The young Werefox could discern tone and a rather complex vocabulary from these kinds of messages. He could even see which species of shifter was communicating with him, as well as who they meant to him. Despite the unnerving feeling he got from using this ability, a waterfall of relief washed over him. He didn't want to meet many of his shifting colleagues here, and the one he was required to be with was immediately reaching out to him. It seemed they would be leaving rather soon.

While that did sound nice to him, there was a want as well to get lost through the facility, to savor any alone time he could have. Unfortunately, these scents had an origin



point, and for him not to follow it, it would have made him look idiotic. Finley didn't really know how to exactly give these messages out himself yet, but he tried to do so, and made his way to the mess hall.

The immediate stench of food hit his nostrils, he tried to hone in on those smells as technically everything had a much stronger scent to him now. It was easier on the mind to truly identify the exact aromatics of apple pie, cinnamon pancakes, and whatever else was left for breakfast as lunch was starting to make its way to the hot plates from a faraway place.

Finley soon entered the cafeteria, seeing how there were a few people sitting around from place to place, little groups organized into those for friends and familial colleagues. The Fox immediately stopped as he saw one man, gruff and buff, staring at him. It was like he was just a mere animal in a forest, freezing as a predator was nearby, observing him. It made his heart rate increase, sweat automatically beading down his forehead. It all changed when that man turned his intense stare into a cordial smile. That must have been his senior.

"You must be my junior?" The older man phrased it like a question but both of them knew it was a simple statement thanks to their pheromones. "According to the company, you're supposed to refer to me as 'Specialist Coleman,' and I'm supposed to refer to you as 'Specialist Craven.'" He wrinkled his nose and shook his head. "I'm not



going to do that. Call me Barrett.” The junior out of the two opened his mouth to speak, but was cut off. “And I’m going to call you Finley.”

The Fox shifter nodded his head. “Nice to meet you. ” Finley noticed the other shifter was still eating breakfast. A few sausages, a half eaten waffle soaked in syrup, and some orange juice. He turned his head around, using the opportunity to scan the room while awkwardly avoiding eye contact. “So you said you wanted to leave immediately right?”

Barrett grunted out in affirmation. “Yep yep. Have you eaten yet today?”

Finley shook his head. “No. And I don’t really feel too hungry.” He sat down opposite from the other, the pheromones he gave off telling Finley that he was a Bear shifter. Of course he was. He already looks like one.

“Too bad. You’re going to need something. They’re not going to have lunch out for another hour, and breakfast already wrapped up. Here, have the rest of mine.” He gave a grin that showed off abnormally sharp teeth. “Every growing boy needs a good bit of slop every now and then.”

Before he knew it, the silver tray was right in front of him. Finley knew there was a type of intimacy with shifters, the animalism in them, in him, made the idea of sharing



food to be like one of the best gifts you could give to someone. It showed that somebody had an interest in you whether they either liked you, or wanted to know you better. It was the best first impression one could give, and it made Finley cringe because he took it to heart now when before he was bitten he wouldn't have thought much other than how gross it was to share the half-eaten food from another guy. A new set of manners inside his brain told him to grab the tray, and start eating, and so he did.

Already his mind was throwing Barrett on top of the chain, the better of the two, the one to listen to. It wasn't something he explicitly wanted, but both his human and shifter instincts were telling him it would be better and easier this way. Plus, the other man was his boss.

Finley took sparse glances in between bites. At this point both men knew what their shifter species were. But not once had the younger Fox examined his superior until now. Barrett had a thick brown beard that seemed as if it covered more of his face than there was bare skin. Brown eyes, brown hair, it was almost as if brown was his middle name. The younger one knew why of course – you could never truly be human again once you had this... affliction. Although, Finley doubted that Barrett felt the same way.

"It's good eh? We may be miles and miles from our home but the cooking ain't too bad!" The words were meant to ease the situation coming forth. After all, if they were going to be partners for this tour, then it would be best to be on good terms.



Finley nodded his head. "Tastes like breakfast. Thanks for this." He ended his sentence by scarfing down half of a sausage link.

"Ain't from gratitude alone, I need you alert and awake." He stood up from his chair, the man packed with muscle and beef. It was like the fat was intertwined with it all, no doubt helping him seem thicker all around. "Me and you? This place ain't nothing for us. There's food all around from the animals, all we need to do to deal with the cold is change into our real selves. The cold means nothing then. But it's not our lives that we have to worry about, it's the lives of these workers, the ones with families back home waiting for them, they're the ones that we're being paid to protect."

Finley meekly bobbed his head. "Yeah... I know that."

Barrett looked at the tray, noticing that it was now devoid of food. With that, he picked up his gear, slinging the heavy load over his back. "Let's get a move on. Our snow sleds been warming up for a bit now. We've got about twenty-five miles from the metal hut they've got us living in."

The ride went faster than he thought, the inside of the motorized sled warm with its heater pumping as hard as its exhaust. Finley had to remind himself that he was within the Arctic Circle, permafrost being a common feature here. When they finally



arrived, the Fox was half-surprised to see that Barrett was pretty much telling the truth. Essentially their base was the top of a ranger tower, covered in metal, with no windows, and affixed to the ground. "How are we supposed to see anything when we don't have... you know height?"

The Bear in human form gave him a confused smile. "We can smell farther than our eyes. You *should* know that, *shouldn't you?*"

Finley didn't say anything else, for as good that nose was on Barrett, he still couldn't detect that Finley was a new quotation convert quotation.

After the larger man put in the key code, they were both inside and away from the elements. To Finley it felt like jacket weather outside even though it was becoming rapidly colder with each passing hour. The inside of their little hovel reminded him of some bachelor pad, a style in which it was gray in color and abstract in furniture. The corporation had made sure they would be comfortable, but the sleekness did not make him feel at home. It was corporate modernity in its worst and best form.

"Make yourself at home. There should be another bedroom for you, I chose the one with the larger bed already." He gave a few hoarse chuckles as Finley felt a large hand smack against his back. "Although there's nothing that says you can't sleep with me! I'm sure every new recruit wouldn't mind a teddy bear."



Blood rushed into the young Werefox's cheeks, his crotch feeling a tingly sensation as he made his next words harsher than he intended. "I'll be okay, no need for that." He meant it partially, but there was a gnawing feeling in the back of his brain, telling him it would be safer to be with the head of the pack.

Barrett had mostly ignored his tone as he ruffled through a nearby storage closet, whipping out a long barreled rifle. As Finley's eyes saw the weapon, more anxiety rose in his chest. "They never really teach any of you how to use a firearm do they? I feel it best to at least let you get a few shots in. We may be able to transform at a moment's notice, and run as fast as the wind, but if there's a polar bear that needs to be taken out and you can't reach it, then this weapon is going to be a lifesaver for one of the workers. You get me?" Finley nodded. "Good! Let's go outside."

It didn't take long for Barrett to set up a few targets, each one a different length away in distance. An empty MRE packet, a plastic bottle half full of water, a cardboard box with a smiley face on the side. Despite it being modern day, the weapon looked ornate in his hands. He couldn't help but let his triangular fingernails, sharp and deadly, ride against the wooden frame. He could only count the number of times he held a firearm on his fingers, most of the time just being given it to look at and never fire. The Fox shifter didn't know why he wasn't given such training before this moment, but he figured that it was Barrett's responsibility now.



He had recognized the words said to him from movies, video games, all forms of entertainment. For as much as he hated his new self, the enhanced physical abilities allowed him to do all of those things. There was just one enhancement that he only remembered as he pulled the trigger for the first target, the farthest target. His... hyper-attuned hearing.

Barrett, despite his size, was thrown back as Finley shot up and growled from the loud noise, holding his ears with his hands as he visibly clenched his teeth and walked several steps in one direction only to pace back, staring at the snow on the ground as the pain was insufferable. It was quite the shock to the other man who knew it was coming thanks to his experiences before, and anticipated it, but why didn't finley, another shifter, do the same?

Just like how the Fox felt an affinity to follow, the Bear felt an affinity to lead, to care for. His ward was in pain, but there was a question of suspicion in his mind. "Are you all right? Sure it was loud, but it couldn't have been that loud!" He let his face creep into a smile to show that the situation was okay, or at least he wasn't upset. Truth be told, Finley's ears were ringing so badly, he couldn't hear anything, not even his own breathing. He wandered around like a chicken with its head cut off, not once hearing a single one of Barrett's words.



Finally the latter put himself in between Finley's aimless walking, the Fox suddenly smacking against the man's chest. He laid his head against it, not even recognizing what it was but only cared for its warmth. The younger man rubbed his orange-brown colored lamb chops all over it, a safe place for him to regain his bearings.

"Well that was fast. Probably should have had some sort of movie night before you fell for me like this but I guess it's in our nature. I could tell by your scent you were going to be infatuated with me. You must have smelt it on me too." Barrett's voice was smooth, alluring. Finley only had a tail for the couple of times that he was forced to transform, but like a phantom limb something back there was wagging.

It was only when the ringing in his ears ceased and he realized that Barrett's large hand was on his head, the Bear's nails scratching at his head, that the junior specialist pushed himself away, red hot blood flushing to his cheeks as he couldn't believe what he had just done.

The Werebear put out his arms with a caring expression that only served to keep Finley at arm's length. It made the senior specialist tilt his head, as if the facts of this situation were making sense. "I smell it on you. You liked it when I was doing that; you like being my little *kit*." He said it so matter of factly, as if he one hundred percent believed it in his heart. That it wasn't just some sort of teasing or flirtation. "But something is off about you. It's almost as if-



"No! Not you... not you too..." It was not Barret personally he was talking about, but the fact that the Bear was a shifter saying the same damn words the Fox had heard so many times before.

"Huh? I don't... understa- oh."

There was still an ache in Finley's head from the gunshot, and he was struggling to even surmise what he was trying to say, the homoerotic instincts of before coming out from the back of his mind, to be the one thing he really wanted to discuss right now. The one thing being his head between the Bear's thighs. Yet he fought those temptations. "Everyone I know thinks I'm a freak, they don't say it but I know they do, I know how they looked at me. So don't look at me like that! If I'm seen as a freak by the freaks then... I'm truly fucking alone."

Barrett relaxed his face, now understanding what was going on. "You weren't born this way. Some motherfucker bite you? Must have happened recently for you to still be so sensitive to your senses. But you like men. I know you do. A few of us at the base knew it. It's just that we have the... ability to know this kind of thing. I feel bad for all the humans out there who can't just know. I guess with you being recently afflicted, you couldn't control those impulses so easily, that scent of info you gave to everyone about... well a lot of things."



“Well I wasn't really always this way okay?” Finley let his body fall, his butt hitting the cold ground as his hands went to cover his face in shame. “It's ruined everything. Split my family in two, instead of finishing college, now I'm here. Lost the full ride.”

Barrett put his hands on his hips, scanning out into the horizon. He gave a little smile as he saw something on the target range he had made. “Well it looks like you nailed it.”

Finley craned his neck and saw his handy work — a bottle broken into hundreds of pieces. “Guess I did.”

The two rested in silence as the chill barely affected them, something Finley noticed too often these days. It was Barrett who eventually spoke. “We should get inside. Get this place feeling like home for you, do our duties and all that.”

They both began to unload their belongings and whatever supplies they were going to need. Now inside of the so-called ‘metal hut,’ the Werefox’s worries were lessened. A lot of the design evoked futuristic aesthetics, metallic walls and floors with white lines that doubled as illuminators. Even with the lack of more obvious lights, everything was bright and well-lit. Barret brought a finger to a nearby touchscreen on the wall, flicking along a scale in the shape of a circle that changed the color temperature of



the lights, going from white to a cool blue, and then a warm orange. There was a single bathroom, a shared kitchen with the living room, a few storage closets, one side bedroom, and then the master bedroom. A place both humble and oddly extravagant, homely yet sophisticated. An environment bordering two worlds, two feelings, two... contradictions.

It was unfortunate that there were no windows, but it made sense. They really didn't need their sight. Even now, untrained as he was, Finley could smell an unfamiliar scent three miles east, a familiar human scent fifteen miles north, and something dangerous eleven miles south. He wanted to ask Barret how one could even push this information away so he could have some peace... but he didn't feel all that comfortable yet. Especially with how... he felt about the Bear.

It only took an hour for the two to settle in, their bags unpacked, their belongings stowed away for another day. It was larger of a shared space than Finley expected, but it still felt too small. A single room in his parents house was all he needed for most of his life, but now a gnawing ate at him, the need for something larger. Like an entire forest that he could just have as his domain. Human language was one of niceties and prone to misunderstandings. With the two shifters, nothing could be misunderstood through their facial expressions, their pheromones, the way their bodies tweaked in little places here and there. Barrett was most definitely the alpha, but that didn't mean he had to be aggressive, or dominative.



In fact, it felt like whatever was Barrett's, could be Finley's as well.

"So essentially, for the next ten hours, we'll be slinging rifles over our shoulders, sniffing for predators, and watching humans struggle to work in the snow. We stay warm, they grumble about their pay and their families, and then we come back home and sleep until the next shift. Any questions?" Barrett and him were in their uniforms now, surprisingly heavy yellow and black coats that would make sure the entire ordeal would feel as if it was taking place on a nice summer beach.

There was one question on Finley's mind. "What if we, uh, have to face a different kind of predator up here?" He was being intentionally unclear.

"What kind of predator are you talking about?" It took him a second, but his natural language picked up the hint. "Oh you're talking about another shifter? I mean, I've heard rumors about some environmentalists coming up here and try to stop things, but honestly I would put my cards more on a rival company hiring some kind of outside operative to come in and fuck things up. There are a few shifters out there that like that kind of money. Of course I've never actually seen one and nobody I've worked with has seen one either. The only things you gotta worry about are the polar bears. That's what I'm saying is the real danger. Just relax. I'll take care of you."



Finley hadn't really ever thought that a shifter could be this nice, he thought he would just be bullied by them, ridiculed for his affliction not being given at birth from two shifter parents. Even if internally, Barrett was made as the alpha, Finley didn't have any problem being his subordinate. It just felt right that way. And to reward that feeling, the Werefox got a sudden twang in his crotch, a stirring, a hardening that began to show a bulge in his crotch. He turned his body immediately but the smell and hormones in the air was well more than enough to betray his subterfuge. It made Barrett smile, but he knew not to comment on it at least for right now.

Even though the work site was a few miles away, the two still took the motorized sled over to it, cutting the distance down to around ten minutes of travel. The sights of the excavation zone screamed industrial gigantism, with large resource extraction devices piloted both by computers and people of all creeds and origins. It took place in a giant crater that helped with the wind chill. Finley had to do a double-take to notice that the crater was man-made, and at some point this was all one uniform plane of ice. Who knows how long it took them to do this, but the fact is that the company must have used plenty of material and oil and God knows what to make this crude basin.

Barrett and Finley made their way to a hastily constructed hunter's tower near one of the edges which had looked like a little cliff at this point. The stairs creaked with every step, the Werefox worrying that he would break one of the planks which made



Barrett enthusiastically slam on each one to show how bendable they were even if they were starting to have a few splinters fly out from the pressure.

After ten minutes of readjusting, Finley got into the groove of just simply staring out into the white wilderness. He tried to use his nose to sniff out any danger, but all he could get was the soot and runoff from the exhaust of the machines below. The sweat and unwashed musk of men and women, of humans, something he wasn't anymore. It was all a cascade of overwhelming smells for his nose.

It, along with the boringness of it all after being there for 3 hours, was what made him not detect the danger to their three o'clock. Barrett had noticed it several minutes ago, deciding to wait and see if his junior would comment on it. The white fur of a four-legged apex predator would typically camouflage itself with the color of this wasteland, but the dirt gave it a more yellow hue which did disappoint the Werebear on Finley's performance but it didn't matter that much now knowing the circumstances.

Finley's face immediately went red as he saw the other man remove his boots, his coat, and various articles of clothing until he was down to some tight underwear. The Werefox had felt on edge ever since night came early, as if feeling that something was pulling invisible strings above him. A blue-black wave loomed amongst the skies. "What in the world are you doing?"



"Getting my paycheck runt. What are you doing?" The young shifter's eyes widened in an instant, Barrett's underwear stretching only for a few moments before exploding into a heap of torn cloth. For a tantalizing moment, the Werebear's genitalia could be seen before being covered by fur and growing mass. Barrett grew exponentially in all directions, his hands, already large enough, became padded and even thicker, the same for his feet which were soon covered by large swaths of dark brown bear fur. A short protrusion on his face stretched out into a stout muzzle, the teeth inside sharpening to such a point that even refined metals could be chewed into like taffy. His neck grew, his back grew, everything about him was growing. And for some reason, all Finley could think about was how quickly his arousal shot up at the sight of his senior.

The changing shifter jumped from the tower, his bulky legs along with the snow cushioning his fall. Barrett was completely unrecognizable now, nothing more than a Werebear charging on two legs for a brief moment before falling onto all fours towards an animal that Finley now saw in the distance. Thanks to instincts most newborn shifters had, it was then that the Werefox's senses picked up that wild beast in the distance. Well, now there were two wild beasts in the distance, and Finley's mind as well as his crotch throbbed at the appearance of the brown furred beast.

At this point Barrett looked more like a feral bear, charging his enemy as the polar bear realized it had a much larger challenger approaching. Although its own instincts betrayed its capabilities, thinking of itself as an apex predator that could never be



defeated. It returned Barrett's charge with one of its own, puffs of steam shooting out of its black nose. The workers had no idea of the situation that was occurring, the indent they were in combined with the Werebear's path on the outer rim made them ignorant to the action above.

Finley let his eyes shift, the new color taking on a vibrant orange that let him zoom in to see the action up close. It was Barrett who shoulder charged right into the body of the polar bear, tossing the thing back as if it was just a plastic block. The Werebear moved in a semicircle, putting his back to the wasteland so that the polar bear would focus on him and not the workers below. Whether it would be some kind of magic or natural instincts that made this wild animal want to kill today was unknown, but that did not matter to the Bear shifter.

The polar bear lunged forward, its brain severed from the rest of its body as Barrett brought his claw down, slicing right into it, its neck and head flying forward while the rest of its body slumped into the ground, as good as dead. There was something about Barrett's stance that exuded dominance before relaxing into a neutral pose. It wasn't even a challenge, but there was no reason to boast over something dead, no less than an animal that could never have registered was going to lose that easily.

The corpse was left there to rot. Other predators would find their way to it and in the brutally honest way that nature can be, it would satisfy other polar bears who came



looking for an easy meal. But one that wouldn't run and scream and call for its shifter protectors, no, it'd be laying there and ready to be consumed.

That's about as much as Finley could think before he felt an... odd shudder. Something inside, something... integral to him was being snatched away. Control. Autonomy. Something *ancient*, something with... authority. It demanded a cost only he could provide. A bargain forced onto him. The curse was here, and it was demanding its due.

There... in the distance, just on the furthest horizon. The beginning of a glowing, white sphere rising up just as the sun had left behind him long ago. Even though Barret was many, many feet away, Finley could sense he was smiling, anticipating this moment, having timed his change as to bypass this uncomfortability. Or was it a way to show subservience? Either way, the junior specialist's heart leapt from his chest, as if it were trying to dive into one of the giant pearl's craters.

Was it his heart... or his humanity? Either way, the changes were coming.

The Werefox doubled over, gritting his teeth, holding the rusted guardrail beside him with a heavy grip, bending the metal there like clay. His teeth were the first to change, gritting together harder than a hydraulic press, his lips curling up to reveal the white fangs lengthening, sharpening, his face growing outwards into a deformed snout



that crunched into position. Sweat and drool mixed together before it was taken over by orange fur, his bones *stretching* as Finley gained height, muscle, and animalistic features that'd truly betray his humanity. He did not **want** this. He did not **want** his fingernails to grow into claws, his clothes ripping into frail webs as lushious and thick orange-white fur pushed out of them. A tail flying out like a spear that pierced and tore a hole in his pants. Feet into large paws, well padded for the elements, a repertoire of strength across his chest that'd make bodybuilders blush, and pointed ears that'd curve like large radar dishes and detect sound better than any in the animal kingdom.

The pressure had dampened, and his eyes were now nothing but a glowing yellow. His breaths heavy and haggard, with the steam puffing out of them melting the snow in front of him immediately. His brain was electrified, his nerves shocked, and his body attempting to stand only for it to fall again, right into the arms of an even larger and burlier Werebear.

"I gotcha." The Bear's grip was firm but gentle at the same time, like when one holds their own newborn with great care.

The amount of warmth that Finley could feel was overwhelming, sweltering, the fur that they radiated from within, it made him think that they were in Miami during a hot summer. The snowflakes that came from above weren't even allowed to touch the tips of their fur strands before melting away.



The Werefox somehow found the energy to speak. "I thought it would have gotten easier than last time." His paws found their footing, but his body did not dare waste this opportunity of being held, both his heart and his crotch tingling from the sensation. Although his tail gave away his sacred feelings and thanks to the height difference between them, Barrett could easily see the wagging.

"It does get easier runt. It's just that you're new is all. Although you should get into the habit of knowing when the full moon is coming. We have calendars you know? It doesn't matter if we don't lose ourselves like the movies lie about, it's just... better to act than react." The Werebear let go of him, Finley's tail drooping down like a sad sunflower.

The junior specialist remembered watching... *those* films. Where the shifter would try to have a normal life only for the moon to pop up and they turn into a *savage* beast that's willing to kill *anything*. He recalled enjoying those movies just as much as he did superhero ones, not even once thinking about the authenticity of it all.

Of course there was a nugget of truth in everything. Most shifters of sound mind have no issue forcibly transforming on a full moon, but those with very real and very human disorders and mental complications could easily fall to a beast that's been domesticated for hundreds of years. After all, if one were to suffer hallucinations, then how would they know what would be real, or how would their bestial instincts react?



Finley had been so distracted by the rush of everything that he didn't notice the matted gunk of polar bear blood still on Barrett's fur, now mixing into his own softer hide. The smell registered with him then, as it originally was masked by the Bear's musk. "Oh... from up here the kill looked more clean."

The senior specialist laughed, his eyes nothing but one luminescent hue similarly to Finley's, except his was green. "It never is, unfortunately, but it's my own fault. I could have just shot him. Eh, I needed a shower anyway." His face then got rather close to the Fox's. "And now so do you." Another smile, this one making Finley spasm with glee.

There were still parts of the smaller shifter that rejected this notion of attraction, but it felt like ever since both men had changed into their true forms, parts of his humanity had dwindled, the ones that were able to hold back these feelings that made him want to be subservient. It did not feel entirely within his choice, similarly to love and how it often forced somebody to speak on emotions they could not entirely understand. It felt a lot like this, except instead of it being his heart that longed this emotion, it was like a dog that demanded what it wanted. It recognized the hierarchy, the authority, and now it wanted protection, it wanted to be held roughly, it wanted to have sex.

And Barrett didn't really need instincts, or scent, or anything to really notice Finley's knot peeking from his sheath, the flaring red rocket shaking excitedly despite



the Werefox's human hesitation. "Looks like our shift just ended as well. I say we get home, take a nice shower with a lot of warm water, and then we take care of this huh?" The Werebear's paw moved downwards, a few of his stout fingers playing with the stretchy cream white furred folds of Finley's scrotum.

It made him tingle, his body shaking in a mixture of electrifying surprise and pleasure. The ride back to base felt like it took hours to get through. He kept trying to sneak peeks at Barrett's crotch but the Bear's fur was too thick to get a clear picture, but there was also something off about the other shifter, as if he wasn't entirely into the situation. The two sniffed each other greedily prior to getting off that watchtower, a kind of scented inebriation that perhaps was starting to die down for the Bear? But in that... new porn that he had been watching, the Werefox thought a time like this would be the one where the Bear brings over a thick hand to play with his prey. Either way, Barrett knew the other was wanting to see his rugged package yet he was hiding it for a reason unknown to the other beast. Of course it had to be something about the Fox's aroma, it had to be. Was something off about him? Was something... *unclear*?

The two exited the mechanized sled, the moon fully shown as green lines of an aurora borealis sparked across the cold dark blue sky. It was a scene and situation Finley could have never imagined in a million years, truly proving that life will lead you to a place to never expect. The blood had dried on them both, and the snow could have been like white sand for it felt as toasty as a desert with their heightened emotions and



fur and body heat. If it had been earlier in the day, when he was still human, Finley would have been annoyed at the idea of them having to share a shower for conservation reasons.

But it took no time for him and the Werebear to get inside the rectangular shower, their bodies that never once allowed to separate. It would be as if one bar of soap would be used to wash a conjoined being, conjoined in more than just body but soul. Finley still couldn't see his senior's genitals thanks to their bellies and the angle, but there was something nagging at the back of his head.

Barrett had noticed it way before all of this, he understood parts of it when they first met, when that gunshot hurt Finley's ears and he was told the truth, and it was something the Bear had always known — the infection of one onto another brought more than just the supposed curse, but the literal essence of who the former was. Finley was not completely into him from simply sexuality, or just common attraction, but because a piece of whoever infected Finley was in him now, and was pushing this.

Consent was not guaranteed, ancient instincts and the sheer, mischievous push of someone who would be malevolent enough to force this affliction onto someone who was not born with it was here again. Just like on that fateful night, control was being taken away, a choice was being made without the young man's consideration.



It was then that Finley turned around, his rear now rather close to Barrett's crotch, but the Bear took advantage of this rageful, angsty spirit by placing his hands on top of Werefox's shoulders, holding him so tightly that the smallest shifter could not move, so that he could not bend over, so that finally, the experience will be over.

It was a meek little moan, not emasculating, but a quiet, heightened tone. Finley's ejaculate flung itself into the linoleum wall, a good amount of beastly seed painting what was already white. It was quick; a quarter of the pleasure of Finley's typical climaxes... but it was over. The Werefox had indeed walked halfway there, but it was the thing inside of him, not the origin of the supposed curse, but that of who inflicted this on him.

Barrett shut the water off, enough dirt and blood had been cleaned from their bodies and now the junior specialist was crouched down in a ball, whimpering along the Bear's paws. "I-I didn't mean for it to go that far. I..." The young man's voice was shaky, scattered, like the words he said were chosen along a million other words that could have been said and crafted in that moment.

The Bear stepped out of the shower, trying to create space between them, grabbing a towel for them both in an attempt to make the situation seem mundane, like it was no big deal. "Yeah whoever infected you seems like an even bigger asshole than I thought. It's all right man."



Finley didn't want to sleep in his own room tonight, preferring to be in the master bedroom and sharing a bed just so that somebody was there to comfort him. The mattress was nice, the silk sheet on top of them doing nothing for warmth but it was still a nice material to feel against their fur. In Barrett's hands was the carefully grasped letter that the younger shifter had brought along with him, the one his mother wrote.

It was given with hesitation, but when the Bear had finished reading, he looked at Finley with his pupil-less green hue. "You know the way she writes this, someone could easily confuse it with what your *current* thing is all about, unless I'm mistaken?"

The Werefox brought his head up to the Bear's chest, placing the side of his head against it. "Funny how that is, isn't it? My parents didn't really think it was my fault for this... body, but you know you leave one tab open on the computer and somebody gets a little nosy and now they're worried about whether they'll actually have grandchildren. Heh, never seen them be so against adoption either."

Barrett smiled at that, giving a few hearty chuckles. "So that does mean part of you really wanted this?"

"Of course. I still do want it. But... I know what you're thinking."



The Bear pressed his back further against the headboard, taking a deep long breath before exhaling it all out. "You're still pretty new to all this. And I want to make sure that this thing you really, really want. We know each other's scents, and we can find each other pretty easily."

"And... we could also just share phone numbers?"

Another laugh from the Bear. "That is true. I suppose I'm old-fashioned. But here's what I'm offering. We make it through the next sixty days, then we go our separate ways. You get a bit of time away from me, we let these feelings build up or fester or however you want to take it... and you get a bit of a better grasp on yourself, a bit of your own person back... then we'll meet again. Then I'll get a better grasp on what you really want, and I think you will too."

Was this a rejection? Or was it something more responsible? Finley really didn't have control on specific parts of himself, new shifters generally didn't. Had it not been for his successful psych evaluation soon after being infected, Finley might have been stuck in some medical ward for who knows how long. Nonetheless, this journey was strange and unknown and even now he didn't really understand everything. But he knew enough to know that Barrett was going to be a great guide in this journey, one who wasn't always active, or hands on. Barrett wasn't going to be the all-star quarterback captain but more of a coach that would help the younger shifter know more about



himself and the condition that he was going to have to live with, a condition that maybe... wasn't so bad.

"Well I suppose once the moon goes down tomorrow, it'll get easier." Finley said the words so innocently, but his ear twitched as if it heard Barrett's smile growing wider.

"Unfortunately around here runt, the next time the sun rises is in... I believe sixty days exactly. Meaning..."

Meaning that Finley would be stuck in this body for two whole months. He did not scream, he did not roar, he merely scrunched his muzzle and let out a long sigh.

## **Three months later...**

The green foliage of the forest felt so natural to him compared to that frosty wasteland up north. The orange dusky streak across the sky was already beginning to fade as Finley's boots solemnly walked down the hastily made trail that was only meant for one person to follow. It wasn't made through grinding the grass into dirt, but the faint smell left on its leaves.

The work was work, but it was nice to have those days with just him and Barrett, whether it would be watching a movie, or just spending the silence together before bed.



He didn't understand it all back then, why Barrett didn't just take him for his own but the young man realized it soon after getting back to his home. One shifter had already taken away a part of him, and Barrett wanted to make sure *he* wasn't going to take any others. It made Finley's inside gleam with romantic thoughts, feeling now that he could truly trust the Bear.

And speaking of the Bear, there he was, in the middle of that glade with a tranquil river flowing in the background. He was already changed into his brown fuzzy form, a flower of the tundra in his mouth — a souvenir from their time together. No words needed to be exchanged, the Werefox had matured enough, and whatever overwhelming feelings he had, they were his own in complete totality. The curse... no, the *affliction* had been forced on him, but his sexuality was something he'd been born with. This *is* him.

After making sure he wouldn't destroy another set of clothes, Finley voluntarily changed before the full moon did it for him, charging at the Bear who caught him mid-jump as the two made love. Their snouts pressed together, their lips moving wherever they could kiss as they embraced such long held feelings. It wouldn't be long until the Fox voluntarily bent over, his sides being held by such giant hands.



More than one of Finley's wishes were granted that night, and the smile that he had could not have been any wider as the Bear entered him. At least until that smile turned into a wince, and then... ***euphoria***.

