

Kevin stared forward in the empty coffee shop. His insecurities were soaring. He had always been sure of himself throughout his life, fully aware of who he was, what he was, and was able to cope with it. He brushed his slightly overgrown hair behind his ears and leaned against the counter, waiting for the next customer to enter. Normally on nights like this, he used the quiet as a chance to get school work done, completing homework between customers. Yet on this night, he felt dread. He didn't want to feel or experience anything. He wanted to resist, to avoid even any sensation that suggested he had internal feelings.

He felt a weight in his heart, a feeling of finality. It hadn't always felt this way. Tyler used to visit Kevin at the shop, who would elicit conversations that were both random and also geared to take Kevin's mind off certain issues. He would start spouting off about upcoming movies or whether the Colts were going to make it to the playoffs again. There was a certain charm about Tyler, one that told Kevin there was someone there for him, someone who supported him, someone who loved him.

As a gay football player, Kevin had extreme difficulty in knowing who he was. All he understood growing up was football, perfecting his game, and being the best possible player. His parents, especially his father, had given him the impression that sports was everything. Sports were a ticket to a future, a scholarship, and possibly an opportunity for fame. This sense of ambition became his world, which dominated every aspect of his being. Kevin found himself practicing for the sport, to which he was one of the fastest running backs his town had ever seen, though he would learn later in life that there was a special reason as to why his talents were so profound.

"I believe in you," he heard Tyler telling him, causing Kevin extreme sadness. He wanted to forget him, pretend he never existed. But that wasn't realistic. He recognized there needed to be a basis of reality in life.

Kevin had met Tyler entirely by chance. In fact, Tyler collided into Kevin's life at a point when he wasn't sure of himself and dealing with a unique reality: he was a werewolf. Since he was 17, he began sprouting fur and became carnal every full moon. He couldn't control it, handle it, let alone accept it. He was supposed to be a football player! He was supposed to be on the fast track to be a NFL superstar, and now he was thrust with the reality that there was a "monster" within him, least that was what he described it as to himself initially.

Tyler had witnessed Kevin transforming one evening. In the first few months when Kevin was trying to learn where to "wolf out" every month, he tended to fail to locate an area and would forcibly transform in the middle of the woods. Tyler happened to be in the woods one full moon night, going for a late night walk to clear his mind, when he witnessed Mr. football player submitting himself to the full moon. Rather than run, he watched, mystified. He wasn't terrified, but rather, he wanted to understand.

"Don't freak out, but I saw you last night." Kevin's heart had stopped, but he saw in Tyler's stunning eyes that there was compassion. He didn't exactly know much about Tyler, only in that

he was a relatively new student in his school, having recently moved from Montreal. There was something alluring to him in a natural sense, an aura that strongly suggested 'you can trust me.' Rather than deny his werewolf side, he simply broke down and hugged this stranger he could now share his secret with.

They became close, fast. Tyler started spend time with Kevin, not because he wanted to unearth the dirty details of what it was like to be a werewolf, but because he genuinely found Kevin interesting. As a result, Kevin found himself opening up to Tyler, revealing his fears that being a werewolf would ruin his life. "All I want out of life is to play football," he would tell Tyler, who would then pat Kevin on the shoulder and reassure him that his fears weren't unfounded. He would then impart encouragement, aimed to debunk that belief that all was already lost. "Did you know that Stephen King almost wasn't the writer he is now?" He once asked Kevin, knowing Stephen King was a favorite of Kevin's. "When he wrote his first novel...I think it was *Carrie*...anyway, he had no confidence in his future as a writer. He actually threw away the manuscript in the garbage and was ready to move on. His wife, who believed in him, fished the manuscript out of the trash and pushed him to keep writing. The book was published and we know the rest. Point is, you may think your future is over, but I'm here to hold you up cause I believe in you."

That was when Kevin first kissed Tyler. It happened without warning. For Tyler, he later confessed he was in love with Kevin for months and had been discreetly hoping something would blossom.

The kiss between them terrified Kevin. Oddly enough, being gay seemed more frightening than being a werewolf. Yet, he was more confounded with an understanding that he wasn't just a werewolf, he was a...gay werewolf.

He kissed Tyler again anyway, and allowed himself to fall in love. He never conceived of the possibility he was gay, but with Tyler, he knew it was something that he had always known but hadn't wanted to accept, very much like being a werewolf. However, Tyler gave him that belief that it was ok to be both. It only took a few months before Kevin openly hand Tyler's hand in the school hallways, coming out openly. They still held the secret that he was a werewolf close to their hearts, cause that was only for them to know...and experiment with.

Then came the fall season and the game against Hampton. Third quarter, second down...he couldn't get up. The impact he took kept him on the ground. He would learn after being escorted off the field that it was an ACL injury and his playing for the remainder of the season was effectively over. A possibility of a scholarship, a very real possibility, was now a distant dream. Undoubtedly, it wasn't truly to be.

He was furious, angry with the world. Compassion and comforting only made him angrier. Rather than trying to cope and find a new avenue that would make a new pathway easier to understand, he chose to burn everything around him. He knew it was childish and would achieve nothing more than pushing away others, but he did it anyway. It was a self-fulfilling

prophecy he was creating: Push away people and then lament how people weren't there for him. This treatment had no exception with Tyler.

"What the hell do you know?!" He shouted at Tyler. "You only care about me cause you were latching off my success and were only initially interested cause you wanted me to sleep with you as a werewolf! You're twisted. I wasn't even gay until I met you."

That was the last time they spoke. Tyler tried calling a handful of times after that final conversation, but Kevin never responded. He had know immediately how unfair he had been, but was scared to own up to it. It took three months for him to text Tyler and finally admit fault, but by that point, the damage was done. Tyler responded with an eloquent note detailing his appreciation, but their time together was over. He wished Kevin the best. And he meant it.

Emptiness. That's what Kevin felt since reading that message. He ultimately had to delete due to obsessively reading it. Insomnia started. Regret poured through his veins, but he knew he had to learn from it. If anything, he would be a better person for experiencing such hurt that he directly caused.

"Bro, what can you give me for free?"

Kevin looked up from the barista counter, seeing his former football mate, Stephen. Kevin mentally noted that his friend seemed amped up, his adrenaline clearly pumping. "Um, we have a lot of extra matcha powder. I could make you a green tea latte and I don't think anyone would notice anything is missing."

"Don't care. Long as I don't have to pay anything."

"Sure."

Kevin grabbed a nearby medium cup and began adding the milk, powder and vanilla syrup that created the flavor profile of the latte. He glanced up at Stephen, who was beaming as Kevin prepared the drink. "What's so funny?" He asked, his eyes focused upon the drink as he placed the mixture into the milk frother.

"You know that guy you used to date?"

"Tyler?" His hand trembled as he poured the latte into a cup.

"Yeah. I saw him near the theaters earlier tonight." Stephen bit his lip, trying to contain his laughter. "He know he hurt you bad bro and I care about you and all. I hate seeing you all gloomy lately, so I beat the living hell out of him."

An awkward silence.

"What?" Kevin caught himself saying.

"Yeah bro! He was getting into his car when I hit him in the back of the head. He fell down so fast that it was almost hilarious, and then I started to kick him. I think he was crying when I left. Who cares. Anyway, so I figured I come here and get a free drink for my services."

"I didn't ask you to do that," Kevin sternly said.

"That's what friends are for, to look out for each other when one doesn't know what he needs. Oh! I'm gonna use the bathroom real fast and then I gotta bail."

Stephen abruptly walked away, entering the bathroom. Kevin found himself fuming. He poured the latte down the sink and gripped the sink tight. He wanted to scream. He could feel every fiber of his body vibrating with anger at Stephen. He shook, furious that the person he still loved was hurt somewhere.

"Oh!" He exclaimed, gripping the sink tighter as he felt his spine arch upwards. He felt his back crack and ridges formed, pushing hard against his uniform shirt. He felt the ridges go down his back, reaching his tailbone. "Oh God," he murmured to himself in pain. He didn't understand. Why was this happening? It wasn't a full moon. He gripped the sink tighter as his fingernails blackened in color and started extending into claws.

He felt his tailbone pushed down, hard. He moaned, which transitioned into a light growl. He felt hairs starting to sprout on the cheeks on his butt. Slowly at first, but then very hastily. So itchy, but the pain kept his hands gripping the sink. "Oh God," he stammered again as he felt his tail grow, pushing up against his jeans hard. He growled in pain, feeling it grow larger and thicker, pushing the jeans outwards.

At the same time, he felt his arms becoming restricted within his black coffee house uniform shirt. His already defined biceps and triceps began to grow thicker and. Fur was already racing to cover his arms, with the sleeves of his tearing as his arms thickened two times the size they were. "Please, no," Kevin said.

He doubled over in even more pain as his tail inched out further and he felt his chest elongating and sprouting fur. His already defined six pack thickened further and pushed outwards, straining his shirt and tearing it at the neck. "Oh!" Kevin moaned in the pain, just as his molars extended into fangs. He growled as he could feel muscle developing and pulsating throughout his body. He could also feel his thighs growing. He had always had thick thighs on account of squatting a volume of weight, but it did not compare to the thickening mass they were as he forcibly transformed into a werewolf. His furry quads tore from his jeans.

Tears streamed down his face as he tried to resist the transformation, but it was futile. He felt his ears point and begin to travel up the side of his head, as his teeth sharpened further.

"Stop!" He managed to growl, his vocal cords now affected by the transformation. He felt his feet collide against his sneakers as they stretched. He could feel each bone popping as they realigned and grew. His toenails felt like they were on fire as they sharpened and pushed outwards, creating talons that ripped through the front of his shoes.

His tail tore out of the back of his jeans as his shirt and jeans tore open more due to the constricting fur and muscle growth. He hardly noticed that his shoes had torn in half to reveal his growing feet, cause his face pushed forward into a muzzle. He felt and heard all the bone in his face crack noisily. He bared his sharp fangs as his eyes turned yellow.

To Kevin's surprise, he was still aware as to who he was. He was fully transformed, yes, but hadn't gone feral, like he often did on full moons. This was different.

He glared at the closed bathroom door, waiting for Stephen to come out. He now knew why this transformation occurred: he hated bullies and refused to let them exist unchecked. While Stephen's assault of Tyler made this personal for Kevin, he would never permit this behavior towards anyone. There was no way he would allow Stephen to walk away from his day unchecked.

He mentally decided he would then go out and find Tyler and be sure he was all right. He knew it wouldn't solve anything and their relationship was forever done, but he also understood that there would always be a piece his heart that belonged to Tyler. That wouldn't ever change, and that comforted him.

The bathroom door opened.

Stephen stepped out.

He screamed at the sight before him.

The scream was cut off abruptly.