

Wednesday, September 28th, 2011

Moon Phase - New

Finishing off the last of the second sub and his soda, Alex headed back outside. Once on his motorcycle, he thought through all the places he had found this guy. The first was the park, too far away from where he was now. Then, Catherine's place of work and Nathan's, both relatively close. After leaving the lot, he made his way over to Gamestop first. Nathan's car wasn't there and the store was lightly packed. Looking through the windows while he pretended to mess around with his phone, he didn't see anyone with red clothing or black and bleached hair. Although that made him feel hopeful, he had to check for his scent to be sure.

Heading inside and doing a full walk of the store, as small as it was, Alex felt more like a wolf than a civilian as he checked for the scent. Even more so than a month before when he was just exploring the house, or a part of his neighborhood. With the store lacking the werewolf's scent, he relaxed a bit, glad to know he hadn't shown up again. Leaving with a nod to the employee who was working there, his next stop was Catherine's place of work.

Before he started the engine again, another question crossed his mind: Was this guy watching people besides his friends? He had uncovered his presence at two of the places they worked, but those were among the few places he always went in town. Let alone the places anyone could go. Looking out to the lines of stores on his side of the town square, he could barely imagine going inside each one just to find one scent. Deciding to focus on the places of those close to him for now, Alex made his way to the Half-Price Books down the road.

Pulling into closest parking spot he could find, he scanned the aisles he could see from the lot. Once again, there was no immediate sign of him but like before, Catherine was working a shift at the trade-in counter. Once inside, Alex took a few quick sniffs of the air; her perfume he identified first, followed by compositions of tobacco and body spray before the wind coming in behind him scattered the scents.

Giving a wave as he walked up to the counter, Catherine returned the gesture. Her first sentence afterwards was exactly what he was hoping to hear. "Hey. I haven't seen that guy you told us about."

"Nice. I was just over at Gamestop and I didn't see him there either." Catherine nodded with a smile, albeit one that wasn't completely uplifting. "Just in case though, I'll check."

Starting from the spot he had found the werewolf's scent before, Alex went through the aisles towards the right of the store one by one, occasionally crouching down to see if the scent had settled to the floor. He found scents similar to the ones he'd noticed at the front, but not the one he was looking for. Stopping at the Science Fiction aisle to give his nose a break, he thought of listening to a few songs while he walked the rest of the store. Seeing his instant messenger lacking any new alerts, he decided against it just in case one came.

At the same time, his old fear of his friends not talking to him because of his revelation started to creep back. Or was it because he wasn't talking much to them? Shaking his head a bit, Alex chocked it up to neither possibility; all four of them were still speaking face to face. Beyond that, no message alerts was a good thing to a degree. It was the fastest way they had to warn each other if this guy was around.

Making his way to the other side of the store, Alex repeated the process of checking each aisle. None of them had any trace of the scent, much to his relief. Heading back to the counter to let Catherine know, she had stepped out, her scent trail leading him back to the Mystery aisle.

She was organizing a new batch of trade-ins when he found her. "I didn't find it."

"Good to know." Catherine replied. "I'll still keep my eyes out though."

Nodding to his friend, Alex left the store, looking around as he prepared to repeat the process. For a second, he thought of diverting towards the Tampa shop instead of Blue Moon, just in case he showed around there. Thinking it was too far out of the way, he continued to his workplace.

Daniel was working the register when he arrived, offering him a wave as he entered. Inside, the place was thick with the scent of an air spray, making Alex rub his nose. As he walked around the store, the sharp oxygen scent of the spray remained the most prevalent one. The few scents he could find in the air came from the inventory on display. Heading back to the rear of the store, and seeing that Trevor wasn't in his usual place, Alex crouched down out of sight. Some of the scents near the floor grew stronger, but the spray had settled and had the same effect down low. What scents he could pick up were those coming off of the products on the shelves, and a few from under the carpeting.

With the shelves in good order, and little sign of customer traffic, Alex had to ask Daniel if he'd seen the guy. As he made his way to the register, he could feel the question pause in his lungs. His friends were already involved in this being lookouts. He didn't want to drag his coworkers in as well. Hoping Daniel wouldn't ask too many questions, Alex presented the question to him. He hummed as he thought back. "Black and bleached hair? No, I didn't see anyone like that."

Alex nodded with a slight smile. "Thanks." Although he didn't see any sign of question in his coworker's gaze, he gave him a quick goodbye and left. On the way back home, he breathed a sigh of relief. Clear on all three fronts. At least for now.

Friday, September 30th, 2011

Moon Phase - Waxing Crescent

As his classes on Thursday went by, Alex debated whether to patrol the same places again. His high school and his neighborhood were where the killings were happening most often, but the first time he had to kill to feed, he hadn't found a single trace of his attacker. Once his History class was done, he spent a few minutes setting up location makers on his phone's GPS. Looking over the location spacing, they were spread throughout several square miles. The killings in the northernmost areas, and his personal encounters in the south.

Seeing how huge of an area he would have to patrol to narrow things down, the idea became even more daunting. Deep down, he began to feel what he was sure his father did sometimes. If this guy was using the entire area he'd mapped out as a stretch of territory, his chance of finding him was slim.

His first thought was to search the forested areas near his neighborhood, starting with the park across Highway 6. It was more than large enough to offer a place to hide, day or night. As he made his way there, crossing over a rise on the highway, he could feel his chest sinking a bit.

Watching for a gap in traffic near the entrance, Alex veered off and onto the winding road leading to the park. Through his helmet, he couldn't identify much beyond a collection of pond and pine tree related scents. Likely the strongest ones he was about to encounter. Despite the sun being out, and the other werewolf greeting him with normal small talk before, he felt less safe the further he drove.

At the parking lot, two other vehicles were there: a truck and a sedan. Neither one he recognized, nor the people he could see. With a few potential witnesses around, his chances of encountering the other werewolf felt

slimmer. Unless he didn't care if anyone saw him. Once his helmet was off, Alex's nostrils were quickly flushed with plant, water, engine and food scents. Ignoring the ones of food as best he could, he made his way over to the walking trail, the winds coming through the wooded area as he walked it. They shifted between south-bound and west-bound every minute or so, the swaying pines showing where the scents he was picking up on the currents were likely coming from.

Before long, Alex could no longer see the parking lot. It was just him, and whatever else could be out here. If anything was. When he reached the furthest point west the trail would go, he checked his GPS again. There was at least a square mile, if not more, of forested area beyond. Full of stagnant pools of water, dead brush, and countless other things from what he could see. The scents from those overpowered the other weaker ones in the breezes. Crouching down to try and catch some scents near the ground, those from the fallen leaves and bark became stronger instead. While he did notice what he thought was someone's body scent, he didn't recognize it. The werewolf wasn't here.

On the way back to his bike, Alex felt some relief at not finding the guy, mixed with slight annoyance. Getting a chance to tell this guy he was on to him would have been enjoyable, but then it could also be life-threatening to him and his friends. As he readied his keys for the ignition, he thought of patrolling everyone's workplaces again, just in case. His mind changed on that as he left and approached the highway. If his friends saw this guy, he was willing to trust they would say so.

When his English class the next day let out, he felt his phone vibrate with a received message. Although expecting something bad, his preconception proved incorrect when he checked it. "*Guys. I was wondering if you all wanted to see a movie or something before we go out to eat tonight. Oh, and Happy Birthday, Marcus.*" Typing out his response as he sat outside his next class, Alex received two more texts before his Calculus class was out; one from Nathan, the other from Marcus, both variants of a Yes response.

Foregoing a trip to the skateshop to pass the time, Alex instead rode around the perimeter of the mall to achieve the same ends, the afternoon foot traffic, of which there was very little, allowing him to ride without fear of running into anyone. When his friends began to arrive, seeing Marcus wearing his work tee under a white shirt instead of a jacket of some kind immediately made him ask if he was called in; he shook his head in response.

"It's not that cold out." he said as a strong wind rushed by them.

"If you say so." Catherine said. "So, which film do you guys want to see?"

"I have no idea. What's on this week?" As Nathan began flipping through the list of available films, the rest of the group began naming off ones they thought were good. The general direction was towards a drama film of some kind. "That one's sold out..." Nathan said as he found a potential match. "There's another showing at 4:10, though. That one?"

With a general agreement on the showing, the group started towards the theater, the small talk between them moving from games to developments at work. The afternoon crowds were thankfully light, but Alex's senses were quickly swamped by dozens of scents as they entered the building. Many of those being the scents of flavorings and sodas from the concession stands. Although much nicer than the ones he'd been searching through the day before, being surrounded by so many of them remained distracting even after some time had passed. By the time the film was over however, the scents of so many sweets had started to make his stomach churn, along with Marcus'.

Once back at the mall, they split off as Nathan and Catherine headed for the bookstore, saying they

would regroup shortly. With his meal in his hands shortly afterwards, Alex fired off a question to Marcus after he swallowed his first bite. "Hey, man. About what happened last week...Are you still a little skeptical about it?"

Marcus shrugged. "It *is* hard to believe."

"No worries. I get you." Alex replied, although in his mind, he was wondering why his friend was thinking that way.

"Catherine's really been on the lookout for that guy since you stopped by her work last week, though."

"I wasn't trying to unnerve her or anything." Alex replied, his tone a bit defensive. "Just making sure he wasn't stalking her. Or any of us."

"You had any luck with that?"

"Aside from Nathan's place of work, no. This guy could be... Hang on. Let me show you." Alex pulled out his phone and showed where the locations were.

"That's a pretty big area."

"That's what I said too."

"Hopefully, the police are looking around there."

Hearing that, Alex diverted the topic a bit. "With canine units, but I believe so." Marcus acknowledged the statement, going back to eating as they kept walking.

When they rejoined Catherine and Nathan, browsing the fantasy and role-playing sections respectfully, Catherine was the first to suggest eating now would be a better idea than waiting. With his stomach not fully satisfied with what he had eaten, Alex nodded at the suggestion.

They arrived at Steakhouse Burgers to the scents of cooking meat, causing him to lick his lips; his stomach felt even emptier as he took them in and gurgled in response. Picking a spot near the right-most window looking out from the restaurant, he set his helmet aside to mark their table while they went to order. While looking over the menu, his friends all placed their orders before him when he couldn't decide what to get. Settling on a steak and garlic bread on the side, he offered a ten to pay for his portion.

"So, how's it feel to be 21?" Catherine asked as they waited for their meals to arrive.

"No different than 20." Marcus said. "At least until I try a shot of whiskey."

"Got a flavor picked out?"

"Nah, but my folks have some. A Scottish brand, I think."

"Be careful, then." Alex said. "Their stuff is powerful."

"How would you know?" One side of Marcus' lips curled up as he asked the question.

Alex snorted a laugh, but didn't answer.

"Because he's swiped a drink before, I'll bet." Catherine chimed in, keeping a straight face.

"It's Scottish. Nuf' said."

"Give me caffeine anyday." Nathan said.

"Anyway," Alex began. "after this, you all interested in going somewhere else?"

"Nothing comes to mind. We've had a pretty full day so far." Marcus said.

"A movie, light shopping, and a big dinner's plenty for me." Catherine said.

"I'm guessing no one has early shifts tomorrow, then."

"Nope. Opened early today, and that's my weekend done." Nathan said.

"Me either, so it's just me and Bailey in my lap with my XBOX tonight." Alex said.

As the conversation continued and trailed off into other subjects, the time waiting for their meals seemed to shorten. Taking a few more chips and a drink of soda a while later, Alex could smell what he was certain was garlic in the air. It was only a few minutes later before the side orders were brought out to them, along with Marcus' refill of his soda.

The cooked garlic's scent was more powerful once under Alex's nose, making him want his steak even more. Offering Catherine some of it since she was the only one who had yet to eat much, she instead chose to wait for her meal. "Thanks anyway. Looks good." Alex nodded, and then directed his attention to eating.

Up until their entrees came out to the table, the restaurant filled with more groups of people. Among them were a few families and what seemed like a business manager dinner group. A few individuals came as well; despite being around his age, neither of them had black and bleached hair. Much to his relief. As he sliced off the first part of his steak, the pinkish inside and the scents of the seasonings enticing both his eyes and nose, Alex heard Nathan speak, albeit in a hushed tone. "And the werewolf buys a steak for dinner. Typical."

Alex smirked at that. "At least it's not raw." After taking the first bite, he sat chewing it for a minute to take in the flavor. It was lacking stringiness, which was a plus.

"Since we've all got our food," Catherine reached for a wrapped object and a card, handing it to Marcus afterward. It was thick, and seemed like a hardback book of some kind. "Happy 21st."

"Thanks. I'll open it later."

"In that case," Nathan made a similar gesture into his jacket's inside pockets.

Meanwhile, Alex ducked down and began to sift through his backpack to find the game and the card he'd purchased. Reaching into the front pocket, he only found his T-wrench, with the rest of the pack behind it feeling light. "*Oh, crap. Did I forget it?*"

Sans running into his attacker, humiliation from forgetting something like this made his face flush with blood. Opening the back pockets this time as his friend received his second gift, he heard something make a crickling sound like crumpled paper. Breathing a massive sigh, he found the game inside the rear pocket, still wrapped in red foil with the card nearby.

Pulling them out, he handed them to his friend. "Enjoy your 21st, man."

"Thanks, guys. Let's finish eating; I'll open them outside."

Nodding in response, Alex went back to his steak. Noticing that the customer pool had changed a bit since his head was down, he looked around at all the occupied tables and the ordering counter. One of the families had left, and another had come in. No individuals it seemed. "*Good.*" He thought to himself. Taking another bite of his steak, again chewing to savor the flavor, the front door of the restaurant opened. He immediately glanced up to see who was coming in response.

He saw the red hoodie first, then the person's arms wrapped around themselves. His pulse immediately jumped at least ten beats per minute. He couldn't smell the person yet, but his body was already running on auto-pilot. So much so that he didn't hear anyone address him.

The person shook once as they approached the order counter, unwrapping themselves as they did so. Alex watched intently as they pulled the hoodie down, revealing the black and bleached hair. "*No.*" Without thinking, his arms began to tremble. He almost couldn't breathe. Not here. Anywhere but here. His thoughts became fractured, as did his breathing. Watching the guy as he ordered, Alex could feel his lungs produce some slight growls. They were quiet, but he could feel his throat rumble with each one.

"Hey." Feeling someone push his right shoulder, Alex snapped his head around to see Nathan. His breathing started to stabilize as he looked at his friend. Nathan in turn leaned back almost half a foot. "Dude, the hell?"

Alex didn't answer; his friend was frightened, but this took precedence. Turning back to see his attacker hadn't noticed them yet, at least he hoped, his heart kept beating against his ribs. Hard and strong. It was all he could do to not get up and confront this guy. Even though he wanted to. As he continued to watch, he caught some scents of soap wafting nearby.

"Alex?" It was Catherine this time.

"He's here." Alex replied. "The counter." No one else said anything after that.

When his attacker again said he would pay in cash, a question flashed through his head: Where was this guy getting this money? Did he have a job, or steal it?

Just then, the werewolf turned and once again locked eyes with him. Alex dropped his head half an inch and another growl sounded. Louder this time. For a second, he thought he was tasting blood from the iron-like taste in his mouth. Feeling that his teeth had already shaped into fangs confirmed it.

More smells came to him then. Nathan's fear scent, and two others new to him but similar to that one: Marcus and Catherine's. Torn between feelings of preservation and fear, Alex tried to relax while not taking his eyes off the werewolf. He watched as he made his way back to a table near the entrance. With every step in that direction, Alex stood up, straightening his neck and running his tongue near his fangs.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Marcus looking up at him, one hand reaching behind him. Either to run or to get up from his chair. Nathan and Catherine remained silent, although he thought he heard a gasp from her.

The realization that he was scaring his friends then smacked him in the face and he felt his face drain of blood. What had they seen? Gripping his hands, he heard scrapping against the wood of the tables. His claws.

Alex felt frozen to the spot. Had anyone else seen him showcase those? Or his fangs? Or something else he didn't know about? "*No. Don't panic. Calm down.*"

Feeling like the eyes of the entire world were on him, Alex shook his head. This guy had seen his friends with him. For all he knew, this guy now knew they were friends, or now knew their scents and who to look for. As he thought about it, claws would certainly give him a leg up right now.

Taking a step, he saw Marcus shoot up from his chair and stand between him and his attacker. "Dude..." He stopped talking.

Alex could see the fear in his eyes. Not unjustified at all. "Stay back."

He stepped around Marcus and made his way to the other werewolf. As much as he wanted to tell himself that this guy wasn't meaning him any direct harm, direct was the key word. He wouldn't cause something here, with witnesses. He would do it without them. Without him knowing.

When he saw his attacker up close as a human, Alex's memory flashed back to the night he was attacked. This was the kid who had bitten into and shredded his shoulder and arm? Who had been killing so many animals for food? He shook that thought aside. The roles were reversed now. He had the upper hand here. "What are you doing here?" His voice came out lower than normal.

"Waiting on a meal." The werewolf's reply was neutral in tone, if not slightly frustrated.

With his nose at work on the scents of the werewolf as he thought of a response, Alex found few rural

scents outside of oak, maple and holly on him. All the rest were collections of scents more in common with apartment or house living, or really good cleaning.

It was then that Alex wished he could hear this guy's heartbeat. "I don't buy that for one second."

"Oh? Why not? Why can't I eat a meal by myself while you get to be around others?"

His limbs shaking from that statement, Alex started to reply. "If you even think about it..."

His attacker stood up, sliding the chair away so loudly that Alex felt every eye look their direction. No reply came after the action. Just the action itself. But whether it was that, or the look in this guy's eyes, he shirked back an inch, narrowing his eyes. Deep down, it was like his body was recoiling on its own.

He then felt someone grab his shoulder. It was Marcus. With his eyes darting back and forth, he was lost for words. He couldn't say anything. Nothing felt right enough to say. And before he could think of how to continue, he felt the spasms in his arms and shoulders getting more noticeable. They traveled down his chest, into his legs, making him feel wobbly.

All his thoughts froze. Not here. Not now.

With one final glare at the other werewolf, Alex rushed outside, Marcus in pursuit by the footfalls behind him. Once outside, his nose was flushed with scents as his olfactory senses grew stronger, his head starting to burn up as his limbs kept twitching.

Seconds later, Catherine and Nathan joined them. When Alex saw them, even though he was trying not to look like he would hurt them, they both showed clear signs of fear; cowering gestures and expressions similar to his parents. And none of it was helped by the sounds of bones and tissue crunching while his hands turned into paws.

"Marcus. Your keys." Nathan demanded after a few seconds.

Marcus' tone was rife with fear as he spoke. "What for?"

"Your truck bed's covered." Nathan looked in Alex's direction and he wasted no time nodding before swallowing. With the keys in hand, they made haste over to Marcus' truck, he and Catherine hanging back. When Alex shot a glance at them, they were embraced.

The top cover of the Ford wasn't very thick; too much screaming would sound from under it. Still smelling fear on his friend, Alex watched his hands fumble getting the key into the lock once, then finding the spot the second. The rear came done quickly, revealing a pitch black cage; Alex took a subconscious step back.

The feeling of his muscles starting to grow and tighten got him to panic. It was either that, or risk being in the open for the shift. Looking to his friend, feeling his body trembling still and his breathing becoming more growlish, he watched him back up. Part of him wanted the three of them to leave him alone as this happened; the rest wanted them around in case this guy didn't leave. With another look at the covered bed, he at last climbed in.

Once the rear latch closed, Alex was in pitch blackness. Smells of his sweat and the steak on his breath were small comfort as he started to pull his clothing off. His T-shirt had tightened around his chest and arms from the muscles bulging, making it hard to remove. The rest of his clothing slipped off easily. Now lying on the ice cold bed-liner, he grabbed his discarded tee shirt to cover his mouth in case he had to scream, at the same time wishing his fur would grow in to heat him up.

His first time to need it came swiftly. The bones in his feet crunched and snapped, starting their changes into digitigrade. Covering his face, tears welling in his eyes, the cotton let some of his screams and moans

through, his own scents helping to relax him a bit. The same set of snaps then occurred inside his skull while his ears moved up the side of his head, now more wolf-like.

Aside from the pain of everything, the images of his friends looking so afraid of him made his heart feel punched. Seeing him starting to shift right in front of them. Now what would they see in him?

The crunching sounds reached his spine next, with his tail growing out as his pelt began to emerge. His chest and legs curled up as the itching took over for the cold on his skin, his stomach almost doing a flip in response. And then his jaws went nearly slack again with another set of popping bones.

With his shirt still covering his face, he pulled it away just as he felt his skull and jaws push out to form his muzzle, the last of his pelt growing around it. He felt warmed and relieved with his transformation now over, but kept his eyes shut as he took some breaths to try and relax.