

Ancient History

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Ancient History

by [Fire_Cat](#)

Summary

Asking a vampire or a werewolf how they were turned is usually considered taboo. Impolite at best, just plain rude at worst. Most won't talk about what happened to them, especially not to strangers, they're rarely happy stories.

It's hard not to be curious sometimes though, and Bdubs can't help but wonder how Etho ended up the way he is now. What it was like for him all those years ago. He knows he shouldn't ask, but they get along well now, so surely it wouldn't hurt. Right?

It's not a story Etho has told many times. However, just this once, he'll tell it. Because it's Bdubs, because he likes him. But only if Bdubs tells his own story too.

(Also known as Etho and Bdubs talk about the events that changed their lives forever. They share their stories, and we will see just what happened to them all those years ago.)

Notes

Okay so you may not have been expecting more from me so soon but I am excited to write this story and this first chapter is quite short, so once I'd gotten my notes written up it didn't take very long to get this started! This chapter is very much an introductory chapter, but it

was still fun to write and I hope it will interest you in what is to come!

This fic is a bit different to the others. Both in it's subject, but also in the fact that this one is probably gonna be the longest vampire/werewolf au fic so far. Excited? Me too!

But yeah, I don't have much to say about this one really, this first chapter was a fun opening to write and I hope that you like it!

As always, thank you to my friend CJ for being awesome and making this au with me! This chapter is actually based on a scene we'd talked about a while ago, albeit adjusted a little to better fit where the boys are at right now in this series.

And thank you to Cazuchan for the beta reading, it's always much appreciated!!

And that's all I've got, enjoy the fic! <3

Personal Questions

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Bdubs threw his hands into the air with such force that he almost chucked his controller across the room in the process. He let out a victory yell as he finally beat Etho at this old racing game.

“Yes! Finally!” he was grinning, excited that he’d finally won after over an hour of play, “I beat you! See, I told you I would! I told you you weren’t unbeatable!”

“I don’t know about that. How do you know I didn’t just let you win?” Etho teased, sporting a cheeky smile as he clicked through the game menus.

The two of them hanging out and playing video games had become fairly common lately. Perhaps especially after Bdubs discovered Etho’s assortment of old consoles and collection of decades-old games. Some Bdubs remembered playing with his brother twenty-five years ago. Maybe it was nostalgia, but playing them again with Etho was a lot of fun. If not a bit annoying when he lost.

“Don’t- No you didn’t!” Bdubs snapped, playfully shoving at his shoulder. “Let me have this one victory!”

Etho chuckled at him, “Alright alright. Well done. You did great.”

Bdubs nodded and crossed his arms over his chest. “You’re damn right I did.”

“You want to play another round?” Etho asked, “I can go back to beating you, set the record straight.”

“No way man I’m stopping on a high note,” Bdubs said, taking a deep breath as he calmed down. He’d finally won a game, he wasn’t going back to losing again and again and again. That’s probably what would happen if they kept playing. After all, Etho was far better at video games than he should be. “Damn my heart’s going wild after all that,” he added, smiling and pressing his hand over his chest, feeling his heart race under his palm. Beating quickly after he’d gotten so worked up and mildly stressed in his desperation to win something.

“Little old man can’t handle all the excitement,” Etho said, not looking away from the screen.

Bdubs’ gaze locked onto him and he yelled “OI!” Of course, Etho used that as an excuse to make fun of him. It was hardly unexpected but *still* .

Etho laughed. “Sorry sorry, couldn’t help myself.”

Bdubs frowned at him, though there was no malice behind it and he was fighting back a smile. “Yeah, you never can.”

“It’s just so easy to wind you up.”

“Uh-huh. At least I have a heartbeat though.” Bdubs shrugged.

“Oh, now that’s a low blow, Bubs,” Etho said, pressing his hand over his heart as if he were offended.

“Is it though? Is it really? ‘Cos it’s true.” And it was. Vampires were technically dead, so Etho

didn't breathe and didn't have a heartbeat. Simple as that.

"I guess. My heart stopped beating a loooong time ago." Etho hummed, leaning his elbow on the arm of the couch and resting his head on his palm. "Don't think about it, to be honest."

"Makes sense. Must have been weird at first though, right?" Bdubs asked, realizing after the words left his mouth that he might be starting to push too far. Asking vampires about things like that wasn't usually a good idea. Personal questions about how they were turned, about what it was like, were best avoided.

This also applied to werewolves, but Bdubs wasn't that bothered about those sorts of questions. He didn't enjoy it, but he didn't care too much either. And over the years he'd noticed that despite it being somewhat taboo to ask, different people responded very differently to those questions.

Ren was very open about it, he didn't mind talking about what had happened to him. Tango was always vague as if he was embarrassed by it. Bdubs only knew what had happened to Impulse because he'd been around when he'd first shown up. Doc would glare if you even tried to take the conversation in that direction.

Etho was like Doc, and very rarely spoke about his past. Bdubs knew very little, but he often found himself wondering.

"I don't think I actually noticed it." Etho shrugged, "Not straight away at least."

Bdubs raised a brow at him, Etho had answered the question easily, so maybe continuing on this topic was okay. At least for now. He didn't want to make him uncomfortable though, he'd have to be careful. "How do you not notice that your heart has stopped beating?"

"Well... A lot was going on, and I wasn't in the habit of checking my pulse every time I woke up." Etho said, his gaze drifting to the tv screen, which was still sitting on the game menu.

Bdubs nodded, everything he'd ever heard about vampirism had told him that the transformation process was hard and painful. So even something major, like your heart no longer beating, was probably an easy thing to miss amongst all that.

He wasn't entirely sure why, but he reached over and gently took Etho's wrist in his hand, pressing two fingers against his pulse point. Or what would be his pulse point, if he had a pulse.

"You're a couple of centuries late to feel anything there, Bubs." Etho chuckled.

Bdubs smiled and shook his head a little, "I know. It's just weird I guess." he bit at his lip, thinking about what to say next. There was something he wanted to ask, something that he didn't think Etho would answer but maybe it could be worth a try. He just hoped Etho wouldn't be upset with him for it. "Hey. Can I ask you something?"

"Maybe. What're you going to ask?" Etho replied, Bdubs was still looking at his wrist but he could feel Etho's eyes on him.

"You don't have to answer if you don't want to." Bdubs started, wanting that to be clear. "I'm just curious really, but it might be too... Personal, I guess."

"Uh huh?"

He hesitated for a long moment, not entirely sure how Etho would react and internally bracing himself a little. "Talking about this stuff I guess I was just wondering... How- How did you end up

as a vampire?" he asked, as gently as he could, looking up at Etho to see him watching with those sharp red eyes that could pierce through his soul.

Etho hummed and looked away again. "You really want to know that story huh?"

"If you're comfortable telling it. I know that stuff is personal and- private. It doesn't bother me all that much, but I know a lot of people don't like talking about it." He paused, but after ten seconds passed and Etho didn't so much as open his mouth, Bdubs started talking again, "I'm just over curious I think. Sorry." He said, shrugging as he slipped his hand away from Etho's wrist. He wasn't entirely sure where things were going with this conversation now, but he worried that it had made Etho uncomfortable.

They fell into silence for a few minutes, and Bdubs was starting to regret asking. He kept glancing at Etho, trying to figure out what might be going on in his head. But he was not an easy man to read sometimes. Usually, this was because half his face would be hidden behind his mask, but he wasn't wearing the mask right now and it was still difficult to tell what he was thinking about.

He just sat there, staring forward with a blank expression and his chin propped in his palm.

Eventually, Etho sighed, closing his eyes and drumming his fingers against his thigh before looking back at Bdubs. "Okay. I'll tell you."

Bdubs perked up a little. He'd almost been expecting Etho to ask him to leave, not agree to answer his question. "You will? You're okay with that? You don't have to."

Etho nodded, turning in his seat to face Bdubs a bit better. "I know. But I want to. Since it's you. And you're my friend, and I trust you."

"If you're sure," Bdubs said, trying to ignore how nice it felt to hear Etho say he trusted him. He could process that later.

Etho smiled, "Yeah, I am." There was a small pause, "But,"

"Oh jeez, what's the catch?"

"Only if you tell me how you ended up as a werewolf first." That wasn't quite what Bdubs had expected, but maybe he should have. He didn't need to put too much thought into it though, it felt like a fair trade.

"Alright." Bdubs agreed, "I can work with that. I'll tell you."

"Yeah? As long as you're okay with it, of course."

"To be honest, talking about it doesn't bother me that much anymore. So I don't mind."

Etho picked his controller up from where it sat in his lap and shut the game down, putting it on the coffee table before turning his attention back to Bdubs. "So. Story time?"

"Yeah, story time." Bdubs chuckled a little, crossing his legs in front of him and leaning back in his seat. He hadn't told this story in a while, so this should be interesting. "I'm sure you can picture this city as it was ten years ago. Since I'm pretty sure you were around back then."

"Ten years is such a long time though," Etho grumbled, feigning dramatics and dropping his head back against the couch.

“Oh shush. Ten years should be nothing to you Mister I’m Two Hundred Years Old.”

Etho laughed. “Okay okay, sorry. Go on.”

Bdubs rolled his eyes and smiled, “Right. So. Dull September evening, about ten years ago, it had been cloudy all day, and I didn’t acknowledge the full moon but it was there... I was walking home from work and...”

Chapter End Notes

Bdubs has set the scene, and in the next chapter we will be travelling back ten years to see just what happened to him back then!

And I do mean literally travelling back ten years, not just Bdubs talking about what happened. We’re time travellin’ baby!

I said at the start that this story will be the longest so far? Yeah, I’ve kept the chapter number marked as ? but it should be at least 5, maybe more but we’ll see. I haven’t written a fic that long in quite a while so be patient with me, but I am excited to get to work on this! And I’m probably gonna start chapter two the moment this is published lol

Plugging [my Tumblr and this AUs tag](#) again because that’s where you can find me and more stuff for this au outside of the fics! Come on over and say hi!

The reception on the last fic (the last couple of fics actually) has been incredible, and I love you all so much, so thank you everyone who comments and leaves kudos on my stories, you’re all amazing! <3

I’ll see you soon for chapter two!

Rumours or Reality

Chapter Summary

Ten years ago on a chilly September evening, Bdubs was walking home from work. He didn't know it then, that his life was about to change forever. Passing rumours of large animals in the forest seemed just a bit too far-fetched, after all.

Chapter Notes

Aha! Here I am, took a little longer than I'd of liked but it's finally done! This ended up longer than I thought it would be, but hopefully that's not an issue. I could of split it in half, but eventually decided to keep it as one part.

As always, thank you to my friend CJ for building this AU with me, and to Cazuchan for beta-reading!

So, let's jump back ten years, and see what happened to Bdubs, shall we?

Enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

-- September, 201X, about ten years ago --

The cold air sent a shiver down Bdubs' spine as he walked down the street. Summer was ending and the nights were getting colder. Maybe he should have brought a warmer coat with him, oh well.

For now, he was more focused on getting to his car and going home. It had been a long, busy day. Dealing with work clients and driving around the city from place to place. He was exhausted, hungry and looking forward to making himself some food before going to bed for the night.

The full moon peered through the clouds high above him, moonlight shining down onto the street below. It was late, much later than he usually liked being out, and the night was quiet outside of the hum of distant traffic.

This street ran alongside the forest that bordered the city. Bdubs had heard whispers of wolves and wild cats living out there. If he was still in America maybe he would have believed them, but he wasn't, and he was pretty sure animals like that didn't exist in this country. Not in the wild at least.

He'd only been here six months, but he'd never seen or heard of any actual evidence for the things people claimed. So it was probably just weird urban legends. A few big stray dogs spotted on dark nights and little else. What more could it be?

Rumors weren't worth worrying over though. Getting home was his only interest at the moment.

Bdubs fished his keys out of his pocket as his car came into view. He thought he heard footsteps

coming up behind him and glanced over his shoulder. Seeing nothing; he dismissed it and continued walking.

As he reached his car he yawned and moved to put his key in the lock.

A deep, rumbling growl came from behind him, and he froze. What was that..?

He turned towards the noise, and standing there was a dog.

A big black dog. Bigger than any dog he had ever seen. Staring at him with icy blue eyes. Head held low and lips drawn back in a snarl.

“Good doggy...” he murmured, blindly fumbling with his keys. Trying to unlock his car and open the door without looking away from the dog.

It barked, snapped its jaws and leapt at him.

Bdubs yelped and jumped to the side, narrowly missing its teeth and claws. He stumbled but managed to stay on his feet. The dog’s claws scratched at the metal of his car and he watched it, utterly bewildered by what was happening.

“What in the world...” he breathed as the dog growled at him. He could feel his heart racing in his chest and his hands were shaking. For some reason, his first instinct was telling him to run.

So that’s what he did.

It probably wasn’t the smartest thing to do, but he did it anyway. Turning on his heel and running down the street the way he’d come. Wanting to put as much distance between himself and the dog as he could.

He soon heard the bounding strides of the dog chasing him but didn’t dare look behind him. He kept running. His panting breaths and pounding heartbeat were loud in his ears.

Bdubs liked to think he kept fit, but he wasn’t much of a runner. The dog soon caught up and slammed into him, throwing him to the ground. His body hitting the sidewalk and knocked the air out of his lungs.

He could hardly breathe but he still managed to yell and kick, trying to roll onto his back and get better leverage. He had no luck as its huge paws held him down.

The dog barked and sank its jaws into his shoulder. Sharp teeth slicing through his clothes and into his flesh.

A strangled cry was all that came out of him, unable to get enough air to scream. His vision clouded around the edges, trying desperately to pull away from it.

In response, it sunk its teeth in further, lifting him off the ground a few inches and shaking him side to side. Bdubs screamed this time, distantly praying that maybe somebody would hear and help him.

The street was quiet though, nobody heard, nobody came. His cries echoed through the cold air and faded away.

He gasped and shouted, trying to struggle free of the beast holding him in its jaws. But it was far too strong for him, and only seemed to tighten its grip further.

Bdubs squeezed his eyes shut, gritting his teeth through the pain as tears slipped down his cheeks. Why was this happening? Silently begging. *Please just let me go. Please!*

A howl came from the forest, and the dog stilled. Not letting him go but loosening its hold just slightly.

There was another bark, and this time it dropped him. He hit the concrete with a soft thud and a whimper.

Bdubs stayed completely still as the dog growled. Not daring to move. Waiting until he heard its footsteps retreat and run away.

His head was spinning and he could barely breathe, the pain in his shoulder shot down his arm and into his chest. His heart was pounding against his ribs so hard it hurt.

As he opened his eyes he caught a glimpse of another animal in the forest, brownish with blue eyes that met his gaze for a second. It then turned and ran, disappearing into the darkness.

Lying here in the middle of the street probably wasn't a good idea. He needed to move. He needed to get up. Go home. Somewhere safe. Away from here.

It took a minute or two, but eventually, Bdubs managed to force himself to sit up. Putting his weight on his right arm and holding the injured one close to his chest.

He whimpered as any movement agitated the wounds. He was scared to look at his shoulder. Afraid of what he'd see. He knew the dog had torn through his coat and ripped into his skin. Pain throbbed around the wound and his shirt felt slightly damp where blood had soaked into it.

His breathing was still coming too fast. Harsh, panicked breaths that made his head spin and his lungs ache. He needed to calm down. Needed to breathe.

That was easier said than done though.

Bdubs looked down the street and saw his car still parked on the side of the road. If he could get to his car. Then he could take a moment to calm himself down and figure out what to do next.

Standing proved difficult with how much he was shaking. But by bracing himself on a nearby lamppost he managed to get himself upright and somewhat steady.

He took slow, careful steps down the sidewalk towards his car. Finding the key still in the lock, he turned it and pulled the door open, dropping down into the driver's seat.

Once the door was shut and locked from the inside, he leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes. Trying to ignore the pain and just *breathe* .

Eventually, he stopped feeling like he was gasping just to get enough air. Though he was still panting, it was better than nothing. He pulled the sun visor down and flicked the little mirror open, flinching when he saw the state he was in.

Wide, scared eyes and tear tracks running down his face. He looked like a mess. Probably should have expected that though.

He took a deep breath and finally decided to look at the wound he'd been left with. He unzipped his coat and pulled it away from his shoulder, wincing at the sparks of pain it caused. Even with his shirt still in the way, Bdubs could see how bad the bite was.

Puncture wounds marked where the dog had bitten him, its teeth sinking through his flesh without difficulty. Blood had soaked into his white shirt, leaving it damp and sticking to his skin.

Nausea rolled in his stomach and he grimaced, looking away and trying to keep himself calm.

This was something that needed to be seen by a doctor. Probably quickly. That's what you do when you get bitten by a dog, right? Go to the doctor?

It was a big dog though. A really, really big dog... But it could have only been a dog. What it was didn't matter. Well, it did, since he'd probably be asked. But getting help was maybe slightly more important.

"Okay. Okay," he muttered, wincing as he pulled his coat back up over his shoulder and pressed his hand against where the bite was, hoping that might slow some of the bleeding. "Dog bite. Very-very big dog bite. Oh god. Uh... So- big dog, stray dog. Bite... God..." he closed his eyes and just tried to focus on his breathing. The constant pain blooming across his left shoulder, spreading into his chest and down his arm making that very difficult.

Driving in this state probably wasn't a good idea. He was panicked, in pain and could barely move his left arm. Walking didn't seem particularly doable right now though. Just getting to his car had been hard enough.

The hospital wasn't that far away if he could get there and go into the ER- or, whatever they called it here. Different countries, different names for the same things. Probably didn't matter right now.

But if he could get there without incident, then they could help him. Right?

He wasn't sure what else to do or where else to go. So it was probably his best bet.

As long as he didn't crash his car on the way there anyway.

Accident and Emergency. A&E. That's what they called it here. Not that it mattered, but the big glowing sign above the entrance was hard to miss.

Somehow, Bdubs had managed to drive to the hospital without problems. It was perhaps the most nerve-wracking drive he'd had since sitting behind the wheel for the first time when he was sixteen. But he'd made it. Just about.

The streets had been quiet, and he'd put every ounce of focus he could into keeping calm and steady. He'd almost taken a wrong turn, and a bump in the road had sent waves of pain shooting through his shoulder. He didn't have far to go though, and it wasn't long before he was pulling into the parking lot and figuring out what to do next.

His brain was working slowly, adrenaline fading from his system and leaving him a little light-headed and breathless. The blood loss likely wasn't helping with that either. Going inside was probably his best bet. So that's what he should do.

Bdubs made his way towards the entrance, holding his hand against his wounded shoulder. He leaned against the wall by the door, trying to breathe properly and focus. There was a receptionist desk near the entrance. That was probably where he needed to go.

The lady behind the desk greeted him with a smile, though her expression quickly shifted to concern when she saw the blood on his clothes and hands.

She was very kind, sitting him down and asking him a few questions. His head was starting to spin though, the pain in his shoulder was getting worse, and focusing enough to answer was proving difficult.

They could tell he was in a bad way, and they didn't keep him waiting long. Soon he was sitting on a hospital bed with a doctor looking over his injuries. They cleaned up the blood and talked him through the process. They asked him about what had happened.

All he could say was that it was a dog. A really big dog. He had no idea why it had attacked him. He hadn't done anything to it, he hadn't even known it was there until it had started growling at him.

They gave him some pain relief and told him that some of the wounds left by the dog's teeth would need stitches. Bdubs wasn't particularly happy about that, but he wasn't going to complain either. He wasn't sure how long he was there. He was so exhausted he thought he might fall asleep where he was sitting. He managed to keep himself awake, trying to stay still as he was tended to and stitched up.

Once they were done, the doctor left the room briefly to fetch a clean shirt for him to wear to replace the torn and blood-soaked one he'd arrived in.

The door opened again a minute later, and Bdubs had expected to see the doctor or the nurse who had been treating him before. Instead, he was faced with someone new.

A young man with black hair, wearing a white coat. He had a staff tag on, but there was something... odd, about him. Something that Bdubs couldn't place.

He smiled as he approached, and Bdubs smiled back despite his confusion. "Can I help you?" he asked.

"Yes, sorry. Don't mean to disturb. Mr. Booker, I presume?" said the man, he sounded American.

"Yeah, that's me," Bdubs said, not entirely sure what was going on. "Do you work here?"

The man nodded and reached into the inside pocket of his coat, pulling out what looked like a business card. "I do. You were bitten by a dog, right?"

"Biggest damn dog I ever saw. But yeah. That's what happened."

"The full moon does bring out some difficult creatures." The man hummed, Bdubs had no idea what that meant. "Here," he said, holding out the card in his hand. Bdubs took it and looked it over. It was white with green borders and a phone number printed on one side. "What happened to you may be a little more than just a dog bite. Call the number here, it'll put you through to a man named Doc. He'll be able to help you."

Bdubs stared at the stranger for a moment, not sure how to respond. Was he a doctor? He had to be, why else would he be here? What in the world was he talking about though? 'More than a dog bite'? What did that mean?

"Right." was all that left Bdubs' mouth. "I have no idea what you're talking about but okay?"

The man smiled, "It sounds bizarre, but it'll make more sense once you speak to him." he said, stepping towards the door. "Good luck, maybe we'll see each other again someday."

"Uh-huh... Thanks?" Bdubs didn't know what had just happened.

The doctor who had been treating him before stepped back into the room, walking right past the stranger as if he hadn't seen him. Which was odd but Bdubs didn't question it as the man gave a little wave and left.

Bdubs slipped the card into his jeans and listened to what the doctor was telling him as he was handed a clean shirt. Deciding not to think about it too much right now and just focus on the matter at hand so that he could go home soon.

Today had been a very long day, all he really wanted at this point was to sleep.

Eventually, Bdubs was allowed to leave. A prescription for painkillers in his wallet and a date put into his phone to come back and get his stitches taken out.

He'd decided to take a taxi home. He was so tired and he didn't want to drive, even if it wasn't far. He could come back and pick his car up tomorrow. Hopefully he wouldn't get a ticket for leaving it here overnight. But if he did he'd figure something out.

Once he was back in his apartment, Bdubs tossed his ruined shirt in the trash, got changed into his pajamas, and promptly passed out in bed.

Maybe he'd wake up and find that this had all been some weird messed-up dream. He'd appreciate that.

Alas, when he woke the following morning, the first thing he was made aware of was the pain in his shoulder, across his chest, and down his back. And he winced as he rolled onto his side, taking deep breaths and hoping it'd ease soon.

He stayed in bed wishing that it had all been a nightmare. But he knew that laying around all day wouldn't do him any good, even if it was tempting. So after a while, he dragged himself out of bed, made breakfast and took some painkillers.

As he got changed he found the card in the jeans he'd been wearing last night.

It did seem awfully shady. Calling the number would probably get him scammed or kidnapped. But maybe it was worth a go if nothing else. If whoever answered started setting off alarm bells in his head then he could always put the phone down and throw the card away.

For now though he sat at his desk, playing with the card between his fingers. It was still quite early, not even eight o'clock yet, so he probably wouldn't get an answer. He could busy himself with other things in the meantime, and it would give him a chance to think about it some more.

His right arm wasn't injured, so he could draw without any problems, which he was happy about. This gave him something to pass the time.

Once nine o'clock rolled around, he decided to just bite the bullet and call the number. What's the worst that could happen?

He leant back in his chair as he tapped the number into his phone, his finger hovered over the call button for a few seconds before pressing it. He had no idea what to expect from this.

The phone rang three times before someone answered. A cheerful-sounding voice on the other side. "Hello, this is Ren Shepherd speaking. How can I help you?"

"Uh, hi. My name's James, I was given this number at the hospital last night. Told someone called

'Doc' could help me out with- something?" Bdubs said slowly, realizing he had no idea how this conversation was going to go or what he was supposed to say.

"Ah, I see. Okay. Well you've called the right place!" said the man, Ren, apparently. "I'm gonna take a guess and say you got bitten by a dog last night huh?"

Bdubs blinked, how had he known that? "Yeah. I did. How did you..?"

"That's usually why people get given this number. You were told the truth though, we can help you."

"Okay, and you're not going to like, scam or kidnap me or anything? 'Cos not gonna lie this is a little shady."

He heard Ren laugh, "No way dude don't worry. We're harmless. And we're good at dealing with... Dog bites. These particular sort of dog bites anyway." He stopped and cleared his throat before continuing. "Doc isn't up during the day, but you can come over tonight and he'll take a look. Any time after about seven is probably ideal this time of year. Usually dark by then." there was a pause, and he chuckled a little before adding. "That probably makes it sound even shadier, oops."

"Yeah, a little bit." Bdubs sighed and ran his hand over his face. Yep. This was going to get him stabbed in a back alley or something. Oh well... "I can come over, sure."

"Sweet, what'd you say your name was again? Gonna write this down."

"James. James Booker."

Ren hummed and Bdubs heard paper rustling. "James B-double-O K E R. There. And you're gonna need our address."

"Would be helpful, yeah."

Ren chuckled again and gave Bdubs the address, which he scribbled down on a sticky note.

They talked for a moment longer before saying goodbye and hanging up.

Bdubs put his phone down on his desk and scrubbed at his face with his hands. This was all so weird. What was he even supposed to think?

Maybe putting too much thought into it wasn't a good idea. He'd just go and see them and see what happened.

What had been said was swirling around his head though. How did this Ren guy know that he'd been bitten by a dog? What had he meant when he said that was usually why people were given that number? 'Particular sort of dog bites'. What did that mean??

So many questions. Nowhere near enough energy to put too much thought into any of them.

Bdubs tried to keep himself busy during the day. Drawing and getting work done, replying to emails, and generally trying to keep his mind occupied. Having something to focus on other than what had happened last night and the lingering ache in his shoulder that the painkillers didn't quite get rid of made getting through the day a little bit easier.

Despite this though, whenever he took any kind of break he found himself debating whether

meeting these people, Ren and Doc, was a good idea. He didn't even know *why* he'd been put in contact with them in the first place. What could they do that the hospital couldn't?

As he'd eaten lunch he'd looked up the address on his laptop, expecting some kind of doctor's office. Instead, it seemed to lead to an apartment building. Which made him a little bit concerned. He had been given the correct address, right?

He supposed he'd find out later.

In the afternoon he caught the bus down to the hospital to pick up his car. There was a ticket on the windscreen for not paying and leaving the car there overnight. Bdubs sighed and shoved it in his pocket. He'd deal with that later. For now he wanted to stop by the pharmacy to fill in the prescription he'd been given and then go back home.

It was dark by half past seven. And at eight o'clock he decided that he may as well take his chances and go and see the people he'd called earlier. Maybe, if he was very lucky, they'd take his wallet but leave him alive.

He was being pessimistic, he knew, but he didn't quite have the energy to care.

The address wasn't too far, so Bdubs decided to walk. He was steady on his feet, just tired. It'd be fine.

The walk took fifteen minutes at most. Bdubs buzzed the intercom outside the front door and looked up at the building. It seemed nice if nothing else. Not run down, so hopefully, that was a good sign.

"Hello?" came a voice through the tinny speaker, making him jump and dragging him out of his thoughts. The voice was familiar, the same man he'd spoken to earlier.

"Yes, hello!" Bdubs replied, a little louder than he'd planned. "Hi. Uh, it's James, I called earlier?"

"Oh hey, my dude! Glad you came, I'll buzz you in, we're on the third floor."

"Cool, thanks"

There was a click as the door unlocked and Bdubs headed inside. Taking the elevator up to the third floor and walking down the corridor looking for the right apartment.

It only took a few seconds for someone to answer the door after he knocked, and he was faced with a tall dark-haired man smiling down at him with bright blue eyes.

"Hey there, dude! You must be James," he said.

"Yeah, hi, and you must be Ren." Bdubs smiled, trying not to look or sound as nervous as he was.

Ren held out his hand and Bdubs shook it before following him inside.

"Hey Doc, our visitor is here!" Ren called down the hallway before leading Bdubs through to the kitchen. He glanced around as he followed, the place was tidy and somewhat modern. Which was a little bit comforting, though he was still on edge. "You don't have to be so nervous my dude, I promise we're not gonna hurt you." Ren smiled at him as if he'd read his thoughts.

Bdubs rubbed at the back of his neck, "Sorry. This is all just- weird. You know?"

Ren gave a nod, "Yeah I know. But you'll be fine. Doc will be able to figure out what's going on.

But whilst we wait I can better explain why you were given our number.”

“That’d be great if you could.”

They sat at the kitchen table, Bdubs taking the chair opposite Ren.

“Okay, so. This is probably going to sound ridiculous.” Ren said, holding Bdubs’ gaze. That wasn’t a comforting start. “Last night there was a full moon. I’m going to guess that you were probably near the forest right? And you were attacked by a dog. Or what you thought was a dog, anyway.”

“Yeah. It was a damn big dog too. What else could it be?”

“A wolf.”

Bdubs stared for a moment before shaking his head. “I- Look I’ve only been here six months and I don’t know where you’re from ‘cos you don’t sound English but a *wolf*? No. There aren’t wolves in this country. It was just a big dog.”

“I’m South African.” Ren smiled, which answered that question. “You’re not wrong though. There aren’t wild wolves in this country. But last night was a full moon. And that’s the one time when there *are* wolves around here.” he continued, getting back on topic. He spoke clearly and calmly, and he would have sounded genuine if what he was saying wasn’t bizarre.

It took a few moments before Bdubs was able to respond, “Wolves on a full moon? What, like- *werewolves*? Seriously?”

“That’s right dude,” Ren said as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

Bdubs didn’t know what to say, how the heck was he supposed to respond to that? This guy was insane! “Werewolves? Aha... Yeah. No. Werewolves? No. Werewolves aren’t real.”

“You’re sitting in front of one, so I’d say that’s good evidence to the contrary.” came a deep, soft voice from somewhere behind him.

Bdubs turned in his chair to see a very tall, very broad man with an eyepatch over his left eye standing by the door. He was smiling, and it was probably supposed to be friendly but Bdubs felt his heart rate pick up.

This must be Doc.

“Uh- hi.” was all Bdubs could say.

“Hello. I see Ren’s been explaining things,” he said, joining the other two at the table. As he moved closer Bdubs noticed the scars that streaked across his face and that his right eye shimmered red. Who was this guy?

“Yeah, he has but- werewolves. You want me to believe I was bitten by a *werewolf*? ” Bdubs wasn’t quite able to stop the nervous chuckle that escaped him as he spoke. This whole thing was just ridiculous.

“That does seem to be what we’re dealing with.” Doc nodded.

“Doc is, well, a doctor. He can test you for lycanthropy and if you were infected we can help you.” Ren said, his tone a little softer as he leaned forward against the table. “I’m the pack leader in the city, when new wolves show up part of my job is to look after them.”

“Right..” Bdubs muttered, running his hand over his face. “If you’re a doctor why do you work out of your apartment? You realize that’s shady right?”

Doc chuckled, “I know dude I know. But most places don’t hire vampires.”

Bdubs found himself staring again, and as Doc smiled he caught a glimpse of sharp fangs in his mouth. He swallowed down the bubbling of fear in his chest and looked at his hands. How was this real?

Vampires. Geez. What was he getting himself into?

“Yeah okay,” he said, his voice coming out slightly squeaky.

“I won’t hurt you, don’t worry,” Doc said gently, and Bdubs hoped he could believe him. “Where were you bitten?” he asked.

“On my shoulder,” Bdubs replied, just answering questions was probably the best idea right now.

“Can I take a look?”

Bdubs hesitated, not sure he wanted to take his shirt off in front of two guys he didn’t even know. But he also didn’t want to argue with a man who looked to be twice his size and was also apparently a vampire. So he nodded and agreed, “Uh, yeah, sure.”

Bdubs followed Doc down the hallway and into an office. A doctor’s office of sorts, he presumed. Medical equipment on the shelves. The curtains were drawn, but the lights in the ceiling were bright.

Doc sat at the desk and Bdubs took the seat across from him, shrugging off his coat and trying not to wince as the movement sent a spark of pain through him. Ren stayed standing in the doorway, watching.

He was still unsure about this, still nervous that he was going to get attacked or kidnapped or *something*. But he pulled his shirt off over his head when asked, revealing the fresh bite wound.

Doc hummed and moved closer, his touch gentle as he took a look at it. Bdubs noticed that his right arm was prosthetic, made of plastic and metal. He didn’t question how it moved almost like a real arm though, it was none of his business and it wasn’t important.

“This is definitely a wolf bite,” Doc said as he went back to his desk, looking for something. “Has it been twenty-four hours since you were bitten?”

“I think so. Why?” Bdubs asked, not taking his eyes off of whatever Doc was doing.

“It takes about a day for lycanthropy to latch onto a person’s system,” Doc replied, quite casually. “All I need is a little bit of blood, and then we’ll know if you’ve been infected.”

“And if I have...?” Bdubs bit at his lip, he wasn’t liking this. Not at all.

“Then we’ll help you,” said Ren. “If you’ve been turned, then you’re in the best place.”

Bdubs gave a slow nod, looking down at his lap. “And if I haven’t...?”

“Then you’ll go home and won’t remember that you ever met us,” Doc said, moving over to Bdubs again. Bdubs decided not to ask what he meant by that. “Can I have your hand? I only need a drop of blood for this to work.”

Bdubs held his hand out for Doc to take, ignoring how he'd started trembling. Letting a vampire take his blood was probably a stupid idea, but he didn't want to argue. It'd be fine. Probably.

The nerves in his chest and his heart beating so fast he could hear it wasn't helping him believe that though.

Doc took his hand and clipped some kind of small device over his fingertip. Bdubs flinched as he felt something sharp prick his skin, and after holding it there for a few seconds Doc moved it away and let go of his hand.

Ren must have noticed how uncomfortable and nervous he was, standing next to him and gently squeezing his right shoulder.

"You're gonna be okay." he said softly, "Whatever happens, you're gonna be okay."

Bdubs hoped he was right.

He waited anxiously as Doc tapped at his computer, not sure what he should expect.

Doc turned to face Bdubs and broke the silence, "The test came back positive. So it looks like you've been infected with it."

"Is there a chance of error here?" Bdubs asked, not entirely sure how he was supposed to react to this news.

"A very, very slim one. I've had a long time to perfect these tests." Doc said, and all Bdubs could do was nod. "You'll be okay man, I know it's a lot to process, but everything will make sense soon enough."

"I can talk you through things. Everything will be okay." Ren said, squeezing his shoulder and smiling down at him.

Bdubs didn't know how to reply. Didn't know how to react. This was insane. *Werewolves*. He was being told he'd been bitten by a *werewolf*.

These things weren't real. This was all just some crazy nonsense *nightmare* it had to be!

This couldn't be real...

Bdubs leaned forward and put his head in his hands. "This isn't real..." he muttered. "I'm just-unconscious in the hospital or high on pain meds or something. This *can't* be real! I'd have heard about it before if it was real!"

"It's all very hush-hush. I have contacts at the hospital, that's how they knew to talk to you." Doc said, but Bdubs wasn't sure that helped. Secret werewolves? Secret vampires? *How??*

Ren crouched down in front of him, and Bdubs peered between his fingers to find him looking at him with concern. "It's real. As weird as it sounds I promise it's real. I can show you all the proof I've got and everything. It's tough, but you're gonna be okay buddy I promise."

He seemed genuine. He seemed kind. So did Doc. Albeit a little intimidating. They didn't seem like bad people. Just a little odd.

Still. Werewolves... *Goodness sakes!* Why couldn't it have just been a normal dog bite? That would have been so much simpler!

He didn't need this nonsense. He really didn't need this...

Chapter End Notes

Poor guy, he's had a rough 24 hours! He'll be okay, it might take some time, but he'll be okay! We know that he's doing well in the future, after all!

This one was harder to write than I thought it would be, but still a lot of fun! Even if it was just putting Bdubs through considerable stress pfft. Ren and Doc will look after him though. He's not on his own with this!

Can you spot the unnamed cameo Hermit in this chapter?

Next chapter should be fairly short (especially in comparison to the last) so with a little luck won't take too long to get it done. But we shall see!

Also if you're wondering where Bdubs 'real name' comes from, I thought it would be fun for them all to have a more realistic name alongside the name they're known by. So everyone in this au has a 'real name', though some are known, and some are not. They're mostly irrelevant though, since most go by their nicknames. For Bdubs though, James was picked mostly at random, and I went with Booker 'cos I wanted the B Double O without using Bdubs' actual irl name. So there you go!

But yeah, if you're reading this you must have made it to the end. I hope you like this chapter and Bdubs' piece of backstory! I'm really enjoying working on this fic, so I hope that you're enjoying it too! Thank you everyone for all the comments and kudos so far, means a lot to me and I love you guys! <3 (Why are my end notes always so long??)

Intermission

Chapter Summary

Bdubs has told his story, and now there's space for some chit-chat before moving on to Etho's.

Chapter Notes

Aaaa I'm so sorry this took so long! All manner of things, from working on other projects to getting sick to just general procrastination (oops) resulted in this taking so much longer than I'd wanted it to. I also wrote 1000 words, read it back and went 'oh no that's awful' and started from scratch. So that didn't help either.

But! I'm here now! Last chapter we jumped back ten years, now we're back in the present day. This chapter is, well, intermission, as the title suggests. It's fairly short. But hopefully it'll suffice for now.

Other than that I don't think I have much to say about this chapter going into it. So, as always thank you to CJ for being awesome and building this AU with me, and to Cazuchan for beta-reading. And also thank you to all of you readers for waiting so long. This wasn't supposed to take a month to finish, that really wasn't the plan.

Anyway, now we're here, lets rejoin Etho and Bdubs and their conversation!
Enjoy! <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Etho didn't say a word as Bdubs told his story. He simply watched and listened. Bdubs had expected comments, annoying remarks, maybe jokes, but he got none. Perhaps this was Etho being respectful, putting his usual antics to the side when they were talking about something more serious.

It was oddly nice to know that he was capable of that. But seeing Etho so quiet was still a little strange.

Bdubs tried not to let it bother him, and he continued recounting the event that had led to him becoming a werewolf. As well as the stressful aftermath of the incident.

"I stayed at Ren's place for about an hour after that." Bdubs said as he came to the end of his story. "He talked to me about what was going to happen, what I should be prepared for. All that important stuff," he added, fiddling with a loose thread on his hoodie. "It was difficult to take in though, I was so stressed and confused. I don't think I processed much of it at first."

"Not surprising." Etho hummed, the first words he'd spoken in the last fifteen minutes or so. "At least you had people around to help you." He was right about that, and Bdubs was very grateful for the help he'd gotten back then. The comment made him wonder if Etho hadn't been so lucky

though.

“Absolutely. I did ghost them for a week after I first met them. Don’t think I wanted to accept what was happening.” Bdubs admitted, a nervous smile on his lips. “But eventually I did call Ren back and we talked. He was really helpful.” he continued. As concerned and suspicious of Ren and Doc as he’d been at first, Bdubs had no idea how things would have gone if he hadn’t been directed to them.

He supposed he had Cub to thank for that, the then mysterious stranger at the hospital who’d given him their number.

“It all sounds like you were, uh, in the wrong place at the wrong time. I think.” Etho pointed out, and Bdubs couldn’t deny that. The whole thing was very much a case of ‘wrong place wrong time’, and more than once he’d thought about how it could have all been avoided if he’d just done something slightly differently that night.

If he’d parked his car somewhere else, rather than right next to the forest.

If he’d finished his work a little earlier or a little later, and got there before or after the wolf had been there.

If he’d been paying more attention and hadn’t been so tired, maybe he would have noticed the wolf and been able to avoid it.

Not that the ‘what ifs’ mattered now, ten years later. But he had dwelled on them a bit in the past.

“It was, but I doubt I’m the only person that’s happened to.” Bdubs shrugged. “I’ve accepted it for what it is though. Thinking about all the ‘what ifs’ just made me feel worse about it.”

Etho hummed, “That one I can understand.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I imagine it’s quite universal though.” Etho shrugged, he was probably right.

“Probably.” Bdubs agreed. “That’s about all there is to the story though. That’s how I got turned.” he shrugged, there wasn’t much else to talk about. “Well, things were a bit weird leading up to the first full moon, but other than the shock of it I don’t think it was that different from every other full moon I’ve dealt with since,” he added. That much was true. The first one had been scary, not knowing exactly what to expect. But now, all these years later, it wasn’t that different in his memory from the others.

“Still must have been frightening at the time.” Etho stated. Bdubs could see a hint of concern in his red eyes. He was right though, it had been scary.

“Terrifying, yeah. Painful. But I don’t remember it much, my memory is fuzzy until I woke up the next morning.” That was how almost every transformation went though, so whilst it had been scary at the time, it didn’t stand out all that much anymore. “If anything, it was the waking up naked in the forest that was the most bizarre part of it.”

That dragged a chuckle out of Etho, “Yeah can’t say I envy you on that one.”

“You shouldn’t envy any of it!”

“Oh I don’t, I promise you I don’t.”

Bdubs gave a firm nod. "Good." There was nothing about lycanthropy worth envying. Bdubs had learned how to manage it, but that didn't make it enjoyable, he wouldn't wish it on anyone else.

He imagined vampirism was the same though. Nothing about it that he envied.

Well, maybe eternal youth, not having to worry about getting old, that would be nice. And the superhuman powers were rather cool too. Being able to run and climb like Etho could did sound like fun. But the rest? Blood drinking, immortality, being technically dead? No thank you!

Etho's smile lingered for a few seconds before he spoke again, "Does it get easier?" he asked, "Dealing with the transformations and everything, I mean." Maybe Bdubs should've expected a question like that, it shouldn't have surprised him the way it did. "You seem to have a pretty good handle on it these days if nothing else. Most of the time anyway."

Bdubs decided not to take the 'most of the time' as some sort of insult, if only because it wasn't entirely wrong. He had to consider his response for a moment though. "It becomes routine." was the answer he landed on. "It's been part of my life for ten years now. It's just another thing I have to deal with."

It had taken a couple of years to get used to and adjust to the changes that lycanthropy brought. It wasn't a quick process and it had been frustrating. Gradually though, he had learned how to manage it the best he could.

He'd had a lot of support too, both from Ren and Doc and from all the other wolves and magical folks he'd met over the years.

It still annoyed him sometimes, and he was sure it always would. But keeping watch of the moon's cycle, preparing for it, dealing with the aftermath. It was all just part of his routine now. Not massively different from any other thing he did on the regular.

"That makes sense." Etho replied, "And was what I expected you to say too," he added with a smile.

Bdubs raised a brow at him. "Then why did you ask?"

"I was curious." Etho shrugged.

"Of course you were." Bdubs rolled his eyes "But, yeah. That's my story. Not that interesting really. But that's how it happened."

He was expecting a joke, but instead, Etho spoke softly as he said; "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For telling me. Even if talking about it doesn't bother you that much, it's still not easy stuff to talk about."

Bdubs hummed, "True. It is tricky. But I don't mind it. Thank you for listening." Etho sitting and listening so respectfully had been very nice. Thanking him for it wasn't something Bdubs had thought he'd do, but it seemed appropriate. "Now it's your turn," he said after a few moments, aiming the subject of conversation away from his history and towards Etho's. That had been the deal after all.

"I guess it is. You really want to know how I ended up as a vampire huh?" Etho smiled, and Bdubs almost felt like bracing himself for some long-winded excuse for why he wouldn't tell him now.

“Yeah, I do. You said that if I told you how I was turned, you’d tell me how you were.” Bdubs said with a firm nod.

Etho chuckled and ruffled Bdubs’ hair, laughing more as Bdubs swatted his hand away. “I know, I know. Okay. I’ll tell you the long story of how I became a vampire.”

Bdubs shifted how he sat a little, making himself more comfortable. He was eager to hear what Etho would say. To hear about what had happened to him all those years ago. “Oh it’s a long story is it?”

“It feels like a long story,” Etho said, a small smile still on his face. “And it was a long time ago too.”

“Two hundred years is a very long time, yeah.”

“I doubt you can picture Canada two hundred years ago the same way I can picture this city as it was ten years ago.”

“Etho I can barely picture Canada as it is now, let alone what it was like two hundred years ago!” Bdubs shouted, a little louder than he’d meant to.

Etho laughed, “Have you been to Canada?”

“A couple of times, but not recently,” Bdubs replied, bringing his volume back down. He had been there, but that was years ago, and he hadn’t been there long. He wondered when Etho had last been there, traveling as a vampire couldn’t be easy, and he didn’t know how long Etho had been in this country. Something to ask another time, perhaps.

“And that was probably in the cities, huh? Was a bit different where I was.”

“Go on then, set the scene, let’s hear the tale of how Etho became a vampire.” Bdubs smiled, his curiosity growing the longer this was dragged out.

“Okay, so, Canada, two hundred years ago. Well- I’m pretty sure the area was called Canada at the time, the provinces and everything were different back then.” Etho hummed, the fact that country’s names had changed over the years somehow hadn’t crossed Bdubs’ mind before. With Canada though he assumed it was the colonies changing, more than anything else.

Something he could research, he supposed. Out of curiosity. And it could be interesting to know more about the world Etho had been born into.

“If the area you were born in wasn’t called Canada at the time would that make you a fake Canadian?” Bdubs joked, maybe he shouldn’t have, but he couldn’t help himself.

“*Fake* - no! I’ll look it up later. But regardless of what it was called back then, it is a part of Canada *now*. I’m Canadian.” Etho frowned, though Bdubs could see him fighting back a smile, and he couldn’t help but laugh a little. Etho stared for a second before chuckling too. “*Anyway*,” he said, getting the topic back on track. “Do you want my story or not?”

“Yes! Yes, I do!”

“Then shush.” Etho teased, and it took everything Bdubs had in him not to reply with another snide remark. “So. Two hundred years ago, in the middle of winter. It was cold, and getting dark, and I’d been out in the woods near town for most of the day...”

Chapter End Notes

Ooo who's looking forward to Etho's story? I know I am! And I already know what happens, I just need to write it.

This chapter is just chit chat between the boys, no drama or action. But their chatter is always fun so it's fine.

Also I get to add 'History of Canada' to my list of things I didn't expect to spend over an hour researching for a fanfic
I'm not even kidding, I went on a considerable Wikipedia dive. It was very interesting! And- almost all of it is unimportant to the fic and won't be used but oh well! I know more than I did about when Canada became Canada (which was what I was originally looking for) among other things, so that's fun.

Anyway! Next chapter we'll be going back a whopping two hundred years to see what happened to Etho. I'm excited to write this, already have a few drabbly paragraphs I wrote ages ago. I'll try not to take as long this time though, a month is ages and I don't want to keep folks waiting that long again if I can help it.

For now though, I'm sorry again for keeping you all waiting, but I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Thank you all for reading, commenting, and leaving kudos, I love you all!
<3

Canadian Winter

Chapter Summary

Two hundred years ago Etho's life was simple and routine. He expected it to always be like that. He never would have thought that one mistake and a bit of bad luck could change the course of his life forever.

Chapter Notes

Hello hello! I'm back again with what I have affectionately dubbed, the Etho Has a Very Bad Time chapter. I was hoping to get this done a little quicker, but with how long this chapter is hopefully the wait can be excused haha. This is 7k! It's the longest chapter in any of the stories for this au. That's wild! I am quite happy with it though.

But yeah! I'd been wanting to write this part of the story for months so finally getting it done has been a lot of fun! Tricky in places, but fun all the same!

As always, thank you to my amazing friend CJ for building this au with me. And thank you to DoctorBethany for doing some beta-reading for me when my usual beta wasn't able to!

Right then. Let's jump back a whopping two hundred years and see what happened to Etho, shall we?

Enjoy! <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

--Somewhere in Canada, 182X, two hundred years ago--

Etho trekked through the thick snow behind his uncle's hunting party. Tired and cold from spending all afternoon out in the forest setting and checking traps, he was looking forward to getting home.

The sun was starting to set and the temperature was dropping. A light flurry of snowflakes fluttered down from the cloudy sky. They'd been out for longer than they'd planned, and the sooner he could go inside and sit in front of the fire with something warm to eat the better.

"Hey now don't fall behind!" One of the men called back to him.

Etho held up his hand and smiled, "I'm coming don't worry!" he replied, his breath forming clouds in front of him. He wasn't going to stop, he wanted to be home by nightfall as much as the rest of them did. Preferably before the weather took a turn for the worst as well.

Conditions could change in a matter of minutes after all. Especially at this time of year. It was far from unheard of for it to go from slightly overcast to a blizzard incredibly quickly.

There weren't always warning signs either, you didn't always get the luxury of being able to take precautions. Etho had seen it happen many times over the years.

Sometimes people would get lost in those storms. If they were lucky, they'd reappear when the weather cleared, shaken and cold, but alive.

If they weren't lucky, then they wouldn't come back. Those that didn't would sometimes be found a few days later. Their bodies, frozen solid and dug out of the snow by dogs.

Etho had known at least one person who had suffered that fate. It couldn't be a pleasant way to go.

The wind was gradually picking up as he walked. Whistling through the trees and blowing snow into his eyes, making them water. He lifted an arm to try to shield his face from the weather. Dealing with long freezing winters every year meant he was used to the snow. But that didn't make it any nicer to trudge through when he was already tired.

Something struck him from behind. A strong gust of wind with enough force to knock him off his feet. His eyes widened and he gasped sharply as he went sprawling forwards, tumbling over into the snow.

Etho groaned and tried to push himself upright, sitting on his knees as he steadied himself. Muffled voices were coming from somewhere ahead of him. But he couldn't see anyone, couldn't make out what they were saying. When had he gotten so far from the group?

He needed to catch up to them before the conditions out here got any worse.

Swallowing hard and taking a deep breath, he stood up and brushed some of the snow off his clothes. Taking a second just to breathe before he started to walk again. He had to keep moving.

The thick snow and strengthening winds were making things difficult. The forest around him had already been coated in white, but now just seeing what was in front of him was getting difficult, the snow falling faster and obscuring his vision.

Etho managed to walk a little further before the wind tried to knock him down again. The thick snow left him staggering as he lost his footing. Falling and hitting the ground with a soft grunt.

His teeth were starting to chatter, and his hands and feet were numb in his gloves and boots. It was so cold, but he needed to keep moving. He had to catch up to the group. He couldn't let himself fall any further behind.

Standing again was a struggle and the snowfall was almost blinding him now. The weather had changed so quickly. It was always a possibility in the winter, but it wasn't fair!

Behind the howling gale in his ears, he heard a distant shout, someone calling his name. "Hey!" Etho yelled into the wind, finally managing to push himself upright. "Uncle!"

There was no response. Only wind whipping at the snow and shaking the trees. This wasn't good.

It was so cold. And he was scared. Fear and panic rose in his chest at an alarming rate. His heart was racing, maybe some of that was adrenaline, but most of it was probably fear.

He had to keep moving. He hadn't been that far from town. Or at least he didn't think he had. Maybe he could get back if he just kept walking.

Then again, he wasn't so sure he knew where he was anymore.

It was so easy to get turned around in the snow. Especially when he could barely see five feet in front of his face. And when what little he could see was all white.

The snow was falling so fast that it was obscuring his tracks. It was hard to tell which way he'd come from, or which way he'd been going.

This was bad.

If you get lost in a storm, find shelter. He'd been taught that. If he could find somewhere sheltered then maybe he could wait out the storm. Find his way home once the weather cleared.

So he should find shelter. Or... Would that just lead to him getting hopelessly lost? He didn't know what direction he was facing anymore. Didn't know where he was going, or where he was.

"HELP!!" Etho yelled as loud as he could. It hurt his throat, but he didn't care. He just wanted somebody to hear him.

The only response he got was the wind. No voices.

He had to keep moving.

Etho forced himself to walk. Pulling his boots through the deep snow. Maybe he was going in the wrong direction. Maybe he was taking himself further from home, rather than towards it. But if he stayed in one place he definitely wouldn't get out of this. At least by walking there was a chance he might find shelter. A building or a cavern. Even just a big tree that he could hide behind. He'd take anything right now.

But there was nothing. Nothing that could shield him from the wind and snow. Nowhere that he could rest and catch his breath and try to warm up.

The sun was setting quickly, it was getting dark. The wind was getting stronger. Blowing the snow into Etho's face and making his eyes sting no matter how hard he tried to protect himself with his arms.

It was so cold, and he was so scared. Each step was harder than the last and his lungs burned with each breath. He pulled his coat tighter around his shoulders, the cold seeping through the thick fabric and furs that usually kept him warm.

He was shivering violently, it felt like shards of ice were digging into his bones, leaving his muscles rigid and stiff. He couldn't stop shaking, looking around wildly as he walked, desperate to find a way to get out of this weather.

The snow was blinding him. All he could see was white. Even if there was somewhere nearby that would help him right now, he wouldn't have seen it.

Etho didn't know how long he was walking, time moved so strangely out here. It felt like hours, but it probably hadn't been that long. Every so often he'd try to shout for help. But his voice was quickly engulfed by the storm, the wind whisking it away to fade far from anyone who could hear it.

No one returned his calls. No one else would be foolish enough to get stuck in weather like this.

Eventually, the last remnants of energy in his system succumbed to the cold. Etho stumbled and his knees buckled, dropping him into the snow with a soft thud. He lay there, panting and trembling. Trying to block out the icy pain that had seeped into his limbs.

Etho pushed at the snow, desperately trying to get up again. He had to get up. He couldn't stay here. It was so cold. He'd freeze. He needed to get up. Needed to find shelter. But he could barely move. Unable to find the strength in his exhausted body to get back onto his feet.

The wind whistled and howled around him. A thin layer of snow was already starting to form on top of him. His heart was pounding and his lungs hurt. It was so cold. He didn't want to just give up. But he was so tired. And it was so dark. It'd be so easy to just. Close his eyes. Sleep.

Etho whimpered and curled up in the snow, pulling his coat as tight around himself as he could. Holding onto the slim hope that it might protect him from the rest of the storm.

It was so cold. He didn't think he was shivering anymore. That was a bad sign, right? He'd been taught that at some point. Being so cold that you stopped shivering. That was bad.

Maybe this was it. Maybe this was where he died. He hadn't even reached his twenty-fifth birthday, but it could be worse. He'd known plenty of people who died younger, unfortunate as it was.

He didn't want this to be the end. He didn't want to die. Didn't want to become another person who disappeared in the snow never to be seen alive again. He didn't want that.

But, maybe that was just how it was supposed to be...

Maybe in the morning, once the storm had passed, his uncle would come out looking for him. The dogs would dig him out of the snow, frozen. Dead.

His uncle would feel responsible for it, Etho thought. Would feel guilty and blame himself. Say it was his fault for letting his nephew fall behind the group, for not making sure he stayed close when the weather had started to turn.

His aunt would grieve, he was sure. She'd be devastated. He was the only thing she had left of his mother, of her sister, he knew that. She'd always doted on him and loved him like her own. Losing him would break her.

And his cousins, he hoped they'd miss him too. They'd always been close. Like siblings to him. They were going to be so angry though, he thought. Angry and disappointed and sad. Angry at him for hurting their mother. Disappointed with their father for letting it happen. Sad that he was gone...

He hoped he'd be missed. Even if it was only his family who missed him.

He didn't feel very cold any more.

"Please..." Etho whimpered, eyes squeezed shut as tears slid down his cheeks. His voice was quiet and lost to the wind in an instant. "Help me... Please..." he didn't know who he was talking to. Nobody would hear him. He was so scared, so tired.

Exhausted from trekking through the blizzard. He just wanted to sleep... Sleep and hope that when the sun comes up tomorrow he might still be alive.

Maybe... Maybe if he was very lucky...

It would be so easy to sleep...

Just sleep...

Something grabbed his shoulders. He heard a noise that sounded like a voice.

He was pulled upright, his eyes fluttering as he drifted in and out of consciousness. How long had he been out here? Where was he? Was it still snowing?

He heard the noise again, followed by a gentle shake of his shoulders.

"Come on, lad." A warm, soft voice was speaking quietly in his ear, "Stay with me."

At least it was a person who had found him, and not a wolf. Or a bear.

"Wha..." Etho mumbled, not able to get any actual words out of his mouth.

He felt an arm curl around him and he was pulled up onto his feet. But there was no strength left in him, he could barely stay awake. His boots dragged in the snow as he tried to get his feet under him. But whoever they were, they held his weight and supported him as they moved.

His eyes slip closed again. It felt like only a few seconds had passed. But when he opened them he was inside. Laying on a plush rug in front of a warm fire, soft blankets and furs wrapped around him.

Where was he?

He lifted his head a little but just that small movement made the world spin and he closed his eyes. Taking deep breaths and laying his head back down.

The wind was still whistling outside, the fire crackled, the storm made the windows rattle and wood walls creak. But despite that, it was oddly peaceful here. Warm and comfortable, sheltered from the cold that could have killed him.

Etho opened his eyes again and slowly pushed himself to sit upright. His head spun, but it was more bearable and passed after a few seconds.

He glanced around the room, wanting to get a better idea of where he was. It was small but cozy. The fireplace in front of him warmed the room, and a lantern hanging from the ceiling cast flickering orange candlelight across the space.

It must have been a cabin, but Etho had never seen such a building in the forest near his town before.

The forest was pretty big though, so perhaps he shouldn't have expected to.

Letting his guard down in an unfamiliar place wasn't a good idea, and he knew that. But whatever this place was, it was better than freezing to death out in the snow.

Etho laid back down and pulled the soft blankets closer to him. He was so tired. He could sleep some more, and get some rest. Enjoy this warmth.

"You're awake." said a voice from nearby, startling Etho slightly. He sat up again and saw a woman standing nearby, watching him closely. How long had she been there? Was she the one who had brought him here? She must have been.

"Uh- yeah. Hello," he said, voice quiet and slightly croaky. He cleared his throat before he spoke again. "Did you bring me here?"

"I did." she nodded, stepping closer to him. She sounded young, but the low light in here made it

hard to see her face. “You’re a bit more awake than you were when I found you. What were you doing out there? This sort of weather can kill a man in no time at all.”

“I know... I was separated from my group and got lost in the snow.”

“Ah, yes that’d do it,” she said gently. “You can stay here until the weather clears.”

“Thank you.” Etho smiled, glancing out the window, though all he saw was darkness. “For helping me, as well. Thank you,” he added.

“You’re welcome. And you’re lucky I found you or you would have frozen out there.” maybe he should question *how* she’d found him. But right now he didn’t care too much, he was just glad that he was alive.

“I don’t doubt that... ” he said, rubbing a little at the back of his neck.

It was quiet for a few seconds until the woman spoke again. “Your family must be worried about you.”

“I imagine so, yes.”

“Wife and children at home waiting for you?” she asked, tipping her head to the side slightly.

The question caught him off guard, though he wasn’t sure why, she was far from the first person to ask him something like that. “O-oh. No. No no. None of that.” he stammered.

“No? You look old enough for it.”

“I- I am. Just um. Suppose I haven’t- found anyone, yet.” Which was true, he hadn’t. Though his aunt had certainly tried to find him a wife. Unsuccessfully, but she’d tried.

“A shame. A handsome young man like you would catch any girl’s heart I’m sure.” She was smiling as she spoke, but Etho just felt a little awkward, not entirely sure what he was supposed to feel about that.

“Uh- thanks.” he smiled nervously. “I think..” he added to himself, looking down at his hands.

“Anyway, you should rest, so I’ll leave you be,” she said, stepping back towards the door.

Etho yawned as if on cue, “More sleep does sound awfully appealing right now.” he said, and he heard her chuckle softly in response.

“I’ll leave you be then, but I’ll be around if you need anything.” She walked to the door but paused before going through. “I never got your name.”

“Oh um, Edward. My name’s Edward.”

She smiled at him, “Get some sleep Edward, call if you need anything.” With that, she left the room, closing the door behind her.

Etho hummed, he’d wanted to ask her for her name as well but hadn’t been given a chance to. Oh well. Maybe later.

For now, he wanted to get some more sleep, and with luck maybe the storm would have passed by the time he woke up in the morning.

The wind was still whistling outside, but the darkness hid any falling snow. It was definitely freezing out there though, so Etho had no intentions of trying to leave until the sun rose.

So, for now, he was going to rest. Laying down and pulling the soft blankets and furs over his shoulders again, curling up a little and enjoying the warmth.

Tired and comfortable, he quickly slipped back into sleep.

Sharp pain in his neck woke him in an instant. A weight on his chest trapped him, pinning him down.

It was darker in here than it had been, and something was- *biting* him?! Etho didn't know what to do, but his first instinct was to get away. Pushing at the weight on top of him and trying to get free. But whatever- *whoever* it was, didn't budge.

"Get- get off!" he yelled, kicking at nothing and desperately trying to free himself, but to no avail.

The pain and pressure in his neck eased. A soft voice spoke in his ear. A familiar voice. "Shhh, just relax. It'll hurt less that way." said the woman, and Etho froze. She hummed quietly, looking down at him and brushing her fingers through his hair. He stared at her, before trying to struggle free again.

He was bigger than her. Why wasn't he strong enough to push her off?

She ducked her head and pain stabbed into his neck again. She was biting him. It hurt- why- why was this happening?!

"Let me go! Get off!" he cried, still struggling against her but getting nowhere. His head started to spin and fighting back was getting harder. What... What was happening...

After another minute she let go of him, leaning back and smiling down at him. Blood dripped from her lips and clung to her sharp teeth. Her eyes glistened red in the low light. How hadn't he noticed that before? He didn't understand...

"What- why..." he muttered.

"I'm so sorry, Edward. Truly. But such perfect easy prey doesn't come around here very often." she cooed, moving her hand to cup his face, brushing her thumb over his cheek.

"I- I- let me go- please.." Etho whimpered, trembling and scared, why was this happening? *Who- what* was she?

"No. Sorry," she said, bringing her wrist up to her mouth and biting down, teeth sinking into her flesh and drawing blood. Etho didn't understand what he was looking at. Didn't understand why this was happening. What was she doing?

In one quick movement, she used one hand to hold his head still and pressed her bloodied wrist against his mouth. "Just one drop.." she murmured. Etho thrashed and tried to move his head away. But she held firm. She was so strong.

The coppery taste of blood hit his tongue and she tightened her grip. Not letting him move. More drops of her blood found their way into his mouth, and he swallowed on reflex. Coughing as the warm metallic taste moved down his throat.

"Good boy." she hummed, still holding his head and making him meet her gaze. "Sleep now, rest."

Etho couldn't look away from her, and his eyes fluttered closed before he had a chance to fight it.

Etho woke up sometime later. His head hurt and everything ached. Sore and uncomfortable. At first, his half-asleep mind put it down to sleeping on the floor, rather than in a bed.

But then the memories found their way back to him. Reminding him of what had happened. That he'd been attacked. Bitten by- why would someone bite him? He wasn't sure. It felt like a bad dream though. Just a nightmare. Something like that, it had to be a nightmare...

Bringing his hand up to the pain in his neck proved him wrong. Dried blood was rough against his fingers. He swallowed hard and took a deep breath. Okay so... That hadn't been a nightmare then. That was real.

Etho sat up slowly and looked out the window. It was light out now, but the hint of orange suggested it was still early. He couldn't hear the wind anymore and there was no snow falling on the other side of the glass. The storm must have passed.

Good. He wanted to go home.

The cabin was quiet. The fire had died, and the candle in the lantern had fizzled out. There were no signs of life or movement.

Just him.

Alone.

Etho shakily pulled himself to his feet, his legs feeling weak beneath him. He managed to stay upright as he walked over to the window and looked outside. The snow was thick on the ground, but the sky had cleared, which hopefully meant no more snow would fall.

He needed to get out of here. He had to leave. It would still be cold outside, but he just wanted to go home.

Not that he knew where home was from here. But he had to try.

Pulling his coat tight around his shoulders. Etho moved quietly towards the front door. He was unsteady on his feet, his head hurt, sitting back down and resting sounded much more appealing than walking through the snow. But there was no sign of the woman who'd brought him here. Maybe that meant she was still asleep. He had to take this opportunity to get away from here.

The front door was locked. He should have expected that, but it still annoyed him. Glancing around the hallway he spotted a key on a hook and he grabbed it, hoping it would fit the lock. It was the only key here, it had to be.

Fumbling with the lock as quietly as he could, Etho turned the key and unlocked the door. Letting out a soft sigh of relief as he slipped outside. Careful to close the door behind him.

The early morning sunlight hurt his eyes and the icy cold air made him shudder. The snow was several inches deep and wouldn't be easy to walk in if he was full of energy and ready to go. Let alone right now, tired and sore and scared. But he had to go for it. He had to get home and this was his only chance.

Walking through the thick snow was as difficult as he'd expected it to be. Distantly he knew that if the woman found he'd gone missing she could follow his tracks and find him, but he didn't care.

The air stung his lungs and little clouds formed in front of him with each breath. The sunlight made him squint whenever it broke through the trees and flashed in his eyes. Only worsening his headache.

All of this was awful. But Etho kept walking. He just had to keep walking. Was he going the right way? He hoped so.

"Hello!" Etho called into the cold air, hoping that maybe, just maybe somebody would hear him. Somebody who could help him and take him home. "Can anyone hear me?" he couldn't see the cabin behind him anymore, and the forest around him was unfamiliar. But maybe there would be someone. Anyone.

Every few minutes he'd shout. Knowing that the chances of anyone being nearby were slim, but he had to try.

What limited energy he had was rapidly draining away. Breathing heavily as he dragged his feet through the snow. He didn't want to stop, didn't want to take a break. Scared that if he did he wouldn't be able to get up and move again.

The sound of dogs barking in the distance met his ears, catching his attention in an instant. If there were dogs then there had to be a person with them. Maybe someone who could help him.

Maybe he should be more cautious. Concerned that he'd be found by another person who would hurt him. But he wasn't sure he had any choice but to take that risk.

"Is someone there?" he called, the dogs' owner had to be nearby, maybe they'd hear him, "Hello! I need help." his throat hurt, but he wasn't giving up. "Hello?"

The dogs were getting louder, muffled paw steps in the snow as they ran. Were they getting closer? Had someone heard him?

The barking kept getting louder until the source emerged from the undergrowth. A pack of hunting dogs, all with leather collars around their necks.

They ran up to him, barking and sniffing at his boots. Etho dropped to his knees and patted one of the dogs on the head as he grabbed its collar, trying to see if there was anything written on it. Some sort of identification to who they belonged to.

He rubbed at his eyes to get his vision to clear, focusing on the small letters written on the tag. The dog's name wasn't of much interest to him, but the name of its owner sent a flood of relief through him.

"Uncle.." he muttered, a smile tugging at his lips. These were his uncle's dogs. "Uncle!" he yelled, letting go of the dog's collar and pulling himself back to his feet, "Uncle!"

For a moment all he could hear was the dogs at his heels, but then; "Edward?" a familiar voice calling to him. "Edward!"

Etho followed the voice calling his name. "Uncle!" he was so close, his uncle would take him home. He'd take him home and everything would be okay.

His uncle appeared from the trees and rushed over to him, Etho practically fell into his arms, exhausted and just so relieved to find someone.

"Ed- oh you're alive. Thank God you're alive." his uncle said, holding him tight. "You're freezing."

Let's get you home."

"Please... Please I want to go home.." was all Etho could respond with. Letting his uncle support him and help him back to town.

Etho's memory was a bit of a blur. He remembered his uncle bringing him home. His aunts' joy and relief at seeing him back in one piece. Cold and tired, but alive. He remembered them helping him to his room, and he was asleep within moments of his head hitting the pillow. It was still early in the morning, but despite sleeping much of the night, he'd been so exhausted that he couldn't stay awake.

He didn't know how long he'd slept. Didn't know how long it had been since he'd gotten home. All he knew now was that he'd never felt so ill in all his life.

His whole body felt like it was burning up on the inside. But at the same time, he couldn't stop shivering, even with blankets pulled over him. His head pounded with every beat of his heart and he could barely find the energy to open his eyes.

His aunt was sitting beside him on the edge of the bed. Etho could hear her talking, but his fever-addled brain wasn't making sense of the words. She was running her fingers through his sweaty hair, speaking softly to him. Trying to comfort him. It was nice. Etho liked hearing her voice, even if he didn't know what she was saying right now.

Whenever he was awake there seemed to be someone with him. His aunt, his uncle, or one of his cousins. Sometimes they'd talk to him, though his ability to understand and respond wasn't consistent. Other times they'd just sit quietly, keep him company.

He distantly wondered if they thought he was dying.

Maybe he was.

Etho could vaguely remember a doctor coming by. He didn't know what had been said, but the man had checked him over. Spoken to his family about what might be wrong with him. The doctor seemed to think it was the effects of the cold, according to what his uncle had said when Etho had been feeling slightly more lucid anyway. He just needed to rest and then he'd be on the mend in no time.

He'd wanted to believe that, but as time passed, Etho wasn't so sure that he did. He couldn't tell how many days had gone by. Didn't know how long he'd been laying in bed. But if he didn't know any better, he'd think he was getting worse.

His fever wasn't breaking. He couldn't eat anything without coughing it back up, even keeping water down was proving a struggle. They were all trying so hard to look after him. He wanted to tell them that he loved them. He was scared.

Etho slipped back into unconsciousness after a while. Never quite able to stay awake for long. But a restless sleep was all he got.

When he woke again he was curled up on his side. Still so weak he could barely move. Still unable to tell if he felt too hot or too cold.

There was a pain in his stomach. Gnawing hunger from going so long without food. The mere thought of eating made him want to gag. Yet still, it clawed at his insides. He needed to eat. Needed food.

Was this how a hungry animal felt? Desperate for its next meal.

Slowly, he moved his hand up to his mouth, holding his finger between his teeth and biting down. It hurt, but something in his brain wouldn't let him pull his hand away.

Etho was trembling as he failed to fight the urge to bite harder. Using what little strength he had to increase the pressure until his skin split under his teeth. Tasting copper as a drop of blood trickled into his mouth.

Usually, tasting blood would be unpleasant. But right now, it almost seemed to soothe something in his head. Though at the same time it encouraged something else. Something he couldn't identify.

Biting on two fingers drew a few more drops of blood. The metallic taste should be foul but there was something in him that was craving it. Needing it. Needing more. So much more than just a few drops.

Someone grabbed his wrist and gently pulled his hand away from his mouth. "Ed don't hurt yourself.." said his uncle's voice, the words just managing to process in his brain. All Etho was able to do in response was whimper, not enough strength in him to try and pull his hand free.

He heard a sigh and felt his uncle squeeze his shoulder. He spoke some more, but Etho stopped trying to make sense of it. He was so tired. So hungry...

He must have fallen asleep again. And when he woke he could hear people talking, multiple voices.

Etho opened his eyes and saw three people standing in the room. His vision was blurred, but he'd recognize his aunt and uncle anywhere. The third he wasn't sure of, but he looked like the doctor who had visited before.

They were talking quietly between themselves and didn't seem to have noticed that Etho was awake. He couldn't make a sound to draw their attention to him. So he lay there and listened.

"So what do we do?" his uncle asked the doctor, "He's not getting better, what's wrong with him?"

The doctor hummed, "I'm afraid I don't know. At first, as I said the other day, I thought it was simply the result of him getting lost in the cold. That with bed rest he'd be fine."

"That's obviously not the case though, he's still sick."

"Yes, he is. And it seems he's getting worse." said the doctor. "He hasn't been able to eat, whenever he's tried he just vomits it back up. Medicine hasn't worked for the same reasons. Just keeping water down has proven difficult for him." there was a pause, and Etho saw the doctor glance over at him. "At this point, if the sickness doesn't take him, dehydration will. We can keep trying. But, I believe the best thing we can do for him now. Is make sure he's comfortable. And hope for the best."

Etho felt a lump form in his throat. He didn't want to die...

His aunt stayed by his side for a while after that. Whenever he was awake she was there, stroking his hair and speaking softly to him.

Etho didn't know what she was saying, but he let himself rest with his head on her chest, her arms

wrapped around him. Not that he had the energy to resist even if he wanted to.

She tried to get him to drink, holding a cup of water up to his lips and gently encouraging him to sip at it. Etho tried, he did. But anything going down his throat made him cough. Even water made his stomach hurt, made him nauseous. Keeping what little he managed to swallow down was much harder than it should have been.

Nothing was changing. His fever was getting worse, and cold chills were still running through him despite how it felt like his blood was boiling. Simply breathing steadily was proving difficult. Each breath rattled in his chest and made his lungs ache. He couldn't focus on anything, couldn't see straight. Too weak to move and so, so tired...

However, the next time he woke, he didn't feel quite so terrible. His body felt heavy and his head still hurt. But something had changed.

Etho frowned as he opened his eyes to find everything dark. Realizing a second later that his blanket had been pulled up over his head, he pulled the covers away and stared up at the ceiling. Something was different. His thoughts still felt slightly clouded, yet they were clearer than they'd been in days.

He didn't feel hot anymore. Didn't feel cold either. He pressed his hand against his forehead and he didn't feel feverish. Interesting. Had he recovered, was he better? Just like that?

Weakness still sat heavily in his limbs, moving was difficult. But he managed to sit upright. He glanced around the room. There was nobody here. He was alone. It was dark outside, only the moon shining through the window to light the room.

Vicious hunger clawed at his gut, and Etho wrapped his arms around his middle. He hadn't eaten in days. He needed something.

Usually, when he woke up hungry, he'd go downstairs, see if his aunt had cooked anything, or put something together for himself. But that wasn't what his brain was telling him to do now.

There was something in his mind, something new, something *violent*, telling him that he needed to go outside to find food. Something very particular. Something that he wouldn't find in the kitchen cupboards.

Etho swung his legs over the edge of the bed, bare feet touching the chilled wood floor. He almost felt like he needed to force air into his lungs to breathe. He was listening for something. For movement elsewhere in the house.

At first, he heard nothing. He climbed out of bed and walked quietly over to the door, pressing his ear against it. Listening.

He heard something then. Someone.- crying? It sounded like a woman. His aunt, maybe. But why would she be crying? Hm. It didn't matter. He needed to eat. Needed to feed. Something in his head screaming at him to find something. And telling him how to get it.

Etho went over to the window and looked outside. It was nighttime, the street lit with gas lamps, and thick snow pushed to either side of the road. It would be cold out there. Dreadfully cold. He was in his nightclothes, he wasn't dressed for that sort of weather.

Something told him that it didn't matter. That the cold wasn't an issue. He just needed to feed. Needed... Needed...

Quietly as he could, Etho pulled the window open and climbed up onto the windowsill. His limbs shook with exhaustion and hunger, but he ignored it.

He couldn't hear his heart beating in his ears anymore. Couldn't feel it in his chest. He almost felt calm.

Glancing up and down the street, Etho spotted a glimpse of movement in the darkness. Someone walking along the opposite side of the road. They didn't see him perched in the window, they were just going about their night. The noise in his head told him to follow.

After a deep breath, he jumped out of the window. His legs almost gave out as he landed, but he managed to stay on his feet.

Slowly, cautiously, Etho made his way down the street, following the person, keeping to the shadows like an animal stalking prey.

He didn't know what was driving him to do this. A powerful urge, an instinct, that he'd never felt before. Shouting in his mind and pushing him to do everything it told him.

Etho didn't have the strength to fight against it. So he walked. Barely feeling the cold snow under his bare feet.

The person, a man, stepped off the road and walked down an alleyway. Quiet and dark and hidden from view.

Etho peered around the corner. Watching the man stack wooden crates against the wall of the building.

When the man turned his back to walk further down the alley, Etho started following him again, staying close to the wall and stepping carefully.

He didn't dare move too quickly, didn't dare make noise. He was desperate and hungry and he needed to do this. Couldn't fail. Needed this to work.

Whatever *this* was.

A stray glass bottle tumbled across the cobbles as his foot knocked against it. The man looked over his shoulder and Etho froze, hoping he wouldn't be spotted.

The man looked surprised, but then his expression softened to concern. Stepping closer to him.

"Edward Stone, is that you?" he asked, squinting slightly in the dark. Etho couldn't speak, couldn't find words, he just stared. How did this man know his name? Was this someone he knew? He couldn't tell. "I heard you were sick, what are you doing out here?"

Etho still didn't reply. The sound that made its way out of his throat instead was a growl.

The man's concern grew, taking a half-step back, "Edward? Are you okay?"

The noise in Etho's head was getting louder. Yelling at him, *screaming* that this was what he needed. Violent urges flooded his whole body and he clenched his fists at his sides.

A much quieter, more rational thought told him to stop. To go home. Wanted to tell the man to run. To yell and tell him to get out of here.

But he couldn't speak. And it was all dismissed and quickly drowned out.

Overridden by what felt like *blood lust*, he launched himself at the man. Tackling him to the ground and trying to pin him down, hands fisted in his shirt.

Etho *snarled*. It didn't sound human. He'd never made that noise before. He sounded like an animal.

"Stop!" his prey yelled, struggling against him. Etho didn't know where this strength was coming from, but he wasn't letting go. His eyes were drawn to the man's throat, teeth bared as he leaned forward slightly, hesitating despite the urges in his head telling him this was what he needed.

The man kicked and threw Etho off of him, scrabbling to his feet and trying to run.

Etho yelped as he hit the ground, stunned for a second before shaking his head and giving chase.

He closed the gap between them in an instant and grabbed him again. Knocking the man down and winding him.

This time, Etho didn't hesitate. Pulling the man's head to the side and leaning forwards to bite into his neck.

His teeth easily sank through the flesh, biting down hard as hot blood filled his mouth.

It tasted sweet. It felt good. Closing his eyes as he drank. Needing more. More blood. Drinking greedily, droplets sliding down his chin. Each mouthful eased the hunger that had been clawing at his stomach.

Biting harder made more blood rush into his mouth, and he tightened his hold on the man's hair as pure euphoria rushed through his system.

Etho drank until his prey stopped struggling and lay limp against the floor. The gnawing hunger in his gut had faded. He felt full, content. His vision slightly blurred at the edges as he pulled away, watching the blood seep from the wound in the man's neck.

He took a shaky breath and wiped his mouth with his sleeve, looking down to see blood smeared across the white fabric.

The aching desire, hunger, and need in his head were gone. The noise had quietened down. He could think clearer.

What... What had he done...?

Etho swallowed, forcing air into his lungs. He was crouched over a dead body. There was a dead body beneath him. And he was the reason the man was dead. He'd done this.

Tears ran down Etho's cheeks as it started to process. What he'd done. "Oh.. oh snap..." he muttered, his hands trembling.

"Hey!" came a shout from nearby, footsteps quickly approaching. "What's going on over here!"

Etho gasped and stumbled to his feet, turning around just as two men carrying rifles appeared at the entrance to the alleyway. Town guards.

On impulse, Etho bared his teeth and hissed, before turning on his heel and running down the alley.

The men shouted after him. A gunshot echoed down the street and Etho flinched, the bullet

striking the ground near him.

He didn't stop. He couldn't stop. Climbing the fence at the other end of the alley with ease and jumping to the ground before breaking into a sprint again. Suddenly feeling full of energy. He needed to get away.

So he kept running. And running. And running...

Chapter End Notes

Oh Etho. I am so sorry for putting you through all that. He's going to be okay, we know him in the present, we know that he's okay. It just- takes a while.

I feel so sorry for him, and for his family. CJ and I have had this whole backstory figured out for ages, but actually writing it? Ow. It was fun though, I'll admit that. Even if it did end up really long. I enjoyed writing this, even if it is seven thousand words of Etho having a bad time pfft

And in case you're wondering, for Etho's 'real name', I went with Edward because I wanted a name that started with E. Originally I was going to use Ethan, since it also has a similar sound to Etho, but a bit of research told me that Ethan is slightly more modern, in that it wasn't used much until relatively recently. So I picked Edward instead. The surname 'Stone' is for *redstone* or *stone* slab or whatever, either works, and I liked it, so that's what I picked!

Also, will note that the vampire who turned Etho isn't supposed to be anyone in particular. It would have been cool to make them a character we knew but with how everyone is placed it wouldn't work. So she is a mystery. But that's fine.

Oh! And! Because I forgot to do this on the last chapter. Now that you've read this, please do go and check out [food poisoning](#) by @Beans_McGee and [Fake Fur and Other White Lies](#) by @GoodTimesWithScar. These two awesome fics are about this au, and I love them so so much! You really gotta go check them out, they're really great reads and a lot of fun!

But yeah, I think that's everything I have for this! Thank you so much for reading, I hope you enjoyed this! And thank you to everyone who leaves kudos and comments. Next chapter will be the last chapter for this fic, and I'll get that to you as soon as I can. Thanks again guys, I love you all!! <3

In the End

Chapter Summary

With their stories told, Etho and Bdubs take some time to talk about things. Serious conversation never lasts long with these two though.

Chapter Notes

At long last the final chapter of this fic is complete! I- may have had this mostly finished for about a week and just kept putting off posting it which I apologise for but! It's here now! Took a little longer than I'd have liked to. But. It's complete!

This chapter is mostly just chatter, the boys talking about things and what not. But it was nice to write so I hope you enjoy it!
(Please ignore the chapter title I'm not sure I like it and I might change it later pfft)

I don't really have much more to say about this one before we start, so I'm just gonna say my usual thank yous to CJ for building this au with me and being awesome and to DoctorBethany for doing some beta-ing for me!

Here's to the last chapter of the longest finished fic I've written in- possibly ever.
Enjoy! <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Bdubs stayed quiet as Etho spoke. Listening to every word that left his mouth, he didn't want to miss any details.

He wasn't sure what sort of story he'd expected from Etho, and yet, what he heard still surprised him.

Etho barely looked at him as he talked, mostly staring forward at nothing or down at his hands.

He seemed calm and his voice didn't waver. But those usually sharp red eyes of his were filled with something that Bdubs didn't think he'd seen from Etho before. Not like this anyway.

Hurt. Pain. Longing, maybe. For a life so long ago that should have been ordinary. A life that was taken from him quickly and without his consent.

Bdubs supposed he could relate to that last part. But in truth, the biggest difference between his life now and his life ten years ago was the addition of lycanthropy and everything it brought with it.

For Etho though, it sounded like everything had changed completely in the span of only a few days.

And that was both terrifying, and heartbreaking.

"I was on my own after that," Etho said as he ended his story. "Had to figure things out for myself."

Which took time but I think I did alright." he shrugged as he finished, meeting Bdubs' gaze for the first time in several minutes.

Bdubs knew he should say something, but he didn't know what. What was he supposed to say? The whole thing sounded terrible, it was no wonder Etho didn't like to talk about it. How was he supposed to respond to any of it?

"Boring story huh?" Etho said, a soft smile on his face, and that seemed to snap Bdubs out of whatever thoughts he'd drifted into.

"No! No, quite the opposite." he said, realizing he'd been quiet when he should have said something "I just- I don't know what to say, dude. That- jeez."

Etho hummed. "I guess it was a lot in a short space of time."

"That's one way of putting it," Bdubs said, running his hand through his hair. "How did you even cope with all of that? I mean- dude. Adjusting to everything lycanthropy brought into my life was hard but at least my life was still mostly the same afterward."

Etho sighed and looked down at his hands. "To be honest. I didn't cope with it. Not at all. Not at first." his voice was soft, almost sad, "I was completely on my own, basically wild and half-starved in the forest. A lot of it is a blur now, I think I was running on instinct most of the time." he added with a shrug, fiddling with the fabric of his gloves.

"Damn.." was all Bdubs could say. He'd seen Etho in a blood-hungry state once and had seen how it changed his behavior. He never wanted to see him like that again. Imagining him stuck in that state for any length of time was unpleasant, to put it mildly. "What about the vampire that turned you? Where did she go?"

"No idea. I never saw her again." Etho shrugged.

"So you really were on your own then."

Etho nodded, he looked unsure about whether he wanted to keep talking, "More than once," he started, still sounding hesitant, "during those early months. More than once I... I seriously considered just... Curling up somewhere and letting myself die. At least then I wouldn't have to live as some bloodthirsty monster." Etho paused, and Bdubs stared. His eyes going wide as he processed just what Etho had admitted to. "But it scared me. Dying. So I kept going. I'm a survivalist, I suppose. And here I am."

"You- you can't just end that with- with 'and here I am' dude goodness sakes!" Bdubs sputtered, throwing his hands into the air. "You seriously can't just end a confession like that. With something so casual."

Etho chuckled a little. "Sorry."

Bdubs huffed, bringing his arms back down and folding them over his chest as he shifted a little to lean against Etho, putting his head on his shoulder. "I'm sorry all of that happened to you. It must have been hard."

"Yeah. It was. Was hard for a long time." Etho said, resting his head against Bdubs', "I was on my own, could rarely trust other vampires, it was hard. It gradually got easier, but it was pretty tough."

"Definitely sounds like it," Bdubs muttered. 'Pretty tough' sounded like a considerable understatement but if that's what Etho was going to call it then Bdubs wasn't going to tell him

otherwise.

Etho hummed and put his arm around Bdubs' shoulders. Bdubs let him, the comfort was nice, even if he wasn't the one who needed comforting right now. "I'm okay though, it was a long time ago. A lot has changed since then."

"Well yeah, you're not out in the woods on your own anymore for one thing."

"Yup yup, I've got you now." Etho smiled, flicking Bdubs' forehead with his free hand.

"Oi!" Bdubs yelled, swatting Etho's hand away. "You're incapable of being serious for more than ten minutes aren't you?"

That pulled a laugh out of Etho, and despite the lingering hurt in his eyes, the smile on his face was genuine. "Yup. But it was centuries ago, being serious about it for too long just feels weird."

"Alright, fair enough." Bdubs sighed, "I'm still allowed to feel sorry for you though. That whole story was- well. Traumatic."

"Oh snappers I haven't traumatized you with it too have I?"

"Etho I got bitten by a werewolf. I'm *already* traumatized! I don't need you to do that for me." Bdubs glared at him for a few seconds before they both broke into quiet laughter.

Neither of them spoke for a little while, just enjoying the company and comfort between them.

Bdubs couldn't stop his mind from wandering though. Thinking about everything that had been said tonight.

The story he'd told. How one incident, one case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, had changed his life.

The story Etho had told. How a simple mistake and a bit of bad luck had led to him losing everything.

The two of them together. Ten years, two hundred years later. Both had long accepted what happened to them, adjusted and adapted to all the changes the curses in their blood had brought them.

Two people born not only in different countries but in different centuries. That under normal circumstances would never have met. Not even close.

And yet, here they were.

How strange the world can be sometimes.

Another question was nagging at Bdubs' mind as he thought about what Etho had told him. How things had gone for him all those years ago. He should know better than to be any nosier than he already had been, but he was curious.

"Etho?" he said, his soft tone pushing through the comfortable silence that sat over them.

"Hm?"

"Can I ask you something?"

"Got more questions, huh?"

"Just one. But like before you don't have to answer if you don't want to."

"Alright, go on then."

Bdubs bit his lip a little as he figured out exactly how he wanted to word this, "You were on your own so much because you couldn't trust other vampires. Is that why you're not fond of the Court, even now?"

There was a long moment of silence before Etho replied, "People think I don't like the Court but that's not true." he said simply, "I like them just fine. They gave me the support and stability that I desperately needed when I first arrived in this city. I just like my independence and I don't like relying on them."

Bdubs nodded to that, he wasn't sure that it answered his question but it made sense. He couldn't help but wonder what state Etho had been in when he'd arrived that he'd needed support like that though, but quickly decided that was a question for another day.

"Although.." Etho started, pausing after only one word had left his mouth. "You're not wrong either. Spending so many years having to be so cautious of other vampires has stuck with me." he stopped again, thinking, "I know that the vampires here are friendly and won't hurt me but.." he was frowning, stopping and starting as he spoke. Whatever he was trying to say seemed to be harder to put into words than maybe he'd been prepared for. "But there's part of me. Even now. That worries. That doesn't want to be vulnerable around other vampires because in the past that would have gotten me killed." his gaze drifted away from Bdubs as he spoke and that serious tone had found its way back into his voice.

That's when it clicked in Bdubs' head. Etho was always so hesitant about asking for help. Always insistent on doing things himself and keeping away from the Court when he was hurt or ill. But it wasn't because he didn't like them. Or even just because he was stubborn.

No. It was simply because shaking old habits, old means of protecting himself, wasn't as easy as maybe he wanted it to be. And they had lingered much longer than they were needed.

Decades or even centuries longer, in Etho's case.

The lasting effects of trauma. Basically. From the stress and danger he'd been in back then. Sticking close even now.

"Yeah, that makes sense," Bdubs said, his voice coming out quieter than he'd expected it to be. "And I guess since I'm not a vampire I don't quite fall under that then, huh," he added, thinking out loud a little.

The serious look on Etho's face faded and he smiled, humming softly as he dropped his head on top of Bdubs' again, "Yeah. Yeah, you're safe."

Bdubs felt a flutter of warmth in his chest. If trusting others was something that Etho still found difficult at times, then knowing he felt safe around him felt very special. Maybe it was just a small thing, but it meant more than Bdubs would have expected it to. Much more.

"I'm safe am I," he hummed, a small smile pulling at his lips. "So that's why you showed up at my door covered in your own blood at 2am that one time."

Etho chuckled and pulled Bdubs closer to him, ignoring his undignified yell as he wrapped both

arms around him, "You're safe and my emergency nurse."

"I am not your nurse!" Bdubs protested. His cries not matching how he let himself relax into Etho's hold, resting his head against his chest.

"You make a good one, though."

Bdubs grumbled in response, "Just don't wake me up at stupid o'clock again or I'll leave you to bleed out on my doorstep."

"I don't know if I can bleed out. Vampires don't die easily."

"No, but they sure do complain a lot when they get hurt."

"I got stabbed, Bdubs. You'd complain too if you got stabbed."

"Details!"

Etho just laughed, and Bdubs felt him squeeze him gently. This was nice.

Quiet hung over them for a little while. A comfortable, warm silence after a serious conversation was very welcome.

Distantly, Bdubs knew that it was getting late. He knew that if he let himself stay like this for too long he'd fall asleep in Etho's arms. Which was something that he *was not* going to let happen. He'd never hear the end of it if he did. Giving Etho that sort of fuel to tease him with was a terrible idea.

However, even though he knew he should get up, he didn't particularly want to.

Exactly how long they stayed like that Bdubs wasn't sure. But eventually, Etho shifted slightly and spoke.

"I kinda want to eat something."

"You are *not* biting me. I'm not gonna be your dinner. Lunch. Whatever." Bdubs said firmly, frowning at Etho but not moving from where he was still leaning against him.

"No, Bubs. Not- I'm not hungry." Etho chuckled. "I meant food. I want to eat food."

"Oh."

"I'm not gonna bite you. Not tonight anyway."

"I'm going to ignore that and instead ask what you want to eat," Bdubs said, fighting the urge to sigh as he, somewhat hesitantly, pulled away from Etho so that he could look at him properly.

Etho let him move but kept an arm loosely around his shoulders, humming in thought. "Not sure."

"Very helpful."

"Oh! No, I do know. I could make pancakes. Do you want pancakes?"

That was not what Bdubs had expected Etho to decide on. Not at all. "Pancakes? Etho it's the middle of the night. I should probably go home and go to bed soon actually."

"Noo don't leave." Etho pulled him close again and held him tight, a little too tight.

"Etho please remember that I do actually need to breathe," Bdubs said, voice muffled and slightly strained.

Etho loosened his grip and gave a nervous smile. "Oops, sorry."

Bdubs took a deep breath as he leaned back, allowing his lungs to properly fill with air again. "It's fine. But it is late, I can't stay all night."

"You could. You have before."

"I was badly injured and barely able to walk. That doesn't count."

"No? Shame. Oh well." Etho stretched his arms above his head before standing up. "Do you want pancakes? I'm gonna make some pancakes."

"Again, it's the middle of the night."

"So? I've said before that I could make you pancakes, but I never have."

"That's true," Bdubs muttered, Etho had said multiple times that he'd make them pancakes one day. It had never happened though, and Bdubs still wasn't entirely convinced that Etho actually knew how to cook anything, even something simple like a pancake.

Eating anything substantial at this time of night was not a good idea, he knew that. But, just this once, maybe it wouldn't hurt.

He'd probably regret that decision later, but he'd deal with that when the time came.

"Alright, fine. If only because I want to see if you do know how to make pancakes," he said as he stood up. "But. I'm blaming you if I wake up with indigestion or something tomorrow."

"I think I can live with that." Etho smiled before walking to the kitchen.

Bdubs just smiled to himself for a moment, this wasn't at all how he'd expected tonight to go. But it wasn't bad, not at all.

Two difficult stories had been told. The conversation had been more serious than perhaps it ever had been between them. And now after all that, they were back to teasing and happy chatter.

And pancakes. Apparently. Which was new.

Despite it all though, Bdubs felt like he knew Etho a little better now. Knew the reasons behind something he'd wondered about for almost as long as he'd known him.

It was a little strange. To picture what Etho might have been like all those years ago. What his life was like. His home. His family. All so different from what he had now. To who he was now.

Bdubs wondered if he'd recognize Etho if he saw him when he was human. He wasn't sure that he would.

Not that it mattered, not really. Bdubs was a different man now from who he'd been ten years ago. Just as he was sure Etho had been a very different man when he was human. Compared to the mischievous vampire now standing beside him making pancakes at nine-thirty at night, anyway.

They'd learned a lot about each other tonight. Mostly bad things. Painful, traumatic things that would never truly leave them. Things that they might never actively talk about again.

But they were important things. And despite it all being a dark part of both of their lives, being open about his past and hearing about Etho's felt good. Even if it all happened a long time ago now.

Etho made some damn good pancakes, it turned out.

On second thought, maybe a late-night snack like this was the perfect end to all the serious talk.

They went back to their games and random chatter after eating. Staying up much later than Bdubs would usually allow. But it wasn't so bad, and as he crashed on Etho's couch, exhausted. Bdubs couldn't pull the soft smile off his face.

Chapter End Notes

And that's it folks! Aren't these boys sweet? I had fun with this one, I wanted the serious tone there of course, but also some softness and some silliness because there's been a lot of serious stuff in this fic. Hopefully it worked as well as I think it did.

But yeah! This is the last chapter of this fic! It took longer to get through all five than I would of liked, but I am really quite proud of myself for getting this finished at all so I'm taking that as a win!

As for what's next though. Well, I have a little thing I wrote like six months ago that I might tidy up and post. But other than that, for this au, I want to write stuff focusing on other characters. We've got 50k words of Etho and Bdubs (that's so much holy shit), and whilst those two might still be around, I want to focus on someone else a bit. Who you ask? Well I've got a few ideas, but we'll have to wait and see!

Until then. Thank you to everyone who has stuck around and made it this far, for all the comments and kudos, it means a lot and I love you all! <3

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