

Werewolf 41

Chapter 41: Omega Beta Alpha

Perhaps it had been because of how tired Gary had been throughout Friday, or it might have had something to do with him having gone to sleep before midnight when he would get new notification, but this morning he woke up well rested.

The absence of the annoying alarm that usually woke him up, long before his sister Amy, certainly also had a part to play in that. Stretching, Gary checked his status, already expecting to see some changes. Unsurprisingly, his Daily Quests had once again refreshed, but there was also a new notification waiting for him.

[Your bloodlust grows]

[10 days until the next full moon]

Unlike yesterday, there were no mentions of any additional stats due to it being closer to the full moon though. After looking at his phone, he realised that it was already 11:00 AM, meaning that he only had one hour before meeting up with Tom.

“Holy crap I slept in this late!” Gary cursed internally, getting dressed as quickly as possible before leaving the apartment. Thirty seconds later he returned, making sure to bring along Kai’s phone as well this time.

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Heading to the town centre where the library was located, Gary decided to run there. This method didn’t use up any money and he found it to be a good way to check whether he might actually increase his Energy bar this way.

Energy and Health were both stats under the Werewolf System, so if he could naturally improve Strength and Endurance, why not those two? It was at least worth a shot... although it was mostly about saving money.

The library was three story building, and had been built at the edge of the shopping street, at the end of all the shops. It was primarily used by university students who actually had a hopeful future ahead of them. It was one of the few safe areas of town where the police regularly patrolled, which was why gangs left it untouched.

The gangs, In the first place, during the day didn't interfere much with the general business that would operate in the high street.

Gary's powerful eyesight allowed him to see Tom already waiting for him, but from the distance he could also see that something was wrong with his friend. Slowing down his stride his happy face quickly turned sour.

"What happened to you?" Gary asked.

Tom put on a smile and touched his swollen and cut eye.

"This...ah man. I was watching one of Kirk's Altered fights, and then as I went out of my room I wanted to try out his Tornado Kick. Stupid me, I fell down the stairs and banged up my eye on the banister pretty badly."

Although a fall down the stairs might explain some of it, Tom also had other markings on his body. Ignoring Tom's dislike for most physical activities, 'falling down the stairs' was pretty much the textbook answer someone gave when trying to hide something.

'Could it be trouble at home? No, his parents aren't like that. They treasure their golden boy too much to hurt him.' Gary thought. He knew that something was up, but Tom's behaviour made it clear, he didn't exactly want to talk about it. Given how many secrets of his own Gary was keeping from his best friend, he didn't feel it was right for him to push him on the matter.

"So what move was it again?" Gary asked, pretending to accept the explanation he had been presented, as they both entered the library together.

As with any library it was very quiet, so they kept their mouths shut until reaching the third floor where they could access the public computers. Tom searched up all the relevant books in the library that they might need.

Using the internet, he just looked up the pages and information they actually needed. Tom was reading through them all and writing down notes that Gary didn't quite understand, so for now he was just being used as a delivery boy.

Whenever, Tom would find a book they thought that could be of use, Gary would be asked to go get it, constantly going back and forth between, until finally, clicking his fingers and rubbing his good eye, Tom was satisfied with the research he had done.

"Alright, I believe I have learned everything there is to know about Alpha, Beta and Omega wolves." Tom claimed, folding his arms, proud.

"Let's start with what applies with actual wolves. According to the lore I found, it should more or less coincide. Still, take all of this information with a pinch of salt." Tom flipped the notepad he had brought with him, and opened a blank page. He then pulled out a marker pen and wrote the word Alpha.

While explaining, he would write out the points and explain everything to Gary.

"Wolves are creatures that often hunt in packs, so every pack has their leader. These are the so-called Alphas. A wolf pack usually has an Alpha male and his Alpha partner. These two could be seen as the family leaders.'

"Beta wolves are pretty much wolves that are under the Alpha. They could be their siblings, their children or even outsiders. However they all belong to a pack, following the Alpha or Alphas. Are you following so far?" Tom asked and Gary nodded.

"Okay, I get those two, but if an Alpha is like the leader of a gang, and the Betas are like his henchman and subordinates, then what exactly is an Omega?" Gary asked.

His Optional Quest told Gary to turn an Omega wolf into a Beta, but this was where his confusion was setting in. Assuming he himself was the Alpha wolf, was it referring to his siblings like Amy, or maybe his mother was the Alpha wolf and he and his sisters were considered Betas.

“This is where things get a little interesting.” Tom answered, flipping his notebook to a blank page once again. “An Omega wolf is usually an outsider to a family or someone belonging to no family. Either way, they’re usually at the bottom of the hierarchy. Essentially, after everyone else has gotten their food, the Omega has to eat whatever is left.”

So far, if Gary was being classified as werewolf in these terms he wasn’t sure what he was.

“I know you were talking about wolves, but werewolves are part human right. So how does this work?”

“There are quite a few rules here and it gets a bit complicated, but essentially a werewolf can turn another with a bite. Alpha wolves bite and turn those they wish to work under them, thereby creating Beta wolves. Once turned, the Beta wolves can also turn others making them into other Beta wolves that will have to listen to the Alpha...To an extent I should add but let’s keep it simple for now”

Hearing this, a shaking realisation came to Gary’s mind.

‘A bite can turn someone...no...no when the system message came up saying I made an Omega wolf...’

Images flashed in Gary’s head to the time he had lost it slightly. At one point during his fight against Billy Buster, his sanity had left him and he had only wanted to win by all means. As he recalled, he had ended up biting the guy.

‘Yesterday, the news reported Billy was on the run and his parents were dead... Don’t tell me... was I responsible for this by fighting him? Is he...really a werewolf now?’

“Wait, you said that if an Alpha bites someone they would turn them into a Beta, that they would have to follow them, so what about an Omega?” Gary asked, realising that something was strange about the wording of the quest.

“As for an Omega wolf, in most cases they seem to be wolves who have been kicked out of a pack. However, that doesn’t always have to be the case. For instance, they could also be the only surviving wolf of a group. In a way, you could say that Alpha and Beta wolves are just Omega wolves who belong to a pack and have a hierarchy amongst themselves.”

“If we take you for example, right now you would technically be a lone wolf at the moment, which would make you an Omega wolf. I assume if you were to bite someone it would make another Omega wolf.”

“If there are multiple Omega wolves, I supposed that they would eventually try to form a pack. However, most likely they would battle it out to decide who amongst them would be the Alpha, making the others submit.”

Gary was sure that Tom’s guess was spot on, because judging by the Quest he was right. The system clearly stated that there was an Omega wolf out there and to start his family he would have to make it accept being the Beta wolf to his Alpha.

Until then, this also meant that at the moment there was another Werewolf in town and in ten days time, there is practically guaranteed to be a bloodbath.

Chapter 42: An Unusual Gift

After Tom was done with his explanation about Alpha, Beta and Omega wolves, he proceeded to go into detail about some other possibilities for what these words could mean. Unfortunately, Gary didn’t really register anything past that point. After learning of what his future could possibly entail things were going in one ear and out of the other as he was too busy to think what he should do about it.

‘I was just starting to appreciate this system for letting me shine during Rugby practice and allowing me to make money with Kai, but now it seems that this really is more of a curse rather than a blessing.’

Suddenly, the ten days until the next full moon seemed to be a lot shorter than it had appeared this morning. In the first place they weren’t really sure what would happen, maybe Gary would just get the biggest stat boost of his life on that day, but that was unlikely.

He had already entertained the thought of either getting Tom to tie him up, so he couldn’t do anyone any harm, or perhaps hiding that day somewhere where there shouldn’t be any other people. However,

knowing that there is another werewolf out, he had to do something about it, especially since he was the one at fault for that.

‘So assuming that Omega wolf really is Billy that should mean that just like me he hasn’t turned yet, right?’ Gary thought. ‘But then why did he end up killing his parents? I haven’t hurt anyone... At least, I don’t think I did... apart from those three guys perhaps... Sh*t, do all werewolves have to hurt people?’

If Billy really was that Omega wolf, the high schooler had a different problem altogether. Billy was on the run, the prime suspect for killing his own parents. With the police not having any clue where he was, how was a sixteen year old supposed to find him?

He looked through the system, hoping there might be some way to track the guy down, but so far, other than the red mist he could use to follow Barry because of their Forced Bond, if there actually was a way, the system had yet to grant it to him.

At that moment, Tom had finished explaining everything he needed to, unaware that his friend hadn’t been listening at all, just nodding along. He stood up, intending to put some of the books away, when he felt a sharp pain on his side, causing him to almost drop the books.

“The stairs?” Gary asked, taking the books off of him as he went to put them back.

“Yeah... sorry, I’m not in the best of shape.” Tom apologised.

Being so concerned about his own problem, Gary had almost forgotten that Tom was in some type of tricky situation of his own. Since he had come to help him, despite his own situation, Gary wanted to return the favour. Unfortunately, this was harder than it sounded, since Tom refused to tell him exactly what his problem was.

‘Well, those bruises definitely aren’t self-inflicted. Did he run into another gang, only this time there was no mysterious stranger to help him?’ Gary thought, placing the books back and heading to his friend.

“Tom, I’ll be honest, I’m getting worried about this werewolf stuff. I have no idea what will happen to me when the full moon comes up, but I’m going to need someone to help me and you’re the only person who is really helping me.”

“So I want you to promise me that the two of us will be friends no matter what happens. I also promise you that I won’t eat you.” Gary added, not realising how hard it actually was to say out those words, since the possibility actually existed.

He held out his hand, ready for a hand shake and although his words were quite cheesy in the sense for two people who were in high school, there was a reason for them.

“Gary, are you on drugs or something?” Tom asked, nevertheless grabbing his hand. “We’ll always be friends. Besides, I don’t think we have to worry about it. Even if you do turn, my scrawny ass won’t even be enough to be an appetizer.”

[A spoken deal has been made, would you like to mark “Tom Green”?]

Once the two of them shook hands, the system gave Gary exactly the notification he had been hoping for. His Bond Mark skill triggered when he made a sincere promise to another party. It would allow him to track Tom at any point in time, which might tell him more about what exactly had happened to his friend.

However, his skill had a very bad side effect. If Tom ended up breaking that promise, he would be assigned a Broken Mark, which would automatically turn him into a hunting target, so Gary had to make sure that the promise was something that neither one of them would ever break. He was also secretly hoping that it might have the additional effect of making Tom immune from becoming a hunting target for as long as he kept his promise.

[Yes]

[2/5 Marks have been assigned]

After mentally agreeing to activate the skill, Gary saw a mark that looked similar to a M appear over Tom’s head. His friend started giving off a new type of scent, which was similar yet at the same time different to the one Barry had.

Another thing that was different was the colour of the mist that followed with the scent. Rather than red, this one was green, so unless one of the side effects of becoming a werewolf included belated red green blindness, it should be impossible for Gary to get the two of them mixed up.

After leaving the library the two of them split ways once again. Tom asked if he wanted to meet up tomorrow to do anything, but Gary claimed that he already had other plans. The truth was, he didn't really want to leave the house more than necessary, in case any members of the Underdogs or people who worked for them were looking for him.

Were it not mandatory, he might have even ditched school all together, until he figured out how to deal with Damion and his thugs. Still, Gary did go to the gym on his way home and the convenience store to continue doing his Daily Quest as these were vital to improving his body and strengthening him.

[Name: Gary Dem]

[Level 4]

[Exp 225/460]

[Health: 100/100]

[Energy: 110/110]

[Heart rate 62 BPM]

[State: Normal]

Without any underground fights, no challenging school clubs or hunting colour gangs, his leveling had naturally stagnated. School was closed today and going after the gangs again would be suicidal, until they would become less wary again, meaning he would just have to wait until Kai called him for his next fight.

The rest of his Saturday proceeded as normal, to the point that Gary even went to bed at a reasonable time, simply because there was nothing else to do. Nevertheless, it took him a couple of hours until he finally fell asleep, due to everything on his mind and the decreasing number of days that were left.

In the middle of the night, Gary woke up in sweat once again, pulling his bed sheets off him. He was covered in sweat and immediately looked to see if his sister was okay. Apparently her sleep was so deep that she hadn't even noticed her older brother screaming right next to her...

[Your bloodlust grows]

[9 days until the next full moon]

Because of the messages he had received he knew it was past midnight at least.

'Damn, I can't keep having these dreams. All this werewolf stuff is causing me to have the strangest of nightmares.' Gary thought as he went to answer the call of nature. Before he made it to the toilet, however, he was distracted by a scent in the air.

It was something he had never smelled before, and naturally he followed where his nose led him.

'Who could be cooking this late at night?' Gary wondered.

Strangely, the scent was closeby, yet it wasn't coming from inside their apartment, but from their front door. Opening it, Gary could soon see what it was. Right there on the Dem's doorstep, was what looked like a fresh piece of meat.

The only thing was it still had blood around it and it was lying there on the ground. Gary had seen quite a lot of raw meat recently but never had he seen something like this before. His natural human brain was making him feel a little sick, but for some reason the smell it gave off made him hungry.

The question was, why?

Soon the system had answered that question for him.

[Human flesh discovered]

[For a growing young Werewolf such as you, consuming human flesh is the best way to recover your Energy and who knows, it could make you stronger!]

Chapter 43: Crossed the line!

If Gary hadn't felt sick before, he certainly did so now, having gotten confirmation in regards to what exactly that was in front of his door. He quickly turned away, fighting off his body's reaction to throw up, but he soon enough realised that it wasn't exactly going to get rid of the problem.

It was getting hard to think for him, as the smell was so tantalising he could feel the saliva already dripping down his chin. Gary went to pinch his nose, which actually helped him more than he had anticipated.

'Why the hell is there human flesh in front of my home?! I can't even tell what part of the body that is.' Gary thought. 'No, it might be for the best if I don't know.'

It seemed as if Gary had developed a real knack for keeping secrets away from his family, so he quickly closed the door, which further helped him regain sanity. Although not confirmed, all signs pointed that the piece of flesh had something to do with him.

The good news was, it was pitch black outside and after midnight, so it was unlikely that anyone would suddenly come out of their apartment door and find that piece of human flesh on their doorstep, which meant Gary had a little time to think about what to do with it.

He was wondering just who could have done such a thing and after racking his brain he came to three conclusions.

'There's a chance that it might have been me... maybe all those nightmares have made me go crazy and just like Billy I ended up killing someone? It would certainly explain those weird dreams...'

Thinking about this more thoroughly, he came to the conclusion that it didn't seem to make sense. For one, his clothes had no blood on it, and at the same time if he was turning into a werewolf or doing this subconsciously his body would have eaten the flesh by now, not left it outside the door, as if to remind himself.

The next suspect was the Underdogs gang. Perhaps they had found his address and this was their warning to him, that if he didn't return the item then they would do this to him.

He had seen the Underdogs treat humans like dirt before, so he wouldn't put it past them, but that didn't really seem to make sense either. If they had already found out where he lived, why not just abduct and interrogate him? If not him, at least his mother or sister? No, this seemed to be too roundabout for them.

'That only leaves Billy... but why exactly did he leave that here? I thought he was supposed to have become a werewolf, not a housecat. Besides, if we're both Omega wolves, why would he leave me a present? Then... could this be some sort of war declaration?' Gary thought. 'Oh sh*t, what if this belongs to his parents?'

Now that he had a prime suspect, Gary still had to decide what to do with it.

Of course, there was the method his system had indirectly suggested, but knowing that his was human flesh, he just couldn't bring himself to do it. Even if the system did say there was a chance of making him stronger, this was just inhumane. There were always other ways of improving his strength. On top of this, he was also afraid that it would leave behind blood as evidence. If this really was one of Billy's parents and the police came over... Gary didn't want to continue that thought.

He couldn't just throw it into the garbage either. If one of the neighbours found it, they might call the police. The last thing he wanted was to bring attention to himself. Not only because evidence was all over their door step, but also because it might tip off the Underdogs.

In the end, there was only one person who came to mind who might know how to handle such a delicate situation. Although he still didn't completely trust him, for some reason Gary had a feeling that he wouldn't disappoint him.

Heading back inside quickly, Gary grabbed what he needed and then went outside once again. With the small phone in his hand he had already hit send, pinging a message to the person who he believed could help him right now.

Ding

'Does that guy never sleep? No, I should thank God or whoever was responsible that he's still up.'

[Jesus, what type of mess have you gotten yourself into? I leave you on your own for a couple of days and you come back with this? Alright, we'll talk more about this on Monday, so here's what you do. First off, with the Underdogs chasing you, reporting it to the police or trying to get rid of the evidence yourself will only make it worse, so DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT!]

[For the time being, you might want to cover it up with something. I will make some calls and in around fifteen minutes some people should come over and make sure that this thing disappears. They're professionals, so let them do what they need to do. Also, consider this a warning, for YOUR OWN SAKE, DON'T LET THEM SEE WHO YOU ARE! STAY INSIDE AND IGNORE THEM!]

[Can't wait to hear your explanation for this one.]

Holding the phone and reading the messages, a wave of emotions overcame Gary. He couldn't believe that his problem would actually be solved with one simple text.

'It can't be that easy, can it?' Gary pinched himself to make sure he wasn't still sleeping.

Although he had been instructed to keep inside, Gary couldn't help but be curious as to how this problem would be solved and just what the big deal was. Eventually though, around ten minutes later, Gary heard a car pull up outside and the doors slam shut.

As soon as they started running up the stairs, he lost his nerve and shut the door waiting behind it, listening in to see if he could hear anything.

'Man, what I wouldn't give if we had a peep hole right now. From the sound of their footsteps there should be three of them.'

"Alright, let's get this cleaned up as soon as possible." One of the men whispered in a deep voice that sounded like it belonged to an adult. Gary could hear the sound of the men putting on scrubs, before his nose started to notice the scent of chemicals.

The high schooler was making sure to breathe as quietly as possible, while the men worked. It didn't take them long to finish their work and Gary could make out that they were starting to head down again.

'I might be able to see what they look like from my window. If I climb to the roof, my eyes should be able to still spot them.' Gary decided, running to his room, but his plans got foiled.

"Gary, what the hell are you doing at this hour?! Get back to bed, you idiot!" His sister angrily snarled at him, as his running had actually managed to wake her.

"Sorry, Amy." Gary apologised. He couldn't climb out the window now and by the time his sister would fall asleep, the men would be long gone. Still, it made him wonder...just who the hell Kai was?

How was a kid around his age able to solve a problem this easily? Gary knew that Kai knew people in the Underdogs and that his upperclassman should still be a member of the Underdogs, but just what position could he have if he could just call on those 'professionals'?

Perhaps more importantly, how could he not have panicked when Gary had admitted that there was what he 'assumed' to be a piece of human flesh in front of his doorstep?

'Well, I doubt he'll tell me anything, even if I do ask him. If only he could solve my werewolf problems just as easily.' Gary sighed, tensing his fist as he looked over to his little sister who had started to doze off.

'You damn Omega wolf, you came right to my family's doorstep! I don't know how you did it, but that crosses the line! It looks like I'm going to have to deal with you before the full moon!'

Chapter 44: A.I.F

After the types of days Gary was having, one would think that he would be having trouble sleeping, yet for some reason, the closer it got to the full moon, the more his body craved sleep. No matter how much he worried, at some point he would basically just pass out.

Still, when waking up Sunday noon, he hadn't forgotten about what had occurred in the middle of the night. Although Gary didn't exactly know what that piece of flesh in front of his house was supposed to mean to him it was tantamount to a war declaration.

The Omega wolf knew where he and his family lived. This time he might have brought him a 'present', but who's to say that next time he won't turn Gary's family members into such a piece of meat. He had to find Billy and deal with him.

Luckily, it was Sunday, giving Gary the whole day to at least find some clues on the other's whereabouts. During the week it would be far more difficult.

'First things first,' Gary checked every tab the Werewolf System had, in case he might have missed anything.

'I can't find anything in this system that would help me. Maybe he unlocked another skill, or he managed to track my scent somehow?' Gary thought in frustration after going through everything twice. However, the Omega wolf had somehow been able to track where he was, so in theory Gary should be able to do the same.

"I'm going over to meet Stacy, I'll be back by dinner!" Amy shouted, and the door quickly closed behind her.

Hearing this, Gary's heart started to beat faster.

'Sh*t, Billy was here at night, so could he have picked up Amy's scent? What if the human flesh was his message to me that he intended to go after my family?! She said she would be back by dinner, and it's not too far to Stacy's, she's also traveling during the day.'

'Billy hasn't been caught yet according to the news so she should be okay. Should I just put a Bond Mark on her just like I did Tom? But what the hell do I get her to promise me?' Gary thought.

With the system not helping him, Gary decided to text someone who had been a big help earlier, hoping that he might have any useful information.

[STOP LOOKING FOR TROUBLE!] Kai replied back almost immediately.

[You might feel responsible for him since he was Green Fang's debut opponent, but to Billy Buster it was just another day. Heck, he lost against three other schmooks before you, one of them even beat him three times.]

[If you go searching after the same guy the police are after, there is a good chance the Underdogs will find you. Remember they have eyes everywhere and that includes in the police force as well!]

Alas, Kai proved to be far less helpful than he had been the previous time.

Now that Gary took a moment to think about it, he realised that if Kai, or the Underdogs for that matter, knew where he was, that Billy would have most likely already been apprehended. For the moment, he was the only one who actually knew that he was an Omega wolf.

With no better solution, Gary decided to turn on the TV, in hopes there might be an update on the situation. It didn't take long for his wish to be granted.

"This just in, this morning yet another murder victim has been found in an apartment in the area of Montay, and Chief of Police, Anton Millstun has shared more information about it. He confirmed that the modus operandi coincides with the murder of the Bruntins. Following the wishes of the late victim's family, his name will not be shared."

"So far, police have found no connection between the Bruntins and the dead high schooler. There has also been no news in regards to Billy Bruntin's whereabouts and according to Mr Millstun they have to determine whether Billy is the prime suspect or just another victim."

The news didn't look hopeful and worse of all Gary was wondering if Billy had killed again.

'The flesh from yesterday, was that...this new person? That would explain why it looked so...fresh. Why would he even kill a high schooler? Was it just an easy target... or was there more to it?'

Thinking about the flesh, Gary was also reminded about his system message that had appeared as he had looked over it. It had told him that there was the possibility he might grow stronger through consuming flesh.

Since Billy was the first person he had turned, Gary had no idea what the rules were. Was he the only one who could grow stronger by eating others, or was that something all werewolves shared that he himself created? Another reasonable question was whether it was a one-time thing, or if one grew stronger the more one ate of someone.

The latter possibility was far scarier. For all he knew, Billy might have eaten nearly three entire human bodies. Billy had already been unnaturally strong for his age. The only reason why Gary had been able to match up to him was due to the Werewolf System.

Even if he hadn't gained a system of his own, it was at least safe to assume that he could transform. With that ability, as well as additional stats, would it even be possible for Gary to beat a supernatural Omega wolf?

Immediately, Gary started to prepare to leave the apartment himself.

'It's my fault that Billy keeps killing people. What's worse he might just get stronger as the days go by. My best chance of stopping him is stopping him now!'

Quickly leaving the home, the high schooler headed to the address of Billy's home. It was a little far from Gary's as it was a different neighborhood, and it also looked like his next victim was in the same area.

'If only I could get into his room and find something that belonged to him. Given my keen nose, maybe I could just find him like a search dog?'

Wearing his usual hoodie to cover himself, Gary ended up going over the apartment block where the Bruntins used to live. The neighborhood was quite similar to Gary's. The streets were also filled with litter and graffiti just in a different area. If Gary had to take a guess, Billy must not have exactly lived the best life either. Then again, if he had, he would have had no reason to fight underground.

It was easy enough to spot where he lived, even without using his nose, because at the very moment, Gary could see heaps of reporters interviewing those that lived in the apartment complex.

He peeked around the corner of the street down the road.

'Damn, so much for my plan. If I so much as try to go up to the apartment, then those reporters will definitely try to question me. I can't afford to show myself on TV!' Sniffing the air, Gary tried to pick up any strange scents, but with all the people present, not to mention the sweats and food that was being sold by some 'entrepreneurs', it was impossible to do.

Gary deemed it too risky to go into the apartment, so he would just have to find Billy another way.

"Hey there, little buddy, where are you in a rush to?" A male voice addressed him from behind.

Gary looked up to see two adults blocking his way. He hadn't noticed them, yet now they directly stood in front of him in their white and gold clothing.

"It looks to me like someone doesn't want to be seen. What's that famous saying? 'The criminal always returns to the scene of the crime'?" The female commented.

"Huh, I'm no criminal, I was merely curious." Gary answered in a panic, wondering just who these people were in the first place. He was getting ready to use Charging Heart and run away, even if it would make him look more suspicious to these strangers.

"Now hold on." The woman grabbed onto Gary as if she had anticipated his next move. "If you've got nothing to hide, then you should have no problem having a little chat with us. You might not be the murderer, but it looks like you might know a few things."

Both of them pulled out their wallets at the same time, displaying a golden badge with the symbol of a white rose, with the acronym A.I.F. on the top.

Gary gulped. 'Oh brother, these guys are even worse than the police. Why didn't I listen to Kai's advice? How the hell did I manage to stumble into the Altered Investigation Force?!'

Chapter 45: Boiling point

The Altered Investigation Force, more commonly referred to as White Rose, was one of the most well known police forces. Gary had seen them mentioned multiple times on the news and for more reasons than one, but the main reason why they stood out was due to their force being made up entirely of Altered.

'I might outrun a normal human, but I doubt it will work on an Altered. If I try anything that might seem beyond what a human could do, they'll think I'm an Altered person and will investigate how I became one.' Gary thought.

Sadie Nimper and Frank Hue had both been watching the apartment building for a while now. They were currently supposed to be working on a different case. Earlier this week, in what they assumed to be a gang trade gone wrong, three bodies had been uncovered that appear to have been killed by an Altered.

The reason why they were staking out Billy's apartment was due to the condition of their respective corpses. They seemed to be killed in a similar way, making them believe that it might also be due to an Altered. They had yet to determine whether it was the same killer as in their case, or another unreported Altered who had gone rogue.

"I'm just a curious teenager. It's not everyday that Slough is on the news. I sorta came here to see what all the fuss was about. It just seemed like a cool idea to be where all the action was. Now that I say it out loud, I don't actually know what I was expecting." Gary tried to explain, praying that they would take him for just a dumb teenager.

"So what if you're a teenager. The suspect shouldn't be that much older than you. Come on, now that you know who we are, just spill the beans and tell us what you know!" Sandie aggressively demanded.

“Hey, hey, you’re strongly implying something there. Just because both of them are teenagers doesn’t mean they know each other, right?” Frank tried to calm his partner down. It was obvious to Gary that the two of them were playing a little game of Good Cop - Bad Cop, not that he would dare to call them out on it.

“However, if you don’t mind us asking, what’s with the hood? If you really wanted to check things out, why would you try to sneak away after seeing the reporters?” Frank asked with a friendly smile, as if to hide the fact that he was calling the high schooler out on his contradiction.

Since Frank was the Good Cop, Gary quickly grasped that he would be his answer to get out of his mess. His ‘just a dumb teenager’ act seemed to have failed, but he was sure there was one way to convince them. He looked around left and right, before he slowly then pulled down his hood revealing his bright green hair.

“I... I had my hair done recently. However, the result turned out far brighter than I wanted. Once I saw the reporters I got scared that I could get interviewed. It’s already bad enough that my friends were teasing me in school about it, but if my current appearance gets shown on TV... yeah, I would never live it down.”

“I swear, I was only her because I was curious. Me and that Billy guy, we don’t even go to the same school. First time I ever heard about him was on TV.” Gary claimed, making a ‘Scout’s honor’ sign, even though he had never been part of them.

It looked like Frank was trying to hold in his laughter after seeing Gary’s hair, with his explanation it certainly sounded like a ‘tragic tale.’

“Oh really, what school do you go to and what’s your name?” Sandie asked, seemingly not fully convinced yet.

“Westbridge, Gary Dem, Ma’am.” Gary answered immediately. “You can check at the school.”

There was an odd stare that just wouldn’t go away and Sandie was still holding onto Gary’s hand. A few seconds passed, before she finally let go.

“Get out of here! A stupid kid like you shouldn’t hang around crime scenes. I swear if we ever catch you near another one again, I’ll personally bring you in for questioning!” Sandie threatened, and Gary quickly ran off, thanking his lucky stars that he had just escaped a close call.

“Why did you let him go?” Frank asked. “

“Well you heard him, him and Billy don’t go to the same school, but for someone who’s not involved in the case he sure did know enough about it. Do kids really pay attention to what’s on the news these days?”

“Perhaps I’m just being too cautious, it was a death that happened in the neighbourhood so maybe he did know about it, but just in case take a note of the kid’s name and school. If we find something linking Billy to them, we should pay him another visit at some point.”

— —

‘Damn it, what do I do now? That woman made it abundantly clear that if they ever see me anywhere near the spots Billy might have been, it will just make matters worse.’

In the end, since Gary was unable to locate Billy anyway, he decided to head home after doing his regular Daily Quests. Before he knew it the next day had arrived.

[Your bloodlust grows]

[8 days until the next full moon]

‘For the love of God! Oi, you stupid system, don’t you have an option to turn this off?! I don’t need a freaking reminder every day. I do have my own calendar, you know?!’ Gary cursed internally.

With the time until the next full moon approaching, Gary’s temper was rising. He understood that getting frustrated at the situation didn’t help, but cursing did help him calm down.

The only good news was at least today there was nothing in front of his door.

— —

As always, the weekend was over far too soon. Tom was looking at himself in the mirror. His swollen eye had healed up but the bottom of his eyelid was still a little fat causing him to squint a little. His parents had been very concerned about the wounds, so he had made up a lie that he had helped Gary who had been accepted on the Rugby team with some training.

'If those two bastards would have only listened... There was no goddamn need to beat me into submission when I was already doing my best to make Gary quit the Rugby team on my own! What should I do? Once they see him play again, will they come after me again?' Tom wondered, still feeling the pain from last time. 'Maybe I can ask Gary to accompany me home? Or perhaps I could hide at his for a bit?'

There was a specific reason why Tom hadn't told Gary about the incident. He was worried that his best friend might snap and do something stupid to them if he found out. Now that he knew that the other was a werewolf who could transform, getting him angry wasn't exactly the best idea, especially so close to the full moon.

— —

Arriving at school, Tom eventually saw Gary in the hallway. Coincidentally, he came at the perfect time to see that someone else had blocked Gary's path, standing in the middle of the hallway. Surprisingly, it was neither Gil nor Barry, instead it was someone that they had come to know recently.

"Hey Gary I don't know what was up with you coming to the Karate club the other day. That was really not cool what you did back there." Steven said. "You only won because I was off guard! If it had been a real fight, don't think it would go the same way!"

Gary didn't even look at Steven as he was talking down on him. He had too much other stuff to worry about and his mind was fully occupied with trying to figure out how to get rid of his problems, which already stressed him to the max.

Steven, noticing that Gary was bluntly ignoring him, naturally took this the wrong way.

“Hey, man! Do you really think you’re some hot sh*t? I know you man, you did all of that to hit on Xin, but if she isn’t going out with me, then there’s no way in hell she’ll be going out with you!”

“Can you please just let me through?!” Gary almost shouted, and barged past him pushing him off to the side. Gary had been so loud that the other students who were conversing in the halls got silenced and turned around to look at the commotion.

Hearing what was going on they started whispering and all these whispers were heard by Steven.

‘They’re talking about me! They must have heard about how I lost to him in a fight! Now he’s even pushing me in the hallway!’ Believing that the other students were talking about him, Steven felt like he had to set the record straight, to prove himself and make up for his loss.

However, as a karateka, he couldn’t just go around and start swinging fists. He needed Gary to start the fight, so he could claim it was self-defense, but not even mentioning Xin had annoyed him.

“You have a sister, right?” Steven asked, and at that moment Gary stopped inches before entering his classroom. It was obvious that this had gotten his attention. “I heard that she is quite the looker. Tell you what, you can have Xin and in turn I’ll have your sister.”

Gary turned around and started to walk up to Steven, stopping just in front of him.

“Hey Steven.”

“Wha-“ Before Steven could finish his sentence, he felt Gary’s hand grab the side of his head, only to slam it with great force into the side of the wall. Letting go of his head Steven’s body slid down on the floor.

“Shut the f*ck up.” Gary said.

Chapter 46: Anger

The corridor was silent, until one of the girls started screaming since Steven continued to lie on the floor unconsciously.

“He killed him! Gary just killed somebody!” Tiffany screamed.

Although it was unheard of that a scrawny high schooler would have the strength to kill someone with one hit, Gary was far from being an ordinary high schooler. In his rage, he had struck Steven without holding back. Tom ran past the gathering crowd and checked out the situation.

His best friend was still in disbelief about what he had just done. Gary just stood there, looking from the hand that had slammed Steven into the wall to the body to his feet. Meanwhile, Tom had noticed the specks of red that started to run down the karateka’s head. Examining the carotid artery, he let out a sigh of relief when he felt a pulse.

“Gary, snap out of it! He’s okay but we need to get him to the nurse ASAP! I mean he’s not okay, but at least he’s alive, now help me carry him.” Tom called out to his friend, and quickly Gary went to the other side lifting him off the ground as the two walked to the nurse’s office.

The crowd just watched them with their mouths wide open, none of them knew what they were supposed to do. Should they go and help the duo? Should they call a teacher? Perhaps an ambulance? In the end the thing those high schoolers chose... was to spread the news about this event to those who had missed it!

Tom and Gary were lucky enough that no teacher was in the hallways, but they encountered someone else. Xin had just come from the toilet and was surprised to see three faces she recognised.

“What happened to him?” Xin asked when she saw the way Steven was carried by the two.

Gary would have loved to explain himself to her, but he honestly didn’t know how. The truth was, he had just bashed the skull of his school mate in. Sure, Steven had provoked him, but even Gary saw that he had vastly overreacted. As such, the duo just walked past, leaving Xin to listen to the rumours that had already begun to spread.

“He slammed him into the wall with just ONE hand!”

“Caspar told me that Josh, who was there, even heard the poor guy’s skull crack. Steven might never be able to be the same again!”

“Does anyone know what he told that Broccoli head to piss him off to that degree?”

“I don’t know, I heard the name Xin get mentioned.”

Hearing this, Xin felt a bit guilty. Had she somehow ended up being the cause of this mess?

‘Were those stupid boys seriously fighting over me?’

Eventually, Tom and Gary brought Steven over to the nurse’s office. After briefly checking his vitals, the nurse immediately decided that this was something above her paygrade, so she called an ambulance. The high schooler was breathing and she did what she could to keep him in a stable condition, but for some reason he wasn’t responding nor did he show any signs of regaining consciousness.

When asked what had happened, Gary mumbled he had been hit in the head, but there wasn’t much details after that. The nurse had agreed to let them stay and miss the morning lessons, believing that the three of them were friends.

It didn’t take too long for the ambulance to arrive at school. After getting a brief account on what had happened they took Steven away, leaving Tom and Gary behind. Once her patient was out, the nurse left to go and make a report.

“What...what happened there, bro?” Tom eventually asked, after making sure the nurse wouldn’t come back because she might have forgotten something.

“I-I don’t know. Suddenly all this anger, this rage just came over me. The moment he mentioned Amy, images of him hurting my family came flooding into my head. All my senses were telling me that I needed to do everything I could to stop him. Before I even realised what I did, I saw him on the floor.” Gary tried to explain as best he could.

Nevertheless, he didn't tell Tom everything. If he was honest, he had actually wanted to hurt Steven more. The only reason he had stopped was because panic had begun to set at the sight of the motionless teenager. His rational side returned, stopping him from further worsening the situation.

Tom didn't ask him any more questions after that, however he was very glad that he had decided to keep the truth about what had really happened to him on Friday hidden from his best friend. If Gary could get this crazy at the mere thought of someone hurting those close to him, the two of them would have most likely ended in a morgue rather than the hospital.

Eventually, the two of them headed to their class. All eyes quickly turned to the two who had entered the room.

"Gary, you are finally here. There's no need for you to sit down, Headmistress Young wants to see you in her office. I'm sure you know why." Mrs Bedford said, after briefly looking at who had disturbed her class.

It didn't go unnoticed and for some reason, Gary felt pissed off at being ignored like that. Fortunately, his rational side was still in charge, so the high schooler just started walking to the principal's room, leaving Tom to sit down in class.

'What is wrong with me? How come everything is getting on my nerves today? Are people just arseholes today, or am I being super sensitive?' Gary wondered, worried that this might be the effect of the 'bloodlust' his system kept mentioning.

Above the double door, a plaque read Headmistress Young. He knocked at the door and soon a 'Come in' sounded from the other side. This was the first time he had been called in. Cautiously, Gary opened the door and entered the large office that was big enough to fit even a sofa and coffee machine inside.

"I would love to say that it's good to see you, Mr. Dem, but you should already be aware why you're here." Ironically, Mrs Young's family name didn't match her outer appearance. She was an older woman with mostly gray hair. The light in her eyes showed that she was actually younger than she looked and that the graying of her hair was mostly due to the stress that came with her position.

“We have already gathered the testimony of the students who saw this morning’s event unfold and a few minutes ago, the hospital sent me a report about Mr. Richardson’s condition. You might be elated to know that your school mate is awake and is doing relatively fine. There are no injuries other than some bruising on the outside of his head and a bump. Luckily after some rest he should be good as new.”

“Unfortunately, this doesn’t change the fact that his mother is out for blood. She wants something done and I’m in no position to deny her request. We can’t exactly allow you to get away scot-free after doing what you did.”

“Fortunately, you were never really a troublesome student. While I personally don’t understand why a young man like you would choose to dye his hair in that horrible colour, it doesn’t violate school regulations. It’s also your first offense, so I would have usually just let you off with a warning, but due to how severe this case is, I’m afraid I can’t do that.”

Honestly, Gary had expected to be shouted at the moment he came in. He had been prepared to get a good lecture about how dangerous and wrong his actions had been and how easily he could have ruined Steven’s and his own future.

The way Headmistress Young had chosen to talk with him as her equal had made it so he didn’t find her annoying, yet the tone in her voice made him fear for the worst about what was going to happen next.

“I expect you to write an apology letter to the Richardson’s family, about how deeply you regret your actions. Now I don’t care if you really do or not, but for your own sake you should make sure that it at least sounds sincere enough so that Mrs Richardson won’t pursue any legal actions against you.”

“Apart from that, effective immediately, you’re excluded from school for the rest of the week.”

“Excluded?!” Gary repeated, standing up from his seat. “You mean, I won’t be allowed to come to school for an entire week?!”

Chapter 47: Follow the mist

Most teenagers disliked going to school and only did so because their parents told them to. Every holiday was a joy since it meant one day of not having to go to that dreaded place, so the concept of ‘punishing’ someone by making them not go to school, had always seemed rather bizarre.

For a troublemaker, being excluded essentially meant they got a free week to do whatever they wished. However, now that Gary was suddenly faced with that situation, he began to realise the real horror of it.

'What the hell do I tell Mum?'

Their high school had a relatively good reputation in Slough. Getting suspended for a week was rather unheard of. In fact, any more than that and it would have meant expulsion.

Was this Mrs Young's way of telling him how close he had come to being...expelled?

Suddenly, Gary started to consider the consequences about what would happen if that had happened. He would have to change schools, probably forcing his family to move apartments to another area. It might mean his mother would have to find new jobs.

Essentially, it would ruin the lives of the entire Dem family.

On top of that, with nothing to do but to stay at home on his own, he was worried that he might go mad... or worse, do something extremely stupid like go out and look for Billy.

"As someone who's now excluded, you won't participate in any more lessons. For the time being, you're to stay here. Feel free to start on that apology letter and I will have my secretary bring you some other school work later." Headmistress Young explained. "Honestly, I would have just sent you home immediately, but there is a reason why I'm keeping you here."

"By now the whole school is aware about what has occurred, including the teachers. One teacher in particular has strongly insisted for you to be let off."

Gary was baffled to hear this. He wasn't particularly friendly with any of his teachers, nor did he excel at any subjects. His relationship with his homeroom teacher wasn't out of the ordinary either, so it was hard to pinpoint who exactly it could be.

“Never would have I thought there would come a day I would see Mr Root begging me to not expel a student like you. Unlike what your stature suggests, he claims that you’re a very gifted Rugby player, one he simply can’t do without.”

Mr Root would have been the last person Gary would have suspected, even if he had been doing better in their training matches, was it really to the point where they needed him this much?

“I have therefore agreed to make a special exception for you. Despite being Excluded, you’re allowed to attend the club lesson after school for the whole week, and that will include today. I will look forward to your performance on the weekend.”

For some reason, Gary felt quite happy with the news. At the moment, playing Rugby really was the only distraction he had left. Given his performance, he was very excited to test himself in their first official game.

After giving him the sheets of work he needed to go through Mrs Young stayed in the room doing her own work.

‘Mom should be at her first job, so I doubt she already knows. Mrs Young’s secretary will probably notify Mom via a letter, so all I gotta do is get to it before she does. I sorta got a week off... maybe I can use this to my advantage. It gives me more time to figure things out.’

—

Class had continued without Gary, yet Tom was constantly looking over at his friend’s empty seat. He was worried for him in more ways than one. When Mrs Bedford’s class was over, Gary still hadn’t returned, which told Tom that his best friend must be in some serious trouble. Tom had tried texting Gary during the breaks and at lunch, but he hadn’t answered yet.

Eventually, it was time for Rugby practice. During his walk to the changing room, he encountered two large figures. Immediately, Tom put his head down hoping to avoid eye contact, yet it did nothing. A few moments later, two heavy arms were over his shoulders.

“Hey Tom, old buddy. Why don’t we have a talk before heading to practice today?” Gil ‘suggested’ with a smile as he started to push the smaller boy in a certain direction...

Tom wanted to walk forward, but both of them had gripped him tightly. They were practically forcing him to come with them as they dragged him, lifting him slightly off the ground all the way to the closest toilets.

As soon as they entered, they shouted to see if anyone else was inside. Once it was clear that it was just the three of them, they locked the door behind them.

“Sooo, me and Barry went to check out the roster this afternoon and for some reason Gary’s name was still there. Why is that?” Gil asked, shoving Tom’s small body to the floor.

“I didn’t get the chance to talk to him yet! You must have heard what happened this morning!” Tom tried to explain, quickly checking the room for any way to escape his captors.

“Grab him!” Gil ordered and Barry picked him off the ground holding his hands up so he couldn’t use them to defend himself. The next second and a large slap from Gil’s hand went right across Tom’s face. His cheek turned bright red and he could taste iron, as the inside of his mouth had smashed against his teeth.

“You could have texted him, or talked to him over the weekend. Aren’t you guys close?! No, it looks to me like you didn’t take what we told you seriously.” Gil then grabbed Tom by the back of his head, shoving him into one of the toilet stalls.

School toilets, although they were being cleaned regularly and this one hadn’t been used today, weren’t exactly the most clean places.

“Hey Gil, don’t you think this is taking things a bit too far?” Barry asked, but Gil didn’t seem to be listening.

The next moment, he shoved Tom’s head into the toilet for a few seconds, pushing him down watching him wiggle and struggle. While doing this a smile appeared on his face. The feeling of having total control of another human life was exhilarating.

'Why? Why are they doing this to me?! What did I ever do to you?!' Tom thought as he was cursing at his life. 'I didn't even tell him what you guys did to me, because I'm trying to protect your sorry miserable lives!'

Lifting his head out of the water, Tom gasped for air. He couldn't even say anything because all he was doing was trying to breathe.

"This isn't enough." Gil declared after dunking him a couple of times.

Barry realised that his friend had lost it, yet it seemed too late to stop him and worse of all now he was apart of whatever was about to happen.

—

Out on the field, Gary had joined the club practice. He noticed that Tom wasn't out yet, but judging by the green mist he could see that he was still somewhere in school. Tom didn't care for rugby in the first place, so it didn't matter if he was on time to not and it didn't seem like the teacher did either. Which was why Gary thought it wasn't so strange.

Before the lesson started, Mr Root had pulled Gary to the side.

"Listen here, broccoli head, I don't know what exactly made you do what you did this morning, but let me tell you this. I'm used to dealing with kids who have anger problems and who have an aggressive nature. You didn't really seem the type, but you have proven me wrong more than once already. The good thing is, there is an easy fix. "

"Use that pent up anger, frustration whatever is inside you, out on the field. Use it to run faster from the others, use it to snatch the ball out of their hands, and use it to tackle them to the ground, because on the field all of that is allowed."

The practice had started, and the words that Mr Root used had spurred Gary on. In today's practice he was playing even better than before. He was sharper as if his eyes were glued to the ball. It was strange

because his technique and play tactics weren't as sharp as someone like Blake, but he made up for it with his talent.

Eventually, Gil and Barry also arrived on the field. Naturally, they got a scolding from Mr Root and after running a few laps, they were allowed to join in the practice game.

Both of them tried to tackle Gary when he was in possession of the ball but they were too slow. Instead a couple of the faster, lighter students managed to get a hold of him. Still, Gary with his power was able to move forward until he passed on the ball to Blake, allowing him to score the try that won them the practice game.

Both Blake and Gary were praised as if they had won the world cup, the two of them had proven to be an unexpectedly good match as a team.

"You two!" Mr Root said. "If you can repeat what you did today on the weekend, we are going to destroy Eton High!"

Gary was enjoying the praise just like he had done on Friday, and his mood felt better than before, but he noticed something. Although Rugby practice was nearly over, Tom wasn't on the bench, his mist was still in the school. Once it was over, Tom never having appeared, instead of heading to the locker room, Gary decided to head indoors and follow the mist to his location.

'I know I'm not meant to go to school, but lessons are over anyway so it won't matter, right?' Gary thought as he was too concerned for his friend to care even if that wasn't the case.

He was surprised to find the mist leading him to the toilets, especially since they weren't too far away from the changing rooms. Just standing outside though, Gary was now even more concerned because his nose picked up a scent he had recently become overly familiar with.

'Blood!'

He quickly pushed the door open, and followed the mist to one of the stalls. Opening it, he could see Tom, lying on the ground, his front teeth shattered with blood spilling out on the toilet seat.

Chapter 48: Don't fight!

When seeing Tom lying on the floor in the bathroom stall, there was a mix of emotions that came over Gary. Most prominently worry about his best friend's condition, followed by anger at whoever had done this to him, yet there was one feeling he hadn't expected.

Hunger.

The smell of blood coming from Tom's mouth was strong. While out on the field, Gary hadn't been hungry at all, but suddenly, being confronted with this tantalizing scent, he felt as if he hadn't really eaten in days, only to stumble upon a fresh grilled barbecue. Saliva started to escape his mouth.

Fortunately, Gary's other feelings quickly snapped him out of his daze. He shook his head to regain his clarity and wiped off the drool. The high schooler carefully grabbed Tom by his shoulders and put him into an upright position.

With his face no longer on the floor, Gary started to inspect the other's condition. From what he could see, one of his front teeth looked to have been beaten out, while the one next to it was slightly chipped. There was also the wound on his head, but Gary had no idea whether he had any inner injuries.

Looking in the toilet, the bowl of water had turned red. Although his best friend's wounds didn't seem fatal he could tell that Tom had been put through a lot of pain. He didn't even want to imagine how long he had been tortured like this, since he had been missing the entire Rugby practice.

"Tom, are you okay? Talk to me, please. What should I do?" Gary asked, despite realising how dumb the first question was, given the situation.

Having been lifted from the floor and hearing his name being called out, Tom slowly came to. He hadn't been knocked out, yet the pain had been too much for him. The experience of getting tortured had been so tiring, that by the time Barry and Gil had left, his body had practically shut down to concentrate on healing.

"G-gary..." Tom weakly whispered, yet the pain was still overwhelming him. After looking who it was, Tom had closed his eyes again, wanting nothing more than to return to sleep.

Seeing his best friend still alive, Gary let out a sigh of relief. He knew that he couldn't just leave him here, since Tom needed medical help. With no outer wounds, he carefully lifted his friend's buddy off the ground and placed him on his shoulders while holding him from behind. The high schooler hoped that it wouldn't worsen his condition, but he started running straight to the nurse's office.

She was naturally surprised to see him for the second time today. The nurse wanted to say something to him about this morning's situation, especially since she had learned the truth of the earlier situation.

However, Gary didn't stop. He went right past her and gently placed Tom on one of the beds.

"Help him!" Gary pleaded with tear filled eyes.

Seeing how much blood was there, the nurse was worried it was a serious wound and went to help him straight away. Once again though, there was only so much she could do, but there was good news.

After giving Tom some painkillers, since his teeth were the area that had suffered the most damage, there was nothing else. This wasn't an urgent case, so there was no need for the ambulance to be called, but she did have to make a report, and strongly suggested for Tom to go to the hospital as soon as possible to get his mouth looked at.

"Are you sure that is how you found him, and it wasn't..."

"It wasn't me." Gary replied aggressively, realizing what she was implying. "I admit that Steven was me, but this time I'm innocent. Mr Root and the other students can testify that I was at Rugby practice the whole time! After that I went to the toilet because I had to and that's where I found him!"

The nurse still gave him a questionable look, but she had to leave. Not only was school over, but now she had to inform someone of what had happened leaving Gary and Tom alone once again. Nevertheless, she was inclined to believe Gary was telling the truth this time. Not only because he claimed to have witnesses this time who can prove his innocence, but more so because he had genuinely been concerned for Tom, and had even been tearing up when they came through the door.

Gary had decided to stay by Tom's side until he eventually woke up again. This time due to the painkillers, he wasn't in as much pain as he was before, allowing him to stay awake for longer.

However, before Tom could even say anything, Gary was there with his own question.

“Who did this to you?” Gary asked. “Why did they do this?”

Tom could see it, that look was in his best friend’s eyes again.

“Gary, please...just...just forget about it.”

“Forget about it? Forget about it?! After they did all of this to you?! Do you realize that it was lucky that I even found you? If you let people like that get away without any consequences then what will happen?”

“Next time, you might not get so lucky. What if they do worse things to you? Whatever they did to you, I’ll make sure they experience the same pain as you did!” Gary claimed, holding onto the side of the bed frame that was made of metal squeezing tightly.

With Tom not answering, Gary soon let go of the handle to pace up and down, hoping to calm down, and looking at the metal handle by the side of his bed he could see that it had bent slightly.

‘I can’t, I can’t tell Gary who did this, otherwise, those guys...’

“Gary, I’m not denying that you have a point, but think about your circumstances. The whole school knows what happened to you after Steven. You’ve been excluded. If you do anything of that sort again, then that means you will be expelled straight away, no matter how small your transgression is.”

“I know your family situation. Have you thought about what happens with Amy and your mother, if that happens? I appreciate the gesture, but do you really want to do this to them?”

Listening to what Tom was saying, it brought the anger out of Gary slightly, as the images of his family appeared in his head. In the first place everything he was doing was for them. He wanted to get revenge for Tom and he wanted to help him out but he did realise that his best friend was protecting him in his

own way, by not telling him who these people were... even though he already had a slight suspicion. Aside from Tom, there had only been two other students who hadn't been there the whole time.

Gary was about to leave it there, but then he remembered that Tom had arrived at the library with a black eye. Putting these two incidents together, this wasn't the first time he had been hurt.

"Do you think they won't attack you again?" Gary asked.

Tom gulped, because he wasn't sure of the answer himself. He had expected to be bullied a bit, because of Gary, but something was clearly wrong with Gil. He seemed to have really enjoyed the power he had had over Tom, rather than doing it for his own teammate's sake.

It was then that Tom had heard the door to the nurse's office shut, since Gary had already left. However, Gary hadn't left without anything in his hand. When the nurse had taken a look at Tom, she had taken his bloody shirt off and changed it for a set of clean robes.

Right now Gary had it in his hand.

'Tom was bleeding a lot, so whoever hurt him, their scent should also be here.'

Chapter 49: Grey Elephants

As someone who was a normal teenager up until last week, becoming a werewolf and acting like that didn't come naturally to Gary. Unfortunately, his system didn't help him in any meaningful way to find the culprits.

While it was easy enough to follow the mist of those he had Marked, it was a different story when he had to try and pick up a scent from the bloody mess that was Tom's shirt. He would take a few steps and every so often he would take another sniff of the shirt. Being in a school that had a few hundred students didn't make his task any easier either.

'It's somehow easier to focus, when I close my eyes... there, I think it should be in that direction!' Gary opened his eyes and soon found himself outside on the field. It hadn't been too long since Rugby practice had finished, so the scents of his teammates were still fresh. Surprisingly, he noticed that the scent that he had picked up had split in different directions.

'I'm sure of it, there really was more than one person behind it. So much for giving them the benefit of the doubt. Here I even had some sympathy for that stupid bastard!'

Two members had arrived late for Rugby practice. Everything was starting to fall into place. Gary took a big sniff and now he was sure of it. One of the scents was in the same direction as the strange red mist he could see that led him to Barry.

'Why the hell did they attack Tom?!' Gary tensed his fist so hard that it felt like his veins were going to pop from his hands. 'Is it really just because they don't want me to be on the team? They couldn't go for me, so they went for Tom? What bullcrap is that?!' Gary swung out his hand hitting the school wall.

Usually, a swing so fast and so hard would have shattered someone's wrist but not Gary. At the moment he didn't feel any pain. Fortunately, the high schooler hadn't directly aimed for the wall, otherwise he might have left his fist print.

Looking at the mist, it told him that Barry was still in school for whatever reason. Since he had been Marked, Gary didn't worry about losing him. No, he was far more interested in Gil. His scent had left the school grounds.

The words of Tom still rang through his head, that if he was to do anything, then he would be expelled especially after the incident today.

'Whatever I do outside of school shouldn't be a problem as long as nobody recognises me!'

Lifting up his hood Gary started to walk out of school. He always walked around in a hoodie, so he could cover up his hair and face. He used to do that as a transporter, but now it proved useful to avoid members of the Underdogs, though today it would have a different use.

Tom's shirt had been placed in his bag, and whenever he lost Gil's scent among the myriad of others, he would take another sniff to catch it. Once he entered more problematic areas, the number of scents decreased sharply.

On his way, he also did his routine stop at the convenience store eating some meat, restoring his energy from his rugby match just in case he needed it.

[230/460 experience]

[Skill activated Charging Heart]

[All stats have temporarily been doubled]

[-10 Energy points]

Running through the streets, Gary had started to hurry tracking down the scent, afraid that perhaps Gil might reach home soon.

Eventually, he noticed that he had entered a certain area in Slough.

'Doesn't this area belong to the Grey Elephant gang? They are the second biggest gang after the Underdogs and also the ones controlling the grey colour gang.' Gary thought to himself, but it still wasn't completely dark out. The sun was just starting to set so the gangs usually wouldn't bother others anyway, not that Gary was particularly worried if they chose to attack him.

Following Gil's scent Gary moved away from the residential area and followed him to the industrial one, arriving in front of abandoned warehouses. He had never been here, but he recognised that such a location practically screamed 'gang hang out'.

The high schooler had to be extra cautious, fighting off a group and an entire gang were two completely different things. Having tracked the scent to one warehouse in particular he could now see that there were members wearing pieces of grey clothing on the outside. He could hear some cheering all the way from his location.

He sneaked around the outside until found a pipe that led to the roof. Gary wasn't the best climber, but he had been practicing and with Charging Heart still active, jumping up and grabbing onto the pipe proved to be easy. Using his hands and legs he soon found himself on the metallic roof.

The high schooler was careful with his footsteps since it would make quite a bit of noise, but luckily there were also plenty of seagulls on the roof. Whenever they would move, they would make the roof clang regardless of how quiet he was, and it seemed like whatever was happening inside they were far too preoccupied with what was happening.

Finding a hole in the roof Gary was happy to see that it allowed him to watch what was happening underneath. His enhanced hearing also allowed him to hear what they were saying.

“Not bad, kid.” A male voice praised someone. “Your skill, your strength, and most of all your ruthlessness are the real deal. You’re perfect. There’s just one last thing for you to do before we let you in our gang.”

One person stood there, bloody and battered, yet he was in a far better condition than the other guy around his feet. Gary had only heard about it, but he assumed that he had just walked in on the grey colour gang having held something akin to an ‘audition’.

There were a couple of ways to join a colour gang, but the most direct one was the scene Gary had just stumbled upon. Those willing to join could challenge already active members and if they proved themselves, the colour gang would usually offer to recruit them.

‘That’s him...he was the one that hurt TOM!’ Gary could still smell Tom’s blood on his clothes, even though it was now mixed in with the other person’s on the ground.

“You will join us on our rounds today. After that we’ll discuss your payment and more. I have hope for you. If you do well and rise up, then you might even be accepted into the Grey Elephants.”

Gary would love nothing more than to jump down and pay back Gil, but his rational side was still present. His first instinct was nothing but suicidal. There were around thirty members inside, and the person that Gil was speaking to seemed to be their leader.

No leader of any gang would be an easy person to deal with, especially belonging to the colour gang underneath the Grey Elephants. He could continue to follow Gil and his scent but from the sounds of it, the leader himself might be the one to show Gil the ropes.

There was no guarantee that Gary would get a chance to get his revenge today and there was also another problem. He still needed to hurry home to intercept the letter about his exclusion from school. His mother should be working late tonight, so he should still have some time

It was then that the system answered his prayers, solving his issue once again.

[You have successfully tracked down a target using your keen nose!]

[You are acting more like a werewolf and less than a human by the day!]

[Bloodlust has been detected]

[Would you like to activate a Forced Bond?]

Last time he had Marked Barry by accident, though he had been holding him by the wrist. Now it appeared as if physical touch wasn't a necessary requirement. Now that he thought about it, Gary realised that back when he had defeated the colour gang members, the system had also offered him to activate a Forced Bond, even though he hadn't touched them.

At the time, he had declined, but now that Gary saw the message with his emotions running high, he didn't hesitate.

[Yes!]

[Forced Bond has been activated]

[3/5 Marks have been assigned]

Chapter 50: The letter

Gary hadn't been considering the consequences of Marking Gil. He wasn't sure what would happen when the full moon came out, and quite frankly, he didn't care at the moment. Now that he had made sure that he would always be able to find Gil, it was time for him to head home.

As he left the area, he could see that the Marking worked as intended. A visible red mist trail could be seen in the air leading to him. Now he had two markings, one for Barry and one for Gil, but the way Gary was able to tell the difference between the two of them was due to the different scent each mist would give.

Quickly, using a Charging Heart for the second time, Gary rushed back skipping his daily gym workout and headed to his apartment block. While doing so, the images of Tom were appearing through his head.

'Those guys, why...why...why would they hurt him that badly!' Gary ran faster and faster, leaping over trash cans in the middle of the street, without slowing down.

'Tom, why didn't you say anything? With how late they were, they must have been torturing you all that while. How could you protect that scum? The smile on Gil's face... that was not the face of a human, he's a monster worse than me! He will just come back to hurt you again and again, so I need to make sure he doesn't get the chance!'

The good news was that the running had quenched Gary's anger a little and he had made it back to his apartment far quicker than he had anticipated, even with his newfound powers. Opening the door, he quickly looked down to search for the letter that his school surely must have already sent out.

However, it wasn't there. More accurately speaking, there was nothing there. Usually, there would at least be spam letters advertising something, if not overdue bills that piled up. Unfortunately, someone appeared to have already collected all this.

"Are you looking for this?" Amy asked, holding up a letter in her hand, while standing in the kitchen. The rest of the missing letters were also on the counter top.

"Amy!" Gary rushed over and was far quicker than she had expected, the letter was quickly snatched from her hand, before she had any chance to hide it behind her back. Just as he had expected, the letter

was to inform his mother that Gary had been excluded for a week for getting into a fight to the point of sending a schoolmate into the hospital.

“Hey, you know I’m still going to tell Mum!” Amy said, pouting. “Ever since you came back with your green hair, I was worried that one day you would do something stupid, but this? Seriously, I know that you like watching those Altered fights, but you’ve never gotten in a fight before! What was it even about that you sent the other guy into the hospital? A girl, or a boy, or maybe just some stupid boy stuff?” Amy couldn’t stop asking her older brother questions driven by a mix of worry and curiosity.

‘There’s no way I can tell Amy that I got into a fight because he threatened to date her! That would just be too...too...embarrassing.’ Gary’s face was going red just at the thought of it.

Still, he needed to figure out a way to stop Amy from telling their mother, otherwise not only would he get an earful and worry her to death, she probably wouldn’t let him freely leave the house anymore either. He would be grounded and he just couldn’t afford that in his current situation.

“Why did you even open the letter in the first place, it’s not even addressed to you?” Gary tried to change the subject, clearly annoyed that his sister wouldn’t back down.

“Because I saw your school logo on it. Schools only send letters home if it’s good news or bad news, and come on. With your head, what the hell kind of good news would there be? If it was something I wasn’t meant to see I planned to just close the letter and place it back in as if I never opened it.” Amy smugly replied, aware that she had the moral high ground on this one.

Seeing no way out of the situation, there was really only one thing Gary could do.

“Please, I beg you, just don’t tell Mum. You should know how much she would worry. It’s just a week, I will manage to somehow keep it hidden from her.” Gary pleaded. “I promise to make it worth your while!”

Unexpectedly, his little sister held out her hand, turning her head away.

“Fine, but you owe me! If you want me to keep it a secret then it’s going to cost you.”

A few seconds later, she felt something in her hand. Opening her eyes, she saw a fifty note in her hand. For a moment, Gary could swear that he saw Amy's eyes turn into gold bars.

When his little sister had asked for payment, she hadn't literally meant money. She had intended to blackmail Gary into taking over her chores for this week. Either that, or perhaps make him act like her servant or bodyguard next time she visited Stacy, but this was much better than all of those options.

"Where... how do you even have this much money?" Amy asked. "Don't tell me you robbed the guy on top of sending him to the hospital?!"

The truth was, other than the five hundred he had stashed away in their room, Gary had been now down to the last hundred from the first paycheck he had earned that day fighting against Billy Buster... and now he had given Amy half of that, just so that she would keep quiet.

"Nothing of that sort! What do you take your brother for?!" Gary protested, but Amy pointed to the letter he still held in his hand.

"You know, how I've been claiming to visit Tom a lot lately? Well, the truth is I've been helping out another friend of mine with their family business. They give me money for helping out. At the end of each day, I get paid in cash."

"I haven't told Mum because you know what she's like. She would just feel bad and tell me to stop. Saying it's an adult's job to take care of their family, but... you know, I'm also part of this family."

Hearing this, Amy felt a little bad for taking the money. Gary had worked hard for this money, and he had done so for the sake of everyone.

"Arghh, here take it back." Amy said, shoving it back in Gary's hand. "After you tell me all that, what kind of person would I be to take it? You think about others too much." She sighed, making her way back to her room.

"Wait, are you going to tell, Mum?" Gary called out after her.

“No, just do what you want.” Amy turned around and smiled. Although her brother wasn’t the brightest, he really was the best brother she had. “I’ll try to think of a way for Mum to accept the money, if you have more of it.”

Now, knowing that his sister wouldn’t reveal the situation, Gary went out with the letter, destroying it on his way out.

“Wait, it’s already this late. Are you going to your work again?” Amy asked, worriedly.

“Nope, I need to return something to someone.” Gary replied and shut the door.

It was time for him to hunt.