

Trouble at the Border

Ella

Webpage unavailable until you connect to the Internet

I sigh. This is highly annoying. I am trying to do an internet search on the word 'Lycan', and it just won't work. I guess that the network I am on didn't have many masts in an area this rural. I have never had this problem in London. You could get a perfect signal just about everywhere you went. I just knew that I had heard the word Lycan before, but I just couldn't remember where. Why didn't this school have WiFi like everywhere else? I sigh again and chuck my phone onto my bedside table and sit on the side of my bed for a minute or so, wondering what to do.

I decide to go for a run. I can see the September sun still beaming happily across the grounds through the window, and it all looks so inviting. I check my watch; it is an hour or so until dinner, so this would probably be a good time to go. Running felt good, it burned off the delicious food I enjoyed so much, and it was one thing I was naturally incredibly good at without really having to try.

I put on my black running shorts with a white tank top and slip on my running trainers before heading out the door.

I make my way through the atrium and out the front of the school before I start jogging down the winding road that my dad had driven me down only yesterday.

I didn't know the grounds at all, so I knew I'd be taking some rather random routes to begin with. I increase my pace, feeling my heart rate pick up, and any insecurities I had about starting here in this new place soon begin to melt away under the warm sun.

Before long, I can't see the building anymore as I run along a beaten track through rows of tall trees. I wasn't used to running on natural, uneven ground before, as usually it was tarmac. The wind gently rustles the leaves of the trees as I pass, and I feel so calm and renewed. I denitely needed this after my strange, rst day. Running along the Thames or through Regents Park was great back in London, but being in the countryside now was literally a breath of fresh air. I increase my speed, marveling at how effortless it is to run faster and faster. Who knew country air was this good? I don't think I could run this fast or as easily back in London.

I come to a section of river and decide to stop for a moment. I am not even out of breath, which I did nd a little strange. I close my eyes and enjoy the feeling of the sun on my face, taking in the sounds of nature all around me. The leaves are rustling, birds are tweeting at each other in the nearby trees, and water ows down the river. It all sounds so natural and so peaceful. I stand there for a few minutes with a little smile on my face, enjoying the relative silence.

I feel great. More alive than I had ever felt.

The silence is suddenly pierced by a deep, throaty growl that snaps me back to my other senses. I look around wildly with my heart pounding away in my chest, and it takes a few seconds for me to see it. There, across the river and partially obscured by the long grass, is a large, monstrous-looking wolf. My blood immediately runs cold. I'd seen enough depictions around the school within the last day or so to see that this was denitely not some random stray dog and most denitely a wolf. It growls at me again and pads forward a few feet. I freeze, and I wonder momentarily if wolves can swim, or even whether it can easily jump several feet across the river.

It continues to stare at me, revealing its yellow teeth and its manky black hair bristling up across its back. Were its eyes red or was that just a trick of the sunlight? Something about it is giving me a very bad feeling, and I am about to turn and run when I hear an even deeper growl coming from behind me. I remain frozen in place...I am surrounded.

I take in a shuddering breath as I hear the second wolf approach me from behind. Its paws crunch over the fallen leaves and I slowly look to my left as it draws level with me, now only a couple of feet away. I take another shuddering breath in, my head swimming as I regard this second wolf in horror; this wolf is huge.

Despite it's much larger size, it couldn't look more different than the rst. Its coat is a rich, glossy hazelnut colour, and it was at least double the size of the manky black one. Far bigger than I thought a wolf could ever be. It turns its head and looks right into my eyes and almost immediately, I bizarrely feel safe. My anxiety fades away immediately as I stare back into its piercing green eyes. In fact, as bizarre as the notion seems, it makes me feel calmer the closer it gets to me. I know, instinctively, somehow...that this wolf is here to protect me, and that it means no harm to me at all. I feel my heart rate dropping and my focus returns while I stare into the eyes of this much bigger wolf. Something about it seems familiar, and I feel very peculiar along with highly confused. I am not sure what is going on, but I feel so comfortable around the wolf that I almost want to go up and stroke its glossy fur.

I whip my head back around as more growls sound from various other directions across the river. Two more manky wolves skulk into view.

As curious as this situation is becoming, I know that I really need to run away from these wolves as quickly as possible. I turn and begin to run as fast as I can, back in the direction of the school. I force myself to run faster and faster as I hear a rapid thunder of movement, snapping jaws and numerous vicious growls. I hear distant yelping and the sound of various pounding paws as I increase my speed more and more. I was denitely being chased, but at the same time, I think I can also hear them ghting as I pick up my speed even more, almost gliding through the grass. I run into the open eld and I keep going, not once daring to look behind me. With relief, I can see the vast collection of buildings of the school campus in the distance. Despite the strange sounds going on behind me, I still don't look back, and I don't stop running until I get to the now deserted patio outside the main hall where I'd been sat at lunchtime. I immediately turn to look back across the sports eld in dread, hoping they hadn't followed me all the way back to school.

I only see my protector, standing on the eld only about twenty metres away. I breathe hard, locked in eye contact with the hazelnut wolf once again for at least half a minute.

Why did I feel so at ease toward it?

It looked like it could easily tear me in half within a split second, if it wanted to.

Suddenly, it turns and lopes away. I come to my senses once again and decide that it is high time I got back inside the building to absolute safety.

I hurry inside and go straight back to my room.

"Whoa, Ella are you okay?" Freya asks with concern as I burst through the door, watching me lean against the door once I've closed it, promptly sinking to the oor. The adrenaline I had felt had just worn off, and now I feel shaky and exhausted as I breathe in deeply for a few moments. I look up at her and note her concerned expression.

"Yeah, I am now. I just went for a run around the grounds and I ran into a big black wolf with like...red eyes. Actually, there were several of them...of the black wolves, I mean. But there was this other wolf that came from behind me, this even bigger, hazelnut brown wolf with green eyes...and...wow, I know it sounds so ridiculous to say this out loud, but it seemed to be...protecting me or something. But I felt so weird around it, like it was a friend or something. It was just so weird." I blurt out nervously, as saying it all out loud seemed even crazier than it seemed in my head earlier, "is there a huge domesticated wolf-like dog that lives here at the school?"

To my great surprise, Freya's expression doesn't portray any shock at the news of there being wolves within the grounds. She just sits there frowning for a moment, before looking at me curiously like a puzzle once again. Does this sort of thing happen often out here in the countryside? Perhaps this was a common occurrence?

"Did they chase you?" she suddenly asks, her eyebrows raised. Why did that matter?

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure they did. I could hear them behind me at rst, but I think they fought, and the bigger brown one followed me back toward the school. Then it just left once I got to the patio," I reply with a shrug. She looks pensive, and so I continue, "I guess there must be a big wild wolf population around here, I mean why else are wolves featured on literally all the artwork around the school and on the school logo?"

I shrug again with an awkward laugh, grabbing a towel and some clothes before heading into the bathroom to wash and change for dinner.

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Freya

As soon as Ella shuts the bathroom door, I grab my phone. It sounded like Ella had encountered not one, but several rogue wolves. One was not unheard of at all, but several were a little bit concerning. It was clear from her description of her 'protector' that Austin had been out on patrol; Ella had just encountered Atlas. I was very surprised to hear she wasn't afraid of him, but moreso that she was chased and managed to run away.

Me: AUS? Rogues?!

I wait a few minutes for a reply. He was probably nowhere near his phone right now...hopefully cleaning up the mess he had left.

My phone chirps back a little sooner than I'd expected.

Austin: is your roommate okay?

Me: Yeah, she's ne. What happened? She said she went for a run, and it sounds like she bumped into several rogues?!!

Austin: yeah she did. There were four at the north border by the river. I was thankfully doing Ollie's patrol for him when I found them. I got there just in time.

Me: did you deal with them?

Austin: do you even need to ask? Of course. Dom has just headed out to clean up. It was very weird though.

Me: weird?

Austin: Yeah. Your roommate is ridiculously fast. Abnormally fast. She easily outran them...and she also outran Atlas. He was shocked to say the least...

I frown and read his last message again in absolute disbelief. Even fast humans couldn't run faster than an omega Lycan, let alone an alpha.

The bathroom door suddenly opens and Ella wanders out. She continues to innocently dry her long blonde hair as I watch her curiously.

Something is denitely off about this one. She randomly healed from a knife cut this morning, and humans have NEVER outrun a Lycan. Lycans in human form can't outrun a Lycan. And more importantly, no one outruns an alpha. Mira says to me.

Mira was right. Ella really didn't seem to be the garden-variety human I'd initially thought she was, that much was becoming clear. But if she wasn't wolf, witch, elf or anything else that I recognised, what was she? Why could she see the wolf artwork around the school? The enchantments were meant to hide all that from humans...

She brushes her long blonde hair and hums to herself softly. Whatever her deal was, she was nice, down-to-earth, easy to get along with...and even though it had only been a day or so, I was already quite fond of her.

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Austin

After a long day of classes, it was a welcome relief to shift into Atlas and quite literally take a backseat for a while. Ollie couldn't make his patrol at the last minute, so I happily offered to ll in for him. There had apparently been more local sightings of rogues recently, so it denitely needed to be done.

Rogue wolves were wolves who had been banished from other packs, or for whatever reason, simply didn't belong to any pack in particular; something bizarre for any wolf, as to belong to a pack was something written into our DNA. This made them potentially dangerous, as they could very much be 'for hire' to other 'supes' needing wolf strength for many nefarious purposes. Their human counterparts lived as such. They didn't often have xed abodes or any form of normal employment. They weren't particularly strong or anything, but they were unpredictable, lacked morals and could be very ruthless. You were only as strong as the pack you belonged to, so generally most of them could be easily dealt with by the higher-ranked sixth-formers at the school.

Atlas thoroughly enjoys being able to stretch his legs, darting in and out of the woodlands around the edge of the school boundary and hunting down several rabbits. This was one of the things I enjoyed least about when we were in his form; feeling Atlas chomp down on rabbits, feeling their bones crunching beneath his powerful teeth. But, he had to live through a lot of the strange things I did as a human, so I kept quiet about it.

Atlas suddenly stops and sniffs...and then sniffs again.

Someone is nearby, by the river. One of the humans, he says, now trotting toward the river, still sning the air with a rabbit between his jaws.

Why would any human be out this far? I ask. Atlas continues to sniff and then moves with sudden urgency, dropping the dead rabbit on the ground. I could smell them now too.

Rogues. Several. I can smell them, and they're near the human! Atlas announces as he charges quickly toward their ominous odour.

We run into a clearing by the river at the north border and, sure enough, there was a human. With a slight panic and sense of dread, I realise it wasn't just any human, it was Freya's new roommate. Her scent is much stronger to us now that we are in Lycan form, and I recognise it immediately. I could smell a denite edge to her scent, there was something very different. It was so unusual, something owery and warm. But without her unusual scent I'd have recognised that light blonde hair anywhere, there was nobody else at school who looked like her. I can hear her heartbeat, and it tells me that she is terried...but she isn't moving, clearly frozen in fear. I doubt our presence is going to help with that, but we have a job to do right now and that is to deal with the rogues and protect a fellow student.

We growl toward the rogue across the river, announcing our presence and intention to defend our border. I sense Ella's initial increase in fear as she realises she is surrounded. This is really not an ideal situation for a human to be involved in, and we need to handle it carefully. It is strange because rogues would usually avoid humans at all cost...so why now? Why Ella?

Atlas pads deliberately alongside her, to make it clear she is under our protection. She looks toward us and we in turn look toward her. As our eyes connect, her heartbeat bizarrely starts to decrease, and she begins to relax, as if she somehow knows we mean her no harm. But that wasn't possible...or was it? I was perplexed, but now was not the time to contemplate much else. We growl again, louder this time as three more rogues now appear across the lake.

Crap, this is not what we need right now. We can deal with four quite easily, but how are we going to do it without her getting caught up in it all? I say to Atlas, beginning to get very concerned. She needs to be moving already, but she is still standing there.

She needs to run. She should've run already. WHY isn't she running? Atlas growls internally.

As if she somehow hears us, Ella suddenly turns around and begins to run back in the direction of the school. I feel a short moment of relief before the rogues immediately pounce effortlessly over the river and tear off after her.

But...they are no match for Atlas.

We take out the slower two quickly and easily with Atlas' deadly and ecient jaws, hearing their pained howls behind us as they succumb to the deep wounds we have swiftly incited on their necks.

Austin, look at the human, Atlas suddenly says, sounding rather surprised.

How on earth is she so far ahead? I ask as we jump on the third rogue and bite it swiftly with our strong jaws.

We run faster to catch up to the fourth, who, to my absolute disbelief, still hasn't managed to keep up with Ella at all. The fourth is slain as easily as the other three and our job is done. It shouldn't have been this easy with a human involved, but no normal human would have ever outrun a group of rogues the way she just has. She hadn't looked back even once the entire time, which was probably a good thing.

I'm quite curious now... Atlas says, suddenly picking up speed more and more.

What are you doing, Atlas? Slow down, we don't want to scare her more than she is already! I exclaim as Atlas ramps up his pace to follow Ella.

In case you're not noticing this Austin, this human...we cannot match her speed. She is much faster than we are, Atlas says in disbelief.

WHAT? How is that even possible? I ask, heavily confused.

We stop in the grass about twenty metres from the patio. Ella stops on the patio, and she quickly turns around to look straight at us, her expression one of curiosity rather than fear. We stare back, now equally curious about her as she is about us.

She's barely broken a sweat. Check her heart rate, her respiratory rate...something isn't right with this girl. She appears ter and faster than an Olympic athlete...and then some! Atlas says, sounding suspicious.

There is denitely something very unusual about her. That's for sure, I agree.

We maintain eye contact for a few more seconds before we turn and lope away to where I'd hidden my clothes, in my usual spot in an old stone gazebo. I needed to go check in with my grandfather, knowing he'd want to hear about all of this.

I enter the atrium from the front entrance, dressed once again in my jeans and long-sleeved t-shirt. I go over to the lift by the reception desk and press the button, getting into the lift that leads to the top of one of the four turrets around the school. This was where my grandfather's oce was, and where he lived while at school.

I knock on my grandfather's door and wait, feeling my phone vibrating in my pocket. I look at the screen.

Freya: AUS? Rogues?!

I frown. Ella had clearly gone back to her room and immediately spoken to Freya about her furry encounter, not that I could blame her.

"Come in, my dear boy." I hear my grandfather say from within his oce. I smirk to myself, wondering how tall I needed to get for him to stop referring to me as 'my dear boy'.

"Afternoon Pa, how's things?" I ask, casually plonking myself into one of the chairs opposite his desk.

"Wonderful. The sun is warm, the grass has become surprisingly lush. Arcane actually enjoyed a plod outside earlier, which is unusual for him in our old age," he replies with a smile.

"That's kind of why I'm here...I was just on patrol and encountered four rogues on the north border. I thought I should let you know," I reply, dding with a hole in my sleeve.

"Four? That is an unusually high number," he says, now looking deep in thought, "I assume you've taken care of them?"

"Of course," I reply a little indignantly, with a slight eye roll. I took my duties very seriously.

"All cleaned up?" he then asks, looking at me with a c****d brow.

Oh...

This was denitely the rst time I had forgotten something rather crucial. My brain was a little muddled, it seemed.

"Ah..." I exclaim, pulling my phone out of my pocket and shooting a hasty message to one of our gampas, Dominic. My grandfather smirks at my unusual disorganisation. He knew I was better than that.

"Why are you really up here, Austin? What has made you forget a process you are usually quite adept at?"

I smile; he never missed a beat, even in his advanced age.

"Freya has a new roommate."

"Well...that was bound to happen after last year's incident," he replies with a chuckle.

"Sure, but she's...different," I reply frowning a little.

"Humans are humans, Austin. We can't simply say they're different, just because they're human. I am a little disappointed, you should be more accepting-" he begins to say curtly. I cut him off immediately. That wasn't what I was suggesting at all.

"-NO, Pa; I don't care that she's human. But...is she? She was right by the four rogues. When she ran, that's when they decided to attack and, naturally, Atlas and I took care of them. But...she outran the rogues. Easily," I exclaim, still not believing what I'd witnessed. His eyebrows rise sharply.

"That is unusual," he agrees. I now take a breath in.

"...and then, at our full speed, she outran Atlas too," I conclude. His eyes widen abruptly in great surprise, but then narrow as he processes what I have said. I shrug at him.

"She doesn't smell totally human either. She smells...warm and owery...like a meadow on a summer's day or something," I mutter. My cheeks turn pink as my grandfather looks at me suddenly with a strange curiosity.

"That's an interesting assessment. I'll look into her a bit more and see what I can nd out," he says, getting up and staring curiously at a few bottles of drink in a cabinet behind his desk. I get up and leave, taking my phone out of my pocket to message Freya back.