The Other Landry

Ella

It had been a few days since my encounter with the wolves, and thankfully nothing else had happened. I'd managed to go for a run again midweek without any incident, and I was feeling more and more at home here at my new school. Other than my somewhat dramatic rst day, nothing unusual had happened...but something still felt a bit strange about the school. I was enjoying it, and I was very thankful that I had two friends already, but I still felt like I was on the outside, looking in.

It was now late afternoon on Friday, and I was getting ready for another run. Something about this place made me want to go out far more than I used to back home, and it likely had something to do with the vast, beautiful grounds. I change into my running clothes and head out, thankful that the weather had been warm and sunny all week, so there was no chance of mud or puddles.

I run toward a fairly large pond around the back of the school and start to make my way around it past a delightful looking swing bench and some large and rather colourful hydrangea bushes. The grounds here were stunning, and I felt really blessed and content to be here. I once again started losing myself in the sensory wonderland around me; the scents, the sounds and the colours. There was no distant and constant roar of trac and honking of horns like I was so used to, back in London.

I am running underneath a rather large willow tree when my foot suddenly catches a large tree root that I had apparently not noticed on the path ahead. I fall forwards very hard due to the speed I was running, instinctively throwing my arms out in front of me, my palms and knees hitting the oor quite roughly as I slide forwards a few feet in the dirt.

Perfect, just...perfect.

I groan loudly as I study my palms in front of me. My palms and my knees feel very sore. After a second or two, I am distracted from the pain as I feel two strong hands gently lift me up from under my armpits, helping me get back to standing. I know I don't weigh much, but I am surprised anyone could have done that so smoothly.

I turn around and promptly gasp louder than I would've ever wanted, as I am now face to face with Freya's older brother Austin, wearing workout gear himself.

I instinctively look him up and down, unable to stop myself from taking in the sight of his toned arms and the subtle outline of his pectoral muscles through his dark green tank top.

The sight of him in front of me, causes some interesting things to happen to me that hadn't happened before. My mouth goes dry, my heart rate kicks into gear and I feel a hot ush appear across my cheeks, feeling an entirely new level of shy as I stand there looking at him. I swallow hard, and I look up into his piercing green eyes, once again feeling a strange jolt in my stomach as I do so, just like Monday lunchtime on the patio.

After a few seconds, I pull myself together and realise that I REALLY need to stop staring at him like this and actually say something.

"Thank you," I manage to say, albeit a little fast, but at least I was now appearing a little more normal. Maybe he was used to girls acting this scatty around him? I had heard enough from Freya in the past few days to know that he was not short on female admirers...possibly some male ones too.

"It was no problem," he replies, a slight smile appearing on his handsome face, "have you always been this clumsy or is this a new thing you're trying?"

His voice is deep and disarming, and a warm and genuine smile is now spreading across his face the longer he looks at me.

Oh wow, what a smile...

I stare at him again, feeling more than a little ustered. If anything, my legs do feel a little weak with the way he is looking at me...a cliché I wouldn't have ever guessed could actually be true. Yet here I am, steadily being turned to goo, just by a smile...

It's just hormones Ella, it's just a guy, you've seen them before. Get a grip! I think to myself. It takes a few seconds for me to register that he has actually asked me a question.

"No I, umm," I clear my throat, "I tripped over a tree root."

I gesture behind him...except where we both look right now, there is just at ground down the length of the path....not a single tree root in sight.

Huh...then what the heck did I trip on? I frown, now feeling a little stupid. He turns back to look at me with an amused expression and I bite my lip as I stare back up at him.

"Yeah, it looks pretty hazardous down that clear path," he jokes, still grinning down at me. His smile is so charming and something about him makes me feel so incredibly calm and comfortable, and yet utterly tumultuous all at the same time. I look away and tuck some hair behind my ear, once again feeling rather shy. I was not used to talking to guys at all, and denitely not guys who looked like him.

"Apologies, I should really introduce myself; I'm Austin, Freya's older brother," he says, holding out a hand. I smile a little at his odd formality, taking his hand and giving it a rm shake.

"I'm Ella, Freya's roommate, but I guess you already know that," I manage to say. He clearly knew that I knew who Freya was, so it was a fair deduction.

"Yeah, she's mentioned you a number of times this week. She's quite pleased to have a nice, normal person for a roommate," he says with a light chuckle. He looks like he is concentrating on something for a few moments and then looks up at me again.

"Do you fancy a running buddy? Just in case there are more tree roots and possibly a few errant twigs, that I may need to save you from?" he suggests with one of his thick eyebrows now c****d a little mischievously. I feel a little surprised at this offer, but something within me is nudging me to spend more time in his presence, even though I feel like a bit of an anxious mess right now.

"Sure...I mean....if you think you can keep up? I'm pretty fast..." I offer a little more cheekily than I'd intended, perhaps feeling a little bolder after his suggestion. I know I will have to slow my pace down for him. I turn around and start to run again. I can hear him following behind as we run past the pond entirely and out toward some woodland. He runs alongside me for a few moments and then starts to overtake me. He turns his head toward me and shoots me a quick grin...and I let out a laugh.

Oh, boy you have NO chance, I think to myself.

With the sun warming my face, I pick up my speed as we run toward another large, beautiful willow tree by yet another clump of trees. Faster and faster I run, now leaving Austin far behind. Just like the other day, running feels effortless as I swiftly run down a thankfully unobstructed path. Getting away from the smoggy air of London had clearly had its advantages. I was running faster than I ever had before, and I felt simply terric.

I reach an old stone gazebo that has partially surrendered to another large willow tree, and I decide to stop inside of it. I turn to look back and see Austin about twenty metres behind me. He soon comes running to a stop next to me, his hands on his knees as he leans forward, trying to get his breath back. He stands about a foot or two away from me, breathing heavily. His expression is rather perplexed; had he not encountered a faster runner before?

"You...are...seriously...fast," he manages to say. He mops his face with his t-shirt, revealing a set of bronzed abs for a second or two. My eyes widen like dinner plates before I quickly avert them, my heart beating a little faster once again. He was denitely having more of an effect on me than I wanted. This is my roommate's brother, and Freya had been pretty clear to me about avoiding him.

Still, there was no rule against just talking to the guy...surely?

"Well...I should probably be honest and tell you that I hold several, national, long distance running titles for girls under eighteen, and I am also the current, national record holder for the one-hundred-metre sprint for girls under eighteen," I explain proudly, "so...yes I am pretty fast. Unusually, I can handle both sprinting and long-distance running. But, since coming here, I feel faster than ever. I guess country air really is better than London air."

I lean back against one of the pillars with my arms behind me, now worried that I had sounded a bit full of myself. His breathing has now returned to normal, and he is looking at me with a keen interest.

"So...what brought the girl out of the big city and down south to the countryside?" he asks, now leaning back against one of the pillars of the gazebo too, his strong arms folded across his chest. I swallow hard and concentrate on his question rather than how visually appealing I am nding him right now, opting to look up into the canopy of the willow tree instead.

"I don't know, it sounds pretty corny, but I just knew I needed to get away from the city for a change and get out into the countryside. Any time I ran in Regents Park I just found myself wanting more of nature and less of the grey concrete and tarmac," I said, shrugging a little, "I started looking at schools in this county as I was born not too far away from here. Exton just kinda called to me and I just...well, I couldn't ignore it."

He leans down a little and looks right into my eyes. It feels a little intense.

"Well...you denitely came to the right place," he replies softly in a very assured way. We stare at each other in a comfortable silence for a moment.

"Uhh, plus the sciences are pretty well reviewed here, so that was a pretty big draw for me. I'm taking biology, chemistry, physics and psychology."

He nods, his expression indicating he was impressed with what I was taking.

"Science is one of many academic areas that this school excels in," Austin replies. I scoff a little; of course he would think that, his family owned the school.

"What do you study?" I ask curiously. He laughs awkwardly before responding.

"Two different law subjects, economics, sociology, politics and international relations," he lists. My eyebrows rise as I count how many he was taking.

"You study six college classes? They sound fairly hefty too," I remark. Was he smart as well as handsome?

"Yeah, I'm kept pretty busy," he agrees with a slight frown. He almost sounds like he had no choice in the matter.

"What are you hoping to do: run a small country?" I joke. He lets out a short laugh at my comment and looks intensely into my eyes once more.

"Something like that," he replies, looking down at the ground with his eyebrows raised, "so...are you thinking of going to the winter formal?"

He looks back up at me from beneath his thick brows. I nod with a slight shrug.

"Yeah, uhh, your sister is taking Annabelle and I shopping tomorrow, so I'll probably nd something to wear then, even though it's still two months away. It's actually on the same day as my birthday, so that'll be quite nice," I reply. He raises his eyebrows in surprise. Then he looks a little playful as he speaks again.

"Well, in that case, I have a proposition for you," he says, taking a step forward and reaching toward me to casually tuck some of my hair back behind my ear. I feel my cheeks burn and my heart races again at this tender but rather forward gesture, from someone I have only just met. I force myself to look up at him as a smile creeps across his handsome face. I can't help but smile back at him at this point, as his smile is utterly infectious.

"What kind of proposition?" I ask meekly, my heart thundering in my chest at the way he is smiling down at me. He bites his bottom lip for a moment before responding.

"Let's race back to school. If I win, you have to dance with me at the formal. But...if you win, you...well...you still have to dance with me at the formal," he says with a sly smirk appearing once again.

Oh my word, did he really just say that?

To me?

My heart races a little at the idea, once again. Had I actually hit my head when I tripped up? I must've done, because it seems a little like he is irting with me. I was not entirely sure, but it kind of seemed like it.

"Wow, I mean, what can I say to those two incredibly different outcomes?" I joke back with an awkward laugh. He nods and looks very serious.

"Exactly, and I think that both are quite reasonable," he replies before biting his lip again, "okay, maybe you're right...so, a proposition adjustment. If I win, I get to formally encourage everyone to wish you happy birthday at the formal. I'm thinking I should denitely involve the DJ, maybe get them to play Happy Birthday? Get the kitchen staff that I know to make you a big fancy cake..."

I laugh at this idea. A public and embarrassing birthday greeting or a dance with a very handsome guy?

I knew which one I'd be picking, it was a no brainer...and apparently that was the point. A dance wouldn't be that bad, would it? Freya couldn't have an issue with an innocent dance...especially one that had essentially been requested by her brother.

"Well," I begin slowly, "there is denitely a Sophie's Choice situation going on here-" and then I immediately run off back toward the school.

"I look forward to our dance!" I hear him call after me, far, far behind.

...

Austin

Ollie had just kicked my ass in the gym with another grueling weight workout, when I see Freya's roommate skipping down the stairs in her running gear. I had made eye contact with her around the school a few times this week, and I wondered how she had found her rst week here; particularly after the rogue incident.

We should follow her, in case there are more rogues, Atlas interjects.

Ha, sure thing, but are you sure it's not that you want me to follow her because you're interested in why she can run so fast? Specically...faster than you? I reply.

Just do as I say, Atlas responds curtly.

I do as Atlas suggests and I run behind her, keeping an appropriate distance. I didn't really want her to notice me...or did I? I had to admit I was a little curious about her too. Something about her had piqued my curiosity along with Atlas.

She is running past one of the willow trees around the pond when she suddenly trips over something, falling forwards quite roughly onto the dirt path.

Crap...it looked like it could have really hurt her. I quickly catch up to her and gently cup my hands underneath her armpits, pulling her upwards until she nds her footing. She is very light, so it is no trouble at all. She turns around and looks up at me, a little gasp escaping her, suddenly looking rather shy. I can hear her heart beat increase a little as her eyes quickly travel up and down the length of me, before she nally looks up into my face.

She is so shy, and it is oddly endearing when I think about how forward and ferocious all the she-wolves were around here in comparison.

She thanks me, and I make a quip about her being clumsy, since there was clearly nothing she could've tripped up on along her route. I realise we have never been formally introduced, given that for our rst meeting I was actually as Atlas', not that she'd ever be able to know that.

"Apologies, I should really introduce myself; I'm Austin, Freya's older brother," I say, holding my hand out politely. A little smile appears on her face before she takes my hand and gives it a shake; I am glad to see that she enjoyed the gesture, or at least found it amusing.

"I'm Ella, Freya's roommate, but I guess you already know that," she replies.

"Yeah, she's mentioned you a number of times this week. She's quite pleased to have a nice, normal person for a roommate."

I probably shouldn't have used the term 'normal' in front of her.

Ask if she's happy for you to join her on the rest of her run, Atlas promptly says in my mind.

You are like a dog with a bone, I retort.

Woof woof, Atlas jokes, something he didn't do often.

"Do you fancy a running buddy? You know...in case there are more tree roots or an errant twig, that I may need to save you from," I joke, feeling strangely eager to know more about her.

"Sure... I mean if you think you can keep up? I'm pretty fast," she replies. So, she knows she is fast, but that doesn't stop her from leaping into a sprint without warning, in order to get ahead of me. It was time to see if Atlas was just being slow the other day.

She is soon running very fast, but I also knew I could be faster, so I pick up my pace as we both head out into the open eld. Soon, I am overtaking her.

Perhaps she simply had an adrenaline rush the other day, Atlas muses, sounding slightly disappointed, if anything.

Maybe. This is still pretty damn fast for a human, though, I reply, starting to feel a little fatigued already.

But then, a second later, something behind me piques my supernatural sense, putting my wolf senses on high alert...like some sort of crackle of energy.

Within seconds, she has overtaken me again, her long blonde plait swaying side to side as she sprints past. Her running looks so effortless and so natural to her. Her heartbeat sure didn't sound like someone who was denitely running faster than Usain Bolt. Being downwind of her now, she smells less human than the other day. Denitely something owery, natural, and...did sunlight have a smell?

She stops up ahead in the familiar, old stone gazebo, and seems quite surprised at how far ahead of me she had gotten. I come to a stop and begin to catch my breath, noticing that she isn't breathless in the slightest. That in itself, is quite bizarre.

"You...are...seriously...fast," I manage to say, mopping some sweat from my face with my tank top.

She promptly explains to me that she is some sort of national running prodigy in the category of girls under eighteen. She leans up against one of the pillars, suddenly looking a little awkward about what she has just told me.

I'd be happy to hold awards, she has every right to be impressed with herself, I say to Atlas.

"So, what brought the girl out of the big city and down south to the countryside?" I ask casually, leaning against one of the pillars myself and crossing my arms.

"I don't know, it sounds pretty corny, but I just knew I needed to get away from the city for a change and get out into the countryside. Any time I ran in Regents Park, I just found myself wanting more of nature and less of the grey concrete and tarmac," she replies, shrugging her shoulders a little, "I started looking at schools in this county as I was born not too far away from here. Exton just kinda called to me and I just...well, I couldn't ignore it."

Neat, she was born around here. I felt sad for her, that her parents had moved her to a concrete paradise instead of staying around here. She could've come to this school for years now, if they hadn't moved.

"Well... you denitely came to the right place," I say evenly. She looks up at me with her bright blue eyes and a slight smile on her face. We don't say anything for a few moments. She seems to wake herself up a little and continues to talk about why she came here.

"Uhh, plus the sciences are pretty well reviewed here, so that was the biggest draw for me. I'm taking biology, chemistry, physics and psychology."

Beauty and brains? Not a combination we often come across, Atlas jokes.

"Science is one of many academic areas that this school excels in," I reply truthfully. I think I see her eyes roll slightly for a moment; I probably sound like the school prospectus.

"What do you study?" she now asks, eyeing me curiously. I laugh nervously for a moment, wondering how she will react to hearing that I am taking six classes instead of the usual three or four.

"Two different law subjects, economics, sociology, politics and international relations," I reveal. Her eyebrows shoot up in surprise.

"You study six college-level classes? They sound fairly hefty too," she says, looking a little appalled.

"Yeah, I'm kept pretty busy," I reply with a sigh and a slight frown.

Too busy, really, I should be doing those reports right now, I comment inwardly.

Those boring reports can wait, this is much more interesting, Atlas growls back.

"What are you hoping to do: run a small country?" she jokes. I reply with a short chuckle...if only she knew. But she wouldn't ever know about our Lycan community here, or about our vast supernatural world, even though she didn't really seem like she was entirely human. I am briey surprised to feel a little downhearted about the fact; that she will never really know me at all. Not the real me.

"Something like that," I reply, somewhat truthfully, looking down at the ground.

"So...are you thinking of going to the winter formal?" I then ask.

"Yeah, uhh, your sister is taking Annabelle and I shopping tomorrow, so I'll probably nd something to wear then, even though it's still two months away. It's actually on the same day as my birthday, so that'll be fun," she replies brightly.

"Oh really? Well in that case, I have a proposition for you," I say, casually reaching out and tucking her hair back behind her ear. I am really not sure why I have just done that...but then I immediately wonder how she has taken it. I am relieved and oddly satised when her heart rate increases and a ush appears across her cheeks. She smiles broadly at me this time and I feel a pleasant warmth ll my chest as she does so.

Why do I nd her so interesting? She's just a normal human girl, and yet...I want to know more about her. Lots more, I admit to Atlas.

She doesn't seem human. It's not completely tangible, but it's there. The longer we stand here, the more intrigued I am. But I'm not sure WHAT she is. Atlas replies.

It was nice to know Atlas and I were on the same page, particularly as he apparently hadn't been when it had come to Ava.

She's denitely VERY positively affected by us. Well, your human form anyway. Her autonomic respondes clearly suggests she nds you rather visually appealing, Atlas growls proudly. As clinical as Atlas just made that sound, I feel myself smile a little more.

"What do you propose?" she nally asks. I bite my lip a little and decided to be bold again.

"Let's race back to school. If I win, you have to dance with me at the formal. But, if you win, you...well, you still have to dance with me at the formal," I reply with a little smirk on my face, earning another utter of her heart. Her immediate expression is a little amusing. She clearly wasn't used to someone irting with her and I really liked that. It was refreshing.

"Wow, I mean what can I say to those two incredibly different outcomes?" she jokes.

"Exactly, I think they're quite reasonable," I reply.

"Okay, maybe you're right...a proposition adjustment. If I win, I get to formally encourage everyone to wish you happy birthday at the formal. I'm thinking I should denitely involve the DJ, maybe to play Happy Birthday? Get the kitchen staff that I know to make you a big fancy cake..."

Interesting. This is an unusually bold move for you, remarks Atlas.

What a choice. She denitely wasn't the type to want a public 'happy birthday' and we both know she was going to beat me back to the school, unless she purposefully went slower. Looks like a dance could be on the cards...

"Well," she begins slowly, "denitely a Sophie's Choice situation going on here-" and then she suddenly turns and dashes off toward the school.

"I look forward to our dance!" I call after her, not even bothering to move.

I just stand there with an intrigued smile on my face, watching her sprint off across the grass. All I can think about now, is when I would get to talk to her again, a feeling and thought that I am quite surprised about.

Now who is curious? I thought you weren't interested in any girl aside from your potential mate? You have been very forward with her and I'm very surprised, particularly where as far as we know, she is human...therefore off limits, Atlas postulates.

I don't know Atlas, I can't explain it, I'm surprised too, I admit truthfully.

Besides, you were the one who told me to follow her, remember?

Fair point, Atlas says calmly.

I begin walking back to the school, treading on curious clumps of tiny, blue forget-me-nots as I go.