Lie To The Officer

Colton woke up first.

Half an hour after the sun sunk below the horizon, he groaned and blinked at me, looking confused for a moment, until he moved and winced, once again reminded of what had happened.

“Is Lux—?”

I shook my head, trying to smother my worry. “Not yet.”

He sat up a little straighter, careful to keep his side still. “I feel disgusting.”

I turned and looked at him, smiling. His hair was ruffled and his left side was caked in dried blood. His skin wasn’t as pale as before but it was missing its usual healthy hue.

“You don’t look too great,” I told him. “How’s it healing?”

Colton looked down at his wound, frowning a bit. “Slowly.”

“There might have been some wolfsbane on the bullet,” I said. “It was a good thing we got it out fast before it spread through your system.”

Colton grunted. “That would’ve sucked.”

He was silent for a few moments but then a smile graced his face. Soon the smile grew to a grin and then he was laughing, clutching his side, half in pain and half in good humor.

“What’s funny?” I asked, shooting a glance at Lux. I wondered if the noise in the car would wake her up. I hoped it would.

Colton covered his eyes, still chuckling. “I was shot.”

I raised an eyebrow. “That’s not really funny.”

Another round of laughter hit him. “It is though. I mean, I did something to help somebody else. I helped you save Lux. I was brave.”

I peeked over at him, wondering just how much that meant to him. “You did,” I agreed.

He looked at me. “My mother is going to be pissed I’m hurt, but I think she’ll be proud when she finds out why.” He was silent after that, likely thinking over his words.

“I’m worried about Lux,” I admitted quietly. “Shouldn’t she be up by now?”

Colton shrugged. “I don’t know. She was hit over the head pretty hard, and before that, she suffered two traumatic events: separating from you, then being attacked.”

Guilt made me heavy. “I guess you’re right.”

Colton swore. “What I’m wondering is, how are we supposed to get the blood out of the car seat? We might have to reconsider getting the entire interior reupholstered and cleaned.”

“I don’t really think it matt—” I fell silent as red and blue lights started following us down the road.

I drove slowly, trying not to draw any unwanted attention. Colton noticed too and turned to look over his shoulder.

“If we get pulled over, we’re done.”

I looked from the blood all over him to the unconscious girl in the back seat and nodded. “You’re right,” I told him. “There’s not a lie in the world that can explain this.”

“Just drive carefully,” Colton instructed as the police car cruised closer. “They’ll have no reason to stop us.”

I sighed. “Yes, they do. We don’t have New Jersey plates.”

“So?”

“In war, people are suspicious.”

Unfortunately, the police officer behind us was one of those people.

He drove up behind us, honked his horn, and the lights on the top of the cruiser flooded our car with swirling patterns of red and blue.

“Shit,” Colton swore, leaning his head back on the rest of his seat. “What do we do?”

I had difficulty swallowing as my throat was so dry. “We lie.”

A moment later, the officer tapped on the glass. “License, registration, and identification, please.” The officer scribbled something on his notepad before leaning down and looking in the car.

When he did, he nearly fell over.

“Officer,” I said quickly. “We’re coming from the attack a few miles away. My friend dropped his gun and one of those filthy mutts picked it up and used it against him.

“Can you imagine that? They already got claws and fangs and they have to use our weapons?”

The officer stared at Colton. “Jeez, are you okay?”

Colton winced, voice shaking. “Hanging in.”

“Who’s that?” the officer asked, pointing to Lux.

I lied quickly. “Another person from the raid. She passed out a while ago.”

“You’re driving awfully slow for someone rushing to the hospital,” the officer said.

“We didn’t want to get pulled over. We figured that it would take longer than doing the limit.” I watched the cop’s face from the corner of my eye, hoping that he would take the bait and let us go.

“And your plates?” The cop’s eyes moved to Colton again and stopped. Suddenly, he stood before I had an opportunity to reply. “Let me check a few things and I’ll get back to you. Wait here.”

I watched as the cop returned to his car and sat in the front seat. He seemed to be talking to someone over the radio.

My nerves ate at my stomach. What if he didn’t believe us? I wasn’t a good enough driver to outrun a human in a car.

“What do you think?” Colton asked.

I opened my mouth but Lux quickly stole my attention. “Why did we stop?” She picked her head up off her arm and sat up slowly, looking more confused than Colton had upon waking.

“We were pulled over,” I told her, not quite meeting her eye.

She looked over her shoulder and then grimaced when her head spun.

“Are we going to get through or…?” Lux trailed off when she caught sight of Colton’s wounded side. “Oh, my god, are you okay?”

Colton grinned. “Fine.”

“He’s proud,” I mumbled.

Lux’s eyes were huge. “When did you—?”

Colton was all smiles. “Lux, I’m okay. See?” he said, pointing to the white bandage around his side. “I’m not bleeding anymore?”

Lux deflated a little as her worry left her, but Colton’s words only made me tense up more. I realized now what the police officer had seen.

“We’re in trouble,” I said quietly.

Colton frowned. “What do you mean? The cop hasn’t said anything yet.”

“Your bandage,” I said, closing my eyes. “It’s pristine.

“Any human who was shot an hour ago would still be bleeding without medical attention. There is no way your bandage would be pristine.” I turned and looked at Lux, dread filling me. “He knows.”

Colton turned a sickly green. “What do we do?”

“Just wait,” Lux whispered. “Maybe there’s a chance—”

I shook my head. “If he thought we were humans, he’d be rushing us on to the hospital. He knows what we are.”

Lux pressed her hands to her head, no doubt still confused after being unconscious for so long.

Colton bit at his nails. “Maybe we could—?”

“We have to run,” I told him while looking at Lux. “Are you going to be all right to run, both of you?” I switched my gaze between them, looking from Lux’s bruised face to Colton’s bandaged torso.

He shrugged. “I guess we have to be.”

Lux nodded, her eyes slipping away from the present. My wolf whined in my head, worried. What had she seen before she was knocked out? What was she feeling?

Colton smacked my arm. “We need to get out of this car.”

Lux and I both looked up to see two more police cars heading toward us. They were intending to block our vehicle on the road, but it didn’t matter, we’d be running.

“Shit,” I swore. “Let’s go.” We all opened our doors and started running across the highway, playing chicken with cars as the police officer yelled and shot at us.

I grabbed Lux’s hand as we ran; I was reluctant to let her out of my sight again.

We made it across the stretch of road and onto the grass and began sprinting to the trees a hundred yards away.

Lux never complained although she staggered a few times, her balance off from the blow she suffered.

Colton was a few paces behind us, wincing and grunting as every step aggravated his wound. I pushed the two to go faster, setting the pace for our getaway.

The sound of an engine revving spiked panic in me as I dragged Lux along.

I chanced a look over my shoulder and watched as a police car followed us onto the grass, its headlights illuminating our bodies in the dark.

I swore and yelled at Colton to run faster, my body pushing itself to its limits.

More shots fired, sounding like pops and snaps as they echoed off the trees ahead and made their way back to my ears. Lux shrieked as a bullet whizzed past us, disappearing into the darkness ahead.

“We have to shift,” Colton wheezed from behind me. “We aren’t moving fast enough!”

I glanced down at Lux in panic. “I can’t shift around her; we don’t know what will happen.”

Colton was almost out of breath. “We know what will happen if we don’t!” He took a few more steps before yelling. “We’ll get caught!”

I swore as we ran. Colton was right, we couldn’t outrun a car.

But how could I shift and risk Lux? If she shifted now, there would be no chance of escaping. The next bullet put a hole through the sleeve of my shirt and made the decision for me.

When we were a few steps from the clearing, I let go of Lux’s hand and shifted, catching the sound of ripping clothing as Colton followed my lead.

Lux kept running alongside us as we made it into the trees.

I heard tires squeal as the police car came to a stop and the officers got out, intent on following us on foot. We stopped and laid low as I gestured for Lux with my head to get on my back.

“Come on out, mutts,” one of the men yelled as four flashlights illuminated. The yellow beams of light swept over the woods, coming close to where we were hiding.

Even in the dark, I could see the outline of the guns.

Slowly, Lux grabbed onto the fur near my neck and swung one leg over my back.

I could hear her labored breathing in my ear and feel her heart beating as she pressed her body along my back and buried her face in my fur. My wolf bristled as her other leg squeezed my side.

As soon as she was secure, we were running.

The police officers yelled and ran after us, but Colton and I moved too fast for them to track. A few shots were fired, but they were off target and too slow to hit us.

Colton pulled ahead of me, his blood staining his side as his wound opened.

We only ran for about three minutes before we encountered problems. Lux made an odd sound and then she was no longer on my back.

I barked at Colton to stop running and turned around, finding Lux laying on the ground. She rolled onto her back and I saw her face contorting in pain.

I looked around in a panic, wondering how far the police were behind us and if they were calling for backup.

The humans that raided Alpha Vex’s pack weren’t far off either, and I had told the first officer as much.

Colton whined and laid down near Lux, his eyes watching as her body writhed and twisted.

She breathed heavily, her skin breaking out into a sweat, and her eyes lolling in their sockets. She was shifting, and I couldn’t do anything to stop it.

I considered shifting back to my human form, but my wolf was pumped with adrenaline. Besides, it would mean I was stuck on two legs again, and it was obvious that Lux had to shift.

She had to run with us.

If she didn’t, we’d die.

Lux screamed as her back arched, and I whined, pressing my nose to her side. I wanted to take the pain away from her, to take it in her place.

But I couldn’t.

Werewolves shift young when the body is still forming, so the change isn't as painful. I couldn't imagine shifting for the first time at an age when your body is already set.

"Keegan," Lux yelled, her face crumpling. She clutched the grass under her as her bones started to snap and break apart.

Lux bit down on her lip hard enough to draw blood as her spine picked up off the ground and broke.

I looked away as fur sprouted along her limbs; it was pale gray, like in my dreams.

Lux started to cry as the change picked up pace, her whole body attacking itself as it morphed into another form completely.

Colton met my eyes across Lux's broken body and whined. I whined back and then glued my eyes to my mate. She had to get through this.

Even more, she had to do it quickly. Over the sound of Lux's cries, I could hear footsteps coming nearer. The humans weren't giving up.

Colton bolted to his feet as a human came nearer. He met my eyes briefly before disappearing to stop the human before he gave up our location, if Lux's cries didn't do that first.

I continued to watch Lux transform, sensing that the final shift was near. Her legs were changing shape, bending backward as her feet shortened into paws.

Before long, the rest of her changed until she was just a shivering wolf on the forest floor.

The human I loved was gone. She was buried beneath layers of fur and wild, animal eyes. The thoughtful, quiet, strong, Lux was now a tiny gray wolf, shaking as it took in its surroundings.

Lux was a wolf.

The pain increased until finally, something snapped, and my mind was cleared. I opened my eyes, aware that my body was shaking but unsure why.

I looked at the trees around me, taking in the unfamiliar scents with a sniff of my nose.

My thoughts worked in a strange blend between instinctual reactions and wise expectations. I was still present in my mind but it was no longer a private place.

A deep growl made me shoot to my feet, my hackles rising and my tail swishing low between my legs. I couldn't see the threat but I could sense it nearby.

Tension rolled off me as I bared my teeth and prepared myself.

A low whine made me turn. A large wolf stood before me; tall with narrow hips and shoulders.

The wolf was a multitude of colors. His body was brown but his snout and paws were black. Only the tips of his ears and the area around his eyes were white.

The wolf stepped forward and I stepped backward, almost as if we were dancing. Clearly frustrated, the other wolf dropped his head and took another step toward me, slow and careful.

I didn't move after that first step. I trusted him.

I struggled to remember why because my brain kept losing focus but it didn't matter.

The animal part of my mind was more concerned with reading the wolf's body language, taking in the smell of potential prey, and listening to the approaching footsteps than figuring out *who* the wolf was.

However, as soon as the wolf touched his muzzle to mine, I knew: Keegan.

On instinct, I threw my head back and howled, the sound full of delight and joy. My howl cut off when I realized the footsteps had ceased.

My heart pounded as I took off running in the opposite direction, aware that I had given up our location.

Keegan chased after me, catching up within a few strides. I stumbled as I ran, not quite used to the way this body wanted to move.

Every time I took control of my mind, I fell, but I wasn't ready to give my control over to an animal.

Keegan growled as I fell again, perhaps willing me to stop overthinking, but I couldn't grasp how both my front and back paws should move together. The feeling of running in this form was too strange.

A few moments later, another wolf caught up to us. It took me a few seconds to realize it was Colton. He moved to run on my opposite side, helping Keegan to support me as we moved through the trees.

I heard a few more bullets after that but they landed nowhere near us and sounded far off. Eventually, the woods fell silent around us and I found my footing and was able to run on my own.

It was another hour of running before we slowed to a walk, stalking through the trees slowly as we all caught our breaths.

Despite my fatigue, I was on a high that I couldn't come down from. I had shifted. I was powerful. I could keep up.

We stopped walking as the woods started to thin out and a few cottages became visible through the trees. I pressed myself low to the ground and watched the lights in the cottage wink out.

Colton and Keegan seemed to be communicating in an odd way before Keegan shifted and started running toward the houses, his bare skin bright in the moonlight.

I stood and moved to go after him but Colton barked quietly and stepped in front of me.

Realizing I couldn't follow, I resolved myself to lie on the ground and watch Keegan as he slipped into one of the houses.

Colton paced for the entire three minutes that Keegan was gone. We met Keegan at the edge of the tree line when he returned, fully clothed, with food and clothing for Colton and me.

Colton shifted instantaneously, catching the clothes Keegan threw to him and pulling them on carefully.

He winced as his wound was jostled and pressed some leaves to the bullet wound, which was only bleeding a little.

Keegan came close to me, his face streaked with dirt. He smiled a little, his gaze endearing, as he bent down in front of me and tilted his head to the side.

I picked myself up and whined, backing up a few paces and exhaling through my nose.

"Shifting back is easy," he told me. "Just think of yourself in your human form."

He laughed a little and scratched the back of his neck. "It should be easy for you. You've spent your entire life as a human."

I sent him a flat look.

Then again, I wasn't sure what look I was sending as my features weren't exactly my own. I focused my mind on Keegan's advice and shut my eyes tight, envisioning my pale hair and eyes.

Envisioning myself was harder than it should've been. I hadn't seen my reflection in weeks. Werewolves who slept in tents and lived in the middle of the woods didn't have mirrors.

The thought never occurred to me until now.

So, instead of picturing myself, I pictured the things that made me *me.*

I thought of my old room. I thought of my father's eyes. I thought of Davy and Pep, the werewolves who sold me to Keegan's uncle. The people who started everything.

I thought of how I felt the first time I met Keegan. I thought of sleeping next to him on the forest floor. I thought of kissing him.

“Lux?”

I opened my eyes and jumped a little, startled to be looking at the world from my normal height. The wind hit my skin, sending goosebumps over my entire body.

I swallowed and wrapped my arms around my torso on instinct.

Keegan growled at Colton, who spun away quickly and averted his eyes. Keegan hedged toward me then, his eyes tilted upward in an attempt to make me feel more comfortable.

I smiled to myself, flattered even though nothing was going to make me feel better about standing naked in the woods.

I grabbed the clothes from him and pulled them on, frowning as the sleeves and pants surpassed the length of my limbs.

“You can look,” I told Keegan and Colton as I rolled the waistband and sleeves.

They both smiled at me.

“Are you all right?” Colton asked.

I avoided his question. “Is your side still bleeding?” Keegan didn’t miss my diversion.

Colton shrugged. “It’s okay, we heal fast.” He hesitated for a moment and then added, “I guess you will, too, now.”

I raked my fingers through my hair and grimaced. “I guess.”

Colton was awkward in the silence. “Your wolf was really pretty.” I wasn’t sure how to respond to that question as I couldn’t exactly decide whether I was happy with shifting.

After a moment, Keegan grabbed my hand and started tugging me away from Colton. “Build a fire!” Keegan shouted to Colton as we walked.

Colton threw up two thumbs and started clearing a space for the fire.

When we were a good distance away, Keegan let go of me and took a step back. His expression was serious. “I’m sorry for leaving you.”

“I told you to go,” I told him, not wanting him to hold the blame. “I refused to leave.”

Keegan pulled on his hair a little. “I shouldn’t have left you there, especially since I knew how dangerous it would be if the pack was attacked.”

I frowned. “You couldn’t have known.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Keegan said, pressing his lips together. “I should not have left you.”

“It wasn’t your choice!” I told him fiercely. “It was a mutual decision to separate.”

Keegan pulled me closer and wrapped his arms around me, placing his chin on my forehead. “That was a stupid decision.”

I laughed and placed my cheek against his chest, feeling like I was home. “Really stupid.”

He was silent for a moment before asking, “Are you all right?”

I closed my eyes as a tear escaped.

I pictured Sophie, her eyes as old and forgiving as the forest, her smile wistful and kind, her hands soft and reassuring. My friend, who came back from the grave only to die again?

And what about Paul? The beta who had befriended my mate? Paul, who rushed to his mate’s side only to die beside her.

In my mind, I saw their tent crashing to the ground, the fabric consumed by flames.

How could I be all right when such loving people were gone?

How could I be all right when I'd seen bullets find flesh and couldn't do anything to stop it?

How could I be all right when I didn't know if anyone had survived?

I pressed my face into Keegan's shirt, wishing the smell of smoke didn't cling to his skin. "No," I whispered. "No, I'm not all right."