

Breathe Me

[OOC: An idea that I talked with MischiefMun about. Epic woobie feels, in other words, in regards to family and big brothers, in particular. Because sometimes, big brothers are dicks and need a punch in the face.]

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*Be my friend, hold me
Wrap me up, unfold me
I am small, and needy
Warm me up and breathe me
-“Breathe Me” by Sia*

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Relief couldn't begin to describe how Lupin was feeling when she collapsed into her bed at her parents' house after checking on her pup at three in the morning. She didn't sleep, but there was comfort in just lying there, hearing her pup, her family sleeping peacefully away. It lulled her into a semi-conscious state until the morning sun rose and wearily, she got up along with it. Jared's scent was still strong in the house, and a small part of her was happy, even if his wife's was still there as well. He's had a lot of time off lately, she's noticed. Or maybe he just had a lot of time stacked up on the books that he's finally decided to take out. If things kept playing out this way, though, her sister-in-law was going to pop soon while they were on vacation.

Lupin heaved a sigh as she traipsed downstairs and shuffled through the rooms to reach the kitchen. Amaroq and Cerberus had been sleeping downstairs with her parents' Great Dane, Harley, but as soon as she slipped into the kitchen, all three were trotting inside with happy dog-grins and expectant, watery eyes and wagging tails.

She smiled at them, saw her mother's littler dog, Princess, come trotting in on tiny legs and not far behind, her last Pokemon, Atlas. He snuffled about until he found Lupin's leg and scrabbled with small claws, squeaking at her to be picked up. She obliged and began making coffee after setting him on her shoulder, giving his head a scratch as she busied herself. While the coffee brewed, she let the dogs outside into the backyard, smirking a bit as they all scrambled for their own patch of grass to sniff and piss on.

Atlas snuffled against her neck and cheek, sneezed, and then burrowed his snout against her neck again. She scratched his head, turned back to the kitchen, began preparing for the morning meal for her pup. Soon enough, she had her own breakfast sizzling in a skillet on the stove while she went to grab Quorra, who was up and about and smiling and babbling away. Atlas immediately took to shuffling after Lupin instead of risking grabby little hands from the pup snatching him up.

“Into the high chair we go, baby, and then nummy eggs and oatmeal!”

It warmed her up when she got a happy, gaping little smile from her daughter. She'd been away too long, much too long. Granted it hadn't even been a week, but she still felt that every hour, every day away was too long. She hated having to bounce around to the Helicarrier to here to her garage to across the states. *I can't bring her with though*, she thought morosely. At least here, with her parents, she had a somewhat more stable schedule and life. She knew her mother absolutely enjoyed it, she adored Quorra with all her heart...even if she did turn into a little fuzz ball on the full moons, just like her mother.

Getting that news the morning after from Lorcan when she was just barely coherent...Lupin shivered. It had scared the living daylight out of her. She thought she was going to have a heart attack.

Lupin was finishing feeding herself and her pup when her older brother came ambling into the kitchen alone, sniffing pointedly.

"Oh thank god somebody made coffee."

"Morning to you too," she called to him as he made a straight shot toward the coffee maker. He glanced over at her, giving a sheepish, sleepy smile.

"Sorry, London. Mornin'. And mornin' to you too, sweetie. Christ, you made a cute baby."

"Damn straight I did." Lupin grouched back, turning to smile at her pup. Her daughter laughed, pounding her hands on the highchair tray. She felt a fuzzy head rub against her elbow and turned to find Cerberus there, wagging his tail nub and panting. From the corner of her eye she saw Amaroq lifting his huge head toward her plate and she turned just in time to see him snatching up her last bacon. Cerberus scrambled away with a yelp, joining Amaroq. "Little fucking thieves! Get back here!"

The two took off before she could swipe at either of them as they ran and crunched on the piece of meat mid-step and she growled, ears flaring against the back of her head. Jared snickered.

"I dunno about you, but I think you just got bacon-snatched."

"Fuckers. See if I let you out the next job I work!" She called, shaking a fist in the air. Quorra squealed, hands pounding against the tray again.

He laughed again.

"Shouldn't curse around you baby. She's gonna start repeating everything soon like your old parrots did."

"And I'll smack her little butt if she tries."

"Be nice," he chided with a clucked tongue as he poured himself a cup of coffee.

“I will be. I’ll use open hand when I do.”

Jared snorted, shaking his head and came to sit beside her at the table. He paused to take a test sip and grimaced. “Ooh, Jesus. Did you make this with rocket fuel or something? Friggin’ strong.”

“What can I say, I like my coffee strong. Boyfriend does too.”

His eyebrows shot up in surprise and he stopped mid-sip. “You datin’ again? Wow. That’s...unexpected.”

Lupin hesitated, looking away, although a ghost of a smile flickered across her lips. “It, uh...it’s the same guy as before...the one we talked about?:

"Wait, the Irish guy?"

"Yeah. Lorcan. We...sorted some things out. Got back together."

“Apparently,” he coughed, taking another sip. Lupin glanced at him from over her shoulder as she began cleaning Quorra up. She had to fight with her pup for a few seconds to clean her face, her neck, her hands.

“So, you’ve been kind of coming and going a lot lately. Is your work that erratic or something that they need you at odd ends of the country nowadays?”

He was watching her, she could feel his dark eyes on her, and it sent a shiver down her spine.

“Yeah. You can say that. Consulting requires a lot of research. I often have to go get that information in person.”

“What, is everyone you’re in contact with out of touch with technology? Can’t pick up a phone or scan in a few documents?”

“Not when its ancient documents or artifacts that need special care and environments to be handled in.”

No one really knew what she consulted in or for who, either. They also didn’t know she hunted monsters like herself. The less her family knew, the better, and she wanted to keep it that way.

“And your...employers, they don’t mind that you’re...well...ya know, *unavailable* during...certain times of the month?” He rolled a hand as though it was the only way to explain her away. She resisted the urge to bristle her tail, to stiffen at his words, to let her ears lower against her head and stay pinned there. He couldn’t even say it. She looked over in time to see him glance away from her, saw the nervousness flash across his face, his eyes.

“They know,” she finally replied, trying to hide her disappointment in him. She turned back to Quorra, busying herself with unlatching the tray at last and started unbuckling her pup from the seat.

“They also know about...” now she was hesitating and could say the words. “You know.”

“Do they recruit people like you? Um...mutants, I mean.”

“Werewolf,” she growled out back at him, out of habit, and immediately she regretted her tone.

“You were a mutant first,” he countered and she felt that miserable stab in her chest. *Might as well just say freak*, that poisonous little voice hissed. She tried to squash it back down, to push it away. It hurt the first couple of breaths to get past that tight feeling in her chest.

“Don’t say that word.”

“Why? It’s what you are. Like I’m human, and Quorra...she’s half-human.”

“Don’t say that!”

She whirled, tail bristling and standing on end now, but she was met with a stubborn, if hesitant gaze. Even if he was being truthful, he didn’t have a right to go slinging those words around her. He didn’t have that *privilege*, even.

“London, she turned into a fucking wolf pup the other week. I’m just stating facts. James was human, wasn’t he? And you’re not, you’re—,”

“Shut your damned mouth, right the *fuck* now.”

They stared one another down, and she saw that nervousness streak across his eyes again, saw her reflection in them, just barely, but it was enough to notice the slight golden glow of her angry eyes. She looked away, fists quivering at her side. Quorra whined and whimpered, little hands clawing at her hand, yanking on her, pulling herself closer toward her mother. Lupin turned to pick her up.

Jared was still glaring at her, feeling a little braver that she had been the one to back down first.

“You’ve got some serious issues. Always snapping at people like that. I’m surprised you didn’t get NJP’d in the military with your attitude. I know for damned sure my CO wouldn’t have stood for your insubordination.”

She had to fight to keep her temper down, to keep her tongue glued to the roof of her mouth. Lupin merely glared back from over her shoulder, face pulled into an ugly snarl. She saw his eyes flicker over her face, lingering on her scar—knew he was looking right at it, felt his eyes on it—and she cracked her knuckles in warning.

“You wanna leave this room right now.”

Tension crushed down on them, filling the space between and around the two of them. Quorra wiggled in her arms, trying to reach down toward the plate on the table. Lupin kept her pinned to her hip without looking, the fist at her side still shaking, her heart pounding and blood rushing in her ears. A flash of hesitation briefly came across Jared’s face, weighing his options: stay and risk furthering angering his fuzzy rage monster of a younger sister or leave in one whole and intact piece.

Finally he pushed away from the table, lifting himself to his full height.

“Damned right I do. Good talk, London. Really. Always a fucking pleasure talking with a psycho.”

“Well, at least when I make my promises, I stick with them instead of ditching the people I made them to.”

He paused mid-step, halfway through the kitchen door leading to the dining room and beyond, looking over his shoulder with a mixture of his earlier anger and bemusement.

“And what the hell does *that* mean?”

“You know damned well what I mean. I was twelve when you decided I cramped your style too much and started ditching me. I was fourteen when I got picked up by the cops for the first time and needed someone on my side and when I was practically begging you, you turned your back on me, pretended I wasn’t there. I fucking fifteen when you ignored me for nearly a whole year after you decided to leave for the army. When I ran off for three weeks, not a single letter of yours asked about me and if I’d been found. I read all of the ones you sent to mom and dad, I know you didn’t! You wrote *Hanson* more than me. I have four letters versus how many you sent him? Mom? Dad?”

That pressure in her chest was back, stabbing into her heart, her lungs like glass, crushing her ribcage, hammering down on her shoulders and making them sag as though under a great weight. Her eyes felt hot and itchy, her throat pinching closed and she fought to keep it open.

“You gave up giving a damn the minute your friends started labeling me crazy and needing to be put in a fucking mental ward. You sat by and let them and you *still* let them! You let your fucking *wife* treat me like I’m some disgusting little insect that she sneers down on and she’s better than, for fucking sake.”

“Oh Christ, London, are you fucking *kidding* me? You’re *seriously* still upset about that? They didn’t mean it, they’re were just kidding around with you! And you *hate* Giselle for no goddamned reason at all and you don’t even *know* her.”

That stirring in her chest of rage was slowly rising and she struggled to keep it at bay, to keep her temper down.

“Jared, I love you...but you’re a shitty older brother,” she swallowed, her throat cotton-dry and scratchy. “And I’m sick of you choosing people you barely know over your own family.”

“At least Giselle doesn’t cling to me like a goddamned leech. Neither do Mom or Dad. You were always tagging along when I didn’t want you to, and it was only because of Mom that I even let you come along with me half the time. She made me promise to keep an eye on you, to make sure you didn’t lose control because of what happened with that jerk of a dad of ours—,”

He clamped his mouth shut and hissed between his teeth, a shocked expression coming over his countenance. For a moment, Lupin forgot how to breath. Her own face fell to a slack jawed look and she drew her brows up, staring at him questioningly.

“Wha...what are you talking about? He beat the crap out of mom and left, he—,” She stopped herself short. *He’s lying about something*, she suddenly realized. *He’s hiding something*.

“What happened that night? The one he left, Jared. What *happened*?”

He shook his head, pursing his lips tightly. “Forget it, London. Just forget about it.” Jared turned to leave, scoffing, trying to look nonchalant but she saw the brief flash of fear in his eyes, could smell him suddenly reeking of it. It was enough. She sprung forward, heard her pup giggle at the heady rush in her one arm while she pinned Jared to the wall with the other. He yelped and tried to push her away, but she held strong.

“Goddamit, Jared, what happened? What have you and Mom been *lying* to me about all these years? What happened to that bastard?!”

“Why do you care so damned much, you *hate* him! London, get off of me!”

“Just *tell me!*”

She hadn’t realized she was shouting until she felt her throat stinging seconds after the words flew from her mouth. She breathed heavily, her body shaking. Jared stopped struggling, staring down at her from over his shoulder. She could feel him shaking, smell that fear wafting off of him, it was so potent...

He was quiet for a few moments.

Then, “That was the night your pyrokinesis started showing up. You burned him after he finished beating Mom and me up. He came after you. He got one hit in and then...I don’t remember too well. Neither does Mom, but...his face was on fire. I remember that much. Kind of hard to forget a sight like that...and the fucking *smell*. Christ. He ran out the front door, never came back. Never found a body or a hospital record of him. We never saw him again after that, he just...disappeared.” He grunted, trying to push her away again, gave up. “Happy? Mom told me to not tell anyone. Not you, not Grandma, nobody. Dad found out, yeah, but...he’s cool like that. We could trust him.”

The silence swarmed in between them, making it hard to breathe. Lupin stared up at Jared, speechless, and her hold on him loosening. He pried himself from her grip, moving slowly, eyeing her carefully, a mixture of regret and lingering anger still burning in his eyes.

“You...kept this from me?”

“Mom wanted to keep you safe. You don’t know what it was like for mutants back then, it wasn’t like it is now—”

“So making me look *crazy* was the best alternative? Putting me through—through *years* of fucking therapy, having counselors telling me it was all in my head, that I had an overactive imagination, that I was one step away from a fucking mental ward? That was the best fucking alternative?!”

The regret and shame was winning out now, painting his face and he couldn’t hold his gaze with her. Her pup squirmed and whimpered in her other arm while she cracked the knuckles in her free hand, glaring up at her older brother.

“I-It wasn’t like, London. At least, that wasn’t what we *wanted*—”

“Because making your daughter, your kid sister, think that she’s *crazy* is *always* the best option there is. Maybe you *should* have locked me up,” she snapped back unceremoniously, glaring at him once more. She stepped away from him, shaking her head and bringing her other arm to support her daughter a bit better. Little arms encircled around her neck, clinging tightly.

She turned away, feeling her stomach churn. She couldn’t look at him anymore. Years of pining away for a relationship with him like it had been when they were kids had been wasted. That boy wasn’t coming back. The person she knew and the person who was standing before her were on opposite ends of the spectrum and she’d most likely never have that relationship with him again. She wasn’t even sure it had been real when they were children now. Had it all been some illusion he upheld until he got bored with her? Had he held up the facade that he cared or had it been genuine at the start? She pushed the idea from her mind. She didn’t want to know.

Her stomach churned uneasily again when that little nasty voice rose its ugly head back up, whispering away at how she was only going to end up pushing everyone she cared about away from her. The thoughts came to standstill when she heard Jared approaching her from behind, footsteps hurried.

“London, wait, please,” he said, hand reaching out to grasp her arm. He barely touched her when she whirled on him and slammed the back of her fist in his chest, flinging him against the fridge. His back slammed into it, hard enough to dislodge several magnets off to clatter to the ground as he slowly slid down to his butt, gasping for air. His eyes were wide with shock as he thumped his chest to try and start coughing, to get air into his lungs.

She growled deep in her chest, her throat, glaring down at him, unable to find words at first. Finally she let out a shuddering breath and said, “I always hoped...that you’d come around one

day. That maybe it could go back to the way it was. You and me, against the world and all that, but..." she shook her head. "I don't even know who you are anymore, but you sure as hell ain't my brother. As far as I'm concerned...I don't have any brothers. Not in this family."

The fist she'd whipped out at him was trembling by her side, taut and ready for another round. Heat rose around her and sparks spat about her fist, up her arm and she saw the fear colouring his face as his eyes flicked back and forth between her flame-engulfed fist and her glowering face.

Another soft whimper in her ear was a reminder she needed to walk away. She gripped her pup tightly, extinguishing the flames around her fist and turned, ears pinning against her head almost instantly when she saw someone else in the kitchen doorway watching them. It was Giselle, clutching at her swollen belly, eyes wide and mouth agape as she stared at Lupin. Her gaze flicked back and forth between her and Jared for a few moments.

"You never said...you never told me that your sister was a mutant."

Lupin narrowed her eyes, adjusting her grip on her pup as she strode forward, tail bristling. Giselle shied away and Lupin caught a whiff of the sickly sweet scent of her terror as she passed her by. Lupin paused mid-step, glancing at her from the corner of her eye and sneered.

"You know what, Jared? I was wrong. She's the *perfect* woman for you. You're both stuck up, snobbish, and think you're better than everyone around you. Hope you have a great life with her, bro. Good catching up."

She stepped off again, whistling sharply. Amaroq, Cerberus and Atlas came trotting and toddling after her as she made her way up the stairs to her bedroom, intent on packing up and leaving before she ran into anyone else. She didn't think she could withstand another go with anybody else in the house.

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