

I marched through the thick layer of snow until I reached the edge of a nearby forest, with a trailhead leading into it. A large, red sign right in front of me stated in large, white letters: PROCEED WITH CAUTION! *Why would someone put this here? It's the middle of winter, most of the predators are hibernating, and there's no sign of life in these woods as far as the eye can see.* I ignored the sign's warning and proceeded on my journey; it may take days until I reach the nearest town.

I hiked for a good five miles; or maybe it was six? I wasn't keeping track. My focus was only on keeping my balance as I hiked down the snow-covered trail. No one must have used it in some time; the snow was still thick, but had a slight incline along the trail. By the time dusk came and the air became colder, I set up a small fire for the night. All I found for fuel were some twigs, some small branches, and some decaying bark. I only had a small fire and my thick cloak to keep me warm for the night. Fatigue and exhaustion kicked in and I soon fell asleep, despite the cold.

A loud rustling stirred me awake. Frightened, I bolted up to search for the source of the noise until a quick, blunt force hit me against my temple. I could only feel the cold snow against my face before I blacked out.

Waking up, I found myself tied to a thick tree near a large fire about five feet high in front of me in a clearing. *How'd they managed to make one so big in this cold?* They tied my hands straight over my head, the ropes choked my wrists, elbows, and arms, and they bound my legs together. These too were being choked by the ropes. All my limbs quickly became numb, but the rope seemed to give some the more I struggled in my bindings. I tried moving as much as possible to aid getting blood flow back into my limbs. It was all in vain, however, as the cold aided in numbing my limbs.

From the yellow glow of the firelight, I saw my captors. They were big, hairy, and didn't look friendly. They held a consistent hunch and resembled werewolves of some kind, but they acted more...wild than a normal werewolf. It's as if they were born this way instead of cursed like in most lore I've read and heard.

They seemed to be arguing among themselves, but all I heard were moist, thick growls; I could see the glistening saliva on their lips as they growled and barked at each other. They soon became more violent, their growls getting louder. Soon they started clawing, kicking, and biting at each other. I nearly chuckled at the sight. *They must be fighting over who would get a taste of me first.*

As the fight wore on, one got shoved into the fire; it gave a high-pitched squeal over and over until it died. None of the other wolves seemed to care. God...I don't think I'll get that sound out of my head.

During the scuffle, one of them missed a swipe and managed to cut off the ropes binding my biceps. I took the opportunity to escape. I managed to wiggle one arm through the weak bindings, though it felt like a dead-weight by now. I was able to reach my dagger strapped onto my belt. But after pulling it out, another wolf slammed right into me, knocking the dagger out of my hand and landed in the snow. *Shit.* I tried to weasel out one leg, the bindings becoming more loose the more I tried freeing myself. A leg managed to get loose. Carefully, I reached a foot over to my dagger and tried

kicking it up towards me. After catching it with my freed hand, I cut through the remaining bindings.

I quickly hid behind the tree I was bound to, shaking my arms and bouncing on my toes some. *Damn. I don't know when the last time I was that immobilized.* After removing what numbness I could, I bolted away from the werewolf camp and into the forest. I didn't care where I went, so long as it wasn't here.

The wolves seemed too preoccupied to notice my escape. My only hope now is that I'm not the only human in these woods.