

# Tale of the High Moon

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A short story I wrote based on the Cry Wolf party game. Oh, and the chapter titles come together to make a poem, so I guess it's a two-fer.

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# Tale of the High Moon : Chapter 1

## 1. There has been a story told of a High Moon -

¶

The village at twilight was a peaceful place. Countryside ran further than any on two legs ever could, in all directions, breaking only for a few houses and the town square. Crickets promised a cold night and the full moon promised bloodshed, if only they knew.

¶ Old woman Withers worked in her garden later than the others; though her eyes were blinder, her hands knew better the growth of the plants.

¶ "It's getting darker," she called to Phillip and Suzanne who happened by. "And it's going to be a cold night. Best to stay inside, locked in with the warmth."

¶ "Just you make sure to keep those plants from the frost. My work's no good without your herbs." Phillip was the local doctor; he met Suzanne many years ago when he reduced her boiling fever, and he'd been using Old Woman Withers' herbs even then. They'd had a beautiful wedding - Spring, if Withers could remember what her eyes had seen. They hadn't had children, but they'd cared for many.

¶ "How old is Old Woman Withers?" Suzanne whispered to Phillip.

¶ "You know, I think there used to be a song," Phillip replied, tightening his arms around her arms and waist. "How many times does the moon turn 'round? /How many times does the werewolf sound? /When did God first plant the ground? /That's when you've got Woman Withers."

¶ Suzanne laughed. Phillip had a sweet voice.

¶

¶ Savannah sighed and pictured that someday she'd be as happy as Suzanne, with a certain dark-haired husband at her side. Just thinking of Eric made her smile. She'd seen him earlier in the day at a distance. He worked alongside his father, George, the both of them deep-chested and strong. They hadn't looked like butchers, more like knights. What beautiful dark-haired children she and Eric would have, and perhaps one red-head like herself. Eric told her he loved her hair.

¶ "Savannah! Come and help me with dinner."

¶ "Coming, mother."

¶ Her mother was a plump blonde with rosy cheeks and an easy smile.

¶ "Take this to the table," she ordered her daughter, handing off a bowl of potatoes. "You can't spend all your time in doorways, whiling away about some boy."

¶ Savannah blushed. "How do you know I was whiling away?" She pinched her mother's cheek until her hand was slapped away. "I could have been enjoying the breeze."

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“No one enjoys a breeze that bites them through. Besides, from what Mary says, the young and in love always while about in doorways.”

Savannah blushed a deeper red. Mary was Eric's mother.

“I've no idea what you're talking about,” Savannah said, lifting her chin. Her mother rolled her eyes and a cold wind swept trough.

“Thomas, close the door!”

“Aye, woman, I've only just stepped in it! Would you rather me on the other side?” He asked as he entered the dining room, smiling. He kissed his wife on the cheek. “Good evening, Sarah.”

Savannah looked away. How her parents didn't have dozens of children by now, she'd never know.

“How's town?” Sarah asked.

“The same as always, love. How's home?”

“Better now that you're home.”

“Get a hold of yourselves; I'm still in the room,” Savannah sighed. “But Father, no news today? There's hardly any tell beyond our village.”

“Things are quiet, which is how I'd have them. Better it be hen-gossip than news, I say.”

“Hens don't gossip, Tom,” Sarah chided.

“Oh?” he asked, one brow raised. “Then what would that be when you go to Gloria's every other day?”

“Learning, dear. Exchanging secrets of soups and needle and thread, of course. Isn't that right, Savannah?” Both women smiled.

“It's true, Father.” What was true was that they gossiped idly about other women, places and things. Harmless, really, and they did sew.

“Women,” he grumbled. “You tell Gloria her husband owes me another game of cards- I'm sure he cheated last.”

“Father, surely not! You've just got no way about lying.”

Sarah laughed. “It's true! How you fooled me into marriage I don't know.”

“Not by lying. At least, not at first.”

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ï¸¸ Savanah looked at her parents and thought of Eric again. Before turning in to bed, she latched the door against the unusually forceful and cold night.

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## Chapter 2

*2. that cast a bloody shadow from o'erhead;*

There was a frenzied pounding at the door. Phillip shook his wife awake and got to his feet. As the village doctor, he was always prepared for an emergency. Like when the boy had broken his leg last year and the girl who'd fallen in the ditch the year before that. Suzanne lit candles and unrolled a blanket as Phillip opened the door. For a second he was blinded by the first rays of the dawning sun and the cool wind that seized the hair of his skin, and Kenneth nearly knocked him over. The sobbing man was carrying someone, Phillip didn't recognize who, but the smell of blood was overwhelming. Suzanne nearly reeled from it but composed herself, making haste to gather bandages and boil water.

"Set her down, Kenneth," Phillip instructed. Kenneth laid her gingerly on the blanket, his chest heaving and his hands clenched at his sides.

The woman's face was half-destroyed, her neck and chest a gaping wound. Phillip tried to wipe her clean and check for signs of life. Her hands were cold but he detected a shallow pulse. The bone of her cheek poked through. There was hardly flesh to piece together.

Suzanne masked her horror as she knelt beside her husband and attempted to stem the bleeding.

"I'll see to her. Phil, see to Kenneth," she whispered to him. Kenneth was shaking and covered in blood.

"Kenneth, my friend, what has happened here?"

He tried to speak, but his voice choked in his throat. His eyes bulged and welled with fresh tears. Suzanne's hand laid on Phillip's shoulder. He looked at her, beyond her to the woman, and she shook her head. Kenneth saw this and dropped to his knees.

"Gloria," he sobbed. "My Gloria, my Gloria." His palms shoved against his eyes, smearing the blood.

Suzanne gasped and saw the woman anew. Sure enough it was Gloria. Wavy black hair matted with blood, blue eyes forever closed, body limp and cold, small as it ever had been in life. Suzanne cried quietly, not stealing Kenneth's grief. He'd loved her more than all and now he was her widower.

Phillip pulled Kenneth into his arms like a brother or father would have. "Hush, son, and tell me what happened."

There was a haunted and empty look of Kenneth's eyes, as if he were dead and didn't know why.

"I don't, I didn't,"

"It's obvious that some sort of animal has been at her," Suzanne prompted softly. Kenneth looked at her, stricken, as if he'd been reminded.

"It was dark outside-early. I don't know why the silly woman was up so early. She always did things like that, my Gloria," he groaned, clutching his stomach. Phillip frowned. So the woman had crossed paths with a mighty beast. A wolf, perhaps. Exceptâexcept that there were no wolves this close to the village. This troubled Phillip greatly.

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"Must have been a rogue wolf," Suzanne sniffed, voicing her husband's thoughts. Kenneth nodded. Phillip looked at the man: dark brown hair, flat with blood and sweat, body dirtied in the same, eyes wide and unseeing.

"Kenneth, we've got to get you clean and checked over."

"No. No, I'm fine," he said dryly.

"You can't be about in your state," Suzanne insisted, placing a comforting hand on Kenneth's shoulder. "You need to get cleaned up and rest, dear. Arrangements need to be made."

Looking ten years older, Kenneth nodded slowly. Suzanne offered him a sweet, sad smile and left Phillip to care for him while she cleaned Gloria's body properly.

## Chapter 3

### *3. Many hearts wept and sang in fear,*

The sun had dawned only a few hours ago and already her mother was dragging her from bed 'to take Gloria the bolt of wool she'd asked for'. Savannah packed a lunch basket for her father and one for she and her mother. Thomas kissed them both good day and the three left the door, going separate ways. The walk was pleasant, the chill from the night had all but disappeared.

Gloria and Kenneth's house looked as if it sprang up from the ground. The stone was the same color and texture as the earth and seemed to breathe with the breezes. Sarah knocked on the door. Savannah wondered why she smiled so. Kenneth answered the door, which was unusual enough that Savannah almost dropped her basket.

"Oh, are you ill, Kenneth? You don't look well at all," Sarah commented. Kenneth remained a step back from the door, his face half obscured by darkness. "Is Gloria here or has she gone to fetch something from the doctor's?"

Kenneth's chin wobbled and his swollen eyes watered. "Yes, she's at the doctor's." The door closed before Sarah could speak again.

"My, wasn't that rude."

"Mother, he looks very ill. I wouldn't have gone in anyway to be locked in with that cold-sickness. He did us a favor."

"I suppose," she huffed. "But she shouldn't be walking about so far."

"What do you mean? She always walks as far. Just as we have."

Sarah bit her lip in the way she did when she was considering whether to pass on a good story. "My daughter, I ought to wait until Gloria herself is here to tell you, butâ"

"Well? Tell me!"

"Gloria's pregnant!"

"Oh, really? How good for her! Is that why she's at the doctor's?"

"Could be so." She frowned. "Still, that's an awful lot of stress to put on a new mother. She was already so very worried."

"We women are stronger than even we know, mother. I'm sure Gloria will be just fine. Fine enough to care for herself, her husband and her new one. I wonder if it's a girl."

"Men want sons."

"But father has only me and is happy."



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Her mother beamed at her. "That he is, girl. What a special one we knew you were, so tiny with a flame of hair atop your head, like a tiny candle."

"I hope my children will have my same hair."

"What's this talk of children, then? Has it got anything to do with Mary's boy?"

"Eric isâ€" she was full of things to say about Eric.

"Ah, he's that then, eh?" Her mother said slyly. "Your father seems to take to him."

"Do you really think so?" Savannah sighed, and grabbed her mother's hand, the way she used to when she was little.

When they reached the square, it was crowded with people like Savannah had never seen before. It reminded her of a traveling fair that passed through once, except there was no joy in the air. Tension, worry that made her break out in a nervous sweat.

"Mother? What's going on?" She felt pressed in on all sides, suffocated.

"I don't know, love. Come on, let's find Phillip's."

They pushed through the crowd and found that it only got denser the closer they came to the doctor's.

*Dead!*

*Who's dead?*

*That woman, one what lived on the end.*

*The pretty one?*

*Aye, that.*

*What happened?*

*Dead! Killed!*

*Something's on the loose!*

*Shame, that.*

*Something's got to be done.*

*Found her last night, he did.*

*Poor lad!*

*Dead! Dead!*

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"What's all this, then?" Sarah grunted as she pushed through the front of the crowd. She pounded on the door until Phillip answered.

"Please, we've got,"

"Gloria, Gloria, where is she? Kenneth said that she'd come this way."

Phillip's face fell.

"Sarah. Gloria's gone from us. Since this dawn."

"Oh, God, no!" Sarah cried out as her legs gave way. Savannah caught her and held her close. She was too shocked to say much of anything.

"Her funeral pyre will be set up this evening."

"That poor, poor, baby," Sarah wept.

"She was a lovely girl," Phillip said.

"Mother, let's go home. Please," Savannah whispered. "Goodbye, doctor."

Savannah propelled her mother through the crowd, home.

— — —

"That was Sarah." Phillip said to his wife.

"Oh, she must have been devastated. She was very close to Gloria. They walk, well, *used to* walk down to her home two or three times a week. Where is she gone?"

"Her daughter took her home. Had to hold her up by the arms."

"Savannah. She's a good daughter and very shy. How did she take the news?"

"Must have been in shock. She looked nervous, anxious to get away but she didn't crack even a bit."

"Poor girl! And she's known Gloria her whole life!" Suzanne tsked. "It's probably going to hit her hard later."

"This is hitting us all hard. Nothing like this has ever happened, not since generations back. I've never seen the village so worked up."

"Any news gets the village worked up," Suzanne sighed as she thought of the crowds outside of her door, begging for tads of information.

— — —

"God damn it, I've always said that no news is good news!" Thomas shouted to the air when Sarah told him the news. She flinched at his volume and he softened. "How are you?"

"This is such a tragedy, Thomas. I loved Gloria, how could this happen to her? She harmed nothing!"

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"I know, I know. And how difficult this must be for Kenneth."

"Kenneth! I remember now, he looked so horrible. He looks like death, I swear it."

"Don't swear. Not on something like that. God, I don't know what I would do if something happened to you. If I didn't have Savannah to look after," he cut himself short. He let go of Sarah suddenly, his face ashen.

"What is it?"

"I know what I would do if I lost you, and I can't let Kenneth do it." He swung on his coat and strapped a long knife to his waist. Savannah watched from the far end of the room.

"Thomas, don't go out there!"

"Don't worry, love, but I can't let Kenneth do what I would, in his place." He stepped out of the door. Sarah began to pace, her breath coming in short bursts.

Savannah wished that she could see Eric, to hear his voice telling her that it was all going to be okay. To brush his dark hair and smell his scent.

"Mother, we have to get ready for the funeral. Father will be there, surely, with Kenneth."

"All right, love. All right, Savannah."

— — —

Kenneth sat at his table in the dark. The top seemed to stretch on forever, like desert sands. He'd seen the desert once, long ago. One day he'd see it again, maybe. He imagined that the grooves were clefts miles deep and that the circles were sandstorms that he'd have to avoid. But there was no water. None, for all the everlasting desert. The sound of grainy wind filled his ears, and he did not hear the beating at the door.

Thomas broke the latch on the door as he rammed it with his body. Kenneth looked up at the breathless man.

"Thomas."

"Kenneth?" His eyes widened to adjust to the dark. "Would you like a lamp?"

"I don't need one."

"Everyone needs some light in their life."

"Mine is gone." The words sounded empty to his ears. "Mine is gone. *Gone*." He slammed his fist down on the table, suddenly furious. "She's gone, Thomas! Don't you get that? Doesn't everyone see that it's *my fault*?"

"No one thinks that. We know ye. You loved her, our Gloria."

"You're wrong. I *love* her, *my* Gloria."

"Good. Because she'd not want to see you sitting about in the dark. Would she?"

"She understood me." His breath hitched and Thomas waited for it. "She," his throat was too tight for words.

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"Lay it out, brother."

Kenneth hung his head and cried silent tears. The tears fell into the grooves, flooding the desert clefts. Drown, drown.

Kenneth cleared his throat and wiped his face. "Thank you, Thomas. You're a good man. I've, uh, got to go, haven't I?"

"I'm afraid you do."

Kenneth stood and Thomas thought that he would need a hand, but the man was solid. It was his face that was broken, changed. He almost stepped back when the dark eyes met his.

"Promise me something, Thomas."

"What is it that needs promising?"

"That you'll protect your family right. Not like me. Keep your girls safe no matter what."

"I'll do my best."

"That's *not good enough!*" Kenneth glared at Thomas. "Promise me."

"All right, brother. I promise." Thomas swallowed hard as the tension bled out of Kenneth.

"Good. It's all we can do for our women. Love and protect them, is all."

## Chapter 4

### *4. but those who sang loudest were dead*

The village was out in full force, even more so than earlier in the day, by the looks of it. The solemn occasion had everyone in whispers. Even Old Woman Withers was there, in front.

Savannah and her mother searched the crowd for Thomas while trying not to get separated by villagers vying for a view.

"There he is, mother, look!" Savannah said. A hush fell over them all as Thomas and Kenneth appeared, between them lifted the bed. Gloria was wrapped properly in the shawl of the dead. They placed her on her high pyre and stepped down. Thomas gripped Kenneth's arm before he joined his family.

Phillip stood before Kenneth and offered him a torch. Kenneth accepted it wordlessly and sobs broke out as he set it to the pyre.

The flames were orange and red as they climbed higher and the darkening sky contrasted beautifully.

Savannah could not concentrate on the flicker. She searched for Eric. There he was, next to his father. He looked furious. His jaw clenched and his heavy brows drew together. Sarah's hand gripped her arm and that split second distraction made her lose sight of him.

"I'll be right back," she whispered to her mother. Sarah called after her but could not weave through the crowd in pursuit.

Eric was nowhere to be found. The rest of the village looked deserted. Where could he-

"It's not safe to walk about at night."

Savannah jumped at the sound of Eric's voice. She turned, and there he was. "I'm safe now that you're here. Why did you"

"I'm very serious about this, Savannah." His voice had a hard, protective edge. "I don't you walking about in the dark. I need to keep you safe."

"Safe from what?"

"Safe from everything." He gripped her hands and brought them to his chest. "I love you, Savannah. I don't want you to come to harm."

"You love me?" Savannah gasped. He'd never been so direct, so forceful.

"You hadn't guessed?" He smiled that wry smile of his that she liked -loved- and kissed her forehead. "I want to marry you and for you to have my children, dozens of them. Far, far away from here." He said it almost like a prayer and Savannah's heart swelled.

"Yes, Eric, I love you, too. My heart is yours."

"And mine yours, my love."

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Their eyes locked and he ran his fingers through her hair as he bent his head down, and someone screamed. Eric instinctively snapped her closer to him.

"What was that?"

"Trouble," Eric growled.

Mary clapped a hand over her mouth in horror. What trickery was this? What mockery did some imp make of this tragic day? The flames that covered Gloria to take her soul to the Divine had turned ice blue and raged as if on paper kindling. And the fire, it *screamed*. Like a hawk diving in the sky, by one hundred. She gripped George's arm.

"Where is our son?"

"He is not here with us. He will be fine."

"I know." She squint her eyes at the unnatural flame and said a prayer for her soul.

They watched as Phillip stepped forward, waving his fist in the air. He stood too close to the pyre and the flame kissed his temple, singing the hair from his head. Two boys helped him up just as Withers began to scream.

"There is evil among us!" Her hand turned into a small fist and an accusing finger that she crooked towards them all. "Take my word! This is no small thing!" The crowd hushed and Old Woman Withers spoke over the howling flames. She turned to Kenneth, who was shaking as if he were going to scatter in the wind. "It were no ordinary wolf that had your wife, Kenneth!"

The crowd gasped. Surely not! She can't mean!

Kenneth shook his head and his hands pressed down over his ears.

"Leave him be, hag!" A barreling voice called out. "Can't you see that he's been through enough? Don't start on with your nonsense." Bishop stepped forward. He was a hulking man with a shaggy black beard and piercing green eyes. A blacksmith, he usually kept to his work. He towered over most men and Withers appeared miniscule beside him.

Withers pointed her finger towards his chest. "I know of what I speak, blacksmith." Then she turned to the crowd, "Take in this night, all! I have seen more than you care to forget. Beware of the werewolf!" The flame roared, then suddenly died.

George held Mary tight so that she would not be knocked away from him in the sea of panicked souls. He caught sight of his son, a mirror image of him, holding tight the red-haired girl Savannah. Superstition was a certain way to rile up villagers. A certain way to disaster. He prayed that it came and left swiftly, whatever it was.

## Chapter 5

*5. Many would bargain with Death and the Devil*

"Didn't I tell you? Didn't I warn you? Here is the proof!" Withers wailed. Others gathered around to gasp and mutter at the sight- a row of herbs cleaved straight from the ground. Wolfsbane. "They are among us!"

*Would the wolfsbane save us?*

*We need the protection of the wolfsbane!*

*Where does the wolfsbane grow wild?*

*They are among us.*

*They must be stopped!*

*Who could it be?*

*They must have seen the pyre!*

*They heard the words!*

*They saw the flames and destroyed the wolfsbane!*

*Withers is right! Listen to her!*

*What are we to do?*

*What are we to do?*

"Listen to me," Phillip called over the mob. "Do not panic." They surged towards him, desperation in their features. "I have wolfsbane." He quieted their cries with his hands. "Please, I only have a small amount."

"I'll give you five chickens!"

"Nay, I'll give you two sheep!"

Those who had nothing to bid slipped away, their hearts heavy with worry.

George knocked on the door and could hear Suzanne from the other side. The older woman sure had a voice on her, and that was saying nothing of her gossiping.

"Have you come for wolfsbane?" She asked before she saw who stood in the doorway. George and his son looked at each other.

"What?" Eric asked, his voice flat.

"Oh, it's the butchers!" Suzanne called over her shoulder. She showed them in.

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Phillip met them in the sitting room. He looked invigorated.

"Hello, George. It's good to see you, Eric."

They returned the pleasantries and handed him the cuts of meat that they brought to the doctor every week. Suzanne took it from Phillip and disappeared into the back.

"Phillip, what's this I hear of wolfsbane?" George asked.

"Did you want to have some for your doorway? We have only a bit left, but-,"

"I'm surprised at you, getting caught up in this superstition." George crossed his arms and looked at the man hard. Phillip laughed.

"Don't you think it better to be prepared than to realize later that perhaps you were mistaken?"

"I'm not mistaken. There are no such things as werewolves. It's an old wives tale, and frankly I think Withers is far past her mind. Bishop was right, says me."

"Yet what do we know of Bishop? He's a shady character."

"He works hard, keeps to himself. There's nothing wrong with a man for wanting that."

Phillip shrugged. "Withers reckons herself a seer. Says she can sense the evil is right here in the village."

"Maybe," Eric said, "what she's sensing isn't the werewolves." He narrowed his eyes at the doctor and glanced to the front door, where another villager was bartering with Suzanne over a clove.

"Aye, werewolves don't exist!" George said, slapping his thigh. The doctor sighed.

"I don't want to argue with you, my friends. Thank you for the cuts." He stood and showed them out. At the door he asked, "Are you sure about the wolfsbane?"

"We're sure," Eric answered.

"I hear you, lad. But think- what was that at the pyre? We didn't imagine that, now did we?" He looked at George. "I'll be seeing you." He closed the door.

"He's quite a salesman, isn't he?" Eric asked his father.

"I can't believe he's being so foolish. Mark me, he'll make things worse before he makes them better."

"What do you think about Old Woman Withers, passing herself off as a seer?"

"I think that if she believes the tripe she's selling, she'd keep her mouth shut. I'm sure the 'werewolves' wouldn't appreciate the threat of being exposed."



## Chapter 6

*6. and hope themselves relieved,*

"Oh, mercy!" Sarah cried out as she rushed forward to join the mob.

"Mother, what now?" Savannah asked as she raced behind her. The two women pushed forward to see. Everyone stood before Old Woman Withers' house, and Savannah thought that the old woman was screeching omens again.

"Sarah! Oh, good that you're here!" Suzanne called and gripped the woman by the arm. "Withers has gone and died!"

"Killed? Another one?"

"No, it looks like she died in her sleep. But, Sarah, oh, there's something else!"

Savannah tried to catch her words as she lagged behind. She saw her mother gasp, a look of complete shock on her face.

The three women stood in the doorway of Withers' house. Phillip stepped from within.

"I can't get her to come down."

"Who?" Savannah asked, confused. Wasn't Withers dead, then?

"Did you tell her?" Phillip asked Suzanne.

"I just told Sarah."

Sarah turned to Savannah. "There's a girl, Savannah. A girl who's been kept locked up in the attic all this time. For years!"

"And now she won't come down," Phillip said.

"I'll get her." Savannah said. The others stared at her. She set her arms straight to her side. "I'm sure that I can do it. Please, let me try."

Suzanne looked at her curiously, then to Phillip.

"The stairs are in the back. Be careful, it's dark."

She exhaled and stepped through the threshold.

It smelled like plants and wet earth inside. There were pots and jars everywhere and pictures stacked in messy piles. Every man, woman and child had wondered at some point what it was like inside Old Woman Withers' home, since she'd stopped inviting people in so many years ago. And so she'd finally died. Savannah wondered just how old she was. And how did she die?

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Savannah's skirt brushed a pot and it tilted almost too far before she caught it. She exhaled in relief and noticed that there was something already spilled on the floor. It was in the shadow but as she bent closer to look at it, she knew what she saw. Paw prints. Big ones. She looked over her shoulder and, seeing no one, smeared them out. No sense in giving the village any more to fret over. She dusted her hands and then she saw the stairs.

They creaked as she ascended and she knew that the girl would hear them.

"Hello?" Silence. "My name is Savannah, and I've come to take you from this place. Old Woman Withers has died," she said as she pushed against the door. It was locked. She sat outside of it.

After counting to ten under her breath, she tapped on the door. Then she tapped again.

An answering tap came from the other side of the door.

"I know how it is to feel locked up," Savannah said. "To want to get away. Don't you want to come away with me?"

"But you aren't going anywhere," a soft voice replied.

"Sure I am. First, I'm going away from here. I don't really like it in here. Do you?"

"No. Is she really gone?"

"Yes. Will you tell me your name?"

"Jessica."

"Good, Jessica. Do you want to open the door and meet me?"

"Yes."

The door unlatched and Savannah stood. A girl, maybe eight years old, stood there. She had black hair and large brown eyes. Her skin was pale from being inside.

"Hello, Jessica." Savannah offered her hand and the girl rushed to her, throwing her hands around Savannah's waist.

Savannah lifted the girl onto her hip - she was dangerously underweight- and descended the stairs.

They all looked on as Savannah appeared with the tiny girl on her hip. Sarah and Suzanne fretted over them like mother hens. Phillip wiped his forehead.

*Look at that poor girl!*

*Withers must have been a madwoman!*

*What kind of person could have done such a thing?*

*Oh, how thin the girl is!*

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*Good Phillip found her!*

*Phillip and Suzanne are such good ones.*

*I told you that Withers was a nutter!*

*I didn't believe her anyway.*

*Ha! What seer she was!*

*She was turning us all mad!*

*Withers is probably to blame for all this anyway!*

*Good thing the red-haired girl came!*

"What can be done with her?" Suzanne asked her husband Philip and Sarah. Jessica was still clinging to Savannah in the next room. "I suppose we could keep her here," she suggested. Think of all the visitors she'd haveâ

"Don't be silly. We're too old to care for a child," Phillip sighed. Suzanne frowned.

"Well, she does certainly seem to take to my girl," Sarah said.

"I suppose," Suzanne said.

"Would you mind, Sarah?" Phillip asked. "I don't mean to burden you, but,"

"Don't think to ask twice," Sarah said. "Of course I'll take in the poor thing. What she needs is some good mothering. It will be good for Savannah, I think. Of course, I'll have to talk to Thomas but I know that the man can't say no to a child in need."

"That's mighty fine of you, Sarah," Phillip said relievedly. "And of Thomas, too."

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Thomas took one look at the girl and knew that he couldn't say no. She wouldn't say a word and stood behind Savannah, both hands on his daughter's skirt. Savannah had that defiant look in her eye that he knew didn't come from him.

"I'm more than happy to have another in my family."

"Oh, father, thank you!" Savannah exclaimed.

"Aye, it's nothing," he said, hugging her. "You're responsible for her, you know."

"I'll take very good care of her. I will." Her eyes almost glowed. "Come on, Jessica. Let's get you washed up." Her hand swallowed the dark-haired girl's as she walked her out of the room.

"Thomas, thank you. It's best for all of us." Sarah hugged him warmly, laying her chin on his chest. He looked down into her eyes and smiled.

## Tale of the High Moon

"Who knew that we'd end up with two daughters?"

"The world keeps giving them to us."

"Yes." His smile faltered. "Do you think that we should tell Savannah?"

"About what?" Sarah asked but she dropped her eyes.

"You know very well what."

"She's our daughter, Thomas. Nothing can change that."

"I know it well as you do, butâ when I look at that girl, Jessica, I get the odd feeling, an urge almost, to tell Savannah the truth."

"There are many truths."

"Not like this one."

"But what if it makes her hate us, knowing that she's not our flesh and blood? Please, don't risk it. My heart couldn't take the pain."

Thomas sighed and rubbed his face.

"Then I won't. I love ye, woman."

"And I love you."

He kissed her.

## Chapter 7

7. Just as surely as love is foolish and knows no bounds,

"Thank you, Bishop." Eric said, pocketing the small iron pieces. He had a delicate touch for such a large man.

"Ah, think nothing of it. I've been having a rough go, of late."

"I've heard. Phillip hasn't been the best of men towards you. People are fools."

"Aye, they are that, and fickle, too. They'll be back once they get some new bone to chew on."

"Let's hope that it's soon enough."

"Right, that." He lifted his arm back to heavy work and Eric was surprised that his beard never caught in the flame. He and Bishop had become friends, of sorts, and he admired the toughness of the man. Nothing moved him.

Eric walked the short way to Savannah's, cutting through the woods. Rumor of werewolves perturbed him none; he was better than that. His feet moved quickly so that he would all the sooner see his love. He could hear her in the distance, her laughter carried on the wind.

She was sitting a little ways off from the house, on a hill. Beside her was a dark-haired girl he'd not seen before. Savannah had her head tilted, listening to whatever the girl was saying. He stopped and took in the sight. The sunlight caught in his love's hair and she glowed.

The girl turned suddenly towards him. She gripped Savannah's arm in apparent terror. Savannah's face brightened when she saw Eric there, though the girl was trying to pull her away.

"It's okay, Jessica. That there is only Eric, the boy I told you about."

"That can't be him," Jessica whispered.

"Why not?"

Jessica clamped her mouth as Eric drew closer.

"Hello, Savannah." He beamed down at her. She took his offered hand and stood. She reached for Jessica but the girl shied away.

"Eric, this is Jessica. They found her in Old Woman Withers' home, hidden away. She's very smart."

"I've heard of her. They also say she's very pretty," he charmed as he squat to reach eye-level with the child. She hung her head so her dark hair fell in front of her face. "But will I see her face to tell for myself?" he teased. Slowly, Jessica lifted her head. "Ah, there she is! They were right, I think."

Her eyes seemed overly large, like she was trying to see everything. When she looked at him, he smiled and pat her head. She jerked back from him, almost horrified.

## Tale of the High Moon

"She's in bad shape," Savannah whispered to Eric. She touched Jessica's cheek and the girl stood behind her, away from Eric.

"It's a shame. But I've brought you both a present."

"Really?" Savannah asked.

"Really," he mocked as his hand went to his pocket. Two small crosses lay in his palm. "Bishop was kind enough."

"Bishop? Kind?"

"Don't believe the rumors, is all."

"I'll believe what you have to say."

"I'm glad to hear it, believe me." He wanted to kiss her, but Jessica was watching intently. "There's a loop at the top so a tie can be thread through. It'll make a decent necklace."

"I love it. Jessica, come see."

She hesitantly approached Eric's palm.

"Take one," he offered.

She looked from him to his palm and snatched a cross. Savannah laughed.

"You don't have to be so shy."

"It's no problem with me. I'm sure we'll come to be friends before this is all through." He smiled at the girl again. "So you brought her from her hiding place, did you? I can't imagine being trapped in with Old Woman Withers."

"Neither can I nor anyone in the village."

"I always said that you could charm a beast from the darkness," he grinned. "Well, I better be getting on. My father needs my help this evening. You stay safe, do you hear me? The little one, too."

"I will."

He pressed a kiss to her hand.

"Goodbye, Jessica."

"Goodbye," she whispered.

"I don't like him. He's not like you said."

"What do you mean? He was awfully sweet to you. Did he scare you?"

"Yes. He-I don't like him. He loves you a lot."

## Tale of the High Moon

"He does, I think." Savannah blushed. "I love him, too."

"You oughtn't. He's going to hurt you."

"Don't be silly. Eric would never hurt me." She brushed through Jessica's thick hair. "What was it like, living with Old Woman Withers?"

"She never let me go outside. I couldn't open the windows or go downstairs when the door was open. She was always talking, always asking."

"What did she talk about?"

"Plants and animals and the nature of things. She taught me all of what she knew, but she didn't tell me what I wanted."

"What did you want?"

"I wanted to know who my mother was. Where is my father? She said that my mother is dead and that I should forget about having one. Gran was all that I should worry about."

"I'm sorry. You shouldn't have had to live that way. Do you remember anything else?"

"I was a baby when Gran took me."

"Oh." She plaited the hair into one long braid. "You said that she asked you things. What things?"

For a moment, Savannah thought that Jessica hadn't heard.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Cross my heart and hope,"

"Don't!" Jessica almost screamed. Savannah stilled, lost for words. "Don't say 'hope to die'. I'll tell you. Sometimes I have dreams about people. I don't know who they are and I don't know where they are. Gran would ask me to describe them. She said I had a gift. I'm not supposed to tell anyone but Gran. But she's dead."

Savannah folded her arms and looked at Jessica. She knew what she was saying: that the dreams were the future, like magic. Like witchcraft. People were still being burned for that. Not ever in the village, of course, because everyone knew everyone there. No one would burn their neighbor.

"I believe you, Jessica. And we'll keep this a secret between us, okay? Not even Eric will know. I promise."

"Thank you, Savannah." The girl hugged her tightly.

## Chapter 8

*8. They find themselves deceived.*

"Kenneth, how good to see you! Come right on in, Phillip will be with us in a moment." Suzanne ushered him in and he was surprised to find himself not the only visitor of the evening. Of course, the doctor and his wife had risen in popularity since Gloria's death, but he didn't expect such a blatant display.

He tried not to be miserable as every pair of eyes scrutinized him as he found a seat in the corner. They expected him to be miserable and to look as bad as he did. Otherwise, what would there be to talk about? A bitter taste rose in his throat.

"Kenneth, Suzanne told me you were here." Phillip greeted as he pulled a chair close.

"I'm surprised you could find me amidst your guests. It's quite the party in here." He tried to take the hard edge out of his voice and the criticism.

"Yes, Suzanne has come to enjoy the company." The look on his face said that the good doctor would rather not have so many underfoot.

"And you, the business, no? What a profit that wolfsbane has made you."

"Well, there is no true price of protection, is there. If you would like, I have just a bit left."

"No, it's too late for me."

"Kenneth, would you like a drink?" Suzanne asked, the gracious hostess.

"Something to put fur on my chin," he replied, then laughed dryly. He had stopped shaving since Gloria's death. Since her killing. Suzanne smiled at him but gave her husband a worried look as if to say, 'Don't let him get out of hand'. Wouldn't her guests, her gossiping hens, just love that, though? "I must be crazy to decline, am I right? I'm probably the only one to turn you down."

"Not the only one. In fact, George turned me down flat the other day. Said there was no such things as werewolves. But you and I know different, don't we?"

Kenneth gave him a hard look. Phillip wanted to bite his tongue. Is that any kind of way to speak to a grieving man? Especially Kenneth. He'd been a wild, wandering and fiery youth, finally tamed only by Gloria. Without Gloria, Kenneth was apt to explode. He decided to take a different vein. "And Bishop, now that's a hard-headed man. Very shady, too. Very shady. I mean, the man has no family, no friends. What's he really doing in this village?"

"You're saying?"

Phillip leaned in to Kenneth, as if everyone hadn't heard this from him already, "I'm saying that if it was anyone who was a -you know- it would be him. It makes sense."

"Here you go," Suzanne interrupted.

"To what separates men from beasts," Kenneth toasted to no one and downed the drink.



## Tale of the High Moon

Phillip chuckled unsurely. "Did you hear about Withers? That poor woman."

"I heard. Who hadn't? What do you think did her in? Your professional opinion, doctor."

"Age, I'd say. Stress. But the girl was a surprise."

"Aye, I'd heard there'd been a wee girl kept prisoner. Can you imagine that- kept locked in with Withers?" They both laughed. "Kind of killed her credibility, so to speak, didn't that?"

"Yes, it did." Phillip frowned as if remembering something unpleasant. "But now that's passed and I hear that the girl is doing quite well."

"The girl?" Suzanne interrupted. "Yes, she's living with Sarah's red-haired girl, Savannah. What an odd pair they make. I've heard that they've been seen at all hours of the day, wandering through fields and woods. Picking plants and things."

"Considering that the girl had never been outside, I'd say that was normal." Kenneth said.

"Normal?" Suzanne scoffed. "Holding hands and dancing in circles with flowers in their hair, normal? I don't think so. The girl should have stayed with us."

"The girl didn't want to be with us," Phillip softly reminded her. He'd had to remind her of more and more things since all of the attention.

"Well, I don't care what *charm* Savannah has over the girl, that child would be safer here. You know what they say about red-haired women," she said confidently.

"That they were born that way? That they're part Irish?" Kenneth offered.

"No. That they're potion-brewers and enchantresses."

"Nothing like our doctor here, then, mixer of medicines." Kenneth countered sarcastically. "You're no better than Old Woman Withers, screaming nonsense," he growled. Suzanne backed away fearfully.

"Phillip!"

"Watch your tongue, Suzanne," Phillip warned. "You let it get away with too much. Forgive her, Kenneth. We're just a couple of old people trying to make it through."

"You seem to be 'making it through' just fine. Care to sell me some wolfsbane? Care to trade me some lies?" He directed towards Phillip, the latter towards Suzanne. He stood suddenly. "Phillip, you have changed. Your house is now a den of lies and gossip, a breeding ground for dangerous thoughts. You ought to watch yourself."

Phillip stood and placed a hand on Kenneth's shoulder. "It is you who have changed. Think of that."

Kenneth gave him a weary look and his eyes were still haunted by grief and guilt. He put a hand on Phillip's shoulder and left.

## Chapter 9

### *9. When one knocks at the Devil's door*

"Suzanne, I saw you that day outside of Withers' with the little girl and Sarah's daughter."

"Oh, yes. I was there, of course. That little darling needed help. She's doing just fine, no, she isn't here. She's living with Sarah's girl. She's doing fine, but I worry."

"About what?"

"Oh, just some things that I've heard. I hope she's not being, you know, influenced by Savannah -that's the red-haired girl - in a way she shouldn't be."

"In what way?"

"You're dragging it out of me but okay. Well, you know what they say about red-haired girls. That sometimes they're, you know, changelings."

"You don't say."

"And you've seen Thomas and Sarah, they're sweet as can be! But that girl."

"Now that you say it, I've seen her singing to herself sometimes. And unnaturally pretty! And then there's that hair! God love her for it, but where does it come from?"

"That's what I say. I asked Phillip just the other day, because I couldn't remember it, 'When did Thomas and Sarah move into the village?' and you know what he said? I kid not, 'Just a bit over sixteen years ago with their baby girl already crawling.'"

"You're kidding!"

"Not at all. And you know what else? That girl has never been sick a day in her life! Never once been through for a fever, stomach ache, nothing!"

"You don't say."

"That's why I worry about the girl sometimes. Were she where I could watch her, then I just know that I'd have piece of mind. And you all could come and visit her. They don't let anyone see her, you know."

"They don't?"

"No, they always say that Savannah had taken her somewhere. They spend all of their time together. Not even Sarah gets to see her much."

"Oh, poor Sarah!"

"That's what I say. It must be hard having a daughter like that. She and Thomas have tried, God knows they have, but with a red-haired girl there's no telling."

## Tale of the High Moon

"You don't suppose the red-haired girl had anything funny to do with Gloria, do you?"

"I can't say, truthfully. But I can say that Sarah was Gloria's best friend and that they three would see her two, maybe three times a week."

"And everyone knows how jealous demons can be, taking something like a friendship and destroying it for no good reason."

"I know, I know. And Phillip told me that when Sarah found out about Gloria, Savannah was standing right there and didn't shed a tear. She just grabbed her mother and took her home. Probably glad to have her to herself, if you ask me."

"And Gloria was like an aunt to that child! Oh, that's unnatural!"

"That's what I say. And on the night of Gloria's funeral, do you remember seeing her there? Savannah? I didn't."

"Actually, I did see her. But you know what? She did disappear just before that demon of a fire erupted."

"And that's when Withers' wolfsbane was dug up. If you were a werewolf, wouldn't you do the same?"

"The very same. Oh, I can't believe that!"

"I try not to think it. I try to pray for it to turn out some other way in my mind, but I keep thinking of how that little girl is with her right now!"

"Shame and outrage, it is!"

"I know, I know. Try not to dwell on it, please. After all, it could just be happenstance. This is just between you and me, right?"

"Surely!"

"Thank you," Suzanne sighed as she left.

"Do you know what I just heard from Suzanne?"

"I do love a good piece of gossip!"

## Chapter 10

10. At the height of the dead's high Moon

"I can't stand it anymore, Thomas," Sarah said, holding her head in her hands.

"You have to. It will pass, like all untrue gossip," he said as he put his hands on her shoulders reassuringly.

"But it's not all of it untrue! She *isn't* our child, but she's not a changeling. I know that. My heart tells me that much. Yetâ !" "

"Oh, no, Sarah."

"You know it! You know that she is different from us. It's not just the red hair. It's how she looks at the stars, how she sings to the birds. How that girl connects with her! They both are strange."

"They're smart is all. Sarah, we've been blessed with two girls who are thinkers, not cursed with changelings or imps. Don't let that silly gossip corrupt you!"

"I just wish they would stop," Sarah said, crying. "I just want the best for my girls."

"I do, too. We'll be strong. It's just talk and we are stronger than that."

Jessica crept away from the door, hating the sound of Sarah's tears. She was such a kind and loving woman. And she thought of her as a daughter, which warmed Jessica. But it was Savannah she loved, and Savannah who needed to be protected. Fear hit her in the chest and she ran to find Savannah.

"Jessica, what's the hurry?"

"Nothing, I just had to make sure that you were still here."

"Of course I am. You know we never go out at night."

"I know. But that's not what they say, is it?"

"What, those lies? I don't worry about them. I've got my family and Eric, so everything is as it should be."

"And me?"

"I said 'family'. That's you, too." Savannah looked at Jessica again. Sometimes the girl stared at her with an expression of such miserable dread that it scared her. She was looking at her that way now. "Come here and tell me what's wrong."

"I'm scared."

"Scared of what? Not still of werewolves? Nothing's going to come for you."

"Not me. You."

## Tale of the High Moon

Savannah laughed. "No werewolf is going to get me. I've got Eric to protect me. Besides, there's no such thing." She thought of the paw prints and smiled. "Now, it's getting dark so you must be getting to sleep. You can teach me more about flowers tomorrow. Okay?"

"Okay."

## Chapter 11

*11. One must be prepared for Him to answer,*

Suzanne heard an eerie scrape at the door. She imagined an overly large dog pawing at the door. Scrape, scrape, drag. She shoved Phillip awake.

"Phillip, there's something at the door!"

"Are you sure it isn't your imagination running off again?"

"When did you turn so bitter to me?"

Phillip sat up. "When did we go so wrong? We're not bad people, or we weren't."

"Phillip, the door!"

"Oh, all right."

She stood behind him as he opened the door. There was no one. He turned to say that to Suzanne when he saw it. Burned into his front door was a large X glittering with small sparks. He'd never seen such a thing. Suzanne took one look, inhaled and before Phillip could stop her, let out a splitting scream.

*What is this?*

*What's going on?*

*Oh, tragedy without end!*

*Has someone died? Someone else?*

*A mark on the door! The devil's mark!*

*Who's door? Whose!*

*The doctor's door. He's been marked!*

*Suzanne and the doctor have been marked!*

*The werewolf will strike them! They must be saved!*

*The werewolf must be stopped!*

*Find the werewolf, kill it!*

*Who is guilty? Who is guilty?*

*Burn them! Find them, burn them!*

*Her, the changeling! Suzanne warned us of her!*

## Tale of the High Moon

*Her! It was her! She must have!*

*She's a witch! A werewolf! Kill her!*

*The red-haired witch! She's got the child!*

*She's marked the door of her next victim!*

*The jealous one! The murderess! The trickster in a woman's dress!*

*Get her! Get her! Get her!*

---

Savannah woke when something in her room fell.

"What? Jessica?" She became immediately alert. "What's happened?"

---

Kenneth woke to a pounding on his door. What now?

"Kenneth! Justice for you, at last!" An unfamiliar voice called to him. He unlatched the door. "They've found the werewolf!"

"They what?" All sleep left him.

"Yes, they're taking her to the square now. She's going to burn for what she's done to you and to this village."

"Wait, *her*?"

"The red-haired changeling. Thomas' girl. Her parents are innocent; it's just the devil we want."

Kenneth took off in a sprint, never once looking back.

## Chapter 12

*12. 'Oh, you've arrived none too soon', and*

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry! I just wanted them to stop! I thought that,"

"You wanted who to stop? Jessica, you're not making any sense."

"The talkers! The ones who spread the lies!"

Savannah looked at Jessica's hands. They were black with what looked like ash.

"Jessica, what have you done?"

"I was trying to scare them - the doctor and his wife - into leaving you alone. Leaving us all alone, but I think it's made it come true."

"What? What come true?"

"The dream that I had about you." Jessica's eyes teemed. "They're going to come for you now, and it's all my fault."

"No, hush. Nothing's your fault. We can do this." She pulled a hand through her damnably red hair, the strands that Eric loved. "We're going to run away."

She knew she was too late when she saw the glow coming from the west. The mob was coming for her, baying for her blood. Jessica held her hand tightly. Sarah and Thomas awoke.

"Where are you going, Savannah?" Thomas shouted.

"They're coming for me, Mother, Father!" Savannah cried. "They think that I'm a witch, and they're coming for me!"

"Nonsense! You've been listening to too much talk!"

"No, that talk is coming for me! Listen!"

In their silence they could hear the shouts.

"Oh, Thomas!" Sarah cried.

"You're not going anywhere," he declared. "I'll talk some sense into them and we'll all be back sleep before it's begun."

"No, Father! Let me go!" Savannah broke for the door but Thomas barred the way.

"They. Will. Not."

"Father!" Savannah sobbed, fear coursing through her as she felt the mob close in.



## Tale of the High Moon

"Oh, Savannah, tell me it isn't true!" Sarah cried, her hands over her face.

"What!" Savannah shouted in a panicked voice.

"Tell me that you aren't a witch! Please tell me that you never touched Gloria!"

Savannah looked at her mother incredulously, as if she'd been stabbed.

"Why didn't you ever tell me that you're not my mother? Sarah! Why!"

"I don't know! I don't know! I didn't think that you would,"

"Sarah, listen to what you are saying!" Thomas shouted at her.

"I just don't know, Thomas!" She collapsed in a chair.

A heavy fist or object landed on the door.

"Thomas! Give up the girl!" Someone called. Savannah trembled but kept her hand firm in Jessica's.

Thomas opened the door.

"Listen, I think this has all gotten carried away. Why don't we talk about this,"

"Shove it! Give her up!" Several people called. Savannah was numb as Jessica sobbed into her skirts.

"Now, listen to me!" Thomas growled, but was shoved out of the way as the mob poured in.

Jessica screamed as a thousand hands grabbed Savannah and she was too weak to hold on. Sarah stood in the corner, crying and Thomas was held down by two men. Savannah struggled against them but their hands were crushing and unforgiving. She knew then that they meant to kill her.

"I didn't do it! I didn't!" She screamed. They mocked her.

"What lies it spews forth! How cunning! What trickery!"

Kenneth caught his breath and looked around the maddened square. The looks on the villager's faces were the same - savage delight, only some confused. Eric's was one of them. Then the mob came through, all torches and blind ignorance. And atop them, oh God, was the girl. Savannah. Kenneth felt a burning on his cheek and as he looked over he saw that Eric was glaring at him, full of hatred.

"Eric!" Savannah screamed as they began to tie her down. She had seen him, hadn't she? He was there for her, wasn't he? When there was no one else to save her? When everyone looked at her with such hate and fear and there was Suzanne grinning and Phillip wouldn't even look at her oh God where was her father where was Jessica she hoped she was safe where was her mother why why why where was Eric where was he? "Eric!"

"Savannah!" Eric's blood was pounding in his ears. His skin felt hot, too hot. He saw Kenneth standing over there, apart. It was all his fault, everything was. Now his love, his heart - "Savannah! Let me through!" He threw people down by the neck, not caring if they were hurt or dead. What he cared about was being tied to the stake. He was halfway through the mob before they realized that he was throwing men twice his size out of the way. They flew back ten feet as he crashed into them, trying to get to Savannah.

## Tale of the High Moon

*Look at that! He is a beast!*

*She calls him! He is one of them!*

*Kill him! Get them both!*

*Kill them! Kill them! Kill them!*

Fur erupted along his arms and his teeth were too big for his jaw but he was trying to keep it together until he got to her. The men began to beat him with shovels and torches but they were nothing. Someone was helping him fight, trying to get Savannah free. Bishop. Bishop was there, throwing men back, taking punches and giving more. Eric met his eye and thanked him silently. Bishop nodded his head and cracked another man in the skull.

Savannah pulled against the ropes but they were tied securely. She tore her skin trying to loosen herself. Someone lit the hay beneath her and she screamed. A howl mixed with her scream and she saw her Eric, her lovely Eric, change into a wolf. He was the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen, and the last.

Eric felt his heart explode the moment Savannah caught fire. Her pain was his pain. He leapt over the mob, even as they cut him, beat him. Savannah writhed as her skin burned. Her hair curled up in the flames.

He leapt upon the two who had brought this on Savannah and himself. Suzanne screamed as the wolf ripped Phillip's head clear of his body. She stumbled backwards but Eric caught her by the legs and shook her to death. He howled in grief as he tackled the stake that held his love bound. Bishop was there beside him, using his bare hands to pull away the still-lit rope. Savannah was beyond hope, beyond repair. Bishop hung his head and his tears sizzled as they fell on Savannah's face.

Eric could feel the strength bleeding from him. He would die soon, as well. But he gathered his strength to turn to the mob. The men ran in every direction, save one who stood still. Kenneth. Eric launched himself at him, snapping jaws and clawing paws. Kenneth fell under the attack but held the werewolf off. Eric's eyes were full of hate and blame as they stilled. Savannah drew her last breath, and her spirit called his to accompany her. The wolf fell limp against him, and Kenneth rolled it off. The men tried to lift the wolf.

"Wait," he started, but bit off his warning. The wolf burst into blue flame and the men caught fire. They ran, screaming.

Kenneth looked at the aftermath of it all. Waste, such waste. Savannah was burned to death, Eric followed her into the afterlife. George and Mary were stoned, maybe to death, for suspicion of being werewolves. Phillip and Suzanne were torn to pieces. Bishop had been run through and hanged for his involvement. Half of the villagers were wounded or dead.

*We waged a battle and won!*

*That's something to pass on to our children!*

*Where is my husband? Where is my son?*

*It was good. We did the right thing!*

*We defeated the evil!*

## Tale of the High Moon

*There will be no more werewolves!*

*So much blood!*

*Sacrifices for the greater good!*

*All this death because of some witch and her werewolf!*

*Lament the righteous dead!*

*Curse the guilty souls! Pray not for them!*

## Chapter 13

*13. to swallow you whole without qualm.*

Jessica held her breath as she hid beneath Savanna's bed. The one was coming, she knew. She would not tell Thomas and Sarah. Not afterâno, she would not. They would meet him soon enough.

Thomas sat at his table with his wife. They said nothing and didn't touch. There was nothing and everything between them. There was a knock at the door, then it swung open. Kenneth.

"Hello, Thomas." Kenneth said, his face different, sharper.

"Kenneth, my friend. What brings you by?"

"I was just in the square. Remember the day that you came to me in my home? The promise you made?"

Thomas' throat clicked as he swallowed. "I do."

"Well?"

"What, Kenneth? I did try. No one can say,"

Kenneth threw the table across the room and Sarah gasped, too worn for a scream. "*Liar*. How could you have tried if I had to watch Savannah burn? Eric died trying to save her! Bishop, as well! And where were you? Here!" Kenneth grabbed Thomas by his shirt. "I am changed, Thomas. I have lost my humanity." As he spoke, Thomas was horrified by how Kenneth's overgrown beard spread across his jaw and down his neck, crept up his face and along his arms. The last thing he saw was fangs.

Jessica wanted to cover her ears but she didn't. She made herself listen to all of it. Thomas being broken against the wall, Sarah screaming as she was split open, Kenneth as he paced around the room, leaving bloody paw prints. She waited for him.

"Girl? Where are you? I can smell you in here."

Jessica trembled. The bed flipped from over her and Kenneth looked down. "Come here, girl."

Jessica crawled towards him but he grabbed the back of her dress and set her to her feet.

"My name is Jessica." She stood straight as Savannah would. Kenneth stared at her, not a hint of what he was thinking on his face. She shivered despite her show of bravery. He was almost all animal on the inside. The man in him had died.

"Well, Jessica. You're what the fuss is all about. You're the true seer, then. Not Withers, that hag. She was just using you?"

"Yes. Yes, but I'm not what all the fuss is about. You are," she said defiantly. "You started all of this."

A flicker of sadness passed through his eyes.

## Tale of the High Moon

"Aye, it is that. It was I who killed Gloria. It was an accident, of course. She was out looking for me and she shouldn't have been. The moon was high and that's when I have the least control. She surprised me. And I attacked her and my unborn child. I didn't know what to do so I took her to the doctor. I knew she was dead, butâ you always just hope that something that bad can still be fixed. I should have died with her, as is our way, but I didn't give her my heart completely until it was too late. I'd been afraid, and nowâ That would have been that, had not the pyre burned blue. I didn't think that she would - only werewolves burn blue- but I didn't take the babe into consideration. Part werewolf, she would have been. I'd like to think that it would have been a girl. My own girl." Kenneth sighed and rubbed at his beard. "Eric was furious with me. He was the only other werewolf in the village and we knew that if it ever got out of control it would end bloodily. I think that he would have left then, if it were not for his lass, Savannah. Innocent of everything, she was. He wanted to take her with him. He never thought that they would come for her, who would? But you knew, didn't you?"

"I dreamt of her long ago."

"Did you, now? Did you dream of Eric slipping in to kill Withers? He did. She was stirring up more trouble than she was worth with those visions of yours. That would have been the end of it, had Suzanne kept to her own business. Ah, and the good doctor!" Kenneth laughed. "It was the doctor who dug up Withers' wolfsbane. I could smell it on him. He made a pretty penny from the sale of that, not that he'll be using it now. He even started rumors about Bishop being a werewolf to keep up sales. And his jealous and gossiping wife, well, she's been set straight. She wanted you, did you know that? And what did she get? A mark on her door."

"I did it. I thought it would scare her and make her leave Savannah alone."

"Instead, it stirred everyone into action."

"It's my fault everyone's dead."

"We're both guilty of bringing death to those that loved us."

"Are you going to kill me now?"

"No. You and I both, we're going to leave here. It's too risky of me to let a true seer walk free and point me out later. And you oughtn't be on your own."

"But what about when the full moon comes?"

"We'll work it out on the way," he said as he offered his hand to her.

"On the way to where, Kenneth?" Jessica asked as she took his hand and kept her eyes locked with his, not on Thomas and Sarah's broken bodies, as they walked out into the open dawn.

"Maybe we'll make our way to the desert. I've seen it once. And call me father."

"What is a desert, father?"

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