

## Full Moons Are Perfect for a Werewolf to Come Out (As Transgender)

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Hand outstretched toward the doorbell, Donnie tossed a nervous glance at me. “You’ll be good tonight, right?”

I injected my glare with all the malice I could possibly aim at my boyfriend. “If you get off on treating me like a kid, you should’ve mentioned that sooner,” I said.

“Gross, Joe,” Donnie said and huffed out a breath, fingers twisting in his hair like he’d done the entire car ride here. He kept saying he was overdue for a haircut, but I liked him a little scruffy. “You know how important this is to me,” he added.

“And that’s why you persuaded your mom to move your family’s Thanksgiving to after the full moon,” I reminded him. “Now it’s over. Everything is going to go fine.”

His lips twisted to one side. “Could you at least lose the sunglasses?”

“So they can see these?” I lifted my frat boy sunglasses to give him an unblocked view of my yellow eyes. I found it incredible how easy he forgot.

“Right, yeah,” Donnie said, worrying the cuff of his sweater between his long fingers. “We can’t screw this up.” In that *we*, I heard a clear and obvious *you*. As if I was a mindless dog, not a grown man who could handle a stupid dinner party.

“Don’t worry your pretty little ass off. I’ll be your good fuckin’ boy,” I said, reaching across him to ring the doorbell and end the conversation. Seconds later, a woman with a gaudy bedazzled turkey apron answered the door. Her mousy black hair swayed around her pointed face as she looked at me. Scratch that, not at me—*over* me, never meeting my eyes.

“Hi, mom,” Donnie said, that lopsided smile I love brightening his face like a rebooted laptop. “Happy Turkey Day!”

She pursed her lips, eyes trained on the pins decorating my jean jacket. Donnie made me take off the ones with nudity, violence, and profanities before driving over. “You’re two minutes later than you told me, sweetie,” his mom said, voice warm in a way that didn’t seep into her face.

I squinted at Donnie to see how he'd react to the snub, but his smile was superglued on. "I know. I'm sorry," Donnie said. He turned to me as if remembering I was there and slapped me on the back. "This is Joseph Ratley, my boyfriend."

I held out my hand to shake, ignoring the way it made me feel like I was selling something. "Nice to meet you, Mrs. Zhang," I said, cringing when my voice broke on the second syllable of "Mrs." My voice hadn't cracked that bad in a while, now that I was close to being ten months on T, but sometimes the HRT gods still decided to strike down my ego.

Mrs. Zhang stared at the tattoos on my hand, lingering on the word *hell* scrawled across my knuckles. The other hand read *bent*. If it had been a colder November night, I might have been able to cover the more raunchy ones with gloves, but no luck. I silently cursed climate change.

Staring somewhere between my eyebrows with a tense smile, she said, "Call me Violet."

Donnie and I followed her inside the house, which was about ten degrees cooler than outside. All the fans were on full blast, the light whirring noise accompanied by warm chatter seeping from the dining room where a long table seated a group of people who looked at me with a variety of uncertain expressions. I took notice of an older woman with bubblegum pink cheeks who let out a little snort when I walked in and a chubby teenager wearing a Cure hoodie who surreptitiously checked me out. I bared my teeth in what I hope looked like a smile and ignored the urge to adjust my shirt.

An older man with thinning hair styled like an aging rockstar waved his arms out wide. "Junior! Good to see you," he said to Donnie, who returned his wave.

I sat down in one of the empty seats, reflecting on this information. Donnie never talked about his dad, who he was apparently named after, or his family for that matter. Looking at the cheerful guy sitting across from me, I wondered why.

"Nice specs," said a man who dressed like he thought Cybertrucks were cool. I didn't know why anyone would wear an untucked t-shirt over belted khakis, but I knew damn well those horn-rimmed glasses weren't prescription. I raised my eyebrows at him, opting to keep my inside thoughts inside for once.

"What's up, old man?" Donnie said as he took a seat next to me. "How's tricks?"

"Old man," the elder Donovan chuckled. "Things are great here. I was just

telling your mother she needs to take a break from the night shifts. Now that you're set up in your new practice, we'll be millionaires by the end of the year!"

"He's a therapist, not a surgeon," a woman on the other side of Donnie said with a tightness to her voice that screamed *I lived in a big city for at least a week*. Beside her, Cybertruck Guy hid a snort with a sip of iced tea.

"A doctor is a doctor," Donovan said. He waved a hand at me. "Plus, he's got a hot brunette on his arm. You're living the American dream, Donnie."

Before I could address being called eye candy, the old lady with a blush fetish did it for me.

"I don't know what America you're living in," she said like she was trying to be quiet. The goth teenager stiffened beside her, and City Girl stared at her napkin like it was a mildly interesting Twitter exchange.

"Food's ready!" Violet called out from the kitchen. The table let out a collective sigh. I followed the herd into the kitchen, snagging a finger in Donnie's belt loop to keep from being separated.

"I can guess which ones are your parents, but who the hell are the rest of these people?" I hissed under my breath.

His eyes flashed a warning at my language, but he pointed at the bitchy old woman and said, "That's my Grandmother Richards, dad's side." Next, he pointed out City Lady and Cybertruck Man. "My sister Alexa and her husband Grant." The goth teen. "Their son Parker."

I forgot half of their names immediately, but I nodded. "Got it. Thanks, baby."

He handed me a plate. "They don't bite," he said, then paused to consider before leaning closer. "Unlike *some* people."

Before I could reply, he moved to help his grandmother fix her plate.

*Bastard*, I thought with a smile. Then, the smell of the food hit me. I wondered if Violet was magic the way each aroma complemented the next, succulent steam rising from the feast like fog on a lake. I waited my turn behind Grandmother Stick-Up-Her-Ass and filled my plate with heaps of turkey, ham, chicken, that hot dogs and beans dish, and a couple sticks of celery to balance it out.

"Guess not all libs are vegan," Grant said as I set my plate on the table, careful to not topple the pile of meat.

I shot him a look that sent him back to buttering his baked potato. Truth is, I used to be vegan until recently. I changed my diet for a couple reasons. One, I got major protein cravings from the testosterone, and plant-based meat wasn't doing it for me anymore. Two, I got turned into a werewolf.

I don't have a cool story to back it up. If your life and body are going to be permanently altered by a supernatural monster, you should at least get an epic fight story to share. But no—a few months ago I fell asleep at the bus station after working a double at the supermarket and woke up to a snarling werewolf sinking its canines into my shoulder. It bolted when I cried out, and my bus arrived soon after. I staunched the goopy flow of blood with my jacket on the ride home and passed out the second I got in bed.

When I woke up the next morning the wound felt slimy in an infected way, like the top layer of soup forgotten on a stove. My brain banged around inside my skull and my limbs weighed me down like full-to-bursting grocery sacks. I called Donnie between bouts of puking my guts out, and he drove me to the hospital, running a hand through my hair when he wasn't holding it away from my face as I hurled into a grocery bag. By the time he pulled into the emergency bay, I felt completely fine. Hell, I felt better than I had before getting attacked. And I was starving. After the hospital's infection tests showed up negative, I convinced him to drive to a crappy pizza place where I devoured a full meat lover's pie under Donnie's concerned gaze, thinking it had just been a really short 24 hour flu.

I didn't realize anything was wrong with me until the next full moon. I mean, I ate twice as much as usual, gained enough weight in muscle to stretch out my clothes, and got significantly more hairy, but I chalked it all up to HRT doing a damn good job. The body contortions and blackouts during my first full moon clued me in. Lucky for me, my boyfriend spent a majority of his childhood idolizing Sam and Dean Winchester. We squeezed lycanthropy into our relationship like a third member.

Violet sat down next to me at the head of the table with a modest plate of greens. She cleared her throat, and the table quieted. "Now that everyone's settled, who wants to say grace?"

I looked to Donovan, but his eyes were on Donnie. So were the eyes of everyone else. I held back a laugh, knowing damn well Donnie hadn't stepped inside a church since his eighteenth birthday.

"I can do it," Donnie said, holding his hands out. Surprised, I took one. Violet took my other hand, her cold, soft fingers barely skimming my skin. I watched as everyone tilted their heads forward.

“Bless us O Lord,” Donnie began, then everyone chanted with him. “And these, Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ, our Lord.”

“Amen,” Donnie said, squeezing my hand before reaching for a spoon. I waited to make sure there were no more surprise rituals before grabbing my own cutlery. It didn’t sit right with me how easily Donnie could switch it up and pretend to be Catholic just to please his family. Made me wonder what else he’d change for them.

“Who’s got bets on the Bengals this afternoon?” Donovan asked, breaking the cult-like spell that went over the family as quickly as it had come.

Grant stabbed a fork in the air in front of him. “You’re insane if you think they’ll beat the Forty-Niners.”

“Have some Midwest pride,” Alexa said, pouring herself a glass of wine.

“Pride,” Granny Rich muttered under her breath. I held mine, shoving meat into my mouth instead. At the taste, all thoughts of bitter old ladies fled my head. It was just the right combination of soft, juicy, and smoky. It was like licking the inside of a grill. My mouth watered, and I made plans to get seconds.

“This is amazing, Violet,” I said to Donnie’s mom. She smiled weakly.

“Thanks. Mrs. Richards always said I had a knack for cooking,” Violet said, nodding toward the Grandmother, who focused on cutting up a bit of turkey on her plate.

“She was right,” I said, darting my eyes to Donnie to see if he noticed my ass-kissing. He was busy fending off an excited Grant about some conspiracy theory the latter had discovered. A little pissed, I went back to eating.

“So, where did you two meet?” Donovan asked, eyes crinkling at the corners.

“Class,” Donnie said at the same time I said, “Bar.” Donnie shot me a look. After dating for the past two years, I could read the subtext in his eyes proficiently. This time, his face said *I swear to god if you tell them the first thing you said to me was that you could show me something better to do with my mouth than drink, you’re going to need a new ride home.*

“Class,” I appended.

“Yeah? What class?” Alexa asked, leaning forward on the vinyl tablecloth.

I let Donnie answer. “Poetry elective,” he said, nudging my shoulder with his. “He needed help interpreting Keats.”

“And you needed help writing metaphors,” I said with a sugary smile, knowing damn well Donnie only knew the name John Keats because of the quotes I scrawled on sticky notes on our bathroom mirror.

“What did you study in college?” Donovan asked, patting his mouth with a napkin.

“Art,” I said, sending a round of eye contact around the table.

“That’s awesome,” Parker said, finally looking up from where he’d been lining up the green beans on his plate. “What’s your favorite medium?”

“Mainly ink,” I answered, “but I mess around with graphite. Pretty fond of spray paint, too.” I paused for another bite of chicken before asking, “You into art?”

Parker’s face lit up. “Yeah, I started drawing a few years ago, and I really enjoy it. My main interest right now is watercolors.”

I nodded, thinking about it. “Good stuff, but I can never wait for the layers to dry.”

“I just use a hair dryer,” Parker said with a shrug.

Alexa swatted her son. “Is that why my Dyson Supersonic keeps going missing?”

Parker turned back to his green beans.

Donnie cleared his throat. “Joe’s working on a project for the library.”

“That’s great,” Donovan said. “What kind of project?”

I nudged Donnie’s foot with mine to say thanks. I knew he knew that I could talk about this project for hours. “They wanted a mural for the lounge of the new teen section, and I’m friends with one of the librarians. I’m going for abstract portraits of famous authors. Y’know—Dickenson. Lorde.” I smirked at Donnie. “Keats.” In the spirit of gratefulness, I neglected to mention that the librarian friend offered me the mural over a bowl of weed.

Donnie, never passing up a chance to brag about me, said, “They’re adding

places for kids to get resources and hold club meetings. I think people have already started setting up an LGBTQ club and a monthly horror movie night.”

“That sounds nice,” Violet said right as her mother-in-law loudly clucked her tongue. Fueled by meat and already on edge, I narrowed my eyes at the Grandmother.

“Do you have a problem with that?” I asked. Donnie cleared his throat, eyes wide enough that I could see little red blood vessels.

She kept her gaze on her corn as she gently sawed it off the cob. “In my opinion, children shouldn’t be exposed to that sort of thing,” she said.

“You mean my sort of thing?” I said. “Our sort of thing?” I waved my hand between Donnie and me, ignoring his kick to my shin. The people around me took great interest in their food, silverware clinking out a chaotic pattern as Alexa stirred up a conversation about gas prices.

Grandmother Richards rose to her feet, slowly but full of livid energy. “Don’t drag him into this. He’s completely normal.”

I laughed. “Your grandson’s fucking gay.”

“Joe!” Donnie snapped.

“What? You are,” I said. He shook his head, not in refutation of the fact but disappointment.

Grandmother Richards raised a shaking finger at me. “At least he’s not a monster.”

I shot up to my full five feet and nine-and-a-half inches across from her, curling my nails into the tablecloth. “Monster, really? Is it that fucking hard to just call me what I am?”

She held her finger steady, then hissed, “*Werewolf?*”

Everyone stared at me, food abandoned.

I took off my sunglasses to see the unfiltered truth on my boyfriend’s face. “You told them I was a werewolf?” I asked, my voice surprisingly steady.

Donnie had the nerve to look uncomfortable as he shrank back. He spoke slowly, as if talking to a wild animal: “You said you’d rather me come out for you

than have to deal with it yourself.” *Please just sit back down*, his eyes said.

I exploded. “I meant about being fucking trans!”

A few weeks ago, Donnie and I watched a movie where some train operator messed up the railroad switch operation and ended up killing dozens of people—children, parents, bystanders crushed immediately by the metal beast. At the end, they showed a picture of the real people from the story, including the guy who caused all the damage. The look on his face was identical to Donnie’s as he said, “Oh.”

The rest of the family, who had remained silent thus far, exploded into a flurry of sound.

“You’re trans?” Parker asked.

“Do you know Kai? They’re my coworker’s nonbinary daughter,” Donovan said. “I think they’re your age.”

“A gay, transgendered werewolf,” Grant said. “The left’s wet dream.”

“When you two do it, is it technically bestiality?” Alexa asked.

I looked to Donnie for backup, but his attention was back on his plate. I decided to answer the last one. “No. What the hell?”

“What?” Alexa shrugged, leaning back in her chair. “I’m curious. I’ve read some freaky books.”

A loud thump sounded at the end of the table as Grandmother Richards knocked over her chair. She grabbed her butter knife and waved it in my face. “I will not have a creature of the night in my house, seducing the only son of my son!” she yelled.

“That’s vampires, Gran,” Alexa muttered under her breath.

“Get out!” Grandmother Richards shrieked. The knife came dangerously close to my nose, and I hissed at the burning in my nostrils. “You like that?” she cried. “It’s silver!”

Before I could pounce on her ass, Violet took my hand and yanked me into the living room. She closed the door, muffling the desperate voices. I took a minute to practice some of the meditative breathing Donnie’s always begging me to try. Funny enough, I stopped seeing red after a few breaths.

The living room was messy, lived in. There were photo albums stacked on the coffee table, which sagged under the weight. Five-dollar knick-knack elephants littered every surface, including the top of a boxy television that looked half my age. The brown carpet crunched under my feet, stains of all colors surrounding me. A light fragrance of vanilla danced over everything.

“Better?” Violet asked, still holding my hand.

“Yeah,” I said. “Thanks.”

Violet led us to the couch, falling back into the pilling fabric and plethora of throw pillows. I sat on the far end, watching her fingers tap out a rhythm on her knees.

“They get so loud,” Violet said after a bit.

I nodded. “They do.”

“How are you feeling?” Violet asked.

“Fine,” I said.

“Are you sure?” she asked in that warm voice. I felt my insides bubble, and words began flying out of my mouth.

“I’m mostly pissed at Donnie,” I said. “He didn’t back me up at all back there. I don’t know why he brought me here if he was just going to throw me to the wolves at the first sign of trouble.” I paused as my mind caught up to my mouth. “No offense.”

Violet remained silent, so I went on, voice rising as my anger reignited. “I know I’m messed up, but I thought he liked me that way. But no, now he wants me to tone myself down to fit into his perfect family, where he’s got this perfect house and a sister who bugs him and a mom and dad who care enough to ask—”

“He doesn’t have a dad,” Violet interrupted.

I squinted at her. “Then who the hell is Donovan?” I asked.

“You mean Don? My husband. His stepdad,” she said. “Donnie’s dad died twelve years ago.”

“Oh,” I said.

“It was a car accident. Donnie didn’t come out of his room for weeks after. I had to call firefighters to break down his door to make sure he hadn’t killed himself,” Violet said with the tone of someone reading a recipe. Her fingers tapped faster. “So, we’re not a perfect family. You fit in fine. I’m sorry anyone made you feel you had to change.”

“Why wouldn’t he tell me?” I asked, quieter.

Violet shrugged. “He feels big feelings, but he doesn’t talk about them much. Probably inherited it from me. I was shocked he decided to be a therapist.”

I settled farther into the couch, which tugged at my body like quicksand as my mind wandered. Last winter, I drove to Virginia and back a lot to help a friend going through chemo. Donnie didn’t say anything to stop me, but I could feel the anxiety radiating off of him. He’d attack me with hugs the second I stepped through the door. Sweaty and tired from hours crammed in a small car, I resented it. And he didn’t cry when he drove me to the hospital when I got bitten. He shut down, treating it more like an errand than life or death. I was too sick to be bothered at the time. I remember how white his knuckles got on the steering wheel, though. And the first few months we lived together, I’d wake up sometimes to him pressing two fingers under my jaw. I thought it was a sex thing at the time, but I realized now that he might have been checking for a pulse.

The door between the dining and living room opened, and I wondered briefly if my musings had summoned Donnie. But it was just Parker, hands stuffed into his hoodie pocket. He plopped onto the couch next to Violet.

“Great-grandmother is still yelling,” Parker reported. “Loudly.”

“Reminds me of my mom,” I said with a laugh.

“She wasn’t big on the werewolf thing either?” Violet asked, eyes focused somewhere between my eyebrows.

“Not that,” I said. “She wasn’t a fan of the trans thing.” I’ll never forget how she reacted when I came out to her. She pursed her lips, grabbed my wrist, and said we were going bra shopping. I asked her if she’d heard what I said, and she tightened her grip and told me to shut the hell up. At thirteen, I did what she said.

“Oh,” Violet said. “That sucks.”

I laughed at her bluntness. “It does.”

A thoughtful expression passed over her face before she said, “I think you’re

a fine young man, if that helps.” She raised her black eyes to mine, and my throat tightened. There was a hesitant sort of kindness in her gaze, one I hadn’t seen in years. If I squinted, I could pretend her hair was brown, longer and curly, her eyebrows thicker, and her eyes the same muddy green as mine used to be.

“What helps is I haven’t seen her in half a decade,” I said, ignoring the twinge in my guts as the woman beside me morphed back into Violet.

“I can’t imagine that,” Parker said. “Losing contact with your mom.”

“You get used to it,” I lied. Violet patted my arm, and it was all I could do not to lean into it. She smelled like autumn, but more like apples and bonfires than pumpkin spice.

“How did you choose your name?” Parker asked after a while.

I shrugged and said, “I was a big fan of joe mama jokes as a kid.”

“Bullshit,” Violet said. Her language jolted a squeak of laughter from my throat.

“Nope,” I said, recovering quickly. “I was the king of fifth grade.”

That got a smile out of them both.

The door to the dining room creaked open, and my hackles raised. But it wasn’t Granny The Werewolf Slayer standing there, waving her cutlery. It was my boyfriend.

Donnie shut the door behind him, running over to me as his mouth overflowed with apologies. “I’m so sorry, Joe—I didn’t mean to—I should have asked to clarify, and—”

“It’s okay,” I said, mostly to shut him up.

“He’s lying,” Violet said. “You kind of shat the bed on this one, sweetie.”

“Mom,” Donnie said, scandalized as he squeezed between me and the end of the couch.

“They still gearing up to stake my heart?” I asked. Donnie sighed in response and set his head on my shoulder.

“That’s vampires again,” Parker said.

“Who’s the werewolf here?” I asked, softening my words with a wink.

“Don’s talking Grandmother down as we speak,” Donnie said. For a moment, I caught a glimpse of a younger version of him, curled up in his bed and staring at the walls, too tired to cry anymore.

I kissed his forehead.

“What was that for?” he asked, his smile reappearing like sunlight through the cracks of a dilapidated roof. “I thought you were mad at me.”

“I am,” I said, holding him closer. He cuddled up into my side.

Parker made a surprisingly accurate gagging noise. “Not the PDA.”

“I second that,” Violet said. I could have sworn she smirked. Donnie sighed dramatically as he disentangled himself from me.

The door opened, and Don poked his head into the living room. “So sorry about all that, Joe. Grandmother promised to keep quiet, if you want to come back in here.”

Just as Don finished talking, Grandmother Richard’s voice peeled in from the dining room, sharp and sudden: “–am not going to play nice with the transsexual werewolf!”

Don grimaced. “We gave her plastic silverware, if that’s any consolation.”

Donnie looked up at me. *We can leave, if you want*, his face said.

“Well.” I slapped my thighs, preparing to stand. “Let’s face the fuckin’ music.”

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A month later, the living room was covered in twinkling lights, wrapping paper, and hundreds of pine needles. Don and Grant were glued to the football game on television, and Parker was eagerly inspecting the set of watercolor pencils I’d gotten him. Alexa paused to ruffle his hair before turning back to her conversation with Violet over a podcast she’d recommended. Grandmother Richards sat in a rocking chair in the corner, turning the pages of a yellowing book. I lounged on the couch, sipping eggnog from a smaller batch Violet had made with less cinnamon to accommodate my easily irritated nose.

Donnie leaned back from where he sat on the floor between my knees and handed me a package shoddily wrapped in gold paper. “This one’s for you,” he said.

“Who’s it from?” I asked, already unwrapping it.

Donnie shrugged. “Didn’t say. Does it say inside?” When I didn’t answer, he looked up at me. “What is it, baby?”

I held up a shock collar the perfect size for a Doberman or Great Dane.

Donnie’s face dropped. His head snapped to his sister. “Alexa!”

“Wasn’t me,” she said, hands up. “It’s kind of funny, though,” she added with a giggle.

“No, it’s not,” Donnie said, sitting up. “Who did this?”

A sharp noise, like a polite throat-clearing taught to kids in the 1950’s, cut through the room. Grandmother Richards flipped a page in her book, unable to hide her smug smile.

“Grandmother, we talked about this,” Donnie said, and it sounded like the start of a lecture. I shut him up with a nudge to the side and a look that said *I got this*.

Locking eyes with the Grandmother, I put the collar on and grinned my sharp-toothed smile. “We’ll find a use for this,” I said, planting a sloppy kiss on my boyfriend’s lips. He smiled against my mouth, and I almost didn’t hear his grandmother’s scandalized gasp.