

Ghost Seekers or Something

“What is happening out there?” whispered Britt as something battered against the door of the closet they were currently hiding inside.

Craig wrapped her in his large arms. “It’s fine, babe, it’s going to be fine,” he murmured.

Britt shook her head and clutched at his large, reassuring body. “Are we going to be okay?” she hissed.

“We are going to be fine.”

Britt shook her head, and, impulsively, she pressed her lips to his, reveling in his sweet taste, enjoying the way he crushed her against him.

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Earlier that day

Craig Tanner crushed the can in his hand. Cola squirted everywhere, eliciting a snarl from Gwen Lucas who was splattered by the majority of it.

“Watch it,” rumbled his older brother, Darryl, though without much heat – the fact that he could now take great pains to wipe the cola off his girlfriend, Gwen, made him a little less annoyed than he should have been. He continued to paw at her sweater until she giggled and told him to stop.

Craig grunted an apology but didn’t pay much mind to either of them. He was too busy watching a male moving in on his mate. *Grrr.*

He watched as Britt Lucas giggled and put her hand over her mouth and nose, the way she always did when she was worried that she was going to snort. It was adorable and made his inner wolf forget his fury – for a couple of moments at least.

Craig was a wolf shifter and a member of the Grey Wolf Pack, as were his brothers, Darryl and Eric, who were currently sitting with him and alternately ignoring him and teasing him. Britt was also a member of the pack – along with her twin sister, Gwen, who more often than not found herself joined at the lips with her boyfriend, Darryl. But while Gwen and Darryl were happily dating, Britt, so far, had been immune to Craig’s many, many, *many* overtures. She claimed he was too young for her. She claimed she didn’t want a boyfriend. Yeah, she claimed a lot of things.

His wolf huffed, but Craig soothed him. He wasn’t overly worried about that. His adoration of Britt started when he first shifted, and he was sure that one day, she would be his. He just had to be patient. Of course, that didn’t mean he had to sit by and put up with every dick who tried to make a move on her.

It was a school day – so they were at school, and trying to enjoy the enormous lunch his mom packed for him. But he wasn’t eating; he was too busy watching Britt and her ‘project partner’ James. *The dick.*

Britt usually ate with him – well, with her sister and best friend, Missy – but Craig always made sure he joined her. Even when he didn't have lunch for the same period, he made sure he was there. But James had suggested they go to a separate table so they could discuss their project together without interruption. So now, he was stuck with his brothers, Gwen and Missy. Darryl didn't even go to school there anymore – he had graduated and was in training to be a pack enforcer, but usually stopped by for lunch to see Gwen because he claimed he couldn't stand to be away from her. Their relationship had been off and on for more than a year. It appeared to be on at that moment.

Craig's wolf sneered as Britt did the hand over her nose again. It didn't seem to him like much work was being discussed at all. He doubted James would adore her little giggle-snort as much as he did.

"Hey, squirt, wanna trade lunches?" asked Eric.

Craig grunted, not paying any attention, as he heard some rustling behind him, and Craig undoubtedly dug into his lunch bag, divesting him of the best treats his mom had packed. He didn't care.

"You didn't trade anything," murmured Missy in a soft voice.

"I left him my apple core," said Eric in a highly smug voice.

Craig couldn't see it, but he was sure Missy was blushing – she blushed over everything. She was a sweet, little rabbit shifter who was virtually scared of her own shadow. She could generally be relied upon to give him all the info he needed to keep track of his future mate. Missy didn't like it when Craig cornered her in the hallway and demanded to know Britt's every move, but she was too submissive not to tell him. Plus, she adored Eric – for some unknown reason that Craig couldn't fathom – and perhaps felt that helping Craig would reflect well on her. Eric wouldn't care about that, but Craig wasn't about to admit that to her.

"You gonna eat that?" rumbled Eric.

"Umm, my pretzel? No, you can have it," squeaked Missy.

"Sweet."

Usually, the Tanner males of his family topped about six-foot-six - which is the height Craig had already managed to reach at fifteen. But through pure dint of stealing everyone's lunches, Eric, at age seventeen, had already surpassed them and made it to six-foot-eight. How the tiny Missy ever thought she had a shot was a mystery to Craig – though, apparently, Missy used to be on the pole vaulting team, so maybe that would play a part.

"Don't let him take your lunch!" snapped Gwen in disapproval.

Unlike Missy, the lithe wolf shifter was not afraid to stand up for herself. A struggle started behind Craig, as Gwen tried to pry the pretzel away from Eric, and then Darryl got involved, and Missy protested that she didn't mind.

Craig ignored them - he was far too focused on what was going on, two tables over. He narrowed his eyes, and his wolf howled as James took a sip of Britt's cherry cola. How dare he! That was crossing a line!

He leaped to his feet, determined to go over there and stop it, to show the male what happened when he messed with another's mate, but he stopped before he did.

"Sit down," groaned Darryl. "You'll embarrass yourself, and us by association. You want that dickish stag to laugh at us?"

Craig humphed but did as he was told, much to his inner wolf's chagrin. Mostly because he knew it would irritate Britt if he went over there acting like a jealous loon. Plus, yeah, he didn't want to see the smug look on James' face - the male was a stag shifter, and seemed to think that being a veggie-eating deer was somehow better than being a wolf shifter - as if! *Grrr*.

"Ugh, I hate that deer herd, they're so snobby," complained Gwen. The battle for the pretzel was abandoned in the face of universal dislike of the local deer herd.

James' herd was quite affluent and very much of the opinion that they were a thousand times better than their wolf pack.

"Stupid prey," grumbled Eric, "no offense, Missy," he added quickly on hearing her squeak.

"It's fine," she murmured, looking at him adoringly. Eric was completely oblivious. "I don't like them either. They're not very kind to members of my warren."

Not many shifters were - rabbits were generally at the bottom of the food chain everywhere they went. It was pretty unusual to find a rabbit hanging around with a group of wolves, but Britt and Missy had been firm friends for years, and they accepted Missy because of Britt. Also, Craig would hurt anyone who dared hurt Missy and, therefore, Britt by association.

Eric humphed. "They do anything, you let me know," he said, puffing out his chest.

Missy almost had a fit of the vapors.

Craig resisted the urge to vomit. He almost wished Britt was as amenable to the Tanner charms as Missy or even Gwen, but he didn't, because that would be disloyal, and he didn't want Britt to change for anything. She was already perfect thought his smitten wolf - though he could do without her choice of friends. His wolf snarled as the unworthy male scooted a little closer to Britt so they could read from the same book.

"You don't have to worry about him," said Gwen, mildly irritated though not entirely unkindly. "Britt's not interested in dating him."

"Wouldn't matter if she was," sneered Eric. "I heard all that dick's interested in is 'bone bingo.'"

Darryl and Gwen let out matching sounds of disgust.

“Bone bingo?” murmured Missy innocently.

Eric grunted. “A bunch of his friends have got this bet going to see how many girls they can... ah.. you know...”

“Bone,” interjected Gwen drily.

“Yeah,” muttered Eric, “before the end of the school year. They assigned points to all the girls in the senior class. I heard they all put five hundred bucks into the pot, and whoever has the most points by graduation gets it all.”

“That’s awful!” exclaimed Missy and then frowned. “It also makes me wonder what my grandma means when she says she’s going to play bingo. Oh, I dread to think how many points I’m worth,” she added in a trembling voice.

Eric, Darryl, and Gwen started grumbling about what they wished they could do to the dicks, and what exactly they deserved – nothing good.

Craig listened to the exchange with increasing fury. Something had to be done.

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Grrr. Britt cleared her throat and hushed her annoyed inner wolf. “Umm, I’m getting a little hot,” she muttered, scooting away from James. She didn’t want his leg brushing against hers, or his breath on her cheek.

James smiled and shrugged. “Sorry, I was just getting into the book.”

The book in question was a dull tome about how to create documentaries. The chapter they were reading was about the need for subtitles and was extolling the virtues of various fonts. It was anything but interesting.

“Well, you read it first, and then I’ll read it,” she suggested, pushing the book to him while moving away slightly further.

Ordinarily, Britt loved her English lit class – it was her favorite. *Books were her jam!* Except, she didn’t say that out loud too often – because her twin usually laughed at her and called her a nerd. But today, she didn’t love it, because her usual teacher – the excellent Ms. Myers – was out sick, and they had a substitute, and the substitute was a media teacher, and not very interested in books at all.

So, they had been tasked with creating an ‘edgy’ one-off reality show, and yes, he did use the word ‘edgy.’ Plus, he had partnered her with James. Usually, she would work with Missy or Gwen – Missy would always agree to whatever she wanted to do because she was a sweetie, and Gwen would just let her do what she wanted because Gwen’s input would be minimal – and Britt was happy with both of these approaches. But no, she was stuck with James, who was intent on making a ‘ghost hunting’ documentary. *Ugh.*

Oh, it got worse than that. Not only was James completely steamrolling her ideas, but he was also getting a little too close for comfort. Her inner wolf growled, and Britt soothed her. Not to worry, they'd be away from him soon.

Honestly, she didn't pay much mind to James usually – mostly because, usually, he wasn't so up close and personal to her. He was hardly a paragon of virtue, and wasn't the type of person she would particularly want to friends with, but she respected the fact that he loved books almost as much as she did. The two of them were always vying to be top of the class – though he probably wouldn't be quite as gracious in defeat as she would if she beat him to the top spot, rather than him beating her. He had asked her out before but hadn't seemed to care that she said no. Plus, he asked her out *after* he asked out her cheerleading, popular twin sister – so really, he didn't have much right to feel annoyed that she turned him down – she was second choice and all.

But now that they were unwitting partners, he seemed to think it was the green light to cozy up to her, to rub his leg against her, and, ugh, sniff her hair. She already had one male who went out of his way to sniff her hair, crowd her, and brush against her every freaking chance he got – thank you very much! Though, she didn't particularly mind when he did it. She said she did, but she didn't.

Her wolf mewled as she felt his eyes boring a hole into the back of her head. Yep, she knew Craig was watching her. When was he ever not watching her? Though he was watching her in irritation and jealousy at that moment, and the last thing she wanted was for him to get the wrong idea about James. Not that anything was going on with Craig, she just didn't see the need for him to be unnecessarily jealous. The last thing she ever wanted to do was hurt Craig, or encourage him to run off and find a girlfriend...

James took another sip of her drink, and she tried not to growl at him. That was her favorite flavor – they didn't sell it in the cafeteria, Craig ran out and bought her that during his free period. When James put the can down, she shuffled it a little away from him, out of his reach.

"So, ah, are you sure this whole ghost hunting thing is a good idea?" she tried. "It's just I don't see how we can definitely find a ghost."

She had seen a couple of shows like that, and honestly, she wasn't very impressed. Ghosts were real - there were ghosts in the world. That wasn't in dispute. Just like there were wolf shifters, vampires and witches. It was just that ghosts could do very little, they were benign, and only a few psychics could see them. Those ghost shows were full of people running around a supposedly haunted house or graveyard, with a camera, panting, panicking, and pretending that every little noise they heard was a ghost or some unexplained phenomenon. It was probably just some guy called Jerry with a sound-board.

Sadly, James was not to be deterred. "Yeah, it'll be great – I have the perfect place."

Britt sagged. "You do? That's amazing."

"Yeah!" he agreed, completely missing her sarcasm. "It's an abandoned roller skating rink."

Her mouth dropped open. “What?” she cried. “Ah!”

The second exclamation was for Craig, who was beside her at warp speed, one hand on her shoulder, both proprietary and reassuring.

“Are you okay?” he asked, his young, handsome face full of concern. “I heard you scream.”

“I wasn’t screaming,” she sighed, even as her wolf yipped like a puppy.

“We were talking about our project,” said James in a testy voice. “Maybe you should run along and toss a football around.”

Britt bristled on Craig’s behalf. James looked down on Craig – figuratively speaking because Craig had six inches on him – because Craig was a freshman, and they were seniors. Also, because Craig was on the football team – and James assumed he was some meathead who wasn’t academically inclined. Well, Craig wasn’t just on the team – he was the star of the team. Everyone went wild at his games cheering him on, especially Britt, who went to every single one religiously.

“Craig maintains a B+ average,” she muttered hotly, and a little proudly. Craig would probably do even better if he actually put some effort in – rather than spending all his time and energy following her around.

James snorted while Craig merely smirked. He could give a fig about James’ dismissal, but he was exceedingly smug at the way she felt the need to defend him.

Craig grunted. “Yeah, well, maybe I can help out with this project thing.”

With very little grace, he pushed both James and Britt apart and sat between them, pretending to look over the books and notes on the table. James looked pissed, but Britt had to put a hand over her mouth to stop herself from giggling. Why did she always find everything he did cute?

“James wants to do a ghost hunter documentary at the abandoned roller rink – the condemned roller rink,” explained Britt.

“Does he?” said Craig slowly, leafing through the boring book they had been reading just a few minutes ago.

James pricked. “Yes. I think it’s a great idea.”

Craig slammed the boring book down, making James jump. “So do I!”

“You do?” exclaimed James and Britt together.

Craig shrugged a pair of massive shoulders. “Sure, I love those shows. Don’t I, babe?”

Britt blushed a little. “Yes. But, the roller rink isn’t safe – haven’t you guys seen all those signs saying keep out, and the fact that it’s structurally unstable? We could get hurt.”

Craig waved a hand dismissively. "They just say that because they don't want teenagers to go in there."

Britt raised an eyebrow. "Teenagers like us?"

"Yeah, they don't want us to make out in there." He waggled his eyebrows suggestively, and her blush deepened. "But I think that place would be great – it's a genius idea." He turned to James and gave him the full glare of his beautiful smile, and even James wasn't immune.

"You think so?" James asked, mildly mollified.

Craig could be downright charming when he wanted. Plus, it didn't hurt that James clearly had an ego the size of Brazil.

"Absolutely, I want to help."

"You do?" said Britt, thoroughly confused by what was happening.

She had expected him to come charging over to try and drag her away from James – and her wolf was kind of pleased about that. She hadn't expected him to start sucking up to James – Craig wasn't the type to suck up to anyone, well, other than her.

James looked wary. "Really?"

Craig nodded his head emphatically, with an abundance of boyish enthusiasm. "To be involved in a real-life episode of ghost hunters? Hell, yeah!"

"Well, I suppose you could carry the boom mike."

"Wait, what boom mike?" asked Britt, feeling like the conversation was running away from her.

"Yeah, that would be awesome!" cried Craig with feeling.

Britt almost believed he meant it, but... there was something just not right about Craig's behavior. However, James didn't seem to notice.

"My cousin will video it – he's made tons of home movies. I'll write up some notes – a short script - and we can start filming tonight," said James with mounting excitement.

"Cool!"

Britt held up her hands. "Cousin? Video? Script? What exactly is my part in all this?"

James gave her a near-patronizing look. "You and I will be the talent – we'll be presenting the show, babe."

Britt's inner wolf snarled at the endearment coming from James, but she was amazed by the fact that Craig didn't seem to mind. Last week he thumped Darryl for calling her 'Britty baby,' and yet, he didn't

mind this guy calling her 'babe' - the endearment that he used over and over – even though she begged him not to call her that.

“Great,” said Craig, beaming at James.

“Awesome. I better go work on that script. We’ll call it ghost hunters.”

“I think that name’s already taken,” she protested feebly.

But, again, James wasn’t to be deterred. “Well, we’ll call it ghost seekers or something. Meet you there at eight.”

To her horror, James bumped fists with Craig, before giving her a leer and walking away.

“Craig, what...”

Before she could finish her sentence, Craig leaped to his feet and winked at her. “Later, babe.”

He strode away, leaving Britt on her own and entirely unclear about what just happened.

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James glanced at his watch. They still had twenty minutes until the ice princess, and the idiot were due to arrive. But, they could be early.

He’d prefer Craig wasn’t there, but he rather liked the idea of teaching the smug little shit a lesson. He thought because he could run after a ball that he was something special. Any idiot could play football – James could certainly be excellent at the game if he cared enough to try, he just didn’t want to try. His inner stag chuffed in agreement.

At least Britt had more sense than to fall for his charms. The boy chased after her like a puppy, but she always rebuffed him.

But then, in nearly four years of high school, the ice princess had never dated anyone. True, she wasn’t popular like her sister, and she was definitely a nerd, but she was pretty hot. Guys had noticed her and asked her out, but she always said no. It was why she was worth a whopping two hundred points, and James was going to be the one to get her. She was worth fifty points more than any other girl on their list.

Getting her would secure him the win. All he had to do was scare the hell out of her, and she would happily fall into his arms. Plus, if he terrified that idiot Tanner boy while doing it – all the better!

His cousin, Milo, and a couple of friends, Ben and Gibbs, had agreed to help him, in exchange for a share of the money. James didn’t even care about that. But to prove he was the best, to prove that he could have any girl he wanted, that was certainly worth the effort.

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“Don’t look at me like that,” said Craig in an amused voice.

“Like what?” Britt grumbled.

“Like the way your psycho brother usually looks at me – like you want to kill me for simply breathing the wrong way.”

Britt snorted, though it was probably true that her older, and overprotective, brother, Hans, usually did want to kill Craig for everything he did. That included, looking at Britt in the wrong way, standing too close to her, breathing funny in her direction – the list went on and on.

Craig crawled through the hole in the fence and held it up for her.

Britt sighed and wriggled through after him, cursing as she caught her jeans on some wire and ripped them.

“Damnit!” she snapped as she clambered to her feet.

“You didn’t hurt yourself, did you?” demanded Craig, dropping to the ground to inspect her leg.

“No,” she said before giggling and snorting as Craig ran his hands up her leg. “I’m ticklish, stop it.”

A devilish look flashed over his face. “Really?”

He started tickling her leg, and she squealed in laughter as her wolf yipped like a puppy. “Stop it... I can’t... I can’t... Stop!” she howled.

“Oof! You kicked me!” he exclaimed, more in amusement than anything else.

Britt shrugged defensively. “Well, I told you to stop.”

Craig jumped to his feet, an inane grin on his face, and apparently none the worse for wear having been kicked. “C’mon, babe, we better go, or we’ll be late – can’t keep James waiting.”

She shook her head, not entirely buying the idea that he gave two hoots about James. “Do you really want to do this?”

“Yeah, it’s going to be fun.”

“It’s going to be dire,” she corrected him.

Craig chuckled and took one of her hands. The warmth of his skin gave her the usual tingles, and her wolf cooed at his closeness.

“Keep an open mind, babe, maybe you’ll enjoy yourself.”

Britt stared at him in disbelief, but it was hard to stay mad at him for longer than a couple of seconds. Every time he flashed her a smile, she melted just a little more.

“Fine,” she ground out, “let’s go. I guess at least the sooner we get there, the sooner it will be over.”

“That’s the spirit, babe!”

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Britt took the flashlight proffered to her by James’ cousin, Milo. Like James, he was also a stag shifter, but he was infinitely more unsettling than James. In particular, the way he was looking at Britt was a little creepy. It was a smug leer, and he was definitely checking out her breasts. Or at least trying to – she wasn’t overly endowed, and she was currently swamped under one of her brother’s sweaters. Hey, it gets cold at night.

“Oof,” grumbled Milo, breaking his stare, as the boom mike hit him square on the head.

“Whoa, sorry, man,” said Craig, grinning widely.

Milo muttered something and rubbed his head, but didn’t say anything. He daren’t in the face of the huge, smiling wolf shifter. Craig winked at Britt, and she pretended she wasn’t pleased or grateful for him intervening.

Britt switched the flashlight on and rolled her eyes as it made a desultory flicker before finally coming to life. The pale stream of light coming out of it would hardly illuminate a pair of cats’ eyes that were right in front of it – never mind anything else. But, clearly, that was the point. Proper, working equipment would be no good for what they were doing – they needed crappy equipment that wouldn’t highlight the lack of ghosts.

James came over, smiling. If she didn’t know any better, she would say he was full of nervous excitement. But how he could get excited for this, she had no idea.

“Is that what you’re wearing?” he asked Britt, allowing a frown to dim his eagerness.

Well, duh, huffed her inner wolf. “Ah, yeah, I get cold.”

He looked her up and down, clearly considering whether he should say something – perhaps wondering how he could phrase it that he wanted her to show more skin. But, he didn’t bother.

“Did you get the script?”

“Sure.”

Britt almost snorted as she pulled the folded piece of paper out of her pocket. Calling it a script was perhaps a bit much – it was half a page, and she only had a couple of lines. The stage directions were that he wanted ‘realistic reactions’ rather than rehearsed dialogue. This was going to end badly, and oh, she was so bummed – this was probably going to be the first time she got a C in a class, or worse, a D!

“Great, let’s get started.”

Again, if she didn't know any better, she could swear that he was giving Craig a malicious look, but... she knew better, right?

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"We're here at the Darlington Roller Rink where twenty years ago..."

Craig let his mind wander as James prattled on. He was talking about how some roller derby girl was killed here under mysterious circumstances, and that was why it was shut down. When Craig asked his dad, he said they were shut down for major health code violations – not least for the fact that the snack bar was selling hot dogs that had expired two years ago, and their mystery sauce was mayonnaise that had been in the sun too long. Craig supposed people could have gotten sick from daring to eat the food, but when you eat something called mystery sauce, you get everything you deserve.

His wolf perked up as Britt started talking.

"That's right, James, and we're here to see if we can find out what happened to her."

Her delivery was flat, she glared at the camera, and she obviously didn't want to be there, and she was... gorgeous as always. His wolf preened for their mate. Though, he wouldn't dare call her his mate out loud – because Britt, and probably her brother Hans, would kill him. But yeah, he was sure she was his. She was his mate-to-be – no matter how much she protested, though her protests became less and less convincing every day.

James' cheek twitched, apparently not quite as impressed by Britt as Craig, but he continued nonetheless, and Craig tuned out, watching as Britt rolled her eyes repeatedly. Craig tried not to chuckle. He had inserted himself into this situation because he was worried that Britt might be vulnerable to James' questionable charms, but he realized he shouldn't have worried. Though, there was no way that he was going to allow Britt to be alone with James or his pervy cousin.

Plus, there was the little matter of James getting what he deserved – not least for daring to call Britt 'babe.' Craig glanced at his phone and tried not to grin.

There was a sharp sound of chains being rattled, like the wind was beating against a chained door – except it wasn't a windy night.

"What was that?" breathed Britt, flashing her pathetic light up and down the corridor.

James flickered in a smirk before he smothered it. "Let's find out."

Game on. *Rawr.*

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"C'mon, hurry up," hissed Gibbs.

Ben waved at him to go as he finished with the message in the shower stall – if horror movies proved anything, it was that ghosts like to leave messages on shower glass. Something about steam. Of course, the roller rink didn't have power, so they had to bring a travel kettle and... anyway, it was annoying, but Ben was doing it.

Silently, Gibbs made his way into the locker room. He grunted as he realized the wet footsteps were already drying. He grabbed the sponge and started wetting them again. They were trying to suggest that some girl died in the shower – or some such nonsense.

His inner stag grumbled. This was a hell of a lot of effort just for a female. But, James always had to win – he wouldn't take no for an answer. It was why Gibbs and Ben had given up any hope of winning 'bone bingo' – they could never compete with James because they would never make as much effort as him. James took the time to find out what a female liked, and by the time he got them into bed, they were starting to fall in love with him - it made Gibbs a little uneasy to see how devastated they were when he dumped them right after they slept with him. But Ben seemed to think James was some kind of legend, and Gibbs didn't like to voice his unhappiness out loud – he'd never live it down.

Though, he might have intimated to James that Missy – that cute, little rabbit shifter – preferred the company of women. After that, James decided she wasn't worth putting on the 'bone bingo' list, and Gibbs breathed a little easier. Although Gibbs wasn't about to ask her out – he'd be laughed out of his herd for dating a rabbit – he didn't want James to get her into bed and break her fluffy, little heart.

Gibbs wasn't totally on board with what James was doing to Britt – she was Missy's best friend and all, though he wouldn't mind scaring the ever-loving-bejeezus out of one of those smirking Tanner boys. Those hulking idiots roamed the school as if they owned it. He just regretted it wasn't Eric. He considered the young one, Craig, was pretty harmless, but Eric well, he, ah... well, Missy hung off his every word just a little too closely for Gibbs' liking. Yeah, agreed his jealous stag.

"Ukt!"

Gibbs straightened as his stag pawed the ground. "Ben?" he hissed.

No answer. He padded back to the showers and found them empty. Ben had got so far as to write, 'you're all going to,' on the shower glass, but it was supposed to say 'die' at the end. The half-finished message was there. The kettle was lying on the floor, but Ben was gone.

"Uh, Ben?" he murmured with increasing worry.

In spite of himself, in spite of the strong animal inside him, his breathing increased as worry niggled at him.

He felt a waft of air behind him and spun around, waving his torch.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

His query was met with a woman's laughter – a woman's maniacal laughter, and he turned around trying to find the source.

"This isn't funny!" he grumbled, ignoring the irony of what was happening.

He jumped, and his stag grunted as one of the open locker doors slammed. It was probably the wind he soothed his inner beast, though without much conviction. He thought of the story James made up about the dead roller derby girl – and how she haunted the roller rink. It was all nonsense, of course – something James invented to scare Britt, but still...

Another door slammed, and then another. His light whirled around the room as they all started banging.

He backed into the showers, telling himself there was obviously a rational explanation for all this. But as arms enfolded him, all rationality left the room, and later, he was ashamed to admit he screamed.

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"It came from down here."

Britt reluctantly chased after James as he ran into the women's locker room. He hurled the door open triumphantly, and Britt, Milo, and Craig poured into the room after him.

She waved her light around the room, but all she could see was a bunch of open locker doors, and James looking mightily confused.

"There's nothing here," he muttered.

"What were you expecting?" asked Britt waspishly.

"Ah..."

He moved around the room with Milo and Craig diligently following him. In particular, James seemed interested in the floor and the shower room.

Britt made a half-hearted effort to look around, but honestly, she wasn't expecting to find much. Although, one thing she noticed made her pause for thought, though not for long, as a moment later, her attention was drawn back to James, who made a low, worried noise.

"Have you found something?" she asked, doubting very much that he had.

"It, ah, looks like blood," said James as he focused his light on the floor of the shower.

Britt perked up. "Really?"

"Ah, yeah," he murmured, thoroughly confused.

Britt glanced up at Craig, who was affecting his holier than holy look - that he only put on when he was definitely up to something.

"James..."

James almost jumped out of his skin as the weedy voice echoed through the room.

"Who said that?" he demanded, glaring at all of them in turn.

"James..."

"Did you hear that?" he rasped, looking around wildly.

"We're standing right next to you, of course, we did," muttered Britt, frowning.

"James... I want you, James."

James' eyes bulged. "This – this isn't supposed to happen," he said faintly.

Britt narrowed her eyes at the conviction in his tone. "What is supposed to happen?"

But James ignored her. He whimpered as smoke started filling the locker room. Milo – in spite of his own worry – was diligently filming everything. Craig looked pretty placid and appeared to be cleaning his ear out while still holding the mike.

"You're mine, James."

Locker doors started rattling, and there was a thunderous rumbling noise echoing through the room. Britt looked down at the floor – the noise sounded like an earthquake, but the floor wasn't moving, so it couldn't be real.

"Stay with me, forever, James."

Milo yelped as a dusty old roller skate flew through the air and hit him square in the camera. Craig dodged and muttered something as another flew at him.

"Be mine, James."

Lots of things started flying through the air – old skates, old beer cans left by other teenagers – who went there to drink rather than make some ridiculous Ghost Seekers or Something TV show. Britt growled and batted them away.

James appeared to be starting to hyperventilate.

"Uh, James," started Britt.

"I want someone to stay with me forever."

They gasped as a bright light shone at them, and Britt shielded her face with her arms as her wolf howled in annoyance.

“It’s a ghost – it’s a real ghost!” whined Milo.

“Come with me, James.”

“James, maybe we should get out of here!” cried Britt over the now-almost deafening noise.

She tried to look at him, but the flying debris and the light made it difficult to see him, to see what he was doing, though she couldn’t mistake what he did next.

James roughly grabbed her shoulders and pushed her toward the light. Presumably, he chose her because she was the closest person to him – she didn’t think he actively decided not to hurl Milo at the light because of some familial closeness. Nope, she just drew the short straw due to proximity.

“Take her, not me, take her!” screamed James. “I don’t deserve this!” he yelled – a little untruthfully.

Britt stumbled forward as she heard James retreating, running footsteps, and the slower ones of Milo following. Before she fell, two familiar arms caught her and lifted her, carrying her away and into a closet. The decades-old smell of bleach and cleaning fluid tickled her nostrils.

Britt flinched as something battered against the door.

“What is happening out there?” she grumbled. It was probably some more flying debris – she hoped it let up soon. She did not fancy spending the night in a stinky old closet.

Craig wrapped her in his large arms. “It’s fine, babe, it’s going to be fine,” he murmured.

Britt shook her head and buried her head into his chest so he couldn’t see her laughing. Though she considered that if she did have to spend the night there, the company could not have been better.

“Are we going to be okay?” she muttered, half-wondering whether some security guard would turn up at some point and call the cops on them – she dreaded to think how her brothers would react if the cops brought her home in the middle of the night, and told them that she had been found in an abandoned building cuddling up to a boy. Yep, not only would Hans go ballistic, but her usually calm brother, Acksel, would also probably blow a fuse too.

“We are going to be fine,” he said gruffly.

Britt shook her head. He thought she was actually worried. But no, she was rarely worried when Craig was around. Increasingly, everything just seemed to be okay when he was with her. She knew he’d do anything for her, and anything to keep her safe. Her wolf whimpered in happiness for knowing that, and Britt felt a surge of affection for her lovely, young wolf. Impulsively, she pressed her lips to his, reveling in his sweet taste, enjoying the way he crushed her against him.

Now

When their lips finally parted Craig gazed at Britt with a wistful look on his face.

“Wow,” he murmured.

His wolf gave him a cocky growl. Yeah, he seconded that.

Okay, he and Britt had enjoyed the odd brief kiss, but this – *this* – was their first real kiss. His first real kiss altogether, and while he wasn’t sure about Britt, he thought it was her first too.

“Yeah, wow,” she giggled and then blushed as she snorted.

“That was amazing,” he said dreamily, and eagerly moved in for another kiss.

But before his lips could land, she pressed a finger to them and gave him a wry look. “Which part? The kiss, or the part where you, most likely your brothers, probably Gwen, and I’m guessing Missy’s little brother, scared James witless?”

Craig blinked at her and hesitated just a little too long for his answer to be believable. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“Aha.”

Disappointingly, Britt wiggled against him until he let her down. She took a moment to listen, and since she heard no noises from the other side of the door, boldly, she threw it open and stepped outside, looking around.

Britt folded her arms and turned back to look at him. “Well, it appears that our ghost has disappeared. Or have they? Here, Caspar? Come here! Come on out!”

Craig followed her, trying not to look guilty. “Ah, Britt...”

Britt spun on her heel to look at him, almost in concern. “What? No babe? Are you not feeling well?”

“Ah, well...”

She stepped toward him. “It appears the ghost has left, though there seem to be some wires and microphones hanging around.”

“The thing is...”

Britt stopped directly in front of him. “I bet with that kind of equipment you could probably put on quite a good show, especially if you were the president of the AV club, and an experienced amateur horror filmmaker, say, like, Missy’s younger brother. He once spent an hour telling me about how easy it is to create a haunted house.”

Craig’s eyes narrowed as his wolf growled. “How much time have you been spending with her brother?”

Okay, so he was eleven, and probably no competition – but he was still male.

Britt ignored him and continued, “He told me it was actually pretty easy – and that he liked to use wires to throw things around the room, and a smoke machine, he said you always have to have a smoke machine.”

Craig sighed and hung his head. “When exactly did you...”

“Embarrassingly, it was about the time the ‘spirit’ declared she was here for James. I really should have figured it out at lunch when you virtually called James a genius.”

His wolf growled. Yeah, he struggled with that – he had to force the word out of his mouth, and tell himself over and over that it was all for Britt.

“Did you honestly think I was going to do anything with James?” she asked him incredulously. “Did you really believe I would become part of his ridiculous ‘bone bingo’ competition?”

Craig snapped to look at her. “You know about that?”

“Of course, I do! Half the school does now – including most of the faculty, which is probably because I tattled on him to Ms. Myers.” Britt looked a little sheepish at her admission. “I was kind of hoping that she’d give him detention for being a disgrace to shifters everywhere – sadly, all she did was tell the principal, and he’s a close friend of James’ dad, so he did nothing.” She blew out a breath of disgust. “Am I right in thinking that a couple of his idiot friends were here, trying to scare me into, oh, I don’t know, jumping into his arms?”

“Yeah, that pretty much seemed to be the plan,” he groused as his wolf roared angrily.

“Yeah, I worried he had some half-baked scheme in mind – graduation is fast approaching.”

“So why did you agree to come tonight?”

She tugged on his shirt. “Because I knew you would be here. I mean, I didn’t know about your plans, but I knew you wouldn’t let anything happen.”

“But, what if I hadn’t insisted on coming?” She would have been at the mercy of James and his idiot friends!

Britt rolled her eyes impatiently. “Then there’s no way I’d be here. Come on – I may be a little naïve sometimes, but I’m not likely to agree to meet a guy I barely know, at an abandoned roller rink, late at night along with his skeezy cousin. I just wouldn’t have come, and maybe I would have called the cops to tell them that some shady looking men had been spotted breaking into the roller rink. I can only believe that a night in the cell would improve James’ attitude, or at least, it wouldn’t make it any worse.”

“You’d really have called the cops?”

“I’m a tattler – I can’t help it!”

His wolf howled with laughter. “My good girl,” he cooed, wrapping her in his arms.

“Hey, no, I’m still mad at you,” she protested feebly, as he gave her hair a long, satisfying sniff.

His wolf rumbled proudly for his little she-wolf. He had nothing to worry about where Britt was concerned. She was safe, and she was his, whether she admitted it or not.

“Ugh,” she groaned as he deposited her on the ground and took her hand.

Though, he noticed that she didn’t bother to yank her hand away. Every day, her defenses weakened to him a little more. It was only a matter of time thought his wolf smugly.

He pulled her outside of the building, and she gasped as she found Darryl and Gwen kissing and giggling. But, that wasn’t what surprised her – she’d seen *that* a thousand times before. Nope, it was the fact that two of James’ friends and herd mates were still sitting on the ground, scowling while Eric and Missy stood over them. Though, Missy hardly looked like she was keeping them there – nope, she looked like she was about to break out into a run if anyone shouted the word ‘boo.’

Britt scrunched up her nose and her wolf chuffed. She couldn’t really scent any of them – undoubtedly, all of them had doused themselves in some kind of odor-covering deodorant, designed to fool shifters.

Gwen dislodged Darryl’s lips long enough to grin at Britt. “Hey, did you see any ghosts?” she teased.

“Nope, just a couple of big scaredy-cats,” said Britt. “Scaredy-stags?”

Darryl hooted with laughter. One of James’ friends – Ben – grumbled, but a growl from Eric silenced him.

“I think I’ve had enough fun for one night,” said Britt. “Time to go home.”

“Me too,” agreed Missy, looking relieved. She was even nervier than Britt about doing something she shouldn’t. “And I really should get my brother home; he doesn’t like being out late.”

She glanced over to where her brother was sitting. He appeared to be playing a game on a handheld console, and utterly oblivious to everything that was happening in the world at that moment.

“I’ll drive you,” said Gibbs, trying to clamber to his feet.

Eric clapped a hand on his shoulder, in what could be construed as a friendly way, but was more likely a threat.

“No, I’ll drive her. You can go,” Eric rumbled at both him and Ben.

“James and Milo took off in that direction,” said Britt, raising her arm and pointing. “They were moving at about forty miles an hour, so you better hurry to catch up to them.”

Ben muttered, but the two of them slunk away as fast as they could without actually running. Though, when they thought they were out of sight, they started running.

“You didn’t hurt them, did you?” asked Britt in concern. “I mean, their alpha might tell our alpha, and we’ll get in trouble, and then Hans will go ape...”

Craig’s wolf huffed, uncaring, but she had a point. The last thing he wanted was Britt getting grounded by her over-zealous brother.

“They deserved it, but no,” admitted Darryl grudgingly. “Though that guy, Ben, got a nosebleed when we grabbed him. Damn stag got blood on my best shirt,” he groused.

“Maybe it’s time to retire this shirt,” suggested Gwen drolly.

Darryl shrugged. His best shirt had two grass stains, and the pocket was hanging loose – his best shirt hadn’t been nice since two minutes after he first got it and put it on two years ago.

Darryl and Gwen walked away, arm in arm, arguing over the state of his closet, while Eric led Missy away and collected her oblivious brother.

“I was never interested in James,” murmured Britt, in such a soft voice he almost missed it. “I mean, in case you were worried about that.”

His wolf growled in pleasure to hear it.

Craig squeezed her hand. “Let’s go home.”

*

Britt glanced over to where James was sitting - his eyes were trying to bore a hole through Craig, and he didn’t look altogether happy. He was sitting with Ben and Gibbs. Ben didn’t look particularly put out, though Gibbs was pretty sullen, and for some reason kept glancing at Missy – who was spending her lunch hour hopeless trying to teach Eric about the civil war. He had a test that afternoon, and given that he kept calling the leader of the confederate army Captain Crunch, Britt didn’t hold out much hope for him, either for any future as a historian or passing the test.

James was surely aware of Craig’s interference last night and was quite peeved at it. Britt had to press her lips together to stop herself from smirking, though she did nothing to quell her inner wolf’s mirth. Hey, the guy deserved it – mainly for the ludicrously named ‘bone bingo.’

Thankfully, her real English teacher had returned and declared the whole project to be absolute nonsense, and had, instead, set them a nice juicy assignment on comparing the prose of Sense and Sensibility to Wuthering Heights. Britt couldn’t wait to get stuck into both books. Was there anything better than snuggling up with a good book?

She shyly looked up through her lashes at Craig as he tried to fit a whole peach into his mouth. Well, there was snuggling up with a certain male. Her wolf sighed, and her heart twinged.

Britt wondered what would have happened if Craig wasn't around. Would she have been susceptible to that idiot, James? Yeah, the haunted roller rink was a completely ridiculous idea, but with enough coercion, would she have eventually fallen for his smarmy act and allowed herself to be seduced like so many other girls in the school? She didn't know the answer to that for sure – she'd like to say no, but, honestly, she couldn't be sure. Although, her brother Hans was always an enormous deterrent to doing anything with boys – she once gave a Valentine to a boy in second grade, and in return he kissed her cheek, and, well, his family still has a restraining order against Hans. She tried not to laugh as she thought about it.

All Britt knew was that she felt sorry for all the girls in school who didn't have a Craig watching out for them, and that, while Craig was around, she couldn't even imagine herself holding hands with any other male, never mind kissing them, or... other stuff. Because, although he was still young – and so was she for that matter - there was no one else in the world to her, and she wasn't sure there ever would be. *Rawr.*

"Hey, babe, how many crackers do you think I can eat in a minute?"

Craig dazzled her with a smile as he held up a full packet of crackers. All the Tanner boys had been given entire packages for their lunches – it was probably a day when their father packed the food, he took a very low-effort approach when packing lunches, and tended to sweep contents of cupboards into bags. That was why Craig had a jar of pickles last week – he ate them all, naturally.

Britt gave an obligatory eye-roll at 'babe,' but didn't bother to object – he'd earned babe, for a few days at least. "I've no idea, ten, maybe."

"Ten?" he grumbled, thoroughly put out by the small amount.

Britt shrugged and smiled at his adorable frown. "Fifteen then."

"Five bucks says forty," suggested Darryl, in between kissing Gwen.

"No way," cried Eric, gladly putting down his textbook. "Bet you ten bucks it can't be more than thirty."

"Probably more like twenty," murmured a frazzled-looking Missy, who was also grateful to get away from the textbook – teaching Eric would test even the most patient of saints. "They are very dry."

"Humph, I bet I can do fifty," declared Craig and gave Britt an expectant, puppy-dog look.

Her wolf wagged her tail, and Britt let out a mock-sigh. "Okay, I'll time you. Just... don't choke or anything."

Craig smirked. "If I do, you can give me mouth-to-mouth." His eyes flashed excitedly – as if choking was something to look forward to!

"Actually, Darryl's the one trained in CPR – so he'd probably have to be the one to do it," Britt said, trying not to giggle or snort as Craig's face fell.

Darryl and Craig exchanged unimpressed glances, and Britt assumed that they were mentally telling the other that CPR was not going to be happening that day – under any circumstances.

“Come on then, if you insist on doing this,” she said.

Darryl, Eric, and Gwen named their final betting amounts, and each placed some money on the table. Missy demurred that she didn’t have any money, and Eric winked at her before lending her some. She was so flustered she named an enormous amount of crackers that seemed an unlikely total – even for Craig. Britt refrained from betting – refusing to bet on something that could cause him to choke. Craig was mightily pleased to hear it, though she did reiterate that she would time him.

She set up the timer on her phone and said, “Go!”

Britt tried not to laugh as he crammed crackers into his mouth, but really, he was adorable. They were still young, and so much could still happen yet, but for once, she found herself very impatient for the future to come.

The end