



Solitude
by Sophie. Age 16
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A frown had bored into the moon's face far before Emmi padded below it, but when he looked up at it for assurance, its grimace seemed as if it was personally for him. The white socks decorating the tips of his paws sank into the bitter cold embrace of the snow beneath him as he lowered his nose to sniff at the forest floor, biting back the sensitivity on his whiskers in the name of dinner. Dinner did not come. Dinner would not come. There was no trace of life here either, he couldn't remember where the other critters that inhabited the area had scurried off to, but nobody had come back for him - let alone even acknowledged that he had been forgotten. Nobody noticed. He knew that. The moon had been his closest friend since everyone left, keeping a close eye on him as he slept exposed to nature's unforgiving hands, and providing him with a shrub or two to nibble on; not exactly a meal, but it was food in his stomach that hadn't been there before. Now, it felt as if the moon had too turned its back on him.

Something about tonight was off. The usual sense of isolation and closeness with the moon was tainted somehow, by something or someone. Somewhere, beneath the tree's looming grasp on the ground and shadow blanket, a pair of eyes were fixed on him. It seemed that the ancient croaks and groans that the stick figures had been echoing out were merely a mask to hide the creature staring back at him: its body obscured by the hues of charcoal that had managed to escape the moonlight. Oh. The moon was on the enemy's side.

Shielding the silence between the pair, the wind's whispered secrets swept back and forth, beckoning a naive ear to listen - almost tempting Emmi to tear his gaze away from those eyes that appeared to be getting closer by the second. Almost. He could see it properly now: Its bones and the thin layer of skin that held them together, its sunken eyes and the mats of snow that were laced into its fur. Cuts and scars brandished its meek body, acting as convictions rather than trophies - assuring it was forever ashamed rather than proud. Closer up, its eyes no longer withheld malice, instead entrancing Emmi with the misery within them.

How the thing had even got out here, let alone survived the journey, was truly a mystery. Its black fur against the snow resembled a thorn among roses, and it was certainly in no shape for combat, but Emmi supposed that his red fur wasn't exactly ideal either. Whatever the case, he guessed that it, too, had been forgotten - abandoned, one may say. This soul was of no harm, and so he felt his own paws guiding him towards the other. Briefly noting the shake in its legs, he watched its ears tip down in question, before it let out a sudden string of yowls and cries that he couldn't understand. He just couldn't understand, or maybe he had been alone so long that he had forgotten how to.

Its outburst had chased away the quiet like a rabbit in headlights, and yet it had been for nothing at all. He wished he could call it more than 'it,' but he supposed that's all someone becomes when they are tossed out, just an 'it' in a crowd of other 'its' trying to find their way. This cat's name had left when its owner had, and it was back to being nobody again. In some strange way, he wondered if he could be more than just an 'it' to this cat, so at least somebody remembered him when he was gone - so that he could die knowing that somebody might be waiting for him. Perhaps it was a foolish thought to have.

It had taken no offense to Emmi's silence, and instead gently rubbed its body against him, before nestling amongst the snow beside his feet. This time, when it looked up at him, he could've sworn he saw more than just misery in those eyes, maybe it was a hint of trust, or maybe he was just squinting too hard. The truth wasn't important anymore, and the moon watched as Emmi curled up next to the creature with the delusion that maybe he was right - and though the snow clung to his fur like leeches to skin, he had never felt this warm before.
