

Of Wolves and Men

By

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Notice** Portions of this story may prove too graphic, sexually explicit, or violent for sensitive readers. It is intended for mature readers.

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“When dreams become reality, they can still feel like a dream.”

"I see two men around you," I said as I pushed my long dark hair back over my shoulders, closed my almond shaped, sapphire blue eyes, and inhaled deeply through my nose. "One is a blue collar worker. He works with chemicals. Tar, I think. I can smell tar. The other is white collar and works around computers in some capacity. The blue collar worker looks to be in his early thirties while the white collar worker looks closer to forty."

The woman sitting opposite of me smiled with satisfaction and eagerly leaned forward as she said, "Yes. That's right! My husband, Jim, works on a road crew. He's thirty-three. The man I'm seeing works in IT. Do you know what that is? It's information technology."

"I'm aware," I informed her with a controlled, bland sounding voice.

It was rare that I turned people away once I agreed to do a psychic reading for them, but I could already tell that I was going to do exactly that with this woman and my mind was whirling as to the correct way to reject her. She struck me as someone who didn't read between the lines, so I'd have to be blunt and direct.

Shrugging her shoulders at my response, the woman's eyes looked starstruck as she continued with, "He's a bit older than me. He's forty-one and I'm twenty-six, but he's so... so..."

"I'm sorry, but I can't read for you," I said as I slid the folded bills that the woman had presented as payment upon sitting down back across the table to her.

"Why?" she asked with dismay. "What's wrong?"

"I had trouble in the past after reading for a woman who was having an affair with a married man," I said with solemnity. "The wife of the husband accused me of supporting the affair. No matter what I said to convince her

otherwise, I received the bulk of the blame. She incessantly telephoned both my home and cell phone to harass and threaten me. At one point, she even tried to run my car off the road with her SUV. I was forced to get a restraining order against her.” Slowly shaking my head while memories of the ordeal flitted about in my mind, I continued with, “So much negativity. It was annoying, uncomfortable, and a little frightening. I made a promise then and there never to go against my principles and read on situations like that again.”

“You don’t need to worry about that, George isn’t married,” she explained with satisfaction.

I instantly knew that was not the truth. What I wasn’t sure about was whether she’d been lied to by this man and believed him to be single. With my resolve to stay clear of this mess, I had no intention of going deeper into the subject to find out.

“I’d rather not,” I said as I pushed the money even closer toward her.

“But I just found out that I’m pregnant and I need you to tell me who the father of my baby is,” she insisted. “It’s my first child. I have to know if it’s my husband’s or George’s. I have to know what to do.”

I was outraged with the situation. Perhaps I was raised with a moral compass that was outdated, but it infuriated me to think that someone would ask me to use my gifts for something like this. It felt low and degrading. When I was with Rob, he’d have insisted that I do it even if I complained that it made me feel like a circus act. Now that he was out of the picture, I was free to decline.

“There are medical tests for such matters,” I said with veiled disgust as I pushed my chair back and stood up.

“Humph,” the indignant woman snorted as hands with red nails that looked almost claw-like grabbed her money and haphazardly shoved it into her

oversized designer knockoff handbag. Leaping out of her chair with obvious indignation, she snipped, "I've never heard of a psychic with morals."

My blood boiled from the insult, but I managed to remain stoic as I walked to the door and pulled on the doorknob. Holding the thick wooden barrier that separated us from the outside open as wide as I could, I said in a tone that said far more than my facial expression let on, "Please leave."

We were about the same age, but that's where the similarities ended. Samantha Greene was a bottled bleach blonde with a height that made her stand an easy head taller than me. Her large boned structure and appreciation of good food made her easily three times as wide as my slender, petite form, but, at that moment, it was my energy that dominated the space between us.

I pursed my lips as the frustrated woman pushed past me while muttering indignations in such a low level that I didn't bother to try to understand them. Her body language and tone of voice were enough to clue me in to the meaning of the words spewing from collagen infused lips that were painted a brilliant ruby red.

Standing in the doorway, I watched as Samantha aggressively marched to a grey Volkswagen Jetta that was parked along the curb in front of my house. The sound of the car door slamming after she slid behind the driver's wheel was only exceeded by the screeching of tires as the vehicle raced away.

After closing the thick oak exterior door to my circa eighteen hundred home as if it weighed a ton, I leaned against it and sighed. I'd grown weary of the life I'd foolishly created for myself in the small Pennsylvania town that was located on the edge of the Pocono Mountain region.

Having moved there three years earlier after a rough breakup with, Rob, my overbearing fiancé, I'd hoped to find peace and balance within the life of a small town. Instead, I simply attracted more of the same. The only difference was that I was now picking and choosing who I did psychic readings for.

I'd made up my mind to completely stop doing the readings. I'd taken up writing novels and I wanted to only focus on that, but, somehow I'd get talked into doing just one more. It was enough to drive me mad at times. I was furious with myself for not having the where-with-all to say no to these people. I felt like I was trapped on a hamster wheel that wouldn't slow down enough for me to get off. My sanity's saving grace was the friendship I'd developed with the town veterinarian, Kenzie McGovern.

Approximately three-thousand people inhabited the village of Freedom. The residents' primary support came from logging and lumber.

Its main street sported an independent grocery store that also housed a pharmacy, a movie theater, two bars, a hardware store, a pizzeria, a Chinese takeout, and a thrift shop. Just around the corner on a small side street was Mildred's Cafe. On the outskirts of town, near the entrance to the highway, was a gas station that had a McDonalds and a Dunkin Donuts inside the store cavity.

Feeling lonely and out of place after unpacking my meager belongings that came nowhere near completing the furnishing of my newly purchased, three-thousand square foot Victorian style home, I'd decided to step out for lunch. I tended to eat light in the midday, so all I wanted was a bowl of soup and a cup of herbal tea. The only place in town to get that was Mildred's Cafe.

Little did I realize when I eagerly made my way to the cozy diner that Mildred's cooking was famed within the area. The tiny establishment offered breakfast and lunch, but was closed for dinner. If residents wanted something to supper on other than what Freedom had to offer, they had to drive twenty miles east to the small city of Wilkes-Barre.

There was exactly one seat left vacant in the crowded café when I entered. It was at the counter. Under normal circumstances, I preferred to sit at a table or a booth. Sitting at the counter made me feel exposed and conspicuous. Since I had no choice if I wanted that bowl of soup -which my stomach was now growling for-, I slid onto the stool and peered at the chalk board where the choices for the soup of the day were neatly written.

"The broccoli cheese is my favorite," said a friendly voice coming from the woman seated to my left. "I'd get that if I were you. It's what I ordered."

The stocky, plain looking woman with short-cropped sandy-blonde hair, no makeup, and clothes that were in typical lumberjack style who was making the suggestion for the soup de jour was Kenzie McGregor. Being the only veterinarian for miles, she was very accustomed to carrying on small talk with people who she barely knew but who knew her or, at least, knew of her, whenever she stepped out.

I found the woman who was my senior by only a few years both entertaining and likable and fell into easy conversation with her. By the time we'd finished our lunch, we'd become fast friends.

Wrestling with animals both big and small provided a semblance of strength in Kenzie that both surprised and impressed me. It was that strength behind the knocking on my door that made it vibrate like someone was trying to beat it down.

"Lisa, are you home?" Kenzie bellowed from the opposite side of the thick barrier. "I only have a few minutes. Open up if you're home, will you?"

Forcing my body to move, I stepped away from the door and swung it opened.

"I have exactly fifteen minutes before I have to get back to the office," Kenzie barked as she marched past me toward the kitchen. "Is there coffee made?" she asked over her shoulder without looking back.

"In the pot, but it's not fresh" I called after her.

I closed the door and made my way to the kitchen in a far less rushed fashion. When I reached it, I found my friend filling a mug with the hours old brew.

Taking a huge gulp of the dark, thickened liquid, she wrinkled her nose and said, "There's no comparison to freshly brewed java, but beggars can't be choosers. It's the caffeine kick that I'm after, anyway."

“Why didn’t you stop and get a cup from Mildred’s or the gas station?” I asked with curiosity.

“I can’t stand that rag water they try to pass off as coffee at the gas station and you know what Mildred’s is like at this time of day,” Kenzie replied. “I swear, the whole population of Freedom eats out for lunch. I didn’t have time to wait in line.”

“What’s the big hurry?” I asked, with genuine curiosity as I poured out the rest of the old coffee and filled the pot with fresh water to brew a new batch.

“That’s why I’m here,” she said with excited animation. “An old buddy of mine, Oscar Spears, is in town. We went to veterinary school together. We were quite close for a long time. I’m not sure why, but we lost touch over the last year.”

I knit my brows together in thought. “I think you’ve mentioned him.”

She nodded.

“I’m sure I have,” she said as she pulled the carafe out from the steam of freshly brewed coffee and held her now empty mug beneath it until it was half-full. Placing the carafe back in its rightful place, she splashed a bit of cream into her rich, dark brew and sniffed it appreciatively. “He’s meeting me for dinner to discuss some sort of proposition that he has.”

“Romance or business?” I asked.

Kenzie vigorously shook her head as she admitted that there had never been romance between them.

“He’s very good looking,” she said with a hefty sigh, “but we just never took it past friendship. Not that I would have minded, mind you...”

“Maybe he’s ready,” I wistfully mused.

She threw her head back in laughter.

Her fondness for me was apparent as she good naturedly said, “For someone who is anti-relationship, you seem pretty hell bent on pairing me up with this guy.”

I scowled at the remark. I didn’t like to think of myself as being anti-relationship. Yet, in many ways I was still recovering from my breakup so I wasn’t in a rush to get involved again. I could see where that could be construed as anti-relationship, but I didn’t like it.

“It’s not that,” I explained. “It’s just that I sometimes get lonely so I figure you do too. Having a man on occasion to fill in that loneliness might be nice.”

“Are you telling me that you’re ready to jump back onto the dating train?” she asked with surprise.

“Not yet,” I replied, “but that doesn’t mean that you need to stay alone.”

“I’m not alone,” Kenzie informed her. “I just don’t talk about my private business.

I gave a mockingly innocent smile, “Not even to me?”

“Especially not to you, you mind reading witch,” my friend teased back.

Our light-hearted bantering brought back thoughts of my last client and I sighed.

“Did I offend you?” she apologetically asked. “I’m sorry. It was a joke.”

I gave a slight shake of my head. Even though I didn’t do the psychic reading for Samantha Greene, I still withheld her name as I proceeded to explain what had occurred just minutes before Kenzie had arrived. Knowing how strongly I felt about client confidentiality, she never asked for the identity of the cheating married woman who had no idea who the father of her baby was.

“I thought you said that you were stopping the readings for people,” Kenzie said with a scowl. “Isn’t that one of the things you wanted to leave

behind when you moved here? I mean, it's not like you need the money or anything. Your inheritance is enough to last beyond your years on this earth if you stay in this little town. Plus, you get your book royalties. Why bother with readings?"

"This was a special request from Cali, a friend from back home. The woman traveled ninety minutes to see me. She shouldn't have wasted her time," I said. "The shame is on me. I should have checked to see what the reading would be about when I was scheduling her. I usually do, but I thought Cali knew better."

"Perhaps this Cali didn't think to find out what the woman wanted before asking you to do the favor. Anyway, I don't know how you are able to know things about people like that," Kenzie said. "I know it's becoming more and more acceptable with society, but it kind of freaks me out."

"It did me for years," I admitted. "It was Rob who finally got me to be comfortable with my abilities and who taught me how to use them correctly. I never enjoyed it, though. I did it mainly to appease him. After breaking up with him, I wanted nothing more to do with it. Unfortunately, things like that have a tendency to follow a person. Once a psychic, always a psychic, I guess."

"Not if you don't want it," Kenzie said with a smile.

"I don't, but then, there are times when I do," I mused. "I think I'd like to only use my abilities if and when I feel like it instead of on demand by strangers."

Setting down her coffee mug, Kenzie headed for the door. "That's completely understandable. I have to run, but I thought you'd like to meet Oscar. Join us for dinner tonight?"

"Where?" I asked.

With a sheepish grin, Kenzie said, "How about your back patio? I'll bring takeout."

After a roll of my eyes, a friendly, knowing smile, a slow shake of my head, and a slight sigh of resignation, I nodded in agreement.

“It will be late,” Kenzie said. “I have surgery this afternoon. Shall we say eight?”

“Let me guess,” I chuckled. “Chinese or pizza.”

“I thought Chinese,” she good naturedly replied as she raced out of the house toward her car.