



*"When the full moon rises
and the wolfsbane blooms,
you will be as cursed as I am."*

CURSED

PETER GRAY

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Cursed

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This book is dedicated to all of my friends and online fans that have been reading my work for years. Thank you for encouraging me to become a self-published author and believing in my work. This one is dedicated to all of you.

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The Caretaker

There was something wrong even *then*, and I shouldn't have turned a blind eye and ignored it.

It was pure folly.

Pure folly to convince myself that I could change the situation, that my influence over him could have steered the course of our fate.

But I was wrong.

“You’re an idiot!” The loud scream behind me startled me. Ben was standing out of his car seat, pushing his head through the sunroof to let the cool autumn breeze blow hard upon his face. His screams echoed through the car before trailing down the old country road. His boyfriend, Taylor, did his best to pull on the side of his jeans while chuckling in hysterics.

“Ben, get down!”

“This is crazy!” Ben happily responded. He stretched his neck back all the way before letting out a long howl like a wolf. Ben was having the time of his life, but unfortunately for him, his sister had the good sense to slow down the car and pull over.

“What are you doing?” Ben complained to his sister, Ashley. “I was having fun up there.”

“I’m not getting pulled over by the cops because of you,” Ashley snapped. “Sit your ass down.”

Ben grunted at his sister in annoyance, but he was obedient enough to slip through the small sunroof and plummet back into his seat. Taylor did his best to hold back his giggles with the palm of his hand, knowing Ashley would lash out her anger at him as well if they didn’t behave.

Ashley pulled up her dark shades and settled it over her wavy brown hair with golden blonde highlights. “Will I regret inviting you guys to the campsite?” she sighed out with a hint of worry.

“No,” Ben and Taylor answered back at the same time as if they were misbehaved children. It often felt that way when they were together, it was rather hard to believe that there was a five year age gap between them. Taylor was the older, he was just a few weeks short of reaching an unbearable quarter life crisis.

Turning twenty-five would not feel like such a big deal if it wasn’t for the fact that Taylor was the oldest one in the car. In normal situations, Taylor with his shortly trimmed brown hair and large black eyes would give off a mature air about him, especially when it was accompanied with that famous brooding look of his. Once his long-time boyfriend Benjamin Shaves was around him, Taylor’s behaviour would entirely change. Whether it was for better or for worse, sometimes it was so hard to tell.

Apparently, Ashley didn’t have the patience for their childish behaviour today. “You know, I didn’t have to invite you,” she reminded them harshly. “I was fine with just going on this trip with Sara.”

“You need a man with you,” her brother jeered. “Who else will protect you out in the wild?”

Ashley pressed down on a button to close the sunroof. "I would hardly call it the wild," she shot back as she looked overhead to make sure the sunroof was closed all the way. "It's a campsite."

"Yeah, an abandoned one," Ben shot back, which immediately brought another fit of giggles from Taylor. "Why else would you get it so cheap?"

"Look!" Ashley turned around in her seat with her finger pointing at her younger brother. "Money is tight and I'm on a budget." Her arm stretched outwards with her finger hovering over her brother's chest. "I don't need you to make snide comments. You know I just bought a new place."

"Yeah, I know," Ben drawled out with boredom, while he brushed his fingers through his curly honey blonde hair.

"And unlike you, I don't have a partner to help pay for it." Ashley made sure to turn her head to Taylor now that he was in control of his emotions. "So, the two of you shut up and behave."

Ben smiled at his sister playfully, and then gave a slight nod of his head in open submission.

Ashley was satisfied, so she turned in her seat to start up the car.

"How much longer, Ash," I finally spoke up, "until we get there?"

She glanced down at her phone and rapped out, "Fifteen minutes."

"Good, because I have to use the bathroom at some point."

"It won't be as nice as the ones we have back home," my friend reminded me. "But that's country life for you."

"More like, camp life," I teased, and then rolled down my window to let in some fresh air. It was a cold October day, but I was tired of feeling the heaters blow all over me. My hand stuck

out to feel the frigid air, noticing how the small hairs on my arm flickered upwards with goose bumps prickling my skin.

My black nail polish matched the sleekness of Ashley's vehicle; a jetty black shade that reflected the sad grey lighting overhead, as if the sun had given up shining for the day. A lone road stretched before us, curving and winding through deep forestry, a world where only crimson coloured leaves shone in the shallow sunlight. An occasional yellow would peep into view, fading leaves that warned of a bleak winter fast approaching.

It was my idea to get away, wanting to escape the mundane existence of my all too repetitive life. It was as though something snapped within me, and next thing I knew I was pulling out my warmest winter clothing and calling up my parents to dig up my old sleeping bag. Ashley reluctantly agreed to go away with me this weekend, and it was by pure accident that her brother and his boyfriend decided to tag along with us.

"There's a sign," Ashley piped up with hopefulness. "Finally."

"Blackthorn Campground," I read aloud. "We made it."

"Finally," Ashley repeated. "Alright boys, you better behave yourself when we get there." She tilted her head in my direction. "It's like they are *children*." I chuckled at my friend's snide comment, knowing a portion of her words were true. "Sara, can you grab my purse next to your feet? My credit card is there."

"Yeah, sure."

"I think I have everything," Ashley fretted as she pushed back her long-tousled curls. Strands of light honey blonde highlights blended well with her warm chestnut coloured hair; an alluring shade that often captured many a man's attention. "I'm worried, you know. I have never done anything like this before."

"Don't worry. Camping isn't as hard as it sounds." The road

widened to show a gravelled parking lot with only an old black pickup truck in front of a wooden building. “Besides we have a cabin! No worrying about putting up a tent and wondering where to go to the washroom.”

“Yeah.”

“It will be nice.”

“Sure,” my friend answered me with less enthusiasm than I would have liked. “But it will be cold.”

“We have sleeping bags,” I reminded her. “And they probably have cots set up for us.”

“Ashley!” Ben called out from behind her. “Why are there no cars here?”

“Because it’s Halloween weekend,” Ashley drawled out as if it were fairly obvious, “and we are the only ones stupid enough to camp out here.”

She parked the car next to the old pick-up truck before she eyed it with disdain. I hardly batted an eye at the ancient truck, since it was a normal sight where I grew up.

Taylor propped open the door first, letting out a relieved sigh once his brown leather boots hit the gravelled ground. “Fresh air,” Taylor teased, as he closed his eyes with pure bliss to truly breathe it in. “Am I right, Ben?”

“Yeah,” his boyfriend agreed, and then opened the door on his side of the car.

Ashley had her car window rolled down to reapply her lipstick, while I was opening my backpack to unearth my fall jacket.

“You coming?” Taylor rapped out with impatience. “It’s cold out here.”

“It’s fall,” I replied without sparing a glance in his direction. My left hand offered Ashley her purse, before I began to get out of the car. “It’s not like we’re in Florida.”

“I was just saying it was cold, hun.” Taylor put on his classic aviator sunglasses before he brushed back his short black locks. “No need to get all testy.” He shook his head at me in a naughty way before muttering, “time of the month.”

“It’s not, actually.”

Ben was laughing from the other side of the car and a part of me wondered why we even bothered inviting the two of them.

Ashley shut her car door loudly to get our attention. “Alright, sunshines!” she called out, “time to get moving.”

“Where?” he asked, with his large hands raised high in the air. “All I see is this car and that building over there.”

“This is where we sign in,” she stated with half a smile. “Come on.”

Taylor went around the car to get to Ben, both reaching for each other’s hands as they quietly walked behind Ashley. I was too busy tying up my hiking shoes to keep up with them, taking a moment to truly enjoy the peace and quiet. The wind was blowing through the leaves, creating a soft rustling sound that almost lulled me to sleep. Dark red leaves scraped against the ash white gravel as it blew away from me, following the wind that led to the abandoned forest.

I let my eyes sink into the darkness of the forest, noticing how eerily silent this whole place was when I listened to it. I swallowed hard nervously, feeling like something wasn’t right. The sound of Ashley calling out my name brought me back to the present, and I turned away from the spot to run after them.

“What were you looking at?” Ashley demanded, once I approached the three of them.

“I was thinking.”

“Took a long time thinking,” she noted. “Everything all right?”

I nodded my head as I stared past them to glare at the scratched wooden pine door. “Yeah,” I lied, and brushed past them to take in the deep marks over the doorway. “You think there are wild animals out here?” I looked over my shoulder to take in the curious looks from my three friends. “Bears? You know, something big enough to make marks like this?”

Taylor pushed himself past Ben to stand next to me, letting the tip of his fingertip drag along the grotesque black marks. “Ashley? You sure we are at the right place?”

“I’m not an idiot,” she shot back irritably. “Of course, this is the right place.”

“It’s only ...” Taylor let his fingers reach the very bottom of the jagged line, only to pull away once he noticed the splinter of wood sticking out at the very end. “The place looks abandoned and there is no one here.”

“A truck,” she reminded us all.

“Yeah, but someone could have dropped it off here.”

“You want to go back home, is that it?”

“I don’t want to be in a place where something ...” he pointed at the jagged lines at the bottom of the door, “... is so determined to force itself inside of there.”

I ignored them all to rap on the wooden door, deciding this was the only way to find out if we are in the right place after all. I knocked for a solid minute before I heard a lock sliding on the other side of the door, and then quickly took a step back before the stranger could open it. A hand was held over the front of his face, doing his best to block out the pale sunlight that was creeping its way inside of his darkened home.

“Hello,” I quietly offered. “Umm ...” I looked behind me to catch my friends’ reactions, “we booked two cabins at this campsite. It’s—it’s ...” I felt nervous once the man lowered his

hand, letting dark green eyes settle over me with an enchanting gaze. I bit down at my lip, feeling irrationally nervous under his lengthy stare.

“I thought I sent you an email that it’s cancelled,” he drawled out in a low voice.

“We didn’t get that.” I looked over my shoulder to catch sight of my best friend. “Did we?”

“If I had data,” Sara mused aloud, “I could check, but we are too isolated to use it. It’s like we are in the middle of nowhere.”

“I did send that email,” the man insisted with a sharpness to his voice. “The four of you aren’t welcome here.” The door was beginning to close, so I stuck my shoe in the tiny crack to prevent him from closing it completely.

“Hey!” I called out. “We paid for this.”

“Then I’ll cancel it.”

“How do I know you will keep your word?”

The man became silent, which wasn’t exactly a good sign. He let his hand hold over the doorknob loosen, placing his long fingers over a corner of the wooden door to prop it open. He glared at us long and hard, and then through barely parted lips ordered us inside.

I was the first to step in, noticing how black his living room was since there were no open windows in sight. We passed an open area, and then followed him past an open doorway that showed his kitchen. Ben was whispering something to his partner, but aside from that there was no other sound. I took the lead, following this man’s sure footsteps until we reached the back of his house. He turned on a lamp by pulling on some clear white string, letting a pale light-bulb illuminate his small office space.

It was only then that I could take in this man’s rugged

appearance; his dark brown hair was significantly curly and wild in a strange sort of way; his jawline was scruffy with bristles of brown hair peppering its way over his chin. The goatee was the only thing that was kept neat and orderly, and I imagined if he shaved away his scruff, he would be quite a handsome man.

“Take a seat,” he ordered, once he realized I was looking at him too hard. An old desktop computer was turning on in front of him, allowing him to sit over the edge of the table so half of his body was facing my direction. “I thought I sent you the damn email,” he grumbled out tiredly. “We don’t have visitors this time of year.”

“Why not?”

“Because all of the caretakers are away. I’m the only one left to take care of the grounds.” He pulled up his baggy navy-blue sleeves, crumbling them over until it rested over his wiry biceps.

“Can’t you let us stay anyways?” I asked him politely. “Since we came all this way.”

Ashley felt the need to put in her two cents. “Over two hours to be exact.”

“City folks?” the dark-haired man in front of me inquired. “Can hear it in your accents.”

“You do?” I asked out with surprise.

“Yeah.” He turned his gaze to the royal blue screen in front of him and typed in the necessary password. “I’m opening up my email now.”

“To see if you cancelled it.”

“Yeah,” he replied without emotion. “Move your chair back a bit.” He waited until I rolled his chair away from his desk to stand in front of me. He bent over, giving me a prime view to check him out if I really wanted too. I wasn’t sure if I really wanted too, so I swiveled my chair to face Ashley to see she had

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