

Chapter 9 - Christmas Break

December rolled around and Christmas was only three days away. All the castle was decorated with mistletoe and garland. A large Christmas tree was set up in the Great Hall. Some students were staying at the castle while others went home. Michelle's parents had owed her to say that they were going on a cruise to the Bahamas and that she would have to stay there for the holiday after the New Year. Frustrated, Michelle crumpled the parchment up into a ball and tossed it away, accidentally hitting Sirius in the head.

"Hey," he said defensively. "Why are you beating me up?"

"Sorry," Michelle muttered. "I can't believe I'm going to be stuck here for the holidays while my parents enjoy the warm sunshine."

Remus' parents had wanted him to come home. After hearing Michelle's predicament, he had decided to owl his parents and ask them if they would mind Michelle joining them. When Remus told her this, she was touched.

"Remus, I don't want to be a burden on your family. Plus, it's YOUR Christmas with YOUR family. I'm sure they wouldn't want to spend it with a perfect stranger."

Remus shook his head. "Nonsense. My parents would be pleased to have you. You would not be a burden."

Michelle kept protesting, but Remus put his foot down. Michelle finally and reluctantly agreed to spend Christmas with the Lupins.

The next day, students began leaving the castle to head to the train station. The Hogwarts Express was already in the station, preparing to bring them back to Kings Cross. Michelle, Remus, and Lily boarded the train and found an empty compartment. There were a lot of students heading home. James, Sirius, and Peter, however, stayed behind. James' parents were working late and non stop in the Ministry of Magic. Sirius' parents, both Muggles, worked in the nearby hospital in London and feared that they wouldn't be able to get off Christmas and Christmas Eve, so they had requested that Sirius remain at Hogwarts, promising to make it up to him. James and Sirius decided to use this occasion to test out some new pranks on the Slytherin students who were remaining in the castle.

Remus, Lily, and Michelle sat down in their compartment. Michelle and Remus were sitting next to each other, while Lily was sitting across from them. Michelle and Remus were snuggled up against each other, Michelle's head resting on Remus' shoulder.

Once everyone had boarded the train, the scarlet steam engine let out a puff of steam and the pistons began slowly pumping, then gradually picked up speed. Shortly, the train pulled out of the station and they were on their way back to Kings Cross.

They relaxed and just chatted.

About twenty minutes later, there was a knock on the compartment door.

“Come in,” Remus called.

The door opened and a girl dressed in a Hufflepuff robe and uniform stepped in. She was really pretty with shoulder length blond hair and coffee colored brown eyes. Michelle immediately felt her body tensing. Before all this tormenting, she regarded each house with respect. Now, she mistrusted both the Slytherin and Hufflepuff houses.

“Mind if I join you?” the girl asked softly.

“If you wouldn’t mind sharing the compartment with a freak,” Michelle said coldly.

The girl smiled. Remus realized she was also in the 6th year, the same age as they were. He also noticed how pretty she was and felt himself becoming shy around her.

“I don’t believe what everyone is saying,” she said firmly. “I judge for myself.”

“Have a seat,” Lily said, gesturing to the empty space beside her. The girl sat down and Michelle regarded the girl closely.

“I’m Caitlin Cromwell,” the girl introduced herself as she extended her hand out.

Remus leaned forward and shook it, as did Lily. When Michelle’s hand clasped around Caitlin’s, Caitlin had this strange expression on her face. She turned her head left and stared into space. After a few seconds, Caitlin seemed to come around and her body slightly jumped and she blinked several times.

“Are you alright?” Remus asked with concern studying her.

“Um, yeah,” Caitlin said clearing her throat. “There’s going to be an ‘end-of-the-year’ party this year. I’d advise you two,” she gestured to Lily and Remus. “And your friends to sit near an exit.”

“Why?” Lily asked curiously and even Michelle found that comment a little odd. Michelle thought the girl was hiding something, but she couldn’t put her finger on it.

“It’s-it’s just a strong feeling I have,” Caitlin replied shiftily.

Michelle narrowed her eyes suspiciously at Caitlin. Yep. This girl was definitely hiding something. First, how’d she know there was going to be a party at the end of the year?

Unless Dumbledore told everyone but somehow missed the three of them. Secondly, she didn't really answer Lily's question honestly.

She glanced at Remus. He blushed each time Caitlin smiled at him or looked at him. She was talking with Lily right now about classes and things. Michelle jabbed him in the ribs and he gave her an innocent look. Michelle just scowled. Remus leaned close and whispered in her ear.

"Don't worry," he said softly. "I love you, okay?"

Michelle just grumbled an indistinguishable response. She'd naturally be a bit touchy since Remus was the first guy that she ever loved and actually took their relationship to the next level. She was probably more insecure than she thought.

Finally, the train pulled into Kings Cross station. The pistons began slowing down, bringing the train to a complete stop. They gathered their belongings and disembarked. Caitlin smiled and waved good-bye to them.

"See you in a week," she called cheerfully at them.

"See you," Michelle called back in a false cheerful tone. She didn't trust Caitlin at all.

Lily spied her parents and hugged Remus and Michelle before heading over to them. Remus spied his parents, then took Michelle's hand in his and headed over to them. Michelle realized that Remus took after his father with looks and overall physique. Mrs. Lupin was really pretty with shoulder length dark brown hair and blue eyes. They were both dressed in Muggle clothing. Mr. Lupin was dressed in jeans and a burgundy sweater and a black parka. Mrs. Lupin was also dressed in jeans and a green sweater under a black women's pea coat. Her hair was blowing softly over her shoulders.

Remus and Michelle stood in front of them. Remus gave his mother a kiss on the cheek, and then hugged his father.

"Mum? Dad? This is Michelle," Remus introduced her proudly while gently pushing her forward.

Mrs. Lupin stepped forward and gently put her arms around Michelle's shoulders. "Welcome dear. I hope you will just relax and make yourself at home."

Mr. Lupin took Michelle and Remus' luggage and they began walking toward the parking lot. They approached a silver sedan, and as they got closer, Michelle realized that it was a Mercedes Benz S600, an expensive Muggle car. Mr. Lupin put their things into the trunk and then closed it. Michelle was quickly ushered into the back seat by Remus who sat next to her. The back doors were closed and Mr. and Mrs. Lupin climbed into the front seats and closed their doors as well. Remus reached up behind his right shoulder and pulled the seat belt on across his chest, buckling it in. Michelle did the same. Mr. and Mrs. Lupin also seat belted themselves in and Mr. Lupin started the car, pulling it out of the parking lot.

“Thank you for having me, Mr. and Mrs. Lupin,” Michelle said graciously as she took in how soft the tan leather seating was.

“It’s not a problem, dear,” Mrs. Lupin said kindly. “It’s a shame that your parents had decided to go away for Christmas. What an uncanny coincidence.”

“Uncanny indeed,” Michelle muttered out of the corner of her mouth to Remus.

Remus gave her a sympathetic look. He knew how much this hurt Michelle, the fact that her parents wanted to spend some time on their own, rather than be with her on Christmas.

Michelle looked out the window. The city scenery began diminishing and rolling moors replaced it.

“We live on the outskirts,” Remus explained, leaning close to her. “We have a pretty good sized property.”

Michelle raised an eyebrow and thought, *Why doesn't that surprise me?*

It seemed to her that the Lupins had money. Sure enough, her suspicions were confirmed when Mr. Lupin pulled onto a gravel driveway. There was a two story blue and white colonial style house with a wrap around porch and an arc driveway in front that had a large stone canopy over the middle of it where the car was parked in the shade. The window shutters were a beautiful sky blue color. Rose bushes hugged the front of the house and a well manicured lawn stretched on until it hit the beginning of a moor in the distance. Michelle’s eyes drew wide. Remus never told her or the Marauders that his family was rich. Mr. Lupin pulled the car under the canopy and then shut off the engine. Everyone unbuckled themselves and pushed open their doors. Michelle got out and stood behind the opened back door behind the driver’s seat and just looked around, taking it all in.

Remus closed his door and so did his parents. Michelle finally closed the door and Mr. Lupin went around to the back of the sedan to get their luggage out. Mrs. Lupin led them inside.

“Make yourself at home,” Mrs. Lupin said softly as she led them into the living room.

Michelle sat down on the couch. The living room was painted a wine color with a white border. The carpet was the same wine color. The rich dark maple furniture accented the wall color nicely. A coffee table was centered before a long sofa and a matching loveseat with floral print fabric. To the right stood an entertainment center, where a stereo and a flat screen plasma TV hung on the wall above it.

A large eat-in kitchen, which was off to the left, was done entirely in a modern day pattern and there was a marble topped island in the center of it. A side-by-side refrigerator, as well as a dishwasher and a microwave set off the appliances.

There was a staircase to the right next to the dining room which was next to the kitchen. The stairs were carpeted.

Mr. Lupin came in, and once he was inside, he magicked the trunks to float upstairs. He turned to Michelle.

“Your bedroom is right across from Remus’,” he explained softly. “Just don’t go into the basement tomorrow.”

Michelle looked at him. “Why sir?” she asked.

Mr. Lupin hesitated as though searching for the right explanation. “It’s being renovated. Dangerous stuff down there,” he said finally giving her a smile.

Michelle looked at Remus and immediately it dawned on her. Remus hadn’t told his parents that he’d told her about being a werewolf.

“Sure,” Michelle said.

“Remus? Why don’t you show Michelle her bedroom?” Mrs. Lupin said brightly.

“Yeah,” Remus said and beckoned Michelle to follow him. They headed up the staircase. Remus stood in front of a door just off to the right. He grabbed the door knob and turned it. Michelle stood beside him and stepped into the room.

The floor was lined with dark blue carpeting; the walls were done in the palest blue with a scalloped border. There was a maple wood sleigh bed against the wall with a blue and white floral quilt and sapphire sheets. An entertainment center housing a TV stood off to the left. A desk was against the corner where a computer system was. Michelle was in awe. She’d never seen a room so lovely. Finally she found her voice and turned to Remus.

“Why didn’t you tell me your family was rich?” she asked confusedly. “Do James, Sirius, Peter and Lily know about this?”

Remus leaned against the door frame and folded his arms over his chest. “Because, I don’t want you to treat me differently, and no...you’re the first to know.” he replied, staring into Michelle’s eyes. “But please don’t tell the Marauders just yet. I’m going to tell them when the time is right.”

“When the time is right? You’ve known them for six years now,” Michelle scoffed.

Remus’ expression fell and immediately Michelle felt guilty. She was just so upset over her parents that she unintentionally snapped at Remus. She exhaled, stepped closer to Remus and threw her arms around him, hugging him.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized. “I didn’t mean to snap at you. I guess I’m still a bit tense about this whole ‘cruise’ thing my parents went on.”

Remus hugged her tightly. “It’s alright. I totally understand. Listen, get dressed and freshen up, then come down for dinner.”

Remus released Michelle and gave her a kiss before turning and heading back downstairs. Michelle closed the door and headed over to her trunk. She pulled out a pair of white jogging pants and a pink tank top with spaghetti shoulder straps. She headed into the bathroom.

Remus was so happy and ecstatic that Michelle was staying with them. His feelings toward her intensified and he knew that when he graduated he wanted to marry her. Werewolves mated for life. Remus wasn't about to tell his parents that he'd slept with Michelle yet. He would tell them later on though.

Michelle quickly showered and pulled on the clothes. Her hair was left damp and fluffed around her shoulders. She headed back downstairs.

At dinner, the Lupins wanted to hear all about Michelle's family. Michelle's parents had gone so far as put up her three-year-old sister for adoption simply because they had no time to devote to her. When Michelle had gotten the letter to Hogwarts, they were thrilled and happy that she would be away for the entire seven years of study and home only on the holidays. Michelle had to admit, she was also relieved as well. She missed her little sister greatly and often thought about her. Both the Lupins were in total shock as they heard this and couldn't understand how parents could be so cold. Remus was watching Michelle closely as she broke down and excused herself from dessert.

Michelle flung herself face down on the bed and she ended up crying herself to sleep. Remus knew better than to go after her. He knew she needed her space and respected that.

She woke up what seemed like hours later. She yawned and glanced at the digital clock on her nightstand. It read 11:00 PM.

God I'd been asleep for nearly 5 hours or so, she thought, and decided to go find Mr. and Mrs. Lupin. She felt bad for just abruptly getting up from the table like that at dinner. She found them in the living room watching TV. Remus was no where to be seen.

"Sleep well, honey?" Mr. Lupin asked, looking up at her with a kind face.

"Yeah," Michelle said. "I just wanted to apologize for just getting up like that earlier at dinner. It was rude."

"Earlier at dinner?" Mrs. Lupin asked frowning. "You missed dinner dear. You left the table yesterday. You slept all day. Remus told us not to bother you."

Michelle's stomach grumbled hungrily.

"If you'd like, I can make you something to eat," Mr. Lupin offered.

"That sounds wonderful, but first I'd like to take a walk if that's okay?" Michelle asked.

"Sure," he said. "Just stick to the path."

“Where’s Remus?”

“He’s on an errand,” Mrs. Lupin said quickly. Michelle grabbed her black hooded jogging jacket, and pulled it on. She zippered it up halfway, and then headed outside.

It was pitch black out, with the exception of the full moonlight above her illuminating the moor a head of her. A little path was there and she followed it. The night air was chilly and her breath came out in puffs of steam as she exhaled. A thin mist floated and snaked around the grass, creating a spooky atmosphere. Michelle knew that Remus probably changed into a wolf by now. Just then, a horrible sounding howl cut through the darkness like a knife, causing her to stop walking. It also sent chills up her spine. The howl rose up again and Michelle felt fear gripping her chest. She turned and slowly began heading back the way she came. She felt like she was being watched now and heard low growls coming from the darkness, but she couldn’t tell if it was behind her or in front of her. Suddenly, something huge jumped on her, knocking her face down into the grass. She flipped herself over and stared right into the face of a black wolf with ice blue eyes. The monster’s cold, wet, black nose were inches from hers and the blue eyes had a cool lust in them.

“Remus,” Michelle sighed, feeling her heart rate gradually decreasing. “You scared the shit out of me!”

She went to get up but the black wolf’s ears flattened out sideways and it lifted the upper lip of its snout, lowering the bottom lip, exposing four white canines and incisors at her. It snarled and stood with its head lowered, its front paws spread slightly, and its hackles raised. It was in an attack position.

“R-Remus?” Michelle stammered slowly backing up. “It’s me. What’s wrong?”

The wolf snarled again and leapt into the air. Michelle screamed and threw her arms up over her face protectively. The wolf hit her with the force of a small truck. She was knocked onto her back on the grass. The wolf was standing over her, snapping its jaws at her, trying to get at her throat. Michelle thrust her right arm into the wolf’s jaws, trying to fend him off. She felt its teeth sinking into the material of her jacket and she heard the tearing sound. Another bite and that would be her skin.

She screamed again and that’s when a second wolf appeared. This one was gray and white and had amber/jaundice colored eyes. The gray wolf charged the black one, knocking it off her, and the two wolves began fighting viciously. Michelle scrambled to her feet and ran for her life.

The next morning, Remus, in human form, was sitting in the living room holding a piece of Michelle’s hooded jacket. A police officer was now talking to his parents. When he’d changed early this morning, he’d found the piece of material as well as a lot of blood that stained the grass. He told his parents that he thought Michelle was attacked by some kind of ‘wild dog’ and they called the police and told them that theory. He naturally told his parents that he thought HE’D attacked her or feared it, but they weren’t going to tell the police

officer that. So they came up with the 'wild dog' scenario and the fact that Michelle hadn't come back from her walk.

A few minutes later, the front door opened and Michelle walked in. Her right arm was exposed, dirt and mud smudged the front of her jacket, jeans, her throat and face. Her hair was dirt smudged and bits of grass clung in it. She was unharmed but she looked sick to her stomach. Mr. and Mrs. Lupin rushed forward to hug her.

"Oh good Lord!" Mrs. Lupin cried, hugging her carefully. "Thank God you're alright! We were so worried!"

Seeing that things were okay, the officer tipped the brim of his cap before he left. Once Mrs. Lupin released Michelle, they sat down on the couch. Remus was sitting on the loveseat and felt immense relief flooding over him. This is what he'd feared...that he changed and attacked her. When he'd woken up, he wasn't in the cage in the basement. Somehow he'd broken loose and gotten outside. Suppose he'd attacked an innocent person? Or even Michelle.

"What happened?" Remus asked her. "When I changed I found this along with tons of blood on the grass."

He held out the piece of material from her jacket. His parents looked at him shocked. He nodded.

"She knows about me being a werewolf," he explained. "I told her."

The Lupins nodded.

"She won't tell anyone, don't worry," he reassured them.

"T-the black wolf was just about to attack me when this gray wolf appeared and they began fighting. The gray wolf had pinned the black wolf down and it tore out its throat. See, I ran and fell into a mud puddle, but I ended up running in circles and I ended up running right back to the same spot. After that, I passed out," Michelle said.

"We're just glad you're alright!" Remus said, hugging her tightly, glad that his worst fear hadn't come true. Michelle hugged him back. She only hoped that when they returned to Hogwarts, things would be different.