

The Turning Moon

Her bones changed first, shifting and stretching, cracking as the joints found their new places. Then her skin, tingling and growing warmer with a coat of glossy white fur. Next her senses: sharpening and intensifying. Her eyes glinted bright gold. She ran her tongue over smooth white fangs and scraped her claws over the ground. The moon glowed on the wolf's back as she glared up at the sky, a new savagery overpowering her. The wolf started to run, and above her the stars glittered.

Sage gazed at herself in the mirror, scrutinizing her figure as a human. She was short but her legs were strong. She could still feel the tingling from the wolf's fur on her skin. Her eyes were green but if she stared hard enough they shimmered a golden hazel. She flexed her shoulders, remembering the strength they had when she ran as the wolf. The fangs were gone too, but Sage thought that her canine teeth looked sharper than they had before. She sighed and gathered her hair into a bundle. It were still tangled from the night but she did not care. She liked the wild look it gave her: feral and dangerous. She stared longer into the mirror. People she knew always told her she was pretty, but she never believed them. That was what friends were supposed to say, if only to fulfill an obligation.

Sage would be late to school today, but that was all right. A forged letter was an easy thing to do, and she had told her mother that her first class would not be meeting. She could take her time this morning.

The clothes she chose for that day were forest-colored and natural; anything else felt poisonous on her skin. She left her face plain and left her jewelry in its boxes. She would not be seen today.

The early October sky was pale grey and cold, and the bare trees groaned in the swirling breeze. She looked up sharply as a crow called out and another answered with an ominous sound that filled Sage with a strange apprehension. She watched the leaves skitter across her driveway and found it hard to get into her car, now a cage of metal and fumes. Though it was cold outside she rolled down the windows so she could still smell the clear air and the drying plants. It was a smell of decay and smoke, but it was a beautiful scent.

Sage shook her head and fumbled with the keys. It took two tries to start the car, and she crawled along the roads, eyes alert.

She walked into class with burning eyes, mumbled an apology, and sat stiffly in a seat in the back. The hours went by in a blur, and when there was nothing more to do, she went outside to a bench under a tree and listened to the wind. The sky was still grey, though darker, and three crows circled overhead. She breathed in the crisp air and exhaled, watching the cloud of frozen breath.

That night seems so far away now, contemplated Sage. *Like a dream.* But she knew it was not, because she could remember every detail. That never happened with her actual dreams; they were always lost into glowing fragments, gradually dissolving into nothing but a feeling.

She wondered if anyone else ever felt the wilderness calling to them, and felt as if they belonged there more than anywhere else; if they ever felt more animal than human. The house was empty and dark; her mother was at work or a party. Sage crept through the hallways, eyes adjusting to the blue-grey light, trying not to disrupt the calm silence. She slipped past the dog, gently touching its head as it pushed its nose questioningly into her leg. The dog whined pitifully as Sage closed the door softly behind her.

The forest was dark and mysterious. The moon, a searchlight in the sky, washed the land with silver and the black trees swayed beckoningly. Sage followed them; she trusted the night. She started as a crow took flight, fluttering its midnight wings. Its cry echoed menacingly, and sent a thrill through Sage.

She dropped down to her hands and knees and crawled along the forest floor. Her eyes widened in the darkness, and she heard every sound the forest made; smelled every scent.

She held her breath as a fox slipped out from the undergrowth, its fur glistening white in the patches of moonlight. Sage and the fox locked eyes for a moment, and then the fox trotted on. Sage smiled to herself and took another step. Then the forest changed. A black cloud slid across the moon, engulfing the woods in thick darkness. Sage began to feel nervous: what if she could not find her way back home? This was a rash, stupid idea, she said to herself. What kind of crazy person goes into the woods at night, sneaking around like a beast? She shook her head and rose to her feet, brushing the leaf mold and dirt from her hands. The cloud still covered the moon.

She thought about what ventured out in the forest at night—the stories were always bloody, and humans never escaped human. There was talk of harpies, human vultures that feast on human's blood to gain their knowledge; angry and crafty spirits that attacked lost travelers; werewolves, who turned anyone they thought deserved it.

A sudden, crackling fear gripped her and Sage ran. She imagined something following her and she crashed mindlessly through the trees; the clouds uncovered the moon. Sage's eyes were opened, and she saw it there, slavering and glaring. Its eyes glinted red, and Sage knew something was about to change.

“How much do you want to believe?” it hissed, and when Sage woke up she was covered in her own blood.

Sage snapped out of her thoughts and gazed sharply across the campus green. She narrowed her eyes to focus better, but she would know that walk from a world away. Sage shivered as a chilled breeze swept past. His dark blue stare flashed in her mind. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply of the biting air, but when she looked again, he was gone. She shook her head and rose from the bench. *Maybe he really is only in my mind*, she thought.

Sage found it hard to breathe every time he walked by. She tried not to, but she had to lower her gaze so as not to meet his. It had been three years, and Sage knew she was a coward. She was too stubborn to let go, and he had no idea. But now she had to go home.

The next day when she saw him, Sage growled to herself as she walked silently by him, and then scolded herself for bringing her secret into the day, dank and grey as it was. That belonged to the night, not the sun. *This has gone on for too long*, she thought, risking a glance over her shoulder. Her breath caught in her throat as their eyes met. It was like lightning.

That night, when she returned home, Sage sat in her dark room and thought of a name for herself. *If I am to live a half-life as a wolf, I need a name for that half of me*, she thought. She closed her eyes. *Sariah. Perfect.* She opened her eyes and, satisfied with her new name, collapsed onto her unmade bed and slept.

She woke up drenched in sweat and shaking. It was barely morning and the sky was overcast and reflecting the distant city lights, turning it a pallid yellow. Delirious, Sage stumbled out of bed and staggered to her mirror. She looked terrified and hunched over. She shook her head, trying to figure out what was wrong with her. Still shivering, she crept back to her bed and fell

into a restless, feverish sleep. Her dreams were terrible and distorted, full of trees made of fangs and eyes dripping blood; winged creatures dragging their wasted bodies to red skies, and things trapped in lost houses—they haunted her even as she drove, too fast, to school in the morning.

He walked in front of her and Sage turned up her music so loud it made her ears hurt. She looked pleadingly up at the whitened sky and naked trees, praying for a full moon soon. This human body was making her nervous. She exhaled heavily and shoved her hands deeper into her pockets to keep them from trembling.

He was so dangerous to her. She saw him stop, and watched with narrowed eyes as a girl, younger, and with a doughy face and small, sparkling eyes gazed up at him with a simpering expression. He wallowed in the attention, and turned his back to face the girl fully. Sage curled her lips in scornful disgust. This was new. Sage suddenly wondered what she saw in him.

Sitting in class next to him under those dreadful fluorescent lights made things no better. He did not talk to her today, as he sometimes did, and Sage sat there staring intently at the wall, feeling like a fool for ever wanting to look at him.

Soon, she began to shake again. Her hands grew cold, and the noise in the room became a jumbled buzz.

“Excuse me,” she said, her voice sounding very far away, “I need to leave.”

The other students looked at her with quizzical, concerned expressions, but he kept his eyes averted. It made Sage angry.

“Why?” the teacher asked, chalk poised on the board in mid-letter.

“I...I can't. I just can't,” stammered Sage as she gathered her things together and left. The room was silent as she closed the door behind her.

Seven days later, the moon again shone almost as bright as the sun, with a pallor like silver. Sage stood in the bitter cold air hugging her coat closer and staring at the frosted ground. She took a deep breath and slowly stepped toward the forest, peeling off her coat as she went. Dead leaves swirled around her as she stripped off the rest of her clothes, her skin glowing pale.

She raised her eyes to the moon, and felt the change beginning. The wildness came into her eyes and she cried out to the sky as she became the wolf. Growling, Sariah stalked into the forest, glancing around warily as she went.

Somehow, she thought, someday, I will find a way to stay this way forever.

Two days later, Sage was leaving her house for school when her mother intercepted her at the door.

“Where were you been all last night?” Sage’s mother asked. She sounded tragically drunk.

“I was right where I was supposed to be,” answered Sage accusingly, and reached for the handle. Her mother’s hand got there first, and locked the door. Sage glanced questioningly at her.

“What was that tone? You’re not leaving here until you apologize. You don’t spend enough time with me,” her mother slurred. Sage tried in vain to hold back her disgust.

“I’m going to be late,” she mumbled and unlocked the door again. She was about to open it when her mother’s hand struck the side of her face. The wildness entered Sage and she whirled around and seized her mother around the neck.

“Do not hit me,” growled Sage, eyes burning furiously.

“What do you think you are, a wolf?” choked her mother, laughing nervously. Sage released her with a snort, pulled open the door and walked haughtily to her car. Her mother stared wide-eyed out the door after her, yelling something Sage did not listen to. What Sage did not see was the shadow slipping in between the trees, or hear the rusting of the juniper branches beneath the sound of her own footsteps.

In the bright white-lit classroom, Sage sat next to him again, though she could not tell anyone why. The two of them made small talk in a quiet moment, and she stayed close behind him when they left. They were still talking when they split off on their separate ways. Sage went into her next class smiling reluctantly.

She saw him again right before going home but he was not alone. The girl was close to him, far too close, whispering something to him and looking up at him with those thin, black eyes. They were smiling, and then—Sage wanted to scream, but she did not. She made no sound when she turned and flew to her car, and she did not need to look back to know that they had not seen her.

Her mother was not home when Sage got there. *Good riddance*, she said to herself, reaching up to where she still felt the sting.

She slowly got out of her car and then burst into tears. Her wails shook her body, and she sunk to the ground, teeth chattering even though she was not cold. Gradually her sobs faded to whimpering, and her tears dried on her cheeks. She rubbed her sore red eyes and stared out to the

comforting forest. She startled and leapt to her feet when she saw eyes staring back. The blinked slowly, beckoning her. Sage was skeptical, but she stepped slowly toward the trees.

The eyes were yellow and glittering with a steady, wise gaze, and they belonged to a girl. She crouched in the mottled shadows and her long dark hair was matted and stringy, but strangely—wildly—beautiful. She seemed to Sage not quite human.

“Do you know what I am?” asked the girl, her voice eerily familiar. The girl was not much older than Sage, but she sounded aged beyond her years.

“I do,” answered Sage, “but I do not know who you are.”

The girl smiled, baring sharpened teeth. “How much do you want to believe?” she whispered. Sage’s eyes widened.

“You are the one who changed me?”

“But you are not angry about that.”

“No, I—thank you,” Sage replied slowly. The wolf-girl continued gaze at her with those unnerving yellow eyes.

“How long have you been a wolf?” asked Sage.

“Longer than you; much longer. So long, I am almost not human anymore.” She paused. “I chose well when I chose you.”

Sage was silent. Then she asked, “why are you talking to me now?”

“To teach you what you need to know; it is the duty of those who change to teach the changed. You are not fully human anymore either, and so you must not act like you are. You have a name for yourself, yes?”

“Sariah.”

“Good,” said the girl, smiling savagely again. “Never speak your human name while you are a wolf, and let no one else speak it. This is a gift I have given you, and you have the power to use it as you wish.”

“Is there a way, then, to stay a wolf forever? To stop being human all together? This body is sometimes terrible.”

“I understand. There are ways: you can wait like I am doing, for you will stop being human eventually. Or, you can change someone...”

“Who?” asked Sage, leaning closer.

“Who does not want to be changed. Most of us are drawn to those, like you, who will be thankful. We usually scorn those who do not want to be changed.”

“But I would no longer be human.”

The girl nodded. Sage stared off into the forest, mind reeling.

“What are you thinking of?” asked the girl, eyes narrowed.

“I know—just something that happened today,” stammered Sage. The girl looked skeptical. “I thought I loved someone, and—“

“Now they are gone? They love someone else?”

“Yes.” Sage swallowed the tears she felt burning in her throat. The girl looked down for a moment, and sorrow flashed across her face. Then she smiled knowingly.

“What else exists?” she said.

Sage sighed. “I wish I could say that he was nothing to me now—”

“But you still love him.”

Sage did not reply. There was silence between them.

“He must be punished,” growled the girl suddenly, bitterly.

“Revenge?” she asked uncertainly. “I had always heard that revenge is regretted.”

The girl grinned menacingly. “It is not regretted if it is deserved,” she whispered. Sage thought about this, then rose to her feet.

“Then there shall be revenge,” she said quietly. “And I will never be human again.”

Sage knew that before she could punish him the way she planned to, the two of them would have to become close friends. She started the next day, by greeting him in class with a bright smile and asking him how he was. He flashed her a confused half-smile and returned the greeting. Sage walked with him afterward, talking about anything and everything that came to mind, and he seemed all right with that. Once she was alone again, Sage smiled to herself.

You have fallen into another trap, she thought, and this one is much more dangerous. Sage tried to have a conversation with him every day, and she reluctantly found that she half-enjoyed his presence. Even in the world outside of her dreams, he was a good friend. The only times she broke down were when she saw them together: him following the doughy-faced girl like a mindless puppy, trusting something he knew nothing about. *She is nothing like me,* Sage thought, glaring malevolently at the malicious, glittering black eyes.

Sage frequently met with the wolf-girl; sometimes as a human, sometimes as a wolf.

“You are becoming less human by the day,” commented the wolf-girl, now a scruffy, dark grey she-wolf, one night in early December. “How is your plan going?”

“We are closer,” answered Sariah, the white wolf. “But I still feel that somewhere in my human heart, I don’t hate him. And every time I see him with her...I want to tear myself apart.”

The wolf-girl nodded in understanding.

“But he had no right to do this to you. He does not deserve to be loved, does he?”

“No, of course not,” growled Sariah, eyes glinting. “He deserves to be alone.”

Sage decided that she must know where he lived. The opportunity presented itself when the teacher of their class together smugly announced that there would be a test in a week. Sage knew the material almost perfectly, but she figured, with a small smile, that some extra studying would be fine.

She leaned toward him and said, in a whisper that he would have to strain to hear, “Do you think that we could study for this together sometime, maybe after school?”

He looked surprised for a moment, then broke eye contact and said, quietly, “sure. We could do that at your house, do you think?”

Sage smiled, yellow-green eyes sparkling; they had changed color since she was turned. “No,” she replied. “I wouldn’t trust my mother around guests.”

“Okay, so my house then. After school tomorrow? I guess I can drive you.”

“That would be great,” Sage said, smiling again. “But,” she added, dropping her gaze, “you’re sure your girlfriend won’t mind?”

She saw with grim satisfaction that the question caught him off guard.

“No, she won’t,” he said, still not looking at her.

On the way home from his house, Sage was silent. She replayed the afternoon in her head, from his ambiguous glances to her unnecessary laughter. She smiled slightly when she thought of them being so close together, but her expression immediately darkened when she remembered her vengeful intention. He was also silent as he drove, but the silence was comfortable, and though there was much either of them could have said, it was as if there was no need for it now.

Sage turned towards him and smiled sadly as he pulled up into her driveway. The white noise of the engine, now gone, emphasized the desolateness of the winter landscape.

“So,” he began, hesitantly, “does this mean that you’re not mad at me?”

“You thought I was mad at you?” asked Sage, genuinely surprised. “I suppose I wasn’t as subtle as I thought,” she added with a nervous laugh. He smiled slightly.

“Well, I’m sorry.”

“Why do you think I was mad?”

“You’d sometimes give me these mean looks, and other times you’d seem really sad. I was kind of worried, to tell the truth.”

Sage flushed and turned away.

“But,” he continued, “then you started talking to me again, so I figured it was all right. Friends?” He looked so innocent, holding out his hand, eyes open and clear. It made Sage angry and suddenly the air in his car was suffocating.

“Friends?” she shot back, eyes blazing. She wrenched open the door, but did not get out. “Is that all I’m good for, after all I’ve done? I never wanted to be just friends with you,” she cried.

“I said I was sorry,” he countered, sounding bewildered. Sage stepped out of the car and leaned toward him, lowering her voice to a dangerous, growling whisper. She could feel the wildness rising inside.

“Sorry is only a word we use as a poor excuse for an apology. The true apologies are the actions we take to set things straight.”

“What do you want me to do,” he asked, sounding irritated now, “stop liking her?”

“It would be a start,” snapped Sage, slamming the door in his face.

Now, Sage would wait. She would wait patiently and silently for the moon to fill out to a silver disk; for the time when the wolf could hunt and hurt without empathy. She knew the way to her destination, but first she wanted to see the wolf-girl. She found her in the early evening, before the moon rose above the horizon line.

“Tonight is the night,” said Sage, the wolf-girl fixing her with a deep, intense yellow gaze. “He will forever regret what he has done to me.” The wolf-girl bared her teeth in a ferocious smile.

“Good. And remember, once you do this, you will be forever a wolf.”

“I know,” replied Sariah, yellow-green eyes glinting. “And it is exactly what I want.”

“Wait,” the wolf-girl said. “You cannot change if you do not see what changes you.” Sage understood. As long as she did not raise her eyes to the moon, she would remain human. Later that night, she left her house. Sage pulled her hood farther down, shielding her eyes from the glowing moon as she slid through the forest. She knew exactly where he lived.

She gazed up at his window with hatred and shook her head. *No, I do not love him anymore.* Sage bent to pick up a stone at her feet. She stared at his window a moment longer, then flung the stone, shattering the glass. The sound was deafening against the night’s silence. He was outside in a moment, and Sage almost smiled at the surprise and confusion in his eyes.

“Sage?” he gasped. She raised her hood slightly, just enough to meet his eyes. The anger there startled him. “What are you doing?” he whispered, taking a tentative step closer. She narrowed her eyes and took a step back.

“You ruined me,” she said fiercely. He started to say something, but she cut him off. “You knew I wanted you, but you never said a word. What could you have lost? But you did nothing. I could have loved you.”

“You hardly said anything to me—”

“Because I didn’t know if you’d listen,” Sage shot back, seething. “And apparently, you did not.” With that, Sage threw back her hood and let the moonlight fill her eyes.

He was too scared even to run. He simply stared, the air crackling around him, palpable with his fear. The wolf turned its glittering eyes on him, and its fangs glowed in the menacing moonlight. The wolf advanced slowly, and it had a strange expression on its face: one of hatred, but also of savage glee. When the wolf lunged, he ran.

Sariah knew she could catch him at any moment, but she reveled in the chase. She howled aloud as they crashed through the forest, and she could smell his fear, could see it in the air. It made her feel powerful.

It did not take long before he could go no farther. A tangle of brush blocked his way and he stood there dumbly, drowned in his own terror. Sariah stopped and stared at him for a long moment, and, before she could change her mind, leapt forward and sunk her teeth into his neck. His blood clogged her nostrils and coated her tongue, and if she had been human she would have retched. *Hadn’t she loved him once?*

Sariah unclenched her jaws and lowered herself to the ground beside him. She was forever a wolf now, and she had all the time in the world to wait for him to wake up.

To Sariah, it seemed as if she had been asleep for days. But the moon had hardly moved; it had been only minutes. He had woken up beside her, and was standing on trembling legs, head hanging. But he was not human. His dark grey and brown fur was matted with his own blood, and his blue eyes were dull and terribly dark. He looked at her and she stared back, emotionless.

“What have you done to me?” he whined, almost pitifully, if not for the tinge of anger in his voice.

“Only what you deserved,” answered Sariah impassively. “And now,” she added after a moment’s hesitation, “I will never feel the pain of being human again.”

“You are so selfish,” he growled, taking an unsteady step backward. Sariah leapt to her paws, snarling.

“I will never regret this,” she cried. “For what you have done to me, you will walk alone for the rest of your life.”

“As will you, Sage,” he said.

“Don’t ever call me that,” Sariah growled back. “That is not who I am anymore.”

Without another word, Sariah turned and fled. He watched her disappear into the trees, then turned and slowly padded through the forest.