

Chew

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A short story about a group of friends and a monster among them.

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She was a scientist. 30 years old, female. Correction. A Geneticist. Studying the effects of cross breeding. Experimentation they told her. Then she found out they were successful. A hybrid. They incubated a half wolf, half human zygote until they could no longer keep it stable in the chamber. It was not completely formed but once they released it, no one could control it and it escaped. She was attacked. Bitten. What they unleashed onto the world reminded her of the tales the Elders would recite around the great Fires. The Wendi-go would frighten and fascinate her. Now, instead of been a long ago tale. They have made the creature live and breathe. * * * I looked around the cabin of the plane. There are 7 of us each of us with our strengths and weaknesses. We were only planning an afternoon hunt when a damn blizzard blew in and sheeted us out, total whiteout, completely disorienting us. Thank God for our rescue. I looked around at all the faces, looking so exhausted but with a hint of relief. First there is Tom 35, he's got a wife and new baby girl. He's got frostbite on his fingers pretty bad, but I think he'll be OK. Then Terry 37, Tom's brother. Looks just like him too. Brownish hair, strong jaw, built like an ox the both of them, lumberjack strong. Made from good stock. He's got frostbite the worst of all. His are starting to turn black from the blood freezing, causing the flesh to decay. I don't really give him a fighting chance of his fingers getting saved; nose and ears look OK though. Buck there is my son. God I hate looking at him this way. He's such a solider. His frostbite affected his feet worse than his hands so he had to just lay there most of the time while we were lost. That's why I think his hypothermia is worse too. He still can't stop shivering. Jaime is just 27, just married and a baby on the way. He seemed to be in the first stages of hypothermia as well, but he was just thrilled to be there. No worries about the situation at hand. It was also his first hunt with the gang. He joined the job down at the factory and heard us talking and wanted to come along. He has frostbite on his hands and feet. It looks pretty bad, but I think he'll pull through. Old Mike there is 39, my buddy. We've been through thick and thin. Grew up together as neighbors. Guess we're in the thick again. His frostbite is not that bad as the rest, but it's still bad. Then there is Rick he is 19, Mike's son and Buck's best friend. I am sure it's hard for him to watch his friend go through this. His frostbite is about the same as his Dad's, if not a little less severe. They must share some secret to keep from getting the worst of it. I need to learn it. Finally let me introduce myself John, 38. The ache of this frostbite was so bad I wanted to gnaw my darn feet off. Now they are going numb, so I don't

know if that is any better. I pushed the button on the side of my helmet labeled 'talk'. "How goes it up there?" The pilot's response mike was set to automatic, so all he has to do was talk into the mike. "Everything look-" "Sorry. What was that mate?" "What in God's name was that?" I had no idea what the pilot had seen but I was about to feel what he was feeling as the plane went down. I saw flashes but it was not my life. I saw the trees coming in flashes, at high speed, through the cargo plane's small forward window. I heard and felt everything. I wasn't one of the fortunate ones to be knocked out cold. We skimmed over the trees for about 3 seconds and took a nosedive and everyone went flying. Thankfully harnesses secured us all. The worst of us were in the litters and strapped down to the floor. But that didn't keep us from getting tossed about. The plane didn't just slid into a crash landing. It sliced through a couple trees, the branches immediately taking off the wings and turning the plane into a metal lifesaver if we made it, a coffin for 8 if we did not. Finally, with a loud and sickening crash the plane came to a stop. No sooner had we landed did I hear the pilot through my headset embedded in my helmet. "Everyone OK back there? If so, we need to evacuate and try and salvage what we can." I looked around and it seemed to me like everyone was OK. "Jamie, hey buddy you ready to roll?" I saw Jamie huddled up against the back wall. He was shivering the whole trip. When he didn't answer I unbuckled my harness and went to shake his shoulder. "Jamie-." He head lolled back and I could see the wound. He had taken a hit to the jugular. Looked like a piece of metal or hard plastic. "Oh geez. Can I get some help back here!" I yelled. I heard some shuffling then the pilot was asking, "What the problem?" I just pointed. He saw Jamie, and the wound. "I see. Well I am sorry for your loss and we will take care of your friend as well." He checked for a pulse out of courtesy even though it looked good and well like Jamie had perished in the crash. "Thank you," I replied and went about getting supplies into a pack bag and getting off the plane. The best any of us could do was help each other. We were hurt and aching. The ones that had less pain helped the worst ones, but that did not keep us from wanting to collapse in a heap of burning nerves. "Alright guys. I will take care of the fella that didn't make it. If you all want to say anything special I can respect that. But in your current condition I don't see us getting around a graveside to do it. But we can pay our respects here and now." The pilot allowed us to speak our peace. A few tears were shed, not because Jamie was a long time friend, but because anytime someone dies, it hurts. Plus, he will never get to see his baby. Tom, Mike Rick and I start doing the best we can to set up camp. Fortunately we were able to salvage the radio. Mike has some communications background experience and would be in charge of getting us rescued. The pilot and him will be working in round the clock shifts to try to make emergency contact. Rick has amazing survival skills. At our last rescue, a few hours before help had arrived he was able to get a fire going. It was a little late for some of us with our frostbite and all, but it still helped to stop the damage progress any further. So Rick got right on the fire this time. The pilot stowed an over-all tarp that's like an open tent. It is big enough to cover an area to sleep about 10 people. It was designed for emergency situations like this. So with a little sweat and a lot of grunting we had the tent up. By the time that was done Rick had the fire ready. Thankfully we had food supplies. So the only thing marked against us is that we were out in the middle of nowhere, and we were injured to varying degrees. We even had our hunting rifles that

made it through our first rescue and through the crash. "Well I went back to the crash site and the plane hasn't been blow to bits. So whatever else we might need I think will be safe for now," the pilot informed us. "All we can do now is sit and wait to be rescued..again." Some of us chuckled weakly at his joke and went back to work settling in the camp. Dinner was served about an hour later and we were all finished. "Aren't you going to eat anything else?" I asked Rick. He was already lean as a bean pole. "Naw, I got my protein shakes and vitamins. I am on a special diet." Mike had already made a pallet and was snoozing. He had second shift, which was evening to morning. So I guess he was getting a head start on his sleep. "God Almighty did you guys hear that?" "Yeah, sounded like a scream, but way out here." That gave me chills from the bottom of my feet to the top of my head. "Maybe we should have someone stand guard with Mike tonight, while he is checking the radio. That just sounded weird." "Probably was some kind of animal," Buck replied with confidence. "If it was, it was probably being eaten by something bigger." * * * Though I only had half a human side it was enough to give me emotions, feelings, wants and needs. I shifted to my human side when necessary to blend in with them, like now. They won't know what's coming to them once the Cycle is complete. I didn't ask to be this way. I didn't ask to be chomped on back at the lab. Now I have to feed my New Nature. I have this hunger so intense I feel like I am going to die if I don't eat. I've got plenty to eat now. No worries. * * * The inviting almost torturous smell of a recent kill drifted on the winter winds. Saliva pooled in Mike's mouth and his stomach growling loud enough to draw a few curious stares. "You sure you don't want a snack or something?" A quick head jerk no and Mike was moving to the other side of the camp. Everyone was settled in and the persistent throb of the need to feed was causing a sheen of sweat to coat Mike's skin. He had only eaten a quarter his required caloric intake for the day. "Imma go for a walk. Be back." "Got the runs there, eh Mike?" A couple guys chuckled. This bunch were close enough to poke fun whenever, at whoever's expense and whatever the cause. "Must have been someone I ate," Mike muttered low under his breath as he disappeared under the cover of the dense trees. * * * Raw warm flesh that so recently struggled to live became infused with an essence that pure was heaven. It seemed to be laced with something addictive because my human nature found this act repulsive. Yet, here I am on all fours coated in blood and feasting heartily on the remains of a wild beast. Strange to be able to remember I am human but to see my limbs deformed into that of a canine. Well, not even fully canine. Thick wiry fur covering my limbs that were swelled with thick muscles. My hands lengthened and were hooked with sharp talons. Running my tongue across my incisors that so deftly severed the jugular of the dead animal at my feet. I should be vomiting the chunks of raw, bloody flesh I am gorging on. I should be concerned about being found out and killed or worse becoming an experiment. I leaned back and let out another mournful wail. Mike stopped dead in his tracks. "What was that?" An inhuman almost animalistic screaming ripped through the trees. Still, the alluring scent of blood and carrion was leading him almost without him realizing how far he had walked. Her scent weaved together causing his body to react as well. She was here. The woman who attacked him that night he ventured deep into the woods behind his house. Turning him into something ghastly. That made him do unspeakable acts. His vision at night had improved drastically to say the least. As did his hearing and sense of touch. Sometimes his

awareness would get sidetracked when other urges trumped common sense. A cursed man can only live in the shadows of humanity. Walk upright among them but never fully embrace the ability and nature. Mike's craving to feed would have exposed him had he not developed a protein bar with high levels of glucose, fat and calcium. A poor substitute for the sweet tang singing in his nose at this moment and effectively making a zombie out of him. Except he wanted more than brains.