

Fueling Up

“Can’t we stop to eat yet?”

My shoulders tensed. Vic has asked the same question five minutes ago. Even I knew we were in the middle of fucking nowhere, and I hadn’t opened my eyes for the last hour. The hum of Frank’s old Ford Falcon usually put me right out, but even the old, uneven highway rattling the car couldn’t drown out Vic’s bitching that night.

Though to be fair, we hadn’t had time to afford Vic a full meal the last time we stopped. He always cut a lean figure, but I had noticed the lines in his cheeks sank deeper than usual. It cast some shadows down his face that put me on edge, and he was my own blood-brother.

“Three miles,” Frank grunted, the scowl audible in his voice. I opened my eyes long enough to catch the headlights offering a brief flash of a decrepit road sign. “And quit whining. You’re giving me a headache.”

“At least he’s moved on from the house burning down,” I mumbled. “Like it wasn’t his own fault.”

“How was I supposed to know they sent two tails? They’d never done that before.”

“They’re getting more persistent,” Frank conceded, the heat gone from his voice. He scratched at his beard. “We’ll just have to be more cautious. Especially you, Vic. The mother won’t put up with you like I do.”

I expected Vic to argue like usual, but he must have forgot when the gas station appeared over the hill. He bristled with excitement like he hadn’t eaten thousands of times, as if it still held some inkling of novelty after all these years. He still had the

appetite of somebody half his age, and the table manners of that same somebody. I couldn't count how many times Frank told him he was going to ruin his teeth.

The last couple miles passed in merciful silence before, as promised, Frank exited off the highway. The car crackled with something. Anticipation? Dread? I couldn't put my finger on it. Vic bounced in his seat as we rolled into a run-down gas station with a lone car parked by the single pair of pumps. The sickly fluorescent lights above cast a pale glow on the man filling up his BMW. It reflected off his jet-black hair, which bounced slightly when he glanced up at the Falcon pulling up to the other side of the pump. He gave a small nod as Vic got out and dashed past him towards the convenience store. My brother cast glances back towards the cars, his dilated pupils visible from across the parking lot.

Frank stood a stoic contrast, and stuck his hands in his pockets as he approached the pump. Or maybe it was just apathy. Maybe after another hundred years I wouldn't have the energy to hate myself anymore, either. "Where you headed, friend?" he asked. I cranked down my window by a sliver to hear the man's response better, and lulled my forehead against the freezing glass. I hadn't noticed in my half-sleep, but my stomach rumbled every few seconds. Part of me wished Vic would hurry the hell up, and the other part tried to cleave itself from the first.

"Helena," the stranger replied with a polite smile. "It's basecamp for my ski vacation. I've been looking forward to it all year," he said. I cringed a little at that. Something to live for. But Frank's calm expression didn't change, he only nodded. Or maybe a soured expression was hidden underneath the mass of hair on his face. "What about you guys? Where are you headed?"

“We’re visiting some family up in Edmonton,” Frank answered. Which was technically true, though a mild way to say it. More like returning to the brood. “Seeing family up in Helena, friend?”

“Nope! It’s going to be me and the mountains, just the way I like it.”

Frank nodded again. “Good. That’s good.”

The man stepped farther into my line of sight as he returned the pump, and my eyes locked onto his. He was fit – not too muscular, but not lanky either. A premium cut. He fidgeted under my gaze, and I placed my hand over the door handle, ready to jump out if needed. “Hey, man,” he said, warily turning his attention back to Frank. “Aren’t you going to fuel up?”

“Nah. Tank’s still mostly full.”

Vic appeared in a blur behind the man and bodily threw him towards the Falcon. I flung open my door and yanked him into the back seat while he stumbled, with Frank and Vic diving in behind. My fangs sank into his neck first, catching the scream before it could leave his mouth. We feasted, the whole crude ceremony ending with Vic pushing a pale corpse back out onto the asphalt. “That hit the spot,” he sighed happily as he climbed out.

A deafening noise rattled the night, and Vic collapsed with a grunt. I heard a shotgun being racked, and then the barrel of the weapon poked into the backseat. “Don’t move,” a gruff voice said. Probably the gas station’s clerk. Fucking Vic was supposed to make sure nobody else was around. “I’ve already called the police.”

“Put that down, friend,” Frank said, his voice as level as always. “This car means a lot to me.”

The clerk's arm tensed, but before he could pull the trigger, Frank grabbed the barrel of the shotgun and twisted. The barrel bent straight up like in the old cartoons. The clerk stumbled backwards, dropping the ruined weapon and tripping over our latest meal to fall on his back.

Frank handed me the shotgun and climbed out of the car. "Freak," the clerk spat as I slowly unloaded the slugs. A full stomach always made me a little groggy. "Monster," he added. Vic stirred, coughing a little as he pushed himself to his feet. His shirt was red, but the skin underneath had already merged whole again. "What the hell is going on?"

Frank ignored the clerk. "What did I just say about being more cautious?" he scolded Vic. "Get in the fucking car."

"Sorry," Vic mumbled, his eyes on the ground as he scrambled into the passenger seat.

"Gonna bitch about your ruined shirt now?" I teased.

"Shut up."

"I'm dreaming, I must be dreaming," the clerk ranted, scooting backwards. "None of this is real."

I just smiled. I couldn't help it. "Good luck explaining this to the cops, then."

The clerk gulped. Probably from the nice view of my pointed teeth. "You aren't going to kill me?"

I shook my head, wiping our prints from the empty shotgun before lobbing him the weapon. He made no effort to catch it, and it clattered unceremoniously on the ground. I almost laughed.

By Frank's stoic expression, you'd think the clerk asked if he wanted his receipt.

"Nah. Who's going to believe you?"