

Make My Heart an Arrow

A thick padlock sat nestled on a thick chain connecting two heavy steel doors, clearly new additions to the ramshackle old barn and paddock that had been turned into a kennel. Other new additions were evident—barred windows, razor wire on the fencing, and security lights, which we'd already disabled. Of course, I didn't have the combination and the padlock was the size of my fist. And from the muffled crashes coming from the cabin, now was not a good time to go search for the information. Wuf sat next to me, a solid and weighty mass now that he was getting fed regularly. I guess since you could no longer count my ribs on sight, the same could be said about me. We were both rehabbed strays and we were learning, but I wasn't learning fast enough.

Wuf tilted his head and looked at me with his deep black eyes. *Open lock?* I don't know how to explain it—he doesn't talk to me. Not like Steve talks to Lena, but we still seem to understand each other.

I shake my head at him. "I can't pick it. It's a combination lock—no key." Lena had been teaching me how to pick most basic locks. Not the usual education most people my age are getting. If I was still home in Illinois, I'd probably be failing Algebra by now. I preferred picking locks.

There was a great crash behind me. I turned as someone burst through a broken glass door. The man rolled to his feet and ran. I could have told him to not bother, but he wouldn't listen. They never do. And Lena always wins. She followed closely behind, slowing so she could duck carefully out the remnants of the glass

door. Once outside, she paused, watching the man run, one hand on her hip, the other wrapped around a wicked looking spear.

Lena looks like something out of a Viking saga. Her golden hair is loose, held back by a bronze circlet. A flowing cape of swan feathers flows from her shoulders. The effect is slightly spoiled by her torn jeans, black converse, and faded Spock T-shirt that said, "That's not logical, Captain."

Hoof beats thundered from the front the house. I grew up reading about knights in battered paperbacks I got from the library. Back then, I'd never seen a horse up close. I knew knights rode chargers or warhorses, but I didn't really understand what that meant—not until I met Lena and Steve.

Steve is a unicorn, another thing I read about in those battered paperbacks. I'd always pictured them as sweet and dainty. More mild-mannered and deer like than warhorse. One look at Steve and I quickly understood how wrong my earlier conceptions of unicorns and warhorses were. Steve is *huge* and about as delicate as a Sherman tank. When he tears across a field, like he was doing now the thuds of his hooves resonate in your chest like a violent heart beat. I need a stool to brush him down with the curry comb. If I stepped in front of him now, he could easily mow me down and I'd be trampled to death under his hooves.

I am always very polite to Steve.

And if you're thinking of bringing up his name, don't. He picked it, and he doesn't take any sort of mockery over it very well.

Lena ran, grabbed his mane, and swung up onto his back. It looked effortless and smooth, and I know for certain that it took a lot of training to learn how to do

that. I've tried and I have the bruises to prove it. Lena leaned down, her spear low. I shivered at the deadly beauty of it.

Wuf nudged my shoulder with his nose and I felt the cold radiate down my arm. I shook myself and turned back to my task. Lena could handle her end. It was time for me to handle mine. Which I wasn't sure I could currently do. I looked back at the stupid lock. Then at the fence surrounding the paddock, which was chain link topped with razor wire. Damn it. I had one job, and that was to get into the kennel, and I'd failed before I started.

What if this was it? What if this was the failure that made Lena decide that I wasn't worth the money? What if she sent me home? Wuf huffed at me, a gently chiding sound, before head butting me in the side. I stumbled back a step, even though it was a gentle shove. Wuf is a waheela, and Lena describes him as an 'unholy union between polar bear and wolf.' And I can see it. Though Wuf's head is canine in shape, his features are broader and almost prehistoric looking. He's sized closer to a bear, or will be once he fills out a little more. His last owner captured, starved and beat him so he would fight in underground cage matches. Now that his white hair was growing out, it was starting to darken at the edges, a nice bluish silver. Except where it was growing over scar tissue. Those hairs were coarser and a brighter white. He is built for cold climates and wide open spaces. Instead he travels around in a horse trailer with me, a unicorn, and a half Valkyrie. I was human and totally useless.

Wuf leaned in and licked the lock and chain, which I tried to pull him away from doing because that could not be sanitary. I grabbed a handful of his fur and

stopped. The lock was iced over. Wuf raised one massive paw and slammed it down on the lock. The lock stayed intact but the chain shattered. I stared at it at once overjoyed that my mission wasn't a failure and annoyed that its success wasn't because of me. Totally useless human.

Wuf sat back, his tongue lolling out like he was laughing. I still somehow got the gist of what he was saying. *Team*. He broke the lock, and later I'd get him some bacon. I wasn't purposeless. I sighed and pulled the arm of my jacket over my hand to keep it warm as I shoved the gate open. Who knew waheelas had a sense of humor?

The kennel smelled. I pulled the neckline of my shirt up to cover my nose from the worst of the stink. Wuf sneezed, his lip curling up afterward. He didn't like the stench either. Wet, moldy hay, the acrid bite of ammonia, and worse things—a smell my brain lumped together and had long ago dubbed as the smell of neglect.

We passed several empty stalls, the dirt floor covered in moldy hay. I was glad they were empty, their tenants probably sold off already. When I got to the back I found a larger stall, a small heat lamp slung haphazardly over a large metal dog crate. This run was at least dry, though not clean, the sting of ammonia so strong my eyes wanted to water. I opened the door to the stall and made my way over to the crate, Wuf right behind me.

The stink got stronger as I leaned over the cage, the blankets on the bottom probably saturated in urine that had since dried. I couldn't see what was inside. Just in case I put on the thick leather gloves Lena had got me before I opened the cage and pushed the blanket aside. Three puppies slept in the pile, two brindles and one

solid white, their thin coats doing nothing to hide the ammonia burns on their skin. Puppies sort of pee everywhere when they're first born and their mom has the unenviable task of cleaning them. No one had been cleaning these pups. So either the mom was dead or they'd been separated. Too early, by the looks of things. Their eyes hadn't been open long, and they were still wobbled a little when they walked. They were big for their age, about eleven inches nose to tail. Or I should say noses. The white one turned and in his haste to get away from me, fell on his but. He had a black ring around his right eyes, all three of them. I rocked back on my heels.

"I'll be damned," I whispered.

"Someone will be," Lena said, walking up behind me. She tipped her chin at the kennel. "Those are cerberi." I let out a low whistle, which apparently woke the other two puppies up, making them wiggle closer to their brother...and nine tiny heads swivel in my direction.

Steve had to calm the puppies. They weren't used to being handled at all, and apparently they didn't associate the smell of humans with anything reassuring, because my scent made them go nuts—even more than the smell of Lena covered in blood. We stole a few towels from the house to wrap the puppies to keep them warm while we cleaned up. Steve had found the mom's pup—she'd died, probably while giving birth—and the owner had thrown her body into a freezer. I didn't want to consider why he would do that. Wuf dug a big hole at the end of the clearing so we could bury the mom properly while Lena cleaned up whatever evidence she

might have left in the house. I didn't ask what happened to the man. I didn't care and I didn't want to know.

Once everything was taken care of, we set fire to the barn. It was far from any outbuilding and well away from the trees, and so there was little chance of the fire spreading. But we didn't need anyone poking around and finding any hints of what the man had been selling.

Once everything was done, Lena rode Steve, the puppies safely in her arms. They had gone back to sleep. Her circlet and cape were gone, her spear collapsed back into a short metal rod. I carried it for her and walked beside Wuf as we took the game trail we'd used to get to the house. We'd parked about a mile away, since horse trailers weren't exactly stealth vehicles.

Usually we would have driven for a few hours and then camped somewhere, but the puppies desperately needed a proper bath, warmth and food, which would prove difficult. So we drove until we found a small rundown motel on the side of the road. Lena used some baby wipes that she kept in the truck to wipe any visible blood or mud off her face and hands before she ducked in to get us a room. We tended to stay in the kind of places that didn't ask too many questions.

I let Steve and Wuf out. We'd picked the motel because it was tucked at the edge of a large wooded area. Wuf would do okay in a motel room, but Steve didn't enjoy the experience. He said the bad motel art gave him hives of the soul. So they would spend the night in the woods, Steve using whatever weird magic unicorns have to cloak them. He couldn't make them invisible or anything, its just that people

didn't quite see what they actually were. Instead of a giant unicorn, they'd probably see a horse or an elk. I'm not sure what they'd see instead of Wuf.

I gave Wuf a good scratch behind the ears. "Don't let anyone shoot at you, okay buddy?" He chuffed, clearly dismissing my concern, before tapping my chin with his nose. Then they both quietly slipped into the forest.

Lena came back with her keys and we both went into the hotel to face the fun that would be bathing three cerebai. Or I should say, I got to wash the pups. Lena had calls to make.

Three heads mean that there are more teeth to bite you with. They may still have puppy teeth, but they were sharp and now that Steve was gone, the puppies were freaked out again. Nobody broke the skin, but it wasn't fun.

Once I had them clean and dry, I put them into the little corral I'd made by tipping the chairs on their side, placing them perpendicular to the walls. I'd lined the bottom with the hideous comforter that had been on the bed. By the time that was done, Lena was back from the grocery store with a few cartons of half and half and a pack of raw ground beef.

I stared at her haul. "I was hoping we could order pizza or something."

Lena snorted, handing me a bag from a local drive through chain, something with a pirate fish for the logo. I examined the bag with concern. Don't get me wrong—I would eat it. You don't grow up the way I have and turn down a meal. But my time on the road had made me a little skeptical of unknown drive-through places.

“It’s fish and chips. I promise it won’t bite you. And it was either that a local burger place called, ‘Plumpy’s.’ I made an executive decision and went with the fish.”

“That’s why you’re the fearless leader,” I said through a mouth full of lukewarm fries. After I wolfed down my food, I had the fun task of mashing the meat and milk up into a nice thick paste, and I only had a Tupperware bowl and a big plastic spoon to do it with. It was...not appetizing once I was done. To be honest it hadn’t been very appetizing before I’d started, either. The puppies disagreed. The smell woke them and they started poking around in their make-shift pen, yipping. The paste was too thick for a bottle, and I wasn’t going to feed them wolf style because I’m anti-regurgitation. Thankfully, Lena had bought pastry bags, the kind people decorate cakes with. I can honestly say that the manufacturer didn’t have three-headed puppies in mind when they made them, but they worked rather well. We shot the paste into their mouths and the puppies lapped it up. It didn’t all make it in, and I’m sure the maid was going to have serious questions about what we’d been doing with the hotel linens, but that’s to be expected.

Their tummies full, I moved onto the next job--laundry. In between bouts of breaking up cage matches, illegal monster puppy mills, and murder and mayhem, I had to do a lot of laundry. As Lena always told me, it wasn’t a sexy part of the job, but it was very necessary. I now belong to a small percentile of the teenage population who can tell you what detergents, water temperatures, and techniques are best for getting blood out of most fabrics. Also ichor, saliva, mud, snot and a host of other things I gag just thinking about.

The motel had a few coin-operated washing machines and I got our stuff going before returning to the room. Once it dries, I'll have to see if anything needs to get mended. I'm aces at replacing buttons and mending torn seams, work that Lena is constantly producing. But while I've excelled at the domestic duties, I'm failing madly at the rest of it. Lena has tried to teach me hand-to-hand combat—at least the basic stuff, and I'm okay at it. She's tried to show me a little bit about handling a sword or a spear—tools that are second nature to her—and I am not the natural she was hoping I'd be. It also doesn't help that I'm allergic to feathers, and she has a cape of them every time she goes into battle. I take medication for the allergy and she hasn't given up on the other stuff yet, but I still worry that it won't be enough. I'll get sent back. My mom doesn't need another mouth to feed, and I do my little sister a world more good by sending home almost every dollar Lena pays me.

That means I double down hard on everything else—I clean, mend, and do any odd job or menial task Lena offers and some she doesn't think of. I don't complain. And I hit the books hard. Just not the one's I'd be hitting if I were home and in school. Tonight that means I'm studying several chapters of an old bestiary Lena found for me. Some of it is wrong—misconstrued facts, or flat out mythology, but if I read close, I can find some grains of truth. When I'm done reading, I'll talk the chapters over with Lena, my own personal fact-checker.

I didn't realize I'd fallen asleep on the book until Lena tried to gently remove it. She'd just pulled it out of my hands when I started awake yelling, "The laundry!"

She quietly placed the book on the nightstand so as not to wake the puppies.

“I can’t tell whether that’s funny or sad.”

I rubbed drool onto my shoulder and swung my feet off the bed. “I have to get it out of the dryer before someone steals it.”

Lena pushed my feet back. “I’ll get it.”

“But—”

“You’re dead on your feet, Jonah. Sometimes I forget you’re a growing boy.” She grabbed the old fashioned room key off the top of the ancient TV. “I did laundry before you came around, remember? I’m sure I can manage just this once.”

Which is exactly what I’m afraid of—that Lena will see that she could just as easily do my work. That I’m not necessary. I can’t go home. I won’t.

When I wake up, I’m greeted with orange juice and a breakfast burrito from a local gas station, a basket of now wrinkled and unfolded laundry, and a comforter covered in puppy pee. The puppies aren’t potty trained, clearly. Which means instead of waking me up to take them out, they just pissed on the blankets. I pull the leftover meat mush out of the mini fridge and feed the puppies first before wiping them all down with a washcloth and putting them in their kennels. Then it’s another trip to the washing machine with the hotel linens. It only costs us a few bucks and avoids a lot of awkward questions.

My burrito is cold when I finally get to it, but welcome. I’m a little jealous of Lena’s coffee, but she decided that I’m too young to start drinking it, which is funny. Vigilante justice is fine, but let’s not start getting crazy with caffeine.

She catches me eyeing her cup. “It will stunt your growth.”

“Pretty sure that’s not true.”

She shrugs. I give up, finish my orange juice, and start folding our laundry so I can pack it. While we're not in any rush, the sooner we get going, the sooner we can hand off puppy duty. They puppies are cute, but they take a lot of care. Also, they bite.

Lena found someone who could take the cerberi off our hands. Unfortunately that person lives over the mountains and down the coast in Oregon. Lena wasn't sure how long it would take to get there. It would depend a lot on what the passes looked like and you can't exactly speed while pulling a large trailer. Steve complains if the ride gets too bumpy.

Even though I'd fed them twice, Steve was going to have to work on them hard to get them to believe that I was on the list of okay humans. For such tiny pups, they didn't trust us much. While I got the truck and trailer loaded, Lena checked out and then went into the forest to summon the rest of our crew.

Wuf butted me with his head as I let him in. I gave him a good scratch behind the ear, shaking the frost off my fingers after. "I missed you too, buddy." After everyone was finally settled, we headed out.

Usually when we're on the move, we only stop for bathroom breaks and the occasional stretch. With the puppies we had to stop more frequently. They needed to be fed often, which we couldn't do while driving. The puppies also needed bathroom breaks as we didn't have a lot of clean linens to change out their kennel bedding, and Steve had a sensitive nose. You haven't really dealt with complaining until you've heard a unicorn complain. It feels like ants are crawling on your brain. If he gets really mad, the ants bite.

We were tucked away in a grassy clearing a little off the main road. Two of the pups were playing tug with a few of my socks while the third sprawled in my lap, his paws up toward the sky. His tongues lolled out, his brown eyes bright and crazy in that puppy way that meant that while he may be still now, he could bite my hand at any moment. I slowly reached over and scratched his belly, a smile spreading on my face.

Lena sat cross-legged next to me, and chewed on some beef jerky and consulted a map. "Don't get attached."

"I know. I won't."

She made a noise that told me that she didn't believe that statement one bit, but she didn't say anything. The first week I'd traveled with Lena, she'd called me Cannon Fodder. If I wasn't careful she would start up again.

"You know, you could just get a smart phone. They have a mapping system."

"They're also expensive, easily broken and send out a GPS signal. No thank you." She traced a line with her index finger. "I prefer maps. They're cheap and they never lose service."

"Where are we going, anyway?"

"A farm outside of New Hope, Oregon." She snorted at the name. "*Of course* that's where he settled."

"Who?" I jerked my arm up, trying to avoid the puppy's playful nips. I wasn't fast enough and he clamped onto the sleeve of my hoodie, tearing it.

"Grant." She started folding the map up. It wasn't folded right, so it didn't lay flat. Frowning, Lena opened it and tried again. After the third try, she gave it to the

puppy on my lap, who instantly chewed it into small, slobbery bits.

"I could have folded that, you know."

"But that wouldn't have made me feel better," Lena said, standing up and brushing the grass off her jeans. A blob of map was stuck to her Ramones T-shirt and I pointed it out to her.

"True, but now we need a new map."

Lena shrugged. "Maps are cheap, remember? My good mood? Priceless." She leaned down and scooped up the wiggling puppy. She nodded at the other two, telling me to go round them up. "C'mon Cannon Fodder. We have a drive ahead of us yet."

I sighed, knowing it would take a few days for the name to die back down again. It did no good to fight it, so I just ignored it.

When we finally pulled up to Grant's place, it wasn't what I was expecting. What I'd been expecting based on the total lack of information Lena had given me, I'm not sure. But a beat-up farmhouse at the end of a long, dusty drive wasn't it. Off to the left an orchard of what looked like apple trees curved with the slight roll to the field, the grass in the orchard was long and swaying with the breeze. A weathered fence surrounded it. To my right a large barn needed a few repairs and a new paint job. The house in front of us needed a fresh coat as well, but the porch and the rocking chairs were clean and cozy looking.

A man came out of the barn wearing paint-splattered cargo pants, a thin sweat-drenched shirt, and broken-in work boots. He didn't fill the doorway, because

the doorway was built with horses in mind, but it felt like he did. His body was built along the lines of sturdy efficiency, his tan arms covered in the swirl of black tattoos. I couldn't make out their design. His long brown hair was pulled back in a pony tail, but a few strands had come loose, sticking to the sweat on his face.

"He's a handsome fella."

Lena huffed. "What teenage boy says 'handsome fella'?"

"One secure in his burgeoning sexuality."

Lena scowled at me, but there was a flush to her cheeks. "Burgeoning sexuality? Do I need to be a little more careful about which paperbacks you're reading?"

I snorted. "Like you have any interest in censoring my reading material. You don't believe in it and you're far too lazy. Is that Grant?"

Lena turned her scowl back to the windshield. "Damn it, you're right. And yes, yes it is." She took in a steady breath. "Might as well get out of the truck." But she didn't move. I can't tell you how I knew—Lena had a good game face, and she's good at concealing her emotions, but I'm good at reading them.

"You're nervous."

Her hands gripped the wheel just a fraction tighter. "I am no such thing. I am a Valkyrie—a badass warrior maiden. I do not get nervous."

I unclipped my seatbelt. "That's ridiculous, and you know it. You need a clear mind for battle, and that means you have to be aware of your emotions and deal with them accordingly." I waved a hand in front of her in a mystical fashion and did my best Vader voice. "Search your feelings; you know it to be true."

“I find your illogic and emotions a constant irritant.”

“Don’t mix fandoms. You’re better than that.”

Lena unclipped her seatbelt and cracked her door open letting in the smell of sunshine on grass and hay. “I’m not mixing. Star Trek clearly outstrips Star Wars, so my quote topped yours and killed it.” She slid out of the truck and I had to scramble to catch up. I didn’t make it very far before Steve stopped me. He wanted out so he could greet Grant, too. I went back and undid the latches to let him and Wuf free. We decided to leave the puppies be for now.

Steve clearly liked Grant. He pranced a little on his way to greet him. Wuf hung back with me, unsure of this new person, which wasn’t surprising. I gave Wuf a scratch behind his ear to let him know I understood why he didn’t trust easy. I knew what it was like to be afraid, too. With one arm, I hugged him close. “Feel everything you need to feel, Wuf,” I whispered. “Just don’t let it control you.” An out of control waheela was as dangerous as a pack of rabid bears.

Wuf and I walked up together and I stuck out my hand for Grant to shake.

“You must be Cannon Fodder,” he said, a large grin nearly splitting his face. Up close I could see that he had a scar bisecting one eyebrow and a few mixed in with the tattoos on his arm.

“I prefer Jonah.” His hand enveloped mine and he shook it firmly, not so strong as to be an alpha jackass, but not so loose as to dismiss me entirely. I found that I liked Grant.

“I bet you do.” He seemed to take the measure of me for a second before he dropped my hand.

“This is Wuf.” I scratched Wuf’s head to remind him that Grant was a friend.

Grant held a hand out, palm down, fingers curled in for the waheela to sniff.

“Wuf?”

I felt my neck get hot. “It’s short for Mr. Wuffles,” I mumbled. Lena sighed as she always did when I said his full name. “He likes it,” I argued, again, my tone defensive. Wuf licked my face, his saliva leaving an icy path on my cheek.

Once Wuf gave Grant the okay, the big guy leaned in to scratch under Wuf’s chin. “I bet he does. How about we go see those puppies?”

We brought out the three cerberi pups. They liked the farm a great deal. They frolicked in the tall grass around the barn, one breaking away from the other two to chase a bug. Grant watched the puppies with a grin that grew wider as he took in Lena’s scowl.

“Seriously? They’re puppies, Lena. Everyone likes puppies.”

“Who says I don’t like them?” Lena said, a hint of challenge in her voice.

“You look like you’re going to stare them into submission.”

Lena growled something too low for me to catch, but I think Grant got the gist of it because he laughed. He did that thing again where he took in my measure, then Lena’s, then came back to me.

“Jonah, you named the puppies, didn’t you?”

Lena crossed her arms. “He most certainly did not, because he knows we aren’t keeping them and—” she broke off when she caught the look on my face and then groaned. “You named the damn puppies.”

“No.” *Yes.*

They both stared at me. “The white one is Spock.” I admitted. “The smaller one is named Hercules.”

“And the one chasing the bug?” Grant asked.

“Stooge.”

Grant tried to cover his smile by wiping one hand over his face. “I think you guys are going to need to stay awhile.”

Lena’s shoulders slumped. “How long?”

He watched the pups, face thoughtful. “A week? Maybe more. It takes as long as it takes, Lena.”

Grumbling, Lena headed back to the truck to get our things.

The farmhouse needed some work on the outside, but Grant had already done whatever remodeling was required on the inside. The living room and kitchen were warm and bright, the wood floors recently redone and the walls painted. The furniture didn’t match except in comfort and the crocheted blankets were only outnumbered by all of the plants. Grant’s niece, Azzy, was ten and apparently had all the green thumbs and liked to keep them occupied.

The other permanent occupant of the house was Grant’s grandmother—I was told to call her Granny Mae and immediately drafted into kitchen duty. Since I’d done a lot of the cooking at home before I left, I knew a lot of basic prep, though Granny Mae showed me a better way to hold the knife and a trick to dicing onions. She was small compared to Grant, and wiry, but she had the same sizing-up gaze that her grandson seemed to have. When Grant did it, there was an oddly warm aspect to it, but Granny Mae lacked that. She wasn’t cold, but efficient and had no

patience for nonsense. Dinner consisted of pan-fried veggies, fried chicken, iced tea and biscuits so fluffy it was all I could do to not snatch a second out of the basket.

Granny Mae slid another onto my plate without a word.

“I swear I’m feeding him,” Lena said, spreading the napkin in her lap.

Granny Mae shrugged. “Boys this age, they’re all stomach. I had to double the size of my garden when Grant turned eleven.”

“He didn’t eat much before that?” Azzy asked, her question having the feel of a well-worn prompt.

Granny Mae smiled. “No. He was puny before that.” She held her fingers apart an inch. “Barely this big. Ate like a mouse.”

Azzy grinned before going back to her chicken. I couldn’t help but smile, too, though it hurt a little. I couldn’t remember the last time I’d sat down to a meal like this—a family meal, where no one was stressed or tired or sad, and there was plenty of food. My eyes watered as I stared at my plate. Suddenly I couldn’t eat another bite.

“May I be excused, please?”

Lena’s eyebrows shot up in surprise, but she schooled her face quickly. “Are you feeling okay?”

I nodded, not quite trusting myself to speak. Granny Mae folded up the biscuit she’d put on my plate and my chicken into a napkin and handed it to me. “Go. Check on your friends. You can say hi to the goats if you want, but I’d avoid the chickens for now.” I left quickly and quietly, my head still down, hoping the hair in

my face covered that I was trying not to cry. Valkyries prize stoicism and bravery, and if I wanted to stay with her, I had to mold myself in that image.

I gave my chicken to Wuf, and he ate it bones and all. He'd curled up in the barn on a bed of hay, the puppies asleep next to him. Steve was out in the orchard somewhere—he was very cryptic about the whole thing. I settled into the hay my head on Wuf's side, and tried to finish my biscuit. It was still warm and buttery and even though it was so inviting before, I couldn't even look at it now. I extended it to Wuf, who tried to nudge it back to me. The tears I'd held back erupted and I shoved it back at him. "Just take it." He licked my hand and I felt bad for snapping at him, so I added, "Please, Wuf. Just...please." He waited another second before taking the biscuit gently from my fingers. He swallowed it in one bite, then butted me with his head. And for the first time in years, I did something I promised myself I would never do again. I cried myself to sleep.

END OF PART ONE