

FLASH FICTION

When the Wolf Bowed

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Rain turned the Blackpine trail into black glass.

Elias should have gone home when Kaia told him to. Instead he followed the broken branches, the strange tracks, and the drops of blood leading deeper into the forest.

He found her beside the creek.

Kaia was on her knees, fingers dug into the mud. Her shoulders shook beneath a torn sweatshirt.

“Don’t come closer,” she said.

“Kaia?”

Her head snapped up.

Gold flooded her eyes.

Bones shifted beneath her skin.

Elias stopped breathing.

Kaia screamed.

The sound became a growl.

Her body changed with terrifying speed—hands widening, spine arching, dark hair spilling into fur until the girl he had known since childhood was gone and an enormous wolf crouched where she had been.

Elias stumbled backward.

A pale hand caught his shoulder.

Seraphine.

“Now,” she said, “you may run.”

Something moved behind her.

A man stepped from the trees, handsome in the wrong way—too still, too perfect, his smile empty.

“Vale,” he said. “You found the Heartborn first.”

Seraphine’s face hardened.

The stranger lunged.

Elias barely saw her move.

One moment Seraphine stood beside him. The next she struck the immortal hard enough to send him through a cedar sapling.

The wolf attacked too.

Kaia’s jaws closed around the stranger’s arm. He twisted, slashing across her side.

She crashed to the ground.

“Kaia!”

The stranger laughed.

Seraphine’s eyes darkened. “You should not have done that.”

What followed happened too quickly for Elias to understand: silver movement, a crack like splitting timber, the stranger vanishing into the rain.

Seraphine turned.

“Do not touch her.”

But Elias was already kneeling beside the wolf.

Blood soaked Kaia’s fur.

Her breathing came shallow.

He pressed his palm over the wound.

Heat surged through him.

Not pain.

Recognition.

The forest seemed to inhale.

Beneath his hand, torn flesh began knitting together.

Kaia’s breathing steadied.

The wolf opened her golden eyes.

Then, impossibly, she lowered her head against Elias’s chest.

Seraphine stood motionless.

Rain ran down her face.

For the first time since Elias had met her, she looked afraid.

“That’s impossible,” she whispered.

Elias stared at his blood-smeared hand.

“What am I?”

Seraphine looked toward the dark trees where the other immortal had disappeared.

“Something Blackpine was supposed to have buried centuries ago.”

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