

Alice sighed as her pen stroked across the page.

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm sorry I can't stay, but I have to join the one I love. I would tell you in person, but I just... I can't. There is no way you would understand, and there is no way that I can explain it. It just... It's what I need to do. Please don't take this as a slam on you two. I love you both very much and have had a very happy life with you. But the time has come for me to seek my own path.

Please don't think badly of me for pursuing love or for leaving you. You will both always be in my heart, for ever and ever.

Love you always,

Alice

The reindeer swallowed hard. Goodbyes were never her strong suit, and unlike going off to summer camp or to college, this wasn't the kind of goodbye where you expected to see each other again in a few weeks. She sealed the letter into an envelope, addressed it "Mom and Dad," and laid it down in front of her parents' door. She hesitated a moment, the gravity of the choice the 20-year-old was making weighing upon her, but thinking of her love spurred her courage, and she snuck out silently, got on her bicycle, and began riding without looking back.

It was cool and very dark; with the moon being new, there was nothing to light her way, and she rode slowly and cautiously along the sidewalk. Owls hooted and flitted quietly overhead, their large eyes seeming like ghostly white blobs in the darkness. But to Alice, the gloom seemed somehow fitting, especially considering where she was going.

The wrought iron gate squeaked as she moved it out of the way and pedaled her way into the cemetery. A mist had settled over the graveyard, adding to the eerie ambiance as she found what she was looking for: the stump of an ancient tree. She parked her bike next to her and sat down on the stump, waiting.

A light breeze picked up, and the craggy branches of a tree overhead moved out of the way, unblocking the view of a lonely lamp-post that cast its pale, white glow onto her. Meanwhile, the mist seemed to dislike the disturbance and slowly faded.

"Alice," a voice said.

The reindeer turned, startled, to see a bear, muscular but feminine and curvy, looking at her. Alice rose and smiled.

"Leah! I knew you'd come," she said, rushing into the arms of her love.

Leah embraced her and inhaled the scent of the reindeer's long, red hair as she held her close. She swallowed, a lump in her throat.

"I hoped you wouldn't," she confessed, parting the embrace and taking a step back to regard her love with piercing, ice-blue eyes.

Alice gasped, taken aback. "Wh—you hoped I wouldn't?" she asked. "Don't you love me?"

"Of *course*, of *course* I do!" Leah said, rushing to embrace her again. "But...the journey we're about to go on...it's not for the faint of heart." She swallowed hard again. "Are you *sure* this is what you want? It's not too late to turn back, and I won't think any less of you if you do!"

Alice was silent for a long time.

"I'm sure," she said at last, her voice firm. "Love... Love like ours is worth the risk."

Her emerald eyes looked earnestly into Leah's, and Leah squeezed her tightly and ran her paw affectionately over Alice's large rack of antlers.

True Love's Price

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"I'm glad," the bear said, "Because as much as I hoped for your sake that you wouldn't come, I hoped equally much that you would...for mine."

Alice smiled, and the two locked lips in a passionate kiss. Before they realized it, they both were naked, their warm bodies pressed against each other, their nipples erect and gently grazing on each other's fur. They kissed again and lay down on the soft ground. Leah's paws explored her love's body, tactilely appreciating how her breasts curved into a slender waist before curving again into hips that drove her wild. Her fingers traced those curves, eliciting a gasp of pleasure from her love as they settled on Alice's crotch and stroked her clitoris with indescribable tenderness.

Alice squeezed her eyes closed, feeling her love's touch on her body and kissed as hard as she could. Her lips quivered as she lowered her arm to cup Leah's breast in her hand, to roll the sensitive nipple between her fingers, to graze over it enticingly.

Leah exhaled sharply, and Alice's other hand reached down to stroke the bear's clit, eliciting a hoarse whimper. As their fingers both became more persistent, they both moaned aloud as the pleasure of the sensations and each other's company flowed through them. Alice leaned down and took Leah's supple breast into her mouth, nursing it with tenderness and passion and sending thrills of sensation up and down Leah's spine. Leah responded by sliding her fingers down into Alice's wetness and using her long, dexterous claws to tease her G-spot. Alice cried out in pleasure around Leah's nipple and had to give up sucking it for a moment as the pleasure bathed her in bliss.

Their bodies quivered in delight, both of them teetering on the edge of orgasm.

"You're still sure?" Leah gasped. "Last...chance..."

"I'm sure," Alice replied breathlessly.

"Do you remember the words?"

"Yes." Alice whispered something in Leah's ear, and Leah swallowed hard.

Their orgasms neared. Their mouths parted, and Leah quickly traced her lips down Alice's face, lingering over her neck. She bit down with such passionate ferocity that she drew blood, eliciting an ecstatic moan from her love as the intensity drove them both over the edge. The two continued to rub each other's clitorises, their bodies grinding together and heightening and prolonging their orgasmic bliss. Still Leah remained fastened to Alice's neck as the reindeer wrapped her arms around her and clung on for dear life. They continued to grind against each other, clitoris grazing clitoris and sending them both higher and higher into the throes of climax, both of them panting and heaving with the intense feelings.

They remained locked together like that for quite some time before Leah felt Alice's grip weaken.

"Shadows," Alice whispered hoarsely, "Embrace me."

A tear rolled down each of their cheeks as Leah bit down harder, squeezing her eyes closed and sucking hard on the reindeer's neck.

Alice went limp in her arms, and Leah finally let go of her neck, her mouth stained with blood. She half-sobbed, half-sighed as she brought Alice's head close to hers, touching foreheads with her now-dead love. With a heavy heart, she put the reindeer's clothes back on her, lifted the reindeer's lifeless body, and carried her to an open grave, laid her in it, and arranged her red hair just the way Alice would have wanted. She swallowed hard, no longer bothering to restrain the tears that fell down her face as she caressed her love's antlers one last time.

Then she climbed out of the grave and buried her love, each shovelful of earth feeling heavier than the last. Though strong, she trembled as she rained earth down on Alice's lifeless body, saving her head for last, as if hoping that Alice would come back, or maybe just wanting to see her love's face as long as she could. The first shovelful that fell on Alice's face made Leah's chest ache, and she had to pause to regain her composure. It was easier, then. If she didn't think too hard about it, she could assume she was just filling in any old hole in the ground.

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With a heavy sigh, she stepped back over to her clothes, reached in, and found what she was looking for. She returned to Alice's grave, closed her eyes, pressed a jagged blade to her flesh, and cut into herself. Blood began to drip from her arm, blackening the soft earth below her.

"Walk in the shadows and forsake the light," she said softly, making a fist and squeezing to drop more blood onto the fresh grave.

She stood a moment, looking wistfully at her love's forever resting-place, and then wrapped her wounded arm around her face, took a breath, and vanished into the night air.

It was cold and still the next night as a shadowy figure flew into the graveyard, flapping its wings hard. With an abrupt screech, it transformed from a bat into Leah, and she stood at Alice's grave breathing hard from exertion. Her heart pounded with anticipation, the exertion of her journey, and fear. Had she done everything right? What if she accidentally said "night" instead of "light"? What if she hadn't given enough blood? What if she gave too much? What if—

Her fretting was interrupted by a sudden heave in the grave before her. A pale reindeer hoof suddenly erupted from the ground, and as the ground collapsed around it, Alice appeared, gasping for air. Leah breathed and exhausted sigh of relief and hurriedly reached down to grab her love's wrist and heave her out of the ground.

"Are you okay?" Leah asked anxiously, brushing some of the dirt off of her.

Alice's shoulders heaved with the exertion of having just pulled herself out of the grave. "I—I feel so *tired*," she said.

"Here," Leah said, baring her neck and moving close to Alice's face. "Drink up; you need your strength."

"But..." Alice panted, "I'll drain your energy."

"I'm a big girl; I can take it," Leah said, rubbing the reindeer's hair affectionately, "And you've had a rough day; come on, drink up."

Alice opened her mouth and ran her tongue over her teeth, gasping to see how sharp her canines had become.

"Easy as you go," Leah said. "It doesn't take much pressure."

Alice swallowed, hesitated, and then tentatively bit into Leah's neck. Her new instincts directed her aim, and before she realized what was happening, she could taste her love's blood coursing into her mouth. She gasped, horrified at what she was doing, yet also satisfied at how good and nourishing the blood tasted. Putting her squeamishness aside in favor of regaining her strength, she took a deep draught from Leah and then let go.

"Thirsty, huh?" Leah chuckled, feeling a little light-headed.

"I'm sorry," Alice said, blushing with embarrassment. "I—"

"You're new and need your strength," Leah said reassuringly, putting her paw on her love's shoulder and letting out another sigh of relief. "I am so very glad to see that you made it. I didn't sleep a wink yesterday from nerves."

"It was like going into a deep sleep and then waking up," Alice said. "I remember everything up until I said the words, and then the next moment, I woke up and began crawling towards the surface. *That* part was a little scary..."

Leah chuckled. "Yeah, but the worst is over now." She cupped Alice's face affectionately in her large paw. "You can't die of suffocation anymore; there are a *lot* of things that can't kill you now." She nodded to herself. "You'll get used to the feelings in time," she said gently. "And you've got all the time in the world. Literally, *all* the time."

Alice sat up and leaned against her love. "I'd rather get used to some feelings with you," she hinted.

"Girl, how much blood did you drink? You're already horny?" Leah laughed.

"Like you said, the worst is over, and I feel like celebrating!" Alice said, giving her lover doe-eyes.

Leah started to protest but just sighed and laughed instead. "You *know* I can't resist when you do that!"

Alice squealed with glee and then looked down in surprise. "Aww, you put my clothes back on?" she asked, smiling.

"Well, I wasn't gonna leave you to come out naked!" Leah laughed.

Alice leaned forward and kissed her, and then both quickly took their clothes off again. They kissed passionately once more, and then Alice finally got to do something she'd always wanted to do but couldn't until now: she let her lips trail down Leah's body, licking, kissing, and lightly biting, using her new fangs to elicit whimpers of ecstasy from the bear. She nipped her neck, her breast, her nipple, nibbled her side, and at last grazed her teeth over Leah's clitoris, making her buck with pleasure.

By the time Leah even got to reciprocate, she had nearly orgasmed. Careful not to draw too much blood from her fragile love, she sank her teeth into Alice's inner thigh, eliciting a cry of ecstatic pain and pleasure blended into an overwhelming sensation. She let go and bit again, gently, tenderly, on Alice's quivering vulva. The reindeer shuddered and whimpered, her nose deep inside of Leah's musky muff sending a shiver down the bear's spine. Their lips watered as they smelled each other's heat, and as if in a trance, they both dipped their tongues into each other's sweet folds. Their bodies writhed against each other as their tongues both lapped as hard as they could against each other's G-spots.

They both came at once, gasping and moaning in pleasure as their juices flowed into eager mouths and were lapped up by passionate tongues. They both lay there quivering and panting, exhausted from their efforts.

"We did it," Alice finally said, the realization suddenly hitting her. "I'm... I'm really a—"

"Yes," Leah replied, putting her finger to her love's lips. "Like I said, the worst part is over."

"Well, then...what now?" Alice asked. "I feel like I've got my whole life ahead of me!"

Leah laughed. "Girl, you're 20; you *always* had your whole life ahead of you!"

"Yeah, but... Now it seems like I've got so much *more* life ahead of me! It's—it's just overwhelming!"

Leah cocked her head, smiled, and looked at her love. "How about we take it one step at a time?" she suggested.

Alice nodded, and the two got to their feet and got dressed.

"Come on," Leah said, offering her arm, which Alice happily took. "Let's get walking."

"Walking?" Alice asked. "But I thought—"

"It's only your first day, girl," Leah chuckled. "Be patient; you'll learn to transform soon enough. In the meantime, it's not often that we get a night this nice. Let's take our time and enjoy it!"

Alice couldn't argue with that, and she rested her head on Leah's shoulder as they walked into the darkness. It would be a drastic change from what she was used to, she knew, but feeling Leah's arm wrapped protectively around her waist, she was certain she'd made the right choice.