

*A Sip...*



*A Torquere Press Short*

***Tree Hugger***  
***By Julia Talbot***

The moon hung over him like some old, fat dude, an accusing face that seemed on the verge of opening its mouth and screaming at him. Dorian just kept running, using that double-chinned face to tell him where he was, and how much more time he had before dawn.

His feet had long since run right out of his shoes, and the soles bled, leaving a path that any fool with a bloodhound could follow. Still, the drugs coursing through his system made it impossible for him to change, to let the wolf run free and clear.

Drugs.

Some asshole with a dart gun and a fucking agenda lets themselves run free, claiming that they're going to save the world from demons, and suddenly it's not safe to be a werewolf. Like it had ever been all that safe, anyway. Someone was always out to either prove that the supernatural existed and that it had to be stopped, or to prove that the beyond didn't exist, and they were trying to stamp it out to prove their point.

He only idly wondered which one this guy was.

Dorian would bet on the former, as the guy had a Hugh Jackman as Van Helsing look, with a long duster and longer hair, with darts coming out of a crossbow.

Jesus.

A tree limb popped up right in his line of sight, and he tried to duck, but it hit his cheek, ripping a gouge. There were no leaves to soften the blow, as it was late December, and they'd long since fallen.

Goddamn it.

The terrain was changing, the trees getting thicker, and Dorian knew he could hide better here, could blend in. That was a damned good thing, because he was tiring, and he would need a place to hole up during the day. He scanned the terrain for a thicket of brush, a hollow log, something he could use as a den.

Another advantage of the whole wolf thing was that you weren't scared of a few bugs or moldy leaves.

There. There was a tree with a huge root system, hollowed out at the base to form a shelter. If anything else had decided to make that its home, Dorian was big enough and mean enough that he could run it off, for sure. He'd sleep there during the day and hit the trail again at night, and by then the drugs would have worn off.

He could run on all fours tomorrow, and that would end the chase, then and there.

Pushing himself the last few feet, Dorian went to his knees and crawled into the lee of the tree. The space was bigger than he'd originally thought. A lot bigger. In fact, he had the impression of dizzying space, and of a ledge with a deep, deep drop-off – right before he fell.

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Ash stared at the naked man who had fallen into his tree.

Really, it wasn't every day that naked men appeared in his hall. Squirrels, raccoons, the occasional skunk (whew), but rarely men.

When they did, it was usually bad. It meant they were freezing to death, or someone was trying to hide their bodies, or worse.

Sighing, Ash called for assistance. "Tighe! Callum! We have a man dropped from above! This one is still breathing."

"Breathing?" Tighe poked the man like a human might poke a dying possum. "Huh. Well, he doesn't look blue."

"It's not that cold up there today," Dorian snapped, rolling his eyes. Really, some of his people needed to get up among the leaves more. "Put him in a bed and let him sleep it off. Call me when he wakes up."

"His feet are all bloody." Callum wrinkled his thin nose. "Really, these humans."

"If you make me do this myself..."

"No, no," Tighe said. "We're on it. Come on."

They picked the man up and carried him off, and Ash didn't think much more about it. He had other things to keep him busy, like a dispute with a local naiad over water rights now that a heavy drought was upon them. Apparently someone in the grove had roots that were encroaching.

It wasn't until well after supper that Tighe caught up with him, grim-faced and tight-lipped. "We have a problem, Ash."

"Do we?" He suddenly remembered the man who had fallen down their rabbit hole. "With the human?"

"Yes. I don't think he's entirely human."

Ash raised a brow. "What does that mean?"

"It means our usual enchantment to keep him from remembering his time below won't work."

"Blight." Sighing, Ash headed for the little bower where they kept any of their unwanted guests. It seemed luxurious and comfortable, but it was also very secure. Even someone not entirely human would have trouble figuring out the root ball that doubled as a door lock.

The man was asleep when Ash arrived, curled up in the bed, which was a box built into the wall, filled with the softest of fibers, derived from dandelions. Ingenious, really, on the part of their scientists.

He was still nude, but now he was clean, the blood and dirt washed away. Bruises showed on the pale skin, but not nearly as many of them as had shown before. The man healed with amazing swiftness, even more swiftly than a normal human, and their rate of healing had always amazed Ash.

An injured tree could take years to heal.

The man had black hair and long eyelashes and was well-muscled. Well-muscled enough for Ash to take a firm sort of interest. Oh, his people might not be human, but physiologically they were extremely similar. He might even envy what this man had a tiny bit, as it was far from tiny.

This one must be a shower, rather than a grower. Dryads tended toward growing, as they did in all things.

How Tighe might know that he wasn't human...

Snuffling, the man rolled, stretching, showing off a hairy chest and an impressive stubble of beard. Then he yawned and, between the elongated canines and the growling noise that no human throat could produce, Ash understood.

This was some sort of hybrid.

"Are you awake, then?" Ash asked, walking to the foot of the bed.

"Mnh?" The man blinked his eyes open, staring at Ash with a feral golden gaze. "I guess."

"Good. How soon can you leave?"

"Well, that depends on where I am. I thought I fell into a tree."

Ash looked about, nodding. Yes, he could see where the beautifully polished, wood-paneled walls and the tightly-woven reed rugs would make someone unused to their world a bit confused.

"You did. That was a rather special portal, however."

"Ah." Those fascinating eyes narrowed shrewdly. "Dryads. I've heard, but you guys are like, fairy tales for us fairy tale creatures. That would explain why you're sort of... green."

"Are we? How droll. You are..."

"Dorian Alvarez. Werewolf."

"Well, how very interesting. We tell horror stories about your kind peeing on us."

Dorian stared at him a moment, then started to laugh, the sound belly-deep and happy. "That's pretty good."

"Thank you."

Dorian sat up, clearly testing every muscle, as each one bulged in succession. Thankfully, Dryads did not drool, or Ash would have started just then. That was an amazing display, one that needed bells, perhaps. Maybe trumpets.

"So, I gotta ask," Dorian said. "Is English, like, a universal language, or what?"

"You mean why do I speak as you do?"

One dark brow went up, which was something Ash had rarely seen in his people; he was one of the few who had such an expressive face. "Yeah," Dorian said. "That would be it."

"Well, thousands of years of listening, I suppose. We are patient, and we learn well."

"Uh-huh." Dorian looked him over thoroughly, from the top of his leafy head to the tips of his toes. It made him feel naked, as the humans would call it, though his people were always in their natural state. "What else are you good at?"

"You never answered my question," Ash said, rather than answer Dorian's. "When are you leaving?"

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Man, a guy could get a complex. Dorian lifted one arm and sniffed his pit. "Do I offend?"

"No. But you will be a danger to us. You need to go as soon as you are able."

"I can't go until dark. Unless it is dark." He knew it wasn't. There was no pull from the moon, no desire to shift. He knew he could; the drugs had worn off. The wolf sat right at the door of his brain, waiting for the moon.

"Not yet. Why dark?"

"I was being followed. I can change into my wolf after dark and outrun anything, but right now I'm just another naked dude."

"I see." The guy was fascinating. His skin was green and brown and kind of wood-grained. He had hair, but it looked a lot like leaves, and he was hot. Naked and hot and tree-like. Weird.

"You have a name?" Dorian finally asked, breaking the strained silence that had fallen.

"Ash."

"Like the..."

"Tree. Yes."

"Cool." They sat there and stared at each other until Dorian rolled his shoulders. "So, what do you do for fun around here?"

"Fun?"

"Fun." This should not be a foreign concept. "Do you have sex?"

"Sex." Ash was staring like he'd grown two heads. "Of course we do. How do you think we make more trees?"

Trees came from seeds. Duh. "I don't guess I've ever thought about it."

"Would you like to have sex now? I find you very attractive. That should keep you busy until dark."

Dorian blinked. Then blinked again. "You want to have sex. With me."

"I would not be averse to the idea." Ash looked so... reasonable. But man, the tree limb that sprang up between those legs was kind of wow.

"Well, I'm all for it." He held out a hand, his cock starting to rise up, too. "Come on."

Ash joined him on the bed, or in it, as it was kind of a box. No hint of self-consciousness marked the man's stately movements, and everything was slow, deliberate. They were both naked, so there was no clothes ripping, no surprises.

There was the feel of Ash's skin, though, which wasn't bark-like at all, but wasn't smooth human skin, either. It was like polished heart wood. Warm and a little grainy, and it had a sheen that fascinated him.

He touched Ash's cheek, feeling no stubble at all. Ash touched him back, fingers tracing his heavy growth of beard, curious and careful.

Well, hell, if they were playing follow the leader, there were other things he wanted to feel. Dorian ran his thumb down over Ash's throat, then down to the tiny nipples that sat hard and tight on the hairless chest.

"Why does a Dryad have nipples?"

"Hmm." Ash glanced down, brows furrowing. "I blame you. We're all designed by the same hand, after all."

"Uh. Okay." He wasn't really a God-fearing type, but who knew. Unable to wait a moment longer, Dorian reached down and cupped Ash's cock, stroking it experimentally. It felt kind of amazing. Like stroking a carved wood dildo.

Dude.

Ash hummed, this amazing sound that reminded him of caves. Underground sounds. "More."

"Only if you touch me, too."

"Oh, yes. Of course." Ash smiled, splaying both hands across Dorian's chest, fingers scraping over his nipples, testing his fur. It felt good, strong, and Dorian moaned, arching into the touch.

"You are so warm. So alive. I like the hair."

"Thanks. Can I kiss you?" It might be good, or it might taste like wood chips, but it was worth a try.

"Kiss?"

That look was so confused. God. Dorian leaned forward, pressing his mouth to Ash's, which earned him a surprised grunt. Then that mouth mashed down over his, and Ash was proving what a good learner he was.

They kissed and rolled and tussled, both of them touching, both of them making hot noises, until anyone passing by the damned tree would probably think they were losing their minds. If he really was in a tree... He didn't have any reason to think he wasn't.

In fact, he had a couple of very solid reasons to believe he was.

One of them was in his hand, swollen to three times its size when it was soft, and Dorian finally broke the kissing session to bend down and lick the tip.

Ash shouted for him, almost poking his eye out when that cock jerked, dancing for him.

"Watch that, man." He said it with a grin, laughing up into Ash's eyes.

"Sorry. That... Please do it again."

"You bet." He could do one better. He sucked at Ash's cock, licking all the way down, as far as he could go. Which may not have been very far, but it was far enough to get him another shout, another harsh push of those lean, brown hips.

So damned weird, but so good.

The taste wasn't at all off-putting. It was natural, woodsy, but not like chewing a table or anything. No, it was way more alive and amazing than that. It was even better when Ash turned in the weird little box of a bed and straddled him, mouth at Dorian's cock. They were pretty much alike in that part of their bodies, just like they were in the nipple department.

Ash could suck.

Oh, he wasn't an expert, was far from it. But eager? Hell, yes.

They moved together, him showing Ash the way, grabbing that firm, firm ass in his hands and pulling, getting more of the man in his mouth. Ash's teeth stung him for a moment, and he growled a warning, but soon enough they had a damned fine rhythm going.

It was the weirdest damned thing he'd ever done, in or out of bed.

Ash explored him, from his ass to his balls, fingers trailing over his skin, testing his short curls. His toes curled right up, and the wolf pushed at that door in his brain. The moon was coming.

So was he, if he wasn't careful. He wanted Ash with him, though, so he kept on pulling, kept on sucking, closing his eyes and really giving that thick cock what-for.

"Oh." The sound came out around Dorian's skin, Ash starting to lose the rhythm and buck above him, almost pushing too far into his throat.

Dorian breathed deep through his nose, letting his lips pull, letting his fingers do the walking, pressing at the balls that were reassuringly human. He pushed down hard right behind them, and that was it.

Ash screamed, the sound seeming to echo like a strong wind through winter trees, and that cock pulsed in his mouth, swelling huge and pushing deep. Nothing came out, though. Not a drop.

Pulling back, he stared at Ash with wide eyes, but Ash wasn't paying any mind. No, sir. He was sucking to beat the band, and Dorian finally had to give himself over to it, had to let the tree-man bring him to a rocking, moaning climax, his balls drawing up so hard he thought they were going to explode. Until he figured he was just going to fly apart and burst the tree into pieces.

Dorian came like a ton of bricks, his body jerking, the smell of his come sharp and animalistic compared to the earthy scent of Ash's body.

Panting, Dorian stroked Ash's hair, his fingers finding little whorls that felt almost like vines in among the leafy waves. Too cool.

Ash blinked up at him, eyes as green as summer grass. "That was... that was good, yes?"



"Hell, yes. You didn't think it was good?"

"I have never felt anything so pleasant," Ash said, almost primly. "I simply was not sure if you felt the same."

"Uh-huh. Well, the spunk dripping off your chin says it was damned fine."

Ash swiped the back of one hand over his face, staring at Dorian's come. "How interesting."

"Yeah. I mean, you didn't... There wasn't any."

"Issue? Oh, no. I mean, it's not the season at all. My sap will not be rising for at least two more lunar cycles. Then I would be much more. Er."

"Right. Gotcha." Man, he was going to have to come back to this tree in late February. Wasn't that when those syrup people collected sap? That would be the time to...

Dorian doubled over, his body trying to change, to let the wolf out.

"What is it, Dorian?" His name sounded weirdly lilting on Ash's lips.

"The moon. Must be the moon rising. You got to show me how to get out of the tree, Ash. I don't want to tear it up."

"No. No, of course not. You will be careful once you are out. Not to get caught by whoever is chasing you."

Look at that. From *when the heck are you leaving to have sex with me* to *hey I care what happens to you*, all in just a short time.

Cool.

"I'll be super careful, and I promise I won't lead anyone to your tree."

"Thank you." One hand came up to caress his cheek, and Ash smiled. "May I have one more kiss?"

God, that was cute, the way Ash said kiss like he'd never felt it in his mouth before.

"Sure. At least one more." He fought the moon long enough to press his mouth to Ash's, but the kiss ended in a howl, Dorian's head tilting up, searching for the sky.

"Come. Quickly." Ash pulled at him, grabbing by the arm, yanking on him.

They passed through a dizzying series of halls and rooms, finally coming to a great cavern that looked like a crazy ballroom, with roots hanging from the ceiling and shit.

"The great hall," Ash said. "This is the way out. All you must do is reach for the surface, and it will find you."

Reach for the... Shit, his brain was barely processing, and this guy wanted him to be all Dorothy in Oz. Sighing, he thought about running under the moon, about escaping his pursuers and leading anything bad away from Ash's tree...

And his hands were clawing at the ground, thick soil and roots under him, the smell of cold night air hitting him in the face.

Yes. Yes, that was it. His body told him to howl, but he held it in, letting the wolf come out, his joints and bones creaking and popping. He shrank, his muzzle growing out of his face, the fur growing out to protect him from the cold.

Run. Run. There was something out there, hunting him and he had to run.

Dorian pulled his lips back in a snarl, showing his teeth. Then he very deliberately lifted his leg and marked the tree with his scent.

He would want to remember where this one was come sap season. He was sure of it.

End

Tree Hugger

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