

LONE WOLF

MY WOLF'S BANE 1.3 † THE DAMSEL IN MY DISTRESS



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Lone Wolf

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The Damsel in My Distress



Throughout my first day at Verdugo Hills Academy, I scanned the corridors and scoped out each class before claiming a chair. I even wielded my superhuman hearing, eavesdropping on private conversations in hopes of finding out more about Autumn. All I really learned was the guys had drooling issues when it came to her. The girls seemed to like Autumn, too, which was odd, considering what kind of girl she'd have to be to date that loser. It didn't fit.

By the end of the day, I hadn't seen one sign that Autumn was less human than anyone else at school. Maybe there really was a werewolf or some other supernatural something nearby this morning, but I'd been too distracted by Autumn's hotness to get a good bead on who it was.

I needed to be more careful around her so I didn't get thrown off again. A werewolf scout would track me down eventually, but I refused to make it easy for them by getting sloppy and losing focus over some chick.

Especially when said chick threw me under the bus for a total tool.

After my last class, I waited for Trevor outside on the low concrete wall. My heart pounded the instant I recognized Autumn's dark hair and long legs approaching a short, redheaded girl who looked too young to be a senior.

"Hey, Autumn." The redhead gave a shy smile. "I'm having some people over on Saturday night and thought you might like to come."

Autumn scrunched up her face. "Uhm, this Saturday is Daniel's party."

"Oh," the redhead squeaked. "I thought it was *next* weekend." Her face flushed before she wandered off.

Autumn turned in a circle to scan the crowd, probably looking for Loser. She froze when she met my gaze and my stomach dipped. I ignored my body's betrayal and whispered, "What a piece of work."

Her eyes narrowed as if she'd heard me — which wasn't possible over the dull roar of liberated prisoners. Not for a human anyway. Unless she'd read my lips. As if to prove me right, she rolled her eyes, then spun around and strode to her clunker. After she shoved her

backpack through the window, her hand dived into her back pocket for her cell, calling attention to her perfect ass. Okay, so I'd have to be crazy not to want to hook up with a girl who looked like that, but it didn't mean I could ever *like* her.

Autumn's fingers danced over the screen — probably texting Loser. I saw him in my peripheral vision, heading her way. I knew I should look for Trevor, but my eyes were glued to the hot chick and the creep.

"Hey, babe." Loser sidled up to her, offering up a goofy grin.

She returned his smile and my gut screamed to kick his ass. Ugh. I couldn't watch those two anymore. I tuned Autumn and Loser out, glancing over my shoulder to the school's big double doors. If my cousin made me late for work because he wanted another glimpse of that blonde he liked... Not that Maya wasn't cool. Why she'd hang out with a snob like Autumn, though, I had no idea.

Seeing the crowd begin to thin, I checked my cell for the time. Trevor needed to get his carcass into my Jeep or he'd be hoofing it home. Seriously.

When I faced forward again, Loser was gone and

Autumn was inside her clunker. Her keys jingled just before she turned the key, but the engine didn't turn over. It didn't do a damn thing. Well, duh, it had died a brutal death when she'd pulled in this morning. Did Autumn think her car held healing powers and if it sat long enough, it would magically start?

Maybe it was for the best that Trevor hadn't arrived yet. I was dying to see how Autumn's moron boyfriend would handle this. But when I scanned the grounds again, I didn't see him anywhere.

Crap, a decent mechanic like me couldn't leave a girl stranded in a nearly deserted parking lot. Sure, Autumn could call her parents or roadside service, but how long would that take? I blew out a breath, disgusted for allowing myself to get sucked into her problems.

When I spotted Trevor heading toward me, I pointed to my Jeep, then held up my index finger as I strolled toward Autumn and her junk heap. When I got to her window, she just about jumped through the windshield. The size of her startled eyes returned to normal as she focused on me. Why was scaring people always so much fun?

I struggled not to smirk but the corners of my mouth twitched anyway. "Car trouble?"

“Yeah.” Her gaze darted around. I wondered if she was hoping for someone else to rescue her. “Car won’t start.”

When I motioned to the hood, she only stared at me. I rolled my eyes. “Release the hood so I can check it out,” I said slowly.

Autumn’s cheeks flushed, making her skin glow until she was even prettier. She’d put on makeup since lunch, but she didn’t need it.

I couldn’t see what she was doing with her hands, but the hood hadn’t budged. As she fumbled for the hood release, my eyes caught on her neck and the curve of her jaw. What was a beautiful girl like her doing with a guy like Loser?

Oh, yeah, she was just like him.

“Move and I’ll do it,” I said in a sharper voice than I’d intended.

As she climbed out of the car and squeezed past me, our shoulders brushed and my stomach knotted. Cursing myself for not moving out of the way to avoid contact with her, I popped the hood and examined the engine.

“So what do you think?” Autumn asked, appearing at my side.

“If I knew...” I gave her my most condescending look, hoping to create even more distance between us. Maybe then I’d lose the urge to back her up against the car and see if those lips tasted as good as they looked. “I’d already be fixing it and one step closer to being gone.”

She sucked in a breath and her eyes hardened. Good. I didn’t need her being nice and she didn’t need to like me. This stupid physical attraction I felt for her would die soon enough anyway.

“If you’re going to be a jerk about it, why bother helping me at all?”

“Because my mom raised me right.” For a split second, my gaze fell on her plump bottom lip. I quickly averted my eyes and shook off the heat rushing through my veins. Not the girl for me, I reminded myself. “If you prefer, I could leave.”

“That would make you even more of a douche,” she said, slamming a hand on her hip.

Autumn had guts. I liked it.

Wait. No. I didn’t like her. To prove it to myself, I

ignored her comment and zeroed in on the engine again. But I didn't see it at all. I turned to watch her hips sway as she wandered away, and noticed the Taurus's nearly flat tire. "Rear passenger-side tire is a little low. You should stop and get some air soon."

"Okay, thanks." She sidled up next to me again as though discussing her tire had given us a clean slate. As if. "So... you know a lot about cars?"

"I know enough." I forced myself not to look at her, hoping she'd give up on small talk.

"Where'd you learn? Your dad teach you?"

"No." She'd take the hint eventually, wouldn't she? Until then, I needed to get this repair on, if at all possible, or I'd be late to work. Aha, there was the problem. I pointed to the battery. "See the way the clamp isn't connecting to the battery?"

She studied the box. "The vibrations wiggled it free?"

"That would be my guess." Finding the problem with a car always gave me a good feeling, like some things in life *could* be fixed. I flashed her a grin and nudged her with my elbow. "Maybe under all that hair and spiffy clothes is a car geek just itching to bust free."

She beamed and for a moment, I got lost in her gorgeous smile. Uh-oh, I was allowing her to make me forget again. I wiped the grin off my face, abruptly swung away, and jiggled the cables. "Okay, try it again."

She climbed behind the wheel and the car sparked to life. Time to get the hell out of Dodge before I yanked her out of the car and started making out with her right there on the hood. God, what was *wrong* with me? I whirled and bolted.

"So it was just the connection?" Autumn called out.

"I'm gonna be late," I mumbled and made tracks to my Jeep.

"Thank you!" I heard her say as I got behind the wheel.

I didn't answer. If I'd said anything or looked at her one more time, I might have turned around and made good on everything I wanted to do with her.

"Did you get it started?" Trevor swiveled in his seat to see out the back window.

"Of course." I started the Jeep and made a run for the gate before Autumn could distract me again.

"Maybe you should fix that personality next!" she

shouted.

I snickered as I exited the lot. Yep, I liked her energy.

Not getting complicated with her wasn't going to be as easy as I'd thought.