

Excerpt from "A Canadian Werewolf in New York"
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FIRST DRAFT
"Scene Introducing ex-girlfriend Gail"

When I opened the door to my room, I wasn't surprised to see Gail sitting in the armchair, despite the fact that we'd broken it off a few years ago.

I picked up that familiar scent again when I got off the elevator. As I moved towards my room I realized why I'd had difficulty placing it. She'd switched perfumes. That, combined with it having been so long since I'd last seen her had thrown me a bit of a curveball.

Knowing that she was there on the other side of that door was one thing, but it was surprising to me that she was there at all, especially given the way our relationship had ended.

Her heartbeat started racing the moment I opened the door. I glanced at her, at the brunette beauty with cool green eyes, her sunglasses tucked just above bangs that framed her cute face in a gently curving cascade down past her shoulders. She wore clothes that were uncharacteristic for her but showed off her body quite nicely. A white cut-off shirt revealed well-toned abs and a slender waist. Hot

black with yellow stripe short-shorts showed off tanned legs that went on forever.

She was a beautiful, incredible woman. I'd been lucky to even be seen in her presence in the past, never mind sleep with her. My own heart started racing, wishing it hadn't ended, wishing I could pull her close right there and make sweet love to her.

But there was something in her scent I'd never detected from her before. Defiance like she often got when in confrontation or argument. But underlying it, a fear of sorts.

She was afraid.

Afraid of me.

Her heart raced even faster as I took in all these things, and I didn't even have the door completely opened before she properly surprised me.

"I know the truth about you Andrews," she said, throwing a copy of that morning's New York Press at my feet. "I know you're a werewolf."

I gazed at her, then looked down at the floor as if I would find my jaw there somewhere.

I looked back up at Gail and suddenly felt a pang in my heart. This beautiful woman whom I'd loved, this

cherished beauty whom I'd laughed with, danced with, made sweet love with, suddenly knew my most intimate secret.

"You bastard," she said, getting up from the chair and pacing toward the window. "Why didn't you tell me?"

As she moved within the shadow between the desk lamp and the light coming in the window, I reflected on this remarkable woman whose company I never thought I would grace again.

I had first met Gail three years ago when I was writing Tome of Terror, the novel in which Maxwell Bronte is framed for the murder of the owner of a highly controversial rare edition of the Necronomicon. Gail was my field expert in the realm of the occult.

It was the end of a long, exhausting day of research when I met up with her for our early evening appointment. I'd gotten her number from Anne Lee, Mack's executive assistant and made the contact earlier in the day, and arranged to meet her for coffee at about 6:00 PM.

I remember walking to the appointment, a quick jaunt from the Algonquin to the Starbucks nestled within the Barnes and Noble book shop on Fifth Avenue, more excited about the thought that I'd be able to browse the new releases section of the store after our meeting than about the meeting itself.

That changed the moment I spotted her.

And I knew exactly who she was when I walked into the coffee shop. Even if she hadn't been wearing an outfit that screamed "occult" to me -- a black cotton shirt with a lacy frill from her neck to the top of her cleavage, a black collar studded with silver rivets, not unlike a dog's, tight black leather pants and a shiny black leather jacket -- I would have been able to guess who she was merely by the way that her heart skipped a beat as I walked into the room.

I didn't attribute the heart-skip as anything other than the normal anticipatory feeling one gets when meeting a stranger at an arranged time and place. Despite the mutually agreed upon location, it doesn't come without the possibility of being stood up, and as one sits there waiting for their other half to show, particularly when it is someone the other person knows only through phone conversation and has never met in person before, there's a certain aurora of suspense whenever a new person matching the description enters the room. There's a brief yet intense moment of anticipatory angst with each arrival as one wonders if this is the person with whom the arrangements were made. The tension slowly resolves itself when the person who enters strolls in with a manner that

clearly indicates they are not there to meet someone -- their eyes do not once scan the room with in a seeking manner, or they immediately smile and say something to a party seated at another table.

But the moment that I heard the heart-skip, I quickly made eye contact with her, and she smiled at me with a confident recognition that I was the one she was to meet. She could have recognized me from the photo on one of my book jackets, but I had the feeling that it wasn't that. Her manner struck me as slightly predatory; not in the hunting sense, but in the way that she scanned the room. She was a very observant person. She wasn't just sitting in the room, she was actively participating in the room's flow, in its very essence. You could tell that she wasn't just sitting among the other people at the table, but she was reading each of the other people's faces, her mind confident of the stories that each person told through the way that they looked around, spoke to one another, fiddled with the props on their table, drank their beverage.

I rarely encounter people with that manner. And it's not something that I'd really noticed before acquiring my special senses; but some people have this way of reading a room, of sucking in the very marrow of the entire location they were in, easily studying the people around them as if

they were bullet point character sketches and not complete strangers. In my time it's usually been either other writers or certain criminal types who give off that sense. I'd yet to have met a person who read people's fortunes for a living, but it made sense to me that she would have that sense too.

I remember reading once that, regardless of whether or not one believes in the power of fortune telling, that the person who is "seeing" the future of another is partially relying on whatever divination tools they are using, and partially reading the subtle, unspoken reactions of the person.

I guess that ever since my life had been altered with a supernatural change, this lycanthropic blood coursing through my veins, my mind had opened up to a whole new reality.

As Hamlet told his dearest friend amidst rumors of his father's ghost appearing in the thick of the night, there were more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophies. My mind had never been closed to supernatural things -- even as a child, I'd enjoyed reading tales of Sasquatch, the Loch Ness monster, UFO's and the like. But nothing opens the mind quite like becoming a

creature that most people assume are mythical in nature, that exist only in comic books and horror novels.

So I was struck with Gail immediately; and not merely because she was the most attractive person in the room.

No, I was struck with her because by the time I got to the table, I knew that we shared a special kinship, that, like me, she had a quick fix on the others we shared the coffee shop with.

For example, I knew that she could tell that at the table in the corner the young short guy with the crew-cut hair, the sideburns that extended down his face almost to his jowls, the navy blue silk shirt with a pattern of white and red dragons on it, sitting behind an open laptop and just staring at it, was a writer, a frustrated writer who'd just hit some sort of mental block that no amount of coffee could jolt him out of; or the older woman with the square framed glasses, ear-length blond wavy hair the yellow gemstone earrings, green striped top cover in a hand-knitted cardigan and clutching her coffee in a vice-tight grip was a bookstore employee on her break and trying desperately not to think about the cigarette she was no longer allowed to have inside; or the middle-aged guy across the room sitting at a table facing Gail, the not-unattractive guy with brown hair and wearing a pair of dark sunglasses, a

white collared shirt and a lime-green sport jacket who rolled his wedding ring around his finger with his thumb while fiddling with the newspaper he tried to hold in front of his face, unable to properly hide the fact that he was completely taken with Gail, stealing glances at her every few seconds from behind his paper.

Yes, I knew that Gail had been able to pick up on the not-so subtle cues these people cast out into the room, and I was taken with her.

By the time I reached the table, I had been able to take in at least this much of the people within the room, but for the first time in a long while, I'd stopped taking in the sights and sounds around me, and focused completely on Gail.

Sure, she was physically beautiful. But there was something else about her, an aura, if you will, that cast its spell on me immediately. Even without my heightened senses, I knew that I'd have been completely in awe, in total rapture, like that guy in the lime jacket across the room.

Our quick meeting had turned into an hour of intriguing conversation, and we ended up moving to a restaurant down the street, where, upon finishing dinner, we'd ordered dessert, and round after round of coffee

refills. The waiter that had served us got a huge tip, for allowing us to stay there for the several hours in which we'd sat there conversing, sharing all kinds of intimate details with one another.

After the restaurant closed and we walked, the air between us filled with the type of conversation you might expect to hear between two life-long friends who hadn't seen each other in a decade, I was extremely thankful for the timing of the cycle of the moon. If it had been just a few days earlier, I would have had to excuse myself a few hours earlier and by that time would likely be racing through central park at a break-neck pace, my wolf-self likely filled with a thirst, a hunger in its heart that it couldn't quench.

But no, the timing couldn't be better.

By the time our stroll ended -- a stroll in which we'd found ourselves moving up and down the theatre district strip, walking the streets between Broadway and Fifth Avenue like a couple of trick-or-treaters not wanting to miss a single house.

Neither one of us had mentioned our deep and urgent desire not to let the evening end, and while my heart and loins burned for her -- something I knew she could tell, and which I could easily detect she felt completely the

same -- I was glad that that entire first night the only physical thing that happened between us was the occasional light touch of the hand across the table, or, while walking, the way she held onto my arm.

We didn't even kiss when we parted ways in a grey pre-dawn morning light. We just stood and looked longingly at one another, each knowing how completely infatuated the other person was, yet each holding our passion in check just below the surface.

I think it must have been the fact that we both knew that this could be the beginning of a phenomenal, life-long relationship, and thus there was no need to jump into anything.

And those first few weeks, the relationship did work out like that -- we met for coffee and dinner again the next night, but not without a quick touch-base phone call in the middle of the afternoon. And again, we walked the entire evening, sharing intimate details of our lives. It was only when it had started to rain that we ran, hand in hand, up the street to an all night diner where we'd spent the rest of the pre-dawn hours together.

It was on the third night that we'd made love for the first time. We'd agreed to meet at the hotel lobby at the Algonquin. When she'd walked up to the table where I was

drinking a xxx, an Algonquin house specialty, I stood up, the moment suddenly right between us to share a kiss, and the quick peck turned into a heated, lengthy smooch.

We'd quickly moved from there to my room, and after making sweet love with this woman, we lay in bed and talked more.

I'd never loved another person so much as I'd loved Gail. I'd never known so much about another person either, nor had another person known so much about me.

Except for one single fact -- that I was a werewolf.

It is what, ultimately, led to our downfall.

From the time we met, we'd spent as many hours together as possible, mostly in the evening, as our daily appointments and schedules permitted. And we spent virtually every single night together, either at my room at the Algonquin or at her flat in Chelsea.

But three and a half weeks into our relationship was when the cycle of the moon worked its magic in my physiology and I needed to spend my evenings apart from her.

It's a shame, too, since my adeptness at being a lover, my endurance, my stamina, were all improved during this phase -- and Gail could sense it, I know. But she didn't know what was causing it.

When I first came up with the excuse that I had to fly out of the city on a book-related trip, a story I'd been concocting in my head for weeks, she was disappointed, but understanding.

During the second cycle the following month -- it becomes almost funny how I can measure my life now by the cycles of the moon -- my excuse had been I was under deadline to get my novel in to the publisher -- an excuse that was legitimate since I'd spent almost all of my time with Gail, getting as much sleep as I could during the day instead of working on my novel, which I thanked in my heart each and every day for necessitating my meeting with this glorious, wonderful woman -- and that I needed to spend my nights burning the midnight oil to get it done on time.

By the time the third cycle arrived and I'd come down with a nasty "stomach flu" I started detecting her suspicions about my regular disappearances.

The fourth cycle she was more suspicious about why I needed to go, particularly when I started to reach a certain physical desirability and animal-lust that she rather enjoyed in me.

The fifth cycle was when the suspicion turned into accusation. She knew for sure that I was lying to her

about what I was doing during the specific moon cycle, but she obviously didn't know exactly what.

With nothing more to go on, and given that it was usually the evening and the wee hours of the night in which she couldn't track me down even if she tried, she'd assumed I'd taken another lover.

We'd broken up by the time I went into the next cycle.

I'd lost a part of my heart then -- something special within me had died.

As I'd said, I'd never been so close to anyone, no other single person had known so much about me, about the real me deep inside (yes, the real me, save for the whole wolf thing).

But I imagine it was foolish of me to think that I could maintain a solid and truth-filled relationship with anyone while keeping that big a secret from them.

Foolish, stupid, idiotic.

I could go on.

I thought that I'd never see Gail again, but here she was, in my apartment.

She was standing in the window, looking out, not facing me. "Well?" she said, and her heartbeat revealed another jolt of fear -- likely the fear at having her back to me.

That hurt.

I stared at her back, finding it difficult to break the hypnotic thoughts of how we met and the great pairing that we'd made. My mind tossed between that and the hurtful things I'd lived through when we broke up, and at the thought she was actually afraid of me now.

"I deserve an answer," she said, looking over her shoulder at me. "When I accused you of sleeping around, you didn't deny it. You just stood there like an idiot. Why didn't you just tell me the truth?"

"Gail," I started, my eyes watering with the sudden rush of emotions. "I don't know what to say. I mean, how could I begin to tell you? How is it possible that you would believe me? If I told you, you'd have walked out, wanted to have me committed."

She turned to face me, her arms crossed over her chest. "I'm the last person who'd do that. And you of all people should know it." She looked down at the floor for a moment. "For Christ sake, Michael, I run an occult shop, I teach divination, I'm a consultant for various researchers and on movies and television shows about the supernatural.

"I'm likely the only person who would have believed you."

It was true, of course. Why didn't I think of that a couple of years ago? Why hadn't I just taken the chance and told her about my true nature?

"I . . ." I began, not sure what I wanted to say. "I was never unfaithful to you, Gail."