` The crackling of a campfire accompanied Ashley’s quiet night in the woods. She had decided to go camping out so she could visit a lake that one of her friends told her about. It took her all day to find the place, and once she had finally gotten her tent and a fire set up, the sun had already set. The moon had risen and both moonlight and glittering stars glimmered off of the surface of the lake. The lake was vast, and she couldn’t see the other side of the water from where she was, but she wasn’t a stranger to lakes and forests. The lake had a very subtle flow to it, as if a gentle current was flowing through the lake. This made Ashley very aware that this lake had to feed into a river somewhere. She made a note to not go swimming tomorrow, just in case she lost her bearings and got sucked into the river.

Since Ashely wasn’t ready to go to bed just yet, she was laying down and staring at the moon lit sky. Her raven like hair billowed behind her head, spreading out in smooth, silky locks as she relaxed amongst the woods. She wasn’t very tall; only being about 5’2’’. She wasn’t a stranger to being out in the woods though, often going on hikes and enjoying experiencing nature more then anything else. So she was very toned and well built with a modest sized chest. All in all, she was proud and happy with how she looked.

As she stared at the night sky, she felt like time didn’t exist. The moon and stars hung above her, forced to dance across the night sky until the sun takes them away in the morning. It was peaceful for her, and she might have fallen asleep if she hadn’t started to hear music being played from somewhere. Wait. Why was there music suddenly playing out here? She hadn’t seen anyone else in the forest while she had ventured out to the lake. She couldn’t see the other side of the lake either, so she highly doubted someone was on the other side of it unless they were blaring their music.

Ashley stood up, straining her ears to listen for the sound of music dancing through the night. It sounded like it was coming from the water. No, the more she listened to the sounds around her, the more enveloping the music felt. It was almost as if it was all around her, dancing on the wind, bouncing off of the trees and surrounding her with the melodic tune that could only come from a string instrument. Yet the longer she listened, the stronger the compulsion to go into the lake became. Before she realized it, her feet were moving towards the water, and the cool water lapped at her feet.

The tune grew louder, more intense, and what originally, she thought was a harp sounded much more like a guitar. Part of her knew she needed to go back to her campsite, but her feet were moving of their own accord, and it was becoming difficult to focus on anything but the music. That warm electric tune flowed around her, like a tornado of energy that compelled her to go towards it. The only problem was that every step towards the source of the music had her walking into the cold water of the lake. Despite the chill running up her body as the water crept up and over her body, she couldn’t stop moving into the water. Soon enough, she couldn’t touch the ground anymore, and was forced to wade slowly deeper.

The warning bells in her mind were washed away as the water splashed over her head, dragging her down below the surface for a moment. She could see a pillar of stone jutting out of the lake, and as she managed to rise to the surface again, she thought she saw someone sitting on the pillar. She wanted to call out, but as she swam farther into the lake, the subtle current she had noticed earlier was becoming stronger and stronger. Every stroke towards the pillar found her drifting away, and while the music played her body tried harder and harder to fight the current.

The water’s grip on Ashley was steadfast, and as she was pulled away from the music, her mind slowly came back under her control. The only problem was that she was being pulled out of the lake, and as her foggy mind tried to gather its bearings once more, she realized something. She wasn’t just being fed into a river; she was being fed into rapids. Her limbs burned, her lungs hurt, and despite knowing no one else should be out here, she managed enough of her energy to call out for help. She screamed as the waters lapped at her, the frothing current pulling her under as her tired limbs cracked and banged against rocks and dirt that were unyielding against the current.

“Oh no.”

She thought she heard a voice just now. Something moved through the water, or was it the darkness playing tricks on her? She didn’t know. Her mind was racing, and she was scared she was hallucinating from her panic. Especially when she saw those red eyes in the distance. Dark, red eyes with gold piercing through the center. They were growing closer. There was a sudden crack to the back of her head, and those red eyes were the last thing she saw before her own eyes closed and she drifted into darkness.

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Everything hurt. Ashley’s head was throbbing and as she tried to sit up she couldn’t help but wince as little sparks of pain jumped through her body. Slowly she managed to sit up. She could still move her limbs, and nothing felt broken. She just felt very bruised and banged up. Wait. Where was she? She looked around, eyes wide as she realized she wasn’t in her bed, or even at the camp site. She was in a cave. A small fire crackled next to her as she looked through the cave. It looked like someone was living here. Cabinets and drawers were placed throughout one side of the cave. She noted that the cave seemed a bit bare, though the floor was smooth enough that it wasn’t painful to walk on.

“Oh, you’re finally up.” Standing at the edge of the cave was a tall, blond man. He had bright blue eyes, and a slightly concerned look on his face. “I getting a little worried there. You banged your head up pretty badly last night.” His tone was soft with a hint of concern in it. Ashley couldn’t help but look over him, seeing how well built the man was. Had she been standing, he’d be a foot taller then her, but in her position on the ground he towered over her.

“Ah… did you, did you save me last night? I don’t know what happened really. My head still feels a bit fuzzy.” She says, rubbing her temple a bit, and realizing that her forehead was wrapped up in bandages. The man nodded, before putting a bowl in front of her.

“Yeah, I saw you drift into the river and helped pull you out. Here, I made breakfast for you in case you’d be hungry when you finally did wake up.” It looked like he had cooked up fish and mixed it with vegetables and roots, making a warm and pleasant tasting stew. Ashely realized that as she stared at the bowl that she was very hungry.

“How long was I out?” She took a taste of the food, and to her surprise found it rather delicious.

“About half a day.” He says, sifting through a few things in the cave. She couldn’t help but watch his every move. It seemed weird that he was out here, and that he had a cave set up like a home. She always thought that someone who decided to live out in the woods would look like a hippie or a druid of some sort. Not someone who looked like they worked out every day. His long, blond hair framed his face as he seemed to be looking for something.

“This is, really good. Thank you…?” She trailed off, hoping he’d finally introduce himself.

“Oh, Grim. My name’s Grim. I suspect that you’ll be wanting to leave soon, right? Your injuries aren’t too bad, so you should be able to walk with relative ease.” He seemed uneasy, like something was bothering him. Plus he kept avoiding looking at her, only giving little glances here and there instead of watching her like Ashley was him. What she didn’t know, was that Grim didn’t like strangers being around. He was worried that he’d do something he regrets, and was hoping to push her away before anything else happened.

“My name’s Ashley. It’s a pleasure to meet you Grim. Thank you for rescuing me, and for helping take care of me now.” She said warmly, placing the now empty bowl down and standing up slowly. Her limbs ached a bit, but it wasn’t awful. She could still move decently enough. It just meant she’d need to rest up when she went home later.

“It’d be a bit rude if I couldn’t do something in return for what you’ve done though, I don’t want to just duck and run after all the effort you’ve gone to for me.” She said softly, stepping towards him and suddenly wrapping her arms around him. “So thank you.” She whispered warmly, squeezing him between her arms.

Grim froze up as she hugged him. He managed to keep his composure, but those concerned thoughts flashed in his mind like alarm bells. Yet, he began to ignore them. Maybe this wasn’t so bad. Maybe it was a sign of something better starting to happen. He wrapped an arm around her gently in response and sighed.

“Well, I was planning on doing some fishing today. If you want you can join me.” He said reluctantly, gently breaking the hug before working on gathering some fishing gear. Ashley beamed excited at the prospect of spending time with him.

“Sure!” She bounced on her feet, looking to see if she could help grab anything, only to realize… she had no idea what anything in this cave was used for. Though, as she took a closer look, she realized that there was a harp and a guitar placed gently on their stands in the corner of the cave.

“Oh, do you play?” She asked, though something in her mind whispered to her. Something felt strange about the string instruments. Something nagged at her mind, almost like a gentle tune whispering in the wind. She shook her head, trying to clear it from her mind.

“Yeah, I enjoy playing them here and there. It’s nice and peaceful out here, so no one can bother me while I’m playing.” He responds, though there’s a hint of nervousness to his voice. He quickly grabs the guitar and straps it to his back, while offering a case of fishing gear to her. “Don’t worry about it though, could you carry this for me? I can take you back to your campsite and we can set up a fishing spot there.” He said softly, before starting to leave the cave. Ashley only had a few moments to gather herself and follow suit as he left.

She couldn’t help but stare at him as she tried to catch up. He seemed to be swaying his hips, almost as if he knew she’d be watching him. His hips swayed with every step. Despite the muscular arms and well-toned legs, he still had a noticeable curve to his hips that left her blushing. She hurried up to his side, trying to keep up with his quick pace.

“So, why do you live out here? I mean, I assume you live out here anyways, since that cave seemed a bit more homely then it should be for someone camping.” She asked curiously.

“Oh, well. Its nice out here. I love living near water, and since I can’t live near the ocean I’d rather live out here by a nice river and lake.” He hums softly, “Besides, its nice and peaceful out here, don’t you agree? There isn’t anything out here to cause much worry. Oh look, your campsite’s here, and its in a great spot for fishing.” It seemed like he was trying to brush past the topic, increasing his pace towards Ashley’s campsite.

“Yeah but… doesn’t it get, you know. Lone- hey wait!” Ashley started, but then she had to almost start running in order to match the pace of the taller man. Once they reached her campsite, Ashley couldn’t help but set the fishing gear down and go looking through her tent and belongs. There was a nagging concern that he knew where she had been camped out, but after looking over everything it didn’t seem like anything was out of place.

When she was done sifting through her stuff, she realized that Grim had already set himself up with his fishing line. She shuffled over to him, and he offered her a second line to cast.

“You’ve ever fished before?” He asked softly, his voice gentle and melodic. The way he spoke made the concern’s Ashley was just having start to melt away. It felt like his words sank into her mind and filled her with a sense of comfort. So when he offered her the fishing rod, she nodded softly and took it in her hands.

“I’ve umm… yeah. I’ve fished before. Its… just the waiting that’s the hardest.” She took the rod quickly, her cheeks flushing a soft red before she quickly turned and worked on casting her line. While she prepared her rod, Grim cast his. Moments later, a second red bobble would join the first as Ashley cast her line. While Ashley tried to relax, periodically casting glances over to Grim, the man next to her had larger concerns nagging at his mind.

Grim had many reasons for living out in the woods alone. Not many people would want to live out in the middle of nowhere, with nobody to talk to or spend time with for months on end… And yet Grim knew that even if he opened to this stranger, there’d be a chance that he’d do something to ruin any chance of her wanting to stay or see him again. It had been a while since he had managed to eat anything substantial, and he could feel a quiet, gnawing hunger starting to whisper its way into the back of his mind.

“So, why’d you decide to come camping out here?” Grim needed to break the silence that inevitably occurred while fishing. His mind was drifting, and if he let it drift for too long then he would likely be heading back to his home alone.

“Oh! Well, I love camping, and I heard about this beautiful lake that no one really has tampered with out here. When I got here yesterday I was rather surprised at how lovely the whole area looked. As if no one had come out here in months.” A slight grin crossed her face and she couldn’t help but nudge Grim in the side, “you’re not the reason no one comes out here are you? Not putting on a spooky mask at night and scaring people away, are you?” She couldn’t help but chuckle and tease him. After all, it was strange to see someone out here in the middle of nowhere, let alone living out here. She welcomed the company though. Especially since the current company literally saved her life. It was the least she could do.

Grim flashed her a grin, and for a brief moment she thought she saw his teeth lined up like sharp, shark teeth. The moment passed in the blink of an eye, and his grin looked just like a normal grin. She rubbed her eyes, not hearing his words as he spoke. Maybe she hit her head harder then she thought last night. Grim noticed Ashley’s sudden discomfort and placed a gentle hand on her shoulder.

“Are you alright? Do you need anything?” He asked her softly. She looked up at him and saw just how close she was to him. His blond hair framed his warm face, those eyes seemed to glimmer like gold as he looked over her. She could see the concern in his eyes, and she tried to give him a warm smile to ease said concern.

“I’m… I’m ok. I think I just need some water.” She makes a motion to get up, but Grim’s hand gently pushes her back down.

“I’ll get you some, don’t worry.” He says warmly, before pulling out a cup from the gear he had her carry. He then dipped the cup into the lake and scooped up some of the clear water. “since no one ever comes here, the water here is pretty clean, see?”

Ashley was hesitant, but when she looked at the water, she was quite surprised to see that he was telling the truth. At least, it looked like it anyways. The water was clear, and if she didn’t know any better, she’d think the cup was empty. As she took a sip of the water, she realized just how thirsty she had been. The cup was emptied almost as fast as it took Grim to fill it. On top of that, the water did taste clean. Free of impurities or other gunk that might show up in the tap water back at home.

“Oh wow… you weren’t kidding. That even tastes clean! I wish I had brought some bottles, so I could bring some home with me later.” She muses, before raising a brow. Grim had set his pole to the side and pulled out his guitar. She watched him strum the strings once, twice, and then a third time, while adjusting the knobs to help tune it.

Grim noticed her watching and smiled warmly at her, “I always play a bit while I’m out fishing. Its easy to switch between one or the other for me, so it helps pass the time and makes things a bit more peaceful. I hope you don’t mind.” He explains, before his fingers begin the slow, melodic dance across the neck of the guitar. She nods, listening to his every word as they hung in the air.

“You must be really good then if you play so much.” She says happily, watching his fingers dance and pick slowly. As the music flowed from his fingers, she found herself slowly losing her focus again.

“You could say that. Why not relax and listen? Don’t worry about the fish or anything, just relax while I play. It might help your head too.” He coos softly, strumming across the strings. Ashley simply nodded, letting herself lay on her back and just watch and listen to Grim play his guitar. The music flowed and washed over them as his fingers danced along the strings. She let her eyes drift closed as the music carried her away.

Ashley felt the world melt away as the music took hold of her. It felt familiar, this feeling of drifting away. As she laid next to Grim, she felt as if she was floating on water. His music feeling like the push and pull of the shore, rocking her mind from side to side. She felt comfortable around him, that warmth becoming more and more prominent in how she felt towards him. She wanted to get to know him better, and while she was relaxing, she resolved herself to figure out how to see him again. She was thankful for her ability to navigate the forest, because she was confident that she’d be able to find him again next time she comes out camping.

Slowly, the music started to fade. While Ashley had been trying to think, her mind had faded in and out of a pseudo sleep. It was almost like being put under during a surgery, but as Grim’s music slowed to a crawl, and eventually a stop, she found her awareness coming back to her. As she opened her eyes she realized that the sun was hanging a lot lower then it had been when they got to her campsite. Grim was cleaning the area up, packing away the fishing supplies and it seemed like he was getting ready to leave. Ashley got up and started to help gather stuff as well.

“You know, I don’t need to go home until tomorrow, so if you want I could keep you company tonight, Grim.” She said softly, while gathering the fishing rods. She hadn’t noticed when she got up, but now that everything was being compiled together, she was that Grim had managed to catch a few fish while she was out. How did he manage that while he was playing music? She didn’t think she had fallen asleep. She didn’t ask about it though.

“Oh? You want to… stay around longer?” Grim asked, looking a bit concerned.

“Well, yeah! You’re really nice, and it must get awfully lonely out here, right?” She asked gently. “Besides, you’ve got to have a lot of stories about your time living out here, right?”

Grim did his best to hide his concerned look. He could already feel the hunger starting to creep up on him, and he knew that if she came home with him tonight then he might not get to ever see her again afterwards. He went to tell her not to worry about it, to not come follow him and to just forget about the hermit living out in the woods.

“That sounds lovely.” The words escaped his lips before he could stop himself. He hadn’t had anyone want to be around him in a long time, and that need for someone to spend time with overpowered the fears eating away at his mind. “I’m sure I can tell you some stories about my time out here.”

Ashley smiled happily, and almost jumped a bit in joy that he wanted her to stay a bit longer. “Thanks! I’ll make sure not to need any rescuing tonight either.” She teases cutely. She bounced on her feet, gathering the last of what they needed before excitedly waiting for Grim to guide her back to his cave. She hadn’t been paying attention when they left, but this time she’d watch the woods as they made their way back to his little cave in the forest.

Grim quickly started guiding them towards his cave. The sun was slowly setting, making the shadows grow longer and larger. He was hoping that if he managed to cook the fish fast enough, it would be able to tide him over for the night, but he could feel that persistent, needy grumbling whispering from his stomach. He was quiet during the walk home, keeping his focus up the best he can. When they finally made it back to his home, Ashley was looking very concerned.

“Hey Grim… are you ok? You’re not looking to well.” She said softly once all the fishing gear was put away. “You’re not catching a fever or anything, are you?” Her voice was gentle and filled with concern. If he was getting sick she wasn’t sure what she’d do. She could try dragging him out of the woods, but then what would she do? Explain that she found this stranger in the woods and he needed help? Thankfully, Grim waved her concerns away.

“I’m fine, its just been a long day is all. I didn’t get much sleep yesterday after all, so I’m just… feeling a bit exhausted is all.” He lied, haphazardly getting a fire going so he could start prepping and cooking the fish he caught. If he could focus his mind on something else asides from Ashley, he might make it through the night. The problem was that Ashley kept scooting closer to him.

“Well here, let me help at least. You shouldn’t have to do everything after all. You caught the fish, so I should help prep them.” She says softly, settling right next to him and holding her hand out expectantly. Grim glanced at her, and his stomach let out a rather loud growl that rumbled through him. The sight of her was making him hungrier, but he tried to suppress that growing hunger. He didn’t want to eat her. He didn’t want to put her through being devoured, especially after she had spent such a wonderful day with him. He wanted to see her again. But that hunger was growing stronger with each passing second.

“See? If you let me help, you can get food cooking faster and you won’t be so hungry. Did you decide to not eat too this morning?” She teased softly, pressing a finger to his stomach. As her finger pressed against his skin, something felt… wrong. Sure, his skin felt like skin, but there was a roughness that felt unnatural to her there as well. Almost as if it was a mixture of smooth flesh and rough leather.

Unfortunately for Ashley, her poking Grim in his current state was the straw that broke the camel’s back. She watched with wide eyes as his flesh started to shift and change. It started from where she poked him, and flowed across his body like a wave. Pink skin melded into light blue flesh. The change crept along his body as Grim’s true form was revealed. His forearms became scaled and clawed, a dark blue that contrasted with the bright coloration of his skin. Those golden locks of hair drained away, revealing black hair that was tinged with a deep, dark bluish hue over it. His ears twisted out, becoming deep red fins protruding from the side of his head.

But what made Ashley scream were those crimson colored eyes. Everything came flooding back to her. The mind addling music, the very reason she had been in the river. Those crimson red eyes staring back at her, centered with golden irises. The man she had spent the day with was gone, trapped behind those hungry eyes of desire and need.

“Y..you… You’re… you’re the one who drew me into the water, aren’t you?” She stammered, falling back as the merman stood up, looming over the smaller girl. He didn’t speak, but his stomach let out another grumbling groan. His tongue slid across his lips, revealing those sharp, shark like teeth that lined the inside of his mouth. There was a bit of hesitation in his movements, almost as if he was trying to give her enough time to run and get away, but Ashley sat there like a deer in headlights. She’d never seen anything like this before. The person she’d spent the day with was… was… something else. There was a part of her mind that didn’t want to call him a monster. He had treated her so nicely! But this… this scared her.

And her fears became a reality as he lunged atop of her. She let out a scream, pushing and kicking at him as he pinned her to the ground with his strong hands. All of that muscle wasn’t for show, and she found herself stuck beneath him, his face looming ever closer over her. She’d find it hot if she wasn’t scared for her life! Her next scream was cut short as Grim opened his jaws wide and enveloped the entirety of her head like a snake. His jaws creaked as they stretched wide enough to stuff the entirety of the poor girl’s head between his lips. His tongue licked and tasted over her cheeks, and when his tongue brushed against her lips, she tried to bite him in retaliation! Sadly, her attempts at pushing him off, or even hurting him were met with an unyielding force. The angle and his natural strength were just too much to keep her from sinking deeper into his jaws.

Hard, forceful swallows pulled her head into his throat. The tight, undulating tunnel dragged her deeper into his body, forcing her shoulders to glide past his jaws. His hands forced her arms to her side, making most of her struggles even more pointless at this point, and as he straddled her hips, he swallowed and pushed down against her. She twisted, whined and tried to get him to stop, but all her struggles were met with that forceful grip, and that ever-present tugging sensation that dragged her deeper and deeper into him. Her chest slipped between his jaws, and for a few moments his tongue danced and squirmed its way beneath her clothing to taste and lick over her body. She could hear his groans of enjoyment as she grew closer to slipping into his stomach.

Another forceful lurch caused her whole world to twist and change. Grim had scooted himself back so that it was easier to swallow her body, and he timed his next swallow with lifting her body up above him. Her chest sank into his throat, her stomach glided past his teeth, and soon enough her head and shoulders both were very quickly squeezed through a tight ring of flesh. She let out a groan and tried to kick her legs at something, anything to get free. Yet all she accomplished was wiggling her hips as she hung upside down, halfway inside of Grim’s body. The warm flesh squeezed and kneaded against her head as it swelled out his middle. Each subsequent swallow forced his belly to swell out more and more.

He spared no time on her hips. That hunger driving him to devour her completely. He wasn’t in full control anymore, but he knew what he was doing. He didn’t want this, but gods the feeling of her body filling his up was so satisfying. It quelled the hunger bit by bit, but that hunger wouldn’t go away until Ashley was fully within him. As her hips swelled out his cheeks, he grabbed ahold of her ankles in order to help make the process smoother. He knew he had to finish her off. He couldn’t just let her out, his body wouldn’t let him. His fears had come true, and now his hunger had ruined a chance for him to develop a connection with someone again.

His neck stretched and swelled out as her hips squeezed down his throat. Her legs, pinned together by Grim’s grip, were easily swallowed up afterwards. They slipped down his throat like noodles. Every struggle and squirm she tried was met with flesh pressing back against her. His stomach was rolling and kneading against her body as he swallowed the last bits of her body. As her feet trailed down his throat, he couldn’t help but press his hand against the bulge vanishing away into his swollen stomach.

“G..grim?! W..what the… what’s going on?” Ashley managed to whimper; the walls pushing against her arms and legs as she tried to push outwards. She was forced to curl up in a fetal position, and Grim’s stomach was rolling and squeezing her tightly that she was having trouble breathing.

“I’m… I’m sorry Ashley. I knew you’d be scared if you saw how I really was, and I just wanted someone to be close to for once. I haven’t eaten anyone substantial in weeks. I tried to resist but… you just, smelled and tasted too good.” He coos softly, hands gently rubbing and kneading along his stomach. He rolled along the swollen dome of flesh with deft hands, trying to gather up all that air in his stomach.

“W..what’s going to happen to me? You.. you ate me. Is this all that you wanted me for?” She asked, kicking at the stomach again. Already she could feel the air getting thinner. Stomach’s weren’t made for people to stay in, and she could feel her head starting to get light already.

“No!” He exclaimed, “I really do enjoy spending time with you, and I hope we can again one day but…” he trailed off. He knew that it wouldn’t happen. He squeezed his stomach one more time, before he suddenly let out a loud belch. Ashley would feel the air flow up and out of the stomach, and any further attempt at talking would melt away as the air grew thinner and less capable of handling her presence. Slowly, her eyes closed, and her mind faded into sleep. A sleep that she feared she would never wake up from.

Grim let out a sigh when his stomach finally went still. “I’m sorry.” He said simply, before hefting himself up and waddling out of the cave. He slowly made his way back to Ashley’s campsite, and by the time he reached her tent, his stomach had shrunken down by a third of its original size. The sloshing, glorping sounds accompanied his steps filled the forest with a cacophony of digestive noises, but he ignored it. He had one last thing he needed to do tonight before he could relax and truly enjoy the feeling of being so full.

Once at her campsite, he kneeled and started to draw a few symbols into the dirt. Once the symbols were drawn, he pressed a hand against his gurgling gut and concentrated. Slowly, a small mote of energy was pulled out of the digesting girl within him, and with that energy he gently pushed it into the symbols on the ground.

“There. Maybe you won’t even remember all of this, and you’ll just go home without fears or worries.” He whispered softly, before wandering back to his home. He was feeling tired. After all, he had just trekked through the forest twice with the weight of a cute girl within him and set up the process to make it so that she’d be able to come back tomorrow when the sun rose. Now he could just lay back and relax in his little cave. He settled himself down to rest and relax, and soon enough he had fallen asleep to the soft, grumbling noises of Ashley slowly melting and digesting within him.

When he awoke, his stomach was flat and trim once more. Any sign of the cute girl that he had unceremoniously devoured was gone, apart from the rather noticeable swell on his hips. He stretched and sighed sadly. Ashley had been really nice, and he had truly hoped that he’d be able to contain himself enough to learn more about her and to spend more time with her. Instead, he had eaten her, and now she was probably trekking back home.

“G..Grim?” A familiar voice called out to him, and as he turned to see who was there, he was greeted with the nervous form of the raven-haired girl. Ashley had come back, and was watching him with a nervous, curious gaze.