

# Locked Hearts

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*When two men get turned into moose, they are forced to wander around the Canadian wilderness. Can they survive on their own? Or more importantly; can they survive each other?*

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## Locked Hearts

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A biting wind tore through the Canadian wilderness like a rapier as thick snow swirled against the many trees dotting its terrain. A soaring mountain range encircled the horizon, and in its center stood a vast frozen lake capped by a crisp cerulean sky that reached high above the world at its feet. Not a cloud could be seen save for a soft mist atop the mountains, and the sun's light reflected radiantly off the pure white snow blanketing the lake's surface.

It was truly a glorious day, but despite its beauty, few creatures dared to brave the bitter cold that saturated it. Most hid in their dens or huddled within their herd, but there were two Bull Moose that seemed determined not to conform. Their long bony legs carved deep gashes into the once seamless mantle of snow, and their heads bobbed up and down in accordance with their step. Regal antlers adorned their heads, and a thin layer of ice crystals flecked their darkened fur as they marched numbly against the gale.

I hate the cold, one of the beast grunted through chattering teeth.

Get over it Brian. Complaining about the cold isn't going to make it go away.

The larger moose now identified as Brian glanced distastefully at his companion before pressing the matter.

Yah, but I don't have to like it, Billy.

I told you never to call me that! It's *William*.

Brian chuckled softly at his victory, and mumbled a halfhearted "whatever" before allowing silence to fall once more.

It wasn't long before they'd managed to reach the center of the valley, at which point Brian slowed his pace and continued at a cautious crawl. William sighed impatiently at this and stopped to face this lagging friend. "What's wrong *now*?" he asked with obvious irritation.

"Are you sure this ice will hold us? I mean, it's only been winter for a few weeks now&How do we know the lake is frozen enough to hold two Bull Moose?" Concern encompassed Brian's elongated face, and he paused every now and then to test the ice with a hoofed foot.

"Please, I've lived up north a lot longer than you have. I think I'd know what could be walked on and what couldn't. Rolling his eyes and turning from his friend, William continued forward with exaggerated confidence.

But you weren't a moose then! You were still a man&Actually, you were just a boy. A frozen puddle could have supported you better than a moose on a lake.

William seemed to consider this for a moment, but shook it off with a snort. That may be true, but I still think you're overreacting. You *are* from Arizona after all. You aren't used to traveling over frozen water. Just be glad you have fur now for protection against the temperature when it goes below seventy degrees. Brian narrowed his eyes at this comment, and quickened his pace to keep up with William.

Yah, well&I still don't know why you dragged us out here. It's *freezing* today! I can't even blink without worrying about my eyelids freezing together. Brian's comment earned no response from William, so he tried again. Besides, it's not like we have a destination. We don't even know how we got turned into moose in the first place! I don't see how walking around in the middle of nowhere on the coldest day of the year will help us turn back to normal. Again, William refused to respond, so Brian ran ahead to demand his attention. Listen! It's pointless to be out here right now! Taking one day's brake isn't going to kill us, but if we don't stop, this cold might!

Faced with a road block, William came to a complete halt and glared daggers at Brian through fiery eyes. They were at a stand off, and neither man was willing to back down.

No! We have to keep moving!

Why? What would be the point if we both end up freezing to death?

If we stop moving I can *guarantee* we'll freeze to death. We have to keep our blood pumping or our bodies will shut down.

It took a moment for Brian to construct a credible argument for this, and William could feel his patience wearing thinner by the second.

Couldn't we have traveled through the woods? Why'd we have to come out into the middle of the lake? The wind is blowing right on us. At least in the woods we'd have *some* sort of shelter.

Not really&Plus, crossing this lake is the quickest way to the other side of the valley.

Why are we even *going* to the other side of the valley? What if we've been going the wrong way this whole time? We could end up falling through the ice, or worse, freezing to death out here! I can't even feel my legs anymore! It was true. Many parts of their bodies had become so frozen they became numb to the pain that secretly plagued them. It was a wonder how they managed to keep standing at all, and with the wind picking up in their direction, the thought of advancement became bleak. Even the sun seemed to mock them, for though its light gleamed brightly overhead, it offered neither warmth nor comfort for their frostbitten bodies.

Well it's too late now! We're already half way across, so why don't we keep going forward?

Because we know that the other way is safe! Plus, the wind would be behind us instead of in our faces! William looked ready to argue, but Brian didn't let him. And another thing! Who put *you* in charge?

We've been out here for over a month, and you haven't let me make one decision!

That's because you don't know how to survive out here!

Oh? So you think trying to converse with a hunter is a good survival technique?

Hey! It was worth a shot!

Yah, a shot in the ear! Brain shouted, indicating the circular bullet hole that pierced his left ear.

The two moose were nose to nose now. Thick clouds of mist puffed from their mouths, keeping their saliva from freezing upon air contact. Their bodies were shaking profusely from both rage and bitter cold, and their knees threatened to collapse from numbness.

Well if you hadn't been running toward him we might have been able to sneak up close enough to talk to him! William seethed through staggered breaths.

Moose can't talk to humans anyway, so it was a stupid idea from the start! I think all those years of child abuse are finally screwing with your head, *Billy*.

Brian barely had time to finish his statement before a large blur came crashing headlong into his chest. The force of the attack left him both winded and confused, and for a moment the world seemed to spin as he attempted to regain his composure. What the , but the blow came again this time from his right flank , and his massive body was sent crashing to the ground with a loud grunt as the reality of the situation finally sank in. *William*.

Still rather dazed, Brian struggled desperately to his feet and charged the shaky outline of his attacker. His head was lowered defensively, and a distinct *crack* filled the air as his antlers made contact with William's. The shock from the collision aided in correcting Brian's vision, but sent stinging pain coursing throughout William's body as he braced against the assault. However, he refused to back down, and with his antlers still pressed against Brian's, he began to push forward in a stubborn attempt at victory.

They seemed to be at a standstill, but Brian could sense William's body waning under the pressure of their duel. This had been the opportunity he'd been waiting for, and he thrust his head violently to the side, the prongs of his antlers catching on William's and sending him face first into the snow.

William was surprised by this maneuver, and looked up crossly through snow-filled eyes only to see a massive pair of hooves diving right toward his face. He managed to roll out of their path however, and quickly staggered to his feet while shaking the remaining snow from his body.

You could have crushed my head! he shouted indignantly at Brian, anger eminent in his voice.

I wouldn't worry about it. I'm beginning to think nothing can penetrate that thick skull of yours.

Not taking kindly to this remark, William lowered his antlers and ran furiously at his former comrade. Again their antlers met with a *crack*, and again the two stubborn moose were at a standstill. However, William wasn't about to fall prey to another one of Brian's tricks, so he began thrashing his antlers from

side to side in an attempt to catch him off guard. This tactic worked, and after shoving the Arizonian's antlers out of the way he had a clear shot of his left flank, which he promptly rammed with his own antlers.

Winded, but too angry to care, Brian countered by lashing out with his front hooves once more. One managed to catch William in the face, and left a deep gash running vertically across his right eye. Pain surged through him, and he reared back as warm crimson blood gushed from the swelling wound. However, the pain didn't last, and as numbing cold overcame it, so rage overcame William.

The snow at his feet was dotted with scarlet blood, and ice was exposed in many places, reviling the black abyss that lurked below.

There was a moment when both men stood at opposite ends of this arena, panting heavily, but never taking their eyes off each other.

It was at that moment when all sense of reason was lost, and instinct coupled with an unjustified desire to vanquish and destroy took over. It was an innate feeling they could neither recognize nor resist, and they charged each other with a mighty bellow that cut through the silence like a whip.

Their antlers collided with a thunderous *crack*, both moose thrashing their heads spasmodically as the continual clicking of bone against bone filled the crisp winter air. Strategy was thrown to the wind, and more than once a stray antler prong found its way to the face of the opposing beast.

This senseless scuffle seemed to last an eternity, but a moment came where neither moose could remove his antlers from the other's rack. They took little note of this at first, but after a series of futile escape attempts, the full weight of the situation came crashing down like a tsunami. They were stuck; fused by their antlers, which had become impossibly woven together during their mindless brawl. They knew that if they couldn't escape this bond, they would die of starvation, and that was something *neither* of them wanted.

Beastly instinct quickly left them, and human reasoning returned, granting them a truce, and a renewed sense of cooperation. However, fear gripped them, and they wasted little time with words as they desperately attempted to pull back on each other's antlers.

Suddenly, a deep resonating sound filled the air, and despite their fears, both William and Brian froze to listen. The sound came again, louder this time, and the two men looked nervously at each other through pleading eyes.

William's right eye had become frozen shut with blood, but he could still see the sadness and fear that filled the heart of his renewed comrade. He couldn't help but feel like their situation was his fault, and his soul cried out for a second chance as the ice beneath him began to fracture.

I'm sorry Brian, he mumbled, his voice cracking as he spoke for the first time since the beginning of the fight.

For what? Brian's voice held a tone of innocence, but stronger than that was the sound of defeat.

Leading you out here and starting a fight in the middle of a frozen lake. Not able to face Brian anymore, William turned his remaining eye downward and stared guiltily at the ground.

Don't worry about it&I shouldn't have been making fun of you like that.

Both men were looking at the ground now, watching as the thick ice splintered into a web of hairline cracks. They were too numb to move, and too tired to try, so they sank to their knees and allowed their bodies to rest on the ice in submission.

Yah know&If our antlers hadn't gotten stuck we might have stood a chance, Brian said, more to himself than anyone.

Maybe& Not quite knowing what to say, William continued to stare pensively at the ever widening cracks in the ice. It's kinda strange ya know? How people feel when they know they're gonna die& he said after a long pause, still refusing to make eye contact with Brian.

Yah&

Silence fell once more as the ice groaned in protest under their weight.

William&Do you think we'll go to Hell?

The question came suddenly, prompting the smaller moose to lift his gaze back to Brian's as their eyes meet once more.

I don't know.

At that moment of painful truth, an almighty *CRACK* enveloped the valley as a tremendous eruption of water and ice exploded into the air like a cannon. The lake itself seemed to engulf the two moose on its surface; ice closing in around them and water crashing down in a tremulous torrent.

The instant their bodies were submerged, any hint of breath was forced out of them, only to be replaced by an emptiness that yearned to be filled. Any part of them that had retained feeling was lost to the cold, and while they attempted to resurface for air, they could neither feel nor accomplish their goal.

Swirling water quickly morphed into blinding darkness, and their bodies ceased to function as they slowly sank to the depths of the vast lake.

Any hope of survival was lost, and with it left all sense of consciousness, which faded into silent slumber.