

Shifter Sisters: Sex and the Single Werewolf
Sierra Dafoe

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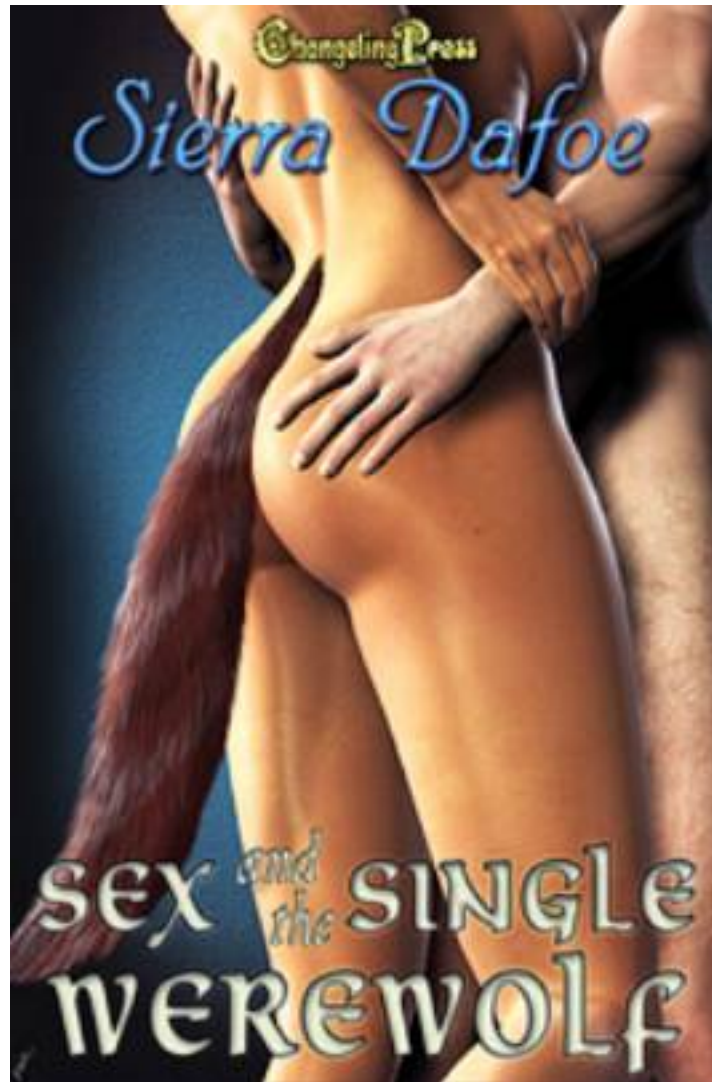
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Cover Artist: Bryan Keller



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Shifter Sisters: Sex and the Single Werewolf
Sierra Dafoe

One's a canine. One's a cat. And one's a vampire who hates the sight of blood. Together they're the Shifter Sisters, a hard-rocking band of misfits who stand by each other when the chips are down -- no matter how much the fur might fly the rest of the time!

Luna, the band's drummer and a werewolf by birth, has a talent for hooking up with men who only let her down. But she never gives up hope or her faith in romance, and when a sweet, sexy stranger catches her eye, Lu is convinced she's finally found The One.

But how are you supposed to land the man of your dreams when you really *do* turn into a bitch at "that time of the month"? And can you ever find true love while hiding half of who you are?

Chapter One

The stage lights beat down. Everything beyond them was a haze. Lu's sticks blurred on the drums as she drove the beat behind Tori's bass line. She lived for this, the rhythm pounding in her blood, her body totally immersed in the needs of the music, her mind disengaged, floating, silent...

Man, she *loved* it when they did Melissa Etheridge with Tori's strong contralto belting out the lyrics and Persia filling in riffs on the keyboard. The audience stomped, whistled, and burst into applause as Tori brought the song to a close.

"Thank you! Thank you, everyone!"

Lu's leather wristbands kept her hands pretty dry, but the sweat was rolling into her eyes, stinging. She shook her head sharply, sending beads of sweat flying, then paused to push her shaggy brown hair back from her face -- and saw Persia sidle out from behind the keyboard, sliding the strap of her bubblegum-pink Stratocaster over her head. *Oh, Christ. Here we go again.*

Sure enough, the all too familiar rockabilly riff sang out through the smoky nightclub. Lu scowled at Tori who rolled her eyes resignedly before picking up the bass line. Sighing her exasperation, Lu picked up her sticks as Persia moved to the center mike and launched, for the gazillionth time, into the Stray Cats' signature song.

"I don't bother chasing mice around..."

Persia's breathy, Marilyn-esque purr invariably got on Lu's last nerve. That shit was tired three decades ago -- but damned if the guys in the crowd didn't still lap it up, wolf-whistling and cheering as Persia strutted and preened, her curvy little body jiggling in all the right places.

Those same men falling all over the platinum-blond sex kitten never seemed to notice *her*, Luna thought. Well, the hell with them, anyway. Not every guy in the world was intimidated by her height, or her bulging drummer's biceps. Some guys even liked them.

Rick, for example.

Lu could feel herself grinning like an idiot, but she didn't care. While one part of her mind kept the beat moving behind Persia's baby-doll croon, the rest was busy picturing Rick's naked body, with his weightlifter's arms that made hers look downright scrawny, his broad, ripped torso and thick, insistent cock.

Oh, yeah. That man could fuck like a steam train. And if she was lucky...

Tori's warning glance brought her back to the present, and Lu realized abruptly she was lagging behind on the beat. Turning her attention back to her kit, Lu dropped to a simple two-click while Persia pinched out a half-assed guitar solo.

Jesus! Why couldn't she just stick to the keyboards, for Christ's sake? Not that the crowd seemed to care, Lu thought sourly. She'd seen Persia wrap men around her little finger so tight it was a wonder they didn't squeak. And there she was, at it again, rolling her shoulders and fluttering her lashes, letting go of the guitar long enough to trail a hand down her plump little thigh as she sang the last chorus.

Finally.

Lu brought her sticks down with a crash, then flipped them to feather out a hiss on the high hat as the male portion of the audience, at least, roared its approval. Persia winked and threw them a kiss as Tori stepped back up to the microphone.

"Thank you! We're the Shifter Sisters, everybody! Thank you and good night!"

The stage lights went out. Lu reached for her sports bottle and squirted water down the back of her neck as Tori started unplugging cords and Persia, characteristically, wandered down off the stage to be swallowed immediately by a throng of fans.

"There she goes again." Luna nodded toward the crowd.

“God damn it!” The raven-haired bass player looked up in exasperation. “Persia!”

Persia glanced back, waved airily, and disappeared toward the bar. Tori scowled after her, her hands propped on her slender hips. “Well, she better come back for her keyboard. I am *not* lugging that damn thing out to the van for her again.”

“Yeah,” Lu snorted, “you always say that.” Ignoring Tori’s glare, she stood, stretched, and wiped the sweat from her neck before starting to break down her kit.

By the time she had her drums and cymbals packed away in their cases, the house lights were on and Persia had returned with a trio of burly, grinning college boys she’d recruited to haul her equipment for her. They carried everything out to the dock and loaded the keyboard and mike stands into the van as Persia flounced, managing to look incapable of carrying so much as a microphone. Disgusted, Lu muscled her drums into the van by herself while the boys hovered around Persia like bees around honeysuckle.

More fools they if they think she’ll even give them the time of day.

Lu grinned. Persia was like one of those hair-loss commercials -- always promising way more than she ever delivered. But, just like the faux products the commercials advertised, the men kept buying, and buying...

What the hell *was* it about that damn chubby blonde, anyway? Not that she’d ever want to be like Persia! Yeech. The very thought made her hackles stand up. But still...

Lu sighed. It’d be nice to have a guy falling all over *her* like that.

Tori shoved her Fender’s case behind the seat, looked over at Persia with a grimace, and turned back to Lu. “You coming?”

“No, I, uh... I think I’ll walk home.”

Tori raised an eyebrow, then glanced out at the moonlight pouring down just beyond the loading dock. “You sure? It’s kind of late.”

Lu shrugged. “It’s not *that* late. Besides, I’ll strangle her if I come home now.”

“Be my guest,” Tori muttered, slamming the back doors of the van shut. “Persia!”

Persia neatly sidestepped her eager entourage as Tori slid behind the wheel of the van and ducked into the passenger’s seat. She waved gaily to the boys as the van pulled out. “Goodnight, sweeties!”

They waved back, grinning -- too dumb, in Lu’s opinion, to even resent being used. Jesus!

Disgusted, she turned on her heel and walked away.

* * *

Twenty minutes later, Lu stood on the sidewalk outside Rick’s building, looking up. His apartment was on the third floor. The windows were dark, and Lu hesitated, arguing with herself.

C’mon, Lu, he’s in bed already. And you were the one who told him you couldn’t come over. Besides, you’ve only been seeing each other for three weeks -- that’s hardly long enough to go showing up at a man’s door in the middle of the night.

Yeah, but what if he *wanted* company? And he’d sounded disappointed on the phone when she’d told him she was busy. Besides, nothing ventured, nothing gained, right?

But the entire building was absolutely silent around her as she climbed the stairs. The long third-floor hallway was almost pitch black. Luna stood outside Rick’s apartment door, her heart pounding in her chest. Hesitantly, she raised her hand, tapped once lightly, then cursed herself for a coward.

C’mon, if you’re going to knock, then knock, damn it!

She rapped harder, and the door swung open. She stared down at it blankly. It must not have been latched all the way -- she hadn’t knocked *that* hard. Stepping into the darkened living room, she whispered nervously, “Rick?”

Soft silver moonlight trickled from the window in the narrow hall leading to his bedroom. Ahead of her she could hear low, murmuring noises. The TV must be on -- which meant he was awake.

A slow, lazy warmth unfolded between Lu’s thighs as she imagined him, propped up against the pillows, his hard torso gleaming in the light of the TV. Smiling, she padded to his door, and paused as she heard a low moan.

A distinctly *feminine* moan.

Ah, shit.

Maybe he's watching porn, Lu thought frantically. *Maybe he's in there, lying in bed with his hand wrapped around his cock, thinking of me and watching porn...*

Yeah, right. She should leave. Right now. She knew it. But instead she pushed open the bedroom door.

There *was* a hand gliding up and down his shaft -- the only problem was, it wasn't Rick's. His were busy plunging themselves, fore and aft, between a pair of soft, widespread thighs. The woman lying beneath him craned her neck up, engulfing the tip of his cock with her lips as she rubbed the shaft eagerly, not even stopping when Rick lifted his head from between her thighs, saw Lu in the doorway, and froze with one finger deep in Blowjob Girl's rectum.

Lu stared, feeling her heart drop like an elevator in freefall -- cable snapped, overrides failed, passengers screaming all the way down...

Congratulations, Lu. You sure know how to pick 'em.

God damn it! She turned abruptly in the doorway, and heard Rick lurch from the bed behind her. "Lu? Lu, wait a second!"

In the hallway, she paused, biting back tears as Rick stumbled out of the bedroom, his broad naked body outlined in moonlight. "Lu, it's not what you think. She's just an old girlfriend, baby, she doesn't mean anything to me --" An outraged shriek from the bedroom greeted his words.

"It's not what I think, huh?" Lu laughed bitterly, turning to face him, feeling fury start to simmer somewhere under her heartbreak. "What I think, Romeo, is that you couldn't keep it in your pants for one single night."

"Look, Lu, she just showed up; it's not like I invited her here!"

Lu could feel her nostrils flaring. "What do you think, I'm stupid? Or do you just not know the word *no*?"

"Lu..."

"Forget it. Just forget it." Whirling away, she stormed toward the door, wanting desperately to break something.

"God damn it, Lu!"

Coming up behind her, Rick grabbed her arm. As his hand closed on her biceps, the rage inside her boiled over in one blinding rush.

Oh, shit.

Some small part of her mind watched, horrified as her control snapped like a twig. Looking down, Lu saw black, silky hair spread like wildfire down her muscled arms, felt the talons spring out with an almost audible snap.

Shit oh shit oh shit...

With a desperate heave, she tore herself from his grasp, threw open the door, and fled into the blessed darkness of the hall.

Naked, Rick stormed out after her. "Damn it, Lu, talk to me!"

Silence greeted him, and disgusted, he turned back toward his apartment. "Fine. Be that way. Goddamn insecure bitch."

A growl rumbled out of the darkness.

"Lu?" Rick froze, peering uncertainly into the darkness. "Yeah, real cute, Lu. Go fuck yourself."

The growl rose to a snarl.

Rick blanched, then threw back his shoulders in typical masculine bravado. "Oh, give me a break, you fucking psycho *cunt*!"

At that, something lunged out of the darkness, roaring straight at him in a whirlwind of flashing teeth and fur, and Rick's eyes widened in sudden terror. "Shit!"

He bolted for his apartment, stumbled in his haste, landed heavily on one knee, threw himself forward -- and screamed as ivory-white fangs chomped down on his naked butt.

Chapter Two

Wearily, Lu pushed open the door of the apartment she shared with Persia and Tori. Persia was sprawled on the white sofa, simultaneously leafing through a magazine and painting her toenails a revolting fuchsia pink. Without looking up from the page, she said, "Hey, Lu. Here's one for you. 'Top Ten Signs You Really *Do* Turn into a Bitch at That Time of the Month'."

"Oh, go shred a rug, Persia."

Smirking, Persia glanced up at Lu -- and vaulted straight into the air. The nail polish went flying, spraying across the white cushions. Magazines tumbled from the sofa as she tore back and forth across the room, shrieking at the top of her lungs, "Red alert! Red alert!"

Tori ran in from the kitchen, her hands still in oven mitts. "Jesus! What?"

Flinging out an arm, Persia pointed at Lu, standing with her clothes in tatters and her face spattered with blood.

"Red alert! Red alert! Red alert!"

Her screeches drilled through Lu's skull, which was already pounding. Simultaneously, she and Tori both snapped, "Persia, shut up!"

Persia froze mid-shriek. Slitting her sapphire-blue eyes at them, she sniffed. "Well, if you're going to be *that* way about it..."

With a huff, she turned toward the hallway, but Tori blocked her exit. "Uh-uh, Per. Not till you clean this mess up."

"What?" Persia stared in utter disbelief. "It wasn't me! If she hadn't burst in here, dripping in blood --"

Tori pulled off the oven mitts and slapped them down on the coffee table. "I don't care. It's your nail polish. *You* clean it up. Now, before it sets."

With a look of complete disgust, Persia stalked back to the sofa, knelt down beside it, and made a great show of dabbing desultorily at the mess with a handful of Kleenex. Tori folded her arms. "Fine, but if I have to get it cleaned professionally, it's coming out of your pay."

Sulking, Persia pushed back to her feet and headed for the bathroom for cleaning supplies. As soon as she left the room, Tori turned to Lu and asked quietly, "Well? *Is* it a red alert?"

Lu slumped back against the apartment door and shook her head. "I don't think so. The hall was pretty dark..."

Then she laughed bitterly. "Besides, what guy is really gonna believe the chick he's been nailing is a werewolf?"

Tori raised an eyebrow. "Are we going to be seeing this on the evening news?"

"What's to see?" Lu shrugged. "'Man bit in ass by rabid dog -- film at eleven.'"

Persia, just coming back in with a bucket and bottle of Pine-Sol, stopped short. "You bit him in the ass?" Her eyes widened with something that might have been respect. "Well, I guess being a dog's good for *something*." She plumped back to her knees by the couch and started scrubbing.

"I told you it was too late to be out," Tori scolded, bending to pick up the scattered magazines.

"C'mon, Tor! It's four days till full moon. I would have been fine, if..."

"If what?" Tori checked, looking at Lu warily.

It was Persia who answered, shrugging her soft little shoulders. "If he hadn't cheated on her, duh. Get a clue, Victoria."

"Stay out of this, Per. And I thought we agreed to give 'Stray Cat Strut' a rest."

"But Tori, it's my *trademark*!" Persia wailed.

Tori ignored her. "So is that what happened?" Lu nodded. Sighing, Tori sank into one of the armchairs and reached for a cigarette.

Luna watched her with an admiration that stopped just short of envy. Persia might radiate sex like a cat shedding

fur, but Tori was stunning. Tall and statuesque, with alabaster skin that glowed beneath her raven-black hair, and cool gray eyes that looked out at the world with far more experience than any one woman should have. She herself was just big. Big and gangly. Rawboned, one short-lived fling had called her -- shoulders way too broad for any proper human female, arms corded with muscle, shaggy brown hair that invariably hung in her eyes... She *did* have boobs though, dammit. Even if she did tend to hide them under flannel shirts and overalls. It was Tori who'd found her, homeless and lost, and taken her under her wing, just as she'd adopted Persia. It was Tori, too, who booked their shows, dealt with the club owners, and handled the cash. Lu would have given just about anything to make her smile.

But that was the one thing Tori almost never did.

As the tears she'd suppressed all the way home started welling up, Lu dropped heavily to a seat on the ottoman.

"God! Is there a man alive who *doesn't* cheat?"

"No," said Persia, just as Tori said, "Yes." Tori glared, then stubbed out her cigarette. "Of course there is, honey. You just..."

"...have to stop picking losers," Persia interjected snidely. She threw her hands up before Tori could protest. "I know! I know! I'm going."

Leaving the cleaning supplies strewn across the carpet, she flounced out of the room. "Well, at least the sofa's clean." Tori sighed. "And she's right, you know."

Lu could feel her face crumple. "I know. It's just that..."

"Just that you invariably throw yourself at any man who shows the slightest interest. Oh, Lu."

The black-haired beauty came and sat beside her, sliding an arm around Lu as she dropped her head onto Tori's shoulder. "Does it really matter so much, Lu? There's worse things in the world than not having a man, you know. I don't."

"I know. But I'm not *like* you, Tori. I'm not even like Persia."

"Thank God," Tori murmured.

"She doesn't need *anybody*."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that, Lu."

"Well, she acts like she doesn't. And I do." Lu's tears spilled out afresh, hot and bitter. "I do. I'm so tired of being alone, Tor."

"I know, baby. I know." Tori held Luna, gently stroking her shaggy brown hair. "And you'll find the right one someday, Lu, someone who's real, and honest, and caring..."

"And doesn't mind if his girlfriend turns into a wolf. Yeah. Sure." Dejected, Lu hung her head. Tori sat, silently holding her hand.

* * *

Through a haze of sweat, Lu gazed out at the audience as her arms pistoned, laying down a hard, heavy beat on the toms.

Geno's was packed tonight -- even more crowded than it had been the night before. The crowd seemed to blend into one loud, happy mass of humanity, dancing, laughing, flirting...

Watching from behind her drum kit, Lu felt a hopeless longing in the pit of her stomach. They made it look so easy. Yeah, okay, she knew it wasn't really -- was love *ever* easy? But it was damned near impossible when you were a... a...

Furiously, Lu forced her thoughts in another direction.

Why was she always such a doormat? She knew what she was doing, watching the crowd -- she was looking for Rick, hoping he'd magically show up.

How pathetic was that? And what if he did show up -- then what? Did she really think he was going to apologize? Would she even take him back, if he did?

Well, yeah. She probably would. All she could think of was the feel of him, his big burly body moving on top of her, inside her, fucking her with an enthusiasm which Lu realized had nothing to do with *her*.

The truth of that hurt. But how many guys would line up to date a five-foot-ten werewolf, anyway? Lu knew the answer to that. She scowled as she looked back at the crowd. What would it be like to be on the other side of those lights? To be *normal*? She couldn't even imagine it. All her life she'd watched the women around her, the way they'd giggled and smiled and bitched, taking so many things for granted it made Lu almost sick with envy.

She'd give anything to be one of them.

Angrily, Lu crashed the cymbals, meeting Persia's final chord as they finished the set and Tori stepped up to the microphone. Before she'd even finished thanking the audience for coming, Lu was on her feet, breaking down her kit.

"What the hell's your hurry?" Persia hissed as Lu shoved by her, humping her stuff off the stage. Lu didn't bother to answer.

She had everything piled on the loading dock by the time Tori pulled the van up, jumping down and opening the cargo door before it had even rolled completely to a stop. She could feel Tori watching her as she shoved her cases and stands into the van.

"Lu..."

The note of worry in Tori's voice scraped against her already-raw nerves. "Goddammit, Tori, I'm just going for a walk, is that okay with you? I am *not* going to Rick's, I am *not* getting in trouble, I'm just going for a walk! Okay?"

Tori raised her hands in surrender. "Okay."

But Lu could feel Tori gazing uncertainly after her as she strode down the alley and into the night.

* * *

The moon glowed down, fat and heavy -- but not full, not yet. Lu knew the difference instinctively -- it was ingrained in every molecule of her being. That round white orb tugged at her, making her feel restless, irritable... She paced through the streets of Portland, her long legs swinging in a ground-eating pace. Striding through the Old Port, she watched with bitter envy as a guy dragged a girl into a searing embrace, leaning in a shadowed doorway. They were so absorbed in their kiss they didn't even notice her as she passed by.

Damn it! Was it too much to ask for? Too much to want? Just a little affection, a little human contact...

Except you're not human, Lu.

Shoving her fists into the pockets of her overalls, Lu hurried on.

She liked Portland actually. It was small enough to feel cozy, large enough to slide under the radar. And sliding under the radar was what the three of them did best -- they'd turned it into an art over the years.

Tucson, Atlanta, Oklahoma City... That'd been dire, ten months of nothing but Loretta and Patsy and Wynonna -- but it had paid the bills. Still, Lu had been almost grateful when Persia had -- like a goddamn fluffhead -- shifted right in front of the city fire marshal. Twenty minutes later they'd had their gear stored and been on their way to Portland, Maine.

She found herself walking through a quiet residential area, the kind of neighborhood that had tricycles parked neatly beside wide front porches, and special mailboxes for the Sunday paper. Lights were on here and there, and Lu peered into them as she passed. Here, a woman in a terrycloth robe lifted her crying child from its crib and held it close, stroking its downy hair. There, an old man, sleepless, sat in front of a television with a cat curled on his lap. His gnarled old hands stroked it gently, and straining her ears, Lu could hear the cat's purr. In another, two young lovers sprawled on a couch, locked in a kiss that curled Lu's toes, watching.

Just life. Just ordinary, everyday, *human* life.

And everything she was never going to have.

Lu stood, feeling the anguish inside her tighten like a band around her chest. She wanted to break something, to swear aloud, to run wildly through the night, outpacing the longing in her breast...

Then her ears caught the soft strum of a guitar somewhere nearby.

It was coming from a big old brick Victorian just ahead of her. Peering around the side of the building, she could

see a narrow alley between the house and the property fence choked with bushes -- and the warm spill of light from a window halfway down the side.

Whoever it was, they were good. Really good. Intrigued, Lu stepped toward the alley -- and a cat exploded from beneath the bushes, startling her. She staggered back as the cat raced across the yard, paused at the curb to hiss indignantly at Lu, and streaked off, yowling, into the darkness.

Luna sighed. She never could fool cats.

What was she doing here? Wandering around the city, peering into homes that weren't hers and never would be. She should just go back to her apartment and forget it.

But something about that deft, intricate tune drew her. And throwing scruples aside, Lu crept between the overgrown rhododendrons, cursing silently at each snapping twig.

Finally, half crouched in the bushes, she raised her head cautiously -- and froze, as suddenly and completely as if turned to stone.

Chapter Three

Jesus!

Lu stared, swallowing convulsively, forgetting for a moment where she was or how she'd got there. Just inside the window she could see a small, sparsely furnished apartment -- a folding table, a stack of milk crates holding books and amplifier cords, a narrow bed...

And, sitting on it, the most gorgeous man she had ever seen.

Dressed in nothing but a faded pair of jeans, he sat, his long, agile fingers moving over the neck of a guitar. The music spilling from it was as entrancing as he was; a haunting, complex melody that sounded vaguely Irish. He looked Irish too, with that mass of unruly black curls almost brushing his shoulders, and the sort of creamy-pale skin that only Irishmen seemed to have. A medallion dangled from a short thong about his neck, glinting in the light as he paused and leaned forward, jotting something in the spiral-bound notebook that lay open next to him on the bed. Then he went back to strumming the guitar.

Lu swallowed as she watched the tendons flex and release in his powerful forearms. They were dusted with a fine, silky black hair, and there were freckles sprinkled across his shoulders. He wasn't as massive as Rick had been, not by a long shot -- Rick had been built like the proverbial brick shithouse. This man was lean, lean and rangy, with broad, sturdy shoulders and tight, bulging biceps.

He was singing softly to himself, but even so Lu could hear the way his voice rumbled in his throat, deep and warm -- and God, was it sexy. Her nipples hardened under the bib of her overalls just listening to him. He plucked a last chord from the guitar and fell silent, letting his hand dangle idly over the strings as he sat, staring intently at nothing, his black hair tumbling around his quiet face.

Then, with a sigh he put the guitar aside and stood. Outside, in the shadows, Lu sucked in an involuntary breath. Whoever he was, he was built like a young god. His body tapered, all lean, hard muscle, from those broad shoulders to a deliciously narrow waist. Everything about him seemed carved of marble; the pronounced curve of his collarbones, the expanse of his chest, his tight, rippled abdomen with that enticing dip of navel. She could see the sensuous swell of muscle along his hipbone just above the faded denim of his jeans. And the same silky hair that dusted his forearms trickled in a black, beguiling line down the plane of his stomach.

Lu was suddenly aware of the dampness in her crotch, the hot, hungry thud of desire in her groin. God! How she wanted to trace that line of hair with one finger, follow its softness down to the hardness below...

Placing the guitar carefully in its stand, the man crossed to the window, and Lu slunk back further into the bushes. He stood, leaning against the frame as he stared out at the darkness.

He couldn't see her, could he? He certainly didn't appear to. There was a heaviness about him, a brooding quality that made her wonder what he was thinking. Who *was* he, anyway? The room was so bare it hardly even looked like he lived there. There wasn't even so much as a poster on the walls.

Yeah, now there's a sign of stability, Lu. Christ! You really are attracted to losers.

But he didn't look like a loser. His face, shadowed softly by the light behind him, seemed both gentle and resolute. High, heavy cheekbones gave his face a look of determination, while his full, curved lips were expressively sensual. And his eyes... His eyes...

Lu pulled her thoughts back together with an effort. Blue. They were blue. A rich, deep cobalt, so dark it seemed almost black. Like an ocean, she thought distractedly, like deep, open ocean...

What would it be like to have them looking at her? Lu gulped at the thought, almost grateful they weren't. He was looking out absently, his gaze turned inward, his thoughts appearing to be miles and miles away.

Then he ran a hand across his chest, brushing lightly at his nipples. Lu swallowed, feeling the warmth in her crotch flare upward. Slowly, he stroked his hand down the flat of his stomach. Lu watched, entranced, as his

fingers trailed along that trickle of dark hair leading down from his belly button, and slid, with his palm flat against his belly, into his jeans.

Oh, Christ.

He wasn't really going to... to do *that* in front of her, was he? She shouldn't be here. She shouldn't be seeing this. It was wrong. It was spying. It was...

God, it was arousing!

She'd close her eyes, that's all. She just wouldn't watch -- no *way* was she going to watch as his strong, agile fingers unbuttoned his jeans, or as he slid the zipper downward, uncovering the hard, shiny curve of his glans. Nope, she wasn't going to watch as he revealed his cock inch by sweet, delectable inch -- she was so close she could see the hot, heavy pulse of the veins lacing its thickness.

And she *definitely* wasn't going to watch as he slid his hand lower, cupping his balls.

They were full and hard, their curved, heavy weight brushing against his stroking fingers. She could see the soft, dark hairs, and the way the pebbled skin tightened still further under his gentle touch. She could almost imagine the weight of them resting against her palm -- they'd be warm, she knew, warm and velvety and heavy with semen.

What would it feel like to lick them, suck them softly, roll them between her fingers as her tongue danced over the base of his shaft? Closing her eyes, she imagined herself on the far side of the glass, kneeling at his feet, tasting the sweet, salty muskiness of his balls on her tongue. She could practically hear his low groan as she took them in her mouth...

No. He really *had* groaned. Startled, Lu looked up -- but he hadn't seen her. In fact, his eyes were closed now, his head tilted back, revealing the muscular column of his neck. Then he wrapped his other hand around his throbbing shaft.

Oh God.

Her cunt was so slick it was soaking right through her panties. She could feel the seam of her overalls, dragging against her swollen clit. Surreptitiously, Lu rocked her hips forward increasing the pressure, and felt a wave of hunger so deep she reeled, collapsing forward against the hard brick below his window.

Very, very cautiously, she tilted her head back and looked up.

Oh, Christ. He *was* looking down, right at her!

No. No, he wasn't. It only looked that way -- in fact, he was watching his hand as it clenched his shaft, dragging the skin slowly back and forth.

Staring up from the darkness, Lu imagined he really *was* looking down at her, *into* her, those cobalt-blue eyes glowing with a deep, smoldering desire. Hell, she could fantasize, couldn't she? Watching his fingers trail along his pulsing shaft, she longed to feel them on her aching breasts, caressing them, squeezing them...

His jaw was lax, his eyes heavy and intent as he watched himself masturbating. Slowly, teasing himself, he stroked a finger through the drop of moisture at its tip, coating his cockhead. Raising a hand to his mouth, he moistened his fingers with saliva, then ran them again over the thick, swollen glans, pinching it lightly.

Lu almost came right then.

Quivering, she held herself back, gasping as she fought the white heat throbbing in her groin. She didn't know him -- and she was never *going* to know him, Lu reminded herself sternly.

But for this one night she wanted to make love with him, if only in her imagination. And this one night it was going to be perfect.

Ignoring the ache that flared deep in her groin, Lu forced herself to wait as he fondled his cockhead, running his fingers down around it so the tiny slit in the tip gaped, showing a pearly drop of precome. Lu swallowed, staring, completely entranced by his hand moving over his shaft, dragging the silken skin up and down his swollen cock. But when he lowered his other hand to his balls and squeezed them, groaning, Lu couldn't resist undoing the side buttons of her baggy overalls and slipping her hand inside.

It was so easy to imagine that it was really happening. That she was there, kneeling at his feet, no glass between

them, nothing separating them... He would look down, just as he was doing now, would wrap his hand around his throbbing shaft, caressing it, placing the very tip of it against her lips, feeding it to her slowly as his eyes went dark with need...

Tilting her head back, Lu pictured it, the way that hard, velvety head would feel pushing into her mouth, the salty taste of his come seeping from the bulging tip. Moaning, she pressed softly against her clit, feeling her peak quivering, just a hair's breadth away.

Fighting for control, she held herself still, drinking in the sight of him, his head thrown back now, his thick coal-black curls tumbling down against his shoulders as they flexed and bunched, his hands squeezing that gorgeous cock, fondling his balls, tormenting himself. His fist dragged up and down, savaging his cock, and he groaned, the sound low and thrilling.

Oh, God, he was so close! She could see it in the way his balls tightened further, drawing up against the base of his cock, the skin stretched and shiny with the weight of his approaching orgasm. His hand moved faster, raking his shaft, and Lu stared, feeling saliva pool in her mouth.

Gasping, she clung to her control, feeling her blood beat in time with his thrusting fist. He was looking down again, his pupils dilated so far his eyes looked as black as his hair, his gaze fixed intently on his rock-hard shaft. His mouth moved, whispering something, and then his face clenched in ecstasy. Jets of come spurted from the gaping slit of his cock. Panting, Lu leaned forward, imagining that hot, salty fluid bursting into her mouth, across her breasts, soaking her...

God, *yes!* She moaned as her orgasm shook her, spearing straight through her in waves of white fire. Her cunt squeezed tight, longing to feel every inch of that long, thick cock inside her, splitting her open, driving into her again and again as she shuddered and groaned, her cries spilling from her as freely as her juices...

Oh, shit! Lu, you stupid...

Yanking her hands from her overalls, Lu clamped them over her mouth. Scrambling backward, she ducked beneath the bushes, holding herself motionless as the man peered out the window, a perplexed expression on his face. Lu barely dared breathe until at last, with a small shake of his head, he turned away.

A few moments later, the light in the window went out.

Quivering, Lu stayed crouched where she was, too terrified to move... and then realized she didn't *want* to move. She didn't want to leave, didn't want to walk the long, solitary path back to her place.

She didn't want to leave *him*.

It didn't matter who he was. It didn't matter that she'd never meet him. He was perfect, and beautiful -- and for a few precious minutes, he'd been hers.

Even if he didn't know it.

She wanted him, Lu admitted. She wanted him with a fervency greater than anything she'd ever felt. She wanted to curl up on the dry leaves outside his window and stay right there, as close to him as she could get. She would give anything -- *anything* -- to belong to this man, to be able to touch him, kiss him...

Keep him.

Which was, of course, impossible.

Her vision blurred with tears, and Lu crawled silently from beneath the bushes, her heart aching like a cold stone in her chest as she crept away.

Chapter Four

As her fingers moved unerringly over the heavy strings of her bass, Tori watched Luna from the corner of her eye. Lu's eyes were closed, her face contorted in concentration as she beat at the drums with a fury that had Tori worried.

Something had happened that night. Something more than just the blowout with Rick. For the past four weeks Lu had lived in a daze, dragging herself to gigs, to the grocery store, basically not moving unless Tori made her. The rest of the time she just lay on her bed, staring blankly at a wall Tori was certain she didn't even see.

The only time she seemed to come alive anymore was behind her drums -- and then she came alive with a clenched, desperate energy that was terrifying to watch.

This wasn't like her. Through all her failed relationships, Lu had always bounced back, jumping like a puppy at the next man who offered her any affection whatsoever. As annoying as that endless optimism had been, like watching a train wreck happening over and over, it sure beat the hell out of this -- whatever it was.

What had *happened* to her?

Lu was a mess, Tori thought candidly. Her shaggy hair was stringy, matted with oil. Her green overalls bagged over a tight-fitting gray crop-top. She hadn't even, Tori noted, bothered to tie her boots.

The song ended, and Tori stepped back from the mike, debating whether to end the set early. *Somebody* had to talk to Lu... and "somebody" invariably meant her. But before she could signal the others, Persia had slipped her Strat over her neck and was picking out that goddamn Stray Cats riff again.

Tori gritted her jaw -- but Luna did more than that. She thrust to her feet so abruptly she knocked one of her snares over, and the clatter cut Persia short. A whine of feedback seared the sudden silence as Lu stalked across the stage toward the wing.

Tori and Persia stared at each other helplessly, frozen in shock. But halfway there Lu paused, then reached suddenly for Tori's Ovation. Tori could hear the audience shifting uncertainly, and she moved quickly, dragging a stool out for Lu -- who didn't even look up as she took the offered seat -- and reaching for the mike stand to move it closer. Lu shook her head.

She was right, of course -- giving Lu a microphone was like pouring gasoline on a forest fire. She didn't sing often. Tori used to encourage her to, thinking that Lu's reluctance was just nerves. When Lu snarled at her and threatened to quit the band if she didn't back off, Tori finally figured out that it wasn't simply stage fright. She watched nervously as Lu fiddled with the tuning knobs, bent low over the guitar, her face utterly void of expression as she plucked lightly at the strings.

What was going on in that shaggy head of hers?

Finally Lu opened her mouth, launching into an achingly gorgeous Sass Jordan tune. Shivers ran up Tori's spine as Lu's rich, haunting voice rolled out, stilling the restless crowd, seizing them in a velvet and unbreakable grip. *Jesus*, Tori thought. *If Lu sang all the time...*

If Lu sang all the time, they'd be famous. Which would carry problems of its own. But she wouldn't. She *hated* her voice -- and Tori knew why.

It was the voice of the wolf.

Softly, Tori picked up the bass line, saw Persia move behind the drums to add a quiet backbeat. Not that Luna needed either of them. Hell, she didn't even need the guitar. Her voice throbbed in the air as she poured every ounce of her grief and longing into the simple, beautiful song. *"I want to believe in something for real. I want to believe in something I feel..."*

The crowd was utterly silent, mesmerized even as Tori was herself. Tears welled in her eyes as Lu's voice soared upward, climbing on a wave of need and yearning so palpable, so poignant, it made Tori's throat ache.

Then, from somewhere in the audience, Tori felt a strange, echoing intensity. Lifting her head, she scanned the crowd, looking over their still, upturned faces.

There. At the bar. Broad shoulders hunched over a pint of beer, a mass of curly black hair -- and dark eyes that watched Lu with a hungry concentration. He was listening with an intensity that was almost uncanny. But he wasn't *just* listening, Tori thought. He wanted something.

What? And who was he?

She was just being paranoid, Tori told herself sternly -- but she was oddly relieved when he rose, paying for his beer and quietly slipping out of the bar at the end of Lu's song.

The audience was absolutely silent, still caught in the thrall of the music as Lu placed the Ovation back in its stand and strode off the stage. Slowly, a smatter of applause rippled through the club. A single, shrill whistle rose. As if that was some sort of signal, the entire crowd burst into cheers, so overwhelming Tori doubted they could even hear her as she spoke into the mike. "Thank you. Thank you, everyone! We're the Shifter Sisters. Thank you, and good night!"

Then, as the entire club shook with their thunderous applause, she and Persia followed Lu off the stage.

* * *

Lu slumped in the hallway that led to the loading dock, her hands jammed deep in her pockets, her back against the wall. She could feel the shouts and clapping within vibrating through her shoulder blades, but so what? Who cared? She scowled as Tori, coming through the stage door, beamed at her.

"My God, Lu, can you hear them?"

"Yeah," Luna replied morosely. "Like they even know what they're clapping for."

"Lu..."

"Maybe I should just go in there and show them. What do you think?" She glared at Tori challengingly.

Persia's face fell into its usual sulky lines. "I don't know what you're making such a stink about, Lu. We all have to deal with it..."

"No." Lu cut her off. "No, Persia, you don't. *You* get a goddamn choice."

"Well, it's not *my* fault you turn into a goddamn we -- *oof!*" Persia shut up abruptly as Tori threw an elbow in her ribs.

"What?" Lu demanded. Tori was staring at her like she'd sprouted fangs right in front of them. Except...

Except she wasn't. She was staring past her. So was Persia.

"Excuse me, ladies... I don't mean to interrupt..."

Lu turned slowly.

Oh... my... God.

It was him. The man in the window. The man with the guitar. The man who'd... Lu gulped, flushing as a vivid recollection of the last time she'd seen him rushed through her brain.

He seemed puzzled by the trio of stares directed at him, which made Lu only stare harder. Could he really be so oblivious to the way he looked? Coal-black hair tumbling in a mass of curls around his face... his face...

Jesus, he was even more gorgeous up close. He seemed younger somehow tonight -- maybe it was just the small smile playing around the corners of his lips as he looked at them. From the corner of her eye, Luna saw Tori gulp. At that, he ducked his head, abashed by their appreciative stares.

Fucking gorgeous, *and* cute. Hot damn.

"I'm sorry. You're Lu, right?"

After Tori elbowed her twice, Lu remembered to nod.

"I was, ah... I was wondering if I might have a word with you."

Yup. Irish. Just a ghost of a brogue, but there. What else would he be, with skin like warm ivory and that midnight-black hair?

"Uh... sure. Sure." Turning on her heel, Lu strode toward the loading dock. The man followed behind.

"Hey!" Persia shouted after her. "Hey, what about your stuff?"

Luna paused and almost turned back, then grinned as Tori whispered fiercely, “Persia, shut *up*.” Outside, she stopped on the loading dock, looking down into the narrow alley that ran behind the club. The man -- whoever he was -- jumped down to the pavement and held out his arms. Was she supposed to follow? *What the heck?* Reaching down to brace her hands on his shoulders, Lu let him catch her as she dropped to the asphalt, then stood for a second just looking up at him. His hands rested lightly on her waist. A soft wind from the bay tossed his hair, and she realized he was only a few inches taller than her -- six-one, maybe. Or six-two. His lips looked so soft, so warm. All she’d have to do would be tilt her head, and...

“I’m sorry. I’m not usually this forward.” Flashing that self-deprecating, lopsided grin, the man stepped back, dropping his hands from her waist. “But I really do want to talk to you.”

“Yeah.” God, why couldn’t she gather her thoughts? They seemed to scatter in the breeze every time he smiled. And every time she looked away, all she could see was his hand on his cock, stroking it...

Oh, shit. He *had* seen her. What else could this be about? But why hadn’t he just called the cops, then? Why wasn’t she sitting in a jail cell right now, charged with vagrant eyeballing, or something?

She waited, tense and silent, until finally, he cleared his throat. “It’s... Well, I write, you see.” He ran a hand through his hair. “Look, this is... God! Why is this so awkward?”

Maybe because I want to toss you down and rip your clothes off right here in the alley. Or maybe because I watched you jack off, and we both know it.

But he didn’t seem to. He seemed embarrassed, yes, but... “Uh, who are you?”

“Oh, aye, Sean. There’s a fine start. Why don’t you try introducing yourself to the lady?” He threw up his hands in self-disgust. “I’m hopeless at this, you know.”

Lu found her lips twitching in a smile, and ducked her chin to hide it. Well, whatever he wanted, it didn’t appear to be upbraiding her for watching him.

“I... Look, can we walk a bit?” He extended his arm and Lu, bemused, took it. “I’m Sean,” he added as they reached the sidewalk. A gust of wind caught his hair, tossing it. “Sean O’Shaughnessey.”

“You are not!” Staring, Lu dropped his arm. He was putting her on. He had to be.

“Ah, it’s a wicked curse my parents laid on my birth, so it is.” He broadened his brogue on purpose, grinning. “They’re first generation Irish, you know. Never gave a thought to what that name might cost me in grade school.”

“And what did it?”

“A lot of teasing, nothing worse. What’s Lu short for?”

“Luna.”

“That’s a lovely name. The moon. We’re ruled by the moon, you know, we Irishmen. Poets and dreamers, the lot of us.”

Yeah. Try being really ruled by the moon. Lu replied curtly, “Is that so?”

He nodded sagely. “And that’s what I...” He broke off abruptly, glancing down at the ground. His brow wrinkled slightly. Then he dropped to one knee before Lu and reached for her feet.

Startled, she drew back. “What are you doing?”

“Tying your shoes. You’re going to break your neck walking around like that.” Deftly, he knotted the laces of her boot. “Now the other one.”

Lu stood there, looking down at his bent head, all that glossy mass of black curls practically brushing her thigh... She was suddenly conscious of the smell of her own body; the tang of dried sweat from a hard night’s drumming. And he’d taken her arm, while walking? She shuddered. He really *was* a gentleman.

“There, that’s better.” He grinned up at her. A few patrons leaving the club stared, and Sean stood quickly.

“Look, I don’t mean to be rude, but what do you want?” Lu’s voice was harsher than she’d meant it to be. She couldn’t help it. There was something about him, with those high, heavy cheekbones, and those thick sable lashes around eyes that were so deep a blue they looked almost black. His shoulders, broad and angular as he’d bent before her. The strong, graceful column of his neck and those curls, whispering against the collar of his flannel

shirt...

Stop it, Lu!

Never in her life had she wanted a man this bad.

"Well, I don't know quite how to ask this, but..."

My God, was he going to ask her out? Lu's heart beat triple time as she waited, breathless.

Why was she so terrified? It wasn't as if she hadn't ever been on a date before. Well, okay, so maybe "date" wasn't really the right term. She wasn't the kind of girl guys usually asked out to fancy dinners. A movie, sometimes -- she'd usually ended up sitting in the back, feeling her companion's arm slide stealthily around her, knowing the entire second half of the film would be lost in hot breaths and heavy petting.

And she'd never seen anything wrong with that. Until now.

Maybe she did deserve to be taken on a date. A proper date, one that was more than a pit stop on the way to some guy's bed. She'd always been so busy being grateful that anyone would pay her any attention at all, that...

"It's your voice, you see."

"What?" She blinked.

"Well, that was why I wanted to talk to you. I'm a songwriter." He shrugged disparagingly. "Irish. I told you. I'm not very good. But I thought maybe we could get together sometime... I'd love to hear you sing one of my songs."

Lu shook her head, trying to reorient herself. *Of course he's not interested in you! How could he be? Look at yourself, Lu. You're not Persia. You're not Tori. You're built like a fucking linebacker, for Christ's sake. And you haven't washed your hair in...*

"A week," she muttered.

"I'm sorry?"

She looked up at him. Sean O'Shaughnessey. She chuckled sadly. He was way too improbable to be anything but real. Real, and honest, and caring.

And not for you.

Lu sighed. "Sorry. I was just thinking out loud. Sure, we could do that."

"Really?" An amazed smile broke across his face. The brilliance of it hurt, and Lu had to look away. "Great. That's just... Tomorrow? How would tomorrow be?"

"Fine." Lu spoke woodenly, not even hearing herself. Her voice. That's all he was interested in. A dull, familiar anger filled her as she hunched her shoulders and nodded toward the club. "I should get back." Turning abruptly, she started away.

"Uh, Lu? Can I... get your phone number or something?" Sean loped to catch up, and then fell in alongside her, his long strides matching hers. "Or we could just meet somewhere, if you'd rather."

She stopped abruptly, cursing herself for an ass. "Yeah. I'm sorry. You got a pen?"

He did, and she wrote her number down for him, watching as he folded it carefully and put it in his wallet, then stuck the wallet into the back pocket of his jeans. Loose jeans. They hung low on his lean hips. They'd be soft, she bet. Soft against her palm, with warm, hard muscle underneath...

Oh, Christ, Lu! Stop it!

She dragged her gaze up from his crotch, and found herself looking into his midnight-blue eyes. She was struck again by how near in height they were, how easy it would be to just tilt her head and...

Except that it *wasn't* easy. It wasn't easy at all.

She stepped back, and Sean ducked his head, grinning a bit -- not at her, though. At something he was thinking, maybe. It wasn't a happy grin.

Suddenly, she remembered how he'd looked that night almost four weeks before -- grim, somehow. Almost melancholy. Shoving his hands in his pockets, he shrugged, his shoulders moving easily under his shirt.

"I told you, Lu, I'm hopeless at this." He smiled again wryly. "See you tomorrow?" Lu nodded numbly. "Good. I'll call."

Turning, he strode away. After a moment, he started whistling. Lu just stared after him, hugging herself against the ocean breeze, which was growing chill.

Quietly, she whispered, “No, you won’t.”

Chapter Five

“Where the hell have you been all night?” Tori, looking bleary-eyed and cranky, leaped up from an armchair as Lu let herself in. She’d spent the entire night wandering, unable to go home, unable even to make herself go back to the club where Persia and Tori had undoubtedly waited. And waited...

What did it matter where she went? She was still a werewolf. A freak. As she’d sat, finally, on the Eastern Prom, watching the fat, nearly-full moon sink into the west as the sky slowly grew light over Casco Bay, that was the only thing she’d been certain of. And nothing would change it.

Persia was curled on the sofa, half-asleep, but she blinked awake as Tori stalked toward Lu, furious. “Do you know what time it is? You had me worried sick!”

“He tied my boots.”

“Lu, are you even listening to me?”

Crossing the living room, Lu repeated woodenly, “He tied my boots. And he likes my voice. Shit!” She flung herself down onto the sofa. Persia sprang out of the way just in time.

“He tied your boots.”

Lu covered her face with a pillow. “I said that. Twice.”

“So he likes you.”

“No. He likes my voice.”

“Well,” Persia said brightly, “that’s a start.”

“Per!” Abruptly, Luna sat up and fired the pillow across the room in frustration. “Did it ever occur to you I only date losers because I won’t mind losing *them*?”

“Well, *duh*. We were wondering when you were going to figure that out.”

“What?” Lu glared at her and Tori in outrage. Tori’s lips quirked. Sullenly, Lu threw herself back down on the couch and folded her arms. “It doesn’t matter,” she muttered, staring at the ceiling. “It doesn’t matter. He’s not interested in me. He won’t call.”

“He already did.” Tori’s tone was dry. “At eight-thirty this morning.”

“Shit!”

“Yeah,” added Persia, “and if he does it again I’m removing his balls.”

“Oh my God. Oh my God. What’m I gonna do?” Suddenly, Lu couldn’t sit still. She leapt to her feet, running her hands through her oily hair.

“Take a shower for starters,” Persia suggested.

“No, you don’t understand! He’s interested in my voice, not me, and he’s perfect, and I am so *totally* fucked.”

The phone rang. Lu froze. “Oh, fuck.”

Giving her a skeptical glance, Tori moved toward the phone. As her hand closed on the receiver, Lu grabbed her wrist. “Tell him I’m not here. Tell him I’m dead.” Tori just raised an eyebrow, and Lu let go. “Tell him I’ve changed my mind.”

Tori picked up the phone. Lu sidled away, gnawing at a thumbnail.

“Hello? Yes. Yes, she is. No, I don’t think she can come to the phone at the moment. Can she... Oh. Certainly, that’d be... Good. Sure. You know where... Okay, then.” She hung up.

“What? What’d he say?”

Tori looked at her, a speculative light in her gray eyes. Then she started toward the kitchen without replying. Lu shrieked, “Tori!”

“What? Is it all right if I make coffee? And you’re the one who didn’t want to talk to him, remember?”

“I... Fine. Make your damn coffee.” Huffing, Lu dropped to a seat.

Tori affected a rather haughty look. "Thank you." As she disappeared into the kitchen she added casually, "Oh, and you might want to take Persia's suggestion. He's on his way over."

"What?"

As Lu fled toward the bathroom, frantically tugging off her clothes, she heard Persia murmur, "Wow. I didn't think she could move that fast."

* * *

Lu, wrapped in an oversized beach towel, her hair dripping, froze when the doorbell rang eighteen minutes later. She shot one panicked look at Persia who uncurled herself lazily from the couch to answer the door, and dashed into her room. Slamming the bedroom door shut behind her, Lu leaned against it, panting.

This is ridiculous! Get a grip, Lu -- he's not interested in you, okay? Your voice. He's just interested in your voice. That's all. It's okay.

She didn't stop to question why that thought should relieve her, but it did. Slowly her thundering heartbeat eased, catching only once or twice as she heard the muffled tones of his rich tenor voice from the kitchen. Tossing on the first clean clothes that came to hand, she padded through the living room toweling her hair.

Tori looked up from the stove where she was scrambling eggs. Persia sat at the table, her plump little calves wrapped around her chair leg and her chin resting on her folded hands as she stared up at Sean with those huge sapphire eyes. Sean himself was fetching plates from the cabinet under Tori's direction. A white paper bakery bag sat in the middle of the table.

"Y'know, it's a lovely day out, ladies," Sean said, reaching for the drawn window shade. "Why don't I --"

"No!" Three voices shouted in unison. He dropped his hand, taken aback.

Tori gazed disconcerted at Lu, leaving her to fumble for an explanation. "It's... Tori. She has an eye condition. Very sensitive to sunlight."

"Ah. I'm sorry."

Tori nodded. "Don't mention it. A minor annoyance, that's all." She grimaced, and stirred the eggs.

"And good morning." Sean turned toward Lu with a grin. "Croissant?" He opened the white bag, rustling through it as he arranged fluffy fresh-baked croissants on a tray. "We've got almond, strawberry jam, chocolate..." Quick as lightning, Persia's hand darted out and snagged the chocolate one. Sean blinked at her, bemused, as she gazed up at him, doe-eyed, and nibbled daintily at the pastry. "Okay, so no chocolate. Apple?"

"Fine." Lu poured herself a cup of coffee, ignoring Tori's sidelong glance. She was quite proud of herself actually; her hand didn't tremble as she tilted the coffee pot -- not much, anyway; her voice was steady, almost cool, even...

"Is this okay?" Sean asked rather nervously. "I mean, that I dropped by?"

"Sure." Lu shrugged nonchalantly, and took a bite of the croissant he handed her.

It was Tori who got them through breakfast, graciously offering Sean a seat and plying him with questions. Where did he live (Lu already knew that), what did he do for work (he built sailboats and managed apartment buildings), what did he think of the show last night. On that last, Sean managed to choke on a bit of croissant that went down the wrong way during his enthusiastic praises. Persia preened, looking smug, while Tori thumped Sean solidly between the shoulder blades.

At last Tori rose, stretching gracefully. "Well, kiddies, if you'll excuse me, I've got some stuff I have to do. Persia?"

Persia spread butter on a second croissant and blithely ignored her. Under the table, Lu kicked Persia's shins sharply. "Ow! Fine. Fine, I'm going." Sean stood as she rose and stalked to the doorway. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do," she purred over her shoulder.

With a smirk, she followed Tori out of the room. Sean raised an eyebrow playfully. "And what might that be?" "What? What Persia wouldn't do? I've yet to find out." Lu started gathering the dishes and plunked them in the sink.

"Look, Lu, I really didn't mean... I mean, I hope you don't mind my coming over like this."

Lu shrugged as she turned on the faucet. "I don't mind."

"Good." Sean reached for a dishtowel and started drying plates as she washed them. Despite her resolve, her heart thudded painfully every time his hand brushed against hers, or their thighs momentarily pressed against each other. It didn't help any that her cheeks were flaming.

She couldn't for the life of her grasp why he was still there. He seemed uncomfortable, his gaze fixed on his hands as he dried the dishes. Finally, he turned to her, his eyes dark with some emotion she couldn't read. "Lu. See, the thing is, I..."

"Miaow!"

Lu whipped around, water dripping from her wet hands, and glared at the fluffy white cat hunkered on the table.

"Damn it, P -- uh, pussycat! Scat!"

The cat blinked its crystal-blue eyes at her. Then it began sniffing the leftover croissants.

"Hey, you didn't mention you had a cat." Sean grinned and stretched out his hand to scratch behind its ears. It leaned into his caress, purring, and blinked up at Lu with a fatuous smirk. Lu gave it the dirtiest look she could muster.

"It's not mine. I hate cats."

It started licking the pastries. "Now, now," Sean said as he lifted the plate out of its reach. The cat meowed indignantly. "You're already fat enough, pretty." He reached out to caress it again, but the cat, with a snotty expression, swiped at his hand. "Hey!"

"Git!" Lu flicked her hands at it, sending a spray of dishwater in its direction. The cat hissed, leaped from the table, and disappeared.

Sucking his scratches, Sean muttered, "I can almost see your point."

"Yeah. So, you were saying?"

"Oh. Right. I just feel bad about last night. I... Well, you see..."

Despite all her resolutions, Lu felt her heart sink. "That's okay. We don't have to get together. I'm kinda busy these days, anyway." She scrubbed at the glass in her hands rather harder than she'd meant to. The glass shattered.

"Jesus and Mary! Are you all right?" Sean leaped to her side, pulling her hand from the sink, turning it over to inspect the small gash on her palm. "I'd better bandage that."

"No, it's okay." Pulling her hand from his grasp, she wrapped a paper towel over the cut, adding irritably as he reached for her again, "I said leave it, Sean!"

"I'm sorry." He checked, dropping his hands awkwardly to his sides, and then shoving them deep into his pockets. "Maybe this wasn't such a good idea."

"Probably not. We're not exactly early risers, around here." Sean glanced dubiously from her to the wall clock. It was almost eleven. "Thanks for the croissants, though." She held out her hand.

"Yeah. Look, can I at least make up for my untimely intrusion? With some dinner, maybe?"

Lu shook her head quickly as he stepped closer. "You don't have to do that."

"Yes, but I want to. I..." He broke off, glancing over Lu's shoulder. "Our chaperone's back."

Outraged, Lu glared at the cat. It sat on a chair, licking one white, furry paw, and almost seemed to smirk.

Defiantly, she turned back to Sean. "Fine. I'd be delighted."

"Really?" He sounded so surprised that Lu wondered if she'd been meant to say no. Probably. He was just being polite, after all. She glowered at the cat as he continued, "How about tonight? I know a great little Thai place..."

"Sounds great." Lu bit off the words. Oh, what she was going to do to that fat little conniving...

Sean glanced at her, obviously puzzled by her tone, but he nodded. "All right, then. Say eight o'clock?"

"Sure." With an effort, she controlled her seething.

He grinned, a little uncertainly. "Good. I'll just... see myself out." It was almost a question, and Lu nodded.

"Okay."

"Okay, then." Moving toward the door, he brushed against her lightly in passing, and in that brief second of contact, Lu's defenses crumbled. Her body yearned toward him; hips, belly, breasts all responding in a heartbeat

to his nearness, his warmth...

Shit! And she'd agreed to have dinner with him? Was she *nuts*?

"And take care of that hand!" The front door clicked shut, and Lu spun toward the table. "Persia!"

Persia was sitting there, the plate of croissants once again in front of her, scattering crumbs as she pulled the strawberry jam one in two. "Ew. I don't like this kind. It looks like blood. I'd better save it for... Hey Tori!" She looked up, smirking as Tori glided into the kitchen, and thrust the croissant at her, the jam dripping out in crimson drops. "Want a bite?" she asked, smiling maliciously. Tori shuddered, going even paler than usual, and moved quickly to pour a cup of coffee.

"So?" she asked. "How did it go?"

"How did *what* go?"

"She said yes," Persia announced smugly.

"Damn it, Persia!"

"He's got great hands, I'll say that for him." Persia picked up the almond croissant and sniffed at it.

"Yeah," Lu replied sourly. "Think you coulda leaned on him a little harder?"

"Hey, at least you know he knows how to pet a pussy."

"Great," Lu groaned, "that is just what I needed to hear." Slumping to a seat, she thunked her forehead against the tabletop in time with her swears. "Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. What'm I gonna do?"

"Nail him. He's fucking dreamy."

"Per!" Lifting her head, Lu glared at her. "Don't you understand? I can't! I can't go out to dinner with him! I'll die. He's... and I'm... and he's..."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." Persia toyed with the croissant, flipping it over and studying it before tearing off a tiny piece.

"He's not interested. You told us." Lu glared at her.

Tori leaned against the counter, sipping her coffee. Her tired eyes twinkled at Lu over the rim of her mug. "Lu, whether you like it or not, you're being wooed."

"I am *not* being wooed!"

"Fresh baked croissants? That's some serious wooing," Persia agreed as she reached for the last one. Tori smacked her hand sharply. "Hey!"

"Don't be such a pig, Per. They're not yours." Tori turned her stern gaze on Lu. "And make no mistake, Lu -- you *are* going tonight."

Lu gulped.

Chapter Six

Great, so a guy finally takes me on a date -- a real date. A date that isn't just about getting me into bed. And what am I busy thinking about?

Sean glanced at her, puzzled. "Is something wrong?"

Hurriedly, Lu dragged her gaze up to his face. "No, nothing's wrong. Why?"

"You keep staring at my hand. I swear, every bite I take..."

"I'm sorry, I just..." *Keep picturing it squeezing your cock.* She fumbled for an excuse. "I just can't seem to get the hang of chopsticks." Which was true -- she had a sneaking suspicion there was rice in her bra from her fumbling attempts.

Why in hell had she let Persia dress her? The front of this dress was scooped so low it was a wonder her tits didn't just tumble out onto the table. And the damn garter belt kept twisting around her thighs -- how the hell did women wear these things?

Lu grimaced. She could still hear Persia's horrified shriek as she'd stripped. Then Persia had run for the Nair while Tori had grinned and asked, all innocence, if it was full moon again *already*.

Damn them anyway. She should have ripped them both a new asshole for looking so fucking gleeful as they'd exfoliated and depilated, plucked and pruned and poufed... Now there was nothing to do but suffer through. Not that she was suffering, exactly. Especially not when Sean slid around to her side of the booth and picked up her chopsticks. "Here. Like this," he said, curling her fingers around the smooth pieces of wood. His hands covering hers were warm and firm, callused on the tips from playing guitar, the muscles nicely built up from bridging chords and building boats and beating off...

Lu swore as another scoop of rice went tumbling back to her plate. Sean laughed. "They *do* have forks, you know." And before she could protest, he called the waitress over and got her plain old American silverware. Even better, he stayed on the bench next to her, simply sliding his plate over to her side of the table. Then he fed her a bite of sushi, which was nothing at all like what she'd expected, and seemed to wake all her taste buds up at once. But as she bent toward him to take it, he recoiled slightly, and Lu felt her hopes crumble.

See? He really isn't interested in me, damn it!

"Sorry," she mumbled, and sat back abruptly, her shoulders hunching.

"No, it's not you. Well, it is, sort of..." His words trailed off, and Sean let out an exasperated breath -- directed not at her, Lu knew instinctively. At himself? "All right. Fine. Don't be offended, but..."

"But what?"

"It's your perfume. It's..."

"A little strong?"

Sean chuckled ruefully. "You could say that. You smell like a cat house."

"You have no idea," Lu murmured, "how right you are."

Sean glanced at her, puzzled, then reached for a napkin. "Here." He dipped it in his water glass. "Let me just..." Tilting Lu's head, he wiped down her neck.

Lu blushed, feeling the steady trickle of moisture between her thighs moving quickly toward flood status. Turning her chin, Sean attended to the other side of her neck, his face just inches from hers. His eyes captured her attention again -- cobalt blue, deep-water ocean blue. She could drown in those eyes; happily go under without a single whimper...

"Better?" she asked as he leaned forward, sniffing judiciously.

"Better," he agreed. "At least you smell a little more like you."

"Ha! Sticky and sweaty and..."

“Musky and earthy...” Sean grinned.

Damn! Why did he have to be so nice? So friendly? So utterly sexy? She was fucking going to *kill* Persia. And Tori.

Shoving her plate back, Lu rose abruptly.

“What? Lu, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing. I... Nothing. Look, can we get out of here?”

“Sure, if you want.” Lu watched, chewing her lip and clenching the silk throw that Tori had tossed around her shoulders tight across her chest as he paid the check. He held the door for her, which only made Lu grind her teeth harder.

Damn it, *why* had she let them talk her into this? It was like being on a diet with somebody waving chocolate bonbons in your face -- it just wasn’t fair! Sean was quiet as they walked from the restaurant -- offended, no doubt. She would be, too, if she were him. Jeez, here he was, just trying to be nice. Was it *his* fault she’d happily jump him right here on the sidewalk?

That thought, unfortunately, just made it worse. Now she couldn’t stop thinking about what she’d like to do given half a chance. Wrap her hands around that thick, gorgeous cock. Rub it the way she’d watched him do till he’d groan, his balls aching with need... Would he pull her down on top of him? Shove that glorious shaft up into her? God! She’d ride him six ways to Sunday and back. Hell, in this dress she wouldn’t even have to bother taking her clothes off, they could just...

Lu stopped short in the middle of the street and screamed, “Fuuuuuck!”

Sean, predictably, stared at her in shock.

Good one, Lu. Exactly how to impress a guy. “Shit,” she muttered. “I’m sorry. It’s --”

“No, I really should have --”

“I don’t want you to think I don’t appreciate --”

“Lu...”

“It’s just that I never know what to do, or to say, and I really, *really* --”

He grabbed her arms, turned her toward him. “Lu!”

“What?”

He gazed down at her, the expression in his eyes oddly intense. “Lu, I’m sorry. I wasn’t being totally honest last night. I...”

Ah, jeez, this is where he trots out that lame shit about just being friends...

“Lu, I really like you.”

“What?” She blinked. “My voice. You like my voice.”

“Yeah. I do. But I also like you.” He looked aside, embarrassed.

“So it was just an excuse. My voice.”

“Ye -- no! No, I meant it, I’d... You can’t imagine what it’d be like, hearing you sing one of my songs. You can’t imagine what it’d do to me... Probably something very much like what you’re doing right now, just standing there,” he added wryly. “Lu...”

“You... you like me?”

“Sure and didn’t I just say that?” His eyes twinkled with amusement. Then amusement changed into something that was both warmer and more piercing. “Now the only question is, do you like me?”

No matter how rock-steady a man might be on his feet, he’s going to sway a bit when a five-foot-ten werewolf throws herself into his arms.

* * *

They practically fell through the door of Sean’s apartment, their mouths still locked together as he fumbled for the latch. “Just... In here... It’s not much, but...”

Thump!

They fell onto the bed in a heap, wriggling to unbutton buttons, unhook hooks, unsnap snaps... Clothing snarled,

snagged, fought them every inch of the way, and Sean was cursing by the time he got his jeans off. Then he raised himself on one arm, looking down at her as she lay beside him. “Ah, Lu. I don’t get it. I don’t do this, you know...”

“Do what?” she asked mischievously, closing her hand around his rigid cock. “This?” She moved her hand up and down. Sean groaned.

Jesus, it was even bigger than it’d looked. Her fingers barely closed around it -- and she had *big* hands. It felt like hot velvet, gliding against her palm, hot velvet over a core of iron. His pulse beat so hard it made his shaft flex in her grip.

“All right, yeah,” he admitted, his voice rough with desire. “Yeah, sometimes I do that.”

And didn’t she know it. Grinning in the darkness, seeing him outlined by the moonlight spilling through the window, Lu was still struck by the unreality of it all. She was here, *here*, with him! With Sean. With no glass between them and his hard, warm body pressed close against hers, his fingers trailing over the curve of her breast, teasing her nipple to a tight, aching point...

“Or did you mean this?” she murmured, pulling him on top of her. God, she was so ready for him! Her cunt was a maelstrom of liquid fire, begging to be pierced. Grabbing his hard, rounded buttocks, she tugged him closer, and that delectable cock slid between her thighs, its tip gliding through the sodden slickness of her folds.

“Yes,” he rasped. “Yes, lass, I meant this. Christ Almighty, you feel good, Lu.”

“I feel even better inside,” she whispered, and raised herself up to meet him as he sank into her, groaning.

Jesus! No man had ever filled her like this. His cock spread her open in one hard, almost painful thrust as he pushed in to the hilt. She could feel his balls, so distended with come they felt almost rigid, pressing against the sensitive skin between her cunt and her rectum. Tilting her hips, she pulled him even closer, reveling in the hoarse gasp she drew from him.

“Oh, so you like that, Sean O’Shaughnessey?” Sliding her hands up the muscular sides of his ribcage, she could feel his chuckle.

“*Like* it? The woman must be daft.” Lifting his head, he looked down at her, and Lu could see moonlight in his cobalt-blue eyes. “I don’t like it, Lu -- I’d *die* for it.”

It was as if the entire world hung suspended -- she couldn’t breathe. Couldn’t speak. Couldn’t do anything but feel his heartbeat thundering through his broad chest, the echoing pulse of his cock in her cunt, the tender exultation that flooded through her, both deeper and warmer than even the lust burning in her groin. Then he flexed his hips, driving his cock home again, and Lu tossed her head back, letting the cries spill from her throat as he took her, and took her, and took her...

“Oh, God, Sean!” she screamed as her orgasm hit her, exploding outward in a tsunami of hot, creamy bliss. Her muscles clamped down, dragging him deeper, urging him on as he rammed in to the limit, filling her utterly. His shaft was a hard, thrusting center around which she melted, her cunt pulsing with rapture. He rocked forward, and she could feel his cockhead so deep inside her she’d have sworn it was buried up to her navel.

“Oh, so you like that, Luna... Shit!” He froze inside her, and she stared up.

“What’s wrong?”

“Sean, you ass, you don’t even know her last name! And you bring her back here and shag her like she’s just some --”

“Sean!” She grabbed him, holding him between her thighs, not letting him pull out as he’d started to do. “It’s Howell. All right?”

“Luna Howell,” he repeated, and gazed at her skeptically.

“You’re one to talk, Sean O’Shaughnessey.”

“True. Well, Luna Howell, shall I stop, or --”

“If you do,” she stated flatly, “you *will* die for it.”

He grinned. “Your wish is my command -- or is it, your command is my wish?”

Damn, they really aren’t kidding about that touch of the Blarney.

So Lu allowed herself to do what she'd been dreaming of since the first time she saw him -- she buried her hands in those thick, jet-black curls, dragged his mouth down to hers, and found other uses for his tongue than talk. So smoothly it almost felt like magic, he slid back inside her, his cock prodding deep between her silken folds. Lu wrapped her arms around his neck, holding him close as he moved inside her. His rhythm was slow, steady, rocking her gently like waves in an ocean. She felt buoyant, adrift but somehow utterly secure in the anchoring circle of his arms. Lifting her head, she laid her cheek against his strong neck, moving with him as their bodies merged, her warmth embracing him, his heat pushing inward, deeper...

Her breathing grew heavier. So did his. She could almost feel the need building inside him, pulsing, growing stronger with each blissful stroke. He leaned his cheek against her forehead, nuzzling her hair as he whispered mindlessly, "Lu, Lu, oh Lu..."

No man had ever said her name while making love before.

But then again, had she ever really made love? For all the times she'd let herself get obsessed with a man, none of them were even remotely like this. She and Sean clung to each other, their hearts speeding in unison, sweat slicking their bodies as they tried with every fiber of their beings to meld their bodies into one. His voice was deepening, growing hoarse as the tension inside him flared to match her own. Gripping him inside her, she rocked her hips, urging him on. She could feel his climax straining, swelling his balls, tensing his muscles; he was so close, so close...

So was she.

Then he paused above her, and Lu whimpered, nudging hungrily with her hips, screaming silently, *God, don't stop now!*

"No, wait, Lu. I've got to..." Gritting his teeth, he pulled out of her, and she cried aloud at the sudden emptiness. "I'm sorry," he said, his voice rueful in the darkness. "I really should have earlier, but..." A warm chuckle followed his words, and Lu heard a rustle as he fumbled in the nightstand drawer, then a small, unfamiliar ripping sound. When his cock nudged back between her legs, feeling strangely artificial, Lu finally understood. A condom. He'd put on a condom. No man she'd been with before had ever bothered. Had ever bothered to care if she wound up pregnant, or sick, or infected with something...

Lu felt tears stinging behind her eyelids as Sean eased into her. He *did* care about her. He hadn't even asked her -- he'd simply done it. No half-hearted "Are you on the pill?" to which she'd always nodded in reply -- it was easier. No fumbling excuses, no nothing. This was a man who treated his woman right. No matter what. Although, in this case, there was really no need. Long experience had proven she couldn't catch or carry human diseases any more than she could "catch" pregnant.

Which, given my history, is a damn good thing, she thought wryly.

The rubber felt strange, reminding her too much of the window, the glass separating them as she'd watched him, hungry for the feel of flesh against flesh. She wanted to tell him, to feel him naked inside her, feel the hot, pulsing flow of his semen as he climaxed. But how could she explain?

So she bit her lip and said nothing, and the condom stayed between them, as insubstantial and yet as isolating as a secret.

It wasn't the same. It was still really good, but it wasn't the same. She was way too conscious of that thin layer of latex, Saran Wrap instead of silk against the walls of her passage. And when he came, groaning as his body arched above her, she felt a strange, hollow emptiness deep inside, as if her body was still waiting for that flood of hot come, filling her, *fulfilling* her... Her cunt spasmed and gripped as he thrust in again, and she cried out as her peak crested inside her -- but instead of warm, creamy waves it felt more like shattering glass; one hard, sharp bolt of ecstasy. Then it was gone.

Even as Sean slumped on top of her, gathering her tight in his arms as he kissed her cheeks, her forehead, and finally her lips, Lu felt a strange sense of dislocation. A sense that something was missing. And it wasn't him, she realized slowly. It wasn't him holding back -- it was her.

Chapter Seven

Carefully, Sean withdrew, reaching down to hold the condom in place as he pulled out of her. Sliding it off, he looked at it ruefully. "Now there's one shocked little rubber," he chuckled, and dropped it in the trash can.

"Why?"

Sean looked down at her, his grin slightly embarrassed. "I think it gave up on me two years ago."

"Two years? Yeah, right."

"Sad but true." He stretched out again beside her, kissing her forehead lightly before rolling onto his back.

"Almost three, actually."

Propping herself on one arm, Lu glared at him disbelievingly. "Exactly how many women have you slept with?"

"Four. Five, now."

"Bullshit."

He glanced at her, his brow wrinkling. "Why?"

"Because... Because." *Because no man who looks as fine as you do has turned down that many offers. No way in hell.* "Fine," she snapped. "How many have you been in love with?"

"Dozens."

She stared at him. He grinned. "Feel better now?"

"No," Lu muttered sulkily. Sean laughed, and pulled her closer so her head rested on his shoulder. Raising her hand, he laced his fingers through hers, his long, callused thumb idly stroking her palm. Slowly, Lu felt the tension ease from her body. "It's so strange," she whispered. "I mean, I hardly know you..."

"Ask me anything you like."

Lu glanced up at him. "Anything?"

"Anything." He stretched, arching his back and spreading his muscled arms wide, then settled her again with her head on his chest. For a moment they simply lay, listening to each other's heartbeats. "The truth of it is," he said eventually, "I've only fallen in love three times in my life."

"Really?"

He nodded solemnly. "The first time was with my second grade teacher. Miss Perrodin."

"Tell me she wasn't one of the ones you slept with."

He chuckled, then sighed in exaggerated nostalgia. "She had the most lovely penmanship I'd ever laid eyes on --"

"What is that, a bad pun?"

"It's heaven's own truth. Like poetry, her handwriting was all loops and curlicues. Ah, I remember how she used to lean over me, guiding my hand..."

He was putting on the brogue for her, trying to amuse her. "You'd *better* be talking about penmanship," Lu growled -- and it was Sean who laughed. "All right, then, who was the second?"

"Maggie Givens." Suddenly, Sean's voice had no laughter in it at all, and she saw his jaw clench in the moonlight. "She..."

Lu tried to forestall him. "You don't have to talk about it, if you don't want."

"Lu, I told you, you can ask me anything. I don't believe in secrets."

A hot flush of guilt -- or was it shame? -- burned through her. Lu dropped her gaze, but Sean didn't seem to notice. He folded his hands behind his head, and she trailed her palm lightly over his chest as he spoke.

"She was the first girl who... I was eighteen. We were together for five years, engaged for three. I wanted to marry her as soon as we both turned twenty-one, but she kept saying, 'No, wait.' I should have known then, just from that... Anyway, two months before the big day, she left town. With company, they tell me."

"Oh, Sean..."

His lips twisted in a rueful grimace. “None so blind as those who won’t see, hey? But I’m glad, Lu. I wasn’t at the time of course, but... She wasn’t right. *It* wasn’t right. If it had been, she’d never have hesitated the way she did. She’d never have run out on me. She’d never have...”

“Lied,” Lu finished. He nodded. Lu felt a sinking feeling in her gut.

Oh, God. I should never have said yes. I should never have started this.

Of all the things she’d thought about, all the objections she’d raised in her own mind, the one thing that had never occurred to her was the possibility of hurting him.

What was she going to do?

End it. End it, Lu. Now. Before either one of you gets hurt any worse than you have to.

“Sean...”

He tilted his head, looking down at her, then brushed his lips against her hair in a feather-light kiss. “Mm-hmm?”

“Sean, I...” His arms slid around her again, holding her close. One hand slipped under her arm and fondled her breast. “Sean, stop that!”

“All right. Would this be better?” Rolling onto his side, facing her, he lowered his head, cupping her breasts together as he tongued her nipples.

“Oh, yeah... no, I mean, no! I mean... Sean, we were talking!”

He glanced up at her, grinned, and said, “So talk.”

“I...” The words wouldn’t come. She ought to say them -- she *knew* she ought to say them -- but her throat seemed to freeze solid each time she tried. His gaze wandered dangerously back to her cleavage and Lu scrambled frantically for something else to say.

“Okay, that’s two. Who was the third?”

“Ah, the third... I’m not ready to talk about that one yet.” He went back to licking her nipples, and Lu was finding it harder and harder to keep her concentration.

“I thought you were so big on not keeping secrets.”

“It isn’t a secret. I’m just not ready to talk about it. And that’s not what you were going to say.”

“Fine. I’ll tell you what I was going to say when you tell me about the third one.”

“Fair enough.” He turned his attention back to her breasts, rolling her nipples between his deft fingers even as he lashed his tongue over their hypersensitive tips. Lu moaned, loving the stimulation, feeling desire flare again in her groin as her clit rose, swelling. But at the same time she was screaming at herself, *Coward! Coward!*

There was no way this would ever end well.

When do they ever?, her mutinous libido wanted to know.

That’s beside the point! The point is, this is Sean, not some inconsiderate prick like Gary or Doug or... or... or... Rick?

Yes, damn it! Rick! That was a cheap shot, a pathetically low blow. Just because she hadn’t thought of him in weeks didn’t mean she didn’t remember his name.

And she knew what the right thing to do was, damn it! She knew it as well as she knew what Sean was doing to her, right now, his mouth tugging on her full, aching nipple like he was ravenous, like he couldn’t get enough of her...

Wouldn’t it be kinder to let them both have this one night?

That’s rationalization of the worst sort, Lu, and you... you...

Her conscience shut up abruptly as Sean suckled harder, sending a jolt of sheer lust straight into her womb.

Ah, hell. “Sean?”

“Mmmm.”

Grabbing his hands, Lu held them still. “Sean, there’s something I need to tell you.”

With a flattering reluctance, he loosed her breasts, propped himself up on his arms and looked down at her.

“Sean, I...”

The seemingly endless number of things she could have said whirled tumultuously in her mind. *I have to go.*

Don't fall in love with me. I'm a werewolf. I think I'm falling in love with you.

What came out was, "Sean, I can't have children. I can't get pregnant."

His face twisted in a wholly unfeigned grimace of sympathy. Lu was shocked to realize she was nearly in tears. Tenderly, he drew her into his arms. "Oh, lass, lass..." He held her so gently, and Lu let a grief she had never acknowledged pour through her, safe in the shelter of his arms.

He kissed her forehead, her cheeks, her eyes, murmuring comfortingly till her tears started to ease. Finally she shook herself, dashing them away impatiently, and shrugged. "So now you know. I'm damaged goods."

"Don't talk that way!" Sean's voice was sharp, and she looked up at him, surprised. The line of his jaw was strong, almost stubborn -- she hadn't noticed that before. Why hadn't she ever noticed that before? "You're not. You're not, Lu. You're everything you need to be."

His eyes were fierce, and Lu felt a small, furtive emotion unfold in her heart -- a feeling of being protected, defended... No man had ever done that before either. Lifting her hands, Sean cupped them in his, kissing the back, then the palms as he said, "And it's not like there aren't thousands of children who need a good home." He smiled at her gently.

"That's true." Then she added, more lightly, "Besides, there's one other upside that hasn't occurred to you."

"What's that?"

"Well, you know that condom you just threw away?"

"Yeah?"

Lu grinned. "I think his mates are going to be *very* disappointed."

Sean's eyes widened a moment, then a slow, broad grin broke across his handsome features. "Oh, lass. Now that *is* an upside." Raising an eyebrow, he slid his hand toward her crotch, running his fingers through the soft fur on her mons before dipping lower to find the hard nub of her clit. She gasped as he pressed it, rubbing in small, controlled circles. Then, his eyes gleaming wickedly, he slid down on the bed and settled himself between her thighs.

No. No, this wasn't how this was supposed to go. She was the one who was supposed to be pleasing *him*, not... Not...

Oh. Oh, my.

Lu's back arched automatically as his tongue found her clit, lapping eagerly at it as he trailed a finger between her folds. Helplessly, she dropped her hands to his warm, sturdy shoulders, exploring their broad, hard planes and angles, the ridge of his collarbone, the firm swell of his deltoids. Spreading her outer lips gently, Sean trailed his tongue downward, prodding her opening, and Lu gasped, her hands sliding automatically to his thick black curls, clenching in their heavy softness as he drove his tongue deeper. He groaned as he tasted her, his voice husky with lust, and Lu's head dropped back bonelessly, her thighs falling open.

Do what you want, Sean, she whispered inside her head. *Do anything you want with me. Oh, sweet God!*

His tongue delved deeper, warm and wet inside her, devouring her hungrily. His thumb glided intoxicatingly up and down her clit, working it till it was so hard it ached. Then he raised his head and closed his lips around it, suckling exactly as he'd suckled her nipples. White light exploded behind Lu's eyelids.

"Oh, God, Sean! Oh, Jesus!" Her hands clenched in his hair, forcing his mouth hard against her, as waves of golden fire ripped through her body, making her shudder and gasp as she came -- and then came again as his tongue teased her unmercifully, lashing at her swollen nub until she bucked below him, crying out shamelessly in the depths of her rapture.

She collapsed back to the mattress, panting, and he grinned. "Oh, no, Lu, you don't get done that easy."

She didn't want to. Her cunt was practically singing, and little pleasurable shocks ran along her nerves as he caressed her -- her thighs, her hips, her belly...

His eyes darkened as he looked down at her breasts thrust up toward him and silvered with moonlight, so full and round they looked like two small moons themselves. "Oh, saints, Lu. I never guessed you had such beautiful breasts," he breathed as he curled his hands around them. Then he chuckled. "It's just as well I didn't. I might

never have managed to talk to you at all.”

“What do you mean?”

He quirked an eyebrow. “Haven’t you figured it out yet?”

“No. Figured what out?”

But his fingers closed around her nipples, squeezing them firmly between thumb and forefinger, and the jolt of desire that spiked through her drove the question from her mind. She moaned, reaching for the erection that pressed against her hip, but he shook his head, clucking. “So impatient, Lu. I want to play with these pretties first.”

“Damn it, Sean!” Then she chuckled. “Well, you’ll just have to do both.”

“What do you... Lu!”

With the inhuman strength that always seemed to disconcert men, Lu flipped him easily onto his back. Sean’s eyes widened in surprise, then appreciation. “Oh, it’s a big, fine, strong girl you are, Lu. I suppose I’ll just have to be at your mercy.”

“You damn betchya,” she growled, her lips curved in a smirk. He reached to pull her astride him, but Lu shook her head, copying his cluck. “So impatient.”

Instead, she spread his thighs, making room for her to kneel between them as she bent over his cock. She could feel his hands trailing over her shoulders, just as hers had, and he gasped as her breasts brushed his groin. Lu shifted downward, gripping his shaft with one hand and sliding her other hand lower to fondle his balls. Despite the fact that he’d ejaculated not a half-hour before, the skin of his sac was stretched taut over their hard, curving fullness. Cupping them together, she squeezed lightly, even as she slid her other hand up and down his shaft. Sean groaned. “Aye, do your worst, lass.”

Smiling wickedly, she tilted his cock till it stood straight out from his body, and slid her mouth down around it in one hot, wet plunge.

“Jesus!” Sean gasped. “Oh, saints, Lu.” His fingers slid lightly into her shaggy hair, and she reveled in the way they trembled slightly as she pistoned her head downward, engulfing as much of his shaft as she could. She couldn’t possibly take it all -- the circumference of it stretched her jaw wide as it was. But she lashed eagerly at the thick, engorged rim of his cockhead, and ran her tongue, over and over, into the sweet little slit at the tip. His juices spilled out, slicking her tongue with their salty tang, and she swallowed eagerly, wanting more.

But as her mouth clenched around his cock, he knotted his hands into fists, forcing her head still. “No more, Lu,” he gritted. “Sweet Jesus, no more. I’m going to shoot off right now if you don’t stop.”

Regretfully, she let his cock slide from between her lips, sucking delicately as she released it. He threw his head back with a hoarse cry as it popped from her mouth. His balls pulsed in her grip.

He lay panting a moment, and she watched the muscles in his throat work as he swallowed repeatedly, trying to force back the tension that throbbed through his cock. Caressing it gently, Lu marveled at its hardness. It was so erect the skin was stretched tight, barely moving under her gentle touch. Slowly, Sean’s breathing eased just a trifle, and he gazed down at her with heavy-lidded eyes.

“All right, you wanton wench, bring me those big, luscious breasts of yours. Now!” His hands closed on her arms, pulling her upward. A little surprised and incredibly aroused, she let him drag her atop him, positioning her over his jutting erection. When he had her where he wanted her, with his hard, swollen head nudging between her folds, he raised his hands to her breasts, covering them with his powerful fingers. He kneaded their round, heavy fullness until Lu arched her back, whimpering as she pressed them harder into his grip.

She tried to lower herself onto his teasing shaft, but he stopped her with a look. “Not yet, Lu.” Then he returned his attention to her breasts, squeezing them together, stroking their curves, tugging at her erect nipples, lightly at first and then harder as she moaned, until she was squirming above him, feeling her juices trickle down around his waiting cock.

“More?” he whispered. She nodded wordlessly, then cried aloud as his fingers clamped down on her nipples. Gasping, she hung above him, totally at his mercy, enthralled at the way his gaze was glued to her breasts. He

tormented her nipples, pinching them mercilessly until they were searing points of fire, driving her to a height of longing she'd never known. He twisted them, driving her sensations up to a point where pleasure and pain twined into ecstasy, and she tossed her head back, thrusting her breasts forward, moaning incoherently as she felt herself hover on the brink.

Just from that. Just from the feel of his hands on her breasts. Jesus!

"Now," he whispered between clenched teeth. "Now, Lu, take my cock in your cunt. The same way you did in your mouth. Swallow it, Lu." He twisted her nipples again, and gasping, she drove herself down on him, burying him so deep inside her she cried out in shock. His cock split her open, sinking in to the balls, and she shuddered and bucked as she climaxed atop him, impaled on that enormous, rock-hard shaft.

His jaw clenched as he watched her, fighting to contain his own peak as she came, her cunt gripping and releasing, her juices soaking his balls.

"Ah, yes, lass. That's right. Now ride it."

She did, still trapped in the shattering waves of sensation. Seizing her breasts, he cupped their full weight, holding them as she thrust herself down on his cock. Rocking, she drove it deeper, hammering it into her, her mons grinding against his pubic bone as he pressed up to meet her.

God! How could he fill her so completely? It was like he was made for her. His shaft spread her passage wide, and she could feel the rim of his cockhead dragging against her as he slid partway out, only to ram in again harder. And again. And again. His fingers slid back to her nipples, trapping them in a grip both tender and fierce. His thumbs flicked the hypersensitive tips, making her gasp as she rode him hungrily, feeling the fire inside her deepen into a conflagration.

"Oh, Christ, Sean, I'm going to come again."

"Good." His voice was rough with barely constrained passion. "Come for me, lass. Come on top of me. Now." Thrusting herself downward, Lu screamed as she peaked, her eyes fixed on Sean's as he watched her climax, gasping and shaking as her cunt squeezed his shaft, feeling it swell further as his balls contracted. Then his face clenched, and he roared as his fluids exploded outward, shooting deep inside her in hot, pounding waves. Sobbing in ecstasy, she collapsed forward, her fingers knitting through his as he held her aloft, his arm muscles bunching, staring up into her eyes as his cock throbbed inside her until the last drop was drained.

Finally, he lowered her down gently, and she lay on his chest, listening to his thundering heartbeat as the sweat cooled on their bodies. She felt hollow, emptied out, limp as a fish. Sean apparently wasn't much better off -- he lifted his head to kiss her hair briefly, then dropped it back with a groan. He draped a heavy arm around her, holding her close.

She heard him turn his head to the side, and he chuckled. The sound was incredibly intimate, rumbling straight through the broad expanse of his chest.

"Good morning."

Cracking open an eye, she realized he was right. The light had been growing around them for some time, but they'd been too involved to notice. Now she groaned as the sunlight stabbed into her eyes, and buried her face in the crook of his shoulder.

"Is there anyplace you have to be today, Lu?"

She shook her head sleepily.

"Good. Then good night."

"Nnn-ite," she mumbled back, and snuggled deeper into his arms. She heard him whisper something else, but she was tired, so tired...

Chapter Eight

What woke her was the soft, gentle sounds of a guitar. Lu opened her eyes slowly, and saw Sean sitting at the folding table in nothing but a pair of cutoffs, his long, beautiful hands moving over the strings. The tune was deceptively simple, a haunting lyric line that seemed to call out plaintively before dropping into the chorus. He hummed under his breath as he played, stopping abruptly to jot something down on the battered spiral notebook lying open on the table.

"That's lovely," she said. He glanced over with a smile. His hand shifted on the guitar's neck, and he strummed a chord.

"You in the moonlight with your sleepy eyes..."

He trailed off, and she rolled over, laughing. "Oh no. No. You did *not* just serenade me with Fleetwood Mac."

"What's wrong with that?" He moved to put the guitar aside, and she protested.

"No. I want to hear the other one. What was it?"

He grinned and looked aside. "Just something I'm working on."

"Can I hear it?"

"Not yet."

Setting the guitar in its stand, he rose and crossed to the bed, stretching out beside her and lacing his fingers through hers.

"Sean?"

"Mmm?"

"Do you ever play your stuff? Out, I mean?"

He shrugged. "Down at Geno's sometimes. They have an open mike night on Tuesdays."

"I'd love to come sometime."

"You can come right now." He grinned, and pulled her into his arms. His hair was damp under her fingers, and he smelled clean, fresh-scrubbed.

Lu winced as he nuzzled her neck. "Oh God. I must stink."

"Mmm," he agreed. "You stink of sex."

"Yeech! Sean..."

He shrugged. "It's a huge improvement over the way you smelled last night." His hands slid down her back, cupping her ass, tugging her tighter against his long, lean body. She could feel the warm ridge of his growing erection through the worn denim of his cutoffs. Ducking his head, he lapped at her breasts, closing his eyes as he inhaled her scent and hummed again, appreciatively. "Mmmm."

Her nipples were hardening already, a taut, hungry urgency growing steadily in her core. Tilting her head, she rubbed her cheek against his damp curls as he suckled first one breast then the other, tugging at them with his lips and tongue till she pressed herself against him, longing for more. His hand slid to her crotch, prodding between her thighs for the throbbing nub of her clit, and rubbed it gently.

She clung to him, holding his head at her breast, gazing down at him through heavy-lidded eyes, drinking in the sight of him -- those broad, smooth shoulders dotted with freckles; the strong column of his neck; his creamy-pale skin and the curve of his cheekbone, and those full, mobile lips, closed around her nipple...

Oh! He was gorgeous. He was so perfect, it was almost like waking to find herself in a dream. Only no dream could draw such sensations from her body. A wild, restless yearning pulsed along her nerves, making her blood sing with energy, her body ache with need. She arched her back, feeling something primal and hot unfold, deep in her core...

Shit. Wait a minute. Lu stiffened, and raised her head. "Sean?"

“Mm-hmm?”

It was morning, it *had* to be -- only why was the light in the room so dim? “Sean, what time is it?”

“Late,” he chuckled ruefully. “I woke up around three. You were still out like a light, so I ducked out for supplies before the store closed. We’ve got steaks, fresh asparagus, a bottle of wine...”

Before the store closed? Oh, shit!

Lu rolled to her feet, scrambling frantically for her clothes. “Oh, Christ, how could I be so *stupid*? God damn it!”

“What’s the matter?”

Panting, she tried to untangle her stockings, chucked them aside in frustration, and tugged on her dress. “Shoes! Where the fuck are my shoes?”

“Lu, what is it?” Sean had drawn himself up into a sitting position on the bed, his forearms propped on his knees as he watched her, concerned.

“Oh, don’t ask, Sean. *Please don’t ask!*” Tugging on one shoe, she glanced at the window. Cool pinkish light trickled down between the buildings; the last flush of sunset. “Shit!” Grabbing up her other shoe, she bolted for the door.

“Lu!” In two long strides, Sean caught her arm and swung her around to face him. “Lu, what’s going on?”

She stared up at him, her eyes wide with panic. “I can’t tell you. I’m sorry. I have to go.”

“All right.” He nodded, his eyes shadowed with worry, and kissed her mouth gently. She clung for a moment to the sweetness of that kiss, treasuring it, searing it into her memory. She released him at last, and Sean smiled slightly. “I’ll call y --”

“No.” Lu shook her head, and winced as his eyes widened in shock and hurt. “No, don’t call me. Don’t come over. Just forget you ever met me, Sean. I...”

Whirling, she tore herself from his grip and dashed from the apartment, down the hall, out the front door.

Immediately, the tidal forces in her blood roared upward, straining at her control. The porch steps were rough under her bare foot as she thudded down them, hearing Sean behind her. *No! No Sean, please!*

He leaned over the porch rail, shouting after her as she fled up the street. “Lu!”

The dusk thickened around her, treacherously fast. *Oh, shit. Oh shit.* She could sense the moon hanging just below the rim of the horizon, bathing the sky with an anticipatory wash of gold.

The spring moon. The lover’s moon. The irony tore at her heart. She was never going to make it. She pounded up the street, one shoe clenched in her hand, ignoring the startled stares from passing cars and pedestrians. If she could just get to the corner, get out of Sean’s sight...

Inexorably, the Earth continued in its turning, and the silver edge of the moon slipped over the horizon. With a harsh, desperate sob, Lu threw herself behind a Dumpster, feeling agony lance along her bones as the change took her.

Horns blared. Brakes squealed. She heard the crunch of a collision. Then she was running, running on all fours, streaking through the darkness and the glare of streetlamps, weaving dangerously between the swerving cars.

* * *

“...in a seven-car pile-up yesterday evening on Cumberland Avenue. The animal, which numerous eyewitnesses claim was a wolf, was seen heading north along Congress Street before disappearing.”

“A wolf, Susan?”

“Yes, Jim -- and it gets better than that.”

Sitting stiffly on the sofa, Tori watched the morning news, her coffee growing cold in the mug she clenched in her hands. Persia eyed her dubiously, and kept her mouth shut. On the TV, the Clairol-blond announcer gave a plastic smile as she added, “Some witnesses actually claim they’d seen it change from a young woman into a wolf.”

“A werewolf?” The male announcer, his silver hair plastered back from his patrician face, raised a skeptical eyebrow. “What’s next? Vampires in the Old Port?”

“Well, whatever it was, Jim, I’m happy to say no major injuries were sustained in the crash. One woman from

Falmouth was treated for a sprained wrist at Maine Medical Center...”

Tori flicked off the TV. She and Persia stared at each other a moment in silence. Then Persia let out a long-suffering sigh. “I just got my room arranged the way I like it, too.”

“Don’t,” Tori said sharply. “Don’t do that, Per. It wasn’t Lu’s fault.”

“Fine.” Persia drew the word out into a whine. “I’ll start packing.”

Tori shook her head. “No, wait.”

“Are you crazy?”

“Maybe.”

She’d been frantic yesterday evening as the sky grew darker and still Lu hadn’t returned. Then Sean called, twice, his voice sharp with worry. She’d promised to let him know when Lu returned, and hung up.

Which, as it turned out, was now. Tori looked up as the apartment door opened. Lu stood there, naked. Dirt smeared her cheeks, coated her palms, and streaked her belly.

“For God’s sake, close the door.”

Wearily, Lu did, and then slumped to the ottoman, burying her head in her hands. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Did you tell him?”

Lu looked up at Tori in disbelief. “Are you crazy?”

Tori let out an exasperated breath. “I swear, if one more person asks me that...”

“Did you ever consider it might be true?” Persia shot snidely. Tori ignored her.

“Did Sean see you?”

“No.” Lu shook her head. “I don’t think so.”

“Yeah, but how many other people did?” Persia demanded. “Tori, you know the rules...”

“I should. I made them. Now shut up, Persia. Lu... Do you love him?”

Tears glimmered in Lu’s eyes. “I don’t know,” she whispered. “I don’t...” Then she hung her head, and sobbed.

Uncurling herself from the armchair, Persia padded from the room, returning a moment later with a thick feather quilt that she draped over Lu’s shoulders. Lu clutched it to her, crying.

Tori stroked her matted hair helplessly, feeling pity wrench at her heart. “Lu. I don’t want us to leave here. Not yet. Not till you...”

A firm rap on the door cut her off. “See, it’s the cops!” Persia hissed. “Tori, I *told* you!” As Tori moved toward the door, she sprang to her feet and streaked from the room.

“Scaredy-cat,” Tori murmured. “Better cover up.” Lu tugged the quilt closer around herself as Tori opened the door a crack, peering out.

“Is she here?”

Tori swung the door wide, and Lu looked up, startled. Sean stood in the doorway, his pale face almost gray with exhaustion. Dark circles marred the skin under his eyes. He held an envelope in one hand. His voice was hollow, almost gruff as he whispered, “Lu...”

She stared at him, shocked into stillness as he came forward, his hand lifting to trace the smear of dirt on her cheek. “Ah, sweet Jesus, Lu, what happened to you?”

“I’m all right.” Self-consciously, she clapped her hand to her cheek. “I’m all right, really.”

“No, you’re not. Look at you. Lu, what’s going on?”

“I told you, Sean, please don’t ask. You wouldn’t believe me.”

“Lu, I... Look, can we talk about this in private?”

Lu glanced at Tori who jerked her head meaningfully at the hallway. “Sure.” Feeling painfully awkward, she led Sean to her room.

He shut the door behind them and leaned against it silently, fiddling with the envelope in his hands. “I think you owe me a few words of explanation, Lu.”

She nodded sadly. "I do, too."

"Why did you run out like that? What happened? When I saw that car wreck, I..."

"Sean, I'm fine."

"Then what the hell is going on?"

Lu felt her heart slowly crack into pieces. Sighing, she sat at the foot of the bed. "Sean, I can't tell you. Please... It's not you. It's nothing about you. You're... everything I could have ever wanted, and... and I..." She broke off, biting back a fresh spate of tears. Sean's eyes softened, and he came to kneel at her feet, putting his arms around her and holding her close.

"Then why can't we be together? I don't need to know... I... You don't have to tell me. Not ever. Not if you don't want to."

"I thought you didn't believe in secrets."

"I don't. But I believe in you."

Throwing her head back, Lu laughed mirthlessly. Sean grabbed her arms, forcing her to look at him. "Last night, you asked me who the third woman I fell in love with was. It's not was, Lu. It's *is*."

His words, and the look in his eyes, pierced her heart. She'd been so right to think it would hurt this time. What she'd never imagined in her wildest dreams was how much.

Oh, Sean!

She wanted to throw her arms around him, to hold him tight against her forever. It was impossible -- and she couldn't even tell him why. "Sean, you don't *know* me. Not really."

"Yes I do." His tone was firm, absolutely confident, and she stared at him in wonder. "When I heard you sing, Lu, when I heard your voice, there was so much passion in it, such longing... And I *knew* that longing. I knew it like I know my own heart." His eyes burned into hers, intent and determined. "Whatever it is, Lu, we can face it together."

"Oh, Sean," she whispered.

"Lu." Taking her chin in his hand, he tilted her head up. "Lu, I promise you..."

"No. Don't. Don't promise, Sean. Just... love me."

With a hoarse sob, he lowered his head, seizing her mouth in a bruising kiss. His lips raked across hers, forcing them open, and he cupped her head in his hands as his tongue probed her mouth until she was breathless.

"Sean..."

"Shh, love." Sliding the quilt from her shoulders, he eased her down on the bed. Gazing down at her, he caressed her lightly, trailing his palm up the flat plane of her belly, stroking her shoulders, tracing her features tenderly with one strong, callused finger. "Oh, Lu. Say you don't want me. Say you don't want me and I'll leave you alone."

He waited, but she said nothing. Holding her gaze, Sean lowered his mouth to hers, brushing her lips lightly. She opened her mouth, touched her tongue to his, and he groaned as he crushed her to him, molding her body against his as he touched her, stroking her thighs, kneading her ass, running his hand up her ribcage to cup her breast. Her body blazed under his touch -- how could he know every inch of her so well? Lu clung to him, panting, knowing this was wrong, it was so very wrong... But she couldn't stop. She couldn't help it. She wanted him so much!

"Then love me, Sean," she whispered, her voice rough with wild desperation. "Love me."

Pinning her with those cobalt-blue eyes, he stood, shedding his clothes quickly. She watched, not moving, just drinking the sight of him in -- his broad, chiseled torso, the muscles that flexed along his ribcage as he peeled off his shirt, the seductive line of his hips and his powerful thighs as he unbuttoned his jeans and slid them down. Then he lowered himself on top of her, his arms holding his weight, as she shifted, spreading her thighs, clenching her eyes shut as she felt him nudge at her entrance.

"No, Lu. Look at me. I need to know that you want this."

She opened her eyes, and whatever he saw in them must have convinced him, because he pressed into her gently,

easing her open. God, he was huge! Slowly, slowly, his rigid cock sank deeper, spreading her wide as he rocked, his chest heaving, his eyes dark with barely-controlled need.

Wrapping her legs around his waist, Lu pulled him closer, and with a groan, he sank in to the hilt. “Ah, sweet mother Mary and all the saints, Lu, you feel even better than you did last night.” Pistoning smoothly, he caressed her inside and out till she felt like her very bones were melting under his tender onslaught.

They were both so engrossed that neither one heard the small snick of the latch as the bedroom door cracked open. Sean’s thrusts increased as he felt Lu respond, driving into her harder as she arched below him, her cries spiraling upward in her arousal.

“Oh, yes, Sean. Please. Please take me. Fuck me. Love me. Any way you want, Sean. Any way at all.”

Her words spurred him on, and he grabbed her thighs, forcing them wider as he hammered into her. She could feel the tension roaring inside him, tightening his balls, driving him harder... Her own need flared upward, meeting his, and her fingers dug into his shoulders as she clung to him, moaning. He slammed his hips downward, fucking her as if determined to make her his by sheer force, and she whimpered with lust every time his abs brushed her clit.

She pressed herself tight against him, feeling his heart thunder beneath his ribs. His shoulders bunched under her hands as he held them both aloft, cheek pressed to cheek, her breasts against his chest, skin against skin down the length of their bodies to the point where their bodies blended together. He moved inside her, teasing her higher, until she gasped and whimpered and thrust her hips upward, feeling all her anguish and pain and desire and love explode inside of her in one hot golden rush.

Sean groaned, his body stiffening against her as he rammed himself home, quivering as he shot jet after jet of come deep in her cunt. Their hips ground together as they clung, trying to meld deeper, deeper yet. She could feel him, still throbbing inside her, his balls still clenching as she drained him, squeezing him with her passage, desperate for everything he had to give.

Then she heard a familiar “Miaow.”

“Fuck!” Sean gasped as Lu tore herself out from under him, yanking his cock painfully from the grip of her passage. She lunged at the white cat who, Sean saw, had jumped onto the bed at some point during their lovemaking, and was now sprawled, purring, its claws lazily kneading the sheets as it watched them.

But as Lu sprang at it, the cat leaped to its feet, its sapphire eyes suddenly wide in alarm. “You fucking *bitch!*” “Oh, come on, Lu.” Sean chuckled, reaching out to calm her. “It’s only a...”

He broke off in shock as black fur seemed to wash down Lu’s naked back. *What the fuck?* It spread like wildfire, and he heard something creak. Her spine seemed to ripple under the fur, and then he was stumbling backward in terror, away from the wolf that lunged at the white cat, snarling murderously.

Yowling in terror, the cat streaked around the room, the wolf snapping at its heels as Sean bolted for the door.

“*Miiaowrrw!*” Sean darted one horrified glance back, and the cat catapulted straight into his arms. He staggered backward into the hall, slamming the door just as something huge and heavy smashed into it, and fell with a thud. Panting hoarsely, Sean stared at the door in shock. Then his biceps screamed in protest as the weight in his arms went, in half a heartbeat, from fourteen pounds to a hundred and forty. He looked down in panic at the short, chubby, naked platinum blonde snuggled far too intimately against his chest.

“I always knew,” Persia purred up at him, her full, pink-tipped breasts brushing his abs, “that you were a cat lover.”

Sean backed away so quickly he slammed into the wall, jarring a picture loose. It fell with a crash.

“Persia!”

Sean spun. Tori stood behind them, her face clenched in fury. She stalked menacingly toward Persia who backed quickly away. Sean’s eyes widened as Tori bared her teeth.

“Holy Christ! What the fuck are you, then?”

“Don’t ask,” a voice said dryly, and Sean whirled to see Luna standing in her bedroom doorway, her shoulders

slumped in defeat. She took a step toward him, her eyes pleading, and he stumbled backward. “Don’t touch me! Don’t... whatever you are! Christ!” He stared, his eyes darting wildly from Lu to Persia to Tori with her teeth. A small, confused whimper burst from his throat. Then he dashed into Lu’s bedroom, snatched up his jeans, and tore down the hall butt-naked. The door slammed.

“Well.” Lu’s face was an absolutely expressionless mask. “I’d say that went as well as could be expected.” Tori wheeled on Persia who held her hands up in self-defense, whining, “Hey, I was just having fun!” “Yeah, some fun, Persia.” Squatting, Tori started picking up shards of broken glass, her movements stiff with anger.

“I’ll get the broom,” Persia said meekly. She glanced once at Lu, and slunk toward the kitchen. Lu turned woodenly to go into her room, but Tori’s low murmur stopped her. “Lu. Tell me now. Is he the kind to go shrieking to the police?”

“How should I know?” she replied bitterly. “I only met him two days ago.”

And one night, spent crouched in some bushes. But Tori didn’t know about that -- and Tori never would, Lu vowed. Some secrets *were* worth keeping.

“Oh, I think you do, Lu.” Tori’s gray eyes watched her steadily, and Lu felt a sob wrench through her chest.

“No. No, he’s not.”

“Okay, then. Go take a shower. We’ll sort it out later.”

“Where are we gonna go now?” Persia asked, returning with the broom and dustpan.

Tori shook her head. “I don’t know.”

Lu turned back to her room, closing the door softly behind her. It sounded to her like the lid closing on a coffin -- final and absolute. Suddenly, she couldn’t find any more tears inside her. Everything seemed gone, used up, leaving behind only a silent desolation.

Sean’s shirt still lay on the floor, and she picked it up and dropped her face against it, inhaling the clean, warm scent of him. Then she folded it neatly, found his shoes, and tucked his abandoned socks inside them. She’d mail it all to him from somewhere on the road.

Would he think of her sometimes? Would he ever understand?

Really, it just doesn’t matter, Lu, she told herself firmly. She’d known better, and she’d gone ahead and done it anyway. She’d just have to live with that.

But she still couldn’t wish it undone. Not ever.

Placing the pile of clothes on her dresser, she turned away -- and that’s when she saw the envelope, forgotten, on the floor. She picked it up, turned it over curiously, and then opened it. Pulling out the sheets inside, she unfolded them, gazing wonderingly at the clefs and guitar tabs before she could even begin to make sense of the words. She stood there a long time, clutching the pages. Then she pulled open her door and called out, “Tori? Where’s your Ovation?”

Chapter Nine

Lu's hands were shaking as she pushed open the door of Geno's and walked through the small foyer to the bar. She almost hoped he wouldn't be there, but when she peered in, there he was, hunched over the bar, his beautiful strong hands curled around a pint of Guinness. Ducking back, she leaned against the wall of the foyer, her heart pounding in her breast.

Tori had called Geno who had been happy to call the guy hosting the open mike. So she didn't have to brazenly walk through the bar and put her name on the sign-up sheet, which was good, Lu reflected. She had a sneaking suspicion Sean would walk out the moment he saw her.

She'd hoped he would call, of course. He didn't. And that was okay. In fact, she told herself sternly, any way this went was okay. If he was angry enough to drop a dime on her, the van was already packed -- a precautionary measure. Lu even smiled a bit as she thought what her friends were risking to give her this chance. And if he never wanted to see her again... Well, he'd already given her more than any man she'd ever met. She'd be an ass to be ungrateful.

She peeked into the bar again, fondly tracing out the line of his shoulders, that black mop of curls... What she wouldn't give to simply walk in there, plunk herself on the stool next to him, lean over, give him a kiss, and order a beer!

Instead, she turned, and slipped down the hall which led to the bathrooms, the loading dock -- and the side door to the stage.

She waited in the shadows, flinching every time someone shoved the door open from the bar to go to the bathroom. She could hear the various performers clambering up the steps and onto the stage. Some of them, in the way of open mikes, were painfully awful. Some of them were surprisingly good. Invariably though, after every performance there was a hearty, supportive round of applause. One more reason to like Portland -- the music scene wasn't a backbiting rat race.

Finally, she heard the host step up to the mike. "Next, we've got a special treat for you, a lady some of you have heard many times, backing up Geno's Saturday night band."

It was so easy to picture Sean stiffening at those words, standing up in quiet fury and pushing his stool back. *Too late to worry about it now.* The announcer continued, "But you may not have been so lucky as to hear her sing. So here she is tonight, up front and center... Luna Howell!"

Obviously some of the crowd *had* heard her before -- the clapping was more than just supportive. Lu strode onto the stage quickly, dressed as usual in her baggy green overalls with a simple stretch crop top underneath. When Persia had suggested doing something with her hair, Tori had pleasantly offered to smack her silly. So here she was, *au natural*, with nothing but Tori's six string -- and a song that wasn't hers.

She didn't dare look up as she took her seat, propping her boots on the rungs of the stool as she bent over the guitar. The host kindly started to raise the mike for her, and Lu smiled at him, shaking her head. Then she wrapped her fingers around the Ovation's neck, drawing a delicate, wistful chord from it -- and sang.

*Speak without words
The song that the heart sings
And it'll be heard
For the message it brings
Reach out of the light
And you'll find me waiting
To speak without words*

The song my heart sings.

He *had* started to leave she saw when she finally raised her gaze to the audience. He was frozen halfway to the door, his face turned back toward her, his eyes wide with shock... or rage? She couldn't tell. She held his gaze a moment, *willing* him to listen, to stay, and then closed her eyes, pouring everything inside her into his song.

*If I had a way
To make you love me
There'd be no day
That you were not mine
Find me in the night
Where I will be waiting
To speak without words
The song my heart sings.*

Softly, gently, she drew the song to its close. The audience sat silent, still trapped in its spell. She reached for the mike and spoke quietly. "Thank you. That was by a very talented songwriter right here in Portland, a man I will always think of with affection and respect -- Mr. Sean O'Shaughnessey." The audience started clapping, and Lu raised her head, smiling -- but this time, when she looked up, Sean was gone.

* * *

Afterward, in the hall, she hunkered down to place the Ovation back in its case. Snapping the case shut, she glanced toward the bar door -- but what was the point? There was nothing for her there. Well, it had been worth a shot. And at least she'd managed to give him something, however insufficient the gesture might have been. Maybe he'd remember it, years from now. Maybe he'd even smile sometimes, thinking back.

Sighing, she picked up the guitar case, and snuck out the back way onto the loading dock.

"You've got some balls, lass."

She whipped around. Sean stood there, leaning against the brick wall beside the door she'd just come out of, his hands shoved deep in his front pockets. Lu shook her head slowly. "No. Not even as a wolf."

He grimaced at that. "You were right though. I wouldn't have believed you. Not without seeing it."

"Yeah, well..."

"How did you... Were you born that way?"

"I assume so. I really don't know, Sean. I... I was adopted. I..." She sighed heavily. "It didn't start till I hit puberty. I didn't know what was happening. The first time... The first time, I changed back to find myself locked in the basement, with my mother standing outside the door, screaming. Not at me. Just... screaming."

"You must have been terrified."

Lu nodded, hunching her shoulders. "I'm really sorry I hurt you, Sean."

He shook his head as if dismissing the need for apology. "So, how does it work? I mean, you bite someone, do they become... like you?"

"I don't know. I never bit anyone."

"So, you do remember what happens then."

She stared at him. "I don't stop being *me*, Sean. I don't turn into some mindless, bloodthirsty..."

Beast. Monster. Freak.

Her head drooped, and tears sprang to her eyes. She could feel Sean watching her, but she couldn't make herself meet his gaze. "You have no idea how much you meant to me, Sean."

Taking a deep breath, she wiped away her tears with the heel of her hand, and looked at him, smiling bravely.

"Thank you. And thank you for letting me sing your song." She held out her hand. With a flash of that lopsided, self-mocking smile, he took it, held it a moment, then let her go.

"Well... goodbye." Picking up the guitar case, Lu turned away.

"I wrote it as a duet, you know."

She stopped short at the edge of the loading dock. Her heart gave a painful thud in her chest as she looked back uncertainly.

"And we could..." He shrugged. "We could find out what happens if you bite a human."

What?

"Are you *crazy*?"

Sean grinned. "No, I'm Irish." Reaching out, he took Tori's guitar case from her suddenly nerveless fingers. He looked down at her, his deep blue eyes gleaming. "I really want kids, Lu. And I'd rather they be mine."

"Sean..."

He jumped down lightly from the loading dock to the pavement, turned back to look at her, and frowned.

"What?" she asked nervously.

"Good God, woman, aren't you ever going to learn to keep your shoes tied?" Setting down the guitar, he knotted them briskly, then stepped back and looked up at her. "Now, are you coming or not?"

He stretched his hands up toward her. Her mind was whirling. "Sean, I... I don't understand."

He chuckled ruefully. "Well, I *did* tell you I'm hopeless at this. But if you really want me to get down on one knee, Lu, you'll have to come down here for me to do it."

He didn't... He couldn't possibly mean... But there he was, standing with his arms stretched out to catch her. Waiting. Waiting as he'd waited for only one other woman. And this time, Lu knew instinctively, he wouldn't wait forever.

"If it's right," he murmured, his eyes dark with desire, "don't hesitate, lass."

And it *was* right. It was so right Lu could hardly even begin to believe it. But she remembered what he'd said to her, in her bedroom...

"I believe in you, Sean O'Shaughnessey," she whispered -- and let herself fall.

* * *

The amplifier thunked against the top step, and Sean, his chest heaving, called for a halt. Dropping his end, he leaned against the stairwell and shook his head disbelievingly at Lu who carried her end with one hand and his guitar case in the other. "You know, I always thought I was in pretty good shape."

"Sean..."

"It's an unfair advantage you have, to be sure, lass -- but just think, our first three sons can all be professional football players..."

"Our *first* three?"

"And you and I will never have to work another day in our lives." He grinned up at her. "Ready?"

Lu refrained from pointing out that *she* wasn't the one who'd called a halt, and they hauled the amp into the apartment.

Persia threw Sean a snotty glance from the sofa. "What's *he* gonna be? Our token male?"

Tori, emerging from the kitchen, smiled maliciously. "No, Per. I'm afraid we're retiring your Stratocaster."

"What? Tori!"

Taking his Gibson out of its case, Sean burst into a riff that rattled the windows, his left hand flying over the frets as Persia watched, speechless. Then she flopped down on the cushions in a fit of pique. "We have neighbors, you know."

"I guess we'll call that settled, then." Sean grinned at Lu. Kissing her cheek, he added, "I'll get the rest of my stuff." Lu closed the door behind him.

Persia narrowed her eyes suspiciously. "Tori, he's not... You're not letting him... He's not moving *in* here!"

"Yup."

Glaring at the two of them, Persia rose and stalked stiffly out of the room. Tori raised an eyebrow at her departure, and murmured to Lu, “Was that as good for you as it was for me?”

“More. God, I adore pissing her off.”

She grinned. Tori smiled. “It’s good to see you happy, Lu.” She kissed Lu’s cheek, and headed toward the kitchen.

“Tor?”

Tori glanced back, and Lu marveled again at her ethereal beauty. She *deserved* to smile, dammit, a lot more often than she did. “Tori, I really hope some day you get to be this happy, too.”

Tori laughed lightly. “I don’t know, Lu. You know me -- things with me always seem to turn out... bloody.”

With a last, wry look, she disappeared into the kitchen.

Lu heard Sean in the hallway, and opened the door for him. Then she helped him carry his stuff into her -- *their* -- bedroom. Almost before she could put the box she was carrying down, Sean pulled her onto the bed, his hands eagerly tugging at her tank top. Smiling, she ran her hands through his raven-black curls as he lowered his mouth to her breasts. Unbuttoning his jeans with one hand as he kicked his shoes off, Sean disrobed them both even as he continued his tender assault.

Just as he was about to enter her though, Lu felt a suspicious weight at the foot of the bed. Sean must have felt it too, because he whipped his head around to glare at the chubby white cat just as Lu hollered in exasperation, “Persia!”

Bombarded by two hiking boots, one pillow, and a notebook, Persia streaked from the room, yowling.

“Lock?” Sean looked at Lu.

“Definitely.”

“I’ll buy one tomorrow. Now,” he said, his deep blue eyes gleaming, “where were we?”

Sierra Dafoe

Sierra Dafoe published her first erotic romance with Changeling Press in May of 2006, and hasn't stopped since! Named a Rising Star of Romance in July by Love Romances and More, she received three 2006 CAPA nominations including Favorite Erotic Author (a fact which still has her stunned!)

Sierra lives in northern New Hampshire's White Mountains with her incredibly tolerant hubby, her thoroughly obnoxious cat, and her twelve-year-old puppy. Visit her at www.sierradafoe.com for free stories and monthly contests, and join her yahoogroup at http://groups.yahoo.com/The_Sierra_Club -- she loves hearing from her readers!